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The logic of archival authenticity: ISO 15489 and the varieties of forgeries in archives

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According to ISO 15489, the international standard on records management, the four main characteristics of authoritative records are reliability, integrity, usability and authenticity. In this article, the traits of an ideal record as specified by ISO 15489 are discussed by looking at the opposite of an authentic record – a forgery. By examining the varieties of forgeries found in archives, ranging from forgeries of details to forgeries of entire documents both by record creators and users, the argument is put forth that the difference between an authentic and reliable record and a forgery is not at all obvious. Since forgeries are a regrettable evil of an archive, instead of trying to fix authenticity, more thought should be spared on users' and archivists' attitudes towards forgeries and how inauthentic records should be handled in an archive.

Authenticity, n.

A record is authentic 'when it is the document it claims to be. Proving a record's authenticity does not make it more reliable than when it was created. It only warrants that the record does not result from any manipulation, substitution, or falsification occurring after the completion of its procedure of creation [...]'.[1]

In an archival context, a record is authentic when it is what it claims to be. The truthfulness of the content of the record is irrelevant for the concept of authenticity, and instead pertains to the concept of reliability. But, as with reliability, the authenticity of records is connected to the trust users extend to an archive. It is hoped that users assume that records in archives are reliable and authentic. By guaranteeing authenticity, trust between users and the archive itself could be fostered and strengthened.[2]

Guarding the authenticity of archives seems to be one of the duties of an archivist. According to Heather MacNeil, one responsibility of an archivist is 'to safeguard the authenticity of records held in archival custody [...]'.[3] The International Council on

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Archives Code of Ethics states that 'archivists should protect the authenticity of documents during archival processing, preservation and use'.[4] Ideally, an archive should only hold authentic records.[5] But how is authenticity of archives established in the first place?

Context and archival description

Archival description is a process that fixes the context in which records were created in order to gain intellectual and physical control over the records and to facilitate collection management and information exchange.[6] Yet, the constructability of archival context can also be harnessed to aid a presumption that a record is authentic based on the presumption that the other records it had been filed with are authentic.

Based on the assumption of authenticity, the authenticity of records in their aggregation on the one hand and of the individual record on the other hand is safeguarded by keeping records by the same creator together in their original order. In this way, two vital aspects of archival authenticity, identity and integrity, are maintained.[7] By describing records, a partial intellectual control[8] over the records is formed. This does not mean that the records are authenticated through archival description or that their presumed authenticity is tested in any way. The authenticity of the records is only assumed. This method, though time-saving when faced with the sheer number of records created each year, is problematic because forgeries in archives gain credibility through this tacit assumption of authenticity through context.[9]

The authenticity of a record is not just presumed because of the records it is archived with, but because of the alleged trustworthiness of the archive as a whole. The archive is considered trustworthy by users and this trust extends to the authenticity of its entire holdings. Therefore records in the archive are held to be authentic because the archive as an institution lends them authenticity.[10]

Concepts of authenticity in an archival context are closely connected to notions of trust and trustworthiness. Anneli Sundqvist researched trust formation in record systems and argued that trust is not something that can be created. Instead, trust is given by someone even though the information provided on the subject is not perfect and complete. Giving trust is therefore risky and interdependent as well as impermanent, and trustworthiness is itself socially negotiated and susceptible to change.[11]

Trust in the authenticity of records is connected to their contextual properties. In their originating environment, little information has to be given to garner trust in them, but the farther they are located from their originating environment, the more information needs to be provided to make them understandable in their context. Furthermore, authenticity is contingent on a subjective set of criteria of the established norm of a time and place. Something is proclaimed to be authentic with regards to a standard of what this object is supposed to look like.[12] As a result, authenticity is never fixed or certain but is instead a process.[13]

In this article, I discuss the traits of an ideal record as specified by ISO 15489, by looking at the opposite of an authentic record – a forgery. By examining the varieties of forgeries found in archives, ranging from forgeries of details to forgeries of entire documents both by record creators and users, I argue that the difference between an authentic and reliable record and a forgery is not at all obvious. Since forgeries are a regrettable evil of an archive, instead of trying to fix authenticity, more thought should be spared on users' and archivists' attitudes towards forgeries and how inauthentic records should be handled in an archive.

ISO 15489 and an adequate record

According to ISO 15489, the international standard on records management, an adequate record is one that has four specific characteristics: usability, which means that the record is retrievable and can be interpreted; integrity, which means that the record is 'complete and unaltered';[14] reliability, which means that what the record states is accurate; and authenticity, which is, as already mentioned, the state of undisputed origin.[15]

ISO defined authenticity as follows:

> An authentic record is one that can be proven
>
> a) to be what it purports to be,
> b) to have been created or sent by the person purported to have created or sent it, and
> c) to have been created or sent at the time purported.
>
> To ensure the authenticity of records, organizations should implement and document policies and procedures which control the creation, receipt, transmission, maintenance and disposition of records to ensure that records creators are authorized and identified and that records are protected against unauthorized addition, deletion, alteration, use and concealment.[16]

