

HISTORIOGRAPHY: Rostovtzeff in Madison

Author(s): G. W. BOWERSOCK

Source: *The American Scholar*, Vol. 55, No. 3 (Summer 1986), pp. 391-400

Published by: The Phi Beta Kappa Society

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41211341>

Accessed: 07-09-2018 18:54 UTC

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



*The Phi Beta Kappa Society* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The American Scholar*

JSTOR

## Rostovtzeff in Madison

G. W. BOWERSOCK

The social and economic history of classical antiquity inevitably evokes the memory of M. I. Rostovtzeff, the Russian émigré who was among the pioneers in a field that has now taken a central place in the writing of ancient history. At his death in 1952, after a wasted decade in which he patiently endured the irreversible damages of incompetent surgery, the scholarly world proclaimed his greatness in a succession of admiring necrologies and interpretative studies. His volumes on the social and economic history of the Roman Empire and of the Hellenistic world had already become acknowledged classics of historical scholarship. His excavation at Dura Europus on the banks of the Euphrates had opened up a frontier town that was subject to Parthia and Rome in succession before it finally fell to the Persians in the third century A.D. The remains at Dura Europus, bearing witness to an interwoven Semitic and Graeco-Roman culture at a military and commercial center alongside one of the great rivers of the world, stand as a fitting memorial to the audacious and wide-ranging historian and archaeologist who uncovered them.

Rostovtzeff was born in Kiev in 1870. He acquired distinction as a scholar during his forty-eight years in Russia, but virtually all his most important work came later. He was best known as a professor at Yale, where he left an indelible stamp on the Classics Department through his perhaps overzealous advocacy of archaeology and history at the expense of literature and philology. Yet his excesses were the excesses of greatness, and Arnaldo

Momigliano was undoubtedly correct in observing many years ago that Rostovtzeff's exile from Russia after 1918 was ultimately what made him the great man he was. But he did not proceed directly to New Haven. For five years before the appointment at Yale in 1925 Rostovtzeff had been a professor at the University of Wisconsin in Madison.

The two years which intervened between Rostovtzeff's departure from Russia and his arrival in Madison had been a time of little happiness. The Rostovtzeffs were not cordially welcomed in Oxford. His assertive manner and un-English breadth of interest succeeded in alienating him from most of the leading scholars there, with the significant exception of J. G. C. Anderson, the future Camden Professor who, as a Scot, also felt something of a foreigner in Oxford. The transformation of Rostovtzeff into the scholar we know began in Madison, and it is apparent from the evidence documenting his five years there that without the University of Wisconsin this transformation might never have taken place at all. The University in Madison fostered the astounding intellectual development of Rostovtzeff in his mature years by providing him with an atmosphere of support and respect. It proved that the vigorous open spirit of a displaced Russian—who had felt so confined in Oxford—could find a congenial home in the American Middle West.

In the preface to the first volume of Rostovtzeff's *History of the Ancient World*, he wrote the following tribute to his first American university:

✦ G. W. BOWERSOCK, professor of ancient history at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, is the author of several books, including *Julian the Apostate* and *Roman Arabia*.

I dedicate the book to the University of Wisconsin. In the darkest hour of my life, the University of Wisconsin made it possible for me to resume my learned studies and carry them on without interrup-

tion. During five years which I spent there, I met with constant kindness from my colleagues and unvarying consideration on the part of the University authorities for my requests and my scientific occupations. Nor can I recall without a feeling of gratitude the sympathy of the students. Such an atmosphere lightened the toil of writing this book, and it was addressed in the first instance to the students of Wisconsin.

We should mark these words well—"In the darkest hour of my life." There is no more poignant statement of Rostovtzeff's unhappiness in Oxford and the sense of alienation and loneliness that overwhelmed him upon his separation from the Russia of the old regime, which he always loved.

The arrival of Rostovtzeff in Madison, just as he was approaching his fiftieth birthday, was, therefore, a major event in the history of classical studies in the present century. It was also a somewhat improbable one. In making public here for the first time details of Rostovtzeff's academic life between 1920 and 1925, I rely upon archival material from the University of Wisconsin together with personal reminiscences and private letters that have been generously made available to me. This material vividly illuminates a period in Rostovtzeff's career that has been generally neglected. It tends to confirm the importance of those years, as stated by Rostovtzeff himself, and it contributes new and occasionally disquieting testimony on American university life after the First World War.

