

READING WITH MAPS, PRINTS AND COMMONPLACE BOOKS,
OR HOW THE POET V.A. ZHUKOVSKY TAUGHT ALEXANDER II
TO READ RUSSIA (1825-1838)

Damiano Rebecchini

UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO

Vasilii Zhukovsky, apart from being one of the best Russian poets of his time as well as the tutor of Tsar Alexander II, was an extraordinary reader, one of those readers who are the delight of the historians of reading. He left us a great amount of information not only about what he read, but also about how he read. In his diaries, observations on his readings abound. The pages of the books from his library are full of marks, comments, annotations.¹ The way he approached reading changed in time, according to the circumstances and the texts he read. At times, he conceived reading as a conversation with the finest minds of past centuries, as Descartes defined it in his *Discours de la méthode*.² In this case, his annotations took the form of questions, objections, answers or comments to the author whose work he was reading.³ Other times, he used reading as a tool for self-analysis and self-perfecting, thus combining the typical aims of the spiritual readings of Christian monasticism (see, for instance, Guigo II's *Scala claustralium*) with a tension towards self-analysis proper of European sentimentalism.⁴ In a 1819 note he wrote: "Reading is one of our *most important duties*. Müller says: Lesen ist nichts; lesen und denken – etwas; lesen, denken und fühlen – die Vollkommenheit.

¹ See Biblioteka Zhukovskogo v Tomske 1978-1988; in particular, Ianushkevich 1984: 14-31.

² Descartes 1982: 5.

³ See, for instance, Zhukovsky's reactions to reading J.J. Rousseau's works in Kanunova 1984: 229-336.

⁴ See Coco 2005: 42-43. On reading in Russian sentimentalism, see Kochetkova 1994: 156-189.

We must read for the very reason why we must live; that is, to perfect our spirit.”⁵

Other times, finally, the moment of reading was for Zhukovsky a creative moment or, better, the “threshold” of creation, the beginning of an act of imagination that often developed into a translation or an original poetic re-elaboration of the text he was reading. The margins of the books in his library are indeed full of such translations.⁶ The poet often read with that particular inclination of the soul that consisted in imagining what style and semantic aspect the text he was reading would have acquired, if it had been translated into another language and transferred into a different literature. Many of his most original poetic works were indeed born of translations. “One does not know what to call him,” wrote Nikolai Gogol about him, “whether a translator or an original poet.” And he added: “by translating, he could obtain, in his very translations, the same effects as an original and authentic author.”⁷

It is precisely Zhukovsky’s particular way of reading through translating that I would like to focus upon. I would like to show how this reading mode of his may have influenced the way of reading and interpreting reality of the political leader that he tutored. And I would like to do so by analysing the main didactic aids used by Zhukovsky in the period he taught the future tsar, between 1825 and 1838, in order to help him memorise the content of what they read together.⁸

In my opinion, not enough attention has been paid to the memory aids used to memorise and record the readings, and on the mental processes that their use implied. I will now discuss, in particular, three different such aids that Zhukovsky used while reading with his pupil: 1) iconographic material (maps, drawings, prints); 2) two forms of commonplace books he himself had developed; 3) mnemonic tables designed to help the pupil remember the content of the texts he had read. The idea I wish to put forward is that each of these aids can shape a text’s dynamic reality, stressing certain aspects of its meaning, and thus producing, with its specific structure, a well-defined interpretative effect on the reader.

⁵ Zhukovsky 2004: 136.

⁶ Thus, on the pages of his books, various translations appear of poems by Herder, Wieland, K.W. Ramler, G.C. Pfeffel and other English and French authors. See, for example, Remorova 1978: 149-300; Remorova 1984: 337-358; Remorova 1988: 376-399. On Zhukovsky the translator, see for example Eichstädt 1970 and Averintsev 1996: 137-164.

⁷ Gogol 1984: 348.

⁸ The works dealing with Alexander II’s education are numerous but, so far, little attention has been paid to the content of courses and to the main didactic aids employed. See Stepanov 1902; Mikhnevich 1902: 361-389; Samover 1991: 5-13; Wortman 1995: 345-351; Shmidt 2000. Recently, Timur Guzairov has analysed some historical texts written by Zhukovsky for the heir about the early Russian history (862-1505). See Guzairov 2007: 43-57 and Guzairov 2013. On manuals and the study method used to teach universal history, see Rebecchini 2012: 77-102.

