

THE FIRST STEPS OF ST. PETERSBURG CLASSICAL SCHOLARSHIP

An Academician Gottlieb Siegfried Bayer (1694 – 1738) *

CLASSICAL SCHOLARSHIP IN MODERN RUSSIA

The development of historical knowledge, the setting of history as a science, and the formation of classical scholarship was a difficult and long process in Russia. First of all, this should be explained by the peculiar position of Russia on the eastern frontiers of Europe and the remoteness of eastern Slavonic tribes, including those who were the ancestors of Russian people, from the cradle of European civilisation, and the ancient Greek and Roman worlds. Hence a comparatively late acquaintance of Russians with the cultural achievements of antiquity, such as a developed alphabet, elements of literature and perfect forms of religious ideology embodied in Christianity.

Practically speaking, the formation of classical scholarship in Russia started only in the Petrine epoch – that is, from the moment when the country led by the gifted tsar-reformer took the historic stride towards Western Europe for the sake of quick familiarisation with European military technique, industrial technology, secular forms of education and the elements of modern scientific knowledge in the sphere of natural science and mathematics as well as in the humanities, including history.

St. Petersburg, the new capital of Russia, the “window to Europe”, was destined to play the leading role in this global transformation. St. Petersburg became the main channel by which Russian society became acquainted with forms and achievements of the Western European civilisation. This process of Europeanisation and modernisation of Russia in the sphere of culture, secular education and humanities naturally led to assimilation of humanistic traditions cultivated in the West and bred by classical culture. It is necessary to remember that it was time of European Enlightenment, time of classicism with its pretentious imitation of ancient cultural forms accompanied by passion for rationalism and cult of state.

* This paper, which was read at the Conference “Three Centures of classical scholarship in St. Petersburg” (August 25–27 2003), is a short version of a more detailed account, with all necessary references, in my book “Русская наука об античности” [“The Russian classical scholarship”] (SPb. 1999) Chapter 2, p. 46 ff.

It is not surprising that in Russia as well as in the West the natural basis for the development of new Russian culture and education was formed by classicist culture with its resting on the values of Graeco-Roman civilisation, with its orientation towards the forms of state organisation and civil manners and customs created by antiquity, with its passion for aesthetic values, literature and mythology, with the cult of Latin and Greek, and finally, with its characteristic tendency to regard the Greek and Roman political systems as a starting point of the world history to a no lesser extent than the world creation according to the Bible.

An important role of classical education and of classical scholarship in the process of formation of new Russian humanities is quite understandable in this context. We can say without exaggeration that classical scholarship was destined to become the foundation for the whole complex of historical and philological disciplines, and of the universal history in particular.

Returning to St. Petersburg, it is necessary to point out that this new capital became and for a long period of time remained the leader of scientific progress in Russia. It was here that the most prestigious scientific schools were formed, including the object of our special attention, the St. Petersburg historical school, and its nucleus, St. Petersburg classical school of historians.

However, development of this discipline as well as of the whole body of humanities in Russia was neither easy nor uniformly progressive. The process of its forming lasted for a century and even more, consisting of two phases with a large interval between them. The initial introduction of this subject in Russia, connected with the foundation of St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities and Academic University, had slowed down considerably by the last third of the 18th century. It resumed its speed only in the second third of the 19th century, and was crowned at last with great success.

It is necessary to take into consideration that the formation of any scientific school is not an instantaneous process. The efforts of many generations of scholars are necessary for establishing a successful academic school. From this point of view, the birth of Russian classical scholarship did not take a long time. The German classicist G. S. Bayer, invited from Germany to Russia, and the first native Russian scholar of antiquity Michail Kutorga are separated only by hundred years, which is not a big interval in history.

