

# **DIGITAL HUMANITIES AND TRAINING STUDENTS TO WORK WITH SOURCES: THE EXAMPLE OF STUDYING THEOSOPHICAL JOURNALISM OF THE RUSSIAN EMIGRATION OF 1920s-1930s**

**Prof. Elena Kriazheva-Kartseva, Ph.D.**

The Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University), Russia

## **ABSTRACT**

The article is devoted to the study of the experience of using the capabilities of Digital Humanities in the preparation of research projects in history. In particular, the article reveals the methodology for using a complex of areas of information computer technologies when working with sources, on the example of studying Russian Theosophical Journalism of Emigration of 1920s-1930s, which can be used when studying other topics by students of humanitarian orientation. The teacher can teach students to use information technology in different ways. First, get acquainted with the databases of archives and electronic libraries. Modern capabilities allow you to remotely analyze the catalogs of emigrant publications. Secondly, the researcher has access in a number of cases to already digitized sources in databases, for example, in the Consolidated Catalog of Periodicals of the Russian Emigration - Emigrantika (<http://www.emigrantika.ru/>), getting acquainted not only with the text, but also visual information. Thirdly, Digital Humanities allow using a variety of tools for interpreting texts, in particular, programs for creating author's databases with the introduction of hypertext, programs for conducting content analysis. It is these components that allow us to conclude that modern information computer technologies are increasingly allowing historians to conduct a source study of electronic resources, interpret the received primary data, and in the future create more and more advanced distributed systems. Acquaintance of students with the models of work of researchers using the capabilities of Digital Humanities should also contribute to the more active implementation of modern methods of working with various types of information contained in historical sources.

**Keywords:** *Digital Humanities, multimodal humanities, teaching students new methods of historical research, Theosophical Journalism of the Russian Emigration of 1920s – 1930s*

## **INTRODUCTION**

At present, it is difficult to imagine conducting historical research without the involvement of information and communication technologies. Accordingly, teachers discuss methods of teaching students new methods of working with historical sources in order to form their research competencies.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Methodologically, this article is based on the ideas of humanitarian informatics, which received special development at the beginning of the XXI century, with the advent of Web 2.0 technologies.

### **1. Prerequisites for the introduction of new methods and forms of training specialists – historians in Russia**

The beginning of the XXI century in Russia became the period of the state's recovery from the crisis of the 1990s, which is characterized by cardinal transformations in all spheres of society.

The transformations have affected the field of education. In 2003, the Russian Federation entered the Bologna system, which led to a radical revision of all standards in education, the development of new approaches to teaching in higher education.

The reforms of the educational system at universities were also caused by the active formation of the economy of the fifth wave of innovation, and preparations for the transition to the sixth one.

These challenges affected all areas of training, including traditional, classical ones, which include history education.

Among the conceptual achievements of the period from 2003 to 2020: creation of research centers in the higher education system; updating the content of history education, which is reflected in new programs, lecture courses, textbooks; an emphasis in the organization of the educational process on the development of students' research competencies. The latter would have been impossible without a revision of the technologies for conducting scientific research of students, among whom information technologies took an important place.

### **2. The history of the implementation of information and communication technologies in historical research**

The modern scientific paradigm is formed by scientists who actively use information and communication technologies, which have become an active research tool after the advent of Web 2.0 - the Internet, with open user content. Historians also note the high potential of using new technologies. The conceptual apparatus of researchers has been replenished with such concepts as Digital history, E-History, Digital Humanities, and in Russian science, the term Historical Informatics.

A historical overview of the development of information and communication technologies in the humanities is presented in the chapter "Information and communication technologies" by A. S. Kotov, in the collective monograph "The study of Russia by modern historians of the West and the East." [1]

The author notes that an extensive historiography of this issue is presented in the works of American and English researchers - T. Presner, D. J. Cohen, S. Hockey; and also in the works of Russian researchers - L.I. Borodkin. I. M. Garskova, A. Yu. Volodin.

According to A.S. Kotov, the most successful periodization of the application of information and communication technologies in the humanities is presented in the works of Susan Hockey. [2]

The researcher pointed out that the beginning of the use of information technology was founded by Jesuit priest Robert Bus, who, together with founder of IBM Thomas Watson, transferred the process of creating an index of the words used in the works of Thomas Aquinas into the processes of an electronic computer.

Later, during the four periods of DH's development, researchers went from calculating on mainframes ("large computers") to working on personal computers, from the first professional associations to creation of international associations (Association for History and Computing), from using local networks to working in international professional social networks (Academia.edu, ResearchGate, Social Science Research Network and others).

