EDUCATIONAL POTENTIAL OF SOURCES OF PERSONAL ORIGIN FOR THE STUDY OF MODERN HISTORY

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Abstract

The study of modern history is the most important and final element of the preparation of the student-historian at the University. The basis of the educational process is the work with historical sources. Given the special interest of modern humanitarian knowledge to the "human factor", the author aims to briefly summarize the experience of the organization of work with the category of historical sources, which most fully reflects the idea of the role of man in modern history – sources of personal origin. The author examines in detail the principles, stages and methods of organization of educational activities with such a variety of these sources as the diaries of ordinary citizens. The report shows the advantages of diaries over later memoirs. Special attention is paid to the organization of educational and research activities of students to work with diaries.

At the first stage, the teacher conducts an introductory lecture, which gives students an idea of the specifics of the diary as a historical source. At the next stage, the issues of searching for these sources by contacting citizens and the relevant Internet sites are considered. One of the most successful projects in this regard is the website "http://prozhito.org/", the creators of which for a number of years actively collect and prepare for publication on the website and for publication diaries of both famous historical figures and ordinary citizens.

In this report, the author examines the technology of preparing handwritten texts for posting on the site and the experience of organizing such work with students of the Moscow Region State University, recently connected to such activities, which is, of course, not only scientific, but also of great educational importance. The report shows that this joint activity of the teacher and students allows students to learn more deeply the methods of working with historical sources, and for the historical science itself provides extremely valuable information on modern history, which is difficult to find in the sources of official origin. Key points of the report are illustrated by examples of extracts from diaries.

Keywords: modern history, diaries, students, methods, historical sources, ordinary citizens.

1 INTRODUCTION

Historical source is the basis of the study of the history of human society. Sources of personal origin are one of the most important types of written historical sources, "created privately for the purpose of self-expression, self-awareness and self-affirmation of the author" [1]. One of their varieties are personal diaries. Both in Russian and in foreign historical science there are still discussions about their importance and methods of work with this category of sources. Defining features of diaries as a historical source, a number of the Russian authors find them in criteria of targeting of the document. They believe that the author of the diary usually does not assume an outside reader [1]. Recognizing in General the validity of this statement, we note that in modern literature there are other ideas about the targeting of diaries. So, J. Hellbeck, convincingly showing that the genre of the diary does not disappear in the era of Stalinist totalitarianism in the USSR, draws attention to one of the goals of the authors of such documents – "fit into the socio-political order", their passion for finding how they can transform themselves in accordance with the requirements of the revolution [2]. In this sense, the authors of such texts did not need to fear that even their innermost thoughts would become known, for example, to the authorities: it was the personal nature of the diaries that could convince the Communist state that the author of the diary was on the ideologically correct path. Thus, the diary was a means not only of self-expression, but also of self-transformation.

To an even greater extent, the use of personal diaries as a historical source is relevant in the study of modern history. For natural reasons, only a small part of them is available to historians today. The authors of the well-known work on source studies [1], speaking about the evolution of sources of personal origin after 1991, do not even mention the diaries, which indicates a very weak involvement of such sources in scientific circulation. However, the number of such diaries in modern history (which
is usually understood as the period since 1992) is not so small as to ignore them. Especially valuable are those documents that have already become the property of specialists.

As long-term teaching experience of the author shows, students of higher educational institutions have some difficulties in working with this category of historical sources. Students do not fully understand how to search for these sources, and methods of working with them. Students are not always aware of the differences between the types of sources of personal origin, in particular, between diaries and memories. Serious difficulties for the students is the extraction of valuable diaries of historical information. Require further development and skills of critical analysis of the text of diaries, as often given in their information students are perceived without any verification of their compliance with reality. To the full extent, all this applies to the diaries on modern history.

Thus, the considerable educational potential of this category of sources is not fully used, which prompted the author to make this report.

2 METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this study is based on the allocation of theoretical and practical parts. In the theoretical part of the study, the author focuses on the formation of students knowledge about the features of the diary as a historical source. The main teaching method at this stage is a lecture. The teacher gives students an idea of the classification of diaries. One of its variants is the division of diaries into 1) diaries-Chronicles; 2) diaries-"photos" and 3) diaries-reflections [1]. This classification, for all its conventionality, allows you to make a preliminary idea of the features of the various diaries.

Already at this stage, the teacher actively refers to the examples from the diaries on the modern history of Russia. The possibility to get acquainted with such diaries exists due to the fact that some of them have already been published (in whole or in part) [3; 4], access to others is provided by specialized sites. One of the most informative is the existing since 2015 website "http://prozhito.org/" providing access to the diaries of well-known historical figures (politicians, cultural figures, the military, members of the public and ordinary citizens).

