

Inventories as Material and Textual Sources for Late Medieval and Early Modern Social, Gender and Cultural History (14th-16th centuries)

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With the renewed interest in material culture, not only the objects but also the written sources in which objects are documented get increasing attention. However, the focus is most often not directed to the sources themselves but rather to what they convey on objects of the past. Such an approach tends to reduce the sources to mere 'quarries' for information. This observation is particularly true for the paradigmatic source on objects, the inventory, which so far has received little attention as a specific type of source. Starting from a sample of 138 princely Italian and German inventories from the 14th and 16th centuries, which are complemented by a comparison with urban inventories, this paper points out the quality of textual thingness of inventories regarding them both as texts and objects. The thesis I propose is that inventories can become primordial documents for social, gender and cultural history if their narrative quality is taken seriously.

Mit dem erneuerten Interesse an der materiellen Kultur geraten nicht nur die Dinge, sondern auch die schriftlichen Quellen über Objekte in den Fokus. Das Interesse ist jedoch meist nicht auf die Dokumente selbst gerichtet, sondern auf ihre Aussagekraft über historische Artefakte. Ein solcher Zugang reduziert die Quellen zu reinen Steinbrüchen für Informationen. Dies gilt in besonderem Maß für die paradigmatische Quelle zu Objekten, das Inventar, das als Quellengattung selbst kaum Aufmerksamkeit erfuhr. Ausgehend von einem Korpus von 138 fürstlichen Inventaren aus dem italienischen und deutschen Kontext des 14. und 16. Jahrhunderts, ergänzt um Vergleiche mit städtischen Inventaren, arbeitet dieser Beitrag die spezielle Charakteristik von Inventaren in ihrer textuellen Dinghaftigkeit heraus, indem sie sowohl als Texte wie als Artefakte betrachtet werden. Nur wenn Inventare in ihrer narrativen Qualität ernst genommen werden, so die These, können sie als erstrangige Quellen für die Sozial-, Geschlechter- und Kulturgeschichte fungieren.

Textual Thingness stands at the core of the following contribution with regard to the most typical type of document for investigating historical objects, namely inventories. Despite the fact that inventories have attracted the interest of researchers since the 19th century in search for historical artefacts and curiosities, they have hardly ever been at the focus as historical sources in



memo

Recommended Citation:
Antenhofer, Christina: Inventories as Material and Textual Sources for Late Medieval and Early Modern Social, Gender and Cultural History (14th-16th centuries), in: MEMO 7 (2020): Textual Thingness / Textuelle Dinghaftigkeit, S. 22-46. Pdf-Format, doi: 10.25536/20200702.

Featured Image

Fresco painting 1420-1430, South Tyrol. Institute for Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture, Image No. 002841. Accessible via REAL-online: <https://realonline.imareal.sbg.ac.at/detail/nr-002841/>.

their own right. When speaking about textual thingness, however, inventories are among the most fascinating sources regarding this question from at least two points of view: 1) Despite their great variety, inventories as a matter of principle can be classified as documents which translate objects into words.¹ They are therefore the document par excellence concerning the question how historical texts produced and reproduced material objects. 2) Moreover, beside its textual quality, the inventory itself can be looked at as a material object. In fact, inventories are more than just the written texts. Their material form conveys a whole range of information which adds to the narration of the inventory and is vital for interpreting the inventories and the textual things named there. This paper therefore aims at presenting inventories both as textual and material sources regarding historical objects.

However, the focus here will not be on the objects per se, but on objects brought back into their manifold relationships existing basically between people, things and spaces. In doing so, the paper wants to stress the fact that inventories are not only important sources for the history of historical objects, but in view of the new approaches to material culture² they become primary sources for social, gender³ and cultural history. Inventories can be read as narratives on people's lives, shaped via the objects they possessed during their lifetime. It is this narrative quality of inventories as sources which stands at the core of this contribution considering both their textual as well as their material quality.⁴ While their potential as sources for art and economic history has already been well explored in recent times, the thesis I propose is that the potential of inventories as sources for the social, cultural and above all gender history of premodern times remains yet to be explored. In order to fully exploit the capacity of information inventories offer in this perspective, however, they need to get attention as historiographic sources in their own right.

In the following, I will start with a brief overview on research on inventories (chapter 1). In a second step, attention will turn to inventories as texts: chapter 2 explores basic differentiations of different types of inventories, chapter 3 considers functions of inventories while chapter 4 treats different occasions for inventorying processes. The final chapter of the paper will then address the material quality of the inventory as an object.

This analysis is based on research I conducted on inventories, testaments and marriage contracts from German and Italian courts of the 14th and 15th centuries, involving the houses of the Habsburg, Wittelsbach, Württemberg, Görz, Tirol, Visconti, Sforza and Gonzaga.⁵ Altogether I analyzed 138 inventories and lists, and I realized that there are many different forms in which texts survive that we simply call *inventories*. Analyzing the textual as well as the material form of the sources are essential keys to understand the manifold meanings of the inventory as document type and the varied purposes such documents were made for in their original contexts.

1 See Keating/Markey 2011, p. 209: "inventories attempt to translate material things into linguistic statements."

2 See Samida/Eggert/Hahn (eds.) 2014; Latour [1999] 2010a; Latour [2005] 2010b; briefly summarized in Antenhofer 2020.

3 On the importance of a specific gendered look on material culture see Dempsey et al. 2019.

4 See in this respect also Freddolini/Helmreich 2014.

5 This essay is based on core chapters of my forthcoming habilitation thesis: Antenhofer 2021.

1. Inventories as a Research Topic: From Lists of Objects to Historiographic Narratives

Inventories count among the neglected or certainly underestimated historical sources. In fact, for most of the time they have been regarded simply as lists of objects, and historians and art historians have used them above all to identify specific artefacts, most often the very precious ones. Art historians have used them to trace back pieces of arts, identify collected items or to search for pieces of arts that no longer exist.⁶ Linguists on the other hand have used them as lists of words, and unsurprisingly, the *Glossarium mediæ et infimæ latinitatis* by Du Cange⁷ for example often mentions inventories as sources for the use of certain words.

It seems as if for a long time inventories were of little interest for their quality as sources and were only exploited in search of information and data they convey. In fact, there is no valid study on the specific characteristics of inventories as a type of source. Traditional introductions to medieval sources neglect inventories or simply summarize them under administrative sources.⁸ Lists – so it seemed – are not texts, but only administrative side products like for instance accounts.⁹ Similar to such administrative sources, in the Middle Ages they had little chance to survive and be passed on to the present. A second misunderstanding concerned the view of inventories as very objective and to some extent ‘naïve’ sources: they were just lists of things, nothing more; therefore, they certainly spoke the truth.¹⁰

Although interest in inventories has been very articulate starting from the late 19th century with the approaches of the older cultural history (*Kulturgeschichte*),¹¹ there exist hardly any systematic works on inventories. Starting with the 19th century, inventories were above all searched for and edited for specific social groups or regions with a focus on the mentioned objects.¹² Surviving from this time period there are very important editions of inventories, which had often been published in journals for regional or local history. Starting with the interest in social and economic history of the post war era inventories became an important source for these branches of historical research. Historians, above all those of modern times, subsequently used inventories as serial sources.¹³ Their highly regular structure made them primary sources for quantitative analyses, and they were often reduced to mere sources of data. Gabriela Signori warned us that with such computer based serial analyses the sources literally die a “formalized” death on the dissecting table of the historian specialized in digital methods.¹⁴

The new approaches of cultural history and history of consumption have seen a new rise of studies in inventories, and it is now that the inventories

6 Cf. e.g. Lhotsky 1941–1945; see on this focus of art history on inventories from the 19th century to the present Keating/Markey 2011.

