

MICHAEL IVANOVITCH ROSTOVTZEFF

1870-1952

MICHAEL IVANOVITCH ROSTOVTZEFF was born near Kiev on 10 November 1870. He graduated from the First Classical Gymnasium of Kiev in 1888, and after studying for two years at the University of Kiev migrated to that of St. Petersburg, graduating in 1892. Even in these early years he showed his bent for the fields of study in which later he was to become famous. His schoolboy thesis was on 'The Administration of the Roman Provinces in the time of Cicero', his undergraduate thesis on 'Pompeii in the light of the New Excavations'. As early as this, social, administrative, and economic history was his main interest, and already he appreciated the importance of archaeological evidence for this theme. For the next three years he taught in the gymnasium at Tsarskoe-Selo. In 1895 he was awarded a travelling scholarship and spent the next three years partly at Vienna, working in Bormann and Bendorf's seminar, partly in Italy, where he divided his time between the German Archaeological Institute at Rome and his beloved Pompeii. In these years he published his first articles in German (he had already in 1894-6 produced work in Russian which is inaccessible to me), an epigraphical contribution, the first of many, to *Arch. epigr. Mitt.*, and in the *Mitteilungen* of the German Archaeological Institute of Rome, a preliminary attack on the still unsolved problem of the *anabolicum* and a study of the relations of the *patrimonium* and the *ratio thesaurorum*. During these years he was also working on his Master's thesis, which he presented in 1898 and published in Russian in the following year. It was not until 1904 that it became accessible to Western scholars in a German version as the famous *Geschichte der Staatspacht in der römischen Kaiserzeit* (*Philologus, Suppl. ix*). Here he gave a rich foretaste of his powers as an historian, in particular his sweeping range and his mastery of diverse techniques. The monograph was a pioneer work—and remains the standard authority—on the farming system in antiquity. It covers all types of farming from taxes to public lands, and, despite its modest title, ranges from fifth-century Athens through the Hellenistic kingdoms and the Roman Republic before tracing the decline of the system under the Principate. It uses literary, papyrological, and

epigraphical evidence with equal skill and sureness. Of particular interest are the analogies that Rostovtzeff was the first to point out between the Ptolemaic farming laws and the *Lex Hieronica* of Sicily, and the subtle analysis (since developed by de Laet in his *Portoria*) of the transition from the farming company to the single *conductor*, who finally becomes an imperial *procurator* under the Principate.

During these years he was also making the preparatory studies which led up to his doctoral thesis. Here he first demonstrated his powers as an historical archaeologist. His topic was Roman lead tokens, and he began with an exhaustive survey of the physical objects, publishing successively catalogues of tokens in various collections, such as *Études sur les plombs antiques* (*Rev. Num.* 1897-9), *Catalogue des plombs antiques de la Bibliothèque Nationale* (1900), and *Tesserarum Urbis Romae et Suburbi plumbearum Sylloge* (1903, 1905). On this he based a thesis, later published in German as a *Beiheft* of *Klio* (1905) under the title of *Römische Bleitesserae*, in which he correlated the data provided by the actual tokens with literary, legal, and epigraphical material, thus illuminating such diverse topics as the corn distributions and *congiaria* of the Principate, Roman games and festivals, and the organization of the *iuventus* in Rome and in Italian towns.

After obtaining his Master's degree in Classical Philology in 1898 Rostovtzeff was appointed Professor of Ancient History in the St. Petersburg College for Women, and began to teach at the Imperial University. In 1901 he took his Doctor's degree, and in the same year he married Sophie Kutchitski, who was to share his fortunes for more than half a century. Two years later, in 1903, he succeeded to the professorship of Latin in the Imperial University: these two chairs, at the University and the College for Women, he held concurrently until the Revolution in 1918. These were busy years, filled with heavy teaching duties—and Rostovtzeff was both a conscientious and an inspiring teacher, as his many generations of pupils testify—and latterly with war work; he gave his time freely to organizations for the relief of refugees and wounded, and was awarded the Legion of Honour by the French Government for his work in maintaining Franco-Russian friendship. None the less Rostovtzeff found time for a steady stream of publications, mostly in Russian, but including notable contributions in German. From these I may single out for mention the articles on *Angariae* in *Klio*, 1906-7, where he traced the history of governmental requisition of