The ISO definition of authenticity organises the concept with three parameters: identity, time, and the essence of the record itself.[17] Sub-characteristic a), 'to be what it purports to be',[18] is especially confusing, since if the record is what it purports to be, it would follow that the record was also created by the person purporting to have created it, at the time it was purported to have been created. The sub-characteristics b) and c) could therefore be subsumed in a). Additionally, the definition of authenticity blurs with the definition of the other core characteristics of an adequate record. Sub-characteristic c) pertains to the temporal aspect of a record. The record should have been 'created or sent at the time purported'.[19] Yet, this is also a feature of reliability:

> Records should be created at the time of the transaction or the incident to which they relate, or soon afterwards, by individuals who have direct knowledge of the facts or by instruments routinely used within the business to conduct the transaction.[20]

Reliability as a characteristic of an adequate record is difficult for archivists to work with, because the assumption behind it is that records should state what is true; or, as Leopold von Ranke said: 'bloß zeigen, wie es eigentlich gewesen'[21] – the record should just state how it really happened. Beside the fact that this implies a level of objectivity that is impossible for a human being to attain, it remains questionable how an archivist would be able to check a record's reliability.[22]

Sub-characteristic a) and the short passage under the sub-characteristics, which states 'that records are protected against unauthorized […] alteration […]',[23] overlap with the definition of integrity:

> The integrity of a record refers to its being complete and unaltered. It is necessary that a record be protected against unauthorized alteration.[24]

If the record was altered in the past without the necessary authorisation to do so, it would follow that it is not what it purports to be (sub-characteristic a) of the definition of authenticity).

Forgeries, according to how much of the record was forged, fall short of one or more of the four core characteristics of ISO 15489. Every forgery is useable, since its ultimate use is one of the prerequisites of creating a forgery. But every forgery is also inauthentic, although not every sub-characteristic applies. No forgery actually discloses that it is a forgery, so a) applies to all forgeries. Some forgers falsify the date or the identity of the person who supposedly wrote the record (sub-characteristics b) and c)). This means that, depending on the kind of forgery, the reliability and the integrity of the record is most often also impaired.

The idea of the verification of authenticity would be neither helpful nor realistic and would promise something to stakeholders which is impossible, since even if the record is theoretically authentic when it enters the archive, it can be altered afterwards. An archive will never be full of completely authentic records and users will never be absolutely sure that the records they are looking at are what they purport to be. To quote Laura Millar: 'We make a folly of our work by pretending to a totality we can never achieve'.[25] No matter how much evidence is piled up in favour of the authenticity of a record, it will never be possible to prove it once and for all. The *Donation of Constantine*[26] and other forgeries had been held to be authentic for centuries before they were found to be forgeries. Histories had been constructed based on the belief that these sources are authentic and their content true.[27]

ISO 15489 defined its understanding of authenticity by reflecting on the requirements of an ideal authentic record. In the next section I will analyse variations of records that fall short of these ideals and are considered inauthentic. By examining a number of forgeries based on the documentary part that has been forged, I hope to get a novel understanding of the connections of inauthenticity and authenticity.

Documentary forgeries

There are many crimes that can be committed in an archive. Records can be stolen, users can destroy or harm the records, or forgeries can be brought into the archive. But archives do not guard themselves from all those dangers equally. Studies of archival security of the last 20 years emphasise that archives mostly guard themselves from theft.[28] David Thomas, a senior archivist at the National Archives of the United Kingdom in Kew, asserts:

> I have spent a lot of time over the last few years, past decade I suppose, trying to stop people from stealing records, but the idea of forgeries and introducing things into the archive is quite new and something that until quite recently we haven't defended ourselves against.[29]

Yet forgeries compromise the historical context of the entire archival holdings and exploit the evidential power of records. Therefore, the insertion of forgeries is as detrimental to the trustworthiness of archives as theft.[30]

Forgeries and plagiarism both constitute lies, misrepresentations of facts. A forgery is a lie in which someone poses his or her work as someone else's. St Augustine (354–430 CE) defined a lie as 'falsa significatio cum voluntate fallendi', a wrong expression with the intention to deceive.[31] A forgery is therefore characterised by the intention with which the misrepresentation is presented. A forgery represents itself as genuine in a network of human activity with the intention to deceive for personal or institutional gain. An object becomes a forgery when it pretends to have a history of production and transmission and, most importantly, an authorship it does not have. For

example, a forged Hitler diary is presented to be a genuine diary by Adolf Hitler with the intention to deceive. Plagiarism is on the opposite end of the spectrum, as someone else's work which is presented as one's own.[32]

Forgeries in archives, though less publicised than forgeries in the art world, are no less hazardous.[33] A record, the product of an action, can pose as evidence for this action. Disregarding the market value of records, forged records are dangerous because of their evidentiary nature. They present the evidence for an action that never happened. A record, whether authentic or not, is an instrument and can be used as such.[34] In his article on historical truth in archives, Randolph Starn concedes that 'the archives compound truth with misrepresentation and that archives are products of the formal protocols, institutional arrangement, more or less explicit intentions, and historical circumstances of their formation and preservation'.[35]

The number of forgeries in archives is unknown because one has to realise that the document in question is a forgery first. Simply stating the assumption that there is an unknown quantity of forgeries in an archive undermines the credibility of an archive, which in turn impacts the budget and resources of the archive.[36] Hillary Jenkinson thought about the danger forgeries posed for archives in his *A Manual for Archive Administration*, but ultimately determined that forgeries could be prevented from finding their way into an archive by demonstrating an unbroken custody:

> In any case, given an unbroken custody, the possibility of forgery is practically *nil.* […] Summarizing, we may repeat that forgery or falsification is to be regarded as altogether exceptional among Archives. It is only to be expected (1) in the rare case where custody has been violated though the fact is not known, (2) where the Archive in question is not a single production but is of the kind made by one person or body and preserved by another.[37]

Even if Jenkinson was right and an unbroken custody really is the one foolproof way to prevent forgeries from entering archives, it could be argued that custody has very seldom been unbroken and certainly is not in the twenty-first century. Given the mass of forgeries in archives, it stands to reason that unbroken custody is an unattainable ideal.

