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ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE ARCHIVE – DEVELOPMENT OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD DOCUMENTATION

Abstract

Purpose: *The archaeological site archive consists of archaeological finds, samples, and all documentation accompanying archaeological research and excavation or post-excavation processing. This documentation must be permanently stored as a collection in the relevant museum institution. Part of the documentation is also the archaeological field documentation, which is the subject of this research. The purpose of this article is to provide a systematic overview of the development and current state of archaeological field documentation and to identify current issues. What was the development of archaeological field documentation and what types of documents did it contain, and does it contain?*

Methodology: *The research uses a compilation/description method based on already established research and publications in this field.*

Findings: *A review of literature has shown that Slovenian archaeologists only began to deal with archaeological field documentation in the late 1950s. Since the 1980s, the scope of fieldwork has increased significantly, and initiatives for the standardization of archaeological field documentation have begun to emerge. In 2013, the Rules on Archaeological Research were adopted, part of which is Annex 1: Professional Standards for Archaeological Field Research, which sets standards for archaeological field documentation. Archaeologists have been aware and are still conscious of the problem of non-standardization of archaeological field documentation, which is also evident in its archiving.*

Conclusion: *The standardization of archaeological field documentation is quite vague and does not contain precise and clear instructions, so the field remains rather undefined. Its status within the archive of an archaeological site in a museum remains unclear.*

Keywords: *Slovenian archaeology, archaeological site archive, archaeological field documentation, development, regulation*

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1 INTRODUCTION

Even a quick glance through the numerous archaeological collections in Slovenian museums tells us that Slovenia has a rich past. Archaeological finds in museums tell us about the past and about people. In order to fully understand the stories of our predecessors, which have woven themselves into the story of our present, it is not enough to study only archaeological finds, it is necessary to thoroughly understand the entire context of archaeological research, which also includes archaeological field documentation. Archaeological finds and archaeological field documentation together form the archaeological site archive. Article 2 of the Rules on Archaeological Research (PAR, 2013, 2022) defines the term ‘archaeological site archive’ as *“the result of an individual archaeological site together with all archaeological finds, samples, and complete documentation accompanying the archaeological research and excavation or post-excavation processing, and must be permanently stored as a collection in such a way as to allow access to experts and the wider public.”*

In the past, archaeological field documentation was more of a secondary concern, with priority given to archaeological finds. As Novaković et al. (2007, i) note, Slovenian field archaeology did not have a comprehensive system of standards and similar regulations until 2007. The documentation created by archaeologists in their work was more or less left to their judgement as to what and how to document and archive.

This article presents archaeological field documentation, which is part of the archaeological site archive. The research focuses on reviewing the development of archaeological field documentation and the current state of affairs in this field. A review of the archives of archaeological sites in museums shows a gradual development from a simple excavation diary written in a notebook, to complex documentation defined for each method of archaeological research. What was archaeological field documentation like in the past? What types of documents did it contain? What is the current situation in this field? What types of documentation are defined by relevant legislation?

This article is part of a study of the state of archaeological sites archives in museums and institutions responsible for their preservation.

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD DOCUMENTATION - IN THE PAST

The first attempts to standardize and define archaeological field documentation date back to the 1950s. R. Berce (1951) published an article entitled Technical Documentation in 'Zbornik zaštite spomenika kulture II'. As Medarić (2024, 50) points out, Berce was one of the first to write about aerial photography, and he also participated in the first attempts to use geophysics in archaeology.

In the 1960s, S. Pahič (1965-67) developed instructions for conducting topography, documenting sites, and preparing manuscripts. He sought to standardize the methodology and documentation for collecting and recording bibliographic and field data on archaeological sites and finds from the Palaeolithic to the Middle Ages. He defined two stages of work: fieldwork and post-fieldwork. The main form of documentation in fieldwork is the field diary. The final document in the post-fieldwork stage is the Record of the find, site, notification, and card index, photo archive, and site map. He precisely defines what data must be included in both documents. He suggested that this documentation is stored at the institution coordinating topographical research (the Archaeology Section of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts). Pahič's instructions were used in more or less unchanged form for more than two decades and, in fact, with certain modifications, can still be used today, according to Novaković et al. (2007, 42).

Novaković et al. (2007, ii) note that it was only from the 1970s onwards, when the scope of fieldwork increased significantly, that initiatives began to emerge to standardize certain aspects of archaeological practice and activities in the field of archaeological heritage protection. Petru (1974) writes in 'Varstvo spomenikov' that the monument protection law at the time did not contain clear provisions regarding the professional and scientific role of the excavation leader and his colleagues in field research, nor did it define the documentation that should be produced during fieldwork.

