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## INFLUENCE OF MODERN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES ON THE VIEWS ON THE BASIC OBJECT OF ARCHIVAL SCIENCE

### Abstract

*The article is devoted to the problem of determining the main object of archival science. The traditional object of archival science is an archival document. However, under the influence of modern information technologies, the types of documents, their content have significantly changed. In this regard, some archivists believe that the main object of archival research is not a document, but information. When examining the identified problem, the author concludes that the archival document remains the main object of archival science. This is due to its ability to serve as an evidence, confirmation, as well as the presence of attributes, allowing to identify the author, the time and place of recording information on the media.*

**Key words:** archival science, object, modern information technologies, information, document, record

## L'INFLUENZA DELLE MODERNE TECNOLOGIE DELL'INFORMAZIONE SULLE OPINIONI ATTORNO ALL'OGGETTO DI BASE DELL'ARCHIVISTICA

### Sintesi

*Il presente articolo è dedicato al problema di determinare l'oggetto principale dell'archivistica. L'oggetto tradizionale dell'archivistica è un documento d'archivio. Tuttavia, sotto l'influenza delle moderne tecnologie informatiche, i tipi di documenti ed il loro contenuto sono notevolmente cambiati. A questo proposito, alcuni archivisti ritengono che l'oggetto principale della ricerca d'archivio non sia un documento, ma un'informazione. Esaminando il problema identificato, l'autore conclude che il documento d'archivio rimane l'oggetto principale dell'archivistica. Ciò è dovuto alla sua capacità di servire come prova, come conferma, così come la presenza di attributi, permettendo di identificare l'autore, l'ora e il luogo di registrazione delle informazioni sui media.*

**Parole chiave:** archivistica, oggetto, tecnologie informatiche moderne, informazione, documento, record

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## VPLIV MODERNIH TEHNOLOGIJ NA VIDIK GLAVNE VSEBINE ARHIVSKE ZNANOSTI

### Izvlaček

Članek obravnava problematiko opredelitve glavne vsebine arhivske znanosti. Tradicionalno je glavna vsebina oziroma objekt arhivske znanosti arhivski dokument. Toda pod vplivom sodobnih informacijskih tehnologij so se vrste dokumentov in njihova vsebina bistveno spremenili. V zvezi s tem nekateri arhivisti menijo, da glavni predmet arhivskega raziskovanja ni dokument, ampak informacija. Avtor pregledu ugotovljenega problema ugotavlja, da arhivski dokument ostaja glavni predmet arhivske znanosti. To je posledica njegove sposobnosti, da služi kot dokaz, potrditev, pa tudi prisotnosti atributov za identifikacijo avtorja, čas in kraj zapisovanja informacije na medij.

**Ključne besede:** arhivska znanost, predmet, sodobne informacijske tehnologije, informacije, dokument, zapis

## УПЛУЙ СУЧАСНЫХ ІНФАРМАЦЫЙНЫХ ТЭХНАЛОГІЙ НА УЯЎЛЕННІ АБ АСНОЎНЫМ АБ'ЕКЦЕ АРХІВАЗНАЎСТВА

### РЭЗЮМЭ

Артыкул прысвечаны праблеме вызначэння асноўнага аб'екта архівазнаўства як навукі. Традыцыйным аб'ектам архівазнаўства з'яўляецца архіўны дакумент. Аднак пад уплывам сучасных інфармацыйных тэхналогій відавая разнастайнасць дакументаў, іх змястоўнае напаяўненне перажываюць істотныя змены. У гэтай сувязі шэрагам архівістаў выказваецца меркаванне, што асноўным аб'ектам архівазнаўчых даследаванняў становіцца не дакумент, а інфармацыя. Пры разглядзе пазначанай праблемы аўтар робіць выснову, што асноўным аб'ектам архівазнаўства па-ранейшаму застаецца архіўны дакумент. Гэта абумоўлена яго здольнасцю служыць сведчаннем, доказам, а таксама наяўнасцю рэквізітаў, якія дазваляюць ідэнтыфікаваць аўтара, час і месца фіксацыі інфармацыі на носьбіце.

