

Vatican Archives: An Inventory and Guide to Historical Documents of the Holy See—A Ten-Year Retrospective

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Abstract

Ten years ago the authors published the results of their work to create a comprehensive descriptive framework for the historical documentation of the Holy See primarily housed in repositories within Vatican City. The Archivio Segreto Vaticano is the most important of these repositories, and descriptions of its holdings form the bulk of the publication. This article revisits this project ten years after publication to assess its contribution and the extent to which work at the various Vatican repositories has improved on the work done by the Michigan team. This retrospective explores issues relating to the limits of information technology, the complications of joint projects, the role of scholars in the descriptive process, and the need for conceptual frameworks in digital-based description.

Introduction

The archival holdings of the Holy See, most of which are housed at the Archivio Segreto Vaticano (ASV) and date back more than a thousand years, are among the most complex in the world. The history of the Holy See (which includes both the Roman Catholic Church and the Vatican City State) is at the foundation of Western culture and history. The archives of the Vatican are rightly a critical source for understanding the evolution of cultural and political history. Given the enormous possibilities contained in this documentation, finding an adequate level of description to guide researchers through the complex web of fonds and series that constitute the archives is an exceptional challenge. Matteo Sanfilippo and Giovanni Pizzorusso note a long-standing need for a comprehensive overview of the broad corpus of documentation that constitutes the archives of the Vatican.¹ During the second half of the twentieth century, a

¹ Matteo Sanfilippo and Giovanni Pizzorusso, eds., "Introduzione," *Gli Archivi della Santa Sede come fonte per la storia moderna e contemporanea* (Viterbo: Sette Citta, 2001).

number of publication projects were undertaken to address the problem. Though all are incomplete and, like all guides, become increasingly out of date, they survive as windows into this complex body of documentation.²

In 1988, a group of archivists and historians from the University of Michigan embarked on a project to apply newly emerging information technologies and descriptive standards to represent the breadth of this documentation. The Michigan Project was initiated in 1984 at the invitation of the then-prefect of the Vatican Archives, Rev. Josef Metzler, O.M.I., though the Getty Grant Program, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Homeland Foundation, the Lilly Endowment, and the American Friends of the Vatican Library funded it independently of the Vatican. The Vatican Archives Project, as it came to be known, was designed to build a database that would serve as an access system to the extensive holdings of the Archivio Segreto Vaticano. With the encouragement of the then-prefect of the Vatican Apostolic Library (BAV), Rev. Leonard Boyle O.P., this project was to complement efforts at the BAV to mount an online version of its card catalog.

This article assesses the Vatican Archives Project twenty years from its beginning, fifteen years after uploading the descriptive data onto the Research Libraries Information Network (RLIN), and ten years after the publication of the printed version. It examines both the accomplishments of the project in light of more recent developments in archival description and the limits of sustainability of projects such as the Vatican Archives Project. While the Vatican work was unique, the lessons learned in terms of project management and sustainability are important for other projects that cross cultural and institutional boundaries.

The scope of the project as it evolved was enormous. The archival holdings of the Holy See fill many tens of miles of shelves and date from the ninth century to the present. We faced a challenge in determining the best conceptual framework for representing such an enormous archives. After a considerable period of discussion, consultation, and experimentation, we formulated a project that would provide a systematic overview at the series level of the extensive archives of the Holy See in the form of an online database. We had three goals as we began the project in 1988:

1. to create a baseline database that would be given to the ASV and could be augmented by Vatican personnel in the future;
2. to select a format that permitted robust information retrieval both on-site at the ASV and remotely from around the world; and

² Karl A. Fink, *Das Vatikanische Archiv: Einführung in die Bestände und ihre Erforschung* (Rome: W. Regenberg, 1951); Lajos Pasztor, *Guida delle fonti per la storia dell'America Latina negli archivi della Santa Sede e degli archivi ecclesiastici d'Italia* (Vatican City: Archivio Vaticano, 1970); Leonard E. Boyle, *A Survey of the Vatican Archives and of its Medieval Holdings*, rev. ed. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2001).

3. to design a system that could intellectually reunite collections in the ASV with their dispersed counterparts around Rome and in Western Europe.

The actual implementation of the project involved two separate staffs. One group in Ann Arbor worked to prepare “agency histories” for the varied administrative units of the Holy See over its long history with an emphasis on bureaucratic organization beginning in 1588. A second group worked in Rome in the stacks of the various archives, visiting every shelf, gathering information on each fond or series in a systematic way, comparing that data with existing guides, and matching existing *indici*, or finding aids, to the fonds. The work of each of the two groups was then integrated into a hierarchically structured database. Because of the limits of technology at the time, the hierarchical nature of the database was, by today’s standards, rather awkwardly constructed. Although cumbersome, the database allows entry into different levels and integrates the work of the two groups.

Results of the project were first “published” online through the Research Libraries Group (RLG) Research Library Information Network in 1992.³ A printed version of these data was published as a guide in 1998.⁴ The project was generally received very well.⁵ Historians reviewing the *Inventory and Guide* uniformly praised its comprehensiveness, organization, and depth of the analysis. They also cited the linking of the dispersed fonds and inclusion of other Vatican archival holdings in the Fabbrica di San Pietro, the Archivio di Stato di Roma, and the Propaganda Fide archives as a major contribution of the work. Other important aspects cited were inclusion of the agency histories, descriptions of finding aids, and references to earlier guides. The work was seen as an improvement over the previous published guides. In tribute to the guide, the

³ More detailed information about the project is available in Francis X. Blouin, Jr., “The Historian, the Archivist, and the Vatican Archives: A Case Study in Collaboration in the Age of Information Technology,” *Archivi e Computer* 2 (1993): 75–88; Leonard Coombs, “A New Access System for the Vatican Archives,” *American Archivist* 52 (Fall 1989): 538–46; Francis X. Blouin, Jr., “A Case for Bridging the Gap: The Significance of the Vatican Archives Project for International Archival Information Exchange,” *American Archivist* 55 (Winter 1992): 182–91.

⁴ Francis X. Blouin, Jr., Elizabeth Yakel, Leonard Coombs, Claudia Carlen, and Katherine Gill, eds., *Vatican Archives: An Inventory and Guide to Historical Documents of the Holy See* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). See also Francis X. Blouin, Jr., Peter Horsman, Leonard Coombs, and Elizabeth Yakel, *Vatican Archives: An Inventory and Guide to Historical Documents of the Holy See, Supplement #1, The Archives of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith* (Ann Arbor, Mich: Bentley Historical Library, 2003). The Vatican Archives Project of the University of Michigan was funded through grants from the Getty Grant Program, the Lilly Endowment Inc., the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the American Friends of the Vatican Library. The supplement project was funded by the Gladys Kriebel Delmas Foundation.

