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An Analysis of the theoretical and practical application of Diplomatics to archival description in Knowledge Organization

Abstract
The present study aims to elucidate the relation between archival science and diplomatics based on how the latter may be applied to archival description, encompassing the ideas of identification, representation, and organization. We thus introduce the concept of archival knowledge in the context of the methodology of identification, an intellectual task whose object of study is the produced entity and its records, with a recognition process based on the parameters of diplomatics.

Introduction
Archives are the necessary and obligatory product for the functioning of any organized society. Every activity performed by an institution or individual uses records to enforce or affirm a particular action. Records are created or received by an entity or physical person in relation to their activities (classic archival definition), thus serving to ensure accountability, especially in a democratic society with an obligation to take account of events, both from an administrative and historical point of view.

Over recent centuries, records, archival institutions, and archival science have evolved considerably in every aspect, as a consequence of the accumulation of increasingly compact and broad-based relations, leading to an exponential expansion in the requirements and uses of records necessary to act, negotiate and live (Delmas 2010).

Archives can be conceived as information systems, alongside libraries. Accordingly, both institutions share the purpose of organizing specific knowledge produced and recorded by society through its public and private institutions, in order to enable its portability in space and permanence in time (Smit and Barreto 2002) and, as a consequence, to promote its comprehensive accessibility (Guimarães and Tognoli 2015).

Archival Science is an independent field, but knowledge organization of archives should also be considered a part of KO (Hjørland 2016). In this context, we believe the discipline can benefit from research conducted in knowledge organization (KO) and its approaches, since KO involves the describing, representing, filing and organizing documents and document representations, as well as subjects and concepts, as performed by both humans and computer programs (Hjørland 2008; Tognoli et al. 2013).

As pointed out by Smiraglia (2014, 31), “archives and records repositories, like libraries, serve a critical role in their social milieus, that of preserving and disseminating
the collective knowledge of their cultures.”

But what is this collective knowledge? What do we understand as knowledge in archival science and how do we organize it?

In the last thirty years, archival science has been invited to rethink its principles and methodologies, in order to deal with the production, organization and use of records in the digital environment. In such a specific context, currents of thought have emerged in different countries, such as postmodern and integrated approaches in Canada, post-custodial archival science in Portugal, the records continuum approach in Australia, and archival diplomatics in Italy.

Research in the latter has supported the methodologies of archival knowledge organization since the 1960s when the object of study of archival science was first identified with that of diplomatics, namely records (Bautier 1961).

In the late 1980s, diplomatics was revisited by archival science and found a space within the discussion of the theoretical construction of archival identification for reflection on research into documentary genesis and its relevance to the standardization of record management and technical treatment of records accumulated in archives (Rodrigues 2016).

The present study aims to elucidate the relation between archival science and diplomatics based on research into archival description – understood as a process of archival knowledge representation – and on its relationship with archival identification, "a research methodology that is developed, in the parameters of scientific rigor, as a preliminary and necessary task to the archival functions such as classification/arrangement, appraisal, description and also for the planning of documentary production" (Rodrigues 2012), contributing to the construction of what we call archival knowledge.

Finally, it presents some results of postdoctoral research developed at the Fluminense Federal University - UFF, in Brazil, whose goal was to construct theoretical and methodological elements to characterize diplomatics and its method as necessary for the organization and representation of archival knowledge, within the scope of two main archival functions, classification and description, and its relationship with archival identification.

**Diplomatics and Archival Science: two disciplines, one object**

The beginning of archival theory (Schmidt 2015) came with the promotion of the principle of respect des fonds, which demonstrated the imminent need to formulate concepts and principles that could theorize and rule existing practices in public and private institutions.

In the context of archival theory and practice, this principle was to support the processes of organization and representation of archival knowledge, acting as a guide
for the implementation of archival functions.

According to Duchein (1983, 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”.

Heredia Herrera (2003, 5-6), talks about two principles: the principle of “Provenance”, which "means not mixing the records produced by different bodies" and, the principle of “Original Order”, which means not breaking with the natural order of records produced by different types resulting from the administrative procedures that determined it".

The principle of respect des fonds can therefore be understood at two levels: (a) records from the same producer cannot be mixed with those of another origin; b) records must be preserved in their original order, if it exists, and must reflect the order of the procedure that determined the production of the documents. This definition encompasses two levels of principle: provenance itself (the producer or receiver of the record) and original order (which defines that the organization of the producer must be maintained).

