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Columella in Russian culture. Notes on *Sangermanensis* (St. Petersburg Cl. lat. F. v. 1)

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Abstract

These pages offer a preliminar collection of facts and data about the presence in Russian Culture of Columella's *De re rustica*, starting with the history of the carolingian codex preserved in the Library of St. Petersburg (Cl. lat. F. v. 1; olim Cod. Sangermanensis Petropolitanus 207), transferred to this city by Pyotr Petrovich Dubrovsky shortly after the French Revolution, and providing an account and primary introduction to significant Russian translations and studies on the Roman agronomist drawn up by both revolutionaries and enemies of the October Revolution.

Keywords

Columella's reception; Classical Tradition in Russia; St. Petersburg Cl. lat. F. v. 1; History of Agronomy

In these pages we use the actual name of the National Library of Russia of Saint Petersburg, avoiding the confussion of different names of the city: Petrograd (1914–1924), Leningrad (1924–1991), aswell of the Library: Imperial Public Library (until 1917), Russian Public Library (until 1925), Saltykov-Schedrin State Public Library (until 1992), National Library of Russia (from 1992–). I am indebted to Igor Demidenko for the translation of the Russian-language bibliography cited in this study.

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Johann Gottlob Schneider was the last of Columella's European editors in a position to collate the *codex celeberrimus, omnium antiquissimus* in Paris, shortly before the French Revolution, without having to travel to the icy reaches of the Baltic. This Carolingian codex is still considered one of the best, as well as oldest manuscripts on Roman agronomy.[1] From the 9th to the 17th centuries the manuscript was housed in the Cistercian abbey of Corbie in Northern France. But it was in Paris, in another monastery, Saint-Germain-des-Prés,[2] that the manuscript was wrenched from the tranquility of the cloisters and subjected to the vicissitudes first of the French Revolution, then the Russian Revolution of 1917.[3]

These pages attempt to draw some attention to the fortunes in Russian culture of a Latin author whose history of reception is not too well known, indeed, in the West.[4]

1. Pyotr Petrovich Dubrovsky (1754–1816): robber or rescuer? The survival of a carolingian codex in revolutionary Russia

In August 1794, Schneider's codex of 'extraordinary quality and perfection' lay in the road, next to the abbey of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, then transformed into the Germain saltworks, while close by, most of the 49,387 or so printed works and 7,072 manuscripts housed in the abbey were being consumed by fire. It was no coincidence that Pyotr Petrovich Dubrovsky was found there acquiring a set of Carolingian manuscripts of incalculable value. Nor was it by chance that the Russian bibliophile was present precisely when books were looted from the Bastille, from among which he chose, and thus saved

1 Saint Petersburg, National Library of Russia, Cl. lat. F. v. 1 (*olim* Cod. Sangermanensis Petropolitanus 207). Schneider (1794: fl. 11, 13, 14, ff.) is unstinting in his praise of the *auctoritas libri Sangermanensis*: 'tanta est libri praestantia, tanta lectionum probitas et ueritas!', he reiterates in the *Praefatio*.

2 Ironically, the Columella codex and other works were moved from Corbie by order of Cardinal Richelieu in 1638 (in the context of the war between Spain and France) in order to protect them from the Spanish troops under the command of Cardinal-Infant Ferdinand of Austria that had threatened the region since 1636.

3 See Antonets (2005: pp. 168–221); Cfr. Bleskina (2011). In the bibliography produced in the West concerning the manuscript transmission of Columella's *De re rustica* and the reception history of the Roman agronomist, one finds only very brief allusions to the adquision of the *Sangermanensis* by the Russian Pyotr Petrovich Dubrovsky, and reference to only two articles published in Russia on the Carolingian manuscript, written by Josef Trotsky shortly after Red October 1917: Schneider (1974); Ash (1941); Forster & Heffner (1954); Forster & Heffner (1955); Saint-Denis (1969); Richter (1981–1983); Rodgers (2010). See also Brown (1976: pp. 173–193); García Armendáriz (2003).

