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**DEBATING ANCIENT ORDINANCES:
FRIEDRICH WILHELM JOSEPH VON SCHELLING
AND COUNT SERGEY SEMIONOVICH UVAROV²**

Using a discussion on the significance of Ancient Greek ordinances between F.W.J. Schelling and Count S.S. Uvarov as an example, this article analyses the complex interaction between theological, philosophical, religious, and political factors in the reception of Schelling's philosophical ideas in Russia in the XIX century.

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When one deals with a philosopher, there is always a temptation to interpret his cultural influence by using the contents of his philosophical work as a starting point. At the same time, one thing is missed: Namely, that a philosopher, just like any other person, does not exist in an abstract world of meanings, but rather in a complex social context in which he or she plays various social roles. This factor gained importance in the 18th and 19th centuries, when European society experienced serious changes in its institutional framework, its structure became more complex, and the specter of social roles available for a philosopher during his career had widened dramatically in comparison to that of the Early Modern period.

The life of Friedrich Schelling clearly demonstrates a range of communicative contexts that are available for a philosopher of his time. In each of the numerous episodes of Schelling's communications with Russian intellectuals – be it a public exchange of opinions, direct correspondence, or personal connections – both sides were motivated by philosophical views and ideologies and influenced by personal and communicative factors. I will illustrate this point by referring readers to an example of an exchange between Friedrich Schelling and Count Sergey Semionovich Uvarov, one of Schelling's interlocutors out of a long list of his Russian contacts, which is provided below.

It is widely recognized that Sergey Uvarov was heavily influenced by early 19th century German culture. As is well known, his first important achievement as a scholar was his plan to establish an 'Asiatic Academy' in St. Petersburg. His 'Project of the Asiatic Academy', which was published in French in 1810, later appeared in German in 1811 under the title 'Ideas for the Asiatic academy' – an obvious reference to the works of Johann Gottfried von Herder and Friedrich Schelling³. During the period preceding the publication of this work, Uvarov had spent two years in Vienna as a staff member of the Russian embassy there and travelled around Europe a good deal. It was in 1808-1810 when he met a number of German scholars and writers, and was introduced to brothers August and Friedrich Schlegel, as well as to Germaine de Staël,⁴ Wilhelm and Alexander von Humboldt, before finally winning the favor of Goethe⁵.

It is no surprise that the cultural and political project proposed by the young Russian diplomat was received with great enthusiasm. Uvarov caught the spirit of his time: During the first decades of the 19th century, European scholars were seized by an Orientalist boom, and debates on the role of

³ Uvarov S. *Ideen zu einer asiatischen Akademie*. SPb. 1811.

⁴ On the contacts between Uvarov, the Schegel brothers, and Madame de Staël, see: Дурьлин С.Н. Госпожа де Сталь и ее русские отношения // Литературное наследство. М., 1939. Т. 33/34. С. 215 – 330.

⁵ Later Uvarov corresponded with Goethe; see: Goethe und Uwarow, und ihre Briefwechsel. Mit Erläuterungen von Dr. Georg Schmid. Sonderabdruck aus der «Russischen Revue». Bd. XXVIII. H. 2. St. Petersburg, 1888. On Goethe and Uvarov also see: Дурьлин С.Н. Русские писатели у Гёте в Веймаре // Литературное наследство. Т. 4 – 6. М., 1932. С. 186 – 221.

the Ancient Near East in the rise of Ancient Greek and Roman civilization was an important topic that brought scholars, philosophers, and writers together.

Uvarov established his reputation as a talented scholar, an expert in the field of Classical history and literature, and an equal participant in contemporary academic discussions by publishing an essay entitled 'On the Mysteries of Eleusis', composed in French in 1812 in St Petersburg⁶. This treatise by Uvarov was consciously placed within the context of contemporary German historical, philological, and philosophical debates. The key factor here was a discussion of the symbolism of Ancient mythologies between the two professors of the University of Heidelberg: Friedrich Creuzer, a philosopher and the author of the German translation of the works by Plotinus, and Johann Heinrich Voss, a classicist and a translator of Homer into German. The former interpreted pagan mythologies, including Classical ones, as various modifications of one monotheistic religion that had originated in the Ancient East, while the latter, an advocate of the ideals of Winckelmann's Classicalism, strived to prove the complete independence of Classical culture from that of the Ancient East.

In the first few volumes of his large-scale work on the 'Symbolism and Mythology of Ancient Peoples', Creuzer developed the idea of original monotheism using a range of historical materials; he tried to demonstrate that the initial system of all humankind had been the 'system of emanation' – a view of the world as a descending ladder of degrees of perfection formed by the 'emanation of being from one superfluous source'⁷. Creuzer saw various mythological images as symbolic embodiments of the emanative idea of the world order⁸. To justify his interpretations philosophically, he used a number of arguments taken from the identity philosophy of Schelling.

