

The Period Division of Eurasian History: Existing Problems and Possible Solutions

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Периодизация евразийской истории: существующие проблемы и возможные решения*

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There are several dozens of concepts, showing attempts to divide the historical process or individual epochs of human development into periods. However, the analysis reveals the imperfection of such systems, as well as the lack of a clear and reasonable conceptual apparatus. In addition, over the past decade a great number of discoveries, including archaeological, have been made which brought about significant adjustments to the previously established ideas. A considerable amount of information that requires high-quality design expertise has been collected. The article views the problems of compliance and correct application of a number of historical and cultural terms used in various humanitarian science fields. The foregoing reflections and comparisons are mainly practical. They are aimed at clarifying of the meaning, place, level, the roles and values of other existing symbols, as well as at the demonstration of their adequate usage. For maximum coverage of the evolution of mankind, a reliable system of structuring history is offered: era — epoch — period — time — culture — stage — phase — event — moment.

Key words: history, archeology, periodization, antiquity, Middle Ages, modern times, era, epoch, period, time, culture, stage, phase, event, moment.

DOI 10.14258/izvasu(2016)2-46

By the present time scientists have developed several dozens of concepts which are taking an attempt to structure by time periods of the whole historical process of human development [1; 2, p. 10–29; and etc.].

Существует несколько десятков концепций, демонстрирующих попытки создания периодизации всего исторического процесса или отдельных эпох развития человечества. Однако анализ показывает несовершенство таких систем, а также отсутствие четко выраженного и обоснованного понятийного аппарата. Кроме этого, за последние десятилетия сделано немало открытий, в том числе археологических, которые внесли существенные коррективы в ранее сложившиеся представления. Сформировался значительный объем информации, требующий качественного оформления знаний. В статье рассмотрены вопросы соответствия и корректности применения ряда историко-культурных терминов, используемых в разных гуманитарных науках. Изложенные размышления и сделанные сопоставления носят больше практический характер. Они направлены на выяснение смысловой нагрузки, места, уровня, роли и других значений существующих обозначений, а также на демонстрацию их адекватного использования. Для максимального охвата эволюции человечества предлагается апробированная система структурирования истории с помощью следующих понятий: эра — эпоха — период — время — культура — этап — стадия — фаза — событие — миг.

Ключевые слова: история, археология, периодизация, Древность, Средневековье, Новое время, эра, эпоха, период, время, культура, этап, стадия, фаза, событие, миг.

The Europocentric approach forms the basis of the vast majority of the concepts. Apparently, it has become a reflection of the objective situation related to the previous stage of science development. In the 2nd half of the 20

* Работа выполнена при поддержке гранта Министерства образования и науки РФ (Постановление № 220), полученного ФГБОУ ВПО «Алтайский государственный университет», договор № 14.Z50.31.0010, проект «Древнейшее заселение Сибири: формирование и динамика культур на территории Северной Азии».

and the beginning of the 21 centuries a lot of discoveries, including archaeological, have been made that brought about remarkable adjustments to the previously established ideas. A significant amount of new information which has been collected earlier, requires high-quality expertise in the study of history of both individual regions or countries, as well as on a broader territorial level (within the continents and around the whole world). In the process the emphasis is laid on the conceptual apparatus in use as well as the experience of the conducted research.

This publication sums up the previous work which has been accomplished within the designated theme, some results of the work are presented in various publications, and are partially analyzed [2–6]. This article addresses the issues of compliance and terminological correctness of the application of a number of historical and cultural terms in various fields of humanitarian knowledge. The foregoing reflections and comparisons are mainly practical. They are aimed at clarifying the meaning, place, level, roles, and other values of existing concepts in the structuring of the historical process, as well as at the demonstration of their adequate use. The mentioned objective is important for the dialogue which takes place between the researchers of different science fields, involved in a comprehensive study of Eurasian history.

