

Genealogy Between History and Text: The Digital Humanities' Quest in Researching Multi-Generational Chinggisid intermarriages in Mongol Eurasia

Ishayahu Landa (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem)

The paper discusses the advantages and disadvantages of the digital approaches in the context of historical genealogical research. The case study is the reconstruction and analysis of the multi-generational power networks of the different tribal and ethnic elites and their relations with different Chinggisid clans in Mongol Eurasia (13 – 14 centuries). The paper will discuss three major challenges that genealogical research has to cope with: a) the multiple cross-Eurasian human migrations during this period, due to which even small groups (tribes, clans, separate lineages) dispersed across thousands of kilometers in a short period of time; b) the complex multilayered, levirate- and sororate based networks of the marriages between the Chinggisid rulers and the military nobility, and c) the biased and partial nature of the available literary and non-literary sources from the various cultural and linguistic contexts. Could the usage of the digital humanities' approaches and technologies themselves solve these problems, and help scholars in reconstructing the missing links in the genealogical research? The presentation will show, that only through the mutual usage of three digital approaches – “big data” analysis, usage of the TEI or similar textual markup and network visual reconstruction (SNA) – can the set of problems mentioned above be solved at least partly. Simultaneously, the presentation will also argue that all of the above-mentioned approaches are useless for the historical research's purposes without a) the establishment of the text based (and not record-based) relational database and b) without any efficient cross-checking mechanism of the biographical data made by a human researcher.