



SCHOLARSHIP AND IDEOLOGICAL COMPLIANCE – THE CASE OF ROBERT WIPPER¹

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Abstract

The first article in a series of four that aims at a new evaluation of Robert Wipper (1859–1954) as a scholar of Early, Medieval and Modern Christianity. In this piece we describe his works on Christianity up to 1940. We start with his 1894 dissertation, paying attention to its various backgrounds and to its novel features in particular. Wipper’s original lectures and papers on Christianity that were published between 1900s and 1918 are relatively understudied and overlooked in the context of his professional development. We discuss them in their contemporary setting of early 20th century scholarship on the Bible and Christianity. The article finishes with discussion of his publications of early 1920s that saw light prior to Wipper’s emigration to Latvia.

Keywords

Robert Wipper, theories of myth, studies of religion, Christianity, Marxism.

This essay is a part of our current project that aims at a new evaluation of Robert Wipper² (1859–1954) as a scholar of Early, Medieval and

¹ This article was prepared for project RSF 16-18-10083 „The study of religion in social and cultural context of the epoch: the history of religious and intellectual history of Russia in the first half of XIX–XX centuries“.

² We restore the original German spelling of his surname (e.g. Central State Archive of the City of Moscow. F. 418. Op. 66. Nr. 365. Fol. 25) instead of following the common ‚Wipper‘ which is merely a backward Latinization from the Cyrillic ‚Виппер‘. In Riga Wipper used the latvianized form ‚Vipers‘.

Modern Christianity. As such, it is by necessity short³ and concentrates on a few relatively understudied issues.

The subject matter itself requires at least four essays of standard journal length. The present one (or, Article I) sets a pre-1940s context of the late (so-called ‚atheistic‘) publications on early Christianity that appeared in 1940–1950s within the general setting of Wipper’s work on Christianity. Wipper’s texts on ancient and Christian history that were published between 1940 and 1954 as a coherent and interlaced corpus, which in turn envisaged a would-be (however, left unwritten) monograph on Early Christianity as a Greco-Roman religion, is the subject of Article II. Unpublished papers (i.e. manuscripts, notes, correspondence, etc.) that were left when Wipper died in the Archive of the Russian Academy that explains the setting of existing works and preserved the drafts for the devised monograph in six folders, as well as brief statements on its idea, and synopses, require a separate essay (Article III in the series). For the same reasons, public reception and professional assessment of Wipper’s ideas from 1890 till the present is treated in yet another piece of research (Article IV).

In the present article part 3 that focuses on Wipper’s dissertation was written by Dmitriy Weber, parts 1–2 and 4–5 by Dimitri Bratkin.

1.

Wipper’s life had four distinctively separate stages that closely correspond to his career developments. The first one comprised his undergraduate study in Moscow University and then in Europe; culminating in the public defence of the dissertation on Calvin. The second stage covers his university teaching in Russia, first as extraordinary professor in Novorossiiski University, in Odessa (1894–1897), then in Moscow University, where he held successive positions of *Privat-dozent*, later extraordinary, ordinary and emeritus professor up until his voluntary resignation from the staff position in 1922 (Central State Archive of the City of Moscow.) F. 418. Op. 60. Nr. 273. Fol. 32). The third stage embraces his professorship in

³ Thus, for the sake of word limit, we leave behind biographical details on Wipper, referring English-language readers to the excellent of Hugh Graham’s article (Graham 1986: 22–35).

the Latvian University in Riga (1924–1940), whereas the fourth and the last stage is the final decade and a half of Wipper’s life which he spent in Moscow after his return to the USSR (1940–1954), as a Soviet academic.

A life like this, or in fact, three consecutive lives, is full of incongruities that at times seem as acute as the very difference between Tsarist Moscow, where Wipper was born in 1859, and the Stalin’s capital in which he died ninety-five years later; that is to say, Wipper would take unexpected turns in defiance of his own earlier choices. To name only a few: a minor and almost patronisingly glanced-upon member in the academic entourage of his university mentor, Professor Vladimir Guerrier⁴, Wipper eventually took up Guerrier’s professorship and assumed the position of acknowledged leader in his discipline of universal history. An acquiescent position seeker, who seemed to be riding high upon obtaining an extraordinary professorship in Odessa, Wipper quickly felt aversion to this university in general, to its very atmosphere and student body in particular; he soon resigned his position at the cost of severe income loss, for the only sake of returning to his *alma mater*. The grim experience of teaching outside Moscow in a provincial university in Odessa did not later prevent him from accepting a position in a newly founded Latvian university in Riga. A sympathiser of political liberalism in the days of the empire, Wipper had seemingly no hindrance to produce a book on Ivan the Terrible in 1922 that contemporaries recognised as a hymn to absolute monarchy (Wipper 1922). A Russian patriot, for whom the political independence of erstwhile Russian borderlands in the West and in the Caucasus was ‘a regress to the 16th century’, Wipper would later accept a professorial position in a national university of one of these emergent states and would eventually master the state language fluently enough to be lecturing in it. A pronounced objector to the Bolsheviks in the 1920s, Wipper would triumphantly return to Moscow in 1940, where he would pledge allegiance to Marxism and spend the rest of his life as a member of an unmolested academic establishment despite the ongoing Soviet terror. A native of a German-speaking Lutheran family from Moscow, Wipper would in Riga prove himself an ardent polemicist against the case of Baltic Germans in the history of Latvia. Finally, the style and tenor of his late books on