First we need to resort to a number of basic statements that provide the foundation for the appropriate analysis and present the results in the planned context. The important point is to define the beginning of human history. In native science, this date is associated with the production by the humans of their first tools. As the main source of necessary evidence, the oldest stone products are considered. It should also be recognized that the current general archaeological division into periods is one of the models of scientific period division, which is based on comprehensive research and materials and reflects the objective natural laws. This model was announced by the Roman poet and philosopher Lucretius Carus Titus in the 1 age B.C. In the 1st half of the 19 century this model was established by such Danish scientists as Christian Jurgensen Thomsen and Jens Jacob Asmussen Worso, and was based on the designation of three eras (stone, bronze and iron). “Technological” principle of history division was reflected in the works of John. Lubbock, G. de Mortillet and other archaeologists who dealt with period division from the Paleolithic to the Middle Ages. There were also some other solutions. For example, the concept of the four stages of human development was proved by a Swedish professor of zoology, the director of the museum S. Nilsson. Using the method of ethnographer-archaeological analogies, on the basis of livelihood methods he proposed the following scheme: 1) the time of Hunting-Gathering and Fishing economy — “savage”;

2) the period of nomadic cattle breeding — “nomadism”; 3) the stage of the development of agriculture; 4) stage of the emergency of state, division of labor and making coins — “civilization” [7]. However, the implementation in practice of the so-called Thomsen Worso scientific research system was spread widely. The authors of the book “History and Time. In Search of the Lost” I. Savelyeva and A. Poletaev [8, p. 234] believe that the previously used “ages scheme” can be considered as quite strict and specific, that is, it can be used as a tool for division of history into periods. It can be implemented for long historical periods. However, the attempts to continue this division have not been successful. The scheme still exists locally and is not integrated properly in the developed historical structure.

Further improvement of the mentioned basic concept has led to its development and wider implementation by fractional notation of such periods as the Paleolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic, Chalcolithic, Early, Developed and Late Bronze as well as Early and Late Iron Age. This logical construction misses at least, “Developed Iron Age”. We should not also exclude the possibility of picking out the Transition from Bronze to Iron, as it is recommended by some researchers (eg, M. Kosarev [9]). Marking the historical process with certain transitional stages must take place at an appropriate level, and in accordance with a particular situation. For example, Eneolithic (Chalcolithic or Copper-Stone Age) has already been recognized as a period of transition from the Stone Age to the Bronze Age. It is also necessary to consider other signs in the author’s system of concepts, which determine the multidimensional historical time (see below).

The next concept is connected with choosing of a comparative model developed on the basis of another accounting system of the historical development. In the 1st half of the 19 century historical science adopted rather common but universal scheme based on the picking out of three epochs: Antiquity, the Middle Ages and Modern times [8]. We regularly (consciously or unconsciously) use these terms in our general definitions. O. Spengler [10, p. 49] considered this three-part scheme to be incredibly scarce and meaningless, but at the same time he admitted its “absolute dominion” over the historical consciousness [8, p. 222]. There have been serious attempts to replace this model, which does not reflect any specific characteristics, but is likely to be an abstract version of history division. In the 1930s the Marxist literature canonized five socio-economic formations scheme (primitive communal — slave — feudal — capitalist — communist). It claimed to be a global and antieurocentric form [8, p. 341]. Each formation was a reflection of a peculiar historical stage and was characterized by a set of material and spiritual values, as well as the methods for their creating [11]. However, at the present time this concept is not commonly used, while the rest of the pre-

sented models continue to exist. In addition, there are also some other models.

Thus, the concept of the historical process from the Paleolithic to the present day was presented by a well-known Russian scientist I. Dyakonov [12] in his book. The concept was based on Marxist principles and reflected the mechanism of changing of eight phases of the upward social development in the history of mankind, which are separated from each other:

- The first phase — the primitive;
- The second phase — the primitive communal;
- Third phase — early or communal antiquity;
- The fourth phase — late or imperial antiquity;
- The fifth phase — Middle Ages;
- Sixth phase — stable absolutist post-medieval

[12, p. 152], recognizing the specificity of the time period from the 16 to the 19 century but avoiding the term “New Age”);

- The seventh phase — capitalist;
- The eighth phase — post-capitalist.

The criteria of the mentioned above scheme, along with the level of technology development and related socio-economic relations, is the development of social consciousness and the weapon production. According to N. Rozov [13, p. 239–242], the concept of I. Dyakonov can be criticized for the neglecting of “... the essential nature of the interaction in the society and emerging at this level specific inter-social structures”, which are considered by the world-system, civilization and geopolitical approach. Moreover the history period division and the society stage classification were blended. Taking this into account, as well as developing and using some ideas of domestic and foreign scientists, N. Rozov [13, p. 267–302] developed the idea of first six phases of the nonlinear development of societies based on multidimensional assessments, and then presented the “core period division of the world history”, in which the mentioned below eras are divided into periods:

- formative and basic period (with pointing out the decline stage);
- Period (dominance of regimes and societies) of primitivism;
- Period (dominance of regimes and societies) of barbarism;
- Period (dominance of regimes and societies) of early state;
- Period (dominance of regimes and societies) of mature state;
- Period (dominance of regimes and societies) of interacting state;
- Period (dominance of regimes and societies) of social Sensitivity.