beasts, men, and wagons for public transport from its oriental origins through Hellenistic and Roman times, and brought out its ruinous effects on agriculture; an article on a cognate topic—‘Kornerhebung und Transport im griechisch-römischen Ägypten’ in *Archiv f. Papyrusforschung*, 1906; and two monumental contributions to Pauly-Wissowa on *Fiscus* and *Frumentum*, the former a weighty analysis of the conflicting evidence, mainly epigraphic, on the development of the imperial treasury under the Principate—a problem by no means settled yet despite the efforts of many subsequent scholars—the latter an exhaustive monograph on all aspects of the subject—corn production, the corn trade, corn prices, taxes in corn, and governmental control and distribution of corn in the Roman period. Most notable of all is the famous ‘Studien zur Geschichte des römischen Kolonates’ (*Archiv*, Beiheft, 1910). Here Rostovtzeff brought to bear his encyclopaedic learning on a problem which has fascinated lawyers and historians, Roman and medieval, since the eighteenth century, and still provokes an unceasing stream of articles and monographs—the origins of that form of praedial serfdom which came to prevail in the later Roman Empire and in medieval Europe. Rostovtzeff’s contribution was to put the problem of the colonate in a wider historical setting. Not content with re-examining the position of the *coloni* of the African imperial estates, as revealed in a famous group of inscriptions, he carried back his investigations to the Hellenistic east, analysing the status of the λαοί or native serfs who appear in a number of Greek inscriptions from Asia Minor, and of the βασιλικοὶ γεωργοὶ of Ptolemaic Egypt, and thence carrying forward his study to the various restrictive practices of the Roman government in Egypt, in particular its insistence on the periodic return of persons to their ἰδία or place of origin. While his study did not contribute much directly to the problem of the late Roman colonate, it established the existence of a number of precedents for it in the ancient world, and showed that the general legal and administrative concepts on which it was based had a long history behind them.

During these years Rostovtzeff was also developing his archaeological studies. In 1911 he published in the *Mitteilungen* of the German Archaeological Institute at Rome a long study on ‘die hellenistisch-römische Architekturlandschaft’, based mainly on the Pompeian wall paintings and mosaics which he had first studied when he worked at the Institute in his youth. But his attention at this period was chiefly directed to the archaeology of southern Russia, and he developed an interest, which was to

prove abiding, in the art motifs of the various nomadic peoples who successively passed across the southern steppes, and their affiliations with the art of the nomads farther east in Turkestan and even to the boundaries of China. As much of his work on these topics was written in Russian, and apart from this I am not qualified to appreciate it, I will do no more than briefly enumerate his more important works. In 1914 there appeared, under the auspices of the Imperial Archaeological Commission, his monumental work on Ancient Decorative Painting in south Russia. In addition he had in 1918 completed a book on Scythia and the Bosphorus (in Russian), but when he left Russia after the Revolution he was obliged to leave the manuscript behind. In 1922 the Clarendon Press produced *Iranians and Greeks in South Russia*, which covered much the same ground as the lost manuscript but on a much briefer scale. Then in 1925 the Russian Academy of Sciences, to which he had been elected in 1916, greatly to his surprise published his original work in Russian. Six years later, in 1931, he translated it into German as *Skythien und Bosphorus*, bringing it up to date as far as he could without access to the Russian sites and museums.

Rostovtzeff had always been an active Liberal in politics—he was a foundation member of the Constitutional Democratic Party, which was formed in 1905—and was bitterly opposed to the Communists. When the Revolution took place he resolved to leave Russia, as it turned out, for good, and he spent the next two years as the honoured guest of Oxford University. During these years he was much engaged in combating Communism, lecturing and writing many articles in *Struggling Russia*, *The New Russia*, and other periodicals, particularly on the fate of education and learning under the Bolshevik régime. But not even in this disturbed period did he interrupt his studies. In collaboration with Grenfell he worked on the great papyrus document later published as *P. Tebt. iii. 703*, a detailed series of instructions to a Ptolemaic *οικονόμος* on his multifarious duties. He also began the penetrating analysis of the Zenon papyri which was to bear fruit in 1922 in *A Large Estate in Egypt in the Third Century B.C.*, a vivid picture of the development and organization of the great block of land granted by Ptolemy Philadelphus to his finance minister Apollonius.

