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THE SCIENTIFIC AND POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF TEXTBOOKS ON HISTORY (objective history vs falsification)

Ashot Melkonyan**Institute of History, NAS RA*

This article presents the process of creating new school textbooks on Armenian history in the post-Soviet years. The author emphasizes the necessity to revise a number of issues in Armenian historiography related to the ideological attitudes of the Soviet epoch. The revision of many issues by Armenian historians during the years of independence, such as periodization, the first state formations on the territory of the Armenian Highlands, the Armenian political parties, the First Republic of 1918-1920, Sovietization, etc., is reflected in the new history textbooks. The article provides examples of the distortion of Armenian and Russian history in various textbooks and emphasizes the importance of presenting the objective history in school textbooks for educating the younger generation.

Keywords: *school textbooks, periodization, history of Armenia, Sovietization, distortion of history, objective history.*

Introduction

Following the collapse of the USSR and the declaration of independence in all post-Soviet countries, the newly formed states launched the process of creating new textbooks for school and Higher Educational Institutions (HEI), including the ones covering the history of those countries. In Armenia too, the prominent historians embarked on creating school textbooks on Armenian history at the start of the 1990s. Prior to that, Armenian history was taught once a week in classes 8 to 10 with the implementation of textbooks compiled back in the 1950s which, in fact, were rather modest in scope. It goes without saying that in the last four years of studies at school, students were mostly taught the history of the USSR.

* ashamelk@yahoo.com

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Problems encountered by the authors of new textbooks on the history of Armenia

The authors of the new textbooks faced a real challenge. In the first place it was necessary to come up with a new and objective concept of the history of Armenia, while in the Soviet times numerous issues had either been subject to falsification or simply overlooked because of political stereotypes. Albeit similar problems could be observed in all periods of the history of Armenia, they mostly embraced the epoch of the new and modern history owing to political considerations.

As is known, the history of the USSR countries was taught in the framework of the history of Russia. In particular, it started from the period when the historical territories of these countries were incorporated into the Russian Empire. Under these conditions, the histories of the countries were adjusted to that of Russia thereby refusing the principles adopted by the world history. For instance, the issue of periodization of the history of Armenia, as well as that of other nations of the USSR, were presented in the same system, whereas part of the nations were radically different from each other especially with reference to the ancient times (Melkonyan, 2017, pp. 199-203; Melkonyan, 2022, pp. 35-48).

Oftentimes, one could come across nonsensical approaches towards certain issues of modern history, as well. As is known, many historians believe that the new epoch of the world history started in the middle of the 17th century – the period of the English Revolution (1640 - 1660). However, the new epoch in the history of Armenia is believed to have started in 1801 when the northern regions of Armenia – Lory, Tavoush, Pambak, together with the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti became part of Russia and the process of the annexation of Eastern Armenia to the Russian Empire was launched (History of the Armenian People, 1974, p.7, p. 13). Quite naturally, at that point the actions of another country in relation to the Caucasus could not become a deciding factor for the transition into a modern period. Currently, similar to the world historiographical traditions, the Armenian historiography regards the mid-17th century as the start of the Modern epoch of Armenia, since this period is characterized by the birth of the national-liberation movement (History of Armenia, 2010, pp. 3-4).

Since the issue of the expansion of the territory of the Russian Empire at the expense of the neighboring countries was mentioned, we feel obligated to evaluate this process. It is common knowledge, that currently the active foreign

policy of Russia with regard to neighboring countries is labelled as expansionist. The words *conquest* and *invasion* are used instead of the terms *reunion* or *reunification*, etc. Armenian historiography both in the Soviet and post-Soviet times gave preference to the terms *joining*, *reunification* or the word combination *the establishment of the Russian dominance* (Grigoryan, 1978, pp.185-213; History of Armenia, 2010, pp.33-35).