A few weeks before Christmas in 1919, the History Department of the University of Wisconsin voted to recommend to the Dean and the President an invitation to Michael Rostovtzeff, formerly of the Imperial University of St. Petersburg, to teach in the academic year 1920-21 at a salary of \$5,000. The chairman of the Department, Frederick L. Paxson, met with the Dean and the President personally and then sent a letter explaining the Department's decision in the following terms: "Because of the losses which this Department is certain to suffer next year, it seems to me highly important that provision be made for ancient history that will carry upon its face proof of our intention not to let ancient history suffer from the departure of Professor Westermann." W. L. Westermann had recently accepted an invitation to take up a professorship

at Cornell University, and it was this vacancy which Rostovtzeff was to fill, for a year at least. In order to persuade President Birge and Dean Sellery that Rostovtzeff was worth the then exceptionally high salary of \$5,000 for a year, the History Department cleverly suggested that he might offer a course in Russian history as well as a survey and seminar in ancient history. On January 3, 1920, the administration agreed to the appointment, and Paxson cabled Rostovtzeff with the offer. Two days later Paxson sent a letter with details of the appointment. He knew that Westermann had once met Rostovtzeff in Paris and spoken with him about Madison. But with a candor and clarity characteristic of all his correspondence, Paxson spelled out the details:

The work that we should like to have you undertake would include certain of [Westermann's] classes. He has always lectured twice a week to a large class of freshmen of about 200 on elementary ancient history. . . . In addition to this elementary course Professor Westermann has always conducted, sometimes independently and sometimes in conjunction with the Classical Department, his research seminar in some field of ancient history. We should be glad to have you do likewise in a field acceptable to yourself. We have also thought that many of our students would be interested in a lecture course dealing in a general way with the history of Russia, and we are aware that you have conducted work of this sort at various times, so that it would not be outside the field of your interest.

Rostovtzeff wasted no time in accepting this invitation from a faraway place, which, according to rumor, he claimed he had never heard of before. Certainly he must have heard of Madison because of his prior contact with Westermann, but it may well be true that he lacked any clear notion of where Madison was. The rumor goes on to report that once Rostovtzeff had accepted the appointment, he pulled an atlas off the shelf to find out where he would be going. Such a bold decision was both characteristic of his personality and indicative of his unhappiness in England.

The material in the University archives demonstrates that the invitation to Rostovtzeff was largely at the initiative of the departing professor of ancient history, Westermann. Whatever one may think of that controversial scholar, he was among the pioneers in this

country in the field of ancient economic and social history, and he was one of the very few in the early decades of the century who was in touch with the exciting new currents that Max Weber was generating in Germany. In the *American Historical Review* of July 1915, Westermann had published a major article entitled "The Economic Basis of the Decline of Ancient Culture." In one footnote Westermann cited Rostovtzeff's contribution on agrarian history in the *Handwörterbuch der Staatswissenschaften* and commented: "This remarkable article contains the best survey of the combined political-economic development of antiquity that we have. It is indispensable to anyone who wishes to gain a thorough understanding of ancient economic problems and is the source of many of the ideas here presented." Of course, Westermann was also well acquainted with Weber's *Römische Agrargeschichte* of 1891, and in connection with these topics he referred on numerous occasions to Rostovtzeff's pioneering book on the Roman colonate, *Studien zur Geschichte des römischen Kolonats*. Westermann's well-known indebtedness to Eduard Meyer, another major figure in ancient history in Germany, is also visible in the same article. Overall we can see in that piece the intellectual background not only for Westermann's own work in social and economic history but for his choice of Rostovtzeff as an appropriate successor at Madison. Paxson's letter to Dean Sellery, reporting the Department's decision, made reference to Rostovtzeff's appearance at the international congress of historical sciences in Berlin in the year 1908 and quoted from the report of the American delegate on that occasion, none other than the mediaevalist C. H. Haskins. It seems evident that Westermann had brought this testimony to the Department's attention for referral to the Dean.

