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# **“SOVIET ANTIQUITY”: LOOKING FOR A COHESIVE THEORY**

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## **“SOVIET ANTIQUITY”: LOOKING FOR A COHESIVE THEORY<sup>2</sup>**

The problem basically unanswered is whether the Soviet historiography has ever developed an all-embracing concept of antiquity as a slave-owning society and whether it produced a general scheme of this period at all. Two attempts to create a uniform Marxist concept of “slave-owning antiquity” in 1930-1940s (undertaken by the scholars of GAIMK and by A.V. Mishulin with his followers) failed; a real generalization of ancient history was not achieved before 1980s, when it was perceived (not quite in the manner of Marxist method) as the evolution of rural communities rather than slavery.

JEL Classification: Z.

Keywords: Marxism, ancient history, general concept, social and economic research, class struggle, slavery, rural community, historiography.

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## **Introduction**

### **The “Historiographic Trend” in the Current Russian Research of Antiquity**

The 2010s saw a renaissance of interest of the current Russian scholarship towards the experience of Soviet time in the research of ancient history. A special seminar («Античность и современность» - “Antiquity and Contemporaneity”) was launched in 2014 by Prof. Sergey Karpyuk in the Institute of General History, Russian Academy of Sciences; and a number of conferences devoted to the Soviet historiography of ancient history was held («Советская древность: историография и рецепция античного наследия в СССР» - “Soviet Antiquity: The Historiography and the Reception of Classical Heritage in the USSR”, the Institute of General History, Russian Academy of Sciences, and the Russian State University for Humanities, December 2015, November 2016, October 2017 [Karpyuk, 2016; Karpyuk and Ladynin, 2017]; «Научное наследие А.Б. Рановича: к 130-летию со дня рождения ученого» - “The Scholarly Heritage of A.B. Ranovich: On the Occasion of the 130th Birthday of the Scholar”, the Dimitry Pozharsky University, December 2015 [Gabelko, 2016]). Even earlier there appeared a book by a scholar from Omsk, S.B. Krikh, considering the image of antiquity in the scholarship at different stages of the Soviet history (1920-1930s, 1940s, 1960-1980s) [Krikh, 2013]. The historiographic research by the scholar was not confined to this book but continued in a series of articles (*e.g.*, [Krikh, 2015; 2016a]) and marked a trend that was joined by his immediate colleague O.V. Metel’ [Krikh and Metel’, 2014], A.M. Skvortsov from Chelyabinsk [Skvortsov, 2013; 2015] and other scholars.

It is no wonder that the present-day Russian historians of antiquity take an interest in the Soviet experience of its research. The boundary between the Soviet and the post-Soviet stages of the Russian historiography in the early 1990s was personally witnessed not less than by a half of currently working scholars and was felt due to the disappearance of ideological biases that had to be present in their theses and publications throughout decades. The possibility of real, immediate contact with the world research (through joint projects, publications in international periodicals, positions outside Russia) that opened at the same time affected their work to a lesser extent. To use this possibility one had to possess, aside from an ordinary pen and a personal computer that became generally available in the first post-Soviet decade, also a good knowledge of foreign languages, a sponsorship for studies abroad or a success in a competition with foreign colleagues for a position or grant. These options were not feasible for too many scholars of antiquity in Russia; and its post-Soviet Russian research, though much more opened and susceptible to the world experience (see below), largely remained national in its tradition. Thus, the heritage of the

Soviet time still forms its base; and a reflection about it is not inappropriate for the present scholarship.

However, this reflection has not taken a form of a real historiographic trend before 2010s, while in the previous two decades its necessity was virtually unmet. This situation was defined by S.B. Krikh as “the death of discussions” on the major theoretical problems in the scholarship of antiquity, though the last decades of the Soviet research (1960-1980s) saw their flourish (*e.g.*, the search for a definition of the societies of the Ancient Orient; see Section 2 of the present paper). The reasons for this “death of discussions” are, indeed, manifold [Krikh, 2014]. First, the “field” of earlier theoretical discussions was defined by the Marxist theory: on one side, it dictated categories that researchers were expected to use; but on the other side, it made generalizations proposed by different scholars mutually understandable. However, this theory came to be compromised in the eyes of too many with the downfall of the state founded on it. Second, similarly compromised was the practice of the methodological discussions, which in the Soviet time were often articulated by ideological authorities. Finally, the scholars themselves felt that theoretical generalizations withdrew an opportunity of free pursuit; they preferred to concentrate on particular themes of their interest and not to dictate anymore “the rules of the game” neither to their colleagues nor to themselves.

The inclination to do so was often added with a willingness to harness the material and methods of the world historiography that became more available and better known in the post-Soviet time. In the honest opinion of many scholars harnessing it had necessarily to precede coming back to any new generalizations. It was certainly not by chance that, perhaps, the most ambitious project of 1990s and early 2000s in the domain of antiquity launched by G.M. Bongard-Levin was actually intended at such harnessing. It was the research of the heritage of Michail Rostovtsev (1870-1952), Russian historian of Ancient Rome and Hellenism who worked at the St. Petersburg University before the revolution, emigrated in 1918 and became a prominent university teacher and scholar at the United States (at the Madison and the Yale Universities) [Heinen, Bongard-Levin and Vinogradov, 1993; Bongard-Levin, 1997; Bongard-Levin and Litvinenko, 2003; *cf.* Wes, 1990; Heinen, 2006]. Studying his works and archive material allowed integrating in the current post-Soviet research the achievements of both the pre-revolutionary Russian scholarship and major non-Marxist socio-historical theories of the 20th century (Rostovtsev’s studies of ancient societies are undoubtedly among the best specimens of both these categories).

