

# Unleashing Knowledge and Structuring Notes

Archaeological “archives” and their historiographies

15-16 May 2025

Organized by Rubina Raja (Aarhus University)

The Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters, Copenhagen



GERDA HENKEL STIFTUNG  
CARLSBERG FOUNDATION

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*Excavation Site.* [Between 1898 and 1946] Photograph. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <[www.loc.gov/item/2019698578/](http://www.loc.gov/item/2019698578/)>

### Front cover

Excavation of the tomb of Malkû, 1937 © Palmyra Portrait Project and Rubina Raja, courtesy of the Yale Babylonian collection, Yale University

## Outline

Over the last decade, archaeological archives have gained renewed attention in scholarship due to several factors, such as a heightened awareness of the importance of the decolonization of archaeology as a field also through historiographic research, the location of world heritage in conflict zones, as well as the rapidly growing climate crisis, which also impacts the tangible remains of the past. Archaeological notes and documentation, however, have always had the interest of scholars working in the periods after the time from which the material itself stems. Such “archival material”, usually not originally intended to become actual archives and often found in the shape of unorganized notes and scattered documentation spread across several nation states and held by a mix of private or public institutions, has long been known often to hold a plethora of knowledge. Knowledge which is not limited to solely the archaeology, the archaeological material or the archaeological process. Most often, however, such knowledge, in a broader sense, is not easily understood and unleashed. It will usually take experts with very particular interests, skills and knowledge – both pertaining to the archaeology and history of the material, the place(s), the people(s) as well as the historiographic contextualization of the material – in order to locate and communicate the content of such archives in a meaningful manner. Yet archive archaeology remains a field that is not well defined and such archival material often ends up orphaned between interested researchers and the places that have become the custodians of the material.

Through a set of contributions offered by experts within their various fields, this conference will focus on the advances made in the field over the last decades and the challenges that such archival material still leaves us with and which we struggle to find ways of dealing with in a uniform way, which in turn would allow for comparisons across archives and their materials. The conference will cover material from excavations undertaken in the 19th and

20th centuries in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East. The conference will also address the issues of soft power involved in archive archaeology, a power which institutions holding often unprocessed materials have over such materials, which frequently have been entrusted to them by coincidence. How do we as an academic community move forward in a quest to make archival materials available to all interested and ensure that it is published and enters the scholarly debates, while respecting the content of the material as well as working ethically with it?

There is an immense potential for better understanding archaeological practice of the 19th and 20th centuries through such material, which also offers further openings into fields such as mapping developing research interests, and personal and political networks – competition and alignment – through researching and sometimes digitising such archival material. However, such information and its implications also put a particular responsibility on the researchers dealing with archival materials. The conference will therefore also seek to address the varieties of methodologies and considerations, which experts have applied and made in the course of their research.



**Programme: Thursday 15 May**

8:30–9:00 Coffee and tea (3rd floor)

9:00–9:30 *Unleashing Knowledge and Structuring Notes: Archaeological  
“archives” and their historiographies*  
Rubina Raja (Aarhus University)**Chair: Rubina Raja**9:30–10:20 *Archival Backdirt*  
Jen Baird (Birkbeck, University of London)10:20–11:10 *From Archive to Site Report (and back again). The development of  
Cypriot archaeology in the context of its archival footprint.*  
Thomas Kiely (British Museum)11:10–12:00 *Reconstructing the ‘Minoan Room’ using the Ashmolean’s Sir Arthur  
Evans Archive*  
Andrew Shapland (Ashmolean Museum)  
and Renée Trepagnier (University of Bristol)

12:00–13:00 Lunch (3rd floor)

**Chair: Olympia Bobou**13:00–13:50 *Archaeology in 19th century Greece through the notes of a state official*  
Yannis Galanakis (University of Cambridge)  
and Polina Kapsali (University of Cambridge)13:50–14:40 *Access, legacy and power: the case of the BIRI archives*  
Konstantina Georgiadou (British University of Bahrain)  
and Amalia Kakissis (British School of Athens)

