

HISTORY AND SOURCE STUDIES: ARE DIPLOMATIC DOCUMENTS HISTORICAL SOURCES?

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Abstract: *Historical science assumes that the basic research activity of a historian is work with historical sources. The role and meaning of historical sources in historical researches is gradually replaced the knowledge of the previous historiography. It is particularly important to study new historical sources that is implied not only intergovernmental history but also history of international relationships. This aspect of Source Studies increases the meaning of diplomatic documents as a specific type of written sources of contemporary history. The article considers the phase of historical sources study as diplomatic documents of the new era where the meaning of modern diplomatic documents is increased and grown. The relevance of this theme is explained with development of international relations and foreign affairs in epoch of globalization and integration as well as of interrelations and interdependency of states and international organizations that are consisted the contemporary context of international relations. Documental progress in historical source study occurs due to multiplication of quantity and development of quality of diplomatic documents. It demands new approaches to use these documents to study history as well as new perspectives of diplomatic historical sources classification. In our opinion, it lets to increase the creative potential of historians of international relations and diplomacy for further scrutiny of contemporary history as the stage of the recent history.*

Keywords: diplomacy, diplomatic documents, historical source, historiography.

Value and significance of historical sources in process of the world and human society leaning was obvious in historical science from the first histories of ancient times. The role and meaning of historical sources are important to study history in contemporaneity that is explained with increasing of various issues of humanitarian scientists.

Historical science is permanently focused on source's role and meaning in humanitarian researches. Development of historical science and its part as Source Study change constantly attitude to sources. Main research questions discussed among scientists include the following: what is historical source itself?

Historical Source Study has two basic types of sources: material and written artefacts. Study of international relations in material remains is not perspective and basically relies on written sources. So, the study of

Source Study's issues in our research does not have any material remnants.

In our opinion, the problem of historical diplomatic sources among other Source Study issues is the most significant for historians of international relations. Contemporary historical science turns to issues of the world history to compare with traditional history which basically studied particular states, regions, stages and epochs recent times.

The part of diplomatic documents from historical diplomatic sources has larger scientific interest presently although they were a subdivision of clerical records. This article first considers diplomatic documents as an independent part of historical sources.

Methodology

This paper uses methods of historical analysis of sources. This method assists to consider progress of attitudes to historical sources from secondary historical discipline to the independent historical science as Source Study. On the basis of this method early written documents were studied as records of international relations.

There are also used methods of selection of source-study materials, classification of historical sources, reassessment of previous classification of historical sources due to growing of diplomatic documents' meanings in this article.

Historical analysis of historical sources

According to the French positivist historians of the 19th century Langlois and Seignobos, „*history is written on sources*”.¹ Also some German historians attempted to define concept of „*historical source*”. The definition of „*historical source*” by I. G. Droysen was dominant in German historical science. In his book „*Grundriss Der Historik*” he paid special attention to separate terms „*historical source*” and „*historical research*”.² According to Droysen, the source is the „*historical material*” which was created to remind about the past. The „*materials for historian's work*” imply historical researches. Droysen suggested his original criteria how to differentiate historical source and historical work. In 1872 he argued that the environment plays significant role if an author creates as historical source

¹ Ch.-V. Langlois, Ch. Seignobos, *Introduction aus etudes historiques*, Paris, 1987.

² I. G. Droysen, *Essay on history, Saint Petersburg*, PH „Vladimir Dal”, 2004, p. 502.

or historical book³. Simultaneously with German scientists, Russian humanitarians also focused on problems of historical sources. Bestuzhev-Ryumin elaborated the new definition of „*historical source*”. He suggested his own definition of it as „*a source is everything where any information is drawn upon the past from*” and everything „*where human life, beliefs, institutions, and house holding are expressed*”.⁴

