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**R.G. KUZEEV – S.M. ABRAMZON: SCIENTIFIC DISCUSSION IN
PERSONAL CORRESPONDENCE**

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Abstract

The purpose of the study is to analyze the history of development of the Soviet ethnographic science, formation of its categorical perception. In the 1960–1970s, new historical sources concerning the issues of ethnogenesis and ethnic history entered the historical science. The genealogical chronicles of the Bashkir “shezhere” clan using the example of the Bashkir ethnos were included into a scientific circulation. Scientific discussions of two outstanding scientists R.G. Kuzeev and S.M. Abramzon concerning the early stages of the Bashkir ethnogenesis were never published. The epistolary heritage of scientists allows presenting earlier unstudied problems of the Soviet ethnographic science. The correspondence of R.G. Kuzeev and S.M. Abramzon represents real-life communication, illustrates the scientific knowledge, the choice of research approaches applied in the creation of a scientific concept of the origin of the Bashkir people. In the mid-sixties R.G. Kuzeev developed a program and methodological base for the scientific study of the ethnogenesis of the Bashkir people, which was introduced in the work of the Bashkir Branch of the USSR Academy of Sciences within the next forty years. The second problem was the chronological approach to Bashkir shezhere and the definition of the early “Bulgar” layer correlated to the period of the XV–XVI centuries. The correspondence between R.G. Kuzeev and S.M. Abramzon shows that S.M. Abramzon took an active part in all these scientific structures of R.G. Kuzeev at the level of choosing specific research techniques and in the creation of wide scientific generalizations.

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Keywords: Bashkortostan, ethnicity, history of science, discussion, epistolary heritage



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1. Introduction

The context of scientific research that creates the intellectual history in a certain temporal space is reflected not only in the discoveries and publications of scientists, but also in their interpersonal communication. The correspondence between the leaders of anthropological and ethnographic research in the 1960–1970s of the 20th century reveals a new perspective of the history of emergence and development of these historical trends in the pre-computer era, without the possibility of a quick response via e-mails or scientific social networks. This is evidenced by the correspondence of N.Z. Davis and E. Thompson published in the *Past and Present* historical journal (as cited in Walsham, 2017). Written communication and discussions by American and British researchers not only demonstrated their common interests in finding new ways on a similar topic of folk culture, but also the possibility of creating new ways of interpreting scientific texts.

It is phenomenal that in the Soviet Russia it was during the same period of time that the intellectual basis of common interests in the field of historical and ethnographic problems of studying the past of the peoples of the USSR was formed. The voices of scientists were preserved in extensive correspondence, which reflected the basic principles of their discussion base.

Half a century separates us from the generation represented by two famous domestic researchers R.G. Kuzeev and S.M. Abramzon. To date, the correspondence between scientists has not been published and is kept in the personal funds of scientific archives (Ufa Federal Research Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Scientific Archive). The correspondence demonstrates not only the evidence of personal communication. Both their formal discussions at conferences and private letters capture reflections and debates on the formation of their scientific search and discoveries as the basis for the basic principles of future research approaches. Modern intellectual history needs unofficial evidence of the so-called “eyewitness science”, which makes it possible to identify the bifurcation points in the formation of concepts and directions of scientific research in the complex path of scientific knowledge. In this regard, the correspondence of scientists ceases to be perceived only in the format of personal documents, but it acts as a real path to the discovery and study of a new historical source, the choice of research techniques in building a scientific concept that was developed during the exchange of views, including through epistolary discussions.

2. Problem Statement

The basis of the study is the discussion of R.G. Kuzeev and S.M. Abramzon built on the basis of personal correspondence from the preserved 116 fund of Rail Gumerovich Kuzeev, which is stored in the Scientific Archive of Ufa Federal Research Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences. This fund contains documents illustrating some aspects of the development of historical science in Bashkiria from 1950 to 2000. A significant part of the fund’s 235 cases is occupied by personal correspondence of R.G. Kuzeev with twenty-eight addressees, including leading Soviet ethnographers, archaeologists and historians: T.K. Beisembiev, A.Kh. Margulan, A.M. Khazanov, V.M. Masson, V.A. Schnirelman, G.F. Debets, O.N. Bader, K.V. Chistov, S.M. Abramzon. The correspondence of R.G. Kuzeev with S.M. Abramzon, which has become the subject of the present study for a number of reasons, is the most