**Ключавыя словы:** архівазнаўства, аб'ект, сучасныя інфармацыйныя тэхналогіі, інфармацыя, дакументаваная інфармацыя, дакумент

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Science is a field of human activity aimed at the development and systematization of objective knowledge of reality. In the process of this activity, a system of knowledge about the laws of the functioning and development of objects is being formed in science. The presence of a well-defined object (objects), which is (are) studied by science, is one of its main features.

Various sciences have their own objects to study, and archival science in this regard is no exception. Archival science is closely related to the practical activities of archives, the tasks of which are to accept, preserve and provide conditions for the use of documents for a long time. Therefore the traditional main object of archival science is a document. However, documents are studied not only by archival science, but also by other sciences, for example, documentation science (records management). For archival science, the documents that are stored or to be stored in the archive are important first of all. That is why archival science clarifies that the main object of its research is not any document, but a document stored or to be stored in the archive, i.e., an archival document.

In some countries the legislation fixes that the activity of archives is aimed at dealing with archival documents. For example, the Belarusian Archival Law stipulates that an archive is an organization or a division of an organization that accepts, preserves and uses archival documents (*Закон Республики Беларусь Об архивном деле и делопроизводстве в Республике Беларусь, 2011, art. 29*).

Thus, the concept of the main object of research in archival science is directly related to the concept of the main object of archival work.

## 2 INFLUENCE OF NEW INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES ON THE EXPANDING THE RANGE OF POTENTIAL OBJECTS FOR ARCHIVAL STORAGE

The interpretation of the concept of "document" is quite diverse in various sciences and practical activities. In the field of records management and archival work, the definition of the term "document" is fixed in international terminological standard ISO 5127: 2017: document – recorded information or material object which can be treated as a unit in a documentation process (*International Standard ISO 5127:2017*).

One of the main purposes for which documents are created and stored is their ability to be used as evidence, proof, confirmation of any actions, events, facts, etc. Archivists pay special attention to this feature of documents when selecting and accepting them for storage in archives. Therefore, among a wide range of information objects, denoted by the term "document", archives focus on those that possess the corresponding feature. In English terminology the special term "record" is used to designate such documents. According to the ISO terminological standards, "record" is a document created or received and maintained by an agency, organization or individual in pursuance of legal obligations or in the transaction of business (*International Standard ISO 5127:2017*). After transferring to archive, a document, even if it was originally created for other purposes, is endowed with the appropriate feature and should become a "record".

In recent years, the means of documenting and information exchange have changed significantly. Modern information and communication technologies are used in the activities of various organizations and individuals, electronic documents are increasingly replacing traditional paper documents. The use of an electronic document is stimulated by the government, the creation of e-government is announced as one of the state priorities in many countries.

These factors has considerably influenced on the transformation of ideas about a document and, accordingly, about an object of archival storage. With all this, the informational nature of the document remains unchanged, as well as its ability to serve as evidence, proof, confirmation.

Under these conditions, archivists need to solve professional issues of accepting documents originally created in the form of electronic documents for storage in the archive, ensuring their long-term preservation and confirming legal validity, authenticity and integrity throughout the entire storage period. When solving this task, it is also important to give a clear answer to the question of what an electronic document is and, accordingly, what is the object of the archivist's professional interest in terms of its storage for archiving and its further use.

ISO 5127:2017 uses the term "electronic document", but don't contain its definition. The term "electronic record" is defined as a machine-readable record or a set of data, stored in a machine-readable media. This definition should be considered not too successful, since the concept of a machine-readable record is much broader than the concept of an electronic record. For example, on the basis of this definition, the electronic records should include punch cards and punched tapes, which were used for recording and subsequent machining information from the end of the XVIII century until the end of the XX century. It is obvious that this is not the case.

In different countries, the interpretation of the concept of an electronic document (electronic record) may have its own nuances, but in most cases, archivists and records managers understand an electronic document as a document, the information of which is presented in digital form, for creating and reproducing of which means of electronic computing equipment and associated devices are required.

When analyzing the range of potential objects for archival storage, one should pay attention that they include not only managerial and business documentation, but also legal acts, scientific and technical, geological, telemetric documentation, information resources, audiovisual documents, pictorial and graphic images, scientific, literary, musical and other manuscripts and texts, diaries, memoirs, personnel documents and other types of documents regardless of the type of media (*Закон Республики Беларусь Об архивном деле и делопроизводстве в Республике Беларусь, 2011, art. 9*). It is obvious that all these documents can be created in electronic form. Thus, the range of electronic documents and, accordingly, potential objects for archival storage, is practically unlimited.

