

PETR NIKITIN, THE DISCIPLE OF AUGUST NAUCK *

A. Nauck (1822 – 1892) settled in St. Petersburg in 1859, after his election to the Imperial Academy of Sciences and Humanities. He combined his scholarly activities with teaching and brought up an entire generation of classical scholars. Such prominent classicists as the epigraphist Vasilij Latyshev and papyrologist Victor Jernstedt were proud to call Nauck their teacher. However, the first place among Nauck's pupils belonged to Petr Nikitin. Nikitin was born in 1849 and died just before the Russian revolution, in 1916. He was a first-rate specialist in Ancient Greek and Byzantine literature, well known for his exceptional erudition and critical insight into interpretation of ancient texts. His works demonstrate the highest degree of philological ἀκρίβεια, which Nikitin considered to be “a capricious lady, for a Russian even a viperous one”.¹

For his philological skill, Nikitin was indebted mainly to the German philological school, which first influenced him during his student years in the St. Petersburg Institute of History and Philology. The Institute was founded in 1867, when the minister of public education count Dmitrij Tolstoj introduced the “classical system” of education in Russian gymnasia. The Institute's aim was to train teachers of Greek and Latin, and Nikitin was at the top of the list of the Institute graduates. His principal tutor was the great August Nauck, whose most gifted pupils aimed at achieving that level of knowledge which their teacher had acquired at Schulpforta, one of the most famous classical schools in Germany. According to Nikitin, that was the level “when abundant and thorough reading of works of Classical literature became a source of precept and delight”.² Nauck encouraged Nikitin to choose Greek philology as his main subject and enthused him with passion for tragic poetry, which became later one of Nikitin's main research areas. It was Nauck who persuaded Nikitin to try himself in the field of textual criticism.

After graduation, Nikitin completed his education in Leipzig with a two years scholarship. He attended the philological seminar of the famous

* I'm grateful to Igor S. Klochkov for improving the English of this paper.

¹ “Акрибия госпожа капризная, а для русского человека ехидная”: Saint-Petersburg Branch of the Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences. F. 777. Inv. 2. Act 311. Sheet 1. P. Nikitin to V. Rozen. 27.06.1894.

² П. В. Никитин, “Август Карлович Наук (некролог)” (P. V. Nikitin, “August Karlovich Nauck. Nekrolog”), *ЖМНП* (январь 1893) 32.

Friedrich Ritschl, who was not only a man of great erudition, but also an exceptionally engaging teacher. Nikitin adopted his main paedagogical principle: “lesen, viel lesen, sehr viel lesen, möglichst viel lesen”. Nikitin also attended lectures of Georg Curtius (1820–1885) on the history of Greek grammar. For better understanding of Greek dialectology, Nikitin decided to write a paper based on fresh epigraphic material, “On Ancient Cyprus dialect”, which was his first independent work.³ Nikitin’s master thesis “On the principles of criticism of Aeolic verses of Theocritus” also dealt with the Greek dialectology.⁴ Furthermore, he had a happy opportunity to study under Fr. H. Th. Fritzsche (1818–1878), a great expert on Theocritus, although sometimes he did not agree with ideas of the famous professor. Lectures of these prominent German professors had given Nikitin a lot of new material, which later became the basis of his own research.

On his return to Russia, Nikitin was appointed to a professorship at the Institute of History and Philology in Nezhin, the Ukraine. The institute was in the making: it had bought the library of F. Ritschl after his death in 1876.⁵

Quickly, Nikitin was promoted and moved to St. Petersburg University, where he first became professor, then a dean, and finally rector. He was invariably serious about his professor’s and rector’s responsibilities. His lectures were not easy to understand, but those who had endured the hardships of his severe schooling, as a rule became scholars themselves. Prominent classicists, such as M. I. Rostovtsev, S. A. Zhebelev, A. A. Vasiljev, F. I. Schmit considered Nikitin their teacher.

Professor addressed his audience invariably as ‘Dear Sirs’, even when dear sirs present at a special course would not outnumber two. Despite his generally earnest character, Nikitin loved animating his lectures with witty remarks in the English style, whilst keeping an absolutely straight face. He translated so fluently that all the students of the philological faculty listened to him with admiration. Students respected him and were particularly afraid of his sharp tongue. At the same time, his senior colleagues (F. F. Sokolov) nicknamed him “fair maiden” (“красна девица”) for his exceptional

³ П. В. НИКИТИН, “О древне-кипрском диалекте”, *ЖМНП* (июнь 1875) 69–106.

