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The Meaning of World History and The Evolution of States of The Ancient World

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Abstract

Introduction: The article attempts to examine the main patterns and driving forces of state evolution using specific historical material from the evolution of states in the Ancient World. According to the author, identifying such patterns is difficult because the historical process cannot be identified with natural processes and phenomena that can be quantitatively described and formulated on this basis as universal laws. The author believes that it is more appropriate to use the category of the meaning of world history, on the basis of which the specific historical process is revealed in relation to various legal orders and legal traditions of the past, in particular to the states of the Ancient World, which are the subject of the study.

Methodology and materials: The study of the subject is carried out on the basis of post-classical methodology developed by modern theorists and historians of law (S. V. Kodan, D. A. Pashentsev, A. V. Polyakov, I. L. Chestnov, et al). The main research methods used in this work include, first of all, socio-anthropological, phenomenological, cultural-historical, semiotic and other methods that complement the classical (positivistic) methodology traditionally used in literature.

Results of the study and their discussion: The author identifies the main factors in the evolution of the states of the Ancient World, which include: firstly, the universalization of spiritual (moral, religious, legal, political and other) values; secondly, the improvement of the means of sign communication, which facilitates the transfer of cultural information to an increasing number of people and thereby involves them in legal and political communication; thirdly, the growth of the structural complexity of states, which is a response to the challenges created by the external, social and cultural environment; fourthly, the mutual influences of cultural traditions that facilitate the transfer of historical experience. Based on the conducted study, it is concluded that the transition to each subsequent stage of the evolution of the state contributes to an increasingly deeper and more complete disclosure of the meaning of world history, as well as the achievement of unity in diversity by humanity, which is the goal and purpose of historical development.

Conclusions: The meaning of world history, revealed in the course of world-historical development, predetermines its purposeful nature. At the same time, the goal of world history, including the history of the states of the Ancient World, is a characteristic of the development itself, determining its general direction and main stages. It seems that such an understanding of the goal as the most complete disclosure of the axiological content of world history removes the question of the so-called "end of history", achievable at least in the distant historical perspective.

Keywords: world history, evolution, values, ancient world, antiquity, state, community, polis, empire.

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Introduction

Some argue that attempting to define the meaning of universal history in the context of humankind is as meaningless as pondering the purpose of life for a single individual, deeming both endeavors futile. A prominent example of this perspective is found in the writings of A. Camus, who contended that the sole appropriate way to address the question of life's purpose is to determine whether "life is worth living or not"¹. In the postmodern era, the belief that life and history lack inherent meaning has gained widespread acceptance². This view posits that inquiries into these concepts are merely pseudo-problems stemming from philosophers' simplistic attempts to unravel the mysteries of existence. A rational scientific perspective, however, recognizes only empirical facts, which can be studied using the rigorous methods of natural, social, or exact sciences³.

The unwavering application of this perspective appears to constrain the boundaries of humanities disciplines such as history, art studies, psychology, and jurisprudence. In these fields, the usefulness of universally applicable models for understanding is debatable. Furthermore, G. Rickert, reflecting on why natural science methods do not apply to social and spiritual sciences, determined that a core difference exists between two kinds of knowledge. He posited that natural sciences stand apart from the sciences of the spirit. Rickert argued that a key feature of natural sciences is their reliance on generalization to create universal concepts. Conversely, the cultural sciences, which consistently examine historically contingent and singularly distinctive phenomena, utilize an individualizing approach aimed at revealing the inherent qualitative distinctiveness of the subjects studied.

The justification for its application in the sciences of the spirit (or the humanities) is explained by the fact that their central focus is the historical process as a process of formation and continuous change of individual phenomena⁴.

This dichotomy, which is also prevalent in contemporary literature, despite its seemingly logical coherence, requires adjustments. First and foremost, one might get the impression that a necessary condition for the application of the generalizing method is that the general concepts formulated on its basis possess a non-historical character, as if the very essence of historical science is to describe only individual facts, in contrast to theoretical sciences that generalize the empirical material available to them. M. Weber, a renowned scholar, famously argued for the importance of developing general concepts to explain historical events, with capitalism being a prime example of such a concept within his theoretical framework of sociology. This concept is equally applicable to early bourgeois societies of the 15th-16th centuries as well as to developed industrial and post-industrial systems of our time⁵.

Moreover, some historians (including those specializing in state and legal history⁶) go even further, perceiving the general concepts of capitalism and feudalism as universal categories that alternate and replace one another throughout all historical epochs, thereby establishing the dynamics of the historical process as a whole⁷. There is no doubt that such theoretical generalizations, which are oriented towards a generalizing method used in the natural sciences, suffer from excessive schematism, inevitably conflicting with historical material. Indeed, by defining ancient society as 'capitalist', we pay homage to a well-known modernization trend, equating the dominant mode of production in the Ancient World, which was predominantly agrarian,

¹ Camus, A. (1990) *The Myth of Sisyphus. Essay on the Absurd*. In: Camus A. *The Rebellious Man*. Philosophy. Politics. Art. Politizdat. Pp. 23–100.

² According to J. F. Lyotard, the categorical refusal to engage in discussions regarding the meaning of the historical process, which is symptomatic of the intellectual climate of postmodernism, is one of the clear manifestations of distrust towards metanarratives, one of which is the history of humanity. Lyotard, J. F. (1998) *The State of Postmodernism*. Aletheia. 160 p.

³ Lomakina, I. B., Chestnov, I. L. (2024) *Posthumanism as a Challenge to the Anthropology of Law*. Bulletin of Moscow State Pedagogical University. Series: Legal Sciences. No. 1 (53). Pp. 27–37. (In Russ.)

⁴ Rickert, G. (1998) *Natural Sciences and Cultural Sciences*. Respublika. 413 p.

⁵ Weber, M. (1990) *Preliminary Remarks*. In: Weber M. *Selected Works*. Progress. Pp. 44–61.

⁶ E. B. Khokhlov applies the term "bourgeoisie" with certain caveats to the free trading and artisan population of the classical Greek city-states of the 5th to 4th centuries B. C. However, the question remains open as to how well-developed slaveholding relations correspond to the capitalist mode of production, regardless of how broadly it is understood. Khokhlov, E. B. (2010) *Organization of Economy and Labor in the Ancient Era*. Russian Yearbook of Labor Law. No. 5. Pp. 9–25. (In Russ.)

⁷ Meyer, E. (1910) *Economic Development of the Ancient World*. Trud. Gurevich, A. Ya. (1968) *On the discussion of pre-capitalist social formations: formation and way of life*. Questions of Philosophy. No. 2. Pp. 118–129. (In Russ.)

with industrial production, which is not only characteristic of modern capitalism but also defines its essential features (such as free production and entrepreneurship, capital concentration, predominance of private property, nation-states, etc.). It is no coincidence that the transition to a post-industrial economy in the most developed regions of the world signified the end of capitalism as we know it in those areas.

At the same time, the opposite trend, which involves the deliberate archaization of past societies that supposedly had nothing in common with contemporary society in all aspects, including economy, political relations, law, culture, and even human individuality (which some authors argue was fundamentally devoid of individual characteristics, while others believe it to be purely individualistic), is also misguided. Through the examination of these two extremes—artificial modernization and artificial archaization of past phenomena—it becomes evident that the assertion of a contemporary researcher holds true, who states that the ancient economy, like any other aspect of ancient life, “was neither ‘capitalized’ nor patriarchal; it was unique, and that is the essence of the matter.”⁸

Methodology and Materials

Thus, the objective of this work is to attempt to justify and elucidate the significance of the meaning of universal history as a fundamental common concept that defines the main directions and stages of humanity’s historical development. In an environment of total distrust towards metanarratives, which previously served a meaning-forming function, the explication of the meaningful dimension of human existence at all its levels, including the historical dimension, becomes particularly relevant for the humanities⁹. Legal sciences are no exception; the loss of meaningful clarity regarding the subject of research has had far-reaching consequences not only in cognitive terms but also in practical relations.

This article attempts to demonstrate that the meaning of universal history is vividly manifested in the evolution of state formations — from their inception to the present day. Addressing this task, given the vast array of empirical material, is unfeasible within the confines of a single study; it necessitates the collaborative efforts of all members of the historical and legal community. Therefore, it seems prudent to limit the scope of this research to the evolution of ancient states, examining its key milestones and factors within the context of the aforementioned general hypothesis. In terms of substantiating this hypothesis, ancient history appears particularly relevant.

Between the 3rd millennium BCE and the mid-1st millennium CE, the processes of state genesis and evolution occurred at an accelerated pace, accompanied by tectonic shifts in social structures influenced by numerous factors: the impact of ecological elements, the emergence of new technologies and socio-economic systems, and revolutionary transformations in the spiritual domain, among others. Given the intensity of these processes, it is reasonable to compare antiquity, particularly classical antiquity, to the modern era, which was similarly marked by significant tectonic shifts in the socio-economic, political, and spiritual realms¹⁰. Furthermore, we may venture to suggest that ancient states represent a much more ‘compact’ and easily describable model than those of the modern era, at least due to the clarity of the empirical data available.¹¹

To achieve the objectives of this research, the following tasks were addressed: elucidating the axiological foundation of the meaning of world history through the specific example of the Roman state, which exerted a significant stimulating influence on the subsequent development of states within the context of the Western legal tradition; examining, based on factual material, the primary factors and driving forces behind the evo-

⁸ Andreev, V. N. (1981) Structure of private wealth in Athens in the 5th–4th centuries BC. *Bulletin of ancient history*. No. 3 (157). Pp. 21–48. (In Russ.)

⁹ Pashentsev, D. A. (2022) Anthropocentrism as Overcoming Narrative in Historical and Legal Research. *Bulletin of Moscow State Regional University. Series: Jurisprudence*. No. 3. Pp. 44–50. (In Russ.)

¹⁰ Poldnikov, D. Yu. (2023) Comparative History of Foreign Law. In 2 v. Vol. 1. *Legal Traditions of Antiquity and the Middle Ages*. Norma, INFRA-M. 544 p. (In Russ.)

¹¹ According to E. Hobsbawm, the sheer volume of historical writing in the twentieth century makes it unattainable for any one historian to encompass all of it, even within a single major language. This stands in contrast to specialists in fields like classical antiquity or Byzantine history, who are familiar with both the original writings from those eras and the subsequent literature analyzing them (Hobsbawm, E. *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century (1914–1991)*. Moscow: Independent Newspaper Publishing House, 2004). Page 7).

lution of ancient states, specifically the enhancement of symbolic communication means, the complexity of social structures aimed at increasing the evolutionary stability of the latter, and the mutual influence exerted by cultural traditions on one another; and applying post-classical (post-non-classical) methods, which are currently gaining increasing importance in historical and legal research.

Since the conceptual dimension of world history, including the history of law and the state, has occupied the minds of leading philosophers and scholars for many centuries, the methodology for its study has also evolved under the influence of various factors. Among these, the shift in ideals of scientific rationality has played a leading role, specifically the transition from classical to non-classical, and subsequently to post-non-classical paradigms. Within these differing types of rationality, which are characterized by their ideological and methodological foundations, the issue of meaning and purpose in world history has received diametrically opposed solutions, particularly concerning the evolution of the state. It can be asserted that in the context of post-non-classical epistemology, the category of meaning acquires special theoretical significance and methodological weight. As noted in the literature, “new methodological approaches emerge and actively develop in the history (and history of law) during the second half of the 20th century, which establish the ontology of perception and evaluation of the past: the history of mentalities and historical anthropology; the history of concepts and discourse, new intellectual history; narrative history; microhistory; oral history, among others¹².

The approaches mentioned have dealt a significant blow to the “traditional” or positivist historical-legal science, which focuses on the description of empirical facts and legislative monuments of the past, the content of which often lacks relevance to the socio-historical and cultural context of the respective eras. This circumstance adds particular importance to uncovering the meaning of historical phenomena, as well as the historical process as a whole. In recent years, the meaningful dimension of historical phenomena has been thoroughly and comprehensively examined in the works of proponents of post-classical legal understanding, primarily by figures such as A. A. Dorskaya, S. V. Kodan, I. B. Lomakina, V. I. Pavlov, D. A. Pashentsev, D. Y. Poldnikov, I. L. Chestnov, and others¹³.

These researchers, along with others, are actively advancing the post-classical methodology of historical-legal knowledge by employing various methods such as phenomenological (“eidetic”), socio-anthropological, comparative, cultural-historical, semiotic, and others¹⁴. These methods aim to clarify the broad socio-historical context within which the evolution of states occurs in general, and specifically the evolution of ancient states. This methodology, which is also utilized in the present work, is intended to complement the traditionally used legal-dogmatic, logical-grammatical, hermeneutic, and other classical methods of legal knowledge.

Research findings and their discussion

1. The meaning of history as a value-based foundation of the evolutionary process

To accurately comprehend the historical specificity of ancient states, a mere factual description is clearly insufficient. This individualizing method reduces history to a collection of facts, which must be systematized and organized according to a certain concept. However, such a concept cannot be predetermined in the historical process, similar to certain ‘laws of history,’ each of which possesses a significant degree of conditionality. Consequently, any attempts to liken them to the laws that govern the natural world have ended in failure. Any explanations of the historical process can only be qualitative in nature, and these explanations should aim to seek its meaning, which plays a role in social and humanitarian knowledge akin to the role that laws play in the understanding of nature.

¹² Chestnov, I. L., Lomakina, I. B. (2025) Sociocultural Anthropology of Law as a Historical and Legal Methodology. Bulletin of the St. Petersburg University of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia. No. 2 (106). Pp. 44–49. (In Russ.)

¹³ Chestnov, I. L. (2020) Postclassical Methodology of Legal Research. Bulletin of the University of the Prosecutor’s Office of the Russian Federation. No. 2 (76). Pp. 14–21. (In Russ.)

¹⁴ The set of methods used by post-classical legal history science has developed within the framework of the so-called memorial turn. See more about this: Tikhonova S. V. Communicative Theory of Law in the Digital Age. Dissertation ... Doctor of Legal Sciences. Saratov, 2025. P. 276 and following.

It appears that, unlike natural laws which embody the principle of causality, the meaning of history is teleological; it is explained in light of the ultimate goal towards which the historical process is directed.

This assertion may provoke skepticism in contemporary times, especially when considering that various frameworks of historical processes, constructed not only in the distant past but also in relatively recent history, have seemingly encountered significant failures.

There is a strong temptation to draw an alternative conclusion from this, namely, that there is no coherent Grand History, but rather a multitude of small (particular) histories that lack inherent meaning¹⁵. Those who hold this view overlook the diversity and complexity of world history, which encompasses numerous narratives (cultural, political, socio-economic) that are articulated in relation to different subjects (nations, societies, civilizations, individual persons) and from various perspectives.

This is precisely why the meaning of universal history is perceived by us as a synthetic category, through which each of the individual histories, which may not possess inherent meaning as such, ceases to be merely a chain of random events, but instead transforms into a process characterized by internal unity and coherence.

Essentially, this discussion pertains to history as the evolution of humanity, specifically an evolution aimed at maximizing individuals' awareness of their spiritual unity, which, without a doubt, is achieved through the fullest realization of civilizational diversity and simultaneously by overcoming the barriers that divide civilizations, hindering their mutual understanding and dialogue.

The dialectic of historical development, which encompasses both "systemic" (progressive) and "aleatory" (discontinuous) changes, is particularly evident in the history of Ancient Rome, which underwent a series of revolutions that radically altered the course of events. Among these revolutions are the revolution of 509 B.C., which established the republican system, the revolution of 367 B.C., which expanded the power of the plebeians and led to the creation of the office of urban praetor (praetor urbanus), and the "Gracchi brothers' revolution" (2nd century B.C.), which equalized the property rights of patricians and plebeians. Additionally, one must also consider the significant "Tarquinian revolution" of 616 B.C., which abolished the tribal division of the Roman community, thereby facilitating the emergence of a unified civitas, as well as the revolution of 91 B.C., which extended the rights of the Italians, particularly in the realm of judicial proceedings.

Was not the *res publica restitutio*, initiated by Emperor Augustus in 27 BC, revolutionary in its scale and consequences, despite its conservative ideological presentation, thus justifying its designation as the 'Caesarian Revolution'?¹⁶ It is evident that each of the revolutions mentioned contributed to both the territorial expansion of Pax Romana and the resolution of internal divisions (tribal, communal, inter-state, etc.) while maintaining the cultural identity and political autonomy of the peoples within the Roman Empire¹⁷. Even in the later empire, seemingly unified by Diocletian, Constantine the Great, and Theodosius I, there persists a historically established symbiosis between the western and eastern parts, which until the very end recognized their belonging to a single, if one may say, mother civilization.

The later antique model of organizing imperial space was implemented by medieval empires (the Byzantine and the Holy Roman), each of which, positioning itself as the "true" Roman Empire, effectively maintained the continuity of its existence in both spatial and temporal perspectives¹⁸. Drawing from the experience of the "long Roman Empire," whose evolution over nearly 2,000 years shaped the overall course of Western history, one can conclude that the essence of universal history lies in humanity's pursuit of a state that we can define as unity in diversity.

This unity in diversity manifests in numerous ways, with the dialogue of cultural values being the most significant among them. These values shape the essence of human communication across all its dimensions,

¹⁵ Popper, K. (1992) *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. Vol. II. *The Time of False Prophets*. Hegel, Marx and Other Oracles. Phoenix, International Foundation "Cultural Initiative". 528 p. The conviction that the history of humanity is nothing more than an intellectual phantom was dictated by the call of the Italian philosopher B. Croce to "forever abandon the knowledge of universal history" (Croce B. *Theory and History of Historiography*. Moscow: School "Languages of Russian Culture," 1998. p. 25). However, it is necessary to distinguish between universal history, which represents a mechanical collection of individual histories, and the history of humanity as a phenomenon possessing a meaningful dimension that ensures internal unity.

¹⁶ Mashkin, N. A. (1949) *Principate of Augustus. Origin and Social Essence*. Publishing House of the USSR Academy of Sciences. 686 p. (In Russ.)

¹⁷ Kofanov, L. L. (2015) *The External System of Roman Law: Law of Nature, Law of Nations, and Commercial Law in the Legal Thought of Antiquity*. *Statut*. 192 p. (In Russ.)

¹⁸ Velichko, A. M. (2011) "Byzantine" powers of Western emperors and kings. *Legal Thought*. No. 5 (67). Pp. 57–93. (In Russ.)

including political and legal communication. At the fundamental level, which is the life of each individual, values serve as the primary motivating factor for behavior, determining its objectives. It must be acknowledged that in the absence of such a goal, human existence loses its inherently systemic unity, fragmenting into a multitude of disconnected behavioral acts, often driven purely by instinct¹⁹. Notably, this goal-setting, which is inseparable from meaning, possesses not only a conscious rational aspect but also manifests at an unconscious level.

Consequently, the universal nature of fundamental (traditional) values such as well-being, knowledge, goodness, love, freedom, responsibility, justice, patriotism, service to others, faith in God, etc.,²⁰ is already evident in human behavior. It is important to note that each of the listed values has numerous rational, irrational, and even super-rational manifestations that, as N. Hartmann expressed, 'layer' upon one another²¹. This noted characteristic becomes even more pronounced within the framework of the historical process. The meaningful and purposeful nature of the latter, as previously demonstrated, is not contradicted by the fact that the individual and collective actions of people, which serve as the primary driving force of history, possess a 'limited rational' character. The result of spiritual, moral, and legal progress is a unique 'crystallization' of values, with an increasing number of people recognizing their significance. This, in turn, leads to the elucidation of the objective of the historical process, the achievement of which, even in a distant temporal perspective, is undoubtedly impossible, yet it determines (including at an unconscious level) the direction in which universal history progresses²².

2. The Iconic and Symbolic Aspects of State Evolution

The symbolic dimension is an essential aspect of social space; therefore, any interactions that shape its structure possess a symbolic nature.

This, in turn, implies that social contacts must be meaningful, as their reproduction is impossible without this understanding. Moreover, the symbolic mediation of social interactions can occur in various ways, with the primary role being the attribution of value significance to social communications, since values form the semantic foundation of all sign forms. It is through values that symbolic dominance is established, which solidifies the social space that would otherwise disintegrate into numerous disconnected fragments.

In a historical retrospective, the evolution of semiotic systems is evident, leading to their attribution of general significance, including in a semantic context, which results in the expansion of social space. This can be easily observed through the example of natural languages, whose evolution, as demonstrated by N. Marr, consists of a series of stages that succeed one another: the gestural (kinetic) speech, initially devoid of even meaningful sound elements; the oroacoustic (auditory) speech; and the graphic (visual) speech²³. At the first stage, sign communication occurs only within small groups, whose members are positioned at a minimal distance necessary to see the gestures being produced and possess experience, including axiological experience, that enables them to understand the meaning of these gestures.

At the same time, signs of gestural language possess a strictly referential meaning, represented by specific objects to which they refer. Consequently, gestural language is incapable of conveying general concepts that have an abstract significance. Primarily being indexical or iconic, such signs evoke vivid representations in the minds of communicators regarding individual objects and phenomena, as well as the associative connections between them. As gestural language evolves, these associations become increasingly complex, incorporating

¹⁹ According to S. L. Frank: "The personal life of each of us is meaningless, first and foremost, <...>" The first, so to speak, minimal condition for the possibility of achieving the meaning of life is freedom; only by being free can we act "meaningfully", strive for a rational goal, and seek full satisfaction" (Frank S. L. *The Meaning of Life*. Brussels: Publishing House "Life with God," 1976. p. 61. Thus, even here, the immediate axiological conditions for finding meaning are outlined, both for the life of an individual and for world history as a whole.

²⁰ Polyakov, A. V. (2019) *The Constitution of Russia, Traditional Values and the Basic Principle of Law*. In: *The Constitution and Social Progress: Proceedings of the International Scientific and Practical Conference*. Kant Baltic Federal University Publishing House. Pp. 13–23. (In Russ.)

²¹ Hartman, N. (2003) *On the foundations of ontology*. Nauka. 640 p.

²² Bourdieu, P. (2007) *Social Space and Symbolic Power*. In: Bourdieu P. *Sociology of Social Space*. Aleteia. Pp. 64–86.

²³ Marr, N. Ya. (1934) *Language and Thinking*. In: Marr N. Ya. *Selected Works*. Vol. III. *Language and Society*. Sotsekgiz. Pp. 90–122. (In Russ.)

chains of images whose understanding, due to the specificity of their meaning, becomes inaccessible to those who do not belong to the relevant community²⁴.

With the transition to settled life, external contacts expand, thereby broadening the limits of the social space within which symbolic communication and the circulation of meanings occur. Now, the social space no longer aligns solely with small groups of nomadic hunter-gatherers, but rather with settled agricultural communities that reside in close proximity to one another, interconnected through economic, political, and cultural ties. It is important to note that these contacts were not always friendly or even peaceful; however, they could become so when members of neighboring communities spoke the same language, worshipped the same deities, utilized similar cultural symbols, and shared common values.

In other words, communication among settled agricultural communities occurred when the conditions for mutual understanding were established, leading to mutual recognition of each other's humanity, in contrast to those for whom the right to belong to the human race was fundamentally denied. At the same time, those who possessed oral speech remained captive to the prevailing mode of communication, which imposed a series of limitations and created additional barriers to achieving mutual understanding with other individuals and their communities, even in comparison to kinetic speech. Specifically, oral speech lacks the fundamental signs that constitute the primary layer and common field of communication, accessible to all capable of understanding gestural language.

Considering that the earliest cultures utilizing oral speech remained within the realm of pre-conceptual associative-imagery thinking, each of these cultures was enclosed within a circle of religious-mythological, poetic, artistic, and other images that it generated. This observation highlights a radical distinction between oro-acoustic cultures (both pre-literate and literate) and cultures based on graphic communication, particularly regarding the perception of social space and time²⁵. As M. McLuhan emphasizes, "a child living in the Western world is surrounded by an abstract-explicit visual technology of homogeneous time and uniform-continuous space, where 'cause' is rational, purposeful, and sequential, and events are brought to life and occur in a single plane and in a sequential order. In contrast, an African child exists in an implicitly expressed magical world of the spoken oral word. He encounters not rational but formal causes of the configurational field cultivated by communities devoid of writing."²⁶

It should be noted that not only the African individual but also the Athenian during the peak of polis democracy lived in a world shaped by oral traditions, established through oral and acoustic communication. It is important to reiterate that the predominance of oral communication in ancient civilization did not imply the absence or underdevelopment of other means of conveying information (including gestural signs and written language), but rather highlighted the unique role that dialogical oral speech occupied within the culture²⁷. Over time, however, written communication began to assume a leading role, largely due to its characteristics such as the ability to convey messages over long distances, the accessibility of written language to all speakers, and its formal clarity, which allows for identical interpretation of written messages by all recipients capable of reading them, thereby enhancing mutual understanding among them.

Thanks to this, written communication has proven capable of uniting members of large communities dispersed over vast territories. It is no coincidence that in ancient empires (such as the Achaemenid Empire, Sasanian Persia, Han China, the Roman Empire, etc.), written texts began to play a leading role in all areas of communication, from law to poetry and philosophy. The era in which written communication occupies a central position in the culture of various peoples, restructuring it on fundamentally new principles, has been

²⁴ Frobenius, L. (1910) *Childhood of Humanity*. Publishing house of P. V. Lukovnikov bookstore. 369 p.

²⁵ Let's note that oro-acoustic culture is not always strictly unwritten. Paradoxically, the emergence of writing initially leads to the flourishing of oro-acoustic communication, an example of which is the culture of antiquity, long based on spoken speech. According to S. L. Utchenko, dialogicity, most vividly manifested in ancient philosophy, "should be considered as a particular case, as a manifestation of one of the characteristics of ancient culture as a whole, more precisely—a more general and specific orientation of this culture." We mean the orientation of ancient culture toward the oral, living, spoken word and its auditory perception, that is, what can be called oro-acoustic orientation. (Utchenko, S. L. (1978) *Political Doctrines of Ancient Rome of the 3rd–1st centuries BC*. Nauka. 257 p. (In Russ.))

²⁶ McLuhan, M. (2005) *The Gutenberg Galaxy. The Formation of the Printing Man*. Academic Project; Mir Foundation. 496 p.

²⁷ Dorofeev, D. Yu. (2015) *Personality and communication. Anthropology of the oral and written word in ancient culture*. PEI RCHA. 639 p. (In Russ.)

referred to by K. Jaspers as the axial age. According to the philosopher: “During this era, the fundamental categories that we still use to think were developed, the foundations of world religions were laid, which continue to shape people’s lives today. In all directions, there was a transition to universality.”²⁸

An important aspect of the trends under consideration is the universalization of values, which serves as a necessary condition for the existence of any empire. It is these values that unite the diverse conglomerate of the empire’s inhabitants, with their distinct histories, languages, and religions, into a single civic collective. The unifying significance of values was clearly recognized by the rulers of the Roman Empire; it is no coincidence that its history is one of the struggle for common values. Moreover, it would be a mistake to associate the universalization of values solely with the persecution of those who did not share them, as in the overwhelming majority of cases, they were integrated into human life through peaceful means. People embraced these values primarily due to their confidence in the eternity and unchangeability of the order they supported. This confidence was ensured through various means, including moral and legal frameworks, which acquired a truly universal character within empires, as evidenced by Roman private law.

3. Social Structures and the Evolution of States in the Ancient World

The factors mentioned, namely the development of sign communication methods, forms of social organization, and primarily the dynamics of values that serve as the semantic core around which the socio-cultural reality is constructed in its historical dimension, determine the direction of state evolution. Its main stages include agrarian communities, urban communities (city-states), empires, and nation-states, which are transforming before our eyes, acquiring new forms, the nature of which remains unclear²⁹. In understanding the mechanisms and driving forces of socio-cultural evolution, which includes the evolution of the state, we tend to adhere to the ideas of J. B. Lamarck, which explain the evolution of the social world to a significantly greater extent than Darwinian evolutionism.

Among the key concepts of Lamarck that render his theory applicable to the evolution of sociocultural orders, including the state, it is essential to highlight, firstly, teleology, which refers to the directed nature of evolution; secondly, the staged character of speciation (the so-called Lamarckian ladder of species); thirdly, the inheritance of acquired traits as a driving force of evolution; and fourthly, the interbreeding of species as one of the primary factors in speciation³⁰. It is evident that all the principles of evolutionary development proposed by J. B. Lamarck finds application in the social realm, including the principle of inheritance of acquired traits, which is often viewed with ambiguity by biologists. Furthermore, the evolution of social orders largely occurs due to the emergence of new characteristics and their subsequent consolidation. This is particularly evident in the evolution of the state, where the acquisition of new traits leads to a transition from one historical type of state to another. Each subsequent type is characterized by a greater degree of complexity in terms of structural organization and the range of functions, which in turn affects the complexity and diversity of state forms.

It is important to note that as the complexity of evolving systems increases, their vulnerability also rises for quite understandable reasons. This is why “disconnected homogeneity,” despite its simplicity, proves to be more resilient in evolutionary terms than “connected heterogeneity”³¹. Expanding on this idea, J. B. Lamarck

²⁸ Jaspers, K. (1991) *The Meaning and Purpose of History*. Politizdat. 527 p.

²⁹ I. M. Diakonov and V. A. Yakobson identified the following types of states in the Ancient World: nomes, territorial kingdoms, city-states, and empires (see: Diakonov I. M., Yakobson V. A. “Nomes-States,” “Territorial Kingdoms,” “City-States,” and “Empires”). *Problems of Typology // Bulletin of Ancient History*. 1982. No. 2. pp. 3–16). It is worth noting that some elements of this typology appear to be clearly excessive or redundant. In particular, this concerns “nomadic states,” which are specific cases of community-states that were predominantly spread in Ancient Egypt and the Middle East. As for “territorial kingdoms,” it is impossible not to note the problematic nature of this concept, considering the weak expression of the territorial characteristic in relation to traditional states of the Ancient World and the Middle Ages. See, in particular, Hampl F. *Poleis ohne Territorium // Klio*. 1939. Vol. 32. pp. 1–60.

³⁰ Pozdnyakov, A. A. (2022) *What is Lamarckism? Lethaea rossica*. Vol. 25. Pp. 48–75. (In Russ.)

³¹ Indeed, primitive groups of nomadic hunter-gatherers, without the detrimental influence of other societies, can exist in a virtually unchanged state for hundreds of thousands of years, which indicates a high level of homeostasis ensuring the stability of such groups, as can be observed in the case of Australian Aborigines.

categorized the vast diversity of natural objects (“bodies”) into two broad categories: organized, living bodies, and unorganized, non-living bodies. According to him, “Living beings, or living bodies—animals and plants—constitute <...> the first of these two branches of nature’s creations, and, as is well known, these bodies possess the ability to nourish themselves, develop, reproduce, and all are inevitably destined for death”³². The actual complexity of internal organization and structural-functional characteristics, both of biological organisms and sociocultural systems, serves as an evolutionary mechanism aimed at enhancing their resilience against destructive influences from both internal and external factors.

However, the increase in the degree of organizational complexity of evolving systems not only enhances their viability and longevity but also simultaneously generates new vulnerabilities that pose a threat to the system’s existence³³. In response to these vulnerabilities, the system is compelled to complicate its organization until such complexity leads to its degradation or disintegration. Subsequently, new orders emerge to replace the previous one, which, on one hand, exhibit greater simplicity and thus lower vulnerability, while on the other hand, inherit characteristics acquired from preceding orders during the course of evolutionary development. These new characteristics become additional evolutionary advantages that enable the system to improve while avoiding excessive complexity, which is fraught with the vulnerabilities of the corresponding order. Therefore, the process of evolution is a continuous competition with death, where death always prevails, yet this very victory plays a beneficial role as it gives rise to new life, whose progression begins precisely at the point where the previous life came to an end.

Considering the aforementioned, a theoretical explanation can be derived for all forms of evolution, including the evolution of the state. Specifically, the transition to each subsequent stage of evolutionary development of the traditional state, namely from a communal state to a city-state (in those societies where the latter actually emerged) and from a city-state to an empire, initially may not have been accompanied by the external attributes of the corresponding types of statehood, which were acquired only over time, once a qualitative state was achieved and required formal legitimization. For instance, the Roman state transformed into an empire by the mid-2nd century BC, that is, after the conclusion of the Third Punic War, long before the establishment of Augustus’s principate, which merely marked the final milestone on the lengthy journey from city-state to empire.

4. Cultural diffusion as a factor in the evolution of the state

This process occurred under the influence of a complex constellation of factors that require separate examination. Among these, a significant role was played by the influence exerted by other states in the Middle East and the Mediterranean region, which involved either direct or indirect borrowing of the political experience they had accumulated. The issue of borrowing, or diffusion, of cultural forms as a factor in the historical process is ambiguous and has repeatedly been the subject of discussion in specialized literature. In its classical form, diffusionism asserts that any new cultural phenomenon or complex arises only once under specific conditions, after which it spreads through space via the mutual influence that cultures exert on one another.

Without disputing the significance of cultural borrowings in human history, we believe that the ideas of diffusionism and evolutionism do not exclude one another; rather, they complement each other. This is particularly true when discussing the evolution of a cultural phenomenon such as the state, which is driven by both internal development factors and external borrowings made by one civilization from another through intermediary links. Among such borrowings is the phenomenon of the empire, which was originally not characteristic of ancient civilization, the foundation of which consisted of cities (poleis) and urban civic communities,

³² Lamarck, J. B. (1955) *Introductory Lectures to the Course of Zoology*. In: Lamarck J. B. *Selected Works*. In 2 vols. T. I. Publishing House of the USSR Academy of Sciences. Pp. 9–164.

