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ARCHAEOLOGICAL ARTEFACTS AND THEIR CATALOGUING: COMPARISONS WITH ARCHIVAL PRACTICE

Abstract

Purpose: *Certain archaeological artefacts, depending on the definition of “what constitutes an archival document,” can be treated in accordance with the principles of archival theory and practice. This article examines archaeological artefacts that bear inscriptions and are catalogued using archaeological methods and compares this approach with the cataloguing practices used for archival documents.*

Methodology: *The article discusses appropriate cataloguing practices within archival science, i.e. how archival documents are recorded. A comparative methodology is thus proposed.*

Results: *Through presentation and comparison, the article outlines cataloguing practices and identifies procedures that apply equally to the cataloguing of archaeological artefacts and archival documents and highlights potential shared elements.*

Conclusions: *The results of this research demonstrate the compatibility of cataloguing archaeological artefacts and archival documents, opening new possibilities and outcomes in the context of digitization and the application of artificial intelligence.*

Keywords: *archaeological artefacts, archival documents, cataloguing, shared elements, comparison.*

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INTRODUCTION

This article seeks to explore the question of *how archaeologists catalogue archaeological artefacts that contain written inscriptions or texts*, which archivists would typically define as archival documents. In archival theory and practice, any object that possesses a substrate, a form of recording, and meaningful content is considered an archival document and is catalogued according to established (or varied) methods. A comparison between the cataloguing of archaeological artefacts and archival documents that share these elements—substrate, mode of recording, and content—may be of interest to both archaeologists and archivists. The respective cataloguing methods in both disciplines may benefit archaeological science on the one hand and archival science on the other. Both disciplines create catalogues for research and presentation purposes, intended for both professional and general audiences.

With such catalogues, we aim to spark increased interest in archaeological artefacts on the one hand and in archival documents on the other.

The selected examples follow the principle of *sine ira et studio* and are not subject to any additional selection criteria.

PRESENTATION OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL ARTEFACTS (ARCHAEOLOGY) FOR THE PURPOSES OF THIS RESEARCH

For a better understanding of the present study, it is necessary to begin with a brief introduction to the origin and definition of archaeological artefacts—with or without inscriptions—and the associated academic discipline.

The common aim of the disciplines concerned with Antiquity is to gain insight into the life-worlds and living conditions of past human societies through material remains.

While the field of Antiquity studies up until the 19th century primarily focused on the ancient cultures of Greece and Italy, the exploration of the ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia (Western Asia) and the regions of Central and Northern Europe led to the emergence of further specialised disciplines. These include Classical Archaeology, Roman Provincial Archaeology, Near Eastern Archaeology, Prehistoric Archaeology, Egyptology, and others (Eggert, 2000; Höscher, 2002; von Soden, 1985).

The methods used to study material culture or remains are often interdisciplinary, although they may vary significantly depending on region and period. Such interdisciplinary methods first and foremost involve the documentation of material remains, though this is subject to a variety of local preservation conditions. In general, material remains unearthed during archaeological excavations can be divided into different groups: on one hand, all man-made objects (artefacts), and on the other, archaeological features resulting from human activity. In certain periods and regions, buildings, architectural elements, as well as archaeozoological and archaeobotanical remains are also found.

Today, material remains are more often discovered during so-called rescue excavations than research excavations. These are carried out as part of construction and development projects (e.g. Fera, 2019, 147). Research excavations usually follow a specific research question and are guided by prior knowledge regarding the expected types of finds, periods, and structures. In contrast, rescue excavations often start without any clear expectations regarding the finds. Both research and rescue excavations employ invasive and non-invasive methods (such as geophysical surveys or LiDAR), with the latter being of particular importance since every excavation is inherently destructive, whereas non-invasive methods preserve the archaeological context.

Excavations follow excavation and documentation standards defined by each country (e.g. Jurišić et al., 2019; Janežič et al., 2018). The goal is to achieve as detailed a documentation of the context as possible, which is essential for later scientific interpretation. The application of various scientific (natural science) methods has become a standard component of archaeological analysis and has greatly expanded our knowledge (Fera, 2019, 149).

