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Materials of Vatican Apostolic Library on early history of Eurasia

The materials of this article is based on the results of journey to Italy by me, professor K. Zhumagulov.

Within the framework of the State Program, supported by the Institute of history and ethnology of National Academy of Sciences, professor I was delegated to Italy. The aim of my duty journey was the Identification of rare sources and materials on the history of the Huns, Avars, Turkic khanate, and the Golden Horde.

As we know, it is very difficult to get permission to work in this unique library of Vatican. In addition to professional qualities and appropriate scientific profile there is a prerequisite to have knowledge of Latin or ancient Greek. Acknowledging him being a specialist in world history, having publications on the history of Roman Empire, the papacy and East-West relationships, and having knowledge of Latin and modern languages, the Library granted professor K. Zhumagulov a membership card number (Matricola 15553).

First of all, I would like to begin our report with the words of our President N.A. Nazarbayev from his speech: "Kazakh Khanate, formed on the territory of Eurasia, five and a half centuries ago, – originates from the era of statehood Saks, huns, uisyn state formations, the Great Turkic khanate, Deshti Kipchak and Golden Horde." [1].

Sustained attention from the head of state for history and historical science is quite understandable. Among others, now we are talking about a new model for the future of the country, identifying main values and goals. These values should be modern, strengthen national identity in a globalized world. Therefore, the President emphasizes that overall Kazakh identity must become the core of the historical consciousness of the nation.

Largest ethnic group between antiquity and the Middle Ages were Turks – natives of Central Asia. The early history of Kazakhstan is part of a global Turkic history. It is very important to study in detail the history of the Turks – the Huns, because it was them who since the second half of the 4th century led epochal process in Asia and Europe, which is called the Great Migration. It was a turning point in world history as a whole. Since that time, the synthesis and integration of social relations, cultures and traditions of tribes and peoples who inhabited the Eurasian space had occurred. These processes had many implications for the formation of a qualitatively new civilization and socio-cultural relations.

Now, allow me to return to what was said at the beginning of the report.

In Vatican, in the stacks and collections of the Vatican Apostolic Library (Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana), which ranks number one in Europe in antiquity, rarity and number of manuscripts, I have done a considerable amount of scientific and research work. For instance, new source materials on the history of the Hun Empire, Avar and Turkic Khanate, as well as state and tribal entities on the territory of Kazakhstan in the era of the Middle Ages were identified. Most of these sources are present only in Latin.

Rare sources are papal correspondence, chronicles, stories and notes of travelers, missionaries and other narrative evidences, containing valuable information on the history of the Huns, Turkic Khanate, Dasht-i-Kipchak, Golden Horde, the integration of East and West on the Silk Road.

All of these materials, we found in the collection of manuscripts in the hall of manuscripts Vaticani Latini (Latin collection). For example, regarding the Turks of the Huns and their relationship with the Roman Empire there is evidence in the writings of Pope Leo I the Great (440-461). He summoned the Eastern Roman Empire (Byzantium) to the joint fight against the Huns in opposition to hegemony in Europe. In a letter dated April 23, 451 Pontiff wrote: "nam inter principes Christianos spiritu dei confirmante concordiam gemina per totum mundum fiducia robatur, quia profectus caritatis et fidei utrorumque

armorum potentiam insuperabilem Facit, ut propitiato per unam confessionem deo simul et haeretica falsitiae et barbara destruatur hostilitas ...” [2].

Later in 452 after all Northern Italy was taken by the Huns, their way to Rome was short-lived. It became more evident that the Western Roman Empire cannot stop the onslaught of the Huns, and Attila was close to world domination. Hun Empire, consisting of 4 parts, on the northern outskirts stretched from Huns kingdom to Germany (*Skythica et Germanica regna*). The army of the Roman Empire was unable to withstand the onrush of the Huns, the former was paralyzed by success of the latter. Then the Roman Empire – the world superpower of that time, used a technique: delegated an embassy to the ruler of the Huns, Attila. The Embassy was headed by Pope Leo I: ... “... et tot nobilium provinciarum lattissima eversione credita est saevitia et cupiditas hostilis explenda, nihilque inter omnia consilia principis ac senatus populique Romani salubrius visum est, quam ut per legatos pax truculentissimi regis expeteretur. Suscepit hoc negotium cum viro consulari Avieno et viro praefectorio Trygetio beatissimus papa Leo auxilio dei fatus, quem sciret numquam piorum laboribus defuisse nec aliud secutum est quam praesumpserat fides, nam tota legatione dignanter accepta ita summi sacerdotis praesentia rex gavisus est, ut bello abstinere praeciperet et ultra Danuvium promissa pace discederet ”.

Analyzing the papal correspondence of those years, you can find a letter of 512 or 513, from bishops of the eastern regions addressed to the Pope Symmachus (498-514). From its content I learn that in 452, during the historic meeting Leo I spoke with Attila regarding the release of prisoners who were captured by the Huns.

The fact that the ruler of a vast Hunnish state, to which both Roman Empires paid tributes by the middle of the fifth century, refrained from conquering the city of Rome, giving heed to the request of the embassy, headed by the Pope, demonstrates the wisdom of Attila. He stopped the violence of his troops, refusing, in substance, from the wanton destruction and casualties...

Thus, these sources allow objectively recreate the image of the ruler Attila as the great statesman who performed great deeds. With good reason, we can say that Attila should be regarded as the most outstanding personality of the first millennium. Under his leadership the Huns demonstrated an outstanding art of war during victorious battles against both Roman Empires.

Attila favorably differed from his contemporaries – other warriors who had undertaken military campaigns to Rome. He showed respect for the Christian religion and the pope. Thus, it is not by chance that even now in the main Christian church of the world – St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, you can see pictures of the great ruler of the Hun Empire. It is a bas-relief of the 17th century made by sculptor Alessandro Algardi. It depicts the historic meeting of Leo I with Attila in 452. The same story was captured by Raphael in Stanza di Eliodoro (“Room of Heliodorus”).

Thus, in the main Christian church – St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, there are two unique things by nature symbolizing the immortality of Attila over a number of centuries by now.

In this regard, I want to particularly emphasize that we have found for the first time a very important image of Attila in Vatican Museums – the third one in a row by now – which is not found so far in any publication dedicated to the history of the Hun Empire and Rome. The finding is in one of the galleries, which is part of the Vatican Museums. This gallery is painted with 40 maps, which show the former possessions of the Catholic Church. Of particular interest here are paintings on the ceiling of the gallery – frescoes, which are paintings with historical stories, intertwined with the history of the papacy and international relations.

Closer to the center of the hall gallery among the many drawings we found a picture depicting the above-mentioned meeting of 452 between the ruler of the Huns Attila and Pope Leo I.

This fresco is difficult to see, among many other colorful paintings on the ceiling. However, we were lucky enough to find it in a detailed study of historical images of the gallery.

Unlike well-known fresco of Raphael in the Room of Heliodorus (Stanza di Eliodoro), mentioned in a number of publications, in the “Meeting of Leo the Great with Attila” – Attila is sitting on a white horse with a golden royal crown on his head. In all its form discerns the winner, who conquered northern Italy. Then we can notice a respectful attitude of the papacy to the personality of Attila, which persists to this day.

This image of Attila, which I found the first time, we are sharing with you here in this room. As a medievalist we must say here that it was after this historic meeting of Attila and Leo I on Ambuleius field (*Ager Ambuleius*), when begins the ascent of the authority of the Church and the papacy. Pope Leo I was nicknamed Leo the Great (Leo Magnus), because he was able to persuade Attila not to go to Rome and stopped him at that terrible and dangerous moment for the Empire.

For the history of the papacy and the whole medieval Europe, this meeting objectively was of great importance in terms of the growth of political influence of popes and clergy throughout the Middle Ages and the subsequent history. The Papacy turns gradually into an active force capable to administer the secular affairs across Europe and beyond.