In 1920 Rostovtzeff accepted the invitation of the University of Wisconsin to become Professor of Ancient History. Five years later he moved to Yale, which became his permanent home, first as Sterling Professor of Ancient History and Archaeology

(1925-39), then as Professor Emeritus and as Director of Archaeological Studies (1939-44). For some years after 1944 he suffered from depression of spirits, and when this burden was lifted his power of work was very limited. During these years in particular he owed much to the courageous devotion of his wife. He died on 20 October 1952.

His move to the New World fortunately did not divorce him from active archaeology. In 1926 Yale University took over from the French Academy the excavation of Dura-Europus, the interesting potentialities of which had been demonstrated by Franz Cumont's preliminary exploration in 1923. For ten successive seasons the Yale Expedition dug the site, until the exhaustion of funds, and, even more, the accumulation of material, compelled a pause, which has been devoted to publication. The ten Preliminary Reports have been issued recording the progress of the excavation season by season, and of the Final Report six volumes have so far appeared. In all this work Rostovtzeff took a leading part, and even during the last eight years of his life, when failing health compelled him to abandon the rest of his work, he continued to take an active interest in the publication of the Dura-Europus excavations; his last contribution, 'The palace of the *Dux Ripae*' was printed only a few months before his death. Dura-Europus was indeed a site which had a particular appeal to his tastes and gave scope to his peculiar talents. A Macedonian military colony founded by the Seleucids in a Semitic land, it fell under the successive rule of Parthia and of Rome, and was for long closely linked with Palmyra. It was thus a meeting-place of four cultures, each of which contributed to its population, its religion, its art, and its law and social institutions. Moreover, the arid climate of the middle Euphrates has preserved not only buildings, inscriptions, and pottery, but wall paintings, parchments, papyri, countless graffiti, and even textiles. Rostovtzeff was thus able to uncover, analyse, and interpret material comparable in richness with that produced by his first love, Pompeii, and superior to it in its diversity of interest. Here there was to be found evidence—especially in the parchments and inscriptions—for Seleucid administration, its dynastic cults, colonial policy, and land law. Here, too, a little light was shed on that mysterious organization, the Parthian Empire. The combined study of the military buildings, inscriptions, graffiti, and papyri gives an unusually intimate picture of the personnel, administration, supply, and daily routine of the Roman Army of the late second and early third century. The

temples—and, even more, the famous synagogue and church—with their wall paintings, sculptures, inscriptions, and graffiti brilliantly illustrate the mixture of religions amongst the cosmopolitan population of this frontier town. All these were topics congenial to Rostovtzeff, and he contributed many detailed studies to their elucidation. But even more central to his interests was the role played by Dura-Europus in the caravan trade between the Middle and Far East and the Mediterranean, and the interplay of Greek, Semitic, and Iranian elements in the art of Dura-Europus. On each of these two topics Rostovtzeff wrote a book designed to appeal to a wider public, setting forth a synoptic view of his provisional conclusions, *Caravan Cities* (1932) and *Dura-Europus and its Art* (1938). *Caravan Cities* was the more popular work, dealing in a rather picturesque fashion with four famous Near-Eastern sites, Dura itself, Palmyra, Petra, and Gerasa. It was an error to include the last, for there is no solid evidence that Gerasa had any significant share in the caravan trade; Rostovtzeff was probably tempted to include it by the architectural magnificence of the ruins, and by the fact that a Yale expedition was at that time working on the site. *Dura-Europus and its Art* was an expansion of an earlier monograph in *Yale Classical Studies*, v (1935), entitled 'Dura and the Problem of Parthian Art' and is altogether a more solid work. It summarizes briefly the history of Europus and gives a general description of its topography, and then discusses in detail its art, with special reference to the synagogue and the church.

