Re-Appraising the Appraisal Tab

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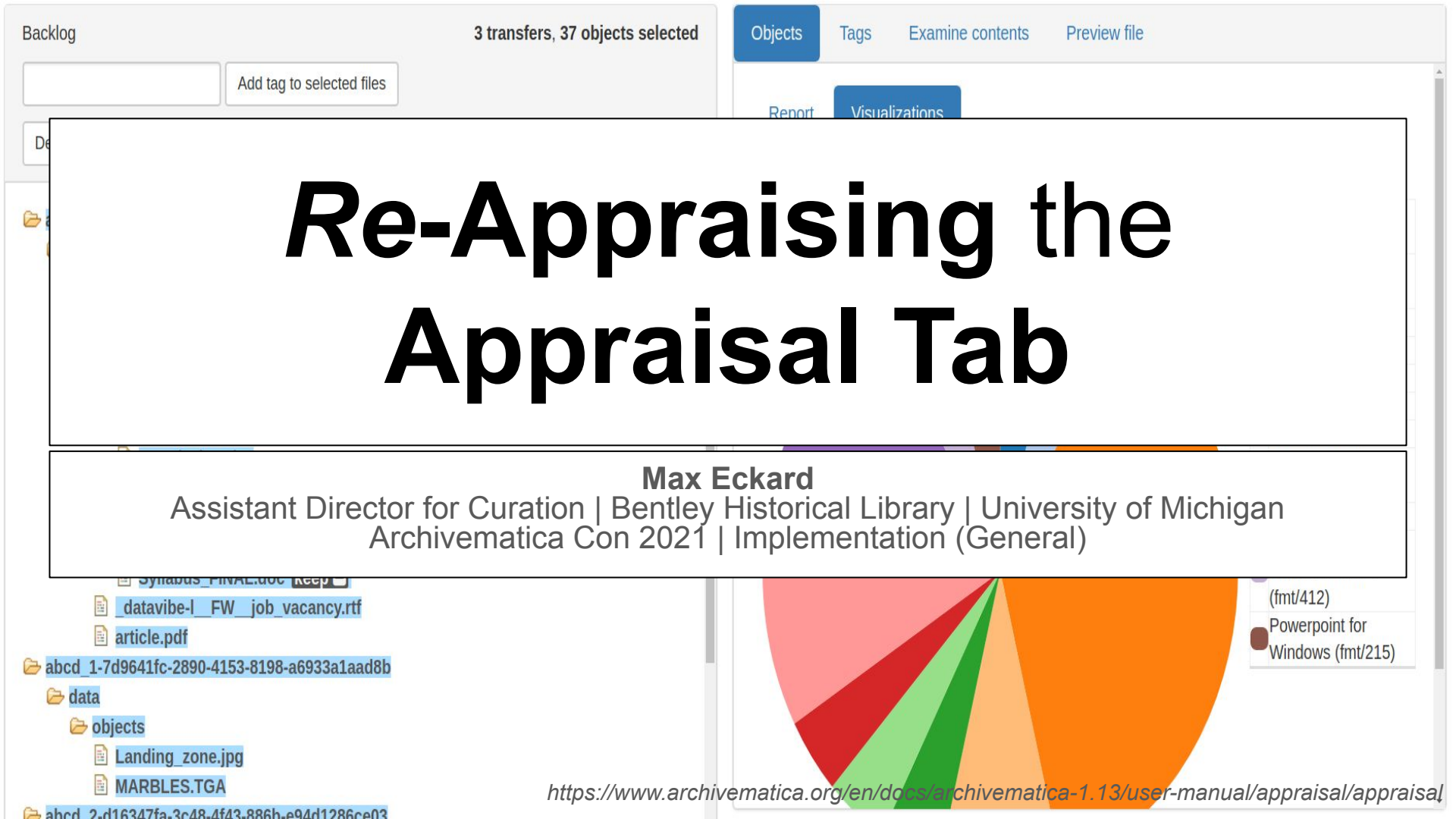
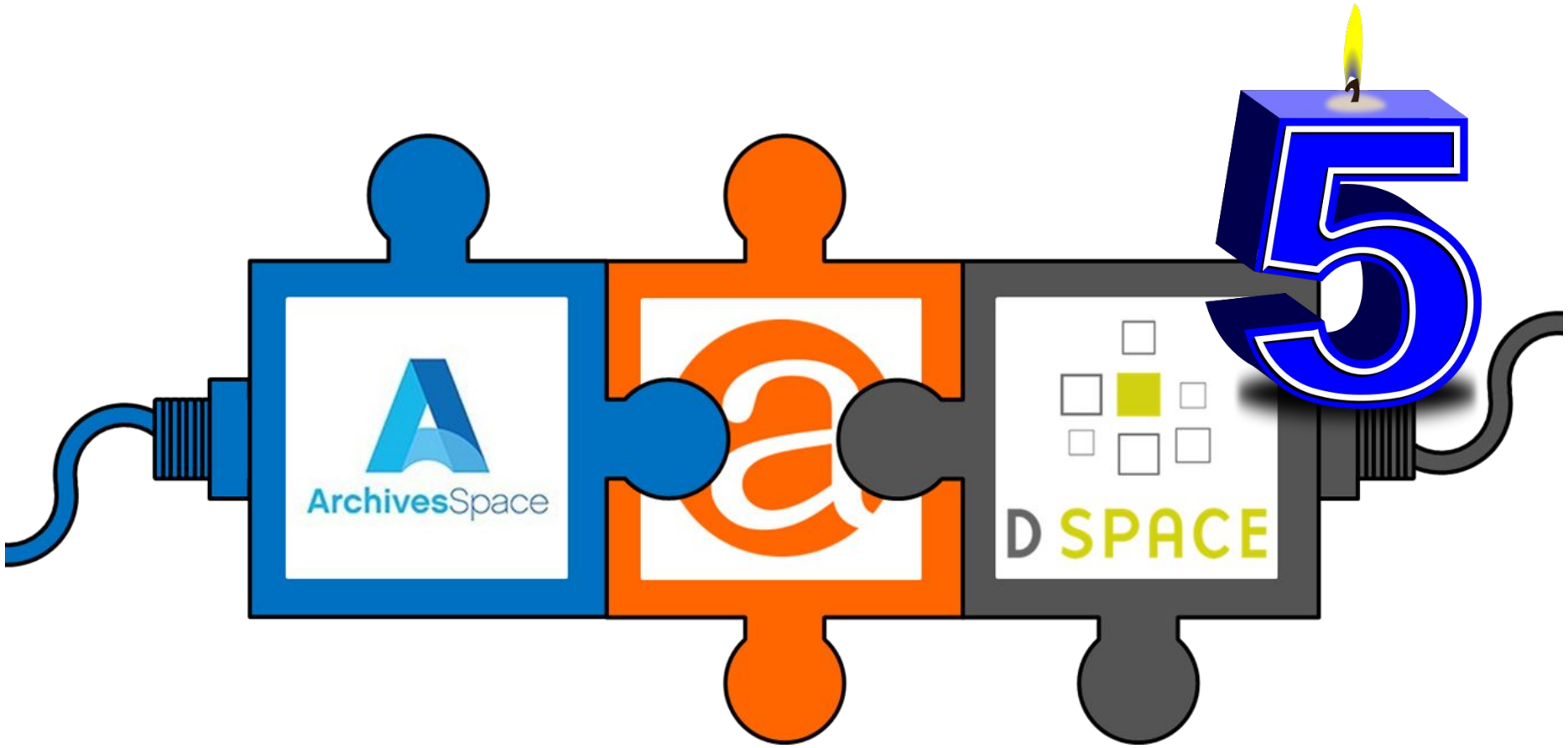


