THE GERMAN REGISTRATUR

by

THEA MILLER

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Department of School of Library, Archival and Information Studies

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

Date 15 October 1997
ABSTRACT

Registratur is "the regulated processing of business matters in the form of the documents generated by these matters". It is fundamental for recordkeeping and archives in Germany, but little understood outside of the German-speaking world. This lack of understanding creates a barrier to the development of common approaches and international standards, a necessary step towards solving the problems which lie ahead for recordkeeping and archives globally.

This thesis examines and explains the concept of Registratur from a series of perspectives set within their general historical framework: the medieval German recordkeeping; the Prussian state administration of the early 19th century; the changes to recordkeeping under the influence of the Büroreform and of later events in post-Second World War Germany. The study of Registratur in Prussia in the 19th century shows that this concept was based on the following elements: (1) file making by business matter, (2) registration, and (3) regulation of the business processes. Although these three elements were only combined and brought to perfection in the classical Prussian Registratur, early forms of them can be studied in the practices of medieval recordkeeping. Despite considerable changes brought on by technological development and by the shifting role of government, the fundamental elements of the classical Prussian Registratur have remained intact in the modern German Registratur, although the Prussian model itself has disappeared. The persistence of these elements is especially remarkable in light of the dramatic deterioration of East German recordkeeping practices immediately following the war, and in view of the pressures experienced by the adoption of electronic data
processing technologies in the public administration. German archivists, having left Registratur to the exclusive responsibility of the registrars in the 17th and 18th centuries, rediscovered the importance of Registratur in the late 19th century as their much-loved library-based systems of archival arrangement gradually collapsed. This development is discussed in the final chapter, following the evolution of the concept of Registratur in its historical context. Today the “Principle of Registratur”, which derives from the concept, is the standard guiding principle for arrangement and description.

The modern concept of Registratur is going to be of great importance for solving the problems currently facing North American recordkeeping and archival work. This thesis concludes that, although the practice of Registratur has little chance of being formally adopted in North America, its conceptual foundations and some of its procedural components are likely to become an integral part of North American and international recordkeeping systems.
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INTRODUCTION

The following work is the result of almost two years of investigating and coming to understand the concept of Registratur\(^1\). This concept, fundamental in the fields of recordkeeping and archives in Germany, has remained in the Romanic and Anglo-Saxon areas of the world at best a mystery and at worst a non-entity. The learning process has been difficult, because, with the exception of two or three minor works, all of the relevant literature is in the German language, and much of it is not even available in North American libraries. Nor is a study of the literature sufficient in itself for attaining a thorough understanding of the concept. Without the opportunity to experience how it is manifested in the daily practice of German recordkeepers and archivists, any understanding would necessarily remain speculative.

These difficulties have not remained unnoticed by other scholars; some are even led to speak of two different archival worlds:

L’Europe se coupe dès lors en deux zones complètement distinctes, quant au type d’administration et quant au système de conservation des archives. L’Europe centrale, orientale et septentrionale adopte entre le XVIe et le XVIIIe siècle la Registratur, qui va donner à ses archives, jusqu’à nos jours, une structure que les archivistes des autres pays peuvent difficilement comprendre. L’Europe occidentale et méridionale, au contraire, reste en très large partie fidèle au système médiéval fondé sur l’ordre chronologique. Les grandes séries, constituées d’après la nature des pièces, leur objet ou leur base géographique, se divisent elles-mêmes en sous-séries chronologiques, les lettres reçues et les lettres expédiées étant généralement conservées séparément et par ordre de dates. Les archives des

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1. I shall avoid italicizing this word again throughout the thesis, due to its numerous occurrences. The plural is Registraturen. The “g” is hard as in “get”, and the accent falls on the last syllable (in the singular).
secrétariats d'État français (Affaires étrangères, Marine, etc.), sont très représentative de ce système d'archivage, de même que les archives vaticanes. Lorsque des dossiers sont établis, on ne conçoit pas de lien systématique entre eux: il n'y a pas de plan de classement préétabli.

Cette coupure archivistique de l'Europe s'est poursuivie jusqu'à nos jours, rendant presque impossible aux archivistes de l'une et l'autre partie de l'Europe de comprendre vraiment leurs problèmes respectifs.²

However, although the serious difficulties involved in understanding Registratur have been recognized and brought to the attention of Western archivists, to date no attempt has been made to produce a thorough study of the concept either in English or in a Romance language. Since the intellectual capabilities of non-German archivists cannot be called into question, it remains to assume that a chief hindrance to such a study heretofore has been a lack of interest, reinforced by differing cultural attitudes.³

2. "Europe then [i.e. from the 16th century] divided itself into two completely distinct zones in relation both to the type of administration and to the system of preservation of archives. Between the 16th and 17th centuries central, eastern and northern Europe adopted the Registratur, which was to structure the archives in a way difficult for the archivists of other countries to understand, even up to the present. Western and southern Europe, on the contrary, remained for the most part loyal to the medieval system based on chronological order. The multitude of file series, which were made up according to the nature of the individual documents, their subject or their geographical origin, were in turn divided into chronological sub-series; letters received and letters transmitted were generally kept separately according to date. The archives of the French state ministries (Foreign Affairs, Navy etc.) are typical of this archival method – the same is true of the Vatican Archives. Once the files are established, no thought is given to the relationship between them: there is no pre-established method of classification. This archival division of Europe has persisted to the present, rendering it practically impossible for archivists in the one or the other part of Europe to really understand each other's problems". Bautier, La phase cruciale de l'histoire des archives, p.146. All translations in this thesis are by the author. See also Duchein: Le respect des fonds en archivistique, p.89, and The History of European Archives, p.18; Papritz (the former director of the Archivschule Marburg) also refers to this situation in: Grundfragen der Archivwissenschaf, p.161.

3. That the archival and recordkeeping practices themselves are to blame for this situation, in so far as they determine the environment in which the consciousness of the archivist/recordkeeper is shaped, would be a curious argument in light of the fact that in the Middle Ages, renowned for supposed lack of intellectual curiosity, chancery officials were eagerly learning and borrowing from their colleagues all over Europe.
This assumption is strengthened, in my view, by the fact that no major study of the concept of Registratur has been undertaken even in Germany⁴. It may indeed be pointed out that here the problem is rather one of too much familiarity rather than of too little; nevertheless, the subject has been dealt with in sufficient breadth that any German archivist with a basic knowledge of the history of Registratur will know that the same word has been used to denote variously a filing office, a system of order and arrangement, and the process of arranging, describing, and providing for the care and preservation of inactive documents. When it is further taken into account that the term “Registratur” serves as the German equivalent of “respect des fonds”, it is truly remarkable that the multitude of meanings has so far been regarded as little more than an historical curiosity. Thus Papritz, in his monumental work Archivwissenschaft, identifies four different meanings of Registratur, only to dismiss the ones which appear irrelevant to his discussion⁵, while Meisner lists as many as eight alternative meanings⁶.

In recent years, however, there have been increasing signs that this nonchalance or indifference is gradually waning. Due partly to the difficulties which ever-increasing amounts of government records are creating for appraisal and storage, and partly to the pressures exerted on already tenuous recordkeeping strategies by the adoption of technologies related to electronic data processing (EDP), a broad re-thinking process

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⁴ This claim may seem surprising in light of the copious literature directly and indirectly concerning Registratur in its numerous forms -- see the bibliography. However, almost all of these studies examine Registratur as a phenomenon -- not as a concept. The few conceptual studies which I am aware of look at Registratur in light of its significance for archives. The most detailed study is one presented by Papritz as part of his major work on archival science, and while this is indeed thorough and invaluable for an understanding of Registratur, it is, in my opinion, deeply flawed by the insistence on approaching a subject from a strictly logical standpoint.


⁶ Meisner, Urkunden- und Aktenlehre der Neuzeit, p.180. The neglect of such a key archival term by this remarkable pioneer of German archival terminology is difficult to understand.
appears to be occurring, leading both to the introduction of new ideas and to the re-
examination of old concepts.7

Furthermore, the world is shrinking and the intellectual villages are slowly being absorbed
into one global community -- a process driven not by post colonial imperialism but by
sharing, trading and compromising. Through such a basic task as the establishment of
international standards for information exchange, even recordkeepers and archivists are
being compelled to examine and evaluate foreign concepts and practices, and to
consider abandoning some long-held and deeply cherished ideas.

Within such a climate of change and transition -- not only in archival thinking but also in
archival practice -- a fresh look at Registratur is called for, an examination not simply of
the practice of Registratur, the archival significance of Registratur, or the historical
phenomenon of Registratur, but of the very concept of Registratur. For within this concept
lie ideas of significance for the future work of archivists.

* * *

The thesis begins with a presentation and study of what most consider to be the epitome
of Registratur: the classical Prussian filing system as it was maintained in the upper state
offices in Brandenburg-Prussia, particularly in the 18th and 19th centuries. The

7. Much of this process is occurring under the banner of "post custodialism": see for example the
work of American archivists Bearman, Ham, and Hedstrom; of Australian archivists
McKemmish, O'Shea and Upward; of the German archivist Menne-Haritz; of the Canadian
archivist Cook, and of the Dutch PIVOT Project.
examination of this form of Registratur will reveal three key elements which in turn will appear as motifs for the rest of the work, namely: the action file, the register, and the business rules.

The following three chapters examine aspects of the historical development of Registratur as a practical institution within government administration. Chapter Two will be concerned with the medieval roots of the Prussian Registratur, examining in detail the foundations of the three key elements identified in Chapter One: methods of bringing together individual documents, methods of obtaining an overview of the body of documents, and methods of regulating the genesis of the documents. Chapter Three presents the Büroreform of the 1900's to 1940's, a movement for administrative change which did away with the classical Prussian Registratur, although not with Registratur per se. Chapter Four discusses modern German Registratur in the post-war era, studying separately the developments in both East and West Germany and then in post-reunification Germany. Here the emphasis is on showing how the essentials of Registratur have survived in a period of enormous change and stress for traditional recordkeeping practices.

The fifth and final chapter approaches Registratur from the archival perspective. First, it discusses the interplay between the idea of Registratur and traditional attitudes towards archives in defining the concept of modern archives as it emerged during the three centuries preceding 1800, particularly in light of ius archivi (the right to hold archives). Then, it presents an account of the developments leading up to the formulation, in the 19th century, of the Principle of Registratur, a more rigorous version of the Principle of
Provenance than its French counterpart respect des fonds, and still the guiding principle for arrangement and description in modern German archives.

The five chapters are intended to serve together as a set of “windows” through which insights into the essential nature of Registratur can be achieved and an understanding facilitated. The conclusion draws the insights together and charts out the significance which a better understanding of the concept of Registratur may have for the work that lies ahead for recordkeepers and archivists.
CHAPTER ONE: The Classical Prussian Registratur

For a first look at Registratur, a brief glimpse into the workings of a typical Prussian government office in the early 19th century is warranted. That the choice should fall on Prussia can be justified not only on the basis of the historian's judgement: were one to travel back in time and inquire as to the best place to learn about Registratur, one would no doubt be pointed in the direction of the closest of a multitude of Prussian official government bureaux. For Prussia was, after the fall of Napoleon, not only the second largest German territorial state\(^1\), but also one of the two leading German nations, an emerging great power and without doubt the strongest economic and military force in central Europe. Much credit for this status was due to the efficiency of the Prussian state administration, without equal in the rest of Europe.

1. The handling of a typical business matter in a Prussian government office

Up to 1918 Prussia was a monarchy\(^2\), and the King traditionally exercised his power through the Privy Council (*Geheimes Rat*). Unlike the modern cabinet, where ministers are assigned to pre-defined portfolios constituting individual business areas (Interior, Exterior, Defence, Finance, Health, Transportation etc.), the Privy Council was made up

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1. Austria-Hungary was the largest, although German only in the sense of being ruled by a German dynasty (the Hapsburgs).
2. From the Middle Ages to the beginning of the 18th century the territory was identified as the Duchy of Brandenburg (the Duke of Brandenburg, holding the status of Electoral Prince or Kurfürst, also possessed the Duchy of Prussia as a vassal of the King of Poland). When Frederick I assumed the royal crown through the possession of Prussia in 1701, his title became King *in* Prussia, and the territory henceforth identified as Prussia or *Preußen* (although properly its centre remained the Duchy of Brandenburg with Berlin as its capital). In 1772 Frederick the Great assumed the title King *of* Prussia. Following the "March Revolution" in 1848, a constitution was introduced in 1849. Bismarck put an unofficial end to the monarchy by having the King crowned as Emperor (*Kaiser*) of the new German Empire (*Deutsches Reich*) in 1871 -- the Prussian crown technically became vacant. With the abdication of William II in 1918, Prussia officially acquired a republican constitution.
of men selected for their political, intellectual and other relevant abilities, who then were

given a variety of tasks to carry out\(^3\). These tasks were then sub-divided among the

officials assigned to the areas defined in the Council. As the tasks grew in size and

complexity, the work was again divided among subordinates further down the

bureaucratic ladder. Over time this led to a hierarchical network of offices or bureaux

(Ämter), each vested with decision-making authority which ultimately derived from the

King\(^4\).

An office\(^5\) was headed by a director or president who, if the office had many tasks to

accomplish, would divide these among several departments. The department heads in

turn would engage experts in the various areas under their jurisdiction who were

responsible for carrying out the actual duties and tasks, using the staff and resources of

the department and being accountable directly to the department head. Because of their

position such experts were (and still are) variously known as Dezernenten (from the Latin
decemere = "decide") or Referenten (from the Latin referre = "report"). In smaller offices

with a lesser number of tasks the director or president would carry out his responsibilities
directly through the Dezernenten.

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3. The first Privy Council was established by Joachim Frederick in 1604. For the manner in which

the various tasks were divided among the Councillors, see his instructions *Einsetzung des

Geheimen Rats* ("Installation of the Privy Council") of 13 December 1604, reprinted in Altman,

*Ausgewählte Urkunden*, pp.55-59.

4. This pragmatic approach to division of functions (as opposed to a method based on

rationalistic or logical principles) meant that the typical Prussian state office was much smaller

— and hence, more effective — than its counterpart in other major nations — England and the

United States, for example. For a comparison between the German (Prussian) and the

American systems in the early 20th century, see Brecht and Glaser, *The Art and Technique of

Administration in German Ministries*, pp.6-12.

5. The following description of a typical Prussian office is very general: the basic structure

allowed for many variations which cannot be recounted here.
Apart from these executive officials, the office consisted of groups of clerical employees whose responsibilities lay in handling the various recordkeeping tasks. Thus, there would be a secretariat (*Expedition*), where secretaries were responsible for producing draft documents from the notes or sketches delivered to them by the *Dezementen*. In the copy room (*Schreibstube*), copyists had the task of writing out the fair copy of documents to be sent out. In the mail room, clerks were responsible for sorting incoming mail and directing it to the proper executive official; they were also responsible for ensuring that outgoing documents were properly dispatched. Accountants took care of the office’s financial records, and in the filing room (*Registratur*) the registrar or Registrars took care of the documents no longer in circulation and assisted the executives in locating files.

A business matter would normally have one of the following three origins: an external person (natural or juridical) requested that the office take some action; the head of the office or of a department ordered some action to be taken; or a superior office (for example the King himself) ordered some action to be taken. All of these situations were manifested in an originating document: in the first case usually a letter, in the second case a memo, and in the third case a directive. In the first and third cases, the originating document first arrived in the mail room, where it was directed to the head (of the office or relevant department) via the filing room (*Registratur*). In the filing room the registrar noted the particulars of the matter in the journal (*Journal oder Tagebuch*) -- including the date received, the author of the originating document, and the nature of the matter -- assigned it a business number (*Geschäftszeichen*), and provided it with a sturdy file cover (*Aktendeckel*) bearing the title of the matter.
The head examined the document briefly, determined which *Dezernent* should handle the matter, and jotted down a few remarks on the document as to how it should be handled. The originating document was then returned in its cover to the filing room, where the registrar noted in the journal that the matter had been before the head and was now going to *Dezernent* N., to whom the document was then promptly directed.

If the matter originated with the head, the memo was likewise sent first to the filing room; the registrar made a new entry in the journal for it as with incoming documents, assigned it a number, gave it a titled file cover, and sent it off to the designated *Dezernent*.

The *Dezernent* had the responsibility of seeing that the appropriate action was carried out. This might be accomplished by simply sketching out what the reply to the document presented to him should be (the *Angabe*). However, often he needed to consult the files, or perhaps discuss the matter with colleagues in other areas of the office, or even with superior or inferior offices; such consultation would give rise to supporting documents in the form of copies, notes, or memos. When this consultation and deliberation process was finished, the sketch of the reply (which would be written directly on the originating document or, if space was not available, on a separate sheet of paper), along with any supporting documents, would then be sent in the file cover to the appropriate secretary, again via the filing room, where the relevant journal entries were added.

The secretary was in charge of creating the draft reply (*Konzepft*), which involved the correct application of the formal criteria as well as an accurate presentation of the content. Attachments also had to be prepared if these were to be included in the
response. The draft, the attachments (if any), the originating document and the supporting documents (if any) were then all sent back to the Dezement for approval (Revision), again by way of the filing room in order that the registrar could plot in the journal the whereabouts of the documents.

When the reply was formulated to the Dezement's satisfaction, he indicated his approval by signing the draft, and then sent it to the filing room along with all the accompanying documents (originating document, supporting documents etc.). Here the registrar noted in the journal the fact that the draft had been signed, and passed the file cover containing all the documents on to the copyist.

The copyist had the task of producing the fair copy from the draft. When this was done, he placed it in the file cover along with all other relevant documents and returned it to the registrar, who noted that the copyist had done his work. The file cover with the fair copy (and of course any other documents) was then sent to whomever had the signing authority for the office (usually the head, i.e. the President, Director, or Department Chief) for the official signature (Zeichnung).

Once this had been accomplished, the file cover with its contents was sent back to the registrar, who noted the fact of the signature in the journal, removed the fair copy and sent it to the mail clerk for dispatch. The registrar also took out any documents which had originally been removed from other files for information purposes and returned them to their proper places. The remaining documents -- that is, the originating document with the various notes by the head and the Dezement, copies of documents from other files,
memos or notes from other officials, and of course the draft of the reply with the signature of the *Dezernent* — were retained in the original file cover. This aggregate was next entered into the file register (*Aktenverzeichnis*) and given a final file number (*Aktenzeichen*), based on the filing plan (*Registraturplan*). The individual documents themselves were placed in proper order, each numbered consecutively, and then stitched into a file cover. The new file was provided with a pasteboard tag (*Aktenschwanz*) on which was written in very clear letters the file code and the file title (or indication of the contents); it was then placed horizontally (i.e. flat) on the storage shelf along with the other files, with the tag sticking out⁶.

The entire process of handling a business matter can schematized as follows:

1. **Delivery** (*Eingang*): matter received in the form of a document.
2. **Delivery registered** (*Eingang eingetragen*): document entered in the journal, assigned a business number (*Geschäftszeichen*).

3. **Decision** (*Conclusum*) : the head decides if the document should be replied to, and if so, by whom. The matter might also begin here.

4. **Journal entry** (*Joumaleintrag*): the registrar makes a notice in the journal that the matter is to be handled by Dezement N.

5. **Reply** (*Angabe*): the Dezement indicates what the response is to be.

6. **Journal entry** (*Joumaleintrag*): the registrar notes that the document has been with the Dezement.

