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# Reproducers Anonymous. Copyists in Nineteenth-Century Historiography<sup>1</sup>

Pieter Huistra

## ABSTRACT

In this article, I study the hitherto rarely explored role of copyists in nineteenth-century historiographical practice. In the domestic sphere, the making of copies was a gendered task, often done by housewives. In the archive, the favored working place of the nineteenth-century historian, copying was the task of clerks deemed intellectually and socially inferior. By the very nature of their work, I argue, copyists remained invisible and anonymous – as long as they did their work well. The visits to the archive of Simancas by the Belgian State Archivist Louis-Prospér Gachard serve as a case in point here. Gachard went to great lengths to gain access, complied with all kinds of strict regulations and found his efforts frustrated by copy clerks. They were potentially subversive elements, that escaped the historian's control. Gachard's work in Simancas shows that the nineteenth-century archival historian was dependent upon others, and this has epistemological implications for historians' proclaimed archival turn.

**A**RGUABLY the most famous copy clerks of the nineteenth century were immortalized by Gustave Flaubert: François Denys Bartholomée Bouvard and Juste Romain Cyrille Pécuchet. Their chance meeting on a bench alongside the Canal Saint Martin in the 1840s led to an instant and lifelong friendship. After receiving an inheritance, the two decided to quit their office jobs, leave metropolitan Paris and start a new life in the Normandy countryside. There, they engaged in all kinds of scientific and scholarly enterprises, passing through all provinces of learning and thus allowing their creator to satirize nineteenth-century French culture. *Bouvard et Pécuchet* remained unfinished, but Flaubert left plans for the ending. After a seemingly endless string of intellectual failures, the two retired clerks decide to return to what they know best: they order a double writing desk and start copying again.

We do not know as much about most nineteenth-century copyists as we do about Bouvard and Pécuchet. What seems typical is their lack of intellectual caliber. It is hard to imagine anything less original than the endless copying of documents. Although Bouvard and Pécuchet are exceptional for their enduring fame – a copyist hardly ever made it to the status of protagonist of a novel – as copyists they are not unique: their colleagues were omnipresent in nineteenth-century offices. Although the letterpress copy had mechanized the process of copying as early as the last decades of the eighteenth century, the hand-made copy remained in demand.<sup>2</sup> When an authenticated copy of a legal document was needed, for

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Philipp Müller for his encouragement and many tips on copying and copyists, and Gustaaf Janssens, Erik Aerts and Timo van Havere, who were very helpful in finding Gachard's anonymous helpers - Research for this article was done while I was still working at KU Leuven

<sup>2</sup> B. Rhodes and W. W. Streeter, *Before Photocopying. The Art and History of Mechanical Copying 1780-1938* (New Castle: Oak Knell Press, 1999).

example, or when historians wanted copies of archival documents, a copyist could provide this service.

In fact, copying was, and probably still is, an activity very common to historiographical practice. Manuscripts need copying, letters need minutes or duplicates, interesting passages from books and articles need noting down and documents from the archives need reproducing. A lot of this reproduction work was not done by historians themselves, as I will show in this article. Historians had copyists, but who were they? What kind of copies did they make and how did their presence influence historiographical practice? I will focus on one historian in particular, the Belgian State Archivist Louis-Prosper Gachard (1800-1885), and his visits to the Spanish archive of Simancas in the 1840s. Gachard's practices make it possible to sketch out the role of copyists in nineteenth-century historiography, albeit through the eyes of historians, archivists and other superiors. The irony with copyists is that they transcribed many documents still present in archives, but their voice can hardly ever be heard in these documents. This, I argue, is caused by the nature of the copyists' work: they often remained nameless, although they were indispensable for the historian – and potentially subversive at the same time.

### I. THE COMMONNESS OF COPYING

A report to the Minister of the Interior in 1835 about the state of the Belgian State Archives in Brussels denounced the expansionist ways of the State Archivist, Louis-Prosper Gachard. The new archivist – Gachard had been appointed in 1831, shortly after Belgian independence – never had enough personnel, the writer of the report warned the minister. What was more, the archival personnel were used by Gachard for his own purposes, not those of the state. The best of the 'expéditionnaires', Lievens "travaille exclusivement pour Mr Gachard"; all Lievens did was help Gachard in his research work, copying documents and preparing manuscripts for publication.<sup>3</sup> Lievens was one of five 'expéditionnaires' working at the Brussels archive in 1835. They were clerks, performing all kinds of tasks, but one of their main assignments was copying. It was not uncommon for Belgian archives to employ copyists who made copies of archival documents on demand. The State Archives maintained several clerks for copying throughout the nineteenth century, and the same was true of the archival depot in Ghent, where the clerks also made copies out of office hours, to earn some extra money.<sup>4</sup>

The writer of the report pointed out to the minister that Lievens was a Belgian state employee and not some kind of personal assistant for Gachard's research activities. In the following years, the Brussels archive would be reformed and the number of clerks reduced, but Gachard continued to use extra hands for his activities. And this comes as no surprise, considering that he was one of those indefatigable workers of nineteenth-century historiography, not only leaving an enormous oeuvre but at the same time building up the Belgian historical infrastructure. He was head of

<sup>3</sup> Algemeen Rijksarchief Brussels (ARA), T 015: Archief Hoger Onderwijs Oud Fonds / 310: report of H. Dellafaille to the Minister of the Interior, 29 Aug. 1835.