14:40–15:10 Coffee (3rd floor)

15:10–17:45 **Visit to Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek**18:00 **Speakers’ Dinner** (Delphine, Vesterbrogade 40)

**Programme: Friday 16 May**

8:30–9:00 Coffee and tea (3rd floor)

**Chair: Filiz Tütüncü Çağlar**9:00–9:50 *Lost Records, Marginalized Sites: Archival Gaps in Seleucia and Apamea*  
Michael Blömer (University of Münster), Olympia Bobou (Aarhus University), Eleanor Neil (Aarhus University), and Rubina Raja (Aarhus University)9:50–10:40 *Mapping the Field: Herzfeld's Sketchbooks from the 1907-1908 Excursion in the Euphrates-Tigris Region*  
Miriam Kühn (Museum für Islamische Kunst, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin)

10:40–11:10 Coffee (3rd floor)

11:10–12:00 *Managing Knowledge in Past and Present Times – the Case of Shiloh*  
Birte Lundgreen (Copenhagen Business School)

12:00–13:00 Lunch (3rd floor)

**Chair: Eleanor Neil**13:00–13:50 *Al Mina, Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum, and the Beazley Archive and Its Pottery Database: Advantages of 45 Years of Recording Objects*  
Thomas Mannack (University of Oxford)13:50–14:40 *Reassembling Gerasa: Urban archaeology's role between geopolitics, regional trajectories and local micro-power*  
Rubina Raja (Aarhus University)

14:40–15:10 Coffee (3rd floor)

**Chair: Miriam Kühn**15:10–16:00 *The Egyptological Archives of the University of Milan: Work in Progress and Future Challenges*  
Patrizia Piacentini (Università degli Studi di Milano)16:00–16:50 *Theodore Macridy: The Devout Servant of Ottoman Archaeology*  
Filiz Tütüncü Çağlar (Aarhus University)**Chair: Rubina Raja**16:50–17:15 *End discussion*17:15 **Reception at the Academy**

## Archival Backdirt

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Is working in archaeological archives the contemporary equivalent of digging in the backdirt of other archaeologists? Archaeological archives can be rich resources, holding as they do important and often unpublished data. But, they can also be hoards of knowledge which has not been attended to: failures of a disciplinary duty of care, in which archaeologists of the present need to labour in the mistakes of others by sifting through what has been, effectively, discarded. This paper examines such discard in order to scrutinise archaeological labour undertaken by local peoples in the Mandate-era Middle East, considering the affordances both of archives and of excavations. In particular, it will look at the ways incidental finds from this archival backdirt reveal of the practices key to but usually missing from the history of archaeology's "Big Digs", including the agency of workers and child labour, and asks how we might deal sensitively with such ignored stories.

## From Archive to Site Report (and back again). The development of Cypriot archaeology in the context of its archival footprint

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Archaeology's evolution as a distinct, self-conscious and perhaps self-referential practice within Europeanised intellectual discourses has commonly been presented in a teleological manner – framed by notions of 'western progress' from casual or chaotic excavation, poor record keeping, and arbitrary modes of interpretation, to the systematic discipline of the modern era. The emergence of the site report as the authoritative source of information about archaeological discoveries and interpretations – written in the third person, eschewing unnecessary personal or narrative elements – is commonly seen as 'natural' culmination of a slow and painful process of imposing control on what the scholar John Myres (writing in the context of Cyprus) described as the 'mischievous pastime' of archaeology. This 'internalist' model of progress has been challenged from the perspective of the imperial and nationalistic agenda influencing archaeology's development, but far less attention has been paid to the complex evolution of recording and interpretation in the field as revealed through archival sources. These offer unique insights on material and quotidian /real time archaeological practices and, crucially, local realities (not least the contribution of local communities) but also question traditional notions of scientific progress rooted in prejudice about past excavation and collection. Drawing in particular on the rich archives of the British Museum, this paper explores the 'evolution' of C19th Cypriot archaeology from travellers letters, journals and photographs to recognisably modern field journals and museum registers.

