

**IURIJ S. LIAPUNOV – A LOST CLASSICIST  
OF THE GREAT WAR GENERATION**

The history of classical and Byzantine scholarship in the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Russia is marked by a number of outstanding figures, famous both at home and abroad. However, a more comprehensive list could be compiled, had all talented scholars with a strong basis for a brilliant academic career had a chance to realize their potential. This essay concerns one of them, Iurij Liapunov, who in spite of all the hopes of his teachers, fell short due to his premature death.

As the author of only two published articles, he remains on the fringes of classical scholars in St Petersburg, almost invisible. What few archives exist of Liapunov are preserved predominantly at the National Library of Russia in his father's fund,<sup>1</sup> while his short autobiography is kept at the State Hermitage.<sup>2</sup> The third archive of Liapunov's family documents at the Institute of Russian Literature (the Pushkin House), Russian Academy of Sciences, has not yet been inventoried and is currently closed for research.<sup>3</sup>

Family roots are often very important, and in our case they are extremely significant for understanding the character and aspirations of Iurij Liapunov. He was a grandson of astronomer Mikhail V. Liapunov

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Manuscripts, National Library of Russia [henceforth OR RNB], f. 451, inv. 1 (S. M. Liapunov) [ОР РНБ, ф. 451, оп. 1], 1090, 1117–20, 1125–8, 1130, 1138, 1142, 1150.

<sup>2</sup> Department of Manuscripts, State Hermitage, f. 1, inv. 13 [ОР ГЭ, ф. 1, оп. 13], 503.

<sup>3</sup> Initially, Sergej Liapunov gave Balakirev's archive and a part of the family archive to the Library of the Academy of Sciences, at earliest, in 1920. For the review of the collection see: Gerashko 2012 [Л. В. Герашко, "Фонд С. М. Ляпунова в рукописном отделе Пушкинского Дома", in: Т. З. Сквирская (ed.), *Петербургский музыкальный архив: Сборник статей и материалов. Памяти Анастасии Сергеевны Ляпуновой*], 159–164.

(1820–1868), who had three outstanding children: mathematician Alexander (1857–1918), Slavacist Boris (1862–1943), and composer Sergej (1859–1924) – Iurij’s father.<sup>4</sup> It is worth mentioning that these various, and amazingly diverse, gifts appeared later in many generations of Liapunov’s family. Iurij’s father Sergej was a student of Sergej I. Taneiev in Moscow, and later became close with the circle of composers, dubbed the “Mighty Handful”, and particularly with Milij A. Balakirev who was appointed Iurij’s godfather.<sup>5</sup> He later became a director of the Free Music School, and a professor at the St Petersburg Conservatoire in 1911. Iurij’s mother Jevgenia, née Demidova, was also musically gifted, and before her marriage was a promising student of singing at the Moscow Conservatoire.<sup>6</sup> Hence there is no surprise that a strong musical trend existed in the family: three sisters of Iurij later became students at the St Petersburg Conservatoire.

On his mother’s side Iurij was a great-grandson of a famous Russian ethnographer, lexicographer and man of letters Vladimir Dahl (1801–1872), who is best all known for his opus magnum, “Explanatory Dictionary of the Living Great Russian language”, in four volumes, which was published in the 1860s. The unique character of this dictionary was appreciated: in the Russian revised version of his autobiography “Другие берега” (“Other Shores”), Vladimir Nabokov recalls that while studying at Cambridge he bought a copy of Dahl’s dictionary and read at least several pages every day.<sup>7</sup> Alongside linguistics, Dahl’s main occupation was medicine. His reputation as a doctor was undisputable: along with two other physicians he was invited to the deathbed of his good friend the poet Alexander S. Pushkin after his fatal duel. The latter bequeathed his friend an emerald ring which had been the poet’s talisman and which became a “real talisman” for Dahl, as he wrote in a letter to Vladimir F. Odoievskij in 1837.<sup>8</sup>

Thus Iurij Liapunov had many ancestors to emulate. He was born in St Petersburg in 1893 and was the eldest son with two brothers and four sisters. For eight years from 1904, he was a pupil at St Anne’s German

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<sup>4</sup> A relative of Liapunov’s family, a Russian academician, naval engineer, and applied mathematician Aleksej N. Krylov (1863–1945) recalls in his memoirs a wonderful summer spent as a child with the three brothers in a mansion in the Simbirsk province near the Volga: Krylov 1978 [А. Н. Крылов, *Мои воспоминания*], 40.

