

Empirical Fact, Fact from the Past and Historical Fact

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Abstract—Scientific facts are theoretical constructors, describing and explaining a phenomena, given to researcher as a sensitive reality, by fundamental laws. Facts from the past unlike a scientific facts, describe not-being which is transcendental, incognizable and reproduced only abstractedly. Facts from the past describe the events that are unique and unrepeatable and which cannot be proved by experiments. That's why the methods of historical facts constructing are significant different from the methods of describing and explaining empirical facts of reality. They are based on imagination and life experience, and are not determined by the object of cognition, but by the worldview of the historian.

Keywords—*empirical fact; fact from the past; historical fact; history; historiography; narrative; interpretation; conceptualization of the past*

I. INTRODUCTION

The task of historiography is to describe and explain historical facts. But before beginning to its solution, it is necessary to determine what the historical facts are and to understand how they differ from the nature and social reality facts.

Semantic analysis of the historical fact concept shows that it is used in different meanings. In some cases it is used as a synonym for the concept "event" (the Battle of Waterloo is a historical fact), in others — it is used as a "testimony" (historical facts testifying of the French revolution), thirdly, as validation of the truth of this judgment (this story is based on the facts) [1]. One more meaning of the term fact — is a synonym for the objective reality phenomenon given to the ego in sensation.

If we consider the fact not as a synonym for the event, but as a confirmation about it, then by fact we will understand the description in the narrative form of the phenomenon of objective reality since in terms of of the cognizing subject, "all factual is already a theory" [2]. Consequently, a fact — is a theoretical construct that "exists only in thought, language or discourse" and, in this meaning, is a semantic reality [3]. In this meaning, fact is a symbolic reality, by which we can recreate the events of being in consciousness. Those, describing the phenomena of reality, facts exist in the linguistic phenomena form. Therefore, a fact should be understood not as a phenomenon of reality independent of the subject, but as a subject-object unity, being the result of learning. It is expressed in the fact that, as

a fact, a phenomenon is describing in accordance with a priori forms and categories of pure reason.

However, this understanding of the fact does not correspond to the past events description, since the past does not exist and, therefore, is not a reality. Ontologically, the past — is a non-being that can be thought, but cannot be observed. Therefore, the events of the past descriptions represent a special class of facts from the past (the facts from the past further), fundamentally different from the facts describing the phenomena of reality.

II. FACT FROM THE PAST AND ITS INTERPRETATION AS A HISTORICAL FACT

Historians do not deal with events, but with statements about them, i.e. with a narrative allowing imagining these past events. As a result, in historiography the subject-objective unity of fact and the cognizing subject is unobtainable as "the object of observation and the object of historical presentation, in other words the source and fact, do not concur" [4].

Another difference between the facts from the past and the facts of empirical reality is that they cannot be verified outside the evidence of sources and explained on the basis of a more general fact, since, for example, in medicine, the fact of illness can be explained by the fact of pathogenic activity of bacteria or viruses. Describing and explaining the events from the past, historians use everyday language. The subjects of their description are unique events that cannot be generalized on the basis of general laws. Therefore, it is incorrect to use the thesis of the theoretical task load of empirical facts to the facts from the past. Historian's conclusions about the connection of the facts from the past are based not on theory, which is based on knowledge of the necessary cause-effect relationship (laws), but on logic and personal experience and are similar to the thoughts of Kant's pigeon, which imagines that it would be more comfortable for him to fly in airless space.

As the past is ontologically a non-being and the artifacts are objective reality for historiography that can be divided into sources (various kinds of documentary records) and monuments of material culture. Therefore, the past is not a non-being in the meaning of something that has never existed, but a being that has existed previously, but does not exist right now, but is one of the reasons for the present. The past physically (as part of material culture) and

super-substantial (as memories and imaginations) continues to be in being, being one of its apanages.

But the facts in general and the facts from the past in particular in themselves only indicate events, but do not give their understanding. Understanding of the facts is only possible with the help of explanatory theory. Even artifacts — the material evidence of the past, will reach the status of a fact of the past only when they will be described and presented in the narrative form, which gives them meaning and attributes. By themselves, they do not contain any information other than the sensually perceived given. Only external manifestations of artifacts are available to the historian, but he can only make hypothetical assumptions of a aprioristic nature about their incorporeity. Artifacts as evidence of the past can only show its difference or similarity with the present, but not act as its justification and explanation. That is why the past exists only as a narrative, describing it, and is learned through this narrative. Thus, following the instructions of Jacques Derrida that "there is nothing outside the text," semantic reality should be viewed as the only form and way of being of the facts from the past [5]. In this regard, Franklin Rudolf Ankersmit constates: "the limits of the text become the limits of the historical world" [6].

