

Recenzie

SYDYKOV, Erlan Bataševič: Lev Gumilev: Encyclopedia

Astana: L. N. Gumilev Eurasian National University, 2012, 635 pp. ISBN 9965-20-024-6

When Lev Nikolaevich Gumilev, who had clearly formulated the Eurasian geopolitical conception that had begun to identify itself among post-October emigrants at the beginning of the 1920s, died in emigration in Paris in 1992, only few people could suppose that one of the best universities in Kazakhstan and probably in whole Central Asia would be named after him.

Lev Gumilev: Encyclopaedia (editor Prof. Turdikul Kasenul Shaban) contains – in separated encyclopaedic texts – evidence of life and scientific success of this great Russian mind. L. N. Gumilev's father was a tsarist officer and poet Nikolay Stepanovich Gumilev (1886 – 1921), executed by the new regime for his anti-Soviet activity. His mother was poetess Anna Akhmatova whose real name was Anna Andreyevna Gorenko (1889 – 1966). This genetic background explains a part of his biography saying that he passed his youth in Soviet labour camps and in exile in Central Asia. During the Great Patriotic War, as World War II is called in the post-Soviet world, he fought as a volunteer in the front line.

Only in 1961, thus quite late, he obtained his first academic title of doctor of historical sciences, followed by doctor of geographical sciences. In those times, his ideas, results of scientific research and works were basically useless for the system of those days even despite their uniqueness and universality, though some Soviet theoreticians of the then geopolitics were discretely interested in them. In the period when liberalisation started in the Soviet Union (a short, sad and fatal era of M. S. Gorbachev), L. N. Gumilev's ideas were sought after, and this enabled him to publish his texts more frequently. He focused them first of all on history of Siberia (the theme of power-generating raw materials was not preferred yet) and on history of the nations of Central Asia (they were part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on their own accord) in the context of the Eurasian steppe zone, effect of both geographic and natural factors, and of the co-existence of a nomadic type of culture with peasant and craftsman, i.e. spatially stationary, types of culture.

In his significant works *Ancient Turks* (*Древние тюрки*, 1967), *History of the Huns* (*История народа Хунну*, 1960), *Ancient Rus and the Great Steppe* (*Девяя Русь и Великая Степь*, 1989), a theme of personal attachment for a territory is cyclically repeated. His thorough knowledge and life experience helped him formulate some original views on history that were expressed, for instance, in his books *From the Rus to Russia: An Outline of Ethnic History* (*От Русы до России: очерки этнической истории*, 1992), *The Rhythms of Eurasia – the Epochs of Civilisation* (*Ритмы Евразии-эпохи цивилизации*, 1993).

L. N. Gumilev is also the author of the specific theory of ethnogenesis in which he utilized a connection of natural and social sciences. In his texts he uses a category of the so-called ethnos which is very hard to be identified with a category of a nation as it is understood in Western Europe. According to him, the ethnos was – at least in the pre-industrial era – an imprint of a certain geographical fact: where he lived, where his profile was formed and where he gained means to survive. The ethnogenesis is „a process when the superethnos passes all stages of its development from the moment of its origin...“ (p. 620). The border of these geographical facts, where two ethnoses met, was (and is in post-modern understanding) a critical place (or places) of the humankind's future. According to Gumilev, the average longevity of an ethnos is about 1,500 years.

The term Eurasia itself raises big disputes, discussions and discrepancies. Eurasia Minor contains Russia, Turkey and Kazakhstan. According to a majority of experts, Eurasia Major is the supercontinent of Europe and Asia. If Russia has the longest history of Eurasian existence¹, it is grounded in a conception of Gumilev who expressed a postulate concerning a synthesis of ethnic Russians and Mongols in his *Great Steppe*. In the reviewed work, the entry „Eurasia“ reads: „...Eurasia is the largest continent... formed by Europe and Asia... (pp. 221 and 222).

Objectively, Kazakhstan is located in the geographical centre of „Eurasia Major“, where a real synthesis of European and Asian cultures comes about. At the same time, Turkey and Turkic language countries as Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, as well as Tatarstan, a Russian Federation subject, try to be a bridge within the political heritage of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and, at the same time, prefer anti-Western rhetoric. This conception can be observed in their effort to create various integration blocs as

¹ In 1881, M. F. Dostoyevsky said of this theme unambiguously: „...we are Tatars in Europe, and in Asia – Europeans...“

a counterweight of dull (simple, propagandistic and plain) Eurocentrism². This is confirmed mainly by two moments:

1. the main task of present geopolitics is, first of all, to maintain the spatial status quo and to extend power positions in Eurasia³,
2. both Brussels and its „Euro-officers“ are simply off the mark in their pressure on Eurasia.

If the results with the encyclopaedia were to be summed up, it could be claimed that it had been a pleasant browsing. The book can be recommended to all, though it is in a language rejected by many people today, but in fact spoken and written by about 144 million of people. The theme of ethnic renaissance is topical and L. N. Gumilev's works can help us change ignorance to knowledge.

(Translated by M. Pochylý, FSV UCM in Trnava)

Peter Juza
Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius at Trnava

² Moreover, Gumilev says that Russia is a superethnos with historically verified complementarism. In: Лавров С.: *В каком мире мы живем?* In: Санкт-Петербургские Ведомости, 30. 05. 1998, ss. 4-5.

³ Juza, P.: *Historicko-civilizačný aspekt ruskej geopolitiky v 21. storočí*, In: Almanach – aktuálne otázky svetovej ekonomiky a politiky, č. 1/2010 (*ročník V.*), FMV EÚ Bratislava, ss. 17-34.