<sup>5</sup> He was baptized as Georgij on 5 April 1893. Balakirev was also the godfather of Iurij’s younger brother Boris.

<sup>6</sup> Ramazanova 1999 [Н. В. Рамазанова, “А. С. Ляпунова – хранитель и исследователь музыкальных рукописей”], 7.

<sup>7</sup> Nabokov 1989 [В. В. Набоков, *Другие берега: Сборник*], 129.

<sup>8</sup> *Pushkin v neizdannoj perepiske...* 1952 [Пушкин в неизданной переписке современников (1815–1837)], 145.

School (the so-called Annenschule), which was founded in 1736 and was one of the oldest and best in the city. The school had both classical and non-classical departments, and accepted both boys and girls. It was one of a few gymnasias in St Petersburg (and in Russia in general) in which Ancient Greek was still taught after the revolution and reform of 1905. For twenty-six years a classicist named Josef König (1845–1910) was a very successful rector of the school. Tadeusz (Faddej) F. Zielinski (1859–1944), one the most famous graduates of Annenschule who at one point taught there, speaks highly of König's Latin lessons in his "Autobiography" and calls him his favorite teacher.<sup>9</sup> After König's death in 1910, Zielinski wrote an obituary of him in German, which was published in the school's yearly report.<sup>10</sup> Iurij Liapunov finished school two years later and, as the top pupil, was awarded a gold medal and a badge named in König's honor.<sup>11</sup>

In 1912 Iurij Liapunov began to study at the Historical-Philological Faculty of St Petersburg University. His keen interest in ancient Greek, Latin and ancient history inspired him to choose the Department of Classics and he was the first in his family to choose this field. At the university Iurij Liapunov participated in the seminars of historian and philologist Sergej A. Zhebelev (1867–1941). His Greek seminar offered a unique opportunity to read and discuss a vast number of texts and to benefit from his concise and insightful comments. One of the peculiar features of Zhebelev's approach to teaching was that he was careful never to overshadow the author with his assessments. This method is well illustrated by Liapunov's description of a seminar by Zhebelev on Olbian inscriptions held in the autumn 1915 (a detailed account of five sessions is preserved in Liapunov's archive).<sup>12</sup> According to Liapunov, Zhebelev encouraged them to choose one particular approach in commenting on the inscriptions, and eventually every text was discussed from all possible points of view. Included in Liapunov's notes is the story of a happy guess in which he managed to prove that an inscription from the North Sea region (*IOSPE* I, 8) dated from an earlier period than claimed (more precisely, the first half of the fourth century BC).<sup>13</sup> This idea was strongly supported by Zhebelev who supported this reevaluation of the date based on the shape of the letter v. Liapunov also describes a lecture presented by one of

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<sup>9</sup> Zielinski 2012, 61.

<sup>10</sup> *Godovoj otchiot* 1911 [*Годовой отчет училища Св. Анны по случаю торжественного акта*], 3–18.

<sup>11</sup> *Godovoj otchiot* 1912 [*Годовой отчет училища Св. Анны по случаю торжественного акта*], 86.

<sup>12</sup> OR RNB, f. 451, 1138.

