

Journal of Integrated Information Management

Vol 10, No 1 (2025)

Jan-June 2025



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doi: [10.26265/jiim.v10i1.41266](https://doi.org/10.26265/jiim.v10i1.41266)

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To cite this article:

Chrysanthopoulos, C., Charamopoulos, L., Festas, M., Koniali, C., Liagka, M., Sarafis, V., Dimitropoulos, D., & Seirinidou, V. (2025). Reassembling the Archive: Datafication and the Digital Afterlife of Early Public Officials in 19th-century Greece . *Journal of Integrated Information Management*, 10(1), 8–18. <https://doi.org/10.26265/jiim.v10i1.41266>

Reassembling the Archive: Datafication and the Digital Afterlife of Early Public Officials in 19th-century Greece

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Article Info

Article history:

Received 29 April 2025

Received in revised form 20 May 2025

Accepted 12 June 2025

<http://dx.doi.org/10.26265/jiim.v10i1.41266>

Abstract:

Purpose — This paper explores the epistemological implications of datafication in historical research through the case study of the BioState project, which digitally reconstructs the careers of early public officials in 19th-century Greece. The project demonstrates how archival traces are reassembled as structured data, creating an administrative archive that never existed in institutional form.

Design/methodology/approach — The study is based on the implementation of a semantic relational database using the Heurist platform, which models historical records as interconnected entities. Methodologically, the project integrates ontology-driven data modeling, archival documentation, and interpretive strategies to convert fragmentary sources into a coherent digital prosopographical system.

Findings — BioState highlights that datafication is not a neutral act of digitization but a performative reconstitution of historical meaning. The project reveals how archival traces, originally non-standardized and dispersed, are transformed into a queryable knowledge system.

Originality/value — This work contributes to digital historiography by advancing a theoretical and practical model for reconstituting absent or fragmented archives. It proposes that the digital archive should be seen not as a repository of the past but as a performative apparatus that enacts new forms of historical visibility. The concept of the "digital afterlife" is introduced to describe how bureaucratic traces acquire renewed significance within computational environments.

Index Terms — Digital history, prosopography, archival hermeneutics, datafication, Greek public administration, digital humanities.

I. INTRODUCTION

The transformations of the digital archives and databases in historical research reflect not only technological advancements but also the methodological and epistemological reconfigurations brought about by the digital turn. As Ian Milligan highlights, the historian's research practice has undergone a radical shift: from searching in physical archives and taking notes in notebooks, it has moved to the mass collection of digital photographs, information retrieval through algorithms, and engagement with born-digital sources such as websites and social media archives [1]. Digitization of sources is not merely a technical process of transferring analogue material into digital form; rather, it is an act of selection, interpretation, and politics, as Gerben Zaagsma argues. Decisions about what is digitized, how it is documented, how it is made accessible, and under what conditions shape the field of historical knowledge and information [2].

At the same time, digital databases and analytical tools enable the reconstruction and redefinition of the archive. Stephen Robertson, drawing on the work of Janet Murray, describes the evolution of the digital archive from "additive forms" that merely replicate analog formats (such as digitized books or curated thematic collections) to dynamic, interactive environments that harness the capabilities of computational processing and data visualization [3]. Moreover, the transformation of the "document" into "data" raises critical issues of representation and interpretation: data are not "raw" but rather constructed; *capta*, as Johanna Drucker argues, resulting from acts of

selection and abstraction on the part of the historian [3, p. 89, 20, 21]. Technological infrastructures are not neutral; they inscribe assumptions and shape interpretive possibilities, thus making digital hermeneutics essential, one that critically reflects on the practices of digitization, documentation, and analysis [4].

The digital turn in historiography has led to a radical redefinition of the archive concept, transforming digitization from a technical act of preservation into a deeply performative practice of historical reconstruction [5]. Datafication refers to the transformation of historical information into structured, machine-readable data, producing a new "digital life" for traces and documents that were once dispersed, fragmented, or even non-existent in physical form. This shift does not merely concern the management or accessibility of sources; it reconfigures the very methodology of historical inquiry and redefines its object [6].

This paper examines the performative dimensions of datafication through the example of the research project entitled "Biographing the State: Digital Prosopography of the Modern Greek Public Administration (19th c.)" (BioState). The project creates digital records for the first public officials of the newly established Greek state, converting fragmented information from diverse archival sources into interconnected entities within a relational database. By employing the open-source collaborative web database service *Heurist* [7], the project does not merely document but effectively "invents" an archive that never previously existed as *fond*: a digital personnel file reconstructing the entire career trajectory of each official who staffed the Provisional Administration of Greece (1822-1827). It reconstructs the careers of individuals who served as public officials during this period, tracing their professional lives from their entry into service until their natural death.

The rapid development of digital prosopography in recent decades has profoundly transformed how collective historical actors are approached. Open access to data, interoperability, semantic linking, and the ability to perform multi-layered analyses have introduced new methodological and epistemological frameworks into historical research. At the same time, the adoption of conceptual models such as the *factoid approach* [8, p. 319, 9, p. 58-59] underscores the interpretative agency involved in structuring digital records and relational data.