AD Baynes-Cope considered the mass of material falling under the category 'forgery' and realised that it was far from homogenous:[38]

> Perhaps instead of 'Frauds' and 'Forgeries' we should think about 'dubious matter' for though there is a certain amount of forgery, there is a great deal of material where the technical terms 'fraud' and 'forgery' may not be exactly applicable.[39]

The group of records that fit into the category *forgery* is more heterogeneous than might initially be assumed. There are three sub-sets of forgeries. The first sub-set is backdating and the recreation of existing documents, where the document shows an earlier date than that on which it had actually been drawn up. Many forgeries are also based on one or many already existing documents. The second type of forgeries is alteration, which means that a detail of an authentic document is changed after its creation, which in turn changes the context and content of the document. The third type of forgeries is the forgery of entire documents, which means that the document is a complete forgery.

A record that has been backdated is considered as inauthentic as a record that has been forged in its entirety and inserted into an archive. In the next few pages I will argue that taking the variety of inauthentic documents into account while thinking about authenticity can be illuminating.

Partial forgeries

Backdating and the recreation of documents

Documents are not necessarily drawn up at the moment the record-worthy act happens. Instead, there is a profound distinction between the point in time when the act happens and the moment it is recorded. A backdated document is one that holds an earlier date than it should if the process of documentation had been followed and, though diplomatically correct, is still considered a forgery because of the intent to deceive. But this does not take the interconnectedness between orality and textualisation into account.[40]

In the context of medieval ownership, rights and grants of property were often not written down but instead transmitted orally.[41] In times of political and economic upheaval these oral grants could be easily ignored. Bruce O'Brien researched forgery and literacy in early English common law and states that in order to avoid losses of rights and property under new sovereigns, the clergy, who made up the majority of literate people at that time, recopied the necessary charters:[42]

> This still left gaps in the record. In some cases, property had been given long before charters were commonly expected to confirm oral grants. In other cases, documents had been lost to fires, which frequently swept through the timber-roofed cathedrals and monasteries. Thus, where property had in fact been granted, there might be no record of any sort. In order to fill this gap, clerics forged.[43]

The rights had been granted but because nothing had been fixed on paper yet, the clergy fixed this mistake by forging the charters and backdating them. In other cases the charters had been written down but had been lost in fires or were just missing. The archbishop Adalbert III of Salzburg, for example, writes about a charter for the monastery in Admont which had been partially destroyed in a fire. It was given to a nun who would repair it and reconstruct the missing piece. In this case, the records were rewritten not by the original creator but by the receiver.[44]

The case of backdated documents illustrates the vagueness of ISO 15489's definition of authenticity and reliability quite well. A backdated document was drawn up by the original creator, so b) applies. It was not created at the time purported, which means that c) is inapplicable. It is therefore not what it purports to be. But backdated documents are forgeries drawn up by the record creator themselves. Though the records were not fully authentic, they were reliable because the information recorded, save for the date, was accurate. ISO states that records 'should be created at the time of the transaction or incident to which they relate, or soon afterwards, [...]'.[45] A backdated document was recorded after the event had occurred. 'Soon afterwards' is too subjective a term to be of use in this context, because how are we to know what was considered to be reasonably soon in the context of medieval recordkeeping?[46] The decidable factor where forgeries are concerned remains the intention to deceive, which in turn is difficult to gauge years after the record was forged.

Sometimes, though, the gap in the records was not due to orality or loss, but just because the records had never been written, so the new record was a complete forgery.[47] This type of forgery is also called 'chancery forgery' because the documents were written up in the chancery of the record creator.[48] This makes it very hard to provide evidence that the record was forged, because the record is diplomatically correct. It is only possible to falsify the record if the chancery provides accounts of its production and possible motives for the forgeries. Derek Pearsall interprets the morality of chancery forgery as follows:

> To edit history in this way was not perceived as a criminal act if the end were just and good. […] They were more fully aware than we are, perhaps, that truth is a cultural artifact, or at least that a truth that is under the guarantee of a higher Truth does not have to answer petty questions about authenticity.[49]

Even though backdating was employed with the intention to deceive, it was also used to partially set the record straight in order to provide proof for rights granted.[50] Backdating is not just a medieval phenomenon. In the context of my experience, backdating occurred at the University of Vienna, when professors backdated oral exam dates to a date that was considered within the bounds of the academic semester by the university's computer system.

