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BEGINNING OF THE STUDY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES OF
CHECHNYA

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Abstract

The paper is devoted to the beginning of the history of the study of archaeological sites of Chechnya and covers the period from the appearance of occasional information on individual, most noticeable objects of antiquity of the 16th-18th centuries in Russian sources (Alkhan-Kalinskoye (Kholopyevskoye) settlement on the Sunzha river, Shelkozavodskoyey settlement on the Terek River, the city of Chechen on the Argun River) recorded in the plain territory and until the middle of the 19th century, when the first scientific publications about the antiquities of the region appeared. The paper also provides some information on other burial archaeological sites on the plain of Chechnya of that period – mounds, as well as on medieval architectural and archaeological sites of the mountainous zone of the. The authors critically consider the beginning of archaeological study of Chechnya as a result of the so-called “academic” expedition of the Russian Academy of Sciences to the North Caucasus with the participation of Gildenstedt, Pallas, Klaprot at the end of the 18th century, who in this part of the region mainly studied the territory of Ingushetia, as well as the Central Caucasus and did not pursue any archaeological goals. The work used a large number of publications dedicated to the history of the study of the antiquities of Chechnya that are given in the references. The paper presents a particular interest as a source of analytical and historiographical research, primarily for authors studying archeology, history and ethnography of the North Caucasus and writing in English.

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1. Introduction

However, the history of archaeological study of Chechnya, which has long been of interest to specialists (Bagaev, 1980; Krupnov, 1960; Vinogradov et al., 1963; Vinogradov & Markovin, 1966) has not yet been fully and thoroughly covered – this point of view, expressed ten years ago after the resumption of archaeologists in the Republic of Chechnya (Mamaev et al., 2012) still remains relevant (Mamaev & Mamaev, 2019).

2. Problem Statement

In particular, the beginning of this process still remains insufficiently studied, despite the fact that in recent years it has been addressed more than once (Bagaev, 2002, 2004, 2008). In this regard, we consider it necessary to consider the earliest episodes of interest in antiquities in Chechnya, defined by our predecessors, as the period of origin and formation of the research tradition of Russian science in relation to the monuments of the region (Kolesnikova, 1997) and/or the time of accumulation of archaeological sources (Bagaev, 2008).

3. Research Questions

The main issue under study is the establishment of the time of the interest in archaeological sites in Chechnya and their study. As previously noted (Mamaev et al., 2012), this stage is now proposed to be counted from 1770 (Bagaev, 2008), i.e. from the beginning of works in the north-eastern and central part of the region of the so-called “academic” or “physical” expedition of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Shafranovskaya & Karpov, 2002; Shirokova & Romanova, 2012) that partially affected the territory under consideration. Earlier, Krupnov (1971) noted that these works belonged mainly to the western part of Chechen-Ingushetia, i.e. Ingushetia, where Klaprot studied the history of the language and ethnography. At the same time, P.S. Pallas mainly worked in the Central Caucasus (Krupnov, 1971) and only part of the efforts of I.-A. Gildenstedt studied some areas of lowland Chechnya.

Besides, it is known that all these surveys, which took place in difficult conditions (Tkachenko, 2018), as a whole, had a different orientation (Shafranovskaya & Karpov, 2002) and archaeological sites were not the goal of their research, not being, unfortunately, a subject of personal scientific interest for the leader of the 2nd Astrakhan expedition of I.-A. Gildenstedt and his colleagues. Obviously, that is why Krupnov (1960) emphasized that none of these three expeditions (meaning the indicated units of the academic expedition of the Russian Academy of Sciences) set archaeological tasks (compare: Bagaev, 2004; Kolesnikova, 1997).

However, some authors nevertheless believe that the programs of their research included the recording of all archaeological sites, the collection of information on ruins and towns, ancient graves, mounds (Kolesnikova, 1997), but, apparently, in this case they referred to the North-West Caucasus and the Central Caucasus, the general situation in which was significantly different from the eastern part of the region. It is also worth mentioning an overview of archival materials related to the work of the expedition of I.A. Gildenstedt in 1768–1775, which almost does not mention any archaeological materials (Materials for history).

In any case, the map of the central part of the Chechen Plain compiled by the latter and displaying, for example, the Khankal Uplands and the flat sections of the valleys of the Argun and Sunzha rivers with their numerous archaeological sites (Vinogradov & Markovin, 1966; Vinogradov & Petrenko, 1999, etc.) does not indicate any monuments of antiquity, but lists mineral and oil sources of primary interest for the expedition, as well as part of the settlements of that period (Lomonosov, 2001). It is revealing that even the famous Khankal Tower (almost the only building of its kind on the Chechen Plain) built in connection with the events of 1735 was not shown on this map (Potto).

4. Purpose of the Study

One of the purposes of the study is to prove that the thesis postulated in the literature (including university) on the beginning of archaeological research in Russia and the North Caucasus since the era of Peter I (Kantorovich & Kuzminykh, 2006; Stegantseva & Rysin, 2009) can hardly relate to Chechnya – the conditions for conducting real archaeological research here developed much later, only in the second half of the 19th century, after the end of the Caucasian War. Besides, during this time, archeology in Russia took its first steps. Moreover, the very concept of this scientific discipline was then interpreted very extensively and ambiguously (Kamenetsky, 2006), including in the literature on the Caucasus (Berger, 1874).