This layout can be considered as an attempt to overcome multiple contradictions that exist in the modern understanding of the concepts of the world history.

To some extent, it is aimed at the destruction of the existing system of abstract division of mankind into antiquity, the Middle Ages, modern and contemporary times.

It is clear that all methods of splitting the history of mankind into periods are certainly subjective, and they reflect the values of each author or a group of like-minded scientists [2, p. 26]. It is also clear that there is no such a theoretical model which would be able to embrace all the facts of the world history [14, p. 56; 15]. Nevertheless such attempts are being made at the present time and they are provided by the remarkable computer capacities. However, in our opinion, it is more important to clarify the place of each fact, event, phenomena and product in the system of generalized models of different levels in relation to other similar indicators.

It should be noted that these basic and widely used schemes of three eras (archaeological and historical), which were attracted for comparison, have their shortcomings that have been repeatedly observed and discussed in scientific journals. One of them is their limited demonstration of a historical period.

The archaeological model covers the most significant cultural and chronological period of human development from the very beginning, but ends with the Middle Ages. Historical (European) scheme does not take into account the most archaic stages, but it covers history since ancient times until today. In our opinion, this shortcoming of both concepts can be overcome. Firstly, both models can be potentially extended, and, secondly, their correct combination, which has been previously planned, can potentially solve the problem of the locality. The following disadvantages (which will be viewed further) can also be eliminated by using the potential of each of the concepts or by their combined application.

The schemes commonly viewed in this article reflect the progressive linear development of the humanity, but they are lacking other important aspects. In fact, the historical process is extremely diverse. This task of period division is not only to specify general trends, but also to take into account the manifestations of the individual, special, single facts. This problem can be solved by expanding the range of notation. The attempts to accomplish this were previously made. The results of this work are offered below. Nevertheless it is difficult to consider unevenness of historical development in any scheme. However, such possibilities really exist.

In general, both widespread schemes have the theoretical and practical nature, and their consistent correspondence ensures the construction of a more capacious model which can be helpful in the construction of the period layout of the entire Eurasian history. So the logic of thought suggests the following optimal steps of period divisions of the mentioned above eras. For such activity the archeologists have already taken some specific steps and this scheme is shown above. This exten-

sion is also used for the next model. Despite the above indicated optimism, solving of the problems faces a lot of difficulties. We will try to solve some of them, and the rest of them will be postponed or only outlined.

To begin with, the scheme of historical epochs can be completed. As a result, it would look like this: the most ancient, ancient, medieval, new and the newest. Each of these periods can be divided into three periods, respectively. The three-part structure is the basic core of any meaningful period division. This is especially important on the initial stages of comprehending the sufficient information. In this regard, we should note that a similar division has already been mentioned. For instance, in the structure division of the Middle Ages there is early, developed and late periods. It is expedient to transfer this experience to other time periods, defining them the same way. The unusual sounding phrases should not be a barrier for this. For example, until recently, many archaeological names set the teeth on edge, but now they are used not only by scientists but by the schoolchildren as well. If we take this approach as a basis, it is possible to demonstrate the extended scheme with necessary additional periods:

— Early, developed and late periods of the most ancient times;

— Early, developed and late periods of the ancient era (early, developed and late antiquity);

— Early, developed and late periods of the Middle Ages (previously developed and late Middle Ages);

— Early, developed and late period of the new era;

— Early, developed and late period of the modern era.

Such arrangement not only demonstrates the widening of cultural and chronological opportunities, but also provides the beginning of a process of overcoming of the shortcomings of the scheme. Marked items can be brought into line with the more specific archaeological concepts.