## Reconstructing the ‘Minoan Room’ using the Ashmolean’s Sir Arthur Evans Archive

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The Sir Arthur Evans Archive at the Ashmolean Museum holds the largest collection of archival materials related to the life and archaeological work of Sir Arthur Evans, the 20th century excavator of Knossos on Crete. Many of the items in the Archive directly relate to Evans’s publications, from early hand-written drafts to paste-ups of illustrations and annotated proofs. The Archive is as much a record of the physical production of Evans’s publications as it is an insight into the excavations at Knossos. The central role of Evans’s publications in the Archive has been explored in a recent research and digitisation project about the British School at Athens’s 1936 Jubilee Exhibition at the Royal Academy in London. Evans, assisted by Mercy Money-Coutts, was invited to curate a ‘Minoan Room’ using objects from the Ashmolean and original drawings and photographs of Knossos which are now part of the Archive. The Archive also contains many of the original exhibition labels which seem to be recycled from publication proofs and original drawings. This paper will discuss the ways this project has attempted to organise, understand and digitally reconstruct Evans’s work in the exhibition. It will also discuss the importance of collaboration with partner institutions, such as the BSA, in the archival reassembly and historic contextualisation of the exhibition. Using the 1936 exhibition project as a case study, this paper will interrogate some of the observations and challenges of the Sir Arthur Evans Archive and discuss how to best study and showcase its archival materials.

## Archaeology in 19th century Greece through the notes of a state official

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This paper stems from our ongoing project to transcribe, comment, and publish the official diary of Panagiotis Eustratiades, General Ephor of Antiquities of Greece from 1864 to 1884, a crucial period with regards to the shaping of archaeological practice in this country and more broadly. We introduce the writer of these records, the problems relating to their study, and our efforts to structure the information they contain while also aiming to unleash new knowledge about the history of archaeology and, more importantly, the formation of its practice within the social environments of the period in question. We consider the shaping of archaeological practice as the result of historically situated interactions among people, places, objects, ideologies and institutions (both official and backstreet, operating at different levels). We, therefore, see its transformation as situated in the intersection of such interactions and relations. By doing so, we shift attention away from the grand narratives of archaeological exploration to the level of microhistory—an approach which places emphasis on the investigation of relations at a human-centred level, while still maintaining an interest in addressing bigger questions about society. Despite numerous challenges, archives are ideal and essential for critical micro-historiographic research. Through selected case studies, we discuss changes in archaeological practice and in how the stories we tell about the 19th century must be rethought as a result.

## Access, legacy and power: the case of the BIRI archives

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The British International Research Institutes (BIRI) are a network of research centres in the arts, humanities, and social sciences of the Mediterranean, the Middle East and North Africa, East Africa and Central Asia. Throughout their century-long history, they have gathered an extensive range of historically significant archives, including archaeological collections, photographic, architectural, and cartographic materials. Additionally, these archives encompass the corporate records of research conducted by individual BIRI and personal collections of scholars who have contributed data to one or more of these institutions.

In 2022, a collaborative initiative among institutions commenced with the aim of establishing standardised methodologies to enable unified access to, and collective querying of, their archival resources. This endeavour seeks to uncover and provide access to previously hidden parts of archives, fostering connections and insights that were historically unattainable. Beyond the technological advancements required to achieve this, a series of critical archival decisions must be addressed, regarding the selection, prioritisation, and inclusion of materials acknowledging their implications for the future of research in these regions.

Recognising the legacy of the implicit influence wielded by archivists and academics who created and managed the BIRI collections, as well as the distinct socio-political contexts of the institutions that shaped the current state of the archives, this paper critically discusses contemporary practices in creating an open access digital repository. By exploring the interplay between technological frameworks and archival strategies, it seeks to illuminate the challenges and opportunities inherent in creating equitable, inclusive, and accessible digital repositories.