https://www.archivematica.org/en/docs/archivematica-1.13/user-manual/appraisal/appraisal/


ArchivesSpace
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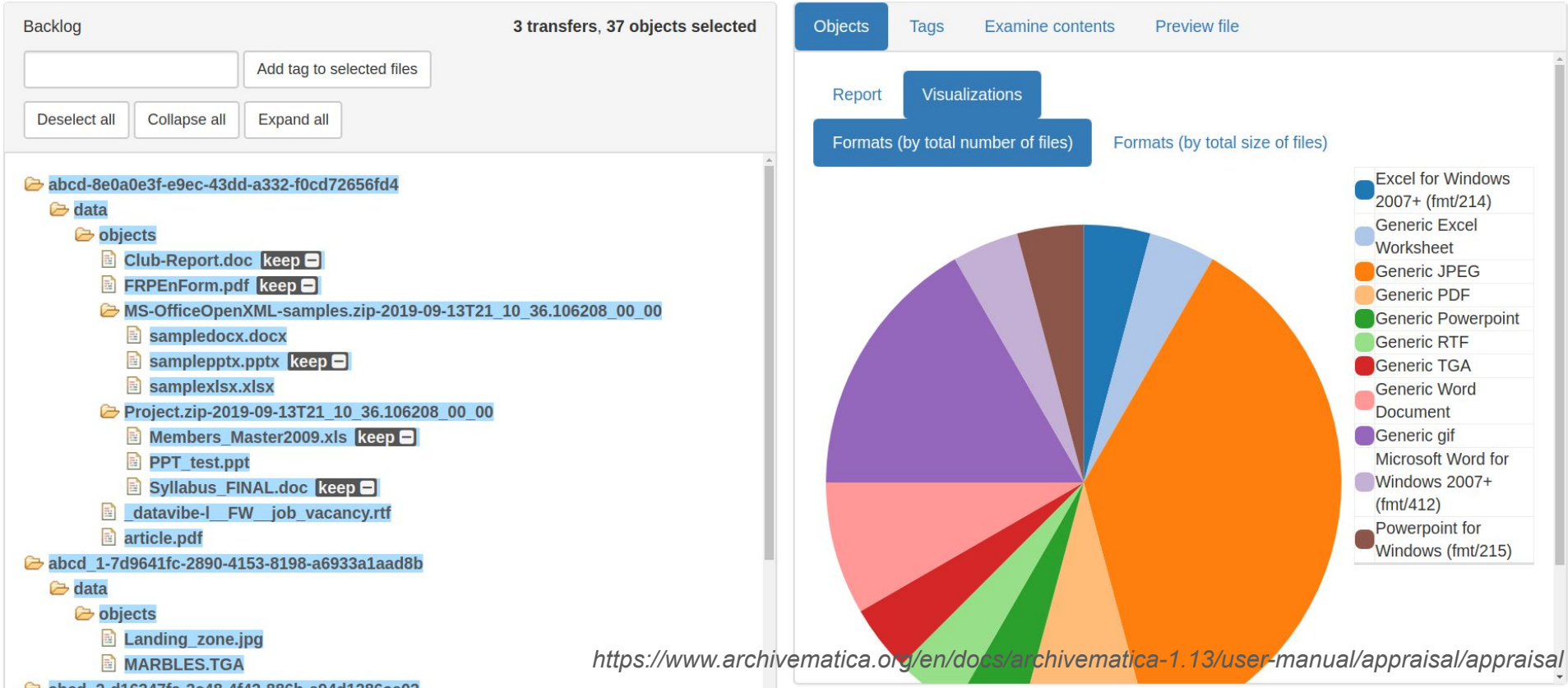
Appraisal Tab