4 Reitz (2013) offers some brief information about the reception of Columella, while Schindler (2012) only provides a few pages and fails to mention either the Roman author's impressive diffusion in Russian culture or important European translators and interpreters. Consider the abundance of information found in studies such as, in the case of Spain, the remarkable *Columela en España* by García Armendáriz (1995) and the volume of studies collected by Maestre Maestre et al. (1997), or, in Portugal, the translation of *De re rustica* by the poligraph and humanist Fernando Oliveira, who was interested in finding out which was the best wood for shipbuilding (as attested by his works *Ars nautica* and *Livro da Fabrica das naos*). See the edition of this translation, with study and notes in Tarrío (2021), with further relevant literature on the subject.

some of the most beautiful and valuable incunabula and printed books, now housed in the National Library in St. Petersburg.

A few years later (1800) the *Sangermanensis* arrived in St. Petersburg, in Dubrovsky's baggage, a miraculous fugitive from the 'hecatomb of the books' unleashed by the Jacobin decree of 2 November 1789.[5] Through this decree, Church property passed into the hands of the nation, a nation, however, without the means to manage their wholesale plunder. The task fell to revolutionaries, who were clearly overwhelmed by the entire business.

Charles-Gilbert Romme, who had founded the Club des Amis de la Loi in 1790, had in his possession the inventories of the Ancien Régime and was responsible for managing the collections, and was accompanied in his meetings by an 18-year-old Russian student. This young man, then living in Paris under the pseudonym Paul Otcher, was in fact Pavel Alexandrovich Stroganov (1774–1817), the son of the enlightened Count and Freemason Alexander Stroganov. The Count had chosen Romme to instruct his son, who was born in Paris, the godson of the future Tsar Paul I. Thanks to his tutor, with his father's approval he had been educated according to the principles of Rousseau's *Emile*. However, when his teacher rose through the ranks to become an exalted Jacobin leader, the young man was sent off to Russia (September 1790) on the orders of Empress Catherine II and his alarmed father, who no doubt pondered the difference between his reading of Rousseau as an enlightened aristocrat *à la page* and the more practical reading of his 'friend' Romme.[6] The Russian embassy in Paris must certainly have played an active role in the expeditious resolution of the thorny case of the would-be revolutionary aristocrat.

Working in the embassy at the same time was secretary Pyotr Petrovich Dubrovsky, an avid bibliophile with a keen knowledge of palaeography. Dubrovsky had worked as a manuscript copyist in the Russian Orthodox Church in Paris before becoming a secretary in the Russian embassy, a post that allowed him to travel to various European countries, including Spain and Portugal, thus expanding his manuscript treasures. Although we do not have documentary evidence, it is plausible that Otcher/Stroganov could have provided Dubrovsky with access to the inventories and information about the dates of the requisitions to the abbeys in Paris, thanks to his familiarity with Romme, at the very heart of Jacobin power.

In any case, in those dramatic and confused years, a lover of ancient books was able to intervene and preserve works that might otherwise have been burned in the revolutionary fires. Leaving the anonymous monastic environment for the personal library of an enlightened bibliophile, the Columella codex, along with other Carolingian manuscripts from Corbie, acquired a new significance. Pyotr Petrovich Dubrovsky was particularly interested in testimonies of the various Latin scripts of Western Europe from the 5th to the 18th centuries, as well as in illuminated manuscripts.[7]

5 See Hessel (1950); Riberette (1970); Polastron (2007: pp. 112, 116 and ff).

6 See Frede (2015: pp. 70–100; 74).

7 The valuable collection of biblical manuscripts, such as the eighth-century Irish Gospel and the tenth-century Sacramental, was studied by Olga Dobiash-Roschdestwenskaja (1874–1939), librarian of the Imperial Library in St. Petersburg. Attention should be drawn to the precious parchment manuscript of 1498 with