Alterations

In some cases, the majority of the original document is left intact and instead a detail is altered and 'corrected'. In 2011, a forged record was discovered at the US National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) in Washington, DC. It came to light that Thomas Lowry, a retired doctor of medicine and amateur historian, had changed the date of a letter by Abraham Lincoln from 1864 to 1865. The letter contained a presidential pardon by Lincoln for the Union soldier Patrick Murphy, who had been sentenced to death by court martial for desertion. Because the day and the month on the letter was 14 April, this alteration would have dated the letter to 14 April 1865, the day before Lincoln was assassinated by John Wilkes Booth at Ford's Theater in Washington, DC. Lowry changed the date to raise the importance of the letter since it would then have been the last official act of Abraham Lincoln as president of the United States.[51]

The 'discovery' of Lincoln's last letter gained Lowry expert status on Abraham Lincoln. He used the record to support his theories in his book *Don't Shoot That Boy: Abraham Lincoln and Military Justice*, which was published in 1999. The record was then put on display in the rotunda that also shows the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence of the United States. The forgery was only detected in 2011 when NARA archivist Trevor Plate, who had used the letter for tours at NARA, realised that the 5 in 1865 looked considerably darker than the other numbers. When questioned, Lowry admitted that he had changed the date with a fountain pen, 'using fade-proof, pigment-based ink'.[52] NARA initiated a visual and chemical investigation of the record to provide evidence that the number 5 was forged and to see if the record could be restored to its original state. This was not possible because the number 4 had been partially erased by Lowry.[53]

Lowry was not prosecuted because the statute of limitations was not applicable any more once a five-year limit had passed. Instead, NARA banned him for life. Plate described the impact of the forged date on the historical and archival profession in a video published on the NARA homepage:[54]

> We rely on primary sources and primary documents as the foundation of our profession. It is very galling and upsetting to me, as a trained historian, that someone would change a document to make it more historically significant than it is. […] Civil War magazines, they still mention this as, you know, this is one of the last things Lincoln did before he went to Ford's Theater. And it's a very good tale that people like to tell, and they've been telling it for the last twelve years.[55]

The correction of one number turned the previously authentic Lincoln letter into a forgery and compromised the interpretative room the original record had to offer. Lowry took advantage of the fact that, owing to the vast holdings of the archive, item-level description of every record is not achievable. After the forgery was detected, NARA decided to make the record as well as reports about the record's authenticity inaccessible to the public because it was feared that, owing to its newfound notoriety, the record would be further mishandled.[56]

ISO 15489's definition of authenticity applies to alterations only partially. In the case of the Lincoln forgery, where only the last number of the date was forged, sub-characteristic b) still applies, since Abraham Lincoln was the author of the letter. However, because Thomas Lowry changed the number 4 to a 5, the record no longer shows the date when it had been created and is no longer what it purports to be. Therefore sub-characteristic a) and c) are no longer applicable. In addition to partial inauthenticity, the Lincoln forgery also falls short of reliability and integrity. Because the ISO definition of reliability also mentions that the record should be created at the time the incident happened, the record has become unreliable because of the unauthorised date change. The record lost its integrity because it was altered without authorisation. Nevertheless, the record remains useable, more so after the forgery was discovered.

The difference between backdated documents and the Lowry forgery, disregarding the temporal direction in which the date had been changed, is that the Lincoln letter was forged not by the record creator, Abraham Lincoln himself, but by an external user of the record, over 130 years later. The difference between the Lowry forgery and the three forgeries in the next section is that, as opposed to the Lowry forgery, the following forgeries are completely inauthentic.

Forgeries of entire documents

The Myatt–Drewe forgeries

Sometimes an entire document is forged as opposed to just minor details like the date. The Myatt–Drewe fraud is a special case of forgeries of entire documents and their subsequent insertion into archives, because the insertion of the forged documents was not the final goal but rather a means to an end. Between 1986 and 1996, John Myatt forged hundreds of paintings, which the con man John Drewe sold. That the paintings were imperfect did not matter, because determinations of the authenticity of a painting are based on its provenance. An artistic provenance consists of records detailing previous transactions of the object in question, such as invoices, correspondence and auction catalogues:[57]

> Exhibition catalogs help document the custodial history of the work, and receipts of sale show where and when it passed through private hands. Diaries, correspondence, and early drawings also shed light on the works themselves. Today, it is this documentary record of ownership, as much as any professional evaluation of quality or artistic style that confirms the authenticity of a work of art.[58]

Ideally, the provenance would prove what Hillary Jenkinson called 'an unbroken chain of custodians' and trace a painting from its creation to its last owner. If the provenance is believable, it does not matter that the painting itself is sub-standard. Drewe therefore forged records and inserted them into major English art archives, like the Tate Gallery

and the Victoria and Albert Museum, thus authenticating the forged paintings.[59] He made sure that the forged documents were as realistic as possible by using contemporary paper and ink. Drewe earned between 1 and 2.5 million pounds sterling by selling forgeries to Christie's, Sotheby's, and directly to art collectors.[60]

Drewe's feat lay not in the fact that he faked documents to authenticate forged paintings, but that he realised the capacity of the archives building itself as an authenticating device. He took advantage of inefficient security controls. Archives traditionally guard themselves more from the danger of theft and disregard the possibility that someone might actually bring something into the archive. Additionally, archivists do not have the time to do an item-level description of the entire holdings. A backlog is common. Because not every record is described, there is room for insertion without the archivist realising that the insertion has happened.[61]

