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3
THE PROBLEMS OF THE HUNS HISTORY IN THE WESTERN HISTORIOGRAPHY

Annotation

In this article the author shortly analyzes the content of books authored by prominent orientalists Rene Grousset ("Empire of the Steppes"), Edward Arthur Thompson ("History of Attila and the Huns" / "The Huns"), Otto J. Maenchen-Helfen ("The World of the Huns. Study of their history and culture"), Christopher Kelly ("The End of Empire: Attila the Hun and the fall of Rome"). As it is well known, these books essentially affected the scientific community’s conception of the Huns. Hence, this paper gives an idea about the major points of view on the problem of the Huns history in the Western historiography.

Keywords: Huns, Attila, Western researchers, brief overview.

An outstanding French orientalist Rene Grousset wrote: Attila, Jenghiz Khan, and Tamerlane: their names are in everyone’s memory. Accounts of them written by western chroniclers and by Chinese or Persian annalists have served to spread their repute. The great barbarians irrupt into areas of developed historical civilizations and suddenly, within a few years, reduce the Roman, Iranian, or Chinese world to a heap of ruins [1].

Historians of different generations have tried and try to explain their origin, the reasons for their greatness, grand achievements and extinction, so this topic is a subject of many researches.

This article gives a brief overview of some works of generalized, monographic level, published in English and Russian. These are the elected historical studies that have made the most outstanding contribution to the Western historiography of the history of the Huns.

One of the leading researchers of the history of Central Asia is a French historian Rene Grousset. Grousset first published his masterpiece on Central Asia in 1939 on the eve of the Second World War. Its English edition was published in 1970 by the publishing house of Rutgers University, New Jersey, USA. In this work R. Grousset tells the story of steppe empires stretching from Manchuria to Budapest. The French historian could summarize all material accumulated by that time and explored a big number of questions dedicated to the history of Central Asia. This book, based on the wide array of sources gives a detailed description of the life of the Great Steppe from ancient times to the XVIII century. The narrative is based on the research of the author himself, who attracted a large number of sources of European, Chinese, Persian and other backgrounds. The novelty of this composition is seen in the point of view of the outstanding Western European scholar on the well-known events, whose opinion is devoid of prejudices, biases and conjunctive approach.

In his book "Empire of the Steppes" R. Grousset provides a very detailed account of the subject which interests us - the Huns. He leads his narrative of the history of the Huns from 300 BC, before their invasion of Europe, led by Attila in V. BC. Relying on the texts of the Chinese historian Tsu-ma Chien Grousset displays the origins of the Huns from Hsiung-nu, the people who lived in the north of China. Talking about the linguistic belonging of the Huns, he says: «As regards the linguistic position of the Hsiung-nu among the Turko-Mongol group of peoples, certain writers, like Kurakichi Shiratori, are inclined to class them with the
Mongols. Pelliot, on the contrary, from the few opportunities of cross-checking afforded by Chinese transcriptions, believes that on the whole these people were Turkic, especially their political leadership» [1, p. 23-24]. Thus R. Grouset only mentions the well-known views on the linguistic classification of the Huns, but he does not state which of them he supports.

R. Grouset writes about the art of the Huns. Ordo animal style. He bases this research on numerous archaeological studies and concludes that Ordis art had deeply influenced the Chinese style known as that of the Warring States, which had flourished from the fifth century B.C.

Describing the people Hsiung-nu, Grouset tells about their political hierarchy, physical appearance. He finds parallels in the economic structure, lifestyle, clothing, traditions, military strategy and tactics of the Huns and the Scythians. The French historian focuses mainly on their military and political history; he compares the role and importance of Attila the Hun in world history with Jenghis Khan and Tamerlane. R. Grouset’s book “Empire of the Steppe” has been highly praised by historians. L. Gumilev considered this work the culmination point in the European Orientalism of the first half of the XX century.

One of the most authoritative researchers of the Huns is a British classicist and medievalist Edward Arthur Thompson. In his studies he relied on the Marxist approach to the historical process. His monograph «History of Attila and the Huns», published in 1948 in the UK, was a notable contribution to the Western orientalism of the first half of the XX century.

