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Assyriology and Stalinism: Soviet Historiography and the Invention of Slavery in the Ancient Near East

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Abstract: This article analyzes the main reasons why Soviet historiography developed a theory that the ancient Near East was characterized by an economy based on slavery. It explores the interplay of external and internal factors leading to the special role of Assyriology in that process, particularly through the work of the Russian and Soviet orientalist Vasiliy Struve.

Keywords: ancient near Eastern history, Assyriology, Stalinism, Soviet historiography

Soviet cultural and intellectual life for about a quarter of century, from the late 1920s to the early 1950s was marked not only by the indirect, but also direct control of Joseph Stalin. He could make decisions about the fate of films (including musical comedies like "Jolly Fellows"/"Moscow Laughs", 1934), the staging of plays and the activities of theaters (fates of Mikhail Bulgakov, Vsevolod Meyerhold), and the circulation of books, etc. In 1947 he advised Sergey Eisenstein how to properly remake the second series of "Ivan the Terrible".[1] In 1950 he published article "Marxism and Problems of Linguistics".[2] Stalin also showed interest in the work of historians. For these reasons, the view spread widely that he was, to one degree or another, involved in all the notable decisions in the intellectual life of the USSR.

By the 1930s, the Soviet view of history as a unified process had been established, based on five "formations": the primitive community, slavery, feudalism, capitalism, and communism. Although this scheme as such was not found in Marx's works and there were competing models within the historical sciences, such as the Asiatic mode of production, it was nonetheless deemed classical Marxism and was the basis for historical periodization in Soviet times and was unofficially referred to as "the big five" (pyatichlenka). Within the circle

1 See Clark (2012), Platt (2007).

2 See Bedford (1985).

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of scholars in present-day St. Petersburg, it is commonly believed that their colleague, the historian Struve (1899–1965), was one of the originators of the five-stage scheme. Their arguments were sometimes rather trivial, such as the fact that Struve's first textbook was subtitled "A Short Course," as was the Stalinist "History of the All-Union Communist Party".[3]

But there were more important reasons for the interconnection of Struve and Stalin in historical periodization. It was in fact Struve who originated the doctrine that slavery was the foundation of ancient Near Eastern economies, a concept that opened the way for proclaiming the unity of East and West in historical process. On the basis of this unity, Soviet Marxists could offer a unified scheme of world history. But how did Struve come up with the idea of slavery in the Orient?

In modern Russian scholarship, there are two opposing explanations. According to the more widely held view, Struve's theory was a response to a demand by the "party and government" for a straightforward and consistent history of the human race, culminating in the Bolsheviks coming to power.[4] A contrary view holds that his theory, proposed without ideological bias, "turned abruptly into one of the elements of the huge ideological machine that dominated the country".[5] Rather than take one or the other side as a matter of opinion, this essay will show how it was that this new theory emerged during the late 1920s and early 1930s. Sources include Struve's articles, papers, textbooks and his retrospective polemical essay,[6] as well as the works of other historians and party officials and more recent personal recollections. Struve's professional papers are not yet available for study, but one can be sure that, like the majority of cautious men of his time in the Soviet Union, he wrote no memoirs.

Struve's opponents in the early 1930s pointed out his rapid changes of position in earlier years: he referred variously to "feudalism" in the Orient and the "Asiatic mode of production," but only later to slavery. For many Bolsheviks who were part of the debate over the "Asiatic mode of production," Struve had a dubious reputation as an "old-school" scholar who had only later moved on to cooperate with Marxists, and so could not have a key role in the theoretical dispute. Long afterwards, the historian of Russian archaeology Alexander Formozov gave this point of view a solid basis.[7] The Bolsheviks needed "spetsy,"

3 Struve (1934b), Istoriia VKP(b) (1938).
4 See Formozov (2006); Patterson (1982: 109).
5 Bol'shakov (2000: 49).
6 Struve (1954).
7 Struve (1954).

as they were called, that is experts who might be holdovers from the old order. During the civil war, for example, former tsarist officers had been inducted into the army as military experts. So too, in peacetime, "specialists" were needed in industry and scholarship. In the social sciences it was soon apparent that Bolsheviks did not have sufficient knowledge of facts or languages to construct anything better than an abstract scheme, so the "old" scholars, if they would agree to accept Marxism, could take on great authority. Needless to say, party representatives had to supervise these specialists to correct their "mistakes." Formozov has drawn attention to the events associated with the creation of the "world historical process" scheme, when "old party members" came to the State Academy of the History of Material Culture (GAIMK) as managers to oversee important discussions in the early 1930s. The purpose of these discussions was not to encourage debate but to arrive at definitive answers.