<sup>13</sup> OR RNB, f. 451, 1138, 1.

the participants of this seminar Erich V. Diehl (1890–1952) who discussed the progress of excavations in Olbia from the eighteenth century.<sup>14</sup> Liapunov planned to write an article on the topography of the Diophantos decree (*IOSPE I*<sup>2</sup>, 352): an unfinished version of the text in which the author supports the claim that the location of the “ancient” Chersonessos was in the Bay of Cossack (Strabo 8. 41. 2) is kept in his archive.<sup>15</sup>

Liapunov’s master’s thesis also covered Ancient Greek literature and was written under the supervision of Zhebelev. The paper was entitled “Sophistic and Thucydides” and considered the influence of sophistic prose on the style, composition, and contents of Thucydides speeches: Liapunov was particularly interested in the use of substantivized adjectives, figures of speech and tropes, as well as the similarities and differences of Thucydides’ style in comparison with that of Gorgias. In 1916, his thesis was awarded a gold medal from the university and was abridged to an article published in the *Journal of the Ministry of Public Education*.<sup>16</sup> Zhebelev thought very high of his student – one can see this from two letters addressed to Liapunov’s mother which were written many years later (in 1927 and 1940): he calls Liapunov his “best pupil” and believes that if he could have lived a longer life he would have become “the first rate scholar” and “would have never disgraced the Liapunov’s family famous for its scientific, scholarly, and artistic pursuits and in due time would have become academician after the example of his uncles”.<sup>17</sup> This opinion corresponds well with vocal observations going back to Andrej N. Iegunov (1895–1968), who mentioned Liapunov among the best students of Classics of his generation.

However, Greek literature was not, obviously, Liapunov’s only interest. He also attended the seminars of Mikhail I. Rostovtzeff (1870–1952), a great authority in the field of Roman history, who taught in the Department at that time. Liapunov joined the class during their study of the Gracchi brothers and in 1917 published his second article which discussed the issue as to whether popular tribunes had the power to take the auspices:<sup>18</sup> the answer was negative, but the author denotes the

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<sup>14</sup> OR RNB, f. 451, 1138, 1.

<sup>15</sup> OR RNB, f. 451, 1118.

<sup>16</sup> Liapunov 1916 [А. С. Ляпунов, “Из наблюдений над стилем речей Фукидида”, *ЖМНП*], 399–436.

<sup>17</sup> OR RNB, f. 451, 1090. Specifically, Alexander M. Liapunov (academician of the Russian Academy of Sciences from 1901) and his brother Boris (corresponding member from 1907 and academician from 1923).

<sup>18</sup> Liapunov 1917 [А. С. Ляпунов, “Имели ли народные трибуны ауспиции?”, *ЖМНП*], 257–286.

juridical inconsistency of the situation when the procedure was conducted in spite of the lack of legislative authority. This reminds us of the fact that during the latter years of the Republic major magistrates often did not take military command during their year of office, but later, as promagistrates. This meant that they were not “in the strictest sense magistrates and had no official right to consult the gods on Rome’s behalf: they could not, as previously, take military auspices before battle”.<sup>19</sup> At the same seminar Liapunov took an interest in the literary sources of the Roman historian Velleius Paterculus and planned to dedicate an article to this issue: a detailed draft version of the text is preserved in Liapunov’s archive at the National Library of Russia.<sup>20</sup> He reviews the history of Velleius Paterculus’ studies in the nineteenth century and draws parallels between his “Roman History” and works of Livy, Seneca, and Valerius Maximus.

Without any doubt, Zhebelev and Rostovtzeff had the strongest impact on Liapunov’s scholarly activities at the university – he writes about this in his “Autobiography” which he compiled when he began to work at the Hermitage.<sup>21</sup> However it is worth mentioning that he also attended the seminars of Zielinski on Greek religion and in 1915 delivered a paper at one titled “Plato’s dialogue ‘Euthydemus’ as a source for the history of religion”.<sup>22</sup>

One can see that the student in Liapunov took equal interest in various aspects of the Classics and it is hard to surmise which field he could have finally chosen for his research, had he lived longer.