The main problem here is not the speed of formation of Russian classical scholarship, but the steadiness of its success and position among the related disciplines. It is obvious how much it owed to the classicist culture, newly absorbed by Russian society. We cannot forget, however, that this cul-

ture was forcibly brought in from the West and restricted to the educated élite (for the most part of noble origin), being alien to the bulk of ordinary population. Hence the instability of classical education and scholarship success in Russia. Russian classicism – either cultural, educational, or scholarly – was derivative from the more general process of Russian Europeanisation. But was this process in itself secure? Tracing the history of Russian classical scholarship and Russian classicism implies involvement in a more general problem of Russian historical development. It is useful, both from the point of historiography and historiosophy, to become acquainted more closely with the history of St. Petersburg classical scholarship.

THE FIRST STEPS AND THE FOUNDATION OF ST. PETERSBURG ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

The reforms of the late 17th – early 18th centuries affected different spheres of Russian public and state life. Legislation and administration, finances and military science, diplomacy and education, everything was vigorously rebuilt. The desire to lessen the gap between Russia and the West was felt in everything. In order to accomplish these tasks there was a need for educated people from Europe. Further development in book printing, the publication of the first Russian newspaper, the opening of secular schools and colleges, and finally the foundation of the Academy of Sciences and Humanities were aimed at serving this purpose.

The most important result of these efforts manifested itself in the formation not only of new secular educational system, but of new scientific knowledge, natural, mathematical and humanitarian. Historical studies, together with other disciplines, were born in Russia in the 18th century. Many factors contributed to the growth of historical knowledge. The first one is the growth of national self-consciousness and the following interest in the history of its own people; the second one should be seen in concrete needs of modern politics such as the necessity to explain historically legislative acts, military reforms, or diplomatic activities. As a result, the above-mentioned factors produced a general cultural boom and the creation of closer connections with western European countries. This last factor in its turn contributed to an interest in universal history and particularly in the history of those states of classical antiquity, whose culture became the basis of European civilisation.

Interest in antiquity as the basis of contemporary classicist culture was an outstanding feature of the Petrine epoch. The flow of new literature, increased by the tsar's general measures aimed at the expansion of book

printing and translation activity, contributed to this interest. The shortage and sometimes absence of literature on some problems was compensated for by the translation of foreign textbooks initiated by the state. Among the books on world history touching upon the period of antiquity there is “An Introduction to European History” by the famous German historian and lawyer Samuel von Pufendorf, which was translated and published at the time of Peter the Great.

We should mention separately that some of translations, published in Russia in the first quarter of the 18th century, were directly connected with ancient history. It is necessary to note that Petrine epoch is richer in translations of classical texts and other works on antiquity than the entire two previous centuries. We can distinguish two trends in these translations. The first continues the traditions of old Russian literature with its interest in translation of the popular stories and collections of aphorisms from antiquity. The second was inspired by new cultural ideas and requests, which drew together Russian and European societies. The first group includes a new edition of the popular “History of Troy” (M. 1709), the second translations of Julius Frontinus’ “Strategems” (exists in manuscript only), Curtius Rufus’ “History of Alexander the Great” (M. 1709), Julius Caesar’s “Memoires” (translated from French adaptation, M. 1711) and Apollodorus’ “Bibliotheca, or On Gods” (M. 1725).

So, in the first quarter of the 18th century Russian literature was enriched by new translations containing facts about antiquity. Acquaintance with these books contributed to the widening of the historical horizon of Russian readers. However, it was not sufficient even for a very gifted reader to become an expert, not to say a researcher, of classical antiquity on the basis just of these translations alone. Proper historical education was needed. General understanding of historical processes, knowledge of ancient languages and auxiliary historical disciplines, and finally an understanding of how to apply critical methods to the historical material could be mastered only by systematic education in secondary and higher schools with a solid classical curriculum.

There were so called Slavonic-Greek-Latin schools and even academies – colleges of semiclerical or semisecular type, founded in Kiev and Moscow as early as the 17th century and offering ancient languages, Greek and Latin, poetics, rhetoric and elements of philosophy. But the programmes of these academies did not include special courses on history. Only teachers of rhetoric from time to time used some examples found in the works of ancient historians. It is necessary to take into consideration that all the teaching in these academies contained the ideas of medieval scholastics and

served the needs of clergymen – naturally, at price of the neglect of secular subjects.

