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LATE ANTIQUITY: NEW METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES
TO TRANSITIONAL HISTORICAL ERA

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Abstract

The article analyzes the problem of modern methodological approaches to the first inter-civilization transitional era in Europe history – Late Antiquity. During the 60-ies of the twentieth century the traditional approach about the decline and the fall of Rome turned out to be exhausted. Since 70th, due to the P. Brown's works and the works of British school a new understanding of this historical period developed as a self-sufficient subcivilization the essence of which was the gradual transformation of complex processes within the dynamic model «continuity–discontinuity». A wide field of research was opened. However, there is a number of problems still, in particular, the issue about the territorial and chronological framework. Besides, the attitude to this concept is more restrained in European historiography. Its methodological aspects are not emphasized actually. There is no an independent school of Late Antiquity study in Russia – the experts operate either in the field of antiquity, or in the field of Byzantine studies.

Key words: Late Antiquity; Middle Ages; The Roman Empire; Early Byzantium; historiography; historical science; transitivity; historical school.

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ПОЗДНЯЯ АНТИЧНОСТЬ: НОВЫЕ МЕТОДОЛОГИЧЕСКИЕ
ПОДХОДЫ К ПЕРЕХОДНОЙ ИСТОРИЧЕСКОЙ ЭПОХЕ

Nowadays Late Antiquity in its various manifestations is one of the most urgent issues discussed in historical literature.

In recent decades the tendency developed in foreign historiography to regard this period as an independent epoch – «the epoch of Late Antiquity» (Late Antiquity, Post-classical world). This era, is revealed more and more as a separate subcivilization, which had a complex interaction of various elements within the «continuity–discontinuity» system [10; 4; 5; 6; 7; 2; 3], and transitivity acts as almost the main structure-forming element.

The dynamic model of «continuity–discontinuity» in practice leads to the combination and the intertwining of many different factors of historical process both at the macro level (major social processes), and on the micro level (the mentality of an individual). The concept of «Late Antiquity» removes the usual barriers and distinctions between the study of ages and nations, which appeared to be completely different, not suitable even for historical and comparative analysis.

The concept became quite well-known in our country, perhaps, since the beginning of the XXI-st

century, but the period of its development and European recognition accounts for 1970-80-ies, when the change of historical paradigms took place in scientific practice of only one generation of historians. During this period there was a real «explosion» in historical science concerning the study of late antiquity [12]. Such interest of researchers in this era is not an accidental one. This period is a very difficult time as such, the era of transition from one civilization (classical antique) to the other (the Medieval civilization of the West and East Christian civilization), the era of radical changes and transformations in all spheres of society life. This is a very difficult period, important in terms of understanding the mechanisms of transformation of one local area to another civilization (the others).

The appearance of Late Antiquity concept was conditioned by several factors. First of all, this theory was in some way a kind of response, the reaction to the conservatism of traditional British historiography. Another powerful factor that prepared the emergence of a new concept is the development of the historical science. The concept of Late Antiquity appeared during the new stage of global humanitarian

knowledge development and became the result of contradiction sharpening between the adherents of legal and institutional history, on the one hand, and the supporters of more general issues of society culture on the other. The concept of Late Antiquity, as N.A. Selunskaya rightly notes, was originally directed against the traditional study of mostly legal and institutional history, against the inertia of academic science [10].

The traditional approaches to late antiquity as to the decline and fall of Rome were fully and finally completed in 1960. The last major summarizing work written by A.H.M. Jones was published in 1964 [9].

But in 1971 some kind of Late Antiquity idea «manifesto» was published – «The World of Late Antiquity» by Peter Brown [6]. Thus, the methodological «revolution» occurred almost simultaneously. The «decline and fall» concept of ancient society was replaced by an alternative view about the gradual transformation non-catastrophic transformation of ancient culture and the origin and formation of a new civilization by the «reformation» of individual segments and whole array clusters. However, the problem of nature and world essence determination that existed within the vast area of the Mediterranean world since the crisis of the III-rd century until the Arab invasion in the VII-th century remains an open one in addition to its strict transitivity.

The concept of Late Antiquity is largely the consequence of a new approach to the selection of priority areas of research and the arsenal of sources. Institutional history, economic and social changes, the written sources that were more traditional themes of academic studies, were replaced by an interest in the visual sources, the history of religion and culture, everyday life and mentality; The interest in the «human dimension», to gender issues increased significantly. The factor of archaeological researches also increased, especially in certain regions of the early Byzantine world (Palestine, Asia Minor, Egypt, and the Balkans).

However, as N.A. Selunskaya rightly pointed out, the view is created that the concept took shape and became a recognized historiographical idea in Anglo-American historiography mainly due to the work of one scientist. Just as J. Huizinga, in fact, created a special image of The Late Middle Ages on his own, the success of Late Antiquity idea was provided by Peter Brown. Of course, it is not a sole author of the concept: this term existed in the scientific use before him. But the book «The world of Late Antiquity, A.D. 150-750» had a particularly wide resonance.