Before going on to his great trilogy, *The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire*, the *History of the Ancient World*, and the *Social and Economic History of the Hellenistic Age*, on which his permanent fame as an historian will rest, it will be convenient to notice briefly the more important of his contemporaneous publications. Rostovtzeff had now reached the full maturity of his powers, and his productivity was prodigious—he is credited with about five hundred articles (over his whole career) in five languages (Russian, German, French, English, and Italian) in almost every classical, historical, and economic periodical of Europe and America. I can therefore only select a few of his larger-scale productions. In *Yale Classical Studies*, iii (1932) he published 'Seleucid Babylonia'. This is a study reminiscent of his doctoral thesis, *Römische Bleitesserae*, consisting of a descriptive catalogue of clay seals found at Uruk, on which—together with literary, papyrological, and epigraphic material from the rest of the Hellenistic world—he based a study of the Seleucid system

of royal record offices and of certain Seleucid taxes. He also developed and expanded his earlier studies of nomadic art. These took him as far afield as China with *Inlaid Bronzes of the Han Dynasty in the Collection of C. T. Loo* (1927), followed up two years later by *The Animal Style in South Russia and China*, in which he traced the reciprocal influences of Scythian, Sarmatian, Celtic, Ionian, and Iranian art and that of China in the Chou and Han periods. In *Mystic Italy* he broke new ground with a study of mystery religions in Italy, based upon an interpretation of the wall paintings of Pompeian and Roman villas, the underground basilica of the Porta Maggiore and other archaeological material.

During this period the *Cambridge Ancient History* was reaching the periods in which Rostovtzeff's chief interest lay, and he was naturally called upon by the editors to contribute largely. One of the editors, Professor Adcock, writes:

Rostovtzeff's collaboration in the *Cambridge Ancient History* was of the most generous kind. His own contributions in Volume VII ('Ptolemaic Egypt' and 'Syria and the East'), Volume VIII ('The Bosphoran Kingdom', 'Pergamum', and 'Rhodes, Delos and Hellenistic commerce'), and Volume IX ('Pontus and its Neighbours') showed that mastery of the evidence which his latest work of great range, *The Social and Economic History of the Hellenistic World*, was to display. In the definition of his contributions the editors had his friendly co-operation, and he skilfully adapted them to the economy of the whole work. The chapters in Volume VII were written in Russian and translated by his friend Sir Ellis Minns; in later volumes he wrote in English with his own characteristic force, so that all that bore his name bore also the imprint of his personality. But, beyond that, his advice was ungrudgingly given in the planning, above all, of the Eleventh Volume in the description of the world of the Empire on the social and economic side. Whatever success was achieved in the planning of this volume and in the choice of contributors owes much to his disinterested and acute appreciation of what the task demanded and how its demands could most effectively be met. It was a great comfort to have the advice of one who, by common consent, was the acknowledged master in that field, whose own great work meant so much to all who wrote after him, and whose chapter on 'The Sarmatae and Parthians' provided something which no one else but he could write with such authority. And he added to his advice and his contributions a lively generous interest in the progress of the work. The occasional visits which he paid to Cambridge, where he was always welcome and at home, renewed a personal friendship which is a lasting recollection. When the *Cambridge Ancient History* was finished, I was able, in the spring of 1939, to visit him at Yale and enjoy the hospitality of Madame Rostovtzeff and himself during the last personal contacts I

was privileged to have with him. His powers were still at their zenith, his creative force seemed inexhaustible, and his sympathetic interest in the hopes of a friend were, as always, a heartening inspiration.

Of his three great works, the *History of the Ancient World*, issued in two volumes, *The Orient and Greece* (1926) and *Rome* (1927), stands apart from the other two. It was inspired by the courses of general lectures on ancient history which it was his duty to give as professor at Wisconsin to large classes of undergraduates, and it bears witness to the energy and enthusiasm with which he addressed himself to this laborious duty, which too many scholars, finding it uncongenial, tend to scamp. As might be expected he revived the undergraduate courses by giving greater emphasis to the social and economic aspects of ancient history, reducing the narrative of political and military events and omitting most of the detail of constitutional development. Some will think that he carried the last process too far, particularly in Roman history, where such weight is traditionally assigned to constitutional law. But though he may have swung away from the traditional presentation of ancient history somewhat too violently, he certainly produced a vivid and stimulating book, very different from the jejune compendia of factual information which many professors produce for their students. The *History of the Ancient World* has done more than any other book to disabuse undergraduates and the general public of the idea that ancient history is a dry-as-dust wilderness of battles and constitutions, inhabited by unreal people who apparently never had to work for their living. Though written for students, the book is in no bad sense a popular work. It is of course based—except for the early oriental history—on a first-hand knowledge of the sources as well as on an immense range of reading in modern secondary work. It discusses the nature of the sources which are available for different periods and indicates their limitations—and, where they are inadequate, as for the early history of Rome, refrains from speculative reconstructions. In a book of this scale a certain degree of dogmatism was inevitable, but on all important topics, Rostovtzeff, while expounding his own individual interpretations, was careful to provide the evidence on which they were based.

