

## Solomon Luria and his Contribution to the Study of Antiquity\*

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Solomon Luria (1891-1964) was one of the major Russian students of classical antiquity in the first half of the twentieth century, and one of those who kept the lamp of classical learning alight during the early decades of the existence of the Soviet Union. His career coincided with the rise of the Soviet system, and his life exemplified the vicissitudes of academic work and Jewish life in Soviet Russia.

Yaakov Luria, Solomon's father, was a learned and well-known ophthalmologist and philanthropist in Mogilev, Belorussia, where Luria was born.<sup>1</sup> Luria was educated at the gymnasium there, graduating with a gold medal in 1908, and going on to study Classics at St. Petersburg University. The staff there included such scholars as S. Zebelev (in Greek history, archaeology and epigraphy); M. Rostovtzeff (Roman history, archaeology and epigraphy); T. Zielinski (classical philology); and I.A. Bodouin de Courtenay (linguistics). In 1913 Luria was awarded a gold medal for his diploma thesis 'The Boeotian League', which was published the following year.<sup>2</sup> By then his article on the inscriptions of Chaeronea had already been published.

After Luria's graduation Zebelev proposed that, in spite of the legal barriers against Jews, Luria should be retained at the University. The request was turned down, and after much hesitation Luria converted to Lutheranism (In March of 1917, a month after the February Revolution, he reverted to Judaism). In 1918 Luria was appointed as a professor at Petrograd University, but in the same year, together with some other members of the faculty staff, he moved to Samara. There he began his teaching career, as a professor of Samara University. In 1921 Luria returned to Petrograd (from 1924 known as Leningrad) University; he worked there till 1929 when ancient history was excluded from the

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<sup>1</sup> Publications on S. Luria's life and work include: 'On the Seventieth Birthday of Professor Luria', *Vestnik Drevnei Istorii (VDI)* 1960, no. 4, 176-98; Y. Kobiv, 'Chair of Classical Philology of Lwow University', *VDI* 1961, no. 4, 187-8; 'In Memory of the Teacher', *VDI* 1965, no. 1, 227-30; B. Nadel, 'Professor Solomon Luria — the Story of his Life (1891-1964)', *Meander* 1965, 209-55 (in Polish); B. Korpziva-Lurie, *The History of a Life*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1987); N. Grinbaum, 'Solomon Luria (1891-1964)', *Philologus* 31 (1987), 300-8; *History and Culture of Antiquity. In Memory of Professor S. Luria* (Lwow, 1980) (in Ukrainian); 'Solomon Luria', *A Brief Jewish Encyclopaedia*, vol. 4, cols. 974-5 (Jerusalem, 1989) (in Russian); B. Vitz-Margulis, 'Solomon Luria', *Belorussian Historical Encyclopaedia*, vol. 4, col. 402 (Minsk, 1997) (in Belorussian); E. Salomonic, 'The Centenary of the Birth of Professor S. Luria', *Archaeology*, 4 (1998), 81-3 (in Ukrainian); 'Solomon Luria', *Belorussian Encyclopaedia*, vol. 9, col. 372 (Minsk, 1999) (in Belorussian); N. Grinbaum, *Mycenological Studies* (St. Petersburg, 2000), 200-21.

<sup>2</sup> S. Luria, *The Boeotian League* (St. Petersburg, 1914).

curricula of Soviet universities. From then on Luria taught mathematics in high schools, until in 1934 the teaching of ancient history was reinstated, and he resumed his position at Leningrad University. In the same year he was awarded a doctor's degree in history. Luria also lectured and supervised postgraduate students in the Leningrad branch of the Institute of History of the Soviet Academy of Sciences.

