

## The Archival Epistemology of Political Economy in the Early Modern British Atlantic World

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This article explores the origins, applications, and demise of a hitherto-overlooked technique of producing political economic knowledge in the early modern British Atlantic world: arguing from the authority of official paperwork contained in bureaucratic archives. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, archival records figured as powerful sources for generating and substantiating policy arguments about imperial political economy. Developed out of the practices of early modern statecraft, such archival methods were applied to the generation of both policies of imperial governance and interpretations of the empire's commercial constitution. The epistemological foundations of early modern political economy thus emerged through both practices of paperwork and debates about the truth-value of documents. By the early nineteenth century, however, new concepts of political knowledge redefined the meanings of "political economy" and "history" in ways that removed archives from both the technologies of administration and the practices of economic reasoning.