
SUMMARIES AND REVIEWS

*METHODOLOGY OF HISTORICAL-GEOGRAPHICAL RESEARCH**

Although historical geography is considered to be a vague science, it possesses a variety of possible tools within the arsenal of the two sciences: history and geography. Methods typical of historical geography can be characterized as sustainable productive methodological systems with their own distinctive and sometimes legendary status (for instance, F. Braudel's geohistory, H.C. Darby's cross-sections, D. Whittlesey and C. Sauer's sequent occupance); and these systems are likely to be understood as a special case of a broader approach — that of regional-historical geography.

Despite the vagueness of the discipline, the specific area of interest of historical geography can be described in the following way: it deals with certain texts that represent a specific area as a set of interrelated elements in a historical perspective. Therefore, historians and geographers take particular interest in study which can be defined as historical geography aimed at determining the historical specificity of a particular place (according to A. Baker's definition) [1]. It dates back to the ancient chorography, and now is the central subject of a number of disciplines such as humanistic geography and historical geography of geographical images.

Scientists therefore face a lack of literature connected with historical-geographical methodology which could help to conduct research in this area. We are confronted with this problem every year when we ask first-year students of the History Department of Tyumen State University to conduct independent historico-geographical research. The only manual available in Russian is an outdated book by V.S. Zhekulin which, although it focuses on historical landscape studies, is not well-suited for future historians [2]. That is why a new book by the St. Petersburg geographer L.B. Vampilova appears to be very necessary and timely [3]. The book can be viewed as a comprehensive guide to the historico-geographical characteristics of the region.

The work is based on the concept of a comprehensive approach that defines the structure of historico-geographical research. The territorial system investigated is viewed from the perspective of three subsystems: paleogeographic, archaeological, and historico-socio-cultural. Within this system, internal elements and their interaction are identified and analyzed, the evolution of natural systems, archaeological cultures and ethnic groups is described, and the socio-cultural development of the region is characterized (pp. 8-9). The main part of the monograph is devoted to the detailed description of a set of methods that form the basis of each of the subsystems. Practical

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application of these methods is demonstrated through the example of the Karelian region, for this area is a subject of special interest for the author. Accordingly, the first part, called "Paleogeographic Characteristics", deals with the peculiarities of landscape analysis, the natural environment and archeology of the postglacial period of Karelia and describes the possibilities of the paleo-geo-morphological, paleontological and other methods. In the second part, "Archaeological Characteristics", the stratigraphy of cultural-historical layers is given (p. 45) and "synchronization" of the major archaeological cultures of the preliterate period of the region is made (p. 53). However, of particular interest to the historian is the third part of the monograph. It deals with the historical and socio-cultural characteristics of the region.

While reading this part of the monograph, which is actually the most voluminous one, we could not help but notice some of its weaknesses (which can be put down to the interdisciplinary character of the book). Let us now take the position of History Department academic and pay attention to the issues that are relevant primarily for the audience studying history. As we see it, the root of the problem lies in the definition of historical geography given on p. 125. The main task of historical geography is considered to be the diachronic analysis of "the historical and geographical territorial system functioning on the basis of interaction of three inseparable components: *landscape, ethnos and natural resources management*". The author of this definition is a geographer; however, a historian would probably have added the notion of *outlook* to this triad, eliminating, or, conversely, raising the question of absence of criticism of the sources in this section of the book. The book says very little about the historical specificity and historical context of the numerous documents (chronicles, scribe and census books, personal data analysis, official reference books of regions and towns in the Russian Empire known as "Memorial Books", geographical dictionaries, etc.) that can be used to work on the historical and geographical features of the region, on the peculiarities of working with them, and on the typical changes of geographical information contained in old texts.

It is also likely that student historians might get a wrong impression of the heuristic potential of these sources. This potential, however, is not limited by the professional set of topics of economic geography. We have no doubt that the problems of the number and density of population, the evolution of natural resource management, the peculiarities of settlement systems, the dynamics of economic development, transport networks, etc. will always be topical. However, such "positivist" formulation of the problem narrows the range of possible historical and geographical subjects. It seems that a modern "historico-socio-cultural characteristic" will hardly be complete without such "subjective-historical" issues as evolution of ideas about the given area (from the administrative, geo-political and ethno-religious points of view).

This objection is considerably aggravated by the fact that the monograph devoted to the methods of regional characteristics does not contain a special section on the geographical category "country / region" and does not properly focus on the principles and methods of regionalization. Undoubtedly, the author who is a geographer may leave this important but perhaps trivial issue for her discipline behind the scenes, or

refer to her other works specifically dedicated to it. However, this considerably weakens the position of the monograph as a universal manual. Probably for an interested but inexperienced reader, the region of Karelia, through whose example various historical and geographical methodologies are demonstrated, will seem a primordial territory, a “natural” region whose territory division principles are not negotiable. Unfortunately, these issues are not addressed in the work, although the methodology of regionalization, its major practices and paradigms are considered to be the necessary foundation of any regional historico-geographical analysis. It will not be a revelation to claim that for the average student specializing in history, such basic things as functional and formal principles of territory division are not quite obvious, neither is the constructivist approach to regionalization. Geographers learn to use the region as a research tool and a method of description from the very beginning; historians, however, take a given map for granted. And this problem, which generates the so-called “administrative principle” of territory division in historians’ research [4], cannot be solved with the help of a manual written in the Russian language [5].

As can be seen from the above, our criticism is primarily concerned with the apparent difficulties that may arise in the implementation of this publication in university teaching practice (the author refers to the educational function of the monograph at the beginning of the book, on p. 4). On the other hand, this work, which suggests a comprehensive approach to the historico-geographical characteristics of the region, should be regarded as a wonderful insight. At least, to date there is no other book on the same problem at our disposal.

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