## Lost Records, Marginalized Sites: Archival Gaps in Seleucia and Apamea

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Seleucia in Pieria and Apamea, once “sister cities” of the Tetrapolis, share intertwined yet divergent archival trajectories that illustrate the complexities of working with fragmented archaeological records. Both cities attracted the attention of early European travellers and were subjects of archaeological investigations in the 1930s. However, the archival legacies of these endeavours have left significant gaps that shape contemporary understandings of their histories.

Seleucia, overshadowed by Antioch, was treated as a secondary concern in the Princeton University excavations of the 1930s. Its archival material, while detailed in some respects, remains under-represented, and the site has yet to benefit from significant re-assessment. Apamea, by contrast, faced the loss of archival material due to World War II, including field notes and artifacts from Belgian missions. However, Apamea has continued to be excavated and explored, creating a detailed understanding of the city, despite the gaps in the historiographical information.

This paper examines the ways present-day scholars engage with and interpret archival materials—or their absence—in constructing knowledge about these sites. Drawing on the conference themes, it interrogates how gaps in archival material influence the methodologies and historiographies of archaeological practice. What does it mean for one site to be marginalized within its own archive and another to reconstruct its identity despite archival destruction? By engaging with these questions, this paper explores the broader implications of fragmented archives for archaeological practice and the ways scholars can navigate the challenges of incomplete or marginalized records to construct meaningful narratives.



## Mapping the Field: Herzfeld's Sketchbooks from the 1907-1908 Excursion in the Euphrates-Tigris Region

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In 1907-1908, Friedrich Sarre, accompanied by Ernst Herzfeld, undertook an archaeological excursion in the Euphrates-Tigris region with the aim of documenting Islamic monuments. This undertaking resulted in eight sketchbooks by Herzfeld, which are currently stored in the Samarra Excavation Archive at the Museum für Islamische Kunst in Berlin. These sketchbooks provide a unique perspective on the methods and approaches to surveying landscapes and monuments in the early twentieth century. The journey culminated in a four-volume publication (1911), laid the groundwork for the Samarra excavations (1911–1913), and expanded the museum's collection through numerous acquisitions.

This paper will explore the knowledge embedded in Herzfeld's sketches, highlighting both the published material and the unpublished details preserved in his notes. It will examine how different sources from the journey – photographs, publications, notes and objects – can be synthesised to provide a more nuanced understanding of the research and its impact on archaeological practice and the historiography of Islamic art in the early twentieth century. The paper will also address the archival history of the eight sketchbooks, examining their preservation in this very specific museum context. In the final section, the paper will consider the political and imperial dimensions of the surveying and excavation of Islamic monuments, exploring how the aims and methods of the journey were influenced by wider political agendas and how these activities intersected with imperial interest in the region at the time.

## Managing Knowledge in Past and Present Times – the Case of Shiloh

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The site of Shiloh (Khirbet Seilun) in Palestine has been excavated several times over the past 100 years. However, the first excavation, during the British Mandate, was carried out by a team of Danish researchers and, as was the norm at the time, the majority of the finds, diaries, photos etc were brought to the Danish National Museum. The Danish excavation was fully published in the 1960s and 1980s, but the archival material has never been scrutinized thoroughly.

The Danish excavation at Shiloh was led by Hans Kjær (1873-1932), curator at the National Museum in Copenhagen, and lasted three field campaigns (1926-1932). But the initiator of the project was the historian of religion dr.phil. Aage Schmidt (1874-1952), who gathered support from a group of Danish clergymen and the businessman H.P. Hjerl Hansen (1870-1946). Hjerl Hansen eventually secured the excavation financially. Thus, the excavation was shaped by a potent cocktail of scientific goals as well as biblical readings and entrepreneurial efforts. Through an analysis of unpublished archival material, we can learn more about this, and also about collaboration with local citizens, from whom the land was purchased, and local workers who were essential for carrying out the excavation but are hardly mentioned in the official publications.

