

“Peculiarity is What Attracts Here a Historian”*

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«Специфика – это главное, что привлекает здесь историка»

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Alexander Alexandrovich Maslennikov is a Russian archaeologist, Classicist, and specialist in the history of the ancient Bosphorus. Currently Doctor of Science in History, Professor Maslennikov runs the Field Research Department of the Institute of Archeology (IA) of the Russian Academy of Sciences. He is a member of the Scientific Council and the head of the East Crimean Archaeological Expedition of the IA RAS.¹

On February 27, 2018, Associate Professor of the Department of General History of Belgorod National Research University S. N. Prokopenko and Professor A. A. Maslennikov sat down for a conversation.

S. P. *At present, you are a prominent scholar, well-known in Russia and abroad, but this is the result of a long journey. In order to start moving, you need to take the first step. What prompted you to take this step, that is, to engage in archeology and history?*

A. M. Well, first of all, colleagues, I would like—not for the sake of modesty, but to maintain objectivity—to clarify that I, of course, am not on the same level as other world renowned Russian scientists. I am most likely known around the country because of my work. I am a great example of a famous Russian proverb that needs only slight paraphrasing. In the original, it sounds like this: “It’s not a place that graces a person, but a person who graces a place.” In contrast, I am an example of a case in which a place graces a person. First, I think that if I had not worked as the head of the field research department of the IA RAS for the past fifteen years, I probably would have been known by a fairly narrow circle of ancient history experts, and there would have been no talk of any international recognition. Secondly, to be honest (and we must be honest), another phrase applies to me that appears on one of the first pages of Dostoevsky’s infamous novel *Demons* about one of the characters: “In science, he generally did little, and to be honest, he did nothing at all.” So, saying that I have done a lot in science is an exaggeration.

As for my inspiration, well, everyone has their own fate and everyone chooses it if they have the opportunity to do so. It is better to ask why I decided to become an archaeologist-Classicalist and why my life has been spent on science and administrative work. Chance means a lot in the life of every person. As for ancient history, I remember very well that during one hot summer when I was five or six years old, I somehow came across a tear-off calendar with a picture of Egyptian pyramids on it. I don’t know why that picture amazed me so much (I didn’t even know how to read then) but I became interested in everything connected with ancient history, especially Egypt. Then at some point once I was already in high school, I stumbled across a story that points again to the impact of unexpected circumstances, repetitions, and random, fateful meetings and books in one’s life. I came

¹ For more details see <http://www.archaeolog.ru/~maslen>

across a story by Gleb Golubev, "In the Wake of the Wind."² It came out somewhere in the early 1960s in some sort of adventure magazine. It is about a young man who ends up on an underwater expedition led by an old professor somewhere in the Crimea region of Kerch. This story amazed me. I was interested and intrigued. These circumstances probably aroused my interest in ancient archeology.

S. P. *That is, the big is born from the small?*

A. M. Yes, but I repeat, a great deal of it was a coincidence. It happened that a quarter of a century later I met the prototypes for that story. Professor V. D. Blavatskii stood at the origins of underwater archeology and became my tutor and teacher.³ And the young man about whom the story was written was an employee of the department of ancient archeology of our institute. This is the late Boris Georgievich Peters.⁴ Another character, who was also discussed in the story, is the famous Classicist Gennadii Andreevich Koshelenko, who is also gone now.⁵ In general, although thousands of people read this book, it completely unexpectedly turned out to be crucial for me. Such is the strength of circumstance.

S. P. *Many sources note that you are a student of the Soviet archaeologist, historian of antiquity, and art critic V. D. Blavatskii, but my sense is Vladimir Dmitrievich is not your only teacher. Could you say who your other teachers in science have been?*

A. M. You know, when I was in school at the Tula Pedagogical University (then an institute), archaeological practice for students just didn't exist. We found expeditions on our own and went to them. There were several of us who were interested. By the way, all of them remain my friends, I keep in touch with everyone, and they have come to join my expedition for many years in a row. Of course, those people whom I met in the first expeditions meant a lot to me. Therefore, among my teachers in the field I will first name I. T. Kruglikova and M. A. Romanovskaia.⁶ The latter name is lesser known, but I have maintained the best relations with Marina Andreevna for many years. As for others, of course, I recall with pleasure and gratitude A. G. Kuzmin, a professor at Tula University. Schoolteacher G. M. Razuvaeva probably also needs to be given credit; she was a good

² Golubev 1963.