Mikhail Larin proposes to divide electronic documents into four categories as archival objects:

- documents initially created in electronic form and remaining so throughout the life cycle;
- electronic copies of documents on a traditional basis;
- databases (registers, inventories, etc.);
- website documents (*Larin, 2017*).

All these objects of documented information are specific in their logical structure and content, the legal regulation of their creation and use is not the same. Electronic documents have not physical, but logical structure. In the conditions of the inevitability of the migration of documents to other formats or/and to other electronic media, not only issues of ensuring the integrity of information of electronic documents are relevant, but also confirmation of their legal significance both at the time of creation and at their further storage and use. At the same time, the migration of an electronic document to another format leads to a change of the electronic document, the loss of its identity, i.e. leads to the appearance of a new document.

Is this acceptable for an archivist, for whom the immutable essence of the document has always been paramount?

The instability of a document in electronic form is particularly clearly seen in the example of such specific documents as information resources (databases, websites, etc.). In contrast, for example, to a management document (both paper and electronic), whose basic information (text) is strictly fixed and cannot be changed without compromising its authenticity and integrity, information resources are mobile, the composition of their information can be arbitrarily changed, supplemented, retired. In the process of forming and maintaining an information resource, we can talk about an infinite set of created documents in electronic form, each of which at a certain moment can be considered as a potential object of archival storage.

In this regard archivists have to decide a problem of appraisal and selection of information resources for storage in the archive, that is, the specification of possible objects of archival storage<sup>2</sup>. What will be the potential objects of archival storage? Information resources entirely in certain time sections (for example, databases, the formation and maintenance of which are completed) or separate documents, parts of documented information included in them?

An illustrative example in this regard is an information resource "The National Legal Internet Portal of the Republic of Belarus Pravo.by", where regulatory legal acts are officially published (*Национальный правовой Интернет-портал Республики Беларусь Pravo.by*). As an information resource, it includes data banks of legal information, each of which is also an information resource, separate (single) regulatory legal acts, news information, etc. What, in this case, is a potential object of archival storage (we have to take into consideration that the originals of normative legal acts published on the Portal are created and signed mainly on paper and these paper ones have to be transferred for permanent storage in state archives)?

Trying to identify potential objects of archival storage in modern conditions, archivists from different countries demonstrate different attitudes to such specific objects of documented information as e-mail messages and posts in social networks.

For example, according to Belarusian archival legislation, e-mail messages are not separate documents, and, accordingly, are not considered as potential objects of archival storage. In the management of organizations, they act as purely "electronic envelopes", to which electronic documents sent from one organization to another are attached (similar to paper envelopes used when sending documents on paper by regular mail). Such e-messages are considered as an integral part of electronic documents, compose their metadata and should be stored together with the electronic document sent or received. As for the auxiliary e-mail messages, including those without attached electronic documents, the regulatory legal acts establish that they are not to be registered and they are to be kept by the recipients until they are needed. Only in the year 2019 it was recognized and enforced that e-messages can be formed into electronic files and stored together with the attached to them official electronic documents, but only if they are important for understanding the

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2 For example, in accordance with par. 1006 of the List of Typical Documents of the National Archival Fond of the Republic of Belarus, created in the activities of state bodies, other organizations and individual entrepreneurs, with indication of their storage periods (established by Resolution of the Ministry of Justice of May 24, 2012 No. 140) information resources (databases, web-sites, electronic editions, geographic information systems, collections of electronic materials, etc.) created in the organizations, which are obliged to transfer documents to state archives, are the documents of permanent storage and have to be transferred to state archives.

circumstances of the management decision or are able to serve as evidence of business activity (*Постановление Министерства юстиции Республики Беларусь от 6 февраля 2019 г. № 19 «Об утверждении Инструкции о порядке работы с электронными документами в государственных органах, иных организациях»*, 2019, par. 46). But separate e-mail messages without official documents attached, especially those created and sent by using personal e-mail addresses, are not still considered as the potential objects of archival storage.

