

## N. M. KARAMZIN AND BARTHÉLEMY'S 'VOYAGE DU JEUNE ANACHARSIS'

When the abbé Jean-Jacques Barthélemy (1716–95) published his *Voyage du jeune Anacharsis en Grèce, vers le milieu du IV<sup>e</sup> siècle avant l'ère vulgaire* in 1788,<sup>1</sup> his reputation as a classical scholar was already established. Since 1747 he had published a series of monographs and articles, principally in the *Mémoires de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, but it was *Anacharsis* which ensured his European fame. Barthélemy managed to reconcile the demands of scholarship with those of a reading public, ill-disposed towards learned and profound works;<sup>2</sup> he placed detailed information about the life and customs of Ancient Greece, which he had culled from the writings of classical and modern authors, within the framework of a 'journey', a popular literary genre in the eighteenth century. In his *avertissement* Barthélemy explained his intentions: 'J'ai composé un voyage plutôt qu'une histoire, parce que tout est en action dans un voyage, et qu'on y permet des détails interdits à l'historien.'<sup>3</sup> Five further editions of his work before 1800, twenty more by 1830, and forty-two in all eloquently testify to the French public's appreciation of Barthélemy's literary talents and his description of his young Scythian's adventures.<sup>4</sup>

Other European countries were quick to review and translate Barthélemy's work; a German translation by Johannes Biester appeared in Berlin as soon as 1789 and Italian and English versions followed in 1791.<sup>5</sup> It was not until 1803 that a Russian translation began to appear in Moscow,<sup>6</sup> but a year later, the first volume of another translation, undertaken by members of the Russian Academy, was published in St Petersburg.<sup>7</sup> The Russian public, however, was acquainted with Barthélemy's work soon after its publication through the efforts of N. M. Karamzin (1766–1826), the most consistent champion and popularizer of European literature in eighteenth-century Russia.<sup>8</sup>

It was during his travels through Germany in the summer of 1789 that Karamzin learnt from the young Leipzig professor of classical literature, Christian Beck (1757–1832), 'about the fame of Anacharsis':

As soon as it was published, all the French men of letters bent their knees and confessed that ancient Greece, which is of such interest to us, Greece, which astonishes us with its ruins and the few surviving monuments of its greatness, had never been described so

<sup>1</sup> Published simultaneously in four and seven volumes. Subsequent references are made to the 3rd edition, 7 vols., Paris, 1790.

<sup>2</sup> Maurice Badolle, *L'Abbé Jean-Jacques Barthélemy (1716–1795) et l'hellénisme en France dans la seconde moitié du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1926), p. 227.

<sup>3</sup> Barthélemy, I, vii.

<sup>4</sup> Badolle, p. 397. This total does not include the numerous *Abrégés* published in the nineteenth century.

<sup>5</sup> There were seven English editions by 1818.

<sup>6</sup> *Putshestviye mladshago Anakharsisa po Gretsii v polovine chetvertago veka do Rozhdestva Khristova; sochineniye g. Barlelemi; perev. s. Frantsuzskago Professor Petr Strakhov i Andrey Rudol'sky*, 9 vols. (Moscow, 1803–19).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, *perevedeno Chlenami Rossiyskoy Akademii*, 6 vols. (St Petersburg, 1804–9).

<sup>8</sup> Barthélemy's *Les Amours de Carite et de Polydore, roman traduit du grec* (Paris, 1760) had been translated earlier by D. I. Fonvizin: *Lyubov' Karity i Polidora. Perevedena s frantsuzskago* (St Petersburg, 1763). Another translation by V. Zaozersky appeared in Moscow in 1790.

perfectly. Professor Heine of Göttingen, one of the leading experts on Greek literature and antiquities, reviewed *Anacharsis* in the *Göttingische gelehrte Anzeigen* and made it famous throughout Germany.<sup>1</sup>

These lines were included in Karamzin's *Pis'ma russkogo puteshestvennika* (*Letters of a Russian Traveller*), which began to appear in the *Moskovskiy zhurnal* (*Moscow Journal*, 1791–2), the literary magazine he edited after his return from abroad. In a later part of the *Pis'ma*, which was not published until 1801 because of censorship difficulties, Karamzin described his meeting in Paris with Barthélemy in May 1790:

Today the young Scythian K\* [Karamzin] had the good fortune to recognize Barthélemy-Plato in the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres.

