Scientific historical and archeological discoveries as an updating factor of teaching the history of Central Asia in the institutes of higher education of Kazakhstan

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Abstract

The article deals with actual issues of the history of Central Asia. In the development of scientific concepts in this article, one thing in common can be defined: was there a civilization in the steppes of Eurasia and if there is a need to accept the nomadic world as part of the civilization of the Eurasian steppes? Recently, among the scientists of the former Soviet Union a new methodological approach has been developed which is radically different from the Soviet historiography to the study of the history of a distinctive culture of the Saka tribes. The given tribes were, more or less, strong unified, as a very harmonious coexistence (prototype of the government), and a special attention is paid to the implementation of scientific materials of unique archeological discoveries and written texts, considered as artifacts of material culture of the Saka tribes. These facts enable the emergence of new scientific development.

At the present an Ethnic History of the Saks Based on such scientific concepts, is stated as the story of Turks (prototype of Turks). At present, along with this issue, the most vulnerable subject, requiring a proper attention from historians, is refutation of established ideological concepts of the Soviet era on the Mongol-Tatar invasion. Increasingly, scientists from Central Asia are wondering whether to call the campaign the Mongol-Tatar as invasion, where also the problem of irrigation system development, as the distinctive sign of prospering culture of the settlement is considered? In answering these questions, in the history of Central Asia, a new vision of the historical events that gave rise to a new understanding of history teaching, was formed. The above-mentioned concepts, as well as the accession of Kazakhstan to the Bologna process has given a new impetus to the improvement of the content of education and training standards in higher education in Kazakhstan.

Keywords: Central Asia, content of history, the civilization of the nomads of the Eurasian steppes, the Bologna process;

1. Introduction

At the present time, the changes are taking place not only in the political sphere of Central Asia, but also in the historical science and teaching history. To this day, the history of Central Asian countries has been presented and written by Russian scientists, because this region was under the colonial rule of Russia. Even the scientists, who wanted to describe only a certain historical event, were adherents of ideological and class worldviews. The teaching history in the institutes of higher education and secondary schools was confined to ideological concepts. The above-mentioned developments in the countries of Central Asia have led to methodological stagnation in the study of history.

Having rejected a class ideology, Central Asian states focus on the civilizational theory in the study of their history and teaching it and look for new shapes forms in the methodological and theoretical principles of history. Kazakhstan’s accession to the Bologna process can be attributed to it, and it resulted in the appearance of admissible opportunities for development of the education system. Archeology as a hierophant of the new discoveries plays a major role in historical science and in its study. Written sources of paucity and the lack of information results in...
difficulties in teaching the ancient and medieval history of Central Asia. In these cases, history is based only on the archaeological finds. Because such finds helped to reproduce the history of the ancient Greece and Rome, Egyptian civilization of the age of the Pharaohs, and for the history of Central Asia, archeological finds can help to restore the history of the Saks’ culture and settled civilization, as well as the civilization of the nomads of the Eurasian steppes.

2. “Saks issue” as an example of the development of historical thought in contemporary Central Asia and its impact on the formation of a new methodology of teaching history in the region.

Up to the present time, research scientists of the history of Central Asia have adhered to an opinion that the autochthonous population of these territories was “barbarians”. For example, it was written about the Sak nomads “they were in a state of constant struggle with settled farmers, swept away everything on their way and turned blooming oasis into dead deserts”. (Russia, full geographic description of our fatherland. Turkestan. SPb. Vol.19. 1913). In this scenario, the opinion among scholars, the question about the steppe civilization of Saks could seem to be irrelevant. But the question of the presence or absence of civilization is important in this case, because the Saks civilization should be seen as a kind of the model of culture. Not only the understanding and teaching the ancient and medieval history of the population of Central Asia, but also the issue of the civilization of the nomads of Eurasian steppes depended on the solution of this question.