Obviously by prearrangement, Westermann wrote to Rostovtzeff on the very day on which Paxson sent the official letter describing the proposed appointment. Westermann recalled the evening they had passed together at the Crillon in Paris during the previous June. He indicated that even at that time the possibility of leaving Wisconsin had been present in his mind together with the thought of bringing Rostovtzeff to Madison. In his letter Westermann

described the Department's offer in terms of the German educational system in order to make it as clear and attractive as possible. Knowing of Rostovtzeff's interest in papyri, he added remarks about the collection at Madison and observed that he thought Rostovtzeff would be able to carry on his papyrological studies in America.

Westermann's careful preparation of the case for Rostovtzeff in the autumn of 1919 involved, as such academic advocacies always do, a comparative estimate of other candidates, notably American candidates, in the same field. One of the most remarkable documents in the archives of the Wisconsin History Department is a memo, obviously prepared by Westermann though not actually signed by him, on the possible contenders for the vacant position in ancient history. This document provides an arresting picture of one corner of the academic landscape in the America of 1919. Many of the names mentioned there have now been forgotten; but others have not. We may consider the assessments of Westermann as a reflection of his own intellectual directions and tastes. His top candidate was obviously Rostovtzeff, described here as "a very brilliant and able man who could possibly be had for \$5,000 and expenses hither." Westermann's second choice was A. E. R. Boak at Michigan, then in his thirties and judged by Westermann, quite rightly, to be a "good, solid man with a future." Westermann went on to observe that he found Boak "much more solid than Tenney Frank."

This last name calls to mind one of the leading scholars of the economic history of the ancient world, a person whose name is associated with a multi-volume economic history of the Roman Empire and a role as an important teacher at the Johns Hopkins University. Along with Lily Ross Taylor and T. R. S. Broughton, Tenney Frank has been generally numbered among the best of American historians of Rome who reached maturity in the first half of the present century. Westermann, however, had a quite different opinion. In the *American Historical Review* of October 1914, he had done a review of Tenney Frank's *Roman Imperialism* in which he eloquently raised questions about the nature of Roman expansion that have recently become live issues again in the wake of an important book

on Roman imperialism by William Harris. Despite the courtly phrasing, Westermann's review of Tenney Frank leaves the reader in no doubt of his opinion: "The author's judgment must certainly be called into question when the divergence of policy and result is so great." In his memorandum on the succession at Madison, Westermann described Tenney Frank in the following terms: "Age, 42. Now professor of Latin at Johns Hopkins. Probable present salary, \$4,000. Ability. Has done good work at research of historical character. Will produce much. Has entree to journals. Work will always be formally attractive. Actually is plated ware."

Among the other candidates on Westermann's list was the noted Orientalist, A. T. Olmstead, who is described as "distinctly an Orientalist with a salary of \$3,500." Westermann notes, "Personality not good." The epigraphist A. B. West is described as an "able research man but a deadly teacher." Westermann's third choice after Rostovtzeff and Boak was C. H. Oldfather, who seems, with benefit of hindsight, a curious choice for a post in ancient history. Westermann's recommendation of him goes as follows: "Control of Latin and Greek. Well along toward doctor's degree. Very attractive personality. Good voice." Anyone who has had experience of university searches and committees will recognize ultimately in Westermann's document a deliberately tendentious presentation designed to ensure the appointment of Rostovtzeff. Westermann's methods and opinions may be called into question, but certainly his determination to bring Rostovtzeff to America is something for which it would be hard to fault him.

After Rostovtzeff's acceptance of the one-year post, Westermann remained in contact and devoted himself unselfishly to preparing for Rostovtzeff's arrival, even as he was also preparing for his own departure to Cornell. Westermann secured an apartment for the Rostovtzeff couple at a building called, in the fashion of that period, The Irving.

Soon, however, Westermann was diverted from his academic preoccupations by an assignment to the State Department for a limited term in connection with the peace arrangements at the conclusion of World War I. It was from his post in the State Department

that Westermann tried his best to untangle an extraordinary confusion over the matter of Rostovtzeff's entry into the United States. Rostovtzeff had applied for a visa at the American embassy in London but without much success. The problem, apart from usual bureaucratic incompetence, seems to have been a question as to whether or not Rostovtzeff was a Bolshevik. This was a point on which President Birge had already reassured himself according to documents in the President's papers at Madison. A member of the English Department, who had met Rostovtzeff in England, had, in fact, explicitly guaranteed to the President at the time of his appointment that Rostovtzeff was neither Jewish nor Bolshevik. It is a bleak and sad comment on American academic life in 1919 and 1920 that both religion and politics should have loomed so large in the assessment of a major scholar. But the evidence is unambiguous.