extensive and systematic of this epistolary heritage. First, R.G. Kuzeev received from S.M. Abramzon a particular “training” in ethnographic field studies. Besides, according to the memoirs of R.G. Kuzeev, S.M. Abramzon, with whom he participated in the Central Asian Expedition of the USSR Academy of Sciences, has been his teacher since 1952. He has been working in the squad under the leadership of Abramzon for three and a half months (as cited in Antonov, 2012). Historiographic essays dedicated to Kuzeev emphasize the importance of the experience of field ethnographic science acquired by him in the Central Asian Expedition (as cited in Yakupov, 2010). Second, the great experience of the scientist Abramzon, who had a fairly high rating in Soviet historical science, played a huge role (as cited in Reshetov, 2001). All taken together predetermined their close scientific ties and searches on similar topics of research into the ethnic formation of the USSR peoples. That is why our attention was drawn to the opportunity to penetrate the process of the emergence or even birth of the intellectual thought of two scientists divided by a huge distance and limited in their substantive discussion by the speed of information transfer.

3. Research Questions

The correspondence of S.M. Abramzon and R.G. Kuzeev containing debatable ideas and polemic, in particular about the opportunities of identifying the ethnographic layers of the XV–XVI centuries in the history of the Bashkir people, methods of ethnographic material dating, opens a little-known page of scientific interaction of scientists while creating their fundamental works on the history of the Bashkir people (Scientific Archive). The study of the correspondence between R.G. Kuzeev and S.M. Abramzon allows setting a number of objectives disclosing the most controversial issues of the Soviet historical science and ethnography, and which were deeply discussed in personal correspondence of two scientists working on similar problems of national identification of the two USSR nations – Kyrgyz and Bashkir. We defined the following research problems corresponding to the mutual interest of the subject discussed for nearly ten years starting with the first remained letters of 1961.

1. First, the discussion of the problem of formation of logically verified structure and content of the monographic composition by R.G. Kuzeev to study the problems of origin of the Bashkir people.
2. Second, discussion of a chronological framework of formation of the Bashkir ethnos.
3. Third, search for a uniform technique of historical and ethnographic study of the USSR people.

4. Purpose of the Study

Based on the study of personal correspondence of two scientists, we set the purpose not so much to recreate the personal history of large Soviet historians and ethnographers R.G. Kuzeev and S.M. Abramzon but to reveal the most deeply discussed problems of ethnic origin and formation of the national identity of the Bashkirs in accordance with the epistolary heritage of scientists which content is still beyond the broad scientific community domain.

5. Research Methods

The study utilized the methods based on historical and genetic approach that make it possible to reveal and track the development of the main intellectual component of a discussion as the basis for the interpretation of available historical and ethnographic materials. The study of the correspondence between the USSR scientists in the 60–70s of the 20th century is also based on the use of the contextual approach disclosing the content and essence of intellectual culture through the analysis of the letters of scientists of that period. Let us particularly identify the debatable component of the correspondence. At present, a discussion in scientific knowledge is highly enough appreciated by the modern community of humanists suggesting not only to keep this experience of communication, but also to expand its boundaries as a method of study and discussion of the subject domain of humanitaristics (Llano, 2021).

6. Findings

The letters of S.M. Abramzon to R.G. Kuzeev, as common for personal correspondence, contain information of companionship of two colleagues: senior and younger (at the time of correspondence in 1961 S.M. Abramzon was 55 years old and R.G. Kuzeev was 32 years old). The first S.M. Abramzon's detailed letter of March 27, 1961 (Scientific Archive) is devoted to the book *Bashkir Shezhere* published in 1960 (Kuzeev, 1960). In fact, S.M. Abramzon provided a deep review of the work highly appreciating "... the value of shezhere as one of historical sources". S.M. Abramzon considered that R.G. Kuzeev managed to reveal the early layer of Bashkir shezhere, belonging to the XV–XVI centuries. Clearly, in his letters S.M. Abramzon bypassed a difficult situation which developed by 1972 that became a subject of discussion until 1973 inclusive (as cited in Reshetov, 2001).

However, as we consider, the incentive motive of regular correspondence of R.G. Kuzeev and S.M. Abramzon and the central problem discussed by the scientists within several years was the writing of the Kuzeev's (1974) monograph "Origin of the Bashkir people: Ethnic structure, resettlement history". The correspondence shows that at this stage of relations the scientists were far beyond the "field school". S.M. Abramzon literally stopped on each aspect of this research: methodology and methodical methods of work with archaeological and ethnographic material; chronological framework and factual material of research.

