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THE URAL SCHOOL OF HISTORIANS

A school of history as a concept has several meanings. More often than not, it is set up as a school of a prominent scholar with its specific range of studies, but time passes and other people who study other problems inspired by a new epoch take the scholar’s place. That is why looking at it from a long-term perspective we see what is called regional schools: the Moscow School, the Siberian School, the Ural School, etc. As a rule, a regional school has its own definite subject of study that does not depend on historic periods, political or methodological trends. For the Urals the subject of study is the history of the region from the most ancient times to the present. Most certainly, we do have established specialized schools: Professor M. Suzumov’s School of Byzantine Studies, Professor L. Kertman’s School of Western Political and Spiritual Culture, Academician V. Alekseev’s School of Russia’s Modernizations, Professor A. Bakunin’s School of the History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Professor V. Krivonogov and Professor O. Vaskovskii’s School of Historiography, and others. We are going to speak about the Ural School of Historians (ethnographers and archeologists are not included), about those who study the problems of the Ural region as a whole.

A complete historiography of the Ural region set out in one unbroken line has not been written yet. All that we have are brief sketches in the special edition of the *Ural Historical Encyclopedia*, and in *Ural Historians of the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Century*, the lives of about four hundred of Clio’s practitioners are traced, whose creative works have been connected to this field of study.¹ There are also short historiography reviews attached to summaries. However, there is quite a bit of
research carried out by the Ural School of Historiography, but it is devoted mainly to the periods of the Revolution, the Civil War, and the first Soviet reforms. That is why we have set ourselves the task to sum up what has been published by the Ural scholars over a long period of time. Due to lack of time and space we have chosen only the most important points to be mentioned.

The Urals are the stronghold of the Russian state. The region has played an outstanding role in Russia’s history, mainly in the history of its economic development. Since time immemorial all sorts of minerals have been mined here. Modern branches of industry that have both civilian and military significance have developed here. Military weapons made in the Urals saved our country in the numerous wars that Russia had to undertake for protecting its independence. One of the most significant contributions of the Ural region is the role it played in the victory over fascist Germany in World War II. The Urals are in the center of the country, and have a highly eventful past, a fact that makes it possible for us to trace both regular and specific traits of Russia’s historical process.

We first hear about the Urals from “the father of history” Herodotus, then from ninth and tenth century Arabian and Persian authors, eleventh to early twelfth century chronicles (Povest vremennykh let) also speak of the area, then there is mention of it in the life stories of the Christian missionaries Stefan of Perm (late fourteenth century) and Trifon of Viatka (sixteenth century). Later the Ural and Siberian chronicles of the first half of the seventeenth century describe Ermak’s campaign and the annexation of Siberia to the Russian state.\(^2\)

The Urals studies of the modern times are much indebted to Peter the Great’s comrades-in-arms, prominent statesmen, the people who set up the state mining system in the Urals—Vasili Tatischev and Vil’gel’m De-Gennin. Vasili Tatischev in his Historical, Geographical, Political and Civilian Lexicon of Russia gives us some unique information about this region, as does De-Gennin in his work The Description of Ural and Siberian Factories. An essential contribution to the historical knowledge of the Urals was made by mining engineers I. German, A. Deriabin, A. Iartsev and others, by participants of academic expeditions of the eighteenth century: I. Gmelin, G. F. Miller, P. Pallas and others, as well as by the regional archival commissions and

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\(^2\) THE PLACE OF RUSSIA IN EUROPE AND ASIA
local lore scholars, in particular those from the Ural Society of Natural Science Lovers, organized in 1870 in Ekaterinburg. Special mention should be made of N. Chupin, I. Krivoshchekov, and V. Shishonko.

The second half of the nineteenth century sees the study of history concentrated in high schools; historical disciplines being introduced there, as well as in pedagogical institutes that had been established by the beginning of the World War I in all provincial centers of the Urals. The year 1916 saw the opening of the first History and Philology Department at Perm University. Boris Grekov, later a prominent Soviet historian and Academy of Sciences member worked there as private tutor. As a result, at the turn of the previous century history did become a discipline, but there was a shortage of qualified specialists, and historical knowledge was still fragmentary, lacking deep conceptual basis. After revolutionary upheavals of the early twentieth century historical education was suspended until the mid 1930s, whereas historical research took on an extremely ideological character. The History and Philology Department of Perm University became the Department of Social Sciences, with the same structure as the Ural University (Ekaterinburg) founded in 1920. History was no longer taught in secondary schools, local history researchers were limited in their activity, and the Ural Society of Natural Science Lovers was dissolved.

The situation started to change for the better after the USSR’s Soviet of People’s Commissars and the Central Committee of the All-Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) issued a statement on May 16, 1934, about “The Teaching of Civil History at Schools.” It was then that the history departments opened at the Udmurt and the Bashkir Pedagogical Institutes. The year 1939 saw the opening of the History Department at the Ural State University. Orenburg and Cheliabinsk Pedagogical Institutes followed suit with a history department in 1940, at Perm University in 1941.