On the one hand, the rapid development of information technology, has stimulated an increase in the number of research projects, publications, on the other hand, has raised a number of questions on the source study of electronic resources. At the beginning of the XXI century, for consideration of methodological issues of work in new conditions, historians began to unite at conferences touching upon the "Digital Humanities" issues as a set of areas for the application of information and communication technologies in the humanities.

It is necessary to note that among the issues that were raised at such conferences, the problem of training professional historians in universities, taking into account the new opportunities of DH.

In our opinion, the most productive option is to familiarize students with the algorithms of work, first of all, by the teachers themselves on scientific projects using information and communication technologies, and then the independent implementation of projects.

### **3. Teaching students to work with sources using information and communication technologies: on the example of studying theosophical periodicals of Russian emigrants of 1920-1930s.**

Modern students entering universities are very familiar with information technology. However, when preparing professional historians, it is important to form competencies in future specialists that will allow them to work with materials presented on the Internet critically. Let us consider the algorithm of interaction with students using the example of working with theosophical journals of Russian emigrants before World War II, which can be organized within the framework of training courses on source studies.

At the first stage, it is necessary to remind students briefly that the beginning of the 20th century is associated with an active interest of the intellectual elite of Europe, as well as Russia, in various occult practices, mystical teachings, which is a reaction to the harshest social realities of capitalist society, a premonition of an impending world war. In large European cities, including Moscow and St. Petersburg, Masonic lodges, the Rosicrucian orders, theosophical and anthroposophical groups actively worked. Researcher P. G. Nosachev introduced the term "marginal religiosity"[3] into scientific circulation to reveal the complexity of this phenomenon, and noted that over the past twenty years, whole academic directions have been formed to study the history of esoteric teachings and organizations.

The need for an interdisciplinary approach complicates the process of studying this phenomenon. The usage of information and communication technologies in the study of marginal religiosity is intended to simplify research procedures. Moreover, the study of the history of the theosophical movement as a phenomenon of the spiritual life of Russia and the West at the end of the XIX - XX centuries is in demand and relevant for understanding the mechanisms of people joining sects and occult nowadays.

We know that the ideas of theosophical teaching began to spread in Russia at the beginning of the 20th century. The founders of the doctrine were Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891) and the English Colonel Henry S. Olcott. In 1875 they founded the Theosophical Society in New York, which was then transferred to India (to Bombay, and in 1881 - in the suburb of Madras - Adyar). After the death of E.P. Blavatsky her work was continued by Annie Besant, who was president of the World Theosophical Society from 1907 to 1933. During her lifetime, the theosophical network covered many countries, including Russia.

Since 1901, several theosophical groups functioned in Russia, in 1908 the Russian Theosophical Society was entered in the register of societies of St. Petersburg, and later it opened branches in Moscow, Kaluga, Kiev, Vladivostok, Smolensk, as well as small theosophical centers in various regions of the Russian Empire.

Members of the society organized meetings, gave lectures, and published journals. The central organ of the society was the "Bulletin of Theosophy", published monthly since 1908 in St. Petersburg.

The revolutionary events of the early twentieth century, as well as the further formalization of new legislative norms in Soviet Russia, then the USSR, led to the closure of society.

The chairman of the society A. A. Kamenskaya and a number of theosophists emigrated to Europe, the rest were exiled to remote regions of the country.

In emigration in 1926, the Russian section of the International Theosophical Society was opened under the name - Russian Theosophical Society outside Russia. A. A. Kamenskaya was its General Secretary from 1926 to 1938. The society opened its branches in the cities of Europe, Asia and America. The largest number of divisions of the Russian section was opened in Europe. According to some reports, in 1931 there were 8, 1938 - 9, in such cities as Geneva, Paris, Prague, Revel, Belgrade, Berlin and others. [4]

Further, students can be asked to answer the question of how to organize a search for sources for the reconstruction of the section's work in emigration.

It is important that when answering, students not only noted that probably some of the sources have not been published and are stored in archives, while others were published. It is important to understand whether the Internet can help in finding these materials.

The teacher can agree with the students and comment that indeed some sources are published. In particular, the work of Elena Fedorovna Pisareva, translator and writer, chairman of the Kaluga Theosophical Society "History of the Russian Theosophical Movement"[5], which contains a certain amount of information about the work of Russian lodges in emigration. A number of sources are kept in the State Archive of the Russian Federation, which catalogs can be found on the special portal "Archives of Russia" (<http://www.rusarchives.ru/>). For example, Fund 7465 "Russian Theosophical Society outside Russia" is waiting for its researcher. However, a comprehensive reconstruction of the history of emigre organizations is impossible without an analysis of their periodicals.