Rostovtzeff's visa was still being held up for some reason in early August of 1920, just as he was planning to board the steamship *Olympic* to sail from England on August 18th. The President of the University of Wisconsin wrote to the Secretary of State to intervene. In his letter President Birge tried to offer assurances on the political side. "To the best of our knowledge," he said, "Professor Rostovtzeff is a loyal gentleman and scholar whose entry into the United States ought not to be interfered with." Meanwhile Paxson, the chairman of the History Department, tried to engage the good offices of Westermann in Washington, and Westermann in turn discovered, after a few probes, that the State Department seemed to know nothing whatever about Rostovtzeff's application for a visa. The trouble seemed to be in London. In a rather desperate letter, Paxson wrote to Westermann that he had received a postcard from Rostovtzeff confirming his intention to sail as planned and complaining that it took so long to convince the authorities that he actually was not a Bolshevik. Westermann meanwhile was obliged to tell Paxson that there was nothing he could do. The bureaucratic machinery had to grind in its own mysterious way. Rostovtzeff would have to be approved by the Department of Justice, by military intelligence, and by the American Navy.

All this confusion had a comic-opera finale

that was entirely characteristic of Rostovtzeff's bravura style of life. Just as Westermann had despaired of getting anything done within the next few months, Rostovtzeff calmly stepped off the boat in New York. On September 1, Westermann wrote to Paxson: "Last night I heard from Colonel Nikolaiev of the Imperial Russian Embassy who is stationed here that Rostovtzeff had arrived in New York City several days ago on the Olympic. He was quite sure of this as he had seen a friend in New York, the old consul there, who had gone down to meet him. The State Department is grinding away on Rostovtzeff's passport, so I will call them off this morning." In short, Rostovtzeff simply got on the boat, crossed the Atlantic, and got off in New York City. No one had any idea of how he managed to enter the United States without a passport or a visa. But over the years pertinacity had been not the least of Rostovtzeff's great talents. Within a few weeks Rostovtzeff had made his way to Madison in order to deliver his first lecture to the freshmen of the University on Thursday, September 23, 1920. So began the Americanization of Michael Rostovtzeff.

He had to confront a large class of students in elementary ancient history together with a band of quizmasters, described by Paxson as "fairly competent assistants," who took the members of the lecture course in small groups for questioning and discussion. In addition Rostovtzeff offered another general course on the development of Russia, with two lectures a week, as well as a seminar in the social and economic history of the ancient world, resuming the topics on which he had presumed to lecture at Oxford. Rostovtzeff cut a formidable figure at Madison. Short and stocky, he stood very straight. His hair was cropped in a brush style, his eyes were disconcertingly bright and piercing, and his manner always positive. He could appear frightening, and the Wisconsin students, confronted with this awesome personality, called him "Rough Stuff."

The History Department gave Rostovtzeff a very warm welcome. He formed a particularly close friendship with the mediaevalist E. H. Byrne. The students treated him with respect and seemed from the beginning to have recognized in him an extraordinary scholar. At Rostovtzeff's last lecture before Christmas in 1920, one of his classes presented him with a

bouquet of roses, which brought immense joy to Rostovtzeff. But he was naturally uneasy in this first year, partly because he was still insecure in his spoken English and knew that he had a strong Russian accent, but also because his appointment was, after all, for only one year, and there was no assurance of renewal. The Rostovtzeffs had abandoned all their worldly goods and were understandably apprehensive about the future, but Sophie Rostovtzeff was a source of great strength to her husband at this time of uncertainty and transition.

In this early period of adjustment Rostovtzeff seems to have had little contact with the Classics Department, which had certainly not elected him a member. It may be argued that he was not missing too much by being deprived of association with George C. Fisk, Grant Showerman, and Moses Slaughter, all of whom were given to scholarship that is politely described in the standard history of the University of Wisconsin as "appreciative" rather than research-oriented. Rostovtzeff was never a scholar who could make a distinction between appreciative writing and scholarly writing. Nevertheless it was too bad for the Classics Department that they did not see more of him. In the course of time he used to meet Showerman in Rome, which was where Showerman preferred to be anyway, but the matter of membership in the Department continued to be an unresolved issue.