⁵ Owen Chadwick, review of *Vatican Archives*, by Blouin et al., *Journal of Theological Studies* 50 (April 1999): 411–12; James M. O’Toole, review of *Vatican Archives*, by Blouin et al., *American Archivist* 62 (Spring 1999): 181–84; Gerald Anderson, review of *Vatican Archives*, by Blouin et al., *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 23 (January 1999): 44–45; Thomas M. Keefe, review of *Vatican Archives*, by Blouin et al., *Church History* 68 (June 1999): 531–32; Frank J. Coppa, review of *Vatican Archives*, by Blouin et al., *Catholic Historical Review* 85 (July 1999): 436–37; Kenneth Gouwens, review of *Vatican Archives*, by Blouin et al., *Sixteenth Century Journal* 30 (1999): 1138–40.

2001 revision of Leonard E. Boyle's *A Survey of the Vatican Archives and of its Medieval Holdings* explicitly cross references entries in the *Inventory and Guide*.⁶

Some reviews were more critical. P. N. R. Zutshi criticized the lack of depth and misrepresentations in some of the agency histories.⁷ He also identified problems with the attribution of records to agencies and at times a lack of synergy between the agency histories and the scope-and-content descriptions. The harshest criticism of the work, however, came from Rev. Sergio Pagano, the former vice-prefect of the Vatican Archives who had taken over as prefect just as the *Inventory and Guide* went to print.⁸ Unlike the Zutshi review that identified substantive issues, Pagano's more severe reviews focused primarily on a relatively small number of factual errors and misrepresentations that arose from the complex process of data entry. Since the data were entered, several reorganizations of material had taken place, new information had been uncovered, some errors came from older labeling, and, of course, we misread some information. Interestingly, these criticisms were aimed at the published guide, not at the records in the RLIN database, which had been online for several years prior to the publication of the guide. Pagano remained silent on the validity of the conceptual framework that for the first time attempted to provide a comprehensive representation of the archival holdings of the Holy See in both online and published form. These critical reviews implied that the ASV could and would present a more thorough, accurate, and comprehensive entrée into the documentation of the Holy See also utilizing modern information technology. Judging by the current Web presence of the ASV as a subsection of the general website of the Holy See, we find that little progress has been made in utilizing the full potential of information technology in explicating the complexities of these archives.⁹

At the time, we did not respond to these more critical reviews. We thought more time was needed before evaluating the significance of the Michigan Project and its relationship to subsequent guides or systems that enhanced access to the archival holdings of the Holy See. Since the publication of the *Inventory and Guide*, ASV Web activity has been the only descriptive activity undertaken in recent years that attempts a conceptual reach similar to that of the Michigan Project. So we use it as a point of comparison in this article. We maintain that despite the limitations and flaws of the Michigan Project and its products (both the RLIN, now WorldCat, records and the published *Inventory and Guide*), the project's conceptualization

⁶ Boyle, *A Survey of the Vatican Archives*.

⁷ P. N. R. Zutshi, review of *Vatican Archives*, by Blouin et al., *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 53 (October 2002): 788–90.

⁸ Sergio M. Pagano, "Una discutibile 'Guida' degli Archivi Vaticani," *Archivum Historiae Pontificiae* 37 (1999): 191–201; Sergio M. Pagano, "A propos d'un guide des archives vaticanes," *Revue D'Histoire Ecclesiastique* 94 (April–June 1999): 515–21. See also Sanfilippo and Pizzorusso, "Introduzione," 9.

⁹ http://asv.vatican.va/home_en.htm, accessed 12 February 2008.

and presentation of information regarding the archival holdings of the Holy See remain the most comprehensive and integrated introduction to the Vatican Archives to date. It is particularly useful for people encountering the archives for the first time. With the perspective of ten years and given the slow pace of the ASV in mounting a system of comparable reach, it seems an appropriate time to revisit the conceptual processes involved when the Michigan Project was undertaken, examine the complicated issues involved, and consider the impact of new technologies in the years since publication of the *Inventory and Guide*. The ASV in its exceptional complexity provides a very interesting platform from which to think through the applications of conceptual frameworks and of information technologies to database design for description of archival holdings.

In this article, we make five points:

1. Our understanding of the different processes involved in constructing a dynamic digital access system and the more traditional process of assembling a fixed published guide;
2. The importance of grounding access systems in a context and philosophy;
3. Any understanding of the Holy See and its archives cannot be solely limited to the holdings of the ASV;
4. Access systems to the archives of complex modern organizations need to take into consideration the intellectual environment of the researcher and the complexity of modern conceptual and methodological frameworks; and
5. Any project of this magnitude and complexity involves complicated administrative issues both during the project itself and after it has ended.

Constructing Dynamic Digital Access Systems

Why is constructing a dynamic digital access system different from constructing a printed guide? Although the information content of a dynamic digital access system can mirror a published guide, information technology offers several additional affordances that increase the accessibility of information. First, online databases make incremental updating and changes possible and therefore better represent the dynamism of modern organizations and their resulting archival records. In this way, access systems also serve administrative functions by tracing administrative change. Second, applying information technology permits both archivists and researchers to retrieve information more precisely by combining and linking concepts and records in ways that a linear printed guide does not allow. Finally, if done appropriately, information technology creates interoperability and the creation of large databases that search across institutions, pulling together dispersed and alienated record groups and fonds.

When we began work on the Michigan Project, our technical options were limited. We could have created our own database structure, but doing so would have eliminated any possibility of interoperability and would have required interface design, information architecture, and programming expertise. We could have adapted over-the-counter relational database systems in use by other large archives, such as D-Base and R-Base, but interoperability and access beyond one archival institution would still have been an issue. In light of these and other considerations, we finally selected the then-recently created data structure standard, Machine Readable Cataloging (MARC) format for Archival and Manuscripts Control (AMC), as the best option at the time for increasing access and providing interoperability. Our experimentation with the MARC AMC format in the ASV led us to believe that this data structure standard would be sufficiently flexible to accommodate the matrix of data elements found in the vast variety of materials in the ASV, yet sufficiently fixed to allow computer processing, search, and interoperability with records from other archives. We were also satisfied that the MARC AMC data structure standard would represent the ASV holdings with sufficient fidelity. We constructed a template with the minimum set of MARC data elements we thought should be applied to all entries, which included inclusive dates, bulk (in linear meters), organization (chronological or other), scope (nature and purpose of the records), and, most importantly, the existence and nature of any finding aids. The application of this strict template required some redefinitions of the rules. In some cases it was necessary to push the boundaries of MARC, but the basic concept was workable in all sectors of the archives.¹⁰

Our adoption of the MARC AMC data structure standard was enhanced by our use of Stephen Hensen's *Archives, Personal Papers, and Manuscripts (APPM)*¹¹ data content standard, as well as data value standards (Library of Congress Subject headings, and the Form Terms for Archives and Manuscript Collections [ftamc] that would later be incorporated into the *Art and Architecture Thesaurus*).¹² This rigorous approach to the construction of the database furthered our goals of interoperability and enhanced information retrieval and discovery. We also selected the MicroMARC application, a stand-alone software application to create archival MARC records, because of its ability to export these records into larger bibliographic utilities, such as RLIN. This application

¹⁰ Elizabeth Yakel, "Pushing MARC-AMC to its Limits: The Vatican Archives Project," *American Archivist* 55 (Winter 1992): 192–201.