Today, Shiloh, located in the West Bank and surrounded by an Israeli settlement, is almost inaccessible. The legacy data is therefore of uttermost importance to be able to present a more inclusive picture of how archaeological knowledge was constructed at Shiloh and who contributed to it.

## **Al Mina, Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum, and the Beazley Archive and Its Pottery Database: Advantages of 45 Years of Recording Objects**

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The article will deal with a project planned with the British Museum, the Beazley Archive Pottery Database, and contributors to Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum. Finds from Al Mina, now in Turkey, are widely dispersed for historical reasons and can be found in the British Museum in London, the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, the Museum of Classical Archaeology in Cambridge, Eton College, and diverse regional collections. The project will endeavour to use the information stored in the Beazley Archive, photographs, sketches, and notes, and the methodology established by CVA, a standardised way of describing and recording fragments, and the Beazley Archive Database with its controlled sets of iconographical terms and huge amount of data, to trace and record those fragments.

## **Reassembling Gerasa: Urban archaeology's role between geopolitics, regional trajectories and local micro-power**

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The Decapolis city Gerasa, today considered one of the best preserved sites in the Middle East with remains mainly from the Roman and Late Antique periods, has been one of scholarly focus for more than a hundred years. Archaeology at the site has been driven by various agendas over the decades, which all one way or the other have been influenced by the geopolitical situation, e. g. the period shortly before dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the institutionalisation of the Mandate regions and post WW2 peace. This contribution reconsiders some of the archaeology undertaken at Gerasa in a geopolitical bird's eye perspective and looks at how such shifting geopolitical situations have influenced the archaeology undertaken and published from the site.

## The Egyptological Archives of the University of Milan: Work in Progress and Future Challenges

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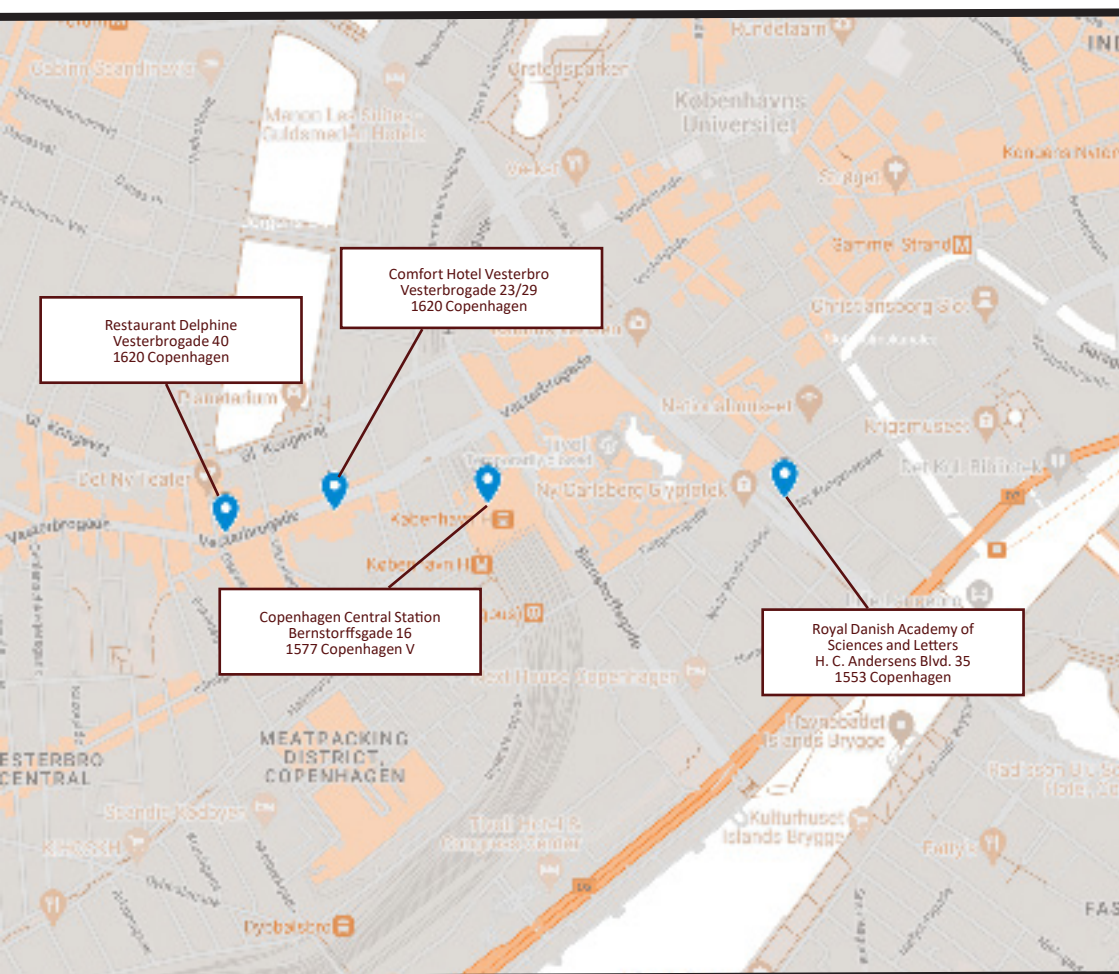
In the Archives of the University of Milan are preserved many documents related to the activities of renowned Egyptologists of the 19th and 20th centuries, as well as of people who travelled in Egypt or worked there in that period, leaving interesting memories and images of the Egyptian people, sites and museums. As an example, many letters that A. Mariette sent to H. Brugsch, a great number of notes, drawings, photographs and journals by V. Loret, significant documents by P. Lacau, archaeological and historical notes, photographs and letters by Varille, a huge quantities of archival material by of B.V. Bothmer, and of other egyptologists and travellers will be illustrated during the communication. The objective is to show how and why we need to use their archives today to better understand the context in which they operated in Egypt and abroad, their cultural bias, and their role in the development of Egyptology, but also to set the basis for further archaeological and historical research. Another focal point is the need for an international cooperation and for the communication among archives, both egyptological and historical, diplomatic or personal. We have already developed some projects in this direction, but the network has to be broadened to better understand the ties or the controversies among the scholars of the past and the new, postcolonial perspectives of the contemporary ones.

