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Course of Lectures, Ancient Mesoamerica, Russia



Research Year: 1999

Culture: Ancient Mesoamerica

Location: Russia

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With this report, I inform FAMSI about the results reached in the project during the period from February, 1999 to final December, 1999.

Main goals of the project

Special courses or even single lectures on the ancient Mesoamerican cultures were never presented in the Russian universities in Siberian and Far Eastern regions. The reason was the total absence of specialists (just Moscow and St. Petersburg universities have several ones), literature on the topics and contacts with the leading scientists in western countries. From another side during my first course on the Precolumbian Americas ("Problem of the Initial Peopling of the New World: Archaeological Records and Questions", Novosibirsk State Univ., October - December, 1998) I met with the great interest of the students and decided to create the course on the Mesoamerican region. From the very beginning I took into consideration all the difficulties and problems of my idea. It's possible to say that last year "*I was living with the Olmecs, Maya and Aztecs*". It took a huge piece of my time and forces.

First of all I want to thank FAMSI for the outstanding help and assistance in my project. Also the big number of specialists in the US and Canada who helped me with the books, reprints, advices, and comments. I'm deeply grateful for this.

Sure, it's not possible to cover all the information and events in the Mesoamerican studies in frames of one short course. Many topics may be presented just by high-class specialists with multiyear field, museums and laboratory experience. So this is why my course is a kind of Introduction to the Mesoamerican studies.

Three main goals are in the focus in this course:

- to present the sequence of the Mesoamerican cultures in time (chronology) and in space (geography, cultural areas);
- to make special accent on the basic problems - the initial peopling of the region, the origin of the agriculture, the peculiarities and the succession of the civilizations, the phenomenon of the science, art and architecture;
- to illustrate modern stage of the Mesoamerican studies, integration of disciplines, international researches, scientific centers and recent finds.

Materials

With the funds provided by FAMSI, I was able to purchase items to form the basis of my course. These include literature (books, reprints, articles, Internet web-pages), various maps (geographical, political, historical) and slide sets:

Three slide sets (Mesoamerican Survey I (100 slides); Mesoamerican Survey II (110 slides); Southwest Archaeology: A Survey); were received from "Pictures of Record, Inc.";

FAMSI sent an excellent set of books (21) and colored albums;

A book by Michael D. Coe, *México: From Olmecs to Aztecs* (1997 edition) was received from Amazon.com;

Used books (about 20); Sanders, W.T. and Price, B.J., *Mesoamerica: The Evolution of a Civilization* (1968); Bernal, I., *The Olmec World* (1969); Weaver, M.P., *The Aztec, Maya, and Their Predecessors* (1972); and 5 new ones; for example; Smith, M.E., *The Aztecs* (1996) were mailed by the colleagues of mine from the US;

Several books (translated from English) in Russian from "The Lost Civilizations" series ("Aztecs", "Maya", "Olmecs") and written by Russian authors - Baglai, V.E., *The Aztecs* (1998).

About 50 reprints from recent literature relevant to the project were sent from the US during last 5-6 months.

Activities

The course will be presented in two universities in Novosibirsk:

Novosibirsk State University, Department of Humanities, February - March, 2000 (16 hours in total, approximately 30 students);

Novosibirsk State Pedagogical University, Department of the World Culture History, February - April, 2000 (32 hours in total, approximately 50 students).

Fareastern State University (Vladivostok), Department of History and Philosophy, invited me to take part in the Fareastern Archaeological Fieldschool with the series of slide presentations (8 lectures in total) during July - August, 2000 in the Maritime region, Russian Far East.

I'm in touch with three more Siberian Universities about the perspective to present the course in 2001-2002 school year.

I also have the appointment to make a lecture (February 11, 2000) in children's archaeological club in Novosibirsk.

12 pages program (200 examples) was published in the Novosibirsk State University (November, 1999). Special slide-projector was bought for the lectures.

Brief content of the course program

1. *Historical, Cultural and geographical characteristics of the region.* The meaning of "Mesoamerica". Geography, landscapes, languages. Early information (Diego

2. *The earliest past of the Mesoamerica.* Initial traces of man in the Region. Valsequillo and Tlapacoya question. Early hunters of the paleoindian period (Clovis-Folsom). Tepexpan man. Richard S. MacNeish's investigations - Ajuereado, El Riego, Coxcatlán, Abejas, Purrón phases. Archaic Period. Preclassic Period. Chiapa de Corzo, San José Mogote, Tlatilco etc.
3. *Early civilizations.Olmecs and "Olmecs problem".* La Venta, San Lorenzo, El Manatí, Tres Zapotes. Early Zapotecs. Monte Albán I.
4. *Classic period.* Classic Period subdivision (Proto Classic, Early Classic, Late Classic). The Teotihuacán phenomenon. Cholula, Xochicalco, Cerro da las Mesas. Classic Monte Albán (Monte Albán II, III-A, III-B, IV).
5. *Classic period. Maya.* Territory and location of sites. Lowland and Highland Mayas. Tikal, Palenque, Uxmal, Chichén Itzá, Copán, Bonampak.
6. *PostClassic period. Toltecs.* Tula and Toltecs. The "Turquoise Road". Connections with the American Southwest. Chaco Canyon. Late Zapotecs. Mitla. The Mixtecs. The Tarascans.
7. *PostClassic Period. Aztecs.* The rise and consolidations of the Aztecs. Tenochtitlán. Aztecs religion, society, militarism. Science and art. The beginning of the Spanish Conquest.
8. *Mesoamerican studies on the border of centuries.* Leading scientific centers and university programs. Recent investigations, new finds and new questions. Mesoamerican cultures in the Internet.

List of literature (32 titles in Russian and in English), chronology, web-pages in the Internet. Each student will get the program and the set of Xeroxes (maps, pictures, archaeological finds) for free.

Future perspectives

I do believe that the lectures will be useful for the students and some of them will be interested in the continuation of the studies. There is the preliminary agreement with the Departments of Humanities (Novosibirsk State Univ.) and the Department of the World Culture History (Novosibirsk State Pedagogical Univ.) about the possibilities for the group of students to be graduated on the Mesoamerican studies in the frames of the World History specialization. It's quite clear that such studies will have the comparative character and will be focused on the similar traits in the cultures of Eurasia (Eastern Asia) and the New World (Mesoamerican Region). For example, comparisons of

animals cults, utilization of stones and minerals in the rituals and decorative art, the origin of agriculture and domestication of animals, mythology, early stages of the watercraft and possible precolumbian contacts in the Pacific. We are about to enlarge our contacts with the specialists in the New World and to exchange information and literature. We'll be looking for the all possible sources for foundation to buy recent books and slides, maybe to apply for some short stay for students in the US universities. I believe that during 3-4 years it will be possible to gather 8-10 students' articles and publish them in a separate book.

I know that I'm just in the starting point of this big and hard work but the "Mesoamerican virus" is living in my blood and I'm optimistic about future.

Submitted 01/01/2000 by:

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