In the 1920s and early 1930s Luria conducted epigraphical research — first, on the Boeotian inscriptions, in connection with his diploma thesis on the Boeotian League, and then on inscriptions of the 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE from Attica as well as from Lemnos, Lokris and Salamis.<sup>3</sup> He suggested restorations of the inscriptions from Salamis (*IG I* 21) and Lemnos (*IG II*<sup>2</sup> 39) and proposed criteria for dating the Attic inscriptions.<sup>4</sup> Continuing the tradition of the St. Petersburg epigraphical school, Luria contributed much to the study of the inscriptions from the Greek colonies on the northern coast of the Black Sea. He was also an assistant member for vols. III-VIII of the international *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* (*SEG*).

In these years Luria wrote about thirty works on the history of the Near East, the Bible, and the history of Jews in the Hellenistic period, including the influential *Anti-Semitism in the Ancient World* (Petrograd, 1922, in Russian).<sup>5</sup> However, his main attention in this period was given to Antiphon the Sophist, whom he called 'the ancient anarchist' and to whom he devoted 13 articles and two books. The study, which began with the reconstruction of the social ideas of Antiphon, eventually resulted in the comprehensive work *A History of Social Thought in Antiquity* (Moscow, 1929; in Russian). At the same time, Luria's conviction that Antiphon's ideas show the influence of the teachings of Democritus gave rise to his deep interest in Democritus himself, to the investigation of whose life and work he dedicated more than forty years.

The 1930s and 1940s were the years of high creativity and mature development of Luria's scholarly work. He wrote entries on Greek religion, cult and mythology for the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, and published a considerable number of articles on ancient history, science and philosophy, including 'Democritus' mechanics' (1935). In 1932 Luria published 'Die Infinitesimaltheorie der antiken Atomisten',<sup>6</sup> in which he took account of newly published papyrological material; the study culminated in the book *The Theory of Infinitesimals in the Ancient Atomists* (Moscow, 1935; in Russian). A further achievement in this field was his monograph *Archimedes* (Moscow, 1945; in Russian). Luria's works in the field of Greek historiography and social and political history

<sup>3</sup> 'Die Lemnische «Apographe»', *Doklady Akademii Nauk* (*Proceedings of the Academy of Sciences*), 1924, 130-1; 'Noch einmal das Lemnische Psefisma', *ibid.*, 134-38; 'Bemerkungen zu Aristoteles *Athēnaion Politeia* 1.16', *Raccolta di scritti in onore di G. Lumbroso* (Milan, 1925), 304-15; 'Zur Rechtfertigung meiner Ergänzung von *IG II* 1', *Klio* 1927, vol. 1, 68-74; 'Klisfen i Pisistratidy', *VDI* 1940, no. 2, 45-51; 'Zum neugefundenen Lokrischen Gesetz', *Doklady Akademii Nauk*, 1924, 216-8; see also his review of G. De Sanctis in *Rivista di Filologia e d'istruzione classica*, 1926 no. 1, 40-51.

<sup>4</sup> 'Zur Geschichte der Präskripte in Attischen Preelidischen Volksbeschlüssen', *Hermes* 62 (1927) 151-75.

<sup>5</sup> Among other works are 'The Biblical Story about the Jews in Egypt', *Jewish Thought*, 1925, 81-126 (in Russian); 'Die Ägyptische Bibel (Joseph und Message)', *Zeitschrift fuer die Alttestamentarische Wissenschaft*, 44 (1926), 94-135.

<sup>6</sup> *Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte der Mathematik*, Bd. 2, H. 2, 106-85 (1932).

published in these years include the investigation of the reforms of Solon, social movements in Argos, political struggle in Athens, and the position of free labourers in ancient Greece. In 1940 he published the first part of *A History of Greece*.

Luria was also a gifted translator. Among the translations that he produced in these years we find Xenophon's *Greek History* (with commentary; Leningrad, 1935) and selected biographies by Plutarch (Leningrad, 1941). He wrote on Archilochus, Alcaeus, Sappho and Herodas. Of particular interest was his work on Greek tragedy in which he detected a wealth of allusions to contemporary historical and political events, an approach that led him to justify the use of tragedy as a historical source. In 1943 in Samara (then Kuibyshev), an evacuee from Leningrad, Luria was awarded another doctoral degree for the thesis 'Literary Form and Topical Subjects in Attic Tragedy'.

