

Linking Genealogical Research to Library and
Information Science
Concepts, Perspectives, Considerations

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A concise but nevertheless comprehensive outlook on genealogy and its relation to Information Science as shaped during years of research in the advanced study of family descent and long engagement in Digital Era Information Management.

ABSTRACT

This essay is based on views and conclusions on genealogy and its relation to information sciences as shaped during long years of research inspired by both personal and experiential interest in the advanced study of family descent. It was a real challenge that, in order to become objectively comprehensive, I had to go beyond my personal preferences and practices, to the standards and culture of the best field professionals.

It was progressively enriched in the process, along with the reconstruction of the family chart, with opinions and conclusions, as set out in relevant articles and journals posted on the Internet and presented in the related bibliography. As stronger becomes, today more than ever, the need for more specialized genealogy books addressing moderate or advanced researchers aiming to produce quality work and the demand for more detailed information for genealogists that credit research more than the basic ability of the use and transcription of files, the texts that follow are an attempt of familiarization with the scientific subject of genealogy such as its importance (Chap.2), its academic position and relationship to other sciences (Chap.3), the possibilities of obtaining through the genealogical research experience professional accreditations, the demonstration of all of those features that clearly demarcate the line between amateurism and professionalism in the field (Chap. 5) and the

extensive reference to private, higher institutions and certification, consultancy, training and evaluation professional bodies bold initiatives measuring both the progress of science and the quality and efficiency of work produced by setting standards of methodology, codes of ethics and professionalism. Also, special attention is paid to the important role of genealogy in the information literacy domain (Chap. 7) and the changes underway in recent decades to the public's needs forcing information scientists and official bodies to a reassessment of skills - activities for the best service of genealogical research in archives and libraries (Chap. 4-6). In addition, effort has been made to highlight the complex relationships, interactions, differences and similarities between genealogists, historians, librarians and other information science professionals.

It should finally be noted that a collection of charts, photographs and documents has been included in the appendix at the end of the book to help better understand and complement the book contents. This edition is only a moderate first attempt to access the genealogy-in relation to library science theme as there are many more elements- to-come that could be incorporated into future efforts.

Chapter 1

Research target and study course

This work examines on the first level both genealogical theoretical and practical aspects , as seen through the various methodologies adopted and the arising problems during the course of research. On the second level, it projects genealogy's interaction with Information Science in the light of the most recent technological advancements.

Concepts have been shaped by personal research, relative bibliography and peer contribution.

Special reference should be made to the importance of the preserved archival repositories such as:

- The local maltese parishes
- The famous Maltese National Library Adami files
- Greek National Archives
- Online Archival Digital Repositories
- Private and Ethnic Communities websites
- Genealogical Federations
- Heraldic and Genealogical Societies Newsletters etc.

Chapter 2

Genealogy definition and purpose

The reality that family trees' timeless interaction advances historical research upgrades all static perceptions regarding the genealogical science frame and context.

From ancient Greek epic tradition of history reconstruction by genealogical lineages enumeration to the Old Testament Chronicles, the Assyrian clay tablets, the princely houses of north and south India and the royal Scottish bards narrations, this early, mainly oral, genealogical tradition era is extensively an amalgam of both myths and real life events in a constant attempt to lift up ruler descent to the divinity sphere.

It's therefore impossible to talk about genealogical science before 1100 A.D., since, until then, recordings were circumstantial, fragmentary, unreliable and often controversial.

Though Second Period (1100-1500 A.D.) genealogical records were used to serve mainly political intentions, they are considered nevertheless fairly reliable.

Later on, midst 15th cent., records became generalized, the detailed study of which mentors the future by demonstrating the causes and effects of human behavior.

Genealogy is as much a general as a specific scientific examination of the past which can, at times, borrow, gather and make use of elements, methods and conclusions of exact and theoretical sciences such as history, archaeology, biology, genetics, statistics, anthropology, philosophy, literature, law and folklore.

Genealogy is an integrated creative and liberal constructivist school where one can open up to an ocean of knowledge and insights to human history and creativity.

As to the genealogical interest motivators, extensive researches have pointed, among others, to our

- Personal need for accurate and valid ancestral past documentation
- Cultural need to safeguard tradition
- Self esteem and self actualization need satisfaction through social contribution
- Fashion and trends
- Inner need to establish our connection to the historical ancestral web and to discover our most intimate “I”, the “why’s” and the “how’s” of our own existence through our ancestors’ talents and traits revelation.

Research skills

Until only recently, due to the absence of scientific specialization, genealogists were basically bound to be self-reliant. Thankfully, along with the appearance of quite enough officially accredited international training opportunities, eliminated became the pitfalls of self-education.

Among the genealogical skills required in order to be able to best perform their research are

- In-depth historical and resource repositories awareness
- Manuscript deciphering talent
- Etymology, onomatology and toponymy mastery

Unpredictable Science

Since around each research corner there is always a pleasant or unpleasant surprise awaiting (rotten manuscripts, illegible documents etc), the genealogists should have the stamina and perseverance to constantly revise and reevaluate data as often as required and to keep walking on the laborious path of theoretical reserve enrichment where their professionalism foundation and evaluation criteria lie.

However, theory and practice are not the only prerequisites of a successful career in genealogy; the perceptiveness and intuition of a “Miss Marple” or a “Detective Poiereau” can be proven at times, when one has to move in the dark, invaluable.

Science underevaluated

It has always been a perfectly practical school of unlimited knowledge, an excellent instrument in the attempt to understand all human nature aspects.