Before the first three decades of the 19th century, Armenia was under the brutal yoke of the Ottoman Empire and Persia and the entry of Eastern Armenia in the territory of Russia, certainly, played a progressive role for the Armenian society. Of course, in this context we do dispute the different approaches of our colleagues to the question under discussion with special reference to the colonial policy of tsarism, as well.

The new school textbooks of the history of Armenia do not cast doubt on the character of the Soviet-German war in 1941-1945. This war was and still is Patriotic for Armenians. It is no news that the Turkish authorities, in a secret alliance with the Fascist Germany, were looking forward to the fall of Moscow or Stalingrad to invade the Caucasus with their army made up of a million soldiers. This turn of events would end in yet another genocide for the population of the region in general and for Armenians, in particular. It was not surprising then, that in the very first days of the war, the Pravda wrote, "Throughout its history the Armenian nation has repeatedly been subject to foreign invasions. Armenians are quite familiar with massacres, pogroms, hunger and violence. The Armenian nation still remembers the physical annihilation of Armenians masterminded by the descendent of Hitler – Kaiser Wilhelm in the years of the World War I. Therefore, at the outbreak of the bloody war launched by the cannibal Hitler against the Soviet nation, the whole Armenian nation stood up as one in defense of the Homeland (Pravda, 1941). It is noteworthy that over 600.000 Armenians took part in the military actions. 109 soldiers were awarded the highest title of the hero of the Soviet Union. Five out of thousands of military commanders became marshals, 69 – generals (Arutyunyan, 2004).

One of the problematic issues is the national-administrative status of Soviet Armenia in the composition of the USSR. In some post-Soviet countries the existence of any national-state status of the union republic is questioned. What is more, the Baltic states and Georgia regard the Soviet years mostly as a period of an occupation regime. Many Armenian historians, including the authors of school textbooks, believe that Bolsheviks who were compelled to

create a federal state were able to avoid dissatisfaction and create a common state based on the new, so-called socialist ideology by offering the countries the status of a union republic, especially to the nations which used to have their own state prior to Sovietization.

The status of the Union Republic, which was the highest status in the Union State, anyway, offered a number of opportunities for the social-economic and cultural development of the given republic and shared certain attributes of statehood such as borders, constitution, government bodies, state symbols – the flag, the hymn, national schools, etc. In some republics, namely in the Georgian SSR, all the constitutions throughout the Soviet period (1922, 1938, 1978) declared Georgian as the state language. Chapter two of the Constitution of 1922 also underscored the importance of the sovereignty of the republic: “Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia is a sovereign state which does not allow equitable control of its territory by another country and does not aspire to expand its rights beyond its territory” (Constitution /Basic Law/ of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia, 1922).

The aforementioned wording was non-existent in the constitutions of many republics.

It found its reflection in the constitutions of a number of countries much later in 1978. The Armenian language was announced a state language only in the third constitution of Soviet Armenia (article 72, 1978) (Constitution /Basic Law/ of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic, 1978).

It is no secret that the republics were deprived of the key attributes of statehood, such as their own armed forces, diplomatic representations abroad, etc. and were under the constant control of the central authorities. However, owing to the fact that the status of the Union Republic was the result of the existence of independence before Sovietization, it could be regarded as a unique expression of statehood. At least, based on the Armenian experience we can say that the majority of the Armenian historians agree to this statement (Melkonyan, 2018, pp. 44-73). It is no accident, that in 1991 all the union republics left the USSR by the decrees of their own legislative bodies – Supreme councils, and within the borders of the former republics. Considering the ideas highlighted above, the Armenian historians put forward the concept of the history of the Armenian statehood in modern times. The start of this period is believed to be May 28, 1918 – the declaration of the First Republic. Its legal predecessor was Soviet Armenia (1920 - 1991) on the basis of which the current – Third Republic was established in 1991.

