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**DIPLOMATICS AS A METHODOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE FOR ARCHIVAL KNOWLEDGE  
ORGANIZATION**

**Introduction**

Knowledge organization is usually discussed in the Library and Information Science community, but it is a concept rarely applied to archival science. It occurs, among other things, due the fact that until the late twentieth century the discipline did not recognize information as its object of study, studying only the record and the archive. Archival science began to consider information as its object of study when in 1988, in North America, the authors Couture, Ducharme, and Rousseau, proposed the use of the terms “organic information” and “non organic information”, defining the former as one created and received by a physical person or entity in the course of a practical activity, and the latter as one contained in bibliographical records, replacing therefore the concepts of archival and bibliographic records, in archival science research.

In archival science, *respect des fonds*, since the second half of the nineteenth century has been considered the most important principle to the organization and representation processes. It was established in 1841 due to the need to solve the accumulation problems inside the National

Archives in France after the French Revolution. According to the principle, the records that are produced or accumulated by one person or entity should be grouped together, which is called the *fonds*. For Duchein (1983, p. 64) “the simplest definition of *respect des fonds* means to group, without mixing them with others, the archives (documents of every kind) created by or coming from an administration, establishment, person, or corporate body.”

In this sense, we understand that the records grouped into *fonds* reflect the knowledge that was produced about a particular person or entity. There are three main actors in this context: (1) the creator (author), who is the physical or juridical person responsible for the creation of records; (2) the user, who will use the record to evidential or administrative ends or to historical purposes, and (3) the intermediaries, who are the archivist or other persons responsible for the organization of records. We think it is possible to view the descriptive work of archival science as another form of knowledge organization once its narrow meaning is defined by Hjørland (2008, p. 88) as “activities such as document description, indexing and classification performed in libraries, bibliographical databases, and archives” specifically the records physical organization, how the records are arranged inside *fonds*, groups, and series, and intellectual organization, identification of records typology, function, creation context; and to build classification systems and descriptions levels.

However, interdisciplinary roots of archival science stem from more than knowledge organization. From the 1980’s archival science systematically incorporated diplomatics as a method.

This paper aims, through the study of three diplomatics methods each from the 17<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries respectively, to analyze the real contribution of diplomatics to methodological perspective of knowledge organization (writ large) as discussed in archival science. To do so, we will compare the methods proposed by Mabillon (1681), Sickel (1867) and Duranti (1989-1998), and lay this evolution against definitions of knowledge organization and its practices to expand our understanding of the similarities and differences that obtain between diplomatics, archival organization, and knowledge organization.

### **Information as the object of Archival Science**

The establishment of information as the object of study in archival science as proposed by Couture, Ducharme and Rousseau by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century highlights the need for changes in archival science that at that time still relied on the manuals of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to organize and represent the archival knowledge. Their approach known as “integrated archival science” aimed to gather the archival work that has been divided in two different professions in North America, the archivist – responsible for documents – and the record manager – responsible for records. According to this approach, the archivists should not be seen as a simple memory keeper anymore. They should have an active role in records creation ensuring the rationalization of the form of information and its processes.

Therefore it is in this context that information begins to have a more active role in the discipline. Once it is a fundamental element for the functioning and development of any organization the archivist and records managers step in to guide how it should be managed and organized effectively.

However, it is still rare to find information as the object of archival science in the research literature, instead of the record or document. A literature review allows us to identify the object of archival science through the works of some authors (Schellenberg, 1956, Heredia, 1991; Duranti, 1995; Couture, 1988; Lodolini, 2008; Bellotto, 2005). According to Bellotto (2005) one can consider two objects of the discipline: the *intellectual* one, which is information, more precisely the data that enables information, and the *physical* one, which is the archives (institutions) and the set of records produced and received by an entity or an individual throughout an activity. We can conclude that, excepting for Couture and Bellotto, all the authors have identified the set of records as the object of archival science, excluding completely the information.

The concept of organic information is connected with the concept of information-as-thing introduced by Buckland (1997) when he defines information as data or a document, a tangible form. Still, according to the author, three assumptions of this information-as-thing are fundamental to characterize it as a document: materiality, intention and processing. For Guimarães (2008) intention gives the document evidential value and processing will guarantee its intelligibility and make possible its diffusion. In this sense, the archival record fits perfectly into this definition of information-as-thing, once it is necessarily information created in a physical form (action and conscription), with the intention to support practical activities that will

serve as evidence of facts made by or about a physical person or entity and that can be processed and organized so it can be used to evidence and historical ends.