“The Saks issue”, the issue of the origin of the Saks’ ethnos and culture, has been considered as a kind of nerve center in the subsystem of the archeology of Central Asia. The Saks is the name of the nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes who lived on the territory of Central Asia and Kazakhstan from the millennium BC to the first centuries AD judging by written sources. The excellent results of archaeological excavations contributed to the actualization of the problem. During the excavation of 1969-1970, a group of Kazakh scientists led by K. Akishev discovered a unique archeological complex in Issyk burial sepulcre. The remains of a Sak warrior in gold clothes were found in the burial ground. In the burial chamber of Issyk sepulcre, over four thousand gold objects, an iron sword and dagger, a bronze mirror, 31 clay, metal and wooden vessels, as well as a silver spoon, a wooden ladle and 26 beads of carnelian and paste were found (Amanjolov, 1996) near the warrior. The treasures from the Issyk burial aroused a great interest and became widely known immediately after the find. Different opinions were offered about the ethnicity of the Saks. Many scholars began to talk about the Iran-speaking origin of Saks tribes, or rather, to the North Iranian (eastern Iranian) Saks tribes. The written sources of ancient authors were given as proofs. However, after the proclamation of independence in Central Asian countries, the historical science holds an opinion that the Saks were the ancestors of the modern Turkic peoples inhabiting Central Asia and Kazakhstan. A silver bowl with an inscription found in the burial chamber of the Sak warrior together with the other things being the most ancient written monuments in the territory of Central Asia says in favor of this opinion. The existence of the written language ranges the civilization of the Saks nomads with the societies of Eurasia contemporary with it. The inscription on the front face of the silver bowl is written in the ancient Turkic language with the use of runic alphabet of Orchono-Yenisei version and consists of 26 characters. A. Amanjolov, a specialist in Turkic philology, names the inscription proto-Turkic and runic-like. The scientist suggests reading it from right to left and advances the following translation: “big brother, (this) hearth for you. The stranger, kneel down! (Let) the generation has food” (Amanjolov, 1996). Referring to the written records of such contents, it is possible to state the Turkic origin of the Sak tribes with certainty. The incorrect interpretation of the “Saks issue” by the Soviet historiography is just one example of the misrepresented and counterfeited history of the people of Central Asia.

3. New concepts of teaching the medieval history of Central Asia

Mongol-Tatar campaigns and the formation of the empire that followed the campaigns played a huge role in the history of Central Asia: the nomads’ sway lasted for almost two and a half centuries and the empire, formed during that time, was able to impose a substantial print or have some impact on the fate of the current Central Asian states. The historians of the Soviet period focused on the destruction of the achievements of the civilization, which the Mongols caused in the conquered countries. Orientalist Academician V.V. Bartold objects to the supporters of this concept. He writes, “Despite the devastation caused by the Mongols, the first time the existence of the Mongol Empire was a period of economic and cultural development of all areas that could benefit from the consequences of the widespread development of caravan trade and closer communication between the western and eastern Asia” (Bartold, 1968). The current historical science of the Central Asian countries adheres to this concept. Besides these changes for the better, Genghis Khan implemented a very important military decimal reform. Along with keeping the old organization of society on the basis of kinship, i.e. by tribes and families, all the people who were able to soldiery (all the Mongols were considered to be eternally liable to call-up on the principle that “there is no Mongolian population, but there is a Mongolian army”) were divided into “tma”, each of whom consisted of 10 thousand horsemen and were led by the nearest relatives of Khan and the most loyal nobles-temniks (generals) led thousands of warriors, sotniks (centurions) led hundreds of them, desyatniks (foremen) were at the head of ten soldiers. This simple decimal military structure known to many peoples in the early stages of the development of the statehood created favorable possibilities to suppress their own people and for aggressive campaigns against neighbors. In addition, being based on rigid military discipline it allowed overcoming the separatist ambitions of tribal chiefs, and in the case of successful campaigns and capture large war booty it helped increase the authority of
the main leader – Khan, turning the power into despotic one, the deifying of his personality. In order to strengthen his power and suppress recalcitrants, Genghis Khan created the security corps of ten thousand, Khan’s bodyguards, consisting of highly trusted and carefully selected individuals - the sons of the ruling military-feudal and bureaucratic aristocracy.