7. **Draft** (*Konzept*): the secretary drafts the reply following the instructions from the Dezement.

8. **Journal entry** (*Joumaleintrag*): the registrar notes that the matter has been with the secretary.

9. **Fair copy** (*Reinschrift*): the copyist makes the fair copy of the reply.

10. **Journal entry** (*Joumaleintrag*): the registrar notes that the matter has been with the copyist.

11. **Signature** (*Zeichnung*): the fair copy is signed by the office’s signing authority.

12. **Journal entry** (*Joumaleintrag*): the registrar notes that the fair copy has been signed.

13. **Dispatch / filing** (*Ausgang / Ablage*): the fair copy is dispatched by the clerk; the file is processed by the registrar.

The business process, when represented in this manner, allows for commentary from several perspectives. For the present purposes attention will be focused on the obviously central role of the registrar and the filing room.
2. The typical Prussian filing room (*Registratur*)

While the responsibilities of the registrar have thus been delineated, it is necessary to point out that the work of the filing room consisted of a great deal more than simply jotting down journal entries and filing documents away. In the period under consideration (early 19th century), the position of registrar was highly respected, and demanded professional training — often registrars had degrees in jurisprudence. The range of skills required can be better appreciated by examining three important aspects of the registrar’s work: the registration of business matters, the filing of documents, and document storage. Such a study will also reveal much of the nature of Registratur, which, after all, was the name given to the filing room.

**a. registration**

The chief tool for the registration of business matters was the journal, known in German variously as the *Journal, Tagebuch, or Geschäftstagebuch*. This was a bound book, in appearance much like an accounting ledger, with blank pages divided into several columns, each for the appropriate entry. The number of columns and their headings could vary, but in all cases they would have to enable the following kinds of information

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8. Papritz characterized the journal as one of the core elements of the Registratur (*Archivwissenschaft*, vol.2, p.300: “Die 'Aufschreibung', so wurden die verschiedenen mit der Führung des Geschäftstagebuches verbundenen Eintragungen und Notizen in den Berliner Ministerial-Registraturen bezeichnet, nahm dadurch eine ziemlichen Umfang an und konnte recht kompliziert werden. Das Geschäftstagebuch wurde dadurch neben dem Aktenplan zum Kernstück und Symbol der Sachakten-Registratur.". That the registration was of matters and not of documents *per se* is overlooked by some authors (including Papritz), although the distinction is important, particularly in comparing the practice with the English registry and its derivatives, which are registers of documents.
to be entered:

- the number of the business matter (assigned by the registrar),
- the date the originating document entered the bureau,
- the date of the originating document,
- the name of the author of the originating document,
- the subject of the originating document (what it concerned),
- the names, titles and dates of all the officials who handled the document(s) in the course of completing the matter (so-called "Stellen" or "locating")
- the date the fair copy was sent out and the other documents pertaining to the matter were received by the filing room, and
- space for making observations and for noting the filing code of the matter.

The journal entries were made in chronological order according to the date when the originating documents were received in the office; each entry received a sequential number. A journal was normally kept for one calendar year only.

The journal, when properly maintained, accomplished a number of tasks simultaneously, of which some may be considered primary, and others secondary. The primary tasks included the identification of each business matter by its own unique number: when the number assigned to the matter within the year was combined with the year of the journal, the result was a unique identification for that matter within the entire body of actions ever carried out by that office. The journal also enabled all documents belonging to a particular

10. Some filing rooms kept their journal entries divided by groups of matters — see Holtzinger, *Katechismus der Registratur- und Archivkunde*, p.70, who however does not approve of the practice.
matter to be traced while the it was in progress, for every time an official was finished with his part of the process, the file cover with the documents had to be returned to the registrar (this time-consuming procedure, known as “Stellen”, was one of the first victims of the administrative reforms later in the century). Supervision of the progress of the matter was also assured through the journal, since it was clear not only which matters had been completed and which not, but also at what stage each uncompleted matter was. The dates noted in this regard further allowed delays to be quickly identified, so that measures could be taken to avoid such delays in the future. Finally, the chronological arrangement of the entries filled the purpose of a finding aid, enabling any file to be quickly found as long as its exact or even approximate date was known.

The journal also served purposes which, while secondary, could nevertheless be of great importance. These included the ability to provide an overview of the entire business of the office in considerable detail. Such an overview was of inestimable value in accomplishing basic tasks as, for example, general planning, hiring and distribution of personnel, office organization and re-structuring, and in increasing efficiency (it is ironic that information provided by the journals served -- if even only in a small part -- to aid the reforms which aimed to abolish it). Another secondary -- but nevertheless important -- function was to provide legal evidence for actions undertaken by the office. For the journal was itself, of course, a document. Its creation was determined by the business rules, which laid down that each and every matter had to be recorded in it; this meant that it could serve in court as evidence in cases where the existence of the matter was questioned or where documents with false business numbers were held to be forgeries.

11. Papritz mentions the Schäfer-Garret case involving forgery of directives purportedly from the (Prussian) government of Kassel: the court could determine the instance of forgery because
Often the function of the journal was divided between a journal for incoming documents (Eingangsjournal) and one for outgoing documents (Abgangsjournal).

The journal for incoming documents still contained most of the entries, including the number of the business matter, information pertaining to the originating document, and information about the handling of the matter up to the point where the fair copy was ready to be sent off. This was recorded in the journal for outgoing documents, including the name of the addressee, the subject of the matter, the date the fair copy was sent out, and the filing code for the documents pertaining to the matter.

In large offices with hundreds or even thousands of business matters per year, finding a single file when the date was not known would have required such effort that it became customary to create indices for the journal. The most common was the subject index (Sachindex, Sachweiser or Sachregister). Usually it consisted simply of two columns, showing the business number on the left and the subject on the right; the subjects were arranged in alphabetical order. In the same manner, name indices (Personenindex or Personenregister) were made to provide access to documents by names, particularly in the cases where a name did not appear either as the author of an originating document or within the note regarding the nature of the matter. Finally, a third kind of index based on place (Ortsindex or Ortsregister) was also in use by some offices: it was fashioned in precisely the same way as the name and subject indices. All of these indices, besides

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the business numbers on the documents did not match the entries in the journal. See Archivwissenschaft, vol.2, p.300.

12. Holtzinger recommends this division and describes both types; see Katechismus pp.69-72 and 73-74 respectively. According to Schatz, Behördenkraftgut p.133, Holtzinger's recommendation must be viewed as anachronistic, since the practice was largely discontinued by the end of the 19th century.

enabling files to be located on a basis other than by date, had the additional function of extending the informational content of the journal by providing access through terms not necessarily present in the journal. This kind of deep structuring also meant that business matters could be connected with each other in ways which would have been almost impossible to secure from the pages of the journal itself.

Another group of registration instruments were used primarily for administrative purposes. Thus, the loan book (Aktenausgabebuch or Aktennotationsbuch) was used for files or documents that had been removed from the filing room in order to complete matters or for consultation. It was divided into several columns where information could be entered concerning the date the material left the filing room, the file code (Aktenzeichen), and the journal number (in case it was for handling a business matter) or the name of the official borrowing it (in case it was just being used for consultation). For matters which involved lengthy delays (as in court cases, where a decision might take months, or in other cases held up by drawn-out decision processes or other difficulties) special "term boxes" were set up where the relevant documents could be stored until needed. The documents in term storage were noted in a special register -- the Terminkalender -- which provided the details of the matter concerned and how long the file was to remain in term storage.

A final register product served only the needs of the registrar and, much later, of the archivist -- this was the file inventory (Aktenverzeichnis or Repertorium). It was always laid out in accordance with the filing room plan (Registraturplan, to be discussed shortly). Again in book form, at least one page was devoted to each section of the filing room plan, regardless of the number of files in the section; blank pages would be left if
additions were anticipated. The page was headed by the title of the section (derived from
the filing room plan), and then the files were listed from top to bottom, each entry being
numbered and showing the actual file title, the dates of its composition, and the file code.
It had two major functions: it served as a finding aid (hence the name "repertorium" from
the Latin reperire = "to find") for the registrar, who could use it to quickly locate files
according to the type of matter. In addition, it was useful in identifying needed
improvements to the filing room plan (which at that time was much more flexible than
modern filing plans)14.

b. filing documents

The registrar was responsible not only for the maintenance of the files, but also for their
arrangement and, indeed, for their very creation15. As it has been shown, the registrar
assigned the business number. This simple task involved determining whether the matter
at hand was in fact a new business matter, or part of an earlier matter (in which case it
would be treated as a continuance of that matter). He did this by examining the nature of
the matter, and, if identified as a something new, by assigning a title to it which succinctly
described what the matter was. *The assignment of a business number and the writing of
a title for it marked the birth of a file.* All the other officials needed to do in handling the
matter was to remove the contents of the file cover they received from the messenger,

14. In her unpublished dissertation, Christine Stade shows clearly the value of such file inventories
for modern archives. She also presents numerous copies of pages from file inventories -- see
Stade, *Beispiele für den Einsatz älterer Registraturfindhilfsmittel,* esp. Attachments 12, 13, 16,
20 and 25.

15. This was very briefly, yet very finely, observed by Enders (op.cit., p.35). The recognition of the
intrinsic connection between Registratur and file creation (and not simply file or records
management) is missing from most modern German authors, who tend instead to dwell on the
subtleties of file formation as part of *Aktenkunde* (file theory), leaving the registrar to keep
things in good order.
fulfil their part of the business process, replace the papers and return the file cover to the registrar. Later, when the matter was complete, the file was assigned a final number (the file code) according to the filing room plan; this marked its entrance into the body of records of that office.

Throughout all of this activity, the key assumption -- and indeed, prerequisite -- was that there was only one type of file making method which came into consideration: this was the organization of all documents into files according to the business matter from which they originated. More than any other element of Registratur, this kind of file making was peculiar to Prussian recordkeeping, and the resulting action file (Sachakte)\(^\text{16}\) lies at the heart of misunderstandings and lack of understanding of Registratur in non-Registratur countries. Its closer examination is therefore in order.

There are two essential principles at work in the method of organizing individual documents into action files. The first principle has already been introduced: it is the principle of the primacy of the business matter, expressed so clearly by the activity of keeping a journal. The second principle is that each document contains only one subject or applies to only one matter.

The principle of the primacy of the business matter was a slow development from the concept of the subject file, which still plays a major role in non-Registratur filing systems.

\(^{16}\) A Sachakte is, literally translated, a subject file. The German Sachakte is however a particular kind of subject file, namely one that is based on the business matters as just described. Since "matter file" is clearly awkward, I have chosen "action file" instead, to convey the idea that the file pertains to the action of handling a business matter. Büttner has referred to the Sachakte in English as a transaction file (see Büttner, Creation, Maintenance and Use, p.5). While this is technically correct, it depends on a broad agreement as to what, precisely, a transaction is.
Subject files can be based on any number of principles: on identification of objects, themes, relationships, or also activities, for example business matters. In contrast to the passive nature of non-Registratur systems, where recordkeeping occurs as the documents are produced, the Brandenburg-Prussian administration from the 16th century onwards took an active approach towards its responsibilities, aiming to anticipate problem areas and seeking to establish relationships among the various activities the officials were carrying out. It was soon discovered that the subject file, using the actions of the office as its basis, provided the kind of control required for a dynamic, far-sighted recordkeeping strategy. For, unlike the series favoured in non-Registratur systems, which can never completely account for all the documents produced, the subject file system based on the business actions comprehends all the matters and hence also all the files. Furthermore, this system can accommodate without problem the series-building which is sometimes unavoidable (as in the case of reports and minutes), so that, by the end of the 18th century, when the Registratur reached its full development, recordkeeping officials were convinced that they had found the philosopher's stone, so to speak.17

File formation on the principle of the primacy of the business matter entails however that the matter is easily identifiable and that each document can be assigned to one unique matter. A letter which deals with several different matters at once cannot be cut up and divided among the appropriate files, and the copying process required to distribute a copy among all the files becomes an impossible task when faced with thousands of incoming documents with no clear single subject. In Brandenburg-Prussia, it was clear by the middle of the 16th century that firm measures had to be taken to ensure that, when

17. For an analysis of the development of the action file see especially Papritz, Organisationsformen der Schriftgutbewahrung in der öffentlichen Verwaltung, col.279-283
composing documents, officials were careful to confine themselves to presenting only one matter per document. The Registrar/Archivist Schönbeck,\textsuperscript{18} accordingly urged Frederick William I (the "Great Elector") to have the practice enforced.\textsuperscript{19}

This is not to ignore the fact that it is in the nature of some business documents to handle several subjects simultaneously. Submitting a report, for example, or holding a meeting are very typical kinds of activities in which a number of subjects necessarily appear in the same document. However, it is still possible to bring such documents under general headings pertaining to business matters (for example, reports of the Ambassador in London), and then arrange them in a chronological series.

The same technique illustrates the flexibility which the principle of the primacy of the business matter offered when making files, for the matter could be conceived of in a rather general way, or in a very specific way, or somewhere in-between. Thus, a very general action file could have the title "Mill matters", and contain documents from all the

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{18} Christoph Schön(e)beck, 1601 - 1662, from 1639 Registrar in the Geheimes Archiv, from 1653 Archivar (the first official of the Privy Archives to receive this title) and Councillor. See Kohnke, Carl Wilhelm Cosmar, who presents both Cosmar's own record of the activity of this exceptional archivist as well as a brief biographical sketch on pp.68-69.
  \item \textsuperscript{19} Papritz claims (Archivwissenschaft, vol.1, p.337) that the principle of "one document, one subject" goes back to a regulation (Verordnung) of Schönbeck dated 13 February 1652. Apart from the fact that Schönbeck was in no legal position to issue any kind of regulation (and hence undoubtedly did not), an admittedly short examination of the records from this period conducted by the author in the Prussian Privy Archives in Berlin, in January 1997, failed to disclose any document which even remotely fit Papritz' account. According to Cosmar, Friedrich Wilhelm ordered a full report of the condition of the archives from Schönbeck on 13 March 1658, to which the archivist replied with his report of 18 March, not only citing numerous problems, but also describing the work he had done and recommending improvements (see Kohnke, Carl Wilhelm Cosmar, pp.23-24). One would look for the principle "one document, one subject" in this report. In any case, its earliest evidence in a regulation occurs in the Reglement für die Geheime Kanzlei ("Regulations for the Privy Chancery") of 2 December 1699, where, in paragraph 22, section 13, the Elector requires a description of the contents ("per generalia und so kurz als immer möglich" - "in general terms and as briefly as possible") to appear on the top of the draft -- see reprint in Kohnke, ibid., p.112.
\end{itemize}
matters that had to do with any mill at any time within the jurisdiction of the office. Such files were obviously not very easy to use when many matters were involved, and therefore the practice gradually evolved -- and was standard in the period under consideration -- of forming files according to very specific, individual matters. Such a file would then have a title like "Repair of the mill in Adorf". Nevertheless, when consistent observance of this method would have led to thousand of file covers containing merely a couple of documents, the registrar was free to compile files according to broader concepts, thus not only easing his own work load but also facilitating the work of the Dezementen.\textsuperscript{20}

It is clear that a file formed on the principle of the primacy of the business matter guaranteed an unalterable context for the documents contained within it. Just as the matter consisted of linked communication and response, so too the documents generated from the handling of the matter were interlocked with each other -- to each letter or memo there would be a reply\textsuperscript{21}. Even without the journal, it was obvious to the registrar or Dezement when a document was missing from a file.

Because action files were formed according to the nature of the activities of the office, i.e. organically, and not according to the usual rationalistic/mechanistic methods employed in series systems, an additional device was required in order to enable files to be located,

\textsuperscript{20} For a more detailed discussion of this flexibility see Papritz, Archivwissenschaft, vol.1, pp.326 ff.

\textsuperscript{21} Papritz describes this interlocking of individual documents within a business matter in considerable detail, ibid., pp.329-331. Hoffmann, Behördliche Schriftgutverwaltung, also mentions this Verzahnung (interlocking) -- see p.114.
once created\(^{22}\). The solution was to resort to a system of functional classification: the totality of business actions of the particular office was divided into broad categories, these categories were then sub-divided into sections, the sections were sub-divided into groups and so forth, according to need. For example, a broad category might be "Mill affairs", which would be divided into the sections: "Mill affairs in District A", "Mill affairs in District B", and "Mill affairs in District C". The section "Mill affairs in District A" could be divided into the groups: "Mill sales", "Mill repairs", and "Mill regulations". Under each of these headings those files would be listed which corresponded to the matter described. Thus the file "Repair of the mill in Adorf" would be listed under the group heading "Mill repairs". The resulting filing room plan (\textit{Registraturplan}) became one of the chief instruments of the registrar and often the most material evidence of his intelligence and ingenuity. Because the plan was based on the business actions of the particular office, each plan was different – there could be no standard plan. The registrar would have to devise the plan in such a way that all files could be arranged within it for as far into the future as one could practically provide for. At the same time, he would have to avoid creating empty categories, or categories of which some would end up containing only very few files, and others containing very many files. The work of classification also required keen judgement, for, as the multitude of divisions and sub-divisions grew, so did the problem of deciding into which category the file at hand should be placed. Each division created had to be provided with a title which was brief, yet aptly descriptive, setting that division apart from other divisions and defining its concept succinctly.

\(^{22}\) In series systems, the number of series tends to be rather restricted, enabling a fairly quick overview. Thus, there might be a series each for correspondence, accounts, meetings, projects etc.. Within each series the files are simply placed in the proper order according to the particular method used for that series, i.e. by date, by name, by place, by number, by subject etc. Thus, finding any single file only requires identifying the series and understanding the method of arrangement within the series.
When the filing room plan was set up, the various categories or divisions had to be further identified with a unique set of letters, or numbers, or a combination of both. This also demanded skill and experience, for such a code had often to consist of two or more parts, which again had to be able to be combined in various manners in order to be applied to all the divisions. The code also had to be designed in such a way that new numbers could be assigned if and when the plan was changed. It was this number — the file code or *Aktenzeichen* — which in the end appeared on the file itself and marked its place in the Registratur.

c. document storage

Creating the file and defining its place within the entire body of files were the most important tasks of the registrar in this aspect of the filing room activities. There remains a third task, however, which merits a brief examination in this context: the storage of files.

Once the matter was completed, the file was assigned its file code according to the filing room plan and entered into the file inventory. It then had to be put away. This involved removing the documents from the file cover and making sure that all documents were present. The documents were then placed in their proper order (the oldest on top, the most recent on the bottom), and then numbered at the top in consecutive order. Any blank sheets would have the top right-hand corner removed and be ignored in the numbering. The file would then be given to a messenger, who (in his spare time) would stitch the documents along the left-hand fold into the file cover, forming a book-like unit that was practically indestructible and yet allowed the documents to be perused
individually. The registrar then made a cardboard slip for the file, on which was written in large characters the file code and the subject (or simply its title). This slip -- the so-called Aktenschwanz -- was attached to the file cover, which was placed flat on a shelf along with the other files. The shelves were divided into cubicles, each cubicle bearing a name or title derived from a section of the filing room plan. Large filing rooms had a great number of shelves taking up a considerable amount of space, which quickly led to the establishment of the filing room as a separate entity within the office or bureau.