This theory of Creuzer provoked a controversy. It took an especially acrimonious form in 1811, when G. Paulus, an implacable enemy of Schelling's philosophy, became a professor of theology at the University of Heidelberg. Voss and Paulus attempted to add a confessional dimension to the debate by accusing Creuzer of crypto-Catholicism and citing the conversions of Romantic writers of his circle (Clemens Brentano, Achim von Arnim, and Joseph von Görres) to Catholicism as an indirect proof of their allegations. The government of the Duchy of Baden had established a special commission to investigate the accusation. It was found that the accusations

⁶ *Ouwaroff S.* Essai sur les mystères d'Eleusis. SPb., 1812.

⁷ This theory by Creuzer was defined by his works on the philosophies of Plotinus and Proclus, who had created model versions of the neo-platonic theory of emanation.

⁸ *Creuzer F.* Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker, besonders der Griechen. 4 Bde. Leipzig; Darmstadt, 1810--1812; numerous articles against Creuzer, published by Voss in a number of German journals in the 1810s and 1820s were put together in one collection: *Voß J.H.* Antisymbolik. 2 Bde. Stuttgart, 1824 – 1826.

of Creuzer were of no substance, and the conflict lost some of its poignancy, though it finally ended only with the death of Voss in 1826⁹.

Uvarov's work on history and mythology had evidently been influenced by Voss, so one is not surprised to learn that Uvarov was seen as a Russian participant in a European scholarly debate that involved major authorities, including Goethe, Schelling, the Schlegel brothers, and Johann Hermann.

Schelling's contribution to the debate consisted of his academic speech entitled 'On the Deities of Samothrace', delivered in 1815 at a meeting of the Bavarian Academy of Sciences and published later that same year as a separate edition with a subtitle 'Appendix to the "Ages of the World"'. In this unusual text that combined high public rhetoric¹⁰ with refined scholarship (the work had historical and linguistic commentaries that were twice as long as the main text and included a detailed analysis of Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and Arabic phrases)¹¹, the philosopher attempted to reconstruct the 'oldest system' of the human world view based on the evidence of Classical authors (such as Mnaseas of Patrae, Dionysodorus of Troezen, Herodotus, Varro, etc.) regarding the existence of a mystery cult of Cabeiri on the island of Samothrace.

I do not intend to go into the details of this, which is probably the most esoteric and mysterious work by Schelling, where he presented the first draft of his 'philosophy of mythology', further developed by him in 1830s. It should be noted here that Schelling saw the evidence for the ancient cult of Cabeiri as a key to the understanding of both Classical and Old Testament religion:

Wie aber, wenn [...] sich schon in griechischer Götterlehre (von indischer und anderer morgenländischer nicht zu reden) Trümmer einer Erkenntniß, ja eines wissenschaftlichen Systems zeigten, das weit über den Umkreis hinausginge, den die älteste durch schriftliche Denkmäler bekannte Offenbarung gezogen hat? Wenn überhaupt diese nicht sowohl einen neuen Strom von Erkenntniß eröffnet hätte, als den durch eine frühere schon eröffneten nur in ein engeres, aber eben darum sicherer fortleitendes Beet eingeschlossen? Wenn sie, nach einmal eingetretener Verderbniß und unaufhaltsamer Entartung in Vielgötterei, mit weisester Einschränkung, von jenem Ursystem nur einen Theil, aber doch diejenigen Züge erhalten hätte, die wieder ins große und umfassende Ganze leiten können? Diesem jedoch sey wie ihm wolle, so beweisen jene Vergleichenungen wenigstens, daß der griechische Götterglaube auf höhere Quellen als auf ägyptische und indische Vorstellungen zurückzuführen ist (SW I, 8. S. 738).

⁹ See: *Резвых П. В.* Дискуссии о мифологии в романтической Altertumswissenschaft. / Препринты. Высшая школа экономики. Серия WP6 "Гуманитарные исследования". 2012; *Howald E.* Der Kampf um Creuzers Symbolik. Tübingen, 1926; *Angsäusser U.* Symbol, Mythos und Griechentum bei G.F. Creuzer. Wien, 1962; *Münch M.-M.* La «symbolique» de F. Creuzer. Paris, 1976.

¹⁰ This speech was incidentally delivered on the day that Ludwig I, the King of Bavaria, was born.