Does the emergence of the historiographic trend with an interest towards the “Soviet antiquity” in 2010s mean that “harnessing the world experience” that lasted through 1990s and 2000s, be it effective or not, is over now and that time has come for the new generalizations in the Russian

research of antiquity on its own earlier base? Perhaps, the answer to this question is positive. But if so then it is highly appropriate to understand what the earlier generalizations in the Soviet research of antiquity were and what the present-day scholarship has to retain of them. A traditional notion about them (if not their label) is that they were founded on the premise of “the slave-owning mode of production” being the basis of ancient societies. It is advisable, however, to ask if this premise has ever been developed into an all-embracing cohesive theory. The second advisable question is if the Soviet research of antiquity has ever elaborated generalizations that allowed producing such theory based at any background (not necessarily at recognizing slavery the major form of economic relations in antiquity). To answer these two questions in the aim of the present paper.

## **Section 1**

### **A Cohesive Theory of “Slave-Owning Antiquity”? Pursuit and Ambitions in the Soviet Research of Antiquity of 1920-1940s**

Before coming down to the research of antiquity in the Soviet Marxism (this term, once introduced by G. Markuze and accepted by S.B. Krikh, defines a system of ideas more dogmatic and at the same time more dependable on political topicality than the world Marxism properly spoken [Markuze, 1969; Krikh, 2013, p. 8-9; Alaev, 2014, p. 74]) one should recall that the Russian scholars of the early 20th century could (and did) apprehend the trend of economic determinism not only from the epigones of Marx. For scholars the cyclist theory of Eduard Meyer [Calder and Demandt, 1990; Meißner, 2012] was, due to the fundamentality of his works, an even more authoritative version of this trend; and this is shown best of all in the already-mentioned works by Michail Rostovtsev [Frolov, 1993; Heinen, 2006]. In the last pre-revolutionary years the influence of the “cyclism” (obviously via Rostovtsev) is notable in the research of Ptolemaic Egypt by young Vassily Struve [Ladynin, 2016, pp. 75-80]<sup>3</sup>. The example of this scholar, keen to build his career in years after revolution not less than before it, is handy, for in 1920s his research is marked with methodological eclecticism. Struve paid a tribute to Marxism (in his hypothesis about the “social revolution” in the Middle Kingdom Egypt [Ilin-Tomich, 2016]); to the “new school of linguistic” created by N.Ya. Marr [Krikh, 2016b]; to the traditional (though not unimpeachable) interpretation of sources in his monography on Manetho [Ladynin, 2016, pp. 82-96]. Such mixture correlated well with the general situation in the Soviet state and society of 1920s: on one side, the revolution stimulated a search for new forms and

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<sup>3</sup> Here and elsewhere, to economize space, no references to publications by Soviet researchers are given, if they are properly referred to in quoted historiographic publications.

methods (one might recall the Soviet modernist art of those years); on the other side, the Soviet power itself did not know well enough what it expected and wanted from the future. Unfinished struggle of factions and leaders inside the Communist Party was not a solid background for establishing a dictate in the sphere of humanitarian knowledge. To do this one needed in the first place a more or less clear vision of a doctrine that had to be forced on scholars and, more generally, on intellectuals. The lack of such vision explains the actual autonomy of the academic science and scholarship in the USSR till the end of 1920s. In the research of antiquity this situation manifested itself in the complete lack of any methodological uniformity and/or guidance even in the segment that deliberately positioned itself as Marxist. S.B. Krikh showed well enough that the proponents of Marxism in the studies of Classical antiquity (A.I. Tyumenev, V.S. Sergeev, S.I. Kovalyov) had to use the “modernizing” and “cyclist” categories (postulating the existence of trade capital, bourgeoisie etc. in Ancient Greece and Rome) of non-Marxist (in the first place, German) historiography [Krikh, 2013, pp. 74-83].

In 1929-1930 struggle inside the party resulted in the ultimate success of Joseph Stalin and the start of the reinforced “build-up of the Socialism”. Academic science and scholarship, like any other sphere of life, could not remain outside the party control; but at that time one needed to know much better than previously, on which theoretical grounds that control had to be implemented. It was obvious that the humanitarian scholarship had to become Marxist. As for the history properly spoken, the development of humanity had to be perceived as a mounting (nominally spiral, actually linear) process that did not allow reverse movement and irregularities at a large scale (hence the ostracism of the hypothesis of the “Asiatic mode of production”, which was forwarded in late 1920s and allowed the irrelevancy of historical laws observed at the West in the Oriental societies [Sawer, 1977, pp. 80-100; Dunn, 1982, pp. 7-38; Krikh, 2013, pp. 83-89]). The history was also given a quasi-eschatological “purpose” – the build-up of the fair egalitarian (“classless”) society; one might recall here a witty “dictionary” made up by Bertrand Russel in order to show congeniality between the historical schemes of Blessed Augustine and Marx [Russell, 2004, p. 338]. The “line” of the human history was thought as the sequence of “modes of production” and of “socio-economic formations” based on them; those lying between the pre-history and the socialism were characterized with the preponderance of one or another form of exploitation; and the essence of history was the struggle between the “antagonistic” classes turning at the boundaries of the “formations” into “social revolutions” (see a general critical discussion, with accent at modern and contemporary history: [Alaev, 2014, pp. 74-79]). However, these postulates gave only a general outline of the historical scheme, while its detailed contents depended not just on research in specific fields of history but also on interpreting utterances of Marxist classics that seemed relevant.