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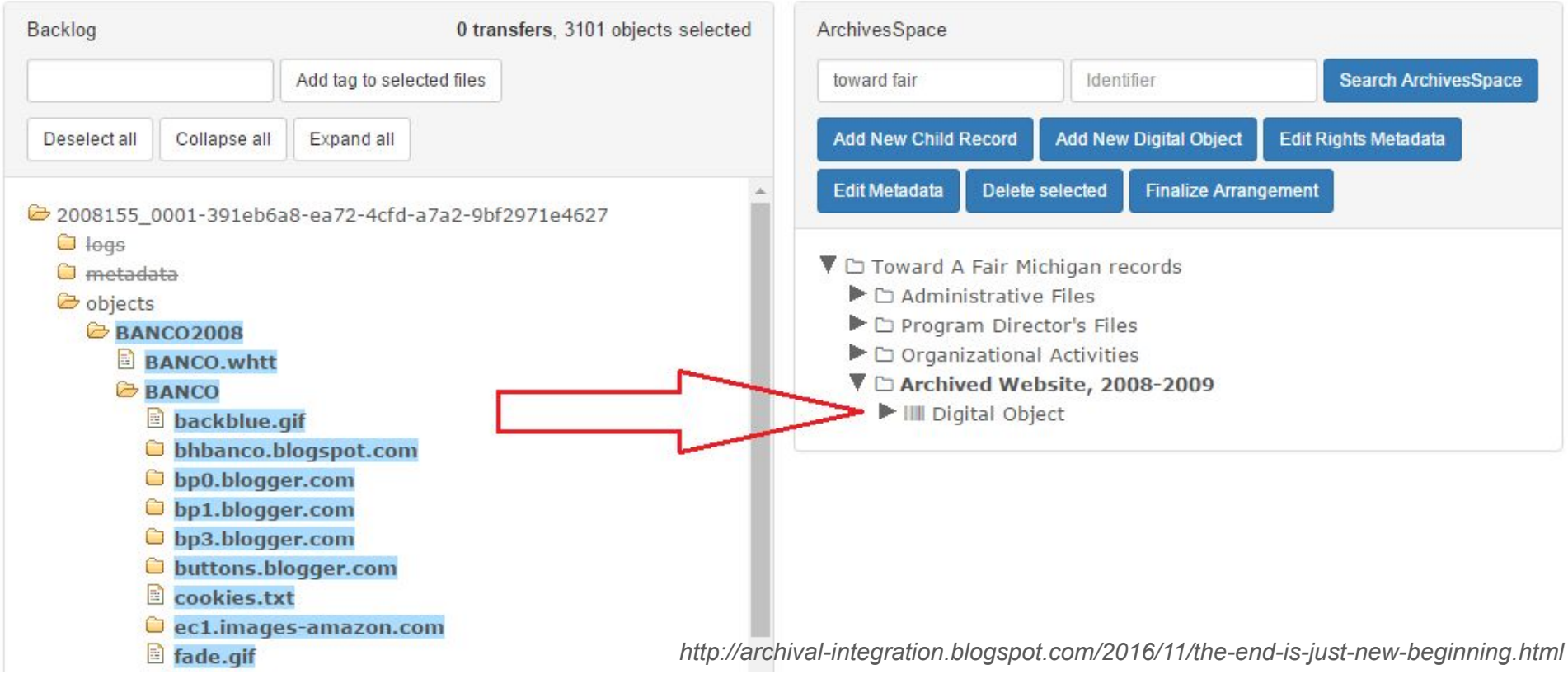