Chapter 3

Genealogy and the academic community

Although the need for the establishment of

- A set of basic academic accreditation standards, qualifications and codes of conduct
- Communication pathways between allied scientific professionals for the promotion of the field
- Genealogical information accessibility gateways

has led to the founding of several societies (domestic and international), genealogy still is considered by many an accessory or a sub-unit of local historical and / or heritage research due, on many occasions, to the prejudice of a number of researchers against scientific methodology driven mainly by their lack of attention to details, pure ignorance of all available resources (especially when researchers originate from irrelevant scientific or professional areas), limited budgets and their hastiness to close the case.

Voices such as that of V.D. Greenwood, 30 years ago in the first issue of *Researcher's Guide to American Genealogy*, crying out that genealogists are true scientists following the exact scientific method of first making hypotheses based on existing knowledge and then planning research projects to discover clues supporting or overthrowing the original conclusion, were unfortunately not persuasive enough to change the minds of all those still considering genealogical research nothing more than a hobby.

Chapter 4

Libraries & Archives serving Genealogical Research- Differences between Europe and the U.S.

In an attempt to comparatively portray the frames and principles of genealogical research facilitation services in Libraries and Archives between Spain, the U.S. and Greece, using as reference point the analysis of the librarian M.Rosa Lopez Llebot, we very soon reach the conclusion that in the Mediterranean the genealogical research process remains a

solitary endeavour with no information science establishment officially willing to take on its service charge.

A decisive role can be contributed, at this point, to the existing archival legislation regarding access restrictions to statistical data and the data protection authorities guidelines in Europe, whereas in the U.S., for more than four decades, LIS have clearly acknowledged the adding value of genealogy which has thus been well incorporated in the usual library reference system which is thoroughly transformed by Total Quality Principles and interoperability dynamics to a genealogy information literacy workshop encouraging education, cooperation and progress.

Apart from limited genealogical private initiatives taking full advantage of WEB 2.0 realities, reference is worth been made to the ambitious task of cataloguing and digitization conducted by the Greek National Archives which, however, can never have the expected outcomes unless the archival access legislation status quo is revised.

Chapter 5

Pursuing Academic Accreditation

Although genealogy could very well be part of the existing social and cultural anthropology and other social sciences academic curricula aiming to equip students with the specialized knowledge indispensable to the genealogical research process, there has been, since the George Andrew Moriarty and Donald Lines Jacobus era, a thriving movement

towards the formation of professional genealogical societies both domestic and international aiming to set field standards, training principles and codes of conduct promoting cooperation between fellow professionals.

Especially the 90's signal the transformation of genealogy from a pastime activity to the symbol of the millennium: a universal identity quest within a global cooperation context.

Even the long lasting prejudice of Information Professionals against the family historians is progressively regressing before the public's change of attitude, the ever growing "friends of the Archives" lobby and the general acceptance that their skills, talents and qualifications are similar and linked together so that in many private and public institutions such as libraries or archives (e.g. Allen County Public Library) one can see archivists in the role of genealogy book writers and librarians as genealogical workshop coordinators.

Additionally, the recently established "Genealogy Librarianship" term is heard in the Higher Education circles to such an extent nowadays that new study and accomplishment award programs are being designed to match the changing scenery.

As for LIS Associations, there has been an ardent new demands recording as regards to the enlargement and enrichment of the Librarian and Information Scientists' aptitudes since responding to the Digital Era research trends demands new Strategic Planning as pointed out in the 2009-

2010 IFLA declaration (patron driven process, multi-tasking cross-discipline education, life-long learning).

Chapter 6

Genealogical Collections Development

Genealogical collections' starting point are the available local history resources which, depending on available budget, can be progressively enriched from related to local migration material.

Each Ethnic Group with its distinctive characteristics make every research a unique challenge obliging this way researchers to familiarize themselves with historical , cultural, religious, linguistic and geographical particularities and this is exactly where the ethnic group associations prove to be invaluable offering genealogists the insight advantage thanks to their extensive archives, indexes, databases, publications, newsletters and web portals.

Especially this last decade, thousands of genealogical websites have seen the light, most of which are private commercial initiatives in their majority imprecise, insufficient, unsubstantiated and outdated.

However, this chapter will be confined to comment on public genealogical services around the globe that, given the latest digital technological advancements, have made family historians more efficient and independent than ever, lightening on one hand the information scientists workload but

running the risk, on the other hand, of a greater internet dependence and loss of archival resources origin track.

Greek descent and the web

Genealogical research reality for the Greek audience is unfortunately quite different. Consecutive wars, border modifications, massive migrations make it, in many cases, almost impossible to track ancestral trails to the exception of population migrating between mid 19th century and World War II as well as British and Italian occupation territories as in the case of the Ionian Islands where regular censuses, inventories and public registries are well preserved.

Special credits should be given to

- The Catholic Church and its contribution to archival safeguarding
- The work of the Hellenic World Foundation (Genealogy and Oral History Department) in collecting family records and organizing historical memory preservation seminars
- Outstanding family research initiatives as reflected in private and local cultural societies publications
- The decisive contribution of the Society of Greek Archivists with a series of excellent publications to the advancement of Information Science and attitude change in facilitating researchers' work
- State TV unbiased genealogical interest broadcasts

Chapter 7

Genealogy promoting Information Literacy

Indisputably, teachers can make of genealogy an invaluable tool in teaching social sciences and literature as it has already been successfully implemented in elementary schools and junior high classes in the U.S. where the stimulating perspective of reconstructing the ancestral line functioned as a motivator for further study and research.

In this new genealogical “find who, where, when and how” game context, a lot of academic modules had to be revised, modified and enriched with new manuals offering students an innovating view to resource access, retrieval, evaluation and interpretation.

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