In June 4, 1933, before Struve presented his decisive paper on slavery in the ancient Near East at the Academy, Prigogine (1896–1937) gave opening remarks. Prigogine had been active during the civil war, but after failing in a political career had moved into the educational and academic hierarchy. He had in fact a poor historical education (having graduated from a Smolensk gymnasium but never having attended a university), but this did not deter him from producing theoretical books such as "Karl Marx and the Problem of Socio-Economic Formations".[8] Formozov suggests that Prigogine was "caretaker" for Struve and his new theory; indeed, when the theory of formations had been fully constructed, Stalin gave the intimidated "old scholars" adequate privileges for the rest of their lives but repressed the "old Bolsheviks" whom he no longer needed. Struve became a member of the Academy of Sciences and for many years headed the Institute of Ethnography and the Institute of Oriental Studies of the USSR Academy of Sciences. Prigogine was executed in March, 1937, for joining a counterrevolutionary Trotskyite organization (rehabilitated in 1956).

Formozov's theory,[9] although interesting in some respects, has grave shortcomings. In the first place, Prigogine and Struve held opposing views about the structure of ancient Near Eastern societies. Prigogine believed that in ancient times the Orient had a mixed feudal-slave system and only a few weeks after Struve's paper modified his views to accept Struve's position. Therefore

8 Note that it was a book about the size of a pamphlet, 107 pages. See Prigogine (1933).

9 It is very likely that in its creation Formozov was helped by his friend, the historian of feudal Russia, Zimin (1920–1980), as evidenced by the recent memoir, unfortunately published against the will of his heirs. See Zimin (2015: 41–42).

Prigogine could not have provided the main inspiration for the slavery theory. In search of influence, one might consider another "evil genius," Tsvibak (1899–1937), who had campaigned actively to bring Marxism into the teaching of history, and who was one of the first to take Struve's part during the discussion in June, 1933, at the GAIMK session in Leningrad.

But the problem with this argument is that neither Prigogine nor Tsvibak (not to mention others of their ilk, such as Nikolay Matorin) represented Stalin; they were, in fact, members of factions within the Bolshevik Party who had opposed Stalin in the recent past. After 1932, of course, they understood that Stalin had prevailed and they tried to survive in the new conditions, so it was only natural that they would want to come up with a theory that would satisfy the new ruler. But none of them had any particular support or backing from the real party bosses, as proved by their imminent tragic fates.

Stalin not only had no spokesmen, he himself did not come up with unambiguous guidelines for historians, especially for such "ancient times." In his memoirs, Igor Diakonoff writes of this period, "for intellectuals and for scholars the requirement was 'move on the Marxist rails,' but often it was not clear exactly what rails were Marxist and what views were grist to the mill of the 'enemies of the working class and communism'."[10] One cannot say with certainty that Stalin even saw any value in the question of social structure in ancient Near Eastern societies. Perhaps the Asiatic mode of production was a bad idea because it had been associated with Trotskyite opposition, but feudalism without slavery (as with the ancient Rus) or slavery only, or some hybrid, was of little import to him. There is no real basis for saying that Stalin (that is, "collective Stalin") punished those who took the wrong side in the debate, although many historians thought so at the time. Many orientalists suffered in the purges of the 1930s, but the reasons for that were often linked to their past political activities or their social background. Prigogine and Tsvibak were arrested and executed not because their work in GAIMK was "subversion" — their work has been deemed subversive because they were arrested.[11] Looking ahead in time, we note that Nikolay Nikolsky, who vehemently opposed Struve, never suffered.[12]

10 Diakonoff (1995: 275).

11 See O vreditel'stve (1937).

12 He lived and worked in Minsk from 1921. Belarusian historian Oleg Malyugin discovered that the OGPU (Joint State Political Directorate) gathered compromising evidence on Nikolsky, but we are unaware of to what extent the historical views of that scholar may have figured in it. I am grateful to Oleg Malyugin for this information.

