
Chapter 3

Memory and Archive

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The digital age's de-spatialisation and de-materialisation of large bodies of knowledge has brought into focus that in contrast to the present day, written materials were regularly collected at specific, localisable places in earlier epochs. Institutions, associations, groups, or even individual persons were responsible for such collections and, through specific practices, they stored and permanently secured artefacts bearing all kinds of information so that these could be used at a later date.

Against this backdrop, in what follows we analyse non-typographic societies and their handling of knowledge repositories. By way of introduction, two essential forms of storage—memory and archive—are examined in their relationship to each other, before we proceed to address the ways in which relevant research has been spurred on by recent impulses in the field of cultural studies. Since the perspective of the CRC 933 'Material Text Cultures', on which this publication is based, focuses in particular on the physical supports of writing, we reflect in a third step on the specific epistemological value of analysing memory and archives in ways that are sensitive to materiality. Finally, we expand our analytical framework to include 'writing' itself as a factor and the implications thereof. This introduction is based on seven theses which are presented, discussed, and exemplified below.

Both archive and memory can be described as storage facilities, i. e., as systems where something can be deposited after undergoing a process of selection for possible (re)use. What is deposited there is saved as a result of filtering practices¹ (cf. Thesis 16) and is thus itself a trace of previous selection processes. Here, we must distinguish between storage planned for the short term, for an indefinite amount of time, or for the long term (comparable to short-term and long-term systems in human memory). Long term storage requires certain forms of organisation and a particularly differentiated handling of the stored material. Likewise, prospective short-term storage can turn into long-term or even permanent storage due to external circumstances: for example, when memories or archives end up being lost due to external factors and only return to use after much time has elapsed.² In the case of archives, these external factors can be the effects of warfare or burial through natural disasters; in the case of human memory,

1 On storage practices, cf. Ast et al. 2015.

2 Cf. Markowitsch 2009; Pritzel/Markowitsch 2017. On the transience and complete loss of archives, see Filippov/Sabaté 2017.

we can think here of the superimposition of memories as a result of traumatic experiences. Individual human memory is understood here as a dynamic and changeable system created through filtering processes, with people cognitively accessing the past on the basis of this system.³ The respective processes are cognitive performances, which are generally referred to as ‘remembering’: What is experienced is recorded and stored by memory, while at the same time being further processed in order to be modelled anew in a practical manner in the very moment of remembering.⁴ As stated in Thesis 12, this momentum and changeability is a common feature of both human memory and the archive. This dynamic variability must be emphasised because common notions of memory are strongly marked by metaphors of static storage. We must distinguish individual human memory from the memory of a social group (‘collective memory’, ‘cultural memory’), which can be understood as that shared ‘knowledge’ of the past that acquires familiarity and validity due to collective communication processes.⁵

The ‘archive’ (from the Greek *ἀρχεῖον* or Latin *archium/archivum*), a term that in recent times has been semantically extended in various ways, functions as a special form of storage. In the ancient sense of the word, it denotes an official building in which certain documents were stored for future use, and by extension also refers to institutions or authorities (e. g., a state archive) that received artefacts after a process of selection and organisation.⁶ In both cases, the archive predominantly fulfils political and administrative functions.⁷ Archives are similar to collections in that both can be said to form ensembles of objects: They bring things together or ‘socialise’ them in one place.⁸ For earlier periods, libraries and treasuries are typical examples of collections,⁹ while the museum can be seen as a representative case for the modern era.¹⁰ For the

³ On the term ‘memory’ as well as its materialisation in ‘memory media’, cf. Allgaier et al. 2019, 185–186 (with further bibliography), as well as the information below in notes 46 and 47.

⁴ Cf. Markowitsch 2009.

⁵ Cf. A. Assmann 1999; J. Assmann 2018; Ernst 2000; Donk 2009; Erll/Nünning/Young 2010; Erll 2017.

⁶ On the history of European archives in particular, see the lecture transcripts of Brenneke 1953, 107ff., in whose estate there was an ‘archive article’ for a *Dictionary of German History, 1943–1946* (ed. by Dietmar: Brenneke 2018, 7–137); on the Latin designation of the archive in Antiquity and the Middle Ages: *ibid.*, 9; Corens/Peters/Walsham 2016, who pursue a socio-historical account of archives in their edited collection of essays, focus on the early modern period; Jungen/Raymond 2012 follow an anthropological approach; on the cultural history of the archive, cf. Vismann 2011, especially 91–100 (English translation: Vismann 2008, 57–61).

⁷ Horstmann/Kopp 2010. See also Chapter 6 ‘Political Rule and Administration’.

⁸ On the practice of collecting, cf. Wilde 2015; Schmidt 2016. On socialisation, cf. Ehmig 2019.

⁹ Medieval collections of interest to museums or antiquarians are known for their coins: Petrarch gave Charles IV gold and silver coins bearing the portraits of ancient emperors from his own treasured holdings (*quas in deliciis habebam*), see: *Petrarcas Briefwechsel mit deutschen Zeitgenossen*, 185. The case of Stephan Matthias von Neidenburg (1480–1495), the bishop of Kulm who is described in the *Prussian Chronicle* as a manic collector crazy for coins, is famous: Waschinski 1968.

¹⁰ So as to be comprehensive, we should recall here that such collections can in turn generate their own administrative archival records: Bödeker/Saada 2007.

pre-modern era, it is not always possible to clearly distinguish an archive from a collection.¹¹ The papal *scrinium*, for example, was both an archive and a library, and the archives of the French kings were kept together with the royal treasury in the High Middle Ages.¹² Finds from the Neo-Babylonian period document that archival material and literary texts were housed together.¹³ A clear demarcation of the two is also difficult to discern in Han-period China, where documents pertaining both to rulers and to administration were stored and presented alongside other objects.¹⁴ In Japan, the *zushoryō*, established at the beginning of the eighth century, is considered to be the first state library, although it also served simultaneously as both a scriptorium and an archive.¹⁵

In principle, however, both ways of socialising objects can be separated analytically. Collections generally consist of things brought together from different locations to a single place. While it may well be the case that these ensembles were designed to be used or consulted at a later date, in a great many instances they served primarily for display and representation. The archive, on the other hand, was marked in the non-typographic age less by the fact that its contents had been sought out, found, and gathered together than by the fact that these items had been deposited, handed over, or stowed away with later use or consultation in mind. They are thus less the result of a determined search and the acquisition than the consequence of storage with the prospective aim of later use.¹⁶ The artefacts socialised in archives are generally speaking of a predominantly administrative nature and pertain to the political or economic sphere rather than being cultural or representative in character. Consequently, archives rarely acquired a specific aura, as can occasionally be observed with famous collections. However, being situated at a prominent locale—at a ruler's residence, for example, or at a place of worship, temple, or monastery regarded as being especially suffused with sanctity—and being directly linked to political power could imbue archives with increased prestige and representativity.

Since both collections and archives are meant to be used, they are in principle accessible, even if this accessibility is reserved to a chosen few. This accessibility distinguishes them fundamentally from deposits whose contents are withheld from people, either completely (genizot, grave deposits, etc.) or for an indefinite period (granaries, buried hoards). In earlier times, access to archives and collections was usually extremely

¹¹ Cf. J. Assmann 2001; Ast et al. 2015; Friedrich 2016; Ryholt/Barjamovic 2019. A careful attempt to uncover the arrangement of archives between late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages in Europe is provided by Krah 2016.

¹² Cf. Barret 2013, 305.

¹³ Cf. J. Assmann 2001; Brenneke 1953, 107; Pedersén 2005.

¹⁴ Cf. Fölster 2018.

¹⁵ Cf. Kornicki 1998, 365; Sommet 2011, 14.

¹⁶ Cf. Wellmann 2012, 392. Collections present knowledge, while archives, through their order and arrangement, also consider future use and thus control the reality they precede: cf. Ebeling 2016, 129. On the distinction between politics and archives, see the contributions in Bausi et al. 2018 and therein programmatically: Fölster 2018, 201–230.

restricted, but the modern era has seen such ensembles become permanent institutions that have been opened to the public more frequently than was previously the case.¹⁷

Two broader notions connected to the concept of archives are primarily encountered in the field of ancient studies. On the one hand, typologically related finds originating from a secure find context are grouped together into what are termed ‘dossiers’ or ‘corpora’.¹⁸ Sometimes, specialist literature also refers to these as ‘archives’, even if the artefacts collected there were not originally located together in the same place—a fact that can give rise to misunderstandings. In this case, scholars effectively turn into retroactive founders of archives in that archaeological discoveries are clustered together for later use according to established scientific practices.¹⁹ On the other hand, even those artefact ensembles are considered as archives whose holdings were indeed deposited together in one place and discovered there by archaeologists, although the latter were by no means originally stored in the abovementioned sense, i. e. with the intention of enabling a possible later use.²⁰ The common element essential to these different understandings of the terms ‘archive’ and ‘collection’ is the ‘socialisation’ of artefacts in one place, whether originally intended or subsequently encountered.²¹

The Concept of the Archive through the Lens of Cultural Studies

The concept of an archive thus shows a broad semantic spectrum, one that has recently been expanded due to the driving force of cultural studies. Research in the humanities that has focused on materiality, such as that conducted in the CRC 933 ‘Material Text Cultures’, necessarily requires distancing oneself from recent Foucauldian uses of the term ‘archive’ in cultural studies. Michel Foucault understood the archive as the law of

¹⁷ On the institutionalisation of the European archive in the early modern period, see Friedrich 2013.

