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## THE SCHOLARLY PROGRAM OF M. I. ROSTOVITZEFF

In the epoch of *Altertumswissenschaft*, the original texts analyzed *philologically* were backed up by ever-growing amounts of material collected, preserved, and studied by classical *archaeology*. The study of *history* needed both philology and archaeology, recently expanded, for complex research, aiming at the coherent restoration of the past. The reconstruction of history – the principal vocation and goal of the humanities – presupposes the use of both philology and archaeology as crucial tools for the study of sources. This was a great ideal in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Against this background, it may seem strange that the works of Michael Rostovtzeff refer much less frequently to philology.

In the process of investigating large regions and vast epochs of the classical world, Rostovtzeff, as a historian of social and economic history, massively relied on archaeological material and works of the imitative arts that circumstantially characterize the technical implements and economic life of the ancients. As a historian of ancient art and an enthusiastic connoisseur of the objects preserved in museums all over the world, he was admirably well versed. At the same time, the bulk of literary and especially of the ever-growing documentary sources needed the masterly use of philology and its multiple tools to develop creative historical study.<sup>1</sup>

As a pupil at the Zhitomir gymnasium (where his father and grandfather had been principals at different times),<sup>2</sup> Rostovtzeff had to

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<sup>1</sup> We have everywhere a huge literature on M. Rostovtzeff. For the Western part, see e. g.: Rufus Fears 1990, 405–418. For a broader background, see Schneider 1991, 543–547.

<sup>2</sup> The most remarkable achievement on M. I. Rostovtzeff after his political resurrection in Russia remains the volume: Bongard-Levin 1997 [Г. М. Бонгард-Левин (ed.), *Скифский роман*]. I find remarkable the portrait given by Tyzhov 2000 [А. Я. Тыжов, “Михаил Иванович Ростовцев”, in: М. И. Ростовцев, *Общество и хозяйство в Римской империи*], 5–12. One of the most recent sketches of Rostovtzeff is an article in Chrystaljow 2021a [В. М. Хрусталева, “Ростовцев М. И.”, in: *Словарь петербургских антиковедов XIX – начала XX века*], 647–654 (with lit.); see also Chrystaljow 2021b (this fascicle).

experience painstaking classical drill, continued and somehow hardened in the atmosphere of Count Dmitry A. Tolstoy's reforms, which took linguistic skills in Greek and Latin as the basis of all solid knowledge. The Zhitomir school with its Polish provenience was notorious for extraordinary drill in ancient languages with translations not only from Greek in Latin but also vice versa, including a "generous" use of the birch rod as educational implement – the testimony of the outstanding Ukrainian geologist academician P. A. Tutkovsky (born in 1858) is overwhelmingly clear in this respect. In the last two classes, however, the future historian became a pupil of the 1<sup>st</sup> Classical Gymnasium in Kiev, where more modern approaches were not so delayed: here, the youth wrote his first study of ancient history and received a silver medal for it at the end of the course.

At St Vladimir University, Rostovtzeff became *inter alia* a student of A. I. Sonny (1861–1922), who had studied at the Russian Philological Seminary in Leipzig and since that time was linked with F. F. (Th.) Zielinski (1859–1944). When he moved to St Petersburg University with Zielinski as one of his professors, he became Zielinski's closest pupil. Zielinsky's mode of study combined wide philological scope with a historical vein, formed by the German tradition. Of special interest for our topic is the special mark that Zielinski invited his pupil to join him at the brilliant Nicholas Gymnasium in Tsarskoe Selo. Here the young scholar wrote a masterful commentary within Russia's official project of commented classical texts for gymnasia, edited by S. Manshtejn and L. Georgievskij: *Julius Caesar, De bello Gallico*, which enjoyed its 9<sup>th</sup> edition in 1916 (just at the end of classical education in Russia).<sup>3</sup>

It was philologists who regarded classical studies at secondary schools as an absolutely necessary philological propedeutics of a *scholarly* type (hence such expressions as *Gelehrtschule*, *grammar school*, *Valediktionsschrift*, et sim.) and as something preparing pupils not only for classical philology, but also for every involvement with the humanities or scholarship. A pupil of A. K. Nauck, P. Nikitin (1849–1916), a philologist whom Rostovtzeff especially esteemed, was intermittently the Director of the University, at other times the Vice-President of the Academy of Sciences in St Petersburg, and maintained similar opinions about classical education. Zielinski published his lectures to the graduates of Russian gymnasia as a book, *The Ancient World and Us* (*Древний мир и мы* [St Petersburg 31911]), which was soon translated into a dozen European