In addition to the material remains recovered from excavations — which may include artefacts with inscriptions or writing such as cuneiform tablets — there are also finds that were already above ground when discovered. These include inscriptions on stelae, statues, buildings, or rock surfaces, such as the Behistun Inscription from the late 6th/5th century BCE in present-day Iran, commissioned by the Achaemenid king Darius I (e.g. Koch, 1992, 13–22, pl. 1–4) or inscriptions on buildings in Persepolis, the capital of the Achaemenid Empire (e.g. Shahbazi, 2013, 22, 38 fig. 19, 118, 119 fig. 97). These are among the earliest textual documents from the ancient Near East brought to Europe by travelers in the 18th-19th century.

The study of inscriptions — epigraphy — is considered an independent discipline within the field of Antiquity studies (e.g. Bodel, 2001). However, as noted, inscribed artefacts can originate from diverse archaeological contexts and may be documented using various archaeological methods. This is also the case with the examples in this study.

As already mentioned, archaeological excavation destroys the context, which is why precise documentation is essential (Fera, 2019, 148–149). In the past, analogue methods such as drawings, photographs, and levelling were used. Today, digital methods dominate, including detailed 3D documentation using total stations, GIS, and terrestrial laser scanning. Exact context documentation is critical for subsequent analysis, including the stratigraphic positioning of artefacts, which is vital for dating.

Processing and analyzing all artefacts from an excavation can be a lengthy and labour-intensive task, ultimately aimed at publishing the results (cf. Janežič et al., 2018, 41). All finds must be cleaned, possibly reconstructed, drawn, photographed, described, scientifically analysed depending on material and research question, and catalogued. The entire process — from planning to publication — generates a vast amount of analogue and digital data that must be archived.

Considering this process — from data collection to the creation of an archive of an archaeological project (cf. Janežič et al., 2018, 45) — this study will examine how inscribed artefacts from archaeological contexts are presented and scientifically processed, and to what extent their documentation overlaps with archival science practices.

DEFINITION OF AN ARCHIVAL DOCUMENT

In general terminology, archival material exists at various levels and in different forms. In this study, we follow the definitions laid out in the ZVDAGA Act and its implementing regulations, where archival material is often described as being of scientific and cultural importance and as a cultural monument. Broader interpretations of what constitutes an archival document can be found in both domestic and international literature. Such documents are selected from documentary material already during the phase of their creation.

For the purposes of this study, I have chosen examples of archival documents that are held in archives around the world and often represent the most important and prominent components of archival collections and fonds. These are charters, which are in the narrow sense written legal instruments that confirm established or recorded data and facts. Medieval charters are linked to rulers, monasteries, popes, cities, and individuals, and they are generally well-researched and processed by experts.

In our contribution, we observe that charters were recorded on various writing materials such as wax, papyrus, and most commonly, parchment (from the 7th to the 14th century). In more recent times, charters were also written on paper.

We are particularly interested in parchment, a writing surface of animal origin that was specially treated for this purpose. The writing was done with quill pens (swan or turkey feathers), or with wooden or metal styluses.

In terms of content, the description can be remarkably broad, as these charters convey a wealth of data through various forms and methods (abbreviations, initials, miniatures, etc.).

EXAMPLES OF INSCRIBED ARTEFACTS: CONTEXT, DOCUMENTATION, AND PUBLICATION

In the following, three concrete examples of archaeological artefacts with inscriptions or text from different time periods and regions will be examined, along with their documentation and presentation in scholarly publications.

Since access to internal cataloguing systems of specific archaeological projects is generally difficult, the examples discussed here are drawn from published literature. It can, however, be reasonably assumed — based on our own experience and involvement in archaeological projects³ — that the catalogue-like information presented in these publications reflects, at least in broad terms, the way such artefacts are recorded in internal project archives.

Our **first example** concerns a so-called “docket”—heart-shaped clay bullae whose string channels and the impression of a knot inside them prove that they were once attached to other writing materials made from perishable media such as papyrus, summarising their content (Röllig, 2014, 2).