In the late 19th century V. O. Klyuchevskiy contributed his definition of historical source. According to him, „*historical sources are written or material monuments where the extinct life of some individuals and whole societies was reflected*”.⁵ From the one hand, the Klyuchevskiy’s definition is not clear due to the term of „*historical source*” is defined through category „*monument*” that also demands to be defined. From the other hand, this definition, according to L. N. Pushkarev, is narrow and incomplete.⁶ First of all, the definition of Klyuchevskiy did not cover diverse complex of historical sources (accidentally, pictorial and phonic sources were „*dropped out*” of. Secondly, sources not only reflect but also represent the past and some part of reality. Klyuchevskiy did not include this attribute of historical sources in his definition of them. Pushkarev was right in his critics of Klyuchevskiy’s definition of the source stating that this definition is close to French historians who interpreted historical sources as past signs. This closeness of Klyuchevskiy and French historical tradition can be explained with that Russian and Western historical thoughts developed parallel that time and it is obvious that Klyuchevskiyk new works of French authors as Langlois and Seignobos.

Although the definition of „*historical source*” of Langlois and Seignobos is partly close Klyuchevskiy’s one but it is different due to their large idealism. According to them, historical sources are „*traces of thoughts and actions of people who lived in the past*”.⁷ Later, Seignobos replaced the term „*source*” by concept of „*document*” which also is a past vestige in material form or in witness’s records.⁸

The definition of Langlois and Seignobos anchored in French Source Study, though later they were highly criticized by opponents of

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ K. N. Bestuzhev-Ryumin, *Russian History, volume 1*, Saint Petersburg, Publishing house E. E. Kozhanchikov, 1872.

⁵ V. O. Klyuchevskiy, *Source study. Sources of Russian History*, Compositions in 9 volumes, volume 8, Moscow, 1989.

⁶ L. N. Pushkarev, *Classification of Russian written sources on the domestic history*, Moscow, Znamia, 1975.

⁷ Ch.-V. Langlois, Ch. Seignobos, *Introduction aus etudes historiques*.

⁸ Sh. Seignobos, *The historical method applied to the social sciences*, Moscow, 1902.

positivist paradigm. Generally, their definition of „*historical source*” reflected the positivist methodological paradigm of most historians on the edge of the 19-20th centuries.

The works of another German classical historian E. Bernheim founded purposeful elaboration of „*historical source*” definition. He stated the most significant thoughts initiated further historians’ activity to develop definitions of “historical source”. Bernheim regarded that „*sources are outputs of human activities to study and confirm historical facts*”.⁹ The positive side of this definition is recognition of connection of a source with human activity and its results. It means social character and value of information included in historical source.

Thus, foreign historians tried to define „*historical source*” on the base of positivist methodology of that time and suggested their own definitions. Those definitions had some important aspects to develop further the process of definition’s creation for „*historical source*” by future historians: historical sources are the basis of historical knowledge which evidences are materials to restore the past in historical researches; a source reflects influence of historical environment followed its genesis and others.

Most historians who were involved into process of the term’s definition „*historical source*” admitted to demarcate ideas of „*historical source*” and „*historical research*”. However, criterion of this demarcation was not detected.

In the early 20th century the positivist methodology was gradually replaced with searching of new paradigm of historical knowledge. Scientists focused on relationships of a cognizant (a historian) and a cognizable object (a source). Scholars were not already satisfied with empirical level of research praxis. Positivist comprehension of the source as a mean of facts’ obtaining was too unilateral and simplified. In the system „*source-historian*” it was necessary to make clear the role of the latter due to his vital meaning in the process of study.

B. D. Grekov (1882-1952) made the essential contribution to development of concept’s definition of „*historical source*” in his lectures in the middle of the 1930s. He gave the large definition of historical source: „*it is mostly everything where we can gather information about the subject that means all that represent a way of historical knowledge*”.¹⁰

⁹ L. N. Pushkarev, *Classification of Russian written sources on the domestic history*.

¹⁰ N. G. Georgiyeva, *Historical source study. Theoretical problems*, Moscow, Prospect, 2015, p. 258.