For instance the most ancient era corresponds with the era of stone. The antiquity is comparable to copper-bronze and early iron ages (paleometal era). The Middle Ages coincide in both cases as it is reasonable to admit an important role of archeology in the study of modern and contemporary history. The logic of further discussion demonstrates correlation on another level:

— The early period of the most ancient times — the Paleolithic;

— Developed period in the most ancient era — Mesolithic;

— Late period of the most ancient times — the Neolithic;

— The early period of the ancient era (early antiquity) — Chalcolithic and Early Bronze;

— Developed period during the ancient era (developed antiquity) — the developed and late bronze;

— Late period of ancient era (late antiquity) — the transition from bronze to iron, and the early Iron Age;

— The early period of the Middle Ages (early Middle Ages) — developed Iron Age;

— Developed period of the medieval era (developed Middle Ages) — Late Iron Age.

The advanced opportunities provided by the archaeological period division are restricted by Late Medieval period (Late Middle Ages). The attempts to continue the period division on the basis of the original “technological” principle were not (as it has already been mentioned) successful. Apparent limitations of the concept should not be an obstacle to scientific research, since the archaeological work is being widely fulfilled in the study of the history of the late Middle Ages, modern and contemporary era. Therefore, it makes sense for the archaeologists to work within this frame that has actually been started with the usage of the term “Early, Developed and Late Middle Ages”.

The following steps can determine schematic solution to the problems of non-uniformity of accounting, multiline and other difficult issues in the historical development. This mission is entrusted by the author for the use of the concepts of “time” and “culture”. Their archaeological content is comparable from some point to the adopted historic approaches, reflecting the dynastic, military-political, economic and other indicators. In such a case a variety of features of these periods will be consistently displayed, as well as the uniqueness of the local historical and cultural manifestations in different parts of Eurasia.

The role of the concept of “time” in archaeology was viewed in a special report, the materials of which are partly reflected in a separate publication [4]. They can be appropriately reproduced here in scale. The emergence, distribution and implementation of the idea of time have been linked to a variety of circumstances. This process is recorded in ancient mythology, which can be a separate research topic. Already in antiquity two concepts or models of time were developed [16, p. 5, 161–166]: “According to *a static concept*, the events of the past, present and future exist in reality and in a sense, at the same time and the formation and disappearance of material objects — it is an illusion that occurs at the moment of awareness of the change. According to *the dynamic concept*, in reality there are only events of the present time; events of the past do not already exist, and future events also do not exist yet”. The problems of the time were studied by the specialists of natural and humanitarian science fields. As a result, a significant amount of information on the subject has been accumulated [8; 17; 18 and etc.]. The two above-mentioned concepts were supplied with some other [17]. One of them (*the substantial*) “... views time as a special substance, along with space, material and so on”, and the other (*relational*) “...considers time to be the relations (or system of relations) between physical events” [16, p. 5]. The problem of the studying

of such phenomenon as time is still relevant. It attracts the attention of philosophers, physicists, historians, culture experts, mathematicians and other researchers. At the present stage a new impetus for the discussion was given by a monograph of I. Saveljeva and A. Poletaev “History and Time. In Search of the Lost” [8].

Understanding of the term “time” as a reflection of a particular period or age is well established in the Russian language [19, p. 107]. As a philosophical category “time” is regarded as a form of sequential change of state or matter. It cannot exist by itself without material change. Time is objective and independent of human consciousness; it is one-dimensional, asymmetric and irreversible. Time as a form of existence of matter is composed of a numerous sequences and durations of the existence of specific quality conditions. However, this discretion is always relative [20, p. 101]. Rather vast concept of “time” is used by historians who link it with a specific sequence of events, duration of recorded facts and processes, with the activities of certain outstanding individuals or teams, etc. In the historical research time appears in two roles: as an instrument of analysis and as an independent object of study [21, p. 28]. Currently the historical time is viewed by an interdisciplinary approach [18].

One can agree with L. Klein [17, p. 12] who says that archaeologists dealing with the problems of time, cannot do without philosophy, which formulates the basic concepts, categories and laws¹. Indeed, in many philosophical writings time occupies an important place. The results of these studies are the two images designated by I. Saveljeva and A. Poletaev [8, p. 73–96]: “The Time-1” (static, homogeneous (quantitative), discrete (mathematically continuous) and causal-neutral) and “Time-2” (dynamic, heterogeneous (qualitative continuous), dynamic and causally effective. The first refers to the physical (Newtonian) time; the second is a reflection of the processes of history. There is a fundamental difference between them [18, p. 23]. This situation is objective. However, the status quo requires the expansion of our understanding of time. J. Shchapova [21, p. 29–30], for example, proposes to consider “The Time-3” (archaeological), which “... has incorporated features of both images of the time, one of which corresponds to the biological, the other to the historical development (and evolution). It is static, uniform, apparently independent, as in biological evolution; it is irreversible and causally effective as in social evolution”. The scientists repeatedly spoke of the complexity of historical time and its definitions. The overview of the different approaches to the topic is outlined by L. Klein [17] in a special article, at the end of which this well-known theorist of archaeology makes such