Peter the Great did everything he could in order to establish the system of secular education in Russia and to give an impulse to the development in scientific knowledge. The decisive move here is connected with the foundation of the Academy of Sciences and Humanities in St. Petersburg (1724–1725).

The newly founded Academy at first did not have any formal regulations, and all its life was determined by the initial project approved by Peter I in January 1724. According to this project, the Academy was divided into three classes, mathematical, physical, and humanitarian (*humaniora*). The third class meant to include three chairs in classical philology and history (ancient and modern), and one in law (together with politics and ethics).

Thus, humanities were adequately represented in the St. Petersburg Academy. This means that founders of the new Academy understood the role which classical education was destined to play in drawing Russia nearer to European classicist and humanist traditions. Later, in 1747, after new academic regulations had been introduced, the humanitarian class was abolished. However, in the following year, the Historical Department and Historical Assembly were created at the Academy, which compensated to some extent the absence of special chairs in these fields.

According to the project of 1724, the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities was to play two roles, that of a scientific and of an educational institute. Consequently, it was supposed to open a University and Gymnasium in the Academy, where academicians and their pupils – postgraduates (*adiuncti*) were to become teachers. However, because of a lack of students, it turned out to be impossible to open a correctly organised University with several faculties immediately. At first the Academy itself fulfilled the role of such a University: all academicians were called professors and had to read public lectures and conduct seminars regularly.

In fact, this Academic University came to existence only in 1747. According to new academic regulations adopted that year, lectures in three cycles of sciences, mathematical, physical and humanitarian, had to be read in this University by professors who differed from academicians. At the head of the University was the Rector, who was an official historiographer. The Rector would report to the president of the Academy.

Unlike the University, the Academic Gymnasium was opened simultaneously with the Academy, in 1725. The Gymnasium's aim was to be a preparatory school for the University. The first place in this Gymnasium

was given to learning foreign languages, in particular Latin and German; some subjects of general instruction such as history were to be taught in senior classes.

On the whole, the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities was a flexible system of institutions, which were to conduct scientific research and to prepare young scientists. The foundation of the Academy contributed considerably to progress in all spheres of knowledge and gave origin to Russian classical scholarship and a wide range of historical and philological disciplines.

However, it is necessary to point out, that first members of the Academy, including classicists, were all foreigners. It is quite understandable that the absence of native scholars led to the invitation of foreign specialists. However, Russian students learned quickly and in some twenty years the first native Russian scholars appeared among the members of the Academy.

SCIENTIFIC AND PUBLIC ACTIVITY OF G. S. BAYER

Among the first foreign specialists invited to the Academy was an outstanding specialist in humanities from Königsberg Gottlieb Siegfried Bayer (1694–1738). He can be rightfully considered the founder of Russian historical and philological scholarship.

Bayer arrived in Petersburg in February 1726. Since this time his scientific activity was closely connected with Petersburg Academy of Sciences. A distinguished scholar and a very industrious man, he was a philologist, linguist, historian, archaeologist. During the twelve years of his stay in Russia he wrote several long books and many articles on different topics, mainly from ancient history. The main subjects of his scientific research in this country lay in the field of Oriental languages (in particular Chinese), ancient Russian history, and antiquity. Bayer's eastern studies are a separate subject, which deserves to be investigated by an orientalist. We would like to say some words about Bayer's Russian studies, because they are more closely related to antiquity, and thus, we can understand their true value.

Bayer studied Russian history partly because of his natural scientific curiosity, partly *ex officio*, because it was expected of him, due to the fact that he was the only representative of humanities in the Russian Academy of Sciences and Humanities at that time. Not feeling himself sufficiently prepared for such studies (he did not know Russian), Bayer limited himself to such themes from Russian history where he could use classical, Byzan-

tine, or Scandinavian sources. However, he took into account some Russian materials translated especially for him.