¹¹ It seems that Schelling purposely wrote a text that was to be developed on a number of levels: He delivered his speech in public and added comments at its publication. In both cases, however, the corresponding rhetorical form enclosed philosophical meaning to be understood only in the context of the 'Ages of the World', which was unpublished during his lifetime: The fact that the speech was intended as an 'appendix' to a philosophical program that Schelling promised to publish year after year confirmed its deliberately fragmental and slightly esoteric character.

The question of the ‘oldest system of humankind’ was central for a treatise by Uvarov as well. In order to find an answer to it, the Russian scholar also looked into the evidence for mystery cults and offered his reconstruction of the history of the development of Ancient religion. As he read much and searched for new academic publications in fields of interest to him, Schelling could have hardly missed the work by Uvarov, especially as it was popular with the public. The book was published in three editions within five years: The first appeared in 1812 in St. Petersburg, the second edition followed in 1815, the same year that Schelling delivered his speech¹², while the third edition was published in 1816 in Paris upon the initiative of Baron Antoine Isaac Silvestre de Sacy (1758-1838), President of the French Academy of Inscriptions and an orientalist with a European reputation¹³.

It could be proved that Schelling first saw Uvarov’s ‘Essay on the Mysteries of Eleusis’ when ‘On the Deities of Samothrace’ had already been published. In 1817 Friedrich Creuzer published a long review of works on the influence of Greek ordinances in the ‘Heidelberger Jahrbücher der Litteratur’¹⁴. The review began with an analysis of ‘On the Deities of Samothrace’ by Schelling and of ‘Essay on the Mysteries of Eleusis’ by Uvarov. While addressing the arguments by Uvarov, Creuzer expressed regret that the Russian author had not seen the work by Schelling¹⁵. A letter from Creuzer to Schelling dated 10 September 1817 showed that Creuzer sent his review directly to the philosopher¹⁶. In this review, Creuzer also praised Uvarov’s book on Nonnus of Panopolis that had appeared the same year. This publication had been supported by Goethe and was dedicated to him. Thus, Creuzer made a point of bringing Schelling’s attention to the works of their Russian colleague.

In 1819, a complimentary review of Uvarov’s book was compiled by Baron Silvestre de Sacy, who wrote an extensive Latin letter to Schelling that focused on his ‘On the Deities of Samothrace’, where he recommended that the philosopher read Uvarov’s work on the ordinances of Eleusis¹⁷. It is worth noting here that this same year the Russian edition of Hermann and Creuzer’s ‘Letters on Homer and Hesiod’ appeared, which were initiated by Uvarov and which included a long afterword by him that summarized his views on Greek ordinances. The German public also knew of this afterword, since it was published in German as a pamphlet under the title ‘On the Pre-Homeric Age’¹⁸. In the draft of the Latin response to Sylvestre de Sacy, Schelling said that he knew the work in question because the ‘*elegantissimus Ouvarovius*’ had

¹² Essai sur les mystères d’Éleusis par m. Ouvaroff, 2 éd., rev. et augm. SPb.: Pluchart, 1815.

¹³ Essai sur les mystères d’Éleusis par Ouvaroff. 3. éd., rev. corr. et augm. Paris: Impr. Royale, 1816.

¹⁴ Heidelberger Jahrbücher der Litteratur. 1817. № 47. S. 735 – 752; № 48. S. 753 – 823.

¹⁵ Ibid. S. 763.

¹⁶ Creuzer an Schelling, 10.09.1817 // Archiv der Berlin-Brandenburgischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. NL Schelling, 231, without pagination.

¹⁷ Sylvestre de Sacy an Schelling, 1819 // Archiv der Berlin-Brandenburgischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. NL Schelling 611, without pagination.

¹⁸ Ouwaroff S. Über das Vor-Homerische Zeitalter. SPb., 1819.

sent him the second edition as a gift¹⁹. This information is corroborated by the fact that the book by Uvarov is listed in a recently found and published catalogue of Schelling's private library²⁰.

It is evident that by this time Schelling and Uvarov had already exchanged letters, but nothing is known yet about the contents of these letters. It is hard to imagine however that in the letter that accompanied his gift of the 'Essay', Uvarov never mentioned his correspondent's work which he had already managed to study in detail: He had a copy of 'On the Deities of Samothrace' sent to him in 1816 by Goethe himself²¹.

