



Research on the Archive Institution in the Governance Model of Bulgaria in the Period 1878-1912 – Project's Perspective

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Abstract

The study of the history of archives is of great scientific, political, and practical importance for every country, as archives are an important factor in the development and security of the state. In fact, by the state of its archives we can judge the state itself. To date, there has been no comprehensive scientific study of the history of the National Archive Fund and its relationship with the country's governance model in Bulgaria. Such research would require a substantial investment of time and resources, but also the coordinated efforts of a large scientific team. This is the reason for approaching it in a way that at this initial stage will only be examined for a certain period. This deliberate delimitation of scope enables a more detailed and in-depth analysis than would be feasible within a single, all-encompassing study.

Through the project – Research on the institution of archives in the governance model of Bulgaria in the period 1878-1912, the scientific team has set the main task of providing the opportunity, through new discoveries and through the results obtained as a result of the implementation of the project, to obtain more in-depth and new knowledge in the field of the history of archives. The study allows the team to trace the processes of creation of the Bulgarian archives, their inclusion as part of the state administration and the beginning of the formation of the “state” archival fund, its composition and organization, and finally, to understand the reasons for the destruction and loss of valuable archival documents. The current paper presents the project's scientific methods, expected results and goals.

Keywords: research project, archives, Bulgaria

1. Introduction

Since the beginning of the 19th century, the concept of protecting cultural heritage, which also includes archives, has been taking shape in international law. The development of digital technologies in the 20th century has provided a new approach to them, which implies not only preservation, but also accessibility, and a new paradigm has been adopted – management of cultural heritage, and under the auspices of UNESCO, the Memory of the World program has been developed, and the need for the Bulgarian scientific community to adequately participate in it makes the study particularly relevant and of international importance.

The formation of the modern Bulgarian statehood after 1878 involved not only the creation of all sorts of political institutions and legal frameworks, but also the development of mechanisms for administrative activities and institutional memory. These include the institution of archives – a particularly ambiguous and often underestimated position within the emerging governance model. Examining the role of archives in the period of 1878 and 1912 offers valuable insight into the priorities, and limitations of early Bulgarian state administration. The period was decisive for the construction of Bulgaria's newly established and still developing governance model, and yet the institutionalization of archives remained fragmented and inconsistent. As a formative phase of Bulgarian statehood, this period reveals fundamental tensions between administrative modernization and the absence of systematic archival governance. Analysing archival administration in this context allows for deeper understanding of how exactly the state conceptualized governance and administrative responsibility in its formative decades.

The number of studies devoted to the history of Bulgarian archives is by no means insignificant. Nevertheless, these works lack an in-depth assessment of whether, during specific historical periods, a coherent and satisfactory model of state governance existed. They also rarely examine the underlying reasons why the state actions in the field of archival administration were insufficient, inconsistent, and chaotic, often driven more by contingency than by deliberate policy. The absence of such a model is particularly noticeable in the period from the Liberation to 1912, when (finally) the first serious initiatives related to archives were undertaken on a national scale. But not all researchers are



committed to commenting on the political ideas and inherited collective attitudes that led to harmful inaction in this period.

Despite the existing body of literature, the relationship between archival institutions and the governance model of the Bulgarian state in the period 1878–1912 has not been systematically analysed. This state of affairs also lacks a useful source base that would significantly contribute to the better quality of research and reduce its duration, which is why its creation is one of the specific goals of the current project. The current paper aims to examine the role of archival institutions within the emerging governance model of Bulgaria between 1878 and 1912, focusing on administrative practices, legislative frameworks, and the causes of institutional fragmentation and document loss [3]. The uneven preservation of archival records during 1878–1912 reflects broader administrative priorities, revealing both strengths and limitations of early Bulgarian governance. Preliminary observations from the processed materials suggest patterns of document loss linked to institutional fragmentation and resource constraints.

A significant part of the archival sources related to Bulgarian institutional history remains underexplored, fragmented, or insufficiently described, which poses serious methodological challenges for historical and archival research [9]. By examining archival institutions within the governance framework of Bulgaria between 1878 and 1912, the study lays the conceptual foundation for a systematic reconstruction of early administrative memory and the creation of a sustainable research infrastructure.

2. Methodology of the Project

For each study, the most important activity is the planning and organization of the research process, and the methodology must be adequate to the set goals and objectives. The study is conducted within the framework of the research project “Research on the institution of archives in the governance model of Bulgaria in the period 1878-1912”. The project applies a combination of qualitative historical methods and archival science approaches in order to examine the role of archival institutions within the governance model of Bulgaria in the period 1878–1912. The study contains both empirical and theoretical research methods.

