

The Medieval History of Russian Regions in the School Textbooks*

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A school course of the history of Middle Ages in Russia traditionally consists of two components: the history of the country (the state) in general and the history of "one's native area" (the study of the local lore). Incidentally, schools of central regions, where the history of the native city cannot be divorced from the national one, pay less attention to the second component.

Russia is a country, enjoying huge territories and the great variety of ethnic groups. No doubt, the attempt of studying the history of all, or just the largest regions is doomed to failure. The merging of the courses of Russian history and the history of nations inhabiting Russia seems similarly impossible. In practice, it will lead to the situation, when the history of national minorities of Russia in text-books will appear to be a sort of artificial appendix to the history of the Russian nation, which is incorrect from both historical and political points of view. The way out is probably in the creation of a special course (or just a separate textbook) of historical ethnology. Nevertheless, the medieval history of separate Russian regions is covered in the comprehensive course, especially in the periods when it becomes important for the understatement of the events of the national importance.

Here, however a proviso should be made. The matter is that the meaning of the very notion "Russia" has been changing throughout the 20th century. The course of the medieval history of Russia cannot do without the history of Kievan Rus, though many contemporary Ukrainian authors, following the traditions of classical Ukrainian national historiography, state that the very Russian history takes its origin only from Vladimir-Suzdal principality. The Russian history of the 14th –15th centuries can't be understood without examining the events which took place in the Great Lithuanian Principedom at that period as lots of West-Russian territories were part of it. That is why, the very term "Russian regions" turns out to be a conventional one.

The study of the regional history appears in the school course of the medieval history of Russia in connection with the topic "The period of Feudal Partition of Rus". Traditionally Russian schools study the history of Kiev principedom, Galicia and Volhynia, Novgorod lands, Vladimir-Suzdal principedom (only in the text-book by T. Tchernikova "The history of Russia of the 9th –17th centuries" Chernigov and Novgorod-Seversky principedoms are added). Thus, the first two regions today are the part of Ukraine, not of Russia. They are likely to be studied in the course of foreign history. But that will be incorrect because even during the period of partition political trends throughout Russian lands were developing in close connection and events which were happening in Galich and Kiev influenced directly, for example, Vladimir.

Why were these very regions chosen? Why, say, Ryazan, Smolensk or Polotsk were not?

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The answer is not only in the fact that those are the largest Russian lands. The selection of Vladimir-Suzdal principedom, Novgorod and Galicia - Volhynia lands as subjects of study provides an opportunity of examining different models of social and political structure. And while the gradual formation of despotic monarchy was observed in the Northeast, where the boyars were completely subordinated to the prince's power, the Northwest saw a formation of an oligarchic republic, where the boyars ruled the state both politically and economically, and where the prince's power was in many ways formal. And in the Southwest there was a severe struggle between the prince and the boyars, which saw no winner in the end.

Meanwhile, for a long time in our home historiography the events, peculiar only to the Southwest were transmitted to the north-eastern Russia, in the history of which analysts also tried to find the struggle between the central (the great prince's and later the czar's) power with the boyars.

In the traditional Soviet text-books by M. Nechkina and P. Leibengroob¹, together with B. Rybakov² the history of principedoms in the period of partition was considered mainly static, only few concrete events were mentioned.

In the modern text-books by T. Tchernikova³, N. Pavlenko and I. Andreev⁴, in the text-book written by A. Urganov and me⁵, much more detailed concrete historical data are provided. However, the degree of detalization of study of different lands in those text-books is unequal. The history of north-eastern Rus is examined extremely in detail, especially the reign of such princes as Andrew (I) Bogolybsky and Vsevolod III. It's arranged in that way due to the fact that Vladimir-Suzdal Rus became the basis of the future Muscovy state. The regulations established in the united Russian state in the 15th – 16th centuries were introduced in the Northeast in the pre-Mongol epoch.

Comparison of the model which was set on the Vladimir lands with those, which were brought into practice in the other regions of Rus, seems to be of extreme importance. Thus, pupils receive the opportunity to get acquainted with alternate variants of historical development and the opportunity to analyse the reasons for exposed differences.

