

IMAGE OF PERICLES
IN VLADISLAV BUZESKUL'S WORKS
AND GERMAN CLASSICAL SCHOLARSHIP:
SOME NOTES*

The name of Vladislav Buzeskul, a distinguished Russian and Ukrainian historian of classical antiquity and the Middle Ages, is little known in the West, partly because he preferred to publish his works in Russian and they were never translated to major European languages.¹ That is why it seems appropriate to say a few words about the personality of the scholar. Vladislav Petrovich Buzeskul – his full name – was born in 1858 in the village of Popovka in Kharkov Province. According to family legend, his paternal ancestors were of Moldovan origin and they came to Russia in the early eighteenth century. In 1876 Buzeskul entered the University of Kharkov where he studied in the Department of History and Philology. Upon graduation he was allowed to remain in the department in preparation for a professorship. It was here that Buzeskul began his teaching career and defended his Master's thesis (1889). Buzeskul worked at the University of Kharkov for nearly forty years. Though he did not approve of the October Revolution of 1917, he nonetheless decided not to emigrate from Soviet Russia. He stayed in Kharkov and continued his scholarly and pedagogical work until his death in 1931.²

Buzeskul never studied at a European university. He even called himself “a home-grown scholar”. Only once in his life did Buzeskul

* I would like to thank Kevin McAleer and Gregory Sherman for language corrections.

¹ But there are two translations in Czech: Buzeskul, *Úvod* 1909; Buzeskul, *Antika* 1923. The lists of Vladislav Buzeskul's works see: Uspenskij – Marr – Bartold – Platonov 1922 [Ф. Успенский, Н. Марр, В. Бартольд, С. Платонов, “Записка об ученых трудах профессора Бузескула”, *Известия РАН*]; Zhebel'jov 1931 [С. А. Жебелев, “Академик Владислав Петрович Бузескул (некролог)”, *Известия Академии наук СССР. Отделение общественных наук*], 1084–1085 (only for the period from 1915 to 1931); Karterev 1946 [С. Н. Каптерев, “Хронологический указатель трудов В. П. Бузескула”, *Вестник древней истории*]; Kadeev 1998 [В. И. Кадеев, *Владислав Петрович Бузескул – профессор Харьковского университета. Биобиблиография*].

² More on Buzeskul's biography see: Kadeev 1998; Frolov 2006 [Э. Д. Фролов, *Русская наука об античности*], 356–372.

travel abroad, in August 1908 when he visited Berlin, where he was a representative of his university at the Third International Congress for Historical Sciences. His only publication with a foreign press was a review of the book *AXAIKA* written by his close friend S. A. Zhebel'jov.³ But, to my mind, this was only a concatenation of circumstances, not a principled position of the scholar. Buzeskul always understood the importance of close ties with contemporary European classical scholarship. For example, in 1903 his friend Sir Paul Vinogradoff, the former professor of Moscow University, who was then a Professor of law in Oxford University, invited Buzeskul to write some articles for a new journal *Vierteljahresschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*. Buzeskul agreed, but did not prepare them in time because he was too busy with other scholarly work.⁴

It should be said that Buzeskul was a historian, not a classical philologist as the most part of Russian classical scholars of his time. His research interests began to form during his study at the university when he was especially interested in Russian medieval history.⁵ After graduation he taught medieval and early modern European history. It was only in 1886, after the retirement of his teacher Professor Mikhail Petrov that Buzeskul reluctantly gave lecture courses in ancient history.⁶ Classical antiquity did not at first attract him, but very soon he changed his mind. Contemporary debates in the foreign and especially German scholarly community about Athenian democracy and the historical role of Pericles drew his attention and impelled him to choose as his Master's (= PhD) thesis the subject *Pericles. A Historical and Critical Study* (Kharkov 1889; 418 pages).⁷ It was the first book in the series of works concerning with the problems of political system of Archaic and Classical Athens which made Buzeskul the most authoritative Russian scholar in this field in the pre-revolutionary period.⁸ Pericles always remained for

³ *Deutsche Literaturzeitung* 4 (1905).

⁴ Antoshchenko 2010 [А. В. Антощенко, “В. П. Бузескул – П. Г. Виноградов: письма, воспоминания”, *Харьківський історіографічний збірник*], 341–343, 351.

⁵ His first published work was the article Buzeskul 1881 [В. П. Бузескул, “О занятии Галича Мстиславом Удалым”, *ЖМНП*].

⁶ Some of them were later published by the author. See, e. g.: Buzeskul 1907 [В. П. Бузескул, *История Греции. Литографированные лекции*].

⁷ See Zhebel'jov 1931, 1071–1072; Frolov 2006, 360–361. Reviews of Buzeskul's thesis see in: *The Athenaeum* 1886, 6 July; *Berliner Philologische Wochenschrift* 4 (1891).