7 Du Cange et al. 1883–1887.

8 Briefly mentioned in: Lhotsky 1963.

9 See on the ephemeral quality of accounts Mersiowsky 2000.

10 See for this critique already Jaritz 2009.

11 See e.g. the fundamental work of Schlosser [1908] 1978.

12 For instance Zingerle’s work on the Tyrolean inventories can be mentioned in this context: Zingerle 1909, or Ficker’s on an early bridal inventory: Ficker 1881; see also the overview on printed inventories of the 19th century: Mély/Bishop (eds.) 1892–1895.

13 See e.g. van der Woude/Schuurman (eds.) 1980.

14 Signori 2001, p. 61.

themselves are regarded under new points of view.¹⁵ Still they remain important sources for the search of objects and get renewed attention with the interest turned to objects in the so called *material turn*.¹⁶ However, it is no longer the search for specific, very outstanding objects but rather for all kinds of objects placed in their contexts and in relations, in networks of human and non-human actors of history which stands at the core of interest.¹⁷ Two main approaches in the newer research on inventories seem above all crucial for an understanding of these documents as sources on social, gender and cultural history:

1. Inventories are texts, and they can be read as such, even if their form is that of a list.¹⁸ The most recent studies pay attention to the fact that inventories like other texts do not give a complete or objective picture of the historical facts, but that they have to be regarded as narratives¹⁹ with their own fictional character²⁰ and performative quality.²¹ Gerhard Jaritz for example spoke about the stories inventories tell. He paid attention to the fact that inventories neither tell everything, nor do they necessarily tell the truth. They hide objects, most often because they only mention precious artefacts. People wanted to show off with the precious objects they possessed, and the inventory serves this special rhetoric. You will not find simple things made of wood or terracotta in inventories, although this is exactly what we find in archaeological excavations.²² Edoardo Rossetti and the authors of his volume on Milanese inventories of patrician houses also highlight the blanks in inventories of Renaissance households. They, however, stress legal reasons: people did not want to mention all the objects they possessed in the presence of authorities. Especially in the case of inheritance or attachment of property people tried to hide the most precious objects so they might not have to give them away.²³

2. Inventories talk about the lives of the people who owned the objects – and they are neither complete nor are they neutral.²⁴ Inventories convey perspectives of the people who owned the artefacts but also about institutions who forced people to record their belongings for different reasons. One such reason could be that they were forced to attach property or even sell it, e.g. in cases of guardianship. Very often inventories are part of legal procedures and thus part of power regimes resulting in conflicts over mobile property. We should never forget that it must have been humiliating in many cases to list one's own property out of need, property linked to personal stories and meanings or generally property that built people's social status.²⁵ Evelyn Welch has directed our attention to the fact that Florentine patrician women were often forced by their husbands to pawn their jewels, and consequently they refused

15 To mention some of the most important: Fey 2007; Friedhoff 2006; Seelig 2001; Rossetti 2012; Riello 2013; Ertl/Karl 2017.

16 See Samida/Eggert/Hahn (eds.) 2014.

17 See Antenhofer 2020.

18 See also Freddolini/Helmreich 2014.

19 Normore 2011.

20 Orlin 2002.

21 Wilson 2018.

22 Jaritz 2009.

23 Rossetti (ed.) 2012; above all Covini 2012.

24 See Antenhofer 2019b.

25 Handzel mentions that for nobles inventorying processes could be regarded as humiliating their sense of honour, Handzel 2011, p. 66 with reference to Pelus-Kaplan/Eickhölter 1993, p. 284 on behalf of inventories of Lübeck.

to leave their houses for shame of being seen in public without their jewels.²⁶ This is illustrated by the example of Bianca Maria Sforza, the second wife of Emperor Maximilian I, who in 1505 could not meet ambassadors any more since out of lack of money she did not possess any clothes worthy for that.²⁷ The history of objects is thus also a history of shame and power, of being visible or invisible, especially in the gendered perspective regarding the visibility of women.

2. Inventories as Texts: Basic Typology of Inventories

How can inventories be defined? Generally speaking they are lists of things; however, such lists can have different forms and the question arises on how lists, registers, inventories and catalogues²⁸ interrelate. In fact, there is no clear definition of what an inventory is, and different types of sources can be subsumed under this notion. This becomes evident regarding how the term is used in literature on the topic and also in the sources.²⁹ In a very specific sense *inventory* can be regarded as a legal term.³⁰ However, in the practical use as to be found in historical sources and respective terminologies the term is applied in a far broader sense, as will be shown in this essay. To organize the different meanings I suggest to look at three basic distinctions:

1. One basic aspect regards the difference between inventories with explicit *legal* character and other registers (*Verzeichnisse*) of things as instruments of administration.³¹

2. A second aspect is the *temporal horizon* of the inventory, i.e. the question if it is a completed document which (only) records the status quo of recorded things in a given moment in time, or if it was a register considered to be continued. This results in the distinction between the *static* and the *dynamic* inventory – a difference I will further work out in the second part of this essay.

3. Finally, a third fundamental difference concerns the *semantic horizon* of the inventory. In fact, there are inventories which relate to a given *space* (most often a house) while other inventories relate to a *person*. I therefore distinguish between *space-related* and *person-related* inventories, a difference which

26 Welch 2008, pp. 45–65.

27 Antenhofer 2019a; Weiss 2010, p. 122.

28 On the question of the catalogue see above all Findlen 1996, pp. 36–37; on the relationship between inventory and catalogue see Freddolini/Helmreich 2014; on questions of terminology see also Fey 2007; Andermann 1987; Friedhoff 2006; as well as the introduction of Ertl/Karl 2017.

29 See e.g. Barbot 2011. Literally inventory simply means the “ensemble of what has been found” („Gesamtheit des Gefundenen“), cf. Kluge 1999, p. 405.

30 „1. INVENTARIUM, Descriptio rerum, quæ post alicujus decessum in illius bonis reperiuntur. Ulpianus leg. 1. D. de Administ. et periculo tutor.: (26, 7.) Tutor, qui repertorium non fecerit, quod vulgo Inventarium appellatur. Occurrit non semel in Legibus Wisigoth. et apud Scriptores practicos.“ Du Cange et al. 1883–1887, t. 4, col. 409b, <http://ducange.enc.sorbonne.fr/INVENTARIUM1>.

31 I do not distinguish between the use of *object* and *thing* given the different discussions on this question. To sum up two opposing approaches: Bruno Latour speaks of *things* in an active sense, while *object* is regarded as the passive reified term in opposition to the human active subject, a negative term, usually rejected in new approaches which tend to highlight the agency of things. See Latour 2010a, 286; 295. Another view regards *things* as the general unspecific term for (unimportant) items, while individual items, which are given more attention and meaning can be called *objects*. See on this distinction in view of items recorded in bills Gruber 2019, pp. 42–43. – For a general view on the philosophical impact of the term *thing* (above all via Heidegger) see Daston 2004. – On the legal aspects of inventories see Löffler 1977.

has important implications from the point of view of gender history. Typically probate inventories are space-related in so far as they record objects stored in a house. They usually follow a spatial structure along the way on which the scribes responsible for the inventorying processes went through the house.³² These kinds of inventories are more often related to the belongings of men, since they usually owned the house and remained there,³³ leading to the fact that male post mortem inventories in the case of princes tend to become court inventories.³⁴ Person-related inventories on the other hand typically record belongings of women, namely brides who were not (entirely) bound to a given house. These source types are highly dominated by female belongings, above all in Italian Renaissance archives, leading to the fact that Edoardo Rossetti guesses in his volume on inventories that the mobile interior of houses was mostly provided by women.³⁵ Person-related inventories usually do not follow a spatial structure but are rather organized along categories of objects, such as silver, textiles, etc.³⁶

This fundamental distinction is essential for understanding the limited perspective of inventories: In fact, personal items belonging to individual people and other mobile items often are not recorded in space-related inventories since they were not considered as part of the buildings. A fact which led some historians to the wrong assumption that late medieval Tyrolean castles were hardly furnished.³⁷ This (wrong) impression resulted from the fact that castle inventories only recorded items that permanently belonged to the single castle.³⁸

Basically, we can thus distinguish the following three main types of inventories.