The fact that Schelling never cited or mentioned the work of Uvarov in the texts published during his lifetime, despite knowing Uvarov's writings, could easily be explained if one takes into consideration the opposing views of the two authors on the problem under question. Following Voss, Uvarov suggested that the absence of references to the ordinances of Eleusis in the writings of Homer pointed to their relatively late origin – post-Homeric in any case. The Enlightenment writer Uvarov differentiated between the Eleusinian ordinances on one hand and the Dionysian and the Bacchic ordinances on the other: He viewed the latter as a more archaic and primitive form of religion and linked the Eleusinian cult of Demeter to the development of civic life in Classical Antiquity. On the contrary, both in 'On the Deities of Samothrace' and in his later lectures on the philosophy of mythology, Schelling attempted to connect the Dionysian and Eleusinian ordinances as stages of one mythological process and thought the latter to be the older of the two.

Moreover, in his book on Nonnus of Panopolis, published in 1817, Uvarov expressed his skepticism towards attempts to clarify any historical or mythological questions by analyzing the writings of Nonnus, and rejected the possibility that his poem 'Dionysiaca' was an important and reliable source of information on the history of the cult of Dionysius²². On the contrary, Schelling used Nonnus extensively in his reconstruction of the cult of Dionysius, despite the fact that 'Dionysiaca' was written in the 5th century A.D. during the period of Late Antiquity. Thus, in both cases Uvarov happened to be an opponent of Schelling in particular historical and philological controversies.

Also, the philosophical views of Uvarov, which were used to interpret the history of Ancient religion, could hardly be approved by Schelling. In his book on Nonnus, Uvarov wrote:

¹⁹ Schelling an Sylvester de Sacy, o.D. // Archiv der Berlin-Brandenburgischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. NL Schelling 858, without pagination.

²⁰ Schellings Handbibliothek / Hrsg. von A. Müller-Bergen. Stuttgart-Bad Canstatt, 2007. S. 195.

²¹ On 2 December 1815, the poet sent the recently received work of Schelling to Uvarov on his own initiative; see: Goethe an Uvarow. [2.] Dezember 1815. // Goethes Werke. Herausgegeben im Auftrag der Großherzogin Sophie von Sachsen. IV. Abteilung: Goethes Briefe. Weimar 1887-1912. Bd. 26. S. 171). In his response dated 13 March 1816, Uvarov thanked Goethe for the book; see: Goethe und Uvarow, und ihre Briefwechsel. Mit Erläuterungen von Dr. Georg Schmid. Sonderabdruck aus der «Russischen Revue». Bd. XXVIII. H. 2. St. Petersburg, 1888. S. 23.

²² Uvarow S. Nonnos von Panopolis der Dichter: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der griechischen Poesie. SPb., 1817.

Der höchste Standpunkt der alten Welt war Pantheismus... Die Religion der Alten bestand eigentlich nur aus zwei Teilen: Politheismus für die Menge, Pantheismus für die kleine Zahl der Geweihten. Dass der menschliche Geist beyde Extreme zugleich berührte, und dass beyde Extreme sich in ein System verbinden liessen, lag in dem Wesen der Dinge; aus der unendlichen Vielheit des sich ewig fortbildenden Volks-Cultus flüchtete der Geist zur entgegengesetzten strengsten Einheit. Auf diese Art war die Verbindung durchaus wesentlich: dem Volke war Alles Gott, dem Philosophen Gott Alles²³.

This was the position Schelling attacked in ‘On the Deities of Samothrace’: ‘Undenkbar wäre schon an sich ein solcher Widerspruch zwischen dem öffentlichen Gottesdienst und der Geheimlehre. Es konnte, wie Saint-Croix bemerkt, nicht kurze Zeit, geschweige an zweitausend Jahre dauern, ohne die Altäre umzustößen, ja ohne die Ruhe der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft zu erschüttern“. Mit einer Hand erschaffen und mit der anderen vernichten, öffentlich täuschen und insgeheim aufklären..., welche Gesetzgebung!’²⁴

The discussion of the correlation between esoteric and exoteric religions in Classical Antiquity had relevance for contemporary religion and politics, especially for evaluating the role of secret societies. Already in 1804 in his treatise ‘Philosophy and Religion’ Schelling rejected attempts to interpret mysterious initiation rites, analogous to Masonic initiations, as an admission to an exclusive group of the elect: ‘Die äußere Form und die Verfassung der Mysterien betreffend, so sind sie als ein öffentliches aus dem Gemüth und Geist der Nation selbst kommendes Institut anzusehen, das der Staat selbst errichtet und heilig bewahrt, das nicht nach Art geheimer Verbindungen von mehr zeitlichen Zwecken einen Theil zuläßt, den andern ausschließt, sondern auf die innere und sittliche Vereinigung aller, die zum Staate gehören, ebenso hinwirkt, wie dieser selbst auf die äußere und gesetzliche Einheit hinwirkt’²⁵. This is the explanation for his appellation to civic society in his speech on the deities of Samothrace. Uvarov, on the other hand, tended to set the ‘small number of the initiated’ in opposition to the superstitious idolatrous ‘crowd’. But the fact that Uvarov initiated the publication of Creuzer’s book shows that the ideas of Creuzer and those of Voss did not seem to be mutually exclusive to him, and his position in the debate was determined by a desire to demonstrate the uniqueness of Classical culture without rejecting the idea of the East as the cradle of civilization, which idea was important to Uvarov.

