

History and Literature: Methodological Context

Konstantin Fedorov

National Research University
Bauman Moscow State Technical University (BMSTU)
d. 5/1, 2-ya Baumanskaya ul.
Moscow, Russia 105005
E-mail: fedorov@live.ru

Tatyana Suzdaleva

National Research University
Bauman Moscow State Technical University (BMSTU)
d. 5/1, 2-ya Baumanskaya ul.
Moscow, Russia 105005
E-mail: syzdalev@list.ru

Abstract—The article from the methodological point of view analyzes the evolution of the views of historians and philosophers on the relationship of history as a science to fiction from antiquity to the present. Particular attention is paid to the influence of postmodernism on modern historiography. In the interpretation of postmodernists, the line that separates the historical narrative from the artistic one is essentially erased. Nevertheless, at the same time, according to the authors, the postmodern challenge in a new way highlighted the complex nature of the interaction between the source and the researcher; it increased the requirements for the content and language of the scientific historical text.

Keywords—*historical science; historical methodology; historiography; art; myth; poetry; fiction; antiquity; middle ages; new time; philosophy; positivism; postmodernism*

I. INTRODUCTION

The principles of historicism and objectivity are fundamental in historical science. They are usually interpreted as a requirement to rely on historical sources, a ban on distorting historical facts and following the principle of “sine ira et studio” (“without anger and addiction”) in assessing events and figures of the past. Unlike a writer, playwright or poets, who turn to the description of past times in his works, the historian must restrain his emotions and imagination. He can put forward hypotheses, speculate and even make mistakes, but has no right to fiction. Thereby, the “territories” of historical science and art are delimited [1].

Many eminent philosophers and historians reflected on the similarities and differences between history and art. According to M. Blok, this is due to the nature of history as a science about people in time and its special relationship to the mode of expression. A historian, as well as a writer, uses the literary language. Many prominent Russian and foreign historians brilliantly mastered the word. “Art versus science, form versus content: how many litigations, which belong in the archives of the scholasticism courts!” the author of the famous “Apology of history” ironically exclaimed [2]. But, of course, the matter is not only in the form in which the results of historical research are clothed. In essence, we are talking about the nature of historical knowledge, the subject and methods of historical science, its social function and the special aesthetics of history. Thus, the problem lies in the field of historical methodology. Interest in it has intensified in connection with the so-called postmodern revolution,

which was accompanied by an attempt to transfer the methods of literary criticism to historical research.

The purpose of this article is to analyze from the methodological point of view the works of the classics of philosophical and historical thought and the works of modern authors in terms of the development of their views on the interaction of history as a science and fiction.

II. MYTH, POETRY, OR DRAMA — ANTIQUE AND MEDIEVAL THINKERS ABOUT THE NATURE OF HISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE

In ancient times all kinds of knowledge about the world were called history. Antique writers at first did not separate history as a study of the past and history as a narration of events and figures of the past. The ancient Greeks considered the patroness of the history Clea, as one of 9 muses — daughters of the all-powerful Zeus and the goddess of memory Mnemosyne. The muse of science was Urania. Consequently, history for the Greeks was more an art than a science. This opinion on the study of the past was natural in the period when the development of scientific knowledge had just begun. History, like philosophy, originated in the depths of the mythological consciousness, A.F. Losev called this phenomenon “mythological historicism” [3]. The main sources of information about the past were myths, legends, traditions, and history was perceived as a genre of fiction. Not without reason the muse of epic poetry Calliopa was Clea's friend.

According to M.A. Barg's fair remark, the closeness of history and drama was noticed already in classical antiquity. “Father of History” Herodotus, who lived in the V century BC, read his work to the audience in the theater. Creating history meant playing the earthly drama of human life. In its turn, the theater “played out”, “revived”, “repeated” various “stories”. In the same way, “historiography” was considered as a kind of art, very close to poetry and drama. In this case, it was not only about the proximity of the means of expression, but also the plots: historians willingly resorted to myth and epic, and poets often “dramatized” historical events [4]. Thus, figurative thinking, rich imagination was a necessary tool of the historian.