⁴ П. В. НИКИТИН, *Об основах для критики текста эолических стихотворений Феокрита* (Киев 1876).

⁵ Ritschl rendered Russian public education another important service. Being in sympathy with the educational reform in Russia he proposed in 1873 to found Russian philological seminary in Leipzig.

modesty and even shyness.⁶ Nikitin was regarded as a person of great authority at the university. Sokolov used to speak of Nikitin with sincere admiration, e. g. “Haven’t you heard of our P. V.’s last one?..” and to point out one of the scholar’s bright ideas regarding a text of an ancient author. He would also quote Nikitin’s witty observations.⁷

Nikitin’s most important work of this period was a doctoral dissertation, published in 1882 under the unpretentious title “Towards the history of dramatic competitions in Athens”.⁸ In fact, it was an almost comprehensive history of the competitions. This small book, all in all 200 pages, was divided into two parts: (1) a review of epigraphic documents on the history of the Attic dramatic contests, and (2) conclusions elucidating the curriculum and the order of the Athenian theatrical performances as well as the relations among the actors and dramatic poets. An interesting fact: many results of Nikitin’s study received a sudden support from Western scholars who had come to the similar conclusions unaware of Nikitin’s work.⁹ Subsequently, some of them would express a regret that they learned about the work of their Russian colleague only from Lugebil’s review.¹⁰ Nikitin wrote in Russian only, except when he occasionally wrote in Latin, though he knew that his works would not receive much response in the West. He did it on principle, in order to defend the competence of the Russian scholarship.

⁶ С. А. Жебелев, “Из университетских воспоминаний” (S. A. Zhebelev, “From the University reminiscences”), *Анналы* 2 (1922) 176.

⁷ С. А. Жебелев, “П. В. Никитин (некролог)” (S. A. Zhebelev, “P. V. Nikitin. Nekrolog”), *ЖМНП* (август 1916) 51.

⁸ П. В. Никитин, *К истории Афинских драматических состязаний* (СПб. 1882).

⁹ E. Rohde, “Scenica”, *RhM* 38 (1883) 251–292; A. Wilhelm, *Urkunden dramatischer Aufführungen in Athen*, mit einem Beitrage von G. Kaibel (Wien 1906).

¹⁰ E. g.: “Als ich 1883 in meinen Vorlesungen über das griechische Bühnenwesen das Ergebnis obiger Untersuchung mitgeteilt hatte, erfuhr ich durch einen Zuhörer, Mag. Schulz aus Russland, dass eine kurz vorher erschienene, russisch geschriebene Schrift von P. Nikitin, *Zur Geschichte der dramatischen Wettkämpfe in Athen* (St. Petersburg 1882), mit ähnlicher Argumentation zu demselben Resultat gelangt sei. Nach dem mir daraus Mitgetheilten verdiente die Schrift eine deutsche Bearbeitung”: J. Lipsius, “Bemerkungen über die dramatische Choregie”, *Berichte über die Verhandlungen der königl. sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig. Phil.-hist. Cl.* 37 (1885) 415 Anm. 1. Review by K. Lugebil: Paul (sic!) Nikitin, *Zur Geschichte der dramatischen Wettkämpfe in Athen 1882* (russisch), *Philologische Wochenschrift* Jahrg. 3 N 31/32 (1883). August, col. 961–968. See also: A. Müller, *Lehrbuch der Griechischen Bühnenalterthümer* = K. F. Hermann’s *Lehrbuch der Griechischen Antiquitäten* III. 2 (Freiburg 1886) 418.

In St. Petersburg, Nikitin had an opportunity to associate more closely with his teacher Nauck. In the 1880s, Nauck was a big name in academic circles, the fact admitted even by the city postmen who would often confuse the address of the academician Nauck (академик Нау́к) with that of the Academy of Sciences (Академия Нау́к). Following his teacher, Nikitin achieved excellent results in the critical treatment of numerous passages in Greek poetical and prosaic texts. When Henry Weil learnt that Nikitin proposed to put the verses 527–531 of Aeschylus’ “Persae” after verse 851, he agreed with the conjecture and introduced it into his edition of Aeschylus.¹¹

In 1888 three academicians (all Germans, O. Boehtlingk, A. Nauck and V. Radlov) nominated Nikitin as a candidate to the Academy of Sciences and Humanities. They hoped that this promotion would make his works more popular in the West.¹² Unfortunately, it did not happen.