Among the many internationally developed prosopographical databases in recent years, the following examples are especially indicative of the methodological and conceptual affinities shared with the present project: a. "The Database of Court Officers: 1660-1837", which provides access to the career histories of every regularly remunerated officer and servant of the English royal household from 1660 to 1837 [10]; b. the "China Government Employee Database - (CGED-Q)", which records all regular civil offices and their holders in the Chinese Empire during the Qing Dynasty (1760-1912) [11]. These projects are based on official

records and registers for civil servants compiled by the administration. Similarly, in Greece, the only relevant research concerns the register of education officials in the 19th century, "People employed in Further, Secondary and Primary Education (19th c.)" based on the records of the Ministry of Education, research conducted two decades ago, making use of the digital capabilities and technology available at the time. [12].

In Greek Digital Humanities, it has also been used for prosopographical studies, mainly of social and political history. For instance, the project "Mapping Island Lives" [13] collects prosopographical information on persons who lived in the Ionian Islands (19th-20th centuries). Also, recently, *Heurist* has been used by members of the Institute of Historical Research of the National Hellenic Research Foundation to create the following prosopographical digital projects: "Prosopography of the Helleno-Venetian World" [14], which studies the persons who lived in the first Venetian colonies (13th century), "Representatives of the National Assemblies and Legislative. Biographical Documentation" [15], which documents the life of the political personnel of the 1821 Revolution and "Biographical Dictionary of Greek Members of Parliament, 1946-1956" [16], which attempts to examine the composition of the parliaments of the first post-war decade, through the compilation of a biographical dictionary of their members. Finally, the project "Cultural mediators between Greece, France and other European countries (1830-1974)" [17], focuses on the role of the intellectuals who contributed to the cultural development and modernization of Greece. To these initiatives may be added the contribution of the Centre for Research on Modern Greek History (KENI) and its Research Group for the Documentation and Study of the Greek Revolution and the Reign of King Otto (ETEMELEOP). Their project "LEXICON / 1833-1843" [18] focuses on the state officials of the period of the Absolute Monarchy, compiling structured biographical data on the administrative personnel of the early modern Greek state with a focus on the military. In a similar vein, though developed with different technological means, "Lexicon 1821" [19], produced by the same institution, comprises entries grounded in archival sources, as well as in primary and secondary literature. These entries are organized into three thematic categories: (a) individuals and social groups, (b) institutions, political bodies, assemblies, and diplomatic acts, and (c) land and naval conflicts, covering the period from 1821 to 1832.

The analysis of such projects requires simultaneous consideration of the technological capacities available at the time of their production, their funding frameworks, and their underlying research objectives. From a broader perspective, *Lexicon 1821* and similar initiatives highlight the dynamic evolution of the field of digital history in Greece over the past three decades, reflecting the ongoing transformation in the relationship between historical research and digital technology.

What the BioState project uniquely contributes to this expanding landscape of prosopographical databases is its focus on the reconstruction of an administrative archive that never existed as such in institutional form. Unlike other projects that are based on pre-existing official registers or consolidated personnel files, BioState builds a digital infrastructure from fragmentary and heterogeneous archival sources, financial orders, official documents, digitized images of the officials' signatures, and marginal notes, which were not originally intended for biographical or administrative indexing. This process entails a double innovation: first, the historiographical reconstitution of bureaucratic memory during the formative years of the Greek state (1821-1832), and second, the semantic modeling of complex, historically contingent relationships between individuals, institutions, places, and administrative acts. By integrating dispersed traces into a coherent and queryable system, BioState not only recovers overlooked figures of state formation but also proposes a methodological framework for the interpretive reconstruction of absent archives in a digital environment. Ultimately, the project produces a corpus of approximately 300 model professional biographies, structured according to specific rules and formats. The analysis of these biographical data will yield insights into the social, economic, and educational profiles of the first employees of the modern Greek state. Moreover, their synthesis will allow for the reconstruction of the collective profile of the typical or ideal civil servant of the first half of the 19th century.

BioState brings to the forefront critical questions: Who constructs and assembles the archive in the digital horizon? Where do the boundaries lie between documentation and interpretation? How does the notion of testimony shift when the historical document is reconstituted as a data node? By examining the architecture, methodological choices, and interpretive tensions of the BioState, we propose a theoretical approach to the digital afterlife of bureaucratic traces; documents that were never organically or functionally produced as fonds yet become such within a digital regime of truth.

II. REASSEMBLING THE ARCHIVE: THEORETICAL CONCEPTION

The notion of *reassembling the archive* does not merely refer to a technical process of processing, indexation, and cataloguing records; rather, it entails a fundamental rearticulation of what we consider to be an "archive" and of its role in the production of historical knowledge. Digitization, particularly when combined with datafication, disrupts the foundational assumptions of archival stability and objectivity; the archive is no longer a set of material memory carriers, but a dynamic and constructed epistemic system [20].

