

The “Archivio Digitale” platform for digitisation of Italian “Archivi di Stato” Medieval sources: the case of San Vito del Trigno charters in the Archivio di Stato di Siena (short paper)

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Abstract

Archivio Digitale is a web portal provided since 2019 by the Istituto Centrale per gli Archivi (ICAR) as a digital archive of documentary fonds preserved in Italian Archivi di Stato or by Soprintendenze archivistiche e bibliografiche. It is expected to collect new digitisations, and many project are in progress in this sense. In particular, the Archivio di Stato di Siena is digitising and describing with reviewed and up-to-date inventories many of its Medieval documentary fonds. The present paper aims to present the digitisation project of a group of thirty-nine charters (1202-1558) from San Vito del Trigno Cistercian abbey, once situated in Southern Abruzzo, a project started in 2021 as a collaboration between Archivio di Stato di Siena and “G. D’Annunzio” university of Chieti-Pescara.

Keywords

Medieval charters, digitization projects, Archivio di Stato di Siena, San Vito del Trigno abbey, Abruzzo

1. Introduction

This paper presents a usage case of Archivio Digitale online portal for description and digitisation of Medieval documentary sources. It’s a work in progress dedicated to an unedited group of thirty-nine charters from S. Vito del Trigno Cistercian abbey, preserved in the Archivio di Stato di Siena, whose historical and archival significance are yet to understand. These documents, dated from 1202 to 1558, many of which preserved in poor conditions, pertain to different religious institutions who were active in a distant area from the Sienese territory, the Adriatic area of nowadays Abruzzo. An effort to study the documental *corpus* from this region is today conditioned and limited by the fragmentation and scattering of its sources. Over time, historians and researchers have paid fairly little attention to the San Vito del Trigno charters, though they are a part of well-known fonds in the Archivio di Stato di Siena, named “Biblioteca pubblica”. Thus, the digitisation project aims to produce a revised and up-to-date description, in order to enable a better historical, palaeographical and diplomatistic understanding of these documents.

2. Archivio Digitale and the digitisation projects in the Archivio di Stato di Siena

The digitisation project started on December 2021, as a collaboration between the Archivio di Stato di Siena and the Medieval History and Latin Palaeography chairs of “G. D’Annunzio” university in Chieti-Pescara. The digitisation and new index filing of the charters from San Vito del Trigno abbey,

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in fact, may offer a new contribution to historical, palaeographical and diplomatistic studies of medieval Abruzzese documentary sources, often fragmented and scattered following the vicissitudes of the institutions who preserved them in the Middle Ages [1, 2]; for that reason, few of them have been edited and studied in their graphical and historical significance yet. In 2021, the “D’Annunzio” university has allocated a fund on the subject, giving rise to the project presented here. The fund has financed a photographic campaign led by a specialized photographer, Rocco D’Errico; an analytical description work is currently in progress by the author of the present paper, as a development of a Master’s thesis on the subject [3], as a preparatory stage for an analytical study about San Vito del Trigno charters. Both descriptions and digital reproductions will be available online, as soon as the new index filing will be completed, within Archivio Digitale.

Archivio Digitale is a web portal provided since 2019 by the Istituto Centrale per gli Archivi (ICAR) as a digital archive containing digitisations of documents preserved by Italian public institutions, as Archivi di Stato, or Soprintendenze archivistiche e bibliografiche. Descriptions and digital images of documents available in Archivio Digitale are searchable within the Sistema Archivistico Nazionale (SAN), together with many other research tools as the archival descriptions provided by the Sistema Informativo degli Archivi di Stato (SIAS). Archivio Digitale started hosting filing and digital reproductions previously available in the SIAS, yet in the future it will collect new digitisations, and the Archivio di Stato di Siena is involved in many projects on the subject: in this context, the digitisation of the San Vito del Trigno charters has been set up. The Archivio di Stato di Siena, in fact, is currently digitising and on-line filing many of its medieval documentary series, in order to provide up-to-date descriptions for research and scholar needs; the new descriptions will complement the series of analytic inventories in the Archivio di Stato di Siena, compiled for the most part during the reorganization of the Sienese archives between ’30s and ’50s of the XXth century [4, 5]: such inventories remain as useful tools in archival research, yet nowadays it’s possible to review them. The new descriptions constitute, in all respects, new inventories: when they will be published in Archivio Digitale, they will be useful for users to know not only the analytical composition, but also palaeographic and diplomatistic features of different documentary fonds in the Archivio di Stato di Siena. With regard to the “Diplomatico” fonds, the digitisation and filing work of the charters from San Salvatore al Monte Amiata, a Benedictine monastery, later a Cistercian abbey, starts from and carries on the studies of Wilhelm Kurze on this subject; in fact, they are dedicated not only to the most ancient charters, already edited and analysed in the *Codex Diplomaticus Amiatinus* [6, 7, 8], but also to the XIIIth century ones. Another project, promoted by the University of Siena, is focused on a digital edition of the “Tavola delle Possessioni”, the XIVth century land register of the Comune of Siena [5, 9]; furthermore, a digitisation campaign is dedicated to the fragments from liturgical books re-used as covers [5]; last, a complete digitisation and filing of the whole “Diplomatico” fonds is going to start.