As early as 1914 Eduard Meyer, discerning Rostovtzeff's qualities, had invited him to write a social and economic history of the ancient world. The First World War and the Russian Revolution prevented the project from being executed in this form, and the whole plan was in fact never completed—except

in broad outline in the *History of the Ancient World*. Rostovtzeff, however, was working on the theme during the war years, his subsequent exile, and his early years at Wisconsin, and in 1926 he produced his great *Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire*. In 1941 he published the yet more massive *Social and Economic History of the Hellenistic World* in two volumes of text and one of notes. He thus covered, on a far more detailed scale than had originally been contemplated, the greater part of the task assigned to him by Eduard Meyer. The ancient Orient, classical Greece, Carthage, and the Roman Republic were omitted. But a continuous economic history was written of the western Latin-speaking world from the reign of Augustus, and of the eastern Greek-speaking world from that of Alexander down to the end of the third century A.D. It was these works that revealed Rostovtzeff's full powers as an historian and it will be upon them above all that his future fame will rest.

Perhaps the most striking feature of Rostovtzeff's historical methods is his use of archaeological material. His views on this question cannot be better expressed than in his own words in the introduction to *Iranians and Greeks in South Russia*:

... But I should like to call for a more rational use of archaeological material than has been usual hitherto. For me archaeology is not a source of illustrations for written texts, but an independent source of historical information, no less valuable and important, sometimes more important, than the written sources. We must learn, and we are gradually learning, how to write history with the help of archaeology.

This, though not a novel doctrine in 1922, had been little put into practice except in fields, like pre-classical Greece or Roman Britain, where written records were exiguous or non-existent. Most ancient historians now pay lip service to it, but not many go through the arduous discipline necessary to practise what they preach. Ancient historians as a rule have received a literary education, and have been bred up to regard the written word as the normal if not the only source of historical information, and such classical scholars as have taken up archaeology have generally become interested in its special problems rather than in the historical interpretation of the finds. The result has been an unhappy divorce between history and archaeology, with loss to both sides, but more especially to history. For this historians have been largely to blame, in that by neglecting archaeological data they have failed to encourage an historical attitude in archaeologists. The result is that archaeologists have tended to

present their data in a form more and more unpalatable to the historian, and sometimes fail to record aspects of their material which are important to historians.

This is not to say that historians, while bearing in mind its limitations and its dangers, should not make as full a use as they can of archaeology; and it may be added that though archaeological finds are more spectacular in fields unlit by literary sources, they yield more reliable evidence when they can be controlled and interpreted by documents. Rostovtzeff was admirably qualified for this part of his task. While he had received a literary classical education, and was by bent primarily an historian, he had from his student days taken a keen interest in archaeology, and during the greater part of his career was an active practitioner of the art, both in the field and in the publication of excavation results, in southern Russia during his years at St. Petersburg and at Dura-Europus during his tenure of the Yale Chair. He had also an unrivalled knowledge of all the great museum collections of Europe and America, toured the Mediterranean world extensively visiting ancient sites, and read archaeological reports exhaustively. An attractive by-product of his zeal for archaeology was the profusion of illustrations with which he enriched his great books. These were no mere ornaments to his work, but carefully selected to illustrate the text and provided with an historical commentary. They include a vast diversity of material—buildings with plans and reconstructions, sculpture, paintings, mosaics, coins and seals, pottery and metalware—and illustrate every aspect of his subject from portraits of the leading personalities to representations of a craftsman's workshop and specimens of his products. But more fundamental was his utilization of purely archaeological data as evidence for social and economic history. This ranged from the study of buildings in their functional aspect, from harbours and market places to country villas, to the analysis of finds of pottery, metalware and miscellaneous objects. He was fully aware of the limitations of archaeological evidence, especially as presented in the average excavator's report, and he often protested at the failure of archaeologists to assemble their results in a coherent form and their neglect of quantitative information. Nevertheless he extracted all that could be got from the jungle of archaeological publications, and drew from it conclusions, which he was generally careful to emphasize were provisional. There will be danger that his great authority will give dogmatic force to hypotheses based on admittedly incomplete material, especially as few future historians

will be able to emulate Rostovtzeff's prodigious capacity for assimilating indigestible archaeological reports, and it is to be hoped that archaeologists will facilitate the historian's task by assembling and analysing the available material.