The first steps to create research structures with a historical profile were made in the 1920s and 1930s with the establishment of Uralist Section at the Udmurt Institute of History, Language and Literature. World War II had a beneficial effect on the growth of historians’ activities in the area, when a great number of leading historians of the country especially researchers from the History Faculty of Moscow State University were evacuated to the Urals.
After the revolution historiography came to be based on Marxist-Leninist methodology with the domination of the formation process and the class struggle as the driving force in history. This was well shown in the idealization of social protest in the pre-Soviet period (R. Pikhoia, V. Baidin), as well as of revolution and the Civil War in the early twentieth century (V. Momonov, I. Plotnikov et al.). The Urals region was presented as a citadel of Bolshevism. The White Guard movement was blamed for the outbreak of the Civil War. Heated debates were held on this point, but due to loss of interest in these questions during the years of liberal reforms, these discussions have not yet been finalized.

Traditionally, the greatest attention was given to the problems of colonizing the Urals (Moscow historians S. Bakhrushin, V. Shunkov, A. Preobrazhenskii, et al.), to the development of its mining industry (N. Baklanov, D. Gavrilov, D. Kashintsev, S. Sigov, L. Sapogovskaya, S. Strumilin, N. Pavlenko, et al.), to the industrial transformation (V. Krivonogov, P. Ryndziunskii, S. Strumilin, V. Iatsunsky, et al.), to the genesis of capitalism and the crisis of serfdom, to the creation of prerequisites of the socialist revolution in the Urals. The most discussed problems were the last two (V. Adamov, F. Bystrykh, D. Gavrilov, F. Gorovoy, T. Guskova, N. Lisovskii, Ia. Volin, et al.). The merits of these studies were that they made a great contribution to the understanding of problems pertaining to the whole state, but their shortcomings were that they often mechanically transferred the all-Russia clichés to Ural grounds.

Quite a number of problems remain controversial to this day as, for example, the contents and chronological dividing lines of the industrial transformation; the social character of the mining industry, etc. Some researchers tend to characterize it as capitalist on the whole, one where a gradual disappearance of the remnants of serfdom takes place (D. Gavrilov); others think that in the mining industry of the post-Reform period there remained a specific “serfdom structure,” the basis of which was the “okrug” system (V. Adamov).

Interest towards the mining industry being the dominating one, pre-Revolutionary farming was studied to a lesser extent, although several interesting works saw light (A. Kondrashenkov, M. Chernysh, V. Pandani et al.). They analyzed the development of productive forces in the village, the commodity-money relations, the land-owning relations
in it, and the social and economic conditions of the peasantry. Problems of the peasantry in the non-Russian districts found their reflection in works by R. Kuzeev, H. Usmanov, and M. Grishkina. Lately historians have been concentrating on the interrelations between the agrarian areas and the mining centers in the Urals, the traditional culture of the peasantry and its mentality (N. Minenko, A. Mosin, I. Poberezhnikov, N. Polovinkin, et al.).

Most of the historians worked on the problems of Soviet society: history of industrial development and the working class (A. Abramovskii, A. Antufiev, A. Bakunin, V. Zuikov, B. Lichman, L. Martushov, E. Minibaev, M. Iamalov, et al.); the agrarian sphere (V. Bersenev, M. Denisevich, N. Efremenkov, G. Kornilov, V. Kulikov, V. Motrevich, R. Tolmacheva, et al.); culture (M. Glavatskii, M. Kondrashova, S. Postnikov, M. Popov, A. Speranskii, V. Chufarov, et al.); science and the scientific-technological policy (E. Artemov, V. Balakin, V. Lebedev et al.); social and political development at the end of the century (A. Kirillov et al.). Dozens of books have been written, hundreds of theses defended. A special place belongs to research into the role of the Urals during World War II.

Because the Urals are multinational, a lot of attention has been given to the problems of the formation of nations, national movements, and national mentality (K. Kulikov, F. Saiakhov, B. Iuldashev, R. Kuzeev, A. Iunosova, et al.). Original theses have been published, for example by R. Kuzeev on the interconditionality of ethno-social processes in eastern Europe and Asian Russia, a factor that led to the formation of the nations existing today.

An important place in historiography is occupied by general surveys, such as the two-volume *History of the Urals*, published in Perm in 1963–1965, the two-volumes *History of the Urals from the Ancient Times to 1861* published in Moscow, the *History of the Urals in the Period of Capitalism* (1989, 1990), and the two-volume *History of Ural Economics* (1988, 1990). They present a broad picture of Ural history from the ancient times until the crisis of Soviet power in the 1980s. However, today they are in need of serious revision, both in their theoretical and factual sense.