Drawing on Lev Manovich's work on cultural analytics and the epistemology of data, we may understand digital archives as cultural interfaces, spaces where historical and bureaucratic knowledge is reorganized through the logics of

computation, modularity, and algorithmic processing [21, 22]. In this light, projects like BioState function not simply as repositories but as engines of knowledge production, where meaning is generated through structured metadata, relational models, and data visualizations. This insight is echoed in Johanna Drucker's distinction between data and capta, the latter being "taken, not given," emphasizing that all data are the result of epistemic acts of selection, framing, and abstraction [23, 24]. Thus, visualizations of state bureaucracies and civil servant trajectories are not neutral outputs but epistemic performance forms of interpretive visualization that shape historical intelligibility.

The BioState project exemplifies these dynamics with remarkable clarity. By tracing the lives and careers of civil servants in 19th-century Greece, BioState does not simply recover a set of bureaucratic records, it reconfigures them into a structured, queryable, and analyzable system of historical knowledge. The project foregrounds the archival traces left by individuals who operated within and through the state apparatus, reconstructing the institutional logic and administrative frameworks of a formative period in the modern Greek state.

What is crucial here is that the archival status of these traces is not pre-existing but digitally produced. Personnel files, decrees, petitions, and reports are transformed into entities, attributes, and relations within a semantic data model. The record, in this context, acquires meaning through its position in a network, its connection to offices, roles, temporal intervals, and geographies. Visualization tools such as interactive maps and career graphs do not merely illustrate data; they enact new interpretive possibilities, allowing users to perceive patterns of mobility, institutional development, and political contingency. At the heart of BioState lies a conceptual shift: from the archive as a fixed repository to the archive as a dynamic field of historical reconstitution.

Theoretical challenges posed by the project demand a reflexive methodological posture. A digital archival hermeneutics must attend to the tools and frameworks it employs; ontologies, taxonomies, controlled vocabularies, and interfaces are not neutral instruments, but agents of meaning. Provenance, authority control, and data modeling practices must be critically examined, not only for their descriptive accuracy but for their historical and theoretical implications. In this light, the work of the digital historian or archivist is not merely technical but interpretive and curatorial. S/he does not recover the past, but remediates it, through selection, encoding, linking, and visual display. The result is not a reproduction of historical truth, but a reframing of historical possibilities within the logic of digital systems. BioState should not be understood simply as a prosopographical database, but as a historiographical intervention: an effort to construct an archival formation that was never institutionally consolidated, through the digital reconstitution of bureaucratic memory.

III. FROM ARCHIVE TO DATA: DATAFICATION AS A FORM OF PERFORMANCE

The concept of datafication, the transformation of complex, interpretively rich historical information into standardized digital data, does not refer merely to the technical transcription of analog material into digital form. Rather, it represents a fundamental epistemological shift that affects how we perceive, structure, and interpret the past. Datafication constitutes a new form of historical performance. It is not a passive registration of “existing” information, but a dynamic incorporation of such information into a structured system of entities, categories, fields, and relationships [25, 26, 27]. Each piece of information: name, position, date, is transformed into a data entry, acquires identity through metadata, and becomes meaningful through its relations to other data points. Documentation does not precede organization; it is enacted through it.

The BioState project offers a paradigmatic example of the performative nature of datafication. At its core lies the construction of digital “personnel files” that never existed in physical form. This act is not merely restitutive but generative: it constructs a new grammar of historical representation through the normative registration of persons and acts.

The way this grammar is implemented is of critical importance. The selection of Heurist as the project’s core infrastructure was deliberate: it is a platform that supports ontological modeling, that is, the definition of core entity categories (e.g., Person, Service, Institution, Document) and the specification of the relationships between them. Through this process, historical information becomes standardized and interconnected, enabling machine-based search, temporal and spatial visualization, statistical extraction, and automated mapping.

A central dimension of this process is the visibility and invisibility it produces. What does not fit into the predefined structures, what cannot be categorized or uniquely identified, is either omitted or relegated to the background. In this sense, datafication does not simply represent the archive; it reorganizes it according to its internal logic.

At the same time, through the creation of entities such as “Political Tenure,” “Kinship Relations,” “Place,” “Administrative Act,” and “Source,” BioState captures a complex web of administrative and social interconnections. Civil servants do not appear as isolated individuals, but as nodes in a multilayered network of institutional, geographical, and temporal relationships. This constitutes a form of networked historiography that would not be feasible without the logic of datafication.

Yet the performative power of datafication also demands hermeneutic vigilance. As scholars of digital history have noted, data standardization is never a politically neutral act—it embeds conceptual assumptions, epistemological norms, and cultural hierarchies [28, 29]. What kinds of information are deemed “useful”? How is ambiguity recorded? What

happens to the “noise” of history?

Data should be understood not as neutral carriers of historical fact, but as inherently interpretive constructions. Every act of normalization, abstraction, or encoding constitutes a hermeneutic intervention, shaping not only what is represented but how it becomes intelligible [30, 31]. This perspective is central to the methodological and epistemological premises of the BioState project. The creation of digital entities such as “Political Tenure,” “Kinship Relations,” or “Administrative Act” does not merely recover archival traces; it actively reconfigures them within a semantic framework that gives them coherence and analytical value. In doing so, BioState exemplifies the notion of *infrastructure as epistemology*: interpretive work does not reside solely in the content of historical data, but in the architecture of the system itself, the data model, the classification logics, and the interface design that make historical meaning possible.

