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Study of the History the Russian Empire in Contemporary American Historiography: New Trends

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Abstract

American Russian studies strongest of foreign schools Russian studies. Scientific school of the United States traditionally focuses significant attention the history of Imperial Russia. The problem of the empire has received particular relevance during the confrontation between the two systems during the Cold War. The collapse of the Soviet Union destroyed the established concepts of American historiography of Russian history. The crisis of the totalitarian and revisionist paradigms has led to new theories of the historical development of Russia. American historians have retained interest in the problem of the empire. In America's leading historical journals, significant proportion of research is devoted to the history of the Russian Empire from different periods. Greatest interest is caused the history of Russia in the late 19th - early 20th centuries. This article contains analysis of the emerging trends in American historiography of imperial Russia. The author explores the scientific concepts that have appeared in the American Russian studies from the beginning of 2000s. Analyzes the problems, which have become relevant in recent years. The author focuses on new trends the American Russian studies.

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1. Introduction

American-Russian studies are traditionally one of the strongest schools of foreign Russian studies. Disintegration of Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War gave rise to the American scientific community, the process of revising the established concepts and paradigms of the history of Russia. The collapse of the Soviet system removed ideologically factor accompanying research in Soviet and Russian studies, which allowed American experts to look at the object of research more objectively. The crisis of the totalitarian and revisionist paradigms led to the emergence in the early 90-ies of the methodological vacuum, which, admittedly, was filled quickly. American Russian studies met the turn of the millennium with a certain baggage of methods, techniques and concepts.

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On the wave of new trends study of the history of the imperial period Russia has become increasingly popular. In the Soviet era the direction of imperial studies were largely determined by the ideology of the Cold War. The most popular trend is the political story. Now accents has shifted significantly from the political side of the story in the history of culture (David-Fox, 2000). Rethinking of the Russian history of this period gave rise to a considerable number of publications on the history of imperial Russia, which allowed some of experts to talk about the emergence of a new scientific direction - the “new history of the empire” (Bolshakova, 2006).

2. New Trends in American Russian Studies

2.1. “The New History of the Empire”

In the context of imperial history several scientific trend has gained prominence, and came to the fore in contemporary works of American researchers of Russian history.

At the beginning of the 21st century, a prominent place in the historiography of the United States occupies “cultural study” (Potapova, 2012). It is there that a significant number of historians began to search for answers to questions about as which have become actual recently, and in the long time are traditional. Researchers saw in the culture, according to a Princeton University professor Laura Engelstein: “not a reflection of underlying social structures and power relations, but the opposite - the source of political styles and even force, leading the destinies of nations” (Engelstein, 2001).

The national question, the study of ethnic groups, history and culture of peoples of the empire also acquired a new angle. The dominant opinion is American researchers about the crisis of national identity, is experiencing a significant part of the population of the Empire, which ultimately became one of the reasons to expedite the death of the Russian Empire. So, Juliet Cadiot by analyzing statistical data, concluded that, until the revolution of 1917 the majority of the Russian population was still define their identity in reliance on ethnic and confessional and state characteristics (Cadiot, 2005).

David Saunders in general shared the view of J. Cadiot. Nevertheless, he emphasizes that reason that prevented the entire population of the Russian Empire to fully understand themselves as Russians, is covered in the inconsistent policy of the tsarist government (Saunders, 2000). Ronald Suny investigating the question of national identity formation indicates a deliberate policy of the central government, consciously focused on creating and maintaining a distinction between the different ethnic groups, emphasizing the superiority of Russian population of the empire and the inferiority of other ethnic groups (Sany, 2000). His thesis is about the absence of equality between the citizens of the empire, at least formally recorded in the empire-wide legislation, partly refutes Gregory Vitarbo, showing an example of the military reform D.A Milutin policy equalizing the rights and responsibilities the dominant Russian people and other peoples of the empire (Vitabo, 2007).

Thus, in the American Russian studies the opinion prevails about the absence of a clear national identity of most of the population of the empire. Russian Empire in the early 20th century was more of a conglomeration of subjects of the emperor of different religions, social classes, ethnic groups, than a nation in the fullest sense of the word, linked by a common cultural space and sense of common history. Installed on top of the idea of "Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationality" was largely artificial and could not bind all diverse population of the empire together.