Thus, in the letter of May 25, 1964 S.M. Abramzon analyzes in detail the plan of a future monograph: "... In fact, your plan doesn't cause any objection. Everything is thought through in it, and it seems quite exhaustive. It is conceived widely, but I am sure that you have the necessary data for this research" (Scientific Archive). Nevertheless, from the point of view of S.M. Abramzon, the structure of the monograph suggested by R.G. Kuzeev was not logically fulfilled. He writes: "I understand that for you the 1st part of the work is the main, but in terms of logic and the interests of the reader it would probably be more correct to change the position of the 1st and 2nd parts. Then the work would gain even bigger symmetry and logical sequence. And it is just more appropriate to consider the ancient ethnic links of the Bashkirs (in fact, their ancestors) in the corresponding chapters ... of the 2nd part. It seems to me that with the suggested structure you will avoid repetitions, overrunning or, on the contrary, returning back. It seems to me that the 1st part of your work shall follow from historical and ethnographic analysis

of all stages in the ethnic history, the result of which was the ethnic map of the Bashkirs in the 16th century” (Scientific Archive). Further, in the letter of June 11, 1970 S.M. Abramzon considered the preparation of cartographic materials which made the work deeper and more valid as the unconditional advantage of the monograph “Origins of the Bashkir People” (Scientific Archive).

By stating that he makes minor comments on the content of Chapter 15, S.M. Abramzon raised a debating question about the Turkic nature of the Bashkir ethnic community. He asked R.G. Kuzeev: “In the VIII–IX centuries, were only the Turkic tribes in Bashkiria the “source material” for the formation of the Bashkir ethnic community? Or all the issues ... of the Finno-Ugric ties will be reflected in Chapter 16?” “Then, are such issues as the initial area of resettlement of the Bashkir tribes (Chapter 17) and the main ethnic features of the Bashkirs (Chapter 20) not related to each other?” (Scientific Archive).

S.M. Abramzon called the dissolution of the ethnographic problems themselves a more significant drawback of the structure and content of the work discussed in it, wishing the author to reflect them in relevant chapters. “Especially in Chapter 20 of the second part, as well as to some extent in the chapters of the 1st part, devoted to the ethnic composition and resettlement of the Bashkir tribes in the 16th century – during the period when certain ethnographic features of the equal groups of the Bashkirs were obviously formed. In the same way, anthropology data were somehow neglected. They may also help to find out some aspects of ethnic history, especially if it is possible to attract paleoanthropological materials” (Scientific Archive).

R.G. Kuzeev’s reaction to the comments and wishes was clearly positive, as indicated by his response letter to S.M. Abramzon dated June 8, 1964: “I am grateful for your letter and advice. They are very valuable, and I will take them into account” (Scientific Archive). This letter of S.M. Abramzon states “Introduction” written with the confident hand of R.G. Kuzeev.

Having learned about the chronological framework of the origin of the Bashkir people in a letter dated May 25, 1964 S.M. Abramzon became interested in new methodological methods for dating the ethnographic material: “...By the way, I am very interested in how you managed to link the ethnographic materials, usually quite difficult to date, precisely to the 16th century? This is very important from a methodological point of view” (Scientific Archive). In a letter dated June 8, 1964 R.G. Kuzeev answered with a detailed analysis of a set of sources used by him, primarily shezhere. “Now about dating the ethnographic material. Here I have no new methodological techniques. Of course, you are right: this part of our work is the most difficult and, perhaps, the most vulnerable to criticism, especially by archaeologists, who themselves still allow many arbitrariness and subjective assessments in dating the material and even more in its interpretation” (Scientific Archive).

In fact, the problem of chronology was caused by vague methodological methods used in Soviet ethnography. With regard to the methodology and methods of the study itself, they were considered by the authors of the correspondence in combination as the study expanded and the views exchanged.

