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**AD LXV DIEM NATALIS  
ALEXANDRI PODOSSINOV BASILII F.**

“Traue dem leitenden Gott und folge dem schweigenden Weltmeer,  
Wär sie noch nicht, sie stieg’ jetzt aus den Fluten empor”

Fr. Schiller, *Kolumbus*.



**Fig. 1. Professor Alexander V. Podossinov.  
St Petersburg, December, 2011. Photograph by A. Sinitsyn.**

These lines prefixed as an epigraph by the German poet Schiller to the great Genoese explorer Columbus, may well be applied to the Russian scholar Alexander Podossinov who turned 65 on 10 April 2015 and to whom this tome is dedicated: classical philologist, researcher of the history and culture of the Ancient World, explorer, translator, expert in ancient geography and cartography, and adept in all the ancient cultures of Eurasia.

Alexander Vasil'evich Podossinov was born in the middle of the last century in the small old Russian town of Vereia near Moscow. After leaving school in 1967, he won admission to the Department of Philology at Moscow State University where he took his degree in classics. His professors were N. A. Fiodorov, A. N. Popov, A. A. Takho-Godi, and other illustrious Soviet classical scholars. Upon graduation in 1972, Alexander Podossinov was offered a position at the Institute of History of the USSR at the Academy of Sciences of the USSR to work in the Department of History of the Ancient States on the Territory of the USSR, which in 1997 was made part of the Institute of World History in the Russian Academy of Sciences. A. V. Podossinov still works there as Chief Senior Researcher of the Center for Eastern Europe in the Ancient and Medieval World.

Alexander Podossinov regards Vladimir Terent'evich Pashuto, Corresponding Fellow at the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, as his mentor, whom he remembers with gratitude and reverence: "in the early 70s he took us, young as we were, under his wing to work in the department that he had just established". Many of V. T. Pashuto's disciples became renowned scholars. Under V. T. Pashuto's guidance, Alexander Podossinov composed his Ph.D. thesis, *Ovid's works as a source of history of Eastern Europe and Transcaucasia*, and subsequently published as a book, *Ovid and the Black Sea Region: a history of historiographic analysis of the poetic text*,<sup>1</sup> that appeared in both Russian and German.<sup>2</sup>

In 1998 A. V. Podossinov defended his doctoral thesis on *Space concepts in the archaic cultures of Eurasia (orientation by the cardinal points)*, and published as a book in the following year as *Ex oriente lux. Orientation by the cardinal points in the ancient cultures of Eurasia*<sup>3</sup> and was met with wide acclaim by numerous scholars in a variety of fields.

In research, Alexander Podossinov skillfully combines the ideas and methods of philology and history, following the principle of *Altertumswissenschaft*, or classical scholarship. A. V. Podossinov is the author of the multi-voluminous *Lingua Latina* textbook (a textbook comprising ten parts, supplemented by a Reader and Russian-Latin and Latin-Russian dictionaries, coauthored with

<sup>1</sup> Podossinov 1984, 8–178.

<sup>2</sup> Podossinov 1985; Podossinov 1987.

<sup>3</sup> Podossinov 1999a.

N. I. Shchaveleva and others).<sup>4</sup> This textbook on the Latin language won high praise from his colleagues; it is said to be “Latin with a human face”. For a quarter of a century the *Magister maximus* himself has used it when teaching at several schools in Moscow:<sup>5</sup> as a way of training children for school competitions (‘The Olympiads’) in classical languages, and for encouraging students to try their hand at translating ancient authors (some of which have been published).



**Fig. 2. The green years, on an archeological expedition trip. From left to right: A. Podossinov, M. Suslova, I. Demidov, A. Maslennikov. USSR, Krasnodar Kraj, Phanagoria, Summer, 1974.**

The ethnic geography of Eastern Europe and Transcaucasia, geographical concepts in antiquity and the Middle Ages, ancient cartography (including the problems of orientation in the world’s descriptions, sea voyages, and reconstructing the routes of ancient seafarers) constitute the primary topics of research that Podossinov has undertaken in his studies of ancient history.<sup>6</sup> In 2000, a collec-

<sup>4</sup> Podossinov 1990–2004. On classical languages and their study in gymnasiums and universities: Podossinov 1983a; 1991d; Podossinov, van Hooff 1991; Podossinov 1998a; Arzumanĭan, Podossinov 2004; 2006.

<sup>5</sup> See, e. g., essays written in various years on *philologus classicus*. A. V. Podossinov, teacher of Latin in Moscow gymnasiums, author of the best Latin textbook ever used in secondary schools and gymnasiums: Liubzhin, 2002; Saltykova, 2010; Lesskis, 2012.