<sup>4</sup> T. Van Havere, "De droom van een archivaris. Een analyse van de constructie van het stadsarchief van Gent en zijn collecties tussen 1800 en 1900" (Vrije Universiteit Brussel, MA thesis, 2013) 67.

the Brussels State Archives for a remarkable fifty-four years, from 1831 to 1885. He acquired many documents for his archival depot, compiled numerous inventories of these archives and managed to build up a centralized system of Belgian state archives in the provinces – his contemporaries called him the “prince” or even the “César” of the archives.<sup>5</sup> At the same time he was the driving force of the Royal Commission of History and an important figure in other historical commissions. Gachard was more of an organizer than the creator of an original oeuvre: his published works consist of many volumes of source publications, from his ‘own’ archival depot and from many other collections throughout Europe. To gather the sources for these editions, Gachard traveled to other archives in Belgium, as well as to France, Germany, Austria and Italy. His greatest success was his trip to Spain, where he became the first foreign scholar ever to be admitted to the Archivo General in Simancas in September 1843. This castle had been first made the repository of state documents by Emperor Charles V in the sixteenth century, and contained important collections for the European nations that had come under (Spanish) Habsburg rule at some point in their history. Napoleonic interference led to the relocation of many documents in the early nineteenth century. Apart from that, Simancas Castle had remained a bulwark of secrecy for three centuries.<sup>6</sup>

Gachard’s trip to Simancas resulted in a five-volume source publication, the *Correspondance de Philippe II sur les affaires des Pays-Bas*, which appeared between 1848 and 1879. Gachard’s name was on the cover of each volume as the sole editor, but this monumental publication was not the work of one man. Many more were involved at different stages of the editing process. To gain access to the repository of documents, Gachard made use of the Minister of the Interior, the Belgian ambassador in Madrid and several Spanish contacts. To turn the manuscripts into printed editions, he had to find a publisher and a printer, who in turn used compositors, correctors, etc. In the intervening stages, when the ‘real’ research was conducted, he also had the use of many “invisible hands”: translators, assistants and copyists.<sup>7</sup> There was nothing new about Gachard’s use of helpers: Anthony Grafton has shown how the sixteenth-century humanist was surrounded by all kinds of figures who made his authorship possible. Printers, publishers, compositors and, not least, correctors played an important and intellectual part in preparing texts for print. These correctors often remained nameless, but they played an essential role in the humanistic enterprise.<sup>8</sup> Gachard started his working life as a corrector in a publishing house, so he knew how the work of many was subsumed under that of one. What is true for Gachard,

<sup>5</sup> This is reflected in the titles of the two most recent biographical works on Gachard: E. Aerts and L. de Mecheleer, “‘Le César des Archives’. Archivistiek en historiografie in de eeuw van Gachard”, *Bibliotheek- & archiefgids*, 79, 3 (2003): 24-35; S. Onghena, “Le prince des archivistes. Intellectuele biografie van Louis-Prospér Gachard 1800-1885” (KU Leuven, MA Thesis, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> On Gachard’s visit to Simancas: G. Janssens, “L.-P. Gachard en de ontsluiting van het Archivo General de Simancas”, *Liber amicorum dr. J. Scheerder. Tijdingen uit Leuven over de Spaanse Nederlanden, de Leuvense universiteit en Historiografie*, ed. A. Jans (Leuven: Vereniging Historici Lovanienses, 1987), 313-341.

<sup>7</sup> *Unsichtbare Hände. Zur Rolle von Laborassistenten, Mechanikern, Zeichnern und Amanuenses in der physikalischen Forschungs- und Entwicklungsarbeit*, ed. K. Hentschel (Stuttgart and Berlin: Diepholz, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> A. Grafton, “Printers’ Correctors and the Publication of Classical Texts”, *Bring out your Dead. The Past as Revelation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 141-155, especially 145; see also A. Grafton, “Correctores Corruptores? Notes on the Social History of Editing Texts”, *Editing Texts / Texte Edieren*, ed. G. W. Most (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1998), 54-76.

holds for many nineteenth-century historians: they can be ‘deconstructed’ to make the many nameless others visible.

Copying – of letters, manuscripts, notes, etc. – was of course a task that was not necessarily done by the historian himself. He often had his assistants for that. The division of labor reflected existing class and gender boundaries. Female historians were virtually invisible in nineteenth-century historiography. They were relegated to less ‘serious’ genres such as historical novels, and had nearly no presence in places such as the seminar or the archive. The domestic sphere was a place where they could partake – scant consolation – in the work of their husbands. Jenny Vanderhaeghen, for example, was praised for running the household and creating the atmosphere in which her famous husband, Henri Pirenne, could write his *Histoire de Belgique*. But she did more: she copied Pirenne’s manuscripts to make them ready for print.<sup>9</sup>

Mrs. Pirenne was no exception.<sup>10</sup> The numismatist Pieter Otto van der Chijs had collaborated with his wife Helena Maas in the 1840s and 1850s on his grand overview of Dutch coins. Maas made drawings of the coins and copied her husband’s manuscripts. However, Van der Chijs remained sole author of the work. Unlike others who had helped him, Maas was never even mentioned in the acknowledgements – until she died. It was only in the volume that appeared in 1853 that Van der Chijs praised his “better half” for the work she had done as well as for being “a real Dutch housewife and mother”.<sup>11</sup> What the tragic case of Helena Maas tells us is that the home was a space that allowed women to partake in history writing, but it still relegated them to lesser jobs. Copying was obviously a part of the historian’s work that could be handed out to those who were socially or intellectually inferior. The work of the sometimes female domestic copyist did not confer any authorship or authority: it was subsumed in the work of the always male historian.