Archaeology provides the historian not only with mute material finds but also with inscribed objects, notably coins, medals, tokens and seals, inscriptions proper on stone or bronze, or, more rarely, in mosaic or painting or on pottery or plate, and papyri, with parchments, wooden tablets, and other ancient forms of writing material. These special classes of material have called forth the specialist arts of the numismatist, the epigraphist, and the papyrologist. In these fields the historian usually feels less alien, and better able to criticize and interpret the findings of the experts, but even here there has been a lamentable tendency for the separate sciences to grow apart from history. This tendency is least marked in epigraphy, where most historians know something of epigraphical technique, and most epigraphists are historians. Numismatics, on the other hand, has long been an independent science, and while numismatists have done sterling historical work, particularly on the chronological and political aspects of coinage, they have generally tended to ignore, except in the field of metrology, its primary economic function: in particular it is difficult for the layman to discover the relative volume of issues and their geographical distribution. In papyrology it is historians who are entirely to blame for any lack of liaison. Papyrologists have always been fully aware of the historical importance of the documents which they decipher, and have provided them with historical commentaries. Historians, it is to be feared, have been intimidated by the bulk and complexity of the papyrological evidence, and, taking refuge in the doctrine that Egypt was a peculiar place, have largely left the study of its institutions to papyrologists and ignored their implications for the rest of the ancient world.

For Rostovtzeff these barriers did not exist. In some fields he was himself a technical expert. His work on tokens and seals has already been noted. He also published many inscriptions and did some work in preparing papyri for publication; incidentally he assembled a collection of papyri at Yale and founded a papyrological school there. But, what was more important, he had a thorough mastery of the published material in all these fields. In his Master's thesis he had made an able synthesis of papyrus documents from Egypt, Cicero's speeches and letters, and imperial inscriptions. In his Doctor's thesis he had combined

data from tokens, inscriptions, papyri, archaeological finds, and the literary sources. On these last it is unnecessary to dilate. I would merely wish to correct the impression which what I have said above may have given, that Rostovtzeff might have neglected literature in favour of archaeology. He was in fact amazingly widely read in ancient literature, both in the authors whose works have an obvious relevance to his principal interests and in its obscurest and least rewarding by-paths.

Genius has been, somewhat inadequately, defined as 'an infinite capacity for taking pains'. On this definition Rostovtzeff may without further ado be admitted to have been a genius. His learning was encyclopaedic and immense. He seems to have studied and mastered every possible primary source in his field, and to have read, criticized, and remembered every modern publication in all the languages of Europe. How he achieved this result I do not know, but it must have been the fruit of unremitting labour and a vast capacity for organization, aided by a prodigious memory. The results are plain to see in the notes to his great works, which are the wonder and despair of scholars. They are more than exhaustive bibliographies—which can be achieved by mechanical methods. In them he corrects and supplements the articles and monographs which he cites, and where, as often, the evidence had not been previously collected by himself or others, cites it in detail, often with reasoned emendations of the published texts of inscriptions and papyri. This side of his genius is strikingly evidenced in the German (1930) and Italian (1932) translations of the *Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire* (1926), where the notes have been so extensively enriched by new material that English scholars find it necessary to use the Italian version.

Important though sheer learning is in the equipment of an historian, it is not everything. Powers of synthesis and imagination are required to make great history and also a certain moral courage. Too many historians have become bogged down in their own learning, and have lapsed into antiquarianism, or at any rate confined themselves to articles and monographs on points of detail, never venturing on a large-scale book. Rostovtzeff possessed to a high degree the gifts of synoptic vision and imagination, and was never submerged by the flood of information which he himself produced and which he derived from the writings of others. Till finally in the last eight years of his long life his health broke down, he retained to the full the energy and

courage to formulate broad conclusions and venture bold hypotheses, in fact to be a creative historian.