At the start of the 1990s many authors engaged in the creation of textbooks and at the same time as members of the staff working on the new academic multivolume “History of Armenia”, had already overcome a series of problems related to the ancient period and the Middle Ages. The results of their work also found their place in school textbooks. Among the problematic issues one can single out the ethnogenesis of the Armenian people as part of Indo-European peoples, the emergence of the first state formations on the territory of the Armenian Highlands, the adoption of Christianity in Armenia as a state religion, the character of the warriors of the 5th century, etc. (History of Armenia, 10th class, 2009, pp. 20-32; History of Armenia, 2018, pp. 15-32, pp. 204-208).

A novel scientific approach was applied to the activities of the Armenian political parties of the late 19th and early 20th centuries as well. In the Soviet times, aiming to discredit the national parties, they were introduced as supporters of the interests of the upper bourgeoisie and bearers of nationalist ideology. All this happened in the time when the Armenian society practically lacked upper bourgeoisie (Katvalyan et al, 2014, pp. 324-343). The history of the Republic of Armenia was written anew (1918-1920). A separate big chapter was dedicated to the Bolshevik-Kemalist union, as a result of which Armenia was Sovietized, was deprived of its state independence, and a series of historical Armenian territories went to Azerbaijan and Turkey (National Archive of Armenia, F. 114, Op. 2, D. 79, etc.)¹.

Here was the general outline of a number of problems identified by Armenian historians in the years of independence. The results of the research are reflected in monographs, joint works and textbooks. In this regard, it is interesting to have a look at the works of Armenian historians from other countries and Russian historians who have provided us with a rare opportunity of studying certain notions. Based on the decree of the President of the Russian Federation, issued on April 14, 2008, historians studied how Russian history was presented in 200 school textbooks and scientific journals in 12 post-Soviet states.

Falsification of the history of Armenia and Russia in textbooks on the history of Azerbaijan

Proceeding from the material, the group of scholars under the supervision of A. A. Danilov and A.V. Philippov produced a comprehensive report which was published as a collective monograph in Moscow in 2009 (Bondarenko et al,

2009). The authors of the investigation came to the conclusion that “except for Belarus and Armenia (to a lesser degree), all the other countries had chosen nationalist narratives to teach the younger generation. These narratives were based on the myths and legends about the ancient roots of their nation, about the high cultural mission of their ancestors and the “sworn enemy” (ibid., p. 5). As a proof of such interpretation, the Russian scholars present certain extracts from various textbooks. Thus, for instance, in the school textbook of the 6th class “History of Azerbaijan”, the ancestors of the Azerbaijanis are introduced as the contemporaries of Sumerians. “The first written evidence of the tribes of the ancient Azerbaijan was recorded in the Sumerian epics and cuneiform writings” (ibid, p. 6). According to the authors of this textbook, the Sumerians themselves were of Turkic origin (Aliev et al, 2013, pp. 52-55) Such interpretation is by no means accidental. Russian researchers noted that the proclamation of ancient Azeris as contemporaries of Sumerians aims to provide grounds for the following thesis: “Modern Armenia was established on the territory of the ancient Western Azerbaijan” (Bondarenko et al, 2009, p. 6).

According to Azerbaijani authors, it follows that Armenia never existed on historical maps (Cf. National Atlas of Armenia, 2017, pp. 215-218)² and that this country was created by Russian invaders on the occupied territories. “The establishment of the Armenian state on the territory of Azerbaijan”, as “History of Azerbaijan” (7th class textbook) reads, “had been a long-time plan of Russia [...] shortly after the death of [...] Peter I, a decree was signed allowing the settlement of Armenians on the territories seized by Russians. This policy of the Russian Emperor was carried on by his descendants during the centuries that followed” (ibid, p. 287).

It is noteworthy that the authors of such textbooks raise serious claims against Russia, as well. The Azerbaijani textbooks view the USSR and Russian policy as genocidal. To prove the idea stated, the Russian historians produce a series of quotes from these textbooks: “In the course of the raid in 914, the Slavic warriors kept looting and destroying the human settlements on the Azerbaijani shores of the Caspian Sea. They massacred the civilians, captured women and children. On the way back, the Slavic army, as agreed, sent half of the rich loot to the Khazar Kagan (ibid. p. 285).