¹⁸ The term ‘dossier’, ambiguous as it is, is also often used for collections compiled by modern scholars from disparate discovered material (for example, of papyri). On the distinction between ‘archives’ and ‘dossiers’, see Martin 1994; Jördens 2001; Vandorpe 2009, 218–219. Ulrike Ehmig and Adrian Heinrich suggest replacing the term ‘dossier’ with the paraphrase “contextual socialisation of what is written” (Ehmig/Heinrich 2019, 1; our translation, German text: “kontextbedingte Vergesellschaftung von Geschriebenem”). For an introduction to archives and archival records in ancient studies: Boussac/Invernizzi 1996; Brosius 2003; Kehoe 2013.

¹⁹ Here, academic research becomes in retrospect the founder of an archive as it were, inasmuch as it compiles excavation finds according to scientific criteria for later evaluation. Occasionally, an extended, metaphorical use of the term ‘archive’ is noticeable, which builds on the idea that researchers can gain information from this context of finds just as they might from a document archive (e. g., an environmental archive, the oceans, layers of the earth): “everything is an archive” (Wellmann 2012, 391; our translation, German text: “alles ist Archiv”).

²⁰ Cf. Martin 1994, 570. Additionally, it is difficult in excavations to understand the composition of artefact arrangements perfectly, a fact that makes it difficult to determine whether they belonged to an archive or not.

²¹ Ehmig 2019.

what can be said and thus as a system of statements.²² This expanded, metaphorical interpretation of the term is difficult to operationalise if we attach great importance to the materiality of archives or archival holdings.²³ On the other hand, archival analyses undertaken in the field of cultural studies have also provided valuable stimuli for research on materiality in the humanities more generally.²⁴ This is especially true of Jacques Derrida's call not to understand the archive as a static storage institution, but rather to explore its changeability and the discourses and practices embedded in it.²⁵ These practices include not only the selection of archival material, but also the constant adaptation and curation of the artefact arrangements stored there. Being sensitive to the praxeological dimension of archiving invites us to inquire about its actors and the social (power-political, cultural, discursive) implications of their actions. Derrida emphasised the importance of these actors, whom he called 'archons', and highlighted their discursive power, i. e., their ability to interpret the archives.²⁶

The term 'archon', however harbours certain dangers. In a purely linguistic sense, it refers to Greek Antiquity, where the word *archōn* (plural: *archontes*) was generally used to describe a public official. Here, though, our concern is less with ancient functionaries than with the new meaning ascribed to the term by Jacques Derrida. The French philosopher used this term (in its French form, *archonte*) to refer to those who shape the discourse about what is kept in a specific archive and its organisation. These 'archons' may be the aforementioned guardians of an archive, i. e. officials comparable to the archivists of our own day. But this is only part of the term's meaning, since 'archons' in the Derridean sense also refers to any individual or group who determines the discourses associated with archives and archival records: These could be the rulers or masters over an archive, i. e., those who have founded or own it. Such persons also have a direct influence on the form, use, and interpretation of the archival material. In some cases, such as in private archives, both aspects of the 'archon' might coincide in the same individual or group of persons; in other cases, such as larger seigneurial or state archives, different persons or groups of persons fulfil the roles of archivists and archive masters, respectively. Since an essential characteristic of an archive is its dynamism and changeability, the comprehensive collective term 'archon' is particularly suitable for describing everyone who has a bearing on this changeability. It is therefore a key term for a broad, cultural studies-based understanding of the archive and will be used as such in this text.

Finally, the modification of archives—and of forms of storing knowledge in general—is conditioned not only by the multiplication and dissemination of knowledge,

²² Foucault 1969, 170 (English translation: Foucault 1972, 129); Gehring 2004, 54–75; Stingelein 2016, 23–24.

²³ For a critique of this, cf. A. Assmann 2001, 270.

²⁴ For an overview, see Ebeling/Günzel 2009.

²⁵ Derrida 1995a (English translation: Derrida 1995b).

²⁶ Derrida 1995a, 13 (English translation: Derrida 1995b, 9–10); cf. also Wirth 2005, 22–24.

but also by processes of rationalisation and streamlining. An archive not only handles storage media; it is itself a changeable medium of storage.²⁷ This involves changes in the cultural practices that are carried out on and with different artefact arrangements.²⁸ Such practices range from the production of artefacts to their use and reception, from archival selection and organisation to the destruction of such materials. This chapter therefore also interrogates the cultural practices performed by different groups of people with respect to archives and the degree to which these actions were based on the changing discourses shaped by the ‘archons’ in question.

Materiality as a Category of Analysis

A cultural-studies approach also proves helpful for studies focussing on the materiality of both individual and social memory, since here, too, we can observe a variability comparable to that of an archive, especially when dealing with material ‘memory media’²⁹ (cf. Thesis 13). We understand such media as artefacts that trigger individual memory or stimulate collective communication about the past. As with other objects, their physical transience depends not only on contingent factors but also on their respective materiality.³⁰ They can serve quite different forms of memory: ‘pragmatic’ memory, designed for short-term, brief recollection; ‘commemorative’ memory, oriented towards regular remembrance; and the special form of social memory called ‘cultural memory’ following Aleida and Jan Assmann.³¹ The specific forms of memory media that are selected to be archived endow an archive with the function of a ‘memory agency’,³² since they specify what can be remembered, by whom, and at what time, and thereby organise not only the act of remembering, but also that of forgetting: While certain media are accepted into a specific archive, others have been discarded. The archiving of material memory media thus proves to be, in terms of memory theory, a “fact-producing act”.³³

This raises the question of the possible connections between the materiality of artefacts and their prospective use. Differences in media also reflect differences in meaning, since the support material and other external features indicate the content.³⁴ This leads to the assumption that there is a direct correlation between the materiality and

²⁷ Cf. Reininghaus 2008; Friedrich 2013, 125–126.

²⁸ Foundational here on the relationship between artefact arrangements and the practices carried out on them is Schatzki 2016, 79–81.

²⁹ Erll/Nünning 2004; Vedder 2012; Allgaier et al. 2019, 182–187.

³⁰ Cf. Wimmer 2016; Ebeling 2016, 126–127.

³¹ Cf. A. Assmann 2001; J. Assmann 2018; Allgaier et al. 2019, 185–187.

³² Cf. Wellmann 2012, 388–390 (quotation on p. 388; our translation, German text: “Gedächtnisagentur”).

³³ Vismann 2011, 89 (English translation: Vismann 2008, 56). Cf. Auer 2000; Barnert/Herzberg/Hikel 2010; Ebeling 2016, 125.

³⁴ Cf. Erll 2004; Ebeling 2016, 126–127. On this, cf. also Chapter 2 ‘Layout, Design, Text-Image’.

the target groups of artefacts, especially if the latter were assembled with the intention of creating and preserving memories for a specific group of recipients (cf. Thesis 17).

A perspective that is sensitive to the issue of materiality also has implications for how we understand the term ‘archive’. Picking up the impulses of cultural studies outlined above—but with a decided focus on materiality—we therefore propose defining an ‘archive’ as an artefact repository particularly related to the administrative sphere that is intentionally created and designed for long term usage. Through the selection, storage, and organisation of memory media, an archive thus understood forms changeable arrangements that are in turn integrated into varying discourses.

The ‘archons’ of these discourses decide whether the material design, the spatial arrangement, or the use of the socialised artefacts is mobilised, restricted, or even halted, which sometimes has considerable consequences for historical processes and their subsequent interpretation. Does the analysis of the changeable, material character of the artefacts and their repositories allow conclusions to be drawn about their custodians (cf. Thesis 15)? In any case, the analysis of the artefacts contained within an archive provides information about the archive’s material design, arrangement, and use. The physical dimension inherent in both memory and archive thus stimulates enquiries into the relationship between space and accessibility and into the topological dimension of what is stored, i. e. how it was organised, arranged, and collected so as to enable the construction of knowledge (cf. Thesis 14).

Inscribed Artefacts as Subjects of Study

The focus of the CRC 933, on which the entire present volume is based, is not on artefacts in general, but rather more specifically on inscribed artefacts. According to Aleida Assmann, “writing” (“Schrift”), and in an extended sense, “what is written” (“Geschriebenes”), serves as the precondition for archives and archiving in non-typographic societies.³⁵ From the perspective of material, memory, and archive studies, the question thus arises as to what added value writing bestows on artefacts and which functions it fulfils.

A fundamental challenge in the production of artefacts that are conceived from the outset as memory media is to ensure their subsequent use as intended by their producers. The time between production and reception can sometimes be long and the medium can become exposed to various influences.³⁶ The changeability of the archive or changes in the cultural practices associated with it can sometimes lead to an imbalance between the original intention on the part of the producers and the actual reception of the artefacts.³⁷ This difference leads us to ask what role writing

³⁵ Cf. A. Assmann 2001, 279. On this and what follows: Allgaier et al. 2019, 197–200.

³⁶ Cf. Allgaier et al. 2019, 187–188.

³⁷ Cf. Erll 2017, 145–146.

plays in mitigating this tension in accordance with the producers' intentions, despite the impossibility of wholly resolving it (cf. Thesis 18).

Writing can be applied onto its support material both during and after the production of an artefact: Objects that are already inscribed can be supplemented by further writing. In other cases, memory media lose their original material supports and are reduced to their textual content, but may continue to live or even be renewed in material form as part of an archive. Socialised artefacts are often subject to such editing and curation. The 'archons' oversee such practices and thus occupy an intermediate position between producer and recipient. This archival work on the object raises questions about its consequences for the relationship between the original artefact and its later recipient(s) (cf. Thesis 15). The reception of memory media depends not least on the 'aura' or 'presence' ascribed to them or perceived through them by actors, institutions, or practices. Thus, some objects can be charged with meaning due to their material make-up, authenticity, artistry, or contextualisation. Writing—especially of an exotic, luxurious, or otherwise unusual nature—can also trigger this effect. Such writing can already be applied to an artefact during its production, or can end up being perceived as aura-laden by recipients after a certain period of time has passed. This aura contributes to providing artefacts with an immediacy that bridges the temporal distance to the time of their creation.³⁸

In what follows, the ideas of our theses, which could only be outlined briefly in this introductory part, are fleshed out, explained in detail, and clarified by examples. Our aim here is to demonstrate the potential that subjects central to the humanities, such as memory and archives, can provide when viewed from the perspective of 'material text cultures' against the backdrop of our own digital age.

