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RUSSIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES HIERARCHY AND POWER IN THE HISTORY OF CIVILIZATIONS

(Moscow, June 15-20, 2000)

This conference, organised jointly by the Centre for Civilizational and Regional Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences and the Department of Social Anthropology of the Russian State University for the Humanities brought together over 150 scholars. While the majority of participants were from Russia, others came from Australia, Canada, France, Germany, India, Kazakhstan, Netherlands, Poland, South Africa, Spain, UK, Ukraine, and the USA. Billed as a discussion of 'the general trends and mechanisms of sociocultural evolution and the processes of sociopolitical evolution in their regional and temporary variation', it turned into a series of debates about the relationship between anthropology and history of the *longue duree*, with contributions from (and implications for) those working in political science, sociology, cultural studies, and related disciplines.

The dialogue was intense, energetic and stimulating in a way which one always hopes for, but does not always find, at conferences. Apart from opening and closing plenary sessions, the main discussions were in a series of parallel panels devoted to specific themes (names of convenors are given in brackets).

- * Civilizational models of complex sociopolitical organization (Dmitri Bondarenko, Andrey Korotayev)
- * The ethological basis of hierarchy and power in human society (Marina Butovskaya)
- * Hierarchy and power among nomads (Nikolai Kradin)
- * The formation and political culture of civil society (Igor Sledzevski)

- * Law, knowledge and power in postcolonial and postsocialist anthropology (Sergei Abashin, Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov, Vladimir Bobrovnikov)
- * Power and secrecy (Victor Bocharov)
- * Religion, status and leadership (Andrey Korotayev)
- * Local models of politogenesis in the pre-industrial world (Dmitri Bondarenko)

Such was the scope and variety of presentations that it would be invidious to single out particular contributions. However, many of the discussions focused in one way or another on the early state and in this respect the presence of Henri Claessen, the doyen of students of state formation, was a particular boon to the conference. Professor Claessen himself gave two papers, one on North-West coast Indian political formations, the other a theoretical reprise of studies of the early state.

However, the problem of the state was set into a specific context by some participants, both Russian and foreign. They claimed that the state was not the only possible form of the supercomplex society but had a great number of "alternatives"; furthermore, in their opinion, such generally more primitive forms as e.g. the tribe or chiefdom could carry out the functions of the early state under some specific ecological or historical circumstances. In particular, this viewpoint was expressed in the volume "Civilizational Models of Politogenesis" contributed by Russian, Israeli, and American anthropologists. Edited by Dmitri Bondarenko and Andrei Korotayev, this volume was published in English by the Institute of African Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences specifically for the conference.

Some general features of the proceedings were striking. The first was the extraordinary command of, and passion for, historical and ethnographic literature exhibited by many of the Russian and ex-Soviet participants the majority of which had never had the good fortune to do fieldwork in their areas of study (though this might not be quite true as regards workshops organised by Dr. Abashin et al., and Prof. Sledzevski). This brought home the huge discrepancies in funding available depending on country of origin. Second was the acute discrepancy between the approaches of the Russian and former Soviet state researchers, on the one hand, and Western academic scholars, on the other. From a Western scholar's viewpoint, this could be summed up very briefly by saying that the former generally sought to be much more scientific and empirically precise, using a variety of models and techniques such as covariate analysis which their more interpretative Western colleagues shied away from. Third was the fact that a number of very interesting papers were given

by Russian university students. Some of these were truly outstanding, particularly in view of the library resources available to them.

The feeling of the participants was that the truly multidisciplinary nature of the discussions worked very well and the different national traditions of scholarship had much to learn from each other. The success of the conference has led a number of the participants to think about making it a biannual event. Preparations are already under way for the next conference to be held in St Petersburg in June 2002 at the Oriental Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Those interested in taking part, either as individual paper givers, or as panel organisers, should contact Dr. Serguei Frantsouzoff at <invost@mail.convey.ru>. A formal announcement will appear in A.T. in due course.

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