However, the closure of the embassy in Paris as a result of the Revolution and the dismissal of the officials by Catherine's heir, Tsar Paul, left the new owner of the codex without financial resources abroad. And so, in January 1800, the *Sangermanensis* left for the capital of the Tsars. For the next five years the *codex* was housed in the modest home of its impoverished curator, until, in 1805, Alexander Sergeyevich Stroganov (the father of the young revolutionary of Paris), restored Dubrovsky to his diplomatic post and appointed him as a keeper of the so-called "manuscripts depot" of the Imperial Library. Dubrovsky was then responsible for the first inventory of 11,000 manuscripts in Zaluski's Polish collection[8] and the first inventory of his own collection, which was not preserved. After the death of Count Stroganov in 1811, the new director, Olenin, dismissed him from his post. The man who had provided the Library with the most valuable part of his collection died in penury, but was at least close to his beloved manuscripts, in 1816.[9]

The transference of this treasure stemmed from an individual's love of manuscripts, but it goes beyond that. It can be seen as a rescue from the ruins of a Paris burned and despoiled by violent mobs. Nikolay Karamzin (1766–1826) left us a valuable contemporary testimony in his diaristic writings, describing his sense of the end of the civilised world and the unrecognisable state of the French metropolis.[10]

In 1903, the Imperial Library authorised the transfer of the Columella codex from St. Petersburg to Munich to be used in the preparation of the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*. Following the advice of Ludwig Traube, renowned paleographer and Professor of Latin Philology, the American archaeologist Albert Van Buren travelled from Rome, where he was studying, examined it, obtained reproductions and published the article 'The Text of Columella' in 1905. He also commented on Lundström's slowness in editing the Columella. In fact, the monumental Nordic work on Columella would only be completed in 1968.

By 1910, the codex had returned to St. Petersburg. That year, Antonio Staerk, who had spent seven years studying the Latin manuscripts of the Dubrovsky collection, published his study in French, thus providing Western philologists with his description and new reproductions, as mentioned by Lindsay in his 1913 review. Of course, no one could foresee that the codex would again be in grave danger, in the midst of the devastation and

105 beautiful miniatures of the *Roman de la Rose* by Lorris & Meung, now kept in the Hermitage for its value for the history of painting, together with other manuscripts of importance because of their owners (such as the Bible of the French King Charles IX); see Thompson (1984) and Logutova (2001). This collection includes other specimens that reveal both his intellectual concerns and his network of friends, for example, the beautifully illustrated codex of Titus Livius, given to him by the widow of J. J. Rousseau after the philosopher's death.

8 The Zaluski Library was part of the spoils resulting from Russia's defeat of the Polish General Zaluski.

9 In 1852 Nicholas I ordered the transfer of part of the Public Library's collection to the Museum of the Book at the Hermitage. In 1861 it was returned to the Public Library. In 2005 a large exhibition of illustrated manuscripts was held at the Hermitage: See Yaroslavtzeva (2012: p. 77); cf. Voronova (1981); Luizova (1952).

10 N. Karamzin published a miscellany of his diaries in two volumes entitled *Aglaia I (1794) and Aglaia II (1795)*. See also Figes (2002: p. 67).

violence following another Revolution,[11] the October Revolution of 1917. The Columella codex again managed to survive, this time gaining a new surname: *Sangermanensis Lenipolitanus* ms. Lat 1.

It then attracted the attention of Aleksandr Iustinovich Malein (1869–1938), philologist, bibliographer, member of the Academy of Sciences and Professor of classical philology, who, between 1924 and 1930, founded the Manuscripts and Rare Books Department of the Library of the Academy of Sciences.[12]

In 1928, the codex was the subject of an analysis by Joseph Moisievich Trotsky[13] (1897–1970), a classical philologist who worked at the University of Leningrad and also at the National Library. His article, submitted to the Academy of Sciences was critical of Schneider's work, pointing out several problematic *loci* in Book V of Columella's treatise and questioning the German philologist's choices in the light of the best *lectiones* of the *Sangermanensis*.[14] This study was presented under the patronage of Sergei Aleksandrovich Zhebelev (1867–1941), a member of the Academy of Sciences since 1927 and the Leningrad Institute of Material History, who was under attack for not strictly aligning himself with Marxist sociological imperatives.[15] Trotsky's *Critical Notes on Book V of Columella's De re rustica* were still strictly philological, which in the following years would become unfeasible, given the enormous pressure suffered by historians of antiquity towards Marxist orthodoxy. In 1928, other colleagues who specialised in antiquity at this university, reluctant to accept the official impositions, had already gone into exile in the West, such as the famous M. I. Rostovtsev, who had done so in 1918 and became a tenured Professor at Yale University in the United States.