5. Research Methods

The study used well-known methods of analytical and historiographical analysis. The assumptions not confirmed by the facts were discarded as unreliable.

6. Findings

The interest (“curiosity” according to Kamenetsky (2006)) in the finds of ancient objects and graves, ruined and abandoned structures, “empty towns”, etc. arose in Russia long time ago (Kamenetsky, 2006). In this regard, it should be noted that the earliest mention of one of the most famous archaeological sites in Chechnya – the largest Alkhan-Kalinsky settlement on the Sunzha river under the name Kholopyevsky first appeared in the documents of the Russian embassy in 1589 (Magomadova, 1981). It is believed that this toponym was a calque of the Turkic “kullar” (slaves), which connection with the settlement was explained by the location of the slave market and the later Chechen village on its territory, called Kulary (Small Kulary) (Popko, 1880; Vinogradov & Golovanova 1982).

Within the framework of the considered topic, it is worth mentioning the message in the document of 1665 from the Ambassadorial Order about a certain city of Chechen near the Chechen River (which meant the Argun river in its plain course), with which the informant Metropolitan Epiphanius from the Georgian embassy also connected the earth mound apparently representing the remains of the fortification. Commenting on this message the famous Caucasian scholar E.N. Kusheva believed that it was about one of the Khankal settlements (Kusheva & Usmanov, 1978; Russian-Chechen, 1997). However, this option of identification seems hardly probable, since these objects are located on Mount Syuir-Kort (now the southern outskirts of Grozny), but not on the shore / by the side of the Argun River

washing the base of another Khankal upland – Syuil-Kort located eastwards. Besides, according to well-known excavation data, they fall out of the chronological context of the considered message (Vinogradov & Petrenko, 1999).

There was also another opinion that identifies the “city of Chechen” with the Goyten-Kortovsky settlement (Vinogradov & Magomadova, 2008). But the archaeological “texture” of the last, discovered by Sevostyanov (1950) is still unclear – it was considered early medieval and naturally fortified (Vinogradov & Markovin, 1966), although according to Laudaev (1872), there were “trenches” on Goyt Korte (Goyten Korte), i.e. some artificial fortifications (?). It should be borne in mind that the hill itself is located 2–3 km east of the Argun River, but not at the river itself (compare: “...The city of Chechen... was built by the Chechenya River...” (Russian-Chechen, 2019), unless it is assumed that the Argun River was the only geographical landmark for the author of the message).

Besides, in connection with the above it is possible to recall another archaeological site located almost at the entrance to the Argun Gorge on the right bank of the Argun river known for a long time, but not attracting much attention – the settlement of Uzek-Yurt near Duba-Yurt village (Anuchin, 1884; Dolbeschef, 1887). Given its location on a busy path, which from the ancient times connected the pre-Caucasian plains with Transcaucasia in this part of the region and, possibly, an extraordinary character (as evidenced by the remains of the destroyed stone structure of the defensive wall (?) on its territory, this comparison cannot yet be completely excluded.

Though, if refer to the statement of Epiphanius about Russian (“And the Georgian Metropolitan Epiphanius and the Georgians and Tushins said: The city of Chechen was the city of great rulers...” (Russian-Chechen, 2019)) origin of the “city of Chechen”, there is even information on a certain Cossack town of Oraz-Kal originally located somewhere in the “Chachan-Tala glade”, and later was transferred to the Terek River (Orazaev & Akhmadov, 1983). Besides, M.A. Polievktov did not exclude the possibility of a “Cossack trace” in the considered situation (as cited in Vinogradova & Magomadova, 2008).

But, if that were the case, with any of the considered options, there is reason to believe that Epiphanius’s message reflected a certain archaeologized object, already “old” by the time of its mention in the source.

Since the middle of the 18th century the territory of the region began to be increasingly reflected on maps, plans and in the descriptions attached to them, compiled by Russian cartographers for this part of the North-East Caucasus.

So, no later than 1743 one of the first explorers of the North Caucasus, the famous Russian historian V.N. Tatishchev, being the Astrakhan governor, who sent two scientific expeditions here, sent the “prospectus” of Kizlyar and “Bragun village” as an annex to one of his letters to the Russian Academy of Sciences (Narozhny, 2003).

The latter, obviously, meant the village of Braguny located at the confluence of the Sunzha River into the Terek River, in the vicinity of which several archaeological sites were recorded a long time ago – ancient settlements and mounds (Mamaev et al., 2012). However, whether the prospectus itself contained any specific references to them remains unclear.

But, as well-known experience shows, the study of cartographic (including early) materials may bring noticeable results in archaeological studies (Kamenetsky, 2002).

First of all, this refers to the above categories of monuments – towns and mounds, the most expressive in landscape terms objects, one of which is now another large (except for the Alkhan-Kalinsky settlement) household object in the flat part of Chechnya – the famous Shelkozavodskoye (Shelkovskoye) settlement, which first (?) appeared on the “Silk Plant Plan at the Terek River...” under the name “former empty settlement” in 1740 (Eremin, 1990; Vinogradov et al., 2003 – historiography is also reflected here). The last definition was the concept adopted in cartography of that time denoting an abandoned and already old object.