Soon afterwards, A. Nauck made him an offer to take part in the preparation of the word index to *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*. Nauck undertook the work in 1889, just after the publication of the second edition. The aged editor did not dare to start the project without any assistance, because he was afraid that he would die before its completion. In his introduction to the index, Nauck wrote that only the support on the part of Nikitin, “collega eruditissimus et diligentissimus”, persuaded him to undertake this work.¹³ Material was collected by several philologists, mainly from St. Petersburg, and Nauck and Nikitin were the editors who verified it. Both editors came to an agreement to divide the work in equal parts, but Nauck had lost the sight of one eye, and the bulk of the work was done by Nikitin.

The index was published in 1892, just after the death of Nauck. In his papers, which were given to the Archives of the Academy of Sciences and Humanities, disciples of Nauck found some works that he had prepared for publication, including three poetical *Canons* of John of Damascus with a commentary. Nauck became interested in the *Canons* of John of Damascus while he was studying fragments of tragic poets. It was Nikitin who took care of the publication.¹⁴

¹¹ Eschyle, *Les Perses*, tr. par H. Weil (Paris 1884).

¹² SPb Branch of the Archives of the Russian Academy of Sciences. F. 1. Inv. 2. Act 3. Sheets 26–28.

¹³ *Tragicae dictionis index spectans ad tragicorum Graecorum fragmenta ab Augusto Nauck edita* (Petropoli 1892) III.

¹⁴ “Johannis Damasceni Canones iambici cum commentario et indice verborum ex schedis Augusti Nauck editi”, *Bulletin de l’Académie Impériale des Sciences de St.-Pétersburg*. Ser. 3. T. 4 [36] (1894) 105–121.

Nikitin considered it to be his duty to complete the works of his deceased friends and colleagues, even when that task impeded his own studies; for example, he finished a series of works of Vasilij Vasiljevskij and Victor Jernstedt.¹⁵ Nikitin was essentially a co-author of his late colleagues, but as a rule he did not put his name on these books, not even as an editor.

As many other Russian classical philologists, Nikitin was interested in Byzantine literature. During the last years of his life, he studied *Paterika*, the most complicated text from the point of view of textual criticism, and published some papers on that topic. In 1910 Nikitin began to prepare a publication of the alphabetic and systematic *Paterika*, but he did not complete the work. In 1993 a well-known French scholar Jean-Claude Guy published a book with the first half of texts that had been studied by Nikitin, though he did not know anything about the work of his predecessor.¹⁶ In the Archives of the Academy of Sciences and Humanities one can find 79 thick block notes with transcriptions and collation of the most important manuscripts of *Paterika*.

Since 1900 Nikitin was the Vice-President of the Academy of Sciences and Humanities and his scholarly research was restricted because he was overburdened with bureaucratic and representative work. The President of the Academy at that time was the Grand Duke Konstantin Konstantinovich, but the role of the latter was more or less ceremonial. Though the staff of the academicians numbered 40 members (honorary and correspondent members were at that time out of staff), there was a lot of current work, done by the Vice-President. During the period of dangerous political instability (1900–1916), Nikitin's strict impartiality saved the Academy from undesirable shocks.

In the autumn of 1914 Russia was overwhelmed by a wave of germanophobia, which was partly excited by the notorious appeal of 93 German

¹⁵ E. g.: “Сказания о 42 Аморийских мучениках и церковная служба им”. Издали В. [Г.] Васильевский и П. [В.] Никитин (В. Wassiliewsky, P. Nikitine [edd.], “De XLII Martyribus Amoriensibus narrationes et carmina sacra”), *Записки имп. Академии наук по Историко-филологическому отделению*, Сер. 8. Т. 7. N 2 (1905); В. [К.] Ернштедт, “Выдержки Паисия Лигарида из бесед патриарха Фотия” (V. Jernstedt, “Extraits des homélies du patriarche Photius faites par Païsios Ligaridès”), *ibid.*, Т. 7. N 8 (1906); А. [А.] Куник, “О трех списках Фотиевых бесед 865 года” (А. Kunik, “Sur trois manuscrits des homélies de Photius de l’an 865”), *ibid.*; В. Ернштедт, “Мих. Андреопуло. Книга Синтипы” (V. Jernstedt, “Mich. Andreopuli Liber Syntipae”), *ibid.*, Т. 11. N 1 (1912).