It is a common knowledge that the sum of such utterances relevant of the capitalism (from “Capital” by Marx to Lenin’s pamphlets on the First World War and the “imperialism”) contained a complete and rather consequent scheme of its development both in Europe and in Russia. Such scheme could be defined more or less definitely for the European Middle Ages (from Engels’ works on the early rural communities, the peasant war in Germany etc.); but it was almost non-existent for the history of antiquity. The reasons of it are quite clear. On one side, the antiquity was a peripheral matter for the founders of Marxism within the whole range of their research and propagandist priorities. Among their writings “The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State” by Engels is notably the only monographic work completely devoted to the pre-history and the ancient history (even so, not to the ancient history exclusively!). On the other hand, in the lifetimes of Marx, Engels and Lenin sources on European Middle Ages, modern history and the history of Russia were easily available in publications and not too difficult to be treated by a man of standard education. On the contrary, ancient Near Eastern and even Classical sources continued to accumulate rapidly throughout the 19th and the 20th centuries, and their interpretation needed a highly specialized professional knowledge. The material on antiquity would not have been reflected in the works of Marxist classics representatively and professionally anyway; thus, a cohesive scheme of the ancient history would not be found there. The existence of such schemes for the Middle Ages and for the modern history urged the ideologists of the Soviet scholarship to force shaping something similar for the antiquity as well; but here the task and the responsibility was mostly theirs and not that of the Marxist classics. Moreover, in the USSR of the early 1930s the word “responsibility” had a gloomy shade; and working out such scheme could not be just a matter of free pursuit.

Probably, A.A. Formozov asserted rightly that in the early 1930s the State Academy for the History of Material Culture (GAIMK; Государственная академия истории материальной культуры - ГАИМК) became a directive body, which formulated the so-called “five-term scheme” («пятичленка»; the sequence of modes of production and socio-economic formations forming the human history: primeval, slave-owning, feudal, capitalist and communist), established a “canon” of Marxist texts basic for the historical research (among them Lenin’s lecture “On State” that remained rather unnoticed previously) and started the elaboration of the specific elements in the resulting outline of history [Formozov, 2006]. Formozov also drew attention to a sort of cooperation between the GAIMK leaders (mostly recent party functionaries) with “old specialists” with pre-revolutionary careers that represented traditional scholarship: the former drew general guidelines, while the latter did the particular work on specific regional and chronological themes. A product of such cooperation was, for instance, the famous concept of the “slave-owning mode of production” at the Ancient Orient produced by V.V. Struve in 1933

[Neronova, 1992, pp. 22-31; Krikh, 2012]. Formozov thought that the GAIMK leader A.G. Progozhin was its instigator [Formozov, 2006, p. 164], while according to S.B. Krikh he was Struve's occasional opponent [Krikh, 2013, p. 97, 103-104, 113-114]. This divergence is not so much important, for Struve's concept correlated anyway with the mission conferred by GAIMK on its employees of the "old school". In 1932-1934 GAIMK was a serious structure with headquarters at the Marble Palace (Мраморный дворец) at Leningrad (St. Petersburg), doing the research in various fields of pre-modern history and publishing a number of periodicals («Известия» - "Bulletin"; «Сообщения» - "Transactions"; journal «Проблемы истории докапиталистических обществ» - "The Problems of the History of Pre-Capitalist Societies"). The research carried out inside GAIMK and deliberated during numerous discussions must have led to a certain outcome, which was undoubtedly seen as constructing of various pieces a mosaic but a cohesive picture of the "pre-capitalist" world history, the economic relation and the social struggle being its determining factor. The notion of the "slave-owning formation" embracing both Western and Eastern parts of the ancient world (see, generally: [Neronova, 1992, p. 20-33, 38-46]) was largely the achievement of GAIMK. A casual effect of its emergence was the notion of "the Ancient Orient" existing only in the Soviet and post-Soviet research (outside its narrower terms "the Ancient Near East", "Ancient India" and "Ancient China" are normally used): for the collaborators of GAIMK it embraced virtually all societies outside the Greek and Roman world and represented them as evolutionary predecessors of the Classical antiquity belonging the "slave-owning formation" together with the Ancient Orient but at a more developed stage.