In the class-polis period of the Greece history, a complex process of the liberation of historical consciousness from mythology and epos took place. As ancient historiography

developed, the first attempts were made to explain the specificity of history. Aristotle saw the difference between poetry and history not in that "one speaks in verse, but another in prose (after all, Herodotus can be shifted to poetry, but his work will remain history anyway, either in verse or in prose), no, the difference is that one says about what was, and the other about what could be". Therefore, from Aristotle's point of view, "poetry is more philosophical and serious than history, poetry speaks more about the common, history is about the singular" [5]. The Greek author Lucian of Samosata, who lived in the era of the Roman Empire (II century AD), wrote that "poetry and poetic works have one task and their own special laws, history has another". He believed that "history has one task and goal — good that can ensue only from truth" [6]. Although the Romans considered history as a part of rhetoric and fiction, they saw the difference between them.

In medieval philosophy of history ideas of universalism and providentialism were dominative. Medieval man was alien to the concept of historicism. D.S. Likhachev considered chronicles as one of the genres of ancient Russian literature. According to the scientist, "the chronicler seeks to see events from the height of their "eternal" and not real meaning". The chronicler's system of depicting the flow of historical events is a consequence not of "special thinking", but of a particular philosophy of history. It depicts the entire course of history, and not the correlation of events [7].

Appealing to the ancient heritage in the Renaissance contributed to the formation of a new attitude to history. The adoption of a heliocentric picture of the world in the early new period, the development of rationalistic and empirical research methods had a powerful influence not only on natural science, but also contributed to the development of historical science. One of the directions of the struggle against church scholasticism was the exposure of Konstantinov's gift by humanists — a forged document used to substantiate the claims of the Catholic Church to secular authority. Thus, the notion of criticism of sources, unfamiliar to medieval authors, appeared. But according to the Italian philosopher B. Croce, referring to history, humanist writers could appreciate the "luxurious decoration of any text" [8].

A contemporary of G. Galileo and F. Bacon was a 16th century French historian, philosopher and jurist J. Bodin, who put history in an exceptional place among other sciences, since "history in many ways surpasses other branches of knowledge and stands in the highest order of necessity and need". In order to collect bits of truth from various sources, J. Bodin called on remembering the wise saying of Aristotle: "When you read a story, it is not known what is more necessary - to believe or constantly doubt." The French thinker warned: "If we agree with everything they write about, without having doubted anything, we will certainly accept the truth as a lie." At the same time, J. Bodin often called history "art" and believed that "the system and method used in the fine arts ... may as well be suitable for history as a discipline" [9].

III. THE PLACE OF HISTORY IN THE CLASSICAL SCIENCE OF NEW AND NEWEST TIME

The transition from the middle Ages to the new time was marked by the emergence of classical science, which was based on experimental bases. Its method was an experiment that allowed combining theory and facts. The formation of a new scientific picture of the world strengthened the need to develop a method of historical science. This made historians turn to a historical source, from which, with the help of criticism, reliable facts can be extracted. D. Vico, in his work "Foundations of New Science", advocated studying the "History of ideas, customs and deeds of the human race", arguing that "the Foundations of the History of Human Nature originate from this "three-fold source"; they are also called the Foundations of Human History" [10].

However, noting the positive moments in historiography, it is necessary to admit that the revolution in natural science promoted the formation of a skeptical view of history for the early new time's philosophers: Galileo, Spinoza, F. Bacon. For example: F. Bacon believed that unlike poetry, which is controlled by imagination, and philosophy, which is controlled by reason, history is controlled by memory.

Since about the middle of the XVIII century the situation has changed, the development of classical science led to its specialization. Research work becomes a profession and, as a result, is separated from other types of mental work and art, including literary. It was in the literature of that time that the concept of "historical science" appeared. In the article "History" in the Encyclopedia of Diderot and D'Alembert, Voltaire gives the following definition: "HISTORY is a statement of facts cited as true, as opposed to a fable that is a statement of false facts" [11].