If a theory of direct authoritative influence is dubious, that does not mean that one of purely scholarly inspiration is thereby confirmed. Struve, like many peoples in Soviet times, corrected his biography after the Revolution. Thus, he claimed that in fact he came from a family of workers, but was adopted by Wilhelm Struve (we do not have reliable evidence of this). The Struve family were Russified Germans who gave Russia a whole dynasty of scientists – primarily astronomers, but also statesmen, one of whom was Peter Struve (1870–1944), so hated by Lenin. Many years later, when students asked Vasiliy Struve if Peter Struve was his relative, he answered: "No, not even a namesake". He graduated from St. Petersburg University, where he listened to lectures by Mikhail Rostovtzeff and Boris Turaev.[13] In 1914 he spent several months in Germany studying Egyptian with Adolf Erman, but was forced to leave before the war. Returning to St. Petersburg he filed a petition for the change of his original "German" name and patronymic Wilhelm Wilhelmovitch (Wilhelm was the name of German Emperor, enemy of Russian Empire) to the Russian version Vasiliy Vasilyevitch. He worked in Petrograd University (Petersburg was renamed too) and in the Egyptian Department of the Hermitage before and after the Revolution.

We know that Struve turned to Marxism only in 1929,[14] and turned to Assyriology only in the 1930s,[15] and that these two events were closely related to each other. We can see in this process the birth of a new paradigm in Kuhn's sense, but not as Kuhn visualized it. We cannot say, for example, that Struve worked on new materials with old methods and tried to change the methods, but, rather, he needed a system of facts that would correspond to the method. Struve knew the answer to his problem but could not choose the equation to produce it until the end of 1931.

13 Turaev (1868–1920) was a Russain Egyptologist and Coptologist who wrote the first Russian textbook for universities on ancient Near Eastern history. He wanted to make Russian one of the basic languages for world scholarship, so he published his own works only in that language. He died in Petrograd in July 1920, blind, starving, sick, and with no support from the new regime. His textbook was reprinted, however, in 1924 and 1935.

14 This information is from the official characterization given to Struve when he was nominated to be a member of the Academy of Sciences (Characterization 1934: 1). Obviously, living in the Soviet Union, Struve must have been interested in Marxist doctrine before 1929, but this date tells us the time he "began to apply new methods".

15 His main work in the 1920s was in Egyptology, such as "Manetho and His Time" (I ch. – 1928, II ch. – 1930). Of course, Struve was interested in Mesopotamia much earlier, but we must remember that he had no experience with cuneiform; two decades later he admitted that in the early 1930s he had not known Sumerian very well. See Struve (1958).

His answer was based on several important statements of Lenin and the masters of Soviet Oriental studies, "old scholars" officially recognized by the new regime, Nikolay Marr and Sergey Ol'denburg. In his 1919 lecture about the state, published in the principal official newspaper "Pravda" in 1929, Lenin said, "the whole of modern, civilized Europe has passed through this stage — slavery ruled supreme two thousand years ago. The vast majority of the peoples of the other parts of the world also passed through this stage."[16] Ol'denburg (1863–1934), a specialist in Buddhism, was permanent secretary of the Russian Academy of Sciences from 1904 to 1929, and after 1930 director of the Oriental Institute. He stated in 1931, "The history of the East shows the same formations as the history of the West."[17] Similar but more prolix pronouncements can be found in Marr's works. Marr (1865–1934) was a linguist who rejected the theory of language families, offering instead a theory of linguistic "stages" that already in the 1920s had been aligned with Marxism (and this theory was later criticized by Stalin in 1950). Marr had collaborated with Struve and had provided him with a model of how an "old scientist" could prove useful in the new circumstances.[18]

It is striking that the famous words of Stalin, spoken February 19, 1933 (in commemoration of the anniversary of the Emancipation Manifesto, March 3 = February 19, Old Style), at the First Congress of Collective Farmers, lent additional support to Struve's previously worked out plan of action. Stalin said, according to the official English translation, "The revolution of the slaves eliminated slave-owners and abolished the form of exploitation of toilers as slaves."[19] At precisely this time Struve was actively at work on the question of how ancient Near Eastern societies were structured.