From the methodical point of view the children acquire the skills of great importance such as to compare events and to state cause-and-effect relationship. For example in the text-books the link between the nature conditions, peculiarities of economy development and the ways of landownership formation is traced back. This factor in its turn influenced the formation of either vassalage or administrative relations between the prince and the boyars. The history of

¹See: Nechkina, M., Leibengroob, P., "The history of the USSR" The text-book for the 7th grade. 10th edition, Moscow, 1975.

²See: "The history of the USSR". The text-book for the 7th grade of secondary school. Edited by B. Rybakov. Moscow, 1981.

³See: Tschernikova, T., "The history of Russia of the 9 -17th centuries. The text-book for 6 -7 grades of comprehensive schools. Moscow, "Drofa", 1997.

⁴See: Pavlenko, N., Andreev, I., "Russia from ancient times to the end of the 17th century". The text-book for the 10th grade of comprehensive schools. Moscow. "Prosveshenye", 1997.

⁵See: Katsva, L., Urganov, A., "The history of Russia of the 13th-15th centuries". The text-book for the 7th grade of secondary schools. Moscow, Moscow Institute for Educational Systems Development (MIROS), 1995.

the Northwest and the Southwest in the text-books is presented in fewer details because their role in the general history of Russia is less important. The study of Novgorod is focused mainly in peculiarities of economy, social structure and political system. The weak point of all contemporary text-books is that the evolution of Novgorod from the 12th to the 15th century is hardly shown in them.

In the chapters covering the epoch of the Golden Horde Yoke (Tatar rule) and the formation of the united Russian state school text-books naturally become Moscow-oriented. However, exactly in that period the problem of regional history turns out to be especially important. In the text-books of the Soviet period the rising of Moscow status was stated without any alternatives. The text-book by M. Nechkina and P. Leibengroob for example stated: "There were especially auspicious conditions for restoration and development of economy around Moscow. There was an old centre of ploughed agriculture here. Peasants from everywhere came to settle nearby. Moscow was situated on the cross-roads of trading routes, it was the centre of the old Russian lands."⁶

In the later editions, for example in the text-book by B. Rybakov and A. Preobrazhensky, issued in 1993 the advantage of Moscow's geographical position is proved more cautiously - only stating that "the Horde troops came to these places more seldom, while the inhabitants of more dangerous lands were eager to settle here".⁷

Not any of Moscow's rivals, including Tver, which Moscow had to stand a long contest with, was reported about. It is rather logical because the authors hardly raise the question whether any other Russian city could ever happen to make the leader of unification process. In the contemporary text-books this question is answered in a different way. The text-book by T. Tchernikova states directly that "not only Moscow could head the unification movement of Russian principdoms. In the end of the 13th - beginning of the 14th centuries several centres of unification of Russian lands could be found". Among those centres were named Galicia - Volhynia, Lithuania, Tver and Moscow Principdoms.

In our text-book this position is stated even more distinctly. It is marked that Moscow territories were well protected from Tartar raids. The presence of significant trade routes and comparatively fertile lands is also mentioned. But it is followed: "Not only Moscow, however, enjoyed all those advantages. The position of Tver was not less profitable. Moscow could have become the centre of unification but didn't obligatory had to. The process of uniting lands around a centre of Northeast was naturally determined, but a lucky chance decided which city would become the capital of the emerging state."

The Great Lithuanian Principdom is defined as another centre of unification. And the following is underlined: "Here in, Russian was a state language, the majority of the population

⁶See: Nechkina, M., Leibengroob, P., *ibid.*, p. 91-92.

⁷See: "The history of the Motherland". The text-book for the 8th grade of secondary school. Edited by B. Rybakov and A. Preobrazhensky. Moscow, 1993. P. 100. Though issued after the disintegration of the USSR, the text-book is, however, a typical Soviet one because it takes after the text-book by the above mentioned authors, issued in 1980, without any significant changes. The same can be referred to the text-book issued by A. Preobrazhensky and B. Rybakov in 1996 for the 6th-7th grades.

were eastern Slavs, Christian Orthodox in religion. They considered their very state to be genuine Rus. Under the rule of the Great Prince Gedymin Lithuania has already become the support of West-Russian lands in the anti-horde struggle. Gedymin's son, the Great Prince Olgerd, enjoying the same right as that of Moscow princes claimed to gather all Russian lands under his reign".⁸