⁸ The major of them are: Buzeskul 1895 [В. П. Бузескул, “Афинская полития” *Аристотеля как источник для истории государственного строя Афин до конца V в. до Р. X.*] (which Buzeskul defended as his Doctor's thesis); Buzeskul, *Istorija* 1909 [В. П. Бузескул, *История афинской демократии*]; Buzeskul 1903 [В. П. Бузескул, *Введение в историю Греции*].

Buzeskul one of his favourite heroes of Greek history. Buzeskul's views on Pericles and Athenian democracy as a whole can be the subject of special research.⁹ The aim of this paper is much more modest. I shall only try to compare the image of the great Athenian created by Buzeskul in his works and particularly in his Master's thesis with that of contemporary German classical scholarship.

Until the eighteenth century in Europe the name of Pericles was usually overshadowed by other prominent figures of ancient history, namely the great men of Sparta and Rome. It was in the work of a German classicist Johann Winckelmann who in the middle of this century revived Thucydides' assessment of Pericles as a great statesman and created an inflated image of him and Athens in the "Age of Pericles".¹⁰ For example, in his *History of Art in Antiquity* Winckelmann wrote: "Die glücklichste Zeit für die Kunst in Griechenland, und sonderlich in Athen, waren die vierzig Jahre, in welchen Perikles, so zu reden, die Republik regierte".¹¹ In England these views became dominant after publication of the monumental *History of Greece* by the liberal historian George Grote in the mid-nineteenth century. Among adherents to this opinion were such scholars as Leopold von Ranke, Wilhelm Oncken, Ernst Curtius, Adolf Schmidt and Gustav Herzberg in Germany, Edmond Filleul in France (though he criticized the means used by Pericles in his politics).¹² In Russian scholarship, Grote's views on Pericles and his historical role were in general endorsed by M. S. Kutorga, his pupil P. I. Ljupersol'skij and V. G. Vasil'evskij.¹³

But Pericles had also been a target of criticism as far back as the early nineteenth century. And this criticism increased in the 1870s, especially in German classical scholarship where the attempt was made

⁹ Regrettably, such a work is still to be written. There are only a few papers on this matter: Gol'din 1914 [Н. С. Гольдин, "Профессор В. П. Бузескул как историк античного мира", *Сборник Харьковского историко-филологического общества*]; Kadeev 1983 [В. И. Кадеев, "В. П. Бузескул как историк", *Вестник Харьковского университета*]. See also: Georgiev 2009 [П. В. Георгиев, *Афинская демократия в отечественной истории середины XIX – первой трети XX веков. Дисс. ... канд. ист. наук*].

¹⁰ See Will 1995, 7.

¹¹ Winckelmann 1764, 308.

¹² Von Ranke 1883, 305–306; Oncken 1866; Curtius 1874, 402 f.; Schmidt 1879, 304–305; Filleul 1873.

¹³ Kutorga 1850 [М. С. Куторга, "Перикл", *Современник*]; Kutorga 1880 [М. С. Куторга, "Новая книга о Перикле", *Русский вестник*]; Ljupersol'skij 1877 [П. И. Люперольский, *Очерк государственной деятельности и частной жизни Перикла*, Известия историко-филологического института князя Безбородко в Нежине]; Vasil'evskij 1867 [В. С. Васильевский, "Взгляды Грота на историю афинской демократии", *ЖМНП*].

to debunk Athenian democracy and downgrade its most brilliant leader. They emphasized the “dark side” of democratic Athens: despotism and the irresponsibility of the *demos* as well as the corrupt politicians. These scholars considered Pericles largely responsible for defeat of the Athenians in the Peloponnesian War and for the decline of democratic Athens after his death.¹⁴

One of the main targets of their attack was Pericles’ military ability. In 1884 Dr. Julius von Pflugk-Harttung published his book *Perikles als Feldherr*.¹⁵ A veteran of the Franco-Prussian War and devotee of K. Clausewitz, he vigorously criticized Pericles’ talents as a general. Pflugk-Harttung admitted his personal bravery, but noted a lack of that quality indispensable to a proper military leader – resoluteness. In Pericles’ conduct of the Peloponnesian War, he says, we see expeditions that lack inner cohesion and thus lacking the potential for greater results.¹⁶ Pericles was a good military minister, a great *Bürgermeister*, but as a foreign-policy leader he was hardly comparable to Themistocles nor for that matter to Cimon as a general.¹⁷

The severest critic of Pericles’ generalship was Max Duncker, author of the monumental *Geschichte des Alterthums* (its seventh [and final] edition appeared in 1877–1886). He agrees that Pericles was a gifted and well-educated man, a good and experienced orator, he also notes his honesty and unselfishness,¹⁸ but in his opinion all these admirable features were insufficient to consider him a great statesman. Duncker especially criticizes Pericles’ foreign policy. According to him, only Athenians and their leader Pericles were to blame for outbreak of the Peloponnesian War. The political reforms of Pericles were particularly detrimental, since they caused corruption and the moral degradation of the Athenian *demos*. Duncker is much more sympathetic toward oligarchic Sparta than he is toward democratic Athens.