¹¹ Stephen L. Hensen, *Archives, Personal Papers, and Manuscripts: A Cataloging Manual for Archival Repositories, Historical Societies, and Manuscript Libraries*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1989).

¹² *Art and Architecture Thesaurus*, available at http://www.getty.edu/research/conducting_research/vocabularies/aat/, accessed 10 January 2008.

made going through the stacks with a laptop computer very convenient and enabled us to construct the MARC records *in situ*.¹³

Particularly relevant to the overall goals of the project, the MARC format was utilized by the online public access catalog (OPAC) in the Vatican Library as well as by RLIN, a bibliographic utility with subscribers around the world. For reasons of efficiency and economy, our intention was to upload the MARC records into the Vatican Library online catalog, purchased from the GEAC Company (now Infor Library Solutions). We envisioned the possibility of a fully integrated access system to the research holdings of both the Vatican Archives and Library. We also thought that our work would form the basis for a dynamic database that could be used administratively by ASV personnel to make updates and additions to the records in real time. Inclusion in the RLIN database allowed for reuniting the dispersed holdings of the ASV and linking ASV collections to others related by subject, time period, or geography, thus enabling new types of historical inquiry into these collections. We saw this plan as a means of allowing robust local and international access to this information.

This grand vision of information sharing to benefit both scholars and ASV staff never came to pass. For a variety of administrative reasons largely due to shifting political sands within the ASV, the information assembled was never deposited in the GEAC system housed in the Vatican Library as initially proposed (though it remains compatible). The information was ingested into RLIN and has now merged into the OCLC WorldCat database.¹⁴ The results were also published as *Vatican Archives: An Inventory and Guide to Historical Documents of the Holy See* by Oxford University Press in 1998. The *Inventory and Guide*, as noted in its introduction, is essentially a printout of the database as it existed in 1996. Since the data were not mounted on the Vatican's own computers, the publication represents a record of the work that was undertaken, as well as a proposal for a strategy for understanding this complex body of documentation. The publication also enables scholars to assess the information we collected while they are actually working in the ASV. The volume's publication appears to associate the project with the time-honored tradition of existing guides, such as those by Karl Fink, Lajos Pasztor, and Leonard Boyle. However, the *Inventory and Guide* differs from those previous efforts because it derives from a database constructed as an organic entity. It is not considered a fixed text but rather a complete view of the content in the database at a particular point in time. At the same time, the content of the database remains flexible. Moreover, though the structure is fixed, the information is organized in distinct, consistent, and logical categories to be adaptable should an alternative structure be introduced using ever-evolving information

¹³ Frederick L. Honhart, "MicroMARC:amc: A Case Study in the Development of an Automated System," *American Archivist* 52 (Winter 1989): 80–86.

¹⁴ See <http://www.worldcat.org>, accessed 2 August 2007.

technologies. At the very least, a lot of information was “keyed in” in digital form, always the most tedious part of database construction. Furthermore, the printed volume contains references to the online RLIN database.

Certainly, many errors inadvertently appear in the database and in the published text. These are unfortunate, and result from a variety of causes, such as reliance on existing guides when stack access was limited, misreading of specific fonds, mislabeled or outdated labels on the spines of fonds composed of bound material, and mistyped data entry. The information was gathered in the process of surveying the ASV shelf by shelf to enter data on the entire contents of the archives. Since we intended to give this information to the Vatican Archives staff, we thought that over time they would add to the database, make changes, and fix errors, as normally occurs with database administration. We also expected that they would share these additions and changes with us for inclusion in the RLIN database. Complicated administrative issues arose in this process, however, which are discussed later. The point here is that within a database, errors are easily corrected and revisions are easily made. As reviews of the *Inventory and Guide* point out, agency histories could be enhanced by drawing on current scholarship, and greater integration of the scope-and-content information to these agency histories could be done over time. The capacity for revision and expansion is the great attribute of online databases. It is worth noting that concurrent with the Michigan Project, the Vatican Library had embarked on transforming its card catalog into an online database. As we did for the Michigan Project, Vatican librarians conceived a general overarching vision for the library database using the standard data structure of MARC. Drawer by drawer, card by card, they entered data on each book into the library’s database. In that project, too, some mistakes were made. Some entries had to be corrected. But problems with data entry invalidate neither the approach nor the enormous service to users it is to have this body of cataloged information about the holdings of the Vatican Library accessible online around the world. The Michigan Project and its accompanying publication are not intended to be the last word on Vatican archival holdings, but rather the first step in the construction of a database to serve as a comprehensive source for the description of the corpus of archival holdings of the Holy See over time.

It is particularly important at this juncture to understand that databases are, indeed, built. They are constructed effort upon effort. They are revised, reconfigured, enhanced, and migrated to newer systems. If done well and maintained, they do not have to be rebuilt. The Vatican Archives Project of the University of Michigan, at considerable expense, presented a fundamental structure that proved adaptable and correctable. As information technologies develop, the project has the capacity to move from one framework to the next because the consistency and predictability of the information eliminates the considerable expense of rekeying the data.

Archival Representation and Access in Context and Philosophy

The current Web access system that is the gateway to the ASV represents an approach to access fundamental to what we might call a “fond”-based understanding of historical archives. It is important to understand this as precondition of using the access tools presented on the ASV website. This set of assumptions differs from those we used in designing the Michigan Project. The conceptual presentation for access to the archives on the current ASV website is a “list of fonds.” The fond is the point of departure. The fond is, of course, a fundamental unit of understanding within a diplomatics approach to providing information on holdings in an archives. This approach focuses on what Luciana Duranti calls the “archival bond,” the basic association of a record with the office that generated it and that provides authentication of that record.¹⁵ The archives, then, is the physical presence of an accumulation of fonds in a particular institutional setting.