Nevertheless, as practice shows, many officials often conduct correspondence using e-mail messages without creating official documents attached to them. Such e-mail messages act as independent objects of information exchange, they contain not only contextual, but also content (basic) information important for the addressee (consumer). In fact, replacing oral communication, such e-mail messages may contain information that, for various reasons, cannot be included in the text of an official document. For example, they may reflect the history of the preparation of the solution adopted, may reveal the reasons why exactly the concrete decision will be the best one, may contain the author's personal attitude to the content of the official document, the problem posed, etc.

There is no doubt that the information of e-mail messages may have scientific, historical, political, social, cultural and (or) other social significance, that is, they may have a certain potential as historical sources. Therefore, e-mail messages that are separate objects of documented information can and have to be considered as potential objects of archival storage.

In 2010 BelNIIDAD prepared and published Methodical Recommendations for using e-mail in the activities of organizations of the Republic of Belarus (*Методические рекомендации по использованию электронной почты в деятельности организаций Республики Беларусь, 2010*). However, the issues of appraisal, selection and transfer of e-mail messages to archives for permanent storage are not considered either in the indicated methodical recommendations or in other regulatory and methodological documents.

US archivists demonstrate a completely different attitude to e-mail messages. The Managing Government Records Directive M-12-18, adopted in 2012, obliged the federal agencies to organize management of e-mail messages both of permanent and temporary storage in an accessible electronic format till the end of 2016 (*Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies and Independent Agencies, 2012*). In compliance with the Directive M-12-18 the National Archives and Records Administration (hereafter – NARA) prepared the Criteria for Managing Email Records, which obliged all the agencies to create policies and training programs that should instruct employees how to distinguish e-mail messages with constant, temporary and fleeting value. Each agency must have a NARA-approved schedule in place to be able to carry out the disposition of permanent and temporary email records – using either agency-specific schedules or General Records Schedule (*Criteria for Managing Email Records, 2016*).

It is logical to consider the solution of the issue of attributing e-mail messages to potential objects of archival storage in combination with such specific objects of documented information as posts in social networks. It seems that the information posted in social networks using institutional accounts also has a certain potential as historical source, and the objects of documented information containing it, respectively, can be considered as potential objects of archival storage.

Attitude to this category of potential archival objects in different countries also varies.

For example, in 2016 NARA announced its intention to acquire software enable the archiving of social networks content. According to the above mentioned Directive M-12-18 federal agencies are obliged by the end of 2019 to provide electronic management of all electronic documents of permanent storage, including those placed in social networks with their metadata. Information posted in social networks, as well as e-mail messages, are also considered as potential objects of archival storage in other countries, for example, in Mexico, Sweden (*Francisco Javier Acuna Llamas, 2017; Петтерсон А.А., 2018*).

On the contrary, in some countries (for example, in Belarus, Russia) the legislation does not consider the information posted in social networks, including institutional ones, as potential objects of archival storage.

The fact that archivists from Belarus and some other countries do not yet pay, or pay negligible attention to such specific objects of documented information as e-mail messages and posts in social networks, is largely due to the fact that these objects are not considered as official documents (records). In contrast to official documents (whether paper or electronic), the legal and evidential strength of which is confirmed by formalities (signature, including electronic, seal, other legally relevant details), e-mail messages and posts in social networks do not have such certifying elements. But these elements are important for archivists when they decide whether to accept documents for archival storage or not from the point of view of their potential use as evidence.

Besides, the issues of selection and transfer for storage in archives of such specific objects is quite difficult from the point of view of scientific and methodological support, especially in terms of verification of the information contained in them. The absence of official formalities raises questions about the confirmation of the origin and authorship of such objects, the official nature of the information presented in them, its compliance with the information contained in the official document (documents). It should be taken into account that the posted (transmitted) information is often secondary and is based on official documents of state bodies and other organizations. This information can be distorted consciously by the author of the informational message, as well as unintentionally due to a banal error, shortening and simplifying the text because of the desire to save time, the desire of the author to supplement it with his personal vision, other reasons of a subjective nature.

The question of attributing e-mail messages and posts in social networks to potential objects of archival storage requires a solution. In particular, archivists will have to deal with them sooner or later when solving the problem of archiving documents of personal origin. It is generally recognized that documents of personal origin may contain information that is valuable from the point of view of historical research, but traditional paper documents are now hardly used as a means of social communication by individuals. Moreover, even the scope of e-mail messages for these purposes has been significantly reduced - the human community is increasingly transferring its communications to the virtual world of social networks.