## Theodore Macridy: The Devout Servant of Ottoman Archaeology

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This paper investigates the life and legacy of Theodore Macridy (1872-1940), a seminal figure in the history of archaeology in the late Ottoman Empire. Serving both the Ottoman Imperial Museum and its successor, the İstanbul Archaeological Museums, for nearly four decades, Macridy was a museum curator, archaeologist, and scholar who persistently sought to share his expertise on an international scale and carve a niche for himself in the scholarly scene. A self-taught archaeologist with substantial knowledge of classical antiquity, Macridy expanded his expertise into Ancient Near Eastern, Byzantine, and Islamic art and archaeology. After retiring, he established the Benaki Museum in Athens, extending his influence into Greece and continuing his work in the field of museology until his death. His career reflects his dedication to fostering archaeology and art history across the Aegean and the Middle East. Drawing on a rich collection of archival material, this study sheds light on his scholarly persona and the ways in which it mirrored the significant cultural transformations of his time. It also reveals how his extensive correspondences and field reports provide a nuanced understanding of issues related to patrimony, identity, and belonging. This paper concludes by emphasizing Macridy's role in shaping the trajectory of archaeological discourse through his interactions with European scholars, thereby situating him within the broader scientific community of his era.

## Venues



## Organizer



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## Conference Webpage

<https://urbnet.au.dk/news/events/2025/unleashing-knowledge>



American Colony. Photo Department, photographer. *Northern views. The excavations at Bethshean. Excavations in progress.* [Between 1921 and 1933] Photograph. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <[www.loc.gov/item/2019695237/](http://www.loc.gov/item/2019695237/)>.

**Book of abstracts**

Unleashing Knowledge and Structuring Notes: Archaeological “archives” and their historiographies

**Organizer:**

Rubina Raja (Aarhus University)