¹⁶ *Les apophtegmes des pères. Collection systématique. Chapitres I–IX. Introduction, texte critique, traduction, et notes par J.-C. Guy* (Paris, Les éditions du Cerf, 1993 [SC 387]).

scholars “To the cultural world”.¹⁷ Among those who subscribed to the appeal were nine honorary members of the Russian Academy of Sciences and Humanities, including U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff. At the end of October 1914 the Imperial Government took a decision to exclude all subjects of hostile powers from all scientific institutions and societies. St. Petersburg University and other scientific institutions followed the resolution without delay. Sixty honorable members of the Academy of Sciences and Humanities were affected by this governmental act. But Nikitin persuaded the General Meeting of the members of the Academy to reject the indiscriminate total expulsion of “hostile subjects”. He insisted on distinguishing between scholarship and politics, stating that “granting an honorary title of a Member of the Academy was an expression of recognition of the service rendered by a person to the scholarship, which once given could not be taken back”.¹⁸

The Academy accepted this view and befell under a storm of accusations. Newspapers charged the academicians with the lack of patriotic feelings and insinuated that Prof. Mommsen’s nightcap was closer to them than Monomachos’ crown (“шапка Мономаха”). Under heavy pressure, in February 1916 the Academy was forced to return to the problem of expulsion. And again, Nikitin’s diplomatic and philological resourcefulness helped the Academy to find a more or less decent solution of this uneasy situation. Academicians voted in favour of expulsion of those honourable members who lived in the countries at war with Russia, but they did not name the expelled. This anonymous expulsion had no legitimacy, but it appeased public opinion; moreover, the Academy was released from the necessity to send formal letters, which would have been insulting to the honourable

¹⁷ S.: B. vom Brocke, “Der Aufruf der 93 ‘an die Kulturwelt!’ und der Zusammenbruch der internationalen Gelehrtenrepublik im ersten Weltkrieg”, in: W. M. Calder III, H. Flashar, Th. Lindken (Hrsg.), *Wilamowitz nach 50 Jahren* (Darmstadt 1985). This careful investigation (with rich literature in n. 1) shows, inter alia, the role of Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff in the composition of this document, reproduced phototypically on p. 718. S. also: А. Н. Дмитриев, “Мобилизация интеллекта: Первая мировая война и международное научное сообщество” (A. N. Dmitriev, “Mobilization of intellect. The First World War and the international scientific community”), in: *Интеллигенция в истории. Образованный человек в представлениях и социальной действительности* (M. 2001) 196–235.

¹⁸ *Протоколы заседаний Общего собрания Императорской Академии наук* (СПб. 1915). Экстраординарное Общее собрание 14.03.1915. § 64; St. Petersburg Branch of the Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences. F. 36. Inv. 1. Act 307. Sheets 14–16.

members and shameful for the Academy itself.¹⁹ The Academy demonstrated its tolerance towards the manifestation of chauvinism on the part of German scholars and showed to the country the priority of international values in research.

In conclusion we may say that Nikitin belonged to that cohort of Russian scholars who went through severe German drilling, but still remained Russian and were open to the entire world. To quote a Russian writer A. Remizov, such people were “nationalists-internationalists”.

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В статье рассматриваются взаимоотношения петербургского филолога-классика А. Наука и его ученика П. В. Никитина. Их тесное научное общение и дружба продолжались четверть века с 1867 по 1892 г. и оказали большое влияние на формирование научных и общественных взглядов Никитина. Во время Первой мировой войны он, будучи вице-президентом Императорской Академии наук, занял по отношению к немецким коллегам достойную русского интеллигента позицию и отстаивал их право оставаться членами ИАН невзирая на военное противостояние двух держав и неблагоприятное общественное мнение.

¹⁹ *Протоколы заседаний Общего собрания Императорской Академии наук* (СПб. 1916). Общее собрание N 2. 6.02.1916. § 43.