³ This applies in particular to the first example, as the author has been directly involved in the corresponding archaeological project.

The docket (D7) originates from the archaeological site of Tall Seh Hamad/Dur-Katlimmu/Magdalu in present-day Syria. It bears an inscription in Old Aramaic and dates to the 7th century BCE, the Neo-Assyrian period (fig. 1a). It was found in a palace-like structure, in room YV, within the stratigraphic unit EE YV-04-01 of the so-called “Red House” at Tall Seh Hamad, and is associated with the “Archive of Šulmu-šarri” (Röllig, 2014, 34–35, D7, 5; Rohde, 2013, 331–345).

This archive of Neo-Assyrian cuneiform tablets was originally stored on an upper floor of the building. From the extensive cuneiform records of the archive, we know that Šulmu-šarri was a “Confidant of the King” and was already active during the reign of the Assyrian king Esarhaddon (680–669 BCE) (Röllig, 2014, 5, 21; Rohde 2013, 342, 344). In docket D7, Šulmu-šarri appears as a creditor in a debt certificate concerning barley. The name of the man who borrowed the barley was Zabudu / Zabudî (Röllig, 2014, 21, 34).

Docket D7 from Tall Seh Hamad, presented here as our first example, was uncovered in 1998 during excavations in room YV of the “Red House.” Its stratigraphic context was documented with precision. In total, 490 clay tablets or fragments, 68 dockets or fragments, two cuneiform clay bulla fragments, and one contract of attachment were recovered from this area, all dating to the 7th century BCE (Rohde 2013, 331, 344).

In Wolfgang Röllig’s publication (2014, 34), docket D7 is depicted both photographically and in a scale drawing at 1:1 (see fig. 1a-b). The catalogue provides the following information:

- inventory number
- content (subject of the text)
- dimensions
- description
- find circumstances
- sealing (in this case, three stamp seal impressions schematically illustrated in the drawing)
- script
- dating
- text lines / translation
- commentary on the text lines

First example: a so-called “docket” from Tall Seh Hamad / Dur-Katlimmu / Magdalu (Syria) (Röllig, 2014, 34–35, D7)



Figure 1a: “Docket” D7 from Tall Seh Hamad / Dur-Katlimmu / Magdalu (Syria) (after Röllig, 2014, 34–35, D7)

D 7

<i>Inventar-Nr.:</i>	SH 98/6949/0598 = DeZ 21048/02
<i>Inhalt:</i>	Schuldurkunde, Gerste.
<i>Maße:</i>	72,5 x 50 x 27 mm.
<i>Beschreibung:</i>	Vollständiges Docket. Brauner Ton, teilweise etwas rauchgeschwärzt. 2 Schnurlöcher am oberen Rand. Auf der Vorderseite 7 Zeilen Text, die Rückseite ist im mittleren Teil an der Oberfläche zerstört. Reste von 7 z.T. fragmentarischen Zeilen.
<i>Fundumstände:</i>	Gefunden am 10.9.1998 in FS 6949/166 im Raum YV des Roten Hauses; EE YV-04-01 (Rohde 2013: 331–345).
<i>Siegelung:</i>	Drei Stempelsiegelabdrücke (Füget in Vorb.: Nr. 292) befinden sich im oberen Bereich der Vorderseite der Urkunde.
<i>Schrift:</i>	Typ III, z.T. sehr tief eingeritzt, flüchtig geschrieben. Worttrennung durch tief eingegrabene Punkte, aber nicht konsequent.
<i>Datierung:</i>	Monat Adar. Eponym Ša-Nabûšû (658).