It was natural for Bayer to turn to the very origins of Russian history, to the beginnings of the Russian nation and state, to the topic of Varangians, so prominently represented both in Russian chronicles and in Byzantine tradition. The natural, though somewhat straightforward, interpretation of this tradition led Bayer to a conclusion about a decisive role of the Varangians (i. e. Normans of Scandinavian origin) in the foundation of the Russian state. This was the first time the decisive role of Normans in Russian prehistory was emphasised, which soon led to rough and endless discussions, in which representatives of patriotic Russian historiography (from M. V. Lomonosov up to M. N. Tihomirov) expressed from time to time a sharp and negative opinion of Bayer as a spokesman for the opposite side.

Luckily, Bayer's studies in antiquity do not touch any national or personal ambitions. It is thus possible to express impartial and complete respect for works of the scholar, who was called "one of the greatest humanists and historians of his century" by such an authoritative judge as August Ludwig von Schlözer. Bayer was a forerunner of the newest trend in classical scholarship and in other spheres of historical and philological knowledge. His studies in the field of ancient history lay in the field of unclear and uninvestigated problems of historical geography, ethnogenesis and chronology. Such works cleared a way for the future study of political and social history of ancient world.

As for concrete topics for his studies in antiquity, Bayer chose them according to various considerations. Partly he was determined to find those subjects in classical antiquity, which were close to eastern and Russian history; partly he was interested in antiquity itself. From this point of view all Bayer's works on antiquity can be divided into three groups.

The first group is connected to Bayer's interest in ancient history of China, India and other Eastern countries and is represented by two big works. One of them is about history of the city Edessa (in northern Mesopotamia) in antiquity and the Middle Ages. Another is dedicated to the Greek-Baktrian state. Until now, both books have remained good collections of material about the history of these countries on the Eastern frontiers of the Graeco-Roman world. The novelty of a scientific trend proposed by Bayer is even more important. It is necessary to point out the relevance of his interest to the zone of cultural interaction between classical and Near-Eastern worlds. In this interest he surpassed the range of vision of contemporary scholars and anticipated the trend of researches of Eastern Hellenism which would be associated with the names of such ac-

knowledgeable innovators as J. G. Droysen, W. W. Tarn and M. I. Rostovtzeff in modern times.

The second group includes works that have some connection with the ancient period of Russian history. There is a series of articles about Scythians, Cimmerians, Hyperboreans, tribes which, according to the ancient tradition, inhabited these territories that later became the cradle of ancient Russia. Bayer was the first scholar who seriously studied the origin and setting of Scythian tribes, the history of their relations with Greek cities of the Black Sea region, their fortune in the epoch of late antiquity. For this purpose he made a selection and comparison of the most important testimonies about ancient Scythia found in ancient authors from Onomacritus and Aeschylus up to Claudius Ptolemaeus. He paid much attention to the analysis of information given by Herodotus, who is our most important source on the history of the Northern Black Sea region in antiquity.

Of course, concrete historical conclusions of Bayer are now outdated. This concerns his drawing together Scythians and Finns, Estonians and some other Baltic tribes, his localisation of the Scythian motherland in Armenia, from where, according to Bayer, they came to the Volga. Not everything is absurd, however, in these ideas. According to modern views, the ruling class of Scythian society, so called Nomadic or Royal Scythians, took its origin from Iran. But we should not forget that the Scythian world as a whole possessed a complex conglomerate structure, and that the ancient Ugro-Finnish or Slavs' ancestors might have been representatives of the lower classes of Scythians. At the same time, the region of Great Armenia and adjoining lands might have been the native land of those Iranian tribes who, having moved to the Volga region, gave birth to the historical Scythians. Moreover, Bayer's articles contain rich historical information and represent first examples of critical study of such an important subject for the prehistory of Eastern Slavs as Herodotus' Scythia was. We can only regret that these works were early and undeservedly forgotten.