In this regard, it is worth noting once again that I.A. Gildenstedt, who was more than once in this part of the Terek River valley, did not pay attention to even now quite noticeable ruins of the walls of the Shelkozavodskoye settlement, as well as to numerous mounds in its area. The main reason for this was already discussed earlier, but probably this was partly explained by the fact that the then population of the Terek left bank (mostly Cossacks and Nogais), with whom the expedition members communicated, did not see anything remarkable in these objects. Moreover, the head of the academic expedition of the Russian Academy of Sciences P.S. Pallas, who himself worked in the region in 1793–1794, despite the fact that the “Terek country” was already described by I.A. Gildenstedt, nevertheless sent one of his employees A. Sokolov on a reconnaissance trip from Mozdok to Astrakhan, but she did not bring any information on the archaeological sites of the left bank of the Terek River.

At the same time, the facts indicate that already at this time the left bank of the Terek River reflected the well-known reverse side of the presence of ancient monuments – the robbery of archaeological sites (Stegantseva & Rysin, 2019). Thus, Ya.O. Pototsky (a honorary academician of the Russian Academy of Sciences), who was here in 1792–1793, mentioned the burial mounds excavated by treasurers in the vicinity of the Naurskaya village judging by the finds of iron ladders and medieval burials (as cited in Sosnina, 2003).

Perhaps, by this time the Shelkozavodskoye settlement was already called Mamaevskoye or simply Gorodishche by local residents (Tkachev, 1911). This monument was also known under other names – Nekrasovskoye, Shamilevskoye, reflecting the realities of a later time. It is also possible to recall an attempt to connect the Horde Place mentioned by Russian sources with it, but there are not enough arguments for this identification (Vinogradov et al., 2003).

At the same time, it seems that its earliest name was the Nogai “Chigim-Kala” (Abandoned Fortress) – the Nogais appeared on the Terek left bank in about the 14th century (Trepavlov, 2002; Narozhny, 2010).

It is believed that its first unnamed mention in scientific literature (although not in archaeological), which appeared before 1817, may be associated with the publication of the famous Russian numismatist H.M. Fren (Tiesenhausen, 1878). There, trying, in particular, to localize one of the mints of the Golden Horde – “Shigun”, he placed it on the Terek River comparing it with some ruins at the village of Shchedrinskaya, now identified with the Shelkozavodskoye settlement (Narozhnaya, 2000). Besides, it should also be noted that the indication of the description of coins by the latter one that were allegedly discovered on the right bank of the Terek River (Ibragimova, 2009) does not correspond to reality (Narozhnaya, 2000).

Perhaps the above identification of H.M. Fren was prompted by the “talking” name noted above – Mamaevskoye settlement, although it is not yet entirely clear how information on this monument got to the numismatist.

It should also be noted that the information on the Shelkozavodskoye settlement later appeared among early researchers of Russian-North Caucasian relations and the history of the Cossacks, who tried to connect it either with one of the Cossack towns or with the first Russian fortifications in this part of the Terek River valley. It is possible that this monument also included a record in the materials of P.G. Butkov published by Bentkovsky (1883) that S. Razin “for some time had a den in the steppe 15 versts from the Terek opposite the Shadrinsky town, in the ancient trench, which is still called the town of Stenka Razin”. Another Cossack researcher Popko (1880) considered the Shelkozavodskoye settlement a Russian fortress in 1567, after which this erroneous identification has entered the local literature for a long time. Already in the 60s of the 20th century this outstanding monument was compared by Gumilev (2003) with the Khazar city of Semender, but this version did not receive recognition (Vinogradov et al., 2003).

All the above facts from the history of the discovery of archaeological finds and monuments in the second half of the 18th century referred to the lowland territory of Chechnya. As for the foothill-mountainous zone of the region, in 1781, the Russian quartermaster Steder, which was sent to the North Caucasus in order to compile a military-geographical map and study possible routes to Transcaucasia, visited the mountain zone on the western border of Chechnya in the area of the Karabulaks settlement and recorded the presence of towers and some large unfinished (?) earthen structure (settlement, shaft?) at the entrance to the mountainous part of the Fortangi River valley (Atalikov, 1996).

It is also necessary to mention the appearance of a brief description of medieval architectural monuments of mountain Chechnya – arming towers – in 1822 in one of the Russian periodicals (Markovin, 1980).

7. Conclusion

In general, as Semenov (1930) noted, even this slow process of familiarizing Russian science with individual archaeological finds and monuments of Chechnya (and the North-East Caucasus) for many years was hampered by the events of the Caucasian War of the first half of the 19th century.

A real scientific study of antiquities in the considered territory actually began in the late 40s - early 50s of the 19th century with the finds of Coban bronzes in the Vozdvizhenskaya fortress (Krupnov, 1960; Kozenkova, 1977) documenting the beginning of the actual archaeological study of the monuments of Chechnya.

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