Thesis 12

Memory and archive are always dynamic and never concluded.

Outside academia, one sometimes encounters the erroneous idea that what is deposited in an archive is permanently removed from the access of societies, groups, or individuals. It is supposedly robbed of its agency by being withdrawn from its usual contexts of meaning, filed away and thus 'frozen' or 'fossilised', as it were. According to this view, whatever is deposited is considered as having been laid to rest in a graveyard of written texts or, at best, as having lapsed into some kind of dormant state from which it only awakes upon being removed once again from the archive.³⁹

³⁸ On the term 'aura' originally: Benjamin 1974, 479–480; cf. also Allgaier et al. 2019, 194–197.

³⁹ A change in this respect is noted by Ebeling 2016, 130: "Today, archives are no longer regarded as passive places and dusty sepulchres for written materials" (our translation, German text: "Archive gelten heute nicht mehr als passive Orte und verstaubte Schriftfriedhöfe").



Fig. 1a: Documents and monogram tracings transmitted in copy form via a cartulary in the *Liber Privilegiorum S. Mauricii Magdeburgensis*. Magdeburg, Landeshauptarchiv Sachsen-Anhalt, Cop. Kopiere und andere Amtsbücher, No. 1a, fol. 16v–17r.

It is true that such a loss of vitality and action can be observed. A family archive can expire as such when the family in question dies out, is exiled, or the like. Documents safely deposited in advance can remain permanently hidden by being buried. This situation is plausible for Ancient Egypt, for instance, as demonstrated by the fact that some collections of family documents cease after the suppression of a native uprising against Persian rule.⁴⁰

However, the field of classical archival studies (archivology)⁴¹ has long known that such forms of fossilisation by no means occur regularly. The processing of archival material does not have to end with its selection and storage. This is precisely the difference between a deposit (in the sense described above) and an archive. In the former, the focus is on securing and locking objects away; in the latter, the change of what is

⁴⁰ Thus in Vleeming 1991 and Pestman 1994.

⁴¹ Ebeling/Günzel 2009.

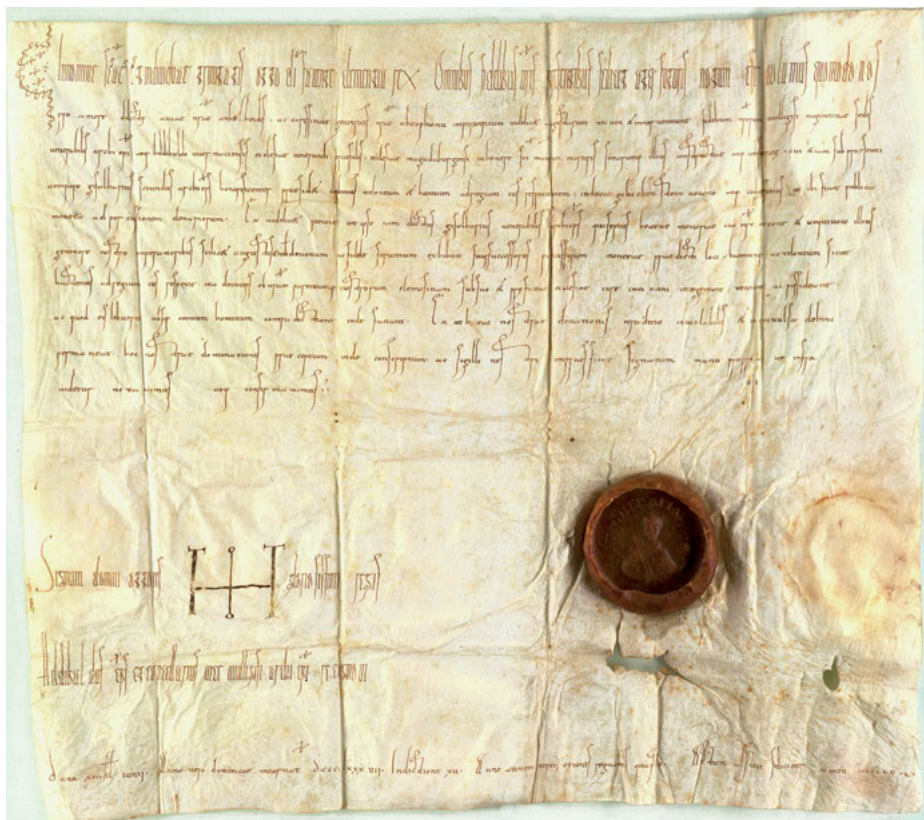


Fig. 1b: Original charter of Otto III, dated 20 May 987. Magdeburg, Landeshauptarchiv Sachsen-Anhalt, Rep. U 1, Erzstift Magdeburg I, 52.

deposited is systemic, since archival material can undergo changes through invento-
risation, registration, compilation, and other administrative interventions, and can
sometimes even lose its material support through transcription and thus be reduced
to its textual content. In the European Middle Ages, for example, documents were
copied or their textual contents incorporated into another document. Furthermore,
entire manuscripts of copied deeds—so-called cartularies—were often produced in
non-typographic societies (Fig. 1a and 1b).⁴² In these processes, the material of the
inscribed artefact could change (e. g., from papyrus to parchment, from parchment to
paper). In other cases, artefacts remained physically intact, but underwent a change
of form: for example, by being complemented with inscriptions or other additions,
reduced in size by cutting or other actions, discarded or even destroyed (cancellation)

⁴² Cf. Kosto/Winroth 2002. An impressive example of this form of archival differentiation is examined
by McCrank 1993.



Fig. 2: Archival processing of written material: the re-binding of parchment documents into codices. Arxiu i Biblioteca Episcopal de Vic (photo: Nikolas Jaspert).

as a result of withdrawal, or altered in their physical presence by folding, smoothing, unrolling, buckling, or the like (Fig. 2).

Finally, archival materials can also undergo change when the spatial context of their storage shifts—for example, when an archive is restructured or when new document series are introduced, thus leading to re-compilations of artefact arrangements. In addition to this immediate physical re-contextualisation in one place, indirect changes in the spatial framework can also be observed: for example, when archives are divided up or change their location.⁴³ The transfer of the papal archives from Rome to Paris in 1810 at the behest of Napoleon Bonaparte, as well as their return in 1815–1817, is an impressive example of the dislocation and changeability of an archive. During this process, many documents were lost, while others were altered (for example, through the removal or replacement of bindings). In such new arrangements, the topology of the artefacts changes, which in turn can have an impact on their use and their praxeological dimension.

⁴³ Such changes are, among other things, the subject of separate ‘archive histories’; cf. note 27 above.

Even without any translocation, the physical framing of the archive is usually dynamic: An archive is set up and initially grows by incorporating more texts of the intended kind, i. e., by following the founders' intentions. This is true, for example, of a seignorial archive housing documents considered important over decades or even centuries, or of a private archive accumulating important legal documents from a single family over several generations. An example of the latter are the multi-part Dioskorean archives discovered in the ancient town of Aphrodito (the present-day village of Kūm Iṣqāw in Egypt). These document three successive generations: the archives of the eponymous Dioskoros, those of his father before him, and those of his own children; all three archives were probably collected and arranged by his wife Sophia and end shortly after the death of the aforementioned Byzantine functionary.⁴⁴ Comparable family archives can be identified in large numbers in the late Middle Ages in Europe.⁴⁵ Finally, an archive can also change insofar as it moves from being an actively growing repository of an administration to a self-contained collection of sources for historical research. These dynamic processes raise the question of the agents involved, inviting us to distinguish between the various functions of different 'archons' (cf. Thesis 15).

The memory and the use of memory media also display comparable dynamics. Neuroscience has long proven that what people experience is not unchangeably 'imprinted' onto human memory; rather, there is a fundamental difference between the acts of experiencing and remembering. 'Remembering' should be understood less as the retrieval of information than as an ad hoc performance of cognitive construction.⁴⁶ At the very moment when we remember something, the experience is always cognitively modelled, undergoing modifications and adaptations in the process. External influences such as new experiences, but also images, narratives, etc., can be responsible for this in a variety of ways: by implanting notions of what is presumed to have happened into the human memory; by closing gaps in memory; and by transforming the cognitive modelling of what has been experienced. Talking about past events, experiences, or actions also changes our cognitive construction of the past.⁴⁷ Who or what the agents of these processes of change are is a question that has been intensively researched and discussed—not without controversy—in the cognitive and neurosciences.

Adaptability and changeability are characteristics not only of individual memory, but also of collective communication about the past, i. e., social memory. Such communication is inherently dynamic,⁴⁸ since those who enjoy discursive authority in terms of interpreting the past—the 'archons of social memory', so to speak—can

⁴⁴ Cf. Fournet 2008.

⁴⁵ For example: Gifre/Matas/Soler 2002; Czaja 2009; Piñol 2014; Head/Rosa 2015.

⁴⁶ On what follows, cf. Markowitsch/Welzer 2005; Markowitsch 2009; Zierold 2006, 27–58; Donk 2009, 18–21; Welzer 2017, 19–25.

⁴⁷ Cf. Schacter 2001; Fried 2004.

⁴⁸ Cf. Donk 2009, 20–25; Welzer 2017, 70–110.

use their influence to update, control, or functionalise the act of remembering: through *damnatio memoriae*,⁴⁹ historical narratives, the creation of legends, and so on. Depending on the historical and cultural context, this function can be fulfilled primarily by the apparatuses of power, religious or cultural authorities, public media, or other opinion-forming forces.

