Colonial archive F.A.I.R.ytales

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Before digitisation and online publishing were widely adopted in archival practises, access to archival data was mainly only possible from within the building that holds the archive. This, together with monetary and visa requirements often hindered people from the so-called global south to access archives of their former colonizers to be able to learn about and relate to their own cultural heritage. Those collections not only include information about the currently highly debated ethnographic collections, or political data (cf. Taiyana, 2021, pp. 32-34), but also knowledge on and documentation of archaeological sites and investigations. During the British colonial period in Sudan, archaeologists were working as colonial officers and among other positions could serve as "Commissioner for Archaeology and Anthropology". The Sudan Archive Durham, that collected official and personal documents from former colonial officers following Sudan´s independence, thereby also holds valuable information of archaeological sites, the history of archaeology as well as local knowledge and practices related to the sites. Only the small part of the archive digitised so far (June 2023) already holds 31 hits for the search term "archaeology" (https://reed.dur.ac.uk/xtf/search?dulcategory=sudan&text=Archaeology).

For archivists working with historical collections of national and international interest and entrusted with the task of its Open Access publication, this situation holds challenges. Archival Open Access publishing of this nature should follow standards of scientific publishing according to the F.A.I.R. principles. At the same time, archivists often also aim at making their archives accessible to the former colonized and enslaved peoples. Yet, formats used in scientific publishing – even while they follow the F.A.I.R. principles – are hardly understandable for non-scientists even of the same cultural background let alone for peoples of other languages and online publishing cultures even with knowledge of Digital Humanities (Sijsma 2020). This is especially tragic since archaeologists together with colonial officers and later local politicians often enough and for various reasons systematically alienated local communities from their archaeological cultural heritage. This alienation is today often reflected in a seeming local indifference towards the preservation of the archaeological sites (cf. Weschenfelder and Becker, 2018, p. 79). The documentation of historical connections between the local communities and their sites that colonial officers collected, could help the communities to reconnect to their sites. However, if access to archival data should support local communities in reclaiming their archaeological cultural heritage, archivists need to keep the needs of these communities in mind and adopt formats of online publishing and the F.A.I.R. principles accordingly.

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