Trotsky/Tronsky was not a historian but a linguist, a specialist in the Latin and Greek languages and in Indo-European studies, as is clear from his work before and after the feverish decades of the 1920s and 1930s.[16] But in that early period of his academic life, the study of Columella, of Latin authors in general, and even his own teaching as a classical

11 An impressive narrative on this period, with useful bibliography in Figes (1997).

12 Malein published a study of textual criticism on the *De re rustica*, which describes and extols the virtues of this manuscript (Malein 1924). He participated in the preparation of the *International Catalogue of Foreign Incunabula* of this Library, and of the *Catalogue of Books from the time of the French Revolution*, which was published in Berlin. He was also the translator of other Latin authors (Lucretius, Apuleius, Martial, Juvenal, Catullus and Titus Livy), along with Thomas More's *Utopia* (1937) as well as the author of several studies on Latin and Greek literature. See Graham (1986: pp. 42–51).

13 This classical philologist signed later work as Tronsky, probably following the fall from grace of his Bolshevik namesake.

14 Trotsky (1928: pp. 115–120). In another study of 1927 (Trotsky 1927) he had already drawn attention to the virtues of the codex for the critical edition of the Latin author in a comparative analysis of the ancient testimony preserved in his city with later editions, including humanistic ones. Trotsky had already received an extraordinary prize in 1918 for his work *Cicero on Art*.

15 Historian and archaeologist of antiquity, Professor of Ancient History at the University of St. Petersburg since 1904, Zhebelev was also a translator of Plato, Aristotle and other ancient philosophers into Russian. After being subjected to enormous pressure, Zhebelev wrote a study on the serf rebellion in Southern Russia. See Krih & Metel (2018: pp. 34–35); Graham (2015: pp. 106 and ff.).

16 Trotsky graduated in 1919 from the University of Odessa and moved to what was still known as Petrograd in 1923 to work at the Institute of Comparative History of Eastern and Western Literatures and Languages.

philologist came up against the harsh scrutiny of his interest in the materialist investigation of history.[17] His activity was suspended because the Soviet State considered classical subjects to be non-essential in the higher education of Russians until 1932 when a decree on the reform of higher education allowed the opening of the first Soviet Chair of Classical Languages and Literatures at the University of Leningrad, in which he collaborated and of which he was appointed a member in 1935.[18]

Although the presence of the Carolingian codex did not result in a critical Russian edition of *De re rustica*, Columella's work struck at the heart of the most serious problem of the Bolshevik Revolution: agriculture and peasantry.

2. Bolshevik Columella?

An anthological translation of the works of Cato, Varro, Columella and Pliny, under the title *On Agriculture*, was published in Leningrad and Moscow in 1937 in the series *Classics of Natural History*, compiled by the philologist and historian Mariya Yefimovna Sergeenko (1891–1987). She recalled later that this translation was initiated by the early 1920s, when she taught Latin to Nikolai Vavilov, who would enter prison in 1940 and die of starvation in 1942.[19]

A note undoubtedly authored by Sergeenko explains the history of the Carolingian codex of Columella and its value. She was also responsible for the choice of the best editions: for the first book, Lundström's edition, and for book III, Schneider's edition (in fact, it was not until 1955 that Josephson's work, which continued Lundström's work, was published).[20]

17 According to Krih & Metel (2018: p. 34), during the New Economic Programme period in the 1920s, researchers of antiquity enjoyed a certain freedom of choice of objects of study, which would end with the triumph of the Stalinist line. In this period it was possible to study the religious history of antiquity, for example, despite their limited financial means and limited publishing capacity. Towards the end of the 1920s, the subjugation of research to the Marxist vision became stricter. This is what Konchalovsky refers to in his memoirs, in relation to the Institute of History of the University of Moscow to which he belonged (*ibid.*: p. 31).