The equality of chances of Moscow and Tver is emphasised by N. Pavlenko and I. Andreev, adding that history knows such facts when the advantages were gained by the lands attacked even harder than the others. The authors offer their readers (let us mention that this text-book is designed for high-school students) the following scheme: "There distinguished two centres which got to claim the role of Ancient Rus' heirs. One of these centres was the Great Lithuanian Princedom, the other was north-eastern Rus". Thus the students understand tersely that the struggle between Moscow and Tver was a kind of a local argument for the primacy on the northeast, the future winner of which "was doomed to collision with Lithuania".⁹

Admitting the presence of many variants of the unification process, the authors of the named text-books strive to cover the events in the regions claiming the leadership in more details. Our text-book, in particular, analyses the policy of Tver princes very minutely, in comparison with the actions of their Moscow rivals. It allows to judge the actions of the latter in the context of morality of those times. The students understand that not only from the position of the 20th century, but also from their contemporaries' point of view Moscow princes exercised a pretty unscrupulous policy.

The detailed characterisation of economical, political and social structure of Lithuania is not adduced in any of the text-books. The one by N. Pavlenko and I. Andreev in connection with the theme "Annexation of Novgorod by Muscovy" mentions that in Lithuania the relations between the sovereign and his subjects were based on contract terms. T. Tchernikova reports that "the Lithuanian state of princes was a kind of federation of lands and towns, the extent of dependence of which on the centre in Vilna differed". Regarding the topic of joining up Novgorod to Moscow she writes that "from the boyars' point of view the sovereign of Polish, Lithuanian, Belarussian and Ukrainian lands, Kazimir IV could become the guarantee of Novgorod's liberties because it was not in his power to obliterate them". Still the text-book never explains why Great Prince of Muscovy was entitled while Polish king was not to deprive the citizens of Novgorod of their traditional rights.

Our text-book also limits the information to the fact that Novgorod boyars sought the union with Lithuania frightened to lose the ancient liberties of the city.

I had to speak about the principal difference between Lithuania and Moscow, mentioning the inner political structure, feuds' and cities' liberties, inter-confessional relations in the teachers' manual.¹⁰ This material is considered to be additional, designed for advanced, mainly specialised classes.

⁸See: Katsva, L., Urganov, A., *ibid.* p. 150-151.

⁹See: Pavlenko, N., Andreev, I., *ibid.* p. 107-108.

¹⁰See: Katsva, L., "History study in the secondary school". Manual for teachers. Moscow, MIROS, 1997. P. 108-109.

The comparison of Moscow Rus and the Great Lithuanian Princedom allows to demonstrate that Russian lands were not doomed to evolve in the autocratic-despotic way.

The specific position of Ryazan princedom, officially independent of Great Prince of Vladimir and lying away from those lands, which Moscow intended to protect, is briefly referred to, both in the text-books by N. Pavlenko and I. Andreev, and ours. T. Tchernikova reports only that the Prince of Ryazan allied with Mamai but she doesn't analyse the stimulating motives of this decision. Other Russian regions of the 13th–15th centuries, for example West-Russian lands or Northern outskirts are mentioned in the text-books merely as the objects of Moscow policy. Still in connection with feudal war in the 15th century our text-book says that "Northern (Vyatka, Galich, Uglich) were the regions of trade liberty. The pre-bourgeois relations have already been forming there. The centre, the main basis of Vasily (II) the Dark consisted of poor peasant masses. The victory of the centre meant the strengthening of despotism". This point of view of an outstanding historian A. Zimin is not a commonly accepted one. Hence the text-book says: "There is a scientific opinion available".¹¹

While studying the material dealing with the 16th century the students get acquainted with the history of Russian regions with the population speaking another language and non Christian Orthodox – the population of Kazan and Astrakhan khanates – for the first time. In this case a regional history is also an ethnic one. And in such multinational and multicultural country as Russia, this theme assumes a special significance. The question is not only to prevent the history study from becoming a belated squaring of accounts of the several ages' remoteness, but also to learn to understand each other better with the help of our subject.