<sup>6</sup> Here is a series of publications: Podossinov 1978; 1979; 1983b; 1989; 1991a; 1991b; 1991c; 1990/1992; 1992; 1993; 1994a; 2000a; 2000b; 2003a; 2003b; 2004; 2005; 2006; 2008; 2010; 2011; 2012a; 2012b; 2013a; 2013b; 2013c; 2015a; 2015c.

tion of his articles on the historical geography of Eastern Europe was published.<sup>7</sup> Of his many publications, I mention just a few: *Eastern Europe in the Roman cartographic tradition. Texts, translations, commentaries*;<sup>8</sup> *Roman Geographical sources: Pomponius Mela and Plinius Maior. Texts, translations and commentaries* (coauthored by M. V. Skrzhinskaïa);<sup>9</sup> a research paper devoted to the orientation by cardinal points, *The Symbols of the Four Evangelists*;<sup>10</sup> long chapters in collective works *Russkaïa reka (The Russian River)*<sup>11</sup> and *Imagines mundi*;<sup>12</sup> the recent short monograph *Where did Odysseus sail?*,<sup>13</sup> and an editor of *Early Russia in the light of foreign sources*.<sup>14</sup> In 1995 he published a widely popular work on Roman mythology containing stories for children and adolescents that featured an amazing array of illustrations; this book immediately became a classic in its own right and thus has become a rare find. A. V. Podossinov has written over 400 scholarly, popular and educational papers. He has translated into Russian works by Agathemeros, Virgil, Hecataeus of Abdera, Ovid, Pomponius Mela, Silius Italicus, Statius, Cicero and many other Greek and Roman authors.

In June–August 2000, a group of historians and classical philologists from Russia took part in the *European Cultural Centre of Delphi* program (ECCD). A. V. Podossinov acted as a visiting professor and delivered a series of lectures on ancient geography and cartography, *κατὰ* and *ἄνω*, and *sub* and *super*. For those of us who attended this academic event, it was an unforgettable three-week experience. Alexander Podossinov established such close ties with his Greek counterparts that he would frequently bring the winners of Academic Competitions in Classical Languages and Ancient History, held for students from Russian gymnasiums and lyceums, to Hellas to enter Greek Language competitions.

I remember a fortnight when I stayed alone in A. V. Podossinov's Moscow flat in July 1999. In those days the Podossinovs used to spend their summers in a small rented house in Peredelkino, where Alexander spent much of his time with his family. During one such weekend during my "Moscow holiday" I visited them at Peredelkino. A. V. Podossinov met me at the railway platform and showed me around the dacha settlement and the local cemetery. We visited the Korneï Chu-

<sup>7</sup> Podossinov 2000c.

<sup>8</sup> Podossinov 2002.

<sup>9</sup> Podossinov Skrzhinskaïa, 2011.

<sup>10</sup> Podossinov 2000d.

<sup>11</sup> Dzhakson, Kalinina, Konovalova, Podossinov 2007 (A. V. Podossinov's chapter is entitled: 'Hydrography of Eastern Europe in the Ancient and Medieval geocartography': Podossinov 2007, 14–97).

<sup>12</sup> Dzhakson, Konovalova, Podossinov 2013 (here A. V. Podossinov's contribution is 'How the ancient man oriented himself in geographical space', pp. 15–129).

<sup>13</sup> Podossinov 2015b.

<sup>14</sup> Podossinov 1999b; *Drevniïa Rus'* 2009.

kovskii Museum (the curator turned out to be an old friend of the Podossinovs), the poet Andrei Voznessenskiĭ's dacha, the museum-house of Boris Pasternak and that of the bard Bulat Okudzhava. In the evening we had a feast. In the garden outside the house that the Podossinovs rented we sang songs and talked all through the night. Alexander – half jesting, half serious – spoke of his plans: “I intend to write seven more books”. That was a decade and a half ago. Since then many more books have been brought to light. A. V. Podossinov has recently completed, *Scythia: a history of the geographic image* (together with T. N. Dzhakson and I. G. Konovalova).<sup>15</sup> We await its publication. And may he write many more!



**Fig. 3. Alexander Podossinov with his wife, Irina, in Munich, Germany, mid–2000s.**  
Photograph by H. J. Schmitt.

At various times in his life A. V. Podossinov was received fellowships to work in Australia, England, Germany and Switzerland. He is a follower of the European – largely, German – tradition of studying antiquity. In the early 1980s, Alexander Podossinov won a scholarship granted by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation (*Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung*): in pursuance of Columbus' behest from Friedrich Schiller's *Kolumbus*: “Immer, immer nach West! Dort muß die Küste sich zeigen”. Deeply in love with German history, culture and

<sup>15</sup> A. V. Podossinov's works on Scythians and Scythia: Podossinov 1977; 1984; 1985a; 1987; 1994b; 2013d; 2014a; 2014b.