In this case, the ASV’s online access system is restricted to those fonds physically present in the archives.¹⁶ The ASV maintains a list of specific fonds and series that have been brought into the archives, providing a title, a location, a list of available finding aids, and identification of a single agency of origin. Identification of the agency generating the fond depends on the presence of the fond in the archive. Those fonds without clear provenance are considered miscellaneous. The home page provides entry to Archival Fonds,¹⁷ which presents a Short Description of Fonds, grouped into six categories, which are briefly explained.¹⁸ It also provides a page of Advices,¹⁹ which explains that the Fond Index is online (labeled on the page as Collection Index). Users can download the Collection Index and Related Description and Research Resources in the PDF format: seventy-four pages of text in thirty-nine PDF pages. The list of fonds is arranged in alphabetical order, each with associated series listed below the title, pages 9 to 55. An alphabetical index, pages 57 to 72, follows the list.

The list as currently presented on the ASV website is complete, except for unprocessed material and some other exceptions, and, where appropriate, these fonds are clustered in administrative groupings such as the Camera Apostolica, Segreteria di Stato, and Sacra Rota Romana. This link between the fond and the agency is the only contextual information. A concordance directs the researcher from individual fond titles, such as *Collectoriae* or *Bullarum registra: Registri dei*

¹⁵ Luciana Duranti, *The Long-term Preservation of Authentic Electronic Records: The Findings of the InterPARES Project* (San Miniato PI, It.: Archilab, 2005).

¹⁶ http://asv.vatican.va/en/fond/1_fond.htm, accessed 20 May 2008.

¹⁷ http://asv.vatican.va/home_en.htm, accessed 20 May 2008.

¹⁸ http://asv.vatican.va/en/fond/1_fond.htm, accessed 20 May 2008.

¹⁹ <http://asv.vatican.va/en/fond/avv.htm>, accessed 20 May 2008.

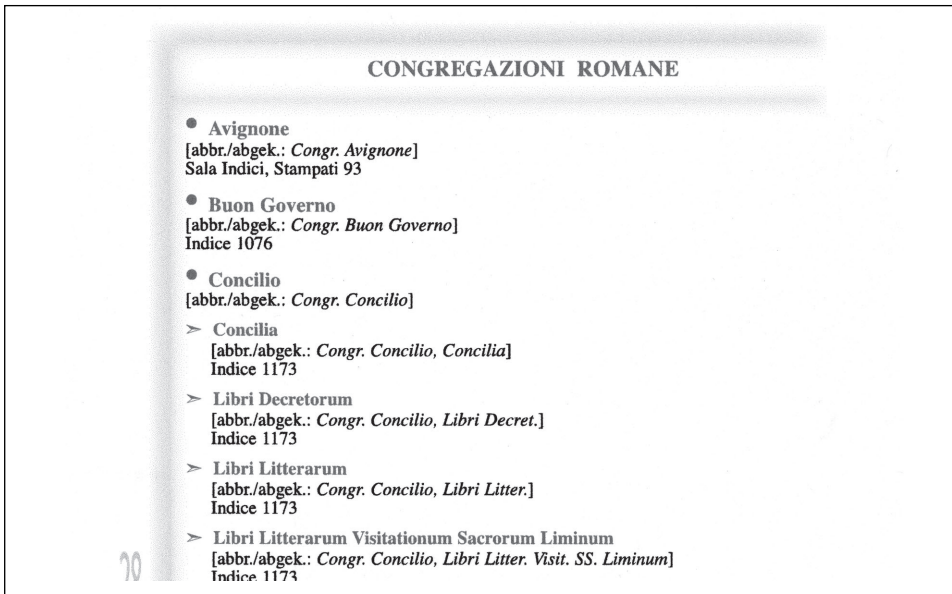


FIGURE 1. Excerpt from *List of fonds from Collection Index and related description and research resources* (Vatican City: Vatican Secret Archives, 2008–09), pp. 28, available at http://asv.vatican.va/download/indicefondi/Indice_fondi_en.pdf.zip, accessed 18 August 2008.

pagamenti in Bullaræ, to the proper creating agency, in this case the Camera Apostolica. This scheme reflects the traditional approach to understanding the ASV and many other older institutions. One must understand the composition of these fonds to predict their content adequately. The ASV list cites some *indici* (finding aids), but does not indicate their coverage, perspective, or limitations, hallmarks of the Michigan Project. As has always been the case, researchers must trace the footnotes of other scholars or rely on the available printed guides to identify particular fonds relevant to the research question at hand.

Modern technology, however, allows adherence to these fond-based archival principles while simultaneously enabling a better understanding of context—also a critical element in understanding archival material. The Michigan Project came to the process of description with a different philosophy. The project emphasized understanding the organizational context in which the records were produced and describing it in a transparent way to enhance users’ understanding of these vast holdings. This more contextual approach sees in the ASV what Thomas Osborne calls the “ordinariness of the archive.”²⁰ That is, the archives is the

²⁰ Thomas Osborne, “The Ordinariness of the Archive,” *Journal of the History of the Human Sciences* 12 (1999): 51–64.

product of human organizational processes. These processes must be understood to grasp fully the significance and limitations of the archives. Hence, we made considerable effort to present a structural history of the evolution of the Holy See as an administrative organization with a clearly defined and relatively stable bureaucratic structure. The project also envisioned the database as a research tool, demonstrating the interrelationships between records, functions, and agencies over time. Our approach subordinated particular lists of fonds to a broader understanding of the relationship between the administration of the Holy See over time and the records that survive—whatever the location of those records.

While discourse on technological applications is important, much of the disconnect between the Michigan and the ASV approaches to archival access systems is philosophical and grounded in differing archival cultures. These differences center on the understanding of the relationship between the records and their context. Our approach was initially epistemological. How do we know what is in the archives? How can we best represent both the intellectual content and the context of what is on the shelf? We wanted to represent the organizational structure of the Vatican so that researchers could determine when and where records exist for all of the agencies.

For institutional archives, such as those at the Vatican, the answers to these questions involve a combination of understanding the functions of the creating agencies, their recordkeeping systems over time, and the records as a product of those functions and systems. Our guiding questions included: What was the nature and history of the agency? What was its function? What recordkeeping systems were developed to support those functions? How did the agencies and recordkeeping systems change over time? What is the nature of the records? What records did the agency produce? When did the agency produce given series of records? How complete are the extant records? What inventories and finding aids exist to describe the records? How have they been used? These questions are essential for understanding the archives. In this conception, the physical location of the material as an organizing principle is subordinated to the process of agency in the production of the records.

In response to what we saw as the duality and relationship of agencies and records, we created two separate types of MARC records.²¹ The first addressed the agency; the second, the records. These two types of MARC records are linked in the RLIN bibliographic utility. The agency record is an abstract or digest of the history and functions of any identifiable organizational unit within the Vatican that had produced documentation at any time, including, for example, all congregations, offices, and nunciatures. Some, of course, such as the Secretariat of State, had long, continuous histories and record series. Others, such as the Commission

²¹ See Blouin et al., *Inventory and Guide*, xv–xl.

