

# The Formation and Development of Archival Science in the Republic of Belarus

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## The Formation and Development of Archival Science in the Republic of Belarus

### *ABSTRACT*

The article is devoted to the development of archival science in Belarus since 1991, when the country became independent. The author discovers the reasons for the creation of specialized scientific archival institutions, the legal basis of their activities, the main directions of their research and elaborations. Special attention is paid to the use of research results in the educational process, the participation of archival research organizations in the preparation of professional personnel archivists and records managers. The article does not ignore the problems preventing the further development of archival science in the country, offers possible solutions.

## Formazione e sviluppo della scienza archivistica nella Repubblica di Bielorussia

### *SINTESI*

L'articolo è dedicato allo sviluppo della scienza archivistica in Bielorussia dal 1991, quando il paese è diventato indipendente. L'autore scopre le ragioni della creazione di istituzioni archivistiche scientifiche specializzate, la base giuridica della loro attività, le direzioni principali della loro ricerca ed elaborazioni. Particolare attenzione è rivolta all'uso dei risultati della ricerca nel processo educativo, alla partecipazione delle organizzazioni di ricerca d'archivio per la preparazione di personale archivistico professionale e di record manager. L'articolo non ignora i problemi che impediscono l'ulteriore sviluppo della scienza archivistica nel paese, ed offre possibili soluzioni.

## Ureditev in razvoj arhivske znanosti v Beloruski Republiki

### *IZVLEČEK*

Članek je posvečen razvoju arhivske znanosti v Belorusiji od leta 1991 dalje, ko je država postala samostojna. Avtor predstavlja razloge za nastanek in ustanovitev specializiranih znanstvenih arhivskih institucij, pravne osnove za njihovo delovanje ter glavne smernice njihovega delovanja in raziskovanja. Posebno pozornost posveča uporabi raziskovalnih rezultatov v izobraževalnem procesu ter sodelovanju arhivskih raziskovalnih organizacij pri izobraževanju arhivistov in dokumentalistov. Članek pa predstavlja tudi težave, ki otežujejo nadaljnji razvoj arhivske znanosti v državi in predstavlja možne rešitve.

## Станаўленне і развіццё архіўнай навукі ў Рэспубліцы Беларусь

### *РЭЗЮМЭ*

У артыкуле разглядаюцца пытанні развіцця архіўнай навукі ў Беларусі пасля 1991 г., калі краіна набыла незалежнасць. Раскрываюцца прычыны стварэння спецыялізаваных навуковых архіўных устаноў, прававыя асновы іх дзейнасці, асноўныя напрамкі навуковых даследаванняў і распрацовак, якія яны выконваюць. Асаблівая ўвага нададзена выкарыстанні вынікаў навуковых даследаванняў у адукацыйным працэсе, удзелу навуковых архіўных арганізацый у падрыхтоўцы прафесійных кадраў архівістаў і кіруючых дакументацыяй. У артыкуле не пакінутыя без увагі праблемы, якія перашкаджаюць далейшаму развіццю архіўнай навукі ў краіне, прапануюцца магчымыя шляхі іх вырашэння.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

All scientific studies within the framework of archival science can be divided into two basic groups: theoretical and applied ones. Since the document is the major subject of study in archival science, theoretical research presupposes studying the essence of the document as a piece of information, its functions, properties, interrelations among documents, their complexes, documentation systems, etc. Applied research aims at the development on a scientific basis of methodological aids (recommendations, techniques, rules, instructions, etc.) meant for facilitation of appraisal of documents and their selection for archival storage, organization of storage of documents in archives, their stock-taking, development of finding aids, scientific use of archival documents and information. Applied research also includes such kinds of work as compilation and publication of collections of documents, directories, archival guides, etc.

The issues related to record management in organizations are also in the focus of permanent attention of archival science in Belarus. The document passes through various stages of its creation and registration, sending, reception, execution, and operative storage before its transfer to storage in archive. The quality and completeness of the documents coming in for storage in archive largely depend on the quality of organization of these works. Therefore the solution of purely archival problems is impossible without development of scientific and methodological issues of work with documents at all stages of its life cycle.

Though archival science relates to historical sphere, the historical studies conducted on the basis of archival documents are not a subject of archival science and shall not be considered in this article.

## 2. FORMATION OF ORGANIZATIONAL AND LEGAL BASES OF DEVELOPMENT OF THE ARCHIVAL SCIENCE IN BELARUS

Being the successor of one of former USSR republics, the Republic of Belarus has inherited, besides the system of state archives operated in its territory, the structure of management of archival service and archival funds stored in its territory, also the main principles and technique of archival work organization.