The ideologists of the 18th century European Enlightenment separated civil history from sacred history, thus taking the decisive step towards the liberation of history from theology. They paid much attention to historiosophical problems. The concept of "philosophy of history" was set due to Voltaire. The concept of the sovereign human mind, of free will in the choice of the historical path, became the backbone element of the historical process. The circle of interests of historians has expanded significantly. The themes of historical works, along with political history, were the influence of the geographical and climatic environment on the development of the state and society, the history of estates, economics, education, etc. However, the problem of treating history as art was not forgotten.

The eminent poet, playwright and simultaneously university professor and historian F. Schiller in his lecture "What is the study of world history and what is the purpose of this study?" spoke of truth as the highest value. Mental activity, in his words, ignites young hearts and awakens inspiration, while a true scientist owns "the noblest of all instruments — science and art". Schiller ridiculed hagglers, for whom the most important thing is to "flaunt the treasure accumulated by the memory and make sure that they do not fall in value". The philosophical mind, Schiller believed, cannot be satisfied with simply collecting facts. It finds its task in establishing links between historical events, past and

present. Unlike the natural scientist, the historian does not stand above facts as simple objects of knowledge, but, on the contrary, plunges into them and, in his imagination, experiences them as events of his own life [12].

The XIX century German historiography developed under the powerful influence of German classical philosophy. G. Hegel in his lectures on the philosophy of history identified three types of historiography: a) the original history; b) reflective history; c) philosophical history. He compared the first type of historiography with poetry. Herodotus, Thucydides and other ancient historians described the deeds, events, and processes that took place before their eyes, and they themselves were imbued with its spirit and transferred what existed in the sphere of spiritual ideas. Thus, according to Hegel, the external phenomenon is transformed into an internal representation. Just as the poet processes the material given to him in his sensations to express it in representations, Hegel gave a definition to reflective historiography as such a history, which rises above the modern era, not in the sense of time, but in the sense of spirit. He understood philosophical history as a "thoughtful consideration of it." [13]

In the 19th century, the so-called "historical school" was formed in Germany, the recognized leader of which was L. Von Ranke, who believed that the real history is more fascinating than any artistic fiction and proclaimed the "discovery of historical truth" as his first task. The rationale for the principles of the "German historical school" was made by I. Droysen. He criticized the followers of the Englishman T. Macaulay and the Frenchman A. Thier, who turned the past "into an artistic, well-retouched image, into an exciting reading". Droysen formulated a number of relevant issues to contemporary historiography: how do art and science relate to each other in the works of historians? Is it really what the historian should do has no other purpose than to write this or that book? Is it true that history can only entertain when teaching, and teach when entertaining? The German historian made a clear distinction between art and science [14]. He considered the "greatest merit" of the German critical school to be the understanding that the basis of historical research is the verification of "sources", a scientific approach to the study of the past.

The successes of natural sciences in the XIX century gave rise to the desire to discover laws of history that act with the same logic as the laws of nature [15]. The answer to this demand of time was the Marxist theory, which considered the development of society as a "natural-historical process". Marxism has given his followers the illusion that historical factology has been replaced by a holistic scientific theory, which makes it possible to investigate the laws of society evolution. Marxist historians fundamentally dissociate themselves from narrative history and, therefore, have drawn a clear boundary between historical science and fiction.

In the second half of the XIX century, under the influence of positivism, an opinion was spread, according to which historical science and literature solve fundamentally different tasks. The historian aims to create an objective

picture of the past and is forced to limit himself to documentary sources. The writer realizes his creative idea, without worrying about reliability. Positivists believed that the tasks of science are, firstly, the establishment of facts; secondly, the development of laws. History establishes the facts; sociology formulates laws [16]. Historians-positivists categorically rejected the invasion of philosophy into history. The positive result of the enthusiasm for positivism among historians was the introduction of a huge number of sources into science, the creation of fundamental works containing rich factual material. But at the same time the cognitive functions of historical science sharply narrowed. Small fractional parts in the narrative text created the effect of reality. R. Barth calls this phenomenon in literature "referential illusion", which was expressed in the well-known thesis of A. Thiers: "To be truthful only, to be like facts, to merge with facts, to live only facts, to follow facts, not to go further than them". [17]

