

# From Dust to Digital

Ten Years of the  
Endangered Archives Programme



EDITED BY MAJA KOMINKO

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Endangered Archives Programme

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Crumb trails, threads and traces:  
Endangered Archives and history

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# Crumb trails, threads and traces: Endangered Archives and history

Maja Kominko

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Advocating the opening of the Imperial Archives of France to scholars, their director-general Léon de Laborde, argued in 1858 that government “has no better means to prevent the writing of bad books than to provide scholars with the means to write good ones”, and that opening the Archives would let “the light of history shine from its true source”.<sup>1</sup> The issue of what historians’ sources are and how they should be approached was debated from the beginning of history-writing, perhaps unsurprisingly considering that it underlies the fundamental question of what history is, and why and how it should be written.<sup>2</sup> What constitutes an archive is not always clear-cut: although predominantly understood as a formal repository of official records, the concept is often extended to accommodate more diverse documentary residue of the past.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Quoted after Jennifer S. Milligan, “The Problem of *Publicité* in the Archives of Second Empire France”, in *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory: Essays from the Sawyer Seminar*, ed. by Francis X. Blouin, Jr. and William G. Rosenberg (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 20-35 (p. 20).

2 Donald R. Kelly, *Faces of History. Historical Inquiry from Herodotus to Herder* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1998); R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Arnaldo Momigliano, *Studies in Historiography* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966); Jacques Le Goff, *History and Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), pp. 152-78; Carlo Ginzburg, *Threads and Traces: True False Fictive* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012).

3 Francis X. Blouin, Jr. and William G. Rosenberg, *Processing the Past. Contesting Authority in History and the Archives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). For a critical theory of archives as a locus of authority, see Jacques Derrida, *Mal d'archive: une impression freudienne* (Paris: Édition Galilée, 1995). For an overview of the theoretical discussion, see Wolfgang Ernst, *Das Rumoren der Archive: Ordnung aus Unordnung* (Berlin: Merve-Verlag, 2002).

The Endangered Archives Programme (EAP), founded to digitise and bring vulnerable documentary materials into the academic domain, belongs to a long tradition of scholarly efforts to find and to publish new pieces of historical evidence. Although not many collections digitised over the first decade of the Endangered Archives Programme can be defined as “archives” in the strictest sense, as we hope this volume shows, this does not make them any less valuable as witnesses of the past.

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In 1707 Elias Assemani, a Maronite priest in the service of Pope Clement XI, was hauled out of the Nile after the boat he travelled on had sunk. The monk who accompanied him drowned, but the 34 Oriental manuscripts they carried were rescued, cleaned, dried and shipped to the Vatican.<sup>4</sup> Assemani acquired these codices in the Deir al-Surian Monastery, which historically was home to Syrian monks in the Egyptian desert. Reports of large collections held by this and several other monasteries in Egypt had reached Europe almost a century earlier, at a time of growing interest in manuscript-based scholarship, development of scientific approaches to codicology and palaeography, and growing interest in the Near East.<sup>5</sup> The latter, largely driven by the region’s association with the Bible, was further fuelled by publication of the great Polyglot Bibles, which combined not only Hebrew, Greek and Latin, but also Aramaic, Syriac, Arabic and Ethiopic texts.<sup>6</sup> The importance of teaching, studying and translating Near Eastern languages increased, and with it the activity of Oriental printing presses in Europe. But accessible textual sources were limited, and it was not long before European scholars and institutions started looking for manuscripts.<sup>7</sup>

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4 *Bibliotheca orientalis Clementino-Vaticana, in qua manuscriptos codices syriacos, arabicos, persicos, turcicos, hebraicos, samaritanos, armenicos, æthiopicos, Graecos, ægyptiacos, ibericos & malabaricos*, ed. by Giuseppe Simone Assemani (Roma: Typis Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide, 1719), Praefatio, sec. 7; Brian E. Colless, “The Place of Syrian Christian Mysticism in Religious History”, *Journal of Religious History*, 5 (June 1968), 1-15 (p. 1).

5 Peter N. Miller, “Peiresc, the Levant and the Mediterranean”, in *The Republic of Letters and the Levant*, ed. by Alastair Hamilton, Murits H. Van Den Boogert and Bart Westerweel (Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. 103-22.

6 Peter N. Miller, “The “Antiquarianization” of Biblical Scholarship and the London Polyglot Bible (1653-57)”, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 62 (July 2001), 463-82; *The Republic of Letters*.

7 Columba Stewart, “Yours, Mine, or Theirs? Historical Observations on the Use, Collection and Sharing of Manuscripts in Western Europe and the Christian Orient”, in *Malphono Rabo w-Malphone*, ed. by George A. Kiraz (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2008), pp. 603-30.

