

Mining Ministers (1572-1815)

Using Semi-structured Data for Historical Research

Histoinformatics, 10 November, 2014

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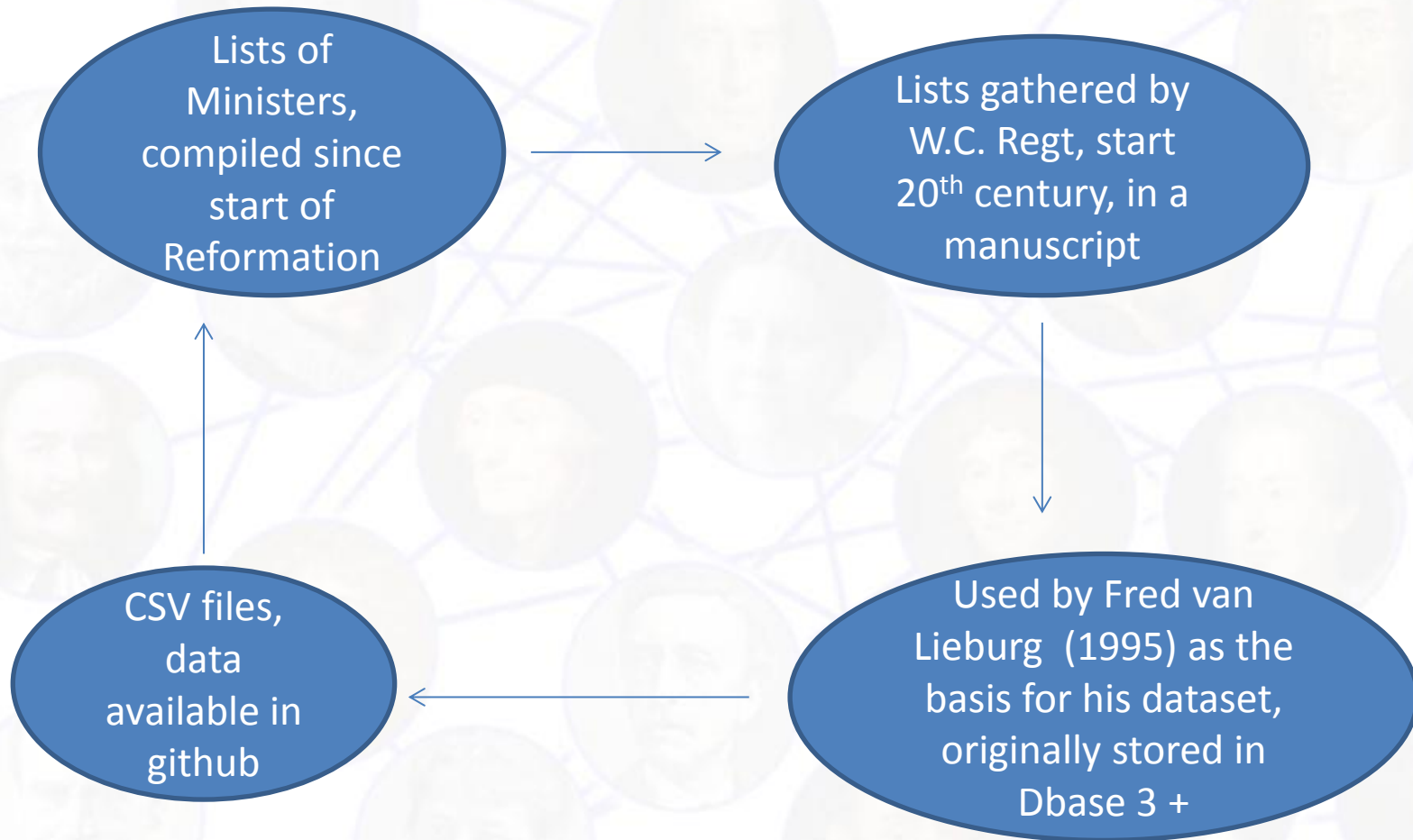
Main Issues

- Historical datasets from the past (eighties-noughties) usually not compatible with modern software
- Historical datasets from the past not open access
- Historical datasets from the past not able to communicate with the outside world (walled in knowledge)

Dutch Ministers 1572-1815

- At the center of any reformed community in the Netherlands
- Responsible for the religious well-being of their congregation
- Likely to be remembered in historical records
- Often well-documented
- 12405 men in the research period

The Data: a (nearly) complete set of ministers 1572-1815



Working with the Data

- CSV: Comma-separated values, stored as plain text files. Ensures interoperability of different formats. 3 star Open Data
- Normalizing dates
- Disambiguating place names \leq GeoNames (<http://www.geonames.org>), not a trivial task since many Dutch colonies were named after Dutch cities

Old and New Questions

- Old: Statistical Analyses: e.g. where were the ministers born? <= A good check to see if our conversion worked
- New: What can we say about the mobility of ministers through the centuries? Place of birth => Location first Job => Second Job, et cet. => Place of Death. <= Kilometres calculated with the help of GeoNames

Mobility of Dutch ministers 1575-1815

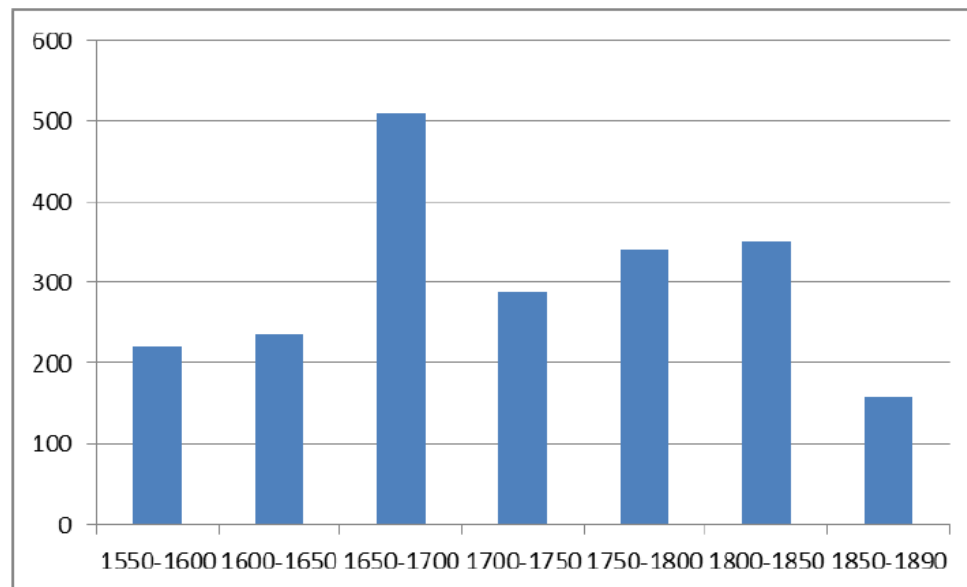


Fig. 3. Mobility in kilometres (distance moved between the known place of birth, work and death) per 50 years (based on dates of death of the ministers)

Conclusions

- Historical datasets from the past (eighties-noughties) usually not compatible with modern software <= **CSV**
- Historical datasets from the past not open Acces <= **Github; in the future: national institution responsible for hosting datasets**
- Historical datasets from the past not able to communicate with the outside world (walled in knowledge) <= **GeoNames; in the future: 5 Star Linked Open Data to enable more enhanced historical querying**