A look at history as a science, dealing exclusively with facts, which at first seemed completely innocent, turned into a deep crisis of historical science in the early XX century. Social upheavals and world wars of the first half of the XX century gave rise to disbelief in the ability of historians to predict the future based on the knowledge of the past. In the eyes of ordinary people, the story of "magistra vitae" ("life mentor") turned into "a servant of politics". Increasingly, voices began to be heard that history is "a policy overturned into the past", that "the victors write history." Thus, they began to consider history not as a science, or even as a genre of literature, but as an effective propaganda tool, designed to serve the interests of political elites [18].

An attempt to overcome the methodological crisis of historical science was the French school of Annals, which placed human at the center of historical research. M. Blok talked about the special aesthetics of the historical science language and called for "not to take away its share of poetry from history". "Human facts are in their essence phenomena too subtle, many of them elude the mathematical dimension. - argued M. Blok. - In order to reproduce them well and due to this understand them well (for is it possible to fully understand what you cannot express?), a great sensitivity of the language, accuracy of shades in tone is required" [19].

The evolution of B. Croce's methodological views is interesting. In one of his early works, the Italian philosopher not only stated the closeness of history and art, but in fact identified them, since "art and history are one and the same — intuition and reproduction of the individual." The distinction, argued Croce, is that art in general, in a broad sense, reproduces or narrates about the possible; the history reproduces or narrates of what actually happened [20]. Many years later, he wrote that a historical book cannot be judged by how revealing, exciting, passionate, curious and entertaining it is, since all this is indicative of novels and dramas. The only criterion for assessing the historical book B. Croce considered historicity, as for poetic - the quality of poetry. By historicity, the Italian philosopher meant "an act of rational understanding, stimulated by practical life" [21].

Y. Heizinga writes a brilliant essay on the place of history in the system of scientific knowledge and the competition of literature and history. The Dutch thinker recognized literature as “a form of knowledge for a culture that generates it”, but which contributes to the comprehension of the world through other means than those that science possesses. He believed that the border between the historian and the fiction writer is “a conscious setting”, from which the scientist proceeds in his work: “If the all-consuming need for “authenticity”, deeply sincere desire to find out “what happened” or “how it really was”, are absent, then this is not about history”. “A genuine connoisseur - wrote J. Huizinga, - rejects wine with certain additives. He feels fake in it. For him, no literary effect can be compared with the pure, robust taste of history. He wants not a dried, but a dry history. To get rid of the perfumery taste of this hybrid genre, the very first authentic historical document that falls into his hands will be enough for him - whether it is a chronicle, verdict, notarial act, letter or resolution [22].

IV. HISTORICAL TEXT IN THE LIGHT OF A POSTMODERNIST CALL

The postmodern revolution in humanitarian knowledge of 1970s in a new way highlighted the question of artistic and figurative thinking role in historical research. Postmodernism proceeds from the fact that alpha and omega of historical research is written text. The text serves as a source from which the historian draws information about past events. He also presents the results of his research to readers in form of a text. Creating it, the researcher plays an active creative role. He, like a writer, uses a wide range of artistic tools designed to interest the reader and convince him in writer’s rightness [23].

Postmodernism has different from classical historical science understanding of the subject and methods of historical cognition, the relationship of the historian and the source, the nature and content of the obtained historical knowledge, the form of its presentation. Historical reality is perceived not as something external to the cognizing subject. Consequently, the active role of the historian in the reconstruction of historical reality is recognized. Much more importance is attached to the language, which is no longer viewed simply as a tool of communication, but also as a semantic factor [24]. Postmodernists questioned seeming indestructible principles of historiography: the concept of historical reality, criteria for the reliability of sources, the limits of knowledge of the past [25].