⁴ Guerrier. Vladimir Ivanovich (1837–1919) was Professor of History at Moscow State University from 1868 to 1904. See (Tsyigankov 2014: 219–230; Pogodin 2004: 151–162.

early Christianity may, for a modern reader, be taken as unconditional surrender to the official ‚scientific atheism‘ of Soviet propaganda.

These developments, of course, may be explained in pure psychological terms as perhaps manifestations of a restless and changeful personality. However, these and a considerable number of other biographical contradictions could be demonstrated in a more pragmatic manner, as either social or academic compliance, as accommodative strategies within the diverse settings Wipper was obliged to live through. If accepted, this idea would promptly suggest an opportunistic reasoning for each occasion. Thus, whatever sincere convictions Wipper may have had about tsars and monarchy, he sought to embrace, unwittingly or not, the expectations of his liberal-inclining audience – hence the liberal tenor of his works prior to 1917. Then, in early 1920s, Wipper’s almost unpredictable turn to Russian history and, of all its subjects, to the story of Ivan IV, and the alleged sympathy towards the most brutal and gruesome monarch of this country could, in comparison with similar developments among his contemporary compatriots, be induced by the sense of bitterness about the national catastrophe of Russian Revolution and Civil War that followed. His subsequent studies in the agrarian history of Latvia that challenged the established opinions of Baltic German scholars could show the intimations that an émigré intellectual had when supporting the national case of his host country. Then, after 1940, despite any of his earlier opinions of Stalin and the Soviet Russia, Wipper’s new stance as a fresh convert to Marxism and his loud-spoken pledge of allegiance to the communist state formed a clear-cut⁵, and the only-available, strategy for his own physical survival and that of his family, let alone the possibility of academic work.

Indeed, explanations like this are easily understandable. Their fundamental flaw, however, lies deep in one-size-fits-for-all character of the approach that downplays any circumstantial differences. If observed with due attention to detail, Wipper’s works present a complex and three-dimensional picture that should acknowledge developments of style, subject and scope.

⁵ See, for instance, his almost obsequious letter, dated 10 February 1948 to A. B. Ranovich (1885–1948), one of the foremost Soviet authorities on Early Christianity (Klyuev, Metel, Krih 2018: 38–39).

2.

This, in particular, refers to Wipper's work on the history of Christianity. This area of study was a recurring subject for the historian. In 1886 his father Georg Franz Wipper (in Russian, Yuri Frantsevich, 1824–1891) published a description of Jerusalem in the days of Jesus (Wipper 1886). In the late 1930s Robert Wipper would acknowledge how much he owed to his father in terms of professional growth (Safronov 1976: 9–10), and this early awakening of interest to the New Testament and its ancient background could have been part of his father's influence. In the same year 1886 Robert wrote to Professor Guerrier (who had been an old friend of his father) that the earliest plans for a dissertation included the „epoch and personality of Julian and the last generation of pagan Hellenistic writers“; elsewhere in the same letter he mentions his reading list (mostly German books) on this subject, and on the 4th century in general. Then Wipper makes a passing remark that elucidates the scope of this would-be dissertation: ‚For the epoch of the Persecuted Church I thought I would read Aubé and Renan ... and get acquainted with the distinguished apologists. I would certainly read B. Constant. I am especially interested in this question, and moreover, I had no idea what books to choose‘ (Manuscript department of Russian National Library. F. 70. K. 38. Nr. 117. Fol. 14v; Tsyigankov 2014: 322–323). This remark of course mentions some discussion between Wipper and his mentor and is telling for both.