The published text of the famous Russian historian I. D. Kovalchenko in which he sharply critically reflects on events in the USSR of December, 1991 which led to its disintegration is given as a diary-reflections. Thus, the author of the diary notes that the heads of the Union republics of the USSR, who signed the agreement in Alma-Ata on December 21, made a coup, grossly ignoring the thousand-year historical tradition of Russian statehood. This method of action, according to Kovalchenko, is destructive and revolutionary. "In the midst of national selfishness, the political ambitions of local leaders and the struggle for full independence... such an outcome was inevitable." However, Kovalchenko believes that at a higher level of political elites, the abolition of a single state could be "more democratic and constitutional" [3]. Students can conclude that the author of the diary condemns not so much the fact of the collapse of the USSR, as the methods of implementation of this action by regional leaders.

Also, a typical example of a diary-reflection is that part of the diary of another famous Russian historian V. V. Shelokhayev, which is devoted to the events of modern history (the diaries of historians were selected by the teacher also in order to acquaint students with the activities of major Russian scientists). Unlike Kovalchenko, who actively reacted to socially significant topics, Shelokhayev reflects mainly on the difficulties and ways of development of Russian historical science. His diary is professionally oriented. If the records of the Soviet period (until the end of the 1980s) are predominantly chronicle in nature and quite briefly reflect the facts mainly of the professional activity of the historian (and in this part are a diary-chronicle), the records in recent years are increasingly moving away from chronicality and represent a thorough reflection of the theoretical nature of the current tasks of historical science in Russia. As a typical example, we can offer the following passage for students to think about January 14-17, 2012: “Yesterday I watched a TV show about the state and prospects of our science. Academician Ryzhov said that the point of no return of domestic science has long passed. In SKOLKOVO [Russian innovation center – D.M.] initiative no one believes. Tragic note. Quite sharply criticized the RAS [Russian Academy of Sciences - D. M.], which is not subject to reform. In this regard, recall the innovations of the early 1990-ies, when the craze went with the democratization of the Russian Academy of Sciences (election of Directors, the public nomination of corresponding members, academicians). However, in these and subsequent years, few people spoke about innovations in the field of scientific research, the development of fundamental scientific projects, etc. However, I have already mentioned this more than once. An old tree may stand long, but to bear
fruit will not be" [4]. However, there are in this diary and records of the most socially significant events (for example, a fairly detailed description of the events of the autumn of 1993, when the crisis of state power in Russia).

A somewhat different kind of reflection we find in the diary of the popular Russian actor and Director R. Bykov. Under the significant date of December 31, 1996, he writes: "the twentieth century is coming to an End... the Impending ecological catastrophe meets almost no resistance. The schizophrenic mentality of the world’s population is a reality that no one wants to notice... We somehow believe that the world is democratizing and that this is its natural way. However, although the geographical Empire is gone, in their place came a new Empire of Finance" [7]. It is easy to notice that here reflections concern the questions connected not so much with concrete professional activity of the author of the diary, how many with those problems of universal character which concerned him at that moment. Accordingly, such diaries-reflections are valuable not for their actual content, but because they give an idea of the mentality of a certain part of the intellectuals of the late twentieth century.

Diaries-Chronicles of a teacher can illustrate on the example of the diaries of the traveler N. Abramov in 1998, which is a very detailed account connected with his travels events [8]. Abramov found time for daily (often even on hours) fixing of the facts connected with the most interesting plots of travel. Such texts give a certain idea of interpersonal relations, but the social significance of such a text is small. A typical passage from this diary is: "June 13. In the morning — a division of opinion. Again I contrasted the people (as it is not broke!). As we got to the Philippines, and how would the delegation of Primorye territory (otherwise a visa was impossible) — for the exhibition of goods of Primorye in the city of Johnson city. It's 80 km from Manila. Our team, inspired by Valery Zhidelev, who, by the way, owe the whole idea — to get to the Philippines, in connection with this exhibition — did not forget about this component of our campaign. In addition, once in advance, we collected $ 30 from the organizers of the exhibition for transportation to some excursion. Not waste them!" [8].

Here is an example for the same 1998 from the diary Chronicles (but with elements of "photographic") student I. Amihud: "8 Jan. Thursday. For today read the Chapter on appropriating the Neolithic (ibid about Neolithic art). Got up extremely late. He reasoned that, although it was necessary to study Friedman during the holidays, to read Budnevich’s magazines and test the modem before the 15th, I would like to read Russell and Oscar Wilde, still it will be possible to allocate a week for archeology to come close to the iron age. Read the magazine. I’m going from time immemorial to write a message to myself in many years: it's terribly interesting (especially if I had time to write as a child). In the meantime, I will limit myself to just such a mention. Who are you, me in 10 years? How are you? How do you feel about my present? And you, from 2030? (Well, I have a special conversation with you.)" [9].