Western historians again interested in elaboration of „*historical source*” definition in the 1940-1950s. Before that well-known ideas of Langlois and Seignobos were dominant in France and Germany in the 1920-1930s. Their notions assumed that, firstly, historical sources are signs of thoughts and human activities of the past, and, secondly, historical sources are the basis of historical knowledge. However, in the process of opposition to positivist methodology for „*formation of the general science about a man*” declared by international journal „*Annales*”, the famous positivist formula of Lucien Febvre: „*History is building on sources. No sources means no history*” was dangerous and impeded to cognitive opportunities of researches and enlargement of interdisciplinary contacts of historians.¹¹ This new approach implied the turn to study of human creativity represented by author of historical source and historian-researcher. Sources maintained their epistemological function of fundamental knowledge in such way but they were interpreted as objective basis of humanitarian sciences of a man and his activity.

This turn was supported by the book of Marc Bloch, a leader of „*Annales*” school, published after his death in 1949. This book had his definition of „*historical source*”: „*everything that an individual speaks or writes everything that he produces everything that he touches to can and should give evidences about him*”.¹²

The positivist meaning of the Bloch’s definition is explained due to not using of words „*vestige*”, „*monument*”, „*sign*” and others demanded elucidation; sources are not limited by written documents only; historical sources keeps their informative potential as the basis of study of the past; it pays attention to an individual as the main subject.

The collective monograph *History and its methods* (1961) demonstrated influence of French researchers who were humanitarian specialists (not only historians) and ideas of „*Annales*” School’s founders on including more historical sources in researches to compare with traditional positivist historiography with its idea „*no history without documents*”. In the introduction of this book professor of School of Advanced Studies C. Samaran defined historical sources through the word „*document*” and simultaneously stated that the term „*document*” in

¹¹ I. N. Danilevskiy, V. V. Kabanov, O. M. Medushevskaya, M. F. Rumyantseva, *Source study: Theory. History. Method. Sources of Russian history*, Moscow, Russian State Humanitarian University, 1998, p. 702.

¹² M. Bloch, *The apology of history or the craft of a historian*, Moscow, Nauka, 1986.

modern science is interpreted larger as written, material, audiovisual, pictorial and other types of sources.¹³

It is obvious that the term „*historical source*” is still discussable. So, the growth of historical scientific heritage, particularly in the 19-20th centuries, lets to find answers for various questions in the sphere of theory and methodology of historiography.

The famous Russian theorist of Source Study O. M. Medushevskaya paid her special attention to the issue of polysemy of „*historical source*” definition. She argued that „*initially, sources have needful to satisfy definite needs. Hence, analogically the notion of a source means satisfaction of spiritual need in knowledge and information*”.¹⁴

Thereby, only historical sources can give information on a man, society, state, events of different times and different places. Human experience, everyday life, intergovernmental relationships, study of the past of the state and world history make a researcher turn to historical sources.

Classification of historical sources

According to educational and academic literature, there were seven types of historical sources to the early 1980s: Written; Material (material remains); Oral (folklore); Ethnographic; Linguistic (data of language); Art (pictures and cinema-photo documents); Phonographic (sound records).

The written sources are central type for our further analysis of historic records, so their characteristics should be considered more detail. Historians admitted how it is important to classify and systematize written sources but they did not find any mutual solution to resolve this problem. One of the most significant causes of the problem is no unified principal which could be based in that classification.

Some researches consider it possible to divide written sources into types and groups according to their content. However, historians trying to do it practically encounter with the same troubles when they try to divide all sources using this principal on types. Content of the source reflects highly diverse the objective reality. For instance, no one written source does not represent only social and economic relations or history

¹³ N. G. Georgiyeva, *Historical source study. Theoretical problems*, p. 258.

¹⁴ O. M. Medushevskaya, *The history of the source study in the XIX-XX centuries*, Moscow, Moscow State Historical and Archival Institute, 1985, p. 70.

of social and political thought. As a rule, it covers several sides of public life simultaneously.

L. N. Pushkarev proposed the most ideal system of classification and systematization of written sources.¹⁵ He suggested dividing them into two main types: Official; Narrative.

Then he divided official sources into four types as cartographic, statistical, acting and clerical. Narrative sources are also divided into four types as personal, art, historical and scientific. At last, every source of all these types is differentiated by him into smaller groups.