18 A biographical profile is provided by the Institute of Linguistic Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences [online available at www.iling.spb.ru; accessed 15.10.2022].

19 See Sergeenko (1987: pp. 141–142). She was a disciple of the classicist Mikhail Rostovtsev and the medievalist Ivan Grevs, who both worked on the agrarian history of Europe. Mariya Yefimovna Sergeenko combined her academic career at Leningrad University with work (between 1931–1934) at the Public Library, and from 1932 at the Institute of History of Science and Technology of the Academy of Sciences. She also participated in the collection *Agriculture in the Middle Ages*, published in 1936, co-ordinated by the medievalist Dobiash-Rozhdestvenskaya (1874–1939), who was responsible for a study of the medieval manuscripts of the Dubrovsky collection.

20 See Bursky (1937: p. 6). Sergeenko's translation was published under her own name in 1970. As a disciple of Rostovtsev – a very illustrious scholar, but dissident and fugitive – Mariya Sergeenko survived her problematic credentials in part thanks to this work on the agronomists. But unlike Trotsky/Tronsky, she undoubtedly had a vocation as a historian of the material life of the ancient world. Cfr. Zmud (2013: pp. 3–26); Ilizarov (2020: pp. 30–37).

However, when her translation was finally published, in 1937, it was preceded by an introduction, authored by Mechislav Iljich Bursky (1903–1944). This piece derived from his doctoral thesis, which had been presented at the Leningrad Academy of Sciences in 1935, with the title 'Agronomists of Ancient Rome', and for which he was granted the degree of Doctor of Agricultural Sciences.

The combination of direct experience of agricultural work with theoretical and bookish research and travels to farms in very different regions links this marxist historian with Columella himself: after fighting in the Red Army from 1921 to 1930, he had been a leader of a *sovkhoz* (state-owned farm) in the North Caucasus and trained simultaneously in the History of Archaeology and the Economics of Agricultural Sciences at the University of the North Caucasus. In 1927 and 1929 he had travelled to France, Germany, Austria and the USA to research on Western agricultural practices, studying at the Berlin Agricultural Academy and the University of California. Back in Leningrad, he had founded and headed the History of Agriculture section of the 'Institute of History of Science and Technology' at the Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union.[21]

Bursky does not hide his admiration for Columella, who emphasised the importance of rationalisation of land cultivation. Such a conviction underpinned the recently founded Institute of Agricultural Sciences under his direction. He stressed the importance attributed by Columella to economic investment in agriculture and his technological optimism about agricultural productivity.[22] At the same time, when dealing with the problematic question of the apparent progressive decrease in slave labour in Columella's time, resulting from the reduction of the wars of conquest, and the progressive introduction of colonization and semi-free forms of exploitation of the land, Bursky could not help speaking as an Agrarian Marxist: "As a clever old fox (Columella), he sought to make the work of slaves more productive".[23] In fact, he simply could not avoid the slave question, a commonplace in the writings of Russian scholars of Antiquity, in the sequence of Stalin's lecture to the Agrarian Historians on 27 September 1929, criticising the divide between academic production and agricultural reality.[24] Stalin's speech, delivered at the First Workers' Congress of the Advanced Kolkhozes of 1933, had defined all historical stages, all previous reform or revolution as successive forms of exploitation

21 He was author of several studies on the history of agriculture, animal husbandry, dairy farming and poultry farming in the United States, settling in Moscow as a member of the Soviet government (1931–1932), and vice-president of Lenin's Agricultural Academy (1932–1933). See biography provided by the 'National Heritage of Russia'.