At the same time, the process of datafication inevitably generates silences. Information that resists categorization, that carries ambiguity, or that does not easily map onto relational structures, tends to recede into the background or be omitted altogether. These absences are not trivial; they represent epistemic and ethical challenges that demand reflection. BioState addresses this through interpretive transparency, documenting the limits of data modeling and acknowledging the historiographical choices embedded in its design. Attending to these silences, what has been excluded, flattened, or rendered unreadable, is a crucial dimension of digital archival hermeneutics. It is through such critical engagements that digital historians and archivists can reclaim the interpretive complexity of the past within computational environments and resist the false objectivity that data structures may appear to promise.

The case of BioState shows that datafication, when accompanied by interpretive transparency and theoretical awareness, can become a tool for generating new historical meaning. The extraction of information from primary sources is not undertaken merely to retrieve documents, but to transform them into interrogable, comparable, and analytically meaningful objects of historical thought.

IV. THE BIOSTATE PROJECT: METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN PRINCIPLES

During the initial phase of the project, a bibliographic database was developed using the Zotero platform to systematically record the relevant historiography and published sources used to document the biographical data of the individuals included in the research process. It also served as a referencing and documentation tool, supporting the processing of individual records, the management of citations, and the consistent handling of bibliographic metadata throughout all stages of the research workflow.

The research project is based on the processing and indexing of archival sources that document the activities and official status of the first public servants of the Provisional Administration during the Greek Revolution. Central to this

process was the “Table of Financial Orders from the Ministry of Finance” [=Πίναξ χρηματικών διαταγών του Υπουργείου προς το Εθνικόν Ταμείον]» (KPAK 252), housed in the General State Archives (GSA) of Greece (Fig. 1), as well as the “Registry of the 3rd Political Department” [=Μητρώο του 3ου επί των Πολιτικών Τμήματος] from the Fighters’ Archive of the National Library of Greece. Additionally, the Archive of the Administrative Committee (1826-1827), the Archive of the National Treasury (1822-1828), and the Executive Archive, all held at the GSA, were utilized. Important data were also drawn from the Archival Collections of the Greek War of Independence and the General Gazette, preserved in the Library of the Hellenic Parliament, as well as from the publications of the Government Gazette (FEK) of the National Printing Office. Despite their historical significance, these archival sources have received limited scholarly attention. Most of these materials have not been fully indexed, published, or integrated into broader historiographical narratives, especially concerning the institutional formation of the state and the bureaucratic constitution of authority during the Greek War of Independence. All archival material used in the study consists of official documents, that is, records produced by

state institutions either for their internal administration or for informing the public. The BioState project addresses this gap by indexing, modeling, and recontextualizing these sources, thus rendering them accessible for the first time as research data.

The indexing of information from archival and literature sources forms the foundation of the project’s research methodology and is crucial for transforming fragmented historical material into structured and interconnected data. The process begins with the systematic collection of records related to individuals who served in the public administration during the Provisional Administration. These sources were parsed into discrete informational units and recorded using an ontology-driven data collection form.

A central methodological principle was transforming fragmentary historical information into interconnected, searchable data. To achieve this, a relational database was designed and implemented within the Heurist environment, selected for its flexibility in supporting ontological modeling and its capacity to integrate heterogeneous types of sources (texts, documents, geographic references, and temporal data).