A little below we read the following sentence: “30 years later, in 944, the Slavic army reappeared on the coasts of the Caspian Sea. This time they had arrived to seize Barda – the largest city in the Caucasus, the main city of Aran, and to settle in Azerbaijan forever. The warriors of Prince Igor of Kiev (912-

945) and the professional army of the Slavic people [...] headed for Barda [...] which was soon captured by them. The population was slaughtered, the city was mercilessly looted [...]. A new stage of massacre started in the city. Women and children were captured. According to historians, up to 20.000 people were killed in Barda at that time” (ibid. p. 285). “In 1032-1033 Shirvan suffered a disastrous raid. Al-Lans, Sarirs, and Russians who had allied with them seized the capital city of Shamakhi of Shirvanshahs and within the next ten days destroyed it. During the raid around 10.000 people were killed in Shirvan” (ibid, p. 285).

The years of the Russian dominance, as well as the Soviet years, are presented in an absolutely gloomy light. The textbooks claim categorically, that “Azerbaijan had turned to a colony of Soviet Russia which had embarked on taking social and economic, as well as political measures that fitted its colonial interests best” (ibid, p. 104).

It is no accident that the authors of these textbooks approve of the collaborationism in the years of World War II. The textbooks of the higher classes describe the process of the creation of national military formations in the composition of the Fascist armed forces of Germany: “On December 22, 1941 Hitler set out to create a separate military unit made up of the Muslims of the Caucasus. There was a separate unit composed of Azerbaijani Muslims, as well. The political emigrants actively worked to liberate the Azerbaijanis from captivity and to include them in the national military sections. The work by M. E. Rasulzade about the three-color flag went from hand to hand in these units [...]. The military unit made up of the Caucasian Muslims took an active part in the seizure of the strategic heights of Mozdok, Kazbek and Elbrus. Germans highly appreciated the fighting skills of the Muslims and awarded many of them with medals” (ibid., pp. 149-150).

More cases of collaborationism can be traced in the following sentences: “In 1943 a free Turkic division was created which included an Azerbaijani legion, as well [...]. The Azerbaijani national legion together with Germans took part in fights against the allied forces in the south of France [...]. In the aftermath of the war, parts of this legion were moved to the territory of neutral countries and were dissolved [...]. Most of them settled in Turkey” (ibid, p. 302).

Russian historians' opinion concerning the new textbooks on the history of Armenia

We believe, the presentation of the Russian colleagues' assessment concerning the same problems with regard to the history of Armenia, will not be out of place.

The authors are convinced that "In the Armenian textbooks the authors seek to produce balanced and multi-sided evaluations. The negative role of the Iranian and Turkish dominance and the positive role of Russia on the economic and cultural development of Eastern Armenia can easily be identified" (ibid. p. 86). They point out to the following quote: "The years of Turkish and Iranian yoke negatively affected the economy of Armenia. After joining Russia, more or less favorable conditions were created for development in Eastern Armenia [...]. Apart from agriculture, other spheres like fishing industry, blacksmithing and jewel crafting had a chance to develop, as well. The reunification with Russia also contributed to the development of trade with Eastern Armenia [...]" (ibid, pp. 86-87, *History of Armenia /modern period/, 2013, p. 112*). Armenian textbooks emphasize that Armenians, like other national minorities, connected their future with the democratization of Russia. That is why they actively participated in revolutionary movements (Bondarenko et al, 2009, p. 87; Stepanyan et al, 2003, p. 110).

