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Ancient history education in Turkey and ancient east-west concepts in ancient historiography
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Abstract

God centered outlook on human of Medieval Age in Europe has given way to human centered humanistic view since the XIV th century along with Renaissance. Developments in scientific understanding began to emerge by this outlook. History is the scientific field which was affected by these developments. These developments aroused interest and admiration to Ancient Greek and Roman Civilizations and expedited the studies on history. When the studies focused on this direction, the concept of Ancient History emerged as a result of departmentalization of History science in the XIX th century and this concept was identified with history of Greece and Rome. By this sense, Greece and Rome were acknowledged and admired more. But archaeological excavations conducted in Middle East since the XVIII th century revealed Ancient East concept at the beginning of XX th century. Are these concepts sufficient to comprehend Ancient World? Or, should new concepts comprising other regions of the World be formed?

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1. Ancient History and Its Historiography

“Ancient history is never anything other than and never should be anything other than a part of one, universal history; and both ancient and modern historians ought never forget that” Edward Meyer (Bengtson, 1971).

Today, while it is discussed whether History studies are of the branches of science or not, it can be said that there has been some developments in terms of methods of work and issues since the XIX th Century.

Historians of the XIXth century accepted the date of the first Olympic Games as 476 BC. However in the beginning of the XIX th Century Mesopotamian civilizations and their connection with the roots of Greek-Roman civilizations were discovered and 3000 BC was accepted as the beginning of Ancient History, the end of Ancient History was accepted as the fall of the Western Roman Empire. The dates that follow the ancient history were taken into account according to interest of Europe.

This region from Adriatic to Indus, which was the habitat of Greek and Roman civilizations, often remained limited with the Rome's eastern border the Caucasus. Perception of the ancient world limited to the geographical and cultural boundaries of Europe seems to be essential in determining the current borders. At the same time this limitation shows that the foundations of contemporary European civilization began to be shaped thousands of years ago in ancient time.

2. Historiography from Ottoman Empire to Republic of Turkey

Europe which has dominated political world since the XIX th Century shows its effect on cultural aspects today. Selim III, who ascended the throne in 1789 at the same time with the French Revolution, gave the first signal of Westernization with the foundation of Nizam-i-Jadid Army. Then in the reign of Mahmut II in 1839, with the Tanzimat Edict, reforms were initiated in the Western sense. Westernization and constitutional studies in 1876 revealed important steps towards political change. Correspondingly to these developments European sympathizers called coterie of the Young Turks intellectuals has emerged in the world of culture.

With the establishment of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey in 23 April 1920 and the proclamation of the Republic in 29 October 1923, Turkey was reborn like a phoenix bird peeling off the ashes from the Ottoman Empire. In political terms, Republic of Turkey fighting for independence against the Western States made many breakthrough drawing samples of Western values. One of the most important pillars of this change has been at the point of establishing the historiography wanting to hold deep-rooted connection to the past and future of the state. Undoubtedly, the domestic and foreign authors who ignited studies on this subject had the perspective of insulting the Turks.

Afet İnan, tells that Atatürk started the project of "Turkish History Thesis” after she had shared the information showing Turks from yellow race and describing them as barbarians in geography textbooks in the French High School in Turkey in 1928. Understanding of history at the early years of Turkish Republic mainly concentrate on the origins of Turkish race. Because of the Europeans who dominated the world formed a classification system that shows Indo-European white race as the master race. In Turkey, according to the classification in geography course books, the first group was the white race; second group was the yellow race. The black race was the third group. Turks, who were shown as barbarians, were in the same group with the Mongols and Chinese (İnan, 1944).

Ottoman intellectual’s perspective was not much more different than this. One of them is the evaluation of Abdurahman Şereff who served as the state's official chronicler until the abolition of the sultanate in 1922. He stated that “Turks did not leave any material culture works since they do not have the ability to leave the works of civilizations. That’s why they were doomed to China in the east and Islamic civilization in the west.” (Yücel, 1944).