It seems that it was with Elias Assemani that the “harvesting of manuscripts” from the Orient began in earnest. His first visit to Deir al-Surian Monastery was followed by other expeditions to the Middle East on behalf of the Vatican Library and in the company of his cousin Joseph Assemani, its future librarian. The manuscripts they collected constitute much of the Vatican Library’s Oriental holdings.<sup>8</sup> Other libraries followed suit. For example, the British Library preserves over 500 codices bought from the Deir al-Surian Monastery between 1839 and 1851.<sup>9</sup> The acquisition of Oriental manuscripts continued throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and with the codices put “to noble use”, scholarship on Eastern Christianity, Near Eastern languages and history grew exponentially.<sup>10</sup> The only occasional wrinkle in this process was caused by the Eastern monks’ reluctance to part with their books. This frustrated westerners, who believed the monks had neither intellectual interest in the manuscripts, nor the skills to read and understand them.<sup>11</sup> Rarely did they pause to reflect on why the monks were so unwilling to sell, and if they considered it at all, they wrote it off as result of anathemas placed in the codices against those who remove them from monasteries.<sup>12</sup> The buyers grew cunning: on one occasion Joseph Assemani was careful to procure codices from the superior without the knowledge of the monks, who would have opposed the transaction.<sup>13</sup> The murkiest and most famous of all such stories is that of the acquisition of the *Codex Sinaiticus*, a Greek Bible including the earliest copy of the Greek New Testament, obtained by Constantine Tischendorf in two instalments: 43 loose leaves, which he brought to Leipzig in 1844, were allegedly

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8 *Ricerche sulla formazione del più antico fondo dei manoscritti orientali della Biblioteca Vaticana*. Studi e Testi 92, ed. by Giorgio Levi della Vida (Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1939).

9 William Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum*, 3 (London: [n. pub.], 1872), pp. viii-xxxii. For more general information on western collecting, see Stewart, “Yours, Mine, or Theirs?”, pp. 622-27.

10 Wright, *Catalogue*, 4-5; See also Sebastian Brock, “The Development of Syriac Studies”, in *The Edward Hincks Bicentenary Lectures*, ed. by Kevin J. Cathcart (Dublin: University College Dublin, 1994), pp. 94-113.

11 William George Browne, *Travels in Africa, Egypt, and Syria, from 1792 to 1798* (London: T. Cadell Junior & W. Davies, Strand and T. N. Longman & O. Rees, Paternoster-Row, 1799), pp. 42-43; Charles-Nicolas-Sigisbert Sonnini de Manoncourt, *Voyage dans la haute et basse Égypte, fait par ordre de l'ancien gouvernement, et contenant des observations de tous genres*, 2 vols (Paris: F. Buisson, 1799), pp. 185-216.

12 Wright, *Catalogue*, 4.

13 Wright, *Catalogue*, 7.

recovered from a basket of old parchments, ready to be burned; the bound codex, secured in 1859, was borrowed to present to the Emperor of Russia.<sup>14</sup>

The European buyers' accounts take pains to illustrate that the manuscripts were neither read nor kept in good condition: they were usually piled up in cellars, covered in dust and neglected.<sup>15</sup> Westerners shrank in horror at traces of wax on ancient lectionaries used for liturgy.<sup>16</sup> To take them at their word, had they not rescued the manuscripts, the codices would have perished. Some accounts seem exaggerated; others may be true, but the miserable state of the codices mostly seems due to the fact that the monks had no resources to care for them, rather than to any lack of appreciation. Would the manuscripts have been lost, were they not brought to the west? Possibly some would. Even today the fate of several collections in Syria and Iraq is not known. Yet the travellers' damning statements are belied by the fact that many of the monasteries retain large libraries of manuscripts to this day.<sup>17</sup>

On the other hand, it is clear that most of the westerners hunted for manuscripts out of genuine scholarly interest. This was not new. In fact, this was how many collections were created in the first place. The Deir al-Surian Monastery's library was greatly expanded through acquisition of manuscripts by the abbot Moses of Nisibis in the tenth century. Notes in several codices document the circumstances of their purchase. In 925, a new vizier sent to Egypt from Caliph al-Muqtadir demanded that monks, who had previously been exempt, should pay the poll-tax. The monasteries of the Egyptian desert elected the abbot of Deir al-Surian as their representative to travel to Baghdad and appeal to the Caliph. It took Moses five years, from 927 to 932, to battle the Abbasid bureaucracy and have the vizier's ruling overturned. It was during these years that he acquired over 250 books, some several centuries old, and brought them back to Deir al-Surian. The arid climate of the Egyptian desert preserved the manuscripts, which are among the oldest Syriac

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14 The latter codex was purchased in 1933 by the British Library. David Parker, *Codex Sinaiticus: The Story of the World's Oldest Bible* (London: British Library, 2010), pp. 127-48.

15 Curzon, in *Visit to the Monasteries*, pp. 23-24, claims to hear a report of monks in Bulgaria who, during a service, stood on old manuscripts in order to protect their bare feet from the cold marble floor of the church. For a description of the lamentable state of the collections in Egypt, see Curzon, *Visit to the Monasteries*, pp. 82, 85-87 and 381-82.