Another distinguished German scholar, Karl Julius Beloch, in his *Die attische Politik seit Perikles*, also defiantly distanced himself from

¹⁴ General survey of these works see in: Landwehr 1888; Bauer 1899.

¹⁵ See also his later paper (von Pflugk-Harttung 1887), in which Pflugk-Harttung answers to the critique of his views by Egelhaaf (Egelhaaf 1886). The most influential contemporary defender of Pericles’ military talents was Hans Delbrück: Delbrück 1890. More recent account of this matter see, e. g., in: Kagan 2005.

¹⁶ Von Pflugk-Harttung 1884, vi.

¹⁷ Von Pflugk-Harttung 1884, 123. It seems that for Pflugk-Harttung (as for Max Duncker, see below) exactly the period of Cimon’s leadership was *Blütezeit* of Athens and the “Age of Pericles” was rather time of decline.

¹⁸ Duncker 1886, 3, 6–7, 14–15.

“Einseitigkeiten der Grote'schen Schule” and its “Cultus der radicalen Demokratie”.¹⁹ In his later work, *Griechische Geschichte*, Beloch's judgment of Pericles as statesman is even more critical: “Wir können selbst zweifeln ob er ein großer Staatsmann gewesen ist. ... Aber er war, wie wir heute sagen würden, ein großer Parlamentarier”.²⁰ According to Beloch Pericles lacked any military talent, and as a politician, he was much inferior to his predecessors Themistocles and Cimon. Beloch also accuses Pericles of “das größte Verbrechen, das die ganze griechische Geschichte kennt”,²¹ namely his plunging Greece into a fratricidal Peloponnesian War only because he wished to retain his power and influence. Among other German scholars who supported some Pflugk-Harttung's and Duncker's critical views were also Adolf Holm²² and Georg Busolt.²³

“These views reflected the present trend, and it seemed to me interesting to analyze them carefully, because the question was about the proper use of methods and techniques of argumentation”, wrote Buzeskul in the introduction of his Master's thesis.²⁴ In fact, the greater part of his dissertation was devoted to a severe critique of these conceptions.²⁵ Some arguments against them had already been aired in Buzeskul's earlier works, especially in his in-depth critical review of the eighth and ninth volumes of Duncker's *Geschichte des Alterthums*.²⁶ Later Buzeskul repeated his main conclusions in his two major works on classical antiquity: *A History of Athenian Democracy* and *Introduction to a History of Greece*.

I shall try to summarize briefly Buzeskul's main arguments. First of all, he rejects his opponents' hypercritical approach to the ancient texts, especially the history of Thucydides. They accused the Athenian historian of idealizing of Pericles and doubted that he was ultimately a reliable source. Buzeskul reminds that a historian should *ex ipso fonte bibere*, and that the best source for this period is the work of Thucydides.²⁷ He writes

¹⁹ Beloch 1884, iv.

²⁰ Beloch 1897, 155.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 92.

²² See his review of the last volume of Duncker's *Geschichte des Alterthums* in *Berliner Philologische Wochenschrift* 20 (1886) 622–628. Cf. Holm 1886, 9.

²³ Busolt 1882; Busolt 1887, 125–126.

²⁴ Buzeskul 1889, iii.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, passim, esp. 1–30, 396–414.

²⁶ Buzeskul 1888 [В. П. Бузескул, “Новый взгляд на государственную деятельность Перикла”].

²⁷ For Buzeskul's high estimation of Thucydides' work see: Buzeskul 1889 [В. П. Бузескул, *Перикл. Историко-критический этюд*], 31–43, 404–414; Buzeskul 1901 [В. П. Бузескул, “Фукидид и историко-критическая наука XIX века”, *ЖМНП*].

that “we have no grounds neither *a priori* distrust Thucydides’ evidence of Pericles, nor completely reject it suspecting the historian in unfounded partiality toward his famous contemporary”.²⁸ Duncker and his supporters too often disparaged the information served up by the great Athenian historian and preferred later and less reliable sources (Plato, Aristotle, Aristophanes, Diodorus Siculus, Plutarch and some others).²⁹ Sometimes they simply replaced the accounts of ancient authors with hypotheses of their own which could not be confirmed by any sources at all.³⁰ Trust toward the ancient tradition is a central point of Buzeskul’s research work.