In recent years, more and more American historians engaged in research is not so popular earlier problem of history periphery of the Russian Empire. Territory of the Russian province can no longer be attributed to «terra incognita» historical science. In the last two decades, there was a set analytical instruments and concepts: from the concept of "frontier" and "borderland" to the theory of "internal colonies" and “russification” used by the process of conquest and integration of the regions of Central Asia, Poland, Ukraine and the Volga-Kama region (Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History, 2013). To the fore began to leave the study of various regions of the empire, the history of relations between the center and the periphery, local government system and the control system a huge country (Evtuhov, 2012).

2.2. *The distribution of interest in history of the Russian Empire by historical periods*

Speaking about the historical preferences of American historians it should be noted that the focus of researchers has traditionally focused history of the late-imperial Russia. Russian historian A. Sal'nikova by analyzing publications beginning of the 2000s, been published in the leading American magazine (*American Historical Review*, *Journal of Modern History*, *Russian Review*, *Slavic Review*) comes to the conclusion undisputed leadership themes of the Russian history of the late 19th century and early 20th century, which share several times higher than the amount of the material dedicated to the period between the 11th century and the first half of the 19th century (Salnikova, 2003).

Necessary to notice that in the period following the disappearance from the world stage of the Soviet Union in the market of American historical journals, a number of new editions. Since 1993 in the Los Angeles became publishing the magazine «*Russian History*», 1996 in California began to be published «*Soviet and post-Soviet Review*», since 2000 a magazine is published “*Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*” Bloomington (Olegina, 2003).

Analysis of the degree of scrutiny of the different periods of Russian history, American researchers for materials, published in the young American journal “*Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*”, confirms the situation with a significant predominance of publications about the problems later-imperial Russia. Magazine “*Kritika*” coeval of the 21st century, that allows to consider it analysis of the most indicative for the identification of new trends in American historiography. Magazine is interesting not only for its dedication to the critical study of Russian and Eurasian history and culture, that it is clear from the name itself, but also the fact that in its pages regularly unfolding debate and discussed various issues of Russian Studies.

After analyzing the issues of the magazine “*Kritika*” from 2000 to the 2014, we can conclude the following: the period of late-imperial Russia (late 19th-early 20th centuries) remains steady leadership in the publications of the authors “*Kritika*”, its noticeably inferior publication for other periods of Russian history. The most noticeable sustained interest to the problems the Russian history of the first half of the 19th century (“pre-reform Russia”), the period of the Mongol invasion of Russia, the period of enlightened absolutism. Although the magazine claims that thirty years ago the history of the Russian Empire was more popular than it is today (David-Fox, 2000), however, it must be reiterated that in the last decade, the number of published works on this topic consistently higher than in other periods of national history.

The interest in this period of Russian history is largely due to the desire of historians, both in Russia and overseas, to link together two tremendous milestones in the history of the Russian state. “*The New History of the Empire*” with its desire reconsider heritage of Soviet studies, smooth the kinks in the approaches and methods to historical writing set itself the goal identify the features of continuity between pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary Russia all spheres of life society (politics, economics, culture, and so on), and not only fundamental changes have taken place, which helps to better understand the Russian history of the 20th century (Olegina, 2003).

Reaction to this was the emergence of the concept of “transition”, which detailed account a professor at New York University's S. Cohen in his article “*Study of Russia without Russia: the collapse of the American post-sovietology*” (Cohen, 2003). The main idea of the concept of transition is the proposition that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia is slowly but surely moving towards reform is a process of "transition from communism to capitalism with the free market and democracy" (Cohen, 2003). This phenomenon is certainly positive in nature and applies to the entire history of the Russian state, as in the past, present and future. Dominant role in this process is given to civil society, as the main carrier of progressive ideas. The concept of transition is not widespread in American historiography of Russian imperial period.

3. Conclusion

Formed in the postwar years, the direction of the American historical thought is studying the history of Russia and the Soviet Union in the early 90s of the 20th century has received a serious shock, which, however, failed to

go through. Let with the losses. Occurred crisis has created new trends in the American Russian studies. Over the past decade, American historiography has enriched the worldwide body of knowledge with new concepts in the history of culture, politics, national identity, religious tolerance, and the like. A New History of the Empire allowed to take another look at the familiar problems. Embarked on objectivity. To date, this campaign to study the history of imperial Russia is dominant among American researchers of Russian history.

The emergence of new historical journals to accelerate the exchange of knowledge between scientists in different countries of the world. 21st century technology, especially the mass distribution on the Internet, enable the integration of into the world scientific space researchers from different countries and continents. It promotes the prompt production of new knowledge, the emergence of dialogue between previously warring scientific communities. In history remains ever less blind spots. Historical science is becoming more ideologically-free from heritage of the past. Perhaps this is the main achievement of the historians of recent decades.

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