Thus, in the letter of June 11, 1970 S.M. Abramzon adjusts a methodological component of R.G. Kuzeev’s research: “Recently I finished the review of the book by L.P. Potapov, which is similar to your work “Ethnic List and Origin of the Altaian” (Potapov, 1969). It is quite interesting in terms of methodology if you didn’t have a chance to read it, I strongly recommend” (Scientific Archive). The problem of the methodology of ethnographic researches of the people of the USSR was one of the most

important parts of the correspondence. In the same letter S.M. Abramzon noted: “I absolutely agree with you that all of us need elaboration of the general approach to the analysis of tribal structure of nomadic and semi-nomadic... the Turkic-speaking people, that we need a uniform methodology. And why don't you show the initiative in the work and don't offer such uniform methodology? Someone has to “push” this matter. There will be a session in a draft of a five-year plan of our sector of the Central Asia for 1973 devoted to ethnogenesis of the people of the Central Asia and the Caucasus. Perhaps, as a matter of preparation for the session you should raise this question?” (Scientific Archive). In the letter of December 20, 1971 S.M. Abramzon showed his attention to the publication “Origins of the Bashkir People” offering R.G. Kuzeev several publishing options. Besides, T.A. Zhdanko became the reviewer, and moreover, the editor-in-chief of the monograph.

Highly appreciating the scientific potential of R.G. Kuzeev, his understanding of the problems of ethnography of the Kyrgyz, in the letter of December 20, 1971 S.M. Abramzon appealed to him “...to undertake the preparation of the review of the monograph “Kyrgyz and Their Ethnographic and Historical-Cultural Relations...” (Scientific Archive). R.G. Kuzeev fulfilled this request of S.M. Abramzon at the highest theoretical, methodological and methodical level of the Soviet historical and ethnographic science. In 1972 the review was published in a regular issue of *The Soviet Ethnography* (Kuzeev, 1972). However, R.G. Kuzeev's phrase, which was summing up the result of the review, caused ambiguous reaction of S.M. Abramzon. Kuzeev (1972) emphasized that in S.M. Abramzon's research the presence “some contentious clauses only enriches the book and increases its scientific importance as the author seeks to express his own opinion on the most complex problems of ethnic, social-economic and cultural history of the Kyrgyz” (p. 156). In the letter of August 31, 1972 S.M. Abramzon wrote about it: “... I admit, I was a little confused by a phrase, which you, by agreement with Yu.V. Arutyunyan inserted into the text of the review. Of course, the thing is not in debatability of any given provisions. Discussions have always been and will be. But all arguments in favor of the role of various components in ethnogenesis are considered debatable (as I understood you), and in fact this disproves the problem setting itself, and completely satisfies the opponents of my approach to ethnogenesis, and first of all Mr. Petrov... This phrase will be just a find for those who took up arms against me and took an active part in this, as you correctly write, shocking history...”.

7. Conclusion

The studied private correspondence and discussion with S.M. Abramzon largely preceded the Kuzeev's (1973, 1978) publications of the 1970s of the XX century (that later became famous) about the formation of the Turkic ethnic group in Eastern Europe and the Cis-Urals region.

It is known that in the same years other approaches to the problem of ethnicity based on the constructivist ideas of Friedrich Barth were formed. According to his approach, ethnicity was manifested through interaction with other ethnic groups and through social processes, reflected in its cultural features (Mácsai, 2016). A similar idea was obviously present in the structures of S.M. Abramzon, as indicated by his letters to R.G. Kuzeev. However, the reaction to the wishes to pay attention to the multifactorial ways of forming the Bashkir ethnic group was ignored by R.G. Kuzeev. It is possible that both scientists were

familiar with the theory of constructivism of their foreign colleagues. However, the Soviet ethnographic thought welcomed those norms that demonstrated the academic works of historians and ethnographers.

Kuzeev joined the world historiography as a bright representative of the academic ethnography of the Soviet state (as cited in Kuzev & Mukhamediarov, 1995). Modern studies still reflect the interest in the works of R. G. Kuzeev on the ethnogenesis of the Bashkirs based on the genealogical records of the Bashkir clans or shezhere (as cited in Mácsai, 2016). However, as we showed, R.G. Kuzeev already at an early stage of discussion correspondence (in a letter dated June 8, 1964) believed that “a historian, an ethnographer developing the medieval history of such people as the Bashkirs has no other material and, even from the point of view of the accepted standards, some of the dating will seem conditional, and we will have to deal with it until we collect new material”. A new accumulation of material on the history of medieval Bashkiria, as he believed, “will obviously be associated with the successes of archeology, which will take at least ten years” (Scientific Archive). The expectations and hopes of the scientist for obtaining archaeological evidence of his concept of the origin of the Bashkir ethnic group have not yet been realized. The theory and practice of archeology of the Southern Urals proved the failure of such a project (Shuteleva et al., 2017). The theoretical component of ethnography and the factology of the archaeological material have not yet been built into a single concept of the ethnic and national identity in the Cis-Urals region.

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