Drewe also donated money and forged references to gain the trust of the archivist and ultimately special access to the archives. He then inserted the forged records, the invoices and the correspondence, into the relevant files and not only authenticated the paintings but the forged documents themselves, because it is assumed that records that are in an archive are already authentic and do not need to be scrutinised further.[62]

The scam was revealed after Drewe's ex-wife alerted the authorities. Both Myatt and Drewe were arrested in 1996. The Myatt–Drewe case had not only a profound impact on the art world, it also exposed the vulnerability of archival records and archives and demonstrated the ease with which records can be added, destroyed or altered.[63]

The Himmler forgeries

In 2005, one of the biggest cases of archives forgeries was exposed in the UK. The historian Martin Allen had inserted records into the National Archives in order to prove connections between the British government and the Nazi regime, for example that Heinrich Himmler had been assassinated by the British government. The forgeries were only discovered when a colleague who had based his research on these records could not remember anything about the Himmler assassination and expressed his doubts about the authenticity of the records. After a forensic investigation the documents in question were exposed as fakes, since the paper and the typeface were not used in that period of time.[64]

Like Drewe, Allen understood the power of the archive for authenticating forgeries. In order to provide proof for his theories, Allen had to insert the evidence into an archive first. Archival security measures, like ID and body checks, are perceived by users of archives as overly cumbersome. In an era when archives are trying to increase their user rates and widen access to their holdings, security measures act as a roadblock to access. It was therefore difficult to know who was using the archive and if the person actually existed as stated on the ID.[65] After the fraud was discovered, the National Archives tightened their security controls. Since then, an ID and a proof of address are requested to complete a background check. The National Archives also authenticated part of their World War II holdings.[66]

This case of forgeries did something that Jenkinson considered to be so rare as to be practically impossible – insertion of forgeries with the explicit intention of the falsification of the archival context in order to falsify history:

In the first place, the possibility of forgery in the literary or historical interest may be practically ruled out: we have seen one example, or alleged example, it is true: but forgery of this kind could not be anything save the rarest occurrence, for it means that custody has been broken with the deliberate intention of falsification.[67]

Arguably, this has not occurred too many times, or, if it did, it is not common knowledge. The last example of an entire forgery was not committed within the last 50 years, but in the late Middle Ages in Austria and commissioned as a bargaining chip more than anything else.

Privilegium Maius

In 1356, the Holy Roman Emperor Karl IV regulated the electoral process of the Holy Roman Empire in the Golden Bull by fixing the number of princes allowed to vote to seven. The Duke of Austria, Rudolf IV, felt left out. So in 1358–59 he commissioned a number of forgeries which would cement the position of the house of Habsburg within the empire and elevate his status to that of the seven Prince-Electors of the Holy Roman Empire by inventing the title of arch-duke.[68] This forgery complex used as a basis the *Privilegium Minus* of 1245, which had elevated the predecessors of the Habsburgs, the Babenbergers, to dukes. The complex is therefore known as the *Privilegium Maius* and contains five charters by Heinrich IV, Friedrich I, Heinrich II, Friedrich II and Rudolf I. Because charters by Caesar and Nero were included in the charter by Heinrich IV, the forgery complex amounts to seven charters.[69]

Rudolf authenticated the charters and sent them to the emperor in Nuremberg. Because the charters by Caesar and Nero appeared unusual to Karl IV, he asked Francesco Petrarca to examine the charters, who in turn pronounced them to be forgeries. Yet, the *Privilegium Maius* still became a law of the empire nearly one hundred years later in 1453, when one of Rudolf's descendants, the Holy Roman Emperor Friedrich III of Habsburg, acknowledged the charters.[70] The remarkable thing about the *Privilegium Maius* is that, even though it was without doubt a forgery and had been exposed as such very early on, it was still authenticated and made lawful, which in turn made the content true as well. Authentication is therefore a reality-transforming action.

In the article 'Notaries, Truth, and Consequences', for example, Kathryn Burns examines notions of truth of archival documents by researching how notaries created truthful statements following the conquest of the Americas in the Andes between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. She concluded that notaries were in a politically and economically powerful position:[71]

This was why people sought notaries in the first place: to render the colloquial into state-sanctioned, 'official' writing. Making documents typically involved at least two moments of writing (that of drafting the *minuta* and that of copying out the final product), and several people played a part in shaping and authorizing the contents. Thus, even in the case of the simplest, most clearly scripted transaction and in the absence of bad faith on anyone's part, slippage could occur: one copyist might misread another's abbreviations, for example. And room existed in this system of truth-production for more interested kinds of slippage, due to bribery and other inducements. […] All notaries fabricated truth-effects, and the results of their word-fixing carried a charge.[72]

Burns argued that just because a document had been notarised, this does not make it true. Instead, a notarised archival source should be historicised and seen in the context

it had been created in. Yet, in a sense, the truth values of these documents were the same as those of the *Privilegium Maius*. What was in the document was not true until it was made to be true.[73]

The three examples illustrating forgeries of entire documents are completely inauthentic if ISO's definition of authenticity is consulted. They are not what they purport to be, the creator was not the person which one should believe he or she was, and the records were created at a completely different time than that stated on the records. They are also unreliable because what is in the records is something that never took place. Nero never had a diploma issued in favour of Austria. Heinrich Himmler was not assassinated by the British government. All the transactional records drawn up to legitimise forged paintings prove to be only fictional transactions.