The name of the famous French scholar and freethinker Ernest Renan (1823–1892) stands here, admittedly, for his multi-volume *Histoire des Origines du Christianisme*. This series commenced with the renowned *Vie de Jésus* in 1863 and was completed with *Marc-Aurèle et la Fin du Monde Antique* in 1882. In the time of writing it was still a novelty book discussed, and criticised, for its radicalism. Benjamin Aubé (1826–1887) was known as a pioneer in the historical study of the acts of martyrs of the Early Church, as the scholar who studied Christian history of late 2nd-early 3rd centuries and published some works on early Christian apologists (e.g. Commodian). Admittedly, if allowed to pursue in this direction, Wipper would in due course have written a dissertation that discussed written sources on martyrdom and Christian apologetic literature and the next stage of this research would have described Christian reaction on pagan society after Constantine. Here is the first anticipation of Wipper's deep

interest in second-century Christianity that became subject of his ultimate monograph in 1954. Texts by Benjamin Constant, as the context of the letter suggests, were recommended to Wipper by his professor. Himself a Catholic with Protestant sympathies Constant (1767–1830) was the champion of political Liberalism and Christian freedom of conscience who wrote extensively on the idea of freedom in the ancient world and passionately opposed in writing the very concept of a state cult.

Although there is no hint of Calvin or Switzerland in this letter, the insightful reader might still be able to sense a shadow passing by. At the start of his professorship Guerrier had issued a biography of Archbishop Willigis of Mainz (Guerrier 1969), but his extensive list of works shown no publications on the history of Christianity between that date and 1891. However, from 1890s on, he would be working extensively on various topics in the history of Medieval Christianity. In 1892, around the time when Wipper started his archival research in Geneva, Guerrier published an article on Western European theocracy (Guerrier 1892: 461–493), and it is very tempting indeed to suppose that Guerrier's choice of Calvinist Geneva as the subject for his student's thesis reflected his own interest to theocratic ideas. Guerrier's works on Church history published after 1890s are conservative, even apologetic; still, in 1886 he apparently suggested that Wipper read Benjamin Constant. It suggests that Guerrier, who by the time was already interested in theocracy and the notion of an established Christian Church as political force.

3.

What was new about Wipper's picture of Calvin and Calvinist Geneva? Before Wipper, Calvin had been systematically portrayed as a Protestant inquisitor who exercised almost unlimited power to persecute dissidents, such as Servetus, who was burned in 1553. Such image of Calvin dominated Russian historiography of the 19th century. For instance, T. N. Granovsky⁶, one of the founders of Russian scholarship of the Middle Ages, reproached Calvin for religious bigotry and absolutism. According to Granovsky,

⁶ Granovsky, Timofey Nikolayevich (1813–1855) was a founder of mediaeval studies in the Russian Empire.

Calvin was a Protestant reformer of the same standing as Luther, yet he possessed powers by far incomparable to those of Luther, and Calvin's executions bracketed him with the Jacobin leaders (Granovsky 1971: 197). For Bauer⁷ Calvin was a person of will rather than emotion, and therefore closer to Loyola rather than Luther; subduing of the state to the church was closer to the Catholic rather than Protestant ideal (Bauer 1881b: 619; Bauer 1881a: 320). Guerrier, himself a disciple of Granovsky, described Calvinism as a version of Protestantism marked by religious exclusiveness and intolerance (Guerrier 1886: 468, 474). In general, for early Russian scholarship the view of Calvin was stereotyped. It came from the analysis of secondary European literature instead of original sources.

The first Russian scholar to undertake a first-hand study of Calvin within the historical context of the Religious Wars in France was Iwan Luchitskiy⁸, who used biographies written by Jérôme-Hermès Bolsec (Bolsec 1582) and Théodore de Bèze (Bèze 1565). These two had exactly opposite views of Calvin, but they agreed on the same personal features of him, namely his pride, contumacy, intolerance, and 'rush to win at all costs' (Luchitskiy 1871: 71–72). The aristocratic sympathies of Calvin, according to Luchitskiy, were explained by the aristocratic upbringing of Calvin himself and the commonplace ideas of his time; thus Calvin's desire was to shake the democratic institutions and to introduce aristocratic rule (Luchitskiy 1871: 86).⁹ Luchitskiy was merely transmitting the conventional image of Calvin, however, he managed to fit it into the context of social development and political debate in Geneva and stimulated further research on Calvinist reformation¹⁰.

By contrast, Wipper sought to avoid one-sidedness in his description. Some of his sources were clearly marred by party bias, whereas two main authorities of the time, viz. Jacques Augustin Gazy¹¹ and Martin

⁷ Bauer, Vasilii Vasilevich (1833–1884) – was a Russian historian, researcher especially of antiquity. See (Bauer 1881a: 320).

⁸ Luchitskiy, Ivan Vasilyevich (1845–1918) – Russian medievalist, teacher. Corresponding Member of the Petersburg Academy of Sciences.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 86. The same image of Calvin was formed in another research works in that time. For example (Likhacheva 1891).

¹⁰ About image of Calvin in the Reformation context see (Dufour 1996: 18–21).