On June 4, 1933, Struve read his long, tedious paper,[20] "The Problem of the Genesis, Development and Disintegration of the Slave Societies in the Ancient Orient,"[21] without question the most important presentation of his life, and decisive for Soviet historiography of antiquity. The title does not fully

16 Lenin (1974: 475).

17 Ol'denburg (1931: 9). About Ol'denburg and his collaboration with Soviet state, see Hirsch (2005).

18 See Krikh (2016).

19 Stalin (1954: 245). In the English version, the style is smoothed: not "eliminated", but "liquidated"; the latter word in the revolutionary lexicon meant "to kill".

20 See Diakonoff (1995: 276–277).

21 Struve (1934c). English readers can access part of this text in: Struve (1969).

correspond to the content: the word "problem" appears nowhere thereafter.[22] The paper contains no theoretical polemics and no evidence in pure form, but is based on two types of examples: citations from classics of Marxist theory showing that it considered slavery to be the first and universal stage in the history of class society, and instances from the ancient Near East of numerous slaves. The multiplicity of these examples was sure to convince listeners and readers of the validity of the proposed interpretation.

The study has a complex and intricate structure and this, together with its considerable length, is one of the reasons it was difficult to listen to (and now to read). But if we analyze its structure, we can detect some important elements (see App. A). First, only two main regions are discussed, Egypt and Mesopotamia (Hittites and Carthaginians are mentioned, but briefly). Second, Mesopotamia is accorded the most space. Third, the history of the Ur III dynasty is central to the exposition of Mesopotamian history. Twenty years later, Struve let slip, in a letter to the editor of the VDI (Journal of Ancient History), not intended for publication, "at the time I realized that I could not prove my thesis of the slave status of the masses in ancient societies using Egyptian materials."[23]

In the late 1940s, when his concept had evolved, Struve could reorganize his material more logically and mask some weaknesses,[24] but in the early 1930s he had proceeded with less accuracy. If we set aside secondary arguments and information from sources that can be interpreted more than one way, we see that the main pillar of his concept is only a few Ur III documents from Umma. The most important of these documents for the new concept were consolidated lists of workers published by Genouillac, especially TCL 5 5675.[25] From these records of the labor force, Struve concluded that the Sumerians used the concept of man-days and that the principal workers (KAL[26] and geme) in royal latifundia labored the year round: "In fact people who were working every day of the year

22 The title in Russian had an interconnection with the famous Friedrich Engels' "Der Ursprung der Familie, des Privateigenthums und des Staats" (1884). Ursprung in Russian is translated as the same word (*proiskhozhdenie*), which we translate as "genesis" in Struve's paper. Moreover, the paper had another intimate relation with Engels' logic: it modulated "new" (Marxist) sight on the "old" (bourgeois) factual material.

23 Struve (1954: 5).

24 See Struve (1949).

25 Genouillac (1922: I–IV, VIII–XVI).

26 In the 1930s Struve never used term 'guruš'; he thought that KAL was the correct reading (he also wrote it in Cyrillic), hence I have used it when describing his position. Only in 1946 and later did Tyumenev and Diakonoff begin to use 'guruš' in publications.

in the landlords' fields could not, of course, have their own fields to work on their own behalf to provide themselves with the production necessary for them to reproduce themselves. If, therefore, the workers of the Umma royal estates were neither serfs nor corvee peasants, they could be either hired men or slaves. But the former possibility is ruled out because, as we have seen above, the summary calculation of the workforce available includes salaried people-days as a subcategory of man-days and the number of these days is extremely small compared to the days of the principal workers. Thus only one possibility remains, to define the principal staff of the royal estates of the city of Umma precisely as slaves."[27]

Despite such a confident statement, in the very next paragraph Struve reveals traces of hesitation when referring to earlier arguments. On the one hand, some workers had sons (dumu – this of course had to be construed as an allusion to their origin in the freemen class); on the other hand, he admits that he decided who these KAL were when he compared them to the slave women, geme, prisoners of war. It was clear to him that the term applied to male prisoners had to mean slaves.[28] As we can see, for him it did not matter who the KAL were – enslaved compatriots or captured foreigners; the main thing was that they be called slaves.