But in 1935 the leaders of GAIMK were arrested and eventually perished, its activities were stopped (their final stage was publishing the three volumes of "The History of the Ancient World" in 1936-1937), while the "old specialists" employed by GAIMK were made Academicians and put at the head of the major structures of historical research (V.V. Struve in the Institute for Oriental Studies, the historian of Ancient Russia B.D. Grekov in the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR). According to S.B. Krikh, the promotion of these scholars of the old school was due to their being more susceptible than the party functionaries to the fact that "the state started giving up its revolutionary waymarks in favour of traditional patriotic ones" («власть начала утрачивать чисто революционные ориентиры в сторону традиционно-патриотических») [Krikh, 2013, p. 110-111, n.177] (here the scholar followed the concept formulated by A.M. Dubrovsky) [Dubrovsky, 2005]. A.A. Formozov proposed a clever analogy between the expected attitude of Stalin towards the leaders of GAIMK and his well-attested opinion about the leaders of RAPP (РАПП - Российская ассоциация пролетарских писателей, Russian Association of the Proletarian Writers). According to Konstantin Simonov, in 1950 Stalin said about the RAPP leader Leopold Averbach: "he was

needed at first but later became a curse for the literature” («Сначала он был необходим, а потом стал проклятием литературы») [Simonov, 1988, p. 200]. Stalin obviously disliked Averbach at either stage of his career and the same would be expected of his possible attitude towards the leaders of GAIMK: half-educated erudites with easily made careers usurping authority over men of real knowledge and talent were obviously a nasty sight not only to Stalin’s taste. However, the dislike did not prevent Stalin from stating even after a lapse of time the initial usefulness of notorious Averbach: he was useful when it was necessary for the Soviet state to establish an imperative ideological control over literature. Probably, the attitude of the state towards GAIMK in the early 1930s was much similar. The sad destiny of its leaders should be explained certainly not just with the huge scale of repressions at Leningrad after the murder of Kirov in 1934 but also with the fact that like Averbach they ceased to be “needed”. It is important to understand why it happened so.

The turn of the Stalinist state towards traditional patriotic values (which anyway did not manifest itself quite definitely before the Great Patriotic War) have never been absolute and did not mean the rejection of Marxist postulates in ideology. This certainly was not meant in the message of the famous Ordinance of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) and the Council of the People’s Commissars of the USSR “On Teaching the Civil History in the Schools of the USSR” (Постановление ЦК ВКП(б) и СНК СССР «О преподавании гражданской истории в школах СССР») of 15 May 1934. However, this document criticized “the abstract definition of the socio-economic formations” («абстрактное определение общественно-экономических формаций»), which substituted “the coherent narration of civil history with avert sociological schemes” («связное изложение гражданской истории отвлечёнными социологическими схемами») and called for teaching history “in a vivid illuminating manner, with the narration of major events and facts in their chronological sequence” («в живой занимательной форме с изложением важнейших событий и фактов в их хронологической последовательности») [Ordinance, 1934]. But sociological approach towards ancient history had to be incriminated to the leaders of GAIMK; and the ultimate result of their pursuit had to be, as it has been already said, building an all-embracing and coherent scheme of pre-capitalist formations, Marxist in its categories and spirit. Higher authorities would not have liked such result due to much the same reasons that caused their ultimate dislike for the ideology of RAPP. Both RAPP and GAIMK produced ideological trends that were gradually gaining autonomy of the party ideology as such and backed the personal ambitions of leaders promoting these trends. To deliberate its concepts GAIMK organized numerous public discussions, free at least in their out-appearance (see a memoir: [Kolobova, 1967, p. 8]), though it is hard to imagine a scholar of the “old school” expressing there his real mood. However, in

the early 1930s the attitude of the party authorities to the very possibility of free discussions was highly negative; and the preceding decade was spent fighting all sorts of “deviations” («уклоны») and “oppositions” obviously not in order to make the Marble Palace their plantation for the future. In due course A.V. Mishulin said about GAIMK: “The pretended ‘divergences’ and ‘fierce’ attacks against one another served to the Trotskists a mere mask for their counterrevolutionary work” («Мнимые “разногласия” и “яростные” выступления друг против друга служили троцкистам простой маскировкой их контрреволюционной работы...») [Mishulin, 1937, p. 236]. The “use” of the GAIMK mission, from the viewpoint of the state and the official ideology, was to corral the historians of certain specialties under the party control and to urge them working within the scheme that was ideologically biased but quite general in its formulation. This task achieved, nothing more was needed; and the leaders of GAIMK could be punished for their excessive ambitions. Those who came to replace them were expected to elaborate their research themes “in a vivid illuminating manner”, with a degree of officially sanctioned theorizing limited in its scope and responsibility. Symptomatically, the theory of the “slave revolution”, notorious due to its being coined by Stalin himself in his speech of 1933, was developed by scholars in a number of competing versions; and the ideological apparatus did not even try (obviously did not deem it necessary) to support either of them as standard [Heinen, 2010, pp. 114-118; Krikh, 2013, p. 116-139; Kirillova, 2017, pp. 350-354]. To sum up, in the early 1930s a coherent and detailed Marxist concept of antiquity did not emerge in the Soviet scholarship.