16 Curzon, *Visit to the Monasteries*, pp. 78-82.

17 Bigoul al-Suriany, "The Manuscript Collection of Deir al-Surian: Its Survival into the Third Millennium", in *Coptic Studies on the Threshold of a New Millennium: Proceedings of the Seventh International Congress of Coptic Studies. Leiden, 27 August – 2 September 2000*, ed. by Mat Immerzeel and Jacques van der Vliet (Leuven, Paris and Dudley, MA: Uitgeverij Peeters en Departement Oosterse Studies, 2004), pp. 281-94.

codices in the world. It is from this collection alone that we have complete writings of the most famous early Syriac authors, Ephrem and Aphrahat.<sup>18</sup> Moses had acquired the books for the spiritual and intellectual benefit of his community; intellectual benefit to the scholarly community also drove the western buyers. Yet there are differences: Moses was part of the historical community that produced the codices; the westerners were outsiders who believed themselves better equipped to read and interpret Eastern Christian books than Eastern Christians themselves.<sup>19</sup> Unsurprisingly, the monks learned to firmly close the doors of their libraries to visitors from the west. Only gradually did scholars travelling to the Middle East to read, rather than buy, regain Christian communities' trust and obtained access to important and in many cases unknown collections. New catalogues were published both by Levantine and western authors, bringing previously unknown works to scholarly attention.<sup>20</sup> Even so, access remained a problem for very practical reasons. A new effort then began: first to microfilm (from the 1950s), then to digitise (from the 1990s) the manuscripts and make them available without removing them from the libraries where they reside.<sup>21</sup> Importantly, photographic documentation ensures that a record of all codices will be preserved, a significant safety measure considering the difficult history of the Middle East. It also permits us to digitally unite dispersed collections and divided manuscripts such as the *Codex Sinaiticus*.<sup>22</sup> Needless to say, the Eastern Christian manuscripts on which I have focused here, are only one example, a case study, in what has been a much wider phenomenon encompassing and affecting, to various degrees, almost all regions of the globe. Arguably

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18 Sebastian Brock, "Without Mushê of Nisibis, Where Would We Be? Some Reflections on the Transmission of Syriac Literature", *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies*, 56 (2004), 15-24.

19 For a wide-ranging discussion of the Occidental bias of history-writing, see Jack Goody, *Theft of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

20 Arthur Vööbus, "In Pursuit of Syriac Manuscripts", *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 37/2 (April 1978), 187-93. For examples of catalogues, see Agnes Smith Lewis, *Catalogue of the Syriac Mss. in the Convent of S. Catharine on Mount Sinai*. *Studia Sinaitica* 1 (London: C.J. Clay and Sons, 1894); Addai Scher, *Catalogue des manuscrits syriaques et arabes, conservés dans la Bibliothèque épiscopale de Séert (Kurdistan) avec notes bibliographiques* (Mosul: Imprimerie des pères dominicains, 1905).

21 Kenneth Clark, "Microfilming Manuscripts in Jerusalem and at Mount Sinai", *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, 123 (1951), 17-24. For large-scale digitisation projects in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Egypt and Ethiopia, see <http://www.hmml.org/our-collections.html>

22 <http://www.codexsinaiticus.org/en/project/> For the hopes of a digital reunion of the Deir al-Surian collection expressed by Father Bigoul, the monastery's librarian, see *British Library Annual Report 2001-2002* (London: The Stationary Office, 2002), p. 13.

the materials brought to western libraries were accessed and studied by more readers than it would otherwise have been possible. Yet this has come at a price. Leaving aside the difficult issue of how the loss of manuscripts affected their custodians, the removal from their original context led to the loss of entire levels of historical information on collection formation, on traditional use of manuscripts, on their original cultural significance. It is important to note that, at the time when western scholars began their hunt for manuscripts, Europe had long ceased to use manuscripts for intellectual and religious purposes. The availability of printing brought the demise of manuscript literary culture and transformed manuscripts into artefacts, to be protected and studied.<sup>23</sup> The western scholars did not recognise that the link between communities and manuscripts as objects of cultural and religious significance still existed elsewhere.

The rise of manuscript-based scholarship and efforts to gather codices into secure libraries were part of a broader interest in primary documents, increasingly gathered into archives and approached scientifically.<sup>24</sup> These efforts culminated with Leopold Ranke, who in his *Geschichten der romanischen und germanischen Völker von 1494 bis 1534* [*Histories of the Latin and German Peoples from 1494 to 1534*] declared his intention to write “how it actually happened” (*wie es eigentlich gewesen*), challenging the status of previous historians as primary sources of history.<sup>25</sup> In 1831 he published a small volume, *Ueber die Verschwörung gegen Venedig, im Jahre 1618* [*On the Conspiracy against Venice in the Year 1618*], on a subject which, as he explained to his publisher, was “distant, complicated ... [and] not a very important matter”.<sup>26</sup> The publication was nevertheless significant: in it, Ranke delivered and described in detail his model of how the historian should work, placing archives at the centre of historical inquiry.<sup>27</sup> Ranke firmly believed that the science of history lay in a strict presentation of the facts; that history could be uncovered from historical documents; and that the task of the historian was not to interpret

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23 Stewart, “Yours, Mine, or Theirs?”, pp. 606-13.