This power over interpretation and memory can also extend to material memory media, whose effect on social memory is considerable. They condense and materialise historical narratives, thus triggering individual memories and facilitating collective communication about the past.⁵⁰ These constructed memories are also regularly subject to processes of change. Against this backdrop, inscriptions on artefacts are of great importance and can serve two primary purposes. When applied at the time of production, they are an attempt at securing the use of an artefact according to the creator's intent and thus seek to control or minimise the future dynamics of the inscribed artefact. When applied retrospectively, writing in turn significantly clarifies the respective writer's intentions: In this special case, the inscription becomes a momentous turning point in an artefact's biography with the ability to steer its reception in completely new directions.⁵¹

Thesis 13

Artefacts experience 'memory biographies' that can be modified during production and reception.

Artefacts can be created specifically to serve as future memory supports or—sometimes after phases when they have completely fallen into oblivion—end up as such only in retrospect. While the production of memory media is often occasioned by concrete intentions and geared towards a very specific kind of interaction, ensuring that these media will actually have their intended effect can only be warranted to a limited extent. Failures can occur in their production and in their ability to store the contents meant to be remembered, which is primarily due to the unpredictable, changing conditions of reception or to discrepancies between the motivations of producers and recipients.⁵²

In the interplay alluded to above between divergent attributions, modifications, and changes of function, artefacts can undergo genuine careers and even veritable

⁴⁹ On *damnatio memoriae*, see the relevant work by Varner 2004; Scholz/Schwedler/Sprenger 2014; Schwedler 2021.

⁵⁰ Cf. Ebeling 2016, 126–127.

⁵¹ Cf. Allgaier et al. 2019, 197–200.

⁵² On the concept of memory and memory research, especially from the perspective of the CRC 933 and with a view to inscribed artefacts, see Allgaier et al. 2019; on the interplay between production and reception, cf. *ibid.*, 187–188.

‘memory biographies’. The conservation, archiving, restoration, and changes to the materiality of artefacts should also be understood and treated as part of such a ‘life cycle’. The concept of a memory biography can be applied to the diachronic inscriptive, creative, intentional, physical, and receptive processes that can create, stabilise, change, wear out, or destroy an inscribed artefact. The congruence between intention and reception is a common experience in non-typographic societies and cultural formations. That tombstones are inscribed with memorial information, thus controlling and stabilising the commemoration of the deceased, can be considered as a normal case of such alignment, one that is shared by the past and the present. However, in this instance we have to be cautious when speaking about guiding or controlling reception. For in essence such a case equates to nothing else than the execution or repetition of a process of production and reception that has been collectively established and agreed upon beyond the level of the individual. An example of this kind of pattern for the inscription of artefacts, repeated countless times and requiring no innovation once it has been invented and established, is the inscription for a relic that is enshrined within an altar and hence invisible. By contrast, the use of special forms or high-quality materials, the prominent placing, intensified reproduction or protected storage—all of which can be discerned from the artefacts and their application—can all reflect attempts on the part of producers at controlling how the artefacts are to be understood and used.⁵³

Why is this so? This is because reception is a complex, autonomous process that cannot be pinned down exactly in accordance with some ‘original intention’. Therefore, we find manifold instances where there is an opposition between intention and reception. Rough drafts intended to be discarded can end up being preserved as autographs and become the object of public veneration. One such case is that of the working notes of Thomas Aquinas, which were venerated as relics in a convent at Saragossa.⁵⁴ Sometimes, drafts remain lying around and are considered unpublishable by an author, yet after his or her death, they appear in print, are reproduced in artefacts, and enjoy widespread reception; the late antique poet Sedulius achieved such unintended public success with his *Carmen Paschale*.⁵⁵ The reuse of ancient material as spolia in medieval buildings is another example of this widespread phenomenon.⁵⁶ Processes such as these (or similar ones) can attain a considerable degree of complexity. As they undergo processes of transformation, archives—or archival extracts—are transferred into artefacts, which themselves go through independent and diverse artefact biographies that can lead to social changes.

⁵³ On early medieval relic labels, see Licht 2017 and Wallenwein/Licht 2021.

⁵⁴ Gils 1970.

⁵⁵ On this process, which is witnessed to by *subscriptiones* on several manuscripts, cf. Wallenwein 2017, 29–32, 255–260. On correction notes in general, *ibid.*, 5–8.

⁵⁶ Esch 1969; Wiegartz 2004; Altekamp/Marcks-Jacobs/Seiler 2013/2017; Bolle/von der Höh/Jaspert 2019, as well as the information below in note 129.

Such a path out of the archive and into the artefact, and from thence to extensive influence, can be prominently observed in the case of the *Codex Florentinus* of the *Digest*, the only collection of model cases of Roman law preserved on stable writing material and prepared under Emperor Justinian in sixth-century Constantinople. Due to political changes, this codification of Roman legal archives initially had no widespread effect. The codex experienced a phase of low reception while housed in southern Italy (Amalfi?) and was then brought to Pisa at the beginning of the twelfth century (as booty of war?). From then on, it was studied as part of the growing field of civil law in Italy and particularly in Bologna, before finally being carried off as a trophy in 1406 to Florence, where it is currently kept.⁵⁷ The *Digest* acted as a reference text for civil law until modern times.

The example above draws attention to the fact that concentrations of information in individual artefacts are a widespread phenomenon of historical archival transmission. Since institutional continuity is often lacking or has been markedly interrupted, traces of historical archives are often preserved only in specific deposits (e. g., Qumran, the archive of Theophanes at Hermopolis, the Villa dei Papiri, genizot) or in the form of codifications (e. g., cartularies, collections of letters). Against this background, an expanded concept of archives allows us to regard analogous codifications of various nature—legal (the *Sachsenspiegel*), commemorative (the Fraternity Book of Reichenau Abbey), administrative (conciliar acts), and liturgical (sacramentary)—as reflections and traces of archival contexts in which processes of transformation can commence once again and form the core of new archives.

Thesis 14

The intentions of the ‘archons’ are manifested in the archives’ location and conditions of access.

Nowadays, public archives must be made accessible for everybody in accordance with current law.⁵⁸ In Antiquity and the Middle Ages, however, a very different ideal surely prevailed, since in these time periods, ‘public’ archives were not so much meant for the public, but rather for seignorial or economic administration. The *aerarium populi Romani* of the Roman Republic, to which is often attributed archival function, fulfilled the function of a public archive only insufficiently, if indeed at all. Although resolutions of the Senate and the people as well as lists of judges and jurors were kept as written artefacts in the Temple of Saturn on the Roman Forum, their use was practically

⁵⁷ On this, along with further bibliography: Licht 2018, 81–88.

⁵⁸ On the role of the archivist in older societies, see Thesis 15. The functions of the modern archivist are described in detail in the *Principles of Access to Archives* of the International Council on Archives (ICA) 2014.

impossible, since neither the broad mass of Romans had access to the archive, nor could authorised officials use the *aerarium* effectively. This is shown by the attempts of Cicero and Cato to specifically search for texts in the Temple of Saturn. In this sense, the *aerarium* was more like a non-public archive for state administration.⁵⁹

But we must make a distinction here. On the one hand, we encounter archives in which documents were kept that were needed by the state in order to demonstrate its own claims (or the fulfilment thereof), such as tax lists or documents on compulsory labour. For such documents, it was important that they be kept beyond the public's unfettered reach (and thus away from the risk of falsification or even destruction). On the other hand, there existed copies of private legal documents that could be referred to in the event of legal disputes. A very well-known hieroglyphic inscription from Ramesside Egypt (thirteenth century BCE)⁶⁰ reports how a state archive was consulted in a major dispute involving property rights, and the Roman administration in Egypt had copies of private documents in two different public archives to ensure their availability for consultation.⁶¹

In contrast to later periods (when they are in the majority), public archives are very rarely represented in the papyrological record, in which we find a majority of the 'private' archives described above⁶² that pertained to individuals,⁶³ families,⁶⁴ or large estates and inheritances.⁶⁵ A family or a taxpayer had a vested interest in keeping its 'papers' in a safe place so that they could be presented in case of some legal challenge. The simple act of depositing one's documents in a wall niche, for example,⁶⁶ is already a first step towards archiving them for later use. Access by people other than the family members themselves would have been problematic and would have entailed at best the risk of the documents being falsified. One example of this can be seen in a papyrus from a family archive in Egypt dating to the period of Persian rule. Sections of the text were erased at a later point in time, possibly in the course of a rivalry between two branches of the family.⁶⁷

⁵⁹ Cf. Culham 1989, 113–115.

⁶⁰ Gardiner 1905.

⁶¹ Cf. Anagnostou-Canas 2009, as well as the bibliography *ibid.*, 169, n. 1; Jördens 2010.

⁶² Cf. Jördens 2001.

⁶³ See, for example, the accidental discovery of the so-called 'Zenon Archive' from the period between 270–240 BCE in Clarysse/Vandorpe 1995, 10–35.

⁶⁴ For example, the archive of a family from Thebes, dated to the period between 317–217 BCE, was found in two clay jars. El-Amir 1959, 21–41 describes the general circumstances of the find and mentions that the documents of the head of the family and his possessions—"though possibly a coincidence"—were kept in the first jar, while those of his family and other relatives were found in the second jar (*ibid.*, 40–41).

⁶⁵ On the Apion family archive, see among others Mazza 2001.

⁶⁶ A 'house of the archives' is known from Dura Europos (third century CE on the central Euphrates), in which a graffiti-covered cellar room served as an office for a certain Nebuchelos, who probably kept his documents in a kind of built-in cupboard; cf. Rostovtzeff/Welles 1931, esp. 169–170 (with illustrations) and 184.

⁶⁷ Cf. Korte 2019, 251–257.