The University fortunately wasted little time in presenting Rostovtzeff with an offer of a permanent appointment at Madison, which he promptly accepted. By the beginning of 1921 he knew that he and his wife had come to America to stay. One of their unresolved problems in settling down into their new life was concern for the father of Sophie Rostovtzeff, who was still in Russia and needed to be looked after. With his indefatigable industry and resourcefulness, Rostovtzeff eventually discovered that there was a Russian Jew who had set up a tailor shop at Irving Court and University Avenue and had proven very successful in bringing some of his own relatives into the United States. Rostovtzeff apparently secured the Russian tailor to act as his agent during a trip back into Russia, and the tailor arrived one day in Madison with Mrs. Rostovtzeff's father in tow. This up-

rooted soul was totally disoriented, but he must have been content to be near his daughter. He was often to be seen sitting in the tailor shop or out buying the ingredients with which he would make jams and jellies in the Rostovtzeff kitchen.

In his second year of teaching at Madison, Rostovtzeff continued to offer the courses for which he had been hired but added, with characteristic breadth of mind, a course on Russian architecture from the eleventh to the seventeenth centuries. There was still at this time no department of fine art at Madison, and such offerings as there were had to be pieced together by interested and competent colleagues in other departments. The announcement for his course in Russian architecture survives in Rostovtzeff's own handwriting, and it displays not only the astonishing range of knowledge we have come to associate with him but also that fierce pride in Russia which remained with him until he died. "Russian art," he wrote in this announcement, "is almost unknown in this country and in Europe. The common view about Russian art considers this as a kind of provincial Byzantine art. Recent investigations of Russian scholars showed this view to be entirely wrong. Russian art had its own quite independent development and brought about monuments as peculiar and as original as did the other branches of European art."

In the first two years, at the same time as he was developing his various courses, Rostovtzeff threw himself with titanic energy into his own scholarly research. Ever since Wilamowitz and Eduard Meyer had invited him in 1914 to write a social and economic history of the ancient world, he had been thinking about that vast subject, which was eventually to appear in his oeuvre as two separate investigations, first of the Roman Empire and subsequently of the Hellenistic world. The war, the revolution in Russia, the uprooting, the unhappiness in Oxford had all conspired so far to keep Rostovtzeff from that theme for which, in retrospect, he seemed predestined. At Madison he began work in earnest, although as late as 1922 he was still making reference to a projected single work entitled "Studies in the Economic Conditions of the Hellenistic and Roman World." But in the increasingly congenial environment of Wisconsin, *The Social*

*and Economic History of the Roman Empire* took shape. A revealing preliminary study appeared in the *Musée Belge* of 1923. It was here that he first divulged to the scholarly world his view of the hatred of the peasants in the Roman Empire for the bourgeoisie and their malign role in the increasingly barbarized Roman army.

At the same time as the preparation of this preliminary study, Rostovtzeff wrote a monograph on the personal archive of a certain Zeno from the Egyptian Fayum. Westermann had been right in telling Rostovtzeff that he would be able to pursue his papyrological studies in the new environment. The correlation of the scattered documents of the Zeno archive, hundreds and hundreds of them, in a single treatment formed the basis for a historical account of what Rostovtzeff called, in the title of his work, "A Large Estate in Egypt in the Third Century B.C." The subtitle was "A Study in Economic History." This work is no less astonishing for its diligence in collecting together so large and dispersed a mass of documents as it is for its imaginative handling of that material. The volume ends with a notice of newly published documents from the same archive. Rostovtzeff took understandable pride in seeing several of his hypotheses further confirmed, and he appealed to the scholarly world for the prompt publication of any remaining Zeno material. The book was published by the University of Wisconsin in its series of studies in the social sciences and history. It was handsomely produced with excellent plates and the liberal use of Greek font and sold at the price of \$2.00.