He focuses in particular on drawings, the main work log, and descriptive books of excavated architectural parts and small finds, for which he also provides instructions on what information they should contain. In 1977, Curk (1977) presented the Agreement on Protected Works on Archaeological Monuments, which he prepared together with stakeholders from the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for

the Protection of Cultural Heritage. He also prepared the Conditions for Issuing Permits for Archaeological Excavations, which include excavation and documentation methods, but, as it states, there are no rules for the selection of methods and documentation. Only a diary and drawings are listed as field documentation. As Nadbath et al. (2018, 7) note, the beginnings of the concept of preventive archaeology date back to the late 1980s, when Slovenian archaeology developed several conceptual and methodological innovations. Numerous non-invasive methods were developed, such as systematic surface field surveys, aerial photography, and geophysics. The first steps in this field were taken by the Department of Archaeology of the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana and the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage, organisation unit Novo mesto. In the subject area of field documentation, a step forward has been made in comparison with archaeological topography. Now, forms are used to document systematic surface inspections and related procedures. (Novaković et al., 2007)

Novaković et al. (2007, 52) note that the introduction of new excavation techniques, known as stratigraphic excavation, has completely changed the philosophy and system of documentation. The development of this took place mainly at the Department of Archaeology of the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana. The main difference in the field of documentation was the elimination of the excavation diary as the main means of documentation. It was replaced by a system of documenting individual contexts based on various forms. The traditional diary is increasingly becoming a diary that monitors the progress of work and records the circumstances of the work. Another important innovation was computer support. (Novaković et al., 2007) As Stančič (1989, 13) points out, the need for computers in archaeology has grown due to the constant increase in data. Computer data processing has thus covered the field of archaeological field research, archaeological office work, and the documentation of finds in museums.

Aerial photography began to develop systematically only from the mid-1990s onwards. Two types of documentation are defined: vertical images, which are produced and stored by the state surveying service, and special, mostly oblique images, produced for the purposes of archaeological research. The only document is a report on the evaluation of aerial photographs, which was submitted to the clients and contained interpretative content. The report is not standardized

and contains information relevant to the client. The field of photograph archiving is also undefined and only involves temporary and makeshift forms of archiving. (Novaković et al., 2007)

The use of geophysical methods in archaeological fieldwork has only been established since the early 1990s. The only document required was a report on the work performed, together with an interpretation of the archaeologically relevant content, which is not standardized. (Novaković et al., 2007)

Grosman (1991, 25, 27) notes that every archaeological excavation is destructive, but it is also an experiment that cannot be repeated, and the unique record in the ground is permanently altered or destroyed. This makes it all the more important to document it properly, as it is ultimately the documentation that enables us to understand and interpret the previous, primary state.

The field of documentation has also been regulated more generally from a legislative perspective: Recommendation of International Principles for Archaeological Excavations, translation published in 'Varstvo spomenikov' XIII-XIV/1968-1969 (1970), Conditions for the issuance of permits for archaeological excavations, prepared by the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Monument Protection on the basis of previous experience in Slovenia ('Varstvo spomenikov', XXI/1977), Law on the Protection of Cultural Heritage (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No. 7/99). The European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (Official Gazette 7/99 and 24/99) does not mention standardization or documentation methods. The Rules on the Procedure for Issuing Permits for Archaeological Research (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No. 113/00) assume that standard excavation or site documentation already exists. However, these standards did not yet exist at the time the Rules were adopted. (Novaković et al., 2007)

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD DOCUMENTATION – CURRENT STATE

In 2007, the Ministry of Culture commissioned a research study which, according to Novaković et al. (2007, i), was intended to provide a professional basis for discussion and, consequently, the introduction of standards excavation documentation, or for the creation of subordinate legislation that would adequately regulate this area. The study covered several segments, including the presentation of proposed stand-

ards, which the authors understand as “*part of a multi-layered system for ensuring the quality of fieldwork and post-fieldwork in archaeology*” (Novaković et al., 2007, 59). Thus, with the proposed standards, they defined the main definitions, purpose, basic principles of procedures, as well as quality criteria for work, instructions for managing procedures, and a manual for individual work techniques. However, Novaković et al. (2007, 59) point out that “*in the proposed standards for archaeological field, post-field, and documentation procedures, we deliberately do not want to provide details or prescribe precisely the methods, technologies, and organization of work.*” Among other things, they believe that contractors and experts should be given room for manoeuvre in developing their fieldwork.