The third group of Bayer's works consists of the articles that were written because of Bayer's direct interest in classical antiquity. First of all, we would like to mention two works on the Achaean league, the largest federal union that existed in Greece in the Hellenistic time (III–II centuries BC). Here we should note not only the carefulness of Bayer's specialised investigation, but also the novelty of the subject especially in comparison with a traditional for classical scholarship concern for ancient monarchy. Bayer's innovation is especially important if we take into consideration the fact that he began to study federative movement

in Greece more than a century before acknowledged pioneers in this field – Ed. A. Freeman and F. G. Miščenko.

Other works of this group are of the more particular character. First of all, there is a work on a not widely known Roman poet of the 1st century AD, Vestricius Spurinna. Bayer makes an attempt to restore Spurinna's biography and gives a selection of the extant fragments of his poems. Then there is a series of papers on ancient coins, Greek and Roman. And at last, small but deserving article about Venus of Cnidus (so in the Bayer's text), that is, the statue of Aphrodite that decorated the Summer Gardens in St. Petersburg, and similar representations of this goddess on two coins from Cnidus. Bayer demonstrates his mastery of interpretation of art and proves convincingly that this statue, which was brought by the order of Peter I from Italy, was made in classical times and is a copy of the famous statue of Aphrodite of Cnidus created by the Athenian sculptor Praxiteles in the 4th century BC. Later, this statue was moved from the Summer Gardens to the Palace of Tauris (hence its name Venus Taurica) and thus marked the beginning of the Russian collection of antique sculptures. Now this statue occupies an honourable place in the Department of Antiquities of the State Hermitage Museum.

Bayer's works are, as a rule, dedicated to a concrete subject and based on the careful analysis of all known sources. Bayer was a well-read person; he remembered many facts, drawn out of literature of most varied origin. He tried to use his great erudition to solve historical, philological and archaeological problems that interested him. Not all of his conclusions are convincing from the positions of modern knowledge and some of his linguistic and historical ideas (particularly those concerning the ancient period of Russian history) were naïve. Yet we cannot deny that he was an outstanding scholar of his time.

In the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities Bayer represented the school newly born in European classical scholarship, which marked the transition from naïve erudition, characteristic of the Renaissance and Early Enlightenment, to the critical study of tradition. From this point of view Bayer is ranked together with such outstanding founders of modern classical scholarship as Richard Bentley, Jochann Joachim Winckelmann and Friedrich August Wolf.

We should not forget that Bayer's work was not limited to promoting of the new scholarly methodology. His choice of such relevant topics as history of contact zones of the Near East, ethnogenesis of the Scythians and other peoples who inhabited the Black Sea region in antiquity, the federative movement in the ancient world, is also important.

Bayer was not only an outstanding scholar, but also a person engaged in public life. He made considerable efforts to organise the educational process at the Academic University and Gymnasium, where he was director. Moreover, his creative activity as a scholar and a teacher helped him to integrate into new Russian life.

While in Russia, he got into contact with outstanding representatives of progressive Russian intellectuals who struggled for the preservation and development of Peter's reforms in the 1720s–30s. Bayer had close relations with Peter's outstanding comrade-in-arms, the head of his "learned detachment" (*cohors studiosa*), the archbishop of Novgorod, Theophan Prokopovič. Bayer was *inter alia* a teacher in the private school, founded by Prokopovič in his house in St. Petersburg near the river Karpovka. In his turn, the statesman encouraged Bayer's scholarly activity and helped him in his St. Petersburg life.

Bayer did not create – he could not do this in contemporary Russia – an academic school of his own, but he greatly influenced many representatives of Russian culture and science. The founder of new Russian classicist literature prince Antioch Kantemir (1709–1744) attended his lectures in the Academic University. The pioneer of original Russian historiography Vasilij Tatiščev (1686–1750) had great respect for Bayer's works and included some of Bayer's articles (in Russian translation) in the first volume of his "Russian history". Under Bayer's direct influence Gerhard Friedrich Müller (in Russian tradition – Miller, 1705–1783), an outstanding and influential member of the Academy and the first rector of the Academic University, restored in 1747, turned to the study of Russian language and history.