3. A typical regulation for the filing room

The activities described in the preceding sections of this chapter did not take place because of "tradition", or because the officials had been trained to behave in the manner they did, or even less so because it was thought to be a "good idea". Such consistency in the observance of recordkeeping practices -- given the considerable number of employees in the royal administration and taking into account their varying personal natures, aptitudes and training -- could only be obtained through regulations which established policies and procedures and which also provided for disciplinary measures in case of infringement (usually dismissal from the service)\(^23\). To close this study of the classical Prussian Registratur, it is thus essential to examine what may be regarded as a typical regulation for the filing room.

\(^{23}\) The significance of regulations for the establishment and maintenance of Registratur appears to have been completely ignored by most German archivists who have written about Registratur.
The “Instructions, How All Provincial Finance Filing Rooms are to Function”\textsuperscript{24} was issued on 1 March 1788 by the Prussian General Directorium to the War and Domain Chambers\textsuperscript{25}. It is divided into the following five sections:

1. Setting up and organizing the filing room
2. Storing the files
3. Making files
4. Finding aids
5. Loaning files

In the third paragraph of the first section is defined the primary purpose of the filing room:

“That everything is set up for convenience of use and that things can be located very easily.”\textsuperscript{26} While admitting that the filing room can be organized according to various principles -- by date, numbers, alphabet or subject -- it is quickly laid down that the best principle is that which conforms to the primary purpose, and this -- in view of the complexity of the activities of the offices involved -- can only be that principle which arranges the files according to the nature of the matters themselves\textsuperscript{27}.

For arranging the files by matter, the following guiding principle is provided:

Every registrar has to picture the Registratur which has been entrusted to him as a whole, the parts of which are the section headings. He must form a basic idea of this whole and see whether the divisions he has made are true parts of the basic idea, he also has to examine the connection these divisions have to the basic idea. For these provide the actual rule for the arrangement, and the individual sections of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{24} Anweisung, wonach sämtliche Landes-Finanz-Registraturen zu bearbeiten.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Reprinted in Schatz, Behördenchriftgut, pp.313-325.
\item \textsuperscript{26} “daß alles zum bequemen Gebrauch eingerichtet worden und sehr leicht aufgefunden werden kann”.
\item \textsuperscript{27} Anweisung, § 3.
\end{itemize}
the Registratur have to coincide with its basic concept in such a way that the former are determined by the latter.²⁸

A final noteworthy clause in this first section addresses the situation where the registrar takes over a filing room which has not been set up in accordance with the primary purpose: "If however he [i.e. the registrar] finds that the rule for the arrangement does not suit its primary purpose, then he must devise another plan for the Registratur which conforms to this purpose, and then submit the plan to the College for approval."²⁸ The filing order is not sacrosanct, rather its value lies entirely in its ability to effectively serve the needs of the administration.³⁰

The second section covers details regarding how the files are to be stored, mentioning problem areas such as incomplete business matters, matters which cover more than one subject, the handling of documents belonging to ongoing matters and so forth. It also underscores the importance of the registrar having an exact knowledge of all the files in his care, stating that such knowledge is a prerequisite for the proper care of the files (§ 4). Cross-referencing is to be provided through copies of the relevant documents (§ 7).

The ordering of files under the same heading is to occur chronologically, with the most


²⁹. "Findet er aber, daß die Regel der Ordnung nicht mit ihrem Endzweck stimmt, so muß er einen andern, dem Endzweck gemäß Plan von der Registratur entwerfen und dem Collegio zur Genehmigung einreichen." Section 1, § 1.

³⁰. It is unfortunate that popular conceptions about the military nature of Prussian administration have been allowed to draw attention away from this deeply pragmatic aspect of Prussian mentality.
recent file on top; within the file each document is to be numbered (§ 8). Finally, instructions are given concerning the handling of files from other filing rooms (§ 10).

The third section is devoted to the actual composition of the files, and begins characteristically with the injunction that one file is to contain only one matter (§ 1). Again, not surprisingly, the order of the documents within the file is to reflect the order of the different stages of the process of handling the matter (§ 3). The outside of the file -- that is to say, the file cover -- is to be marked with three elements: the file code, the file title, and the date range (§ 4). Extensive files are to be divided into volumes, and § 8 specifies how these are to be formed and marked. Towards the end of the section -- in § 11 -- the rather important observation is made that "A principal duty of the registrar is to provide for the correctness and the completeness of the files". This brief phrase makes it abundantly clear that the responsibility of the registrar extends far beyond simply keeping files in order.

The registration activities of the registrar are covered in section four, which contains instructions for maintaining the instruments already presented and discussed earlier, namely: the file inventory (which should cover at least 30 years -- see §§ 2 and 5), an index to the file inventory (§ 3 -- this was mentioned previously as the index to the journal, the difference being negligible), and the journal (§ 7). It also covers the keeping of notes about whatever else might seem important to keep track of (§ 9).

31. Unless it is a series file. The handling of such files is regulated in a series of notes in the same paragraph.
32. "Für die Richtigkeit und Vollständigkeit der Akten zu sorgen, ist eine Hauptpflicht des Registratoris".
Finally, the fifth section covers topics relating to the general relationship of the registrar to his files, including several paragraphs (§§ 1 to 7) of instructions regarding the loan of files to officials. Of particular interest is the reminder of the importance of confidentiality (§ 10) -- since this injunction never fails to show up in regulations concerning the filing room or the general administration of the office, it is clear that breach of confidentiality was an ongoing issue, involving not only the common problem of "loose tongues" but also more serious cases of selling state secrets. A further paragraph (§ 11) provides a list of all the books which the registrar is to keep in the course of fulfilling his duties. The same paragraph provides also for the division of work when more than one registrar is active in a filing room; here it is stipulated -- in a manner which should no longer be surprising -- that each registrar is to acquire a complete knowledge of all the files in the filing room.

4. Summary

The role of the registrar and of the filing room in a typical Prussian government office was a central one: here was the node where files were created, controlled, stored and retrieved. From the filing room the only action remaining was the transfer of the files to the archives (this was the responsibility of the archivist).

The work of the registrar involved two central elements and depended on a third. First, the registrar was responsible for the care of the documentation which evidenced the actions carried out by his office -- this was accomplished through making files following the principle of the primacy of the business matter and by organizing the files according to a scheme which reflected the entire scope of activities of the office. Second, the
registrar had to account for the work that he performed and for the material for which he had responsibility. This was accomplished through the various registers -- principally the journal, the file inventory and the index. Third, the work of the registrar was only possible within the framework of a set of regulations established by the sovereign. These regulations not only provided specific instructions as to the nature and details of the work of the registrar, but also established the context within which his work occurred, i.e. the relationship between business matter and recordkeeping. Without such regulations, the Prussian Registratur would have been simply a curious phenomenon.
CHAPTER TWO: The Medieval Antecedents of the Prussian Registratur

The three elements of the classical Prussian Registratur — file making, registration, and business rules — can be discerned in a nascent form in the multitude of practices which characterized medieval recordkeeping. Indeed, they can be detected already in the Roman imperial period, with its highly developed administrative structure and resulting abundance of records, its use of registers in the form of *commentarii* and *gesta*, and its use of written instructions to regulate the activity of administrative officials. These practices never completely died out, but were absorbed in the western world by the Roman papacy, owing not merely to its Roman roots (many early papal administrators had their training in secular offices), but also to the fact that for many centuries it represented the largest highly structured and stable European organization. It is admittedly intriguing to see how certain of the recordkeeping traditions which developed in modern Europe may have origins in Roman practices transmitted through the Papacy. However, the connections thus spun out remain speculative and cannot serve to explain the very concrete developments which led to the emergence of two entirely different record systems having apparently the same roots and being apparently exposed to the same influences. Any influence needs fertile soil in which to grow, and it is recognized that soils vary from place to place. It accordingly appears incumbent to examine the recordkeeping conditions in Northern Germany preceding the development of the Prussian Registratur.
1. The compilation of individual documents

The making of files as we know it today began only towards the end the medieval era -- that is, in the late 15th century. Prior to this time, attention was focused primarily (although not exclusively) on the diploma, the legal manifestation of a completed business matter. However, even with the diploma, means had to be devised for keeping them as well as the products associated with them -- copies, for example -- gathered together in some fashion to prevent them from being scattered and to enable an official to find them when necessary. The various methods employed for these purposes -- primitive as they may seem to the modern observer -- in turn shaped the strategies the file makers were to employ in the modern era.

The traditions for the compilation of individual documents were established in a period when almost all chancery products were on parchment1. While offering distinct advantages over papyrus, particularly in terms of durability, cost, and availability of local supplies, parchment was nevertheless relatively expensive to produce, and suppliers were careful to get as much from a single skin as possible, which meant that pieces of parchment arriving in the chancery were of no standard shape or size. Any solution to the problem of document storage had, therefore, to proceed from the idea that irregular sizes had to be accommodated.

1. Papyrus was used exclusively by the Merovingian rulers until 677, after which date parchment was very rapidly introduced. The conquering of Egypt, the source for papyrus, by the Arabs under Omer in 641 had led to a considerable increase in price as well as to uncertainty in deliveries. See Bresslau, Handbuch der Urkundenlehre, vol.2, pp.487-489, and Erben, Kaiser- und Königsurkunden, p.120.
The solutions which evolved can be grouped into two general categories. On the one hand is the container solution: loose documents were gathered together into discreet containers, the solid sides or walls of which prevented the documents from shifting location or becoming mixed with other groups of documents. On the other hand is the binding solution: here the documents are fastened together by some means which keeps the individual items together in a certain order; the group thus created is internally fixed but locally movable. These two solutions are not mutually exclusive and were in fact frequently applied simultaneously.

Containers could be large or small. Larger containers took the form of immobile pieces of furniture, for example, shelves or cupboards, which would be divided up into an appropriate number of sections. More mobile units such as cabinets with sliding drawers were also common. Mobility was an important factor for the medieval chancery, since rulers were peripatetic and some documents always had to be at hand. Thus, while the immobile or only partially mobile containers might be appropriate for the archival depot, necessity dictated employment of smaller, yet no less secure devices: namely chests or trunks. A major problem with this solution, however, was that the space available for the documents was too small to be subdivided, thus the documents were simply placed inside and left to arrange themselves according to the motions of travel or the disturbances caused when documents were removed. Another serious problem was the limited access -- while it was clear which documents within the container are on top, it required some effort to find documents elsewhere in the pile, because, unlike the shelf, cupboard, or even the drawer, the stack or pile is accessible only from top to bottom, not from the side. The same problems occurred with similar devices, such as the hamper or
the basket. Containers could, however, be made so small that they could then be placed in other containers; thus another common method of storing stacks of documents was the box (tubes were used if the documents were to be rolled). These small containers had the advantage of being very highly mobile and yet at the same time able to provide adequate protection to the documents and ensure that the stack or pile remained intact. They had the disadvantage of being relatively expensive to produce, and of allowing only a relatively small number of documents to be placed inside them, due to their limited capacity.

In contrast to the container solution, binding was relatively straightforward and did not require the construction of special pieces of furniture or equipment. It entailed, however, that every document be physically altered, since the large non-standard pieces of parchment simply did not lend themselves to being bound together in their original shape. One simple method involved rolling the parchments up individually, and then tying them together into a bundle. More common was folding documents into more or less standard sizes and then bundling them up. There were two major disadvantages to the bundling method: bundled documents could not be perused, and once the bundle was untied, the documents were liable to becoming easily disordered.

The problems with the bundling approach were overcome by another method, which however meant inflicting even greater injury to the document. By piercing the document in the centre, it was possible to affix it on a holding device which then bound the group of documents together. This device could be either rigid or flexible. Rigid devices included spikes, upon which the documents were literally impaled in the appropriate order; the
spike could either protrude vertically, as on a desk or counter, or horizontally from a wall or piece of furniture. A variant of the rigid device is the hook, the sharp end of which could be set into a holder much like the modern safety-pin. Unlike the spike, the hook was movable, and could be suspended from the wall wherever there was room. The use of rigid devices meant that the order of the documents could remain intact while the individual documents were movable, thus allowing their contents to be examined. Unfortunately, since the necessary rigidity was assured not only by the nature of the material (iron) but also by its thickness, use of rigid devices left relatively large holes in the documents. Another disadvantage lay in the fact that the number of documents which could be thus held together was naturally limited by the size of the device.

Flexible devices consisted of cords and thongs and avoided both of the disadvantages of the rigid devices, since the punctures could be smaller and the cord cut to whatever length was necessary; cords which were too short could be easily replaced by longer ones. Again there were two principal methods: either the cord could be knotted at each end in a manner which prevented the documents from sliding along the cord, or the end knots could be spaced relatively far apart, allowing the documents to slide back and forth. The first method was more secure, but made browsing the individual documents a bit tedious. The second method was much more congenial for searching, but at the same time presented greater dangers to the document in that a lot of sliding usually enlarged the hole.
The extensive use of paper in Northern Germany, and with it the possibility of working with documents which were approximately of standard size, probably began in the late 14th century. While the introduction of manufactured paper was in itself something of a revolution, its impact on the gathering of documents was somewhat less dramatic. Containers and bindings continued to be used as before, and in much the same way. However, containers -- and especially compartments -- could now be designed to fit the documents more exactly, resulting in an increased number of compartments for the same amount of area in a cabinet. This also introduced a new element of planning into the keeping of documents, since storage was now dependent not on the whims of nature as expressed in the shape of pieces of parchment, but on calculations made according to expected increases of documents which were all of a similar size.

More interesting is the change in binding methods. When documents are all more or less the same size, it becomes practical to bind them together at a corner (usually, the top left-hand corner) or along an edge (again usually, the left edge) without encountering the problem of larger sheets hiding smaller sheets.

The essential problem with moving the puncture from the centre of the document to the periphery (where it admittedly has less opportunity of marring the text) is that the danger of tearing increases, and a torn edge hole is as good as no hole at all. Thus, while the method of passing a cord through the perforation or perforations was still employed for

2. Standardization itself is a modern phenomenon. However, as Papritz points out (Archivwissenschaft, vol.2, p.10), it was to the commercial advantage of paper makers to ape papers which were of good repute -- even to the extent of mimicking the water marks. This copying led, while not to standard sizes per se, nevertheless to a perceptible homogeneity which was sufficient to provide one of the necessary prerequisites for file making.

3. See Blaschke, Urkundenwesen und Kanzlei der Wettiner bis 1485, p.198.
binding at the corner, it became more expedient to stitch the documents to each other at the corner: this bound the documents securely together and still allowed officials to leaf through the resulting bundle.

The binding could be reinforced by the use of thick card in the form of front and back covers, or by the use of parchment cut from old diplomas. From this method it was but a short step to binding the documents at the side, although the procedure was somewhat more complicated, requiring two additional steps. The first step consisted of providing a stiff piece of material to anchor the binding, since individual pieces cannot be effectively bound to each other at the side. The second step consisted of providing the documents with a fold through which the stitching would be made; for folio formats this involved simply folding the sheet in half, while for quarter formats an artificial fold had to be created by folding over the left margin somewhat. The stitching itself could be placed at the very top and bottom of the spine, where it also served to protect the edges, or it could be located in two wide groups somewhat offset from the centre. For the spine itself parchment was an ideal material, particularly since it could be cut in such a way that enough was available to cover both the front and the back of the document bundle and often also the open right side.

This method of binding represented the effective epitome of medieval document gathering technology. Although it was very close to true book binding, and although true
books were even occasionally made, the problems were greater than the advantages, and the classical Prussian binding was a direct descendent of the less formal method.

2. Registration

The advantages secured by keeping track of objects and events were fully realized early in the Middle Ages, and thus it is of no surprise that a variety of forms is encountered. The most common of these were copybooks and tradition books for diplomas received, property books, vassalage books, and books for general business matters. In the high Middle Ages appeared the register proper.

Given the absence of general charters or consistent legal codes, rights and privileges in the medieval era depended very much upon individual acts evidenced by diplomas, which thus became objects of considerable or even very great value, depending upon the nature of the right or privilege. Secure storage of these diplomas was a matter of high priority, and the common solution was to lock them away in a sturdy trunk or chest which would then be deposited with other valuables in a room or vault considered relatively safe from thieves, vandals and the elements -- particularly fire. However, such a solution based on the need for the security of the original had the drawback of making it difficult to

4. In true book binding, the pages are bound in fascicles, which in octave format leads to pages 1, 2, 15 and 16 being on the same sheet. Book binding of documents therefore requires considerable planning if the order of the documents matters at all.

5. The author follows the customary distinction made by German scholars between use of the term "copybook" (Kopial) for registers of incoming diplomas and the term "register" (Register) for registers of outgoing documents. Although both involved the use of copies, the purpose behind each was fundamentally different, a fact which is reflected in their later development. This should become clear in the course of the following pages.
access for reference, and hence gave origin to the practice of making surrogates in the form of copies.

Copybooks -- i.e., literally, books containing copies of diplomas -- exist from the first half of the 9th century\(^6\); their use continued well into the modern era. In format and layout there was no substantial change over this period, and variations are due mainly to the practice of the particular chancery rather than to improvements or other developments.

Copies could be more or less complete, reproducing both content and form of the original, or they could be considerably abbreviated, with no particular attempt to reproduce the form, only the text of the original being captured. Copies could also be more or less faithful, at times almost mirroring the original, at other times presenting what modern researchers can only regard as fanciful interpretations. Even in fairly faithful reproductions, scribes usually took the liberty of correcting what they viewed as mistakes in the original. A copy could be made directly from the original, or it might be made from another copy; the production of the copy could occur relatively soon after the receipt of the original, or hundred of years later.

The order in which the copies were arranged varied considerably. Quite common was arrangement according to geographical location; here the individual copies would be grouped by locality and then the localities arranged usually in alphabetical order. Chronological order was also common, as was the arrangement according to the legal

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\(^6\) From Fulda, ca. 835. Other extant early examples include the *Liber aureus* of Prüm and the copybooks of Corvey, Salzburg (all three 10th century), Utrecht, Malmédy, Honau, St.Mihiel, Kempten, Brixi and Magdeburg (all 11th century). See Bresslau, op.cit., vol.1, pp.94-95.
nature of the matter concerned. Main groups could also be formed — for example —
according to certain kinds of business matters -- and sub-groups created within them by
locality or chronology. Arrangement of the copies was, however, a secondary task in the
process of producing the copybook, as is made clear by the fact that some of them have
come to us with no evidence of any kind of principle of arrangement being used.

Copies could be made on individual sheets, and the sheets later bound together into
something resembling a book -- this was not so easy with parchment but was entirely
practicable with paper, as the preceding examination of document binding has shown.
More common however was the entry of the copy onto the sheets of a pre-made book:
this saved time but also changed the nature of the copy somewhat, since it was no longer
so much a surrogate of a document, but a business matter in its own right, entered “into
the book” in more or less the same fashion as other business matters.

This is more clear with the tradition books. Although a product of monastery scribes, the
tradition books are interesting in that they aimed to register not merely the various
privileges which the monastery collected, but also other business matters such as
agreements and receipts. This practice is especially evident in Bavaria, where tradition
books departed so much from the copy books that they must be regarded as documents
in their own right\(^7\).