1. Let us start from the iconographic material. The use of images beside written texts has ancient origins, but it became especially relevant in 18th-century pedagogy, thanks to authors like Johann Bernhard Basedow and Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi. Zhukovsky, in particular, was a diligent follower of Pestalozzi, whose elementary teaching method he had been studying ever since the 1810s.⁹ Even before he started teaching Alexander, Zhukovsky had always taken great care to complement the reading of written texts with iconographic material. The poet deemed it essential that Alexander could always read “with images,” by making use of “drawings, maps, tables.”¹⁰ In the syllabus he had submitted to Tsar Nicholas I in 1827, he had much insisted on the fact that in the heir’s library there should always be – along with books – rich collections of geographic and city maps, planimetries, prints and drawings. He even asked the tsar for his permission to employ, for this purpose, the court painter A. Zauerveid who, in his own words, was busy with significantly “less useful tasks.”¹¹ According to his tutor, Alexander’s collection of prints should include: “views of cities and various places; architectural prints; portraits of eminent men; ancient and modern costumes; drawings of natural history subjects; historical prints; representations of mythological figures,” etc.¹² During a trip that Zhukovsky made to Germany and France between 1826 and 1827 – which also had the purpose of building the nucleus of the heir’s library – he visited the shops of the best print merchants in Dresden and Paris, and bought for his pupil many collections of lithographs.¹³ In a letter to the empress, he had underlined that these were “absolutely indispensable to record, in the prince’s mind, everything that he would read to him.”¹⁴

In the summer of 1828, Zhukovsky wrote in a note: “During the holidays, in the mornings and – over the past six months – after supper, from 6 to 7 pm, we have been reading. We have read the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in French, using maps and planimetries of the places.”¹⁵ Reading Homer’s poems with the support of maps helped Zhukovsky give the epic events narrated by Homer a real and historical dimension. The poet strived to con-

⁹ The poet had studied Pestalozzi’s method first in 1815 at the University of Derpt and then in 1821 in Switzerland. In 1827 he had decided to go and personally see how a school founded by the pedagogist worked. Furthermore, in his personal library, apart from Pestalozzi’s complete works, various texts illustrating the Swiss pedagogist’s method may be found. See Lobanov 1981: 165, 194, 252.

¹⁰ Gody ucheniia 1880: 7.

¹¹ Ibid.: 36.

¹² Ibid.: 14.

¹³ On the creation of Alexander II’s library, see Rebekkini 2013: 77-89.

¹⁴ Zhukovskii 1885: 265.

¹⁵ Rukopisnyi Otdel Rossiiskoi Natsional’noi Biblioteki (RO RNB), fund 286, box 1, folder 124: “Osobennye ucheniia v 1828,” folio 2.

fer special reality to the events he read about, he tried to place them in space and time, while reducing their mythological and fairy tale-like connotations as much as he could. To do so, for example, as he read the *Iliad* to his pupil, he also used K.G. Lenz's work *Die Ebene von Troja* (The plane of Troy, 1798), a volume full not only of detailed descriptions of the plane of Troy's topography, but also complete with a great map of the main places in the war.¹⁶ The map precisely reconstructed, on paper, where the Achaeans' camp stood with respect to Troy, the position of Patroclus' and Achilles' tombs, the mountains and rivers that surrounded Troy, etc.¹⁷ Before starting to read Homer's poems, the poet had also asked the French teacher, Florian Gille, to impart their pupil some lessons of Homeric geography.¹⁸ Similarly, he had urged Weiss, the print merchant from Dresden, to have the great collections of lithographs on the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* that he had purchased during his trip to Germany delivered to him as soon as possible.¹⁹ If maps could show the heir the locations of Homeric events, the prints helped him visualise the faces and figures of the heroes of the poems. They provided a real image of the costumes of the heroes and their women, as well as detailed illustrations of the buildings in which they moved. The *Iliad* as read by Zhukovsky with these visual aids was a different work from, for instance, that read aloud to the heir by the classicist poet Nikolai Gnedich in July 1830, in his own new Russian translation.²⁰ The *Iliad* read by Zhukovsky using maps, planimetries and prints was historically more accurate, realistic, detailed and much less epic and legendary.

Zhukovsky also used images to accompany his natural history or Christian doctrine readings. In his Biblical history course, which he taught together with Father Gerasim Pavskii, Zhukovsky used a collection of 200 prints representing events and characters from the Old and the New Testaments.²¹ The reading of passages from the Bible was often complemented by the study of Biblical geography and the frequent use of maps. When these were lacking, the teachers drew them themselves. On the occasion of the Christian doctrine exam, in the summer of 1828, Alexander's tutor Karl

¹⁶ See the list of books borrowed by Zhukovsky from the heir's library on 4 June 1828, before leaving for the summer residences. Arkhiv Gosudarstvennogo Ermitazha (AGE), fund 2, box XIV zh, folder 21, folio 1.