The prerequisite for access to an archive is competence in writing. In ancient and medieval societies, for example, this was a limited skill, with literate persons writing primarily for themselves or their peers. The question as to where archives were stored is thus fundamentally linked to that of who could access them.⁶⁸ Here, we can distinguish between places for consulting documents that are not freely accessible and require the presence of an archivist, and those that are freely accessible, such as today's (mostly) free consultation of public documents via the Internet. Access to an archive (of one's own) could be managed restrictively for competing groups of 'archons', such as in the case of a dispute over archival documents between a bishop and the cathedral chapter. In such situations, permanently appointed archivists had to ensure compliance with the restrictions on access that applied to the buildings for which they were responsible. Another example is that of jointly-used archives. In the late Middle Ages in Europe, several branches of a family would sometimes share an archive. The branches jointly regulated the archive's use and symbolically demonstrated this fact via several locks on chests, letter vaults, other objects, or places that served to store the archived documents. Accordingly, the consent of all users—as well as their keys to the locks of the respective family branches—was required to use the archive.⁶⁹

Today, both public (federal and municipal) and private archives are increasingly moving towards additionally storing documents in digital form, as this is more secure than the physical storage of originals alone. Our ancestors guarded their most precious records as best they could. Therefore, the choice of where to store archival records has been a central issue since ancient times and one conditioned by various factors.

The location of an archive was generally considered to be 'secure' by those who were able to select it as a storage place. This may have been a site regarded as being safe, unaffected by climatic changes and protected from natural disasters such as wildfires or landslides. Naturally shielded locales, such as a rocky grotto or cave, could be possible locations, although archives were more likely to be hidden in them as a deposit, as in the case of the archives hidden in a 'grotto of letters' in the Judean Desert, where refugees from the Bar Kokhba revolt in 132 CE found shelter.⁷⁰ Yet man-made containers, such as jars or boxes, could also be used (and are more likely when the intended use is that of a consultable archive). Consider, for example, the demotic archive of Totoes discovered at Deir el-Medina in two sealed jars (Fig. 3)⁷¹ or three monastic contracts dating to the fifth–sixth century CE from Labla that were deliberately wrapped in cloth and then stowed in a large jar.⁷²

Other man-made containers that were able to house an archive, however, could be much larger, as in the case of a building deliberately erected for the optimal preserva-

⁶⁸ On the restricted presence of writing cf. Frese/Keil/Krüger 2014.

⁶⁹ Cf. Morsel 1998, 294.

⁷⁰ Cf. Yadin 1962; Cuvigny 2009, 49–50, 51–52, and tables 2.6–2.7.

⁷¹ Cf. Botti 1967.

⁷² Cf. McGing 1990, 67.

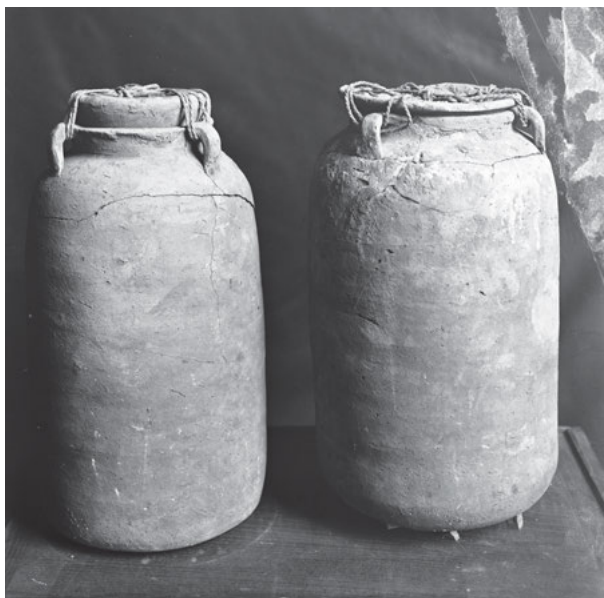


Fig. 3: Two clay jars in which the papyrus scrolls of the Totoes archive, discovered in 1905, were kept. Turin, Museo Egizio, C01790.

tion of such holdings. We see this in the archives of secular princes from the late Middle Ages, which were often stored within fortified castles. Protection of a completely different kind was offered in cases where medieval rulers entrusted their archives to monasteries: Here, security was supposed to be provided not only by literate experts, but also by the locations' special sanctity.⁷³ Late Antiquity and subsequent eras also bear witness to similar patterns of storing archival materials in places of worship symbolically charged with a protective aura.⁷⁴ Already in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt, we find public archives in which private law documents were kept, with the associated contracts concluded before local notaries. One such archive is the temple of Isis Nanaia (the so-called Nanaion), which already served as an archive in the first century.⁷⁵ Another example is formed by the five archives of Nessana in Palestine (sixth–seventh century CE), which were found in two adjoining rooms of the churches of St Mary and of Ss Sergius and Bacchus.⁷⁶ The circumstances of the discovery of the archive of Theodore, the son of Obodianos, were similar: A large number of charred papyrus scrolls were discovered in Petra in the ruins of the main church (hence their current moniker, the Petra Papyri).⁷⁷

⁷³ One of many examples is the archive of the Aragonese kings at the Royal Monastery of Santa María de Sigüenza, which housed a convent of nuns connected to the Knights Hospitaller: López Rodríguez 2007, esp. 426–434.

⁷⁴ The military archives and the base of the auxiliary troops of Dura Europos (third century CE, central Euphrates) were discovered in a temple dedicated to Artemis; cf. Rostovtzeff 1933, 310–315, esp. 312.

⁷⁵ Cf. Jördens 2010.

⁷⁶ Cf. Sijpesteijn 2013; Gascou 2009, 480–481; Stroumsa 2008, 4.

⁷⁷ Cf. Gascou 2009, 480; Jördens 2021.

In his work *On the Magistracies of the Roman State* (*De magistratibus reipublicae Romanae*), John the Lydian (*De mag.* 3.19) makes mention of an archive of court records located in the substructure of the Hippodrome in Constantinople. The premises are said to have extended from the area under the emperor's loggia (the *kathisma*) all the way to the curved tribune of the track (the *sphendonē*), and—according to the author—could be consulted by anyone who requested to see them. In 1927, archaeological excavation works led to the discovery of five small rectangular rooms under the south-eastern half of the Hippodrome (i. e., the section described by John the Lydian) that opened onto a common corridor. In addition to their close proximity to the Great Palace, which was directly connected to the Hippodrome on the north-east, the substructures under the spectator tiers of the racetrack offered plenty of storage space, a constant cool temperature, and protection against external influences and damage by fire, for instance.⁷⁸

Throughout the European Middle Ages, kings moved from one place to another in what is known as itinerant kingship. Their archives (or portions thereof) also moved with them, often stored in chests, and therefore also needed to be mobile,⁷⁹ which raises the following questions: Is the archival material housed in a small container that corresponds to it in size, or is it situated in a special room that affords the storage of additional documents? Is the container mobile and therefore able to be taken by its owner on journeys, or is it fixed in place? There is evidence that Pipe Rolls were consciously used in fief administration in England because they were easier to transport than codices. During journeys from one fief to the next, scribes would write the levies on the rolls, and the sums received would in turn be transferred to other rolls and archived after their return to the central seat of power.⁸⁰

Public archives, by contrast, were stored near an administrative or ruling centre. During the Roman period in Egypt, the central archives for depositing public documents were known to be housed in what were called 'libraries' (one example being the library of the Patrika district in Alexandria). Later, the archives of the council of Hermopolis were created, which contained valuable data on the city between the years 266–268 CE;⁸¹ the list could be extended.⁸² In late medieval Europe, the development of fixed residences for rulers led to the creation of archives in or at the rulers'

⁷⁸ Cf. Haensch 2013, 334–335; Grünbart 2018, 322–323; Kelly 1994.

⁷⁹ From the twelfth century onwards, however, the use of registers as a substitute for archives can be determined with increasing frequency. Registers are the actual beginning of portable, mobile units of stored knowledge in the style of archives. On this, see Vismann 2011, 134–135 (English translation: Vismann 2008, 76–77).

⁸⁰ Cf. Zanke 2017; Holz/Peltzer/Shirota 2019; Holz 2022, 193.

⁸¹ Cf. Drew-Bear 2009.

⁸² Similarly, the aforementioned *aerarium* in Rome, which served as a repository of important state documents, was housed not only in a sacred space (the Temple of Saturn), but also in the political heart of the Roman Republic, since the temple stood between the Capitol and the Roman Forum; on this, cf. Culham 1989, 102.

palaces, while the establishment of municipal town halls led to the creation of municipal archives, mirroring a development that had already been accomplished by less mobile rulers such as bishops. We thus see that location and access are essential to archives.

Thesis 15

The material composition and organisation of archival records reveal information about their ‘archons’.

The ‘archive’ should not be thought of apart from its custodians or masters, whom we refer to by the generic term ‘archons’. These persons control the archive in political and/or administrative terms and fulfil two important tasks: protecting archival materials against the physical decay of their material forms; and adapting them to new needs, contemporary discourses, and presumed future uses.⁸³ Within the group of ‘archons’, we can distinguish two subgroups defined by the responsibilities and rights each subgroup enjoys vis-à-vis the archive. Authorities—such as kings, princes, bishops, abbots, etc.—should be understood as seigneurial ‘archons’: They act as sovereigns over archival holdings and significantly shape an archive’s fate through their foundation of or later intervention in it. Distinct from the preceding group are the administrative ‘archons’: people who are responsible for the administration of an archive, but who can also wield considerable power in terms of their agency. An example of this latter kind of ‘archon’ is an archivist in his or her role as guardian of an official archival building, who would first of all be responsible for the archive’s physical security and integrity, as well as for the storage and conservation of its holdings. Quite often, this person was appointed as a scribe and thus responsible not only for the preservation, but also for the production of documents.⁸⁴

These ‘archons’ and the inscribed artefacts within an archive maintain relationships with one another via certain practices. The ‘archons’ possess competencies in terms of power politics,⁸⁵ and as the creators of the archives, it is they who decide—whether individually or as a group—who has access to the archives; what is to be recorded and thus handed down; and what is to be culled and consigned to oblivion.⁸⁶ In addition to the political dimension just mentioned, this filtering process within an archive can also reflect religious, financial, ideological, and aesthetic interests (cf. Thesis 16). The visible result of this exercise of power is both the archive *qua* building and the artefacts contained therein. An example of the foregoing can be

⁸³ Derrida 1995a (English translation: Derrida 1995b); cf. Wellmann 2012, 386; Wirth 2005, 22–23.