In 1999 the book was reprinted with the title «The Huns». Later this English edition was translated into Russian and published in 2008 under the title «The Huns. Formidable warriors of the steppes». E.A. Thompson was primarily a scholar of ancient and medieval history of Europe. He believed that history of the Huns themselves was certainly interesting, but he was more interested in their relationship with the Roman Empire [2].

E.A. Thompson tells the history of the Huns in Europe from their first attacks on the Goths from the north of the Black Sea to the collapse of the Hun Empire after the death of their legendary leader Attila. This monograph consists of 8 chapters. In the first chapter the British professor gives a critical analysis of the major sources. Then in chapters 2 – 6 he describes the history of the Huns before Attila, their social order in this period, their military victories and defeats, diplomatic relations with the Romans. Chapter 7 narrates about the Huns under Attila’s ruling. Chapter 8 is dedicated to the foreign policy of the Roman Empire and the place of the Huns in it. In conclusion he gives a generalized characteristic of importance of the Huns in European history and the role of Attila as a military leader and ruler.

What significantly differs Thompson’s research from previous analogous works is a critical evaluation of sources, he analyzes them in detail and discusses the limitation of archeological evidence. However the British professor uses only the European written documents and he exaggerates their importance: «It is clear that in studying the history of the Huns we can solely rely on the evidence of the Greek and Roman travelers and historians» [2, p 14].

In selecting sources, E.A. Thompson follows a well-trodden path of R. Grouset, and as a French researcher widely uses the «History» of Ammianus Marcellinus, of which he was a very high opinion: «Before him there were not works that are comparable in scale with his «History». It is surprisingly that E.A. Thompson considered this composition of Ammianus Marcellinus the most reliable and trusted source, although he writes: «It is apparently that roman historian had never seen the Hun and could not rely on his own observations. Therefore, the pages of his «History», dedicated to the Huns, summarize the information received from the second hand» [2, p. 16]. But, despite this, the evidence of Priscus of Panium, who was an eyewitness of many Roman- Hunnic contacts and who directly communicated with the Huns, E.A. Thompson uses only after the «History» of Ammianus Marcellinus.

The novelty of the British professors’ research is seen first of all in the fact that before him almost nobody in the Western historiography of the problem attempted to speak about the social history of the Huns. E.A. Thompson explores the material organization and the social structure of the Hun society in the dynamics, what it was before Attila headed it and how it was
under his rule. The author tells the history of the Huns in much more detail than it has been done in other studies. For example although such researchers as Edward Gibbon («Decline and fall of the Roman Empire»), Hodgkin («Italy and its invaders»), Bury, authors of «The Cambridge Medieval History» and others told about the Huns, but their main goal was the history of the Roman Empire. In these works description of Attila’s life and his state was not very important [2, p. 9-10].

E.A. Thompson avoids a discussion about possible Chinese origin of the nomadic people of the Huns.

The British historian’s point of view on a number of issues of the Hun history is markedly different from the one that was quite common in the Western Orientalism. He refutes the commonly held view of Attila as a brilliant military leader, diplomat and governor, and that the great Hun Empire was only because of his outstanding qualities. He argues that this empire already existed before Attila. Attila considerably differed from Jenghis Khan because he received from his predecessors already finished (or nearly finished) empire, while the Mongols were small, separated pastoral tribes [2, p. 243]. E.A. Thompson questions the military genius of Attila. He believes that the legendary leader of the Huns was almost always accompanied by military success only because he did not meet a decent resistance or he won at the expense of large losses [2, p. 244-245].

There are certain drawbacks in this book, for instance- an apparent lack of primary sources. The author builds his research on several works of the Roman origin, mainly on the writings of Ammianus Marcellinus and Priscus of Panium. To him archaeological material was not of much importance: «Recent discoveries and a thorough study of subjects have made so many ambiguities in the question studied that an experienced archaeologist, if he started writing about the Huns, he could hardly draw any benefit from the findings revealed» [2, p. 14].