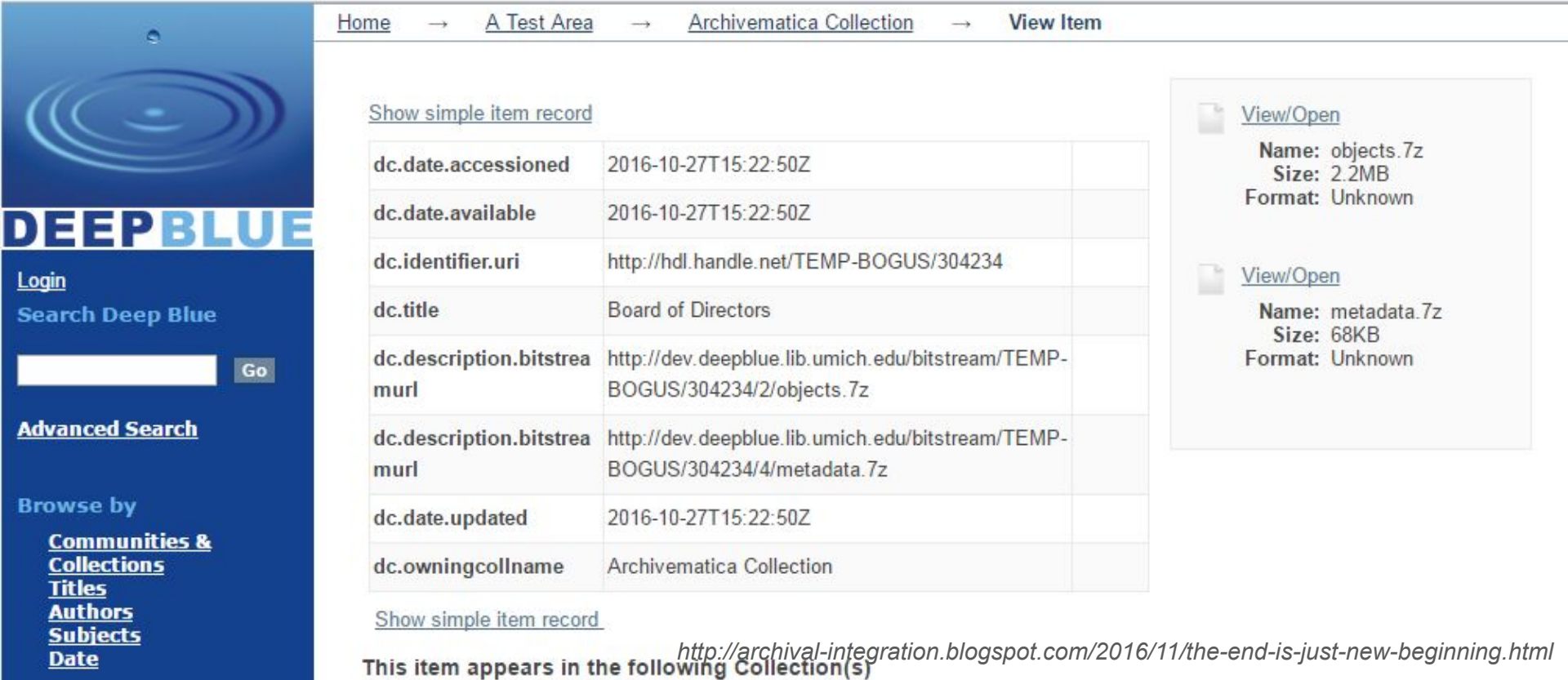
“Tightly-Coupled” Archivematica-ArchivesSpace Integration