### 3 WHAT IS THE MAIN OBJECT OF RESEARCH IN ARCHIVAL SCIENCE - INFORMATION OR DOCUMENT (RECORD)?

The emergence of new types of documented information encourages some archivists to think about revising their views on the main object of archival storage. More and more often we can hear opinion that the main object of archival storage and, accordingly, research in archival science is not a document, but information.

This is not a new idea. It goes back to the 1970s and was brought forward by the well-known Soviet scholar V.N. Avtokratov, who proposed to consider retrospective documentary information as the main object of archival science (*Автokratov B.H., 2001, p. 71*). It should be noted that the appearance of documents on new types of media, including machine-readable documents – the predecessors of a modern electronic document – influenced the formation of the corresponding views of this authoritative scientist.

Another factor influencing the change of mindset is the impetuous growth of documented information not only on electronic, but also on traditional (paper) media. Constantly increasing volumes of documents transferred or to be transferred for archival storage, along with the possibilities of their mass digitization, allow some representatives of the IT sector and archival community to raise the issue of selectively refusing to store in archives paper originals, that is to store in archives "artifacts" and "information" (*Архивные мероприятия в Триесте, 2017*).

One more factor forcing a different look at the main object of archival science is the problem of ensuring the identity (authenticity) of electronic documents. In our opinion, precisely the inability to ensure the identity of an electronic document in the long term (when it migrates to a different format) is largely the reason for the proposals to revise the main object of archival storage and archival science.

Ideas of replacing the concept of "document" as an object of archival storage with the concept of "information", proposals to store and use in the archives not original documents, but their electronic images begin to penetrate into the legal and other regulatory acts.

For example, ISO/TR 18492:2005 provides practical methodological guidance for the long-term preservation and retrieval of authentic electronic document-based information (International Standard ISO/TR 18492:2005). The Belarusian Law "On Electronic Document and Electronic Digital Signature" (with amendments) establishes that when transferring electronic documents to archives for temporary and permanent storage, their originality should be established, and based on them information that constitutes the content of stored electronic documents have to be given to organizations or individuals upon their requests (*Закон Республики Беларусь Об электронном документе и электронной цифровой подписи, 2009, par. 21; Закон Республики Беларусь О внесении изменений и дополнений в Закон Республики Беларусь «Об электронном документе и электронной цифровой подписи», 2018, par.21*). Director of the Branch of the National Archives of Finland in the city of Turku V.-M. Pussinen during the International scientific conference in Moscow in November 2018 informed, that a new Law on Archives is expected to be adopted in Finland in 2019. The new Law will allow "screening" of analog documents with the subsequent destruction paper originals, which have no scientific and historical value (*Задачи архивоведения и документоведения в условиях цифровой экономики: итоги международной научно-практической конференции, 2019*).



But such an approach raises before archivists and archives users a number of questions:

- what is the purpose of transferring documented information for storage in the archive?
- to what extent the information accepted and stored in the archive is capable to be used as evidence, proof, confirmation?
- what is the legal force (legal significance) of information provided by archives at the requests of users?

It is obvious that any information can be either documented (recorded on a material medium) or undocumented (oral). Archives deal with documented information.

In the activities of organizations and individuals, documented information can be created for different purposes. Mostly, it is created to confirm actions, events, facts that have occurred or were established, as well as in pursuance of legal obligations. At the same time, the creation of documented information often does not imply its use for confirmatory and evidential purposes. Replacing oral communication, information can be documented because of the convenience of the consumer (recipient) in choosing the time of its receiving and reading (to get acquainted with an e-mail message or post in a social network and to get answer is possible at any time convenient for the recipient), the reduction of the cost of transmitting information for a long distance (to send e-mail message from Europe to America is cheaper then to make a traditional call). Also information can be documented for entertainment purposes.

In the first case, the documented information is initially considered as evidence and is designed in such a way that this feature of information is ensured. In the second case, the documented information is not initially considered as a proof and can be designed arbitrarily; it can act as a proof only under certain circumstances. But whatever there were the original purposes of creating documented information, when it comes to the archive, it is endowed with precisely this feature – the ability to serve as evidence, proof, confirmation.