Indeed, the concept of Late Antiquity originated as the product of the Oxford university culture development, and as the reaction to the conservatism of its traditions. But over time its value became much wider. Today, the popularity of the concept is mainly

associated with the American university practice and is started to be perceived as a broad concept, which takes into account polycentrism and poly ethnic religious world of Late Antiquity. The studies in line with this new paradigm embraced Australia (the known school of Byzantinology), Israel and Sweden. In French and Italian historiography (and to a large extent in German one) of relatively Late Antiquity much less attention is paid to methodological aspects, but some specific problems, mainly the issues in the paradigm of cultural continuity are studied most actively. Gaza school phenomenon was developed especially successfully [see: 1].

The new approach considers the society of Late Antiquity culture very widely – from the material to the religious component, which, respectively, required the expansion of historical source range. Indeed, see the features of civilization continuity instead of stopping the decline of foundations and the stopping of traditions is quite easy, if you pay attention not to the crises of economic and political systems, but on the culture and religion. The monuments of the last ones representing a vast written tradition (much more extensive than all written texts of classical antiquity), as well as the visual monuments and new archaeological materials, open a new, a broad and a productive research field for scientists today. Late Antiquity appears now really as some kind of an independent and a self-sufficient world, which equally differs from ancient civilizations and classical Middle Ages, from the West and from the East, and at the same time it is closely related by some unbreakable bonds with both. This particular world appears itself is a very diverse, but a united and an autarkic phenomenon.

However, the understanding of this phenomenon requires an answer to many questions nowadays. First of all, it concerns the selection of a qualified border between the epoch of antiquity and the world of Late Antiquity, and between Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. The variety of real life, as well as the multiplicity of approaches and points of view from which the researchers consider this era, allow different interpretations of the events and, consequently, the basis for the development of different periodizations. In general, the chronological framework of the period looks quite fuzzy. Regional differences are too obvious, the pace and the rhythm of development varies. IV-th and the middle of the VII-th century are revealed most often in literature as conventional boundaries, although P. Brown initially considered much broader chronological framework.

The internal periodization of this era is also very important. More or less certainly one may distinguish «early» Late Antiquity (within the IV-th century, or the years 313-395) and «late» Late Antiquity (from Justinian's death to Heraclius death, and the arrival of

the Arabs in 565-641). The works with these frameworks started to appear both in foreign and in domestic science [11].

There is also the issue of Late Antiquity world integrity, where the boundaries of this world took place. Since the second half of V-th century one may specify the area within the political boundaries of Early Byzantium as a civilization kernel and then a buffer zone of Christianized countries, peoples and tribes around it. Actually, ethnic-regional and ethnic-religious differences existed within this world that allows you to raise the issue about early Byzantine multiculturalism.

Regarding Byzantium: if traditional historiography draws its image as a static, unchanging, conservative, largely stagnant state, then a new look on the Late Antiquity (and Early Byzantium as the practically identical to it) provides a completely different image. This period appears as the era of new features and major changes, the era of diversity and creativity, which is reflected in an extremely rich and varied literary tradition, works of art, material culture, etc. Moreover, there is an image of a very inhomogeneous and polyethnic religious education, where a large role was played by Platonism, ancient cults and traditional performances along with Christianity, as well as the variety of syncretic religious practices, widespread within the eastern borders of the empire (and beyond these borders). As I.Y. Vascheva clearly notices, it was the period of experiments and creative search in all areas of life [12].

In domestic science the current situation on this matter the situation is such that classical scholars, byzantinologists and the medievalists of early Latin West in general remain to stay in their own «parties», and the general micro-group of «Late Antiquity scholars» was not formed actually. Nevertheless, there are some scholars who perceive the period methodologically like this. Now not very powerful forces may pay attention to the study of this complex era in Russia. The reasons of it are in a narrow specialization, as well as in the level of the fundamental linguistic and multidisciplinary training. The combination of historians with different profiles for the participation in the discussion of general issues concerning historical knowledge and in research projects would be a crucially positive factor in the study of Late Antiquity in Russia. The interest to such a paradigm as the Late Antiquity image, its discussion may become a unifying factor. Also the possibility of small research groups, potential research schools appearance (both metropolitan and regional ones), which would be focused mainly on the study of Late Antiquity seems quite promising to us.

The concept of Late Antiquity and Postclassic world is a very significant one for the development of world historiography in general. This is one of the major methodological advances during last decades.

Further discussions about this paradigm will be very valuable for the development of historical interpretation methods concerning transitional periods using the example of the first one of them in the history of Europe. And of course, a new field of research provides broad opportunities for the Study of the genesis issues concerning the early Byzantine culture, the heritage of individual authors and schools, the provision of knowledge, the mental revolution, and a lot of other things. A huge source base, a lot of texts was updated. The interest to their authors awakened. In particular, among other things Russia will have to prepare and publish a large number of annotated translations for the works of various authors, and this work has already begun. It is necessary to perform an active archaeological research in the field. Due to all this, the most difficult historical process of classical Mediterranean world medieval study will become much clearer.

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