The empirical methods include systematic literature review, archival research, and identification and examination of primary documentary sources, which are preserved in institutions such as state archives, libraries, museums, and other institutions part of the GLAM sector. Particular attention is paid to sources registered in the National Electronic Register of Documentary Collections. On the other hand, the theoretical methods include problem formulation, identification of institutional and administrative inconsistencies, comparative analysis. Archives function as institutions of memory, whose role extends beyond preservation to include interpretation, accessibility, and the socialization of cultural heritage within society [7].

The described methods allow for the examination of legislative frameworks, administrative practices, and institutional attitudes towards archives during the formative decades of Bulgarian statehood. Vital component of the methodology is the systematic identification, description, and digital reproduction of archival and printed sources. The collected materials are organized in a structured database, designed to enable thematic classification, analytical description, and remote access. Digitization follows the standards adopted by the Bulgarian State Archives, ensuring consistency and long-term usability of the digital copies.

The project, in its entirety (as a topic and methods of implementation), is in line with the latest goals of the National Strategy – for better science and for a better Bulgaria. Its implementation will allow the University of Library Studies and Information Technologies (ULSIT) to establish itself as a centre for cutting-edge scientific research, will strengthen the responsibility of Bulgarian science to society and will raise the international authority of the country, making it possible for us to participate in the initiatives of the International Council on Archives and other UNESCO bodies from the GLAM category. The Memory of the World program, the Europeana portal, the latest three directives for information reuse, etc., have been considered [2].

As for the interdisciplinary significance of the project results, it is undeniable not only for the social sciences, but also for all other fields of science and public practice. This is due to the very nature of archival theory, methodology and practice, which are connected to everything. But in the foreground, in this particular case, is public administration [1].

3. Sources and Materials



The project study is based on a variety of archival and printed sources that are related to the development of archival practices and administrative governance in Bulgaria between 1878 and 1912. The primary source base contains documents, which are preserved in the state archives of Bulgaria. That includes records produced by central and local administrative bodies, ministries, and other public institutions, such as administrative acts, reports, internal regulations, and other documents reflecting archival practices of the period.

In addition to archival holdings, the research project incorporates printed sources such as official gazettes, legislative publications, annual reports, and early scholarly works. They are addressing administrative organization, cultural heritage, and documentary preservation. The source base is enriched even more by materials from libraries, museums, and other institutions part of the GLAM sector that have registered documentary collections in the National Electronic Register.

The available sources are characterized by uneven preservation and varying degrees of completeness. This is reflecting the historical disruptions, but also and the absence of a systematic archival governance during the period under research. This condition of the source base constitutes both a limitation and a central object of analysis, as it directly illustrates the consequences of fragmented archival administration in early Bulgarian statehood [4].

4. Historical and Institutional Context

The establishment of the Bulgarian state after 1878 marked an enormous transformation in all newly established possible aspects – political authority, administrative structures, and legal frameworks. The newly formed institutions were primarily focused on state-building tasks, which are related to governance, territorial administration, and public order. In this process, record-keeping practices developed rapidly as a functional and essential necessity of administration, while archival organization remained secondary and unsystematized. In the period between 1878 and 1912, Bulgaria managed to gradually adopt constitutional principles and administrative regulations. But unfortunately, the archival governance was not institutionalized as a distinct field of public administration. The archival responsibilities were dispersed among various state bodies, such as libraries, museums, and scholarly institutions. That often happened without clear mandates or standardized procedures. As a result, the preservation of records depended on the local practices, individual initiatives, or institutional memory rather than on a centralized archival policy. The formation of administrative memory in post-Liberation Bulgaria was uneven and strongly dependent on the stability of newly established state institutions, which directly affected the preservation and organization of archival records [8].

The lack of specialized archival services within administrative bodies along with the limited legislative attention to archival matters, contributed to the sometimes-permanent loss, destruction, or neglect of documents of lasting historical value. Understanding this historical and institutional context is essential for assessing the role of archives within Bulgaria's early governance model and for explaining the long-term consequences for the formation of the national archival fund.

The early development of archival work in Bulgaria after 1878 was characterized by fragmentation, lack of coordination, and the absence of a unified institutional framework, reflecting broader weaknesses in administrative organization during the formative years of the modern state (Kolev, 1878–1951) [5].

5. Archives and Governance in Bulgaria (1878–1912)

The period after Bulgaria's liberation in 1878 marked the formative years of the country's administrative and institutional structures. While the newly established state had to prioritize the creation of political institutions, legislative frameworks, and mechanisms for governance, the development of archival institutions remained at the surface. The archival function was initially embedded within the broader administrative apparatus, which was managed by existing departments and memory institutions without specialized oversight or standardized procedures. In this period, early record-keeping practices reflected the current immediate practical needs of administration rather than the long-term preservation or systematic documentation. Ministries, local administrations, and emerging cultural institutions managed to maintain all sorts of files, registers, and reports, and yet the absence of resolute archival units often resulted in inconsistent record management. Unfortunately, as a consequence valuable documents were frequently lost, misplaced, or even fully destroyed. That additionally highlights the vulnerability of the state memory in the absence of structured archival governance.