¹⁷ See Lenz 1798.

¹⁸ Cf. Rukopisnyi Otdel Institut Russkoi Literatury (RO IRLI), "Zhukovskii" fund, folder 28045: "27 pisem F.A. Zhilia k V.A. Zhukovskomu. 1826-1845," folio 12.

¹⁹ See Gille's letter to the German book merchant Weiss of 1.9.1828 in the fund 2, box XIV zh, folder 22, folio 1.

²⁰ See P.A. Pletnev's diary entry of 24 January 1830, in RO IRLI, "Arkhiv P.A. Pletneva," "Dnevnik zaniatii s det'mi Nikolaia I," fund 234, box 1, folder 2, folio 18 verso.

²¹ Barsov 1880: 286.

Merder reports the satisfaction of the dowager empress, Mar'ia Fedorovna, with the results obtained by the two teachers: "Her Majesty has expressed her full approval of the results that Father Pavskii and Mr Zhukovsky obtained in their Christian doctrine course, and of the maps of Palestine that they drew which, until today, did not exist in any of the current educational institutions."²² Thanks to maps, in Alexander's eyes even sacred history could appear more realistic, detailed and defined.

With the aid of maps and drawings, Zhukovsky stripped the stories he read of their purely verbal and bookish aspects, anchoring them in space and time. By complementing his readings with the study of maps and drawings, in Alexander's eyes, heroes lost their indefinite and abstract quality, and assumed well-defined features, profiles and colours. The heroes' places, faces, gestures and costumes made a more lasting impression than other elements of the texts, such as dialogues or the general plots. This type of reading, supported by maps, planimetries and drawings, had a contextualising, historicising and occasionally demystifying effect on the text. It emphasised the descriptive and visual sides of literary works, to the detriment of the auditory, stylistic and conceptual ones. Similar iconographic aids thus ended up enhancing specific elements of a text, shaping its meaning and definitely influencing its interpretation.

2. The second aid that Zhukovsky extensively employed with his pupil was a sort of commonplace book. It was a notebook into which Alexander and his two fellow students (the heir attended his courses together with Iosif Viel'gorskii and Aleksandr Patkul') copied the most interesting passages by the authors they were reading. Thus, they collected excerpts by different writers, which were then arranged into different sections according to the subject. As the young readers approached new works, they compiled new sections and, in so doing, they somehow created autonomous texts, which they could then re-read and use for practical purposes. In one single year, Alexander and his classmates managed to fill in as many as five such notebooks.²³ The final product visually represented the best readings they had experienced: the notebooks mirrored their own cultural identity.

This practice had certainly not been invented by Zhukovsky. Commonplace books had existed in Europe at least since the 12th century. Their use had already been regulated and canonised by Erasmus from Rotterdam at the beginning of the 16th century, in his famous manual *De duplici copia verborum ac rerum* (1512). John Locke updated it in his *New*

²² Merder 1885: 359-360.

²³ See Muraveinik 1831.

Method of Making Common-Place-Books (1686).²⁴ However, the commonplace books created by Zhukovsky for his pupils had something special: to start with, they were not an individual but a collective tool. They did not represent the tastes, idiosyncrasies and cultural identity of an individual and autonomous reader but the cultural identity of a group or, rather, the identity that the master meant to forge for his pupils as a group. Secondly, the notebooks did not remain handwritten, as was often the case in Europe in previous centuries, but they were published.²⁵ Indeed, Zhukovsky had insisted that they were periodically printed, once or more often every year, in a small number of copies, so that they could be circulated at court. This way, they could also be read by the tsar, the empress and their entourage. If, on the one hand, their publication could represent a sort of control or censorship by the court, on the other it was also a way of influencing the intellectual and aesthetic orientations of a large number of people. These notebooks could orientate the cultural identity of part of the court, especially considering the cultural prestige that Zhukovsky enjoyed in his first years at court. Indeed, a quick glance at these notebooks is enough to realise how they reflect not only a specific aesthetic orientation but also a specific way of managing and classifying knowledge as meant by the poet. They mirror Zhukovsky's constant effort to provide a precise key of interpretation of the world that his pupil would have to live in.