*deutscher Geist*, for three decades and a half, Alexander Podossinov has sported a black tie with thin green stripes of the *Humboldtianer* (though he wears it only on very special occasions).

Since 2002 A. V. Podossinov has been a professor at the Center for Antique Studies at the Institute of Oriental Cultures and Antiquity (Russian State University of Humanities). Since 2008 he has been the Chair of Ancient Languages at the Department of History (Moscow State University). It is amazing how A. V. Podossinov manages to combine his academic work at the Institute of World History (Russian Academy of Sciences) and at several other universities with his teaching at secondary schools. Apart from lecturing, A. V. Podossinov is engaged in the preparation of periodic scholarly editions. He is the editor-in-chief of a budding (since 2010), yet already well-known, journal *Aristeas. Journal of Classical Philology and Ancient History*, the editor of several issues of the yearbook *Ancient States of Eastern Europe*,<sup>16</sup> the editor of a collection of papers dedicated to geographical and historical problems of the ancient world entitled, *The Periphery of the Classical World in Ancient Geography and Cartography*,<sup>17</sup> and has edited a series of departmental collections of papers.<sup>18</sup> A. V. Podossinov is a member of many editorial boards of national and foreign journals and academic editions, the coordinator of the Russian Association of Teachers of Ancient Languages, a member of the Bureau of the Russian Associations of Classical Scholars. This does not exhaust the academic record of his engagements.

Buoyant, energetic and always cheerful, A. V. Podossinov is a born traveler. He is a regular participant at conferences on classical philology and ancient history, the history of ancient and medieval geography and cartography which are held in various centers for studies of Antiquity; he has travelled half the world delivering lectures at universities in Australia, Bulgaria, Canada, England, France, Germany, Greece, Holland, Italy, Japan, Norway, Poland, Turkey, Sweden and many others. In 2010, his friends and colleagues contributed their articles to a *Festschrift* bearing the festive and lively title *Gaudeamus igitur*.<sup>19</sup>

According to western “university standards”, the mid-sixties is supposed to be the age when a professor becomes an *emeritus*, at which time he is legally bound to end his teaching, to be relieved of his services, and is expected to retire. Yet, the status of *emeritus* can hardly be applied to someone like Podossinov. And anyone who knows Alexander – at work, at home or at conferences – will subscribe to this view. Even now, at his supposed retirement age he holds six different positions, and as usual he remains inspiring and personable.

<sup>16</sup> See Podossinov 1999c; Podossinov, Gabelko 2014.

<sup>17</sup> Podossinov 2014c and here: Podossinov 2014d.

<sup>18</sup> Collections of research papers written at the Department of Ancient Languages, Faculty of History, Moscow State University (2009 and 2012).

<sup>19</sup> Dzhakson, Konovalova, Tsetskladze (eds.) 2010.





**Fig. 4. A. Podossinov while visiting Saratov: with Irina, his wife, and A. Sinitsyn at the war monument to “The Cranes”. Photograph by Eugenia Sinitsyna, June 2005.**



**Fig. 5. A. Podossinov in Germany in 2015, aboard a stone elephant. Munich. Photograph by Dmitriï Shcheglov.**

A generous nature, Alexander Podossinov often invites guests to his flat in the south-west of Moscow, adjacent to Bitsevskii Park. Everyone who has visited his home knows what a fine host he is. His wife, Irina, creates a unique atmosphere; she holds a degree in Russian philology, and is his constant companion and assistant. They have two children – a daughter, Elena, also a philologist, and a son, Sergei, a musician and a sound producer. Amazingly, though always buried in academic research, Alexander finds time for his household; while roaming the world – now with his grandchildren Alexander and Anton – he reads Homer's poems to them.

As far as I know, Podossinov does not write poetry himself, but he loves reading it and often sings in various languages. In the summer of 2000, at Delphi he recited an ode *à la Grecque* which he composed for the occasion of our running the *agon* at the Delphi stadium. He feels keenly about verse, for Alexander is a poet of the Arts. He is also the author of articles on classical themes and images in 19th and 20th century Russian poetry.<sup>20</sup>

It might be more logical to end this essay about the Latin scholar with verses from a classical author, but I chose instead to cite a few lines from Bulat Okudzhava's song, a favorite with A. V. Podossinov, which appears at the end of his *The Symbols of the Four Evangelists*:

*When at sunset the twilight starts curling around  
Let me see them again, them who float past me  
The blue bull, the white eagle, and the golden trout,  
Otherwise, in this ageless world, why should I be?*

*ΥΠΕΡ, ΑΝΩ ΚΑΙ ΑΝΩΤΕΡΩ,  
ET PLVRIMOS ANNOS, ALEXANDER SVPPOPVLINE!!*

*The editors of the Journal "ANABASIS" join in congratulating Alexander Podossinov*

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<sup>20</sup> For example, Podossinov 1985b; 1998b; 2003c.



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