Unsurprisingly, at first criticism from postmodernists caused a negative reaction from professional historians. However, then more and more voices began to be heard, calling for mutual understanding and reconciliation. Therefore, A.L. Yurganov, who fundamentally diverged in his conclusions with postmodernism, saw its main merit “in the sharp criticism of traditionalism, directed against the “Achilles heel” of historical science — the modernization of the past” [26]. Consequently, the positive influence of postmodernism on modern historiography is manifested in the historians’ awareness of the need to constantly check and

comprehend their research methods, forms of organization and presentation of the material.

Reconstructing historical events, the historian cannot confine himself to scientific instruments. Intuition and imagination come to his aid. The historian must dive into the past, have a subtle sense of time, and get used to the consciousness of people who lived many centuries ago. To avoid the modernization of history, it is necessary to take into account that the language, mentality, and picture of the world have changed dramatically over the past centuries [27]. Consequently, the postmodern challenge forces historians to reconsider the methodological apparatus and update the research tools of their science.

However, historians can accept not all postmodernist ideas. The reduction of historical research to the creation of a text does not reveal the specifics of history as a science. Writing a text is not an end in itself for a real scientist. The result of his work is not the creation of a text as such, but a new knowledge about the past, clothed in text form. Like a literary work, the historical text can be written in different genres. A monograph or an article interesting and understandable only to a narrow circle of professionals, a historiosophical essay addressed to humanities intellectuals, a school textbook, a popular science publication intended for a wide readership, and even a work of art can come out of a scientist’s pen. However, when starting a work, a historian must clearly formulate the goal, which ultimately determines the form and content of the text.

In the interpretation of postmodernists, the line separating the historical narrative from the artistic one becomes not just unsteady. It is erased. A. Ya. Gurevich draws attention to the fact that the mechanical transfer of poststructural analysis from literary studies to historical science is unjustified, since philologists deal with artistic texts created by writers and poets who create their own deeply personal artistic worlds, while the work of historians has to recreate the image of once existed reality [28]. Unlike a writer, a historian should not just describe the events of the past, but introduce previously unknown sources into scientific circulation or reinterpret already known facts, discover new facts, reveal cause-and-effect relationships, and reveal patterns of the historical process. Figurative thinking, imagination, and intuition help a scientist, but they do not replace his logic and system of evidence.

V. CONCLUSION

Summing up, it can be noted that the opposition of historical science to literary creativity was dominant in historiography and philosophical thought for a relatively short time — in the second half of the XIX – early XX centuries. However, the understanding of the similarities and differences between history and literature changed. In the period of antiquity and the middle Ages, they were essentially identified. The formation and development of classical science has led to the disengagement of history and literature. History has gained its subject. Methods, principles and categories of historical science were developed. “Postmodern Challenge” again aggravated the

methodological problems of historical knowledge, in a new way highlighted the complex nature of the interaction between the source and the researcher, and increased the requirements for the content and language of the scientific historical text.