The authors of the textbooks on the history of Armenia believe that the Armenian liberation movement in Russia did not have an anti-Russian and separatist character. It was not by chance, that during the hearings of the "Dashnaks' case" – the lawsuit against 159 members of the Armenian Liberation Movement Party (Dashnaktsutyn) in 1912, "the free press of Russia strongly condemned the whole lawsuit", and it was due to the reaction of the Russian community that 94 of the defendants were found innocent and others received minor penalties (Bondarenko et al, 2009, p. 88; *History of Armenia /modern period/. Textbook for the 8th class, 2013, p. 116*). Many prominent Russian politicians, lawyers and writers spoke in defense of the Armenian figures. Not once did the Governor of the Caucasus I.I. Vorontsov-Dashkov highlight the devotion of the Armenian people to the Russian state in his reports to Nikolai II and advised the tsar to stop the lawsuit against the Armenian Liberation Movement Party AREFP).

In the section dedicated to World War I, it is stated that unlike the European area of the military activities, where the Russian forces sustained huge losses and were forced to retreat in 1915, those on the Transcaucasian

front worked well for Russia. The Russian army together with the units of Armenian volunteers occupied the most part of Western Armenia [...] (Bondarenko et al, 2009, p. 88; Stepanyan et al, p. 141).

Conclusion

In the course of creating new school textbooks on the history of Armenia in the post-Soviet years, it became a necessity to revise a number of issues in Armenian historiography related to the ideological attitudes of the Soviet epoch. In the process of revision of many issues by historians during the years of independence, such as periodization, the first state formations on the territory of the Armenian Highlands, the Armenian political parties, the First Republic of 1918-1920, Sovietization, etc., a lot of distortions of historical facts were revealed. To sum up, it is worth noting the importance of creating objective textbooks and guidelines with the view of teaching the younger generation in order to avoid the inter-ethnic hatred. The joint efforts of various international historical communities and institutions become especially significant in this regard.

Notes

1. It was only after the declaration of independence and thanks to the declassification of many archival funds of Armenia relating to the history of the First Republic of 1918-1920 as well as Sovietization that the presentation of an objective picture of the history of the period became possible (Cf. National Archive of Armenia, F. 114, Op. 2, D. 79, etc.).
2. As to the existence of Armenia on historical maps, the authors of these lines had better get acquainted with the first stone map of the world (dating back to the 6th century BC) where the homeland of Armenians is mentioned next to Babylon and Assyria. Moreover, it is quite easy to find the name Armenia on ancient world maps (Cf. National Atlas of Armenia, 2017). This sort of falsification of history, especially in school textbooks for the younger generation, is not accidental. In our days one can frequently hear calls made by high ranking officials of Azerbaijan to capture the territory of Armenia and get back the so-called Azerbaijani “historical lands” such as Zangezur, Sevan and even Yerevan.

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**ՊԱՏՄՈՒԹՅԱՆ ԴԱՄԱԳՐՔԵՐԻ ԳԻՏԱԿԱՆ ԵՎ ՔԱՂԱՔԱԿԱՆ
ՆՇԱՆԱԿՈՒԹՅՈՒՆԸ
(օրյեկտիվ պատմություն ընդդեմ կեղծարարության)**

Աշոտ Մելքոնյան

Հողվածում ներկայացվում է հետխորհրդային տարիներին հայոց պատմության նոր դպրոցական դասագրքերի ստեղծման գործընթացը և ընդգծվում հայ պատմագրության մի շարք հարցերի վերանայման անհրաժեշտությունը: Տարբեր դասագրքերում հայ և ռուս պատմության խեղաթյուրման օրինակների վերլուծությունը ցույց է տալիս, որ դպրոցական դասագրքերում օրյեկտիվ պատմության ներկայացումը չափազանց կարևոր է ոչ միայն պատմության ճիշտ ընկալման և արժևորման, այլև մատաղ սերնդի դաստիարակության համար:

Բանալի բառեր՝ դպրոցական դասագրքերի պարբերականացում, հայոց պատմություն, խորհրդայնացում, պատմության աղավաղում, օրյեկտիվ պատմություն: