

# The Journey Begins: Letter from Vasily Struve to Mikhail Rostovtzev of 25 May 1914

Written by Ivan A. Ladynin  
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## Abstract

The article presents a publication of the letter from Vasily Vasilievich Struve (1889–1965), pioneer in the research of the Ancient Near East societies in the Soviet Union, to Mikhail Ivanovich Rostovtzev (1870–1952), the prominent Classicist, one of the first scholars in socio-economic history of the Antiquity in pre-revolutionary Russia. The letter was written during Struve's post-graduate sabbatical in Berlin in 1914; it is stored in the Russian State Historical Archives in St. Petersburg. The document is significant due to its information on Struve's stay in Berlin and on his contacts with leading German scholars (including Eduard Meyer and Adolf

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Erman), but it also touches upon a bigger issue. In the early 1930s Struve forwarded his concept of slave-owning mode of production in the Ancient Near East, which was immediately accepted into official historiography, making him a leading theoretician in the Soviet research of ancient history. It has been repeatedly stated in memoirs and in post-Soviet historiography that this concept and, generally speaking, Struve's interest in socio-economic issues was opportunistic. His 1910s articles on the Ptolemaic society and state published prior to the Russian revolution weigh heavily against this point of view. The published letter contains Struve's assessment of his future thesis (state institutions of the New Kingdom of Egypt) and puts its topic in the context of current discussions on the Ptolemaic state and society and of his studies in the Rostovtzev's seminar at the St. Petersburg University. Struve declares the study of Egyptian social structure and connections between its pre-Hellenistic and Hellenistic phases his life-task, introduced to him by Rostovtzev. Thus, Struve's early interest in these issues appears to be sincere; it stems from pre-revolutionary trends in the Russian scholarship.



Keywords

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Historical source, Vasily Struve, Mikhail Rostovtzev, Egyptology, classical studies, socio-economical research, Germany.

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