In our opinion, this classification and systematization of written sources can generally be accepted but division of sources into two types is problematic. Author places „*prevalence of reflection or embodiment of reality*” in this division. According to Pushkarev, this prevalence of the rest fact in the source or its tradition cannot be a basis of sources’ division on types or sorts. Evidently, rationale of sources’ division on sorts is so unconvincingly: „*If a source mostly narrates about the past being before that source itself or narrates about the present as a coherent story, so it is narrative source; if an author of the source does not give a coherent story about events and only committed what is happening, so it is documental source*”. However, both these processes are always existed in every historical source. So, we argue that written sources should not be divided into two sorts. It would be more appropriate to divide them into types. The most successful division of sources on sorts suggested by historians is that previous principle which was established to classify all historical sources on types. Determinant attribute is interior form of the source, its structure having dialectical unity of genesis, content and form of historical source connected with its purpose.

Acceptance of interior form of the source and its structure as main feature on which written sources are divided on types is more suitable due to it let to consider every type with general methods of historiographical critics. In our opinion, it should be accepted some sources that have stable structure, keep general origins and interior patterns as well as allow to use united methods of researches to them in the large historical period, for example, social-economic formation of some epoch or whole history of a class society. Every type should have groups and subgroups differentiated by some secondary characteristics from each other. All of these features can exist some short time and then

¹⁵ L. N. Pushkarev, *Classification of Russian written sources on the domestic history*, Moscow, Znamia, 1975.

to disappear. According to that, typical classification should include their formational classification.

To study transformations of classification modes it should be included the classification of Russian historiographer N. G. Georgiyeva who divides written historical sources into five types:¹⁶ Legislative; Official; Publicist; Memorial; Epistolary.

Based on these classification issues, it is assumed to distinguish diplomatic documents as historical sources as a separate group from official papers. Official documents are large and vague part of historical documents whilst diplomatic documents related not only to foreign policy of governments but also to international relations.

So, we argue that written sources should be divided into types and diplomatic documents must be considered as independent sources. It is not possible to study history of diplomacy if diplomatic documents are not parted from official ones.

Peculiarities of diplomatic documents as historical sources

This question assumes that quantity of international relations' sources and their historiography is almost indefinitely. These are political and diplomatic, economic, cultural and other sources. Historian of international relations has abundance of diplomatic documents to study. This affluent material is represented by two types of sources: firstly, published/non-publishes and related to far past/modern sources; secondly, qualitative transformation of these sources themselves.¹⁷

These documents as historical sources are differentiated by their form and structure due to political, economic and technological changes in a society happened of transformations of production processes which affected informational sphere firstly, and also its basic pillars such as finances, trading, currency area, political systems, and international relations.¹⁸

Diplomatic documents as other historical sources include assisted elements which document the following events such as political relations of states (both long and short time); dynamics of concomitant

¹⁶ N. G. Georgiyeva, *Historical source study*, p. 258.

¹⁷ S. S. Shirin, N. M. Bogolubova, J. V. Nikolaeva, „Application of David Easton's Model of Political System to the World Wide Web”, in *World Applied Sciences Journal*, no. 30 (8), 2014, pp. 1083-1087.

¹⁸ V. I. Fokin, S. S. Shirin, J. V. Nikolaeva, N. M. Bogolubova, E. E. Elts, V. N. Baryshnikov, „Interaction of cultures and diplomacy of states”, in *Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences*, no. 38 (1), 2017, pp. 45-49; www.doi.org.

circumstances (for instance, moments of international tensions or critical stages of different negotiations); imaginations of local reality which are formed by accredited diplomats who are usually well-educated and professional (their observation can be long-term or episodic); main actors who are authors of correspondence as political figures, their representations of problems and situations and how they are perceived by their companions.

Diplomatic documents inform additional data on missioned countries: sometimes they are discussable; sometimes they are unique because they can confirm or refute scant information. Additionally, diplomatic sources attest authors' cultural level of some documents as well as cultural quality of their collocutors, nationals and foreigners. So, these documents help to understand their mentality, behavioral models, stereotypes, prejudices, inclines and others. They also can help to understand culture of definite participants such as culture of political actions in international relations. There is analysis to confirm political action by effects of cultural penetration or cultural presence with some pragmatic aims in these sources.