Vs.	h t m · z b d y · ʿwʰ h ʒ y · b ʿ l y · š z ʒ ʿ r 3 š [ʿ r] n ʿ · l s l m s r /// /// ʿ l y ʰ h m l p l g h n h ʒ d n /// /// 6 t b n /// /// m q r ʿ h ʰ Rs. š h d n · 9 h ʿ ʒ ʰ h s s y [] b ʿ ʿ r · [] x // [... 12 [] j w [... ʿ y ʰ r h ʿ d r [l ʰ] m š n b š w	Siegel(urkunde) des Zabudi und des Hušī, Bürger/Besitzer von ŠZŠʿR (über) Gerste, gehörig dem Šulmu-sarri, 6 (Homer) zu ihren Lasten. Für die Hälfte davon (als Zins), Schnitter 6 Stroh 6 Ballen. Zeugen: HŠH Šamsīya Monat Adar Eponym Ša-Nabûšû
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Figure 1b: Catalogue description for “docket” D7 from from Tall Seh Hamad / Dur-Katlimmu / Magdalu (Syria) (after Röllig, 2014, 34–35, D7)

Our **second example** concerns an Old Babylonian clay tablet from the so-called Sînkāšid Palace at the archaeological site of Uruk/Warka in present-day Iraq (Sanati-Müller, 1996, 368, 372 No. 213, Pl. 44, No. 213) (fig. 2a). Uruk-Warka is one of the most important archaeological sites in southern Iraq, with a long history of settlement and research (Crüsemann et al., 2013). As early as the 4th millennium BCE, it was a major urban centre and home to some of the earliest examples of writing on clay tablets.

The tablet, inscribed in Old Babylonian cuneiform and bearing a seal impression, dates to the first half of the 2nd millennium BCE and was excavated during the 19th excavation campaign in 1960–1961 in the Sînkāšid Palace. It is part of the tablet group W 20052, comprising 141 tablets and fragments housed partly in Heidelberg and partly in Baghdad. The contents of this group of tablets relate to the receipt of reed and wood; the translated text on our example reads: “Bring me 20 bundles of reeds for torches!” (Sanati-Müller, 1996, 372).

The tablet, along with other examples, was published in an article by Shirin Sanati-Müller in 1996 in volume 27 of the scholarly series *Baghdader Mitteilungen* of

the Orient Department of the German Archaeological Institute.

The publication includes a drawing of the front and back sides of the tablet with a depiction of the seal image, as well as photographs of all sides (cf. fig. 2a-b). The article provides the following information:

- provenance (described in the text)
- inventory number (in the catalogue of the publication)
- dimensions (in the catalogue of the publication)
- storage location (in the catalogue of the publication)
- dating
- text lines / translation
- commentary in footnotes

The clay tablets from the Sînkāšid Palace in Uruk-Warka published by Sanati-Müller are also included in the database of the *Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative CDLI* (<https://cdli.earth/publications/1777458>).

Second example: a clay tablet from the Sînkāšid Palace in Uruk/Warka (Iraq) (Sanati-Müller 1996, 368, 372 No. 213, Pl. 44, No. 213)



Figure 2a: Clay tablet with cuneiform script from from the Sînkāšid Palace in Uruk/Warka (Iraq) (after Sanati-Müller 1996, 368, 372 No. 213, Pl. 44, No. 213)

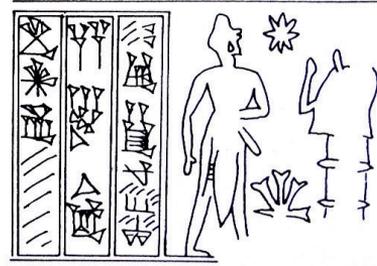
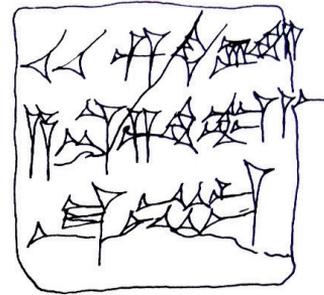
Nr. 213

Tafel: W 20052,89³⁰

Datum: undatiert

Vs	1	20 gi-sa ^{hi-a}
	2	a-na gi-izi-lá
	3	šu-bi-lam
K	4	Siegeldarstellung
Rs		Siegeldarstellung

Siegel³¹: A/Sà-su-um nu² x x
dumu I-din-Eš₄-tár
ir^dNin-[]



Übersetzung: "1-3Laß mir 20 Rohrbündel für Fackeln bringen!"