### **Archival Knowledge Organization and Diplomatic Method**

Just as information is not commonly accepted as the archivist's object of study, knowledge organization is also an unfamiliar concept when it is addressed within archival science. According to Hjørland (2003, p. 88), knowledge organization (KO) is the organization of information in bibliographical records, including citation indexes, full text records and the Internet. It can be taken as a much broader concept, interpreted as invested among other things in disciplines, social institutions, languages and symbolic systems, theories, literatures and genres.

The archival knowledge as explained above is all the knowledge produced about a particular person or entity and grouped into *fonds*. The principle of provenance is one of the guides to archival knowledge organization, however it is not enough to ensure the creation, access and use of contemporary documents according to archival principles.

From the 1980s some new perspectives to organize the archival knowledge have emerged and among them is the diplomatic method which was created in the 17th century and grew out of a practical and juridical need. The proponents of this method sought to verify the authenticity of Church properties through examining the form and rhetoric of documents. It has changed in purpose over the past centuries, finding itself in history in an auxiliary role aiming to understand the past through the analysis of the forms of documents.

The integration of archival science and diplomatics, in the 1980s, led both disciplines to revisit its foundations, concepts, and methods grounded particularly in the nineteenth century, aiming to handle the increasing diversity of records creation. This led some authors to stand for the diplomatic method as one of the methodological perspectives to organize the archival knowledge, together with the *respect des fonds* (Duranti, 1989; MacNeil, 2000; Tognoli & Guimarães, 2009).

The first formulation of a diplomatic method was proposed in 1681 by Jean Mabillon in *De re diplomatic libri VI*, based on analysis and comparison of documents. Mabillon proposed the study of intrinsic and extrinsic elements found in the diplomas. He created an analytical and

comparative formulation which aimed to read the document inside a particular type of documents that belong to a same place and time, and that were to be and analyzed based on this pre-established context. In this sense, Mabillon defined the intrinsic elements as the content of a document including the style, the seals, the dates and the signatures. In his formulation the **text** is divided in: invocation (*invocatio*); inscription and title (*inscriptio e titulis*); appreciation (*imprecationes*); seals (*sigilla*); signatures (*subscriptiones*) and dates (*nota chronologica*). The extrinsic elements encompass the material, medium and inks.

Despite of its contributions to the analysis of a document, it is important to highlight here that this first formulation of the diplomatic method did not have any intention to build theories or a scientific method to support the birth of a new discipline or science. Its intention was purely pragmatic, aiming to solve the problems related to the falsification of diplomas in Middle Ages.

The formulation proposed by Mabillon represents a starting point to the creation of the first real method for analyzing the form and the context of creation of a document. This first formalized method was proposed by Sickel in 1867 in Austria. When the legal act and the genesis of the document begin to have more importance in the diplomatic analysis, the method evolves and those pre-established formulas give rise to the diplomatic interpretation of the form of the document. Once the analysis of this form – crucial to the creation of a legally valid document – begins to have more importance, new elements are incorporated to those established by Mabillon and the diplomatic method emerges.

With Sickel, the division between Protocol, Text and Eschatocol, is created and with this we get the first definition of a diplomatic document, established as “the written evidence, compiled according to a determined form – that is variable depending on place, period, person, transaction – of facts having a juridical nature” (Sickel, 1867, p. 2). The Protocol and the Eschatocol can be identified as the frame of the document. They are responsible for opening and closing the content of the document and for offering the legal elements. The **Protocol** is divided into: invocation, name and title; the **Text** is divided into: name, title and address, preamble, notification, exposition, disposition, corroboration form and announcement of the validation signals; the Eschatocol is divided into: signatures, dates and appreciation. In this method, the style and the language are also considered as intrinsic element.

The establishment of a method diplomatic analysis and the definition of a diplomatic document represent the first intention in creating scientific knowledge about the form of a

document, which can be understood as the real beginning of diplomatics as a discipline. It is also the result of a particular time and context, where general scientific knowledge matures and one can observe the need to create specific methods and to define concepts.

At the same time, diplomatics incorporated the study of action (*action*) and the moment of documentation (*conscription*), so the document can be analyzed in the light of its formation process - from the action that led to its creation, the form chosen to represent the legal activity, and the people who were part of it.

This complex analysis of a document starts to be used not only by the historians but also by the archivists, especially by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the form of the document begins to undergo changes in its elements, specially due the general increase of administrative functions, the complexity of bureaucratic processes of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century, and the new technologies of records creation, like email. These changes have led the archivist to need a deep knowledge about the context of contemporary records creation, and when archival science and diplomatics are approached, by the end of the 1980, from the studies of Carucci (1987) in Italy and Duranti (1989) in Canada, the archival record or archival information, becomes the object of study of a new approach, known as *contemporary diplomatics* or *archival diplomatics*, and the diplomatic method also becomes one of the archivist's most important tools, used to analyze new record creation contexts and, consequently the archival knowledge that is produced and organized in those contexts.