Of course, outside of the monasteries, records of the same or similar matters were kept,
although not in a manner as uniform as the tradition books. These records, usually

\(^7\) See Bresslau, op.cit., p.99-100.
gathered together into book form or created as entries into a book, bear various names and are identified collectively under the German generic terms *Amtsbücher* or *Geschäftsbücher*, i.e. office books or business books. Thus, the *Urbar* was a list of the property titles held by a landowner and included a register of the obligations and contributions of the peasants. One example of particular relevance for the present discussion is the *Landbuch* of the Emperor Charles IV, which is basically a land registry of the March of Brandenburg, which had fallen into his possession. The *Lehensbuch* or vassalage book came into use around the beginning of the 14th century, due to the rise of a monetary economy, and provided a list of vassalage claims and obligations. Given that the act of vassalage itself was often verbal (no diploma was produced), the vassalage book was often the only written record of this important political instrument.

Books for financial records were of course also created, including the ubiquitous accounts book. With the beginning of taxation in the 14th century, tax books gradually made their appearance, registering especially the contributions owed by the various estates. Another important group of office books was formed by products of the law courts. Here a wide range of series could arise, each series being devoted to particular kinds of court cases. Finally, there is the city book, which deserves mention as a particular instance of the office or business book. Unlike the other book forms, which arose primarily on an *ad hoc* basis, city books were conceived from the beginning as a kind of single book intended to be used to register all of the city's business. Of course, as

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8. Technically, copybooks and tradition books must be regarded as forms of office books, all of which are essentially registers.
10. See Beck and Henning, op.cit. p.93.
11. Ibid., p.97
time passed and the business of the city grew increasingly complex, the city book was split into numerous series -- property, finances, the courts, etc. -- which then came superficially to resemble the products of other chanceries. City books were particularly valued by city officials in their constant struggle for independence and recognition within the political structure of the Empire and its territories; they accordingly began very early -- already in the first part of the 13th century\(^{12}\) -- and experienced a progressive development.

Approximately coincident with the city book arose the register proper as a record of outgoing documents. The practice is first observed in the chancery of the Count of Tirol around the middle of the 13th century\(^{13}\), and it spread fairly rapidly throughout Germany, so that even in northern Samland\(^{14}\) the bishop was producing registers from 1322 on\(^{15}\). In 1336 the first registers appeared in Brandenburg under the rule of the Wittelsbachers\(^{16}\), who figured prominently in Germany for their progressive administrative practices.

The basis for the register was -- as for the copybook -- the copy. There were, however, two essential differences between the copy in the register and the copy in the copybook. First, the copybook entry was a surrogate of another document -- the original diploma. Its purpose was to be where the original could not -- for reasons of security -- i.e. in the chancery office. Its function as a surrogate also enabled it to serve as a guide to the holdings of diplomas in the depot. The register entry was not a surrogate of another

\(^{12}\) Ibid., p.89
\(^{13}\) Extant from 1308; see Stolz, Archiv- und Registraturwesen der oberösterreichischen Regierung, p.125.
\(^{14}\) In what is now Lithuania.
\(^{15}\) Forstreuter, Zur Frage der Registerführung in der zentralen Deutschordenskanzlei, p.50.
\(^{16}\) Bresslau, op.cit., vol.1, p.145.
document, for it was not created in order that it could be where the original was not. Nor
could it be conceived as a surrogate of the outgoing document, which by its nature was
never intended to remain part of the chancery. It is, rather, a exemplary case of the
memorial document, that is, a document created in order to remind the creating agency of
what it has done.

Second, the copybook entry could be created at any time. The original was, after all, in
the possession of the office holder; if the copy in the chancery became lost or damaged,
the scribe could simply be instructed to produce another copy. Indeed, some copybook
entries exist which have been produced at least 200 years after the receipt of the original
diploma. With the register entry, the procedure was quite different. The document used
as a basis for the entry had to be dispatched; the head of the chancery could not afford
to wait long periods for documents to be copied before dispatching them. Even when the
register entry was made from the draft, while the fair copy was sent out, drafts could pile
up only for so long before they had to be copied. Again, although registers might, at a
later date, be copied in turn, here the whole register was the object of the copying efforts,
not individual diplomas.

This pressure to produce the register entry quickly led to a major development in
recordkeeping techniques: the extract. While even with the copybook copy some freedom
was usual in determining what would be copied and what not, the increasing burden of
copying outgoing documents led to the idea of simply summarizing the contents. A good
example is furnished by the register practice at the court of the Emperor Charles IV, the
second emperor -- after Ludwig the Bavarian -- to keep regular registers. One volume of
Charles' registers has survived and is now in the Sächsisches Hauptstaatsarchiv in Dresden. The cover bears the inscription “Registrum registrandorum Karoli quarti, darinne keyserliche privilegia, lehenbrive, und andere vil handell lateynisch und deuchsch registrit seyn”\(^{17}\) by a 16th century hand. The entries follow one after the other, separated only by a space, without headings. The order is roughly chronological: the progression from month to month is fairly regular, but within each month the order of the days is very irregular. In general, the register covers the dates January 1360 to April 1361, but some entries from preceding years (1355, 1358 and 1359) have been interpolated. The hands change frequently, as does the ink. While many of the documents are fairly complete transcriptions, many (approximately 40) were abbreviated to extracts. Since the business nature of these documents differs in no apparent manner from those documents which were copied in full -- they are, in particular, of no less importance than these -- it is reasonable to conclude that they were copied in haste directly from the fair copies waiting to be sent out.

Like the copybook, chronological order was one of several ways used to arrange the entries. Others included geographical location, social rank of the addressee, or subject; the arrangement could also be a mixture of these, or no system of arrangement could be used at all. In Brandenburg, on the other hand, it appears that the arrangement according to subject -- and indeed, according to the subject of business -- became fairly standard from approximately 1410 onwards\(^{18}\).

\(^{17}\) "A register of documents to be registered, of Charles the Fourth, therein are registered imperial privileges, feudal letters, many other matters Latin and German".

3. Chancery rules

Chancery rules were relatively uncommon in Germany before the 16th century. This lack of written regulation should not, however, be taken to indicate a lack of regulation altogether: the very large number of medieval diplomas from German chanceries bears clear evidence to the contrary. The explanation is to be sought rather in the reliance on verbal instruction, a tradition which lasted longer than in neighbouring Italy or France.

Officials in the medieval chancery were grouped into four categories. The highest official was the chancellor, sometimes referred to as the protonotarius ("chief notary"). The chancellor was responsible for the lord's seal and hence for the chancery itself; he dispensed the duties to his subordinates. Next in rank were the notaries, sometimes titled secretarii (privy notaries) to distinguish them from public notaries. They were responsible for drafting the diplomas and other documents and for ensuring that the final copies were correctly executed. Technically of the same rank as the notaries were the registrars, who were responsible for keeping account of the business of the chancery as well as of all other matters the lord desired to keep records of. To the registrars fell the task of keeping the books described above\(^\text{19}\). Finally, at the bottom of the hierarchy were the scribes or copyists, whose duty was to make the fair copy from the drafts produced by the notaries.

One of the earliest set of regulations for a chancery was produced around 1320 for the Officialate of the Archbishop of Cologne -- a very large office for the time, comprising more than forty regular permanent staff members, twenty of whom were notaries\(^\text{20}\). One

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19. It is of interest to note that although the registrars did essentially the same work as the regular notaries, it was not considered as dignified, for we hear of registrars being promoted to the office of notary.

hundred and fifty years later (!), the secular administration received a set of regulations in Archbishop Ruprecht's *Hof- und Kanzleiordnung* (Regulations for the Court and Chancery) of 1469. The intended reform of the Imperial administration in 1498 caused the Emperor Maximilian I to draw up regulations for the Imperial Chancery, which were attached to the regulations for the Imperial Court (*Hofordnung*)\(^2\). These regulations were soon followed by a succession of chancery regulations in other courts throughout Germany, including the first chancery regulations for the court of the Elector of Brandenburg in 1537 (*Hofordnung* of the Electoral Prince Joachim II).

These early regulations usually reflect two major concerns of the lord: security, and regulation of the working hours of the staff. The amount of attention paid to these issues can be somewhat irritating for the modern reader, since very little is said about the operation of the chancery itself. An interesting exception is the attention given to the office of the registrar. Thus, in the regulations for the chancery of the Archbishop of Cologne of 1469, it is stipulated that registers are to be kept of -- among other things -- the expenditures of the archbishop's officials and servants as well as of the income of the offices spread throughout the territory. It is further laid down that "Attention should be given in the chancery to the Registratur, registers and letters, and these should be so arranged that they can be easily found, if necessary."\(^2^2\) Similarly, in the Regulations for the Court of Brandenburg of 1537, it is specified that "All documents pertaining to confirmations, privileges, property, serfdom, deposits, recoveries, permission etc., and all

\(21\). Erben, op.cit. p.111 and Stolz, op.cit., p.130.

other letters which may be of importance must be registered and entered into separate books."  

4. Summary

The medieval elements of recordkeeping, as described above, were more or less the same throughout Europe -- it was only in the early modern era that Prussia set out on quite a different path. The precise reasons for this development have not yet been examined, and such an undertaking would be far beyond the limits of the present study. Here the intent has been to simply sketch out the conditions existing at the birth of the Prussian Registratur. Its roots, while not accounting directly for the specific strategy pursued in Prussia, nevertheless shed a good deal of light on its development. It has already been mentioned how, with the introduction of the practice of keeping registers in Brandenburg, the entries were kept quite systematically according to the nature of the business matter -- in other words, that a basis for the further development of the action file had been established. In addition, of the two fundamental types of document gathering available, the chanceries of Brandenburg/Prussia adopted the binding method - - a method which, in contrast to the container method still practised today in administrative offices in North America and Western Europe\(^2\)\(^4\), places the emphasis of organizing on the aggregate, not on the item. Finally, it has been shown that by the end of the Middle Ages the activities of the chancery of the Duchy of Brandenburg were

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24. I am referring to the ubiquitous file folder as a container for loose documents, and the replication of the file folder in EDP technology.
governed by a set of regulations which explicitly provided for the keeping of registers —
the precursors of the journal.
CHAPTER THREE: Transition -- the Büroreform

Towards the end of the 19th century a broad movement began with the aim of reforming business practices in government offices. This movement, known as the Büroreform or, literally, "office (or bureau) reform", affected, at first, primarily the offices of the State of Prussia, followed a couple of decades later by the government offices of the Reich. Municipalities also played a certain role in the reform movement, which, of course, was also supported in various ways by industry and commerce. The reform lasted essentially from about 1895 to 1945, and with it came the end of the classical Prussian Registratur.

1. The nature of the Büroreform

The Büroreform occurred as the traditional methods of conducting business increasingly failed to respond effectively to changing business needs. These changes in general were occasioned by two main factors; there were as well secondary factors relating specifically to file management practices.

One main factor was the rapid increase in the number of tasks and activities of the government bureaux and agencies, resulting in the phenomena of the mass files. This increase was due mainly to increased legislative activity by the parliaments, particularly in the areas of taxation, social welfare, housing, and education. An additional cause was the increasing population, as well as a rapidly developing industry.
A second major factor lay in the innovations occurring in office technology. These included stenography, the typewriter, various copying processes and devices, the substitution of drafts with carbon copies, and the introduction of mechanical filing binders.

In the specific area of file management, critical problem areas included the fracturing of filing systems as offices were subdivided or had parts of their functions transferred to other offices or to a new office. The quality of writing materials steadily diminished, leading to unsightly stacks of yellowing and mouldering documents, as well as to problems caused by tearing, soiling, and fading ink. Further, the filing room, as the "eye of the needle" through which all documents had to pass, proved simply too confined to handle the new influx of records, many of which were forms and repetitive in nature. The filing room, instead of facilitating recordkeeping, began to impede it. This, coupled with the other factors (poor quality of materials and the overall mass of records) led also to a steady decline in the esteem with which the profession of registrar was held, so that, by the end of the period, these officials were often regarded with a certain derision.

2. The history of the Büroreform

The history of the Büroreform can be divided into two major phases. The first, or "Prussian" phase, began in the final years of the 19th century and lasted to approximately the end of the First World War -- in this period reform activity centred around the offices of the Prussian government. The second phase occurred from the end of the First World War to the end of the Second World War, and involved primarily the upper (ministerial) offices of the Reich.
One of the first government agencies to introduce changes in its business procedures was the Prussian Railway, which in the 1890s began implementing new administrative measures to speed up business processes and to economize. These measures also affected recordkeeping. The use of the journal by the registrar was restricted, and the filing room was connected more closely to the chancery, so that the chancery clerks took on some of the responsibilities formerly held by the registrar. Further, a special category of documents — so-called *Weglegesachen* or "interim documents" — was created in order to relieve the filing room by reducing the number of documents it handled.

Between 1895 and 1897, the Prussian government began taking measures to improve chancery procedures. In 1895, the "Chancery Regulations"¹ were issued, followed in 1897 by a joint instruction from the Minister of the Interior and the Minister of Finances entitled *Grundzüge zu Anordnungen über den Geschäftsverkehr der Preußischen Staats- und Kommunalbehörden*.² The *Grundzüge* provided for — among other things — a reform of the chancery language (including avoiding the use of obscure, foreign or outmoded words as well as the technical jargon peculiar to the chancery), the use of postcards, and the introduction of mechanical filing devices. However, because none of the measures was accompanied by provisions for enforcement, and because of the notorious tenaciousness of Prussian bureaucratic tradition, they were simply ignored and the regulations remained a dead letter.

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The pressure for reform remained, however, as was made clear by complaints in the Chamber of Deputies and by the numerous articles appearing in various professional journals -- such as *Preußische Jahrbücher*, *Grenzboten*, and *Verwaltungsarchiv*. In 1909, the Kaiser appointed a “Direct Commission”³ to prepare for the reform of the government administration. Prior to the establishment of the Commission, the Minister of the Interior, von Moltke, issued a set of instructions for administrative reform⁴ as well as a memorandum⁵, in which he outlined various concrete measures to be taken in regard to reforming the recordkeeping procedures⁶.

The Commission consisted of six committees, the members being high government officials, municipal leaders, technocrats and representatives from industry and the free trades. Of these six committees, only the first – the Committee for the Simplification of Business Procedures -- finished its work. Its report, entitled *Grundzüge für eine (vereinfachte) Geschäftsführung der Regierungen*⁷, contained the following recommendations:

- the use of the journal was to be reduced,
- control over the internal routing of documents was to be simplified, and routing folders were to be used,
- as far as possible, the duties of the registrar were to be combined with those of the chancery clerks, and

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3. *Immediatkommision* -- i.e. a commission reporting directly to the head of government. Formally established on 7 June 1909.
4. On 10 March 1908.
5. Dated 12 December 1908.
7. "Basic Principles for a (Simplified) Operation of Government Bureaux". It was ratified by royal decree on 17 June 1910.
• use of "interim documents" (Weglegesachen) was to be introduced.

The report also recommended, however, that the traditional (and time-consuming) file-making method of binding documents be continued. The recommendations of the Grundzüge were implemented on 15 July 1910, although the work of the Commission as a whole had not been concluded. Again, however, the work bore no fruit, partly because of insufficient preparatory work to ensure the co-operation of those involved, partly because inadequate attention was given to the need for training and developing support for the changes. With the outbreak of the First World War this particular reform movement came to a quiet end.

Early in 1917, efforts and continued pressure for serious reforms led to the appointment of two Prussian Commissioners for Administrative Reform: Mügels was given responsibility for the justice system, while Drews was to address the situation in the remaining administrative offices. In the same year, Drews submitted a report, leading to the passing of legislation in 1918, which the contained the following recommendations:

• the use of filing room aids -- the journal in particular, was to be restricted,
• attention was to be given to improving the methods according to which files were handled and organized,
• departmental heads were to be given greater decision-making responsibilities,
• organically conceived business procedures were to be introduced,
• extensive use was to be made of the new office technology, including typewriters, telephones, dictaphones, binders and card catalogues,

9. These appointments marked the effective end of the Immediatkommission.
10. Published in Berlin in 1919 under the title Grundzüge einer Verwaltungsreform ("The Principles of an Administrative Reform").
• provision was to be made for increased co-operation among staff during the introduction and implementation of changes,
• more effective use was to be made of personnel capacities, and
• necessary assurances were to be provided that the reforms planned would also be executed; a Bureau for Office Improvements was established to oversee the execution of the reform measures.

For a third time, however, traditions proved stronger than regulations, and real results were intangible. The initiative passed to the Reichs government.

In the Reich, efforts to provide the executive office (Reichsregierung) with efficient business procedures began in 1920, and were successfully concluded in 1924 with the enactment of the "Procedural Code for the Reichs Executive Office"\(^{11}\). The year 1920 also saw the establishment of a "Commission for the Simplification and Standardization of the Reichs Administration"\(^{12}\) (in one of the six committees of which Drews was a member), which, however, was terminated in 1921 without having achieved any concrete results.

In 1922 a fresh start was made: each ministry appointed a special "Commissioner for Matters of Efficiency"; each of the special commissioners was to prepare recommendations on the basis of his knowledge and experience, and then present them to his respective ministry for examination and evaluation. In addition, all the special commissioners were to keep in touch with one another. The Director of Department I,

\(^{11}\) Geschäftsordnung der Reichsregierung, approved by cabinet on 3 May 1924.

\(^{12}\) Kommission zur Vereinfachung und Vereinheitlichung der Reichsverwaltung.
Brecht, was appointed for the Ministry of the Interior (Reichsministerium des Innern = RMI), which had assumed a leading role in the process.

Brecht submitted the first draft of a Joint Procedural Code (Gemeinsame Geschäftsordnung = GGO) in 1923. As a result, a special sub-commission for recordkeeping matters was formed, with Brecht as one of its members. At the same time, the Code was divided into a general section (GGO I: allgemeiner Teil), and a special section (GGO II: besonderer Teil), and by September of the same year (1923), a draft of section I was finished. However, the recommendations made in this draft were so wide-sweeping, that considerable delay was incurred in the attempt to work out compromises and educate the officials in the necessity for the proposed changes. Meanwhile, work with section II proceeded smoothly, and in 1924 GGO II was passed and enacted.

In January of 1926 Brecht took the unusual step of setting up a trial Registratur in his own department of the RMI. He described it as follows:

The department section has a large Registratur in which three registrars sit at their desks; among the registrars the designated tasks of the section are divided by file numbers. Thus registrar A works with files with the numbers 1000 to 4999, registrar B works with files with the numbers 5000 to 5999, and registrar C with the files from 6000 to 7999. The newly arrived documents are sent to them directly from the main office in covers on which are noted the letters "A", "B" or "C" -- this is no problem for the main office, since they have to examine the contents of the documents anyway in order to determine to whom they should be forwarded. Each registrar has on his desk the sender card catalogue (Einsenderkartei) for his area of responsibility, the file inventory (Aktenverzeichnis), and, ready at hand next to his desk, his files set up after the manner of a library, such that a quick overview is possible. The files take up less, not more, room than before, since either thinner file binders are used,
or in thicker binders the files are arranged with hanging sub-binders until it becomes necessary to create a new separate binder. ... The registrar receives his incoming documents, takes them in their proper order and gives each its appropriate business number (the code for the department plus the file code plus the date), and then makes an entry in the sender card catalogue if necessary. At the same time he notes on the document to whom it should be sent -- if the main office has not already seen to this -- following the business division plan, which is handily organized in the same manner as the filing plan. For all these tasks it is not necessary for the registrar to leave his place. The to and fro between desk, journal, index, subject listing etc. thus has been eliminated. Incorporating new files is very simple: one reach to the file volume -- whose number corresponds to the number just used as the business number -- suffices to have either the correct volume or else the loan card in its place with a note concerning who has the volume. If the matter proceeds in the usual manner, this is not recorded. If the matter has to go to another department or bureau an appropriate entry is made in the "Co-signature List". When the matter is finished, the documents are inserted into the files by the registrar himself. His main interest concerns the organization of the files and their accessibility.13

The successful implementation of his recommendations based on the positive experiences of his trial Registratur enabled Brecht to bring the work of his sub-committee to a rapid conclusion. In February of the same year, a report with recommendations was submitted to the various ministries, which by May had all given their approval. This was followed by approval from the Reichs Cabinet in September, and subsequently with the enactment of the first comprehensive code of business procedures for a German government as the *Gemeinsame Geschäftsordnung I (GGO I)*14.