Moreover, within Archivio Digitale are already available digital photographs and descriptions of two documentary series, the most ancient documentation preserved by the Comune of Siena: the oldest charters (VIII – XIII century) of the “Riformagioni” fonds and the whole “Riformagioni Balzana” fonds [5, 10]. These digitisation projects were not specifically made for Archivio Digitale, yet they had been transferred there from the previous SIAS portal, as above mentioned.

Practically speaking, the digitisation process is composed of two distinct phases: firstly, the data acquisition phase consists in compiling a digital datasheet, that can be used to describe a single archival item (“documentary unit” or “archival unit”), a set of them, as a file about archival fonds, or even a digitisation project itself. When the datasheet describes a documentary unit, as a single charter, or an archival unit, it is structured in entries quite similar to those of a paper datasheet, yet it’s composed of many sections, as will be shown below. In step two, one or more digital images of a physical document are uploaded on a structured metadata. Metadata are then linked in the description file of the specific documentary or archival unit. This way, the description and the digital reproduction of a document are linked each other.

Archivio Digitale aims to be a centralised platform for digitisations of documents preserved by Italian public institutions as Archivi di Stato or Soprintendenze per i beni archivistici e bibliografici, as above mentioned. Thus, it has been developed as a generic cataloguing tool for a wide range of archival holdings, and it allows only a basic archival description of each item: transcriptions or editions are not provided. First of all, descriptions in Archivio Digitale provide information about dating and identification of each document: as a consequence, when new descriptions are based on a new

examination of dating and content, as for the Archivio di Stato di Siena projects, chronological and topical dates of documents in the new Archivio Digitale descriptions may differ from previous inventories and from archival shelfmarks itself. Moreover, dates of single documents in the Archivio di Stato di Siena were sometimes attributed according to the Sienese dating system, which started on September, 8th. Different interpretations may arise in documents in which the Christian Era chronology was not in use, as for papal and imperial privileges. Anyway, dating problems are discussed in a dedicated section, and, in order to ensure identification, current archival shelfmark is always provided. Secondly, a new abstract and a description of the state of preservation are provided: the latter is referred to by a brief comment (as “good”, “bad” etc.) that can be expanded by a more detailed description. As regards to San Vito del Trigno charters, preservation conditions are described in detail, in order to account for damages that don’t allow to read any main information, but also to provide clues that may be helpful for a reconstruction of archival vicissitudes, that is another point of interest in research about them, as will be shown below. Moreover, many sections of the online index files (authors, people, localities and institutions mentioned in each document, bibliographic information) are entries of the related indexes, that are common to the whole Archivio Digitale; as soon as photographs and descriptions of the documents will be available online, it will be possible to search contents with keywords queries or using search boxes for specific fields (years, archival fonds, single documentary or archival units).

On the digitisation side, all Archivio Digitale projects are based upon ICAR guidelines, yearly updated; generally speaking, digital images of *recto* and *verso* of each document are acquired via scanner or digital photographs; beside the originals have to be positioned a metric scale, a chromatic one and a grayscale. Big-dimensioned archival pieces are scanned or photographed both in a total image, where possible and although it may result not perfectly readable, and in single portions. Then, each image is copied in different formats of digital storage: a “master” file at archives’ disposal, on rigid support in high-definition TIFF or RAW format; another one in lower definition, available online and downloadable.