³³ Toynbee, A. J. (2006) *Research of History*. In 3 v. Vol. 1. Publishing house of SPbSU, Oleg Abyshko Publishing House. 446 p.

³⁴ Naimushina, A. N. (2014) *Patterns and Phases of Cultural Diffusion*. *Bulletin of the Russian State Pedagogical Univ. A. I. Herzen*. No. 164. Pp. 78–86. (In Russ.)

representing a kind of “small social forms” that can be compared to the small forms of artistic creativity that also developed within the framework of ancient civilization³⁵.

The dominance of small forms of social organization was significantly influenced by the characteristics of the geographical landscape, which for a long time imposed limits on the territorial expansion of the ancient state. It is well known that the prevailing feature of the landscape in which early Greek and Latin city-states existed was the mountain ranges that separated relatively narrow fertile plains, where the ancient city-states were located³⁶. Under such conditions, the construction of empires proved to be impossible; moreover, ancient culture itself lacked, for a long time (up until the Hellenistic era), not only the political and legal tools but also the mental frameworks that would enable its bearers to think in imperial terms.

The aforementioned circumstance, among other factors, provides grounds for certain legal historians to assert that there were no pathways of continuity linking the ancient state with the state formations of the Ancient East³⁷. From our perspective, we believe that the transformation of the ancient city-state into an empire, or more precisely, the possibility of ‘overlying’ imperial structures upon the primary city-state organisms, which continued to exist even within the empires of Alexander the Great’s successors and the Roman Empire, was a result of direct cultural borrowing from the experiences of ancient Eastern civilizations, which had a dual direction. The first and earliest encounter of the Greeks with the empires of the Ancient East occurred during the era of the Great Migration of Peoples, triggered by the ‘Bronze Age Collapse’ (13th–12th centuries BC), when the Achaeans of the Peloponnese and the Aegeans confronted their might in the Nile Delta and at the walls of Troy³⁸.

There are grounds to believe that this experience served as a catalyst for the establishment of powerful despotic states in mainland Greece, with capitals in Mycenae, Pylos, Tiryns, and others. These states borrowed elements of legal and political order not so much from the Minoan civilization, which had already faded into the realm of distant legends, but rather from the contemporary civilizations of the Ancient East, which were experiencing their peak at that time. This mutual influence, as is well known, becomes particularly intense during the Hellenistic era. While the Mycenaean Greeks’ perception of the political structures of the Ancient East was primarily limited to their one-sided appropriation, which did not add anything to the complex of elements from the ‘donor’ Eastern civilizations, in the Hellenistic period, this appropriation not only becomes more active but also takes on a reciprocal character.

Thus, on one hand, as a result of Alexander the Great’s campaigns, ancient city-states begin to emerge throughout the territory of the former Achaemenid Empire, gradually replacing the more traditional form of civic community typical of the Ancient East, namely the civic-religious communities (âlu), which by the end of the 1st century BC are preserved only in relatively isolated regions such as Circumpontida, the Caucasus, Babylonia, Judea, and others.³⁹ At the same time, the Hellenistic polis itself undergoes significant transformation, leading to its distinctive quality in comparison to the classical ancient polis⁴⁰. Specifically, the polis evolves from an independent state, a bastion of popular sovereignty, into a local administrative center, entirely subordinate to the authority of Hellenistic monarchs and serving as a conduit for their will, differing from other types of urban communities (indigenous cities and military colonies) more in terms of scale than in the extent of political rights.

On the other hand, in the “old” Greek world, royal authority, which was previously confined to relatively narrow limits concerning warfare and the conduct of religious cults, becomes absolute, unrestricted, and all-

³⁵ See more details: *The Ancient Polis: A Course of Lectures* / Ed. V. V. Demytyeva. Moscow: Russian Foundation for the Advancement of Education and Science, 2010.

p. 41–43

³⁶ Andreev, Yu. V. (2001) *The price of freedom and harmony. A few strokes to the portrait of Greek civilization.* Aletheia. 432 p. (In Russ.)

³⁷ Anners, E. (1994) *History of European law.* Nauka. 394 p.

³⁸ Gindin, L. A., Tsymbursky, V. L. (1996) *Homer and the history of the Eastern Mediterranean.* “Vostochnaya literature” of the Russian Academy of Sciences. 328 p. (In Russ.)

³⁹ Abramov, A. E., Bagirov, R. S. (2015) *Civil-temple community as a form of existence of civil society in the ancient Near East.* Bulletin of the Vladimir Law Institute. No. 3 (36). Pp. 147–151. (In Russ.)

⁴⁰ Grushevoy, A. G. (2016) *Democracy in the Greek poleis of the Hellenistic period according to honorary decrees in honor of the Euergetes.* Mnemon: Research and publications on the history of the ancient world. No. 16-1. Pp. 67–80. (In Russ.)

encompassing, resembling the power of ancient Eastern monarchs⁴¹. This trend began to emerge during the late classical period (4th century BC), when tyrants came to power in several city-states, initially holding elective, albeit extraordinary, positions, and subsequently consolidating increasing power in their hands, placing them above the civic collective⁴². In the Hellenistic era, the appropriation of royal authority attributes from Eastern peoples, initiated by Alexander the Great, becomes widespread. All of this indicates that the empire, as a cultural phenomenon that first emerged exclusively in the Ancient East, was subsequently deeply embraced by ancient civilization, receiving within its framework an impetus for further development.