This success led to the submission of a draft Joint Procedural Code for the Upper Bureaux of the Reich\textsuperscript{15} in 1927 by the Reichs Comptroller (Reichssparkommissar).

Although the draft was not complete -- missing was the "Code for Files Control in the Upper Bureaux of the Reich"\textsuperscript{16} -- it was accepted and passed in 1929\textsuperscript{17}. In October of 1931 the Code for Files Control was submitted by the RMI\textsuperscript{18}. After discussion, a revised draft was submitted to the Reichs Cabinet, which immediately gave it approval. Enactment followed in April 1932\textsuperscript{19}. The Code for Files Control went somewhat further in its recommendations than the earlier Joint Procedural Code; among other things, it called for the introduction of A and B files (A = \textit{allgemeine}, i.e. "general", B = \textit{besondere}, i.e. "special"), comprehensive use of the standardized filing plan (\textit{einheitliche Aktenplan}), the possibility of forming files based on single specific matters, and the complete disappearance of the journal; it further evinced a definite preference for decentralized filing.

These reform measures on the part of the Reich were supported by two semi-independent organizations devoted to the study and improvement of records management and office procedures: the Diwiv and the AWV.

The Diwiv or \textit{Deutsches Institut für wirtschaftliche Arbeit in der öffentlichen Verwaltung}\textsuperscript{20} began in 1926\textsuperscript{21} as a subsidiary organization of the \textit{Verwaltungsakademie}\textsuperscript{22} in Berlin. Its

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{15} \textit{Gemeinsame Geschäftsordnung für die höhernen Reichsbehörden}, known simply as the GOH.
  \item \textsuperscript{16} \textit{Ordnungsgrundsätze für die Aktenverwaltung der höhernen Reichsbehörden} or OGHR.
  \item \textsuperscript{17} Enactment retroactive to 1 October 1928.
  \item \textsuperscript{18} It had nevertheless been drafted by the Reichs Comptroller.
  \item \textsuperscript{19} In effect from 1 April.
  \item \textsuperscript{20} "German Institute for Efficient Work in Public Administration"
  \item \textsuperscript{21} Founded on 4 May 1926.
  \item \textsuperscript{22} "Academy of Government Administration".
\end{itemize}
president was Drews, Brecht served as vice-president. The intended purpose of the Diwiv was to act as an independent focus for the various reform efforts being made in government office management. Besides gathering reports and other information as well as providing advice, its activities included setting up exhibits of model offices (one of the nine permanent exhibits was devoted exclusively to recordkeeping), offering courses to public employees, and producing publications. Largely successful in its efforts and drawing up to 800 students at a time in its courses, one of the most noted accomplishments of the Diwiv was its first publication: Brecht's *Die Geschäftsordnung der Reichsministerien. Ihre staatsrechtliche und geschäftstechnische Bedeutung. Zugleich eine Lehrbuch der Büroreform*\textsuperscript{23} -- now considered a classic work of the *Büroreform*. The Diwiv was forced to disband in 1933 by Hitler's newly installed government as part of its programme of withdrawing public funding from progressive organizations.

A parallel development was represented by the AWV or *Ausschuss für wirtschaftliche Verwaltung*\textsuperscript{24}, established in 1925 as an autonomous institution of the *Rationaliserungskuratorium der deutschen Wirtschaft*\textsuperscript{25}. It was thus an agency of the private sector. The AWV co-operated with the Diwiv: among was joint projects was the booklet *Die Schriftgutablage (Registratur)*\textsuperscript{26}, published in 1931. Disbanded after the Second World War, the AWV was re-established in 1950 and has worked closely with the federal government in West Germany.

\textsuperscript{24} "Committee for Economical Administration"
\textsuperscript{25} "Curatorium for the Rationalization of the German Economy" -- one of the several measures taken after the 1st World War to get the economy back on its feet.
\textsuperscript{26} "Filing Records (Registratur)".
The passing of the Code for Files Control in 1931 marked the effective end of the Bürapeform. The concept of the standardized filing plan was markedly successful, however, leading to its adoption in a number of different ministries and administrations, for example the Reichspost, which had begun introducing the standardized filing plan in 1926 and completed this process in 1932, the Reichs Finance Administration (from 1929), the Reichswehr in 1931, the Office for Labour and for Unemployment Insurance in 1934, 1935 the Reichs Justice Administration at the end of 1935, the Luftwaffe in 1937, and the Prussian Police Administration in 1934 -- a late flowering of Prussian reform efforts. In general, interest in reform declined noticeably during the Nazi era, although this was due not so much to ideological factors as to the absorption of large numbers of Prussian officials and clerks into the government offices, as the Reich took over the Prussian administration in the mid-30's. Towards the end of this period, and in particular with the declaration of total war in 1944, a renewed interest in the Bürapeform occurred as qualified personnel and material resources became exceedingly scarce. However, none of the measures taken -- including the abolition of the journal -- contributed to the development of the Bürapeform or caused any enduring change in Registratur.

3. Changes brought about by the Bürapeform

a. The Aktenplan

The Aktenplan -- or "filing plan" -- provided a method of uniform placement of any action file within the general context of the bureau's activity. It developed out of the Registraturplan ("filing room plan") -- which was a mere aid to the registrar -- into an instrument for the organization of files. Further, it enabled this organization to occur
independently of the registrar. It was the most important and lasting of all Büroreform innovations.

There are two principal differences between the Registraturplan and the Aktenplan. First, while the Registraturplan served as an aid to the registrar, the Aktenplan serves the entire bureau. It is intended to be easily grasped by all the bureau staff, and easily used by the department heads and their assistants. Second, the Registraturplan was devised according to the activities actually carried out by the office (or anticipated to be actually carried out); it was therefore unique to each office. The Aktenplan, although likewise conceived with the activities of the office in mind, is generic in nature: what forms the basis for the file structuring are kinds of business matters, not specific or actual business matters. Thus the Aktenplan lends itself easily to standardization, resulting very early in standardized filing plans applying to more than one office.

The Aktenplan as foreseen by the GGO I deserves special attention; although not the first filing plan of its kind, its specifications as laid out in the GGO I were to have a major impact on government recordkeeping. The basis for the plan was the Aktenplan drawn up for the model filing room by Brecht. According to the GGO I, the plan is to be made either for each department of a ministry, or for the entire ministry. It is to be constructed “systematically”, “with foresight”, and “with consideration for the requirements of the business activity” — i.e. according to the tasks and functions of the department. In cases where business areas overlap, the plan is to provide clear guidelines as to where the files

27. See Chapter One, p. 24.
28. GGO I (1926), § 1.
29. ibid.§ 2.
are to be allocated. The four-digit (decimal) classification system is to be used\(^{30}\). The Code claims that the efficiency of the business operations themselves as well as of the maintenance of the files depends upon having a good filing plan\(^{31}\). The plan is to be approved by the department head\(^{32}\), and is to be distributed to the ministerial secretary, the department head, each Dezernent, each clerk, and each registrar\(^{33}\).

b. The filing binder

The introduction of the filing binder was the most visible sign of the changes taking place during the Büroreform, although its importance for the filing room was more of a secondary nature. Filing binders enable the individual documents composing the action file to be bound together in such a way that individual documents can be removed from or inserted into the file without disturbing the order of the other documents. Two main types were introduced: the clip binder and the ring binder; each of these has its peculiar advantages and disadvantages\(^{34}\).

The clip binder appears in two forms. In one form, the clip consists of two flexible metal prongs onto which the individual documents are affixed after holes have been punched into their left margin\(^{35}\). A metal strip, placed on top of the documents at the perforations, simultaneously holds them together through pressure and secures the ends of the two

\(^{30}\) ibid. The four-digit system provides for a major category (indicated by the first digit) and three sub-categories arranged hierarchically (for example: group, sub-group and section). Within each category 10 divisions are allowed.

\(^{31}\) ibid.

\(^{32}\) ibid.

\(^{33}\) ibid., § 4.1.

\(^{34}\) Binder technology was first utilized in the private sector, only gradually being adopted by government offices after a long period of persistent advertising by the producers of office equipment -- see Papritz, Archivwissenschaft, vol. 2, p.342.

\(^{35}\) The holes were 0.5 cm in diameter and set 8 cm apart (from the centre out).
prongs. The press binder, on the other hand, does not require that holes be punched in the documents; instead, through use of a spring mechanism with attached lever and latch, the documents are held in the binder through the constant force exerted by the spring.

Both types enable documents to be quickly removed from and inserted into the file. Because they are essentially horizontal files, they are handy for the worker to use. However, their capacity is relatively limited — particularly in the case of the press binder which can usually accommodate only up to 1 cm of documents. Because of this, the creation of single action files or even split action files is encouraged. In storage, the registrar is forced to consider transferring them to other holders, since large piles of clip binders are difficult to manage.

The ring binder consists of two covers (front and back) joined by a broad flat spine, all quite rigid to enable the device to stand upright when full. It is a bit larger than the DIN-A4 standard format. On the inside of the back cover is a metal mechanism consisting of two large U-shaped hoops: these are held closed by a spring which can be released by means of a lever, thus allowing the hoops to spring open. The documents are inserted on the right hand part of the hoops; holes ½ cm in diameter and 8 cm apart need to be punched in each document. Once inserted, a metal strip with a spring device and lever slides down the hoops and holds the documents in place. The vertical position of the ring

36. i.e. files intended to lie flat on the working or storage surface
37. The major difficulties lie in identifying the contents of the file from the side of the binder, which is usually too narrow for labelling, and in extracting and replacing files. For a more detailed discussion of the clip binder see Papritz, Archivwissenschaft, vol.2, pp.24-33 and 343-347.
38. DIN-A4 = 21 x 29.7 cm or 8 5/16" by 11 11/16", i.e. somewhat narrower and somewhat longer than a normal US standard sheet.
binder means that files can be moved without disturbing or moving other files. Further, the broad back of the ring binder enables the file code to be marked on it; it also allows the use of other marking devices (e.g. lines, colour bars), enabling the binder to be quickly replaced in its original location. Ring binders are, however, notoriously space-consuming: one binder takes up the same amount of space whether it is full or not. Other typical problems include documents drooping on the rings after a period of storage (this is a common problem in all vertical storage), and documents becoming dusty due to the open top and sides of the binder. Further, because poor quality materials are usually used in their manufacture to meet requirements for both strength and economy, problems are encountered with long-storage, and particularly with rusting metal parts. Nor does the size and weight of the ring binder recommend it for constant use.39

c. Interim documents (Weglegesachen)

Interim documents are essentially documents which, upon entering the office, are classed as not being suited for permanent filing, yet as being worthwhile for keeping temporarily on account of their usefulness for particular business matters. They are usually organized in series (alphabetical, numerical etc.), and typically consist of advertising material, prospects which are not followed up on, reminder notes, travel expense notes, correspondence in regard to the technical aspects of preparing for a business trip, and notifications from the post office. In legal offices they also include summons given to witnesses, and fee calculations40.

39. For a more detailed discussion of the ring binder see Papritz, Archivwissenschaft, vol.2, pp.33-35 and 343-345, also Rohr, Aktenwesen der preußischen Regierungen, p.58.
Provision for the creation of interim documents was first made by the Prussian government in its *Grundzüge für eine (vereinfachte) Geschäftsordnung der Regierungen* of 1910. There it was stated that:

All irrelevant documents are to be treated as interim documents and are so characterized in the following instructions, when it is obvious either from the beginning or during the processing that they will unnecessarily burden the files. In particular incoming documents such as brochures, prospects, invitations, postings etc., which are neither to be entered into the journal or inserted into the files, are provided with a corresponding note by the department head.

Similar provisions appeared in the *GGO I* of 1926 and in the *OGHR* of 1932.

Although appearing to be of obvious advantage in keeping extraneous material out of the filing system, there are four major problems involved in the use of interim documents. First, the individual document is treated by itself, i.e. in isolation from the current business matter. A “non-Registratur” or, perhaps better, a non-business matter area is thus created within the bureau or office. Second, it is impossible to define what constitutes an interim document in such a precise manner that all of the staff can identify them consistently. Because of this uncertainty, and because the secretaries are naturally concerned first and foremost with carrying out the business tasks assigned to them, rather than maintaining their records in proper order, there is a tendency to classify only the most

41. Schatz, op.cit., p.73.
42. Cited by Schatz, ibid.: “Als Weglegesachen sind alle belanglosen Schriftstücke zu behandeln und in den darauf ergehenden Verfügungen zu bezeichnen, bei welchen von vornherein ersichtlich ist oder sich bei der Bearbeitung ergibt, daß sie die Akten unnütz beschweren würden. Insbesondere Eingangsstücke, wie Drucksachen, Öfferten, Einladungen, Gelegenheitsanzeigen usw., die weder in das Tagebuch einzutragen sind, noch zu den Akten genommen werden sollen, versieht der Abteilungsdirigent oder der Dezernent mit entsprechenden Vermerken...”
43. *GGO I, Anhang A (Registraturordnung)*, § 21.
44. *OGHR*, § 8.
obviously non-valuable documents as interim documents, and place all the rest in the files — thus defeating the original purpose of maintaining this category. Third, because interim documents lie outside the filing system, their arrangement will occur in simple mechanical series. After a certain time has elapsed, a mass of interim documents will accumulate, and so create problems in retrieving specific ones. The fourth and final problem touches upon archival principles, that is, whether it is wise to allow the secretaries to make irreversible decisions regarding document value. For the creation of interim documents automatically entails that a certain mass of documents will be destroyed each year without ever being inspected or even brought to the attention of the archivist.

d. The *Sachbearbeiterablage* or “decentralized Registratur”

The traditional filing room was conceived as one of the several functional areas of the bureau or office, and like the other functional areas -- accounting, clerical tasks, cashier, post handling etc. -- was assigned to one place. One filing room could serve all or several of the divisions of a single bureau, or each division could have its own filing room. The large bureau or ministerial filing rooms were early victims of the administrative shifts and changes which began occurring towards the end of the last century: they became split or fractured as new bureaux and agencies arose or as old ones were divided. The problems associated with this damage led -- along with the drive for efficiency -- to assigning responsibility for filing to smaller administrative units, and eventually to the individual secretary. The end result was the so-called *Sachbearbeiterablage* or “decentralized Registratur”.
The decentralized Registratur was made possible by eliminating the journal and introducing the Aktenplan, which, as shown above, also provided the business number for each business matter and its associated document. The secretary could then be given responsibility for all the files which he created within his particular area; the Aktenplan ensured that the method of file classification was standard and accurately reflected the individual business areas. The files were kept by each secretary in his own office. A record of incoming documents -- when it was felt necessary to have this -- was kept on filing cards, one card being used for each incoming document. The GGO I of 1926 also made provisions for the case when the secretary was absent (since access to all files has to be ensured at all times). It should be made clear that the implementation of the decentralized Registratur did not necessarily mean that a central filing room was dispensed with.

The decentralized Registratur has the advantage of doing away with the to and fro between office sections and the filing room: the secretary has all the files he needs at his immediate disposal. This speeds up the handling of the business matter. It also saves labour, for, while with the traditional filing system two people have to concern themselves with each file (i.e., the Registrar and the secretary), one person now suffices. Furthermore, the secretary is, by nature of his work, much better acquainted with his files than the Registrar could ever be. This was expected to lead to a better organization of the files and easier access.

45. GGO I, Anhang A (Registaturordnung), Division D ("Arbeit ohne Registratur"), § 13.
46. ibid, § 13, section 2.
47. ibid, § 14.
48. In GGO I, Anhang A, Division D, reference is specifically made to the existence of a central filing room, which may take over for an absent secretary (who is conducting his own decentralized Registratur) -- see § 14, section 2.
There are, however, also a number of serious problems. A purely economical problem is the fact that the secretary -- who is paid according to a relatively high wage scale -- now has to do a considerable amount of work formerly carried out by the filing room assistants, who worked at a rather lower wage scale, for much of the filing work is repetitious and boring. For these same reasons, it is less likely that the secretary will take the same interest in his files as does the registrar, for, after all, this is not his primary duty, nor does it correspond with what he was originally trained for. It could also be argued that the fact that the secretary is more familiar with his own records works against good organization, in that he would not feel the same need for a thorough organization as one who was not so familiar with the records. Small problems involved with the use of the decentralized Registratur increase proportionally as the number of secretaries in the office or bureau increases. One such problem is the fact that each secretary handles not only files relevant only to his own work area, but also files of a general nature, which are also handled and needed by other secretaries. As the number of secretaries increases, so does the replication of work and files, causing increased storage problems and, when the time comes for transfer to the archives, a much larger burden for the archivist. A similar problem is presented by finding files when the subject or file number is only vaguely known, or not known at all. When the number of secretaries is small, it is still possible to go to each one and inquire whether he has the file in question. However, in large bureaux, with a very large number of secretaries, the search for such files becomes truly daunting. For these reasons the introduction of the decentralized Registratur in its pure form was probably one of the least successful measures of the **Büroreform**.
4. Summary

On the one hand, the Büroreform marked a relatively short period of significant change in attitudes towards traditional recordkeeping practices, particularly those of the Prussian administrative offices. Registrars, formerly admired and valued for their knowledge and skills in maintaining complicated filing systems, came to be viewed as impediments to a rational and economic management of office processes, and were accordingly demoted, their work often handed over to others with no experience or training at all in recordkeeping. A consistent pattern in all the developments of the Büroreform is the attempt, not to improve the filing rooms, but to do away with both them and their staff, and to enable non-trained personnel to carry out the necessary filing activities.

On the other hand, it was never the aim of the Büroreform to do away with good filing practices per se, nor was there any serious attempt made to shape the reform so that the results conformed more with practices in the United States, for example, which was otherwise held up as a model for industrial efficiency. In fact, although certain recordkeeping practices underwent change in the course of the reform, it is clear that the ideals of good recordkeeping -- the same ideals as evidenced in the classical Prussian Registratur -- were neither threatened or even noticeably affected. Changes in the methods of file making and registration were advocated, but not the abandonment of file making or registration. Indeed, the Büroreform even went a step further in the development of the traditional three elements of Registratur and provided the first uniform filing code for all government ministries (the Registratur regulations of the GGO I in 1926).
Indeed, in view of the general failure of the Büroreform to implement long-term and stable changes (apart from the use of the filing plan), it can be legitimately questioned whether it is proper to speak of a reform at all. The movement perhaps is better viewed as simply a result of the stresses to recordkeeping brought on by pressures for economy and rationalization, caused simultaneously by technological developments as well as by the rapidly expanding social role of government -- not only in Germany, but in all the other Western industrialized nations. The developments which occurred, therefore, can be viewed as more integral to the nature of Registratur than has been previously acknowledged. In any case, it is clear that both the developments which have taken place, and the discussion which continues to surround the nature of the Büroreform, have both served to confirm the principles of recordkeeping already practised in Prussia in the 18th and 19th centuries.
CHAPTER FOUR: Registratur in Modern Germany

The unconditional surrender of the German military forces on 7 May 1945 meant the end not only of the 74-year-old German Reich but also -- more significantly -- of the state of Prussia and, hence, Prussian administration. All of Germany was occupied by foreign troops, and the civilian administration was controlled by each of the four occupying powers. From this "point zero" the fairly rapid onset of the cold war with its two opposing political systems had major implications also for the survival of traditional recordkeeping practices, such that we are faced with two German recordkeeping histories up until re-unification in 1990.