22 Bursky (1937: pp. 45, 52–53).

23 Bursky (1937: pp. 55–56).

24 "The question of 'Slavery' was imposed as an obligatory subject for historians of antiquity. Zhebelev wrote a study on the serfs revolution in Southern Russia in order to advance in his academic career" (Krih & Metel 2018: pp. 109 and ff.). Of course, absent from the 1937 work is an important economic thinker who had already recently used Roman agronomists to think about the agricultural questions of his time, and specifically the Russian case: Max Weber, who had begun his career with the defence of a thesis on Roman agrarian history and who had already published in 1905 the works *The Situation of Bourgeois Democracy in Russia* and *The Transition of Russia to a Pseudo-Constitutional Regime* (Weber 1994). See Raskolnikoff (1975); Shteppa (1962: pp. 47–90); Strauss (1971: pp. 17–26, 65–92); Levin (1968); Wulff Alonso (1992: pp. 587–600); Wulff Alonso (1984).

of the workers, insisting on the idea of the insularity of the Russian experience, on its character as the absolute zero of history.[25]

The triumph of Stalinist axioms entailed a severe vigilance and distrust of every investigation dedicated to the landowners of the Roman Empire. However, the so-called New Economic Programme (NEP) implemented in the 1920s to cope with the post-war humanitarian disasters – largely derived from the Bolshevik aggression against the peasantry (famines, epidemics, mass mortality and a climate of civil war) – had made it possible to speak of productivity linked to the private and educated mastery of the land. But after Lenin's death, Stalin did not relent in his radical aggression against the peasant landowners.

The translation of Roman agronomists including Columella was published by an Institute under the Supreme Council of National Economy chaired by Bukharin, who had been relegated to this academic role since 1930 after opposing collectivisation and the grain requisitions ordered by Stalin in 1928. As leader of the NEP, he was in favour of a mixed economy with nationalisation of sources of production, but with private management remaining in agriculture. For all these reasons, he had been removed from the Soviet executive since 1929. But from the academy, with his printed opinions, he challenged Stalin to the point that in the same year as the publication of the translation of Columella, in 1937, he was shot after a farcical trial in the so-called Second Moscow Trials.[26]

After Bukharin's death, the Bursky Institute, which had sponsored his study and translation, was immediately shut down. Bursky himself died shortly afterwards, in 1943 or 1944, aged 41, denounced and sentenced by Stalin's ideologist Gregori Alexandrov to serve at the front in a punishment.[27]

Thus a Bolshevik wing of readers of the Roman agronomists disappeared, which does not fit the common image of a Bolshevik elite entirely divorced from and inimical to the peasants.[28]

25 "The history of countries knows many revolutions and they are all different from the October Revolution, because they all come from one point of view: one form of exploitation was changed for another form of exploitation, but the exploitation remained, some exploiters were changed for others, but the aim of exploitation remained. Only the October Revolution succeeded in eliminating all forms of exploitation and liquidating all kinds of exploiters. The revolution of the slaves liquidated the exploiters and eliminated all forms of the workers' slavery. But in their place appeared the colonists, i.e. new exploiters. During capitalism the law permitted unemployment, poverty and death", Stalin's speech, quoted in Krih & Metel (2018: p. 104) (transl. by Igor Demidenko).

26 At the head of the journal *Izvestia* during this period Bukharin also defended the creative freedom of writers in the USSR, interceding on behalf of various poets and intellectuals characterised by their extensive classical or Western culture, such as Osip Mandelstam. See Getty & Naumov (1999: p. 527).

27 Krih & Metel (2018: p. 67).

28 An impressive narrative of this war against the peasantry and its terrible consequences for the entire Russian population (a Bolshevik 'Defeat in victory') can be found in Figes (1997). However, this author does not consider the Bolshevik wing, which strove to study agronomic culture, its history, its world diversity and its possibilities of application in Russia.