It should be noted that in the USSR period practically all theoretical and applied studies in the field of record management and archival science have been concentrated in the Russian centers of science. The Belarusian archives used the results of all-Union scientific studies mainly carried out by the Moscow All-Union Scientific Research Institute of Record Management and Archival Work (VNIIDAD) in cooperation with central Soviet archives and the Moscow State Historical and Archival Institute (MGIAI). In those conditions the Belarusian archivists did not face the problem of conducting independent research work. The workers of archival establishments of Belarus were involved in the elaboration of some most complex applied topics as corporate authors formed out of representatives of archival establishments of various union republics, were engaged in reviewing of scientific and methodological studies made in VNIIDAD, reported at all-union scientific conferences, prepared collections of archival documents for publication, published scientific articles in periodical sectorial press. However their main duty in the scientific and methodological sphere was compilation of local instructions, regulations, and other normative and methodological documents actually duplicating similar all-union ones. At that the main focus was on archival work, paying extremely little attention to the issues of records management.

After breakup of the Soviet Union Belarusian archivists have faced a number of the problems in their professional work, which required urgent solution. The social and economic changes taking place in the country in the early 1990-ies, formation of the national legislation, transition to a commercial basis in mutual relations with the largest Russian scientific centers, have raised an acute problem of carrying out in Belarusian own manifold and comprehensive scientific studies in the field of records management and archival science, and also the development on this basis of normative and methodological base in the sphere of record-keeping and archival work.

The external environment has essentially changed during this period, which has rendered considerable influence on the work of archives. New information technologies have become widely spread in the work with documents in both the organizations and the archives. Belarus, as well as other coun-

tries of the former USSR, began to enter quickly into the world information space. New trends, such as electronic documenting and electronic document management, informational and documentary management, protection of documentary information, international and interstate standardization in the sphere of management of documents and archives, etc. have become priority topics in scientific research.

Implementation of tasks on scientific and methodological support of archives in the changed surrounding was possible only on condition of creation of an appropriate organizational and intellectual environment. For this purpose two research establishments were created within the State Archival Service of the Republic of Belarus: the Belarusian Scientific and Research Institute of Record Management and Archival Work (BelNIIDAD) in 1991 and the Belarusian Scientific and Research Centre of Electronic Documents (BelNITsED) in 1998. Let us note that both scientific establishments were formed by the resolution of the Belarusian Government.

BelNIIDAD and BelNITsED are the specialized scientific organizations in which the major theoretical and applied studies in the field of records management and archival science are concentrated. Both archival scientific centers are officially accredited as scientific organizations according to Law of the Republic of Belarus *On Scientific Activity*. Financing of research conducted there is carried out mainly by the state budget. They also fulfill research and development on a commercial basis under orders of state and non-state organizations and enterprises.

The state archives also have the status of scientific organizations in Belarus. In the first law on archives of 1994 it has been established that the National Archive of the Republic of Belarus and national state archives are the national scientific, methodological and research centers on the work with the documents of the National Archival Fund of the Republic of Belarus (NAF), and regional archives shall be the organizational and methodological centers [1, Art. 20]. The version of the archival law of 1999 has in addition given the status of scientific and methodological centers to regional state archives [2, Art. 12]. New law *On Archival Work and Record Management in the Republic of Belarus* adopted in and effective since the late 2011, has assigned to all state archives (national, regional, and zonal) the status of scientific methodological and research centers on the work with NAF documents [3, Art. 13].

Scientific activity of the state archives is organized according to the Rules of Work of the State Archives of the Republic of Belarus [4, p. 287]. The major forms of scientific research and methodological work of the state archives are:

Participation as coauthors in scientific studies and development works carried out by BelNIIDAD and BelNITsED, reviewing of drafts of scientific works, methodological documents, etc. prepared there;

Participation in scientific, scientific and practical conferences and symposiums, drafting of reports to it, preparation of articles, analytical reviews, collections of documents, directories, databases of the composition and contents of the documents stored there;

Compilation of methodological aids on the work with archival documents, resolution of methodological issues at sessions of the expert and methodological committees, methodological meetings.

Thus, at present the major theoretical and applied research and development of nation-wide and interarchival nature are mainly concentrated in two specialized scientific centers, BelNIIDAD and BelNITsED. The state archives are basically engaged in the local studies aimed at solution of present-day problems of their activity, their scientific studies are based first of all on the archival documents and archival funds stored in a corresponding archive.

### 3. THE MAIN DIRECTIONS OF SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AT PRESENT STAGE

Scientific studies of BelNIIDAD and BelNITsED are formed on the basis of Thematic Schedules of Scientific Research and Development focused on the scientific and technical support of the activity of the Department on Archives and Records Management of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Belarus. Thematic schedules are compiled annually on the basis of proposals of the Department's

sections, state archives, BelNIIDAD and BelNITsED. After approval of the Thematic Schedule the Ministry of Justice acts as a state customer of research work, while BelNIIDAD and BelNITsED as contractors.

BelNIIDAD is a leading scientific institution in the sphere of archival science. The research carried out there is of universal nature, it covers various spheres and directions. BelNITsED focuses mainly on the studies related to the electronic document, its storage, and is also engaged in the development of automated information systems for the state archives.

The major thrusts of research of specialized scientific organizations correspond to those problems which the archives have to face in its daily activity.

### **1. Development of complex methodological bases of work of state archives and archives of organizations**

With active participation of BelNIIDAD on the basis of corresponding scientific and methodological developments the Rules of Work of the State Archives of the Republic of Belarus, the Rules of Work of Archives of the State Bodies, Other Organizations have been compiled and approved. The institute officers have rendered methodological aid to the state archives of scientific and technical documentation and non-print media in the development by them of special rules of work with the corresponding documents. These and other similar documents set requirements to all main kinds of works in archives: from acquisition of archives, organization of stock-taking of documents, provision of its preservation to use of documents by visitors of archives, making copies of archival documents for them, issue of archival statements, etc.

### **2. Research in the field of appraisal of documents, selection of documents for archival storage, acquisition of archives**

On the basis of the elaborated principles and criteria of appraisal BelNIIDAD prepared a number of Lists of Typical Documents created in the activity of state bodies, other organizations with the indication of terms of its storage. The work in this direction retains its urgency, since the sphere of documentation is rather diverse, and new kinds and forms of documents appear in a constantly changing world. At present the issues of appraisal of scientific and technical documentation making the major set of documents of the National Archival Fund are being actively developed by BelNIIDAD. BelNITsED prepared two instructions on appraisal and selection for archival storage of electronic documents and information resources.

### **3. Studies in the field of preservation of archival document**

BelNIIDAD has prepared a number of methodological recommendations on provision of preservation of documents on paper medium, protection of archival documents against theft and unauthorized access, work with especially valuable archival documents, etc. BelNITsED has issued recommendations on preservation of electronic documents, bases and databanks, information resources.

### **4. Research in the history of state bodies and organizations of Belarus**

Quality acquisition of the state archives is impossible without knowledge of history of government bodies, their structure, and lines of activity. For this purpose BelNIIDAD has prepared a series of directories on the history of state institutions of the Soviet period. The latest large-scale project implemented by the institute in this direction, is the directory on the history of government bodies of the Republic of Belarus in the 1991-2008 period. The detailed information about all central and local state institutions, which performed government functions in certain spheres of state and public life, is included in it.

### **5. Development of the issues of theory and practice of archaeography, methodological bases of publication of archival documents**

By the results of the studies performed by BelNIIDAD recommendations on publication of

documents in Cyrillic of the 14<sup>th</sup> - 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, documents in Latin of the 13<sup>th</sup> - 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, documents in Polish of the 16<sup>th</sup> - early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries were issued, the Latin-Belarusian dictionary of official language of the Great Princedom Lithuanian of the 13<sup>th</sup> - 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the directory *Watermarks on Archival Documents of Belarus of the 16<sup>th</sup> - early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries* were compiled, etc. An Archaeographic Committee operates on the basis of BelNIIDAD to coordinate publication activity of the state archives.

## 6. Development of the automated information systems (AIS) for the state archives

This direction of scientific development is in the sphere of BelNITsED. The most important is AIS of the state archive, in the development of which a comprehensive approach is applied. The integrated system itself is composed of separate program modules "Acquisition", "Preservation", "Stock-Taking", "Finding Aids", "Personal Funds", "Usage", which are interconnected in a unified information system. Capabilities of the system make it possible to receive information on each sphere of activity of archives in both a separate archive and all state archives of the country as a whole. The summary database is formed in the Department on Archives and Record Management.

## 7. Research and development in the field of records management

The archive begins in office work. Precise rules of creation of documents and organization of work with it enable archivists to solve various problems, from preservation of documents and its selection for archival storage to the prospects of subsequent use of documents in an archive. BelNIIDAD and BelNITsED have prepared the set of regulatory legal acts and methodological aids on records management, both on paper and on electronic media, which are widely used in daily practice of state and commercial organizations.