¹¹ Fazy, Henri (1842–1920) was a Swiss politician and historian. Wipper analysed his work (Fazy 1891).

John Galiffe¹², paid little attention to the inner political development of Geneva and magnified Calvin's role as a reformer; Wipper would label this approach as 'panegyric Protestant school'. At the same time, Wipper observed that the current political developments of 19th century Geneva had considerable bearing upon the presentation of Calvin, which among other things manifested itself in the loose handling of sources. In Wipper's stance, 'disinterested evaluation' was the feature of extremely few European historians, such as Kampschulte¹³ and Roget¹⁴. The former was labelled as a moderate Catholic who had no confessional bias in the study of Reformers, the latter, according to Wipper, was a 'sober and careful researcher' who critically approached the stock opinions of Calvinist Geneva (Wipper 1894a: 355). However, even though Wipper identified certain images of Calvin as 'mythical', he did not set out to dispel them straightforwardly. Instead, his polemical opinion receives rather oblique phrasing. For Wipper, even though Calvin indeed had immense authority in the Republic of Geneva, his role had never come anywhere near full-fledged dictatorship. Calvin's political standing was critical in the last years of his life (1555–1564), since it was mostly through his gravitas and vast connections that Geneva grew into one of the main Protestant centres. However, Calvin's opinions even on foreign relations (let alone inner policies of the state) were frequently neglected if they were at odds with the course of government decisions of Geneva or could not win the majority of magistrates (Wipper 1894a: 306–308).

Long before Calvin Geneva had received its system of power that consisted of Great and Small City Councils and General Assembly of all the citizens. In the 19th century it was frequently assumed that Calvin's interference was crucial in the transformation of this order, when the powers of assembly were cut down in favour of the Small Council. Calvin was thought to have orchestrated the so-called Constitution of 1543 that sealed this reform. On the contrary, as Wipper managed to demonstrate, even in 1541 when Calvin returned from the exile, he had been sent

¹² Galiffe, Jacques Augustin (1773–1853) was a Genevan historian and genealogist. See (Galiffe 1862; Galiffe 1853). On early Galiffe's ideas see (Spalding 1846).

¹³ Heinrich Johann Kampschulte (1823–1878) was a German catholic priest, politician and historian. Robert Wipper discussed his work (Kampschulte 1869).

¹⁴ Roget, Amédée (1825–1883) was a French historian of the Reformation. Wipper frequently quoted the work (Roget 1870–1883).

to by the people of Geneva three years before, his position was weak (Wipper 1894a: 227–237). Calvin had never taken any position against the assembly, and reinforcement of the magistrate, in effect, set obstacles to Calvin's ecclesiastical projects. Finally, this political turn had minimal religious connection, and it is hardly possible to determine any personal involvement of Calvin in its implementation (Wipper 1894a: 276–279). Calvin's handwritten notes on this reform, often referred to as the proof, do in fact substantiate only his involvement, among others, in drafting of the project as legal adviser (Wipper 1894a: 276–277).

The role of Calvin as a church leader was more evident. Wipper noted that as early as in 1540s he managed appointment and removal of clergy, supervised the discipline of citizens and issued edicts on the religious and moral life of Geneva. Still, Calvin was no personal dictator, since he had to make allowance for the opinion of the secular powers of Geneva (Wipper 1894a: 310–312). For instance, the *Ordonnances ecclésiastiques* (Ecclesiastical Ordinances) devised by Calvin in 1541 underwent considerable editing by the magistrate (Wipper 1894a: 241). Wipper compared the theory of church organisation, as presented in the first redaction of Calvin's 'Institutes of the Christian Religion' (1536) with those in the final version of the *Ordonnances*, and concluded that they differed greatly, especially in such central issues as church organisation, the standing of clergy, clerical authority over the congregation, relations of church and state (Wipper 1894a: 287). Even Calvin's attempts to reform the church system of Geneva in 1560–61 failed when the plan suggested by the so-called 'ecclesiastical dictator' was voted down by the city government (Wipper 1894a: 498–499). The Consistory that, according to Calvin's plans, was to exercise ecclesiastical control, became a supervisory and police organ of the magistrate (Wipper 1894a: 330), with moral discipline governed by secular powers that relied on church representatives, and not vice versa (Wipper 1894a: 344). Thus, according to Wipper, there was no ground for any personal dictatorship of Calvin in Geneva, or for any theocratic rule of any Calvinist church (Wipper 1894b: 96–103).