The success of Rostovtzeff's work on the Zeno archive was due, in large part, to the good relations he had cultivated with scholars throughout America and Europe who could provide him with necessary information and documents. As he worked on this project, Rostovtzeff became increasingly eager to return to Europe to examine the ancient monuments himself and to resume direct personal contact with scholars there. By late 1921 he had already learned the techniques of negotiating with an American university administration for time off. He had enlisted Paxson, as chairman of the History Department, to approach the Dean for a leave of absence, but unfortunately the Dean was unable to oblige

because of a strict rule from the Board of Regents that leave of absence should not be granted before a professor had taught three years. But as Rostovtzeff quickly realized, every good academic administration knows that rules are there to be broken, and by July of 1922 we can see that the Board of Regents voted an exception to its rules for Professor Rostovtzeff and allowed him to take a leave of absence in the second semester of the academic year 1922–23.

Just as Rostovtzeff and his colleagues were turning the screws on the administration for extra leave time, Rostovtzeff was floating another proposal in another area. He approached the Dean of the Graduate School, Charles Slichter, with a plan to excavate in the Fayum. Already in the preface to his book on the Zeno archive, Rostovtzeff had noted the need for immediate exploration of Fayum sites before their precious treasures were destroyed through the encroachments of modern residents. He had secured the support of two noted papyrologists, Grenfell and Edgar, for a project to clear one site systematically. In the preface on Zeno, Rostovtzeff had asked, rather archly, "Is it utopian to think there are men and women in the United States who may grasp the importance of such excavation and may help one of the existing organizations to carry out such an excavation?" Just as he was learning about the mysteries of American leaves of absence, Rostovtzeff was also mastering the techniques of grant-getting.

Dean Slichter was somewhat bemused by Rostovtzeff's proposal, and that is perhaps understandable since Slichter was himself a mathematician. He wrote to Paxson in the following terms: "I received the enclosed memorandum from Professor Rostovtzeff concerning possible excavation in the Fayum district of Egypt. In this writing he does not furnish me all the information I would like. I understand this Fayum district was settled by the Greeks some three hundred years B.C. and was abandoned by them rather suddenly at some time, perhaps in the second or third century A.D. Will you kindly give me the facts concerning this settlement?" Paxson appears to have detected, and probably correctly, a certain impatience on Slichter's part with the imperious manner in which Rostovtzeff had made his request. Paxson provided complete

support for Rostovtzeff's proposal, but he then proceeded to address what was probably Slichter's main point: "The paper seems to me to express very clearly his desires and intentions, and the slight foreign flavor in its composition does not interfere, I think, with its usefulness." The proposal foundered and was apparently dropped by Rostovtzeff in the press of other obligations and, as we shall see, negotiations. But Rostovtzeff's desire to launch an excavation in the eastern part of the Roman Empire from a base in an American university may be seen as a prefiguration of the major project that he later undertook at Dura Europus in eastern Syria after his removal to Yale. Rostovtzeff had been quick to perceive that American munificence held a great potential for enlarging our knowledge of the ancient world through excavation.

His leaves of absence and his excavation projects made him soon realize that such things would be valuable bargaining chips in negotiations either for an appointment elsewhere or for retention at Madison. In the spring of 1923 Rostovtzeff's sponsor and admirer, Westermann, had resigned from his post at Cornell in order to move on to a professorship at Columbia, where he stayed until the end of his career. Once again Westermann saw Rostovtzeff as the best successor, and he managed to persuade his colleagues at Cornell to repeat what his colleagues at Madison had done. They offered him Westermann's chair. In a letter to Paxson from Rome at the end of May 1923, Rostovtzeff explained with charming directness the negotiations that he had been having with Cornell University. He assured Paxson that he was perfectly happy at Wisconsin and that his discussions with Cornell were designed exclusively to improve the opportunities for leaves of absence. "You know, Fred," wrote Rostovtzeff, "how much I like our University and our Department. It would be a great calamity for me to part with the University and you all. But you know also how vital it is for me to have time to work for myself and to collect material for this work in Europe. After the events in Russia it is the very essence of my life. I accept the freshman course; I am now used to it. I accept the amount of my salary [which, it must be admitted, was rather large anyway]. But it is hard for me not to have my vacations for two years.



Material collected in Europe must be worked out, and I have no time to do so. That is the reason why I engaged the *pourparlers* with Cornell, in the hope that you will do something for me and enable me to remain at Wisconsin." Many a native American professor in those days was less adept at manipulating the academic system than Rostovtzeff already was after only a few years in this country.