a conclusion: “We should always remember that, strictly speaking, an archaeological time is not the time, but only a static spatial image. This spatial sequence becomes time as a result of our mental operations. First, it becomes an archaeological time, quite arbitrary, far from reality, and only then it becomes historical time...”. This conclusion deserves attention in connection with the problem of integrating of archaeological data in historical reconstructions. Regarding this, the concept of “time” can be defined as a link between historical epochs and periods, on the one hand, and between the archaeological culture and stages of their development, on the other.

L. Klein has repeatedly paid attention to the theme of time in archaeology. They worked out a considerable amount of information on the topic and they also displayed their vision. During another research of the problem the scientist made the following observations: “Time — is the foundation on which the history and prehistory are built, but there is no time in archaeological material. This material exists in space, but outside of time. On the other hand, the time tends to be reflected in the spatial structures. Therefore, it is indirectly present in archaeological material — as a spatial structure, in the form of the order of the tracks in it; it is, so to speak, is encoded in the material. The reflection of time is represented in the material system of signs which need to be decoded. By establishing the link between the archaeological material and history or prehistory, i. e. doing the interpretation, we introduce time into the material, based on the structure and sequence of the tracks. This is called period division and dating. The introduction of time — it is not only the period division and dating but it is also any thought of change, movement or process” [17, p. 11–12]. In addition to the core (chronological) content, the considered term is used as an external cultural and historical designation.

In view of the above mentioned, the author of the work has worked out a cultural and chronological concept of ancient and medieval history of the Altai territory [2–3]. In the course of this work specific cultural and chronological segments were allocated, which were called *time* with the use of a well known ethnic or conditional (according to vivid archaeological sites) notation: Argens-mayemir time, Pazyryk time, Scythian-Sak time, Hunnish-Syanbi-zhuzhansk time (“Hunn-Sarmatian”), Turkic time, Kyrgyz time, Mongolian time.

“Time” was seen as a tool for learning and as a link between the historical data and archaeological sources. In one of his works a well known Russian archaeologist D. Savinov [22, p. 6] pointed out that “the concept of” time “in its ethno-cultural aspect is manifested in the materials of specific archaeological sites and cul-

¹ Unfortunately, philosophical knowledge is not a priority in the preparation of historians and archaeologists. This is a serious gap in education and it has negative effects.

tures...»). Indeed, each “time” applied by the archaeologists is filled with its certain cultural content, has its chronological framework extends over some specific territory and thus performs an important role in the research. The regional history of time may reflect the local specific features, without conflict interaction within wider designations. For example, the term “Scythian-Sak time” is used for the Eurasian space, but the “Pazyryk” or “Tagarsk” — are used locally in Southern Siberia, but they have a wider understanding than in combination with the term “culture”, with the name of which the notion can be similar, although it is desirable to have different terms.

In the modern concept of ancient and medieval peoples of the Altai territory [2, p. 236–237] the names of the previously mentioned “times” are used within their cultural stages. Such usage of the considered category has a practical meaning within the framework of generalization of similar and geographically close cultures of Southern Siberia as well as of the adjacent territories. There is also a problem of study selection, naming and the usage of such taxonomic unit as “*time*” within the designated system, or in general as a real manifestation in the research practice of historians and archaeologists. This has been described above.

The concept “archaeological culture” is more or less theoretically and practically understandable [23; 24; and etc.]. In our view, it is a universal and necessary today’s definition, it is also a research tool, and a certain level model in structuring history. It reflects traces of life of individuals and different societies which left their traces in the numerous monuments of the archaeology. As a result of the study of archaeological objects, the processes of formation and development of human society are being reconstructed, their material and spiritual component, as well as the conditions of life support and other possible general and specific indicators [5, p. 5].

Designated archaeological cultures² objectively demonstrate the specificity and diversity of the historical process, as well as its laws. At the same time they provide local manifestation in many ways.