1. Registratur in the GDR (German Democratic Republic)

Despite the fact that the Soviet Occupation Zone -- out of which the German Democratic Republic later emerged -- included the core areas of Prussian history and culture (Brandenburg, Pomerania, Prussian Saxony), nowhere else in Germany were the Prussian recordkeeping traditions more thoroughly broken and the very existence of Registratur more threatened. Following the capitulation, the government of the USSR established the Soviet Military Administration (SMAD) as the highest administrative body in the Soviet Occupation Zone. This administration then proceeded to force through a

1. The formal existence of a Prussian state was formally abolished by Law No.46 of the Allied Control Council, issued 25 February 1947 ("The Prussian State together with its central government and all its agencies is abolished.").

2. Announced as "Befehl Nr.1" ("Order No.1") on 9 June 1945, following a directive of the Council of Peoples Deputies of the USSR of 6 June 1945. The directive specified that "The Soviet Military Administration in Germany has the responsibility for supervising the fulfilment by the Germans of the obligations resulting from the unconditional surrender, for administering the Soviet Occupation Zone in Germany and for executing the agreed directives of the Control Council regarding basic issues of a military and economic nature as well as questions of common concern for the whole of Germany." -- cited in Weber, Geschichte der DDR, p.60.
radical re-structuring of the civilian administration in keeping with the current political/ideological goals of the Soviet government, which included ensuring the dominance of the German Communist Party (KPD). Not only were key administrative posts at all levels of government assigned to communists or others who were expected to behave in a loyal manner towards the Soviet Union, a dramatic purge of all professions also began, in the name of “de-nazification". By 1947 an estimated 520,000 professionals -- most of these in the public sector -- had lost their jobs and were replaced by persons largely inexperienced, but politically reliable³. This radical loss of qualified personnel⁴, combined with propaganda against all forms of bureaucracy, a politically-inspired hatred of all things Prussian, and generally low public interest and support for controlling large masses of paper, meant that the new German Democratic Republic began life in 1949 with an astonishingly primitive recordkeeping system bearing hardly any traces of Registratur -- no standard file making procedures or even filing plans, little interest in registration, and no serious regulations. The effects on efficiency could not be disregarded, and from 1950 onwards the GDR attempted to reach the stage in recordkeeping practices where the Reich had left off in 1945.

4. The importance of the radical re-structuring of the public administration in the Soviet Occupation Zone for the development of recordkeeping practices in the GDR was curiously ignored in the recent evaluation presented by Hoffmann, op.cit., pp.67-71, in particular p.67, where the essential reason for the disaster is supposed to lie in the fight against bureaucracy. Brachmann, on the other hand, is clear about the fundamental importance of the loss of qualified personnel, referring on the one hand to the "elimination of the professional officials" after the war and citing as first of three main causes for the problem of inefficiency in the state administration the "lack of training" (Brachmann, *Zur Geschichte der Büroreform*, p.12). Even by the end of the GDR the situation had not altered substantially: Schulze reports that of all the directors and staff members in the central state offices in 1989 55% had their origins in the ranks of the workers and farmers; of these 41% were working in the production sector before assuming their administrative positions (Schulze, *Verwaltungspersonal und Verwaltungsausbildung*, p.147).
Strategies devised to improve recordkeeping standards were formulated and implemented in four major areas: in laws and regulations; through the establishment of educational institutions; in the spreading of information about sound practices through books, brochures and articles in professional journals; and finally in the creation of the administrative archives (Verwaltungsarchive) -- an idea borrowed from the USSR\(^5\).

The basic regulation governing recordkeeping practices in central state offices was the Official Service Regulations of the GDR, passed about a month after the proclamation of the new republic\(^6\). Although loosely based on the GGO / from 1926, its orientation was clearly political in nature, and only one paragraph related to recordkeeping practices, while details regarding Registratur were missing altogether\(^7\). The Regulations were revised with the issue of the Framework Regulation for the Personnel of Central State Offices in 1956, which included provisions for the creation and use of filing plans\(^8\). Aside from special instructions\(^9\), further measures appeared in various archives regulations and guidelines, such as the State Archives Regulations of 1965\(^10\), the revision of the same regulations in 1976, and the Guidelines for the Compilation and Transfer of Official Records from the State Offices to the Administrative Archives, published by the State Archives Administration in 1979\(^11\).

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While there was no specific programme provided at the higher education level for government administration, training in administrative matters was offered by a number of institutions, including the Academy of Political Science and Law of the GDR\(^{12}\), the Technical School for Political Science\(^{13}\), the Business Academies of the regional councils and by some schools organized by the Socialist Unity Party (SED)\(^{14}\). Of particular importance for training in recordkeeping practices was the establishment in 1960 of the Institute for Administrative Organization and Office Technology, which had much the same role and activities of the Diwiv in the 1920's\(^{15}\).

Beginning in the 1950's an ever increasing number of publications appeared, which were devoted to the understanding of proper recordkeeping and to advocating the adoption of various practices associated with the Büroreform. The Institute for Administrative Organization and Office Technology produced a notable series of handbooks, in which topics such as the creation of filing plans and the setting up of efficient filing rooms were discussed\(^{16}\). Archivists played a leading role in these publication efforts: not only did they co-operate in the publications of the Institute, but also numerous articles dealing with recordkeeping issues were written for the archival journal of the GDR, Archivmitteilungen. The State Archives Administration published material in connection with its correspondence course programme for archivists\(^{17}\); it sponsored as well the publication in

\(^{12}\). Akademie für Staats- und Rechtswissenschaft der DDR.
\(^{13}\). Fachschule für Staatswissenschaft.
\(^{14}\). Schulze, op.cit., p.162.
\(^{15}\). The institute was first located in Halle and attached to the Ministry of Finance, later it became part of the Academy of Political Science and Law, with facilities in Leipzig. See Hoffmann, op.cit., p.68.
\(^{16}\). "Leitfaden für die Aufstellung von Aktenplänen" (1962), "Zweckmäßige Gestaltung der Schriftgutregistrator" (1963), "Rationelle Schriftgutregistrator" (1974), and an additional booklet on filing plans in 1982. See Hoffmann, op.cit., p.68, esp.note 25.
\(^{17}\). For example, a textbook on recordkeeping and a "Studienanleitung Schriftgutverwaltung" by Gottfried Dohme.
1965 of Brachmann's major work on recordkeeping, *Die Schriftgutverwaltung in Staat und Wirtschaft*\(^{18}\).

The State Archives Administration was also responsible for the most significant step towards improving recordkeeping practices: the establishment and maintenance of the administrative archives (*Verwaltungsarchive*). Begun in 1951\(^{19}\), the programme was set up to provide all state offices -- at first just those of the government, but later including all state-owned enterprises, institutions, organizations etc. -- with rudimentary archival facilities, staffed by trained personnel working under the supervision of the State Archives Administration or its agent offices at the district level. Based on the concept of the departmental archives (*Altregistratur*) of the 17th and 18th centuries, which in turn was simply a logical development of the medieval archival depot, the primary task of the administrative archives was to gather and transfer the office's records to the final archives\(^{20}\). Unlike the earlier departmental archives, however, they were also assigned a

\(^{18}\) "Recordkeeping in Government and Industry" -- see bibliography.

\(^{19}\) *Anordnung zur Einrichtung von Verwaltungsarchiven*, 26 February 1951.

\(^{20}\) See *Anordnung ....*, §§ 1 and 5. The difference between the concept of the administrative archives and that of a *Zwischenarchiv* -- intermediate archives, limbo, or records centre -- should be emphasized here. The *Zwischenarchiv* is a modern -- one would like to say even industrial -- concept which post-dates the establishment of the administrative archives. *Zwischenarchive* or records centres are independent institutions set up to collect records from a number of offices and agencies within their established jurisdiction. They have no legislated authority to interfere with the recordkeeping practices of the source administrations. The administrative archives, on the other hand, were part of the office administration itself, and enabled (in theory) the administration to put its records in proper order -- and later even carry out appraisal -- before passing them on to the appropriate archival institution. The distinction between administrative archives and *Zwischenarchiv* is thus quite crucial from the perspective of recordkeeping, and is unfortunately blurred by some authors, including the recent contribution of Landwehr (*The German Archival System*, pp.44-45) and also -- interestingly enough -- in what was obviously intended as the GDR's major contribution to the genre of archival handbook: *Archivwesen der DDR* ("Unter Verwaltungsarchiven versteht man Zwischenarchive mit zeitlich begrenzter Zuständigkeit für Registraturgut bzw. Archivgut von Registraturbildnem.")., p.130).
secondary task which was not of an archival nature, but rather in the area of recordkeeping. In a very brief statement in the original legislation, the archivist assigned to the administrative archives was given the authority to supervise “both the practical file making as well as the records storage of the individual departments within the administration”\(^{21}\). While in the beginning staffed by persons with only a very hasty and rudimentary training in archival practice, the quality gradually improved, such that in the final government of the GDR, five ministerial administrative archives were staffed with archivists having a higher education\(^{22}\).

The power given to archivists to guide and shape the recordkeeping practices in practically all state offices -- expressed so clearly by the administrative archives and reinforced by the contributions of archivists in the other areas discussed -- can be viewed in both a positive and a negative light. Its positive contribution lay in the possibility of applying uniform standards to the creation and maintenance of all state records, and in ensuring that the archival records -- in keeping with the policies of the State Archives Administrative -- were properly preserved. On the other hand, the duties thus assumed by the archivists could hardly promote a corresponding sense of responsibility among the actual records creators, and it is quite legitimate to conjecture that this was a leading reason for the failure of recordkeeping practices in the GDR to ever evolve beyond the level marked out by the Büroreform of the 1920's. For when the balance was drawn at the end of the republic in 1990, the results were not impressive.

\(^{21}\) “Der Verwaltungsarchivar überwacht zugleich die technische Aktenführung und die Schriftgutablage bei den einzelnen Abteilungen der Verwaltung”, § 6, section 2.

\(^{22}\) Hoffmann, op.cit., p.70.
The abandonment of the central filing room and the application of decentralized Registratur -- hailed as a mark of conformance to the *Büroreform* -- was never satisfactorily accompanied by the training and discipline required to make this step truly effective. In the area of file making the necessity of basing files on business matters was still something which needed to be made clear to officials. The most glaring problem however lay in the difficulty of getting offices to draw up and use filing plans -- a prerequisite for the use of action files when the filing activities are decentralized. Thus Haker reported as late as 1987 that only about half of all state offices possessed a filing plan, and not all of these in fact used it\(^\text{23}\).

Also in regard to the other two major elements of Registratur -- registration and regulations -- the picture was not flattering. The use of the journal -- decried by the *Büroreform* -- does indeed appear to have generally ceased, registration occurring instead through the use of index cards and, later, punch cards. It is difficult to find much discussion of even these instruments in the contemporary literature, however, and one is left with the impression that registration was not a major concern in GDR recordkeeping -- something that is hardly surprising given the problems with the filing plan, which, after all, provides the business numbers for the documents to be registered. Nor was the situation any better with the implementation of regulations for business processes. Not only were there no new developments in providing uniform regulations at even the higher levels of

\(^{23}\) Haker, Zum Stand der Erarbeitung und Anwendung von Schriftgutbewertungsverzeichnissen, cited by Hoffmann, op.cit., p.69. Haker's observation was confirmed by Kluge in 1990: "Auch die Bemühungen des Zentralen Staatsarchivs um die Einführung von Aktenplänen in den zentralen Staatsorganen hat nicht zu einem Durchbruch geführt, da der Anwendungsgrad im allgemeinen zu gering blieb" (Der Staatliche Archivfonds der DDR, p.164)
government, but the regulations issued (and, apparently, often ignored) did not even match the comprehensiveness of the GGO I of 1926.

The administrative archives -- no doubt the strongest hope for the introduction of sound recordkeeping practices -- were also largely a failure. In Kluge's brief assessment of 1990 there was nothing positive: only 1/3 of the administrative archives which did exist managed to meet the quality standards for the work required (due partly to problems with personnel, partly to a disdain for recordkeeping and preserving records); Kluge even speaks of the "dysfunction of the majority of administrative archives"24.

Despite this rather bleak picture of the development of Registratur in the GDR, there is one point which must be kept in mind: the ideal of Registratur as expressed in the classical Prussian model, and implicit throughout the Bürereform, was never -- except perhaps in the brief period 1945-1949 -- lost sight of. The approach to solving the problems generated by the neglect of sound recordkeeping practices was not through imitation of other countries (not even of the Soviet Union) but by a return to the three elements of Registratur: action file, registration and regulation. The difficulties encountered, and the failure to produce all-round tangible results, cannot be (and was not) attributed to problems with the techniques themselves, but to their implementation in the face of unskilled and uncaring personnel and little public support; no doubt over-centralization, and the resulting huge and heterogeneous bureaucracy, is also to blame.

2. Registratur in the higher offices of the FRG (Federal Republic of Germany) prior to reunification

As in the GDR, politics played a major role in determining the post-war evolution of Registratur in the three western military zones, out of which arose in 1949 the Federal Republic of Germany. This is especially evident in two respects: first, in the importance given to establishing the new republic as a federal democracy, and second, in the overall conservative attitude taken towards changes in the German political and administrative system.

The FRG's federal structure, in many ways hearkening back to the traditionally fragmented state of the "German nation" prior to 1871, and clearly intended as one means of preventing too much power from accumulating in the central government, meant that, as far as recordkeeping was concerned, a multitude of practices and regulations arose at all levels of government, federal, regional, and local. The complete lack of any central body to oversee developments and suggest recommendations, and the resulting lack of standards, encouraged not only a spirit of experimentation, but also a certain resignation and carelessness, leading Papritz to write of a "crisis in Registratur".

The generally conservative approach to the re-structuring of the German political system, and particularly of the administrative organization, while politically controversial,

25. The FRG was constituted on 23 May 1949.
26. Papritz, Organisationsformen der Schriftgutbewahrung in der öffentlichen Verwaltung, col.291
27. As in the Soviet Occupation Zone, a programme of "de-nazification" was carried out in the three allied occupations zones. The rigour with which this programme was carried out, however, in no way matched the efforts of the Communists in the eastern zone, with the result that many former members and collaborators of the Nazi Party -- some having occupied high and influential positions, particularly in the area of justice -- either retained their posts or were able to return to similar positions after a relatively short period of incarceration.
nevertheless had for recordkeeping practices the beneficial result that the new administrative structures were able to begin functioning with personnel already highly trained and skilled. It is therefore possible to speak of an unbroken tradition in recordkeeping in the FRG, and indeed, having taken up where the Third Reich left off, certain improvements were able to be implemented by the time of reunification in 1990. In view of the continued lack of standardization, these improvements can be probably best examined in the Joint Procedural Code (*Gemeinsame Geschäftsordnung* - GGO I) for the ministries of the federal government28.

The Joint Procedural Code of the FRG, like its namesake from the period of the German Reich, consists of two major sections: the Code proper, and Appendix I. The Code proper is in turn divided into 3 chapters, containing altogether 100 paragraphs as well as numerous examples of forms. The first chapter is devoted to basic organizational principles, such as the function and observance of the code and the manner in which the ministries are set up and structured. Here it is important to note the provision for an organizational plan: "The structuring of the ministry is to be portrayed clearly and comprehensively in an organizational plan (abbreviated representation of the competencies of the divisions, the departments and the sections). The plan serves as a basis for the business distribution plan and -- where purposeful -- also for the filing

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28. With the founding of the FRG in 1949 began also work on a new version of the GGO I of 1926, which reached a successful conclusion in 1957 (Cabinet approval on 8 January 1958). The new GGO I, while essentially identical to that of 1926, contained among other things improvements in technical terminology, better instructions concerning the handling of inactive records, and instructions regarding the organization of the filing room. Since 1958 the GGO I has been through four revisions: 1966 (regulations concerning the new *Zwischenarchive*), 1969 (decreased regulation concerning the *Restliste*), 1975 (new instructions regarding preservation), and 1987 (changes in transfer procedures to the *Zwischenarchive*) -- see Hoffmann, op.cit., pp.50-52.
Another important provision concerns the business distribution plan, which is to ensure that the various activities are divided among the divisions, departments and sections according to the nature of the business matters involved ("nach sachlichen Gesichtspunkten") and indeed in such a way, that conflicts of competency are avoided and that similar or related matters are all handled by one and the same office.

The second chapter of the Code proper covers matters relating to business procedures, for example the handling of incoming matters (Eingänge), the handling of internal matters, the manner in which documents are created (drafts, signatures, fair copies etc.), and the handling of special business matters (cabinet matters, reports, meetings, evaluations and so on). While of little immediate relevance to Registratur, this chapter does contain two important provisions related to recordkeeping. First, the responsibility for the documents pertaining to an incoming matter lies with the official designated to handle it for as long as the matter is being worked on, otherwise with the person responsible for keeping the files. This either/or condition obviously simplifies search procedures. Second, the state of any matter at any time should be completely clear from the file itself, a rule which not only pertains to the completeness of documentation.

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29. "Die Gliederung des Ministeriums ist übersichtlich und erschöpfend in einem Organisationsplan (Kurzbezeichnung der Arbeitsgebiete der Abteilungen, Unterabteilungen und Referate) darzustellen. Er bildet die Grundlage für den Geschäftsverteilungsplan (§ 5) und, wo es zweckmäßig ist, auch für den Aktenplan (§ Registraturanweisung)." § 4, GGO l. The need for an organizational plan was not expressed in the Code of 1926. The organizational plan, also known as "Organigramm" or "Strukturplan", is further discussed in Hübener, op.cit., pp.30 ff., and Hoffmann, op.cit., p.204.

30. "Die Verteilung der einzelnen Dienstgeschäfte auf die Abteilungen (Unterabteilungen) und Referate regelt der Geschäftsverteilungsplan. Er grenzt die Arbeitsgebiete nach sachlichen Gesichtspunkten so ab, daß Zuständigkeitsüberschreitungen vermieden, gleichartige oder verwandte Sachgebiete nur von einer Stelle bearbeitet werden." § 5, GGO l.

contained in the file, but which also describes with admirable clarity the nature of the file itself.\(^{32}\)

The third chapter of the code proper has to do with service and house regulations, and has no direct bearing on recordingkeeping practices.

Appendix I is entitled “Filing room Instructions” *(Registraturanweisung -- RegA)*; it is divided into two sections (comprising altogether 23 paragraphs), the first of which deals with the setup and organization of the filing room, the second of which covers topics pertaining to the work routines. Since the filing room is responsible both for the creation and the management of files, file making is handled in the first section, and file management in the second section.