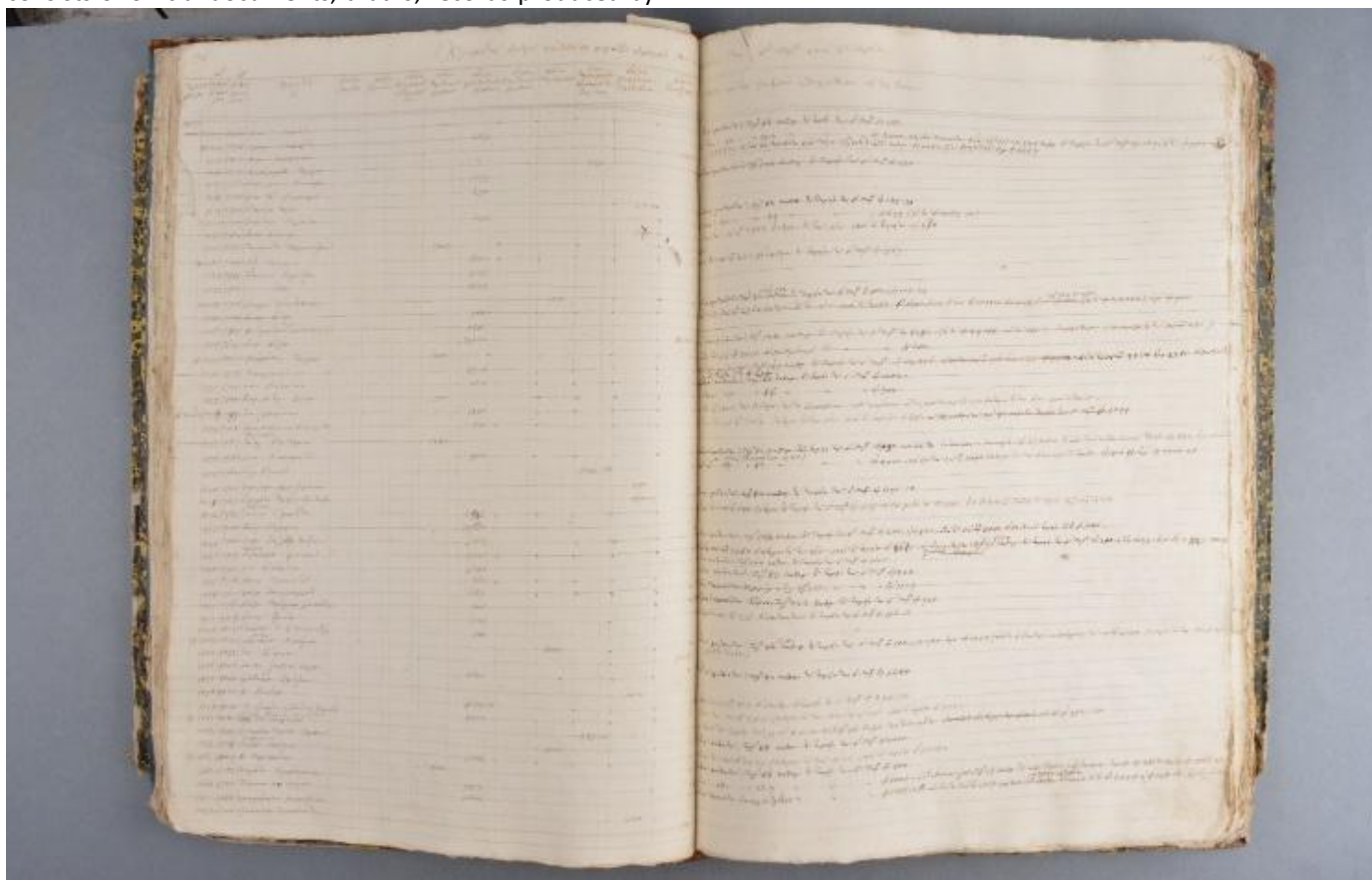


Figure 1. Representative pages from the document “Table of Financial Orders from the Ministry of Finance” (KPAK 252) © General State Archives (GSA) of Greece-Central Service Archives.

Within this framework, the core entities of the database were defined as follows:

- **Person** (as the central referential unit),
- **Institution** (the administrative body),
- **Service** (the relationship between person and institution),
- **Administrative Act** (e.g., appointment, dismissal),
- **Political Tenure** (involvement in formal or informal

- political institutions),
- **Place** (geospatial information),
- **Source** (archival or literature documentation).

This structure enabled the semantic organization of data and facilitated advanced querying, historical visualization, and interpretive reconstruction of the early Greek state's bureaucratic landscape.

During the process of indexing historical information, the research team encountered considerable challenges stemming from the inherent fluidity and heterogeneity of the archival data. A particularly persistent issue was the high degree of variability in the rendering of personal names. The same individual frequently appeared across different sources under multiple orthographic variants, alternative spellings, or name forms influenced by toponymic attributions, familial epithets, or linguistic transformations (e.g., Hellenized or translated versions).

To systematically address this complexity, a standardized recording protocol was adopted. For each historical person of interest, a principal or canonical name form was defined, while all attested alternative versions were also documented and integrated into a structured *Name Thesaurus*. This approach enhanced the precision of name disambiguation and ensured the interoperability and retrievability of individual records across the corpus, regardless of the form under which a person appeared in the sources.

At the same time, temporal issues arose due to the use of both the Julian and Gregorian calendars in the sources,

leading to ambiguities in dating official acts. The solution adopted was the dual recording of dates, aligning both calendar systems to ensure chronological precision and clarity in the documentation of events. Geographical identification is a crucial component in documenting the service trajectories of the first civil servants, as it enables the understanding of the spatial dimension of state operations. Within this framework, locations, places of origin, service, or transfer are recorded with precision and linked to the corresponding administrative acts. To enhance analysis and visualization, these locations are represented using cartographic data, allowing for the geospatial mapping of institutions and officials' movements. The database supports geographical referencing and visualization on digital maps, thereby facilitating the study of the spatial distribution of the state apparatus and the mobility patterns within 19th-century public administration.

The documentation of biographical information is a core pillar of the BioState project, as it directly supports the effort to understand the social and professional profiles of the early public officials. In this context, the full names of individuals are systematically recorded, along with alternative spellings, dates and places of birth and death, family relationships (spouses, children, etc.), and details about education, professional training, and intellectual background. The processing of this data helps shape their social profiles, reveal networks, and enables the interpretation of their roles in the process of state formation.