Luria was not a scholar detached from everyday life. He worried about the growing oppression of the communist regime. On his holidays in the surroundings of Mogilev in the years of collectivization, he saw peasants dying from starvation and refugees from Ukraine. In Leningrad some of his colleagues and pupils were arrested and disappeared. He had the courage to speak out in their defence and expected to be arrested himself as a consequence. After his death his son, Dr. Yaakov Luria, discovered an unfinished manuscript entitled 'The General and Fundamental Principles of the Contemporary Soviet System'. It referred to the Soviet system in such terms as 'state capitalism', 'serfdom', and even 'slavery'. To avoid discovery, Luria wrote it in the ancient Cypriot characters. His opposition to the official linguistic theory of Marr led to the suspension of the publication of the second part of his *A History of Greece*. The authorities castigated Luria's *Herodotus* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1947, in Russian) for its lack of Soviet patriotism and described his correspondence with foreign colleagues as 'grovelling' and later on labelled it 'cosmopolitanism'. In 1949, in the course of the anti-Semitic campaign against the 'cosmopolitans', Luria was dismissed from Leningrad University as 'not befitting his position' (paradoxically, in that same year his *Essays on the History of Ancient Science* were published). He was also removed as supervisor of the second volume of the *Inscriptions of the Northern Coast of the Black Sea*, an epigraphic legacy of V. Latyshev and S. Zebelev. The volume, almost ready for publication, appeared only 16 years later.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the loss of his teaching post, like others in similar plight Luria was allowed to work as a junior researcher for the Committee of the History of Science and Technology at the Institute of History of the Soviet Academy of Sciences. In the years 1950-53 he was able to hold a teaching post, in Latin and linguistics, at the Odessa Institute of Foreign Languages. It was only in 1953 that he managed to return to Leningrad, where he was immediately granted the Chair in Classical Philology. However, he apparently had to face too much by way of humiliation and insults there, and therefore he decided to leave Leningrad almost at once. He answered an advertisement published by Lwow University, and in the fall of 1953 he was elected Chair of the Department of Classics there.

The Lwow period of Luria's life was the high point of his scholarly activity: in these years he wrote 80 works many of which dealt with linguistic subjects, such as, for example, the exemplary analysis of the Pamphylian inscription from Sillyon

<sup>7</sup> *Corpus Inscriptionum Regni Bosporani (CIRB)* (Moscow, 1965).

(‘Burgfrieden in Sillyon’, *Klio* 37 (1959), 7-20). He was also among the founders of the periodical *Issues in Classical Philology* (in Ukrainian).

Luria's work in the field of Mycenology brought him international renown. He suggested that the Linear B tablets unearthed in Pylos in 1939 are Greek and when Michael Ventris published his decipherment, Luria was one of the first to support his analysis of the material. In his correspondence with Ventris, Luria suggested some corrections to his readings. Later Luria was the first scholar in the Soviet Union to publish works on this topic.<sup>8</sup> Only a year after the publication of *Documents in Mycenaean Greek* by Ventris and J. Chadwick (1956), Luria published *Language and Culture of Mycenaean Greece* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1957; in Russian), based on the work of the British scholars as well as the results of his own research.

But the most important of Luria's nearly 300 scholarly productions was undoubtedly the *Democritea*.<sup>9</sup> At the time of Luria's death in 1964, his work on this was almost completed, but it was left to his colleagues and students to publish it posthumously.

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<sup>8</sup> In *VDI*, 1947 no. 4, 70-87; *ibid.* 1954 no. 3, 104-14; 1955 no. 3, 8-36; 1956 no. 4, 3-12; *Minos* 5 (1957), 41-52; *VDI*, 1957 no. 2, 8-24; *ibid.* 1957 no. 3, 196-213.

<sup>9</sup> *Democritea*, collegit emendavit interpretatus est Salomo Luria, Leningrad, 1970.