Like all creative historians he was influenced in the interpretation of the past by his experience of the present. This is not only inevitable but a necessary condition of progress in historical writing. Each generation not only accumulates more information, but views the existing material from a new angle, and is thus able to detect fresh facts in it and re-interpret the whole. The process has of course its dangers. The historians of the new generation, especially under the impact of catastrophic contemporary changes, may, by undue concentration on certain facts which have assumed a new significance in their eyes, impose on the past a novel interpretation which the evidence as a whole does not warrant. Rostovtzeff was not immune from this danger.

Coming of an educated middle-class family and living under the inefficient bureaucracy of Tsarist Russia, Rostovtzeff was naturally a liberal, distrusting and fearing the power of the state and profoundly convinced of the virtues of economic *laissez-faire*. This background prejudiced him against governmental control, especially of the economic life of a country, in antiquity also. His hostility to the Ptolemaic and Roman régimes in Egypt is patent, and his verdict on Diocletian is grossly unfair. He was also led to exaggerate the enlightenment and enterprise of the bourgeoisie in antiquity. He paints a vivid picture of Zeno introducing new types of cultivation and new breeds of animals from Greece on Apollonius's estate in the Fayyum. It is a true picture, and what can be more natural than that a farmer developing virgin soil in a new country should try to acclimatize the plants and animals with which he is familiar? But it cannot be deduced from this that the average middle-class landowner in the ancient world was constantly introducing technical improvements into agriculture. It is more likely that most landowners, like Pliny, confined their interest to their rents and left agricultural technique to their tenants and bailiffs: at any rate agriculture made remarkably little technical progress in antiquity. For the same reasons Rostovtzeff tended perhaps to exaggerate the economic importance of trade and industry in antiquity, both absolutely and as a factor in the prosperity of the bourgeoisie. The evidence, such as it is—and it is admittedly meagre—suggests that agriculture was at all times by far the most important economic activity in the ancient world, and that manufacture and commerce were, except in a few industrial centres and great ports and caravan cities, on a very small scale.

By and large the wealth of the upper and middle classes was derived from the ownership of land, and, except in the few great centres, trade and industry seem to have been left to quite humble people.

The Bolshevik Revolution came as a great shock to Rostovtzeff, and for a time he reacted violently to it. His reaction was not to reject altogether the Marxist interpretation of history. He accepted the Marxist theory of the class war as the dominant factor in history, but regarded the triumph of the proletariat not as a desirable consummation, but as the victory of the primitive and unprogressive elements of society over the enlightened bourgeoisie, whose free economic activity was raising the standard of civilization. It was in this mood that he wrote *The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire*, and it betrayed him into one serious distortion of the facts. He could not resist reading into the revolutionary era of the third century which transformed the Roman Empire a closer analogy to the Russian Revolution than the evidence would warrant. The moving force of that period was the army, and in the army he saw a class-conscious mass of proletarians assaulting the bourgeoisie. The third century is a very ill-documented period, and there is not much evidence one way or the other, but the evidence on which Rostovtzeff based his interpretation is very weak. It amounted to very little more than that the army was largely recruited from the peasantry, and that it frequently sacked cities with gusto. He failed to give due weight to other facts, that the army at this date was a very largely hereditary profession, and that armies not only sacked cities, but fought each other with determination, and ravaged the country-side and brutally maltreated the peasantry: among the few contemporary documents are several petitions to the emperors from villages, which class the soldiers among their principal oppressors. There was in fact no such class solidarity between the army and the peasantry as Rostovtzeff postulated. The army was a professional body, or rather the regional armies were professional groups, prepared to fight for the generals who won their favour, and rival aspirants to the empire exploited it and bribed it with booty and higher pay. In the devastating wars which resulted, and in the ever-increasing exactions required to satisfy growing requirements of the army, the bourgeoisie of course suffered, but the chief victims were the peasantry, as the producers of the food and the owners of the beasts which the army required for its rations and transport.

Rostovtzeff was not altogether a safe historian. He had strong opinions, one might almost say strong prejudices, and on occasion they distorted his vision. But that he was a great historian few would question. His eminent qualities were duly recognized by his own generation in seven honorary doctorates, from Leipzig (1910), Oxford (1919), Wisconsin (1925), Cambridge (1931), Harvard (1936), Athens (1937), and Chicago (1941), and corresponding membership of almost every national academy of Europe and of countless learned societies of both the Old and the New World. There can be little doubt that posterity will esteem him not unworthy to be ranked with Mommsen, Seeck, and the other giants of the nineteenth century.

A. H. M. JONES