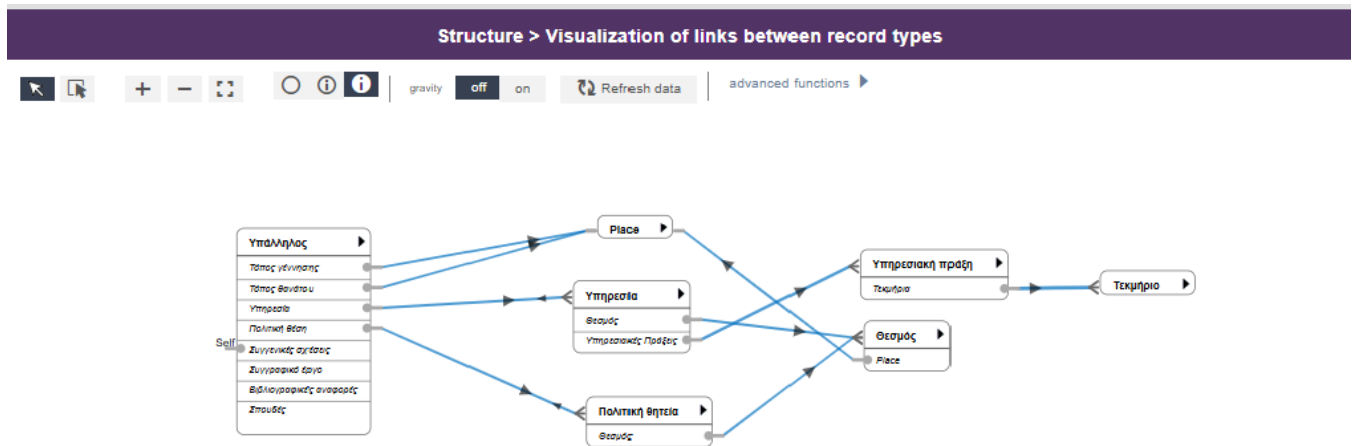


Figure 2. Ontological representation of the relationships between record types in the BioState project's relational database, as implemented within the Heurist system.

In parallel, a methodology for mapping the administrative careers of the officials is applied, aiming to link individuals to the institutions in which they served. Interconnected records are created, including the position held, the duration of service (start and end dates), and the administrative acts documenting their tenure (such as appointments, transfers, resignations, etc.). This information is linked to the respective institutions and their historical context, allowing for the tracking of administrative changes and the structure of public administration. This framework allows for

addressing key research questions: tracing the administrative paths of individuals from the Provisional Administration to the established Greek State; reconstructing the internal organization of the first state services; and studying the evolution of public administration as an institutional mechanism. Moreover, this process leads to the development of specialized vocabularies that reflect the administrative terminology of the 19th century, offering valuable material for future research in the history of institutions.

The implementation of the project resulted in the generation of a structured, scalable, and semantically enriched digital profile for each historical subject, effectively a prosopographical record designed to support complex querying, cross-referencing, and analytical reuse across diverse scholarly workflows. The above visualization (Fig. 2) presents the structure of relationships between record types in the Heurist information environment, as implemented for the BioState project. This ontological representation reflects the core structure of data connections in the relational database, with the entity «Official» («Υπάλληλος») at its center, serving as the main carrier of information. The «Official» is linked to multiple other entities: to «Place» (place of birth and death); to «Service», which records the individual's tenure in a specific institution, including position and duration; to «Political Career», where applicable, capturing involvement in political or para-political institutions (e.g., the Filiki Etaireia); as well as to «Family Relations», «Education», «Authorship», and «Bibliographic References». The entity «Service» is in turn connected to the «Institution» in which the service took place, and to the corresponding «Administrative Act» (such as appointment,

transfer, or resignation), which is documented by a «Source Record» (e.g., Government Gazette, archival records). Institutions are also linked to geographic data (the «Place» entity), allowing for the mapping of administrative activity. This visualization confirms the complex and interconnected nature of the project's data and highlights the functionality of Heurist as a tool for prosopographical documentation, enabling the integrated representation, retrieval, and analysis of information on 19th-century public administration.

The BioState methodology constitutes a hybrid framework, integrating archival source curation with ontology-driven data modeling. In this framework, each primary source fragment is formalized as a relational entity and embedded within a multi-layered, interoperable knowledge graph of persons, institutions, events, and locations (Fig. 3). This structure enables longitudinal tracking of individual careers, mapping of spatial and institutional mobility, detection of administrative patterns, and reconstruction of organizational continuities in the early Greek state-building process.

Αθανασιάδης, Γεώργιος

Υπάλληλος id 88

ΣΤΟΙΧΕΙΑ ΤΑΥΤΟΤΗΤΑΣ

Επώνυμο Αθανασιάδης
Εναλλακτικό επώνυμο Αθανασίου
Όνομα Γεώργιος
Εναλλακτικό όνομα Καπετάν Τζώρτζης
Πατρώνυμο Χατζή Αθανάσιος Ματθαίος

ΒΙΟΓΡΑΦΙΚΕΣ ΠΛΗΡΟΦΟΡΙΕΣ

Ημερομηνία γέννησης 1793 (Julian 1793)
Τόπος γέννησης Σμύρνη
Ημερομηνία θανάτου 1865 (Julian 1865)
Τόπος θανάτου Σμύρνη