This structure of agency and record entries also enables representation of one-to-many as well as many-to-many relationships, which is not possible in a static, linear list. For example, multiple series are tied to one agency or one series is tied to multiple creating agencies over time if responsibility for the function was transferred among agencies. Albeit, using the MARC AMC format to do this was cumbersome, both from a data-entry and a retrieval standpoint. But, at the time, we saw this as our best option for achieving a majority of our goals. These nondynamic linkages still exist in the database. In the current generation of Integrated Library Systems (ILS), these links could be made dynamic to enhance information retrieval and discovery.

We derived our agency and records approach after studying the entries made by some U.S. state archives projects and after discussing the benefits and

FIGURE 2. Example of a relatively short agency history constructed using the MARC AMC format. Some agency histories are much longer.

Records 10 through 10 of 42 returned.

Author: Papal States. Congregazione del buon governo.
 Title: Records, 1660-1910 (bulk 1671-1866).
 Description: 10 linear m.
 Found In: (CStRLIN)VATV615-A
 Notes: Italian, Latin.
 ASV Indice 1076 by Hermann Hoberg provides a
 brief introduction to the fondo and a listing of each busta
 or volume from 1 to 73. The index does not include the
 unnumbered buste. The inventory includes inclusive dates and
 descriptive titles.
 One of the final unnumbered volumes purports to
 be an index to either this congregation or to the S. Cong.
 Consulta (Causa Criminale?). It is very difficult to read.
 Congregazione del Buon Governo.
 Archivio di Stato di Roma. L'Archivio della S.
 Congregazione del Buon Governo (1592-1847). (ID VATV20047-A)
 Subjects: Papal States. Congregatio pro Consultationibus
 Negociorum Status Ecclesiastici.
 Indexes. ftcmc
 Other authors: Papal States. Congregazione del censo.
 Papal States. Congregazione dei catasti.
 Catholic Church. Secretariatus Status.
 Control No.: ocn145567690

FIGURE 3. Example of a short series description constructed using the MARC AMC format. Not shown in this display, derived from WorldCat, is the 852 location field, which notes that these records are located in the Archivio Segreto Vaticano.

costs with archivists in these organizations.²² In retrospect, the Michigan Project proved to be a conceptual precursor to the second edition of the *International Standard Archival Authority Record for Corporate Bodies, Persons and Families*, (ISAAR(CPF)), which consciously separates provenancial and descriptive information and provides for a much richer conceptualization of context.²³ The agency histories are also concordant with the ideals of what would become Encoded Archival Context (EAC). Although we did not make it explicit at the time of the Michigan Project, Adrian Cunningham's idea of context control rather than simply authority control was very much a guiding principle.²⁴ Our approach at the ASV also aligns with other emerging international standards such as the *International Standard on Activities/Functions of Corporate Bodies*

²² David Bearman, "Archives and Manuscripts Control with Bibliographic Utilities: Challenges and Opportunities," *American Archivist* 52 (Winter 1989): 26-39. The specific reference to the agency histories is on page 33.

²³ *International Council on Archives, International Standard Archival Authority Record for Corporate Bodies, Persons and Families (ISAAR(CPF))*, 2nd ed. (Paris: ICA, 2004).

²⁴ Adrian Cunningham, "Harnessing the Power of Provenance in Archival Description: An Australian Perspective on the Development of the Second Edition of ISAAR(CPF)," in *Respect for Authority: Authority Control, Context Control, and Archival Description*, ed. Jean Dryden (Binghamton, N.Y.: Haworth Press, 2008). We are also aware that Australian archivists have promoted this concept for over forty years. See Ian Maclean, "An Analysis of Jenkinson's 'Manual of Archive Administration' in the Light of Australian Experience," in *Essays in Memory of Sir Hilary Jenkinson*, ed. A. E. J. Hollander (London: Society of Archivists, 1962), 128-52 and Peter J. Scott, "The Record Group Concept: A Case for Abandonment," *American Archivist* 29 (October 1966): 493-504. Both reprinted in *Debates and Discourses: Selected Australian Writings on Archival Theory 1951-1990*, ed. Peter Biskup et al. (Canberra: Australian Society of Archivists, 1995), 79-90.

(ISAF).²⁵ For an institution as old and as complex as the Holy See, as much attention needed to be paid to the evolution of the agency as to the description of extant records. Subsequent to the publication of our work, further development of standards in this area demonstrates the validity of this conceptual approach to represent the total archival holdings of the Holy See. Moreover, that approach positions the ASV to embrace newer, more complex conceptions of archival description and the new technologies for implementing them.

Applying this dual representation to the actual records or holdings of the ASV was fairly straightforward. The ASV holdings are easily recognized, for the most part, as distinct series or other recognizable aggregations resulting from agency functions, and the ASV list of fonds represents for the most part their physical storage on the shelves of the stacks. Because of consistencies in reporting formats in the Vatican over time, series are largely intact on the shelves. As we will discuss, some agency records have been split among various repositories, though for the most part as complete series. However, wherever there is a physical separation, the database allows for integration in a logical form of representation.

In addition to providing full descriptions of fonds, series, and available finding aids, a more complex challenge for the Michigan Project was to link descriptive information with the agency history in the RLIN system. To accomplish this hierarchical dimension, we established links designed to function in either the GEAC or RLIN catalogs to lead a user on a general search through both the descriptive records and the historical information about the evolving administrative hierarchy.

Another challenge in representing the records arose from the language used in the history and the records of the Holy See. The bureaucratic organization and record genres at the Vatican are not generally familiar terminologies. The Rota, the Datary, and the Congregation of Rites are terms not readily understood without a sophisticated comprehension of the evolution of the structure of the Holy See. However, an understanding of this terminology is a precondition for encountering the holdings of the ASV. Not only are the agency names particular, the genres of records are similarly ancient in form. The broad international community interested in the potential of the ASV to provide documentation on particular questions does not readily understand terms such as *avvisi*, *consensus*, and other documentary titles. The Michigan Project did not address this set of problems directly, although we did use the MARC field and controlled vocabularies for form and genre to provide alternative access terms more familiar to modern researchers. The ASV website contains a tutorial on papal diplomatics but it focuses on premodern documents and does not address the complexities of Vatican bureaucratic administrative forms and documentary

²⁵ International Council on Archives, *International Standard on Activities/Functions of Corporate Bodies (ISAF)*, (Paris: ICA, 2007).

types that became very complex after bureaucratic reorganization of the Vatican under Sixtus V in 1588.²⁶