⁸⁴ For the European Middle Ages, cf. here: Hermand/Nieus/Renard 2019.

⁸⁵ Cf. Wirth 2005, 22–23.

⁸⁶ Cf. Wellmann 2012, 388–389; Esch 1985; Auer 2000.

found in the *Codex Theodosianus* (XV 14,8), where a decree on the removal of documents from an archive has been preserved. According to the decree, the verdicts pronounced by the *iudices* appointed by Magnus Maximus—a usurper whom Theodosius I defeated in 388 CE—were to be rendered invalid and removed from the *scrinia* (their original place of safekeeping).⁸⁷

The ‘archon’ is also responsible for expanding and updating the archive, charged as he is with the task of building up the latter’s holdings. Such acquisition work includes, above all, the collection and selection of inscribed artefacts, a task which brings the ‘archon’ into close contact with the guardians of such compilations (libraries, museums, etc.).⁸⁸ Other important functions such as the organisation, indexing, and analysis of archival material—not to mention making all this available to intended or authorised audiences—indicate that the ‘archon’ is no mere collector.⁸⁹ He must also react to technical and material developments, guarantee the ongoing preservation of archival materials, and ensure their future legibility. Later ‘archons’ followed the respective practices of their own times in the material reworking of written, preserved materials. Thus, medieval manuscripts sometimes contain marginalia such as reading notes, indications of order, or drawings, which allow conclusions to be drawn about the ‘archons’ themselves.⁹⁰ Archives (in the sense of artefact arrangements) often display a diversity of content and material hailing from diverse cultures, to which the respective ‘archon’ must be sensitive. One obstacle can be the removal of collected items from their original contexts. The ‘archon’ must first determine the artefacts’ provenance, then situate them within the archive, and finally prepare them for future use. It is his task to assign both structural meaning (through registration, etc.) and cultural significance to the artefacts and to construct plausible reception practices. Furthermore, he must guarantee their accessibility and use. In this way, the ‘archon’ becomes the intermediary between producers and archive users (i. e., the recipients of the archival materials) (cf. Thesis 13).

After the artefacts have been assembled in one place and a decision has been made—according to specific criteria—as to whether they should join the archive’s col-

⁸⁷ Cf. Haensch 2013, 336.

⁸⁸ Cf. Wellmann 2012, 385.

⁸⁹ Cf. note 8 above.

⁹⁰ On this, cf. Traube 1910, 6: “Even the copying of any given text by a writer is a small historical fact. Everything that this and each subsequent scribe deliberately or unconsciously adds of his own—his mistakes and corrections; his marginalia down to the simplest notice to the reader, the sign for *nota* and *require*, or the pointing hand—all these brief, almost silent intimations and signs can be interpreted as historical evidence” (our translation, German text: “Schon die Abschreibung irgend eines Schriftstellertextes ist eine kleine historische Tatsache, all das, was dieser und jeder folgende Schreiber von Eigenem absichtlich oder unbewußt hinzutut, seine Fehler und Verbesserungen, seine Randbemerkungen bis herab zum einfachsten Avis au lecteur, dem Zeichen für *nota* und *require* oder der weisenden Hand—all diese kurzen, fast stummen Winke und Zeichen können als geschichtliche Zeugnisse gedeutet werden”).

lection or be discarded, they are subject to yet a further process of organisation (cf. Thesis 16). Caution, though, is required here, as the effectiveness of modern bureaucracy and systematisation can distort our view of the archives of non-typographic societies. Thus, we find evidence for different kinds of central archives in the European Middle Ages. The most important in this respect were probably those of the papacy. Furthermore, there were also a number of highly developed archival holdings, such as the fifteenth-century treasure vault in the castle of the dukes of Savoy at Chambéry, the documents of which were distinguished by extensive classification and inventorisation. At the same time, however, numerous sacks of archival materials are documented as being kept in the same ‘vault’, but they remained unregistered, merely bearing the curt label “of no value” (*nullius valoris*).⁹¹ In rare cases—as evidenced by the example of the oldest archive directory of the Austrian dukes from Baden, dating to the end of the fourteenth century—schemes of archival organisation with collocation notes have survived. The directory in question shows the beginnings of a systematic ordering of the holdings, which were divided according to subject areas and dominions and housed in twenty-eight drawers specially marked with letters and shelf marks that included images.⁹²

Archive holdings can be classified according to their content, use, location, material composition, and other criteria, including legal content, document type or genre, and so on. Artefacts archived in this way allow conclusions to be drawn about the motivations and priorities of the ‘archon’. Through material processing—such as the affixing of seals, stamps, and other signs of authentication—the material can be changed and either increase or decrease in significance. Additionally, changes in format, layout, or standardisation can be made—for example, by applying identical book bindings—in order to mark the assembled artefacts as the property of a specific institution (Fig. 4). The transformation of the text document itself is also possible. For example, ‘archons’ could bind individual pages together in volumes for conservation reasons (Fig. 2) or cut rotuli into sections in order to store them better and insert them into the archive’s classification scheme.⁹³ Such persons thus had a very concrete bearing on the artefacts and the way they were socialised. At the same time, however, the artefacts themselves dictated how they were to be stored and preserved in terms of their affordances.⁹⁴ Scrolls, for example, were stored differently from codices in the royal administration of medieval England.⁹⁵ Clay tablets necessitated different

⁹¹ Cf. Widder 2016, 107–108; Rück 1971, 49–67; on the handling of paper cf. Meyer-Schlenkerich 2018.

⁹² Cf. Lackner 2002, 261–262.

⁹³ This happened, for example, with the so-called Salisbury Roll, a genealogical roll of the Earls of Salisbury, which was cut up and bound into a codex at a later date, presumably in the eighteenth century (Payne 1987, 189). Cf. also note 111 below. A further example of archival editing and the transformation of textual documents placed in archives are volumes containing texts that have been pasted together, so-called *tomoi synkollēsimoī*; on this, see among others Clarysse 2003.

⁹⁴ On the practice of organisation, cf. Ast et al. 2015, 698–699.

⁹⁵ While the royal administration stored rolls in bags and sacks, they did not do the same with codices, which along with rolls were stored in chests for long-term archiving. Cf. Holz 2019, 186.



Fig. 4: Material and formal unification of a historically evolved archive from the European Middle Ages. Arxiu i Biblioteca Episcopal de Vic (photo: Nikolas Jaspers).

storage conditions than did papyri. To a certain extent, the support material determined the artefacts' chances of survival.⁹⁶ Besides the inscribed material itself, the shape and number of artefacts conditioned their topological arrangement. Small, rare (and therefore highly valuable) ivory tablets, important legal documents, and similar items could be stored in wooden chests or cabinets, for example; letters on papyrus could be collected into bundles,⁹⁷ while files or large quantities of archival material in general were deposited in special storerooms or even kept jumbled together in bags or sacks without being registered at all. An exciting example of the storage of archival documents that were considered to be particularly valuable or significant in terms of their content can be found in the inventory of the Abbey of Herzogenburg in Lower Austria from 1781. It reports that while indexing the archived documents, someone came across the chapter letter of foundation from the year 1112, which had theretofore been presumed lost. After its surprising rediscovery, the document was placed in a crafted metal case with golden decoration in 1779 and subsequently kept in the archives with special care.⁹⁸

Furthermore, the frequency and intensity of an artefact's use determines how it was stored and whether it was easily accessible (cf. Thesis 14). The 'archon' had to ensure that the artefact was appropriately stored and presented and, above all, that it

⁹⁶ Cf. Esch 1985, *passim*.

⁹⁷ Cf. Fournet 2007, 688; Vanderheyden 2014, 168.

⁹⁸ Stiftsarchiv Herzogenburg, H. 4.2-F.1001/2; Penz 2004, 20.

could be used in the future. The proper storage of an artefact with respect to its materiality can inform us about the practices and motives of the ‘archon’. Lists compiled in the Mediterranean region at the beginning of the fourteenth century on behalf of local rulers shed light on this process of organising archival material. In the inventory of the royal chapel of Palermo from 1309, for example,⁹⁹ we find a complete commitment to the tradition of regarding the royal archives and the royal treasury as equal institutions, with the inventory thus listing *objets d’art*, vestments, documents, and books all together.¹⁰⁰ Within this compilation, however, the documents are listed separately and are organised according to their local affiliation (the so-called principle of pertinence) and arranged hierarchically within the respective pertinence categories into the groups *privilegia* (partly in purple), *instrumenta*, and *rescripta*. These were stored in a large chest decorated with ivory, in which the majority of the listed documents were kept together.¹⁰¹ From this storage arrangement, one can determine that the listed order according to pertinence and hierarchy represented a systematisation projected onto the collection by the ‘archons’. Three years earlier, in the Crown of Aragon, chancery officials had already compiled an inventory of all parchment documents that provided information about the king’s patrimonial possessions and which were apparently kept together in a separate container—a large chest—for this very reason.¹⁰² In 1345, another compilation was made of all the documents of the crown archives housed in the royal palace in Barcelona, which at that time was considered an independent institution. This inventory not only shows the organisation of the documents, but also notes how they were stored in cabinets or sacks, depending on their materiality (codices, parchment charters etc.).¹⁰³

Thesis 16

In archives, inscribed artefacts are filtered, coded, and transformed.