ΣΠΟΥΔΕΣ ΚΑΙ ΙΔΙΟΤΗΤΕΣ

Σπουδές Σμύρνη
Επαγγέλματα Έμπορος

ΥΠΗΡΕΣΙΑΚΗ ΔΙΑΔΡΟΜΗ

Υπηρεσία Αθανασιάδης, Γεώργιος, Έπαρχος - Επαρχείο Κάτω Ναχαγιέ, 6 May 1823 Julian (Gregorian 18 May 1823)-10 May 1823 Julian (Gregorian 22 May 1823)
Αθανασιάδης, Γεώργιος, Έπαρχος - Επαρχείο Μονεμβασιάς, 10 May 1823 Julian (Gregorian 22 May 1823)
Αθανασιάδης, Γεώργιος, Γραμματέας (Συνθέτης) / Γραμματέας β' - Ειρηνοδίκείο Δαυλίδας, 18 Apr 1842 Julian (Gregorian 30 Apr 1842)
Αθανασιάδης, Γεώργιος, Γραμματέας (Συνθέτης) / Γραμματέας β' - Ειρηνοδίκείο Θηβών, 18 Apr 1842 Julian (Gregorian 30 Apr 1842)-23 Jan 1843 Julian (Gregorian 4 Feb 1843)
Αθανασιάδης, Γεώργιος, Γραμματέας (Συνθέτης) / Γραμματέας β' - Ειρηνοδίκείο Αιγίνης, 23 Jan 1843 Julian (Gregorian 4 Feb 1843)-23 Aug 1843 Julian (Gregorian 4 Sep 1843)

ΠΟΛΙΤΙΚΗ ΔΙΑΔΡΟΜΗ

Μέλος Φιλικής Εταιρείας Ναι
Συμμετοχή σε πολιτικά δίκτυα is Member of - > Φιλική Εταιρεία

ΒΙΒΛΙΟΓΡΑΦΙΑ

Βιβλιογραφικές αναφορές Δοκίμιον ιστορικόν περί της Ελληνικής Επανάστασεως. Φιλήμων, Ιωάννης, 1861
Βίοι Πελοποννησίων ανδρών και των έξωθεν εις την Πελοπόννησον ελθόντων κληρικών στρατιωτικών και πολιτικών των αγωνισαμένων τον αγώνα της Επανάστασεως. Χρυσανθόπουλος, Φώτιος, 1888
Ο καπετάν Τζώρτζης. Δάλλας, Χρήστος
Μεγάλη Ελληνική Εγκυκλοπαίδεια. Δρανδάκης, Παύλος, 1927

Figure 3. Example of a fully complete employee record in the Heurist information system for Georgios Athanasiadis. It includes identity details, biographical and educational information, a detailed timeline of public service positions with dates, references to political activity (member of the Filiki Eteria), and associated literature sources.

V. INTERPRETIVE STAKES AND REPRESENTATIONAL FRAMEWORKS IN THE DIGITAL ARCHIVE

As previously discussed, an archive is never merely a neutral repository of information; it is a system of representation that encodes choices about what is

preserved, how it is structured, and how it becomes meaningful. In digital historiography, these representational dynamics are not diminished by technology, they are made more explicit. Digitization and datafication are not mechanical operations; they are interpretive practices shaped by conceptual frameworks, institutional priorities,

and design decisions [32, 33].

The BioState project exemplifies this complexity. Its core methodological move, the attribution of bureaucratic identity to historically marginal individuals, reflects a commitment to recovering overlooked dimensions of administrative memory. This is not simply a technical procedure; it is a gesture of recognition that gives structure and visibility to actors who were never institutionally acknowledged within conventional archives. In doing so, BioState reframes the early state not as an abstract institutional construct, but as a web of relations between named individuals, official roles, and evolving administrative structures.

This curatorial effort raises essential epistemological questions: Who defines the categories through which the past is made legible? What assumptions underlie the structure of the database? In digital archival environments, curation is not merely a logistical task, it is an act of interpretive modeling. In BioState, the design of entities, attributes, and relationships encodes a particular vision of how historical agency is organized and expressed. Any data model foregrounds certain dimensions of the past while leaving others less accessible or legible.

This becomes especially salient in cases of archival ambiguity, contradictory dates, partial identifications, or inconsistent naming conventions. Rather than flattening this complexity, BioState incorporates it through mechanisms that allow for uncertainty: multiple names, approximate dates, and vague geographical indicators. Such design choices reflect a methodological stance that treats uncertainty not as an error, but as a feature of the historical record requiring thoughtful representation.

Access to the digital archive also raises issues of usability and interpretive transparency. Although BioState is intended as an open-access public resource, the structuring of search pathways, the affordances of visualization tools, and the logic of data export all shape how historical knowledge is encountered and recombined. These interface dynamics function as interpretive filters, shaping what patterns are visible and what questions can be asked.

Moreover, digital archives and databases are not just an informational tool, it is a narrative space. Each interaction with the archive, every search, link, and visualization, constructs a micro-history. In this environment, the construction of historical meaning is no longer monopolized by academic historians; users themselves become active participants in generating interpretations, constructing trajectories, and discovering new perspectives.

The central interpretive challenge of the digital archive lies in its dual role: it preserves the past but also reconfigures it through the logic of its design. Projects like BioState do more than organize information; they contribute to the evolving imagination of statehood, authority, and historical agency. This contribution demands ongoing critical reflection; not only about what the archive contains, but about how it makes history possible.