The subsequent destiny of the Soviet research in the ancient history largely depended on the personalities of those who seized the leadership in its major domains. The monopoly of Struve at the head of the Oriental research allowed him to forward the concept of slave-owning society at the Ancient Orient, which pretended to give a general scheme of its history. It was not impossible to criticize it (*e.g.* [Lurie, 1939, pp. 125-128]) but an alternative of the same scale was not forwarded before 1950s. Incidentally, Struve’s personal character made the situation in the Soviet research of the Ancient Orient, to say the least, less unpleasant than it might have happened in Stalin’s time. However, the Marxist research of the Classical antiquity was more polycentric; and here the influence was divided between the scholars invoking the old academic tradition (like V.S. Sergeev and N.A. Mashkin, to say nothing of the patriarch S.A. Zhebelev, who can hardly be attested as Marxist scholar and whose leadership in Leningrad was rather moral than methodological or organizational) and A.V. Mishulin, a party promotee of another breed than the former GAIMK leaders [Krikh, 2015]. It seems that in a way he took from them a mantle of elaborating a general Marxist concept of antiquity. There is no doubt that he did it from personal conviction; and at the same time he acted less imperiously and ambitiously than

his GAIMK predecessors. Mishulin perceived as a foundation for such general concept the notorious theory of the “slave revolution”, which he did his best to substantiate in his own works on Ancient Rome.

Mishulin’s claims of building the general concept of ancient history can be found in his editorials in “The Journal of Ancient History” (which he headed from 1937 as editor-in-chief), for instance in an article on preparing the Marxist university textbooks on antiquity. This enterprise seemed to him not only highly important but also necessarily collective in its realization, backed with a carefully drafted plan and a detailed distribution of specific missions between the members of a team [Mishulin, 1938]. Another enterprise opening similar possibilities but more difficult to monopolize was preparing the academic “World History”, the plan of which was laid out in the late 1930s. The archive material of this project still waits for its explorer, who will perhaps answer if the delays in preparing this text were not caused, among the other things, with divergences between Mishulin and his opponents belonging to the academic tradition<sup>4</sup>. One more issue worth a special research is Mishulin’s striving to create his own school: among his post-graduate students one should notice P.N. Tarkov, whose works seem a well-considered and rather intelligent attempt to extrapolate the theory of the “slave revolution” on the situation in Hellenistic Mediterranean of the late 3rd and early 2nd centuries B.C. (e.g. [Tarkov, 1950]). It seems that the contribution by Tarkov was for Mishulin one of the “bricks”, of which the whole “edifice” of the Marxist Classical antiquity or even of the entire Marxist ancient history must have been built; however, this stratagem could be successful only with having most scholars of antiquity active at that time to mould such “bricks” in a sufficient quantity.

Mishulin did not have such opportunity: he neither headed a structure comparable to former GAIMK in the magnitude of its activities, nor had numerous students, nor gained a support to his plot from colleagues, especially from those representing the traditional academic scholarship. It is not by chance that his above-mentioned editorial was critical of not only the specific textbooks on the Ancient Orient by V.V. Struve and on Ancient Greece by V.S. Sergeev but also of the very idea of a textbook written by a single author. These authors (the textbook on Ancient Rome was also written by N.A. Mashkin) were loyal towards the Marxist method (Sergeev and Mashkin particularly committed themselves to elaborating the theory of the “slave revolution” [Krikh, 2013, pp. 126-127, 129-130, esp. n. 254]) but at the same time they kept to the spectrum of themes classical for the academic research of antiquity; and their textbooks seemed to prove the possibility on an effective synthesis of both trends. Such “synthesis” was welcome in the times of the “Stalinist empire style” of 1940s, with its already distinct turn towards traditional

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<sup>4</sup> This article already complete, S.G. Karpyuk kindly sent to its author the drafts of two articles on this theme coauthored by him and S.B. Krikh. It is too premature to discuss them here but they will only serve a general introduction to this vast material.

values. The publications by these scholars were viewed at that time not merely as university textbooks but as works of scholarship and seemed to be founded on coherent Marxist concepts; their mere existence disproved for any third-party observer the need to build of various “bricks” the “building” of the Marxist ancient history contemplated by Mishulin. The hostility towards textbooks prepared by single authors was kept for a long time by Mishulin and, after his death in 1947, by his pupils (see, *e.g.*, a review of Mashkin’s textbook on Ancient Rome: [Tarkov, 1951]); but practically they were able only to hinder for a while the re-edition of some of them (for instance, in 1944 Mishulin instigated a negative discussion of Mashkin’s textbook on Ancient Rome in the party’s Central Committee [Mashkin, 2006, p. 658]) and later to fray as much as they could the nerves of their authors (see, *e.g.*, about the discussion of Sergeev’s re-published textbook on Ancient Greece at the time of the notorious “anti-cosmopolite campaign” of 1949: [Bugaeva and Ladynin, 2016]). In 1952, on the background of the new ideological tightening, the editorial of “The Journal of Ancient History” showed a prospect of still unwritten volumes of the “World History” on antiquity [Editorial, 1952]. Symptomatically, this prospect did not mention directly the “slave revolution” but only spoke of the importance of the class struggle (notably, of Spartacus’ rebellion and of the rebellions of slaves and colons in the late antiquity), though the integrating idea of the edition was still delineating stages in the evolution of slavery. But the realization of Volumes I-II of “The World History” dealing with the antiquity was considerably closer to the classical scholarship (see on the role of S.L. Utchenko in preparing Volume II of “The World History”: [Pavlovskaya, 2000]). In fact Mishulin and his supporters, like their predecessors from GAIMK though not so fatally to themselves, lost a chance to shape a coherent Marxist concept of ancient history.