In the text-books of the Soviet period the history of those states was never revealed. The text-book by M. Nechkina and P. Leibengroob merely noticed the following: "After the disintegration of the Golden Horde two Tartar khanates appeared on the Volga banks – Kazan and Astrakhan. Here from Tartar khans committed predatory raids on Russian lands. Here thousands of Russian people suffered in captivity. The local inhabitants: Chuvashes, Mari, Udmurts, Mordvins, Tartars, Bashkirs were severely oppressed by khans and many a time arose in rebellions".¹² The text-book edited by B. Rybakov and A. Preobrazhensky reports: "After the disintegration of the Golden Horde (later named the Great Horde), several states considering themselves to be its successors emerged on its territories. And it meant their claims for the tribute from Rus and constant predatory raids. In the second quarter of the 15th century the Kazan khanate was formed. It included besides Tartars the descendants of Volga Bulgars, Mari, Udmurts, Chuvashes, partly Mordvins, partly Bashkirs. The ruling circles of that feudal state aspired to becoming rich at the expense of the neighbour nations".¹³

Obviously, some of the statements given are partially inaccurate. For example, it is commonly known that though in the middle of the 15th century Kazan khans did really commit raids on Muscovy's eastern borders, on the boundary of the 15th-16th centuries the khanate actually became Moscow's vassal and it was not it which presented threat to Moscow (though

¹¹See: Katsva, L., Urganov, A., *ibid.* p. 169.

¹²See: Nechkina, M., Leibengroob, P., *ibid.* p. 110.

¹³See: "The history of the Motherland". The text-book for the 8th grade of comprehensive schools. Edited by B. Rybakov and A. Preobrazhensky. Moscow, 1993. P. 122.

some raids took place) but Muscovy princes themselves were attacking Kazan aiming to affirm there their protégés.

The main thing is however not in the slips, but in the fact that such narration of the material is, to my mind, rather dangerous. After reading such a text a Russian teenager will become firmly convinced in the thought of historical justice of Kazan conquest which will be perceived by him as a justified revenge for the sufferings of Russian people caused by Tartars. And in this case it will be completely impossible to explain to the students that Kazan Tartars are not to hold the responsibility for the Horde's actions not only because it is immoral to make a nation responsible for its leaders' deeds, but simply because the nationality of Kazan Tartars, formed in the 15th century is descended not from the Mongols but from Volga Bulgars, speaking the Turcic language, who once became the victims of the Mongol conquest similar to Russians themselves.

And a Tartar teenager (in the Soviet period the text-books were unified for the whole country and the adduced texts were studied both by Russian and Tartar children) will experience nothing but the repressed feeling of deep offence.

The outcome of such method of teaching history can be only one – the further strengthening of nationalistic emotions and inter-ethnic tension.

Just these considerations impelled us not only to speak about the formation of Kazan and Astrakhan khanates and the ethnic structure of their population in detail, while covering the foreign policy of Ivan IV, but also to retrace the relations between Moscow and Kazan during the 15th and the first half of the 16th centuries. Our text-book also mentions the heroic resistance of citizens of Kazan to overwhelming Muscovy troops.¹⁴

The history of Kazan khanate is expounded in the text-book by N. Pavlenko and I. Andreev in fewer details but with the sufficient degree of objectivity. T. Tchernikova just touches upon the appearance of Kazan khanate as the result of the Golden Horde's disintegration but she doesn't analyse the structure of its population which makes the understatement of the history of that region more difficult and doesn't avert mutual offences in the substantial extent. On the other hand the demand of historical objectivity is referred to the authors writing for national schools, in Tartarstan, in particular, in the same extent.

Another Russian largest region is Siberia. Unfortunately, in spite of the fact that the enormous majority of Russian territories is situated behind the Urals, the history of Siberia before the 17th century is covered in the text-books pretty fragmentarily. All the text-books without exception first mention Siberia only regarding Ermak's raid, and later – in connection with the actions of Russian travellers of the 17th century. The depiction of life of Siberia inhabitants before their annexation to Russia in contemporary text-books and in the manuals of 70s and 80s as well is just a sketch. But some changes have still happened, being not quantitative but qualitative, which is more important. While M. Nechkina and P. Leibengroob together with B. Rybakov and his co-authors wrote only about the progressive implication of Siberia's annexation to Russia, the text-books issued several years ago objectively cover the

¹⁴See: A. Urganov, L. Katsva, "The history of Russia of the 16th-18th centuries". Moscow, MIESD, 1995.

policy of Russian authorities in Siberia without concealing its colonizative nature and not keeping silent about the cruelties applied to the local inhabitants during Siberia conquest. Still the text-book by T. Tchernikova is an exclusion in this case.

