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METHODOLOGY OF SCIENTIFIC ANALYSIS OF VISUAL SOURCES

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Abstract

This article examines the theoretical and methodological foundations of analyzing visual sources in scientific research. In contemporary historiography, cultural studies, art history, anthropology, and media studies, visual sources are increasingly recognized as important sources of information. The study considers the types of visual sources, methods of their scientific investigation, international and local experiences, as well as new approaches to the analysis of visual materials in the context of digital technologies. The scientific significance of comprehensive methods for analyzing visual sources and of semiotic, iconographic, iconological, and discourse-based methods is revealed.

Keywords: visual source, methodology, iconography, iconology, semiotics, historical source, media studies, visual culture, scientific analysis, digital humanities.

Introduction

In the information society of the twenty-first century, the share of visual information is increasing at an unprecedented rate. Images, photographs, maps, posters, miniatures, films, video materials, and other visual sources created throughout human history play an important role in the study of historical reality. Alongside traditional written sources, visual materials are also emerging as independent objects of scientific research. Today, in history, art history, sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, and communication studies, visual sources are regarded not only as supplementary evidence but also as independent sources of scholarly information. Therefore, the development of a comprehensive methodology for their scientific analysis is one of the most pressing tasks of contemporary research.

Visual sources are important documents that reflect the cultural values, political views, ideological orientations, and historical processes of society. Through their analysis, it is possible to draw profound conclusions about the worldview, social relations, and cultural characteristics of a particular period.

A visual source refers to any material that provides information in visual form about a specific historical period, event, or phenomenon. Such sources include historical paintings and miniatures, photographs, maps and atlases, posters and advertisements, films and video materials, architectural monuments, statues and monuments, digital images, advertising products, and visual content on social media.

As products of human thought, visual sources are created within specific social, political, and cultural contexts. Therefore, they provide important information not only about the object being depicted but also about the author and society that produced them. The French historian Marc Bloch and representatives of the Annales School emphasized the necessity of interpreting historical sources broadly and identified visual materials as an important element of historical research. Later, with the development of Visual History and Visual Anthropology, the academic status of visual

sources became even more firmly established. The analysis of visual sources is based on several scientific theories.

Semiotic Approach

Semiotics is the science that studies systems of signs and symbols. Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Peirce are recognized as the founders of this theory. In semiotic analysis, a visual source is examined through the following elements: sign, symbol, code, meaning, and context. For example, a national flag, colors, or religious symbols depicted in an image may express specific ideological and cultural meanings.

Iconographic Method

The iconographic method is widely used in art history. This approach is aimed at identifying the plot, characters, and attributes represented in an image. Iconographic analysis includes the following: identifying the subject of the image, identifying figures and characters, interpreting symbolic elements, and determining the historical context.

Iconological Method

The iconological method developed by the German scholar Erwin Panofsky serves to identify the deeper meanings of an image. Panofsky's methodology consists of three stages: simple description of the image, identification of iconographic content, and revealing internal philosophical and cultural meanings. Today, this method is considered one of the most effective approaches in visual culture studies.

Stages of Scientific Analysis of Visual Sources

The study of visual sources consists of several consecutive stages. The first stage is source identification. The researcher must answer the following questions: When was the source created? Who is its author? Where was it created? For what purpose was it created? This stage helps determine the authenticity of the source.

The second stage is external analysis. External analysis examines the type of material, technical characteristics, state of preservation, and whether the source is an original or a copy. This stage makes it possible to evaluate the reliability of the source.

The third stage is internal analysis. Internal analysis examines the content of the image, including the plot, composition, colors, signs, characters, and actions. This stage determines the informational potential of the source.

The fourth stage is contextual analysis. The visual source is studied in relation to the historical environment in which it was created. The researcher identifies the political situation, social conditions, cultural environment, and ideological factors.

The fifth stage is interpretation. Through interpretation, the researcher identifies the hidden meanings and scientific significance of the source.

International Experience in the Study of Visual Sources

Today, visual studies are developing as an independent academic field in the world's leading universities and research centers. Scholars at Harvard University, Yale University, and Stanford University conduct extensive research in visual history and visual anthropology. American researchers analyze visual materials from the perspectives of historical reconstruction, popular culture, propaganda, and media studies.

Visual culture studies are particularly advanced in Europe. At the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge in the United Kingdom, projects are being implemented on the digitization of visual sources and their analysis using artificial intelligence. In Germany, the traditions of the Panofsky School are being continued, and iconological methodology is being further refined.

The field of Digital Humanities is creating new opportunities for the study of visual sources. Artificial intelligence has enabled object recognition, facial recognition, image classification, and statistical analysis of visual data.

In Uzbekistan, the study of visual sources is conducted within the fields of history, archaeology, and art history. In particular, Timurid miniatures, historical manuscripts, architectural monuments, archival photographs, and Soviet-era posters constitute important research objects. Scientific institutions within the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan are carrying out work on the cataloguing and scholarly description of historical images. Researchers at the National University of Uzbekistan and Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies are also conducting studies on miniatures, ancient maps, and iconographic materials.

There are several methodological problems in the study of visual sources. The problem of subjective interpretation means that the same image may be interpreted differently by different researchers. Lack of context refers to situations in which information about the circumstances under which historical images were created has not been preserved. Manipulation and editing have become increasingly possible due to modern technologies. The problem of digital authentication concerns verifying the authenticity of images available on the Internet.

The following directions are expected to develop in the future: artificial intelligence-based visual analysis, integration with Big Data, 3D reconstruction, virtual museums, digital archives, and automated iconographic analysis. These developments will significantly increase the accuracy and scientific effectiveness of visual source research.

Visual sources constitute an important informational resource in contemporary scientific research. Their study requires the integrated use of semiotic, iconographic, iconological, and discourse-based methods. International experience demonstrates the effectiveness of a multidisciplinary approach to the analysis of visual sources. Uzbekistan has also accumulated considerable experience in the scientific analysis of historical miniatures, archival photographs, and architectural monuments.

The development of digital technologies and artificial intelligence is initiating a new stage in the study of visual sources. Therefore, a thorough mastery of the methodology of scientific analysis of visual sources in master's and doctoral research has become one of the important requirements of contemporary academic activity.

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