Paxson replied with a chairmanly letter assuring Rostovtzeff of the Department's great need of him but at the same time noting that as a firm offer from Cornell had not yet come in, nothing could be done at that stage. The classic game of *Academe* was pursued to its inevitable conclusion, and in December of 1923, when Cornell made the formal offer to Rostovtzeff, Paxson replied that the Regents of the University, in their desire to keep Rostovtzeff at Wisconsin, had agreed to fix his salary at \$6,500 per annum with every sixth semester on leave at full pay, counting the present semester in 1923 as the first in the series. Rostovtzeff had played with skill, Wisconsin had what it wanted, and Cornell was left to look for another professor. Undoubtedly Rostovtzeff's expressed wish to stay at Wisconsin represented genuine and deep feelings, but he had now put the University on notice that he was willing to be tempted away if the terms were right.

It was late in 1923 that the Cornell affair was finally resolved. Less than a few months later, Yale University had made known the availability of a Sterling Professorship of ancient history, and it became obvious to Rostovtzeff's colleagues at Madison that he would be a prime candidate. Carl Russell Fish, a rather pretentious American historian who had taken over the chairmanship of the History Department, told Rostovtzeff that, as soon as he had seen the announcement of the Sterling Professorship in the *New York Times*, he considered Rostovtzeff's departure inevitable. It will appear that Carl Russell Fish probably had an ulterior motive for anticipating Rostovtzeff's resignation. In any event, by July of 1924, just six months after declining the Cornell offer, Rostovtzeff announced that he would resign from Wisconsin at the end of June in 1925 in order to take up the professorship at Yale. We may assume that Yale assured

Rostovtzeff of an attractive leave pattern, salary, and opportunity to excavate.

On July 1, 1924, Chairman Fish sent a memorandum to Dean Sellery confirming the departure of Rostovtzeff in the following year and making various proposals on the matter of the teaching of ancient history at Madison after his departure. This letter is not an admirable document; it reflects Fish's desire to promote the modern field of European history and to leave the ancient field to the incompetent. "I am very anxious," he wrote, "to have here a man of strength and scholarly productivity in the modern field of European history. . . . Now with reference to the immediate situation, I see a number of courses open. One, which is strongly favored by Professor Byrne, would be to recall Westermann. For various reasons I do not regard this with enthusiasm." After this comment Fish goes on to suggest taking the most junior people available, young students either of ancient history or indeed of other fields, and preparing them to take over Rostovtzeff's courses. These suggestions were clearly designed to save money, which could then be diverted to the appointment in modern European history. In Fish's own words: "If we lose Rostovtzeff and make any one of these arrangements, except that with Westermann, there will be the budgetary opportunity of doing something more substantial for modern European history. I had in mind some such plan as calling Arnold Toynbee for a year on investigation." It looks in an odd way as if Fish had ambitions to do in the modern field exactly what Westermann had done in the ancient—to transplant a giant.

Rostovtzeff, who had learned much about university politics over the last four years and perhaps even knew the way in which Westermann had engineered his own appointment, now set about to persuade his colleagues to bring to Madison the Byzantine historian Alexander Vasiliev. Vasiliev, who was three years older than Rostovtzeff, was at that time a professor at what both scholars preferred to call the Imperial University of St. Petersburg, where an invitation arrived to teach at Madison for one year. Vasiliev quickly accepted and duly appeared on the scene in September of 1925, after Rostovtzeff's departure to Yale. He impressed his colleagues at the University of Wisconsin as a rather old and disorganized

Russian gentleman with an inexplicable taste for going to the movies. Unlike Rostovtzeff, Vasiliev failed at first to command the respect of his classes, which acquired a considerable reputation for disorder. The personalities of "Ole Vassy" and "Rough Stuff" could scarcely have been more unlike.

It is from those first months of Vasiliev's time at Madison that we learn still more about the influence of the University of Wisconsin on Rostovtzeff himself. For it is clear that he was not happy in the move to Yale. Palpable traces of his dissatisfaction can be seen in the preface to his *History of the Ancient World*, in which the work was eloquently dedicated to the University of Wisconsin. The preface begins with a startling remark about the students at Yale. The book was planned and written, wrote Rostovtzeff, at Madison as a course of lectures on ancient history, which, he says, "I gave yearly for nearly five years to the freshmen of Wisconsin University and which I am now giving, in a slightly altered form, to the sophomores of Yale University." In December of 1925 Dean Sellery conducted negotiations with Rostovtzeff to reinstate him as the Professor of Ancient History at Madison.