It was not possible to understand the British politics of Commonwealth of Nations, the French politics in the Northern Africa or in the Middle East, the politics of the United States in Europe and in the world, the Soviet ideological politics, the modern politics of large international organizations, if we did not take into account contributions of diplomatic sources confirmed that cultural politics is a powerful instrument of influence even in defined framework. This discourse is analogical to study migrant economic and political phenomena to define all opportunities for a scientist who learns diplomatic sources without any prejudices and can find essential information and reject occasional one in specific document.

It is obvious that concept of „*diplomatic sources*” is a powerful informational material for historian of international relations who does historical research in spite of its content and methodology.

It is not discussable that diplomatic sources are designed for history of diplomacy and history of international relations. Diplomatic sources help to understand history of diplomacy. History of diplomatic relations has definite role, its technics are gradually improved, and person also has a definite role, during some time social composition of its members is changed.

Diplomatic sources also help to understand history of international relations which is differed with its concept from previous one extended

sphere of research in a society from profile of international relations having independent meaning and self-sufficiency to profile of study related to subjects divided by political lines and united in international organizations.

Thus, diplomatic documents represent a large group of sources on modern history. Management is the process of transmission, assessment, transformation of information which is realized recently (before massive introduction of computers) as paper workflow. The meaning of diplomatic documents as historical sources is defined on their roles in social development and on scientific and historical value of their information.

Issues of diplomatic documents classification as historical sources

Formally, diplomatic sources can be divided into two large parts: official and non-official (or private). The first part is sources of governmental subjects; the second one is records of individuals. In the other words, official sources are mainly proper diplomatic documents and non-official ones are mostly represented by memoires. Official sources can be published and unpublished. The latter sources are kept in state archives or in historical archives of Foreign Affairs Ministries.

Document management in international relations is realized through diplomatic correspondence. There are five types of diplomatic correspondence in special literature: Personal notes; Verbal notes; Memorial notes; Memorandums; Semiofficial private letters.

There are more than these five types of diplomatic documents which also take part in foreign policy and diplomatic activity. These are government statements, statements of Foreign Affairs Ministries for mass media, declarations of government representatives in international organizations, agreements, conventions and others. To compare of diplomatic correspondence these documents cannot be direct appeals to definite states and do not require of official response.

Certainly, positive personal contacts between heads of states are important factors of successful development in contemporary diplomacy that facilitates creation of mutual trust between officials and nations. As a result, it lets to protect national interests effectively and to express positions of different states to their partners clearly and confidentially.

What is about casuistry of documents, it is obvious that all of them have own exterior formal characteristics. Agreement is usually the most important and ceremonial document. It represents are sult of long-term

negotiation process. There are various types of agreements and their political contents are pointed in main articles. For instance, friendship agreements have responsibilities of sides to favor of the signed friendship; alliance agreements usually have some event (cause federis) which can be an occasion to ratify a defensive clause of the agreement. Accords can have points of general or special cooperation. As a rule, last articles of agreements designate duration of its operation and ways of its cancellation or renewal. Sometimes agreements assume formation of special organizations for limited implementations of arrangements. Despite of importance of compliances with formalities, it is obvious that agreement is the most exceptional moment of international life. It represents an attempt to crystallize relationships between two and more countries in definite time of history.

Present diplomatic communications are mostly realized due to emails, phones, faxes, encoded, encrypted and manifested telegrams. It seems that sources of new generation can be problematic to study periods where diplomatic activities are down and material cannot be enough. Nevertheless, reports were the major part of diplomatic documents till recent times. Periodically, in urgent situations intensive diplomatic correspondence occurred between Minister of Foreign Affairs, Head of State and his representatives abroad. These documents had a lot of data on concrete disagreements and general information on political conditions of a state where ambassador was accredited.

„*Notes exchange*” is often happened instead of formal conclusion of the agreement. After completion of negotiations where conditions and content of the document are arranged one subject of international system sends to another some articles formulated them as a traditional diplomatic note. An addressee returns the document confirming that he agrees with its content. Usually it happens when an agreement is signed without formal agreement to avoid ratification of the document in Parliament. Presently, Constitutions of most countries demand ratifications of all agreements mandatorily and practice of note exchanges is a regular procedure in international relations. It is also required when sides intend to limit a formal meaning of agreement or do not declare it in diplomatic circles or in political world generally; in such situations reliability of note exchanges is very valuable.