As a reaction to this kind of thinking, Atatürk focused on Turks role in World domination from 1929. He launched a new era of historical research by having new books brought in 1930, and aroused a great interest in Turkish History among the statesmen and scientists.

3. Atatürk and the Turkish History Thesis

The Turkish people who rose again like a phoenix from the ashes of Ottoman Empire after the wars of Independence and World War I were not going to question their position in the world. However, Mustafa Kemal attracted attention at the battles of Canakkale was distinguished as a leader during the transition term from the
empire to the republic.

Although he preferred the state's science policy as a national education policy returning to the essence of people since the establishment of the Republic on 29 October 1923, over the time, he supported a secular science policy integrated with the world. One of the most important steps of these policies was to reveal the historical identity of the Turkish nation to move towards modern civilization with the nation provided confidence. As well as many innovations made in this regard, from 1928 a series of activities like the establishment of Turkish Historical Society and the Turkish Language Institution and the opening of the Faculty of Language, History and Geography in order to support “History thesis considering Central Asia as a source and current Turkey as the main homeland.” as in the words of H. Ali Yücel (Yücel, 1944) and ‘‘Sun Language Theory’’ were carried out (İnan, 1944).

It couldn’t be enough to open these institutions. Many young who would serve in these institutions were sent abroad for the education in the fields of History, Language, and Archeology. Initially, national history overview was put as a response to the west, eventually joint works were conducted with the foreign scientists who received training from abroad and working in the country.

4. Ancient History and Archaeology Studies in Turkey

Many archaeological researches and excavations in the country have revealed many unknown in Anatolian history. Hundreds of excavation camps and museums were established in a ninety year of period. A portion of the works which were plundered and carried abroad by the western researches whether illegally or by agreements was brought back into the country. However, it is still a fact that the presence of findings of Turkey in the foreign countries which were found during the excavations by treasure hunters.

All of these activities has accelerated the integration of Ancient historians and archaeologists with ‘‘Western Thought’’ more than the other scientific fields. On the other hand, this process of working together has led to more recognition and promotion of our country by foreigners. Çatalhöyük, Göbekli Tepe, and Boğazköy are some of them. After the establishment of the Turkish History Investigation Society in 1931, archaeological surveys and excavations were initiated in 1933. Şevket Aziz Kansu, Hamit Zubeyr Koşay and Remzi Oğuz Arık made a priority in these activities, the first 10 years of these studies had more national character, and then by the arrival of German Jews as refugees during the World War II these researches were conducted in cooperation with these German Researchers and other foreigners. As a result of this cooperation these researches had gain a western character. Admittedly this change occurred by the effect of scientists sent to the West for education .

However, despite these positive developments, some problems have occurred in our Ancient historiography in recent years, such as other social sciences. There are 180 universities in Turkey in early 2014. But it is useless to have the same school curriculum within all the university departments as secondary and high schools of Ministry of Education. And it is unrecoverable to found every field of science departments at the universities in Turkey and in the other countries as well.

In the world’s developed countries each university distinguish in a different science field and in different parts of the world. If a Philosophy department is successful in a university for example History is prominent in the other university, other universities have major science departments like this. While a university focuses on Africa in the field of social sciences, another university concentrates its researches on Asia. This situation is changing even according to the country. While Anthropology goes forward in a country, Philosophy is in another one. If it is targeted to go forward in all fields of science in all 180 universities, these fields are going to be conducted superficially.

Therefore, the great universities in our country, such as Istanbul and Ankara can work by opening of the institutes about every region of the world. However, if İstanbul University could study on the subjects of history, archaeology, geography, sociology, literature and language issues of Europe, Ankara University on America, Trakya University on the Balkans, Kaşkas University which is in Kars on Caucasia, Erzurum Atatürk University on Central Asia, Çukurova University on Eastern Mediterranean, Dicle University on Iran and Harran University on Mesopotamia, Selçuk University on Anatolia, Iran and Turkmenistan, Antalya Akdeniz University on Mediterranean region it would be easier to produce joint projects between different discipline of these universities.