After graduating in 1916, against all expectations and despite Zhebelev’s proposal<sup>23</sup> that he stay at the university to prepare a doctoral thesis, Liapunov felt obliged to take up his right to perform military service and volunteered to join the army. At the very beginning of 1917, he took accelerated classes in the Mikhailovsky Artillery School in Petrograd, which he finished half a year later at the rank of Warrant Officer. While living in the barracks, he sent letters to members his family, of which only three remain dating back to the period of February–March 1917.<sup>24</sup> These letters are addressed to his younger sister Anastasia (1903–1973), nicknamed ‘Naika’. These documents are unique in bringing a real voice to a person otherwise almost unknown, and Liapunov appears as loving and caring brother. In one of his letters he mentions the forthcoming silver

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<sup>19</sup> Beard 1994, 744.

<sup>20</sup> OR RNB, f. 451, 1117.

<sup>21</sup> Department of Manuscripts, State Hermitage, f. 1, inv. 13, 503, 1.

<sup>22</sup> OR RNB, f. 451, 1119.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 1090, 1.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 1141, 250.

wedding anniversary of their parents and advises his sister on how to crochet a placemat for them (it sounds fantastic coming from a man, yet he obviously knew how to do it, as his instructions are very detailed).<sup>25</sup> In the same letter he complains that he cannot come home at Sunday because he failed at the “salute exam” and did not receive a leave pass. At some point he describes the Artillery School’s library and mentions that his literary tastes differ from these of his sister: Iurij realizes that ‘Naika’, who was fourteen then, was not as interested in Xenophon’s “Cyropaedia” as he was.<sup>26</sup>

From a historical view, what is most remarkable is that the letter was written at the beginning of March 1917, two days after Nicholas II abdication.<sup>27</sup> At the time Anastasia was in Moscow where she studied at the Classical gymnasium of S. Fisher.<sup>28</sup> Iurij gives a minute description of the events, describing shooting, machine gun fire, and casualties; among other things he explains to his sister the meaning of a new expression – ‘учредительное собрание’ (constituent assembly), which is depicted as a “sort of State Duma, which will be elected in several months in order to decide how Russia will be governed: so there will be the Tsar, and there will be a republic, etc.”<sup>29</sup> The Liapunov family happened to live in a flat on Shpalernaya Street (44 b), which was a five minute walk from the Tauride Palace. Initially built in 1906 as the residence of Count Grigorij Potiomkin, Catherine’s II favorite, it was transformed into the seat of the first Russian parliament, the Imperial State Duma. Immediately after the February Revolution of 1917, Tauride Palace housed the Provisional Government. It is no wonder that what had been a quiet street became very crowded and noisy – Liapunov writes in his letter of hundreds of people travelling to the Tauride Palace.<sup>30</sup> These events were also witnessed by the Russian religious philosopher Vasilij V. Rozanov (1856–1919) who lived in the same house and who was a neighbor of the Liapunov’s family until the summer of that year.

Liapunov finished Artillery School in the summer of 1917 and after that he served in the army for approximately half a year: he was appointed to the Fourth Western battery in Kharkov,<sup>31</sup> but there is no information as

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 1141, 250, 1, 1.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 1141, 250, 2, 3–4.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 1141, 250, 3.

<sup>28</sup> Anastasia’s mother and her two elder sisters (Kseniya and Liudmila) all attended this school.

<sup>29</sup> OR RNB, f. 451, 1141, 250, 3, 6.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Department of Manuscripts, State Hermitage, f. 1, inv. 13, 503, 1.

to whether he took part in military operations during this time. In March of 1918 he was demobilized and returned to Petrograd to become a member of the Department of Classics at the university. At the beginning of 1919, Liapunov was appointed the secretary of the State Hermitage and he held this important position for the last year of his life. In the archive there is a “Memo book,” which was issued in 1915, however the dates were all changed by the owner for the year 1919. Here Liapunov carefully records his agenda – academic protocols, acquisitions made by the museum, exhibitions that he was in charge of, meetings, etc.<sup>32</sup> Among the names of his colleagues that he mentions are those of the Classical art historian Oskar F. Waldhauer (1883–1935), a numismatist Nicolaj P. Bauer (1888–1942), and an art critic Nicolaj N. Punin (1888–1953) who was appointed the first commissar of the Hermitage Museum.