In particular, Zhukovsky left us two different types of commonplace books that he used and published. The first, entitled *Sobiratel'* (The collector), published in two volumes in 1829, was divided into two sections: the first section included the longest passages, some of which were even three or four pages long, and dealt with subjects such as Biblical history, natural history or Russian history. It contained excerpts by classic authors such as Buffon, but also by contemporaries like Herder and, anonymously, even poetic texts by Pushkin (from the poem "Poltava") and by Zhukovsky himself. The second section contained shorter texts, quotations only a few lines long both in prose and in verse, in different languages, from Russian to German, French and English. These fragments were collected into well-defined thematic sections: "the smallness of man on earth," "monuments," "poetry," "Homer," "history," "races and their level of civilization," etc. Just looking at the first issue of *Sobiratel'* is enough to understand the type of reading that this aid presupposed: the section dedicated to "History" includes Russian, French and German fragments by Cicero, by the Russian historian Nikolai

²⁴ On the origins of commonplace books in medieval times, see Petrucci 2007: 15-41; Moss 1996; Darnton 2009: 149-173.

²⁵ The fact that, in modern times, commonplace books mostly remained hand-written does not exclude the fact that some were published, and greatly influenced the culture of their age. See Moss 1996 on this.

Karamzin, by Sallust, Herder and Thucydides. It is unlikely that Zhukovsky and his pupils, in only one year, could read as many works integrally and took only one or two sentences from them. It is much more likely that they moved from one author to another, from one text or one sylloge to another, ready to find the fragment, sentence, or phrase that suited the general view of their notebook (or a possible practical use thereof). This method for memorising texts presupposed a type of reading not concerned with the genre or style of the text itself, nor with the specific features of a national literature, a historical period or an author. Into these notebooks, Zhukovsky's pupils entered only that which writers of different ages and cultures had in common: a theme, or an idea. This type of commonplace book implied a segmental reading, especially focused on the content and ready to ignore many formal and stylistic aspects of texts. It is important not to underestimate the effects that this method could have. Once the pupil had copied into his notebook the most significant sentence of a certain text, the entire literary work tended towards a re-semantisation – in the reader's memory – based on the fragment that he had recorded in the notebook. The pupil tended, in his memory, to extend the sense of the fragment to the entire work.

The choice of sections in the heir's commonplace books reveals an organisational and interpretational model that Zhukovsky was trying to impose on his pupil (and, perhaps, on part of the court). Most passages collected in the first two issues of the 1829 *Sobiratel'* share Zhukovsky's intention to show the deep connection existing between natural and historical phenomena. Through these fragments, Zhukovsky wanted to show how the entire universe was a God-regulated system, in which the same laws and constants applied to both nature and history, as well as to every individual's life. This is the sense of the opening passages of the first issue of *Sobiratel'*, like "A glance at the world and at man," or "On physical and moral climate": the focus is on the correspondences between the natural, animal and human realms. Nothing is isolated; everything affects its own environment. The same idea also informed the choice of fragments taken from the *Iliad*, from Ossian's poems, from Goethe or Byron. The *Iliad* is recorded into the notebook especially through passages including Homer's famous similes linking the natural and the human worlds.²⁶ For this very reason, the fragments from the Homeric poem are romantically associated to fragments from Ossian's poems and from other texts by anonymous authors of different ages. The *Iliad* that can be romantically associated, in the space of a single page, to Ossian's fragments is very different from the *Iliad* that can be read with the help of maps and drawings of the plane of Troy. It is in turn also different from that declaimed by a classicist poet such as Gnedich.

²⁶ *Sobiratel'* 1829: 13.

The second type of commonplace book used by Zhukovsky, which he had named *Muraveinik* (The anthill), was published in five small volumes during 1831.²⁷ This aid implied a different kind of reading from the previous commonplace book. It required a type of reading in which particular attention was paid to the possibilities of translation of a text into another language and culture. This – translation – was an aspect that the poet was particularly fond of, so much so that he insisted with the heir's teachers that he translate his homework and repeat lessons into different languages.²⁸ Following Herder and Wilhelm von Humboldt's ideas, Zhukovsky was convinced that every language conveyed a unique vision of the world and concepts specific only to itself. In the syllabus addressed to Nicholas I, he had written that a key tool for the education of the future tsar were to be foreign languages, which were “moyens de compléter soi-même les connaissances communiquées par les maîtres.”²⁹ In various issues of *Muraveinik*, Zhukovsky collected short fragments of texts about different subjects, which he had read and translated with his pupils during the year. There, he published passages translated from German and English into Russian and French. Some are translations made by Alexander himself and by his two classmates. Others were made by their master Zhukovsky, who had a real talent for poetic translation. Although, in general, most texts in the notebooks were translations of contemporary authors' texts, the poet also published ample passages from the *Iliad*, first translated into Russian by him for his pupils. According to the Russian literature teacher Petr Pletnev, Zhukovsky counted a lot on the appeal of publishing their translations as an educational means for his pupils. Writes Pletnev about *Muraveinik*: “it is known that the author himself never realises his defects so well as when he sees his work published. Apart from this, those notebooks could also have another advantage, in the eyes of the young author and translator (Alexander): in them, he could also find the mature works of his tutor and he could unconsciously compare them with his, and feel the differences between them more vividly.”³⁰

The excerpts in this type of commonplace book required a kind of reading that focused on the differences and similarities between

²⁷ *Muraveinik* 1831.