The Michigan Project also incorporated two other important descriptive data elements: the scope-and-content notes and the finding aids. We used the scope-and-content notes to represent and describe the records in modern terminology and to explicate their potential utility for a variety of researchers. The *consensus* of the Dataria can be as simple as job applications, but they provide information about family life, bureaucratic practices, and other aspects of social history from the early seventeenth century. The entry for the *Brevia Lateranensia*, 1490–1809, 1814–1908, provides an example:

In the Dataria, special registers of briefs (the *Lateranensia*) began in 1490, while registers containing minutes of Briefs in *forma gratiosa* came into being about 1523. The early volumes of the *Brevia Lateranensia* are valuable because they include the original supplications as well as the text of the outgoing brief. After 1520, the registers mostly cease to record the content of the supplications and simply note the fact that an original signed petition reached the Dataria. This series is principally composed of registers and of minutes of common briefs that were prepared until 1678 in the Secretaria Apostolica and after that in the Dataria. The designation *Lateranensia* derives from the place (i.e., the Lateran Palace) where these registers were kept until 1904, when they were deposited in the ASV. The briefs contain concessions of ordinary graces, most of which are dispensations pertaining to priestly ordination and matrimonial dispensation. However, the project staff found, particularly for the early decades of this series, a much greater variety of graces. In addition to the briefs directed to supplicants (*brevia extensa*), one finds in this series many *commissiones* or assignments of tasks, pertaining to judicial matters (like the ones cited by Boyle). In this case the brief consists simply of a few lines in which the business or the object of the petition is entrusted by the pope to someone else who is usually a high-ranking or highly qualified official (e.g., a bishop nuncio). The briefs are registered in the volumes according to their date of expedition. . . . The minute or abbreviated versions of *brevia extensa* contained in the registers, especially for the period 1523 to 1599, are found in another Dataria Apostolica series, *Minutae brevium in forma gratiosa*. Some minutes preceding 1523 are in the Secretaria Apostolica series Armarium XL, vol. 1.²⁷

We also went beyond a list of existing finding aids for each series. We noted other guides that describe the series, identified both current and retired *indici*, and described how these could best be used. We also analyzed these *indici*, their strengths, weaknesses, the rationale for their composition, the data elements contained in the index, the level of description provided, and whether the index

²⁶ See http://asv.vatican.va/en/dipl/1_papaldocuments.htm, accessed 16 May 2008.

²⁷ Blouin et al., *Inventory and Guide*, 146.

had been published in whole or part. An example of this type of analytical entry is this one for the *Emigrati della rivoluzione francese* series:

ASV *Indice* 1026 (pp. 135–140) briefly lists each volume. Entries include: the old and new volume number, title on the spine of the volume, inclusive dates, pagination, size, and notes of markings on the volume or alphabetical organization, if applicable. Paola Carucci and Raffaele Santoro, eds., “Le fonti archivistiche,” vol. 1 of *La Rivoluzione Francese (1787–1799): Repertorio delle fonti archivistiche e delle fonti a stampa conservate in Italia e nella Città del Vaticano* (Rome, 1991). This work identifies series in the ASV that pertain to the French Revolution. Materials from the following series are mentioned: Francia, SS. Particolari, Emigrati della rivoluzione francese (vols. 1–50), Epoca napoleonica: Francia and Italia, Legazione di Avignone, and Fondo Garampi. Entries list the volume number, identify the total number of folios in a volume, provide the formal or a supplied title, summarize the materials in the volume, and note the inclusive dates. At times, individual documents are identified and described. Because every volume of this collection is mentioned, this section of the work (pp. 244–250) acts as a published index to this series. The information in ASV *Indice* 1026 is only slightly more detailed and descriptive.²⁸

Including interpretative analyses in the description opened us to criticism and error not present in the creation of most archival guides. However, we thought this type of explication is exactly what researchers are lacking and why research in the Vatican Archives is so difficult and time consuming.

On the current ASV website, the lack of explanative contextual information, both in the agency histories and in the scope-and-content notes in the fonds listings, and the lack of any analytical work on the complex body of *indici* or finding aids available represent a fundamentally different philosophical approach to description of complex archival material and to the role of the archivist in describing collections through the careful use of online access systems.²⁹ The value of the descriptive system on the ASV website is significantly diminished because of its more narrow emphasis on a limited number of diplomatics-based categories of description with little explanation for the user. By representing the Vatican organizational structure and records as interlinking files of a database, our method differs from the existing guides that treat the ASV records linearly. While this linear approach is eminently archival, both our conceptual approach and our use of database technology enhances archival description by

1. acknowledging the complex nature of organizations where multiple provenance and changing organizational functions are part of the recordkeeping landscape;

²⁸ Blouin et al., *Inventory and Guide*, 186–87.

²⁹ For the online listing of fonds in the ASV, see http://www.Vatican.va/en/dipl/1_fond.htm, accessed 15 May 2008.

2. making these interrelationships more explicit, which adds a user-friendly dimension, allowing researchers to explore interconnections and resource discovery in new ways; and
3. revealing the gaps in the holdings of the ASV by linking records to the specific agency histories of the Vatican.

This third factor, analysis of gaps in the holdings, is particularly important. In many cases, we identified agencies, but could not find records for them. This analysis provides a sense of what is in the ASV and what is not. It also illuminates the relationships among records in the ASV, other Vatican repositories, and other repositories internationally, discussed in the next section.

The Archivio Segreto and the Holy See

Defining the boundaries of the archives of the Holy See is important to understanding the records. The Michigan Project sought to describe all archival fonds generated by activity of the Holy See over time. The database and guide not only list fonds in the ASV, but also those present in other repositories at the Vatican and in other locations. Significant series have been alienated from the Vatican over time and are not described on the ASV website. Any connection to other repositories containing papal documentation goes unacknowledged. The ASV as an institutional repository is different from a conception of the corpus of documentation that rightly should be considered the archives of the Holy See. Several factors in this regard need to be understood at the outset before encountering the ASV.

Two important historical events are critical for understanding what the ASV contains and what it does not: the Napoleonic Wars in the early nineteenth century and the unification of Italy in the latter part of that century. In its introduction to the archives, the ASV website notes:

In 1810, by order of Napoleon, the archives of the Holy See were taken to Paris, and then brought back to the Vatican between 1815 and 1817, thus causing great losses. . . . When the Italian troops conquered Rome in 1870, the archives found outside the Vatican walls were confiscated by the newborn Italian State, thus constituting the core of the new State Archives of Rome.³⁰

The website does not explain the significant implications of these events. Some fonds taken by Napoleon remain in Paris to this day, and others that were “lost” reemerged, most notably in the manuscript collections of Trinity College, Dublin. These known fonds are small compared to what must have been lost. Some estimates are as high as one-third of the total archives.³¹ Still, researchers

³⁰ See the website for the Archivio Segreto Vaticano, specifically the section on the history of the Vatican Archives, “The Past,” at http://asv.vatican.va/en/arch/1_past.htm, accessed 28 February 2008.