However, even these forgeries were based on authentic records, at least in part. The *Privilegium Maius* was based on the authentic *Privilegium Minus* and then blown up to somewhat bizarre proportions to lay claim to new rights. Drewe used records from the Tate, galleries and auction houses to make his forgeries as foolproof as possible. And, even though he used the wrong ink, Martin Allen tried to use the same diction as similar records from the time. The forgers knew that the records were false. But someone believed them to be true. And that is something every forger needs. A forger needs an audience who believes in the forgery and lends it credibility. Without it, a forgery is just a piece of fiction.

Conclusion

Ariel Neff writes that 'maintaining authentic collections is the goal of any archive, and when collections are tainted by forgeries, the world of archives is affected forever'.[74] This is accurate, but perhaps simplistic. The problem with forgeries in archives is not that the forgery is in the archive, but that it remains undetected. Once the forgery is seen for what it is, it becomes a source of documentary practice in itself. The archive is not the place where historical truth can be found. Disregarding that what is recorded is a subjective and therefore filtered rendition of what happened, what the user can see in an archive is 'a sliver of a sliver of a sliver'[75] of all the records created.[76]

What is more, it is unrealistic to assume that an archive will only ever hold authentic records. Mabillon himself conceded that absolute authenticity is impossible to certify. Instead, stating that a document is authentic can never be more than an informed opinion. The evidence in favour of its authenticity is suggestive rather than a conclusive statement of authenticity.[77] The diplomatic method, as envisaged by Mabillon, is closely connected to Popper's understanding of science. First, the inauthenticity of a record is only presumed and a tentative hypothesis formed, for example 'The Donation of Constantine is a forgery'. In the next step, the hypothesis is tested rigorously according to the presence or absence of the diplomatic traits which the document should have if it were authentic. Once the test has been concluded, the hypothesis is either falsified or corroborated.[78]

I would instead propose that records should not be seen as either completely authentic or completely inauthentic, but labelled according to the extent to which the document is assumed to be authentic. To call a backdated record a forgery in the same sense as Martin Allen's Himmler forgeries are considered to be a forgery seems too general. The difference between backdating and the Lincoln forgery is that backdating is performed by the record creator himself or herself, who writes down an earlier date than that on which the recorded act took place. The informational value of this kind of forgery changes if something is known about the reason for its production:

> The degree of confidence with which these letters are labelled forgeries depends on a knowledge, which is often lacking, of why they were written and how they were seen by contemporaries.[79]

The Lincoln forgery was created by altering an authentic historical record which had already been in the archive, thereby breaching the security of the archive and compromising the trust in a cultural heritage institution. But Lowry kept the record intact save for one number. The record by itself still stated the same amount of information but, because the year had been changed, its context and the ways in which the letter could be interpreted had changed.

On the other hand, forgeries of entire documents, as seen by the Drewe and Allen forgeries, did not alter part of a historical record that had already been in the archive, but instead inserted a completely new record into the archive, because the archive and the records it holds authenticate a record that is placed in a collection. The information of the record is new and changes the context of the entire archive.

Forgeries are crimes against cultural heritage. However, just because a record has been found to be a forgery, this does not mean that the record itself is without use.[80] Forgeries can tell the user about documentary practices of the time, the society that produced them, representations of power, ways of negotiating for rights and property, and the illusive nature of historical sources.[81] In terms of the Allen forgeries, the documents give clues to the pressures of publishing exciting new findings in the academic circle and the hazardous implications of the insertion of forgeries for archives management. Most of all, the staggering number of forgeries created indicates that forgeries are not the exception, but a commonplace feature in history.

A record should not be considered to be authentic just because it is in an archive. James B Rhoads, one of the first archivists to extensively consider archival security measures, argues that 'a *good* archivist must […] be suspicious!'[82] But the user of archival documents should also employ doubt and refrain from expecting that archivists can establish the authenticity of archives as part of the appraisal process. Sundqvist argued that the interest in integrating proof of a record's authenticity and reliability into the record-making process and demonstrating a record system's intrinsic trustworthiness is actually due to a rising distrust of official records.[83] This distrust is useful. A user needs to be prepared for the possibility that the record he or she is looking at is a forgery. History students are trained at university to criticise their sources and should actually use those skills in the archive.[84]

Archivists do not have absolute power over authenticity. Given the sheer amount of records created each year and the prevalence of understaffed archives, it is unrealistic to assume that archivists can perform an item-level inspection of records in order to determine their authenticity. Authenticity remains an unverifiable ideal.[85]

Endnotes

1. Luciana Duranti, 'Reliability and Authenticity: The Concepts and Their Implications', *Archivaria*, no. 39, Spring 1995, pp. 7–8.
2. Sharon Adam, 'Preserving Authenticity in the Digital Age', *Library Hi Tech*, vol. 28, no. 4, 2010, p. 596.
3. Heather MacNeil, 'Trusting Description: Authenticity, Accountability, and Archival Description Standards', *Journal of Archival Organization*, vol. 7, no. 3, 2009, p. 89.
4. International Council on Archives, 'Code of Ethics', available at <http://www.ica.org/5555/reference-documents/ica-code-of-ethics.html>, accessed 3 July 2014.

