ABSTRACT

Starting in the 1920s and into the 1970s, the Danish archaeologist Harald Ingholt (1896–1985) created a vast collection of sculpture, architecture, and epigraphy from Palmyra, Syria (first to third centuries AD). His paper archive contains 2,347 so-called archive sheets, which include photographs, transcriptions of inscriptions, stylistic observations and dating, provenance and collection information, and bibliography. In 2012 the archive was digitized by Professor Rubina Raja and the Palmyra Portrait Project. An in print, commented edition of the archive is underway, but this publication serves to make the archive sheets openly available as a research resource and a starting point for future research on Palmyrene art and epigraphy, the history of excavations in the Middle East, twentieth century collecting practices, and cultural heritage preservation in Syria.

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(1) OVERVIEW

CONTEXT

Palmyra, ancient Tadmor, in modern Syria, was an important city of the Roman Empire with a flourishing sculptural practice in the first to third centuries AD. The approximately 4,000 portraits collected since 2012 within the framework of the *Palmyra Portrait Project* make up the largest group of portraits stemming from one place in the ancient world outside of the city of Rome [1, 2, 3, 4, 5]. This makes the Palmyrene material a significant contributor to studies of iconography and sculptural habit in the Roman world. The sculptural habit in Palmyra was the subject of inquiry for the Danish archaeologist Harald Ingholt, who collected hundreds of images of Palmyrene sculpture over the course of the twentieth century. (Figure 1) Ingholt initiated his research for his higher doctoral dissertation, *Studier over Palmyrensk Skulptur*, around 1922 thereby marking a starting point for his extensive archive [6, 7]. Although Ingholt’s seminal work includes images of some sculptures and references to his archive sheets, it is not a publication of his research archive. Current research on the archive sheets – for example, PS 1430 that includes the annotation, “On back: Letter from Peder Mortensen. Aarhus, 4. Juli 1971.”

![Figure 1](image_url) An example of a sheet from the Ingholt archive, known as PS 151. © Palmyra Portrait Project, Ingholt Archive at Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, and Rubina Raja.
as well as other bibliographic references—shows that Ingholt continued working on his archive into the 1970s [8, 9]. Ingholt then donated and transferred his archive to the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek (Copenhagen, Denmark) in the 1980s [10]. (Figure 2) The archaeologist Gunhild Ploug worked on the archive, but her publication of Palmyrene portraits is also not a publication of the archive [11].

Shortly after the founding of the Palmyra Portrait Project in 2012, the archive was digitized. Additionally, the project members have been researching all of the 2,347 archive sheets, reviewing their inscriptions, bibliography, and other annotations. The archive has been influential in the creation of the forthcoming publication of the approximately 4,000 Palmyrene portraits collected by the project.

Working alongside the Palmyra Portrait Project since 2020 is the project Archive Archaeology: Preserving and Sharing Palmyra’s Cultural Heritage through Harald Ingholt’s Digital Archives [12]. This project has focused on the archive sheets as objects of inquiry, and is preparing the digital archive for publication in print entitled The Ingholt Archive: The Palmyrene Material [13]. This publication includes images of all the archive sheets with an accompanying commentary that includes a description of the archive sheets, transcription of its annotations, transcription and translation of any inscriptions, and full bibliography. Furthermore, the publication looks beyond sculpture to Ingholt’s study of Palmyrene architecture, for example, published in print as an appendix and online as open data. (Figure 3)

The publications, both in print and as open data, will further the study of portraiture in the Roman world, as well as the histories of archaeology and collecting, and cultural heritage preservation.

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**Figure 2** Thank you letter from the director of the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek. ©Rubina Raja and courtesy of Mary Ebaa Underdown.
Figure 3 An unnumbered archive sheet showing several views of architecture in Palmyra. © Palmyra Portrait Project, Ingholt Archive at Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, and Rubina Raja.
SPIRITUAL COVERAGE
Description: Syria, Homs, Palmyra
Latitude: 34 33 12 N degrees minutes/34.5530 decimal degrees
Longitude: 038 16 05 E degrees minutes/38.2680 decimal degrees

TEMPORAL COVERAGE
App. 50 BC-AD 273

(2) METHODS
Harald Ingholt’s archive has been housed at the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen, Denmark, since 1983. It was temporarily transferred to Aarhus University for digitization in 2012, thus creating the dataset under discussion. In Aarhus, each archive sheet was scanned at 1200 DPI and saved as a .tif file. Only the obverse of each sheet was scanned unless annotations appeared on the reverse. In these few instances, in the .pdf file available on Figshare, the reverse immediately follows the obverse.

When the sheets were scanned, care was taken to maintain the order in which they were received from the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek. However, after further research into the archive sheets, it became apparent that the archive’s structure at the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek likely differed from Ingholt’s. This hypothesis is based on each sheet’s PS number. PS was used by Ingholt as an abbreviation for “Palmyrene Sculpture.” Each sheet has two PS numbers, one centred at the top of the sheet in quotation marks, and another in the sheet’s upper right corner that is oriented to the left. (Figure 4) In the example shown in Figure 4, which demonstrates the two different numbering systems, only the number at the top centre is preceded by the abbreviation “PS.” The numbers in the upper right corner are inconsistently preceded by “PS” and the example of Figure 5 shows a case where “PS” is given with this number. (Figure 5) Research on the sheets and Ingholt’s 1928 study suggested that the number in the upper right corner was that assigned by Ingholt whereas the number centred at the top of the sheet was an addition – a renumbering – made by Ploug [6, 7]. As such, the digital archive was re-structured according to the PS numbers assigned by Ingholt. Although this structuring undoes Ploug’s chronological and typological structure, the present form of the digital archive strives to accurately reflect Ingholt’s collection. Furthermore, Ploug never published her advertised monograph on the chronology and we have not found new ground for profound change to the solid chronological work done by Ingholt – also not after scrutinising all of the archive sheets. For the sheets without a PS number, for example the views of architecture, the team preserved the order in which the sheets were received from the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek.