³ Soviet archaeologist-Classicist, historian of antiquity, Doctor of Arts. When A. A. Maslennikov met V. D. Blavatsky, the latter was already retired, but remained an active scholar. For more details, see: Biography of V. D. Blavatsky. http://www.archae.ru/news/news_174.html

⁴ Soviet archaeologist. Vladimir Dmitrievich Blavatskii noted that "Boris Georgievich became the first Soviet underwater archaeologist" (Blavatsky, Koshelenko 1963). For more details see: Peters, Boris Georgievich https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peters_Boris_Georgievich.

⁵ Soviet and Russian archaeologist, a specialist in the history of Hellas, the ancient Black Sea and East era. For more details see: Koshelenko Gennady Andreevich. http://www.ras.ru/win/db/show_per.asp?P=id-58694.ln-ru.

⁶ Soviet archaeologist-antiquologist. For more details see: Kruglikova Irina Timofeevna. http://www.bosportemple.ru/content/researchers/researchers_03.htm

teacher. And, of course, I was lucky that in my life I have met (and thank God for) people who are strong, wholesome, and worthy of imitation. First of all, my tutor V. D. Blavatskii is not only a truly world-famous scientist, but also a very bright, strong, interesting person with a worthy lifetime of experience. Also, strangely enough, his expeditionary driver, who worked with me for a very long time, over fifteen years, is what we might call an old, pure, frontline soldier. He is now ninety-five years old and, thank God, still alive. From them I took everything that is good about me as a person, a man, and a researcher: their attitude to other people, to myself, and to my country.

S. P. *It is wonderful to have met so many good people in life.*

A. M. Yes, I am a very happy person. I have grandchildren, I have people who are dear to me, and all my life I have been doing what I loved to do, which is a rare success. I'm happy to have known good people. I'm proud of this country because it is worth it.

S. P. *What led you to become the head of the East Crimean archaeological group of the IA Academy of Sciences of the USSR in 1975, which eventually turned into the East Crimean archaeological expedition of the IA RAS?*

A. M. Back in 1975, I was in my last year of grad school and already had quite a lot of experience in expeditions (my first expedition was in 1967). I had visited Moldova, the Crimea, and the North Caucasus. I had worked with many archaeologists. Therefore, I already had quite substantial experience. And, most importantly, by that time I felt that I had sufficient strength and organizational skills. In addition, before that—before the army and in the army—I gave a lot of time and energy to Komsomol work. Communicating with people has never been a problem for me. And finally, at some stage, every real man wants to build a space around himself that he considers necessary, correct, and convenient. This implies a certain degree of independence. It so happened that in 1975, I. T. Kruglikova, who had primarily studied the rural territory of the Northern Black Sea Region, left the Kerch Peninsula and Taman for Chersonesus, and the Crimean Azov Sea region was transferred to me. At that time, some territories, including some that we had worked on for half a century, which had been completely closed and inaccessible due to the presence of military installations, became more or less accessible, and it was possible to work where archaeologists had never worked before. Of course, missing such an opportunity would have been a shame. Moreover, our first survey showed that there were a lot of interesting things there.

S. P. *What difficulties did you face as a young researcher?*

A. M. You know, an old soldier was once asked: “So you served in the tsarist army, then in the Soviet army, then somewhere else, but where was your best?” To this he answered without hesitation: “Where I was young.” Therefore, I don't remember the difficulties now. Everything seemed

easy to do, easy to solve. Maybe then there were fewer needs, maybe there was less paperwork, or maybe there was a desire to do something interesting and important, and some everyday difficulties were not frustrating. Torn tents, lack of money, lack of cars, poor food: none of it seemed like a tragedy.

S. P. *Being, as you would say now, a young scientist in 1977 you defended a candidate dissertation,⁷ which in 1981 was published as a monograph,⁸ along with a whole series of articles. These works were all positively received by the scientific community. But I wonder how you would evaluate your own early works from the perspective of today?*

A. M. A number of them cannot now be called profound and substantial, but some ideas still seem to me worthy. Any research implies that a person has become obsessed with an idea and wants to find something new. And then it seemed to me that I had found and explored completely new monuments. The facts that were presented in these first works, I think, still stand and will be in demand for others. Of course, not everything I wrote then meets contemporary expectations, but that's the way it is. It's bad when the later works are worse than the previous ones. This is much worse and must be feared, especially in old age. And the fact that the first works are not always successful is normal, even natural.