## 8. Standardization in the field of management of documents and archives, introduction of international standards in the national legislation in the sphere of management of documents and archives

Inclusion of Belarus in the world information space, activation of international links of Belarusian archives demand coordination of national standards regulating the issues of management of documents and archives, with the international standards. Introduction of the advanced international standards in the practical activities of Belarusian archives is an urgent issue. In doing so, the task is simultaneously set to preserve national traditions and elaborated best practice of work with documents. BelNIIDAD and BelNITsED have prepared a number of standards regulating the issues of archival description, record-keeping and archival terminology, record management, including electronic ones, etc. In 2011 the National Technical Committee TK BY 28 «Records Management» was formed on the basis of BelNIIDAD, which is a site for cooperation of state bodies and other stakeholders in their work on national, interstate and international (regional) standardization in the field of management of documents and archives.

## 4. ARCHIVAL SCIENCE AND TRAINING OF PROFESSIONAL ARCHIVISTS AND RECORD MANAGERS

The studies of the scientific archival organizations are focused, first of all, on its practical application in the state archives, the archives and record management services of organizations. At the same time, in the conditions of constant inflow of the young staff to archives, introduction of achievements of archival science in the educational process related to training of professional archivists and record-keeping officers is no less important.

Training of professional archivists and records managers is performed at the Department of History of the Belarusian State University (BSU). On the initiative of the State Archival Service «*Historical Archival Science*» specialty in 1992 and «*Records Management*» specialty in 2001 were launched in the BSU. The Chair of Source Studies coordinates training of specialists of these specialties. The graduates from the university, who has been trained in these specialties, are stationed not only in the state archival institutions, but also in the state bodies, other organizations being the sources of acquisition of the state archives.

There is close cooperation between the BSU and archival establishments in the sphere of professional training. The basic archivistic and record management subjects have been developed and are lectured to students by directors and other most qualified officers of BelNIIDAD, BelNITsED, and state archives. The methodological and practical aids compiled by BelNIIDAD and BelNITsED for archives, services of records management are actively used in lectures and seminars, independent work of students. It allows not only giving students up-to-date theoretical knowledge, but also training them to put into practice after graduation state-of-the-art scientific, methodological and practical developments. Such work format acquires a special urgency in the conditions of shortage of manuals on record management and archival science and also their fast obsolescence with constantly changing conditions of existence of documents and archives in the present-day world.

The cooperation between scientific archival establishments and BSU continues within magistracy's framework. Besides, creative students and candidates for a master's degree, inclined to scientific research and focused on scientific work in future, have practical training in BelNIIDAD and BelNITsED.

Such close cooperation enables scientific organizations to select the most prospective students and to invite them to work as early as university seniors with orientation to further professional scientific activity.

On the other hand, scientific archival organizations, first of all BelNIIDAD, actively involve university professors in the development of some scientific topics.

The strong links thus developed have resulted in the opening in BelNIIDAD in 2012 of a branch of the Chair of Source Study of BSU Department of History. Its activity is organized according to the Regulations on the Branch of the Chair of Source Study in BelNIIDAD, approved by joint order of BSU Rector and BelNIIDAD Director.

Further training of graduates as qualified scientists is carried out through their postgraduate studies. Postgraduate courses have been operating since 1999 at BelNIIDAD for training of higher qualified scientists on Specialty 05.25.02 - *Documentation Science, Record Management, and Archival Science*. The training of qualified scientific staff on this specialty has also been started in the BSU postgraduate study since 2010. The graduates from postgraduate courses get the diploma of the Researcher, and on condition of the defense of a thesis a scientific degree of the Candidate of Science (History) is conferred, being an intermediate step between a Master of Science (MS) and a Doctor of Science (Ph. D).

## 5. PRESENT-DAY PROBLEMS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF ARCHIVAL SCIENCE

As time has shown, creation of specialized scientific institutions in the sphere of archival science was a far-sighted step. Eventually they managed to be staffed with qualified employees having good theoretical knowledge and considerable practical experience. For the period of its existence BelNIIDAD and BelNITsED have fulfilled more than 100 scientific topics, by the results of which a number of regulatory acts and methodological aids for archivists and record managers were compiled. The scientific organizations actively participate in professional training of staff, hold scientific conferences, and publish transactions.