At the beginning of 1920, in spite of a petition from the Hermitage,<sup>33</sup> Liapunov was called up for the military service in the Red Army and in February of the same year he died of epidemic typhus in Kozlov, a town in the Tambov region in Southern Russia. This is reported in his father’s letter to Iurij’s younger brother Boris.<sup>34</sup> The Hermitage archive has preserved a letter of condolences to Sergej Liapunov written by the acting director S. N. Trojnitskij, which calls Iurij “a dear member” of the Museum’s “family”.<sup>35</sup> For many years after Liapunov’s death Zhebelev maintained close contact with his relatives.<sup>36</sup>

The fate of other members of this remarkable family was also tragic. Soon after Iurij’s death his younger brother Andrej (who also studied at the Annenschule) joined the White Army and disappeared. Their father, the composer Sergej Liapunov, who had been the church warden at the Conservatoire’s church from 1919, opposed the forcible confiscation of valuables by the Bolsheviks and was arrested by them.<sup>37</sup> Having received six months of unsupervised probation, in 1923 he took a year’s leave of absence and went to Paris where he suddenly died from a heart attack in 1924. Iurij’s other brother Boris took monastic vows at the end of the 1920s

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<sup>32</sup> OR RNB, f. 451, 1142.

<sup>33</sup> The document dates to the 18<sup>th</sup> January 1919 (Department of Manuscripts, State Hermitage, f. 1, inv. 13, 503, 2).

<sup>34</sup> OR RNB, f. 451, inv. 2, 81, p. 2; 11 verso.

<sup>35</sup> The letter dates to the 26<sup>th</sup> February 1920 (Department of Manuscripts, State Hermitage, f. 1, on. 13, 503, 9).

<sup>36</sup> For example, in March 1920, he took care of Liapunov’s university grant which was to be paid to his family.

<sup>37</sup> For details of this “Case of Petrograd clergymen” see: V. R. Miller 2012 [B. P. Миллер, “С. М. Ляпунов и ‘Дело о церкви’”], 64–91.



and was arrested in 1932. In 1937 he died in a concentration camp from tuberculosis. Liudmila, who was a linguist and worked at the Institute of Language and Mind, died during the blockade in 1942. His mother and his sister Ksenia, a curator of Coptic textiles at the Hermitage, died some time later during the evacuation. Only two sisters survived after World War II – Olga (who was subsequently disabled) and Anastasia (‘Naika’), a celebrated musicologist, who worked for many years at the National Library of Russia and preserved the family archive.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Ramazanova 2012, 8–10.



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The article presents the tragic fate of Iurij Liapunov (1893–1920), a highly promising classical scholar, the son of composer Sergej Liapunov and a great-grand-son of the famous Russian ethnographer, lexicographer, and man of letters Vladimir Dahl. Having graduated from St. Anne’s German School (Annenschule), Liapunov became a student of the Historical-Philological Faculty of St Petersburg University. Under the supervision of Sergej Zhebelev and Mikhail Rostovtzeff, who were his principal teachers at the Department of Classics, he published two articles in the *Journal of the Ministry of Public Education*. In 1919, Liapunov was appointed the secretary of the State Hermitage. At the start of 1920, he was called up for military service in the Red Army, and in February of the same year he died of epidemic typhus.

В статье рассказывается о трагической судьбе подававшего большие надежды филолога-классика Юрия Сергеевича Ляпунова (1893–1920), сына композитора С. М. Ляпунова и правнука В. И. Даля, выпускника Анненшуле и Санкт-Петербургского университета, где его основными учителями были С. А. Жебелев и М. И. Ростовцев. Под их руководством Ю. С. Ляпунов опубликовал две статьи в *Журнале Министерства народного просвещения*. В последний год жизни он служил секретарем Эрмитажа и одновременно был оставлен при кафедре классической филологии в университете. Ю. С. Ляпунов умер от сыпного тифа во время призыва в Красную армию.

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