## **Section 2**

### **From Aporias to a New Paradigm? Changes in the Methodology of the Soviet Historians of Antiquity in 1950-1980s**

The death of Stalin in March 1953 brought a drastic change to the entire situation in the Soviet society and in the humanitarian scholarship as well. In 1950s such outstanding scholars of antiquity as K.K. Zelyin, E.M. Shtaerman, S.L. Utchenko revealed themselves in large-scale publications. At the same time or few years later schools of Classical research appeared outside the metropolitan cities (see, *e.g.*, about the Kazan’ school: [Almazova, 2016]). Moreover, in the situation of 1950s, especially in their second part after the 20th Congress of the Communist Party, it became possible to propose cooperation between the Soviet and foreign historians of

antiquity and event to put a question of organizing Soviet historical institutes abroad (see about the proposals of Soviet orientalists to launch such structure in Egypt allied at that time with the USSR: [Timofeeva, 2016]).

The other side of this change of mood was the personal desire of a number of historians to find for their research a methodological guidance autonomous from the official ideology. Creating a research method is, to say the least, a hard job not within the powers of anyone. It seems that a quite original method opening wide research opportunities was proposed within the Soviet scholarship of antiquity only by the Leningrad (St. Petersburg) school of Egyptology [Ladynin, 2008, pp. 237, 240-244, 246-249, 254-257]. Its patriarch Yuri Perepyolkin defended his habilitation thesis and started publishing his monographic works only in 1960s but it is commonly known that a great part of them was written much earlier, still in 1940s (cf. [Ladynin, 2008, pp. 240-249, 254-256]. The St. Petersburg Egyptologists (after Perepyolkin also O.D. Berlev and E.S. Bogoslovski) proposed an ingenious theory of non-identity between the modern and ancient mentalities based on a complex analysis of basic categories of the Ancient Egyptian mind. Its great advantage was, in fact, its idiosyncrasy for the modish theories of structuralism and aspiration to explain the acts of ancient mind without recurring to a presumption that it lacked logic or that its logic was somehow alien to modern. However, most scholars had to balance themselves between the classical and contemporary research methods (e.g., the French *Annales* school in medieval studies, the above-mentioned structuralism in anthropology and sometimes in the studies of antiquity) and the methodology of Marxism. A new interest towards it was stimulated by a conviction widely spread after 1956 that the Stalinist rule perverted the true principles of the Communism, to which one had to return; hence a special attention to writings by Marxist classics, which were out of focus in the Soviet propaganda and seemed therefore a well of uncontaminated methodological truth. But the literal perception of Marxist categories or their irrelevant use brought a number of scholars (perfectly honest in their personal motives) to inevitable and insurmountable aporias.

In a way one might define as an aporia the theory of “slave revolution”, *i.e.* extrapolating a model of transition between “socio-economic formations”, which was drafted for the boundary between the Middle Ages and the modern time, on a similar boundary between the antiquity and the Middle Ages. However, forwarding this theory was largely a ramp-up of quasi-research constructs around Stalin’s occasional quotation; and the personal motives of too many its creators can, to say the least, be questioned. Probably the simplest example of an aporia forwarded by an undoubtedly honest historian is a paradoxal idea of E.M. Shtaerman about the formation of state in Ancient Rome not before the end of the Republic and the start of the Principate [Shtaerman, 1989]. Though reproaching one of her opponents of a “limited

knowledge” of the “*istmat* (historical materialism – I.L.) theory” («мой уважаемый оппонент знаком с “теорией истмата” лишь в самых скромных пределах» [Shtaerman, 1990, p. 74]), the scholar could not deny that she herself relied upon Lenin’s postulate, once canonized by GAIMK, about the emergence of state only on the basis of class antagonism (Shtaerman referred not to the lecture “On State” but to Lenin’s polemic with *narodnik* N.M. Mikhailovski and to his conspectus of Engels’ writings [Shtaerman, 1989, p. 86, n. 30; 87, n. 34] but this did not change matter much). To undermine this postulate (which the Soviet scholarship has already been prepared to do by the late 1980s, when Shtaerman spoke out her idea) was quite enough for bringing down the entire construct based on it. Shtaerman’s idea about the plurality of socio-economic forms in the Roman society [Shtaerman, 1969], unlike the sophism about state, must be true: but in the Marxist theory the large stages of human history were defined by the “modes of production”, each of them founded on one prevailing form of economic relations (slavery, feudal rent, wage labour) [Marx, 1987, p. 263]. The assertion that the Roman economy from the 2nd century B.C. to the 2nd century A.D. embraced both slavery and rent modes of exploitation, their proportion furthermore varying quite rapidly and sharply, used Marxist terms but somewhat diluted the notion of the “mode of production” basic for Marxism.