However, we should note that Bayer did not have worthy successors in the field of classical scholarship at the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities. His official successors, the German classicists Johann Georg Lotter (1702–1737) and Christian Crusius (1715–1767), did not make any remarkable impact on the St. Petersburg classical scene. The development of classical scholarship in Russia took place to a certain degree only thanks to Russian Classics enthusiasts, new members of the Academy and lecturers of the University Vasilij Trediakovskij (1703–1769) and Michail Lomonosov (1711–1765). The first enriched Russian literature with a famous heroic poem "Telemachida", a poetic version of Fénelon's novel "The Adventures of Telemachus, Son of Ulixes", and with translations of works of well-known (in that time) French experts in ancient history Charles Rollin and Jean Crevier. Lomonosov, resting upon ancient tradition, composed normative textbooks on Russian stylistics ("Brief Guide in Eloquence", SPb. 1748) and history ("Ancient Russian History", SPb. 1758).

CONCLUSION

The movement, which began in the sphere of Russian classical scholarship by Bayer and was continued by Trediakovskij and Lomonosov, died down in the late 1760s. The reason for this fact was not only the death of the above mentioned Russian classicists, who did not leave worthy successors, but the general situation in Russian science: the abolition of class of *humaniora* at the Academy of Sciences and Humanities, the crisis in the Academic University, which ended its existence after Lomonosov's death. However, many considerable achievements were made in St. Petersburg classical scholarship and in other fields of humanities. These achievements allow us to speak about the first steps in studies of world history, anticipating the St. Petersburg school of historians, originated in the beginning of the 19th century.

One should not think that the last third of the 18th century was absolutely fruitless for the humanities. It is sufficient to remember that it was time of the splendid rule of Catherine II, who contributed to the process of Russian Europeanisation and encouraged further expansion of the Enlightenment and assimilation of western European classicist traditions by Russian society. The reign of Catherine II witnessed the first success of new classical gymnasia, founded in Moscow and Kazan, as well as opening of Moscow University. Enormous growth of translations from Greek and Latin, general passion for antique motives, genres, and forms of the ancient heritage in various cultural spheres such as architecture, painting, sculpture, bear testimony to public aspirations towards European culture. In Russia these facts were also the necessary preconditions of the future triumph of classical education. This general passion for classicist traditions prepared the soil for further growth of Russian classicism and development of Russian classical studies in the 19th century.

Eduard Frolov
St. Petersburg University

Развитие в России исторического знания и становление науки истории, а в ее рамках и формирование науки об античности, было делом непростым и весьма длительным. По существу формирование исторической науки в России начинается лишь со времени петровских реформ, целью которых было форсированное усвоение достижений западноевропейской цивилизации. Ведущая роль в этом глобальном преобразовании выпала на долю новой столицы Рос-

сийской империи – Петербурга. При этом решающий сдвиг в развитии науки и образования в России был связан с основанием в Петербурге Академии наук (1724–1725 гг.).

Здесь, в первом эшелоне иностранных специалистов, приглашенных в новую Российскую Академию, оказался замечательный ученый-гуманитарий, выходец из Кенигсберга Готлиб Зигфрид Байер (1694–1738). Его по праву можно считать основоположником российской историко-филологической науки, в частности и антиковедения. Значение научного творчества Байера определяется разработкой им нового критического метода, равно как и практическим изучением таких актуальных тем, как историческая жизнь контактных зон Переднего Востока, этногенез скифов и других народов, населявших в древности Причерноморье, федеративное движение в античном мире, что делает его прямым предтечей современной науки об античности. Байер не мог еще создать в России преемственной научной школы, но то, что им было сделано, составляет важный исходный момент в формировании научной традиции и приуготовлении сформировавшейся в XIX столетии Петербургской исторической школы.