Inventory (in the strict sense)	Register (broader concept of inventories)
Legal instrument	Instrument of administration
Static – concluded (given moment of time)	Dynamic – to be continued (open temporal horizon)
Person-related	Space-related

Table 1 Three basic types of inventories.

These types are not to be considered as strictly separate, but they usually overlap, as has been shown before. This is above all evident in the case of probate inventories, which at the same time register belongings of a person and objects in a building; they are static, and of course legally binding. Therefore,

32 A good example is the post mortem inventory of count Eberhard of Württemberg, edited in Molitor 2008, pp. 322–334. However, Handzel points out in his study on Austrian probate inventories of the 16th century that some of them were organized according to categories of objects, and some others mixed spatial structures and object categories. Nevertheless he assumes that in a first step probate inventories always were recorded following spatial structures. Likewise, inventories recorded in the case of changes of administration (*Pflegschaftsinventare*) show both kinds of organization, see Handzel 2011, pp. 61–62. Normore points out mixed principles of organization according to spaces and/or categories of objects for Burgundian inventories, see Normore 2011, pp. 219–220.

33 See the results of Riello 2013 who, however, generalizes his argument concluding that inventories mostly record male belongings, see p. 136.

34 Ferrari (ed.) 2003.

35 Rossetti 2012, p. 15. This is very similar in the Jewish context, see Olszowy-Schlanger 1998.

36 See the bridal inventory of Paula Gonzaga, countess of Görz, from 1478, edited in Antenhofer 2019b.

37 Maleczek 1982. Handzel notes that inventories of tutelage (*Pflegschaftsinventare*) were always “poorer” than probate inventories, see Handzel 2011, p. 63.

38 See for castles also Herrmann 1998, esp. p. 87.

these types should be rather considered as extreme vertices of a continuum which covers the entire range of possible forms.

3. Inventories as Texts: Functions of Inventories

The basic function of inventories results from the term itself: They are instruments used to find objects. For this purpose items needed to be recorded as exactly as possible.³⁹ Therefore, objects had to be described in such detail to be identifiable. As Fey already pointed out, it was then a secondary aspect to record the value of goods as well.⁴⁰

As the newer approaches to inventories have highlighted, they are, however, not neutral, objective sources which only “record things in lists”. Like other historiographic texts inventories, too, are shaped by intentions of authors and strategies.⁴¹ Similarly, the recent works on the *urbarium* have likewise stressed that they need to be read from the perspective of cultural history and therefore must be integrated into their communicative contexts.⁴² It is only by integrating inventories in the contexts of their making and thus reading them as texts and narratives that they can be interpreted in a broader sense, offering insights into social, gender and cultural history.

In order to systematize the functions linked to the contexts of the inventorying processes we can distinguish three basic purposes: 1) legal reasons, 2) administrative purposes and 3) representative aspects. The final category also includes functions of memoria and historiography as well as symbolic communication and the iconic quality of the text.⁴³

The *legal* function is the easiest to identify. Legally binding inventories need to have forms of accreditation. These can be seals, the mentioning of witnesses, accreditation by a notary or the form of a chirography. The latter applies for instance to the bridal inventory of Blanca of England from 1402.⁴⁴ These forms of accreditation can be reinforced by the naming of the issuer or even writer of the inventory, the date and place and the circumstances of its making. Often such information is given at the beginning or the end of the inventory. However, even if inventories do not show such signs of verification they can still be used for legal purposes. This for example applied to inventories and account books of merchants, which could be used in legal cases of e.g. insolvency, even though they were penned by the merchants themselves.⁴⁵ Generally speaking, inventories were always drafted to account for a stock of goods.

39 Metz mentioned already for the Carolingian *Brevium exempla* the close connection with Latin glossaries. They were used for recording the agricultural reality for economic purposes and at the same time provided lexicographic lists of plants and animals or tools inspired by ancient tradition, see Metz 1953; from a legal perspective Mohrmann 2012.

40 Fey 2007, p. 473.

41 Jaritz 2009; Freddolini/Helmreich 2014. On the historiographic quality of lists see also Certeau 1991, esp. pp. 115–129. Lazzari talked about writing as a form of conservation, see Lazzari 2008.

42 Sablonier 2002, pp. 97–98; generally Meier/Sablonier (eds.) 1999.

43 For the *urbaria* Sablonier and others have distinguished 4 basic functions: 1) marking sovereign claims, 2) guaranteeing process safety and reliability, 3) internal organizing and arranging, 4) building of tradition and historiography, cf. Sablonier 2002, esp. pp. 98–112; Egloff 1999.

44 Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv (BayHStA) München Geheimes Hausarchiv (GHA) Hauskunden (HU) 2560, 8 July 1402; BayHStA GHA HU 2559, 7 July 1402.

45 See Tonelli 2012, pp. 49–69, with examples from Milan of the 17th century.

All questions regarding the *representative* function of inventories are related to its material shape, which will be discussed in the next chapter. Moreover, also the opening or concluding part of the inventory – which we might call *protocol* and *eschatocol* as it has been suggested for account books⁴⁶ – can provide information concerning this representative function of inventories. The bridal inventory of Antonia Visconti from 1380 for example opens with blessings and quotations from the bible and humanist authors in order to underline the cultural capital of the bride and her family.⁴⁷

The *administrative* function is closely connected to the first two purposes. Mere registers of administrations (which I tend to call registers instead of inventories) are marked by the absence of signs of verification as well as by the lack of representative elements. Here we can find all forms of simple concepts on single sheets of paper, smaller books or even larger codices. Often such registers as well as inventories were first prepared via single lists which were then later bound to books.⁴⁸ Frequently the final inventory mentions different books which had been used to compile one final document, similar to procedures known from accounting. This was the case for the register of the wardrobe of Bianca Maria Sforza, second wife of Maximilian I., which covered nearly her entire life as Roman queen from 1494 to 1508. Her head of wardrobe compiled it most probably after her death using different books he had obviously kept continuously to document his work.⁴⁹ Often people responsible for the administration of goods – such as the head of wardrobe – name themselves in the inventory as the ones who had these goods in their custody. Frequently we find dates which record when goods entered or left the custody of the administrator, and we find cancellations and notes. Even such (simple) registers of administration can show forms of *invocationes* not least because administrators had to give an account of their work.⁵⁰ Very often such inventories are then written from the perspective of the administrator using the *ego*-form, such as did Francesco di Vegy, head of Bianca Maria Sforza's wardrobe: *Conto de la guardaroba de la serenissima m(aes)tà de la regina de veste et altre / robe portate da Milano in Alamagnya, consegnate a my, / Francesco di Vegy, guardaroba de la m(aes)tà serenissima, a 3 de / desembr(e) 1493 in el castello de Milano (videlicet).*⁵¹

To conclude, the main functions of inventories with their respective features can be roughly summarized as follows:

Functions of inventories		
Legal function	Representation	Administration
concluded	concluded	ongoing
naming of issuer	naming of issuer	naming of administrator

46 Riedmann 1984, p. 317; Mersiowsky 2000, p. 40.

47 See on this inventory the catalogue on the exhibit dedicated to her: Rückert 2005; I am preparing the edition Antenhofer 2022.