Diplomatics provides tools for archivists to understand particular types of documents. Such a tool is the study of *documentary typology*, which is an application of the diplomatic method proposed by Duranti. The method can be applied, with clear benefit, to contemporary documents and the study of their creation process. Through typological analysis, the archivist can identify the function of a document and its creation context, focusing his analysis on the evidence of its formal elements, regardless of other alternative sources, such as organization charts and business activities. The analysis is made from bottom to top, from the documentary part (*bottom-up diplomatic analysis*) of the document itself. Therefore, "the analysis of the archivist is gradually moving from the immediate documentary context of the material under examination to its broad functional context and, further, to its socio-cultural context; that is, from the reality of the records to the "image" of records creators" (Duranti, 1998, p.06).

The application of a diplomatic method to contemporary documents also establishes a relationship between document creators and archivists by connecting the archival documents and the legal system in which they were created.

The method proposed by contemporary diplomatics takes into account the facts and actions, the procedures that generated them, the people who worked on creating the document and the function contained in such document. It proposes an internal analysis of the document in order to know the context in which it was created. In this sense, the diplomatic method becomes indispensable in the organization of archival knowledge.

This method is different from the other two presented here once it focus on contemporary documents. So, we can understand that the document is a determining factor for the choice of which method should be applied. According to Duranti's method the analysis should be done based on the following elements: (1) extrinsic elements – medium, script, language, special signs, seals, annotations; (2) intrinsic elements – protocol and its subsections, texts and its subsections, eschatocol and its subsections; (3) persons – author of the act, author of the document, addressee of the act, addressee of the document, writer, countersigners, witness; (4) qualification of signatures; (5) type of act; (6) name of act; (7) relationship between document and procedure; (8), type of document; (9) diplomatic description – context, actions; (10) conclusive comments.

One can observe that the method proposed by contemporary diplomatics is much more complex and requires a deeper study of the document, once the context of records creation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is also more complex. Using this method allows the archivist to understand not only the form of the document but also the legal context in which the document was created, and the persons who participate on it.

In order to elucidate the three methods presented here, we offer a comparative table, based on the elements used in each period of diplomatics.

| <b>Classic Diplomats</b><br><b>Mabillon's formulation</b>   | <b>Modern Diplomats</b><br><b>Sickel's method</b>   | <b>Contemporary Diplomats</b><br><b>Duranti's method</b>  |
|---|---|---|
| <i>Intrinsic elements:</i><br>invocation; inscription and;<br>appreciation; seals; signatures and<br>dates.<br><br><i>Extrinsic elements:</i><br>material, medium and inks. | <i>Protocol:</i> invocation; name and title<br><i>Text:</i> name, title and address;<br>preamble; notification; exposition;<br>disposition; corroboration form ;<br>announcement of the validation<br>signals;<br><i>Eschatocol:</i> signatures ; dates;<br>appreciation<br><i>Style</i><br><i>Language</i> | <i>Extrinsic elements:</i> medium, script,<br>language, special signs, seals,<br>annotations;<br><i>Intrinsic elements:</i> protocol and its<br>subsections, texts and its<br>subsections, eschatocol and its<br>subsections;<br><i>Persons:</i> author of the act, author of<br>the document, addressee of the act,<br>addressee of the document, writer,<br>countersigners, witness;<br><i>Qualification of signatures; Type of<br/>           act;</i><br><i>Name of act;</i><br><i>Relationship between document and<br/>           procedure;</i><br><i>Type of document;</i><br><i>Diplomatic description</i><br><i>Conclusive comments</i> |

## Conclusion

Archival Science is connected to information science and to knowledge organization when its object changes. When we begin to consider the information as the real object of the discipline, its boundaries are extended and the archivist can count with other tools to understand the complexity of contemporary records creation, such as the method proposed by Duranti. As administrations become more flexible and develop horizontal functions and competences, the structure of the institutions becomes more fragmented. Analyzing records as documentary pieces, which in some way traces back to this fragmented structure, is a safe path for the development of methods in archival science, especially for the organization of the knowledge produced inside the institutions.

It is important to say that one method does not replace the other. What can be seen is that the document and its age will determine which method should be used. Of course we cannot apply the classic method to the contemporary document, since the elements are not enough, but we can apply the modern method to *diplomas* and documents of the Middle Ages, once the elements will be enough to analyze it. It is just a matter of choosing which method is better to organize the archival knowledge presented in the fonds.



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