http://archival-integration.blogspot.com/2016/11/the-end-is-just-new-beginning.html

Tightly-Coupled Archivematica-DSpace Integration



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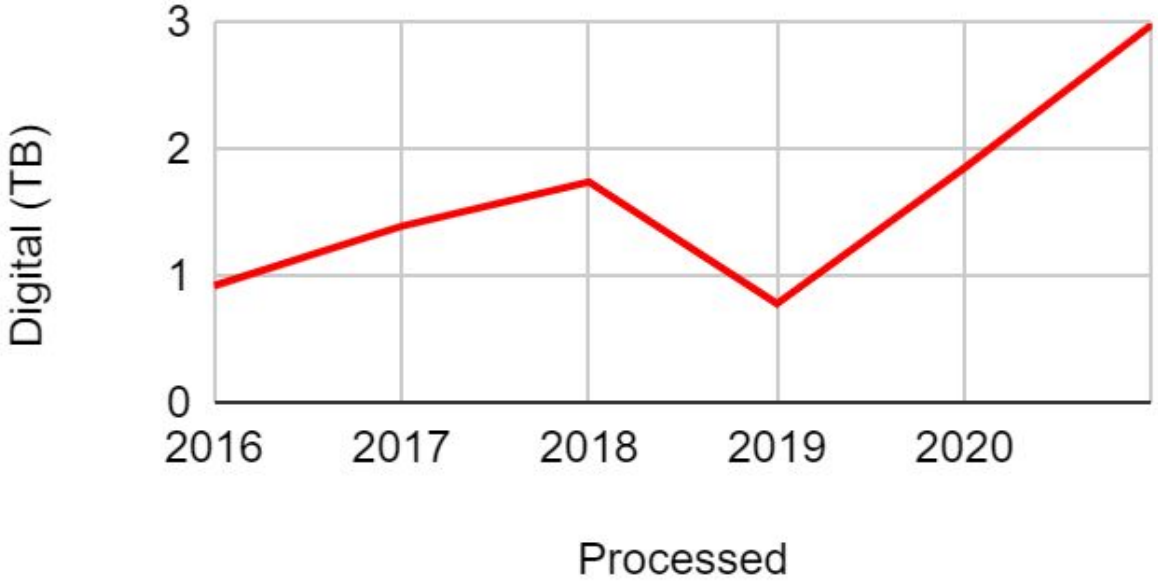
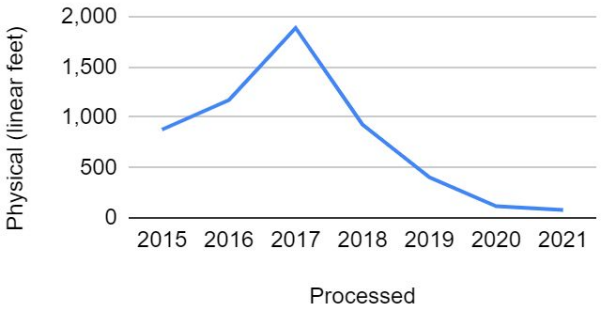
Digital (TB) vs. Processed



Physical (linear feet) vs. Processed



Outline

- The Broader Effects of a Major Grant Project
- Archivematica (and the Appraisal Tab and Workflow Integration) Today
- Technical Lessons Learned
- Social and Cultural Lessons Learned