Archival practices in Bulgaria should be understood as an integral part of cultural heritage management, where preservation, accessibility, and socialization of documents are inseparable from broader governance and cultural policies [6].

Despite these limitations, several national initiatives laid the future groundwork for institutionalization. Efforts were made in order to codify document retention, organize collections within specific institutions, and introduce early cataloguing and descriptive practices. Despite the mentioned actions, these measures were inconsistent, as they are reflecting both the limited resources of the young state and the inherited administrative culture. That culture prioritized immediate bureaucratic functionality over systematic archival preservation.

By analysing the archival administration in this context, we are able to provide insight into the priorities, constraints, and political attitudes of the Bulgarian state in its formative decades. The somehow fragmented and uneven development of archives only illustrates a broader tension between state-building objectives and long-term preservation of the institutional memory. By tracing these dynamics, it just becomes evident how administrative decisions and omissions in this period shaped the composition, accessibility, and continuity of the national archival fund, with lasting implications for both historical research and public governance.

6. Digital Research Infrastructure and Database

One of the major outcomes of the project “Research on the institution of archives in the governance model of Bulgaria in the period 1878-1912” is the creation of a database, which is designed to consolidate the otherwise dispersed archival and printed sources into one unified and easily accessible research infrastructure. The database addresses the historical fragmentation and uneven preservation of records, by providing scholars, students, and practitioners with a platform that facilitates both detailed historical analysis and comparative research.

The database integrates a broad range of materials, including, but not limited to administrative documents, official gazettes, correspondence, reports, and institutional regulations from central and local government bodies, but also materials from libraries, museums, and other GLAM-sector institutions registered in the National Electronic Register. Additionally, selected foreign archival materials are included to contextualize Bulgarian administrative and archival practices within broader European models. Each document is carefully catalogued and described according to international archival standards, while ensuring consistency and enabling systematic retrieval.

The digitization follows all mandatory methodological protocols established by the Bulgarian State Archives. That includes high-resolution scanning, metadata annotation, and standardized descriptive entries. The database is organized into thematic and chronological subcollections, allowing users to search by institution, document type, topic, and date. Advanced search functionalities enable scholars to trace the evolution of administrative practices, evaluate patterns of document preservation and loss, and explore the relationship between governance and archival organization in the formative decades of the Bulgarian state.

Following the processing and digitization of all relevant printed and archival materials, electronic copies are incorporated into the database with an appropriate structure. The set system ensures remote access, analytical description, and thematic organization. This way it allows users to retrieve and study documents efficiently. This infrastructure manages to create a sustainable and expandable platform, which supports further research across subsequent periods, comparative studies, and integration of newly discovered materials.

The database represents a significant contribution to the concept of Open Science and digital humanities initiatives. By providing remote access to previously dispersed or not-so-known sources, it only fosters transparency and encourages interdisciplinary research, while at the same time strengthens collaboration among national and international scholars. The platform also supports pedagogical applications, offering students in archival studies, history, and public administration direct engagement with primary sources and real-world data management practices.

After processing the searched and scanned printed and archival documents related to the topic, their electronic copies will be organized in a structured digital database. It will include thematic and chronological sub-bases, the scope of which will be determined by the type and content of the scanned documents. The system will provide remote search, analytical description, and the ability to filter by institution, document type, topic, and date. In this way, the database will combine consolidation of historical heritage with convenience for researchers, students, and specialists, creating a sustainable and expandable digital infrastructure for future research.



The results of the project will be disseminated through the publication of articles in refereed and indexed scientific journals, participation in international and regional conferences, as well as through exhibitions in the halls of the Archives and the National Assembly. The final event of the project provides for a scientific conference to promote the achievements, with the participation of leading specialists in archival science and cultural heritage in Bulgaria. The publication of a collection of new research on the topic will provide additional visibility of the results and increase the capacity of future specialists.

The project results include available reporting documentation, accumulated analytical material, processed data and drawing conclusions and recommendations. The database ensures real continuity between historical authorities and modern researchers, supporting not only historical science, but also educational and scientific-practical applications. The popularization of scientific production and the enhancement of the competencies of the members of the scientific team contribute to strengthening the national and international scientific authority of ULSIT.

The establishment of this digital infrastructure addresses historical shortcomings and serves as an initiative-taking instrument for future study in this area. It establishes a sustainable and expandable foundation for subsequent studies covering later periods. The database embodies not only the immediate analytical objectives of the project, but also the long-term vision for the modernization, accessibility, and internationalization of Bulgarian archival resources.