3. Anti-Bolshevik Columella: Dmitri Petrovich Konchalovsky (1878–1952)

An earlier translation of Columella (1908), authored by Dmitri P. Konchalovsky, is cited in the study by C. A. Chebelev and S. I. Kovalyov 'The Ancient Method of Production according to Classical Sources. Literary, Epigraphic and Papyrological Testimonies on Social and Economic History of Ancient Greece, Hellenistic Period and Rome', a study promoted by the same Bursky Institute and published in 1933 by the Leningrad State Academy of History of Material Culture.[29]

This translator of Columella was the younger son of the writer, editor and translator Pyotr Petrovich Konchalovsky senior (1839–1904). In 1918 he started to teach at the Institute of History of Moscow University, where, between 1921 and 1929, he carried out research on Roman economic and legal history, relatively independent of the official orthodoxy, until the institute was closed down and the Marxist-Stalinist approach was imposed on all academic production.

However, Bursky, in his 1937 *Introduction* (p. 25), cites another study by Konchalovsky on a fully Columellian theme, published only a year after the Revolution, under the title *The Question of the Decline of Cereal Production in the Final Period of the Roman Republic* (1918).

If his Russian translation of Columella was respected and used, his interpretation of the Roman author and other ancient sources on agronomy differed from the imposed orthodoxy, focusing on a descriptive and conservative analysis of the characteristics of Roman agricultural methods.

In fact, citing Konchalovsky in 1933 and 1937 was possible, but four years later, his name could not be spoken out loud in German-occupied Russia, or throughout the Soviet period.[30] In the summer of 1941, Konchalovsky went to his *dacha* with his family in order to defect, working as a teacher for the German occupiers, under the pseudonym Soshalskiy, in Smolensk, a German-occupied Russian territory near the Belarusian border. In the spring of 1944, he became head of the Regional Committee of the National Socialist Party under the leadership of Bronislav Kaminsky, the famous Belarusian SS commander, decorated with the Iron Cross by Hitler himself.

Konchalovsky's work, some of it published in Paris and Oxford, some posthumously, reveals that this translator of Columella, a convict pan-Slavicist, was critical of the cult of Hitler and Rosenberg's erroneous historical vision, but was determined to instrumentalise the German occupation as a means of liberation from Bolshevik rule. Until his death in Paris in 1952, he remained active as an energetic anti-Soviet propagandist, apparently losing contact with the very important Konchalovsky/Michalkov family of writers, painters and artists.[31]

29 Cf. Krih & Metel (2018: p. 33).

30 Thus in the volume *Agronomists of Ancient Italy* (1970), a reprint of the translation of the Roman agronomists published by Bursky in 1933, there is no mention of Konchalovsky's translation.

31 Konchalovsky (1925; 1933; 1923, reprinted in 2009; 1969; 1970).

4. Columella in 1941: the siege of Leningrad

At the time when Konchalovsky defected, after the beginning of the terrible siege of Leningrad (8 September 1941) the *Sangermanensis* was again in grave danger, in the renamed Russian National Public Library, which continued to function during the nine hundred days of this siege, despite the destruction of hundreds of works and the fact that a quarter of the library staff died, most of them from starvation. If it is poignant to note from the records that more than 40,000 users survived the bombs and malnutrition, reading, it was a relief to classicists that the prudent measure of evacuating the most valuable specimens ensured their preservation, to this day.[32]

Very close to the Library, and one month after the beginning of the siege, on 11 November 1941, Joseph Moisievich Tronsky, author of the 1928 study on Columella mentioned above, was at the University of Leningrad defending his thesis, entitled *A History of Ancient Literature*. In the same year, Zhebelev, the scholar who had presented Tronsky's work on Columella, starved to death during the siege. Translator Mariya Yefimovna Sergeenko refused to be evacuated with the University and continued not only her academic but also her humanitarian work in besieged Leningrad. After the war she continued her studies on Roman agronomists and everyday life in Ancient Rome.[33]

The shift in the focus of Trotsky's thesis, from Columellian micro-analysis to what is presented as the first general Marxist history of Greek and Roman literature, speaks of the pressure of the times.[34] The thesis was submitted shortly after the political purges, during which the director of the National Library himself, Dobranitsky Mechislav Mijailovich (1882–1937), his wife and son, along with 35 other library staff members, had already been shot as counter-revolutionaries.