I had been promised an introduction to him, but as soon as I saw him, following my first impulse, I approached and said to him: 'I am a Russian; I have read *Anacharsis*; I am able to delight in the works of great and immortal talents. Therefore, accept the offering of my profound respect, however awkwardly expressed' (II, 509).

After an exchange of elaborate compliments, Barthélemy invited Karamzin to hear him lecture on Samaritan medallions; uninterested in the subject, Karamzin, nevertheless, observed attentively the abbé's appearance and mannerisms:

The very image of Voltaire, as he is represented in portraits! Tall, thin, with a penetrating glance and a subtle Athenian smile. He is well past seventy, but his voice is attractive, his body erect, all his movements swift and animated (II, 510).

Barthélemy, added Karamzin, possessed only one passion, 'a love of fame, which he moderated by strength of philosophy', together with a touching devotion to his friends.

In addition to references in his *Pis'ma*, Karamzin published in the *Moskovskiy zhurnal* a long review, 'translated, with some changes' from the Jena *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*.<sup>2</sup> His translation of this review, rather than the famed one by Professor Heine, to which he had already referred, exemplifies his conscious selection of those foreign reviews which appealed to him by their ideas and style: they became in translation essentially a statement of his own thoughts on the work under review. Barthélemy's book was hailed as 'a rare phenomenon in literature'; his aim had been 'to present all the sights of ancient Greece in a beautiful picture' and he had managed 'to combine strict historical truth with attractiveness'.<sup>3</sup> In Karamzin's critical language, there could be no higher acclaim for a writer than that of 'attractiveness' (*priyatnost'*).

For the final number of the *Moskovskiy zhurnal* Karamzin translated a passage from *Anacharsis*, which he entitled *Platon, ili o proizkhozhdenii mira* (*Plato, or On the Origin of the World*).<sup>4</sup> Although he pointed out in a footnote that Plato's theories on the Creation were 'a curious and witty romance',<sup>5</sup> Karamzin was generally sympathetic to Plato's belief that 'God was obliged to create — and

<sup>1</sup> N. M. Karamzin, *Sochineniya*, 3 vols. (St Petersburg, 1848), II, 118–19. Subsequent references in the text and footnotes are made to this edition, unless otherwise stated. Translations are my own.

<sup>2</sup> *Moskovskiy zhurnal*, 8 parts (Moscow, 1791–2), III, July (1791), 97–113; August, 201–17; September, 333–41. The original review appeared in *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*, Nos. 196–7 (Jena, 1789), pp. 17–32.

<sup>3</sup> *Moskovskiy zhurnal*, III, 97–8.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, VIII, December (1792), 175–93.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 183, footnote.

created, the best of all possible worlds';<sup>1</sup> this was a philosophy of optimism he had found in the works of such favourite authors as Shaftesbury, Leibniz, James Thomson, and Charles Bonnet.<sup>2</sup>

Karamzin's next translation from *Anacharsis* appeared in 1798 in his *Panteon inostrannoy slovesnosti* (*Pantheon of Foreign Literature*); entitled simply *Sokrat* (*Socrates*), the extract is a paean to his philosophy of virtue as the key to happiness and his unquestioning belief in the 'Supreme Wisdom' of the Creator.<sup>3</sup> Socrates and Plato are both thus firmly established in the traditions of eighteenth-century rationalist religious thought and extolled for their blameless and virtuous conduct in life. Although Socrates had long been considered an ideal model for emulation — no less than five articles in his praise had appeared in the children's journal on which Karamzin collaborated in the three years preceding his journey (1787–9)<sup>4</sup> — the place he assumed in Karamzin's original work in the 1790's was of particular significance. In verse and prose, Karamzin described his youthful admiration for Socrates (I, 84), praised him as 'the first sage of antiquity' (III, 391), as well as the 'most attractive' philosopher for his love of the Graces (I, 106). At a time when Karamzin experienced disillusionment and despair, he saw in Socrates a kindred spirit, who retained a devotion to virtue (I, 39) and was great enough to acknowledge: 'A wise man knows but one thing / That he — knows nothing' (I, 214). Karamzin's translation of Barthélemy's eulogy of Socrates was a further example of his interest in Socrates as well as authoritative support and encouragement for that interest.