S. P. *If you consider your works before the 1980s, which were the most successful in your opinion?*

A. M. I really like the first thing I did on my own in Crimea—the study of burials in stone boxes, of which almost nothing was previously known.⁹ It turned out that this is a whole group of specific monuments. They are a kind of “highlight” in the East Crimean archeology of the early antique period. Of course, it was fascinating. Some of them were not robbed and the articles devoted to these items seem the most successful to me.

S. P. *If you analyze the current situation in the humanities and the situation during your early works as a scholar, what has radically changed?*

A. M. Of course, a lot has changed. First, the pros. Now there are more opportunities to get acquainted with foreign literature. Every historian of antiquity knows that this is such a vast “sea” and all that we have is a small part of what we need to know. The second plus is that it is now more or less easy, if you have money, health, and desire, to visit monuments that we used to know only from books and films, and many of those were far from good quality. I'm not talking about contacts with colleagues. Of course, it would be good for the works that we wrote then, and for a general assessment of the situation on our territory, if these visits occurred in our undergraduate or postgraduate years. If I could have seen then the

⁷ Maslennikov 1977, under tutelage of V. D. Blavatskii.

⁸ Maslennikov 1981.

⁹ See, for example, Maslennikov 1976. Much later, in 1995, a generalizing study on this topic was published: Maslennikov 1995.

monuments of Sicily, Italy and Greece, which make a huge impression, then my horizons would be wider. Of course, then and now, trips are connected with money and other difficulties, but now they are more feasible. And in this regard, I am a little distracted. When people talk about improving the quality of education in one way or another they introduce different gradations, points, and ratings. All this is “scum.” And you understand that all this “scum” exists because it is necessary to comply with some administrative standards. In this regard, I cannot but recall one of my most recent visits to Greece. We were in Mycenae in early March, the off season, but it was impossible to get into the famous Lion Gate. There was a huge crowd of basically high school and college students from Japan and China. That’s what I call a course of ancient history! That’s how it should be taught! That’s what money should be spent on, at least for those who are interested. In the old days in Russian gymnasiums and universities, when teachers received scholarships, they went to Italy or to Greece to improve their knowledge! And all the rest, I repeat, is the administrative, bureaucratic “scum.” And I am not at all ashamed to say this in the face of any representative of any authority. Am I right? I am!

S. P. *Absolutely.*

A. M. Now, the cons. The main minus (I said a little about it earlier) is the monstrous bureaucratization of all science and education with the inevitable increase in the influence of bureaucracy, the monstrous paperwork, and accountability. It is not the lack of financing itself that is bad, but this cumbersome and complicated accountability. If I sit in the subway, hat in hand, asking people to donate for the professor, they will throw me more money and it will be a lot faster. I have no doubt of that. But, most importantly, a much more serious and global problem is also connected with this, something that we historians know very well because it already happened. Ancient Egypt ceased to be great because there were more officials and scribes than those who plowed and sowed. Great China fell apart periodically for the same reason. And no barbarians would have ever conquered the Roman Empire if the officials had not “devoured” all the state resources. If only there weren’t so many of them.

It is noteworthy that the Roman Empire fell into decay at a time when Roman legal science, on which modern law is based, reached its peak. It determined everything, calculated everything, prescribed everything: what, how, to whom, when. But no one wanted to fight for such a state. The officials plagued everyone: artisans, peasants, and people of intellectual labor. Now the neighboring barbarians remained the same barbarians as they had been 200, 300 years prior. Not in terms of ethnic groups, of course. The soldier became different. He did not want to fight properly for a state in which it was hard to live. People did not want to defend such a state because it was easier to live like barbarians did. A state in which an official means more than a doctor, teacher, scientist, hard worker or even military man, such a

state is doomed. But it is legal. Unfortunately, we keep making the same mistake throughout the history of civilization. Maybe it is inevitable.

S. P. *What do you think is the motivation of modern young people coming to science?*

A. M. Only interest and affection. Few people go to science for a different motivation, and it has always been so. You won't make a career here and you won't make a lot of money. This is only a vocation and interest.

S. P. *You have achieved success in science by exploring the rural territory of ancient Bosphorus, but based on an analysis of more than two hundred scientific works you have published, we can conclude that the circle of problems you are interested in goes beyond this main topic. Is it possible to single out one or two areas of important research for you?*

A. M. The interaction of ancient man and the ancient natural environment, how they influenced one another and the historical process as a whole. are very interesting to me. The topics of migration and relations between peoples, political history, and military history are very interesting. And a topic that interests me because of the specifics of my work is the relationship between written and archaeological sources and, in general, the value of archeology in historical reconstructions. What can we say in cases where we do not have written sources, and how adequate is what we said, based on archaeological sources? How can new methods help or can they help at all?

