



On the Institutional Design of the Academic Review Function within ACHRAG

A note on the separation of analytical work
from evaluation and adjudication

ACHRAG

AI Collaborative Historical Research Alliance Group

External Reference Document

I. INTRODUCTION

ACHRAG maintains an internal system by which the scholarly findings produced by its several analytical teams are evaluated and verified, from an independent standpoint, prior to any external publication. The purpose of the present note is to set out, for the benefit of external scholars and the editorial boards of journals to which our work may be submitted, the design principles that govern this academic review function.

The proper names of individual teams within ACHRAG, together with the particulars of its internal organisation, are not disclosed externally, this being a matter of operational policy. Accordingly, this note refers not to named units but to functional designations — "the analytical team," "the academic review team," and so forth.

II. THE SEPARATION OF ANALYTICAL WORK FROM REVIEW

Within ACHRAG, the teams responsible for the analysis of primary sources, writing systems, and archaeological evidence are kept organisationally distinct from the team charged with evaluating the resulting paper drafts. No team that has itself conducted an analysis is permitted to judge the scholarly merit of its own output. That judgement is rendered exclusively by a separate team — the academic review team — which takes no part whatsoever in analytical work.

The purpose of this separation is to remove, as a matter of institutional design, any structural incentive for an analytical team to overstate the value of its own findings. The review team's sole function is the evaluation and adjudication of submitted paper drafts; it conducts no analysis of its own.

III. THE GUARANTEE OF INDEPENDENCE

The academic review team is independent of the analytical teams in the following respects:

- it does not fall within the chain of command of any analytical team;
- the criteria by which it evaluates submissions — its evaluative axes and scoring — are not subject to influence by the analytical teams;
- it does not itself select which matters come before it. Submissions are received according to a fixed procedure, and the review team holds no discretion to accept or decline a given case at will.

This independence exists to prevent the review function from becoming, in substance, an extension of the analytical teams it is meant to evaluate. Where a reviewer sits within the same chain of command as the party under review, the objectivity of the evaluation is structurally compromised.

**IV.THE LIMITATION OF ADJUDICATIVE AUTHORITY: EVALUATION
DISTINGUISHED FROM THE DECISION TO PUBLISH**

The highest evaluation the review team may render — *Accept* — does not itself constitute authorisation for publication. It signifies only that no defect of scholarly substance has been found, and that the review team recommends the matter be referred upward to the final decision-maker.

The review team is not vested, under any circumstance, with the authority to finalise external publication on its own initiative. Its function extends to evaluation and recommendation; the final determination of whether a work is to be published rests with ACHRAG's ultimate decision-making authority, and with that authority alone. This design is deliberate, and is intended to prevent the whole of the publication power from being concentrated in any single internal function.

Documents intended for external release are, correspondingly, subject to a further pre-publication audit — independent of the academic review itself — which examines whether any sensitive internal material has been inadvertently included and whether the document conforms to house style. A favourable review does not excuse a document from this further process.

V.THE LIMITATION OF JURISDICTION

The review team's jurisdiction is confined to a defined set of scholarly domains, namely certain fields within history and archaeology. It does not purport to adjudicate matters falling outside that jurisdiction.

CIRCUMSTANCE	DISPOSITION
A paper draft is submitted that falls outside the team's designated domain	The team declines review and returns a verdict of <i>Hold</i>
A dispute turns on the technical	That question is isolated and referred to a separate,

validity of a statistical method or
algorithm

specialised process of verification

The material before the team is
insufficient to support a conclusion

No definitive verdict is rendered; further verification
is sought before the matter is referred to the final
decision-maker

This limitation is designed to avoid the errors that would arise were the review team to render judgement, under pressure, upon matters lying outside its competence.

VI. THE METHOD OF EVALUATION: NUMERICAL SCORING AND STATED GROUNDS

The review team's evaluations are not expressed in impressionistic or laudatory language — terms such as "interesting" or "excellent" find no place in its reports. Every evaluation is instead expressed through numerical scores against fixed evaluative axes, together with the specific grounds for each score. The principal axes are as follows.

AXIS	CRITERION
Scholarly Validity	Whether the methodology is sound, and whether the conclusions follow logically from the evidence adduced
Novelty	Whether the work advances beyond existing scholarship, rather than restating what is already known
Proportionality of Evidence	Whether the strength of the claims made is commensurate with the strength of the supporting evidence, and whether any claim is overstated
Domain Fitness	Whether the work falls within the submitting team's proper domain
Publication Value	The journal or forum, if any, to which the work is suited

Contradiction	Whether the work conflicts with established scholarly consensus, and,
Detection	if so, whether that conflict is adequately grounded

Upon these axes, the review team renders one of four verdicts.

VERDICT	SIGNIFICATION
<i>Accept</i>	No defect of substance found; referral to the final decision-maker is recommended
<i>Revise</i>	Deficiencies are noted on specific axes; the work is returned to the analytical team with an indication of the direction revision should take
<i>Reject</i>	The work is found to lack scholarly merit, or to fall outside the team's jurisdiction; abandonment is recommended
<i>Hold</i>	Judgement is reserved, pending further verification or external expertise

It should be noted that the review team confines itself to identifying what is deficient and indicating the general direction of correction; it does not draft substitute text. The revision of a manuscript remains, in every case, the responsibility of the analytical team that submitted it.

VII. THE GOVERNING PRINCIPLE

This arrangement draws upon a general principle of institutional governance: that the function which produces a given output ought not to be entrusted also with the evaluation of that output. The principle is not peculiar to ACHRAG. It is reflected, in various forms, in the peer review conventions of the scholarly world; in the separation, within public bodies, of auditing from operational management; in the separation, within the press, of editorial judgement from commercial interest; and in the separation, within systems of justice, of investigation from adjudication.

Of particular relevance is the broader pattern by which an evaluative function, though granted a measure of independence, is nonetheless withheld the power to carry its own determination through to final effect — here, the confirmation of external publication — such that a separate authority must always concur before the matter is concluded. This is a familiar device for preventing the undue concentration of authority in a single hand, and it is the pattern upon which ACHRAG's academic review function has been designed.

A Note on the Character of this Document. *This note is intended to render the design principles of ACHRAG's internal review system intelligible to a general readership; it does not purport to offer a treatise on any legal institution, nor to assert a precise correspondence with any particular public office. ACHRAG's review system is a voluntary internal arrangement for the evaluation of scholarly output, and carries no legal authority or force of compulsion.*

VIII. CORRESPONDENCE

Enquiries concerning this arrangement, or concerning a paper that has been the subject of review, should be directed to the address below. Direct correspondence with individual teams is not accepted.

Correspondence: contact@achrag.org
Where a technical question arises, ACHRAG may, in the first instance, prefer to address it by way of publication on its own website rather than by private reply.



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