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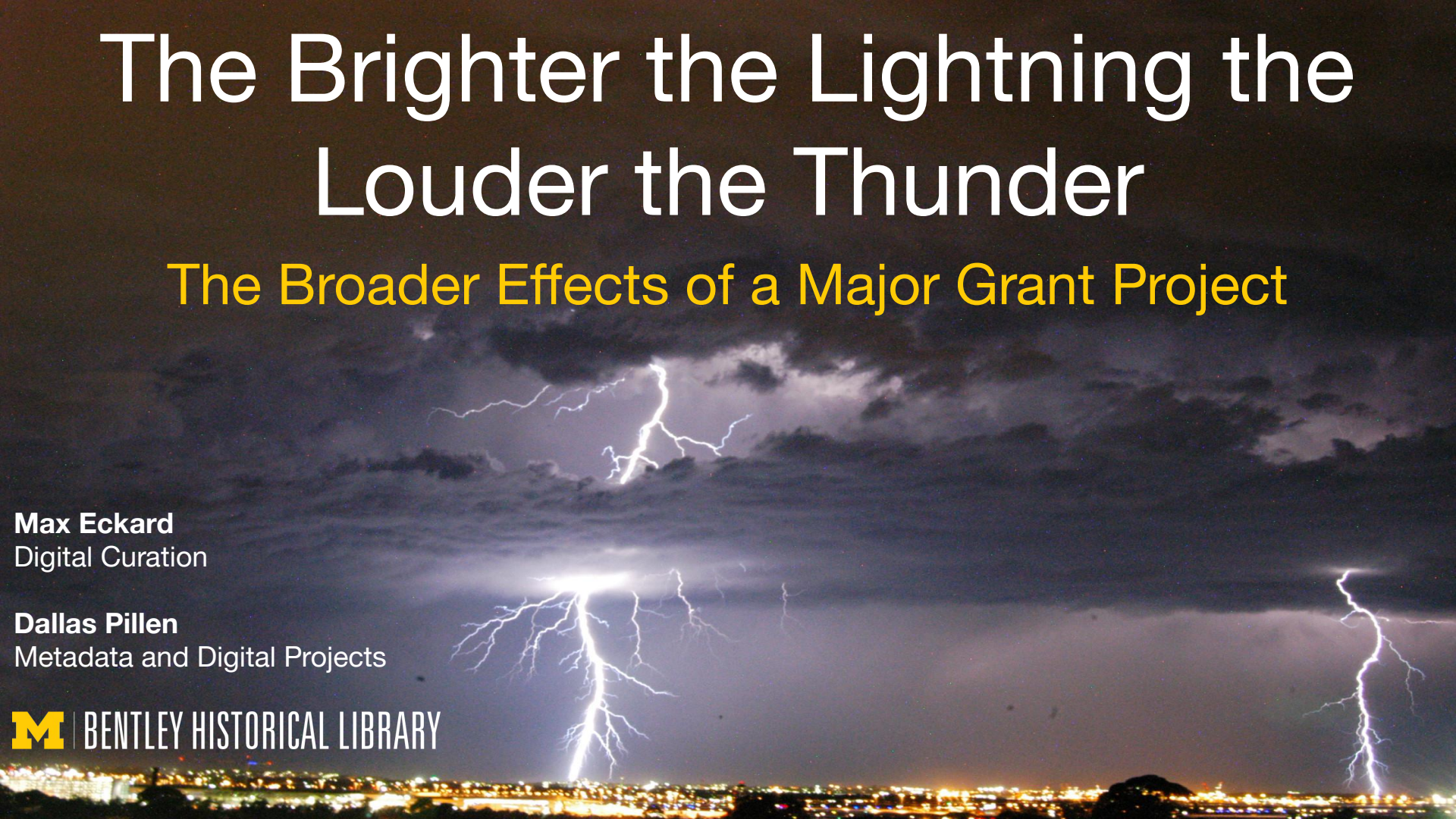
The Brighter the Lightning the Louder the Thunder

The Broader Effects of a Major Grant Project



Max Eckard
Digital Curation

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Metadata and Digital Projects

BENTLEY HISTORICAL LIBRARY

“Working Smarter” (in Gigantic Scare Quotes)

- Started to learn some basic technical skills, at least as individuals
- Technical skills
  - “Scripting it” with Python
  - Getting comfortable on the command line
  - Working with databases
  - Parsing XML
  - Using version control
  - Interacting with APIs
- This ability to work smarter has had a very positive impact on many other areas of our work.

Making Tech Skills a Strategic Priority

- Working smarter as individuals led us to thinking more about making technical skills a strategic priority.
- Put focused effort into group learning around technical upskilling
  - Informal workshops
  - An intensification of this effort with more emphasis on an inclusive approach to peer-to-peer learning experiences within the Curation team
  - Generating deliverables around topics that directly relate to our work
- This process has also made us more collectively aware of the limitations of our own silos of expertise and the ways that the digital initiatives we undertake impact the overall curation of archival materials.

The “Agile” Archivist (Scare Quotes, Again)

- We also learned about agile software development
  - Individuals and interactions with them over processes and tools
  - Working (i.e., good enough) software over comprehensive documentation (although documentation is also important)
  - Customer collaboration over contract negotiation
  - Responding to change over following a plan
- This experience set us on a trajectory that ultimately led us to a better understanding of project management more generally
- The development of project management skills has also had a very positive impact on many other areas of our work.