The most far-fetching historiographic aporia of the post-Stalinist time seems to be the famous second discussion about the “Asiatic mode of production” in 1960s [Chesneaux, Parain and Suret-Canale, 1967; Dunn, 1982, pp. 77-120]. The partisans of this term (attractive due to its apocryphal use in Marx’s writings) tried to show the early emergence at the Orient of either a quite specific “socio-economic formation”, or a combination of slavery and rent exploitation, or the “eternal feudalism” (see annotation of the views expressed: [Sawer, 1977, pp. 100-103; Diakonoff, 1989, vol. 1, pp. 13-17; Diakonoff and Kohl, 1991, pp. 9-13]). Their opponents showed (fairly enough, from the viewpoint of Marxist terminology in its correct use) that the a “mode of production” could be postulated only due to the presence of a specific form of exploitation in its base: there was no reason to postulate an “Asiatic mode of production” if there had existed no form of exploitation at the Orient other than slavery, rent or waged labour [Nikiforov, 1977, p. 34]; and these forms of exploitation seen in different combinations (indeed, not only at the Orient) should be treated as themselves and not as “new”, yet unknown “mode(s) of production” [Nikiforov, 1977, p. 40-46].

Finally, a virtually unnoticed aporia is the interpretation of Hellenism by K.K. Zelyin as not a historical stage but an “idiographic”, situationally specific phenomenon of synthesis between the Greek and Oriental components in economy, politics and culture [Zelyin, 1955]. Without going into details, it can be said that the scholar wanted (rightly) to disprove the definition of Hellenism as a stage in the evolution of the slave-owning mode of production forwarded by

A.B. Ranovich and some other scholars [Krikh, 2013, pp. 140-165]; but he relied on Marxist assumption that a large historical stage can be distinguished only due to changes in socio-economic basis (specifically, in the forms of exploitation) and thus ultimately abandoned (wrongly) the notion of Hellenism as a stage or an epoch. Taking for a criterion of this historical change the evolution of the Greek civil community (*polis*) would have given quite another result (cf. the statement by L.P. Marinovich that at the time of Hellenism “polis ceases to be a subject of history and becomes its object” («...Полис перестает быть субъектом истории и превращается в ее объект»): [Marinovich, 1993, p. 212]), all the more so as even the supporters of Zelyin could not avoid mentioning Hellenism as a chronological, i.e. stadial, phenomenon (cf. [Surikov, 2015, p. 20]).

The destiny of these concepts was different. The hypothesis of Zelyin was accepted by the academic historiography; the hypothesis of Shtaerman concerning the time of the state formation in Rome was forwarded too late (nearly at the end of the Soviet period) to cause a reflection in its own Marxist categories; and the second discussion on the “Asiatic mode of production” caused a disfavor of the authorities as an attempt to build a large-scale historical concept autonomous from the official scheme, alternative to it and nevertheless Marxist in its form. In fact, similar petition of autonomy was met severely in the cases of the first discussion on the “Asiatic mode of production” and of the GAIMK activities (see above). Nevertheless all these constructs did not conceal in themselves lost opportunities of building a coherent and adequate concept of ancient history based on Marxist postulates. Sincerity and the search for an alternative to the official ideology did not help to solve the task once failed by the loyal and orthodox leaders of GAIMK and A.V. Mishulin.

However, in the late Soviet period of 1960-1980s there appeared a number of *longue durée* schemes, which claimed explanation to large-scale historical processes of antiquity. It is instructive to observe the work of S.L. Utchenko at building his concept of crisis in Rome of the 1st century B.C. He viewed this process as the transformation of the Roman civil community (*civitas*) into the state of another type (regional and eventually multiregional), and its turning point was the Social War, the “awesome rebellion of the Italian peasantry” («грандиозное восстание италийского крестьянства») [Utchenko, 1965, pp. 29-32, 132, 135-136]. This concept seems adequate; but Utchenko did his best to formulate it in Marxist terms and therefore defined this process as “social revolution”. The incorrectness of this definition from the viewpoint Marxism is clear: in its categories a “social revolution” is a way to overcome a conflict between the developing productive forces and the social relations of production that lag behind [Marx, 1987, p. 263]. With a series of quotations from Marxist classics Utchenko tried to reason that the contradiction between free peasantry and elite in the Roman society was a motor

of its development much more than the contradiction between slaves and slave-owners [Utchenko, 1965, pp. 146, 154]. However, his construction passed over the question what sort of transformation in the social relations occurred as a result of the Social War. Utchenko made it clear that he treated the term “revolution” wider than its traditional meaning of a momentary or, at least, relatively short occurrence bringing a complete change in a “mode of production” [Utchenko, 1965, pp. 24-29]. However, one should not ignore that the contradiction between the Italics and the Romans were political rather than economic and, anyway, did not form what a Marxist would call a “class antagonism”. Thus, the term “social revolution” in Utchenko’s concept was a tell-tale symbol rather than an adequate term. Utchenko actually built a concept not quite alternative to the Marxist paradigm but hardly coherent with its major categories in their precise meaning.