Wipper acknowledged that, due to Calvin's influence and contribution, religious ideas in Geneva ruled supreme. Religion and politics coalesced, especially in the later years of Calvin's life, when city council records registered sermons and pastors praised the institutions of the republic as

church benefactors (Wipper 1894a: 480–481). Church and magistrate cooperated to achieve mutual goals, e.g. in the foundation of Geneva Academy or in the control over the French Calvinist communities (Wipper 1894a: 483). Still, Calvin's church was a subordinate body to the state, and if theocracy means political supremacy of church, there was hardly anything theocratic about the Calvinist Reformation. Wipper concluded that Geneva's exclusiveness was by far exaggerated, whereas in reality the city conformed to the common Swiss model of church-state relations, in which the secular powers always dominated (Wipper 1894a: 612).

In Wipper's opinion, the legend of 'Geneva theocracy' appeared due to the confusion of theory, as expressed in Calvin's plans about the ideal church organisation, and 'facts of reality' that were neglected. Even though the reformer had clearly aimed to make the state an obedient servant of the church, his plans were never implemented by the magistrate nor accepted by the majority of population, and opposite to the original image, the church of Geneva never enjoyed any form of independence from the state (Wipper 1894a: 342). Calvin, as Wipper noted, had to conform to the real conditions of Geneva, to seek compromises (Wipper 1894a: 312), to be bound by limitations, to proceed carefully, reserving his full ideal in theoretical treatises (Wipper 1894a: 497). In general, Wipper's 'real Calvin' was cautious and prudent, as opposed to the ardent radical fanatic of the legends.

Simultaneously, Wipper drew attention to the opposition that Calvin had been constantly meeting in Geneva from late 1530s till mid-1550s. The picture of a legendary 'holy city' where the spiritual leader and his flock live in harmony with the magistrates and the people venerating the great Christian reformer thus vanished along with the old-fashioned notion of Geneva Christians whose strictest way of life was forever unrivalled. Wipper showed that the severity of morals and punishments of this city was on par with the standards of the time (Wipper 1894a: 336–340). The execution of Servetus was not procured by Calvin alone, since it was supported by other Swiss reformers; the magistrate was heavily prejudiced against the antitrinitarian and actively participated in the condemnation (Wipper 1894a: 453–454).

Thus, Wipper's portrait of Calvin and Geneva was essentially revisionist, and almost in every part it contradicted the standard opinions of Western literature (Léonard 1988: 363). It was published and submitted

for master's degree, however, on the proposal of Professor Guerrier, Wipper received the degree of doctor of universal history in 1894. Subsequently Wipper's views were reiterated in the entries on Calvin and Calvinism that he wrote for the Brockhaus and Efron encyclopedic dictionary and proliferated in many textbooks on general history (Wipper 1895: 100–107).

4.

Wipper had clearly taken a lead from the positivistic historiography of his teachers. The 656-page-long dissertation (plus a separate appendix of fourteen published archival documents) combined archive study in its established uses, with the equally conventional critique of the predecessors. However, in late 1930s, Wipper stated that it was the only work he had written as a research historian (Safronov 1976: 19), and this remark contains a clear understanding that his further work took a different path. Still, the dissertation has the hallmarks of Wipper's further work on Christianity.

First, it rests upon deconstruction; the existing opinions are reduced to their constituent blocks that are, in turn, challenged either by re-reading of the sources, or by the critique of the ways they had been previously studied. Second, it addresses heavily the tendencies and biases that stand behind sources and scholarly opinions. Third, it energetically opposes the established views. Finally, it firmly puts the church and ecclesiastical phenomena into their sociological and political context.

Wipper's future fame as a renowned academic rested on a long series of comprehensive general lecture courses. The manner of these presentations apparently grew out of the lectures he had to teach in Odessa. Scarcity of necessary books in the local university library made it impossible to give research seminars in the style of Ranke (Tsygankov 2014: 334–335)¹⁵ and Wipper's own supervisor V. I. Guerrier, and the needs of students in Odessa necessitated extensive cursory lecturing (Ivanova 2011: 281–290). This genre eventually proved advantageous for Wipper; between

¹⁵ Dmitriy; Tsygankov; 2014. *Professor V. I. Guerrier i ego ucheniki*; Moscow: ROSSPEN; 334–335.