²⁸ *Gody ucheniia* 1880: 47. Zhukovsky and Pletnev had Alexander practice translation for many years. See for example “Perevody 1833 goda” in Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF), fund 678, box 1, folder 228. Also see the notebook titled “Sobranie moikh perevodov,” *ibid.*, folder 229; “Uchebnye sochineniia i perevody velikogo Kniazia Aleksandra Nikolaevicha (1833-1834),” *ibid.*, folder 232.

²⁹ *Gody ucheniia* 1880: 23.

³⁰ GARF, fund 728, box 1, part 2, folder 2527: “Vospominaniia Petra Aleksandrovicha Pletneva o vospitanii Tsesarevicha Aleksandra Nikolaevicha pod rukovodstvom Merdera i Zhukovskogo (1857),” ff. 20-21.

the various European languages and literatures, between the Russian culture and the culture of other nations. Through the constant practice of translation, Zhukovsky encouraged his pupil to play some sort of mental exercise that could help him reduce the centrality of his own language and cultural tradition, and pay more attention to the specificities of the different European cultures. By having him translate a foreign text, he not only encouraged his pupil to consider the importance of the balance between semantic, stylistic and rhythmic value within a work. The young student would also have to evaluate the consequences of transferring such a text into a different literary system. The translations highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of the Russian language and literary tradition. At the same time, they revealed the different conceptual and axiological organization of the other European cultures. Pletnev himself never tired himself of repeating to Alexander that “literature is the most faithful portrait of a nation’s spiritual life” and that “language and thought are an indivisible whole.”³¹ By having him read and translate passages by great English, French and German poets into Russian, Zhukovsky encouraged the heir to compare the civil and cultural development of Russia with that of other European nations. Simultaneously, that allowed Alexander to experience that things that worked in other nations could not work in Russia. From this perspective, translating also represented some excellent training for the political activity of the future sovereign.

3. Yet, the didactic aid that most influenced Alexander’s learning method were the large tables that Zhukovsky had had designed and done for him since they first started studying together.³² They were large coloured sheets of paper, about one metre long, on which the poet had had large columns drawn on differently coloured – pink, blue, yellow, etc. – backgrounds. Each column and each colour represented the development of a civilisation or a nation, which was intersected by rows representing centuries or years. The tables were then filled in with a myriad of small symbols that had to recall individual historical events. The poet was following in an old tradition, at least as old as Eusebius of Caesarea, who wanted to make history materially visible.³³ At the same time, though, Zhukovsky was originally combining that tradition with the ancient art of memory which, starting from Aristotle, had employed different systems of signs to memorise various types of texts.

³¹ See P.A. Pletnev’s letter to Alexander in RO IRLI, fund 234, box 1, folder 7, ff. 2-2(verso) and f. 5.

³² On the origins and precise sources used by Zhukovsky to create this didactic aid, see Rebecchini 2012: 94-102.

³³ See Grafton, Williams 2006: 133-177.

In 18th century and early 19th century historiography, they used synchronic maps that showed the parallel development of national histories, as in Friedrich Strass's *Der Strom der Zeiten* (1803), or in Emmanuel Las Cases' famous *Atlas historique* (1806), or Heinrich Kohlrausch' tables (1815). However, the text written into each column was so small and detailed that it was inconceivable as a didactic aid: instead of simplifying learning, it hindered it.³⁴ Zhukovsky, instead, wanted his pupil to avoid learning things by heart. Therefore, rather than writing the history of a nation inside a column in minuscule characters, he had created a specific system of symbols to recall any protagonists, events and locations of the past quickly and easily. He had invented symbols for every historical figure: not just for kings or emperors, but also for nations, citizens, soldiers and a myriad of professions (philosophers, doctors, writers, etc.). They were all easily recognisable and memorisable. For example, to indicate Queen Cleopatra, he wrote her initial, K, surmounted by a crown (a royal symbol), and with an asterisk (signifying a woman) below it. He had also created symbols for the common actions in history, both collective (attack, defence, siege, election, etc.) and individual (arrival, departure, exile, pilgrimage, birth, death, trip, commerce, game, etc.). The same applied to spaces and locations, for which he created symbols that contained or were placed near historical figures and their actions. Perhaps attracted by Condorcet's old dream of a universal scientific language, Zhukovsky had created anew, for his pupil, an original language made of easily recognisable and memorisable graphic signs, which could recall any type of text read or studied.³⁵ Alexander's study room hosted tables of symbols that he used not only for political history but also for natural or sacred history. Zhukovsky had even tried to translate episodes from the Gospel, like the Annunciation, into his own symbolic language.³⁶ The advantage of these tables, compared to those containing written text, was that they provided an instant picture and left the pupil free to imagine the scene or the situation as he had read it. As the young critic Andrei Kraevskii, who was an admirer of Zhukovsky's tables, noted, their advantage compared to other tables was that they were "a canvas, a background onto which memory and imagination could paint their own images."³⁷ On the one hand, they prevented the pupil from learning texts by heart. On the other, they allowed him to recall the main events just as he had imagined them, and to retell them in different languages. This way, by using general and specific tables for every historical age, Zhukovsky could

³⁴ See Strass 1803; Le Sage 1808; Kohlrausch 1815.

³⁵ See Condorcet 1988: 291-292.

³⁶ See the "Zhukovskii" fund in RO RNB, fund 286, box 1, folder 128, f. 8.

³⁷ Kraevskii 1836: 24.

quickly show the parallel development of civilisations and nations in the ancient world, in the middle ages and in the balanced system of modern Europe. Even for contemporary history, from the French Revolution to 1830, Zhukovsky, after reading Thiers' *Histoire de la Révolution française* to his pupil, had made a table for every year and had entered symbols for every day in which main events had happened in Europe in that period.³⁸

Zhukovsky's aim was for Alexander to have a constantly general view of events. Thus, for over a decade, he insisted that his pupil always study subjects in a synchronic as well as a diachronic perspective, with the help of his tables of symbols. Judging from the preparatory notes to his courses, he truly believed his tables of symbols to be an essential tool for the heir to memorise their readings. The teacher read his lectures or passages from some work; the pupil took notes into his notebook and then had to create his own tables. Iosif Viel'gorskii, one of Alexander's two classmates, admitted that this method was really effective: "I myself – he writes – have created tables for the histories of Italy and France. By doing so, I now remember those events particularly well."³⁹ The tables had the advantage of providing an instant, general view of events occurring at the same time. In an 1823 review of the Russian edition of some German synchronic tables, Zhukovsky had written: "the simple, general overview they provide is these tables' best feature: they are a visual aid yet they do not require extensive reading."⁴⁰ Thanks to his tables, Alexander could always know at a glance what consequences a certain historical action had had not only within a nation, but also in the neighbouring states. Indeed, most history manuals that Zhukovsky had chosen for him, like Heeren's *Handbuch der Geschichte des Europäischen Staatensystems und seiner Colonien* on modern history of 1809, focused on the close connections and relations between European events. This applied both to internal affairs – at the economic, social and political level – and to international relations.⁴¹ The Göttingen historians, very appreciated by Zhukovsky, were precisely those who started conceiving history as a system, as shown by the titles of their writings. For some decades then, Gatterer, Müller, Schlözer and Heeren had been seeing European history as a system of connections (*Zusammenhang*) between political, economic and social factors, strictly linked to each other and to what happened in the neighbouring countries. It was extremely important that a sovereign destined to rule over one of the most influential countries in the Holy Alliance always had a systemic and compared view. More than anything else, Zhukovsky's tables were the tool

³⁸ See RO RNB, fund 286, box 1, folder 125 a: "Osobennye plany," ff. 122-160.

³⁹ Liamina, Samover 1999: 126.

⁴⁰ Zhukovskii 1985: 314.

⁴¹ On the universal history manuals used by Alexander, see Rebecchini 2012: 79-88.

that could help Alexander to read and think European history in such a way. Obviously, the tables recorded mostly the political and event-related aspects of what texts reported, ignoring the psychological side of characters and their actions. However, they obliged the reader to adopt a constantly detached attitude towards history, helped him to consider what happened in the near countries and to grasp the continuity and regularities in historical and social processes. The tables of symbols encouraged the heir to conceive Europe's political scenario rationally, as a balanced system made of strong connections and relationships. Considering the type of manuals employed and the importance of tables in Alexander's education, the consolidated opinion of critics that the future tsar's education was "a sentimental education, an education of the heart" seems not completely grounded.⁴²

4. The question remains of why a romantic poet like Zhukovsky, with his maps, notebooks and tables, wanted to encourage his pupil to read in such a rational and pragmatic way? Why did he want his pupil, through the use of his commonplace books and tables of symbols, to assimilate such a systemic and comparative interpretative method? A completely different approach had been followed, for instance, a few decades before by the tutor of Frederick William IV, Johann Ancillon, in his shaping the future King of Prussia. In an 1814 letter to his pupil, he had written: "You should consider that a Prince must be like a great Artist, who transfers his ideas to the masses of his nation and who wishes to confer some ever increasing perfection to his living Work. Therefore, your task should not seem a burden to you, but the work of your genius."⁴³ Zhukovsky's and Alexander's diaries perhaps offer some insight into this.