Archival materials are always undergoing processes of archival treatment and handling. Before inscribed artefacts find their way into an archive, they must first undergo a process of filtering that enables a targeted use of the texts. Only through this conscious selection does a contingent collection of writings become an archive. Subsequent to this are steps of an editorial or curatorial nature that serve to process archival materials for prospective use and thus facilitate or maintain their usability.

⁹⁹ *Tabularium regiae*, 98–103.

¹⁰⁰ On the identity of treasury and archive, see Bresslau 1912, 162.

¹⁰¹ *Tabularium regiae*, 100.

¹⁰² Cf. *Catálogo de memoriales e inventarios*, 24.

¹⁰³ Cf. *Catálogo de memoriales e inventarios*, 32.

After this initial selection and collection, further processing takes place: additional selecting (sorting and determining items for potential discarding), organising (e.g., according to format or state of preservation), rationalising (compiling inventories and indices), cataloguing (applying shelf marks/call numbers, dorsal notes, uniform bindings) and finally preserving for future recipients. Moreover, there are filtering processes that are conditioned by the creation and interpretation of meaning, the written material's state of preservation, storage capacities, and translation processes.

Due to limited capacity, 'archons' usually have an interest in sorting out duplicates. In typographic societies, duplicates are sometimes hardly worth preserving simply on account of storage capacities, with such writings being filtered out upon entering the archive. Different versions of a text, however, may enter the archive or remain in the collection if they contain additional information, which is especially true for transcripts in non-typographic societies. Often, these texts are not simply copies of something said or written, but rather contain within themselves text and layout variants indicating contexts of use.¹⁰⁴ This is particularly common in the case of medieval narrative sources, which makes it difficult to identify and reconstruct the original text when preparing a (critical) edition.

This situation can be clearly seen in the Byzantine archive from Aphroditon, which contains several documents and poems in drafts and successive versions. For example, two papyri give two versions of the same document: One version is by an Egyptian and the other by a Constantinopolitan. The second copy provides us with a unique opportunity to compare two different cultures through instances of writing, vocabulary, and idiom, since people wrote differently on the banks of the Nile than they did on the Golden Horn in the capital of the Byzantine Empire.¹⁰⁵

The intent of the 'archons' is to select and preserve, through filtering processes, those writings that fulfil the archive's purpose and can be integrated into the archive's structure. This filtering follows an inherent logic, while at the same time creating meaning, since texts are re-contextualised in this act of 'filtration'. Every archive user is therefore dependent on the selection and interpretative skills of the 'archon', who in turn discards any inscribed artefacts which he considers not (sufficiently) relevant for posterity and thus not worth preserving. In other words: The present is assembled anew in archives — 'encoded', as it were — and the future is thus anticipated.¹⁰⁶

104 On this, see Traube 1910, 7: "Even those manuscripts that seem to have lost all value because their immediate originals are still preserved and have been found can regain their own value when viewed historically" (our translation, German text: "Selbst solche Handschriften, die jeden Wert einzubüßen scheinen, da ihre unmittelbaren Vorlagen noch erhalten sind und aufgefunden wurden, können bei historischer Betrachtung ihren Wert zurückgewinnen").

105 Cf. Fournet 2018.

106 Cf. Ebeling 2016, 129.

The assessment of the relevance of inscribed artefacts changes over time. Ephemeral witnesses to everyday life that are not considered worth archiving by their contemporaries can acquire an entirely new value when the temporal distance between the past of their production and the present-day of their reception grows and they become rare witnesses to bygone practices. Today, when such accidentally preserved instances of writing that pertain to everyday life from past times are found, they are often deemed to be extraordinary and valuable cultural assets for an archive. In earlier eras, by contrast, the tendency was for ‘archons’ to admit only such inscribed artefacts that fitted into a specific archive’s structure. Monastic archives primarily collected textual witnesses of legal acts and theological/ecclesiastical works, rather than writings that pertained to everyday life of the religious (notes, recipes, sketches, instructions). When the latter happened to end up in the archive, this was often only by chance.¹⁰⁷ Thus, for example, exercise texts prepared by novices in monastic scriptoria have survived only in small numbers, often hidden amongst other bound writings. An example of this is the Reichenau exercise book, which contains among other things a Greek-Latin vocabulary list together with other (educational) content.¹⁰⁸ We must thus distinguish between intentionally stored (selected) archival material and material that has been handed down only by accident.

In the final analysis, this means that in the world of archives, oblivion is the rule, remembrance is the exception. A special case are those things and texts that are preserved not *because of*, but *despite* their lack of textual meaning. If meaning or significance is ascribed to an artefact via its materiality, or an object is otherwise intriguing enough to merit archiving, it can most certainly end up in the archive’s holdings.

Post-filtering processes of editing and curation are indispensable for the maintenance of an archive, but they can permanently modify inscribed artefacts and thus hinder the recipients’ direct access to the original. Changes to text supports can be useful for a variety of reasons. Practices such as rebinding or relocating archival records alter the material nature of the written material as well as its original arrangement *qua* artefact. The example of medieval cartularies or registers shows that what was written was often reduced to the level of textual content. In some cases, seals, monograms, and other authentication marks on charters were transferred into cartularies and thus preserved in their visual form (Figs. 1a and 1b). However, the external features of the original (a charter bearing a wax seal or lead bulla, etc.) can no longer be fully discerned even here, especially since charters and cartularies were often kept separately after the transcription of text and imagery, and the originals of the former were often not handed down. Occasionally, there are even indications in manuscript compilations as to where the original documents copied in these collections were kept. Such is the case with the note, dating to around 1490, on the cover of a fief register belong-

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Esch 1985, *passim*.

¹⁰⁸ Sankt Paul im Lavanttal, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. 86b/1.

ing to the counts of Hohenlohe: *Dise revers liegen zu Oringen im gewelbe* (“These feudal charters are located in the vault at Öhringen”).¹⁰⁹ Usually, though, there were no explicit references to the material form of the original in such copies. If the cartulary still exists today as an archival source, it provides access to the textual content—but not the materiality—of the original artefact. The aura of the original inscribed artefact also becomes lost through this process of editing. Even the most exact copy possible cannot substitute the material presence of the original for later users, since the authenticity and biography of the original inscribed artefact cannot be duplicated.

The archives of the Papal Penitentiary in Rome may serve as an example of this kind of loss, since they contain neither the plaintiffs’ petitions nor the papal missives issued in response, but only the abridged versions of successfully concluded proceedings that were recorded in the codices. The result is not only that merely a fraction of the information originally available for the proceedings remains extant, but also that the actual materiality of the texts (petitions, issued responses, dispensations, absolutions) was not archived at all. The almost palpable aura of a letter issued by the Pope himself, for example, can thus no longer be grasped in the archive.¹¹⁰ The archive concentrates and transmits a selected amount of information which only allows for limited contexts of interpretation.

The material conditions of the written records of a given archive and their durability fundamentally determine the filtering and editing processes. The role an artefact’s format plays for judging its relevance to the archive should not to be underestimated: Bound manuscripts have a better chance of being handed down than do loose notes or unusual formats, which are more likely to be discarded or have their textual content transferred onto other (more usual) media. Poorly preserved inscribed artefacts could be selected for discarding or, in the best case, handed down as waste paper. In this way, they are actually already removed from the archive, yet are still preserved for posterity (albeit in a misappropriated form). This temporally subordinate filtering process is irregular and often situational, but it is responsible for the fact that much information is lost on the level of both content and material as a result of archival processing. In other cases, poorly preserved documents, or documents that have been insufficiently secured for further preservation, are transcribed or transferred to new storage media. It also occurs that relevant information supports from different textual corpora are combined in new written media. Frequently, essential material information is then no longer preserved, with the transfer of information being prioritised at the expense of the materiality of the text, and material references between form and content being lost as a result. This can be seen, for example, in *Writhe’s Garter Book*:

¹⁰⁹ Hohenlohe-Zentralarchiv Neuenstein, GA 120, no. 5, note on the front cover of the binding. Our translation.

¹¹⁰ On this, cf. the volumes of the *Repertorium poenitentiariae Germanicum*: Schmugge 1996–2018; occasionally, documents of the Penitentiary, scattered across various archives throughout Europe, have nevertheless been preserved, but not in the archives of the Penitentiary itself: Schmugge 1995, 125.

The present-day codex contains not only a cut-up scroll, but also other heraldic and genealogical works in individual layers, all of which were originally not connected and only collated later in various stages of processing.¹¹¹

The archival processing of inscribed artefacts thus leads over time to texts being preserved either in their original material form or just as textual information. Archival materials thus undergo a process of transformation that ensures that what is written remains accessible in the future to possible users. These processes can either facilitate access to the original artefact (better retrieval, use, understanding, etc.) or enhance the distance to it (e. g., spatially through transcription).

At a very basic level, selection takes place because of the limited spatial capacity of an archive. If the amount of writing that is preserved continues to increase and the archive reaches the limits of its capacity, a selection must be made as to what is to remain preserved and what is not. Even when an archive is redesigned, relocated, or rededicated, filtering processes take place and the originally established archives only continue to exist in modified form. An unintentional filter that is difficult to control is the passage of time. Materials can be completely lost due to environmental factors (fire, water, vermin); they can also become inaccessible due to negligence on the part of the ‘archons’ (misplacing, losing, incorrect filing of holdings) or be affected by archival use (bending, folding, cutting) as well. Older textual content—those written on parchment, for instance, and no longer deemed worth keeping at a later point in time—was sometimes erased or washed away, and the material re-inscribed with new text. In special cases, we are sometimes fortunate to be able to decipher the original text that was written. One such example is Cicero’s *On the Commonwealth* (*De re publica*), which has come down to us in significant fragments unintentionally preserved via a parchment palimpsest discovered in the Vatican Library.¹¹²

Especially in the case of the contexts of transmission in non-typographical societies, where the loss of text is already quite extensive, only a fraction of the originally available information has come down to us in this way. We must therefore consider the prior selection and processing of such texts when interpreting archival documents.