24 Anthony Pagden, “Eighteenth-Century Anthropology and the ‘History of Mankind’”, in *History and the Disciplines: The Reclassification of Knowledge in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Donald R. Kelley (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1997), pp. 223-33.

25 Leonard Krieger, *Ranke: The Meaning of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), pp. 4-5. His historical intention was not new. Indeed, Herodotus was already seeking to narrate the real story (*ton eonta logon*) (*History* 1.95.1, 1.116.5).

26 Leopold von Ranke, *Neue Briefe*, ed. by B. Hoefft (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe 1949), p. 158

27 Kasper Risbjerg Eskildsen, “Leopold Ranke’s Archival Turn: Location and Evidence in Modern Historiography”, *Modern Intellectual History*, 5/3 (2008), 425-53.

documents, but to give them their own voice. For a century after Ranke, history and archival research became inseparable.<sup>28</sup>

Yet, as historians started knocking on archives' doors in unprecedented numbers, even the most willing archivists began to realise that access was not without problems. Léon de Laborde may have seen it as a noble ideal, but in practice the negotiation between opening the Imperial Archives and retaining the degree of control required by the French government proved complex and quickly resulted in a scandal. *L'affaire d'Haussonville* started with a project initiated by Louis Napoleon to publish the official edition of his uncle's complete *Correspondance*, which Louis hoped would strengthen his own claim to power. In 1867, a prominent historian and admirer of Napoleon Bonaparte, Joseph d'Haussonville, demonstrated that some letters were conspicuously missing from the official "complete" correspondence. He also exposed the politically-biased practices of the Imperial Archives, where his requests for documents that could undermine the state-approved version were increasingly denied or returned with the annotation "not found". As d'Haussonville noted, this begged the question of the government's role in protecting and shaping the nation's memory.<sup>29</sup> The problem of access was not limited to France. Ranke travelled for months to visit archives and invested significant effort in cultivating archivists and powerful patrons who could ease his way into repositories.<sup>30</sup> Other historians in turn had to trust Ranke's personal credibility, since they could not easily verify whether he accurately quoted, ignored or misrepresented important evidence. It soon became apparent that greater transparency was necessary, and as a result German historians began publishing large editions of archival sources, beginning with the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*.<sup>31</sup>

The archives on which Ranke and other nineteenth-century historians depended were mostly the official state or church repositories, believed to

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28 Anthony Grafton, *The Footnote. A Curious History* (London: Faber and Faber, 1997), pp. 38-50. In France, Charles-Victor Langlois and Charles Seignobos opened their 1898 methodological textbook, intended for students in historical seminars, with this declaration: "History is done with documents [...] Lacking documents, the history of immense periods of the past of humankind is forever unknowable. For nothing can replace documents: no documents, no history". C. V. Langlois and C. Seignobos, *Introduction aux études historiques* (Paris: Hachette, 1898), pp. 1-2.

29 Milligan, "Problem of *Publicité*", pp. 25-28; Stefan Berger, "The Role of the National Archives in Constructing National Master Narratives in Europe", *Archival Science*, 13 (2013), 1-22 (pp. 7-8).

30 Risbjerg Eskildsen, *Leopold Ranke*, pp. 442-46.

31 Grafton, *The Footnote*, pp. 36-72; David Knowles, *Great Historical Enterprises: Problems in Monastic History* (London and New York: Thomas Nelson, 1963).

hold “authentic” records, privileged in the determination of historical truth.<sup>32</sup> Since the introduction of diplomatics in the seventeenth century, historians and archivists had tools to verify the authenticity of records, but the objectivity of the documents themselves, however authentic, was a different issue.<sup>33</sup> To assume that one could objectively reconstruct history from archives, it was necessary to assume that history was objectively recorded in the first place, and that the content of archives was objectively preserved without any bias in what was kept and what was discarded.<sup>34</sup> Gradually, it became clear that such assumptions could not be sustained. Moreover, historians such as Lucien Febvre, Marc Bloch and other *Annalistes* moved away from *histoire événementielle* towards broader analyses of the role of social phenomena in historical events, for which the records kept in official archives provided only limited testimony.<sup>35</sup> Some limitations were practical: official state archives only recorded events in which the state bureaucracy was directly or indirectly involved. This meant that entire areas of history were omitted, rendering not only whole swaths of population, but also many events, invisible: for example, any rebellion that escaped repression usually escaped history as well.<sup>36</sup> Increasingly other types of records – parish registers, personal archives, oral histories – came to play an important role, whilst archival documents were analysed not only for what they recorded but how they recorded it and why.<sup>37</sup> At the same time microhistory and the history of everyday life became subjects of interest.<sup>38</sup> As a

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32 Michel Duchéin, *The History of European Archives*, p. 16; Kasper Risbjerg Eskildsen, “Inventing the Archive: Testimony and Virtue in Modern Historiography”, *History of the Human Sciences*, 26/4 (2013), 8-26.