³¹ Blouin et al., *Inventory and Guide*, xxi.

need to understand that, despite the fact that some records are located far from Vatican City, they are conceptually part of the archives of the Holy See.

More complicated is the division of material that took place in 1870, when the Papal States were incorporated into a unified Italy and the Holy See was geographically restricted to the boundaries of Vatican City. The Archivio di Stato di Roma was established at the time as the civic archives for the region. In the process of incorporation, an enormous collection of papal records, nearly all of which relate to the administration of the Papal States prior to 1870, were moved to this new state archives. These records, identified as civic records as distinct from church-related documents, were extracted from the papal archives and relocated. In most cases the division is logical. Records relating to the governmental administration of transportation, livestock, public order, and so on are found in the state archives rather than at the ASV. However, in some areas the division is not so clear, most notably in the records of the Camera Apostolica. This central office, connected to the administration of all aspects of the See of Rome, often conflated spiritual and temporal concerns. Thus, dividing these records between the Vatican and the Archivio di Stato of Rome was difficult. Scholars continue to debate the division of these records even today. To understand the Cameral holdings of the ASV, one must be aware of the complementary holdings in the state archives of Rome.³²

Scholars working in the Vatican also need to know that important archival materials are stored in archives independent of the ASV. Many congregations and agencies hold their own archives, which are open to scholars. One of the best known is the Archives of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, or “Propaganda Fide,” that holds mission-related material from the sixteenth century to the present. Until the very early twentieth century, those “missions” included all of North and South America, Africa, Asia, Australia, and the Protestant countries of northern Europe. Less well known is the Archives of the Fabbrica di San Pietro, which contains records from construction of that basilica in Rome and from its administration over the past four hundred years. Recently, the important archives of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith was opened to research after being closed for nearly four hundred years. This archives houses the records of the post-Reformation Inquisition and of the Congregation for the Index of Forbidden Books. Also administratively separate, the Archives for the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs contains sensitive diplomatic documents and remains closed to research.

Because the ASV focuses solely on its own holdings, it lacks connection to the broader corpus of archival holdings documenting the Holy See. The Michigan Project argued that although these complementary fonds would never be physically united, a broadly conceived archival representation as embodied

³² See Maria Grazia Pastura Ruggiero, *La Reverenda Camera Apostolica e i suoi archive (secolo XV–XVIII)* (Rome: Archivio di Stato di Roma, 1987).

in the database allows for the virtual intellectual integration into a single descriptive system of these scattered but connected archival fonds. It would be valuable for the ASV to offer a search option on its website to integrate its holdings with other large repositories of papal materials—most notably, the Propaganda Fide, the archives of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the archives of the Fabbrica, and the State Archives of Rome.

The Context of the User

The Michigan Project strove to understand information needs and to bridge the gap between researchers and the records. Here, we were limited by the technologies in the 1980s. It is common to build an archival system from the inside out. That is, to use standard archival conceptions of provenance and descriptions of records to structure systematic data categories in an access system. Both the description on the ASV website and the Michigan Project take that responsibility, but from different perspectives on the relationship of documentation to the organization generating those records. Designing the Michigan Project provided an opportunity to meet with scholars using the archives and to think about how those scholars approach it. Many came from a variety of fields not closely associated with the history of the Holy See as a political or spiritual entity. These scholars, from such diverse fields as social history, art history, and political science, asked different, less institutionally based questions about processes and phenomena in social systems beyond the Holy See. They found it difficult to find answers in existing descriptions of the archives. What was the identity of women religious in the nineteenth century? What was the power relationship between parents and pastor? What was the artistic patrimony of this church or that shrine? The questions that come to the archival holdings of the Holy See are complex. Scholars often stumble upon documentation to serve their interests rather than finding it through systematic searching. Such scholars researching at the Vatican trace the footnotes of others and then probe the sources in more depth.

These scholars search not for records of the Holy See but for voices embedded in the documentation, often revealed by reading those documents “against the grain” of their bureaucratic context.³³ These voices are not easily searched in the more formal terminologies of institutional archival description. In addition to the scope-and-content notes and the analytical entries for the *indici* previously described, the Michigan Project database provides both subject access

³³ Historians and anthropologists interested in the field of “post colonial” studies developed the idea of reading archives “against the grain.” This concept derives from the challenge of using archives formed by the administration of populations under colonial rule to recover the voices of indigenous peoples. See Ann Laura Stoler, “Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance: On the Content in the Form,” in *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory*, ed. Francis X. Blouin, Jr. and William G. Rosenberg (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 267–79.

to collections and citations to some of the major works that cite a series. This approach allows resource discovery outside the provenance approach and assists scholars in tracing citations to the records. The initial implementation of these entries in the RLIN system put the burden on the researcher to search for a term or track down a citation; current library-oriented information technologies allow for more dynamic linking.

We pondered many of these issues related to providing descriptive tools to empower users to find relevant records, but the technologies available at the time limited us. Today, Web-based access systems have opened new ways to enhance archival description and the functionality of online bibliographic catalogs. We suggest two ways the ASV could integrate modern technology into its website. First, scanning technology could be used to enhance the site in two ways. Digital representations of the *indici* of the archives could be easily linked to the fonds listing. Some *indici* of recent origin are born digital and could be easily mounted and linked for full-text searching. Older typed *indici* could be scanned using OCR technology, mounted, and available for full-text searching. Older handwritten *indici* could be scanned. All this is easily done and could be of enormous value to researchers.

Second, because scholars often trace the work of others, mounting and maintaining a comprehensive and up-to-date bibliography of works based on the fonds of the ASV would be very useful, especially since it has already been done. Since 1962, the Vatican Archives and the Vatican Library have issued bibliographies, structured by fond, of works based on the ASV holdings.³⁴ These entries could be scanned and linked to the description of a specific fond on the website. Moreover, these online citations could be searched across entries. Such interactive access to this bibliographic information would be helpful to scholars who want to know about prior uses, as well as potential uses, of a particular fond. Both these strategies would incorporate existing detailed information into a more integrated online access system.

The use of Web 2.0 social networking technologies would enable the incorporation of the knowledge of researchers and archivists into the mix of access possibilities. Annotation, commenting, tagging, and collaborative filtering allow researchers and archivists to report on their discoveries within particular fonds or *indici*, note errors, and add citations. These technologies can be implemented to preserve the authority of the official description, but still enable information sharing among a community of researchers to enhance both access and the archival information.³⁵ In fact, the new WorldCat instantiation of the Michigan

³⁴ See the publication series *Bibliografia dell'Archivio vaticano* (Citta del Vaticano: Presso l'Archivio vaticano e Biblioteca Apostolica vaticana, 1962–2003). Nine volumes have been published to date.