Figure 2b: Catalogue description for the clay tablet with cuneiform script from from the Sínkāšid Palace in Uruk/Warka (Iraq) (after Sanati-Müller 1996, 368, 372 No. 213, Pl. 44, No. 213)

Our **third example** is a fragmentarily preserved Roman military diploma discovered in Vičava in Ptuj – the Roman *Poetovio* (Lovenjak, 2019, 10–14, fig. 8) (fig. 3). It is a small piece of a bronze tablet bearing the remains of five lines of inscription, indicating that it is a fragment of a Roman military diploma.

The fragment was uncovered in 2011 in SE 1259 (Stratigraphic Unit SE 1259) during rescue excavations carried out by the Centre for Preventive Archaeology of the Slovenian Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage (ZVKDS CPA) on the grounds of the former military barracks in Vičava. It dates to a period between the late 1st and mid-2nd century CE. The area is located near the presumed forum of the Roman colony of *Poetovio*.

The find was the subject of a dedicated publication by Milan Lovenjak, published as part of the Small Scholarly Monographs series by the publishing house of the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana. The publication includes a description of the find context, measurements and weight of the bronze fragment, two photo-

graphs, a transcription with partial reconstruction of the Latin text, and translations into Slovenian and German (Lovenjak, 2019, 13, 33).

The publication does not contain a catalogue-style listing of information, nor does it include a drawing of the object or data on its current location.

Third example: the fragment of a Roman military diploma, bronze, from Vičava in Ptuj (Slovenia) (Lovenjak, 2019, 10–14, fig. 8)



]M VETERAN[
]VB IVLIO CAND[
]NESTA MISSI[
]ITATEM DED[
 5]C HABVISSE[

[Imp. Caes(ar) --- / equitibus et peditibus qui militant in alis --- et cohortibus --- quae / apellantur --- et --- -u]m vetera[na et --- et quae sunt in / Moesia Superiore s]ub Iulio Cand[ido stipendiis / emeritis dimissis ho]nستا miss[i]one ipsis liberis / posterisque eorum civ]itatem ded[it et conubium / cum uxoribus quas tun]c habuisse[nt cum est / civitas iis data aut si qui caelibes essent cum / iis quas postea duxissent, dum taxat singuli / singulas. -----]

Figure 3: Foto and transcript of the inscription on the fragment of a Roman military diploma (bronze) from Vičava in Ptuj (Slovenia) (after Lovenjak, 2019, 10–14, fig. 8)

METHODS OF CATALOGUING ARCHIVAL DOCUMENTS

Examples of medieval charters illustrate prescribed standards for the creation of documents and their treatment in archival theory and practice. These are laid out in laws, by-laws, standards, and various guidelines — all developed out of practice or necessity. There exists an extensive body of literature on the most important archival documents, notably the charters from the Middle Ages onward.

These documents are preserved in almost all archives and even in some non-archival institutions such as museums, galleries, and private historical collections. Generally, they are found in archival guides for entire institutions or in specific guides that deal primarily with the cataloguing of charters.

For this article, I will examine several charters which, according to the definition that a charter itself constitutes an archival fond, will be treated accordingly. The general definition of a medieval charter refers to its frequent use of parchment as a substrate (other materials are not discussed here), which was already used during the Roman Empire. The historian Pliny the Elder mentions that parchment was named after Pergamon, where this method of preparing animal skin for writing was developed. The name “parchment” derives from the city of Pergamon. Archives pay great attention to old parchment charters and often take pride in possessing the oldest ones—be it those housed in the Apostolic Archive in the Vatican or in other repositories.

Charters are generally defined as “a written document, drawn up and authenticated in a prescribed form, concerning an act of a legal nature.” They are distinguished and categorised by writing substrate, material, recording method, script, date of origin, size, preservation status, seals, notes, and citations.