1900s and 1940s his textbooks on various periods of Western history were published, quite literally, in dozens of different editions. A typical two-hour lecture would take long hours to prepare, it would be styled in advance in a characteristically elegant academic Russian that combined simplicity and clarity. Each lecture was read, or rather dictated, from handwritten notes that subsequently went to press unchanged and appeared as student textbooks; these stayed in print for decades. Such courses covered a vast array of epochs, from early Minoan Greece to Modern Europe, and that of subjects as diverse as pedagogy, theories of progress, philosophy of history, and last but not least socialism. However, simplicity and lucidity were secured at the cost of almost complete withdrawal from any technical discussion. Wipper demonstrated little, if any, disposition to what was taken as mainstream and quintessential for the historian's craft, especially in the era of Positivist 'scientific history' or *wissenschaftliche Geschichte*. Thus, for instance, the construction of his lectures on ancient Greece and Rome is very different from that of his classicist colleagues. Wipper keenly followed the archaeological exploration in the Aegean and incorporated the newly-discovered Minoan civilization into his picture of the early Western world. On the other hand, standard technical procedures of 19th century *Altertumswissenschaft* that relied heavily on source criticism are seemingly ignored. Wipper's lecture is a refined literary alloy with little clues allowing readers to trace it back to its original ores. His narrative synthesis addresses an audience of students and educated lay public rather than that of peer academics.

Within the broad period prior to 1940 there are notable steps back into the realm of monographic historical study from this characteristically 'Wipperian' style of smooth and broad lecture surveys. First of all, Wipper's body of research on medieval Livonia and Baltic lands dealt with extensive archival study, however, for some reason, Wipper himself did not allocate it within the same genre as his book on Calvin. That source-critical approach would be taken, unconventionally as it was, in his 1946 book on Early Christian literature. Furthermore, if we take all of Wipper's public lectures and all his research on Latvian history off the table, a fair share of what remains on the counter would deal with Christianity and its history. His interest to Christianity was lifelong; it included Wipper's dissertation of 1894, his subsequent publications from 1906 to 1954, and the unpublished drafts from his archive. This research was pursued over

the decades for personal interest, despite any external political impediment or encouragement that could, in its way, hinder or stimulate it.

In 1897 Wipper published a popular account of St Francis and St Dominic (Wipper 1897: 531–643) that generally followed the lines of Guerrier’s almost apologetic work on these medieval saints. However, in less than 10 years he severed the connection to that sort of sympathetic research. On November 2, 1906 Wipper delivered a public lecture in Moscow under the title ‘Light from the East’, that was published in 1907 (Wipper; 1907). Some of the points of this lecture, such as the Babylonian origin of all symbolism, had already been current in his previous public discourses. This particular one was an attempt to explain the origins of Christianity in the light of ‘Babel-Bibel’ theory, or Panbabylonianism, of Friedrich Delitzsch that was a matter of public discussion at that moment. Wipper, himself hardly a specialist in the ancient cultures of Babylonia, did what he had already done on a regular basis in his lecture courses, namely he appropriated a new and reportedly convincing theory that interpreted archaeological data, and took liberty to draw broad conclusions on a vast number of related subjects. Wipper went much further than even Delitzsch would go. For instance, any ascending scale of the ancient Western culture, from the Stone Age onwards, was merely echoing a much greater and far-reaching revolution in the ancient Near East. Ancient Babylonians watched the skies, their speculations gave birth to astronomy, and astronomical observations were rearranged as myths. All mythological motifs can be traced back to these early astronomical observations, including the Jewish and Christian myth of divine trial and punishment, divine atonement and heavenly redeemer. Various components of the latest mythical fusion found their own pathways to the West, for instance, Celestial Queen (the would-be Christian Virgin Mary) had come to Rome long before her would-be Redeemer Son Christ followed her. So far as Europe soaked in bits and pieces of salvation religion, Babylonia experienced her own Reformation, or Puritan Revolution, that took shape as the ethical religion of the biblical prophets. Babylonians who could not survive in the land devastated by numerous aggressors set out to colonise new lands in the same manner as contemporaries of Wipper and his audience left Europe for the USA. In their own pursuit of happiness in the West these Babylonian settlers brought forward various versions of the salvation myth. Later, Jews of the Diaspora, being far more advanced

than their compatriots who remained in agrarian Palestine, colonised the West and brought the newer, and better, version of this reformed and puritan Babylonian religion, viz. Christianity. Its connection with Palestine was haphazard; it came from an accidental identification of the mythical unworldly Redeemer with a literary character of a novel that was set in Palestinian scenery. The surviving Christian literature is a tiniest fraction of what had once thrived; it was mutilated and destroyed by later falsifying and censoring hands. However, it goes without question that this original literature belonged, in a way, to the Enlightenment of its days. Its withered and late variants gave birth to apocalyptic, mysticism and Islam. It took much effort to remove the religious entourage from the original ideas, and it was European science that did it – but science itself was yet another Babylonian invention that came after religion and that is now celebrating victory over its earlier rival.

In the same year the same conclusions were republished in a more scholarly article on the new horizons of historiography (Wipper 1906: 257–274; Wipper 1912: 234–261). The style here was markedly Wipperian, and the audience appreciated it; however, the content, even by the most optimistic expectations of early 20th century, was far-fetched and bordering on fantastic. Certain features of this picture could be traced back to the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* of Göttingen, yet it lacked reservations that even the most radical adherents of this school felt obliged to introduce.