Nevertheless, there are a number of problems nowadays in the development of archival science. These problems can be divided into two categories: scientific and organizational. Unresolved scientific problems are the driving factor of scientific research, as the science stops in its development without them. It is the main task of science to reveal a problem, to perform its comprehensive analysis and to offer possible ways of its solution. Organizational problems are formal and caused by external factors, not relating to science as such.

The kinds of scientific problems are diverse and as a whole correspond to the basic directions of research of scientific archival organizations. The most urgent now are problems of introduction of electronic document circulation technologies, appraisal of electronic documents, their long-term preservation [5, pp. 17-28].

One of the most pressing organizational problems is the considerable increase of applied research, instead of theoretical studies. It is linked with the requirement of commercialization of the results of scientific research, its introduction in practical activities of state archives and other organizations [6]. The funds allocated by the State to science should yield economic and (or) social effect. Therefore the main focus in research work in BelNIIDAD and BelNITsED is now made on applied developments, while theoretical studies have turned in some kind of a hobby for science workers, which they can engage in off duty on their own initiative. However, no qualitative solution of practical problems is possible without appropriate theoretical study.

The problem is the absence in BelNIIDAD of material and technical base for conducting research in the field of preservation of documents, development of optimal techniques of restoration and preservation of archival documents, performance of the required chemical laboratory studies. At present BelNIIDAD thrashes over an opportunity of formation of a specialized scientific division on the basis of the NAF Central Laboratory of Microfilming and Restoration of Documents, which has the necessary premises, special equipment and materials for corresponding studies.

The issues of coordination of scientific activity of BelNIIDAD and BelNITsED also demand resolution. Today the separation of traditional and electronic technologies of work with documents in office-work and in archives becomes practically impossible. However, the existing division of scientific research trends between the two scientific organizations has led to the situation, when BelNIIDAD is engaged in the study of mainly general theoretical and methodological issues, which often become the basis for the subsequent automation, developed by BelNITsED. This results in the complexities in planning and coordination of work completion terms, lack of mutual understanding in definition of its objectives and goals.

A painful problem of activity of scientific organizations is the issue of its staffing and financing. These issues are interconnected. Low salaries of archival scientists, especially young ones, those without a scientific degree, often compel them to stop scientific activity and to look for a higher paid job. There are complexities with defense of thesis, because there is no specialized council on defense of the thesis in the field of archival science and record management in Belarus. The lack of qualified experts considerably limits capabilities of scientific organizations in the choice of topics of scientific research and sometimes affects the terms of work fulfillment and the quality of scientific studies.

The financial and resulting personnel difficulties hinder the formation of national scientific school of archival science and record management in Belarus. The creation of such scientific school, which would absorb the best national traditions and experience, creatively assimilate the advanced foreign scientific achievements and the best techniques of management of documents and archives, offering on these basis optimal solutions of scientific and methodological problems, are deemed extremely important.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The archival science in Belarus is rather multifunctional today. It is not limited to scientific developments, it is focused on practice. The results of scientific research are not only scientific reports, but also optimal techniques of work with documents for archives and records management services, in which the national traditions and the best international practice are used.

Scientific and methodological developments in the field of archival science and records management are employed not only in practical activity of archives and various organizations. They are also actively used in educational process both directly and as a basis for preparation of training aids for students. This aspect of scientific activity is deemed one of the major one. A scientist, who failed to transfer his knowledge to his students capable to develop their teacher's views and to excel him, would not perform his main social mission and therefore often subject to falling into oblivion.

The development of archival science in Belarus is interconnected with diverse problems of scientific and organizational nature. Their resolution is only possible on condition of constant painstaking work demanding complete devotion from archival scientists.

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## SUMMARY

The article is devoted to the current stage of the archival science in Belarus. Nowadays the major theoretical and applied research and development of nation-wide and interarchival nature are mainly concentrated in two specialized scientific centres, BelNIIDAD and BelNITsED. The main directions of their scientific research at present stage are: development of complex methodological bases of work of state archives and archives of organizations; research in the field of appraisal of documents, selection of documents for archival storage, acquisition of archives; studies in the field of preservation of archival documents; development of the issues of theory and practice of archaeography, methodological bases of publication of archival documents; research and development in the field of records management, etc. The studies of the scientific archival organizations are focused, first of all, on its practical application in the state archives, the archives and record management services of organizations. At the same time, the achievements of archival science are actively used in the educational process while training future archivists and records managers. Of course, the archival science in Belarus faces some problems which are the case of special consideration in the article. In conclusion the author pays attention that their resolution is only possible on condition of constant painstaking work demanding complete devotion from archival scientists.

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