In the context of this study, the term *digital afterlife* is not employed metaphorically, but rather analytically: it refers to the second, digital life of bureaucratic records whose original institutional function has ceased, but which acquire renewed meaning and purpose through their transformation into structured data. This constitutes performative survival, an expression of the archival trace's capacity to reappear in a new form, within a new environment, oriented by new questions and analytical frameworks.

The BioState project is a paradigmatic example of this transition. Records such as financial orders, administrative registers, or government gazettes, originally designed for strictly functional or procedural purposes, are reassembled as relational components within an administrative data infrastructure. A name listed in a payment ledger, a reference in an official bulletin, or a marginal note in a handwritten report is recontextualized as a digital entity: reframed as evidence of political tenure, as an indicator of geographic mobility, or as a data point in the professional trajectory of a public official.

This digital afterlife does not imply a revival of the past, but rather the construction of a new present of the past. Bureaucratic inscriptions are assigned a new ontological form: XML entries, database records, relational links, and geospatial visualizations. Interpretation does not merely follow the record; the record itself is already shaped by interpretation. Its inclusion in a database, its relational position, its classification, and its queryability are all forms of performative inscription enacted by the system.

This "second life" is also public. It is tied to access, reusability, analysis, and narrative recomposition. The historian engages with the system through multiple filters, geographical, institutional, temporal, or biographical, and can trace patterns, highlight deviations, and propose new narratives of state formation through the trajectories of individuals. These traces cease to be mere indicators; they become structural elements in the articulation of historical inquiry.

At the same time, this digital reconfiguration presents risks. Detaching a record from its original context may lead to false associations or over-interpretation; repurposing a document in new analytical settings can obscure its original meaning or flatten its archival specificity. The risk of illusory completeness, the impression that the database offers a coherent representation of a reality that was inherently fragmented, remains a persistent epistemological challenge.

Yet, when accompanied by hermeneutic awareness and theoretical reflexivity, the digital afterlife of bureaucratic traces can offer a radically new understanding of historical temporality, not as a linear sequence of events, but as a network of nodes, a system of relationships, a field of traceability. The archive, in this view, becomes a mechanism not for representing historical forms, but for detecting and reconstructing them.

In BioState, the memory of the first civil servants of the

Greek state is not merely revived, it is reconstituted. This reconstitution emerges through the convergence of historical research, archival documentation, and digital modeling. The past does not return as an image; it returns as structure.

VI. CONCLUSION

This paper has explored the epistemological, methodological, and representational implications of datafication and the digital reconstruction of archival records, focusing on the case of the BioState project. Rather than treating BioState simply as a technical instrument of digital documentation, it has been examined here as a performative intervention in the historiography of nineteenth-century Greek public administration, an effort to construct an archive that never historically existed, and to rearticulate the past through the relational logic of digital systems.

At the heart of this analysis lies the recognition that digital archival work is not merely representational, but constitutive of historical knowledge. The transformation of fragmentary documents, such as financial orders, decrees, and administrative notes, into structured, queryable data involves more than transcription or preservation; it entails the configuration of historical meaning through classification schemes, data modeling, and interface design. Within BioState, this process facilitates both the analytical reconstruction of state formation and the recovery of administrative actors and practices marginalized by official records and traditional historiography.

The project further exemplifies the interpretive force embedded in digital infrastructures. Every curatorial decision, regarding inclusion, data structure, and access, shapes a representational order through which the archival material becomes legible. BioState demonstrates that the digital archive does not operate as a neutral repository of facts but as a structured environment of meaning production, in which specific forms of historical visibility are enabled, while others remain constrained or obscured.

This reconfiguration of bureaucratic traces also generates what may be termed a digital afterlife: a second existence for archival materials, now circulating as data, integrated into new analytical constellations, and eliciting novel lines of historical inquiry. This recontextualization offers interpretive potential but also entails risks, decontextualization, semantic overreach, and the false appearance of completeness. These challenges call for a mode of digital hermeneutics grounded in methodological transparency, epistemic reflexivity, and historical attentiveness.

Ultimately, the BioState project calls for a rethinking of archival practice and research in the digital age, not as the passive transmission of the past, but as a generative space of epistemological and historiographical engagement [34, p. 114]. As digital infrastructures shape not only research tools but the very frameworks through which historical knowledge is produced, the archive and the research

database emerge not as static repositories but as a dynamic, performative apparatus, one that actively structures, mediates, and transforms our understanding of the past.

Projects like BioState offer an important opportunity to bridge what Cook and Schwartz have termed *the archival divide*, the growing methodological and epistemological gap between historians and archivists in the digital age [35]. While in the nineteenth and much of the twentieth century the two fields were closely aligned in their concern for the preservation and interpretation of historical records, recent decades have witnessed a divergence: historians have increasingly adopted cultural and critical approaches, whereas archivists have turned toward the pragmatics of digital preservation and infrastructure. By integrating historical inquiry with digital archival design, BioState reanimates a shared space of collaboration. It engages both with the interpretive logics of the historian and the structural imperatives of archival organization, fostering a model of archival praxis in which metadata schemas, ontologies, and digital infrastructures serve not only as technical tools but as means of historical reasoning. In doing so, it demonstrates how digital prosopography can function as a cyberinfrastructural commons, reconnecting scholarly and archival expertise toward the co-production of historical knowledge.

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