Karamzin made no further translations from *Anacharsis*,<sup>5</sup> but at the beginning of the nineteenth century he published two more important notices on Barthélemy's work. In May 1802 there appeared in Karamzin's literary and political journal, the *Vestnik Evropy* (*Messenger of Europe*), a review of Barthélemy's posthumously published *Voyage en Italie* (Paris, 1801), which Karamzin considered 'the most interesting of recent books'.<sup>6</sup> This was followed in 1803 by a notice 'On the Russian Translation of *Anacharsis*' (*O russkom perevode Anakharsisa*).<sup>7</sup> At the end of the review in the *Moskovskiy zhurnal* in 1791 Karamzin had mentioned that '*Anacharsis* is being translated into Russian, and by a man who, in his [Karamzin's] opinion, is well able to translate this important book'.<sup>8</sup> The first volume of Professor Strakhov's translation fully justified his confidence:

The pure and correct style of Mr Strakhov is already well-known to the Public. A comparison of the Russian *Anacharsis* with the original will demonstrate to those who know the French language how faithful and good the translation is; and other people may read it as an original work.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., 192.

<sup>2</sup> Before his journey Karamzin had translated Thomson's *Seasons* and extracts from Bonnet's *Contemplation de la Nature*; he translated Shaftesbury's exchange of letters with Bayle for the *Moskovskiy zhurnal*.

<sup>3</sup> *Panteon inostrannoy slovesnosti*, 3 vols. (Moscow, 1798), II, 93–198.

<sup>4</sup> *Detskoye chteniye dlya serdtsa i razuma*, 20 parts (Moscow, 1785–9), I (1785), 146–52; II, 32; III, 177–83; IV, 28–31, 48.

<sup>5</sup> Other translations from *Anacharsis* appeared in *Muza*, III (1796), 96 ff.; *Ippokrena*, X (1801), 360 ff.; *Novosti russkoy literatury*, IV (1802), 97 ff. A translation of chapter LXXVIII 'De la Bonheur' was published separately by A. Sevast'yanov, one of the translators of the Russian Academy edition: *O blagopoluchii iz Puteshestviya yunago Anakharsisa, sochineniye slavnago Bartelemi* (St Petersburg, 1798).

<sup>6</sup> *Vestnik Evropy*, 12 parts (Moscow, 1802–3), III, 103.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., X, p. 57–8.

<sup>8</sup> *Moskovskiy zhurnal*, III, 341.

<sup>9</sup> *Vestnik Evropy*, X, 58.

Karamzin's enthusiasm for Barthélemy's work had in no way lessened since 1789; indeed 'if we were to ask a knowledgeable Writer: which is the most famous book to have appeared in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, he would certainly name the *Journey of Anacharsis*'.<sup>1</sup>

However important Karamzin's championing of *Anacharsis* might have been in assuring its popularity with the Russian public, it was essentially only one of a series of similar campaigns by Karamzin on behalf of outstanding foreign works; of greater significance is the inspiration Karamzin received from Barthélemy's work in creating his own remarkable story *Afinskaya zhizn'* (*Athenian Life*).<sup>2</sup>

## II

*Afinskaya zhizn'*, written at the end of 1793, was published in 1795 in the second volume of Karamzin's almanack *Aglaya*. This collection made known to the public at large Karamzin's extreme disillusionment with the events of the French Terror, already expressed in private letters to his friend Ivan Dmitriyev (1760-1837)<sup>3</sup> and now echoed and re-echoed in his verse and prose. Although Karamzin's anguish was deep and sincere, it was at the same time a source of creative strength; out of this anguish *Afinskaya zhizn'* was born.