33 Jean Mabillon, *De re diplomatica libri VI* (Paris: Lutec, 1681).

34 Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 21-46, 573-629.

35 For the new definition of historical method, see Marc Bloch, *The Historian’s Craft* (New York: Knopf, 1953).

36 François Furet, “Quantitative Methods of History”, in *Constructing the Past: Essays in Historical Methodology*, ed. by Jacques le Goff and Pierre Nora (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 12-27.

37 Michel Foucault, *L’archéologie du savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969); Patrick Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance: Memory and Oblivion at the End of the First Millennium* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009); Nicholas B. Dirks, “Colonial Histories and Native Informants: Biography of an Archive”, in *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia*, ed. by Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993).

38 Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).

result, a question arose: what are we to preserve, what historical records from the past are we to secure for the future? Perversely, this question may be best answered by looking at what has been discarded in the past.

When he first came to the site of Oxyrhynchus, in Upper Egypt, Bernard Grenfell was not impressed by its ancient rubbish mounds. Yet, within a decade of excavation, he and Arthur Hunt had uncovered 500,000 fragments of papyri, which included plays by Menander, fragments of Euclid's *Elements*, parts of several lost plays by Sophocles, and Christian Apocrypha.<sup>39</sup> There were also tax returns, petitions, lease and sale contracts, wills, letters and shopping lists: from Alexander the Great to the Arab conquest, the entire life of a market town was captured in its discarded papers.<sup>40</sup> The papyri were sent to Oxford, and in 1898 Hunt and Grenfell published the first volume of a long series on the finds (79 volumes published as of 2014). The documents became an essential reference work for the study of Egypt between the fourth century BC and the seventh century AD, and, more broadly, one of the richest sources for the study of ancient culture, literature and economics. It is something of a paradox that we lament the loss of the library of Alexandria, a library we know so little about, when one of the archives that allowed us to learn the most about antiquity came from an ancient dump.<sup>41</sup>

With the arrival of digitisation we can preserve more than ever before. Though I would not advocate preserving everything, the case of Oxyrhynchus shows that, in the case of historical records, we should not make the decision on preservation based solely on the status of the collection. Forgotten, neglected, discarded collections may contain a wealth of historical information. The issue of the bulk of materials is no longer a problem. The new archival "post-custodial" model recognises that stewardship and curation are possible without physical custody of the records.<sup>42</sup>

This model has another important implication. In recent decades, increasing attention has been given to the relationship between archives and the communities, particularly in cases of contested ownership or loss of custody.<sup>43</sup>

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39 William A. Johnson, *Bookrolls and Scribes in Oxyrhynchus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

40 For more information, see <http://www.papyrology.ox.ac.uk/POxy/oxyrhynchus/parsons3.html>

41 Roger Bagnall, "Alexandria: Library of Dreams", *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 146/4 (2002), 348-62.

42 F. Gerald Ham, "Archival Strategies for the Post-Custodial Era", *Society of American Archivists*, 44/3 (1981), 207-16.

43 E. Ketelaar, "Sharing: Collected Memories in Communities of Records", *Archives and*

A poignant and illustrative example is the case of the archives of the Virgin Islands. In 1917 the Islands, then a colony of Denmark, were sold to the United States. The historical records dating back to the seventeenth century were transferred to the Danish National Archives and the National Archives of the United States, becoming inaccessible to the islanders themselves. These records were created primarily by and for the bureaucracy of the Danish West Indies, and they were in Danish. The subjects discussed in the documents were the enslaved and free Africans who made up the bulk of the Danish West Indian population, who were for the most part non-literate, and who spoke English or Dutch Creole.<sup>44</sup> Despite the islands' strong oral tradition, lack of access to the archives meant that the descendants of that population struggled to write their own history.<sup>45</sup> Their collective memory came to be challenged: for example, in 1998 a Danish-American historian questioned the factual underpinnings of the African folk hero Buddhoe, a resistance fighter celebrated by the islanders as the crucial figure in the successful and bloodless Emancipation Rebellion of 1848. The scholar pointed out that no one by this name existed in census records or slave lists of the time, thus undermining the symbol of islanders' identity on the basis of documents that islanders could not access.<sup>46</sup> This situation is not unique. The records of Native Americans, created by federal officials in the Bureau of Indian Affairs, were stored for decades in federal repositories, leading to a situation in which "to be an Indian is having non-Indians control the documents from which other non-Indians write their vision of your history".<sup>47</sup> Until recently, the aboriginal records in Australia were located thousands of kilometres away from the communities they concerned: they were the property of the Crown, and no allowances were made for Aboriginal communities to co-own and co-manage them.<sup>48</sup> Many first and post-colonial nations still have to negotiate access to archives controlled by others.<sup>49</sup> It is ironic that the same

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*Manuscripts*, 33 (2005), 44-61.