Another accusation that Buzeskul levels at his opponents is their exaggeration of Pericles’ historical role. According to him, these scholars lavish too much attention on the personality of the Athenian leader. Good or bad, Pericles was the leader of a democratic state, not a dictator and he did not rule Athens alone. He was always compelled to persuade his compatriots through argument in the assembly and to fight back against the opposition. Pericles’ influence was of course great and very often crucial, but he was not responsible for all decisions of the Athenian government. Sometimes ancient sources betray nothing of Pericles’ participation in what Duncker judged to be objectionable decisions influenced by the Athenian statesman (for example, Duncker erroneously associates with Pericles establishment of payments for attendance of popular assemblies). Moreover, these scholars often assert that Pericles was to blame for events which were the ineluctable result of historical processes and over which he could exercise little or no control.³¹ Buzeskul admits that certain criticisms of Pericles’ detractors are warranted. For example, though considering Pericles a skilled and experienced general, Buzeskul nevertheless concedes that he was no military genius.

Buzeskul asserts that appearance of these negative assessments was almost inevitable. To him they are “signs of our time”, “reaction against immoderate admiration of Pericles and idealization of his personality and his époque”.³² In his Master’s thesis Buzeskul does not connect these views with German classical scholarship only. For example, he wrote that he was expecting for the appearance of similar views in books and papers written by Russian authors.³³ In the later works (especially those

²⁸ Buzeskul 1889, 52.

²⁹ His own analysis of evidence they provided on Pericles see: Buzeskul 1889, 52–66.

³⁰ Buzeskul 1889, 493–494.

³¹ Buzeskul 2005 [В. П. Бүзескул, *Введение в историю Греции*], 429.

³² Buzeskul 1889, 399–400.

³³ *Ibid.*, iii.

published before and during the World War I) Buzeskul changed his mind. He suspected that the roots of German negative attitudes toward Pericles lie in the specific political situation of Germany at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. Bismarck's policy of "blood and iron" and the trio of great military victories from 1864 to 1871 encouraged nationalistic and imperialistic views. Buzeskul found multiple examples of such views in contemporary German scholarly and philosophical literature.³⁴ In the work of many German scholars he discerned the cult of military force and the powerful state as well as the praise for imperial foreign policy and a disdain toward democracy.³⁵ This was unacceptable to a liberal historian like Buzeskul, and he severely rebuked such attitudes.

To conclude, it was close acquaintance with contemporary European, especially German, works concerning Athenian democracy that encouraged Vladislav Buzeskul to devote years of his scholarly work to Greek studies. Nonetheless, Buzeskul always remained a very independently-minded scholar. An image of Pericles which Buzeskul draws in his works is quite positive though he does not idealize the Athenian leader. He says, "If my attitude toward new views on Pericles is negative, it is not because I am a devotee of Athens, but because I am a historian".³⁶ According to Buzeskul, though Pericles was not a reformer like Solon, Cleisthenes, Themistocles and Ephialtes, he was still their worthy successor and in fact completed their work. Some Athenian leaders surpassed Pericles as generals or law-givers, but no one combined so brilliantly these and a great many other skills. To Buzeskul he remains "one of the best representatives of Hellenic people ever".³⁷

Vyacheslav Khrustalyov
Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia
vyacheslav2511@gmail.com

³⁴ Buzeskul 1915 [В. П. Бузескул, "Современная Герания и немецкая историческая наука XIX столетия. К происхождению современной германской идеологии", *Русская мысль*]; Buzeskul 2005, 427–428.

³⁵ It is interesting to compare the critical attitude toward Pericles of some prominent German historians of *Kaiserzeit* with his panegyric image in the historiography of the Third Reich. See, e. g.: Will 1995, 8 f.; Will 2003, 245 f.; Tumans 2012, 50–58; Surikov 2012 [И. Е. Суриков, "Винкельман – Ницше – Гитлер: 'немецкая античность' и складывание нацистской идеологии", *История и современность*], 200–202.

³⁶ Buzeskul 1889, iv.

³⁷ Buzeskul, *Perikl* 1923 [В. П. Бузескул, *Перикл. Личность. Деятельность. Значение*], 121. This book is a shorter and revised version of his Master's thesis written for general public.

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The author expresses some thoughts concerning the image of Pericles created by a distinguished Russian historian Vladislav Buzeskul (1858–1931) in his works, particularly in his Master’s thesis. Buzeskul’s views of Pericles’ personality and activities are compared with those of some prominent German scholars, such as M. Duncker, K. J. Beloch etc.

В статье высказываются некоторые соображения относительно образа Перикла, представленного в сочинениях (прежде всего, в магистерской диссертации) выдающегося российского историка В. П. Бузескула (1858–1931). Точка зрения Бузескула на личность и деятельность Перикла сравнивается с взглядами ряда крупных немецких антиковедов того времени (М. Дункера, К. Ю. Белоха и др.).

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