The other way to make mutual or more agreement is to represent its content as a final communique of negotiations. Practically, all final communiqués of significant top meetings during the World War II were demonstration of achieved agreements and their meanings were close to

agreement although their actual power could be contested. Despite that formal agreements are the most important diplomatic documents, they are rare in international relations.

Diplomatic activity is usually permanent flux of information transited by other documents. It is necessary to note that diplomatic documents are changed significantly recently due to information technologies.

Historian who uses past diplomatic sources existed before communication revolution and historian who uses contemporary diplomatic documents should take into account significant differences of their work which has important consequences. Moreover, it should be noted that top meeting were highly important and defined relations between interested sides for a long time in diplomatic tradition before the World War I and in interwar period. Contrarily, in present days modern communications let to meet often including periodical councils of ministers of various international organizations and others. In the other words, traditional diplomacy and its traditionally interpreted documents were changed by new diplomacy with the other image. Maybe this diplomacy uses past methods but it has other evidences.

For instance, presently a verbal process of top meeting is more important than everyday correspondence of different ambassadors. Surely, this situation can be modified and can have exceptions. Anyway the diplomatic correspondence till the end of World War II was meaningful for every political research of international relations. These sources are presents as reports which every accredited ambassador sent to his Minister of Foreign Affairs and received instructions as responses. Reports and instructions can be defined as fundamental elements of diplomacy. However, this type of sources should be used carefully. First of all, it is necessary to note the tendency of a diplomat to have opinion which is spread in his place of accreditation. It is regular and explainable deformation which historian should take into account. The other deformation can be explained with political system which an ambassador belongs to.

Presently, diplomats usually compose brief review of their activity, inform about their conversations and attach annotation that is a memorandum of the meeting. This type of activity is not a prerogative of top international politics: how reality is complicated, so consideration of most issues moves to special international institutions or regional ones.

Therefore, it is most often that top diplomats ask ambassadors of lower level to compose notes and memorandums. The latter are those

whose opinions are significant for further decision making. At last, in modern times documents are not transited in regular form, they are encrypted or at least are classified. Consequently, sometimes technical problems of interpretation can be occurred with their decrypting and declassifying.

After Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871 and particularly World War I historians started to study actively to make clear a degree of own and exterior responsibilities in reasons of the finished conflicts. To understand some moments of international politics or actions of international system's subjects confirmed official information was necessary. Thus, the idea to publish diplomatic documents was emerged which started to publish in large thematic or general proceedings with special editors.

Conclusions

It should be noted that historical sources are significant as past evidences of humankind. The meanings of historical sources are considered by brief review of their study in the 19-20th centuries.

Diplomatic documents as historical sources are the most important to study in general systematic complex of all historical sources in the modern period. Peculiarities of diplomatic documents as historical sources assume development of opportunities of international relations' historian to study world history in the 20-21st centuries.

There are discussions on diplomatic documents' classification in contemporary history of international relations. There are different opinions on principles and approaches in classification of different groups of diplomatic documents. The central part of these discussions is differentiation of types and groups of diplomatic documents as tools of historian of international relations.

In our opinion, perspective methods of historian of international relations are study of differentiation and growth of diplomatic documents as units, types, subtypes, groups and subgroups of contemporary diplomatic sources.

The general conclusion is authors' suggestion to build some accessible project of diplomatic documents' classification with their diversity and growing. It is helpful to study modern world history as part of the newest history in the future as well as to improve professionalism of historians of international relations.

It is recommended to create a new classification of diplomatic documents as an independent type of written sources. The aim of this classification is to emphasize diplomatic documents as a separate type of this new classification.

To assess a new type of diplomatic documents as historical sources it should take into account all subtypes considered in this article.

To study perspectives of sources' capacities of diplomatic documents it is necessary to consider transformation of contemporary intergovernmental relations into international relations and development of foreign policy into world politics as imperative demand of the 21st century.