The lecture of 1906 already contained in a nutshell each of the features that later would be developed in the Soviet-time Wipper's work on early Christianity. First, the calendrical and astronomical interpretations of the Christian myth. Second, the non-Palestinian origin of Christianity. Third, and most important, is the idea that the existing early Christian literature calls for unlocking of its previous and original, i.e. ,uncensored', version rather than the conventional historical and philological study of the texts as they are.

Within two years Wipper developed this concept further. It was not mere symbolism or mythology that was resettled from Mesopotamia to the West. It was the ,church' as sociological category – undefined, but obviously synonymous to religion and theocracy at the same time – that became transplanted into the lands previously ignorant of it (Wipper 1909: 640–650; Wipper 1912: 280–296).

5.

The Great War of 1914–1918 distracted Wipper from early Christian topics. Only in 1918 did he publish a pamphlet under the title, 'The Origins of Christianity' (Wipper 1918; Wipper 1923). In it, Wipper starts with the notion that everything we have from the earliest days of this religion is, essentially, a product of selection and censorship. It was exercised by those who completed the canon of the New Testament, as exemplified by the uprooting of Tatian's *Diatessaron* by Theodoret in early 5th century and the marginalisation of Marcion. In the 4th century Christian writers knew next to nothing about the origins of the New Testament texts, and they freely indulged themselves into editing and interpolation. Certain important texts, of no known authorship, were ascribed to a certain Paul the Apostle, the mere literary character of Acts. In the 19th century liberal and rationalist Protestant theologians tried to solve the riddle of the New Testament, but they failed to overcome their own religious bias, and as a result, they persisted in the same theologically obfuscated view that made Paul and Jesus 'real' figures in the style of Renan or Strauss. These theologians had to rely on the synoptic gospels as supposed biographies of a certain type. However, the gospels have no historical value whatsoever; they are mere verbal embodiments for the mythological story of a divine sufferer. This myth appeared as amalgamation of many other mythological motifs, and mostly those from the Jewish milieu. Since Judaism suffered a deadly blow in AD 70, these myths became common property, and the first attempts to express them in writing gave rise to the apocalyptic literature. Greeks and Romans who adopted certain features of Jewish faith first heard of the divine saviour, the Messiah, and then they naturally wanted to find him in the past, or better, to 'recognise the Messiah among the signs of times'. They made enquiries, interviewing the fugitives, refugees and displaced individuals. Thus, there were two figures composed in the popular imagination, namely the glorious and formidable Christ on the one hand, and meek and sympathetic Jesus on the other, that were amalgamated by the authors who composed the gospels. There is nothing real in the gospel picture; therefore, any attempts of the liberal theologians are, by definition, futile. Finally, the analysis of the New Testament texts shows that earliest Christian gospels were not socialist.

As the story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1–11 suggests, the early Christian community was a commune, founded by wealthy citizens who tried to save their properties by donating them to the collective body. The gravest sin was to conceal part of one's fortunes, and two sinners were immediately killed – not by the wrath of God, as the text of Acts stated, but by the special security forces that was formed from the younger male members of the sect.

This pamphlet leaves rather mixed feelings. It does take Wipper much effort and many pages to reinvent the wheel and to present commonplaces of liberal theology (e.g. unreliability of the gospels as sources, or the cleavage between the Jesus of history and the Christ of theology) as new, and essentially his personal, insights. Popular style and characteristically Wipperian lecture form requires no academic references, yet it remains an open question what was his knowledge of the secondary literature (,liberal theologians') that he so freely discredited. On the other hand, we may clearly discern standard features of his latter-day concept, e.g. attention to the Jewish forerunners and urban setting of the early Christianity.

In 1921 Wipper published a small book, just another attempt to produce a popular account of the history of religion, under the title ,The Fates of Religion'. He explains that the impetus for writing came simultaneously from the study of early Christianity and the destruction of the European culture in the Great War. It deals with early Christian subjects only up to some extent, because the author's main intention is to draw the world history of religion according to the new scheme. Wipper suggests that religion, as part of human culture, passes four main stages which are at the same time types of religious consciousness. They are, ,the age of magic', based on the ,motif of human-godliness' that is seen among the primitive people; ,the age of religion' which is the period of high antiquity and developed states; ,age of revolution' that is marked by the heresies, challenging the authorities, etc., and finally, ,age of restoration' when religion returns in a different guise. The scheme is clearly tailored to fit European history and the author's disappointment in straightforward progressivism.

Unfortunately, we do not know if Wipper continued to study early Christian history in Riga, although there are a few hints in his archive that he continued to collect quotations and drafts.