REFERENCES

- [1] B.N. Zemtsov and T.R. Suzdaleva, "History as a Science", Proceedings of the International Conference on Contemporary Education, Social Sciences and Ecological Studies (CESSES 2018). Series "Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research", vol. 283, pp. 752-755, 2018. DOI: 10.2991/cesses-18.2018.166
- [2] M. Blok, *Apology of History or the Craft of the Historian*. Moscow: Nauka, 1973, p. 19. (in Russian)
- [3] A.F. Losev, *Ancient Philosophy of History*. Moscow: Nauka, 1977, pp. 35-37. (in Russian)
- [4] M.A. Barg, *Shakespeare and History*. Moscow: Nauka, 1979, p. 8. (in Russian)
- [5] Aristotle, *Works: In 4 vol. Vol.4*. Moscow: Mysl', 1983, p. 655. (in Russian)
- [6] Lucian of Samosata, *Works: In 2 vol. Vol.2*. St. Petersburg: Aleteiya, 2001, pp. 83-84. (in Russian)
- [7] D.S. Likhachev, *Poetics of Old Russian Literature*. Moscow: Nauka, 1979, pp. 258-259. (in Russian)
- [8] B. Croce, *Anthology of Works on Philosophy*. St. Petersburg: Pnevma, 1999, p.208. (in Russian)
- [9] J. Bodin, *Method for the Easy Knowledge of History*. Moscow: Nauka, 2000, pp. 16, 20, 23, 43. (in Russian)
- [10] J. Vico, *Foundations of a New Science on the General Nature of Nations*. Moscow-Kiev: «REFL-book» - «ISA», 1994, p. 127. (in Russian)
- [11] *History in the Encyclopedia of Diderot and D'Alembert*. Leningrad: Nauka, 1978, pp. 7-18. (in Russian)
- [12] F. Schiller, *Collected Works in 7 vol. Vol.4*. Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya literatura, 1956, pp. 9-28. (in Russian)
- [13] G.V.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*. St. Petersburg: Nauka, 1993, p. 57-64. (in Russian)
- [14] I.G. Droysen, *Historica. Lectures on the Encyclopedia and Methodology of History*. St. Petersburg: «Vladimir Dal'», 2004, pp. 565-567. (in Russian)
- [15] V.Yu. Ivlev and Yu.V. Ivlev, "Objective Meaning of Logical Knowledge", Proceedings of the International Conference on Contemporary Education, Social Sciences and Ecological Studies (CESSES 2018). Series "Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research", vol. 283, pp. 880-885, 2018. DOI: 10.2991/cesses-18.2018.194
- [16] N.N. Gubanov, N.I. Gubanov and L.O. Rokotyanskaya, "Prospects for the Development of a Universal Theory of Truth", Proceedings of the International Conference on Contemporary Education, Social Sciences and Ecological Studies (CESSES 2018). Series "Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research", vol. 283, pp. 801-805, 2018. DOI: 10.2991/cesses-18.2018.177
- [17] R. Barth, *Selected Works: Semiotics, Poetics*. Moscow: Progress, 1989, p. 399. (in Russian)
- [18] V.A. Nekhamkin, "A counterfactual Challenge of the Past: Ways of Negotiation", *Herald of the Russian Academy of Sciences*, vol 87, no 2, pp. 191-198, 2017. DOI: 10.1134/S1019331617020046
- [19] M. Blok, *Apology of History or the Craft of the Historian*, pp. 9, 19. (in Russian)
- [20] J. Collingwood, *The Idea of History. An Autobiography*. Moscow: Nauka, 1980, pp. 183-184; (in Russian)
- [21] B. Croce, *Anthology of Works on Philosophy*, p. 209. (in Russian)
- [22] Y. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens; Articles on the History of Culture*. Moscow: Progress-Traditsiya, 1997, pp. 237-238, 243. (in Russian)
- [23] A.N. Nekhamkin and V.A. Nekhamkin, "Counter-factual modeling of the past in everyday cognition", *Dialogue with Time*, no 65, pp. 336-352, 2018. DOI: 10.21267/AQUILO.2018.65.20778
- [24] V.Yu. Ivlev, M.L. Ivleva and V.P. Sedyakin, "Information Metaphors and Classification of Information Sciences", Proceedings of the International Conference on Contemporary Education, Social Sciences and Ecological Studies (CESSES 2018). Series "Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research", vol. 283, pp. 874-879, 2018. DOI: 10.2991/cesses-18.2018.193
- [25] L.P. Repina, *New Historical Science and Social History*. Moscow: Institute of World History of Russian Academy of Science, 1998, pp.224-235. (in Russian)
- [26] A.L. Yurganov, *Categories of Russian Medieval Culture*. Moscow: MIROS, 1998, pp. 7-8. (in Russian)
- [27] N.I. Gubanov and N.N. Gubanov, "Apollo's challenge as a driving force for educational development", *Vestnik slavianskikh kultur – bulletin of slavic cultures-scientific and informational journal*, vol. 50, no. 4, pp. 22-34, 2018.
- [28] A.Ya. Gurevich, *History - an Endless Dispute: Medievalism and Scandinavism: Articles from Different Years*. Moscow: Russian State University for the Humanities, 2005, p. 571. (in Russian)