Before examining these more closely, it should be pointed out that the Instructions allow the existence both of the central filing room and of decentralized Registratur (each official managing her or his own records) -- in fact, both types continue in use today.\(^{33}\)

The function of the filing plan in providing the framework for the creation of files is evident in the six sections of paragraph 3, which is devoted solely to this instrument. Although the

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32. “Der Stand einer Sache muß jederzeit aus den Akten vollständig ersichtlich sein.” § 32.1, *GGO I*. I am indebted to Dr. Büttner for drawing my attention to this simple but fundamental statement, which, although it occurs in direct connection to regulations governing the use of notes, has a general relevance for the nature of file keeping in itself.

33. § 1.2 of *RegA* enjoins the adoption of the decentralized filing system when “it is purposeful”, since it “speeds up and simplifies the work” (“Wenn es zweckdienlich ist, sollen Sachbearbeiterablagen eingeführt werden, um die Arbeit zu beschleunigen und zu vereinfachen.”). The recommendations issued by the Auditor General of the FRG (Präsident des Bundesrechnungshofes) in 1989 present, on the other hand, a sober discussion of both the advantages and the disadvantages of maintaining decentralized filing -- see *Empfehlungen für die Schriftgutverwaltung*, p.69.
Instructions provide little direction as to how a filing plan is actually set up, its
dependence on the organizational plan, its use of hierarchically structured subject
headings as well as unique identifying numbers is clear enough\textsuperscript{34}. The use of the unique
heading number in identifying the files themselves (along with a descriptive title) is
specifically provided for\textsuperscript{35}.

A distinction is made between files of fundamental importance (so-called "A-Akten" – i.e. "allgemeine Akten" or "general files"), and files not of such importance ("B-Akten" – i.e. "besondere Akten" or "special files"). For general files, tables of contents are to be attached to the file, and each separate document is to be numbered in consecutive order\textsuperscript{36}. All files are to be stored upright in ring binders (of the type described in Chapter 3), with the oldest documents coming first, the most recent last, "so that the binder can be read like a book"\textsuperscript{37}.

Various instruments are provided for in regard to the registration of business matters and the associated documents, most of these being covered in the second section. Chief among these are the journal (despite the Büroreform) and its alternative, the file card.

The journal has already been described; it has enjoyed some minor improvements

\textsuperscript{34} More clarity could be desired, however. Although the code proper specified the use of the organizational plan for creating the filing plan (see above), the Instructions merely state that the filing plan is drawn up according to the tasks of the ministry, or other systematic principles ("Von der Stoffgliederung der Aufgaben des Ministeriums oder anderen systematischen Gesichtspunkten ausgehend...", § 3.1)
\textsuperscript{35} RegA, § 3.3.
\textsuperscript{36} RegA, § 5.1-2.
\textsuperscript{37} "Sie sollen mit dem ältesten Schriftstück beginnen (Behördenheftung), also wie ein Buch gelesen werden können." RegA, § 6.2. As in the days of the classical Prussian Registratur, the journal is kept according to calendar years (RegA, § 11.1).
especially in layout, with the number of columns being reduced to around seven. The file cards are based on the filing plan (unlike the journal which is organized according to the business matters themselves). They are rather large, being the same size as a normal sheet of writing paper, and one is made for each heading in the filing plan. The headings are much the same as for the journal. Interestingly, the file cards are recommended for use only by central filing rooms, implying that the journal's role is more for the decentralized Registratur.

Other registration aids include the sender list, the incoming post book, the subject index and the file inventory. The sender list (Einsenderverzeichnis) provides an account of everyone who has taken up contact with the office for business purposes, and is usually set up in the form of a card catalogue, each card containing, besides the personal name, the date(s) of the incoming matters, the business numbers assigned by the sender, and the business number (file number) of the office. The incoming post book (Eingangsbuch) fulfils the same function as the sender list and can be substituted for it; here the entries are arranged in chronological order, usually with one page per calendar day. While both sender list and incoming post book serve to find files by the person(s) originating the business matter, the subject index (Sachverzeichnis) enables matters to be located by topic or subject. The index entries are arranged in alphabetical order; the

38. The sample journal sheet provided by the RegA shows seven columns in the following order: sequential number, date, sender/business number, nature of the matter, handling office, references, authority for decision, and location of the file. (RegA, Appendix R1)

39. File cards are described in more detail in the recommendations for recordkeeping issued by the Auditor General, op.cit., p.51, by Schatz, op.cit., pp.161-163, and by Hoffmann, op.cit., pp.296-297


only other information provided is the number of the journal or file card entry\textsuperscript{42}. All of these devices are optional, as is the file inventory, which is intended to provide an overview of the entire collection of files by file number\textsuperscript{43}.

Of particular interest in the Code are the provisions for the handling of files once they are no longer active. While the Code of 1926 stipulated, in one brief paragraph, that every five years the files were to be inspected to see whether they should be transferred to the Reichsarchiv\textsuperscript{44}, and while the corresponding regulations of the GDR of 1949 failed to make any provision at all for such a transfer\textsuperscript{45}, the FRG Code of 1958 contained two new paragraphs -- one pertaining to the maintenance of records no longer in active use, the other covering the sorting of files and their eventual transfer to the responsible archives or disposal through destruction\textsuperscript{46}. Thus a fourth element was added to the three already present in the classical Prussian Registratur (file making, registration, regulation), namely disposal. The reason this fourth element was originally lacking in the classical Registratur is no doubt to be sought in the fact that during the course of development of this Registratur there were no public archives -- each department kept its own archives, as it were, in the form of the more or less carefully managed Altregistratur, or "old files depot".

\textsuperscript{42} RegA, § 13.5. See also the recommendations of the Auditor General, op.cit., p.53 (under the name "Hinweiskartei"), Schatz, op.cit., p.129, and Hoffmann, op.cit., pp.296-297
\textsuperscript{43} The file inventory can also be laid out in the form of cards. RegA covers the file inventory in § 4.1-2. See also the recommendations of the Auditor General, op.cit., p.50.
\textsuperscript{44} GGO I, RegA (1926), § 7.
\textsuperscript{45} Dienstordnung der DDR, op.cit. This lack was to be made up for by the establishment of the administrative archives, as already discussed. In relation to the present discussion it needs to be borne in mind that the Verwaltungsarchive were archival institutions and under the ultimate jurisdiction of the State Archives Administration (or its subordinate offices), and so not an integral part of the business administration.
\textsuperscript{46} RegA, § 8 "Altablage" and § 9 "Aussonderung, Abgabe, Verwertung und Vernichtung von Schriftgut". Both paragraphs were revised in 1966 and 1975, to account for changes due to the implementation of the Zwischenarchive -- archives limbos or records centres. For the text of the original paragraphs as well as revisions see Hoffmann, op.cit., pp.584-589. RegA also makes provision for the creation and maintenance of retention schedules -- see § 14.
The emergence of the public archives in the last century, coupled with the dramatic increase in the amount of records being produced and requiring storage, created the need for management of the disposal of records, either through transfer to the appropriate archival institution or through destruction, in some orderly and supervisable manner.

On the eve of reunification the FRG had succeeded not only in maintaining, and continuously developing, a consistent set of rules for the method and practice of recordkeeping in its ministries, but it had -- despite the fears and misgivings of some observers -- managed to build on the work of the Bürereform in a positive and constructive manner in at least two respects. First, without forsaking the principles of the reform, it had succeeded in acknowledging the validity of various approaches to efficient recordkeeping (use of journal or use of file cards, central filing or decentralized filing etc.), and avoided abandoning the authority and implementation of standards necessary to ensure that whatever means were adopted, the method and end results were sound. Second, it rounded off the work of the Bürereform and the alteration to the classical Registratur by introducing a fourth element to the recordkeeping process -- the process of regulated disposal of inactive records.

3. Post-reunification Germany: Registratur and electronic data processing

On account of the political circumstances of the re-unification of the two Germanies in 1990, the recordkeeping practices of the GRD came to an official end without having any perceptible influence on further developments. In fact, the end of the East German republic is only a mark of convenience in periodizing the development of the Registratur,
since 1990 represents no break or other discernible hiatus in the regular developments and concerns facing recordkeeping in West German government offices before 1990, and all German government offices after 1990. The division, while artificial, nevertheless is of use in examining the challenges to Registratur which the use of electronic data processing (EDP) has imposed. These challenges, while of course existing prior to re-unification, have clearly tended to occupy a higher profile in the literature of the 1990s.

As the developments in recordkeeping in both German republics show, the ideal of Registratur as exemplified by the classical Prussian model and modified for the sake of economy by the Büroreform has never been fundamentally questioned. When the importance of the application of computer technology to recordkeeping tasks became clear in the 1960s, therefore, the question was not how the technology would alter Registratur (for its principles were firmly established), but rather, how it could be best used -- in other words, what the role of EDP was in relation to Registratur.

This role can be best examined in relation to the four basic elements of Registratur -- namely file making, registration, regulation, and disposal. Since EDP has no direct application in the formulation of the regulatory controls involved in Registratur, there are, in effect, only three elements which need to be considered.

EDP might be considered to have its greatest potential use in the area of file making. At the very least, the ideal of the "paperless office" appears -- on first glance, at any rate -- to offer the prospect of managing records without having to constantly consult filing plans and place documents in folders in the correct manner. For the filing plan can exist
virtually in each computer, so that the appropriate file code can be assigned to a
document with a simple key stroke or click of the mouse; with documents linked
electronically to each other through the file code, files can be assembled, viewed, and
moved about without opening any folders or lifting any pieces of paper. Before such a
vision can be realized, however, two major difficulties need to be resolved: first, the
security of electronic storage needs to at least equal that of paper; second, electronic
creation and processing needs to preserve the traces of the business process.

The first difficulty is a familiar one and requires no lengthy introduction: the cost of
introducing and maintaining EDP systems and the problems of migration incurred through
ever-evolving technology, as well as the inherent uncertainty about the life span of the
storage support system, entail an overall greater security risk for electronic documents
vis-à-vis paper documents. Because of this security risk and the responsibility of
government offices to preserve records of their activities, the day on which EDP can
actually replace paper (rather than simply reduce it) appears to still lie in the future -- at
least as far as German government offices are concerned.\footnote{Hebig, Die Einführung von Büroautomatisierungssystemen, is a very recent contribution to this issue.}

Of greater significance, however, are the implications which the implementation of EDP
has for preserving the traces of the business processes. To date, the EDP systems
offered to German government offices have been based on principles of document
management. Incoming documents are scanned and digitized, circulated through the
network, encoded for security and archival purposes (i.e. provided with an electronic
processing history), printed out as needed and otherwise stored on optical disks. Use of
an electronic filing plan ensures that all documents are provided with a file number; use of indexing and full-text search capabilities enables documents to be located according to a variety of needs.

File making in German government offices, however, is not simply about gathering documents together (or linking them electronically, which amounts to the same thing), it is rather about business processes. A government office is ultimately responsible for its actions -- the documents are of use only in so far as they aid in the reconstruction of the handling of the business matters. This in turn is only possible if they bear traces of the decision-making involved in the processes -- hence the instructions, notes, and special marks which are either written directly on the paper documents or attached to them as separate items. While it is perhaps conceivable that an EDP system might be developed to take account of the processes and not of the documents per se, the past and current failure to do so makes the application of EDP for file making questionable, to say the least.

The use of EDP for the registration of documents or processes appears on the other hand to contain considerable promise. The function of the several conventional registration instruments, journal or file card system, sender list, post book, file inventory and so on, can be combined into one data base; use of networking can then make the information in this database accessible to all authorized office staff. Provided the appropriate precautions are taken -- especially in regard to supervising changes to the

48. The issue of the use of EDP and preserving the traces of business processes has been very clearly discussed especially by Menne-Haritz, see for example: Büroautomation und Schriftgutverwaltung; Akten, Vorgänge und elektronische Bürosysteme (esp.pp.85-104); and Schriftgut oder Dokumente. See also Hebig, op.cit.
database -- EDP can thus provide certain relief in registration routines and offer new perspectives in search techniques\(^\text{49}\).

With regard to the final element, disposal, the situation is not so optimistic. Since disposal affects files, and not individual documents, the use of EDP can, to date, only be considered in regard to files already made and identified (since, as has been shown, EDP so far has not been able to handle file making satisfactorily). In this limited case, EDP can then carry out functions very similar to registration: the retention schedule, coupled to the filing plan, can be connected to the file inventory, and a means provided to signal or flag files as their disposal date approaches. However, the decision as to how long the retention period is to be, and what should happen at the end of the retention period (transfer to the Zwischenarchiv or destruction) is not a matter which can be taken care of through any EDP system, nor can any thought be given to automatic destruction for records not destined for the Zwischenarchiv, since the Bundesarchiv has the final say on destruction of federal government records\(^\text{50}\).

4. Summary

The decades following the end of the Second World War have clearly been tumultuous ones for Registratur in Germany. Following the re-establishment of administrative structures, the conditions imposed by the different political regimes -- in the east a strong

\(^{49}\) Hoffmann, op.cit., discusses the use of EDP for registration in more detail; see pp.195-196.

\(^{50}\) GGO I, RegA (1975), § 9a.2.: "Ausgesondertes Schriftgut ... ist an das Zwischenarchiv abzugeben. Soweit es nicht mehr aufzubewahren und nicht archivwürdig ist, kann es mit schriftlicher Zustimmung des Bundesarchivs bei der Behörde ausgeschieden werden." An exception to this rule applies for temporary files (Weglegesachen).
centralized system crippled by lack of training, experience, discipline and motivation, in
the west a decentralized system hampered by local ambitions, lack of standards and
effective means of cross communication -- and, since the 1960s, the bewilderingly rapid
changes in the application of electronic data technology, have with good reason led to
deep concern among those whose work depends on maintaining of Registratur. To speak
of a "crisis", however, seems unnecessarily dramatic. For at no time in the past fifty years
has the institution of Registratur itself been called into question by those in whose domain
it has traditionally resided\textsuperscript{51}. Thus, while the \textit{Büroreform} showed the extent to which
Registratur could be altered and adapted to changing conditions, the post-war years have
clearly proven the robustness and vitality of Registratur. For not only have the three
essential elements survived intact, but a fourth one (disposal) was added.

\textsuperscript{51} Namely government offices. While private organizations have a very mixed attitude towards
recordkeeping practices as refined as those carried out in government offices, this is nothing
new.
CHAPTER FIVE: Registratur as an Archival Concept

Up to now, the terms “Registratur”, “filing room” or “filing system” or simply “filing” have been used almost synonymously. While this is quite valid from the point of view of recordkeeping, it is potentially misleading, as “Registratur” is also used in German archival practice, and indeed in a way which is of fundamental importance to the German understanding of the nature of archives. To round off this study of the concept of Registratur, it will therefore be necessary to examine its role in the field of archival theory and methodology.

1. Defining archives

To understand the significance of Registratur for German archivists, it is instructive to begin with the classic question “What is an archives?”. An answer to this question may be approached through the study of a model which proposes to reflect only very basic features of the object of the question. This model may be called the “primitive archives”, and is historically exemplified by the archival depots common in medieval Germany -- as well, of course, as in all other Western European countries.

The primitive archives is quite simply a space which contains documents held to be of significant value. The value of the documents is -- unlike jewels or other precious objects -- not of a material, but of a juridical nature: through the documents the holder is (theoretically) able to establish claim to certain rights and privileges, which at times can be very considerable. Because the documents are valuable, the space is kept secure. The space may be large enough for a person to move around, hence a room, chamber,
vault, or it may be so small that only the relevant documents can be contained, as, for example, a chest, trunk, cabinet, box etc. However large or small, the space is kept locked at all times and access is strictly controlled¹.

Care of the primitive archives can be exercised from two perspectives. The first perspective -- and no doubt historically also the earliest -- is that of preservation: The security of the place needs to be maintained in order that the documents contained within it are not lost or damaged. The second perspective is that of order: As the number of documents contained by the space increases, it becomes proportionally more difficult to find any particular document if the total mass is not articulated in some helpful manner. Ultimately, if the document cannot be found (a common enough problem in the Middle Ages and early modern era), the care put into its security is for naught.

In medieval Germany² the primitive archives was identified exclusively from the perspective of preservation, hence the use of Latin expressions such as “archa” (or “arca”, both simply denoting a “closed place”). From “archa” was derived the popular “archarium”, which referred more specifically to a container for documents. “Armarium” was another common Latin expression, denoting a kind of cupboard or closet. Latinized Greek terms such as “chartularium” (from χάρτης -- literally, a sheet of papyrus) had similar connotations. Very popular was the Latin word “scrinium”, again denoting usually the container in which the documents were kept, sometimes however, in a broader sense, the collection of documents as a physical entity. The word “sacrarium” is known

¹. Note that this definition does not take account of the locality of the place, which may be in the same building as the administration, or in a church or monastery, in the city walls, etc.
². Up to the end of the 15th century.
exclusively from the Middle Ages and clearly reveals its origin in the use of the church sacristy as a place for safeguarding diplomas and other valuable documents.

German expressions for the primitive archives also abounded. Aside from the various terms used for the different kinds of containers the documents were stored in — “schrin”, “lade”, “truhe”, “schrank” — the concept was expressed with such words as “Gewölbe” (a vault, for example in a cellar, or in a thick wall) or “Kammer” (a room or chamber, usually with the connotation of privileged access).

Only towards the very end of the Middle Ages did primitive archives begin to be denoted from the perspective of order, but then quite specifically and uniformly with the medieval Latin term “registratura” or with its German cognate, Registratur. The best early examples of this use are without doubt two treatises on Registratur published by Jacob von Rammingen: Von der Registratur, and Ein Summarischer Bericht / Wie es mit einer künstlichen unnd vollkommen Registratur ein gestalt ... In the first work, a general recommendation of his profession, von Rammingen defines Registratur as bringing together “all of the old papers” into a single body and then describing it precisely “in its various divisions and kinds” — i.e., the classical archival task of arrangement and description. The second treatise is much more precise about the nature of the work involved in Registratur:

3. That is, since the 14th century, when use of German began to become common in the chanceries. See for example Janssen, Erzbischöfe von Köln, p.156.
5. Both 1571, see bibliography. It is no coincidence that the problem of ordering and its solution — Registratur — begin to come to fore at the same time as the first modern records start appearing.
6. “… renewal with Registratur brings together perfectly and artfully all of the old papers and matters — i.e. His Highness’ rights and properties — into a single corpus and describes it diligently and precisely in its various divisions and kinds and set it into a very well constructed
Registratur involves registering the contents of the instruments and other documents in various books for the purposes of perpetual reference and memory, and placing these instruments and documents in their proper order and groups, and then maintaining and preserving them from destruction. Registratur, when carried out as precisely, thoroughly and skilfully as possible, consists in a thorough analysis of all instruments, of determining both the principal and secondary matters in their contents, of summarizing these in brief statements and making the appropriate entries. It further consists of dividing the instruments and documents, in arranging and organizing them in books under separate titles, of constructing archival cabinets, placing the archival documents in their assigned places, and then maintaining everything in its proper order, preventing any confusion and preserving them from destruction.\(^7\)

By the time von Rammingen published his treatises the primitive archives had -- at least in the major administrative centres -- evolved into somewhat more complex places usually taking up at least part of a room, if not several rooms. The terminology remained the same however\(^8\) -- now enriched by the word “Registratur”, and the occasional use of “archivum” or its German equivalent “Archiv”. It was not until almost a century later, in the wake of learned discussion concerning the nature and application of *ius archivi*, that a split begins to be discernible and the modern concept of archives starts to emerge.