* * *

A radical approach to the history of early Christianity entered Wipper's scholarship almost instantaneously; however, that change appeared long before 1940 and had clear demarcation. In his earlier life Robert Wipper remained under the influence of his father, a Lutheran of traditional upbringing and conventional pietistic interests in the Bible. The first impulse to study the first centuries of Christian Church may have come under his father's inspiration (and likewise his emancipation from this parental authority could come in anticlerical vestments). The second fatherly figure of Wipper in this period was his mentor, Professor Vladimir Guerrier. In the letter of 1886, quoted above, we can find a trace of their discussion over the topic of Wipper's dissertation. It is safe to suppose that as early as in 1886 Robert Wipper was already eager to write on the subjects of the 2nd and 3rd centuries, such as apologists and martyrs, and the subsequent triumph of Christianity in late Antiquity. For some reason, unknown to us, these plans were not implemented, though the choice of Calvinism and Geneva Reformation may, as it seems, have been profoundly linked to these primeval plans. Later, in 1890s and 1900s Guerrier extensively published his research on Christian subjects, and for some time Wipper followed in the steps of the master. Then their paths parted. In 1894 Wipper felt that his mentor would approve of his sarcastic description of ostentatious and politically loyalist religiosity of the university staff in Odessa, and this was allegedly the highest point of Wipper's expressed early anticlerical emotion.

In 1906 the tone changed. Although Wipper never professe himself an atheist nor uses his lecture as an occasion for promoting any explicit anti-Christian feelings, his stance is clear. Wipper discusses Christianity *etsi deus non datur*, as if there were no god's manifest revelation behind it, nor indeed any difference between Christianity and other religions. After 1917 his tenor grows more straightforward. Wipper explicitly opposes Christian theologians. It should thus be concluded that Wipper's turn to critical study of the Christian beginnings after 1940 was neither unexpected, nor opportunistic. The scholar followed the same line of interest that he had first mentioned in 1886, and the same critical approach that had been manifested since 1906.

On the other hand, this criticism and Wipper's confident tone are self-qualified. He does certainly accept concepts that at the time of writing or lecture remain justified, but his conclusions and allowances are loose and far-fetched, at worst misleading even by the enthusiastic standards of the day. In the twelve years that passed between his first lecture (1906) and his pamphlet on Christian origins (1918) he seems to have acquired next to nothing in terms of erudition or extensive reading in the historiography. Wipper set sail to fearlessly explore the new waters, but his consuetudinary position of an acknowledged expert in any age or land failed him. Wipper departed from the positivist limitations of his dissertation that clearly did not attract him, still what he offered instead, an insightfully wider and freer version of history, was in fact hardly rising over mere scheme and bare theory.

Kokkuvõte

Teadus ja ideoloogiline konformism: Robert Wiperi (1859–1954) juhtum

Artikkel käsitleb Vene ajaloolase Robert Wiperi vaadete arengut tema varakristluse ajalugu ja kirjandust käsitlevate raamatute põhjal. Wipper sündis Moskvas ning lõpetas 1880. aastal Moskva Ülikooli ajaloo ja filoloogia osakonna. Siin kaitses ta ka doktorikraadi ning töötas aastatel 1901–1919 üldajaloo professorina. Seejärel asus ta elama Lätisse ning õpetas Riia ülikoolis kuni 1940. aastani, mil Läti liideti Nõukogude Liiduga. Pärast seda naases ta Moskvasse ja töötas siin kuni surmani.

Wipper avaldas varakristluse ajaloo ja varakristliku kirjandusloo kohta kolm raamatut. Esimene neist, mis ilmus 1918. aastal, pakkus varakristluse ajaloost ja varakristlikust kirjandusest üldist ülevaadet, mis oli kirjutatud Euroopa liberaalse teoloogia konventsionaalses laadis. Ülejäänud raamatud ilmusid juba Nõukogude Liidus, kus ta valiti akadeemikuks, vaatamata neile raamatutele osaks saanud ideoloogilisele kriitikale, mis puudutas tema arusaamu kristluse päritolust ja religiooni rollist ajaloos. 1948. aastal avaldas Wipper mahuka varakristluse kirjandusloo, mis oli oma põhilaadilt marksistlik, kuid erines paljudes küsimustes konventsionaalsetest nõukogulikest seisukohtadest. Artikli autorid on seisukohal,

et tema „ortodoksest marksismist-leninismist“ kõrvalekalduvaid vaateid saab seletada eri lääne teadlaste mõjuga tema uurimustele. Marksismi poole ei pöördunud ta aga mitte välise ideoloogilise surve tõttu, vaid sel põhjusel, et marksistlikud ideed olid tema aja akadeemilises maailmas levinud ja populaarsed.

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