Through this digital research database, the project achieves a dual purpose – it manages to consolidate and preserve the documentary heritage of the early Bulgarian governance while at the same time offers an interactive and scalable tool for the academic community, public institutions, and international initiatives such as UNESCO's Memory of the World program and the Europeana platform. By bridging historical scholarship, archival science, and digital innovation, the database exemplifies the transformative potential of integrated research infrastructures for cultural heritage and governance studies.

7. Project Team

The project team was carefully selected based on each member's professional expertise and specific research interests that are relevant to the project's theme. The collective includes specialists not only in archival science, but also in cultural heritage, history, public administration, information management, and digital content protection. The senior researchers contribute extensive knowledge in the areas of archival practices, cultural and historical heritage, and the historical development of Bulgarian governance, and at the same time providing guidance and supervision for methodological approaches and data analysis.

All team members also bring complementary expertise in intellectual property, digital content management, and the legal and organizational aspects of information systems, by ensuring the technical and ethical aspects of the digital database component. PhD candidates and early-career researchers contribute through focused investigations on archival legislation, digitalization processes, and document preservation. The team includes and students who actively participate in the project, engaging in firsthand archival work, data processing, and scholarly dissemination.

The interdisciplinary composition of the team allows for a comprehensive approach, combining historical research, archival theory, and digital innovation. This collaboration ensures that the project manages not only to consolidate and preserve primary sources but also to strengthen scholarly capacity, and at the same time fosters professional development, and supports sustainable and accessible digital infrastructure for future research.

The team's close connection to both academic teaching and archival practice only ensures the transfer of research results into higher education and professional training. With the active involvement in conferences, publications, and student mentorship, the project fosters continuity between established scholarly expertise and the next generation of archival professionals.

8. Discussion

The analysis of the archival practices and the newly established state's governance in Bulgaria in the period 1878 and 1912 demonstrates a clear tension between the priorities of the early state-building and the systematic preservation of institutional memory. While the administrative structures and legal frameworks developed rapidly, it is the establishment of dedicated archival institutions that remained fragmented, inconsistent, and highly dependent on local initiatives. This only resulted in the uneven



preservation of documents, sometimes even total loss of historically significant records, and challenges for the subsequent scholarship.

The creation of a digital database within the framework of the project “Research on the institution of archives in the governance model of Bulgaria in the period 1878-1912” addresses these historical gaps. By consolidating dispersed archival and printed sources, the database enables all researchers to overcome limitations inherent in the historical record – remotely and with open access. It also facilitates comparative analyses, allowing scholars to trace both the evolution of administrative practices and the impact of archival organization on governance outcomes.

Even more, the database and the related project activities only highlight the interconnection between historical research, archival science, and digital innovation. The initiative exemplifies how interdisciplinary approaches can enhance understanding of the governance models and cultural heritage management, by offering practical tools for education, policy development, and international collaboration. By integrating the Open Science principles and aligning them with initiatives such as UNESCO’s Memory of the World program and the Europeana platform, the project ensures that its outputs have both scholarly and societal relevance.

9. Conclusion

The current research study underlines the importance of archives as a vital component of the state administration and cultural heritage. The period of the project research (1878-1912) reveals not only the achievements, but also the limitations of the early Bulgarian governance. By doing so it demonstrates how the administrative priorities, inherited attitudes, and resource constraints shaped the institutionalization of archival practices.

The project’s database and preliminary findings provide a foundation for future empirical studies, comparative analyses, and interdisciplinary research on archival practices and governance models in Bulgaria and the wider European context. The results of the project can be used, if desired, by other higher education institutions that provide training in the humanities and social sciences.

The dissemination of the project’s results through participation in conferences and educational resources guarantees that the generated knowledge is widely accessible and contributes to the professional development of researchers and students.

By bridging historical scholarship along with digital innovation and international archival standards, the project not only enhances the understanding of Bulgaria’s early governance model but also sets a precedent for future research on the national archival fund. In case of a good reception, the project can be continued, covering the following time periods – 1913-1951, 1952-1974, 1975-2007, 2008 – until today, all periods with significant changes in the organization of Bulgarian archives. The project’s outcomes establish a solid basis for ongoing and expanded studies, fostering continuity between historical authorities and contemporary scholars. This positions Bulgaria’s archival heritage within the broader European and global context.

The results of the project only improve the training in the bachelor’s program “Archivistics and Documental Studies” at ULSIT, enriching the curriculum in the discipline “History of Archives” and achieving a general increase in the quality of training in this discipline. The database with the bibliography and scanned documents is also used in the preparation of course and diploma theses at both levels of study (bachelor’s and master’s), as well as in the preparation of dissertations.

As a conclusion, the project demonstrates that systematic archival research, combined with digital infrastructure and interdisciplinary collaboration, is essential for preserving state memory, informing governance, and advancing both national and international historical scholarship.

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