Struve himself assessed the appearance of this new concept as an ideological turning point. He wrote of it (and about himself to be sure): "Any researcher who seeks to solve the fundamental question of formation will find it a difficult task to work independently of Marxist methodology on all of the enormous amount of material available to us at this stage in the accumulation of knowledge. And it is quite clear that for a specialist who is a graduate of a pre-revolutionary university, this task could be feasible only after a thorough understanding of Marxist methodology. Any departure from the old methodology could only be gradual. The historical and linguistic conceptualization of bourgeois science, based on a comprehensive knowledge of the vast material, had made too great an impression [on him]."[29]

Most Soviet historians reacted to the new theory with great skepticism.[30] Lurie (1903–1958), an Egyptologist, was the first speaker in the debate of June,

27 Struve (1934d: 504).

28 Op. cit.: 505.

29 Thus Struve (1932: 27–28).

30 I cannot agree with Dunn (2011: 47), "that the discussants, except for [Isidor] Lur'e, see the hypothesis suggested by Struve as a promising way out of an embarrassing situation, and would like to accept it".

1933. He spoke quite emotionally but made a number of good points, particularly reproaching Struve because he "increasingly uses a method of construction instead of a method of evidence" and, of course, that "he freely translates various social terms with the word 'slaves', depending on what is being said (or seems to him is being said) in the context to hand."[31] But the problem was that the paper had no critics among Assyriologists, nor could it. In literal accordance with the maxim of Planck, Nikolsky (1848–1917) and Schileiko (1891–1930) were dead. Riftin (1900–1945) was more inclined towards philological studies and did not take part in the theoretical debate about Asian societies.[32] Diakonoff (1915–1999) was only just studying at university. Tyumenev (1880–1959) began to study cuneiform only after Struve's activities to promote the new theory. There was only one serious opponent in that field, Nikolay Nikolsky (1877–1959).

One fact renders the situation increasingly dramatic: in the same year 1933, the first textbook for Soviet schools on the history of the ancient world was published, written by Nikolsky.[33] School textbooks in the Soviet era were produced in identical forms for the entire country (with translations into local languages) as a unified undertaking, and had therefore to claim transmission of knowledge in absolute form, while the state was the guarantor for the validity of such claims. Nikolsky's textbook had a clear position: ancient Greece and Rome were slaveholding societies, whereas Asian societies (Mesopotamia, Egypt, China) were feudal. In Mesopotamia, Nikolsky (not in the textbook itself but in an encyclopedia article[34]) detected a development from the feudal epoch of the Sumerian princes to a dominance of banking capital during the Neo-Babylonian empire. Nikolsky had been a Marxist already in the time of the tsar and was obviously offended by Struve's declaring his conception to be "bourgeois." Moreover, he thought that Struve's position was simply a reworking of the point of view of advocates of the Asiatic mode of production ("*aziatchki*").[35]

For this reason Nikolsky was even more emotional than Lurie. He accused his opponent of revising Marxist doctrine, appealing to the fact that Engels had differentiated ancient slavery from oriental domestic slavery: "Should we assume that the author, 'utterly destroying' positions of Eduard Meyer, at the

31 Lurie (1934: 113, 114).
32 For him, see Kaplan (2015).
33 Nikolsky (1933).
34 Nikolsky (1927: 515–516).
35 Nikolsky (1934a: 7).

same time 'utterly destroys' positions of Engels?" In addition, Nikolsky tried to catch Struve in inaccurate calculations; according to him, Struve had mixed a small number of workers who labored year round on royal estates with a much larger number of dependent workers who were employed short-term for certain projects.[36]

In contrast, Struve behaved more calmly and with greater decorum. In his reply to Nikolsky, he focused on the scientific aspect of the problem, using a full text of the documents, the interpretation of which had already been criticized. He ignored the theoretical attacks of his opponent, not the usual course in debate of the time (and today this looks even gentlemanly). It is hard to pronounce Struve's response convincing in all points; for example, he could not prove (but declared it) that all workers mentioned in the documents received the same minimum rations, but his arguments seemed more weighty than Nikolsky's. In addition the polemic with Nikolsky led Struve to formulate the basic position of his concept: although KAL were different from the slaves of Rome or Carthage *de jure*, from an economic point of view they should be recognized as slaves.[37] For the Soviet historical tradition, which was based on economocentrism, it was a strong argument, when it fact it was a logical trap ("slave" was then still a legal rather than an economic category).[38]