One of the most fundamental works ever published on the history of the Huns, is the book of an Austrian orientalist, historian, writer and traveler Otto J. Maenchen-Helfen «The World of the Huns. Study of their history and culture». Professor Otto Maenchen-Helfen developed a large-scale problem of the history of the Huns and related peoples for many years. After his death he left an unfinished manuscript. It was a source of the book «World of Huns. Study of their history and culture» which was published in 1973 by Berkeley, University of California Press.

Maenchen-Helfen differed from other historians of Eurasia in his unique competence in philology, archaeology, and the history of art. He did not need to guess the identities of tribes, populations, or cities. He knew the primary texts, whether in Greek or Russian or Persian or Chinese. This linguistic ability is particularly necessary in the study of the Huns and their nomadic cognates, since the name «Hun» has been applied to many peoples of different ethnic character, including Ostrogoth, Magyars, and Seljuk. Even ancient nomadic people north of China, the Hsiung-nu, not related to any of these, were called «Hun» by their Sogdian neighbors. Maenchen-Helfen knew the Chinese sources that tell of the Hsiung-nu, and thus could evaluate the relationship of these sources to European sources of Hunnic history [3].

Another special competence was his expertise in the history of Asian art, a subject that he taught for many years. Maenchen-Helfen’s description of technical and stylistic consistencies among metal articles from Hunnic tombs in widely separated localities dispels the myth of supposed Hunnic ignorance of metal-working skills. Maenchen-Helfen emphasizes what distinguishes his studies from previous treatments is the extensive use of archaeological material: «In recent years archeological research has been progressing at such speed that I had to modify my views repeatedly while I was working on these studies» [3, p. XVI-XVII].

To Maenchen-Helfen archeological evidence played a critical role in the determination of the origin of the Huns and their geographical distribution in ancient and early medieval times, as well as the extent of Hunnic penetration into Eastern Europe and their point of entry into Hungarian plain [3, XVI].

He underlines the necessity for sharp and well-reasoned criticism of the sources of the Huns: «From the beginning these peoples were denigrated and demonized by European historians
and dismissed as avatars of the eternal but faceless barbarian hordes from the east, against whom vigilance was always necessary, but whose precise identity was of little importance.» Otto Maenchen-Helfen criticizes hatred, fear of many Western European authors towards to the Huns: «The same fierce hatred burned in Ammianus Marcellinus. He and the other writes of the fourth and fifth centuries depicted the Huns as the savage monsters which we still see today. Hatred and fear distorted the picture of the Huns from the moment they appeared on the lower Danube. Unless this tendentiousness is fully understood — and it rarely is the literary evident is found to be misread» [3, XXIV]. So he begins his study with its reexamination.

According to some authoritative scholars Otto Maenchen-Helfen in his book: «World of Huns. Study of their history and culture» presented to us «The epic character of the great drama that took place on the Eurasian stage early in our era, the clash of armies and the interaction of civilizations. This book is a standard treatise not likely to be superseded in the predictable future» [3, XVII]. In his research Otto Maenchen-Helfen expresses humanity in such a racially charged field as Hunnic studies, it was a rare phenomenon in the German historiography of 30th years of XX century. The novelty and distinctive characteristic of Maenchen-Helfen’s research is seen in his ability to create a reliable account of the ancestors of the Turks and Mongols, free of the usual Western prejudice and linguistic limitations.

One of recent and the most notable works on the history of the Huns is the study of the British historian Christopher Kelly «The End of Empire: Attila the Hun and the fall of Rome» Norton, New York, 2009. The book is divided into four sections. The first section consists of 5 chapters; it is called «Before Attila» and tells about the appearance of the Huns in Europe. The second section — «The Huns and the Romans», includes six parts, it narrates the history of the Roman foreign policy from the beginning to the middle of the 5th century, relations between Rome and the Huns. Section III — «Dinner with Attila” in its six chapters describes the Embassy to the court of Attila. The last, fourth part is titled «The Fall of the Empire». Here K. Kelly analyzes the Hunnic invasion of Gaul in 451, and Italy in 452, the death of Attila and the collapse of his empire.