48 Genet has stressed the importance of lists as “documentation intermédiaire” with the purposes of memoria, administration, identity, law and representation, see Genet 2013, p. 421.

49 Tiroler Landesarchiv (TLA) Innsbruck Inventare A 1.2, 1494–1508. See also Sailer 2011; Antenhofer 2021.

50 The importance of the *invocatio* had already been stressed in the first systematic guideline on how to conceive an inventory by Luca Pacioli, Pacioli [1494] 1994.

51 TLA Inventare 1.2 f. 1v: „This is the account of the wardrobe of the most serene majesty of the queen of clothes and other (textile) goods taken from Milan to Germany, given to me, Francesco di Vegy, head of wardrobe of her majesty, on 3 December 1493 in the castello of Milano (videlicet).” (All translations are mine if not otherwise noted.)

Functions of inventories		
Legal function	Representation	Administration
witnesses	blessings, quotations from the bible, humanistic quotations	ego-perspective
notary as issuer	naming of owner	naming of responsible people
date	date	chronologically ongoing dates / no dates
place of issuing	place of issuing	place of storing of goods
signs of verification, seals, chirograph...	decorations, calligraphic writing, harmonic layout	broad margins for notes, cancellations, notes, columns, indices
different formats	cover, sewing, large format	small format, different formats
parchment and/or paper	parchment and/or paper of high quality	paper

Table 2 Main functions of inventories and distinctive features.

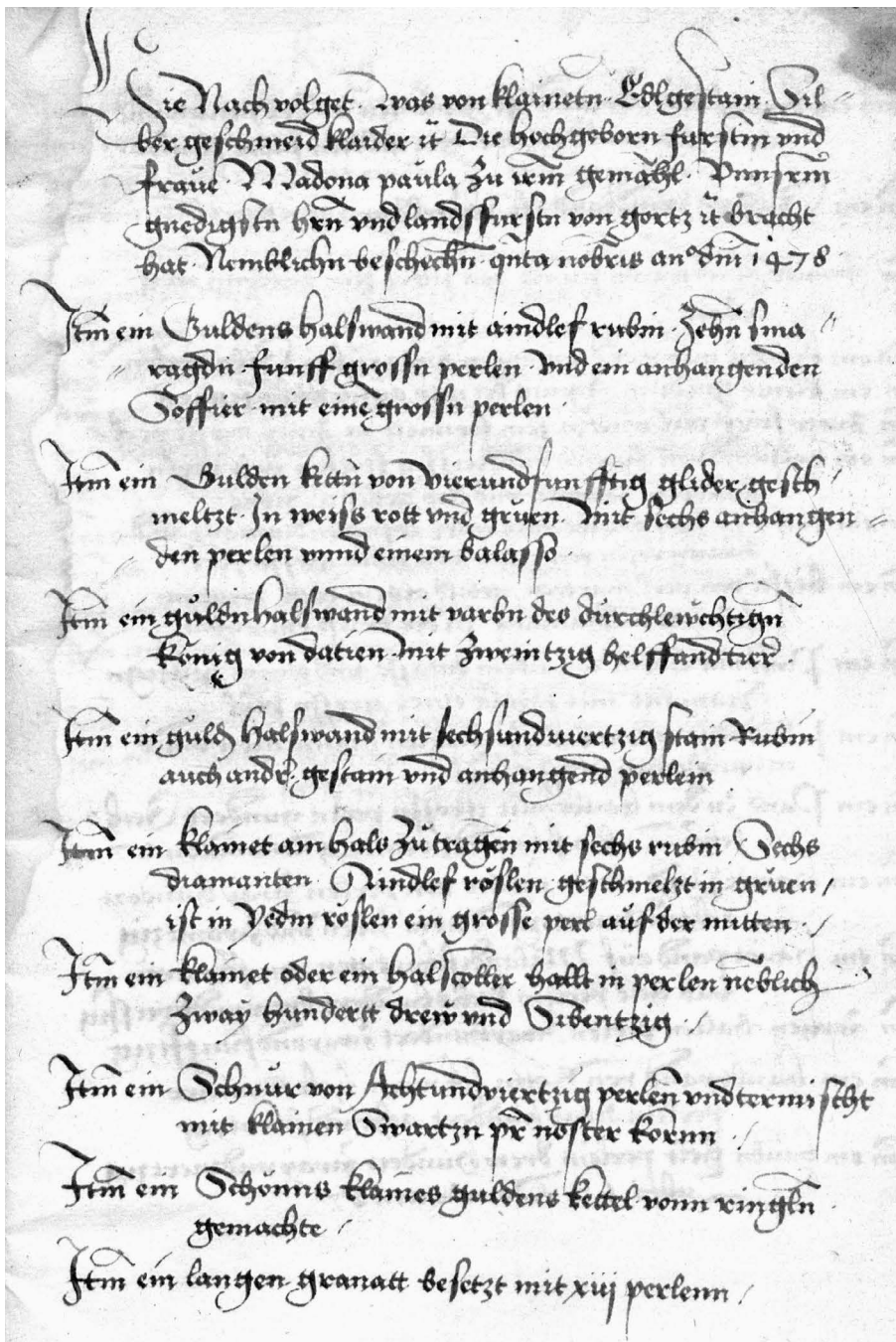


Fig. 1 Inventory of the bridal treasure of Paula Gonzaga, 1478. Inventory in the form of a booklet (*Libell*). Tiroler Landesarchiv Innsbruck A Inventare Nr. 202/8 f. 1r. Courtesy of Tiroler Landesarchiv Innsbruck.

4. Inventories as Texts: Occasions for Inventorying Processes

Considering the occasions for inventorying, we can distinguish even more different types. Based on the corpus of princely inventories from late medieval Italian and German courts mentioned at the beginning, I will outline some recurrent types of occasions for inventorying, without aiming at giving a complete picture.⁵²

Space-related inventories – such as inventories of entire buildings like castles or churches, individual chambers (e.g. for silver or weapons) or of an entire court – were generally compiled when the administration changed⁵³ or in the context of post mortem inventorying processes. In the last case, there is a close relationship to person-related inventories. Typical cases for person-related inventories are accordingly all types of probate inventories. They regard the belongings of a person, however, they tend to follow the rooms and spaces where goods were stored. The categories of the inventories in this case reflect a spatial organization, which is why I would still talk about a space-related form in such a case. Probate inventories thus establish relationships between people, objects and rooms.⁵⁴ In the case of princely inventories, they can become entire court inventories, and they can include belongings from other people as well – such as for example belongings of the wives.⁵⁵ Sometimes they can even devolve into inventories of pawns, such as e.g. the post mortem inventory of duke Otto I of Tyrol from 1310.⁵⁶ Occasionally they only mention parts of the belongings, such as the inventory of jewels compiled after the death of duke Frederick IV of Tyrol in 1439.⁵⁷ They can even take on the form of a simple administrative note like the record of the belongings found in the personal chest of duke Christoph of Bavaria after he had died on the island of Rhodos in 1493.⁵⁸

Often such post-mortem inventories are regarded as the prototype of inventories, considering the definition of the medieval term *inventarium*.⁵⁹ In the urban context, such inventorying processes were made by notaries or testamentary executors who went through the houses and recorded what they found.⁶⁰ However, such inventories do not necessarily include all belongings.⁶¹ In the huge Gonzaga inventory compiled after the death of Federico II from

52 See also the overview in Riello 2013. For an overview on different types of inventories from the Middle Ages up to the 20th century see the forthcoming special issue on inventories: *Inventories as Texts and Artefacts: Methodological Approaches and Challenges*: in *ÖZG 2* (2021).