Utchenko’s scheme is inferior in its magnitude to two other schemes, which took their final shape in the Soviet historiography of antiquity by 1980s and, taken together, could, without exaggeration, claim explaining historical processes of antiquity in their totality. One of them was the concept of the “ways of development” of the early ancient societies formulated by I.M. Diakonoff in its main parts solely, though reposed on the wide experience of Soviet Oriental research (mostly carried out by Diakonoff’s colleagues at Leningrad/St. Petersburg in 1960-1980s). In a year’s term after this concept was presented in a well-argued and obliging form [Diakonoff, Jacobsohn, 1982; *cf.* Diakonoff, 1989, pp. 5-30; Diakonoff and Kohl, 1991, pp. 27-66] there appeared a collective work devoted to Archaic and Classical Greece: it summed up the experience of studies in the evolution of the Greek *poleis* in the First Millenium B.C., till the eve of Hellenism and actually formulated the scheme of this process [Golubtsova, 1983]. The determinant in Diakonoff’s concept was the interrelation between the state and the communal “sectors” of economy, their proportion in each region of the Ancient Near East depending on the geographical and ecological situation. The authors of the collective monography on Ancient Greece gave the determining role to the evolution of *poleis* itself, which also depended on material factors (in the first place, on the progress of production and of the interregional integration in the Mediterranean). As a matter of fact, the processes of the *polis* evolution and of the development of slavery were firstly “separated” from one another in the Soviet research much earlier by O.V. Kudryavtsev in connection to the problem of the *polis*’ crisis in the 4th century B.C. [Kudryavtsev, 1954]; shortly after that this approach was accepted in Volume II of “The World History” dealing with Ancient Greece and Rome, due to the efforts of S.L. Utchenko. Quite importantly, Diakonoff’s judgement that the emergence of *polis* in Greece regularly followed the catastrophe of the Mycenaean society (“third way of development” of the early ancient societies) on the brink of the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages [Diakonoff,

Jacobsohn, 1982, p. 11-13] opened a possibility for the integration of these two schemes, each of them grand-scale in itself.

Their integration was facilitated also by the fact that their creators were unanimous in considering the existence of the rural communities in their different forms the major feature of the ancient history. The postulate that free commoners were the third class in ancient societies, not less but more important than slaves, was a point of consensus for the Soviet researchers of antiquity since at least 1960s (see its formulation in a paper delivered at the 13th International Congress of Historical Science, symptomatically, by Diakonoff and Utchenko in collaboration: [Diakonoff and Utchenko, 1970]). Accepting this thesis made the research of ancient slavery also more precise and detailed: actual result of the academic series “Studies in the History of Slavery in the Classical World” published in 1960-1970s was stating that this form of exploitation was preponderant not even in all the societies of the Graeco-Roman world [Frolov, 1999, p. 412; Heinen, 2010, p. 125]. Diakonoff’s considerations on the typology of the exploitation forms at the Ancient Near East, despite the eye-catching term “helot” that he introduced, looked bleak and not unimpeachable [Diakonoff, 1973; *cf.* the criticism of the so-called “enlarged” interpretation of the term “slave”: Neronova, 1992, p. 111-123, 279-281] compared to his own scheme of the “ways of development”, where the role of the modes of exploitation was subordinate. It seems quite legitimate to say that in the late Soviet research there occurred a “shift” of the determining factor in the historical process of antiquity: one recognized for it the evolution of rural communities not together with the evolution of exploitation forms and the class struggle but rather *instead* of them. This shift was not given a reflection it really deserved neither in Soviet, nor in post-Soviet historiography; however, it is hard to overrate its importance. As a matter of principle, one might ask if it is legitimate to consider Marxist the research accepting as a determinant of the historical process the evolution of rural communities. The point is not only that this approach rejects this role to the forms of exploitation and the class struggle as such; but the disintegration of rural community still in antiquity, as a result of the emerging private property and social conflicts was a commonplace of the Marxist theory postulated by its classics quite distinctly (see, *e.g.*, “The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State” by Engels: [Engels, 1990, pp. 264-268]) and having once played an important role in Struve’s theory of the “slave-owning” society at the Ancient Orient [Krikh, 2013, pp. 94-96]. The revision of this basic postulate could be decorated by whichever fitting quotations; but those who committed it had to realize better the nature of their manipulation! Certainly, this “apostasy from Marxism” needed no regrets: when it took place the Soviet historiography was as close as ever to building up an integrate and internally coherent scheme of the ancient history,

which did not deny the definitive role of material factors in its process but finally rejected their vulgar treatment.

## **Conclusion**

Summing up the contents of this paper, one is entitled to say that the present-day Russian historians of antiquity have every reason not to reject the heritage they have got from at least the last three decades of the Soviet research. It can be seen that an integral scheme of the ancient history that would consequently and correctly employ the categories of the Marxism was not created neither by the ideologically-biased scholarship, nor by researcher seeking an alternative to it. Most probably, it just could not be created. A general scheme of ancient history had a chance to appear in the Soviet scholarship only when in 1960-1980s it took a boldness and a liberty to make considerable corrections to original Marxist axioms. This period in the Soviet historiography of antiquity was also important because in this time it was considerably modernized due not only to methodological corrections but also to the recommencement of ties with the world scholarship. As for the lean of the Soviet research to the socio-economic problems and drafting the schemes of historical process, it is important to realize that this trend was predefined in the 20th century not just with the emergence of Marxism. The Russian scholarship would not avoid this lean (though it might have caused less extremities and victims and employ other research categories), whatever turn the history of this country would have taken. To make sure of this one have just to recall the name and the works of Rostovtsev.

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