Accepting documented information for storage in the archive, the archivist aims to provide it with evidence, confirming force during the entire storage period. For the archivist, in this case, it is not only the content that matters, but also the context, that is, the authorship of the documented information, the time and place of its creation, other attributes that allow to use the information as evidence, proof, confirmation. And if the documented information was not initially provided with these attributes, then upon receipt in the archive, the archivist reveals and fixes them. And this requirement applies to traditional paper documents, photo and other audiovisual documents, electronic documents, digitized copies of paper documents, e-mail messages, posts in social networks, databases and other information resources.

Thus, any fixed on a material carrier information (documented information) transferred to the archive is endowed with the features (qualities) of a document. In other words, using the terminology of ISO 5127: 2017, a document turns into a record.

The archivists face the same problem when using or providing for the use the information stored in the archives. If the information is provided by the archive for evidentiary purposes, as a proof, confirmation of transactions, events that have occurred, facts that were established, then it should be documented and given to the user as a document (record). This information provided on the basis of archival documents must also have elements (attributes) that allow to identify it, that is, must be issued in the form of a document (an archival copy, archival reference, extract from the archival document).

Precisely this feature of the main object of archival storage identifies archives from a number of other institutions that store information and provide it for use (libraries, museums, etc.).

On this basis, we can conclude that the main subjects of professional activity of archivists at the present stage are still the reception, storage, preservation and use of archival documents. Accordingly, the archival document remains the main object of research in archival science.

#### 4 CONCLUSION

Thus, it appears that the main object on which the activity of the archives is directed, and accordingly, the main object of archival science, remains precisely the archival document. At the same time, archival studies include not only single archival documents, but also their complexes. The subjects of archival science are the signs, characteristics, properties of archival documents, their information potential, etc.

It should be noted that a document is information that is recorded on a carrier and has details (attributes) that allow its author to be identified, as well as the time and place of fixation information on the carrier. Exactly this information can serve as evidence, proof and confirmation. At all times the archives have been created and are being created for storage and preservation exactly this information. Of course, undocumented information can also be used as evidence and confirmation, for example, when we are dealing with the testimony of witnesses in a court. But in this case, it will become the object of archivists' interest only after being recorded in court documents.

At the same time, under the influence of modern information technologies, the content of the main object of archival science is changing, filling with new meaning. This is not only a traditional managerial document, but also new types of documents on electronic media. Archivists need to conduct a general valuation of the source potential of such specific objects as information resources, e-mail messages, posts in social networks, as well as to determine the methods for their selection for storage. This is especially relevant in the near future when solving the problem of acquisition the documents of personal origin. And with all this the issues of verification of information, the availability of the so-called "fake news" in social networks should be taken into account.

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## SUMMARY

Archival science is closely related to the practical activities of archives, the tasks of which are to accept, preserve and provide conditions for the use of documents for a long time. That is why the traditional object of research in archival science is a document stored or to be stored in the archive, i.e., an archival document. Last years electronic documents are increasingly replacing traditional paper documents. The types of new electronic documents are rather different. Information resources, e-mail messages, posts in social networks are among them. In these conditions some archivists think about revising their views on the main object of archival storage. More and more often we can hear opinion that the main object of archival storage and, accordingly, research in archival science is not a document, but information. Nevertheless, when accepting documented information for storage in the archive, the archivist aims to provide it with evidence, confirming force during the entire storage period. For the archivist not only the content that matters, but also the context, that is, the authorship of the documented information, the time and place of its creation, other attributes that allow to use the information as evidence, proof, confirmation. And if the documented information was not initially provided with these attributes, then upon receipt in the archive, the archivist reveals and fixes them. If the information is provided by the archive for evidentiary purposes, as a proof, confirmation, then it should be documented and given to the user as a document. This information provided on the basis of archival documents must also have attributes that allow to identify it, that is, must be issued in the form of a document. Precisely this feature of the main object of archival storage identifies archives from a number of other institutions that store information and provide it for use (libraries, museums, etc.). On this basis, we can conclude that the main subjects of professional activity of archivists at the present stage are still the acquisition, storage, preservation and use of archival documents. Accordingly, the archival document remains the main object of research in archival science.

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