S. P. *In your writings you have repeatedly paid attention to the study of transitional and crisis eras. What are the prospects and main difficulties of such studies?*

A. M. Yes, it's good for us to say that this topic is promising, or this topic is interesting for this and that reason, but for people who lived during periods of crisis and change, it was not easy at all. Nevertheless, these periods are indeed important because, firstly, as a rule, they are better covered in sources and not only written, but also archaeological sources as well. Secondly, these are periods where the signs of both the old and the new are brighter and more distinct, and this enables one or another phenomena to be represented, felt, and recorded more objectively. They are revealed in the potential of information and eventuality that is embedded in them. It is like checking a person during a period of difficult events or, conversely, during absolute well-being. One or another side of their character may reveal itself at this particular time. The same goes for world history. As for the difficulties, it can be said that it is very difficult not just to interpret events, but to try to be unprejudiced, to write without bias about a time when everything that is most glorious, as well as everything that is most vile and bloody, comes to the surface. How a historian can keep his objectivity, his conscience? This is probably a great difficulty. How does one get along the edge where you, on the one hand, have obvious sympathies, and on the other, must be objective? Facts? How do we interpret these facts?

Any historian is connected with this issue, and not one will ever, it seems to me, give a firm answer on what to do. This is everyone's personal decision. And this, of course, is a huge complexity.

S. P. *How often did you have to revise your previous views on the development of the Bosphorus state in connection with the emergence of new sources, primarily archaeological?*

A. M. I am not such a large figure in science that I have my own established system of views, ideas about events and stages, and periods of the history of this state. On certain issues, as materials accumulate, rethinking sometimes occurs, although, of course, it is easier to have an established scheme in mind. This internally satisfies you when the new corresponds to what you once imagined, something that you have already developed into some kind of, I repeat, system. And this inner complacency is very dangerous, although very convenient. Yes, of course, there are periods, events, and findings when you understand that everything is different and it pleases you later because you understand that you are moving forward.

S. P. *So, it is absolutely no problem for you to reconsider your views?*

A. M. No, it is not. I don't think this is a problem for any researcher. Even a negative result is a result and in closing something, it opens something else at the same time. It's not like walking in the dark through the dead ends and the labyrinths of old ideas. As you know, science, like many other things, develops in a spiral. And at new stages, we sometimes come to the conclusions that our predecessors or we ourselves made some time ago, and there is nothing wrong or strange about this. Sometimes you read the writings of a scientist who lived several centuries ago and you think that they have an interesting, relevant idea. And this is spiral development. And a researcher who is frozen in their development generally jumps off this "spiral" and looks at the same point. They have no future, so neither will have their research.

S. P. *You have been studying the Bosphorus state all your life. Surely you still have a system of ideas about it. In your opinion, what place does the history of the Bosphorus state occupy in ancient history?*

A. M. Perhaps it is better to talk about the entire Northern Black Sea Coast? Its place is hardly noticeable on the scale of the great ancient Ecumene. And if it was sometimes remembered somewhere, it was during some bright moments of crisis. Here Mithridates fought against Rome, his fate brought him to Bosphorus, he stabbed himself here, as Pushkin wrote. And then Roman historians, writers, commanders, public figures became aware of that. A more or less calm era came, and no one remembered the rulers of Bosphorus. And in earlier times wheat was needed in Athens, which meant that Bosphorus kings were notable and Bosphorus was known. Then the situation changed and it was forgotten. In all respects, it was a kind of "backwater" place, but any society, any social organism in its development,

demonstrates something specific, and in some cases very specific. And these small Greek states bordering a huge amount of pre-state formations (barbarians) demonstrate special features of their state structure, military organization, culture, and everyday life of the population. That is, things that were considered absolutely unacceptable or completely unbelievable in the Mediterranean took place here. But, despite the rather low general standard of living, culture, and some other circumstances, it was still an ancient society. The North Black Sea states belonged to the type of antique states according to the foundations of the culture of a significant part of the population, according to the forms and types of government, and according to the main ideological and religious ideas. Another thing is how all this is "refracted." Peculiarity is the main thing that attracts a historian to this topic. Of course, the scale of events here is incomparable with Hellas, Rome, and other ancient centers, but, nevertheless, it is interesting in its own way. The Northern Black Sea region, its three main antique centers—Bosporus, Olbia and Chersonesus—demonstrate two models of development of ancient society. On the one hand, this is the pseudo-democratic model of Olbia and Chersonesus. On the other, Bosporus demonstrated a tendency toward strict centralization since the earliest period of its history, reaching the hereditary royal power. This is a completely different type, but it is also an ancient society.