5.   Adam, p. 596.

6.   Jennifer Jane Bunn, *Multiple Narratives, Multiple Views: Observing Archival Description*, University College London, London, 2011, p. 107.

7.   MacNeil, p. 90; Brien Brothman, 'Declining Derrida: Integrity, Tensegrity, and the Preservation of Archives from Deconstruction', *Archivaria*, no. 48, Fall 1999, p. 80.

8.   In my experience, archival description does not achieve total intellectual control, because the archives are seldom described from the fonds to the item level. Thus, even if the archivist describes a fonds from fonds to file level, he or she still does not have an exact idea of the entire content or extent of the fonds.

9.   Don C Skemer, 'Diplomatics and Archives', *American Archivist*, vol. 52, no. 3, Summer 1989, p. 382.

10.   Heather MacNeil and Bonnie Mak, 'Constructions of Authenticity', *Library Trends*, vol. 56, no. 1, Summer 2007, p. 27; Luciana Duranti, 'Diplomatics: New Uses for an Old Science', *Archivaria*, no. 28, Summer 1989, p. 12; Luciana Duranti, 'Archives as a Place', *Archives & Social Studies*, vol. 1, no. 0, March 2007, p. 447.

11.   Anneli Sundqvist, 'Documentation Practices and Recordkeeping: A Matter of Trust or Distrust?', *Archival Science*, vol. 11, nos 3–4, November 2011, pp. 279–86; Ayoung Yoon, 'End Users' Trust in Data Repositories: Definition and Influences on Trust Development', *Archival Science*, vol. 14, no. 1, March 2014, p. 22; Jason G Speck, 'Protecting Public Trust: An Archival Wake-Up Call', *Journal of Archival Organization*, vol. 8, no. 1, January–March 2010, p. 32.

12.   Adam, p. 598.

13.   MacNeil, 'Trust and Professional Identity: Narratives, Counter-Narratives and Lingering Ambiguities', *Archival Science*, vol. 11, nos 3–4, November 2011, pp. 183, 187; MacNeil and Mak, p. 29.

14.   ISO 15489-1:2001,'Information and Documentation: Records Management Part 1: General', p. 7, available at <http://www.wgarm.net/ccarm/docs-repository/doc/doc402817.PDF>, accessed 1 July 2014.

15.   ibid.

16.   ibid.

17.   Although it is not stated in the standard, I am assuming that all three characteristics have to apply in order for a record to be considered as authentic according to ISO 15489.

18.   ISO 15489-1:2001, 'Information and Documentation', p. 7.

19.   ibid.

20.   ibid.

21.   Rudolf Vierhaus, 'Rankes Begriff der historischen Objektivität', in Reinhart Koselleck, Wolfgang J Mommsen and Jörn Rüsen (eds), *Objektivität und Parteilichkeit in der Geschichtswissenschaft*, Dtv, Munich, 1977, pp. 63–76.

22.   Jennifer Jane Bunn, email message to author, 28 July 2014.

23.   ISO 15489-1:2001, 'Information and Documentation', p. 7.

24.   ibid.

25.   Laura Millar, 'The Death of the Fonds and the Resurrection of Provenance: Archival Context in Space and Time', *Archivaria*, no. 53, Spring 2002, p. 14.

26.   The Donation of Constantine was the basis for territorial claims of the papacy in Italy until the Renaissance. Though allegedly commissioned by Emperor Constantine, it was probably written in the middle of the eighth century to aid Pope Stephen II in negotiations with Pepin the Short, the Frankish Mayor of the Palace and father of Charlemagne.

27.   Bonnie Mak, 'On the Uses of Authenticity' *Archivaria*, no. 73, Spring 2012, p. 4; Yoon, p. 18.

28.   Susan M Allen, 'Theft in Libraries and Archives', *Journal of Library Administration*, vol. 25, no. 1, 1998, pp. 3–13; Christopher Brown-Syed, 'Some Observations on Systematic Book Theft', *Library & Archival Security*, vol. 15, no. 1, 1999, pp. 83–9; Abigail Leab Martin, 'The Saying and the Doing', *Library & Archival Security*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2000, pp. 27–75; James B Rhoads, 'Alienation and Thievery: Archival Problems', *American Archivist*, vol. 29, no. 2, April 1966, pp. 197–208; Gregor Trinkaus-Randall, 'Library and Archival Security', *Journal of Library Administration*, vol. 25, no. 1, 1998, pp. 91–112.

29.   David Thomas, 'Forgeries in the Archives', available at <http://media.nationalarchives.gov.uk/index.php/forgeries-in-the-archives/>, accessed 25 July 2014.

30. Ariel Neff, 'Rewriting History: Forgeries as Crimes against Our Cultural Heritage', *Library & Archival Security*, vol. 23, no. 1, 2010, p. 19.

31. Michael Wreen, 'Forgery', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 32, no. 2, June 2002, pp. 150–2; Horst Fuhrmann, 'Von der Wahrheit der Fälscher', in *Fälschungen im Mittelalter: Internationaler Kongreß der Monumenta Germaniae Historica München, 16–19. September 1986: Teil I Kongreßdaten und Festvorträge: Literatur und Fälschung*, Hahnsche Buchhandlung, Hanover, 1988, p. 85.