There is a hidden irony in using the concept of "symbolic capital" in relation to the epoch of declared socialism,[39] but we can, without question, state that Nikolsky and Struve were battling for dominance in Soviet Oriental studies and that Nikolsky lost this battle, for several reasons. First, Nikolsky could not consolidate his supporters, partly because he had always lived in Minsk,[40] not in Moscow or Leningrad. In contrast, Struve's theory gained active adherents, for example, the historian of antiquity (and particularly of

36 Nikolsky (1934b).

37 Struve (1934a: 221).

38 This was realized too late to change attitudes in Soviet scholarship, see Iliushechkin (1990: 29 f.).

39 A more serious problem with applying Bourdieu's theory is that it accords a scientific field a higher degree of autonomy than is appropriate for Soviet historiography. See Bourdieu (1976: 91).

40 Nikolsky graduated from Moscow University in 1900, and after that he taught at the gymnasium in Moscow, but he moved to Smolensk in the famine years after the Revolution (there was more food in the province), where he became the rector of the new university. In 1921 he was invited to a new university in Minsk. Only after the World War II, when Nikolsky became a corresponding member of the USSR Academy of Sciences in 1947, he was offered to move to Moscow, but he was not satisfied with the conditions.

the Spartacus uprising) Mishulin (1901–1948), who, though he struggled for influence at Leningrad, clearly supported the concept of slavery.[41]

Second, Nikolsky's textbook was of poor quality, as it was hastily written in a few months. It was published before the decision about the teaching of history in 1934, in which (finally!) Stalin explained what he expected from history books: more concrete facts, less "sociologizing." The textbook received extremely negative reviews,[42] and it had already undergone major revision.[43] After 1940, schools would use another textbook on the history of the ancient world, edited by Mishulin.

Third, Nikolsky was only reacting to the major question about Sumerian society. If Struve had made Sumer the main theme of his studies, Nikolsky merely criticized his opponent without bringing new sources to the debate.

Fourth, Nikolsky could not formulate his claims about Struve in a comprehensive and elegant form, limiting himself to separate attacks, however painful to his opponent. In 1937, he called Struve's concept "subversion,"[44] which in those years sounded almost like an accusation.

As we can see, the early years were hard for the new theory and, long after, Struve recalled that in 1937 Riftin had supported him.[45] But in 1938 everything changed. The Stalinist "scripture," a textbook called "History of the Communist Party," contained, somewhat illogically from the perspective of narrative structure, a theoretical section summarizing the henceforth official view of the history of the human race. Stalin wrote this essay Stalin personally, and though it did not include a direct denial of the Asiatic mode of production, the latter was not named among the *main types* of production. Moreover, the slaveholding system was depicted in the starkest colors, without nuances: "Rich and poor, exploiters and exploited, people with full rights and people with no rights, and a fierce class struggle between them – such is the picture of the slave system."[46]

41 Mishulin was mediocre historian but talented organizer. In 1937, Mishulin became editor of the *VDI* when the creator of journal Alexander Svanidze (brother-in-law of Stalin) was arrested. Unfortunately, the information about Mishulin in Rubinzon's work is inaccurate (and this misinformation is taken up in the work of other scholars). See Rubinsohn (1987: 7), Shaw (2001: 17); Krikh (2015).

42 Tokin (1933), Struve (1934e). See also Malyugin (2015).

43 Kovalev et al. (1935).

44 Nikolsky (1937: XLVIII, n. 3).

45 Kaplan (2015: 139–140), Riftin (1937:14, n. 17). Nevertheless, Riftin formulated his support in very cautious terms, expressing solidarity not with the theory, but merely acknowledging the role of slave labor in the societies of the ancient East.

46 History of the Communist Party (1939: 124).

For Struve, special importance lay in the following words: "the possibility of subjugation of the majority by a minority and their conversion into slaves."[47] This he saw as a justification for a broad interpretation of the concept "slave." "So," concluded Struve, "a society in which slaves from the local community are exploited is the same slave society as one in which the exploited are slave prisoners of war."[48]

Henceforth, though debating with Struve on details, Soviet historians would have to acknowledge the basic position of his theory. In 1941, Nikolsky wrote, "Soviet historical science has put forward the correct general provision on the slave nature of ancient oriental societies."[49] Even Tyumenev agreed in the mid-1950s, though he had some important disagreements with Struve, these were not in matters of principle, because he was carrying out his studies within the new paradigm albeit on its fringes.[50] At that time, it was a victory, but can we say that Struve won because he served the will of Stalin and that Stalin wrote about slave societies influenced by the works of Struve?