From Project Management to Strategic Thinking About Projects

- Our fixation with “agile” gradually grew into an exploration of project management concepts more generally
- That exploration of project management concepts gradually led to thinking more strategically about what projects we want to undertake in the first place
  - Divergent-Emergent-Convergent Thinking ← Divergent, Emergent, and Convergent Thinking: 3 Thinking Modes of Creative Thinking
  - Strategy Knotworking ← Strategy Knotworking: Turning Ideas and Ambitions into Reality
- That thinking more strategically has led to looking for ways to make that process more inclusive and participatory
  - Liberating Structures ← Liberating Structures

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The Appraisal tab is no longer functional

The DSpace integration is no longer functional

The UI crashes regularly.

We have not been successful upgrading to a more current and officially supported release.

Re-Appraising the Workflow Integration

- Over time, however, we found ourselves moving away from this "tightly-coupled" integration.
  - Works really well for relatively small, heterogeneous content
  - does not work as well for relatively large or homogenous content (or content destined for access systems that aren't DSpace)
- We developed our own Python scripts to replicate a lot of what Archivematica was doing, but *outside* of Archivematica
  - Python ArchivesSpace wrapper ← BHL ASpace API Client
  - Python DSpace wrapper ← DAPPr
  - “AIP Repackaging" scripts ← BHL AIP Repackager
- Now we do this for pretty much everything, even the small, heterogeneous content
- So we still have an integration, it’s just more what I would call “loosely-coupled.”

Re-Appraising the Appraisal Tab

- This has also meant that we have moved away from doing appraisal inside Archivematica to doing appraisal outside of Archivematica.
- Most recently we have used Archivematica solely for creating AIPs with the Automation Tools

Archivematica Technical Support

- Meanwhile, we have had some staff turnover at both the Bentley and the LIT department of our University Libraries.
  - Has resulted in a lack of internal knowledge of Archivematica and its specialized integrations with other applications
  - Has had a significant impact on our ability to get technical support for the application
- Started to run into some Archivematica issues that weren't "relatively straightforward to resolve”

(Meanwhile, Archivematica happily chugged away at TBs worth of digital material kicked off via the Automation Tools over the last year and a half or so.)

- So…
  - Maintenance is hard
  - We’re currently in talks with Artefactaul about an annual maintenance agreement

I don't know if we'll go back to using the Appraisal tab or the workflow integration

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Scope Creep, Systems Integration, and the Appraisal tab

- I have often questioned our decision to add appraisal functionality to Archivematica
- I worry that we were trying to make a system accomplish a goal widely outside the scope of its original design.
- It was never really that useful for processing archivists anyway
  - Only moderately useful for archivists focused on digital preservation
  - Less so for processing archivists needing to do intellectual appraisal of content
- I worry that this is an example of “arbitrary complexity, forced without rhyme or reason by the many human institutions and systems to which [the software developers of Archivematica] interfaces must conform”

Maslow's "Hierarchy of Needs" as Applied to Systems Integration

https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-23902918

Maslow's "Hierarchy of Needs" as Applied to Systems Integration

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Resources

- It seems important that “project archivists” that were involved with this digital preservation project eventually became “regular” dealing with digital preservation on a more regular, permanent basis.
- This reasoning also applies to the way that we moved from soft money to General Fund money.

Organization

- Our U-M Library LIT colleagues don’t have any incentive to support Archivematica!
- “Good will” in organizations only goes so far.
- We've slowly but surely been exploring how feasible it might be to support these systems on our own or at least without them
  - We’re exploring technical support with Artefactual.
  - But we also now completely host Aeon on our own
  - We started hosting a development environment for ArchivesSpace as a kind of experiment
- When we can’t do something “on our own,” we develop MOUs that clearly define our relationships with campus partners

Pandemic and the “Great Resignation”

- A pandemic makes people rethink their careers, work conditions, and long-term goals
- There have been pros of being “good to go” with digital processing when it came to the pandemic
  - We’ve been able to support remote work with digital processing
  - Without a full-time digital archivist or even an Archivematica GUI that worked
- We’re not immune to the trends of the “Great Resignation”
- Or even of people in archives learning technical skills and then leaving the profession for what they perceive are greener pastures

Thank You!