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The Fate of the Epistolary Heritage of the Veliky Ustyug Merchant Family Buldakovs of the Late 18th – the First Quarter of the 19th Century

Abstract

The article presents the history of the epistolary heritage of the Buldakov merchant family. The object of the research is letters of M. M. Buldakov, a representative of the Veliky Ustyug merchants, the leading director of the Russian-American company. These documents contain

valuable information on the history of Russian merchants in the last quarter of the 18th – first third of the 19th century and the activities of the Russian-American company. Similar to all sources of epistolary genre, their distinctive feature is that they were created without additional edits and censorship and thereby recorded historical reality at first hand, while retaining the style and language characteristic of the period. The main problem faced by historians is patchy location of M. M. Buldakov's letters. Currently, only a part of them, stored in the Vologda State Historical-Architectural and Art Museum-Reserve, has been published and introduced into scientific use. The documents scattered across other archives are yet to be identified and examined. The purpose of this study is to determine the true volume of the Buldakovs' epistolary heritage, to understand the reasons for its fragmentation, and to trace the movement of documents from one owner to another. This is the first attempt to restore the path of epistolaries from the pre-revolutionary family archive to modern archives, which determines the scientific novelty of the work. The methodological basis of the research is principles of historicism, consistency, and objectivity. This makes it possible to consolidate the scattered information and facts testifying to the movement of M. M. Buldakov's papers. The analytical and synthetic method of comparing data provides an opportunity to see the general picture of letters location, while concrete-historical method allows us to describe the facts in historical sequence. We managed to identify three large collections of letters: in the Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts, in the Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire of the Historical and Documentary Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and in the Vologda State Historical, Architectural and Art Museum-Reserve. The results of this study provide a unified picture of the epistolaries location in different archives, which, in turn, provides an opportunity for historians and archivists to continue their work on identifying and introducing into scientific use of documents necessary for further study of the history of Russian merchants and the Russian-American company activities.

Keywords

Archive, historical sources, epistolary heritage, letters, M. M. Buldakov, Veliky Ustyug, trade, Russian-American company of the late 18th – first quarter of the 19th century.

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