Since I spent most of my archival career at the Regional Archives Maribor (PAM), I will begin with the oldest preserved charter held in this archive. It dates back to the year 1246 and is one of three charters from the 13th century kept by the Regional Archives Maribor.

FIRST EXAMPLE:

Processing of the oldest charter in the Regional Archives Maribor, which dates from 1246. The document is presented with a regest (summary), a citation of its archival location and origin, references to its publications, a complete transcription of the text, and annotations indicating where it has been mentioned.

SECOND EXAMPLE:

The oldest charter in the Historical Archives Ptuj dates from 1431⁴ (fig. 4). It is described with a regist (summary), identification of the authenticator, the method of authentication (hanging seal), dimensions, legal status (original charter), material (parchment), language, script, and seven descriptors.



Figure 4: The oldest charter in the Historical Archives Ptuj, dating to the year 1431(after Historical Archive Ptuj)

Detailed description (Historical Archive Ptuj)

Signature: SI_ZAP/0051, Charter Collection, box 3, 1431 XI 13

Scope: SI_ZAP/0051_00003

Previous signatures: ZAP 51/4; former signature 2/4

Title: The Styrian Duke Frederick IV of Austria grants Andrej of Žusem a princely fief over estates in Močna near Hrastovec and on Kreuzberg

4 We thank Dejan Zadavec for sending us the image and description of the oldest charter in the Historical Archives Ptuj.

Date of issue: 13 November 1431 (on the day of Saint Brictius)

Place of issue: Innsbruck

Issuer: Styrian Duke Frederick IV of Austria **Recipient:** Andrej of Žusem

Regest: Duke Frederick IV of Austria grants Andrej of Žusem, as a princely fief, a manor (sitz), twelve farms, judicial rights and high justice in Močna near Hrastovec, which Andrej had purchased from Oswald von Eroltzheim. He also grants fourteen estates on Kreuzberg, located between Guštanj and Slovenj Gradec, which Andrej had acquired from Johann and Eitel von Eroltzheim, Konrad and Ulrich Dachawer, and the brothers Thomas and Ludwig von Rotenstein.

Authenticator: Styrian Duke Frederick IV of Austria

Authentication method: Hanging seal in a wax capsule

Dimensions (W × H): 32.5 × 16.5 cm

Legal status: Original charter

Material: Parchment

Language: German

Script: German cursive (Gothic cursiva / Kurrent)

Descriptors:

- Styrian Duke Frederick IV of Austria
- Andrej of Žusem
- Oswald and Heinrich von Eroltzheim
- Nikolaus von Eroltzheim
- Johann and Eitel von Eroltzheim
- Konrad and Ulrich Dachawer
- Thomas and Ludwig von Rotenstein
- Močna near Hrastovec
- Guštanj
- Slovenj Gradec

THIRD EXAMPLE:

The oldest charter in the Regional Archives Koper dates from 1187. It is described in the archival guide with information such as a regest (summary), legal status, place of origin, citation references, and archival code.

ANALYSIS AND OVERVIEW OF CATALOGUING ARCHAEOLOGICAL ARTEFACTS

Based on our three preceding examples – a Neo-Assyrian docket, an Old Babylonian clay tablet, and a Roman inscription (military diploma) – we can observe that archaeological artefacts with inscriptions are generally presented in a similar manner in scholarly publications. These publications often serve a dual function: they disseminate research findings and simultaneously reflect the internal cataloguing structure of the respective projects. In this context, we can regard the way the artefacts are described as a form of external catalogue, which in many cases mirrors the internal documentation.

In addition to drawings and photographs, the presentation typically includes the following elements (in varying order), which may appear in the main text, in the catalogue section, or spread across both:

- Record number – collection, institution
- Place of storage
- Provenance – country, archaeological site
- Dating – time period
- Object – type of object (e.g., stele, clay tablet, etc.)
- Material of the object
- Type of script
- Language
- Text
- Translation
- Publication

An interpretive analysis of the cultural-historical significance of the artefacts or texts is typically carried out by the authors within the framework of the initial publication. When such a first publication is comprehensive and detailed, it provides all available information, enabling other researchers to further analyse the artefacts from a range of perspectives.

