INTRODUCING MAKARE · NOVEMBER 2026

A seed vault for human records

Makare is an archive where every document carries its own methodology and says plainly what kind of evidence it is. This post covers why we built it, what goes in, and how you can add to it.

On the night of 25 August 1992, incendiary shells hit the National and University Library of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo. The building burned through the night while librarians and volunteers carried books out under sniper fire. Most of a collection of about 1.5 million volumes was lost, along with rare books, manuscripts and a century of newspapers and journals.

In May of that year the city's Oriental Institute, which held much of the country's Islamic manuscript collection, had been shelled too. Part of what was lost there has since been pieced back together from copies foreign scholars had made of the originals before the war. Those copies are valuable for one reason: someone can say who made them, from what, and when.

Lasting is not the same as trustworthy

Preservation usually means keeping more copies for longer. That matters, and it isn't enough. A scan with no history is just a file on the internet. Nobody can tell whether it is the original, a later edit or a forgery, and the longer it

circulates, the harder that is to check.

A record becomes evidence when it carries its own account: where it came from, who held it, how it reached you, and what is missing. We built an archive that refuses to separate the two. We named it Makare, the Shona word for the distant past, the time of the ancestors.

Built like a seed vault

The Svalbard Global Seed Vault keeps duplicate samples of the world's crop seeds inside an Arctic mountain, so a harvest lost to war or disaster can be planted again. Nobody expects to open it often. It exists so the option is never gone.

Makare is our attempt at the same kind of backstop for documents, recordings and data. It is slow, deliberate work, done for readers we will never meet.

What goes into the archive

Each record is a file plus its methodology, sealed together. Once archived, the fact that this file existed, at this time, with this account attached, is written somewhere that cannot be edited by us or by anyone else. Every record is identified by a fingerprint computed from its own contents, so a copy found anywhere, years from now, can be checked against the original without needing us to still exist.

Makare does not vouch for what a document says. Nothing is peer reviewed by us, and every record states that in its own permanent text. What it gives a reader is enough information to judge for themselves.

Six kinds of evidence

Every record is labelled with what kind of material it is, so a reader knows how much weight to give it.

Firsthand testimony

The contributor, or someone they know, witnessed or produced it directly.

Raw observation or field notes

Measurements, field notes or recordings, with no analysis applied.

Secondary compilation

Assembled from other sources, which a reader should check themselves.

Interpretive claim

It argues for a conclusion. The reasoning is the contributor's.

Preprint, not reviewed

A paper or working draft that no reviewer has checked.

Peer reviewed elsewhere

Already reviewed in a named venue.

Contributing a record

It takes two or three minutes, in four steps.

1 **The files**

Drop in documents, scans, audio or a prepared .zip.

2 **Where it came from**

What it is in one line, where it physically was, how it reached you, who has held it since, and what is missing or uncertain. This is the methodology, and it is the part researchers rely on most.

3 **What kind of material**

Choose one of the six kinds of evidence above.

4 **Context**

A short paragraph in plain language for whoever reads it later, and your name if you want it attached. Names are recorded as a claim, not a verified identity.

Once archived, a record cannot be edited or withdrawn, by you or by us. Take a moment over the methodology. It is what makes the rest worth keeping.

CONTRIBUTE

Add something to the record

A tape, a notebook, a set of field measurements, a paper you want fingerprinted. If it exists nowhere else, it belongs here.

Contribute a record →

SHARE

Pass it to someone who keeps things

Archivists, researchers, the relative with the box in the attic. The archive is only as good as what people bring to it.

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