S. P. *In connection with this point, how justified is the use of the phrase "Bosporus Phenomenon" in Russian history of the ancient period? In St. Petersburg, for example, a major scientific conference under that name is held once every two or three years. Is Bosporus a phenomenon, or was there something similar in other marginal territories of the ancient civilizations?*

A. M. I think "phenomenon" is too loud of a name. There were specifics of Bosporus as an outlying ancient state, to be sure. Some of the special cultural elements that we listed here, of course, did exist. Maybe in some ways they are unique. But the term "phenomenon" itself is used as a signifier; it attracts attention and sounds good. Two major scientific conferences dedicated to the study of the Northern Black Sea coast in the ancient period are held in our country, and they differ somewhat in subject and participants. At the conference in Kerch,¹⁰ most of the reports, if not the absolute majority, are devoted to the topic of Bosporus. And the conference in St. Petersburg¹¹ allows you to take a broader look at Bosporus, and not only Bosporus, from the standpoint of the entire Northern Black Sea region and the Mediterranean. Usually this conference includes reports on Chersonesus, and on Olbia, and on Scythian-barbarian themes. Therefore, there is a different circle of participants, and a wider circle of interests. But

¹⁰ This refers to the annual international conference "Bosporus Readings," which is organized by the "Demeter" charity fund; It is held in Kerch in May.

¹¹ This refers to the international conference "The Bosporus Phenomenon," which is held biennially in St. Petersburg.

both conferences are important, necessary and interesting, and enjoy the well-deserved attention of researchers. Ancient history experts actively participate in them, and they don't only come from our country.

S. P. *How, in your opinion, did the Bosphorians perceive themselves: as 100 percent Greek or did they understand their peculiarity?*

A. M. This is a question of historical psychology, which is poorly developed in our country and has not been studied in the ancient period at all. There are not enough sources for this topic. How did the Bosphorians perceive themselves? With regard to Bosphorus rulers and the powerful sections of the Bosphorus population, we can make some assumptions due to the presence of written sources and a number of archaeological sites. The Spartocids (the dynasty that ruled before Mithridates during the first heyday of the Bosphorus), of course, felt themselves to be part of the Greek world, maybe a little restrained, but, so to speak, the Hellenic elite. They received a good education for that time, were adopted in certain circles of Hellas, and Greek diplomats and military reckoned with them. They felt more like Greeks than barbarians.

The next, broader stage of the social pyramid were the representatives of the highest administrative and military circles and their families. Presumably, for almost the entire history of the Bosphorus, these individuals were primarily of Greek origin and, of course, culture. If anyone got there from the local environment, they most likely acquired Hellenic features and became Greek if not by blood, then by education. That said, some of them (Scythians, later Sarmatians, Alans, Goths and "Romanophiles") could feel quite comfortable in this environment. As for the ordinary population, we have a poor idea of the proportion of Greek descendants in rural areas. It is only clear that it did not remain constant and that it diminished over time, but this process was not "straightforward." In cities, of course, this share was larger, but, again, what was the proportion? In general, cities, even the smallest ones, remained centers of Hellenic culture throughout the ancient period of local history, but here the population could change. Judging by what we know, Hellenic traditions were preserved, although not to the same extent everywhere, up to the late ancient period. How, or rather, who did the inhabitants of rural settlements, sometimes far from the capitals, perceive themselves as? Probably, first of all, they should have considered themselves subjects of their sovereign and their state. And who their father, mother, grandmother, or grandfather was in ethnic terms might not really matter, except in transitional, critical eras, when a new population came into being. Self-awareness and, of course, everyday life in the state of "citizenship" not only meant the fulfillment of certain duties (taxes, service, etc.), but also the recognition of oneself as a member of a very large team, with corresponding protection rights and privileges, even if the representatives of this ordinary rural population have never been to the capital.