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<sup>3</sup> Rostovtzeff 1916 [М. И. Ростовцев (ed.), *Гай Юлий Цезарь. Записки о галльской войне в избранных отрывках*].

languages. The body of cultural and especially epistemological arguments developed by Zielinski, who combined humanistic ideals with the scientific psychology of Wilhelm Wundt to preserve classical education, was of course shared by the socially and politically engaged historian and brave constitutional democrat (russ. *kadet*), Rostovtzeff.<sup>4</sup>

It is clear that advanced philological training at school, given and received at an early age, was not yet scholarship in the full sense of the word, but a sum of the skills that served as substantial preparation for any scholarly or scientific activity in the future. In the case of “dead” classical languages, the acquisition of linguistic skills is not only a value in itself, but also an ideal way to endorse the *hermeneutic* abilities that are crucial for all the humanities. The significance of early and severe drill (compare the “ballet body” education at famous ballet schools) lies in the fact that it is irreplaceable, because work with the primary ancient sources at a more advanced age and/or without exercise under appropriate teachers is full of insuperable obstacles. The art of interpretation of “texts difficult for *direct* understanding” (definition of philology given by J. M. Borovskij, 1896–1994, which does not deny, but restricts the significance of the so-called direct method) is learned most successfully in grammar school through the reading of classics (as far as possible, accompanied by composing essays and/or verse), that is, in the formative years under the direction of experienced scholars and refined pedagogues. In the end, the Zhitomir school proved to be a good prerequisite for a future student of ancient social and material culture, even if, in the following epochs of his life, Rostovtzeff did not seem to cherish the memory of the exuberantly linguistic occupations of his boyhood. The witnesses tell us about his reciting the full text of Horace’s “Roman Odes”, one after another, at a time when his mental bloom was gone.

Special fields of inquiry in the classics in which the unity of archaeology, philology, and history is quite manifest were *epigraphy* and *papyrology*. These belonged to the sphere especially dear to Rostovtzeff, as many of his works take an epigraphic text or papyrus (more often than not, a recently discovered one) as a point of departure. A series of his publications testifies to this preoccupation (e.g. the huge complex of *Zenon papyri*).<sup>5</sup> The list of the courses taught by Professor Rostovtzeff at the University of St Petersburg demonstrates that he placed the

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<sup>4</sup> Zielinski enjoyed in Leipzig not only a touch of the cult of Friedrich Nietzsche, but also the no less massive influence of the innovative scientific psychology taken directly from the hands of Wilhelm Wundt (on this, see Gavrilov 2021 [А. К. Гаврилов, “Зелинский Ф. Ф.”], *Словарь петербургских антиковедов XIX – начала XX века*).

<sup>5</sup> Rostovtzeff 1922.

interpretation of such still largely unexplored texts on the same level with the reading of literary texts. With time, his enthusiasm for papyrological texts, sometimes investigated together with G. Zereteli (1870–1938), only increased.

Controversy about the interpretation of literary texts was not alien to Rostovtzeff, either. It is remarkable when we see that in his brief introduction to his general sketch of Greek history, the historian produces a lot of archaeological illustrations and not one quotation from a literary text! As luck would have it, in the preface to that book, the author explains, “Mere quotations from any great literary work are lifeless things”; in his opinion, the reader should read the great works of classical literature in the original or in translation, but necessarily as an artistic whole.<sup>6</sup>

This type of negative worship of artistic creations could seem a bold excuse for himself or even irony. But Rostovtzeff in general tends to be fundamentally serious and has no inclination to avoid drastic statements. In his manner, he meant what he said. At the same time, we know his close adherence not only to salient political protagonists, but also to contemporary literary people: Vjach. Ivanov, I. Bunin, M. Kuzmin, D. Merezhkovskij, A. Blok, A. Belyj, et al. – all those idols of the Russian Silver Age were welcome at his home, in correspondence with his literary habits and tastes. Probably the request of Kondakov and other “factolaters” (if we try to render the Russian “фактопоклонники”, coined on the model of “идолопоклонники”, that is “idolaters”) self-ironically describes the enthusiasm for nothing but facts. In the case of Rostovtzeff, the situation received the following form: never mix up scientific practices with any *élans à la mode*.