The second part of this question is easily answered. Everything Stalin wrote about modes of production was a distortion of the ideas of Marx, Engels, and Lenin (via Bukharin). We can find no trace of Struve's conception in Stalin's words, because he said nothing about the ancient Near East, directly or indirectly. We can be confident that Struve was not an essential author for Stalin and that he never read any of the historian's works.

The first part of this question is more complex, and the answer to it more important. On the one hand there is no fixed correlation between Stalin's speeches and other significant actions (such as the publication of Lenin's speeches in 1929) and the evolution of the new theory. Rather, we see, as in the case of the "slave revolution," anticipatory ideas, as we find with Stalin's speech and the work of Zhebelev (1867–1941), another "old scholar." Zhebelev published his first study with a highly controversial interpretation of the source data, which allowed him to speak of a slave revolution in the Bosphorus, already in 1932, before Stalin used the word "slave revolution."[51]

47 Ibid.

48 Struve (1954: 19).

49 Nikolsky (1941: 45).

50 See for example Tyumenev (1954). But Struve responded to the manuscript of this article with an angry letter to the editor of *VDI* – Struve (1954).

51 Zhebelev (1932). For Zhebelev, see Graham (1967: 105–108), Tolz (1997: 80–81), Ermolaeva (2016: 249–250). Unfortunately, the authors of latter two works are familiar only with the publication of 1933 and therefore draw misplaced conclusions.

We can likewise be sure that Stalin did not read this work either. Only when new theories had already been published could they be adopted as Marxist, so their authors ran the risk of not knowing in advance whether or not they would be approved. That is why theoretical work by Struve, in which he ascribes the slave-owning formation to Marx himself, appeared only after Stalin's theoretical work.[52]

Yet we should see this process in a wider context. Struve was not constructing his theory in a vacuum, and he found in Assyriology the examples he needed, more so than in Egyptology. Although he often quoted Meissner in his early works, I tend to see the deepest influence from Anton Deimel and Eduard Meyer. Like Deimel,[53] Struve saw in Sumerian society the prototype of the state-capitalist structure,[54] because at the beginning of his theoretical reconstruction he placed the community, which co-owned and exploited their slaves. And, of course, guruš (considered to be slaves) also played the role of a proletariat — Struve consistently underestimated the role of wage earners in the Sumerian economy.[55] Like Meyer, Struve tended to work with simple, powerful generalizations that would be flexible enough not to be overturned by the flood of new evidence. It was an unconscious modernization, different from the modernization of Meyer (and Rostovtzeff as applied to Greek and Roman history), but closely connected to it.[56] In this respect, Struve's theory could be favorably distinguished from Nikolsky's theory because it was a deeper and more ambitious reworking of "bourgeois" concepts.

At this point we can see the hidden, deep coincidence between Struve and Stalin's constructions. What Lenin and Stalin did for Marx, Struve did for Meyer and Deimel and "bourgeois historiography" in general. Not only was it reductionist, it was recoding, but with an important distinction. If Stalin had to say

52 Struve (1940). The paper was read in 1938.

53 Struve, besides text publications, often used the following works of Deimel and his disciples: Anton Deimel "Šumerische Grammatik der archaistischen Texte mit Übungsstücken" (1924), Anna Schneider "Die Sumerische Tempelstadt" (1920), Nikolaus Schneider "Der Viehbestand des é-gal in Lagaš" (1927), "Die Geschäftsurkunden aus Drehem und Djoha" (1930).

54 In historiography, 'state capitalism' can be easily converted into 'state socialism' – as Wittfogel did with idea of the "temple state". See Wittfogel (1957) or Leemans (1950: 40).

55 The issue was not discussed in detail until the works of Gelb and Sharashenidze. See Gelb (1967: 7), Sharashenidze (1986).