Each procedure consists of a definition, description, and documentation. The latter defines the mandatory documents of the procedure that are created before, during, and after the procedure is completed. Mandatory documents include the work plan, field notes, a work log, an archive of primary data (and finds), an archive of secondary data (and finds), a professional report on the work and results, and a project archive. The archive of primary data consists of a systematically organized collection of primary data, finds, and samples. In addition to finds and samples, it also includes all documents (lists, forms, descriptions, etc.) created during fieldwork and organized by source document groups. The secondary archive contains already valorised documents, finds, and samples. The project archive is a comprehensive and systematically organized collection of documentation consisting of the minutes of the handover of the archive to the institution responsible for its storage, archival material (work plan, field notes, work diary, archive of primary data and finds, archive of secondary data and finds, a professional report on the work and results), collections of finds and samples, and an inventory list of finds and samples. They also defined document templates and documentation templates. (Novaković et al., 2007) In 2018, the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia developed Minimum Standards for the Implementation of preliminary archaeological research, which are in line with the Rules on Archaeological Research. (Nadbath et al., 2018). As Nadbath et al. (2018, 9) write, archaeological research standards make it possible to establish uniform, high-quality procedures for archaeological work in all phases of archaeological research. Comparability of results, which enables the synthesis and

integration of results and forms the basis for further methodological development and improvement of the quality and efficiency of work. Each method of preliminary archaeological research (14 methods are defined, e.g., historical analysis of space, geophysical research, intensive field survey of open areas, etc.), has a defined goal and definition, team composition, and selection and coverage. However, a review of these shows that no information is included about the documentation that should be created within the framework of each method. The chapter on minimum standards for post-field processing of data and materials presents the minimum standards for processing the acquired data, handling finds, and temporary storage. (Nadbath et al., 2018) Among other things that belong to the whole documentation are the “*written documents (e.g., forms, lists, field diaries, construction diaries), drawings, slides, and photographs (analogue, negatives, contact copies), research reports and publications, and digital documents (e.g., databases, photographs, video recordings, photo sketches, 3D models, digitized documents).* When processing the captured data, it is necessary to ensure that the primary data is preserved in its original form and content, separate from the data interpreted and modified during processing.” (Nadbath et al., 2018, 41) In 2013, the Rules on Archaeological Research (PAR) were adopted.

Part of the PAR from 2013 is Annex 1, Professional Standards for Archaeological Field Research “*All archaeological research must be systematically planned and carried out and must be properly documented at all stages of the process,*” as stated in PAR in Annex 1 (2013). The subject of archaeological documentation includes: the organization and course of work, work or research procedures and their results, finds, samples, and other objects discovered during research, operational conclusions and interpretations, and all other data relevant to the research. The regulations of archaeological research set standards for the documentation of archaeological research. Archaeological documentation is a systematically organized collection of data on the organization, implementation, and results of archaeological research. All forms of archaeological documentation must be produced or archived in such a way as to ensure the greatest possible durability of the record. (PAR, Appendix 1, 2013)

Standards for archaeological documents include the work plan, field notes, work diary, and professional report on the research. (PAR, Appendix 1, 2013)

Appendix 5 (PAR, 2013) defines the composition of the archaeological site archive, which consists of documentation (work documentation, location documentation, work results documentation) and a systematically organized collection of finds and samples.

In 2022, the Rules on Amendments and Supplements to the Rules on Archaeological Research were adopted, which did not include any amendments or supplements to Annex 1.

4 METHODOLOGY

The first phase of the research into the state of archaeological site archives in Slovenian museums, which is presented in this article, focuses on the presentation of documentation, specifically one type of documentation, i.e. archaeological field documentation, as one of the three basic segments that make up an archaeological site archive. The archive of an archaeological site consists of archaeological finds, samples, and documentation. Knowledge of archaeological field documentation, as part of the overall documentation, is crucial for its correct placement in the archival context. The research focused on reviewing the literature in the field of research, with the aim of obtaining as comprehensive a picture as possible of the development of archaeological field documentation to date. The compilation/description method was used to obtain data, based on already known research and publications in this field. On the one hand, the compilation method summarizes the results of foreign scientific research. On the other hand, the description method provides a uniform description of facts and their relationships and connections without scientific interpretation or explanation. (Novak, 2021).