The mechanism of defining *steps* has been created in archaeology in the framework of archaeological culture, although a number of points remain controversial. In this regard, it is worth paying attention to the point formulated by M. Gryaznov [25, p. 53] while considering the experience of the cultural and chronological construction based on archaeological materials, “It is necessary to date in the chronological figures of the entire period (the stage of culture is meant. — *A.T.*) as a whole, the entire set of sites, but not separate mounds, tombs and so on. Only then you move on to a fractional pre-

cise dating of individual monuments”. This statement can be applied to all components of period division. In each archaeological culture known in the Altai territory from antiquity to the Middle Ages there are stages, marked by qualitative changes associated with certain events. This approach is one of the traditional forms of modern historical thinking [26]. It demonstrates the relative chronology and the various stages of any recorded event or process (emerging, formation and flourishing, as well as modification, transformation and decay), which is reflected by any objective period division. The principle of “three parts” was not strictly observed in the period division of the Altai cultures [2, 236–237; 3]. This is due to the fact that not all mentioned cultures were full of representative material. At the same time the historical development of the peoples demonstrates the variety of reasons for the changes and forms of existence.

It should be pointed out that the stages also have a potential for their internal division. This need is very urgent yet, it would be relevant by the point of a massive accumulation of evidence. In this situation, the most optimal concepts can become “*a stage*” and/or “*a phase*”, which will ensure the further structuring of the historical process.

In the detailed division *events* play a significant role. It has been proved that the historical process is specific. It flows in the time and space, and it can be well demonstrated with the dialectics of quantity and quality. The history seems to be “...a combination of various relationships, actions, ideas, objects, phenomena which form a link between events in their multiplicity”. At the same time each event has its properties in quantity, e.g., time duration and extent in space. The term “event” is seen as crucial for the historical process which is represented by the movement from one event to another. The period division is a form of quantitative designation of historic processes, and it may be linear, hierarchical, total, local, general, special, etc. [27, p. 5–19]. The presented and tested structuring system (epoch — period time — culture-stage) [2–6; 28–30; et al.] objectively reflects the dialectical unity of the general, special and individual, demonstrating the principle, which is clear to the archaeologists who apply typological method and system analysis in their studies. It is aimed at an adequate understanding of the history, but it reflects the different levels or approaches. Currently, it can be substantially expanded with the other concepts: *era* — *epoch* — *period* — *time* — *culture* — *stage* — *phase* — *event* — *moment*. The term “*era*” has a stable application; it reflects part of the history, which is wider than the epoch. *Moment* — is a very short but significant historical

² Problems of allocation and recognition of archaeological cultures are not considered here. This is a separate issue. It should be discussed, but in this case, it is more important for us to recognize the right of existence of the category of “archaeological culture” in the course of archaeological investigations.

unit (sometimes it is a very remarkable moment, such as volley of “Aurora” ship in 1917).

In conclusion, it should be stressed again that any model or design are quite conventional analogues of a real process. Their choice is determined by the knowledge and desire of a researcher, as well by the tasks of his work [8, p. 358]. In connection with the considered theme we should mention Karl Jaspers’s point of view [31, p. 52], which shows an understanding of the designated research areas: “The attempt to structure the history, divide it into several periods always leads to a gross oversimplification, however, these simplifications may serve as arrows indicating the essential points”. As has already been mentioned, there is no such a theoretical model that would be able to embrace all the facts of history in their wholeness [14, p. 56]. Yes, and probably it should not be done, although such attempts are undertaken, even on the global level. The historian must determine for themselves what aspects are of the highest priority in the process of splitting

specific historical periods into shorter segments, considering philosophical and scientific requirements to the period division [13].

In this article, the author has demonstrated his personal view of the current state of matters and tried to show in the form of a system the obvious issues and opportunities to implement the necessary structure division of the historical process, which is being reconstructed by archaeologists, historians, philosophers, culturologists and other researchers. The need to present this information is explained with the practice and the need to arrange the knowledge of past reality in a form of a system. The issues which are touched upon in the article are the topic of a long-time and wide discussion. They have a range of solutions, which are offered by native and foreign scientists [1; 12; 32 and etc.]. In our view, the classical concepts’ potential has not been exhausted and can serve for the further generation of researchers in case of the rational usage. The rest of the theoretical structures will be tested by the time.

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