44 Janette Bastian, *Owning Memory: How a Caribbean Community Lost its Archives and Found Its Memory* (London: Libraries Unlimited, 2003), pp. 19-34.

45 Kenneth E. Foote, "To Remember and Forget: Archives, Memory and Culture", *American Archivist*, 53 (Summer 1990), 378-92 (pp. 380-82).

46 Bastian, *Owning Memory*, pp. 45-48.

47 William T. Hagan, "Archival Captive – The American Indian", *American Archivist*, 41 (April 1978), 135-42.

48 George Morgan, "Decolonising the Archives: Who Owns the Documents", *Comma*, 1 (2003), 147-51.

49 Frederick Cooper, "Memories of Colonization: Commemoration, Preservation and Erasure in an African Archive", in *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory*, pp. 257-66.

states that control these archives have in the past made significant efforts to access, copy and acquire complete records of their own history as written not only by themselves, but also by others. For example, in 1841, the state of New York dispatched John Romeyn Brodhead on a journey to Europe to copy or acquire documents in England, Netherlands and France relating to the history of the United States.<sup>50</sup> Access to records is crucial not only for knowledge of the past and the self-definition of communities, but also for shaping communities' futures; it is vital for justice, reconciliation, language revitalisation or any other form of mending broken links with the past.<sup>51</sup> Starting with a declaration of the French National Assembly in 1794, the access to archival records has been increasingly recognised as a civic right.<sup>52</sup> This right should not be limited to citizens of western countries, and digitisation gives an unparalleled opportunity to allow fully democratic open access.

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This volume, celebrating the tenth anniversary of the EAP, is designed to showcase the historical significance and research potential of the collections digitised through the programme. We invited 19 articles from the 244 projects that the EAP has supported since its inception.<sup>53</sup> To ensure the volume illustrates the wide range of research that the digitised material makes possible, we asked the authors to focus on the collections they digitised, but otherwise gave them complete freedom as to the choice of subject and methodology. The majority of the primary materials discussed in the articles are freely available on the EAP website. The chapters are organised in sections according to the type of media they discuss (inscriptions, manuscripts, archival records, newspapers, photographs, sound archives). Although the categories are porous and divisions are not clear-cut, this provides an illustration of the diverse methodologies used to approach similar types of documentary material in different settings and different regions of the globe.

The first article challenges the traditional notion of the archive. Stefano Biagetti, Ali Ait Kaci and Savino di Lernia discuss the Tifinagh inscriptions in the Tadrart Acacus Mountains in Libya. Their contribution places the

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50 Blouin and Rosenberg, *Processing the Past*, pp. 8-9.

51 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1995).

52 Blouin and Rosenberg, *Processing the Past*, p. 21; Michel Duchein, "The History of European Archives and the Development of the Archival Profession in Europe", *American Archivist*, 55 (Winter 1993), pp. 14-25.

53 See <http://eap.bl.uk/database/collections.a4d>

inscriptions, dated between the early first millennium A.D. and the twentieth century, in the context of the landscape and archaeological finds in the area. The authors show that though the events the inscriptions record (such as the fact that a certain Busni, son of Nebuk went to a place called Tswnt) may not be of monumental historical significance, analysis of the types of names recorded, of the vocabulary used, and of the location of inscriptions allows to reconstruct the history of the region from its “written landscape”.

The following section, on manuscripts, brings together contributions on collections of codices in India, Ethiopia, Kenya and Mali. The articles consider not only the content of the manuscripts, but also their material aspects. What unites them is an emphasis on the original context in which the manuscripts are preserved. The issues of ownership, collection formation and even the symbolic meaning of the codices for their owners are considered as part of the manuscripts’ important historical testimony.

The section begins with a contribution by Stephen Morey, who provides an account of locating, digitising, transcribing and translating Tai Ahom manuscripts from Assam State, Northeast India. The surviving manuscripts mostly date from the eighteenth century, but the texts they preserve are often much older. The Tai Ahom language is no longer spoken and – due to script modernisation – read by very few people, making the recording, transcribing and translating of manuscripts an urgent matter. The author describes the difficulties of this process, the complexities and particularities of the language. He also provides an account of the digitisation and contextualises this scholarly endeavour by discussing the current owners’ relationships with manuscripts which, although no longer understood, are still treasured as objects of symbolic and religious significance.

In the next article, on Lepcha manuscripts, Heleen Plaisier likewise explores codices in private possession, written in a language that, although still spoken, is increasingly under threat of falling silent. The manuscript collections she discusses belong to the Lepcha people, an ethnic minority of circa 30,000 inhabiting a region divided between India, Nepal and Bhutan. Lepcha literary tradition dates back to the eighteenth century when their alphabet was devised to disseminate translations of Tibetan Buddhist texts. Lepcha literature has not been studied, but the author shows that preserved codices capture the way in which the Tibetan influence was combined with native Lepcha stories and customs to create a distinct new tradition.