In addition, it was necessary to establish rules for actions and procedures adopted by professionals working with records. These rules were promulgated in manuals, which became the first scientific corpus in archival science and the basis for developing knowledge about archives and records. From these publications, archival science was to establish itself as a discipline, since the rules and methods postulated in them generated the first theoretical reflections on the area, enabling its addition to the disciplinary field.

In the mid-20th century, due to the need to rationalize the organization and deletion of records produced by public and private administrations, new concepts and functions emerged, such as the theory of (primary and secondary) records values, the difference between record and archive, records appraisal and, more recently, identification as a methodology for records management and handling of records accumulated in archives.

At present, in archival identification, studies of record origins are carried out based on the theoretical and methodological parameters of diplomatics.

Although diplomatics is older than archival science, its object, the documentary form, has potentially been confused with the archival record itself since the beginning of diplomatic studies. The relationship between the disciplines only became explicit in the late 1960s, gaining strength in the 1980s, when it became clear that information technologies and new forms of record production would affect the work of the contemporary archivist, leading to a paradigm shift in the discipline, according to Thomassen (1999).
Carucci (1987, 27) reinforces the idea of a common object between the disciplines, when she writes that "Diplomats studies the single record, or, if we prefer, the elementary archival unit, document[...] ... analyzing, above all, its formal aspects in order to define the legal nature of acts, whether in relation to their genesis or in relation to their effects".

Rogers (2015) understands diplomatic analysis as a process of abstraction and systematization, where the diplomatist deconstructs a document to identify and locate elements that reveal its provenance, relationships, reliability and authenticity.

In a new reality of information production, organization, and use, it is important to establish the reasons behind records creation, what the relationships are between them and their creator and what intentions lie behind the action of recording the information. To do so, analysis of the record, based on diplomatics and its method, has become one of the most secure ways for the archivist to understand it. Being able to establish who produced it, why and for what purpose, through the study of the documentary form is the great contribution of diplomatics to current archival studies.

Archivists have begun to understand the diplomatic method as a new tool to assist with record management in administrative processes. Diplomats, which previously dealt exclusively with the documentary form, has now, as Bellotto (2004) points out, "broadened in the direction of documentary genesis and its contextualization in the attributions, competencies, functions, and activities of accumulating produced entities."

This new "use" of diplomacy by archival science has given rise to what is called “contemporary diplomacy”, or “archival diplomacy”, or “documentary typology”.

**Diplomats and identification: the production of archival knowledge**

Bellotto (2004) made the distinction between the object of classical and contemporary diplomatics, called “documentary typology”, and their method of analysis, which can be complementary to archival identification.

The object of documentary typology is the elementary archival unit analyzed as a documentary genre and defined as the “configuration that assumes a record according to the disposition and nature of the information contained therein”. The typological identification has as its object the record type, reflecting the “organic logic of documentary sets”, which by definition is the “configuration that assumes a genre, according to the activity that generated it” (Bellotto 2004).

Rodrigues (2016), when studying the relationship between diplomacy and archival science and its relevance to the studies of the origins of records emphasizes that "the need to identify records in its production context for planning its creation / production and treatment of its accumulation in the archives led the area to think over the identification as an archival process and the discussions about the place it occupies in the context of archival methodologies"(Rodrigues 2016).
Identification is a research phase, an intellectual task, the object of study of which is the produced entity and its records, whose recognition process is based on the parameters of diplomatics, in its classical and contemporary perspective - documentary typology - producing knowledge for the planning of activities that support archival functions (creation / production, classification, appraisal and description) (Rodrigues 2016).

The methodological basis of identification is the direct application of the principles of provenance and original order, it is its best tool (...). The characterization of the attributes of the creator, its functions and activities and the way in which these established links are translated in the parts of the archival records integrate the knowledge generated in this phase and make up the theoretical basis of the archival identification (Rodrigues 2002).

In this way, we predicate that the archivist, when conducting an identification study (of the creator and its records), based on the diplomatic and documentary typology, produces archival knowledge.

Tognoli et al. (2013) defined archival knowledge as all the knowledge produced about a particular person or entity and grouped into *fonds* (a unit consisting of the set of records accumulated by an entity).

From the examination of the parts, the archivist manages to arrive at the examination of the whole, of the context, of the process, in order to determine the relations existing between one and the other. The results achieved through the identification of the record, through diplomatics, will support the process of representing archival knowledge, in the context of classification and archival description.

**Diplomatics and description: contributions to the organization and representation of archival knowledge**

There are three functions related to organization and representation in archival science: classification/arrangement, appraisal and description, all functioning as product-generating processes and management instruments to control, access and accumulation.

