Juan Bernardo Montoya-Mogollón, Sonia Maria Troitiño

Diplomatic forensics: a necessary historical review for the analysis of the born-digital record

The document is understood as the predominant means of communicating human activity in all its variety. The transformation of the support has created new challenges for its conservation in the different stages of history: stone, clay, papyrus, parchment and paper, among others. These supports have elements in common: 1. they are intelligible directly by the human eye; 2. their conservation and preservation may be possible even in difficult conditions; and 3. when a modification or change of information is made intentionally, its detection is easily identifiable.

The contribution of diplomatic and forensic science has established from its beginnings, theoretical and practical elements to validate and prove the authenticity of records produced in different institutional environments. Diplomatic validation is done by analyzing documents’ internal and external nature, that is, in a critical and in-depth way, it analyzes the information that constitutes the document and its support, as well as additional information that can be fixed in the document. Forensic science, in turn, reinforces the methods of diplomatic validation, ensuring the documentary chain of custody so that it can be used as a source of proof in legal, administrative and other judicial scenarios.

The emergence of the two sciences mentioned refers essentially to the Middle Ages, a historical moment in which the states of Europe began to solidify. The official and solemn documents issued by religious chancelleries were sources of assurance to add the political power of the states in formation. Moreover, the falsification of diplomas (official documents), began to be a common practice to legitimize this political force. Therefore, it was necessary for the church to establish standards and methodologies to analyze the authenticity of these documents, first undertaken by an "empirical" diplomat.

Later, in the 17th century, the Benedictine Jean Mabillon developed a methodology to analyze the nature of documents that were believed to be false. In 1681, he published De re diplomatica libri sex, thereby establishing the scientific character of diplomatics and paleography. From that moment, different faculties of law in Europe expanded study into the authenticity of diverse documents, especially those of a legal nature. The importance of the forensic field was decisive in linking areas of knowledge such as diplomatic science and forensic science, although today only diplomatics is regarded as an autonomous science.

The objective of the present work is to carry out a historical review of diplomatic
and forensic science from its beginnings, to then analyze the resurgence of these two applied sciences in the context of the digital record. Digital diplomatic science assists in verifying the authenticity, reliability and completeness of the digital record, taking into account both its identity and its integrity. Forensic science, on the other hand, establishes rules to verify that the record is not corrupted at any stage of the documentary life cycle.

The methodology used was theoretical-descriptive and exploratory, taking into account the studies of both classical and modern authors. Studies related to areas such as information sciences and knowledge organization, archival science, forensic sciences, diplomatic science and law. It analyzes concepts little addressed in the field, such as digital forensic sciences linked to computer science to try to assist the process of verification and identification of the authenticity of digital archival digital documents.

The results of the research focus on providing the born-digital record with sufficient guarantee for it to be used as a source of administrative, archival, legal, and legal evidence, among others, by analyzing both the internal and external characters within digital systems that produce, conserve, preserve and give access to the user. Likewise, the way diplomatic science and forensic science can subsidize elements to ensure the authenticity of documents at any stage of the documentary life cycle.

The relevance of the present research is based on the fact that we currently need sciences that contribute to the conservation and preservation of the information and knowledge that is being produced in different contexts. It is being observed that digital documents have a high risk of becoming obsolete in the short term and therefore the intervention of sciences such as diplomatic and digital forensics is urgently needed to preserve the documentary collection as a means to keep alive the memory of society.

References