Thus, such digitisation projects can empower different perspectives in many research fields about Medieval documentation, providing online-available digital images and descriptions of documents preserved in Archivi di Stato. Dealing with a great mass of documents may change the possibilities of analysis, not only in reconstructing Medieval history of a territory, but also in order to identify, by comparison of a broader *corpus*, typical external and internal features. First of all, palaeographic and diplomatistic aspects may be more easily accessible; photographs of the *verso* of each charter, too, provide a starting point for an analysis of archival notes: they witness the archival history of documentary fonds, from various proveniences to nowadays Archivi di Stato; moreover, notes on the *verso* may also give clues for understanding which archival structures – memory of possessions and rights obtained by an institution - existed on a territory during the Middle Age, how charters were organised in them, how did they change over time: as regards to the Abruzzese documentation, such a research field has been hardly practised yet, due to scattering and lack, in most cases, of studies and editions, and based on documentation copied in cartularies, the richest and most important documentary sources about medieval Abruzzo that have been studied and edited yet, as the San Clemente a Casauria [11, 12] and the Santa Maria di Tremiti [13, 14] ones. Secondly, an analysis of tergal notes may help understanding the vicissitudes of documents originally preserved in Medieval archives, the progressive scatterings, transfers, acquisitions that led them to nowadays great documentary collectors, just as Archivi di Stato. Studying such vicissitudes means understanding how such a documentary heritage came together, an aim sometimes still to be reached: as an example, the nowadays organisation of the Archivio di Stato di Siena is still conditioned by the archival system choices made since its institution, in 1858, until the first decades of the XXth century, by confusion and disorders in incoming materials and by following vicissitudes, as during the second world war [4, 5]. Yet a comparative analysis of tergal notes also means going backwards and reconstructing the documentation of a territory, the various directions along which it scattered away.

The San Vito del Trigno charters are just an example of this kind of researches: their archival history within the Archivio di Stato di Siena still has to be understood, as how and why they came in Siena hasn’t been studied yet; anyway, they may provide new information about the vicissitudes of the Sienese archive, and tergal notes may be a starting point in this sense, as will be shown below. Moreover, the San Vito charters are just a part of a broader context, the Medieval documentation from a territory, the

Abruzzese one, whose history is still to be reconstructed and studied in its complexity and its meanings. The digitisation project dedicated to these charters, therefore, aims to make available online a still unedited and dispersed source about the history of a precise territory, but also to enable its use in a broader historical, palaeographical and diplomatistic context.

2.1. The San Vito del Trigno charters in Archivio di Stato di Siena

Within their actual preservation site, the “Diplomatico - Biblioteca Pubblica” fonds in Archivio di Stato di Siena (composed of various documentary groups collected, in different ways, in the public library of Siena until 1860, when it was transferred in the Archivio di Stato) [5], the thirty-nine charters related to the San Vito del Trigno Cistercian abbey constitute a well recognizable group of documents, by the geographic area they are referred to, the Abruzzese one, and by its archival vicissitudes, witnessed by many sets of tergal annotations shared by the whole group. The San Vito charters were written since the beginning of XIIIth century until the central years of the XVIth, and they witness how diverse religious institutions diffused through a similar territory, changed over time and acted in a vast portion of the Adriatic area of nowadays Abruzzo. The most ancient documents in this group (first half of XIIIth century), in fact, come from many Benedictine monasteries which were situated in different areas of the Abruzzese territory, from north from the Pescara river (San Vito de Furca church, probably situated in the locality nowadays named Forca di Penne) to the southern boundary of Abruzzo, along the Sangro river (S. Trinità in Paglieta and Santo Stefano in Atessa monasteries); from the second half of the XIIIth century, most part of the deeds is related to the Cistercian abbey that came into possession of these monasteries and of their documents: S. Vito de Piscaria, afterly transferred southward, along the Trigno river, from which it took its new name.

The San Vito charters are almost unedited, and very few studies have been dedicated to the subject: only one document, the most ancient one, was edited by Fedor Schneider in 1914, as a contribute to the research led by the Preußisches Historisches Institut in Rom about Southern Italy administration and institutions during the reign of Frederick II [15]. The San Vito del Trigno charters were considered for the first time as a whole from 1950s, when many Abruzzese “local” historians made notice about it [16, 17, 18]; yet they didn’t make use of the “Biblioteca Pubblica” inventory, compiled in 1940 during the reorganization campaign of the Archivio di Stato di Siena (Ms. B 96 Ter), and the main source to them was still the catalogue of archival material preserved in the Siense public library, printed in 1847; yet only a part of the San Vito del Trigno charters, thirty-one documents out of thirty-nine, was enregistered there [19]. New studies based on the whole documentary group are due to professors and researchers from “G. D’Annunzio” university, who, since 1980s, have dedicated themselves to look for and study documentary sources from Medieval Abruzzo: in 1994, a paper by Roberto Paciocco [20] outlined the institutional vicissitudes of San Vito del Trigno connecting them to the wider historical and religious context of settlement and diffusion of the Cistercian order in Southern Italy, primarily witnessed by the Statuta. In this way, it has been possible to delineate San Vito del Trigno’s origins: it was originally an hospital, San Vito de Furca, that between 1255 and 1256 entered the Cistercian order as a daughter-abbey of Santi Vincenzo e Anastasio alle Tre Fontane, near Rome [21]; ten years later, San Vito de Furca (sometimes named de Piscaria) was transferred along the Trigno river, where it already owned possessions, lands and many ancient Benedictine monasteries donated in 1266 by the bishop of Chieti [22].