After the Hun Empire on western historical arena comes Avar Khanate of Turks of the 6th-8th centuries. Avars – Central Asian tribes of Turkic origin. In Latin sources of the Vatican they are called Avari, Avares.

Data from written sources and archeology confirm the historical continuity of Avarians and Hunnish state, its large variety of tribes, development of international relations from the East (Altai, region of Central Asia, Iran) – to the West (Byzantine Empire, unions of Germanic tribal formations and kingdoms).

Reading the Latin texts of manuscripts we are increasingly convinced that after the Huns, the Avarians continued in the 6th century the progress of the Great Migration in the West.

By studying the history of relations between East and West, in the archives of the Vatican and the Library of the University of La Sapienza in Rome we can trace the following pattern of direct relevance to the history of the Turkic world and Kazakhstan. So after the Avarians, in the 9th century the migration of the Magyars happens, then Pechenegs and Khazars. Afterwards, in the 11th century, that of Kipchaks and Cumans (Comans).

Now, I would like to speak a bit more about Kipchaks. One of the pivots of the ancient Central-Asian ethnic (the Kazakhs) – the Kipchaks had their statehood and borders, called Dasht-i-Kipchak. It was a vast region: in the West – the Syr Darya, in the East – Irtysh, in the South – Seven Rivers, in the north – Edil (Volga).

In the Vatican Library I paid particular attention to the information of European travelers to the East – Central Asia and the lands east of it, i.e., Mongolia and China. This is particular type of historical sources that shed much light on the history of international relations, as well as the economy and way of life, social and political relations, religion and customs.

In total I indicated 126 names (discovered by me) of those who travel to Eastern and Central Asia since the mid-13th and up to the middle of the 15th century. Many of them are almost unknown. The exception is perhaps a narrow range of individual specialists of Western Europe.

For example, it is possible to mention here the following: Balduin von Hennegau, Odorico da Pordenone, Isachus Venerio (Venier), Jacobus von Florenz, Paschalis Hispanus de Victoria, Gottifredo Morosini, Giovanni Querini and a number of other travelers and missionaries.

Italian travelers, for example, noted the ways in which it is possible to cross the lands of Central Asia and the Kipchak Khanate. In this case, the definition of "khanate" coincides with the word "state". Turkic term "khanate" in its content is absolutely identical to the term "State". The data of the Vatican Library has a lot of information about Golden Horde, Chagatai Khanate, about the rule of various Khans, etc.

As already have been mentioned, in the historical sources it is mentioned about Kipchak Khanate as a separate political and state entity. For example, during the time of Kublai Khan it was anachronistic to assert that Chagatai Khanate, Kipchak Khanate or Persia also obeyed him.

Particularly valuable for the history of Kazakhstan, the Turkic world and Central Asia are correspondence of popes and khans of the Golden Horde. We were able to read the content of some manuscripts. However, this work should be continued. In addition, many of these archives, as noted by the administration of the Vatican Apostolic Library.

We examined a number of source materials and the latest literature in European languages on the above-mentioned subjects in the world's largest university La Sapienza (Sapienza Universita di Roma) where more than 150 thousand students, master's degree and doctoral degree students are studying.

These unique materials are important in the ideological-patriotic education of Kazakhstan's society. They certainly will add value to the reserves of the sources and literature for conducting comprehensive studies on the history of Kazakhstan and the Turkic world, as well as world history. New sources and literature will play a significant role in the implementation of scientific and educational activities, especially in the preparation of a new generation of historians within the undergraduate, graduate and doctoral programs in Kazakhstan.

1. Nazarbayev N.A. Uli dala ulagattary, Egemen Kazakhstan, Nov. 2, 2016. – P. 12.

2. Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (BAV), Vaticani Latini (Vat. Lat. 541, f. 67-68 R). See also: BAV, Vat. lat. 1319, f. 96^v, Vat. lat. 544, f. 183-184R

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