In the last stage of his teaching, Zhukovsky decided to dedicate increasingly more time to well-selected, important works, to read with his pupil during the evening.⁴⁴ Zhukovsky considered them very important, so he read them as frequently as possible, especially because they dealt with crucial themes, like the French Revolution and Napoleon's age, which could prove essential in shaping the heir's political vision. In the evening of 7 August 1835, in the presence of Prince Lieven, he began reading to the heir Mignet's *Histoire de la révolution française* (1824).⁴⁵ Mignet starts with these words:

Je vais tracer rapidement l'histoire de la révolution française qui commence en Europe l'ère des sociétés nouvelles, comme

⁴² Wortman 1995: 347.

⁴³ Haake 1920: 23.

⁴⁴ Gody ucheniia 1880: 3.

⁴⁵ Zhukovskii 2004, 14: 31.

la révolution d'Angleterre a commencé l'ère des gouvernements nouveaux. Cette révolution n'a pas seulement modifié le pouvoir politique, elle a changé toute l'existence intérieure de la nation [...]. Le peuple ne possédait aucun droit, la royauté n'avait pas de limites et la France était livrée à la confusion de l'arbitraire ministériel, des régimes particuliers et des privilèges des corps. A cet ordre abusif la révolution en a substitué un plus conforme à la justice et plus approprié à nos temps. Elle a remplacé l'arbitraire par la loi, le privilège par l'égalité; elle a délivré les hommes des distinctions des classes.⁴⁶

The narration is fluent, lively. Zhukovsky annotated in his diary: "The beginning is good."⁴⁷ The heir to the throne annotated in his: "Vasilii Andreevich read us the introduction of Mignet's *History of the Revolution*, it is very interesting."⁴⁸ The following day, the poet and his pupil went on reading the work of the French historian, and focused on the diffusion of anonymous tip-offs: "Towards evening, we read a second passage: it was about anonymous tip-offs," writes the poet.⁴⁹ Zhukovsky notices Alexander's reticence about this subject and writes in his diary:

It is incredible how cautious the Grand Duke is. I must be more careful with him; I must try to encourage him to open up. He is not truly reticent; he finds it difficult to express what he thinks. This is mostly due to his not being used and not having the courage to express his own opinions. Our readings will prove useful to him from this point of view.⁵⁰

The following day, Zhukovsky changed his mind. The prince expressed his opinion very clearly. Only, it did not coincide with the poet's. That day, Zhukovsky wrote in his diary:

We read and had a heated discussion. The G(rand) D(uke) is already fascinated, if not by the rules, at least by the idea of absolutism. I must not argue with him. It is necessary to *undermine* his ideas, to convince him silently.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Mignet 1824: 1-2.

⁴⁷ Zhukovskii 2004, 14: 31.

⁴⁸ GARF, fund 678, box 1, folder 284: "Dnevnik Aleksandra Nikolaevicha za 1835 g.," f. 5.

⁴⁹ Zhukovskii 2004, 14: 31.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

Their readings were one of the means he had to convince him silently. In the following evenings, for more than a month, sometimes every day, the poet read Mignet's work with the heir.⁵² During that summer, in 1835, Zhukovsky had the heir read a great number of writings on the European revolutions, works that showed him the inner weakness of monarchy as an institution in their age. Some of these were Madame de Stael's *Considérations sur les principaux événements de la Révolution française*, Mignet's history of the revolution, the volume on the English revolution of Hume's *History of England*, Schiller's *Histoire du soulèvement des Pays-Bas*, Koch's two *Tableau des révolutions*, Heeren's and Michelet's modern histories, Madame de Campan's memoirs of the French revolution.⁵³ While reading Madame de Staël's work, Zhukovsky had annotated on the volume from his library those passages in which the author proves how the French revolution had not been an episode at all, but the inevitable conclusion of a long historical process:

La révolution de France est une des grandes époques de l'ordre social. Ceux qui la considèrent comme un événement accidentel n'ont porté leurs regards ni dans le passé, ni dans l'avenir. Ils ont pris les acteurs pour la pièce; et, afin de satisfaire leurs passions, ils ont attribué aux hommes du moment ce que les siècles avaient préparé. Il suffisait cependant de jeter un coup d'œil sur les principales crises de l'histoire, pour se convaincre qu'elles ont été toutes inévitables.⁵⁴