Thus, the last years saw the achievement of some progress in the study of the medieval history of Russian regions. In the boundaries of the comprehensive courses the students are given a determined opportunity of forming a concept of the specific development of some of those regions. But it's necessary to emphasise once more that in a country like Russia the complete study of history not only of each, but even of the majority of the regions is impossible in the comprehensive course of the national (state) history, which requires teachers' and local text-books authors' constant attention to the regional material. Luckily, solid regional text-books are being created in many national republics, in Siberia and other regions.

At the same time complicated international relations in Russia in several cases led to such a situation when ancient revenge poured onto the pages of school text-books, the national history in many cases began transforming in mythology, busy proving the grandeur of its people, emphasising its antiquity, its greater than the neighbours' role on the world history. Unfortunately, it is common for the educational literature issued in national republics (for example, in Tartarstan and the Caucasus), as for several central text-books (for example, a completely incredible version of the Slav's history, originating them from Alexander Macedonian's epoch, is offered in the text-book by A. Bogdanov).¹⁵

Hopefully, these are just growing pains, caused by arising of national self-consciousness after the ruin of totalitarian communist regime. The great role, which the school course of history plays in the formation of notions about the past and the present, political views, attitude towards other nations must not be ignored. The responsibility of the text-book author, addressing the still not firmly established consciousness of teenagers is not less than that of a journalist.

It would be mostly desirable if the authors of manuals on the history of the country could avoid chauvinistic underestimation of regional and national specific features, while the authors of the local text-books could get rid of abundant local patriotism, which sometimes is likely to convert to nationalism and spark off separatist spirits.

Abstract

Russia is a very specific country, enjoying huge territories and the great variety of ethnic groups, that's why the attempt of studying the history of all, or just the largest regions is doomed to failure; that's why it's necessary to create a special course (or just a separate textbook) of historical ethnology.

The study of the regional history in the school course of the medieval history of Russia is connected with the topic "The period of Feudal Partition of Rus"; traditionally Russian schools study the history of Kiev princedom, Galicia and Volhynia, Novgorod lands, Vladimir-Suzdal

¹⁵See: Bogdanov, A., "The history of Russia from ancient times to the epoch of Peter I". Moscow, 1997.

princedom.

In the traditional Soviet text-books the history of princedoms in the period of partition was considered mainly static, only few concrete events were mentioned; in the modern text-books much more detailed concrete historical data are provided.

The Northwest and the Southwest of Russia in the text-books is presented in fewer details because their role in the general history of Russia is less important. The study of Novgorod is focused mainly in peculiarities of economy, social structure and political system; the weak point of all contemporary textbooks is that the evolution of Novgorod from the 12th to the 15th century is hardly shown in them.

In the chapters covering the epoch of the Golden Horde Yoke (Tatar rule) and the formation of the united Russian state school text-books naturally become Moscow-oriented. In the later editions, the advantage of the Moscow's position is proved more cautiously. Contemporary text-books state, that in the end of the 13th – beginning of the 14th centuries several centres of unification of Russian lands could be found - Galicia - Volhynia, Lithuania, Tver and Moscow Princedoms.

While studying the material dealing with the 16th century the students get acquainted with the history of Russian regions with the population of Kazan and Astrakhan khanates – for the first time. In the textbooks of the Soviet period the history of those states was never revealed; in the contemporary textbooks this period is covered with the sufficient degree of objectivity.

The history of Siberia before the 17th century is covered in the text-books pretty fragmentarily: all the textbooks without exception first mention Siberia only regarding Ermak's raid, and later – in connection with the actions of Russian travellers.

Thus, the last years show the achievement of some progress in the study of the medieval history of Russian regions. But it's necessary to emphasise that in a country like Russia the complete study of history not only of each, but even of the majority of the regions is impossible in the comprehensive course of the national (state) history, which requires teachers' and local textbooks authors' constant attention to the regional material.