The very structure of the story is dependent on the contrast between the real world whose horrors the author cannot face and the ideal world to which his imagination takes him. Karamzin's thesis is that 'we are more learned than the Greeks, but the Greeks were more intelligent than us', for they were concerned above all with the 'important art of happiness' (III, 411). To escape the modern world Karamzin would willingly exchange his frock-coat for a Greek tunic and 'in moments of pleasant thought, I do exchange it — I wrap myself in a purple cloak (in my imagination, of course), cover my head with a large, floppy hat and step out in Alcibiades's shoes with measured pace and philosophical solemnity — into the square in ancient Athens' (III, 412). The account of such an imaginary visit is Karamzin's attempt to show people of very different interests and views living together in harmony; no moral, political, or social black clouds threaten the idyll. Karamzin sees happy toilers in the fields, hears Plato discoursing on Socrates; he visits the theatre and attends a feast where the subjects of conversation are love, poetry, philosophy, and wine and the guests 'all swear to live and die as friends of the gods and men' (III, 434). But the dream is shattered, the beguiling illusion ended: O my friends! everything passes, everything disappears! Where is Athens? Where is Hippius' house? Where is the temple of pleasure? Where is my Greek cloak? — Dreams! dreams! I sit alone in my study in the country, in a poor dressing gown and see nothing before me, except a guttering candle, a used sheet of paper and the Hamburg newspapers, which tomorrow morning (not before, because I wish to sleep peacefully tonight) will inform me of the terrible madness of our enlightened contemporaries (III, 434-5).

Although clearly rooted in the circumstances of Karamzin's personal crisis, *Afinskaya zhizn'* was a notable manifestation of the Hellenist dream. Karamzin was at one with a long line of eighteenth-century European writers, including Shaftesbury, Barthélemy, Lessing, and Herder, in seeing Greece as the land of

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>2</sup> The relationship between *Anacharsis* and *Afinskaya zhizn'* has been noted by the Soviet scholar Yu. M. Lotman in his article, 'Evolutsiya mirovozzreniya Karamzina (1789-1803)', *Uchenye zapiski Tartuskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta*, vypusk 51 (1957), 144.

<sup>3</sup> *Pis'ma N. M. Karamzina k I. I. Dmitriyevu* (St Petersburg, 1866), pp. 42, 48, 57.

social, political, and aesthetic perfection. In his essay *Melodor k Filaletu* (*Melodor to Philalet*) published in the same volume of *Aglaya as Afinskaya zhizn'*, Karamzin defined Greece's appeal:

There everything entices the eye, the soul, the heart; there reside in splendour Lycurguses and Solons, Codruses and Leonidas, Socrateses and Platos, Homers and Sophocleses, Phidiases and Zeuxises — in a word, there we should marvel at the refined workings of the mind and morality (III, 442-3).

It was this image of Greek life that Schiller idealized in his *Über naive and sentimentalische Dichtung*, which appeared almost simultaneously with Karamzin's work (1795-6), and where Greece, in Irving Babbit's words, 'hovers before the imagination as a sort of Golden Age of pure beauty, a land of chimeras that alone is worthy of the aesthete's habitation'.<sup>1</sup>

It is possible that works other than *Anacharsis*, which sought to convey the spirit of Ancient Greece, influenced Karamzin's attempt; such a book was C. M. Wieland's *Geschichte des Agathon* (1766-7), admired by Karamzin (II, 150), and praised by its English translator for the 'very just and entertaining' description of life in Athens.<sup>2</sup> It was in the volumes of *Anacharsis*, however, that Karamzin found the ideas and themes for his work of twenty-five pages.

In imitation of Barthélemy's *Anacharsis*, Karamzin is guided around Athens by a friend. They meet Plato, surrounded by his disciples, near the Temple of the Muses and, like *Anacharsis*, are filled with respect for him.<sup>3</sup> Karamzin then visits the theatre, which he describes in similar terms to Barthélemy:

Aristen takes me to the Theatre, a huge building, for which the sky serves as a roof. On one side there arises the stage with resplendent decorations, on the other — an imposing amphitheatre with numerous tiers, where thousands of spectators sit in profound silence. (III, 418-19)

Le théâtre s'est ouvert à la pointe du jour. J'y suis arrivé avec Philotas. Rien de si imposant que le premier coup d'oeil; d'un côté, la scène ornée de décorations exécutées par d'habiles artistes; de l'autre, un vaste amphithéâtre couvert de gradins qui s'élèvent les uns au-dessus des autres jusqu'à une très grande hauteur. (II, 217)

Both *Anacharsis* and Karamzin see a play by Sophocles — *Anacharsis* sees *Antigone* (II, 221-2), Karamzin *Oedipus* (III, 419-20). In each case, the action of a terrible scene is recounted and the cathartic effect of the tragedy praised:

Oedipus dies. Horror on every face — in the soul sweet pleasure. O wonder of Art! who will explain your Mysteries? — O Sophocles! — The tragedy has ended. (III, 420)

Ils se passaient presque tous à ma vue, ces événemens cruels; de plutôt un heureux éloignement en adoucissoit l'horreur. Quel est donc cet art qui me fait éprouver à-la-fois tant de douleur et de plaisir, qui m'attache si vivement à des malheurs dont je ne pourrais pas soutenir l'aspect? Quel merveilleux assortiment d'illusions et de réalités! (II, 222).