4. Was the Central Asian the hotbed of settled civilization?

Irrigation and spraying is a significant fact proving that the settled culture existed in Central Asian steppes in the Middle Ages. There exists only one way to lift the veil over the history of the oases – to explore, preserve, study and teach. There is no doubt that a monument is associated with the surrounding landscape and it should not be studied in isolation. Therefore, the preservation of the surrounding area (maximally possible in a spatial aspect) is the most important part of the researchers’ activities. One such fields of research, which requires a comprehensive study, is irrigation, in this case the irrigation of the oases of Central Asia. The interfluve between the Amudarya and Syrdarya takes a special place in Central Asia. This raises the question whether the natural environment created by the interfluves between the Amudarya and Syrdarya rivers is that positive factor due to which the civilization came into existence. In the books on world history, the history of Central Asia and Kazakhstan has been associated with the nomadic way of life. Therefore, the existence of civilization was out of the question. However, the historians of Central Asia have found and keep finding a lot of evidence of the existence of cities and towns. Considering the history of the ancient world, we face with the fact that civilization originated in interfluves in the first place. In order to confirm or refute this thesis, it is also necessary to consider other independent territories where the environment of the analogous type existed, in which a civilization could have emerged. Taking the valley of the Tigris and Euphrates as an example, we faced with the same environmental conditions: steppe, dry climate, sufficient water supply and fertile land. Having compared all this, we can say quite clearly that there arose the sought-for civilization, or to be more precise, a river civilization (Omarov, 2002). The Amu Darya and Syr Darya valleys were the places where cities and irrigation canals were built, the local people knew the basics of astronomy and mathematics. So should compare not the individual parts of a comprehensive whole, but the various systems and the entire societies, existing independently of each other. Only the appearance of similar societies under the equal conditions may be evidence that the theory of environment really explains the genesis of civilizations, as it can be seen on the example of the river area of human environment. Archaeologist K.A.Akishev’s words confirm the importance of cities located on the banks of the rivers, “The Syrdarya has been a hotbed of civilization for centuries” (Akishev, Baipakov and Yerzakovich, 1972).

“Irrigation – the city” interconnection is the problem undeveloped for the territory of Central Asia and Kazakhstan. The archaeological and topographical survey of the towns situated along the Syr Darya also found a relationship between irrigation and the development of the cities and settlements in the area. High temperatures in the vegetation period along with a very limited amount of precipitation caused the need for this artificial irrigation in agriculture. The numerous traces of planning fields around the ruins of more than 60 villages and towns situated on the remains of dry creeks and channels are the evidence. The study of them shows a complex way of the development of irrigation from estuary irrigation through the regulation of water sources with the use of bordering old channels to highly developed flood irrigation.

The region is also interesting with a water system, which are galleries stretching underground for long distances, mostly from the foothills, and repeating the slope. The brick facing of the tunnels precludes filtration, and evaporation does not occur either. Such systems of the transportation of water can be found in the deserts of Central Asia, Arabia and North Africa. The only difference is in their names: they are called Kyarizes in Central Asia, -foggars in the Sahara. The existence of such constructions in the city of Sauran (a medieval city in Kazakhstan) is much said about in written sources. Yet, scientists E.I. Ageeva and G.I. Patsevich did not find the remains of irrigation works during the archeological research in the site of the ancient settlement of Sauran. They assumed that the initial bed of the Syr Darya used to be nearer to the town than at present, and the latter got water from the river through a channel. However, in the XVI century it was necessary to resort to the construction of Kyarizes for the town’s water supply because of the change of the riverbed. The remains of Kyarizes were found only in 1969 (Ageeva and Patsevich, 1958) when the settlement of Sauran and its neighborhood were being observed with vertical aerial photography. The Kyarizes were observed during visual examination from an aircraft. From a height of 1600 m they looked like chains of dark round spots, stretching along the northern outskirts of Sauran. As a result of decoding the received aerial photos and ground surveys, it was noted that the source of one of the kyarizes began in the site of the settlement of Mir-tobe, located near Saurane. The diameters of the wells are about 5 m, and the distance between them is 15 meters According to Vasifi, kyarizes were donated to the city by Mir-Arab, the representative of the local clergy in the XVI century. Vasifi reported that the source of the kyarizes was at a distance of a farsakh from Sauran. Here, a fortress was built, the residents of which were guarding a well of 200 Gyazes (Persian measure of length) deep, and the column of water in the well reached 150 Gyazes. The water was raised to the surface with the chigir (a water-lifting device in the form of a wheel with buckets or a drum with a rope equipped with dippers). At the root of a kyariz, a reservoir was built. There was a charbak, an estate with gardens, vineyards and farm buildings. Approximately 200 Indian slaves worked on the construction of the wells (MIIKh 1969). According to Vasifi the works were conducted in appalling conditions, “It so happened that the air in the well spoiled and it as impossible to work. Then a small ditch-size passage was dug to its depth on one side of the well,
and a kind of hose made of leather was put through the passage. The head of the hose was connected with forge bellows and air was pumped, and the diggers were working. They were toiling with two pumpkins tied to their hips on not to drown if the water spurted suddenly”(Akishev and Baipakov, 1973).

