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Comrade Prometheus, or Place of Antiquity in Revolutionary and Post-Revolutionary Soviet Children and Youth Culture

The Russian Revolutions of the beginning of the 20th century were made in futuristic atmosphere of vanguard culture (“Culture 1” in the terms of Vladimir Paperny). Classical antiquity as well as classical philology were to be “thrown overboard” together with Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, etc. At the same time all the main revolutionary leaders and ideologists were brought up in classical gymnasia and studied how to make speeches on Cicero and Demosthenes. With the reforms of education after the Bolshevik revolution, the system of gymnasia was abolished and new school programme was established. Classical philology was ceased at the university level as well. However in the 1919 Maxim Gorky has initiated a publishing project “World Literature,” which, together with later “Academia,” caused to prepare and publish translations of many classical texts, often for the first time. Adrian Piotrovsky and Sergei Radlov made great Revolutionary performances on example of Greek mass theatre. Tadeusz Zieliński taught about Slavic Renaissance of antiquity and his pupils formed a dance group *Heptachor* aiming to reconstruct Dionysian dances, being trained by Isadora Duncan.

Post-Revolutionary culture or “Culture 2” looked for its roots in Russian antiquity, however it made some turns toward classics as well. The most interesting might be introduction of Latin in secondary school education during and after WW2. Classical philology based on marxist principles studied presumably slaves’ rebellions and class struggle, but it functioned during all the Soviet history.

Children and young adults culture has special attention in every ideologically tense society as it should secure perseverance of the ideological system. In most of the Soviet history classical antiquity was marginalised in children and young adult culture, however mythology of Nicolas Kuhn or texts of Plutarch were republished over and over again, and were present on bookshelves of majority of Soviet families. Popularisation of television gave new possibility of influence on popular culture. From 1969 animations about classical mythology are produced by Soyuzmultfilm (dir. Aleksandra Snezhko-Blotskaya, Fyodor Khitruk etc.) and smaller animation studios in various republics. The 1980 Olympic Games gave another stimulus for popularising of antiquity.

In my research I would like to analyse presence of antiquity (especially of classical mythology) in school textbooks and in cinema and animation productions for children and young adults, and see how the antiquity is appropriated by Soviet culture. What concepts are important for Soviet society and how are they used in educational context? How could Greek gods survive in atheist society, and what meaning was given to Prometheus, Heracles and company? How have Spartacus and Catilina become revolutionaries, and what place had antiquity in Soviet identity, based on contradiction between East and West, Past and Future? What was the reception of these ideas among youth, and how important was Greek and Latin antiquity for ordinary children?

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