To become a fact from the past, the event must be recorded in the form of information about it. Those events, about which information was not kept, are buried in oblivion by himanity and did not become facts from the past. This results to the fact that historiography is attributively tendentious because has to deal only with those events that, for some reason, were stored in memory.

Suppose that under a layer of volcanic ash at the foothill of Vesuvius, the ruins of an ancient city are found. Based on this find it can be concluded that he died as a result of a volcanic eruption. It is not possible to establish reliably the name of the city, nor the exact time of the catastrophe, nor by whom and when it was founded or any other details based on the founded artifacts. Only because of the documentary records we know that the city was called Pompeii, that it was founded by one of the Italic tribes and died as a result of the Vesuvius eruption on August 24, AD 79 and etc. At the same time, even the simplest fact from the past, such as "Caesar, crossed the Rubicon", is a complex construction consisting of many other facts from the past. If these facts are unknown, this event has no historical significance, as well as the crossing of the Rubicon by millions of other people before or after Caesar.

The fact from the past is a simple establishment that an event has happened. The historical fact is not just the knowledge that this event happened, but also an establishment of why it happened and happened this way and not in another way [7]. For example, the establishment that on September 7, 1812, a battle between the armies under the command of Emperor Napoleon and Field Marshal Kutuzov at the Borodino field near Moscow happened. This fact from the past is transformed to a historical fact, when it will be considered with others facts from the past, will be interpreted and estimated in the context of influence on subsequent

events. For example, the establishment that the Russian or French army won in the battle at the Borodino and its result was the surrender of Moscow, is one of the possible interpretations of this fact from the past, is a value judgment and, therefore, has the status of a historical fact. The establishment that on November 7, 1917, the Great October Socialist Revolution happened is a historical fact, because the term "revolution" is abstract concept which has a lot of meanings and means a many different facts. This establishment doesn't have unambiguous localization in time and space and is one of the possible interpretations of these events. Thus, the fact from the past is only a potential possibility of historical fact. The fact from the past is becoming historical just by a historian. In this regard it should be recognized that documentary sources don't consist a historical facts. They are constructed by the historian and are, as it was noted by Robin George Collingwood, not the starting point of the argument, but their result. The construction of historical facts consists in the fact that the historian unites various facts from the past in the narrative, attributing meaning to them.

As the result of this construction, a historical fact with need is determined by author's worldview and shows a specific identity. In historiography, this is manifested in the fact that a historian selects only those facts from the past that are most suitable for his interpretation of the past and ignores (or declare them false) those that contradict it.

III. THE ROUTE THAT HISTORICAL FACTS ARE CREATED AND KNOWN

The principal difference of historical facts from reality facts needs a special method of their knowledge. Collingwood suggests to historian to use his imagination and mentally to move to the past and imagine how would he behaves in such a situation. For example, to establish "which problems of sea battle tactics arose before Nelson in the Battle of Trafalgar" it is needed to "mentally imagine oneself in admiral's place" [8]. This method suggests that with imagination, the historian uses the method of empathy. But historian is not a politic or warlord, but an armchair scientist, who has not hold anything heavier than a goose-quill or pen and, as experience has proven that his endeavor to empathize and understand the actions of historical characters often turns into trivial statements like "a big army is stronger than a small one".

According to the French historians Charles-Victor Langlois and Charles Seignobos, constating the historical facts, historian uses an analogy, finding in the past similarities with and nowadays. In this case, the historian proceeds from the speculative assumption that the facts from the past occur in the same way as the analogous facts of the present [9]. But, the present is different from the past and in it in similar circumstances people act not like in the past. Moreover, in the present there are no such circumstances with that people have faced in the past and vice versa.

During constructing a historical facts, an unsolvable epistemological problem arises, due to the fact that the historian cannot establish and verify how reliably the source

describes the facts from the past, what is falsehood and fantasy in this description, and what is in reality what was described [10].

The very process of singling out and fixing individual events from the flow of reality — is a subjective act, caused only by the observer's design, his worldview attitudes and current interests. Some events are forgotten, the memory of others is maintained by their institutionalization. Is the author of the evidence competent and objective? Can the author describe events in an impartial way do not single out one, and ignoring the other? Can a contemporary appreciate what is really important and what are the secondary details? These questions cannot be answered in the affirmative. An assessment of facts from the past depends on the context (social reality). The context changes with the changes of society and, consequently, the assessment of the past changes.