Once the structure of the digital archive had been finalized, each file was reviewed. Sheets were described, and their text transcribed and commented upon for the publication “The Ingholt Archive: The Palmyrene Material” [13].

(3) DATASET DESCRIPTION

OBJECT NAME
The Ingholt Archive

DATA TYPE
The data set is primary data in the form of high-resolution scans of Ingholt’s archive sheets available as .pdf files. The scans of 2,347 sheets were created by Rubina Raja and the Palmyra Portrait Project. The published form of the archive was completed by the project Archive Archaeology: Preserving and Sharing Palmyra’s Cultural Heritage through Harald Ingholt’s Digital Archive. The authors and the Archive Archaeology project were responsible for the interpretation of the data in the forthcoming publication “The Ingholt Archive: The Palmyrene Material” [13].

FORMAT NAMES AND VERSIONS
PDF – twenty-one sets divided into four categories.

1. Numbered PS sheets: PS 1-100; PS 101-200; PS 201-300; PS 301-400; PS 401-500; PS 501-600; PS 601-700; PS 701-800; PS 801-900; PS 901-1000; PS 1001-1100; PS 1101-1200; PS 1201-1300; PS 1301-1400; PS 1401-1500; PS 1500-

2. Sheets with no PS number

3. Archive Additions: Additional portraits; Views of architecture; Miscellaneous

4. Sheets from the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek

CREATION DATES
Ingholt began creating his archive in the 1920s (most likely 1922) and, based on annotations and bibliography in the archive, continued adding to it into the 1970s. The archive was transferred to the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen, Denmark, in 1983 where the archaeologist Gunhild Ploug began her work. The archive was on loan to Rubina Raja and the Palmyra Portrait Project, Aarhus University, in 2012 for digitization and was thereafter returned. The project Archive Archaeology: Preserving and Sharing Palmyra’s Cultural Heritage through Harald Ingholt’s Digital Archives began working on the archive in June 2020 and completed work in July 2021.

Ca. 1920- sometime in the 1970s (archive compilation)
2012 (initial database compilation and interpretation of data)
06/2020-07/2021 (continued database compilation and interpretation of data)
DATASET CREATORS
Rubina Raja and the Palmyra Portrait Project were responsible for the initiation of data collection [5]. Rubina Raja and the project Archive Archaeology: Preserving and Sharing Palmyra’s Cultural Heritage through Harald Ingholt’s Digital Archive (funded by the ALIPH foundation), along with Olympia Babou and Amy Miranda were responsible for completing the compilation of the data set and its interpretation [12, 13].

LANGUAGE
English with additional data in French, German, Danish, Russian, and Arabic. Inscriptions appear in Latin, ancient Greek, and Palmyrene Aramaic.
(4) REUSE POTENTIAL

With the archive’s forthcoming publication and availability as open data, what was once one scholar’s private research resource will have the potential to influence and increase scholarship and restitution initiatives. Yet, the Ingholt Archive is already proven as a rich resource for Palmyrene studies and Syrian cultural
heritage preservation. The Palmyra Portrait Project has used the archive since its digitization in 2012 as the foundation for several publications on Palmyra [14]. Such recent work includes studies of Palmyrene sculpture at the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, economic and demographic trends, Palmyrene women, tomb reconstructions, and sculpture recontextualization [15, 16, 17, 18, 19].

Open data allows for empirical data sets, such as the Ingholt Archive, to be free resources for scholars and the general public alike, so long as one has Internet access. This practice, although seen in the sciences, is not often done in the humanities. By making the archive available as open data, not only in print, this material can affect scholars and individuals without access to libraries or universities with the resources to add the Ingholt Archive to their holdings. Thus, open data is a democratization of research, allowing otherwise limited scholars and individuals access to primary data. Furthermore, by making the Ingholt Archive available as open data, any forthcoming research that references Palmyrene sculpture can be checked against the primary data.

As open data, the archive sheets are available freely, allowing anyone to work towards the preservation of Syrian cultural heritage and, as such, can serve as a call to action regarding efforts to restore Syria after the destruction of its decade-long civil war. The archive has the potential to give voice to underrepresented groups in discussions on art history and archaeology, allowing anyone with Internet access to engage with this rich collection of material. More specifically, the archive can inform and enrich several current research initiatives that engage with the cultural heritage preservation of Syria, thereby strengthening restitution efforts [20, 21, 22]. Although scholars have reflected upon potential next steps in the study and restitution of Palmyra, the archive and its publication as a source of primary data is a definitive action in the progress of Palmyrene studies [23, 24].

The forthcoming print publication of the archive contains an accompanying commentary that transcribes each sheet’s annotations, translates inscriptions, and provides current bibliography. The publication also includes multiple concordances that contain such information as object locations and collections (past and last known), lists of previously unpublished inscriptions and portraits, object typologies, and dating. The images and Ingholt’s annotations captured by the archive also provide insight into the history of archaeological practice during the twentieth century—a historiography in need of further attention— as well as the history of collecting. In sum, the archive sets the stage for further research and analysis in multiple fields with interest in the ancient world, such as the fields of archaeology, art history, epigraphy, museum studies, and cultural heritage preservation.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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