In the *Introduction* to Tronsky's *General History of Greek and Latin Authors*, the names of Marx and Engels appear to remind Russian readers that the ancient authors presented were exploiters of slaves. Columella's name simply disappears under the generic designation of 'agronomist authors', but his themes and ideas are massively and unambiguously paraphrased,[35] as in the part specifically devoted to literature in imperial times.[36]

Years later Trotsky/Tronsky published his thesis, which became one of the most widely reprinted manuals for the study of Latin literature throughout the Soviet era and beyond, as evidenced by its reissue in the 'School of Classical Philology' series in 2017, published by an editorial group linked to the Russian Academy of Sciences. His handbook contains an apologia for classical studies from a Marxist point of view that responds to

32 See Barashenkov et al. (1963: p. 318).

33 See Basargina (2021: pp. 346–369). She published in 1964 a *Life in Ancient Rome* and a revision and expansion of her first work in *Scientific Farmers of Ancient Italy* (1970). She also translated into Russian the works of Augustine, Eusebius and Tertullian, among other ancient authors.

34 However, his courses at the time of the evacuation of the University to Saratov during the war were the following: 1932–1934: *Problems of the Greek Literary Language*; 1935–1937: *Ancient Theories of Language and Stylistics* (later published in book form); 1937–1939: *Ancient Literary Theory*.

35 See Columella's considerations on the humane treatment of slaves. Col. *Res*. 1.8.15.

36 I was able to consult the last edition: Tronsky (2016: pp. 402 and ff.).

the climate of pressure, self-justification and self-defence of classical philologists in the Stalinist period, including a demonstration of the seminal role of the reading of ancient authors for the theoreticians of the Russian Revolution. The *Introduction* makes it clear that the study of Greek and Latin literature conforms to Marx and Engels' view of ancient society as one of the stages in the development of mankind, marked by the servile exploitation of human beings.[37]

Tronsky was a respected classicist, whose translation of the *Iliad* and a *Latin Grammar* came out in successive editions, and an internationally esteemed scholar, as can be seen in all his works and the international tributes to him, after the fall of the Soviet Union. Since 1998, a *Joseph M. Tronsky Memorial Annual International Conference* has been held at the Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg with an impressive international attendance.[38]

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After the Second World War, in the framework of the new pan-Soviet empire, the work on Roman agronomists did not end, although it was always understood as a patriotic service to the state and the socialist cause, deep-rooted in the official Marxist approach.[39]

Whereas the troubled survival of the Carolingian manuscript did not give rise to a new critical Russian edition of the *De re rustica*, the persistence and prestige of the Latin author in Russian culture, especially in the writings of the Bolshevik wing destroyed by Stalin, is impressive. Before, during and after the Stalinist terror and the tight state control over research and culture, Columella – like other classical authors – seems to have acted as an umbilical cord between Russia and the particular form of unity of *Civilisation* that the classical tradition can provide.[40]

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37 The bibliography excludes Western sources that might allow students access to a more contrasted view of the textbook, but includes a list of ancient authors available in Russian translation.

38 In the exceptional situation of the evacuation, with a considerable part of the academic staff of the University having moved to Saratov, he devised several courses on ancient literature. He is also the author of an *Historical Grammar of the Latin Language*, which is also an essential reference work for Russian students of the Latin language. See the volume Kazansky, N. N. (Ed.). (1998). *Classical languages and Indo-European languages. Studies dedicated to the 100th anniversary of Tronsky's birth*. St. Petersburg. Consider the last colloquium held at the Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg on 18–20 June 2018, still in memory of Tronsky. It was attended by world authorities in Historical Linguistics of Greek, Latin and the Indo-European languages and in the study of the Classical tradition, and published in two substantial volumes: Kazansky, N. N. (Ed.). (2018). *Indo-European Languages and Classical Philology. Proceedings of the International Conference in Memory of Professor Joseph M. Tronsky* (2 vols.). St. Petersburg.

39 See Krih & Metel (2018).

40 Here the term 'Civilisation' is understood in the sense of Brodsky's essay on Iosif Mandelstam (Brodsky 1986: pp. 23–144).

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