K. Kelly builds his research entirely on the compositions of the two Roman authors - Ammianus Marcellinus and Priscus of Panium. He also recognizes the importance of archaeological material. The British historian shares Otto Maenchen-Helfen’s opinion on the issue of the origin of the Huns. As an Austrian scholar he denies any connection of the Hsiung-nu with the Huns.

The novelty of Kelly’s monograph is seen in the attempt to restore the image of Attila as a politically ingenious leader bent more on making strategic alliances to benefit his people than conquering neighboring tribes by savage attacks. Thus, the author tells about his long-term contacts with the Roman general, about the promise of Honoria, the sister of Roman Emperor to marry Attila. Hitherto, before Kelly’s studies these events were not practically described in the historical literature. “Attila the Hun and the Fall of Rome” reframes the warrior king as a political strategist and skillful, talented diplomat, who respected the established diplomatic order in Europe and who was able to successfully establish political relations with consolidating Constantinople and disintegrating western branch of the Roman Empire. The British researcher stresses that Attila perfectly combined military actions and gifted diplomacy in his political art.

The studies of these historians are distinguished by the authors’ approach to the problem. On the one hand it is a balanced, calm analysis in combination with a certain admiration of the greatest personalities of Central Asia – Attila, Jenghis Khan, and Tamerlane. We see it in the works of R. Grousset, Otto Maenchen-Helfen. But on the other hand it is an assessment of the Huns as a parasitic robbers, marauders and extortionists [2, p. 255]. Despite certain differences in their opinion R. Grousset, E.A. Thompson, Otto Maenchen-Helfen and K. Kelly like other western orientalists are unanimous in their understanding that the Huns played an important role in European history, that, in spite of a short stay on the European historical stage, their
appearance had serious consequences for the future development of Western Europe, and probably had a significant impact on the East [2].

The Western orientalists with high linguistic, archaeological competence researched the military-political history of the Huns from the first mention of them to the collapse of Attila Empire in V B.C., their social structure, economic order and art.

The considerable amount of studies on this topic is regularly published in different languages. Apparently, these mysterious nomads - the Huns, their age and the impact on the course of world history, the personalities of their legendary leader Attila the Hun will be still interesting for the Western researchers.

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ПРОБЛЕМЫ ИСТОРИИ ГУННОВ В ЗАПАДНОЙ ИСТОРИОГРАФИИ

Резюме
В данной статье рассматриваются некоторые научные труды зарубежных исследователей, наиболее повлиявшие на развитие западной историографии по проблеме гуннов. В работе кратко анализируется краткое содержание каждой книги, а также особенности позиции ее автора по проблеме гуннов.

Ключевые слова: гунны, Аттила, западные исследователи, краткий обзор.

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БАТЫС ТАРИХНАМАСЫНДАҒЫ ГУН ТАРИХЫ МӘСЕЛЕЛЕРИ

Түйін
Макалада ғұн өнерлесінде қатысты батыс тарихаминың дамуына айтарлықтай есер еткен шетелдік зерттеушілердің кейібір қылық еңбекті еңбектері қарастьрылған.

Түйін сәйесі: ғұндар, Аттила, батыс зерттеушілері, қыскаша полул.

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ЖАҢЫМХАН ОШАН
(Р.Б. Сулейменов атындағы Шығыстану институты, т.ф.к.)
ҚАРЫ ЧОР ТЕГІН ЭПИТФИЯЛЬЫҚ ЕСКЕРТКІШІ МӘТІНІ ЖӘНЕ ОҒАН
КАТЫСТЫ ТАРИХИ МАҒЛУМАТТАР

Аннотация
Көптегін Си ән алынған табылған қытай және түркі руника жазуымен жазылған Кары чор тегін ескертқіші бізге бұгын дейін еш бір тарихи еңбекте жәңі мәліметтерді ұсынады. Сонмен ескерткіш мәтінің кей түсінікісіз тұсын туысқы ұшін біздің тарихи еңбектерді парактауымызға тұра келді.