These examples show that the work of the copyists resembles that of the “invisible technicians” discerned by Steven Shapin in the workshop of seventeenth-century natural philosopher Robert Boyle. There, Boyle did not do all the experimental work by himself: he had technicians who helped him with his instruments or performed complete experiments for him. The experimental knowledge that was created in this process was therefore the work of many. The articles and books in which the knowledge was disseminated, and therefore the knowledge itself, had one sole author: Robert Boyle. It was Boyle who possessed authority to make knowledge claims in the gentlemanly culture of English seventeenth-century natural philosophy.<sup>12</sup> The work of his technicians was subsumed under Boyle’s authorship, as was the labor of copying wives, assistants or servants in the historian’s home.

<sup>9</sup> J. Tollebeek, *Fredericq & Zonen. Een antropologie van de moderne geschiedwetenschap* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2008), 109; S. Keymeulen and J. Tollebeek, *Henri Pirenne, Historian. A Life in Pictures* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2011), 29-30.

<sup>10</sup> See for example the Dutch historian Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer and his wife Betsy in M. Grever, *Strijd tegen de stilte. Johanna Naber (1859-1941) en de vrouwenstem in geschiedenis* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1994).

<sup>11</sup> P. O. van der Chijs, *De munten der voormalige heeren en steden van Gelderland, van de vroegste tijden tot aan de pacificatie van Gend* (Haarlem: Bohn, 1858).

<sup>12</sup> S. Shapin, *A Social History of Truth. Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994), 355-407.



This lack of authorship and epistemic authority has made Boyle's technicians triply invisible, according to Shapin.<sup>13</sup> First, they have received almost no attention from historians of science. This lack of interest in technicians' work has been made up for in the past twenty years in the history of science, whereas copyists and other subservient personnel have received little attention in history of historiography.<sup>14</sup> Second, the technicians have left almost no traces in sources. And third, they were quite invisible to those who employed them too, since their work was not considered that important. All this is true for copyists as well – domestic and in archives. Traces of their work are hard to find, and when the female domestic copyists were praised, it was not primarily for their copying skills. Moreover, copyists suffer from an extra form of invisibility: their work was not meant to be seen. The whole success of a reproduction is based on the accurate conformity of duplicate to original. The better the copy, the more invisible the copyist.

## II. THE LURE OF THE ARCHIVE

Though invisible, these copyists were often indispensable, especially in archives. Working in archives is the historian's fieldwork. It entails travel and an inevitably limited amount of time to take as many notes, make as many excerpts and do as much plain copying as possible – which is why the archival work of present-day historians consists almost solely of taking photographs of documents. Copying devices were human in the nineteenth century. Leopold von Ranke can serve as a case in point. When he made a famous archival tour through Central Europe between 1827 and 1831, he made use of copyists.<sup>15</sup> When working in Roman libraries for example, he had two of them at his disposal and he referred to his use of copyists more than once in his correspondence.<sup>16</sup>

Ranke and other professors had relatively extensive resources for historians. Those of lesser means often did their copying themselves when visiting Europe's archives. The greatest of source publication projects, the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, employed men who gathered and edited source material, the so-called *gelehrte Gehilfe*. Their work involved much copying, and sometimes at least they did it themselves. For example, during his stay in the Low Countries in 1839, Ludwig Bethmann visited many archives in Belgium and the Netherlands, and even went so far as to copy a codex in a small town's parsonage.<sup>17</sup>

The situation of Reinier Cornelis Bakhuizen van den Brink (1810-1865) was even more precarious in the 1840s. Later in his life, he would become the Dutch counter-

<sup>13</sup> Shapin, *A Social History of Truth*, 360-361.

<sup>14</sup> Just one example is the special issue on "technicians" of *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London*, ed. R. Illife, 62, 1 (2008). As mentioned before, Anthony Grafton has shown interest in the work of correctors and had drawn the parallel with Shapin's/Boyle's invisible technician as well: Grafton, "Correctores, corruptores?", 55.

<sup>15</sup> For the journey: K. R. Eskildsen, "Leopold Ranke's Archival Turn. Location and Evidence in Modern Historiography", *Modern Intellectual History*, 5 (2008): 425-453; P. Müller, "Doing Historical Research in the Early Nineteenth Century. Leopold Ranke, the Archive Policy, and the *Relazioni* of the Venetian Republic", *Storia della Storiografia*, 56 (2009): 81-103.

<sup>16</sup> *Neue Briefe*, ed. B. Hoef, (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1949), 127; *Das Briefwerk*, ed. P. Fuchs, (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1949), 200 – many thanks to Philipp Müller; A. Grafton, *The Footnote. A Curious History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 36.

<sup>17</sup> L. Bethmann, *Reise durch die Niederlande, Belgien und Frankreich* (Hannover, 1842), 17-19.

part of Gachard as State Archivist of the Netherlands. He reorganized his archives after the Belgian example. As an editor, Bakhuizen was nowhere near as prolific as Gachard, but he too made a great archival journey, to Vienna. Bakhuizen's taste for archives was born out of necessity: as a classical philologist he left the Netherlands in 1843 because he was in debt for over two hundred thousand guilders. During his eight-year exile he turned to Dutch history, using the books his friends sent him and the documents he found in foreign archives. His search led him to many places: Liège, northern France and Gachard's archive in Brussels. Always short of cash, he had made his copies himself: "my means do not allow me to use copyists, having them copy after my instructions and help me with my research".<sup>18</sup>

Bakhuizen made his greatest find in 1845 in the Imperial Archives in Vienna: the official correspondence of King Philip II and Duchess Margaret of Parma as governor of the Netherlands (1559-1567, 1578-1582). Bakhuizen immediately planned an edition of these letters and therefore copied all the letters himself. He realized that he had no time to lose, because the competition was never asleep. In this case, the competition was Gachard, who had already made a name for himself. Bakhuizen remarked half mockingly, half fearfully that "there would be nothing he would rather do than command his government to let him make another journey for 50 francs a day to Vienna, as he did to Spain".<sup>19</sup> Bakhuizen was right about the amount, but wrong about the timing. It would not be until 1874 that Gachard went to Vienna, receiving 400 francs for travel costs and 50 francs a day for expenses.<sup>20</sup> It was rather thanks to Bakhuizen's slowness that Gachard would eventually become the editor of these letters.

Money was not a problem for Gachard. He received ample funding from the Belgian government, and on his journey to Simancas he was joined by a copyist, Victor Hanssens, who received an allowance of around 20 francs a day.<sup>21</sup> The mission of the two men was instigated by the Belgian Parliament, which wanted research to be conducted into the early modern Estates-General that it saw as its predecessor. Gachard had already searched several Belgian archives and the Dutch archives in The Hague, and was now asked by a Member of Parliament, Bernard du Bus, to continue his work in Madrid and Simancas. Gachard recognized the possibilities of a visit to Simancas and managed to extend his mission to include all national history.<sup>22</sup> This gave him the opportunity to conduct extensive research into his beloved sixteenth century, when Belgium had been under Spanish rule. One of the greatest discoveries Gachard made was the secret correspondence of Philip II and Margaret of Parma. This was complemented by Bakhuizen's find two years later.

The reason behind the archival journeys of Gachard and Bakhuizen was the same: for them, archival documents were the most reliable source of historical knowledge. Their strategy resembles that of Ranke and what has been described as his "archival turn". Ranke deconstructed existing historiography as unreliable, sometimes even

<sup>18</sup> *Briefwisseling van Bakhuizen van den Brink met zijne vrienden gedurende zijne ballingschap*, ed. S. Muller Fz. (Haarlem: Bohn, 1906), 246.

<sup>19</sup> *Briefwisseling van Bakhuizen*, 211.

<sup>20</sup> ARA, I 230: Papiers, notes et manuscrits de Louis-Prospér Gachard / 11: Correspondance et notes relatives à la mission de Gachard aux Archives impériales de Vienne en 1874: letter of the Minister of the Interior to Gachard, 3 July 1874.

<sup>21</sup> ARA, I 230 / 3: Correspondance et rapports concernant les recherches de Gachard dans les archives et bibliothèques d'Espagne: letter of Gachard to the Minister of the Interior, 28 Jan. 1843.

<sup>22</sup> Janssens, "L.-P. Gachard en de ontsluiting", 315-316.

fraudulent. He claimed to have replaced historiographical tradition, using documents drawn from archives. According to Ranke, “history came only into being through the archive”.<sup>23</sup> This was a position to which the two archivists could subscribe. In their works, they repeatedly stressed the importance of archival documents and the new and reliable knowledge archival research would yield. It was only the archives of Simancas that could “mettre les historiens en état de déterminer la véritable caractère” of the Dutch Revolt and the separation of the Low Countries “sur laquelle les écrivains protestants & catholiques sont le moins d’accord”, according to Gachard.<sup>24</sup>

Ranke, Gachard, Bakhuizen and many other nineteenth-century historians saw themselves as innovators of historiography, more than they actually were. It had been common knowledge among historians for at least several centuries that primary and original sources had more authority than derivative ones. Nevertheless, the great value attached to archival documents incited many archival visits and long journeys throughout Europe. The archives opened up rather slowly, but contributed much new material to the study of history and reinforced the epistemological status of archival documents. This high epistemological status had a double basis. First, the documents came from the secret sphere of the state. This bestowed upon them a legal and almost indisputable truth status; claims based on these documents were truer than others.<sup>25</sup>

Second, the original documents that were stored in the archive allowed for a direct, unmediated contact with the past. This was the essential motive for an ‘archival turn’: to escape from mediation by earlier historians and their histories. Something extra was added in what Jo Tollebeek has called the romantic archival fantasy. Not only did the archival documents provide knowledge of the past: they also offered access to it. Repeated contact with archival documents, a Dutch historian said, offered him a “commerce habituel” with historical characters.<sup>26</sup> Most of the time, this contact was more instantaneous, as the gap in time and space could be crossed by touching documents or inhaling dust.<sup>27</sup> Visiting the archive thus became a sensual experience. It was always about ‘hearing’ voices and ‘seeing’ the past – things that came about through ‘touching’ the documents. In this register of speaking about the archive, the sexual was never far away. When Ranke compared archival documents to “schöne Prinzessinnen”, he at least was being knightly.<sup>28</sup> At other times the archival depot was compared to a “harem” and its contents were “virgins” – as was the case with Gachard when he spoke of “sources vierges”, that were discovered and touched for the very first time by him.<sup>29</sup> The attractions of the archive were almost impossible for the historian, a lone male subject, to resist.

<sup>23</sup> Eskildsen, “Leopold Ranke’s Archival Turn”, 437.

<sup>24</sup> ARA, I 230 / 3.

<sup>25</sup> P. Müller, “Die neue Geschichte aus dem alten Archiv. Geschichtsforschung und Arkanpolitik in Mitteleuropa, ca. 1800 - ca. 1850”, *Historische Zeitschrift*, 299 (2014): 36-69.

<sup>26</sup> P. Huistra, “The Trial of Henry of Brederode. Historians, Sources and Location under Discussion in Nineteenth-Century Historiography”, *History of the Human Sciences*, 26 (2013): 61.

<sup>27</sup> J. Tollebeek, “‘Turn’d to Dust and Tears’. Revisiting the Archive”, *History and Theory*, 43 (2004): 241-242.

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in P. Müller, “Geschichte machen. Überlegungen zu local-spezifischen Praktiken in der Geschichtswissenschaft und ihrer epistemischen Bedeutung im 19. Jahrhundert. Ein Literaturbericht”, *Historische Anthropologie. Kultur-Gesellschaft-Alltag*, 12 (2004): 429.

<sup>29</sup> B. G. Smith, “Gender and the Practices of Scientific History”, *American Historical Review*, 110 (1995): 1165-1175; Onghena, “Le prince des archivists”, 65.

## III. ENTERING THE ARCHIVE

The gender of the archival researcher's persona was reinforced by other metaphors to describe archival practice. It was hard work that was compared with various kinds of physical labor. The historian was a hunter, and archival documents were his prey; he was reaping a harvest from the field of the archive; and most commonly, the archive was a mine and its content were precious metals or, with regard to later writing activities, ore. Gachard knew how to evoke the heroism of archival work through these commonplaces. After only two months in Simancas he wrote to the minister that he could now say, without bragging, that "je m'étonne moi-même d'avoir, en si peu de temps, fait une moisson si abondante et si riche".<sup>30</sup>

In the introduction to the first volume of the *Correspondance*, Gachard added to his own reputation by giving details of his journey to Spain. He stressed that he, after numerous failed attempts by other historians, had been the first foreign scholar to enter the "sanctuaire" of Simancas. By describing the archives he gave an idea of the abundance of sources, whilst also paying attention to more specific *trouvailles*. For one very important letter from Margaret of Parma to Philip II he had searched for two months, but the find gave him such joy that it compensated for the many fatiguing and tedious hours he had spent. Gachard portrayed an archival journey in which hardships, such as the cold that prevented him from working in winter, were endured for the reward of many valuable sources that would shed new light on national history.<sup>31</sup>

The "heroic study of records" was an element of Gachard's self-portrayal in his introduction to the *Correspondance*.<sup>32</sup> Many of these elements can also be found in the letters Gachard wrote to his superior, the Minister of the Interior, but they are supplemented by the less heroic and more prosaic sides of archival research, such as boredom and a yearning for home. Gachard stated that he wanted to return to Brussels as early as February 1844 for both professional and private reasons, but the minister did not agree to him returning so soon. Gachard repeatedly described the various troubles and annoyances that made him want to leave, but he did not return to Belgium until December 1844, nineteen months after he had left.<sup>33</sup> This did not prevent Gachard from asking the minister for a second stay in the "triste lieu de Simancas", but this time for a shorter period, from September to December 1846.<sup>34</sup>

Gachard's unwillingness ("à aucun prix") to spend another eleven months in Simancas, as he had during his first trip,<sup>35</sup> was probably at least partly due to the difficult negotiating process that surrounded the archival work in Simancas Castle. When Gachard and Hanssens left Belgium in May 1843, they expected to gain permission to

<sup>30</sup> ARA, I 230 / 3: letter from Gachard to the Minister of the Interior, 18 Nov. 1843.

<sup>31</sup> *Correspondance de Philippe II sur les affaires des Pays-Bas*, ed. L.-P. Gachard, 5 vols. (1848), I, 55, ix, clxxxv, 48.

<sup>32</sup> H. Paul, "The Heroic Study of Records. The Contested Persona of the Archival Historian", *History of the Human Sciences*, 26 (2013): 67-83.

<sup>33</sup> ARA, I 230 / 3: letters from Gachard to the Minister, 18-2-1844 and 4-5-1844.

<sup>34</sup> ARA, I 230 / 4: *Correspondance et rapports concernant les recherches de Gachard dans les archives et bibliothèques d'Espagne*: letter from Gachard to the Minister of the Interior, 8 Aug. 1846.

<sup>35</sup> ARA, I 230 / 4: letter from Gachard to the Minister of the Interior, 8 Aug. 1846.

enter the archive soon, but when they reached Spain in early July after a stop at the *Archives nationales* (then: *royales*) in Paris, they were told that permission had not yet been granted. After two months of work in Madrid libraries, they were finally granted permission by the Spanish Minister of the Interior. During the winter, Hanssens then returned to Belgium, while Gachard stayed in Spain – not in Simancas because of the cold, but in Madrid, where he continued working in libraries. In March 1844 Gachard returned to Simancas to continue his research, but not for long. After two weeks, a new Royal Decree, probably instigated by Spanish historians who tried to prevent foreigners from using the documents in Simancas, denied him access. It was not until May that Gachard could recommence his work in the Archivo General.<sup>36</sup>

State archives, like those of Simancas or the archive in Vienna in which Bakhuizen and Ranke worked, remained part of the secret sphere of the state during much of the nineteenth century. Access to these archival depots and their contents was not so much a right as a privilege, granted per visitor. This meant that good personal connections in the government circles that granted this privilege were useful. Ranke's network was extensive and he gained access quite easily; Bakhuizen, bankrupt and disgraced, had much more difficulty in obtaining governmental support.<sup>37</sup> Gachard had contacts he could call upon to gain and re-gain access to Simancas. He was supported by the Belgian Minister of the Interior, but more important to his dealings in Spain was the Belgian ambassador in Madrid, Count Charles of Marnix. It was Marnix who, among other things, had contacted the Spanish Minister of the Interior who had the final say on access to Simancas. Furthermore, Gachard made sure that he had good contacts with the director-general of the Spanish Department of Education, Arts and Sciences, Antonio Gil de Zarate, and the archivists of Simancas. All these men were thanked explicitly for their goodwill in the *Correspondance* as a public acknowledgement of Gachard's indebtedness. This gratitude was anticipated. Before his departure from Brussels, Gachard had already gained permission from the Minister of the Interior to award a decoration in the Order of Leopold in Spain if this would facilitate his research. Gachard's first plan was to hand it to Diego de Ayala, the archivist of Simancas, but he died in 1844 before he could receive the decoration. Gachard then decided to award it to Gil de Zarate.<sup>38</sup> Both men, the archivist and the director-general, had been instrumental both in gaining Gachard access to Simancas Castle and in improving his working conditions there.

Because of the many restrictions on the use of the archive, the negotiation process did not stop at the gates of Simancas. The archive's regulations stipulated that documents from the last two centuries remained secret, that the archivist must analyze all non-literary documents before they were handed to a researcher, that every note taken by a researcher had to be copied and that researchers were prohibited from copying whole documents. For copying, visitors had to make use of the copy clerks employed by the archive.<sup>39</sup> It was thanks to De Ayala that Gachard was exempted from the copying of his notes and Gil de Zarate introduced new regulations that made the secrecy policy a little less restrictive and a little more liberal. Still, the

<sup>36</sup> Janssens, "L.-P. Gachard en de ontsluiting".

<sup>37</sup> Eskildsen, "Leopold Ranke's Archival Turn".

<sup>38</sup> ARA, I 230 / 4: letter from Gachard to the Minister of the Interior, 18 Nov. 1846.

<sup>39</sup> *Correspondance* (1848), I, 59-61.

regulations meant that neither Gachard nor Hanssens could copy any document that was in the archive. They had to make extensive use of the services of the copyists of Simancas. During his second stay in Simancas in 1846 for example, Gachard ordered a total of 1,568 copies, of which 226 had already been made before he left for Brussels. The Simancas copyists were indispensable for Gachard, but they were not mentioned in the introduction to the *Correspondance*.

#### IV. THE PROBLEM WITH COPYISTS

The copies and their makers, the copyists, were a recurrent problem for the archival researcher. If he could not make use of his own assistants, as in Simancas, he had to find a reliable local workforce. When in Spain, Gachard tried to maximize his copying capacity. During his first stay in Simancas there were two copyists in the archive, both of whom he employed as much as he could. After the arrival of another foreigner at Simancas, the French historian Tiran, Gachard had to share, which slowed down the work.<sup>40</sup> During his second stay, Gachard was pleased to find that the number of employees had increased to seven. The availability of copyists meant that the physical presence of the historian *in situ* was no longer necessary. Tiran, for example, came to Simancas for a week and gave an order for two months of copying work.<sup>41</sup> Gachard adopted the same strategy: when in Simancas, he had copyists working for him in Madrid and vice versa.<sup>42</sup> Archival research was fieldwork on the one hand, but it could be done by mail order as well: the clerks in Simancas would continue to work for Gachard for another twenty years after he left Spain.<sup>43</sup>

Contracting out archival research was not a smooth process, however. In the first place, it was not easy to find a decent copyist. In Simancas in 1843, only one of the clerks knew a little French. This clerk was Manuel Garcia Gonzalez, who became De Ayala's successor as archivist in Simancas and thus stopped copying documents. During the second stay in Simancas, in 1846, technical capabilities had not improved much: the clerks still knew only a little French. This meant that when documents were very difficult to read, it was Gachard who had to decipher them.<sup>44</sup> Copying was skilled labor, and those skills were hard to find in the Spanish public service. Things were not much better on the free market in Madrid: it took Gachard a very long time to find a copyist who could read documents from the seventeenth century or earlier.<sup>45</sup> Problems with copyists were not only of a technical nature. Their behavior was less than perfect as well, according to Gachard: in fact, they were downright lazy. The short opening hours of Simancas Castle and its many closing days were a nuisance about which Gachard complained frequently, and the copyists were one of the targets of these remarks. If they would "au lieu de se borner à quatre heures de

<sup>40</sup> ARA, I 230 / 3: letter from Gachard to the Minister of the Interior, 24 Nov. 1844.

<sup>41</sup> ARA I 230 / 3: letter from Gachard to the Minister of the Interior, 25 July 1844.

<sup>42</sup> ARA, I 230 / 3: letter from Gachard to the Minister of the Interior, 3 Nov. 1844.

<sup>43</sup> G. Janssens, 'De briefwisseling tussen L.-P. Gachard en Manuel Garcia Gonzalez, archivaris van het Archivo General de Simancas. 1844-1854', *Handelingen der Koninklijke Zuidnederlandse Maatschappij voor Taal- en Letterkunde en Geschiedenis*, 44 (1991): 18.

<sup>44</sup> ARA, I 230 / 4: letters from Gachard to the Minister of the Interior, 28 Aug. 1846 and 7 Oct. 1846; see also ARA, I 230 / 3: letter from Gachard to the Minister of the Interior, 14 Sept. 1844.

<sup>45</sup> ARA, I 230 / 3: letter from Gachard to the Minister of the Interior, 26 Nov. 1843.

travail par jour, y consacrer le double de ce temps [...] nous y gagnerions tous". But no, Gachard lamented, they had to take their siesta. Although they were poor and had not received their regular salary for a long time, they did not make any effort to improve their situation by working a little harder for him. This was, according to the frustrated Gachard, typical of the Spanish nature and of course a hindrance to his research.<sup>46</sup>

Criticizing copyists was rather habitual among nineteenth-century historians. Bakhuizen complained that the clerk in the Dutch National Archives was not able to make a decent copy since he knew no Latin. A Dutch colleague of his who made an archival journey to France apparently had a similar form of bad luck with the copyists who worked in the French archives: they "could neither read nor write", he said.<sup>47</sup> That copyists were a regular object of complaint but were hardly ever praised is a feature they share with the technicians described by Shapin. These technicians, Shapin wrote, were unable to make knowledge claims like their master, Robert Boyle. They only attracted any notice in a negative context, when they bungled experiments; they only had the "capacity to subvert".<sup>48</sup> Similarly, the copyists were only noticed when they did not do their work well. Their qualities only appear in the form of a negative image.

If the copyists of Simancas and Madrid embodied negative qualities, Victor Hanssens was their positive counterpart. He possessed the skills and virtues a good copyist needed. As an exception to the rule, Gachard elaborated on his qualities: firstly in order to obtain the minister's approval to bringing him along, and later to thank him in the *Correspondance*. Hanssens, Gachard said, could read old handwriting, knew Spanish and had a knowledge of Belgian history. In addition, the copyist received praise for his "intelligence, sa bonne volonté, son zèle".<sup>49</sup> Hanssens had everything the Spanish copyists seemed to lack, and a division of labor was therefore quickly established between Gachard, Hanssens and their anonymous collaborators. In the hierarchy, Gachard was at the top and Hanssens was second. They read all the documents – conveniently enough Hanssens knew Italian as well – and decided whether they were to be copied or not. Sources that were not copied were "analyzed" by either of the two men. 'Analyzing' was the kind of intellectual labor for which the copy clerks were not suited: it meant making an excerpt from the document that would be sufficient to include it in the future source edition.<sup>50</sup> In the meantime, the clerks of Simancas just made their copies and were aided by either Gachard or Hanssens when they could not read the documents.<sup>51</sup>

What kind of copies were produced? The nature of the reproduction depended on the goal it served, as Markus Friedrich has shown. Especially after the introduction of photography in the archive, archival reproductions reached a new degree of exactness. Like the copies requested by Gachard, these reproductions served to render the

<sup>46</sup> ARA, I 230 / 3: letter from Gachard to the Minister of the Interior, 11 June 1844.

<sup>47</sup> G. Groen van Prinsterer, "Mededeeling aangaande eene reis in Frankrijk en Duitschland, in het belang van het Huis-Archief des Konings", *Bijdragen voor Vaderlandsche Geschiedenis en Oudheidkunde*, 1 (1837): 172.

<sup>48</sup> S. Shapin, "The Invisible Technician", *American Scientist*, 77 (1989): 558.

<sup>49</sup> ARA, I 230 / 3: letter from Gachard to the Minister of the Interior, 28 Jan. 1844.

<sup>50</sup> ARA, I 230 / 3: letter from Gachard to the Minister of the Interior, 11 June 1844.

<sup>51</sup> ARA, I 230 / 3: letter from Gachard to the Minister of the Interior, 5 Nov. 1843.

archive accessible from anywhere. In Gachard's case this meant that he could consult documents from Simancas whilst in Brussels. But facsimiles and photographs could also serve educational and paleographic purposes, as teaching material for new students for example.<sup>52</sup> In these cases, the reproductions needed a high degree of exactness, to convey the old handwriting, seals and other characteristics. Gachard was only interested in publication and he wanted a copy of the content, not the form of the documents. The copies that still can be found in the State Archives in Brussels today consist of pages of cramped nineteenth-century handwriting. The material condition of the original has been ignored as it is in the *Correspondance* edited by Gachard.<sup>53</sup>

The Brussels copies show two hands: a copyist and a corrector. The copyist wrote the text, the corrector, almost certainly Gachard himself, made corrections in the text. This was a procedure that Gachard had deemed necessary from the start. The original plan was that Gachard would collate the copies made by Hanssens, because "avoir des copies inexactes" amounted to the same as having no copies at all.<sup>54</sup> Since Hanssens was not allowed to copy, he took up the task of collating the copies made in Simancas as well.<sup>55</sup> For Gachard, collating the copies was a necessary procedure: if the historian did not check his copyists, he would end up with texts that were "défectueux et incomplets".<sup>56</sup> The procedure of collating reveals much about the status of the copyists. Again, they were treated as an unavoidable problem in the practice of archival research. To increase the speed of working, the historian needed his copyists, but they were unreliable elements that threatened to escape control. One of the ways to establish this control was by cross-checking their work. Their unwillingness to work was another problem in Gachard's eyes. The Spanish copyists were, as we have seen, unsusceptible to financial incentives. Instead they needed the presence of their superior, Gachard sighed. As soon as De Ayala, the first archivist of Simancas, left, his clerks lost interest in their work.<sup>57</sup> The problem with copyists, from the standpoint of the historian, was that they were untrustworthy and possibly subversive, yet unavoidable elements of archival work.

## V. AN ARCHIVAL TURN?

Copies kept flowing in to Gachard from many places: Simancas, Naples, The Hague. These copies posed a problem for him, because he could not collate them against the originals as he had been able to do when on location. It has been suggested that this was the reason why Gachard opted to present summaries in his *Correspondance* and never prepared an edition of letters *in extenso*: the quality of the copies did not make the latter possible.<sup>58</sup> Gachard preferred working with copyists and assistants whom he knew. Hanssens, who accompanied him on his first trip, was an example of this;

<sup>52</sup> M. Friedrich, "Vom Exzerpt zum Photoauftrag zur Datenbank. Technische Rahmenbedingungen historiographischer Forschung in Archiven und Bibliotheken und ihr Wandel seit dem 19. Jahrhundert", *Historische Anthropologie*, 22 (2014): 278-297.

<sup>53</sup> ARA, I 230 / 684: Documents extraits des Archives de Simancas copies à la demande de Gachard.

<sup>54</sup> ARA, I 230 / 3: letter from Gachard to the Minister of the Interior, 28 Jan. 1843.

<sup>55</sup> ARA, I 230 / 3: letter from Gachard to the Minister of the Interior, 23 Sept. 1843.

<sup>56</sup> ARA, I 230 / 3: letter from Gachard to the Minister of the Interior, 9 March 1844.

<sup>57</sup> ARA, I 230 / 3: letter from Gachard to the Minister of the Interior, 11 June 1844.

<sup>58</sup> Janssens, "De briefwisseling", 22.



Charles Lefèvre, who was chosen as the copyist for the second trip to Simancas, although his services were not used in the end, was another case in point. As an employee of the Belgian State Archives, Lefèvre obviously knew French, his work was fast and precise, and he was the best at deciphering letters “parfois indéchiffrables du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle”.<sup>59</sup>

The production of copies was an indispensable aspect of archival research, often carried out by anonymous copyists. Their reward was not a decoration from the King or an acknowledgement in an introduction. The nameless copy clerks in Spain, and elsewhere throughout Europe, were paid in cash. This was true for the likes of Hanssens and Lefèvre as well, but there seems to have been something more at stake in their case. Their copying work seems to have been part of their career path in the Brussels administration – rather like Manuel Garcia Gonzalez, who was promoted from clerk to director of the archives in Simancas. As for another category of reproducers – the domestic, mostly female copyists, who performed their work within the household – their role resembled that of what Debra Lindsay has termed “intimate inmates”.<sup>60</sup> In the historian’s household they were captives of a community that only adopted male members: the women, often wives, contributed but were not really part of the community. On the other hand, for some at least, this work was a way to fulfill their ambitions. It allowed them a life of culture or science, albeit without public recognition.

Not every nineteenth-century historian had the means of Gachard, who could spend many francs on copies. His story therefore may not be entirely typical of the nineteenth-century archival historian. However, all these historians had to deal with subservient personnel of some kind, whether copyists or otherwise. By considering them, we can discern the boundaries of gender and class in nineteenth-century historiography. Such an inquiry also puts into perspective the image of the lone male subject that was cultivated in the discourse on archival research, implying epistemological trouble. The copyists, archivists and indeed ministers, envoys, government representatives and so on, all of whom were important in the conduct of archival research, reveal the irony of the proclaimed archival turn of nineteenth-century historiography. The conditions of access to and use of the archive, the site meant to offer access to the past that was unmediated by any earlier historian, had to be negotiated. Estimates of the reliability and veracity of earlier historians were replaced by negotiations with authorities. These negotiations were complemented by new assessments of reliability, of those elements that continuously threatened to elude the historian’s control: the copyists.

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<sup>59</sup> ARA, I 230 / 4: letter from Gachard to the Minister of the Interior, 28 Aug. 1846.

<sup>60</sup> D. Lindsay, “Intimate Inmates. Wives, Households, and Science in Nineteenth-Century America”, *Isis*, 89 (1998): 631-652.



COMPOSTO IN CARATTERE DANTE MONOTYPE DALLA  
FABRIZIO SERRA EDITORE, PISA · ROMA.  
STAMPATO E RILEGATO NELLA  
TIPOGRAFIA DI AGNANO, AGNANO PISANO (PISA).

★

*Aprile 2016*

(CZ2/FC3)