Jacek Tomaszewski and Michael Gervers focus on physical aspects of the books preserved in the collection of the May Wäyni Monastery in Ethiopia.

In the context of discussing how manuscripts are stored, they explore the physical construction of manuscripts, the methods of their production and historical repairs undertaken for their preservation. Analysis of the parchment, writing layers, book-block and binding structure provides new insights into the history of book production in Ethiopia. The authors describe procedures devised to overcome the practical problems of digitising fragile materials in a challenging environment without further compromising their condition. They offer several recommendations for manuscript conservation strategy in Ethiopia.

The next article also concerns a distinct collection of books in East Africa, but concentrates on their content. Anne Bang examines a collection belonging to the Riyadhha Mosque in Lamu, Kenya, investigating its intellectual connection with the Sufi and legal traditions of Ḥaḍramawt, Yemen, in the period circa 1880-1940. The author also analyses the means by which these books came to be part of the collection: imports, gifts, *waqf* (pious endowment), local copying and local textual production. In doing so, she traces the various ways in which Islamic textual knowledge came to be incorporated into the local canon in Lamu.

The process of creating a library is also explored by Sophie Sarin, both in the historical context of manuscript production in Djenné, Mali, and in the contemporary context of the foundation of a Djenné Manuscript Library, designed to safeguard manuscripts which belong to local families. The library allows the families – traditional keepers of the old, unique and scarcely-known collections – to deposit codices in a secure environment without forfeiting ownership. The author describes the process of negotiation with the families and the archivists' efforts to overcome their reservations and address their concerns. She also outlines the potential of the study of these manuscripts for future investigation into the intellectual history of the region.

There follows a section, on archival records, which brings together articles exploring institutional, community and church archives as well as libraries in Europe, South America, Africa and the Middle East. The authors employ diverse methodologies to approach microhistories and even personal stories captured in the records, demonstrating their significance in the broader historical context, as well as their importance for the local communities.

Elena Marushiakova and Veselin Popov investigate documents and publications recording early Roma movements towards self-determination in modern Bulgaria. Centring on the dramatic life story of one man, the activist Shakir Pashov, the article follows the efforts of the Roma in Bulgaria

to gain a measure of political autonomy within the national framework. The article demonstrates the importance of primary sources and outlines the consequences of detachment from archival records, leading in extreme cases to the scholarly acceptance of events which never actually occurred. The authors engage carefully with documents, noting layers of writing and re-writing resulting from the often dramatic events and reversals that surrounded the creation of Roma records in Bulgaria.

Church records are the subject of analysis for Gabriela Ramos, who explores ecclesiastical documents in Peru revealing the agents and circumstances behind the demarcation of parochial jurisdictions. The author employs a case of contested boundaries, recorded only partially but in fascinating detail, as a window onto a changing demography and economy, and as a microcosm of the church's efforts to control the population of the region. This microhistory allows us to understand the broader processes shaping the institutions of colonial Peru.

Jane Landers, Pablo Gómez, José Polo Acuña and Courtney Campbell also employ ecclesiastical and notarial records to investigate the history of slavery in rural communities on the Pacific and Caribbean coasts of Colombia and Northeastern Brazil. Thousands of African slaves were transported to the region to exploit the gold and silver mines. Indigenous groups joined African slaves in cattle ranching and agricultural labour. The records used by the authors allow a reconstruction of the social and commercial history of these under-studied regions and of African, Afro-descendant and indigenous communities long ignored in Colombian and Brazilian history. The authors touch upon the importance of digitised records for recognising and addressing the land claims of indigenous groups in both countries.

Bashir Salau investigates the ways in which the early colonial administrators in Northern Nigeria experimented with the use of convict labour for the completion of public projects. His contribution introduces and analyses a variety of colonial records related to prisons, placing them in the broader context of the history of the prison system in Nigeria.

Moving from archives of colonial power to archives of communities under colonial rule in Senegal, Fallou Ngom explores the tradition of Ajami, the writing of other languages using modified Arabic script, a practice deeply embedded in the histories and cultures of Islamised Africa. The article focuses on the Ajami tradition of the Muridiyya Sufi order founded by Shaykh Ahmadou Bamba (1853-1927). Discussing both archival and modern material,

the author analyses the religious and secular functions of Ajami and its role in the emergence of a distinct African Muslim identity.

A contribution from Qasem Abu Harb discusses the digitisation of historical periodicals and manuscripts at the al-Aqṣá Mosque Library in East Jerusalem and the al-Jazzār Mosque Library in Acre, placing these two libraries and the materials they contain in the historical and cultural context of Palestine. The article makes a strong case for digitisation and online access as important means both for preserving the manuscripts and for making them accessible not only to scholars abroad, but also to scholars and students in Palestine.