Conclusions

From the above, it becomes evident that the essence of world history is manifested in the evolution of cultural phenomena, including entities such as the state and law. The transition to each subsequent stage of evolution increasingly reveals the semantic potential embedded in humanity's cultural creativity. Among the primary factors of the evolutionary process, as demonstrated, is the universalization of spiritual (religious, moral, legal, political, and other) values, which entails their dissemination across ever-wider communities of people, within which these values serve an integrative function, uniting their members into a cohesive whole.

Simultaneously, the acceptance of shared values serves as a necessary condition for the mutual recognition of participants in cultural communication as equal and self-valuable subjects. It includes the awareness of individuals, cultures, and civilizations of each other's unique characteristics. This awareness, in turn, contributes to humanity's achievement of unity in diversity, which is the goal of the historical process, defining its overall direction and key stages. The continuous movement towards this goal, which constitutes the meaning of world history, occurs over long periods (*la longue durée*), the slow passage of which allows for the discovery of patterns in sociocultural evolution that are hidden from researchers' views over shorter historical distances⁴³.

The dynamics of so-called "eternal" values should also be considered here. At first glance, their existence appears static and unchanging; however, over the long term, they extend their influence over increasingly larger groups of people, bringing them closer together and uniting them in terms of values towards one another and the surrounding world. By extrapolating (with a certain degree of conditionality) the results obtained in this work to the global historical process as a whole, it seems feasible to identify the following stages over an extended period: 1) a prolonged archaic period (from the emergence of humanity to the 8th century BC); 2) the axial age (from the 8th century BC to 1789), which encompasses the history of great world empires; 3) the long 19th century (from 1789 to 1914); 4) the short 20th century (from 1914 to 1991), the conclusion of which marked the onset of the era of global humanity, historically and logically representing the antithesis of the prolonged archaic period⁴⁴.

A powerful driving force behind sociocultural evolution in all its aspects, including the evolution of law and the state, is the enhancement of sign communication methods. It is evident that this process sequentially progresses through the stages of gestural, acoustic (oral-auditory), and visual (graphic) communication, with each of these stages corresponding to specific types of signs. For instance, the primary means of linear gestural language are mainly indexical signs, among which various forms of deixis hold a prominent position. In the stage of acoustic speech, alongside indexical signs, iconic signs emerge, which include both simple pictograms commonly used by primitive peoples and the hieroglyphic writing that has developed from them.

For a long time, writing served a dual purpose: on one hand, in highly developed civilizations such as ancient Egyptian, Hittite, Sumerian-Akkadian, and ancient Chinese, it played a supportive role, being utilized only

⁴¹ Evdokimov, P. A. (2016) Kings of pre-Hellenistic Cyprus: between gods and people, between bronze and iron, at the crossroads of East and West. In: *Gods among people: the cult of rulers in the Hellenistic, post-Hellenistic and Roman world*. Publishing house of the Russian Academy of Arts. Pp. 78–118. (In Russ.)

⁴² Berve, G. (1997) *Tyrants of Greece*. Phoenix. 640 p.

⁴³ Braudel, F. (1977) *History and Social Sciences. Historical Duration*. In: *Philosophy and Methodology of History*. Progress. Pp. 115–142.

⁴⁴ In understanding the "long 19th century" and the "short 20th century," as well as in defining their chronological boundaries, we adhere to E. Hobsbawm's position, fully aware of the inherent conventionality and abstractness of these concepts, which require more detailed elaboration, far beyond the scope of this article.

in limited areas of communication, such as economic, business, and legal correspondence, among others. On the other hand, writing was regarded as a sacred form of communication; it is no coincidence that sacred texts, from the Pyramid Texts to the Quran, were documented in written form.

The transition from hieroglyphic writing to alphabetic writing marks one of the characteristics of the onset of the Axial Age. It is during this period that a new form of communication emerges, specifically symbolic communication, which is qualitatively distinct from indexical and iconic forms of communication. The defining feature of symbols is that their signifieds do not represent specific objects or groups of objects, but rather classes of objects and phenomena, as well as more or less general, including abstract, concepts. Thus, in symbolic (conceptual) thinking, reality is bifurcated into the realm of things and phenomena and the realm of general concepts, with human consciousness establishing unambiguous or polysemous correspondences between the elements of these two sets, precisely through symbols.⁴⁵

The stages of improvement in sign communication tools correspond to the previously discussed stages of social organization evolution, including that of the state. The primary factors influencing this evolution, as we have observed, include a purposeful development trajectory, the acquisition of new characteristics, and an increase in structural complexity. The latter, on one hand, enhances the systemic resilience of the social order; however, on the other hand, it generates new vulnerabilities that pose challenges, prompting the social organism to respond by acquiring new traits and transitioning to the next level of structural-functional organization.

It is not difficult to observe that these stages are directly related not only to the factual aspect of world history but also to its meaningful dimension, as the transition to each subsequent stage facilitates an increasingly profound and comprehensive revelation of the meaning of human history. This is further supported by the mutual influence exerted by cultural traditions, which can be likened to the interbreeding of species in biology or the convergence of languages in linguistics. Moreover, cultural diffusion should not be regarded as a random, sporadic phenomenon, but rather as a consistently active factor that shapes sociocultural evolution in its various aspects, including the evolution of the state. This can be illustrated by the example of the empire phenomenon, which first emerged within the framework of ancient Eastern civilization and was subsequently adopted by Western legal tradition through the intermediary of ancient civilization.

Thus, one can speak of a continuous succession of cultural forms, which serves as a significant factor in historical development on a global scale. It appears that due to a number of circumstances, this succession has particularly manifested itself in the evolution of the ancient states, making it a subject worthy of special attention and a universal model of the world-historical process.

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⁴⁵ Cassirer, E. (2002) *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. Vol. 3. *Phenomenology of Knowledge*. University Book. 400 p.

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