Thesis 17

There is a direct correlation between the materiality of memory media, their target groups, and their chances of survival.

Within the lively research on memory carried out in recent years in the fields of cultural studies and history, the thesis has been formulated that the analysis of the materiality and concrete physical form of memory media allow for conclusions to be drawn about

¹¹¹ *Medieval Pageant. Writhe’s Garter Book*, 1.

¹¹² Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. lat. 5757 (CLA I 35).

their effects and functions.¹¹³ Following the work of the CRC 933, this postulation can be extended so as to claim that the material properties of memory media furthermore provide clues about their intended recipients. To this end, we must determine on a case-by-case basis the extent to which the intended purpose of a given memory media and the choice of its target group directly influence its design.¹¹⁴ In this context, it is useful to take into account aspects such as the size of the recipient group addressed by the memory medium and its intended duration—what has been termed its ‘time index’.¹¹⁵ Following Jan Assmann, we understand this as the factor transcending the present and referring back to various layers of the past.¹¹⁶

If a given artefact has been designed with longevity in mind, the following features seem to be called for: a durable and robust material for the support; careful and elaborate design; and a prominent spatial location, especially if a regular, constant, or cyclical use is intended. Due to this configuration, an opposition can arise between the desired lifespan of the memory medium and the particular qualities of its material support. If its material value is considered to be particularly high (for example, due to its rare occurrence), the artefact stands in danger of being destroyed through refashioning. Prominent examples from non-typographic European cultures pertain to the handling of parchment or metal. Parchment—i. e., painstakingly prepared animal skins that served as inscribable material—were a precious commodity in the Middle Ages and were thus often reused, even as a kind of pre-pulp-based ‘waste paper’ on account of their sturdiness.¹¹⁷ Inscriptions made of bronze or even gold fared much worse because of their monetary value; it is often only the wording in copied form that has come down to us rather than the original inscribed artefact, which was usually molten down. According to the late medieval vernacular versions of the *Marvels of the City of Rome* (*Mirabilia urbis Romae*), the Dioscuri (Castor and Pollux) are said to have specifically revealed that the cult statues of them that were erected on the Quirinal Hill—which in the Middle Ages were incorrectly identified as depicting Praxiteles and Phidias, sculptors who were also incorrectly described as philosophers—were not to be made of metal, lest they fall prey to the Romans’ malice and greed.¹¹⁸ With regard to epigraphy, reference should be made to the *litterae aureae*, the gilded bronze letters of ancient Roman inscriptions, whose former existence is mostly only indicated by the dowel holes of the individual letters; this led to the ‘development’ and decipherment of a separate hole-based alphabet.¹¹⁹ Exotic ivory diptychs or works made

113 Cf. Erll 2004.

114 Cf. Allgaier et al. 2019, 190–193; Ebeling 2016, 127–128.

115 On the factors of the size of the recipient group and the duration of information storage, see Allgaier et al. 2019, 188–189.

116 J. Assmann 2018, 20.

117 Cf. Becker/Licht/Schneidmüller 2015; for research on fragments and waste material, see Neuheuser/Schmitz 2015.

118 *Codice topografico*, 131.

119 Cf. Alföldy 1990 and 1995; Posamentir/Wienholz 2012; Posamentir 2017.

of rock crystal, on the other hand, lent themselves to being reworked into reliquaries and (re-)inscribed because of their materiality, which facilitated their preservation, albeit in modified form.¹²⁰

By contrast, memory media with a shorter time index are usually produced from more ephemeral materials. This category includes, for example, pragmatic memory media used on an occasional basis or only for a singular purpose, such as a notepad or shopping list, both of which function as one-time memory aids.¹²¹ As a rule, we do not find elaborate material design here for lack of both a broad target group and a prospective future use.

The value of a physical support—which is by no means absolute, but rather tied to cultural conventions—not only points back to its target group and the meaning attributed to the artefact, but also to the social or political position of whoever commissioned the artefact and to his or her economic resources. Materiality thus builds an additional communicative bridge between the producers and recipients of memory media.

A central analytical category in all the examples discussed here is the concept of affordance, which refers to the respective options of handling the artefact which the latter offers to users on the basis of its material qualities.¹²² Ideally, then, the materiality of (labelled) memory media reveals which target groups or recipients are meant to handle the artefact; where/when/how such handling should occur according to its creators; in which praxeological contexts it is to be embedded; and in which topological environment(s) it is to be integrated.

Thesis 18

Writing on memory media can shape memory and permanently bridge the gap between intention and reception.

In the context of the issues discussed in Theses 13 and 17, the labelling of memory media plays an exceptional role in helping to guarantee the producers' intended commemorative effects and in allowing for the potential shaping of memory. In this sense, writing creates unambiguity and ensures the targeted use or adequate reception of the message of memory media. While the intentions associated with the production of an unlabelled artefact sometimes remain ambiguous, writing generally facilitates the identification of an artefact-based commemorative endowment.¹²³

This situation is particularly (though not exclusively) evident in the realm of funerary practices. Many cultures mark grave sites not only in purely iconic ways—e. g.,

¹²⁰ Cf. Gerevini 2014.

¹²¹ Cf. Allgaier et al. 2019, 186–191.

¹²² Cf. Fox/Panagiotopoulos/Tsouparopoulou 2015.

¹²³ Cf. Allgaier et al. 2019, 197–200.

crosses and other religious symbols—but also via explicit inscriptions that mention the name (and in some cases, other important details) of the deceased person. This can sometimes occur in a highly developed manner, such as in Ancient Egypt, where the textual genre of ‘autobiography’ emerged as early as the third millennium BCE and focused in particular on an individual’s good personal qualities and the successful holding of office.¹²⁴ Ancient Egypt is likewise the source of the custom of ‘appeals to the living’, by which people who would later pass by the graves would be asked to say a prayer for those buried there, which was believed to provide the departed with useful goods in the afterlife.¹²⁵

Similarly, even without any graphic signs, Christian tombstones and funerary slabs may, through cultural coding, inspire those who view them to pause, remember, and possibly say a prayer simply on account of their material design and location within the sacred space of a church or in special enclosed outdoor spaces, such as churchyards or cemeteries. Yet it is only through the inscribing of text that the memory is explicitly controlled in terms of how the inscriber wishes the dead to be commemorated—i. e., what ritual forms are to be used, what character traits are to be recalled, what times are to be set aside for this commemoration, etc.¹²⁶

Inscriptions on commemorative media thus increase the likelihood that the artefacts will be recognised as bearers of memory and used in accordance with their intended purpose. What is written on commemorative media is therefore potentially suitable for bridging the gap between the intentions of the commissioners, donors, producers, or inscribers on the one hand, and the concerns of the recipients on the other hand, as discussed in Thesis 13.

In this sense, (commemorative) inscriptions secure a certain way of dealing with commemorative media, yet without necessarily preventing unintended misuse. Admittedly, compliance with the written message depended to a considerable extent on the underlying historical conditions. Secular rulers as well as ecclesiastical authorities could fall into disgrace for political or religious reasons, and their memory media could be subjected to the practice of *damnatio memoriae*.¹²⁷ But in such cases, the memory medium itself often survived in its material form, with only the name of the commemorated person being erased or removed. Additionally, after the passage of some time, both the knowledge necessary for interpreting the inscription and the social conventions indispensable for the commemoration could become lost or disappear entirely. Well into the High Middle Ages, the majority of epigraphic evidence from Roman Antiq-

¹²⁴ Most recently, see Stauder-Porchet/Frood/Stauder 2020.

¹²⁵ Cf. Desclaux 2017.

¹²⁶ On the broad field of Christian memorial culture from the perspective of epigraphic studies: Kajanto 1980; Handley 2003; Treffort 2007; Dresken-Weiland/Angerstorfer/Merkt 2012; Clemens/Merten/Schäfer 2015; Jong 2019.

¹²⁷ On the violent handling of written evidence, see Kühne-Wespi/Oschema/Quack 2019; on *damnatio memoriae*, see the references mentioned in note 49 above.

uity could only be understood by an educated elite of monks and clerics, as can be seen from the provenance of the majority of epigraphic sylloges from the period up to around 1200 CE. Due to the complicated administrative, onomastic, and military systems of abbreviation, further reductions in later comprehensibility must be taken into account. Above all, however, the epigraphic legacies of Antiquity were deprived of their former social and, quite often, material or architectural environments, which led to reinterpretations and recontextualisations (for example, under Christian influence).¹²⁸

Thus, even inscriptions were not always able to prevent memory media from entering a new stage of their artefact biographies and from being reused as spolia in other semantic contexts. On the contrary: Epigraphic fragments, such as those bearing ancient names, guaranteed the material, praxeological, and topological transformation of memory media. These were suitable, for example, as tituli for saints' graves, integrated into Christian sacred spaces or re-used in complex referential systems as ornaments of medieval church façades due to their aesthetic and symbolic capacities, for which the inscribed artefacts from bygone times were sometimes even fixed upside down.¹²⁹

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Abbreviations and Sigla

CLA I *Codices Latini Antiquiores. A Palaeographical Guide to Latin Manuscripts Prior to the Ninth Century*, vol. 1, ed. by Elias A. Lowe [and Bernhard Bischoff], Oxford 1934.

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¹²⁸ On this phenomenon, see Greenhalgh 1989; Clemens 2003; Esch 2005; Greenhalgh 2009.

¹²⁹ See the example of the cathedral of Pisa in von der Höh 2006, 386–412; on the phenomenon and practice of taking and using spolia in general, see the references mentioned above in note 56.

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