Another version of the diary-chronicle presented published texts of a former employee of the Communist party of the USSR N. Zenkovich. A typical example for March 1, 1993: "Over the past two years, oil production in Russia has decreased by 170 million tons. This year, according to the most favorable estimates, the country may have 342 million tons of oil. It is only for internal needs" [6]. This diary contains information mainly not from personal, but public life of the country, received from different sources and presents a record of those famous events that once attracted the attention of the author. Therefore, the value of such diaries is not in revealing the facts themselves, but in giving an idea of the priority themes for the intellectuals of the time.

A mixed version of the diary-Chronicles and diary-reflections are diaries assistant to the President of the USSR Mikhail Gorbachev as Chernyaev. In his very intense activity Chernyaev managed to make extensive records, which contain not only the facts, but also their interpretation by the author of the diary. A typical example for July 20, 1991 (Gorbachev's visit to London for the G7 leaders’ meeting: "5 am! From 16 to 19 June – in London. Attended a historic event. The feeling that a country hostile to the President does not want any of this... so Gorbachev continues his revolution of "bringing the country into the world"... and the country perceives it with suspicion and hostility" [5]. Of course, this kind of diaries are useful both for their actual fullness and analysis of events by their direct participant. These and other examples from diaries are accompanied by the teacher's comments and active involvement of students in the process of critical analysis of the source text. Students are taught the ability to recognize different types of diaries and, accordingly, to determine approaches to their study.

At the next stage of the joint activity of students and teachers are considered the search for diaries that reflect the theme of modern history. In comparison with diaries for earlier periods, the search for diaries on modern history is more difficult, because many authors for personal reasons are not yet ready to provide such texts to the researcher. It is surprising that such people are at all. The proof of
this is the presence on the mentioned information resource of several dozen diaries on the history of modernity. And the number of them is constantly updated.

This resource has been functioning since 2015 mainly through the efforts of volunteers, which recently include some students-historians of the University, where the author of the report works. Their work is connected both with the search for sources of personal origin, and mainly with the preparation of their handwritten texts for placement on this information resource and for publication. Such work is very painstaking and requires appropriate skills and patience. But this work gives invaluable experience to future professional historians, because it directly introduces them to the "creative laboratory" of the historian, providing an opportunity to get acquainted with the original text of the historical source. However, such work requires prior training, which is one of the starting tasks of the teacher.

First of all, the participants of the working team involved in the preparation of the diary are indicated. Comments of publishers and other information that is not part of the diary should be given in footnotes. Each new year of diary entries begins with a title indicating the year of entries. In the future, if the author of the diary is not accepted a different way of categorization of the material, records are given by date. If several records are given under one date (for example, morning and evening), they should be separated from each other. If the record does not have the author's date, but the approximate date follows from the context, then the estimated date or period of dates is put, which is stipulated. In general, the editor must withstand the style of entries adopted by the author of the diary. This also applies to grammatical errors, author's punctuation, abbreviations and other things.

Work with the manuscript is divided into two stages - decoding and verification. Decryption - a draft set of text that must be checked again by another participant. Verification is a line-by-line comparison of the manuscript and the transcript of the previous participant, with correction of errors and attempts to disclose all illegible places of the manuscript. Upon completion of the work, the resulting text is passed on for review to the author of the diary or (if this is not possible) his relatives, who must give permission for the publication of the text in this form or another.

3 RESULTS

The preliminary results of the study (at the moment it is far from complete) can be expressed in two aspects. First, the work on the search and preparation for publication of diaries and other sources of personal origin in modern history is the most important task of historical science in this area of research. Carrying out such work requires time and a certain amount of effort. Therefore, the obvious need on this way is to involve a wider range of stakeholders in such work, including among students. To date, a certain base of such work has been created – a body of sources has been collected, a large part of which needs editing.

Secondly, the experience of the work done in this direction indicates the usefulness of attracting students to it. This introduction of students to this work is possible only if certain moral, psychological and technical requirements are met. Therefore, from a University lecturer requires implementation of actions on the preparation of students to such activities. The experience of the author of the report in this direction shows that the competent selection of students and their preliminary preparation of the quality of their work is very high.

It is obvious that this work has good prospects and needs further continuation.

4 CONCLUSIONS

As the conclusions of the study, we note that this kind of scientific work is, of course, not only scientific, but also of great educational importance. The report shows that this joint activity of the teacher and students allows students to learn more deeply the methods of working with historical sources, and for the historical science itself provides extremely valuable information on modern history, which is difficult to find in the sources of official origin.

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