<sup>1</sup> *Rousseau and Romanticism* (New York, 1960), p. 75.

<sup>2</sup> *The History of Agathon*, 4 vols. (London, 1773), I, xii.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Karamzin, III, 415 and Barthélemy, II, 121-2. Plato's discourse on Socrates closely parallels the passage Karamzin had translated from *Anacharsis* in 1798.

In the evening Karamzin attends a feast in the house of Hippius (III, 420 ff.) — as Anacharsis did in Dinias's home (II, 506 ff.). Barthélemy's detailed description of the exotic food (II, 509–10) is reduced to a few lines, but Karamzin retains the allusion to the chalice which is passed around as 'le symbole et le garant de l'amitié qui doit unir les convives' (II, 511): 'all the guests drink from the chalice, as a mark of general, sincere friendship' (III, 422). Hippius's guests, like Dinias's, begin to sing a song in turn; Karamzin's song to Bacchus is near in content to Barthélemy's prose version of an Anacreontic ode, but organized in stanzas of trochaic tetrameters:

Bacchus cannot endure mournful glances,  
Bacchus, lover of loud choruses,  
Quietly pours joys into hearts,  
Destroys envy, malice;  
Deadens grief, sadness;  
Lives in peace with people.  
Sing of Bacchus, sing of joy;  
Sing of happiness, sing of youth —  
Bacchus the handsome is eternally young,  
Bacchus, the lover of sonorous strings.  
(III, 424)

Buvons, chantons Bacchus, il se plaît  
à nos danses, il se plaît à nos chants;  
il étouffe l'envie, la haine et les  
chagrins; aux grâces séduisantes,  
aux amours enchanteurs, il donna la  
naissance. Aimons, buvons,  
chantons Bacchus. (II, 535)<sup>1</sup>

Finally, in both Karamzin's and Barthélemy's accounts, the feasting and entertainment conclude with the entry of beautiful girls who dance with the intoxicated guests.<sup>2</sup>

Thus in broad outline and often in exact detail, Karamzin's *Afinskaya zhizn'* follows Barthélemy's account in the second volume of his work of Anacharsis's life in Athens. Other details and incidents, such as the Plato-Diogenes dispute on the nature of man, Bacchus's triumphant conquest of India, the ironic comment that few who threw themselves from the Leucadian cliff lived to enjoy their cure from love, as well as a version of Sappho's ode to Phaon, although in themselves common anecdotes from classical history and mythology, were readily accessible to Karamzin in *Anacharsis*.<sup>3</sup>

The originality of *Afinskaya zhizn'* is in no way lessened by the parallels drawn with *Anacharsis*. Apart from obvious differences in length and genre, Karamzin's work is remarkable for its strong lyrical character. This was achieved, firstly, by a carefully chosen sentimental vocabulary and syntactical devices, characteristic of Karamzin's prose style — balance and symmetry of clauses and sentences, inversion, alliteration, and repetition, and, secondly, by the introduction of eight poems and songs, evoking a variety of moods and displaying Karamzin's metrical virtuosity.<sup>4</sup> The essence of Barthélemy's admiration for Athens was thus distilled by Karamzin into a carefully-wrought and compact poem in prose.

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<sup>1</sup> There are two more verses in Barthélemy's version; in Karamzin's only the first of these and the repeated chorus.

<sup>2</sup> Karamzin, III, 434; Barthélemy, II, 536.

<sup>3</sup> Karamzin, III, 421 and footnote, 424, 427 n. 1, 426–7; Barthélemy, II, 134, 495; III, 402–3; II, 74.

<sup>4</sup> The predominant metres are iambic and trochaic tetrameters, but there are also twenty-six trochaic dimeters. These have been overlooked by Dr C. L. Drage who asserted that Karamzin wrote only regular trochaic and epic trochaic tetrameters: 'Trochaic Metres in Early Russian Syllabo-Tonic Poetry', *Slavonic and East European Review*, xxxix (1960–1), 369.