32. Wreen, pp. 150–2, 159–63; Gerhard Schmitz, 'Die Waffe der Fälschung zum Schutz der Bedrängten? Bemerkungen zu Gefälschten Konzils- und Kapitularientexten', in *Fälschungen im Mittelalter: Internationaler Kongreß der Monumenta Germaniae Historica München, 16–19. September 1986: Teil II Gefälschte Rechtstexte: Der Bestrafte Fälscher*, Hahnsche Buchhandlung, Hanover, 1988, p. 92; Giles Constable, 'Forged Letters in the Middle Ages', in *Fälschungen im Mittelalter: Internationaler Kongreß der Monumenta Germaniae Historica München, 16–19. September 1986: Teil V Fingierte Briefe: Frömmigkeit und Fälschung: Realienfälschung*, Hahnsche Buchhandlung, Hanover, 1988, p. 15; Theo Kölzer, 'Urkundenfälschungen im Mittelalter', in Karl Corino (ed.), *Gefälscht! Betrug in Politik, Literatur, Wissenschaft, Kunst und Musik,* Eichborn Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1990, pp. 15–16; Derek Pearsall, 'Forging Truth in Medieval England', in Judith Ryan and Alfred Thomas (eds), *Cultures of Forgery: Making Nations, Making Selves*, Routledge, New York, 2003, p. 3.

33. Rodney GS Carter, 'Tainted Archives: Art, Archives, and Authenticity', *Archivaria*, no. 63, Spring 2007, p. 76.

34. Carter, pp. 75–6; Randolph Starn, 'Truths in the Archives', *Common Knowledge*, vol. 8, no. 2, Spring 2002, p. 390.

35. Starn, p. 400.

36. Neff, p. 20.

37. Hillary Jenkinson, *A Manual of Archive Administration: Including the Problems of War Archives and Archive Making*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1922, pp. 14–15.

38. AD Baynes-Cope, 'Frauds and Forgeries in Libraries and Museums', *Journal of the Forensic Science Society*, vol. 13, no. 3, July 1973, p. 169.

39. ibid.

40. Duranti, 'Diplomatics', p. 14; Hans-Georg Krause, 'Rückdatierte Urkunden des Spätmittelalters aus Norddeutschland', in *Fälschungen im Mittelalter: Internationaler Kongreß der Monumenta Germaniae Historica München, 16–19. September 1986: Teil III DiplomatischeFälschunge (I),* Hahnsche Buchhandlung, Hanover, 1988, p. 461.

41. Duranti, 'Diplomatics', p. 14.

42. Bruce O'Brien, 'Forgery and the Literacy of the Early Common Law', *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, vol. 27, no. 1, Spring 1995, pp. 11–12; Horst Fuhrmann, 'Die Fälschungen im Mittelalter: Überlegungen zum Mittelalterlichen Wahrheitsbegriff', *Historische Zeitschrift*, vol. 197, 1963, pp. 535, 543.

43. O'Brien, p. 12; Krause, p. 461.

44. Kölzer, p. 19.

45. ISO 15489-1:2001, 'Information and Documentation', p. 7.

46. I acknowledge that ISO 15489 was written with the modern recordkeeping environment in mind, but argue that its definition of authenticity loses some of its use when it is applied in a different period.

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48. Starn, p. 390.

49. Pearsall, p. 5.

50. Caroline Williams Director, 'Diplomatic Attitudes: From Mabillon to Metadata', *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, vol. 26, no. 1, April 2005, pp. 11–12; Krause, p. 461.

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58.   Laney Salisbury and Aly Sujo, *Provenance: How a Con Man and a Forger Rewrote the History of Modern Art*, Penguin Press, New York, 2009, p. 4.
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60.   Carter, pp. 79–81.
61.   ibid., p. 80; Neff, p. 20; Starn, p. 387.
62.   Carter, p. 80; Neff, p. 21.
63.   ibid., p. 83; ibid., p. 21.
64.   ibid., p. 83; ibid., p. 21; *The Guardian*, 'The 29 Fakes Behind a Rewriting of History', available at <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2008/may/05/nationalarchives.secondworldwar>, accessed 22 July 2014.
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67.   Jenkinson pp. 13.
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73.   ibid., p. 374.
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75.   Verne Harris, 'Claiming Less, Delivering More: A Critique of Positivist Formulations on Archives in South Africa', *Archivaria*, no. 44, Fall 1997, p. 137.
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78.   Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, Routledge Classics, New York, 2002, pp. 264–5.
79.   Constable, p. 24.
80.   Mak, p. 5; Neff, p. 23.
81.   Mak, pp. 5, 7; Fuhrmann, 'Von der Wahrheit der Fälscher', p. 97.
82.   Rhoads, p. 207, emphasis in original.
83.   Anneli Sundqvist, 'Documentation Practices and Recordkeeping: A Matter of Trust or Distrust?', Archival Science, vol. 11, nos. 3–4, November 2011, pp. 279–86
84.   Starn, p. 395.
85.   Carter, p. 85; Neff, p. 20.