Concerning appraisal, when the archivist needs to set deadlines for the elimination or preservation of records, the product will be a representative instrument of records values and destination.

In archival science, classification refers to the establishment of a logic for organizing the components of the fond, which is represented in the classification plan, a device that enables better apprehension of the institution’s operating context and facilitates the retrieval of information contained in documents.

The description aims to represent the content of archives and their records, recording elements of the representation of production contexts and content of the documentary series, whose instruments allow access to this information.
Among these two last functions, there are processes that aim to produce instruments both to organize and represent the content and context of records, such as a classification plan; a representative result of the condensation of institutional information; and internationally standardized descriptive representations for archival description or help finders (guides, inventories or catalogues).

Regarding classification, the application of diplomatics, through diplomatic analysis and typological record identification, has allowed archivists to establish creators and functions, which are necessary to prepare a classification plan.

In relation to the description, the specific theme of this paper, the methodological contribution of diplomatics becomes even more clear, especially after the moment of documentary analysis (when a synthesis is made of the elements extracted from the record to communicate its information).

Etymologically the word "describe" (derived from the preposition de and from the verb scribere) means "to write about". Therefore, the term "archival description" literally means writing about archival material, encompassing the ideas of identification, representation, and organization.

We will use these three ideas as the basis from which to highlight the function of description and its relation to diplomatics.

The first point to consider is the support given by diplomatics to what is called "documentary analysis", which, in the scope of archival science, means to initially extract the necessary elements for the identification of records. Here, the external and internal characters of the documents (recognized by the diplomatic method) are analyzed so that the archivist can identify their content which includes: genre, activity and provenance.

These elements can be extracted by applying the diplomatic method, where the provenance is identified in the initial protocol and /or in the escatocolo; the activity is identified in the dispositio, and the dates in the escatocolo or initial protocol. The genre is also identified through analysis as an intermediary element, that is, the record form as a suitable editorial structure for the insertion of specific content.

The second moment of "documentary analysis", the application of the diplomatic analysis to the record, consists in elaborating a summary of the record. According to Bellotto (2004), with the diplomatic method the archivist will perform a closer documentary reading, to get a necessary understanding through an effective typological analysis, involving such aspects as appraisal, classification and description.

This second stage consists of a representation, that is, from the extraction of the elements carried out in the identification stage, products that represent the record (its content and context) will be elaborated. These products are the help-finders or reference instruments that will explain records in terms of their location, as well as providing the
Organization constitutes the third stage of the descriptive process and concerns the disposition of the information previously identified and represented. At this point, the role of diplomatics is equally important, since its purpose is essentially to study the form of the document, its internal and external elements. The discipline will contribute to the structuring of help-finders, so that relevant information is available in its respective instruments; that, the form of the guide, inventory and catalog corresponds to the content of what it is intended to represent.

The theoretical-methodological support of diplomatics is clearly present in the descriptive process, since documentary analysis, subsidized by diplomatic and typological analysis, is prior and necessary to the archival description. Diplomatic analysis is investigative per se, since the analytic process – considered a process of abstraction – deconstructs the document to analyze its parts. This will reveal the most important elements, such as provenance and documentary type.

In the descriptive process, the archivist uses documentary deconstruction, appropriating the necessary elements in order to be able to represent the content and context of the information, systematizing it in the help finder.

Thus, it can be said that documentary analysis carried out on the basis of diplomatics will provide the elements necessary for the archivist to identify, represent and organize the content of the records and their set, the documentary series that integrates the groups and fonds, in order to guarantee the retrieval of information contained in these documentary sets and in their contexts, and so enable their exchange, diffusion and use.

**Conclusion**

The theoretical-methodological contribution of diplomatics and its method to archival functions within organization characterizes the discipline as formative to contemporary archivists who, in order to respond to the challenges posed by the increasing amount of records and information produced in different environments, have seen their role as guardians of historical documents being extended to record management.

For the purpose of description, diplomatics may subsidize documentary analysis, since its method is considered "an analytical-comparative method that makes possible the study of the relations of the documents with their creation context and with its producer, through the partition and the study of the form of the document, in order to understand it as a testimony of a fact "(Tognoli 2014, 104).

Besides the knowledge generated by record deconstruction, through diplomatic analysis, the archivist can now deal with the knowledge generated from the identification of information producers and their relationships with the procedure to represent the context and content of records. As stated by Rodrigues (2006),
identification as an archival methodology allows the normalization of the archival functions that support the procedures of records management, contributing to the organization and representation of archival knowledge.

References