Although a detailed examination of the influence of *ius archivi* on the development of the modern concept of archives has yet to be undertaken, it seems clear from the work which

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7. This is a paraphrase of the original text, which is in late Latin and almost impossible to comfortably render in English. See von Rammingen, *Ein Summarischer Bericht / Wie es mit einer künstlichen und vollkommen Registratur ein gestalt ...* (first leaf after the title page).

8. As just one example, the new archives established by Maximilian I in Innsbruck was known as a “Briefgewölbe” -- a “letters vault” (see Brenneke, *Archivkunde*, p.156).
has been done\(^9\) that it strengthened the emphasis on the aspect of preservation and contributed to shifting the main burden of ordering over to Registratur, which came more and more to be associated with the activities of the administrative filing room. For what \textit{ius archivi} was ultimately concerned with was the admissibility of documents as evidence in a court of law -- this was supposed to be guaranteed for all documents originating from a \textit{bona fide} archives. The concern about the function of documents as legal evidence was not new, and indeed was provided for in the Code of Justinian, upon which \textit{ius archivi} was based\(^{10}\). What Justinian's Code had in mind, however, was not the individual document (equal to the medieval diploma), but rather the \textit{commentarii} or \textit{gesta}, which were in fact registers, whose reliability was ensured not by corroborative devices such as seals or by special protective measures, but by the \textit{very processes required to produce them}\(^{11}\). The tradition of keeping registers had, however, been quite broken in Germany in the course of the middle ages, such that the absolutist rulers of the 16th and 17th centuries were confronted with the situation of either having to own up to the shoddy recordkeeping practices of the past, and admit that their stockpiles of diplomas had little or only questionable legal value, or to push through an interpretation of \textit{ius archivi} which equipped these diplomas with an unblemished patina of legitimacy, provided that the circumstances of their custody met certain standards\(^{12}\). These standards could not be met by Registratur alone, but only through the "archivum" -- the archives -- the circumstances of owning which the \textit{ius archivi} was careful to delineate in favour of the

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9. The author is aware of only two works -- both valuable -- which have examined \textit{ius archivi} in Germany from an archival standpoint: Pitz's \textit{Beiträge zur Geschichte des Ius Archivi}, and Merzbacher's \textit{Ius Archivi} -- see bibliography.

10. \textit{ius archivi} appealed specifically to provisions in the \textit{Novellae}, no. 49, chapter 2, § 2. See also \textit{Cod.lust.} 7, 52, 6: "Gesta, quae sunt translata in publica monumenta, habere volumus perpetuam firmitatem".

11. See Pitz, op.cit., col.281 ff.

12. For a more detailed discussion of this manoeuvre see Pitz, op.cit., col.285-286.
territorial and local potentates. Thus for Leibniz, archivist and librarian to the Hanoverian court of Duke Johann Frederick, an archives was simply a place “where the papers useful to the state are so preserved, that they are kept intact and unaltered for purposes of future consultation as well as for the eventuality of serving as completely indisputable legal evidence.”

2. Archives and the Registraturprinzip

With the archives thus having emerged in the course of the 17th century as “the place where documents are preserved” and Registratur being consigned to the control of documents in the administrative offices, the problem remained of how to order the documents held in archival storage.

The natural inclination of most archivists -- especially in the 17th, 18th and early 19th century -- was to follow the example of the librarians. In the absence of a defined principle of provenance, and with an enthusiasm borne on the wings of rationalism, encyclopaedic storehouses of knowledge were envisaged, in which archives were to play their own special role. Classification schemes were devised, based on various approaches to subject headings: usually personal names, places, and thematic keywords. This strategy of archival arrangement, known as arrangement according to the principle of pertinence, provided considerable opportunities for displays of intellectual

13. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716), renowned for his philosophical works, was employed at the ducal court in Hanover from 1676 to the end of his life. The passage quoted is cited in Knabe: Leibniz' Vorschläge zum Archiv- und Registraturwesen, p.118.
14. For Meisner (Archivwissenschaftliche Berufssprache) the archives is still primarily "the archival building as a whole, the place of preservation of archival documents, the administrative and research rooms, ..." (p.260).
16. Such was the vision of Leibniz, for example -- who combined both positions as archivist and librarian. See Knabe, op.cit., pp.117-119.
ingenuity and led incidentally to the production of several learned treatises on the matter\(^\text{17}\).

The problems with such arrangement, however, proved in the end to be its undoing. One very considerable difficulty was that the office which created the files destined for the archives had not arranged them according to the classification which the archivist had devised; this meant that all files, once accessioned, had to be re-arranged and described -- a prodigious undertaking indeed, particularly because the files had to be completely dismantled\(^\text{18}\). Further, use of the archival classification plan meant that all of the materials in the archives had the same status -- fonds which were of more importance than others were not apparent as such. The classification also meant that accruals could add to any section whatever, making it impossible to determine in advance how much storage space to allot to any one division. This same fact meant that it was impossible to ever make a definitive set of finding aids, for at the latest they would be out of date by the time of the next accrual\(^\text{19}\). As administration grew more complex in the 19th century, and files grew ever more numerous, it became imperative to adopt an alternative method.

\(^{17}\) For example, Georg Aebbtlins "Tractatio de archivis atque registraturis vulgo Anführung zu der Registraturkunst" (Ulm 1669), Johann Stephan Pütters "Anleitung zur juristischen Praxis" (Göttingen 1753), and Carl Gottlob Günthers "Über die Einrichtung der Hauptarchive, besonders in teutschen Reichslanden" (Altenburg 1783). For a more detailed discussion of the literature, see Brenneke, op.cit., pp.44-52. Perverse as it seems, while the Prussian Registratur was developing into the instrument of perfection it ultimately became, the archivists were busy undoing the work and reclassifying incoming documents according to subject. Indeed Schönbeck, held to be the author of the famous instruction which is a cornerstone for the making of action files ("one document, one subject") devised a subject-based method of arranging the material in the archives which lasted almost 250 years. See Kohnke, Die Pertinenzbestände im Deutschen Zentralarchiv, p.224.

\(^{18}\) Schönbeck refused to accept bound files, see Kohnke, op.cit.

\(^{19}\) For these and other difficulties associated with the method of arrangement by pertinence see Papritz, Archivwissenschaft, vol.3, pp.2-8.
The idea that the files should be kept in the archives in a manner reflecting their origin in a particular office can be seen germinating already in the work of Spiess, who, after following the usual subject-oriented classification method, resignedly concluded in the face of the difficulties caused by this method that "the best plan is that which the documents themselves provide". From germination to regulated principle, however, took more than a century. A decisive impulse was provided by the French Revolution and the succeeding political movements in France -- including the Restoration of the Bourbons in 1814 -- which, in the course of experiences with large amounts of expropriated and later reclaimed archives, greatly sharpened the awareness of the need for maintaining the identity of the original creator of the records. However, even in France it was not until 1841 that the principle of respect des fonds was officially enounced, and even then, within the new fonds established according to provenance, the old library system of deductive arrangement (i.e. based on rational principles) continued untrammelled.

Meanwhile, in Prussia -- and in the wake of the catastrophe of the Napoleonic Wars and of the ensuing administrative reforms of Stein and Hardenberg -- a cautious formulation of respect des fonds was presented in a recommendation of the Academy of Sciences in

20. Spiess, Von Archiven, p.57: "Nun sollte ich auch einen Plan zu Verfertigung eines Archiv-Repertoriums nach allen Tituln vorlegen. Ich habe einen verfertiget, er ist auch höchsten Orts vollkommen genehmiget worden, allein die Erfahrung hat mich bisher gelehret, daß der beste Plan derlenige ist, den die Urkunden selbst an die Hand geben. Mein verfertigter Plan thut mir also wenig Dienste, ich finde Urkunden, die mich an einen Titul erinnern, an den ich vorhero gar nicht gedacht habe, oder ich sehe offenbahr, daß ich fehlen und mir viele Unbequemlichkeit zuziehen würde, ...". The reference to Spiess in Brenneke (op.cit., p.50) incorrectly cites this passage as § 27, it is in fact § 21 of the second chapter, entitled "Von besonders nöthigen und nützlichen Anstalten zur innerlichen Einrichtung eines Archivs".

21. For the effects of the political developments on attitudes towards archives in France after the revolution see Brenneke, op.cit., pp.179 ff. Brenneke's contribution is admirable in indicating convincingly that the move towards the principle of provenance occurred as a result of practical necessity and against the intellectual currents of the time.

22. In a circular of the Minister of the Interior of 24 April 1841, concerning the regulation of the archives in the departements and the districts.

Berlin already in 1819\textsuperscript{25}. Nevertheless, despite a lively discussion concerning the relationship between archives and the Registratur of the administrative offices, in which, among others, the renowned diplomatist Sickel participated\textsuperscript{26}, serious practical developments had to wait until 1881.

After the reforms of 1815, the Prussian Privy State Archives continued working with the same classification plan devised by Schönbeck over 150 years previously, notwithstanding major changes not only to the administrative structure but also in the very functions of the central state offices. Files not foreseen by Schönbeck's scheme were simply inserted under the most convenient heading, and eventually the confusion became so great that only the initiate could find their way around in the archives\textsuperscript{27}.

Eventually state archivist Lehmann drafted regulations to the effect that 1) the materials in the Privy State Archives were to be arranged according to the provenance of the records, and 2) that the files within each provenance group were to be left in the way the originating office kept them, finding aids inclusive\textsuperscript{28}. While the first provision was simply a restatement of the principle of respect des fonds, the second provision went further and was the first expression of what soon became known as the Registraturprinzip -- the principle of Registratur.

\begin{itemize}
\item 24. Heinrich Friedrich Karl Reichsfreiherr von und zu Stein (1757-1831); Karl August Freiherr von Hardenberg (1750-1822), Prussian State Chancellor.
\item 25. Recommendation of the Historical-Philological Section of the Berlin Akademie der Wissenschaften of 6 April 1819, cited by Brenneke, op.cit., p.61. The recommendation stipulated that "die Archive der verschiedenen Landschaften, Stifter und Klöster auch nach ihrer Vereinigung in einer Stadt oder in einem Lokal doch noch gesondert blieben".
\item 26. Theodor Sickel realized that in order to accurately assess the complete characteristics of diplomas, they had to be maintained in the same order as they were in the originating chanceries. For Sickel's contribution, as well as of contemporary archivists, see Brenneke, op.cit., pp.52-61 and 66.
\item 27. Brenneke, op.cit., p.67.
\item 28. Regulativ für die Ordnungsarbeiten im Geheimen Staatsarchiv of 1 July 1881. See Brenneke, op.cit., p.68 for a brief passage from the regulations.
\end{itemize}
The new principle quickly gained general acceptance, particularly after the Dutch archivists published their now famous manual.\(^{29}\) Reaction to this work, however -- especially in regard to the practical difficulties encountered in conforming to the rather rigid Dutch rules -- led to important modifications, probably best expressed in the work of the German archivist Brenneke, who advocated a "principle of free Registratur", according to which the important task was not to preserve or reconstruct the original Registratur after the fashion of the Muller, Feith and Fruin's archival palaeontologist, but to preserve and make clear -- if not already clear -- the functions and activities of the originating office.\(^{30}\) Since the classical Prussian Registratur was itself not built upon any rigid plan, but rather on the premise that the plan had to reflect the nature of the business activities, Brenneke's conception of the principle of Registratur -- the same conception which largely holds today -- can be viewed as not a "free" interpretation of Registratur, but, on the contrary, as conceptually more consistent than that advocated by the Prussian regulative of 1881 and the Dutch manual of 1898.

Little change can be detected in the importance of the principle of Registratur to the work of German archivists since Brenneke's work, although two developments are worth mentioning in this context. In 1926 Striedinger published an article which examined the concept of archival documents in contrast to library documents, and established that the crucial difference lay in the fact that archival documents all had their origin in a

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29. Muller, Feith and Fruin, *Handleiding voor het Ordenen en Beschrijven van Archieven* -- see Bibliography. The Dutch had already been practising the principle of Registratur before the publication of the manual. The reception of this work has far exceeded the understanding of its original historical context, and it is surprising to see the principle of Registratur defended in, for example, North America, which has never had Registratur.


31. Striedinger, *Was ist Archiv-, was Bibliotheks gut?*. See bibliography.
Registratur. To make this claim applicable also to private papers, he extended the concept of Registratur so much that even private individuals could be considered as having their own Registratur. While this claim proved too fantastic for contemporary archivists, the idea was taken up less than 40 years later by archival theorists in the GDR, who found it to be an interpretation consistent with the concept of the "state archival fonds", in which also the private papers of individual citizens played a role.

The second development also occurred in the GDR, and also as a result of work with the concept of the "state archival fonds". In the course of development of a set of standards for the appraisal of archival documents, it was found necessary -- due to the undifferentiated mass represented by the "state archival fonds" -- to have recourse to something other than established filing systems. The concept of the Registraturbildner -- "Registratur maker" -- emerged, articulated by Brather in deliberate reference to Striedinger. While this enabled private papers to be included in the registers intended to be drawn up for appraisal purposes, it was in fact nothing more than a restatement of respect des fonds and represented through its generalization of the concept of Registratur such a serious distortion as to render it effectively meaningless. Neither of these developments continued past 1989.

32. "Every natural or juridical person possesses at least one Registratur, even the hobo on the country lane: the tattered and soiled papers which he presents to the gendarme is his Registratur." Striedinger, op.cit., p.151.
33. Grundsätze der Wertermittlung (1965).
34. Brather, Registraturgut -- Archivgut -- Sammlungen (see bibliography).
3. Summary

After Registratur and archives began to go their separate ways in the 16th century, Registratur as a concept initially lost its significance for archival work. This significance was reluctantly regained in the 19th century, however, when through practical necessity the rationalistic approach to the ordering of the documents in archival storage proved to be inherently unsatisfactory. Today the principle of Registratur, which, going beyond the principle of respect des fonds and demanding respect not only for the office of origin but also for the preservation of the understanding of the functions and activities of that office as expressed in the appropriate arrangement of the files, is such an integral part of German archivists' approach to arrangement and description, that they have become the most ardent supporters of Registratur in the administrative offices.
CONCLUSION

This thesis has concentrated on presenting the concept of Registratur as a phenomenon. Perfected by the Prussians, who had started with the same recordkeeping practices as those common throughout the rest of Europe in the Middle Ages, tinkered with by the reformers of the early 20th century, nearly buried and then resurrected by the GDR, tolerated and even somewhat improved in the particularist administrative environment of the FRG, embraced by the archivists as one of their key principles (after they had succeeded earlier in banishing the idea to the chanceries) -- Registratur presents a variety of facets apparently difficult, on first glance, to reconcile with one another. Registratur has to do with creating files, maintaining documents in proper order, keeping track of both business matters and documents, regulating the business processes themselves, ensuring that files are properly stored and that, once stored, can be quickly found, and providing for the controlled disposal of files after they are no longer required by the office. All of this work can occur either in a separate room occupied by registrars and their assistants, or in the single offices of individual secretaries; some of it can be taken care of through EDP. Registratur has further to do with defining the nature of archives and the object of archival work; it has also to do with providing archivists with a vital instrument in approaching the issue of arrangement and description, and it can play a role in developing appraisal strategies.

All of these facets are complementary, however, and not contradictory. A definition can be achieved, as long as it is borne in mind that the kind of definition to be aimed for is *descriptive* in nature, rather than *prescriptive*. For the fact is that Registratur has existed,
and indeed, flourished, for almost 500 years without being defined in a manner binding for either recordkeepers or archivists.

A key conceptual element of Registratur is clearly the idea of control. This is probably most evident in the classical model presented in Chapter One, where all the processes involved in taking care of a business matter are channelled through the filing room. It is particularly visible in the use of the journal and other devices linked to registration, as well as in the finding aids. However, the idea of control is not in itself sufficient to define Registratur. For control does not account for the special manner in which the documentation of the business matters is kept in order, or even for the way in which files are created. If Registratur were simply control, archivists would have in their Principle of Registratur merely another expression of respect des fonds.

A further key conceptual element can be discerned in the idea of organization. Registratur occurs in a well-defined, highly articulated manner in which all the steps involved in carrying out a business matter have been analysed and connected with each other in a rational and purposeful manner. This idea is best expressed by the filing room plan of the older Prussian offices as well as by the modern filing plan (Aktenplan), and is clearly reflected in the regulations for Registratur and for the articulation of the business processes and of the work flow. Because organization also expresses the individuality of an office (in contrast to control, which is impersonal in nature), it is this element which enables the Principle of Registratur to be applied by archivists in describing not merely the source of the archival documents, but their very identity.
A third key conceptual element is required for Registratur to be completely accounted for: the idea of regulation. The control and organization demonstrated by Registratur are neither fleeting or sporadic, but continuous and regular. These qualities can only be ensured through the existence of regulatory measures independent of the office carrying out the Registratur\(^1\).

By combining these three conceptual elements: control, organization, and regulation, the following definition of Registratur is offered by way of concluding this thesis:

* Registratur is the regulated processing of business matters in the form of the documents generated by these matters. The regulation ensures that the processing is coherently articulated and consistent with the purposes of the office.*

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The questions which lie ahead concern the relevance of Registratur in the context of North American recordkeeping and archival work, and whether Registratur has a future. While neither of these questions can be adequately addressed within the framework of this thesis, nevertheless some indication can be given as to the direction of the response.

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1. The neglect of this concept of regulation is what has led to the idea that also private individuals can have Registratur — see in particular Striedinger as cited above, as well as the concept of personal Registratur propagated in the GDR. A private citizen can, in a quite disciplined manner, imitate the recordkeeping system of a government office using Registratur and maintain this to the end of her or his life. At the end of this life, however, the Registratur comes to a definite end — quite unlike the situation in the government office, where, even if the office is closed, the functions and activities are transferred to another office (and the Registratur along with them). The lack of ability of individuals to regulate their own recordkeeping activities is the primary reason why they cannot produce archival documents (i.e., documents which have their origin in a Registratur).
The practice of Registratur, as discussed within this thesis, is clearly conditioned by German -- and specifically, Prussian -- culture and traditions, and thus it is difficult to envisage it as a product of export. Scepticism is in order as well with regard to adopting even one or two of the features of Registratur, for, as the thesis has made clear, Registratur is not a haphazard assemblage of practices and routines, but a well-considered integration of articulated procedures and concepts. For example, the lack of knowledge of how to make action files (which can never occur simply as individual subject files based on business matters, but only within a system conceived according to all of the activities carried out by the office) is sufficient in itself to make Registratur impossible.

The idea of Registratur, however, as expressed in the definition above, is of great interest, particularly in the wake of the failure of the traditional recordkeeping systems in North America to accommodate the changes being imposed by EDP. Because these systems are based on the concept of series, which in turn is defined by the documents contained within it, they are inherently incapable of responding to the real needs of the administrations, that is, to the need for control and organization of their business activities. Registratur, on the other hand, because it addresses precisely these needs, and treats documents only in relation to the business matters from which they arise, is clearly in a very good position to provide much-needed guidance.

Whether the future, in which the pressure for standardization is anticipated to increase, belongs to Registratur or to the current North American approach, is not clear at this point. It is likely that both will need to change in form. Hopefully, however, a better
understanding of the nature of Registratur will increase the chance that it will be able to play a major role in guiding the improvements required.
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