The section on photographic archives brings together contributions on archives in Argentina, India, Russia and Cameroon. The focus of the articles ranges in subject and approach, but what unites them is an emphasis on the importance of context for the historical interpretation of these images.

Irina Podgorny's article skilfully attempts to resurrect the "murdered evidence", a series of *cartes-de-visite* whose original context and provenance were lost when they reached the museum of La Plata, Argentina and moved through its various departments. In a careful investigation, the author gathers traces of evidence, following Ariadne's thread through a labyrinth of stories, retracing the origins of the photographs back to the milieu of an Italian charlatan, Commendatore Guido Bennati, who travelled through South America in the late 1860s and 1870s.

Kyle Jackson uses missionary photographs from the Mizoram Hills in Northeast India to move away from categories of cultural domination, often employed in discussions of colonial and missionary history, towards exploring the many layers of cross-cultural experience in everyday lives. Placing the photographs in the context of Mizo folklore and contemporary written sources, Jackson offers a sensory immersion into the world that these photographs depict. We are invited not only to see through the eyes of the Mizo and the missionaries, but also to smell through their noses, hear through their ears and even attempt to reach *harhna*, the Mizo sense of spiritual awakening.

David Anderson, Craig Campbell and Mikhail Batashev discuss a collection of photographs by Ivan Baluev, a gifted photographer whose life is known only from documents in his personal file in the Krasnoyarsk Regional Museum. These photographs were taken in 1938 and 1939 during a nine-month "Northern Expedition" to some of the most remote areas of the central Siberian district. Commissioned by the Museum, they capture the sovietisation of the region and its indigenous people, the transition from the old ways of life to the new era. Yet, placed in the context of Baluev's expedition journal, they also

reveal elements of his personal and often ironic commentary on the reality he photographed. Previously, the photographs were most often discussed only as distinct images, not as a collection and not in the context of other documents from the expedition. Consequently, the personal input of the photographer was invisible until now.

Also concentrating on the work of one photographer, David Zeitlyn writes about the private archive of a photographic studio in the West Region of Cameroon. The author places his discussion in the context of the history and current status of photography in West Africa, outlining how mundane bureaucratic factors – such as changes in the design of identity cards – affect the way in which photographers operate. The article explores the social significance of photography and the role of photographs as both personal and communal records. It also outlines different processes – both intentional and accidental – that underlay the creation of the archive and that must be considered in its interpretation.

The last section discusses sound recordings from Guinea, Iran and Russia. The authors devote much attention to the historical context of creation of these materials, but equally to the diverse potential they have for the present: facilitating political reconciliation, inspiring cultural revival, assisting language revitalisation.

Graeme Counsel discusses the collection of vinyl discs from Sylyphone, the national record label of Guinea. The collection, which captures the music of the era of President Sékou Touré (1958-1984) was preserved in the sound archives of the offices of Radio Télévision Guinée in Conakry. It has been neglected despite the high quality of the recordings, and despite their potential to illuminate the first decades following Guinea's independence. The article investigates the stories behind the musical recordings and reconstructs the political context that shaped them. It also reports on archiving and digitisation in an unpredictable and politically charged environment.

Jane Lewisohn provides an overview of the cultural importance of the *Golha* ("Flowers of Persian Song and Music") radio programmes in contemporary Iran. Her article places these programmes in the broader cultural context of twentieth-century Iran and explores the impact they had on the perception of Persian music and poetry. The author describes the process of collecting and digitising the recordings, as well as the impact their digitisation and online publication had on the study of Persian and world music, and on Iranians both in the country and abroad.

The final article, by Tjeerd de Graaf and Victor Denisov, discusses the cataloguing and digitisation of linguistic and ethnographic sound recordings made during the first half of the twentieth century, and stored in institutional and private collections in Russia. The authors make a strong case for the importance of these collections in preserving and revitalising endangered languages in the Russian Federation. They demonstrate that, although many languages are nearly lost, the historic recordings contain enduring testimony to their earlier life, testimony crucial for communities trying to recover what has been nearly forgotten.

The articles use variety of approaches to interpret traces of history captured in digitised records. From their analysis of the form and content of these records new narratives emerge, often in unexpectedly vivid and even personal details. Most of the sources discussed here were not previously subjects of scholarly attention. We hope that the articles in this volume will open new debates and encourage scholars to explore the archives preserved by the EAP with the spirit of discovery (and without the dust) that accompanied young Jules Michelet on his first visit to the archives, those “catacombs of manuscripts”: “I was not slow to discern in the midst of the apparent silence of these galleries, a movement and murmur which were not those of death. These papers and parchments, so long deserted, desired no better than to be restored to the light of day (...) And as I breathed on their dust, I saw them [the dead] rise up. They raised from the sepulchre, one the hand, the other the head, as in the Last Judgement of Michelangelo or in the Dance of Death”.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Jules Michelet, *The History of France*, trans. by G. H. Smith (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1848), p. 48.

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