Echoes of these latent polemics with Uvarov could be found in the later lectures of Schelling. There is a direct reference to the work on Eleusinian ordinances in the records of the first version of Schelling’s lectures on the philosophy of revelation (1831-32), first published in 1992. Schelling repeated: ‘Alles nun zusammengenommen waren in den Mysterien der Demeter

²³ Ibid. S. 24.

²⁴ Schelling *F.W.J. SW.* I, 8. S. 361.

²⁵ SW I, 6, S. 69 – 70.

und des Dionysos vereint, nicht wie Uwaroff meint, durch ein zufälliges Hinzukommen der letzteren zu den ersteren. Die Mysterien des Dionysos waren das natürliche Ende der Mysterien der Demeter. Dionysos in seiner höchsten Potenz war das Ziel, so wie Demeter der Anfang der Mysterien war'²⁶.

This history of Schelling and Uvarov's participation in the controversy over Ancient ordinances demonstrates that in Russia, just as in other countries, the ideas of Schelling were not assimilated only in a philosophical context, but also in a context of the history of mythology and religion. It should also be noted here that the delineation of the two disciplines was barely noticeable in the early 19th century.

The context of history and mythology considerably widened the reference group of the writings of Schelling and formed the conceptual framework of perception that was different from the philosophical debate. Just as Schelling's philosophy of nature, which he conceived during the period of his professorship at Jena and Würzburg, initiated debates between philosophers of nature and physicians (M.G. Pavlov and L.M. Vellansky in Russia), his historical and mythological hypothesis provoked the response of historians of Antiquity, including those who, like Uvarov, were rather skeptical about Schelling's philosophical views²⁷. Schelling's high ability as a philologist and his reputation among German Classicalists, many of whom were in regular contact with him, did not allow Uvarov to ignore Schelling's statements, since his own thought on Eleusinian ordinances remained perforce in the same context.

At the same time, the reaction to Schelling's statements was not one of translation or passive 'taking into consideration'. On the contrary, Russian scholars involved in discussing these ordinances were equal participants in a mutually interesting dialogue and were viewed as such by their German colleagues. The theme of history of mythology was probably the best grounds for such a dialogue since the scholars dealt with a common heritage shared by Europe and Russia, and the reference to the later was a powerful factor of integration by itself. Russian scholars found confirmation of this in the interest of German writers – including Schelling – in the role of the Crimea and Caucasus as a connecting link between East and West²⁸.

²⁶ *Schelling F.W.J.* Urfassung der Philosophie der Offenbarung. Hamburg, 1992. S. 384.

²⁷ The evidence of a clearly unfavorable view of Uvarov on the philosophy of Schelling in the early 1810s could be found in the only known reference to the philosopher in his correspondence. In his letter to G. von Stein, dated in late 1813, Uvarov said that the public in St. Petersburg had grouped all foreign learning together and confused 'the raving of [Schelling] with discoveries by Leibniz' (Русский архив. 1871. № 2. Стлб. 0130, 0131; the surname of the philosopher was identified in the manuscript by A.L. Zorin). Since Leibniz was also mentioned, Uvarov most likely referred to the works on the philosophy of nature and the philosophy of identity popularized in Russia by Vellansky and Pavlov. It is interesting to note that the statement was made in 1813, two years before the publication of 'On the Deities of Samothrace'.

²⁸ In his speech 'On the Deities of Samothrace', Schelling articulated this interest by considering the role of Pelasgians in the development of the culture of Ancient Greece; see: SW I, 8, S. 364 – 365, 402.

One should not ignore the above-mentioned political connotations of the controversy regarding these ordinances since its participants could not avoid reflecting upon relations between religion and state – a highly sensitive theme for both Russian and German society. Within this context, a seemingly innocent exchange of historical and philological arguments acquired a new dimension with references to political imagination. This discursive regime implied a complex relationship between direct statement, hint, and apophysis. This factor should also be taken into consideration when evaluating the perception of Schelling's writings in Russia: 'Reading between the lines' was an integral part of the reception of Schelling in Russia, and not only as the result of a particular Russian political reality, but also in connection with European mythological views of the role of secret societies and unions in spiritual and political life.

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