Inclusion of these artefacts in databases such as the previously mentioned Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative (CDLI), the Epigraphic Database Heidelberg (<https://edh.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/>), or the Electronic Archive of Greek and Latin Epigraphy (EAGLE) also ensures broad public accessibility.

ANALYSIS AND OVERVIEW OF CATALOGUING ARCHIVAL DOCUMENTS

Based on the presented archival documents — i.e., medieval charters — we can analyze and describe how these charters are catalogued or published in various books, collections, exhibition catalogues, etc. The following cataloguing methods are common:

1. Image with short summary and location
2. Image with extended content, location, and catalogue reference
3. Image and structured cataloguing following agreed elements:
 - a. Location
 - b. Date
 - c. Citation of publication
 - d. Regest (summary of contents)
 - e. Publications
 - f. Microfilm/scan status
 - g. Published regest
 - h. Full transcription (requires expertise in language, scripts, abbreviations, historical topography)
 - i. Writing substrate
 - j. Dimensions
 - k. Language
 - l. Script
 - m. Preservation state
 - n. Seals
 - o. Bibliography

Such a wide range of cataloguing forms is applied variably in practice. For example, Žnidarič Golec (2006, 3), presents a schematic approach to charter cataloguing including:

- Location (folder number)
- Date of origin
- Number of catalogued units
- Place and date
- Issuance of catalogue unit

- Regest
- Legal status = original = script = substrate = language = name of issuer = preservation = seal = notes
- Publications (literature)

Similarly, Čipič Rehar (2018, 12) presents a comparable schematic structure.

In the *Staatliche Archive Bayerns – Jahresbericht 2022* (Grau, 2022, 34), a papal charter from 1259 is presented with basic metadata, image, location (Landshut Archive), and collection number U1780. This format continues throughout the book.

4. The overall quality of cataloguing medieval charters is satisfactory. However, inconsistency and especially a lack of knowledge about charters—as the most valuable documents in some archives—can be surprising.

5. In some cases, charters are visually well-presented but only partially follow the prescribed archival principles.

CONCLUSION

This article has examined the methodological intersections and divergences in the treatment of inscribed objects within the disciplines of archival science and archaeology. Building on the premise that certain archaeological artefacts — especially those bearing inscriptions — can be regarded as archival documents according to the criteria of archival science, the study set out to compare the cataloguing and documentation approaches employed in both fields.

By analysing selected examples — namely, medieval charters as archival documents and archaeological artefacts such as a Neo-Assyrian docket, an Old Babylonian clay tablet, and a Roman military diploma — the study has highlighted how both disciplines engage with similar fundamental aspects: provenance, material composition, writing system, language, content, state of preservation, and contextual embedding. These examples illustrate that, despite differences in the origin and intended function of the objects, the principles of describing and cataloguing them show notable parallels. Both archaeology and archival science aim to record these items systematically in order to preserve and communicate their historical significance, often using comparable structural elements in their respective catalogue entries.

At the same time, the study underscores that the two disciplines are shaped by different professional traditions, legal frameworks, and practical challenges. While archival documents are often preserved within institutional settings and have been continuously transmitted, archaeological artefacts are usually recovered from disrupted contexts and require reconstruction through excavation and interpretation. These differences influence the methods and metadata standards applied in cataloguing.

Nonetheless, the research has shown that there is considerable potential for methodological exchange and interdisciplinary collaboration. In particular, the integration of digital tools — such as 3D documentation, database structuring, and artificial intelligence — holds promise for the future. While not the focus of this article, such technologies offer valuable opportunities for developing shared frameworks for the recording, analysis, and dissemination of inscribed historical sources.

In conclusion, the study argues for a closer dialogue between archaeology and archival science, not only in terms of technical and methodological innovation but also in developing a common language for the documentation and cataloguing of inscribed artefacts. Such collaboration would significantly enhance the accessibility, comparability, and interpretive potential of historical materials across disciplinary boundaries in an increasingly digitised research environment.

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