53 This was very often the case in the considerable stock of late medieval castle inventories from Tyrol and Vorarlberg, ed. in Zingerle 1909.

54 See on this spatial quality of inventories e.g. Russo 2011; Riello 2013; Matschinegg 2019.

55 See the inventory of Eberhard III of Württemberg, ed. Molitor 2008.

56 Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv (HHStA) Wien Handschriften (HS) B 123 Tirolisches Kanzleibuch 1303–1319 (= olim Wiener Codex 383; Q.) f. 51v–53r, ed. in Mayr-Adlwang 1898, pp. 166–168, n. 339.

57 Kleinodieninventar des Nachlasses von Herzog Friedrich IV. von Habsburg, HHStA Familienurkunden (UR FUK) 559, 1439; TLA Inventare A 1.1, 1439; ed. Schönherr 1883, pp. 202–208.

58 BayHStA GHA HU 830.

59 *inventarium* du Cange, t. 4, col. 409b, online <http://ducange.enc.sorbonne.fr/INVENTARIUM1>.

60 See Rossetti (ed.) 2012; van der Woude/Schuurman (eds.) 1980; Mannheims/Roth 1984; Baulant et al. (eds.) 1988; Simon-Muscheid 2004, pp. 177–179.

61 On the different reasons for the lacking completeness of inventories see the summary of the most important arguments in Handzel 2011, pp. 64–71.

1540–1542 by several notaries, for example, all the clothes are missing.⁶² Both Herrmann and Andermann have outlined for administrative inventories that objects related to people's bodies, such as jewels and clothes, were generally missing in inventories of buildings compiled by notaries.⁶³ Andermann has noted that neither the belongings of administrators nor those of even the bishops as owners of the castles he looked at were recorded.⁶⁴ Handzel has pointed out for the Austrian tutelage (*Pflegschaft*) inventories of the 16th century that personal belongings were missing, but they could be found in probate inventories.⁶⁵

A second important distinction has to be made between male and female belongings, which leads us directly to the prototypical form of person-related inventory: the inventory of the bridal trousseau. In the Italian cases these inventories, too, were issued by notaries.⁶⁶ Unlike probate inventories they do not follow a spatial structure, but they follow categories of objects the bride took with her to her new court (and later eventually to her widow retreat). Since for the Italian context the objects of the bridal trousseau counted as part of the dowry, they were usually recorded in inventories. These inventories on the one hand served an internal purpose for the natal family of the bride, namely to document what they had given to the bride and which value the objects had. Since wedding contracts usually specified that the objects of the bridal trousseau had to be given back to the native family in the case of a childless death of the bride, the families were keen on recording these objects.⁶⁷ In the case of widowhood, on the other hand, the inventory made sure the widow could take her own goods with her to her widow retreat.

The case of Bianca Maria Sforza again beautifully illustrates how an inventory as text could take on several different forms as a material object according to the different purposes it served. In fact, the inventory on her immense dowry worth 100.000 ducats⁶⁸ issued in 1493 survives in four different forms. Two simple sheets of paper written in Italian still exist in the State Archives of Milan. They can be looked at as the lists compiled by the Sforza court administrators. One of the sheets even gives the financial value of most of the objects and was used to account the value of the trousseau.⁶⁹ Surviving in the State Archives of Vienna there is the huge notary instrument of the inventory written in Latin, which was recorded on two pieces of parchment sewn together to acquire the impressive length of 1,84 m.⁷⁰ This was the legally binding form of the inventory which documented the handing over of the treasure.⁷¹ Moreover, in Vienna we also have an Italian version of the inventory written in a

62 Ferrari 2003, pp. 17–18.

63 Herrmann 1998, pp. 86–87.

64 Andermann 1987, pp. 141–142.

65 Handzel 2011, pp. 44–73.

66 See again the bridal inventory of Antonia Visconti from 1380 compiled among others by the notary Johannes Falconus.

67 See Antenhofer 2019b; see generally Spieß 2008.

68 The value of the trousseau is mentioned in the notary version of the inventory, HHStA UR FUK 830/1,2, as well as in the wedding contract HHStA UR FUK 829/1,2; see also Weiss 2010, p. 56.

69 Archivio di Stato di Milano (ASMi) Archivio Visconteo-Sforzesco (ASforz) potenze sovrane (pot. sovr.) carteggio (cart.) 1467 f. 45, 18 November 1493; ASMi ASforz pot. sovr. cart. 1467 f. 63.

70 Weiss 2010, pp. 58–59, image p. 60.

71 HHStA UR FUK 830/1,2, 2 December 1493; ed. Herrgott 1760, pp. 61–67, n. 60. An edition of the Latin version based on a lost Milanese document is given by Ceruti 1875. An edition of the Italian version is given by Calvi 1888, pp. 131–146.

calligraphic humanist hand writing on paper bound to a small booklet.⁷² Most probably this was the representative version of the inventory for Bianca Maria's personal use, compiled in a form more convenient to handle than the huge instrument on parchment.

In the German contexts, only few examples of bridal inventories from the late Middle Ages survive and usually take on the form of simple administrative documents.⁷³ This can be explained firstly by the fact that German law did not count the objects of the trousseau as part of the dowry,⁷⁴ and secondly by a more customary handling of male and female mobile belongings, which is evident in the distinction of the *Gerade* and the *Heergewäte* in the *Sachsenspiegel*.⁷⁵

Another frequent type of person-related inventories are registers of pawns. Above all, jewels were frequently pledged to get money, usually with the intention to solve the pawns and get the jewels back – jewels among which we find such spectacular objects like crowns. In fact, this is the reason why in such registers objects are described in great detail to make sure they could be identified and solved. It is therefore no wonder that such registers are among the earliest and most frequent written sources for princely objects such as e.g. the Habsburg treasures.⁷⁶ The earliest Habsburg inventory is in fact a register of pawned jewels belonging to duke Albrecht I, from 10th November 1354.⁷⁷

According to the type of document, the description of the objects may vary.⁷⁸ Notary instruments e.g. often give the financial value of objects, which is not always the case in mere administrative forms. In Italian archives we also find lists of objects compiled by goldsmiths, who had to describe the jewels in detail and to estimate their value.⁷⁹ Inventories thus can be interpreted as the results of complex practices of administration involving different experts.

The common characteristics of all types of inventories (in the strict sense of static inventory) is that they are bound to a given occasion which made it necessary to record goods at a specific moment. Usually it was the case of a liminal phase with consecutive legal implications: When people, usually women, left their home and moved into a new house, when their husband died and they moved to their widow retreat, or generally when people died and the ownership of their properties changed, or in the case of changing administrators. The temporal and spatial movement of people had consequences on their mobile and immobile goods, which were also set in motion and needed to be reordered. Inventories, though they appear static, accordingly often give a glimpse on objects at a given moment shortly before or after they had to be moved from their places. This is particularly true for registers of pawns. It might not surprise under this perspective that some inventories even register

72 HHStA UR FUK 828.

73 See e.g. Anna of Württemberg, Hauptstaatsarchiv (HStA) Stuttgart A 602 Nr 66 = Württembergische Regesten (WR) 66; Mechthild of Württemberg, HStA Stuttgart A 602 Nr 277 = WR 277, [1454]; Anna and Katherina of Habsburg, HHStA Familienarchiv Familienakten 18 f. 20r–21v, [1443/1447]; Elisabeth of Bayern, BayHStA GHA HU 618.

74 See Spieß 2008.

75 See in this respect also the results of Signori 2001, pp. 104–108; basically also Bungenstock 1971; Bungenstock 1978.

76 See Lhotsky's history of the medieval Habsburg treasure based on archival documents presented above all by Zimerman 1883.

77 HHStA HS B 6 (= olim Ms. 15) f. 66.

78 Not always sufficiently in detail as art historians might wish, see Keating/Markey 2011, pp. 209–210.

79 See on the question of the estimation of value Barbot 2011.

absent objects, like the one of duke Heinrich of Tyrol, king of Bohemia, which mentions a crown currently not in the treasure because it had been pledged.⁸⁰

The constant flow of objects on the other hand becomes visible in the ongoing registers of administration, which record goods entering and leaving the court. Lists could mention gifts given on occasions of feasts, they could mention objects that were taken out to be repaired or estimated,⁸¹ or even record objects that had been stolen or lost.⁸² Some of these lists were explicitly addressed as *pro memoria*, as for example the list of things compiled for Ascanio Sforza when he moved to Pavia for studying.⁸³

Types of inventories and registers		
Person-related		Space-related
Male	Female	
post mortem inventory	post mortem inventory	post mortem inventory
	bridal inventory	inventories of castles, churches, buildings, shops, ...
register of goods distributed in cases of controversy	register of goods distributed in cases of controversy	court inventories
Special forms of inventories		
inventories of wardrobes, jewels, silver etc.		
registers of pawns	registers of pawns	inventories of single rooms
lists of gifts	lists of gifts	lists of receipts (incoming goods)
lists of losses	lists of losses	lists of losses
special lists on given occasions (travel, goods sent away, study stays, special manufacture of luxury goods, ...)	special lists on given occasions (travel, goods sent away, special manufacture of luxury goods,...)	lists of outgoing goods (for repair, estimation, as loan etc. ...)
shopping lists ⁸⁴	shopping lists	lists of expenses

Table 3 Overview of types of inventories and registers.

Yet, not only spaces and people could be recorded via inventories of objects related to them, even ephemeral events such as feasts could be immortalized via inventories, albeit very rarely. This was undertaken for one of the biggest feasts that took place in Mantova in 1340 to mark a significant moment in the history of the Gonzaga family. The *magna curia* that took place on 2 February 1340 orchestrated the Gonzaga among their most powerful neighbors. Four weddings were celebrated on this occasion and several knights were dubbed. The event was memorized by a unique codex, the *liber magne curie*, made of 18 impressive folia of parchment (497 × 365 mm) in a representative layout and scripture. After a telling proem celebrating the Casa Gonzaga the codex records lists of gifts and expenses on the occasion of the ceremony.⁸⁵

Ad honorem sanctissime et individue Trinitatis [...] pro hac felici, inclita ac magnifica / domo de Gonzaga, cuius magnificum festum milicie fuit de anno

80 Herzog Heinrich (1335), BayHStA Auswärtige Staaten Tirol Lit. 24 f. 33r–36r (new counting 35r–38r); ed. Mayr-Adlwang 1898, pp. 188–190, n. 477.

81 See e.g. the many lists in the Archivio di Stato di Milano; some of the lists are presented by Venturelli 1999.

82 See the inventory of precious things stolen from Nicolò d'Este during the sacco of the Castello Conselice before 1395; edited by Toselli (ed.) 1868, pp. 451–454; see also Ehmer 1998.

83 ASMi ASforz pot. sovr. cart. 1484 fasc. 19, without date: *Ricordo de cose necessarie per monsignore*.

84 See Welch 2005.

85 See now the edition and comment of this codex: Buss/Ferrari (eds.) 2016.

*Domini MCCCXL, die secundo mensis february, tempore quo magnificus et excelsus / dominus Loysius de Gonzaga, dominus primus de hac domo [...] et nati sui nec non multi alii notabiles cives / facti et creati fuerunt milites. Quod quidem describitur in memoria futurorum [...].*⁸⁶

This codex is therefore a striking example for the historiographic quality of the list and the inventory as document type. Lists like other forms of texts thus can take on a multiplicity of functions, and they have to be regarded as textual forms in their own right.⁸⁷

5. Inventories as Objects: Material Aspects of Inventories

Inventories are, however, more than only texts – at the same time they are artefacts which often exist to the present day. Hence it is important to closely look at the material form of the inventory itself to ask what the surviving documents can tell us as objects about their function and the way they have been made.

To look at inventories as material things themselves can also tell us something about the more general question regarding the relationship between people and objects. From this point of view we can ask why certain inventories survive until the present and what significance they had. The recent research on inventories has shown that they seem to appear in significant numbers only starting from the 14th century – some have even claimed that the inventory as source type has been only created in the late Middle Ages.⁸⁸ However, in doing so they neglect older forms like for example records of sacred treasures that very often survive in codices where they have been written down in order to protect them from getting lost and at the same time to protect the treasure from being stolen.⁸⁹

This observation on the ephemeral character of inventories as sources allows us to make one first distinction: we have to distinguish inventories that survive as notes written in other sources – mainly *codices* – from inventories that survive as individual texts or textual objects taking on different forms. It is this second form that we will be interested in, and it is this type that apparently only survives from the later Middle Ages. However, the question that has to be asked is if this situation really reflects the fact that only starting from this period inventories were conceived as individual documents, or if it is only from this time onward that these types of documents survive while they had been thrown away in former times.⁹⁰ The growing number of surviving inventories starting from the 14th century thus may not reflect the real amount of inven-

86 Archivio di Stato di Mantova (ASMn) Archivio Gonzaga (AG) busta (b.) 393 carta (c.) 1r. See Ferrari 2016, p. 144.

87 On the literary quality of lists for medieval literature see already Huizinga [1919] 2006, pp. 347, 409–415, 435; in combination with visual forms of lists Eco 2011; generally Doležalová (ed.) 2009.

88 See e.g. Fey 2007; Keating and Markey attribute the growing number of inventories in the Early Modern period to a “desire to document” the growing number of goods, “an obsession with capturing these objects in time and space”, cf. Keating/Markey 2011, p. 209.

89 See Bischoff on medieval treasure registers, Bischoff 1967, p. 10.

90 Moreover, we have to consider specific legal situations such as for example in England, where from the beginning of the 16th century onwards it became mandatory to issue probate inventories, see e.g. Riello 2013.

tories that once existed, but they are the result of contingent circumstances which lead to their surviving. The literally exploding amounts of inventories that exist from the Early Modern period certainly are the result of new legal frameworks but also of a new interest in archiving documents.⁹¹

In any case, inventories seem to count among the most fragile types of sources destined to be kept only for a short period of time and not for eternity. This aspect of the temporal horizon of the document – the question if it was conceived as a rather volatile note or as a durable document – is a significant information we can draw from the material form of the inventory much better than by only looking at the text.

If we look at inventories as objects we can apply the methods of the traditional auxiliary sciences (*Historische Hilfswissenschaften*), although they will not allow us to describe the documents extensively. In fact, inventories have been neglected by the traditional auxiliary sciences just like other ephemeral administrative source types such as accounts.⁹²

First of all we have to look at the exterior shape of the document: If we analyze sources from the point of view of cultural history, the exterior shape or the type of document is extremely important to reconstruct the communicative and institutional horizon of the source and to integrate the document back in its initial context of emergence.⁹³ It is helpful to start describing the material quality of the source using the categories of exterior critique of sources.

In principle we can distinguish the following forms:

- Single sheet of paper or parchment – simple note (*Zettel/cedula*) or double leaf
- Rolls⁹⁴
- Simple booklet (*Libell*) made of folded sheet or sheets that were put into another
- Simple booklet (*Libell*) made of tacked sheet
- Book made of different quires (*Lagen*) with or without cover
- Charter or notary instrument

Certain intermediary forms are books which have a *protocol* and an *eschatocol*, thus taking on the form of a charter. Looking at the exterior aspects we may, however, nonetheless talk about books in these cases.⁹⁵

Another possibility of a basic distinction is to question if the inventory was drafted on paper or on parchment, or if both writing materials were used. In this case parchment was mostly only used to serve as cover for a book made of paper or to reinforce the tacking of the paper.⁹⁶ Other exterior aspects to note are forms of sealing, notary signets or elaborated scripture, and all kinds of decoration. They are important indicators which tell us about the legal value

91 See for the growing research on archives above all Friedrich 2013.

92 See Riedmann 1984; Mersiowsky 2000. On the potential of bills for the social history of objects see Gruber 2019.

93 See Brauer 2013, pp. 17–19.

94 Above all for the English contexts, see Stratford 2012.

95 An inventory in the form of a book can be analyzed in detail in terms of codicological criteria, whereas diplomatic criteria can be used as a starting point for the description of inventories in the form of charters. Regarding this diplomatic mixed types of Late Medieval and Early Modern administrative writings using the example of the *libell* see Vogtherr 2014, esp. p. 64.

96 On the semantic quality of the use of paper or parchment see Meyer/Schultz/Schneidmüller (eds.) 2015.

of the document and whether it served a representative function or was only used for mere administrative purposes. Further indicators in this regard are the size of the sheets. The bigger the inventory, the more ceremonious it was and the more important for representation.

If we look at the sheet we can distinguish between folio and narrow folio (*Schmalfolio*). Narrow folio was a very common format for administration which emerged when a folio was folded in the middle. Thus, two columns were formed. Very often only the left column was used for recording the items of the inventory, while the right column was left empty to add further notes. If such folios were then tacked and bound into a book, they were again often used in the folio form and only the remaining folding shows that their original use was as narrow folios. However, we can also find such narrow folios where each column was used for recording items and which later were bound into booklets in the narrow form. This is the most common form of (administrative) inventories that has survived in German archives.

Looking at the sheets we can further distinguish if they were organized in columns or not. The use of columns most often showed – as I have just pointed out – that the inventory was conceived in order to be continued. One column then usually remained empty to add notes on what happened with the items of the inventory.⁹⁷ Often we find two columns, the right one then usually was used for notes. But I have also found columns that were set in the middle of the page while margins were left on both the right and the left side to add notes.⁹⁸

Looking at the layout of the pages we can see if there were margins or not and if the margins were regular or not, if they were large or narrow, and if the gaps between the lines were large or not. It is also important to note if special effects of layout were achieved via indentments. Very often the title or protocol of the inventory and the first lines of the single entries are written further to the left margin of the page, while the following lines have a broader margin to the left, leaving a visible ordered structures. Often the Latin word *item* is used to begin the single entries of an inventory. It may be abbreviated and calligraphically ornated to add to the visual structure of the inventory. All these aspects talk about the purpose of the inventory, and again we can say: the more meticulously organized and the larger its gaps and margins, the more ceremonious, the more representative the inventory was. Looking at the writing we may distinguish if it was a hastily written administrative list or if the scribes payed attention to produce a nice looking document. Of further great importance are all kinds of traces of editing, above all cancelled parts or marginalia, notes, or supplements in other hand writings.

The exterior form is closely related to the two basic functions connected with the temporary horizon of the inventory I have outlined in the beginning. The static inventory records the situation of the treasure in a given moment, e.g. as post mortem inventory. It gives us a glance of one particular moment in the life of the treasures or a stock of goods. A good example is the huge post mortem inventory which developed into a complete court inventory of the

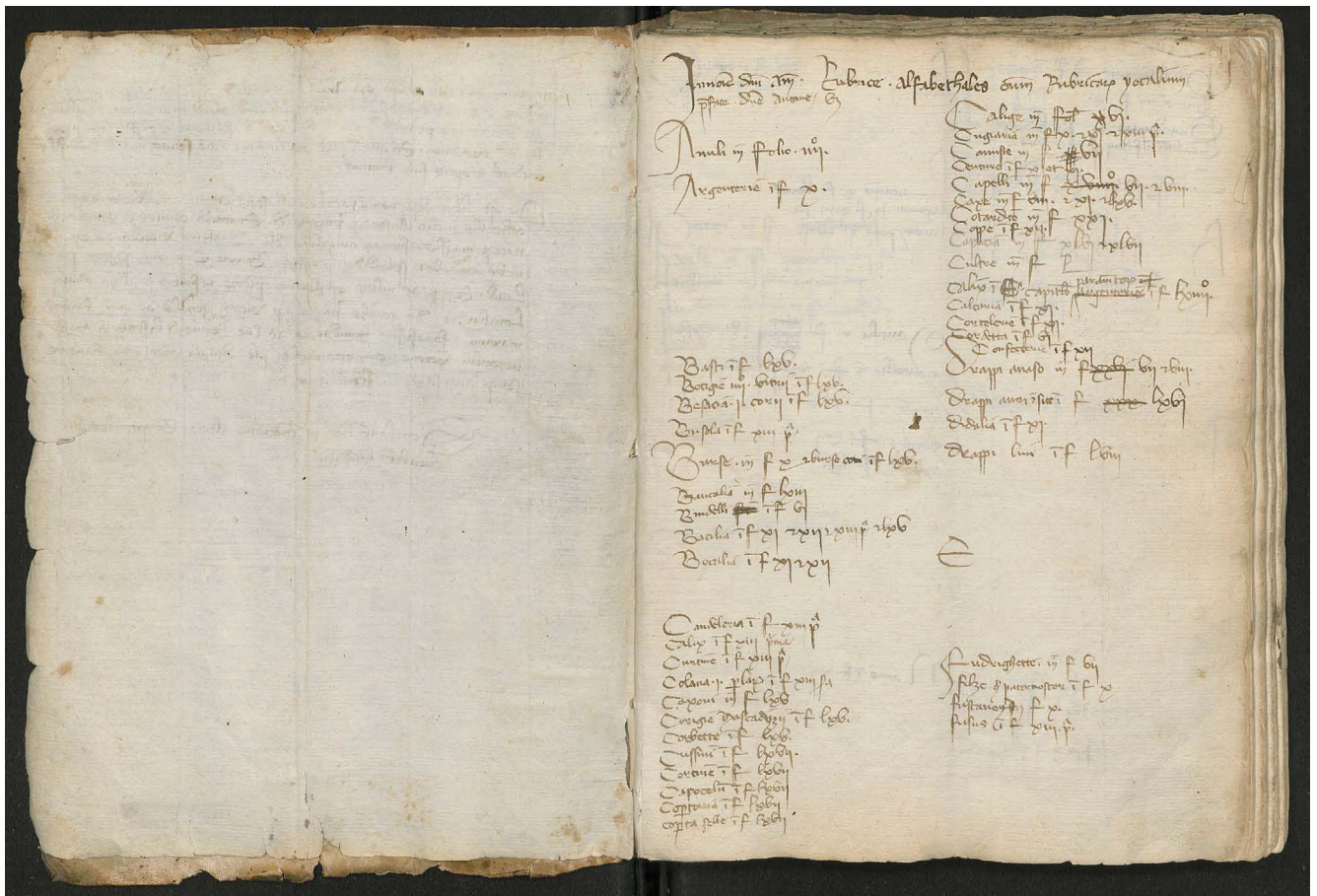
97 In the wardrobe inventory of Bianca Maria Sforza this principle has been translated into the format of pages: the items were noted on the left page, while on the right page information regarding the single clothes and textiles was added. TLA Inventare 1.2.