If we want to evaluate the great number of publications of the Soviet period, we have to admit that they do solve a wide range of problems
pertaining to the history of our country. They introduce into academic circulation a great amount of factual material, while giving an objective estimation of complicated and contradictory events and demonstrating the positive beginnings of great transformations. However, most of them have a definite ideological slant in the spirit of the times. They say nothing about the high price paid for these transformations. They don’t show the consequences of that gigantic social transformation that cardinally changed the face of Russia in the twentieth century and they don’t see its cultural significance.

The post-Soviet period for the Ural school of historians is characterized by a departure from ideological dogmas of the previous epoch, by the appearance of new trends in historiography, by its greater role in Russian historiography. We have witnessed an increase in the number of different approaches to the problems of history and the number of historians with graduate degrees. According to the statistics taken in January 1, 1994, out of the fifty-six higher educational institutions in the Urals only thirty-five had on the faculty historians with advanced degrees. Thirty-eight had the Academy of Science doctorates and 271 had candidate’s degrees. During the 1970s about twenty doctor’s theses had been defended, during the 1980s had about thirty, and the 1990s about sixty. In 2002 the institutes and universities in the Urals and in the Tyumen region had twenty history departments.

The Bashkir, Komi, and Udmurt Institutes of History, Language, and Literature became part of the Ural Division of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR that was founded in 1987. The year 1988 saw the establishment of the Institute of History and Archeology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, which has since become a recognized center of historical thought not only in the Urals, but in Russia as well. It was set up at a time when the country witnessed the fall of communist dogmas, but the new worldview was not yet concretized. Nevertheless the flux meant that a new leaf had been turned over, and the new opportunity offered liberty to choose new research directions and methodological support for them.

One of the first complex programs of research in the field of Russian social studies the “Historical Experience of Regional Development (for the Urals and Contiguous Territories)” was worked out here. In this program historical experience was deprived of ideological requisites,
and it was not identified with elementary historical knowledge. It was looked upon as a retrospective assessment of the past in its relation to the development that followed and to the results of this development from the point of view of modern social practice. Accordingly, a whole series of investigations which had practical significance were carried out. The project gave the institute a possibility to survive in the extremely difficult conditions of the transition period. Among these investigations we can name one of primary importance, a multivolume work entitled *Problem Regions of the Resource Type: Economic Integration of the European North-East, the Urals and Siberia* (2002), which was a collective project done together with economists—a practice that does not often happen in historical research. V. Alekseev and L. Sapogovskaia also published the book *Historical Experience of Industrial Policy in Russia*.

Regionalism was qualified as a political and economic movement for the independence of territorial groups in the field of socioeconomic and ethno-cultural rights. Theoretical and practical questions of regional development in various historical stages of the country were analyzed from this point of view. It soon became clear that regional questions came to the fore as the Soviet Union was disintegrating. Western research centers, in particular, the Institute of European Policy at the Leuven Catholic University (Belgium), became interested in this research. The joint project brought important results that were published both in Russia and abroad (V. Alekseev, *Regionalism in Russia* (1999); V. Alekseev, K. Malfliet, T. Casier, et al., *Regionalism in Russia. The Urals Case* (1995). A fundamental monograph by V. Alekseev, E. Alekseeva, K. Zubkov, and I. Poberezhinikov, * Asiatic Russia in Geopolitical and Civilizing Dynamics*, may be considered as a summary of these investigations. This work is the first complex study of the history of the regions of the Asiatic part of the country during its four hundred years of development within the Russian state.

Another very important problem undertaken by the Institute of History and Archeology is the concept of modernization, by which we mean the transition from the traditional agrarian society to the modern industrial one with all its political, social, cultural, and psychological consequences. A monograph has been published on the subject entitled

In addition to that, the institute has published dozens of monographs on other problems pertaining both to the Urals and Russia. Among them we can name a large book of special importance, *The Urals in the Panorama of the Twentieth Century*, which on the basis of an original conception places at our disposal the consequences of the development of one of the biggest regions of Russia in one of the most complicated and controversial stages of its history. There is also the monograph by S. Nefedov, *A Demographically Structured Analysis of the Social and Economic History of Russia*, which is one of the first attempts in historiography to analyze the history of Russia from the position of a new methodological approach, Jack A. Goldstone’s demographic-structural theory.

Of great interest to the public in Russia and abroad were the books by V. Alekseev devoted to the death of the Romanovs in the Urals, books which formulated a version of the Ekaterinburg tragedy that differed from the official account (The Death of the Czar’s Family; Myths and Reality, [1993]; The Last Act of a Tragedy [1996]; The Romanovs Resurrected?…On the History of Imposture in Twentieth Century Russia, Parts 1–2 [2000, 2004]). Contradictory opinions have been voiced about A. Bakunin’s two volume History of Soviet Totalitarianism (1993, 1997), because in the said work the “blank spots” in Soviet history were “filled in” by the author. Lastly, the first volumes of the series, Society and Power. The Russian Province, 1917–1985, were published.