Then, a solid historical profile of the institutional history of San Vito del Trigno was pointed out; nevertheless, the only description of its documentary sources is the above-mentioned hand-written inventory of the “Biblioteca Pubblica” fonds; here, notices about S. Vito documents are sometimes inaccurate, due to the bad state of preservation of many charters. Yet the San Vito documents witness the significance of the abbey in the Abruzzese territory: the most ancient Siense charters are related to the Penne area, in the Apenninic zone of central Abruzzo, where the hospital church of San Vito de Furca was located; between the ‘50s and ‘70s of the same century, the abbey’s possessions expanded towards the southern Abruzzo and Capitanata, nowadays Molise (Termoli: Archivio di Stato di Siena, Diplomatico Biblioteca Pubblica, 1259 maggio 25, c. 145; 1290 settembre 6, c. 323; 1293 febbraio 26,

c. 351; Petacciato: 1276 agosto 16, c. 223; 1305 giugno 14, c. 489; 1310 ottobre 1, c. 553; 1314 aprile 16, c. 584; Guglionesi: sec. XIV prima metà, giugno, 1, c. 1158) and Puglia (Foggia: Archivio di Stato di Siena, Diplomatico Biblioteca Pubblica, 1271 aprile 9, c. 199); the economic importance of acquisitions in the latter area, as it was involved in transhumance, was pointed out by many studies about another Abruzzese Cistercian abbey, Santa Maria di Casanova [23], and the control of San Vito del Trigno on sheep tracks has been underlined yet primarily on the archaeological ground [24]. Once the San Vito abbey had been transferred on the Trigno river, charters witnessed relevant relations with nearby universitates: inhabitants of Vasto and Termoli, from servants to notaries, often donated their possession or even themselves: a donation to the abbey issued by one of the notaries who wrote many other charters of the San Vito group, the notarius publicus of Vasto Benencasa Berardi is worth mentioning in this sense (Archivio di Stato di Siena, Diplomatico Biblioteca Pubblica, 1309 giugno 23, c. 537); of great importance for the understanding of relations between San Vito del Trigno and the Kingdom of Sicily under the Anjou dynasty are many charters, written since 1276, involving Geoffrey of Milly, senescalus under the reign of king Charles I, and his family: a significative document, in this sense, is an inventory of horses belonging to Agnese, Geoffrey's wife, kept in custody by the abbey (Archivio di Stato di Siena, Diplomatico Biblioteca Pubblica, 1269 novembre 20, c. 379). The relationships between Geoffrey of Milly and San Vito del Trigno still have to be studied, while Geoffrey as a feudal lord and high-officer in the Anjou kingdom is mentioned in the Registri Angioini: in 1284 he was iustitarius of Capitanata and feudal lord of Campomarino, Guglionesi, Petacciato, San Martino [25], and senescalus since 1294 [26].

Furthermore, the San Vito charters attest the abbey's activity within Cistercian order: in 1328, a letter by pope John XXII invalidated many abbatial elections held in Santi Vincenzo ed Anastasio alle Tre Fontane abbey, and established as a new abbot Jacobus de Verulis, monk of Casamari; among the abbots previously elected without a papal consent, one from San Vito is mentioned (Archivio di Stato di Siena, Diplomatico Biblioteca Pubblica, 1337 gennaio 21, c. 812). The latest charters explicitly attest economic hardships during the XIVth century and, from 1468, they mention many commendatory abbots (Archivio di Stato di Siena, Biblioteca Pubblica, 1468 agosto 21, c. 1330; 1504 novembre 6, c. 1385; 1507 dicembre 15, c. 1388; 1558 marzo 19, c. 1427): an analysis of later charters will be a necessary step to understand when and why the San Vito documents arrived in Siena.