98 This was the case for some folios in the ceremonious bridal inventory in book form compiled for Antonia Visconti in 1380. HSTA Stuttgart A 602 Nr 32 = WR 32.

Gonzaga court in Mantova, compiled after the death of Federico II (1540).⁹⁹ Static inventories usually have small margins and leave no place for additions.

The second form is the dynamic inventory, which records a stock of objects in a given moment, e.g. the bridal treasure of a princess, but was conceived to be continued. This means that the inventory includes empty space in the forms of large margins or empty sheets to be used either to note what happened to the single items or to record if new objects were added to the treasure. The bridal inventory of Antonia Visconti from 1380¹⁰⁰ is a good example for this type. Ideally this kind of inventory would also note if things were donated to other people, if they were repaired or if they were lost or pawned. This second form of inventory is similar to what I called books of administration, which may above all be found in Italian princely archives.¹⁰¹

Fig. 2 Liber iocalium, inventory of the bridal treasure of Antonia Visconti. Inventory in the form of a codex, 1380. Index of the inventory. Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart A 602 Nr 32 = WR 32 f. 2r. Courtesy of Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg, Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart.



Inventories that take on the form of books may also contain *indices* or even *tables of content*. They give precious information on the use of the book and processes of administration, and they convey important information on terminology, on ways of organizing items as well as regarding the different categories in use to organize objects. See e.g. the index of a Gonzaga court register from 1381–1402:

Capitulum bacinorum et bronzinorum; capitulum bronzinorum; capitulum candelaborum caldirinorum; capitulum candelaborum; capitulum navium; capitulum botaciorum et bochall.; coppe; moyoli et ghoitti; vasa auri; vasa

⁹⁹ Edited in: Ferrari 2003.

¹⁰⁰ HSTA Stuttgart A 602 Nr 32 = WR 32.

¹⁰¹ See on these sources for the Gonzaga court e.g. L'Occaso 2005.

*christali; inceso(r)ia; basia et scutele; cuclea(r)ii; forcele; salaroli et busole; confeterie; [16v] capitulum arborum; trombe et cornua; arzenterie pro altari; culteli a tabula; perle; nusche et anuli; balassii; anchone; capitulum ymaginum; capitulum lante(r)ne et moyoli; argenteria q. m(agnifi)ce domine Margarite de Gonzaga.*¹⁰²

Using all these aspects we can summarize and create the following model which might be helpful when describing the exterior shape of inventories, the inventory as thing, confronted with the interior aspects to describe the inventory as text:

The inventory as object: Exterior or material aspects	book, booklet, roll, sheet, insert in a charter or in a notary instrument (form of transmission)
	parchment or paper (writing material)
	format
	state of preservation
	cover, tacking, folding
	layout of the inventory (sheets, quires, indices)
	layout of the page (columns, margins)
	aspects of decoration or distinction, graphic signs
	scripture and scribes
	seals, notary signet (means of authentication)
	traces of use and editing
	traces of reception and archiving
	The inventory as text: Internal or discursive aspects
structure: protocol, entries, eschatocol	
naming of issuer, scribe, witnesses (narrative perspective)	
naming of place and date	
internal order of the entries: according to material, purpose, responsibility, place,...	
categories and titles	
indices	
layout of pages and organization of the register	
comments, notes, cancellations, additions, rearrangements	
indications of values or forms of accounting	
static or dynamic inventory: issued in one redaction, in several phases, continuously	
language; (technical) vocabulary	
catalogue? > elaborateness of description, higher principles of organization, 'scientific' interest	
content-related focus of the entries: social, material, iconographic aspects, provenience, horizon of the inventory	
discursive signs of redaction and use	
discursive signs of reception and archiving	

Table 4 Model of internal and external features of inventories as texts and objects.

102 ASMn AG b. 396 c. 16r/v.

6. Conclusion

This paper started with the observation that inventories count among the most interesting sources with regard to textual thingness: first of all because they translate objects into words and second because they are not only texts but material objects with their own thingness as well. Therefore, the focus was put in a first step on inventories as texts. I argued that inventories, while translating objects into words, do not only create lists of objects but build narratives on the relations between people, things and spaces. Textual thingness thus means that the inventories as texts construct these objects and integrate them into social and spatial networks. These are likewise narrated via hierarchies and relations of objects, as well as through the information inventories give about these networks and the information they hide. One basic distinction has to be made between space-related inventories which basically record objects in determined spaces like houses or castles, and person-related inventories which record objects belonging to people. While the first category – from a gender point of view – tends to be dominated by male belongings, the second category is more characterized by female belongings since women and their possessions were less bound to one house and more characterized by mobility due to different life phases. Inventories are thus promising sources for the reconstruction of material surroundings and life scripts which highlights their quality as sources for social and gender history. The renewed interest in objects as linked with people and spaces points to the relevance of inventories for cultural historical approaches. While extant objects often lack their social and cultural context, inventories are the most important sources for bringing forth the multifaceted networks and meanings of objects. Inventories are therefore neither neutral nor objective sources, but they have to be considered as narrative and to some extent fictional texts like other historiographic sources.

The second focus was put on the inventories as things. I argued that the varying forms inventories take on add to the narratives they produce about objects. Inventories survive in many different forms. Taking into account the textual quality and the exterior aspects of the documents will help us to better understand the different functions inventories could take on. Simple and volatile notes or books of administration served the purposes of the administration. Notes on the margins or in columns tell us if the inventory or list was concluded or laid out to be continued, and how it was used for administrative purposes. Inventories with seals or in the form of notary documents or charters stress the legal function of documents e.g. in the context of post mortem inventories or bridal inventories. Such forms can provide us with precious information on the question if inventories, and thus the passing on of objects, were regarded as legally important.

Carefully written and decorated inventories in the form of bigger or smaller books always tell us that the inventory itself could serve a representative function and convey the status of the person who possessed these objects. Such inventories were displayed in public procedures of inventorying, namely in the display of the bridal trousseau. Thus, precious and representative inventories may also have been used to commemorate significant events. This makes them way more than simple administrative texts: they become part of historiography themselves. It is evident that inventories are far from being the

simple lists of objects as which they had been regarded in the past. The renewed interest in both material culture and in pragmatic writing processes has led to an increased attention on ephemeral and more bulky types of writings which apparently lack the quality of being coherent narrative texts. However, this rather reflects the preeminence which the nineteenth century, above all, had given to epic text forms. Inventories present another quality of narration, the listed telling, stories written in the forms of lists. If we take this potential seriously such apparently austere texts offer immense potential to be explored as textual archives on the stories fossilized in the complex relationships between people, objects and spaces.

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Article published in

MEMO 7 (2020): Textual Thingness. DOI: [10.25536/2523-2932072020](https://doi.org/10.25536/2523-2932072020)

Title

Inventories as Material and Textual Sources for Late Medieval and Early Modern Social, Gender and Cultural History (14th-16th centuries)

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DOI of article

<http://dx.doi.org/10.25536/20200702>

Initial publication

December 2020

Last check of all references

30.12.2020

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Recommended Citation

Antenhofer, Christina: Inventories as Material and Textual Sources for Late Medieval and Early Modern Social, Gender and Cultural History (14th-16th centuries), in: MEMO 7 (2020): Textual Thingness / Textuelle Dinghaftigkeit, S. 22-46. Pdf-Format, doi: [10.25536/20200702](https://doi.org/10.25536/20200702).

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