5. The update of the content and implementation of innovation methods in teaching the history of Central Asia in the institutes of higher education of Kazakhstan

Central Asian countries are paying great attention to higher education and know that it plays a key role in the processes defining the basic parameters of the society. It means that the institutes of higher education function as regulators of the formation of subjects of social structures. These functions are defined in the following steps. First, the institutes are responsible for the dissemination of knowledge and skills from generation to generation, without which the society clearly cannot sustain itself and progress. Second, the institutes are largely engaged in science, third, they provide the society with professionals of a certain level, without whom the national economy and culture cannot operate, order and security cannot be ensured, etc. Fourth, the elite of society in politics, economy, science, culture is trained in the institutions, the fortune of the nation is directly determined by how and who are trained as the elite. Fifth, the institutes contribute significantly to the washing out of social barriers in the society: higher education is usually the prerequisite for improving the social status, vertical movement from one social class to another.

At the end of the twentieth century, the intellectuals of the United States “were holding various endless debates about what should be studied or what should be taught. Some of them spoke in favor of the canon of western classics, while others insisted on the inclusion of topics and objects taken from different cultures” (Theodore J. Marchese, 1997). The same processes are currently actual for the institutions of higher education of Kazakhstan. Yet, there are differences in the content of the problem. After gaining independence, the humanities in the institutes and universities of Kazakhstan have set the task to exempt the content of the history from Soviet postulates based on class ideology and to create the content based on universal principles. Basing on the educational policy of the state, the institutes of higher education have been moving to the model of educating adopted in the leading universities of the world. Taking into account the importance of the issue about the recent past, the countries of Central Asia, more specially, Kazakhstan, raises the question of “the adjustment” the system of learning process in the institutes of higher education to the principles of the Bologna process and on March, 11 2010 the Committee of the Ministers of Education of the Bologna process (46 countries) made a decision about the accession of Kazakhstan to the Bologna process. The Law “On Education” of the Republic of Kazakhstan was adopted on the basis of the principles of the Bologna process. The goal of Kazakhstan’s participation in this process is enlargement of the access to European education, the further improvement of the quality of education and increasing the mobility of students and staff through the adoption of a comparable system of the stages of higher education, using a system of credits, issuing European Diploma Supplement to the graduates of the universities of Kazakhstan (Law “On Education” of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2010).

To implement this programmed, the centers for training of doctors (PhD) in partnership with leading foreign universities with accredited doctoral programs were established in 5 universities of Kazakhstan, and annually 3 thousand citizens of Kazakhstan will be sent to the best universities of Eastern Europe and the world for training on programmed of higher professional education through “Bolashak” programmed. It is possible to single out one of the principles of the Bologna process, which encourages the election of courses, so the teachers have to compete and make their courses attractive for a student, a master and a doctoral candidate (PhD). The familiarization with their research results contributes to it. (G.D. Zakirova, M.N. Narenova, T.I. Kenshinbay, G.D. Usenbaeva, 2009)

6. Conclusion

The collapse of the Soviet Union opened new opportunities and priorities for the development and improvement of the cultural and spiritual aspect for the Central Asian states emerged in the post-Soviet territory, including the Republic of Kazakhstan. The Republic of Kazakhstan in reforming its educational policy adheres to the models of education of the leading countries of the world such as the USA, Canada and the UK. Kazakhstan’s accession to the Bologna process facilitated the entry of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the common European educational space. To implement the recommendations of the Bologna system, Kazakhstan went on to a three-stage university education system. The principles of the educational system of Kazakhstan are fulfillment of the requirements for education taking into consideration the achievements of scientific and technological progress and international standards, the continuous improvement of the educational process in the light of the results of monitoring. Primarily, these changes are associated with teaching history. Because, presenting the content of their histories, the histories of the independent Central Asian countries are trying to guard against unnecessary ideologies methodology of the Soviet society and enrich with the contents of the history with new concepts based on archaeological finds. Nowadays this issue is affecting the actual concept of the nomadic civilization of the Eurasian steppes. This understanding of history and historical discoveries are safely introduced in the educational process. Innovative technology and education resources are successfully used in these areas of science.
References


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