Even in the second century CE the Bosporan rulers and the nobility had a very high level of education; they cannot be called Sarmatians. In the second century CE, a fairly prosperous period of local history, one of Bosporus kings tried to gain favor with one of the popular Greek sophists to learn language, literature, and some philosophy; thus he came to Asia Minor. The Bosporan elite and at least part of the "middle" class of that period considered themselves to be part of the great Roman Empire and were proud of it. This is an important factor, and now it becomes clearer to us. Remember our confusion in the nineties when we did not understand who we were, when others wiped their feet upon us. I am generally opposed to the theory of sarmatization of the Bosporus.¹² The Greek language dominated the widest sections of the population. It was spoken, written, and used in documentation. Maybe the rural population spoke some kind of Koine. We are not specifically aware of other languages. One inscription from Panticapaeum of Roman time indicates that even in the capital an Alanian translator was needed.

S. P. *Your research writings are always distinguished by a specific style. This is especially noticeable against the background of publications on archaeological topics. Did you work on this purposefully or is it a natural process for you? Have you ever written in a different manner? How important is it for an archaeologist, in your opinion, to write in an exciting and vivid manner?*

A. M. It is not for me to judge whether I write in an exciting and vivid manner. In general, it's very good that we can now write as we want, or as we like, not only in terms of content, but also in style. When you read the works of our predecessors of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, you get carried away because they spoke easily and fluently and wrote as they spoke. And then there came a period when bureaucratic or other circumstances arose again, as well as tough editorial revision, which made authors write in a stereotyped, dry manner. I understand that some phrases do not carry very important information to put them in the text, but they carry a different, personal attitude of the author, their ability to use the language. The author shows his attitude to what he writes, his emotions, and this greatly animates the text. Sometimes it is hard for the readers, but sometimes, on the contrary, it is interesting to read such works. But in everything you need to know the measure; research papers are not works of fiction. But, probably, if it is interesting to read my articles, it is because I write about what is interesting to me. I write it from my heart. At the same time, I would like to note that research cannot be made to order. You can't have a standard to write a certain amount of papers or more. It all depends

¹² The Bosporus sarmatization theory was first formulated by M. I. Rostovtzeff (Rostovtzeff 1918; Rostovtzeff 1922 and others) and was supported by most scholars. Currently, this hypothesis is being criticized and the question remains very much in dispute.

on one's internal state, mood, and inspiration. Books and articles should stem from the desire to say something, share information, and add something new. This is very important, but, unfortunately, we are required to account for everything, even such things that cannot be estimated using mathematics. There are so many examples when a scholar has hundreds of papers but no one reads them. But they are in the "foremost." They are most quoted, although in a negative key.

S. P. *Alexander Alexandrovich, in addition to everything else, you have been teaching since 2002. At the moment, you are a professor at Tula State Pedagogical University named after Leo Tolstoy. Why did you start teaching?*

A. M. For me, this episode in life is fairly random. There were a number of circumstances. I am a native of Tula, I graduated from this university. At some stage in my life I wanted to try myself as a teacher. The word "professor" adds weight to the regalia and warms the soul, at least when you think of your teachers or characters of famous works. Professor Preobrazhenskii by Bulgakov, it does sound and will sound good. I taught Latin and specialized courses in archeology. The knowledge and study of Latin, as well as mathematics, "keeps the mind in order." With the harmony of its internal systems and constructions, the Latin language is, of course, akin to mathematical calculations. I am not saying that this is the basis of European languages. Latin makes it possible to feel the ancient culture.

S. P. *There is a situation in the world of ancient history that Russian scholars of the history of Ancient Greece and Rome are not in great demand. But with respect to the Classicists who explore the ancient states of the Northern Black Sea region, the situation looks different because foreign experts, if they are interested in this topic, cannot ignore the results of Russian researchers.*

A. M. Yes, in relation to the archaeology of the Northern Black Sea region, of course, nobody knows this area with all its problems better than we do, but it is of little interest to anyone abroad. This must be reckoned with. When you come to any country in the Mediterranean, you see something that we don't have. The level of preservation, diversity, and informational content of archaeological sites is incomparable. Another thing is the question of the methods of excavation and study of the material. We have to extract a maximum of information from rather scarce material, while foreign archaeologists are sort of spoiled by its abundance. We occupy a modest but worthy place in a large family of ancient archeology. If we compare the archaeological reports, given the working conditions of archaeologists, we can say that we are doing a lot and at a good level.

S. P. Thank you, Alexander Alexandrovich, for the interesting answers.

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