56 Struve cited the following works of Meyer: "Die wirtschaftliche Entwicklung des Altertums" (1895), "Die Sklaverei im Altertum" (1898), "Sumerer und Semiten in Babylonien" (1906), "Geschichte des Altertums" (second edition, 1910–1939).

that he followed Marx,[57] Struve had to say that he rejected and surpassed his teachers — Boris Turaev, Eduard Meyer, etc. Struve behaved with dignity and avoided extreme assessments or criticisms of his predecessors, but, like all Soviet scholars, he had to grant the superiority of Soviet historical science. Psychologically, this was part of the self-affirmation of greatness and the self-esteem that became characteristic features of Soviet scholarship. It was a mechanism worked out in the peculiar conditions of the formation of Soviet scholarship, and it offered great potential for drawing the historian into new scholarly parameters.

Soviet historiography, considered from the standpoint of external pressures and the efforts of individual scholars to make their way in it, was not so much in the position of following the instructions of rulers but guessing what those might be. Those who guessed right received preferential treatment. Those who guessed wrong found themselves on the outside, in various ways. Struve undoubtedly wanted to succeed, otherwise he would not have felt such happiness when his theory received, as he believed, confirmation in Stalin's book. Yet in doing so, as a historian he not only "served the inquiry," but he also participated in building a regime, or at least a specific Soviet culture. Assyriology, until then a marginal field in Soviet scholarship, was thereby summoned to play its significant role in this process.

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57 As Samuel Baron wrote, Stalin "blandly represented" his "Short Course" "as a restatement of the basics of Marxism-Leninism". Baron (1995: 77).

Appendix

The Structure of "The Problem of Genesis, Development, and Disintegration of the Slave Societies in the Ancient Orient" by V.V. Struve

Sections			Notes		Overall volume	
	Pages in book	Total number of characters	Pages in book	Total number of characters	Total number of characters	Percentage
I. Preliminaries	**32–34**	**5 350**	**90–91**	**2 400**	**7 750**	**3.4%**
II. The history of Ancient oriental societies	**34–90**	**139 800**	**91–111**	**76 750**	**216 550**	**95.8%**
1. General conditions of slavery	34–38	9 950	91–92	4 400	14 350	6.4%
2. Sumer and Egypt. Community and slavery	38–47	22 250	92–96	18 100	40 350	17, 9%
3. Mesopotamia	47–63	40 500	96–106	37 250	77 750	34.4%
a) Lagash and Urukagina	*47–52*	*13 550*	*96–97*	*2 700*	*16 250*	*7.2%*
b) Akkad	*52–53*	*3 700*	*97–98*	*3 500*	*7 200*	*3.2%*
c) Ur III	*53–58*	*12 300*	*98–103*	*19 200*	*31 500*	*13.9%*
d) Old Babylonian period	*58–62*	*9 400*	*103–106*	*11 650*	*21 050*	*9.3%*
e) Middle Babylonian period	*62–63*	*1 550*	*106*	*200*	*1 750*	*0.8%*
4. Egypt	63–83	50	106–109	11	61	27/23,
a) Old Kingdom	*63–65*	200/41	*106*	000/10	200/52,43	1[c]
and First	*65–70*[a]	700	*106–107*	730	0	*3.1%*
Intermediate	*70–83*[b]	*6 000*	*107–109*	*1 200*	*7 200*	*6/5.7%*
Period		*12*		*1 400/1*	*13 500/12*	*17.9/14.*
b) Middle Kingdom		*100/11*		*330*	*930*	*3%*
and slaves revolt		*600*		*8400/8*	*40*	
c) New Kingdom, slaves revolts and barbarians invasions		*32 100/24* *100*		*200*	*500/32,300*	
5. Disintegration of slavery in the Orient	83–90	16 900	109–111	6 000	22 900	10.1%
III. Concluding remarks	**90**	**1700**	**–**	**–**	**1700**	**0.8%**
Total:	32–90	146 850	90–111	79 150	226 000	100%

[a] P. 67 – excursus into history of the New Kingdom, approx. 600 characters. [b] P. 72–73 – excursus into history of Carthage, approx. 1300 characters; P. 74 – a bureaucracy in Sumer, approx. 550 characters; P. 75 – latifundia in ancient times, approx. 1750 characters; P. 76–77 – on the role of the barbarian invasions in the ancient world, approx. 2400 characters; P. 82–83 – on the uprisings of slaves and mercenaries in the ancient world, approx. 2000 characters. [c] The second figure is volume of minus excursion into the history of other countries.

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