Trying to create a common curriculum in all universities like secondary education in our country makes the subjects superficial and unproductive. Ancient studies are also conducted in our country in this way.

5. Understanding of Ancient History and Historiography in Turkey
It can be said that there is still an understanding of ancient concept described with the XIX th century Greek and Roman world’s boundaries in Ancient Historiography. One of the discussions and the problems on this issue is to try to see the understanding of civilized in the west and barbarians in the east which took Aegean world the center in ancient times in the discipline of history. Certainly every man sees himself in the center. The Babylonians saw the Babylonia as the center of the world, while the borders of the easterners and westerners were Euphrates. For the ancient Greeks, it was the Aegean Sea. The west of this sea was the West; the east of it was the East. Already the meaning of Anatolia comes from the ancient Greek language the “direction where the sun rises” which means “Anatolia”. While the Romans also saw their city of Rome as the center, they called the east of the city as Orient in the East and the west of it as the Occident. They separated the empire as east and west from Illyria (Dalmatian Adriatic environment). East Romans (Byzantium) and Ottomans would see İstanbul as the center. Boundaries of the East and the West were constituted by the straits for them. Right now, this area is our borders that we perceive as the west-east.

In the Old West and Old East discrimination in Ancient historiography; the area in the old west historiography is rather ancient Italy, Greece and Western Anatolia which is Greek and Roman world; and in the old East the area is Tigris and Euphrates River Basin known as Mesopotamia and their subjects of study are the cultures of these regions. While the civilizations like Hittite, Urartu, Phrygia and Lydia which were located in the middle of this area in Anatolia are considered in the Ancient East, Greek and Roman civilizations in the same geography are seen in the Ancient West. It is expected from the experts who work on Ancient History to focus on these areas either in West or East.

However especially like in Central Anatolian mounds the findings of Hittite, Phrygia, Lydia, Persia and Urartu which are considered as Eastern could intertwine with Greece and Roman thought as Western. It is difficult to define these cultures without studying both worlds comparatively. Thus, an archaeologist working only Classical period can say Hittite painted pottery as Greek or on the contrary, the one working Hittite pottery may say otherwise, In addition it is expected from Ancient History experts to work only on ancient languages like a philologist. However, at this point it is faced with the question of on which old language used in Anatolia should be worked. From which of the languages? Hittite, Luwian, the Hurrian, the Urartian, Greek, Latin etc.? Certainly he should prefer the one used in the study area. The desire to learn the pottery and architecture of Hittite for a researcher is very normal if s/he is conducting the research in a Hittite area. It should not be a priority to want to study Urartu or Mesopotamian art for a researcher of a Hittite region (Akurgal, 1988, Bahar, 2010).

6. Conclusions

As a result; currently, it can be said that our outlook on the world and historiography is based on that of Europeans, but we limit to Aegean world which separates Greek and Barbarians with the limits set by Herodotus on Ancient Historiography. Moreover, in his historiography there are large lectures from Scythia, Ethiopia and India which are the world of Barbarians (Herodotus, I.)

Certainly, such a Eurocentric perspective will lead the civilizations in another world outside the civilization descendants of Europe or Greek and Roman to remain in darkness. But it should be noted that world civilization is a common product of all people.

Is not the reflections of this partnership that is being known the presence of people in Ethiopia in the east of the Central Africa, approximately 3.5 million years ago, stepping towards to technology with the earliest stone tools again in this area of Oldowia in Tanzania, emergence of writing in Mesopotamia, rice and gunpowder in China, wheat in Palestine, the first temple in Urfa Göbekli Tepe in Turkey and the first city in Çatalhöyük and the products such as maize, tomato and potato in America?.

In my opinion that it should be passed on History and Ancient Historiography with an understanding of science approaching multi-centered cultures instead of a single-center and single-subject studies, considering human as human in all over the world and based on the interaction between cultures, comparing culture from past to future vertically and with its neighbors horizontally.

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