It should be noted that in the course of teaching students searching on the Internet about these journals can not be made by entering simple queries, since the information search algorithm is formal-logical, without taking into account the requirements of historical science. That is, most often, in response to a request, information is dropped out that is in demand by the mass consumer, and not by the scientific community.

That is why the research scientist must study query languages. And also when searching for information to be guided by scientific registers, bibliographic reviews.

For example, a consolidated list of periodicals of various mystical and occult organizations published in the Russian Empire, then in emigration, and again in the Russian Federation, is contained in the collective monograph "Occultism in Russian and Soviet Culture" edited by B.G. Rosenthal. [6]

Among the many occult journals, such as "Anthroposophy", "Phoenix", "Occultism and Yoga" and others, we also find the Theosophical journal "Vestnik", published in Geneva from 1924 to 1940 in Russian, edited by A. A. Kamenskaya and Ts. L. Gelmboldt.

The issues of the journal contain information on important events of the Theosophical movement; international congresses held by the International Theosophical Society; activities of the Russian section.

Students must understand that only the emergence of Web 2.0 technologies allowed the creation of networked research infrastructures, as well as mechanisms of communication with collectors, passionate about history people, whose data allows to further intensify the implementation of research projects.

Speaking about access to the list and issues of the "Vestnik", it is obvious that some issues of the journal have been digitized and are available in electronic libraries and specialized journals. Students can be shown an electronic database - the portal "Emigrantica" (<http://www.emigrantica.ru/>), containing a consolidated catalog of periodicals from the Russian diaspora. The teacher can introduce students to the algorithm for working with this kind of directories. As a result, students can find and read information about which archives and libraries one can read the issues of the journal, particularly in electronic libraries - the University of California at Berkeley (microfilms), the National Library of the Czech Republic.

The teacher can also emphasize that many keen historians, thanks to the fact that nowadays the Internet provides access to second-hand bookstores, as well as book auctions, can acquire valuable sources in private libraries, or gain access to the private collections of other researchers.

Working with students, one should draw their attention to the fact that the historian's job is also to interpret the found content. The identification and creation of the source base of any historical research should not replace one's own theoretical conclusions, reconstruction of the general historical picture. That is why active work is currently underway to create new tools for working with large amounts of data.

Among the important tools for the historian are programs for content analysis of texts. In Russia, popular programs are: "CONTENT-ANALYSIS Pro", the rights to which belongs to the research committee "Theory of Social Systems" of the Russian Society of Sociologists (<http://ecsocman.hse.ru/text/35480087>), the VAAL system (<http://www.vaal.ru/>).

The result of the lesson with students on the use of information and communication technologies for the search and analysis of periodicals of Russian emigrants-theosophists should be not only the continuation of the formation of the competence of searching for sources on the Internet, but the students' awareness that the modern level of Digital Humanities gives the researcher the opportunity to use the Internet as a reference book, library, archive, and ultimately, as a laboratory of a historian.

## CONCLUSION

For more than 50 years of development of "Digital Humanities" as a complex of directions for the application of information and communication technologies in the humanities, it has gone through a revolutionary path from the creation of the simplest databases to the algorithmization of distributed global interaction via the Internet with the content of large databases, with its own research tools and the use of specialized software.

Since 2000, Digital Humanities have gained particular importance as the computer expanded its capabilities in humanities research and the array of digitized materials increased.

The author concludes that modern liberal arts education presupposes the obligatory study of the possibilities of Digital Humanities.

Training in higher educational institutions for future historians currently contains of students involvement in project activities, which allows them to form the competencies of a researcher. In the course of preparing students for implementation of such projects, students should get acquainted with the possibilities of "Digital Humanities", learn the methodology of working on the Internet with historical resources. The most interesting is the holding of seminars on little-known historical problems. In this article, the author proposes an algorithm for considering the historian's new tools in the classroom solving the problem of finding various sources, including periodicals of the Theosophical societies of Russian emigrants, as well as the possibility of some software products for analyzing the found content.

The development of new forms and methods of conducting classes with students with the involvement of information and communication technologies will allow the formation of a new practice of teaching history, which will be the modern methodological, informational, source study, analytical state of historical

science, and will also allow to continue work on the search for new methods of development of "Digital Humanities" in future.

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