Thanks to digital images of the verso of each charter, in Archivio Digitale may be observed various sets of ancient archival notes: they witness the complex history of the San Vito charters. XIVth-century and Humanistic age annotations appear in some of them, but all the San Vito del Trigno documents bear on the verso an abstract and a progressive number in Italian, all written by the same hand in the XVIIIth century. An identical series of notes appears on the verso of many XIth-XIIIth century charters bound together in the Ms. Lat. 9255, preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France and composed after 1859. The above-mentioned series of tergal notes are shown by nine charters from Abruzzo included in it: these documents (in particular, the most ancient ones) have been known since a publication by Carlo Tedeschi in 2016 [27]. They are all private deeds, apart from the c. 8, a letter by pope Innocent III issued in Sora in 1208, and they involve many monasteries that, during the XIIIth century, became properties of San Vito abbey (S. Martino di Paglieta, S. Leucio di Atessa, SS. Giovanni, Nazario e Celso di Archiano, S. Salvo, that were located in southern Abruzzo, and S. Clemente di Lastiniano, not far from Penne), and to the church of San Vito de Furca. The Sieneese charters and the Ms. Lat. 9255 ones are therefore parts of a same dispersed documentary group, whose the nine documents now in the Bibliothèque Nationale are the oldest portion; in fact, the progressive numbering written in the XVIIIth notes starts with the XIth century Abruzzese charters of Ms. Lat. 9522 (yet the numbering is not always in a rigorous chronological order). The reasons of the dispersion of the two groups are still unknown: they may have been separated when they were collected together in the San Vito abbey's archive; otherwise, they may have been dispersed from Siena, where, between the last decades of the XVIIth century and the end of the XVIIIth, reorganisation campaigns went on in many archives in the town, since the second half of the XVIIIth century at request of the Grand-duke Peter Leopold of Lorena and as a consequence of suppressions of many religious institutions [5]; such works usually produced detailed inventories, in which documents are chronologically organised and described by abstracts, written also on the verso of each charter: these kind of notes are very similar to the XVIIIth century ones on the San Vito charters. If the provenance from Siena of all the San Vito del Trigno documents, both the thirty-nine now in the Archivio di Stato di Siena and the nine bound in the

Ms. Lat. 9255, was ascertained, it would be necessary to understand if their separation was connected with the transfer of archival documents from Italian archives to France during the Napoleonic period, in order to enrich Imperial collections: in this occasion, a great mass of documents from Sieneſe archives was transferred in Paris [28, 29]. That many of them remained there is regarded as poſſible: as an example, a comparison between the inventories compiled before documentation from ſuppreſſed monaſteries and convents was taken away (Archivio di Stato di Siena, Concistoro 2575, n. 8, ins. I-2) and the inventories written when, in 1817, it was back in Siena (Archivio di Stato di Siena, Concistoro 2527, n. 6; n. 8, Ins. I-3), reveals that about 360 charters were miſſing [30].

In conclusion, the digitiſation projects for Archivio Digitale will enable users to deal with a ſubſtantial maſſ of documents, and they will empower the poſſibilities of analysis and comparison of many aſpects of Medieval documentation, as palaeographical and diplomatistic features, or archival notes. Moreover, digital images and deſcriptions provided in Archivio Digitale will be helpful tools in caſes of diſperſed and ſcattered documentation now preſerved in Archivi di Stato or by Soprintendenze per I beni archiviſtici e bibliografici, making poſſible comparisons and connections with other documentary ſources from the ſame area. In this ſenſe, deſcriptions and index filings ensure the ſearchability of each document within the SAN and the related online tools. As regards to San Vito del Trigno charters, they witness connections and relationships between the abbey, the Anjou kingdom, the Cistercian order, the nearby *universitates* and their inhabitants. In addition, the San Vito charters ſhow different palaeographical and diplomatistic features, as they come from different areas that afterly come into poſſeſſion of a ſame Cistercian abbey, making poſſible to ſtudy how ſuch features changed over time. The aim is to make available the San Vito charters in their archival context and to provide ſtarting information for the ſtudy of the complexity and variety of their meanings. They are a part of a documentary *corpus* that ſtill has to be reſtructured, yet the action of “central” powers and institutions, their reflection on a precise territory, is recorded in them. Hence, digitiſing San Vito del Trigno charters is juſt a ſtarting point for understanding the hiſtorical, palaeographical, diplomatistic ſignificance of theſe documents: it makes a very little known hiſtorical ſource available online, in order to enable a wider contextualiſation within religious and institutional viciffitudes of late medieval Southern Italy.

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