5 RESULTS

Archaeological field documentation represents one segment of the documentation that, together with archaeological finds and samples, forms the archive of an archaeological site.

The research conducted reveals what archaeological field documentation used to be like, what types of documents it contained, what the current situation is in this area, and what types of documentation are defined by relevant legislation.

A systematic review of literature shows that documentation was very modest in the past. The first attempts at standardization and definition date back to the 1950s and 1960s. Berce published the first handbook for archaeological excavations, in which he defined technical documentation in the archaeological field. Pahič, on the other hand, drew up instructions for carrying out topography and the associated documentation. He defines the field diary as the main documentation for field work, while the find report, site report, notification and card index, photo library and site map are the final documents of post-field processing.

Since the 1970s, numerous initiatives have been launched, mainly due to the increase in fieldwork, in order to standardise documentation. Archaeological field documentation is defined as drawings, the main work log, descriptive books of excavated architectural parts, and small finds.

In the 1980s and 1990s, numerous new non-invasive methods became established in field archaeology, e.g., aerial photography, geophysical methods, systematic field surface surveys, etc. These introduced various types of forms for documentation and non-standardized reports, e.g., reports on the evaluation of aerial photographs. The introduction of new stratigraphic excavation techniques has resulted in the abandonment of the excavation logbook, which had previously been the main means of documentation. It has been replaced by forms for documenting individual contexts. However, the logbook for monitoring the progress and circumstances of the work has been retained. Computer data processing is also becoming increasingly common in the field.

The foundations of today's archaeological field documentation were laid in 2007, when a research study on minimum standards for excavation documentation was prepared for the Ministry of Culture: an overview of the situation and proposals for standards. It defined the mandatory documents, namely the work plan, field notes, work diary, archive of primary data (and finds), archive of secondary data (and finds), professional report on the work and results, as well as the project archive. Document templates and documentation models were also defined. The study formed the basis for the preparation of the Rules on Archaeological Research, which were adopted in 2013. Part of the Rules is Annex 1, which discusses Professional Standards for Archaeological Field Research. The standards for ar-

archaeological documents are defined. Archaeological field documentation consists of field notes and a work log.

A review of the development of archaeological field documentation showed that archaeologists were aware of the problem of non-standardization of archaeological field documentation and that they attempted to regulate it by setting minimum professional standards with the adoption of the Rules on Archaeological Research. However, the standards are very general and do not contain precise and clear instructions, so that this issue remains rather unclear.

6 CONCLUSION

Sirovica (2016, 281) notes that archaeological field research results in large amounts of written, photographic, and graphic documentation containing key information about the site. Given that this is usually a destructive process, it is very important to ensure that it is stored properly, which is the responsibility of every institution in charge of its storage and archiving. Slovenian field archaeology has made great progress in the field of archaeological field documentation in recent decades. As research has shown, the beginnings in the 1950s and 1960s were modest in this field, with documentation of archaeological field research consisting of field diaries, records of finds and sites, photographs, drawings, and topographic maps. The content of the documentation was not defined; it was left to the individual, the excavator, and his perception of data recording. With the introduction of new non-invasive methods in the 1980s, the situation has changed radically to this day. Archaeologists have come to realize that it is necessary to define basic standards for archaeological field documentation, and not only that, but for all documentation created before, during, and after archaeological excavations, which is part of the archaeological site archive stored in museums. In 2013, the Rules on Archaeological Finds were adopted. Appendix 1, Professional Standards for Archaeological Field Research, defines the standards for archaeological documents. Mandatory archaeological field documentation consists of field notes and a work log.

A review of the development of archaeological field documentation showed that archaeologists were aware of the problem of non-standardization of archaeological field documentation and that they tried to regulate it by setting mini-

imum professional standards with the adoption of the Rules on Archaeological Research. However, the standards are very general and do not contain precise and clear instructions. Puhar et al. (2022, 197) note that “*the documentation of archaeological research is extremely well developed, supported by modern technology and knowledge, and follows the requirements of archaeological science and scientific research objectives.*” However, on the other hand, experts note and urge “*that standards and regulations on museum documentation of archaeological material be developed immediately at the level of museum services...*” (Puhar et al. 2022, 197)

Archaeological field documentation is part of the archive of an archaeological site, the storage of which is the responsibility and obligation of museums. How museums manage archaeological site archives and what the current situation is like in museums presents another question, which might be the topic for another discussion.

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