This seems to be a clear and sound position, but in my view, the “factolaters” somewhat overrated their own ability to stick solely to the facts (which are themselves an object of infinite research). This somewhat simplistic conception by Kondakovians of what a *fact* is paralyzed their cognitive will to a degree. Zielinski, however, was ready to risk a new hypothesis on many occasions, and despite some setbacks often proved correct. At any rate, it was useful for Rostovtzeff to see both the weak and the strong points of the Kondakovian group – and of Zielinski, as well. So, a few of Rostovtzeff’s decisions seem to me to have been made by finding the middle between Zielinski and the Kondakovians, for example, in the question of the language to be used in studying the classics or in the recognition of national scholarship without denying the

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<sup>6</sup> Rostovtzeff 1925, III.

international nature of knowledge. Rostovtzeff was ready to acknowledge his occasional mistakes and at the same time be unflinching when making up his mind on the most complex questions.

### Conclusions

Like the verbal art of the ancients itself, so *philology*, which studies it, acts in Rostovtzeff's work in its proper role, even if for one or another reason he does not show much consciousness of that. Probably this was due to a trauma resulting from the provincially severe grammar school in Zhitomir and because of the – falsely supposed – *Selbstverständlichkeit* of developing rather advanced philological skills during one's youth. If history was Rostovtzeff's goal, his main passion being archaeology, philology definitely served him as a reliable general basis in the common field of classics: even if a scholar did not adore this foundation, he surely had to stand on it.

Another astonishing thing: Michail I. Rostovtzeff was a happy outcome not only of his own talents and character, but to some degree (as we could also say about Zielinski) a consequence of the care taken by the Russian government of the epoch for scholars and national scholarship. These policies secured much philology (as a matter of course, somewhat too much of it for unspecialized schools) on the foundation of solid education, producing at the same time an impression of monotony or even tyranny. Philology became ubiquitous, often annoying, and as it were invisible to the educated persons themselves. This led to the – alas, destructive – wish for liberation in fields of knowledge that seemed to be less formal and more independent in themselves.

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The author asks: what was the place of philology in the stupendous historical work of M. Rostovtzeff, considering that the great scholar identified his scholarly program with history and/or with the archaeology of the ancient world, leaving philology in their shadow. Such a disposition seems to reflect an ever-growing division and even a gap between those three disciplines as different parts of ancient studies in the 20<sup>th</sup> century: natural from the point of view of specialized knowledge, it is fatal from the perspective of hermeneutics, where parts and the whole check each other in a very sophisticated way. Hence, the lecturer’s attempt to ask what the message of Rostovtzeff’s work is on this question, since his teaching in the famous Nickolas Gymnasium in Tsarskoje Selo, along with its brilliant scholarly crew, already speaks for the presence of traditional philological values. The same is indicated by the commented and illustrated edition of *Julius Caesar De bello Gallico* for Russian gymnasia, philology being supplemented here by historical explanations, tables, and pictures. Also significant was that Rostovtzeff’s favorite auxiliary disciplines were epigraphy and papyrology, which, treating new and often hardly readable texts, already presuppose especially strong philological skills. Rostovtzeff’s sensitivity to the artistic value of ancient literature is seen from his biography, which relates how he met and admired the literary persons of the Russian Silver Age and how he wrote lucid Russian himself. As for Rostovtzeff’s lack of sympathy with exclusively philological topics, we guess that this was a consequence of the monotonous accent on grammatical competence disproportionately cultivated in the “classical” reforms of Count D. A. Tolstoy.

Автор ставит вопрос о том, какое место в творчестве М. И. Ростовцева занимала филология: сам он обычно признавал с гордостью свое призвание историка, иногда заодно изъясняя пылкую привязанность к археологии. Это предвещает возобладавшее (не только в России) разделение истории и филологии в рамках антиковедения, что, по представлениям автора, ведет

к печальным для обеих сторон последствиям. Отсюда стремление присмотреться внимательнее к тому, чему в этом смысле учит само творчество историка. О филологических навыках Ростовцева свидетельствует уже его преподавание в Николаевской Царскосельской гимназии с ее великолепным штатом разносторонних знатоков античности (начиная с Ф. Ф. Зелинского), между тем как создание всесторонне комментированного издания *De bello Gallico* Юлия Цезаря для употребления в русских гимназиях показывает мастерство Ростовцева в этой не в последнюю очередь филологической специализации. Поучительно и то, что из вспомогательных исторических дисциплин историк особенно часто читал курсы и писал исследования по папирологии и эпиграфике – дисциплинам, которые уже новизной своего материала требуют особой искушенности в филологии, особенно в вопросах языка. Чувствительность к искусству слова и к носителям этого искусства видна и по биографии историка; она же ощущается по живому слогу его сочинений. С другой стороны, на отсутствие пристрастия к темам сугубо филологическим подействовало отношение Ростовцева к засилью языковых упражнений в толстовской гимназии, где последние были так неубедительно раздуты.

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