But since historiography does not come down to citation and compilation of sources, in all cases where the historian does not refer to the source's message, he resorts to fiction and his arguments, is most likely based on the assumption of how he would act in a similar situation. The historian constructs historical facts based on the assumption that similar events occur under similar circumstances. Furthermore, the facts from the past themselves are not "purely" historical in content [11].

It should be constated that as such historical facts do not exist. Sources contain information about ontologically different facts from the past, which reflect various aspects of social and natural processes (biographical, astronomical, climatic, sociological, political, economic, military, etc.). These facts are economic, political, psychological, cultural, military, religious, etc., but not historical in its content. To analyze these facts a special knowledge will be needed. The historian is not an expert in the sciences that study these facts and his ideas about them are usually shallow [12].

Furthermore, evidences are in the nature of disorderly and chaotic and for the creation of narrative the systematization is required. In this case, a unified methodology for classifying facts from the past does not exist. They can be viewed as the result of rational and irrational work of historical personalities, as a result of class struggle, as an a matter of chance, as a result of confederacy or external intervention, as economic or psychological phenomena, etc. Therefore, the method by which historical facts are constructed from facts from the past has not changed since the time of Herodotus. Based on his personal experience and guided by his ideas about the present and right, the historian chooses from a variety of evidences those that appear to him reliable and turns them into historical facts. The criterion of truth for him is the assurance that this evidence is genuine.

If to refute the one historical fact is possible based of another historical, then to prove it

If one can refute one historical fact is possible bases on another historical fact, then it is impossible to verify their authenticity, as it is impossible to verify the authenticity of the facts from the past. The historian finds some facts

prepared in documents, constructs others on the basis of data unknown to contemporaries, but are known to the historian, and still others contrives, suggesting that they could be. Ultimately, the facts from the past are constructed by the author of the source, and during this process, as Voltaire notes, "honesty gives way to oratory" [13]. Even the most objective and scrupulous researcher distorts the events, being in reality. The characteristic evidence of this is described by L. Tolstoy in the novel "War and Peace", an example of how Nikolai Rostov told how he has been wounded in the Schengraben affair. Tolstoy notes that "Rostov was a truthful young man, he would never have purposely told a lie" and that "he began to tell with the intention of telling everything how it exactly was, but imperceptible, involuntarily and inevitably turned into a lie for himself" [14]. This example clearly demonstrates that the empirical facts and eyewitness's evidences contradict each other. In general, it should be recognized that historical facts and reality are "two completely different things" [15]. But, in this case, we come to a paradox: based on historical facts there are eyewitness's evidences, therefore, they (the facts) should correspond to eyewitness's evidences, but this evidences are not veracious. Therefore, a historical fact — is not something that corresponds to the facts, but something that is significant for the author of the narrative.

IV. CONCLUSION

The scientific intention is to create an explanatory theory, allowing explaining the facts of reality and their relationship. The intention of historiography is congruent with the intention of science, but epistemologically this intention cannot be realized, because historical narratives can explain historical facts "scientifically", that is, intersubjective and uncontroversial, and the historical facts themselves — are theoretical interpretations of the facts from the past. Fixing an event in time and space — is the place where the objectivity of historiography ends [16]. There is no doubt that if some event was in reality, then it necessarily happened somewhere and sometime. But the further descriptions of this event are based on the subjective position of the author of the evidence. For example, it should be considered as a true confirmation that the czarevitch Ivan the Terrible's son Ivan Ivanovich died in 1581. But the circumstances of his death are explained in different ways: whether he died from a disease or his father killed him, striking him by a staff.

In contrast to the empirical facts, determining the objective content of science, the historical fact is not a result of conceptualizing of empirical reality, but an interpretation in the semantic reality narrative form, describing the facts from the past. Both the facts from the past and their interpretations in the form of historical facts, in contrast to the facts of reality, exist only as a text telling about events that may have been in the past. These texts were formed within the framework of institutions that legitimize the events described in them as worthy of perpetuation as facts from the past and the only true ones. Many interpretations of the facts from the past are possible as historical facts. The basis for these interpretations is the belief that the explained facts from the past actually occurred and (or) rational

purposeful activity in the construction of a mythologem that uses for controlling a society in the present [17].

Thus, historiography — is a reflection of the past, which is carried out by conceptualizing of the facts from the past as historical facts. The historian interprets the source, which automatically is thought of as direct evidence, creating a narrative connecting disparate facts from the past to a narrative, in which these facts from the past are connected together as cause and effect and endowed with meaning.

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