A great achievement of the institute is the encyclopedia it has prepared for publication. The unique work, *The Ural Historical Encyclopedia* has seen two editions already (1998, 2000). Its appearance has made possible the creation of a number of encyclopedias and dictionaries in related spheres of knowledge, such as *The Metallurgical

The academic institutes of the Komi and the Udmurt Republics have published fundamental histories of their regions. These are based on new conceptual frameworks and on the latest archival materials, and are of great interest from the point of view of the experience of state construction in the Russian Federation.

Historians working in higher educational establishments had a more difficult task facing them. In the transition period of Russia’s economy higher educational establishments found themselves in a very difficult situation. Their opportunities to prepare monographs for publication became limited. Nonetheless, historical research continued. I would like to make note of books on ferrous metallurgy published by researchers from some higher educational establishments, for example those by V. Zapariia; on the Ural atomic power industry by V. Novoselov and V. Tolstikova; on the history of political repressions by V. Kirillov, as well as the manual on the history of the Urals written by a large group of scholars and edited by V. Kamynin and B. Lichman that has already undergone three editions.

The achievements of the Ural School of Historiography are something to speak of. At present, it is represented by scholars who work in higher educational establishments of Ekaterinburg, Cheliabinsk, Tiumen, Kurgan, and Sarapul. Of the most noted mention should be made of Professors A. Tertyshnii, A. Trofimov (Ekaterinburg), E. Zabolotnii, I. Skipina (Tiumen), and V. Usanov (Kurgan). This school is distinguished not only by its study of historical problems, but also by its close attention to the study of organization of research, to theory, methodology and the study of sources, to the separate stages of the development of historical discipline, to the creative approach of the most prominent scholars. When working on problems of historiography its representatives consider the use of archival sources a very important issue.

Active publishing work may also be considered an achievement of the Ural School of Historiography. Both problems and concrete questions of the development of historiography are studied here. Of the newest works concerning problems that have led to discussions among
scholars are publications on the 1917 revolutions and the Civil War in Russia and in the Urals (O. Vaskovskii, E. Zabolotnii, and A. Tertyshnii); on the political and economic history of the 1920s and 1930s (V. Kamynin, E. Tsypina). Representatives of the Ural School of Historiography are especially active in the work of summarizing the results of the elaboration and application of new methodological and conceptual problems to the study of the history of Russia at the present stage (E. Zabolotnii and V. Kamynin, *Historical Science on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* [1999]; idem, *Russia’s Historical Science at the End of the Twentieth and the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century* [2004]; E. Zabolotnii, V. Kamynin, and I. Shishkin, *Sketches on Modern Historiography of Russia History from the Ancient Times to the Beginning of the Twentieth Century*; and A. Tertyshnii and A. Trofimov, *Russia’s History: Models of Measurement and Explanation* [2005]).

Though the achievements of the Ural School of Historiography in the post-Soviet period are great, we cannot avoid mentioning some of its shortcomings, which can be seen in many of the essays on Russian history that are written today. Among them are the following: the insight into Russian problems within the context of world history is not deep enough, nor does it have a comparative or civilizing character; apologetics of negativism is present in the understanding of Russia’s history; twentieth century history is seen in the worst light; a total substitution of the minuses for the pluses; replacement of old dogmas with new ones; an attempt to refute the basic postulates not on the basis of original ideas and documents, but simply through arbitrary hunches; the ideas expressed on questions of principle are not serious enough and often irresponsible; etc.

In their attempts to do away with “blank spots” in history, several authors have overdone it and forgotten that the modernization period in Russia and in the Urals, in particular, was carried out under very difficult conditions, and not without losses. Absurd conclusions emerge, of the type that “the socialist reform in economy could have taken place only if the whole population had been turned into slaves.” People differ in their attitude towards socialism, but an honest historian cannot cross the socialist experiment out of history. It went on for three quarters of a century. The point is how one interprets it, but it cannot be turned into an absurdity—that would debase history. The time has
come to understand that the Russian practice of the following generation settling accounts with the preceding one is ruinous.

Thus, the Ural School of Historians took three centuries to form. One generation of pupils and scholars has replaced the other. Numerous trends of historical thought appeared and disappeared. At the turn of the twentieth century pieces of information about the Urals have turned into the serious study of the Urals, and, at the end of the twentieth century, have acquired an academic status. A large detachment of Clio’s followers is working here, one that has won all-Russian and international recognition. Its works encompass practically all spheres of life in the region from ancient times up to the present and serve as a reliable potential of its stable development.

NOTES

3. Ibid., 241.