³⁵ Magia Ghetu Krause and Elizabeth Yakel, "Interaction in Virtual Archives: The Polar Bear Expedition Digital Collections Next Generation Finding Aid," *American Archivist* 70 (Fall/Winter 2007): 282–314.

Project database includes functionality that allows scholars to comment on the records. New and evolving information technologies open up a variety of possibilities that were not even imaginable twenty years ago when we began the Michigan Project but, because the data is structured according to international standards, it can be migrated to new systems to enhance access, search, and discovery.

The Administrative Context of the Project

Considering the issues at hand, some background and reflection on the administrative context of the Michigan Project might be useful. That the Vatican Library was moving very quickly toward the creation of an online system to access its published (not archival) holdings substantially motivated the prefect of the Vatican Archives to issue his invitation to the University of Michigan. In encouraging the project, the prefect had no predetermined notions of how existing database technologies could be used to construct an access system. Moreover, the prefect had no resources to invest in the project. It would have to be done entirely with outside funding. The prefect promised unrestricted access to all the stacks of the archives, a necessary precondition for a project of this magnitude and scope.³⁶ For the University of Michigan staff and ultimately for those foundations that supported the project, the possibility of a complete inventory of the holdings of the ASV by archivists unaffiliated with the Vatican was an attractive proposition.

However, complete outside funding proved to be a two-edged sword. On the positive side, the database and subsequent publication could be designed consistent with prevailing professional standards. The project gave an “outsider’s” perspective on the holdings of the ASV and related Vatican archival material. The project staff did not have to navigate among the various positions and perspectives of the ASV, some of which were negative. Without independent funding, the project may well have fallen into a cycle of reviews and challenges that would have bogged down the work to the point of suffocation.

At the same time, however, having no funding from the Vatican meant that the staff had no “buy in” to the project. While the Michigan Project could do its work at will, the varied archives of the Vatican are extremely complicated. At many points, the AVS staff might have clarified issues to the benefit of the project’s products. Most important, once the work was completed, it would have been very helpful to have a staff archivist read and review it. We encouraged review by the ASV, but no one on the staff had any incentive or requirement to do so. As a result, no one on the staff read the draft. The ASV section of the draft

³⁶ Blouin et al., *Inventory and Guide*, xxiv–xxx, xxxv–xl.

remained untouched in the prefect's office for five years prior to publication of the guide. For the supplemental project that inventoried the Archives of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the congregation provided no financial support, yet the staff of that archives was completely cooperative and encouraging. This resulted in a better product.³⁷

Another problem arose because the computer that would store the database was located in the Vatican Library, a unit administratively separate from the archives. Though the library welcomed the data into its system, the staff of the archives had to determine certain configurations and authorities. The project staff had no leverage to assure that the necessary connections were made and sustained, so this preliminary work was never undertaken.

The publication of the database, then, was a fallback position. With no assurance that the information would be mounted and sustained in the Vatican Library GEAC system, the Michigan Project staff focused on a printout of the information in a structured form that grew out of the conceptual framework for the project. Though the publication gives the appearance of a final product, we remain as convinced now as we were in 1988, that any online access system for Vatican archival holdings needs to be a sustained, continually refined, descriptive program in which information in standard data structures can be migrated to new and more powerful platforms over time.

Another consistent administrative difficulty in working with the ASV was its sense of what we would call "exceptionalism" of the material. Because of the importance and long history of the Holy See, its archives are of enormous significance. In terms of constructing an access system, however, they proved no different than any less well-known archives. The components' descriptive data elements were the same as any other archives; linear meters, inclusive dates, and scope and content apply to all archives large and small. This sense of preciousness breeds a sense that ordinary solutions cannot apply to extraordinary archives and that general standards are inappropriate to archives of unique importance.

Conclusion

We argue that despite ten years of activity by the Archivio Segreto Vaticano toward mounting descriptions of its holdings on its website, and despite criticisms of the Michigan Project, both the print and online products of that project remain the most thorough introduction to the archives of the Holy See

³⁷ Francis. X. Blouin Jr., Peter Horsman, Leonard Coombs, and Elizabeth Yakel, *Vatican Archives: An Inventory and Guide to Historical Documents of the Holy See, Supplement #1, The Archives of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, 2003).

available today. Since the publication of the Michigan Project data on RLIN in 1992 and the publication of the database as a guide in 1998, the technologies for providing access to archives and supporting scholarly work have expanded. Encoded Archival Description enables the exchange of data about archival finding aids, applications such as Google Notebook and Zotero assist scholars in taking notes on online sources and capturing citation information about primary as well as secondary sources. None of these existed when we did our work.

Our work also now faces serious issues of sustainability. In the end, our vision of a dynamic, comprehensive database of the records of the Vatican has only been partially realized. Although we incorporated records from several dispersed collections in other countries and in Rome, more collections remain to be included. Most importantly, we planned to sustain the data and the functionality of the database by depositing the data in the Vatican Library OPAC, but this plan was not realized. Therefore, the MARC records are static and have not been updated. While they still provide the most comprehensive guide to the holdings of the Vatican, the files are now over ten years old and do not reflect recent changes. In addition, links between agency histories and records descriptions, designed for the RLIN system, no longer work in WorldCat. Any guide, whether online or in print, ages. We now see the aging process of these data. Ironically, the print version of the *Inventory and Guide* becomes the lasting legacy of the project.

It is surprising, though, that in the intervening years, the ever-evolving power of information technology has not been adequately used to enhance description and access to this important archives. An archives of this complexity and with so many possibilities for research simply must embrace all the power of new technologies to open its contents to as wide a variety of users as possible. The ASV website mirrors fixed, text-based, page-based inventories of the past and does not allow multiple points of access to its holdings. This is to say neither that the current approach of the ASV is invalid, nor that the more comprehensive approach of the Michigan Project excludes the incorporation of other appropriate information. Rather, it is to say that these two approaches could be integrated and enhanced by technologies now on the horizon. Our descriptive work complements the ASV description. We are two parties with two approaches that can enter into an ongoing conversation on how best to use the power of information technology to explicate an understanding of the complexities of the vast archival holdings of the Holy See and to serve user communities that come to the ASV with an array of questions. We continue to hope that by creating an updatable data structure that contains elements of the diplomatics framework, we can enter into an ongoing conversation and collaboration to benefit the ASV as well as the thousands of researchers whose work depends on the archival holdings of the Holy See.