So ample and detailed a picture of the revolutionary events occurring in European history could easily have undermined the heir's beliefs about the universal and unshakable nature of absolutism. At the same time, Napoleon's fate might have convinced him that, in his age, monarchic power could only exist if based on justice, and if the sovereign himself was the first to abide by the law. In 1835, the poet wrote in his diary:

The most important thing for us and for our sovereign is to hold the law in high regard: if both the tsar and his subjects are used to abiding by it, then we could do without any constitution. We cannot think of a constitution yet – I told the Grand Duke – it is not in the nature of the Russian people yet. We have no basis

⁵² GARF, fund 678, box 1, folder 284: "Dnevnik Aleksandra Nikolaevicha za 1835 g.," ff. 5-24.

⁵³ See AGE, fund 2, box XIV zh, folder 21: "Bibliothèque de Monseigneur le Grand Duc Héritier. Livre de notes. Sortie et rentrée des ouvrages prêtées: Chambre d'études à la campagne," f. 79.

⁵⁴ On Zhukovsky's notes on Madame de Staël's book, see Ianushkevich 1990: 115.

whatsoever for such a thing and we still need a strong monarchy. We cannot know now if soon or late the moment will come for a constitution. However, in order to make one needless, you yourself should start learning and teaching others to hold the law in high regard.⁵⁵

While teaching Alexander the French revolution and Napoleon's era, Zhukovsky always tried to report the events from several viewpoints: he read the heir the memoirs of Jacobins, Girondists, realists, émigrés, Napoleonic officers, Louis XVI's apocryphal memoirs and Napoleon's memoirs as transcribed by Las Cases.⁵⁶ Through these readings, Zhukovsky forced the prince to change his perspective continuously. And he did so even more with Russian history, for which he had to fight against consolidated family prejudices, like those on Catherine II or Alexander I. He made the heir read texts about the same historical period – for instance on Alexander I's reign – but offering radically different interpretations. One example is the polemic pamphlet *Zapiski o staroi i novoi Rossii* (Notes on the ancient and the new Russia) by Nikolai Karamzin, and the eulogy *Otryvok iz istorii XIX veka* (A passage on the history of the 19th century) written by Aleksandr Sturdza.⁵⁷ Zhukovsky did so to make the heir consider every historical event from ever-changing perspectives, even opposed ones, and to always make him consider both the internal specificities of the country he would rule and the external context.

Zhukovsky, by reading and studying with his pupil for over a decade, taught Alexander to read in a comparative and contrastive way. This method favoured comparing and contrasting texts and their points of view. It considered various perspectives and directions in the history of different civilisations, nations and cultures, while underlining their being deeply interconnected. This reading method was even more important in his eyes because – as he never failed to repeat – “life is study,” and the textbook his pupil would have to study with the greatest attention was Russia itself.⁵⁸ As he wrote to the empress in May 1837, before he accompanied Alexander on his study trip around Russia:

Our trip can be compared to reading a book, of which the Grand Duke is going to read the summary only, to get a general idea

⁵⁵ Zhukovskii 2004, 14: 29.

⁵⁶ See Rebekkini 2004: 229-253.

⁵⁷ On Karamzin's and Sturdza's writings, see Alexander's diary, August 1835 and January 1836, GARF, fund 678, box 1, folder 284, f. 5 ff. and *ibid.*, folder 287, f. 22. On Sturdza and the drafting of the Holy Alliance, see Liamina 1999: 135-145.

⁵⁸ Zhukovsky had been developing this idea since 1817. See Zhukovskii 2004, 13: 127.

of its content. Later on, he will start reading each chapter individually. This book is Russia. But it is an animated book, which will be able to recognise his reader.⁵⁹

If, for Ancillon, the German people had to be in Frederick William IV's eyes a work of art to be forged by his genius, Zhukovsky taught Alexander to consider Russia a book to be read and interpreted carefully, which required continuous contextualising and comparing, and considering the consequences that any change to the system might have both internally or externally.

To conclude, each of the didactic tools Alexander employed while studying – maps, prints, commonplace books, tables – helped the heir to pay attention to and memorise some specific elements of the texts he read, leading him at the same time to neglect others. The daily use of these tools for more than a decade elicited in the sovereign the development of a well-defined comparative and contrastive method for interpreting texts that could hardly have been limited to his studies. By reading the books from his library for years with the help of maps, prints, commonplace books and tables of symbols, Alexander acquired certain habits and interpretative models, which may also have influenced his reforming policies. The general system of reforms that he introduced in his country a few decades later, indeed, seems to support this view, although it surely needs to be investigated further in future studies.

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⁵⁹ Tatishchev 1903: 703.

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