Ekaterina I. Nosova

St. Petersburg Institute of History, Russian Academy of Sciences, St.Petersburg, Russian Federation

Using Network Analysis to Study the History of Archival Collections Formation: A Case-Study of the Collection of N.P. Likhachev from the Scientific Historical Archive of the St. Petersburg Institute of History

Abstract

Interest in the history of book collections is not a recent phenomenon. However, rapid development of computers and the Internet over the past twenty years has provided researchers with new tools for network analysis, such as UCI6 и NetDraw 2.160. Continuing to identify the provenance of the documents kept in the Western European Section of the Scientific Historical Archive of the St. Petersburg Institute of History of the Russian Academy of Sciences,

the author had to face the fact that abundance of information and complexity of the links between various sources make it difficult to make out the complete picture. The Western European section of the Scientific Historical Archive of the St. Petersburg Institute of History of the Russian Academy of Sciences is mostly based on the collection of the academician N P. Likhachev (1862—1936). N.P. Likhachev contacted hundreds of antiquarian firms around the world, and thus his collection fits into the complex and interwoven system of the European antiquarian market of the late 19th–early 20th century. To overcome the problem of branching data, the author decided to call on the experience of sociologists and to use computer programs for network analysis that enable to reflect and comprehend the links between objects. The article is to present the process and results of this work, as well as to underscore problems and specificity of the programs in relation to the archival material. The main source is data from the personal provenance archive of the academician N. P. Likhachev, collection of documents on the history of the Western European Section, and artifacts from the Likhachev collection. The second layer of sources is antiquarian catalogs. The program can visualize these two layers of information in different ways by using different colors and lines. Overlaying of the schemes allows completing of missing elements in the chain of provenance. It should be noted that due to the richness of the sources, the network, originally compiled for the collection of N.P. Likhachev, grows into a pan-European system of "collector-antiquarian" relationships. It opens wide perspectives for research.

Keywords

Historical sources, archival collection, archival fond, N. P. Likhachev (1862-1936), network analysis, archive heuristic, antique market, collecting.

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About author

Nosova Ekaterina Igorevna, PhD in History, St. Petersburg Institute of History of the Russian Academy of Sciences, researcher, +7-921-85-60-772, katerinanossova@gmail.com

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