When Vasiliev became aware of the possibility of Rostovtzeff's return, he was alarmed. He understood perfectly well that the Department would be unlikely to renew his one-year contract if this happened. At a Department meeting in late January of 1926, he undertook, rather pathetically, to outline his scholarly work in an attempt to persuade his colleagues of his merits. Only a week later he accepted an appointment at the University of Egypt in Cairo, presumably because he had become convinced that Rostovtzeff would indeed return to Madison. By the end of February, however, Rostovtzeff had made a final decision to remain at Yale. In view of his past behavior, Rostovtzeff may be assumed to have won further advantages and privileges from the administration at Yale as a result of the talks with Madison. But it must also be said that Rostovtzeff was undoubtedly a good friend of Vasiliev. Rostovtzeff clearly wished him well and recognized that there was no real possibility of Vasiliev's returning to Russia after his emigration in the previous year. It is very likely, therefore, that an important element in Rostovtzeff's decision to remain at

Yale was regard for his compatriot. This decision was not an easy one, and four days after it was taken, a close friend reported that Rostovtzeff seemed to have fallen into a very deep depression. The immediate result of Rostovtzeff's decision was an offer of a permanent professorship to Vasiliev. This he accepted and filled with distinction for many years. The University of Egypt had to look elsewhere.

During his first troubled year at Yale, the Oxford University Press brought out Rostovtzeff's *Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire*. This masterpiece had come into being entirely at Madison in the congenial environment of its History Department and its students. Only the inevitable delays of publication caused the work to be associated with a professor at Yale. It was the culmination of research that Rostovtzeff had adumbrated a few years earlier in his notable article in the *Musée Belge*. And it provided the model for Rostovtzeff himself in preparing his massive *Social and Economic History of the Hellenistic World*, which he went on to write amid the incomparable resources of his new university.

Long afterwards, when Rostovtzeff was president of the American Historical Association, he told the historian Paul Knaplund that his years at Wisconsin were the happiest in his life. That was obviously no mere flattery. At Yale it was no secret that, as one colleague there put it, "his affection for Wisconsin was strong, deep, and lasting." In the course of five years in a welcoming and stimulating community, Rostovtzeff passed from the isolation and gloom of exile to the confident productivity that characterized his work in America. The intellectual achievement of the years from 1920 to 1925 was stupendous, with the papyrological researches on the Zeno archives and the composition of *The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire*, to say nothing of the two-volume survey, *A History of the Ancient World*. Rostovtzeff came to understand the American system and to exploit it with skill for no merely personal and selfish reasons. The desire for leaves of absence, the pressure for grants to excavate were all in the interests of research of the most fundamental kind. Rostovtzeff had always emphasized the importance of monuments and artifacts, the indispensable help of archaeol-

ogy in the field, and the primacy of geography in understanding the history of the ancient world. In the process of settling down in America, he realized that the universities of this country could provide the resources for developing exactly the kind of broadly based ancient history in which he had always believed. As Clark Hopkins observed in his fascinating book on the discovery of Dura Europus, Rostovtzeff was "eager to make a

truly significant contribution to American universities as well as to classical learning."

It was in Madison that the scholar we recognize in Michael Rostovtzeff came into being—archaeologist and creative interpreter of the social and economic history of the ancient world. It was there that he passed not only the happiest years of his life but perhaps the most important ones. It was there that he made the transition from eminence to greatness.

## *The Fear*

ROBERT WALLACE

Our old dog's frightened of the wind.  
 When a front moves through, she senses  
 the pressure before the sky darkens  
 or the air stirs. Firecrackers wake her.  
 She cowers on back porch or crawls  
 under kitchen table, inconsolable.  
 At night she sleeps more and more  
 under the bed—and that's not enough  
 when the curtains billow and streetlight  
 floods the sill. Nothing assures her.  
 No touch comforts the quaking in her soul  
 at far-off fireworks or rolls of thunder,  
 or the hush of dawn rain. I wake  
 to her watchful silhouette.  
 I leave my hand on her back, but she  
 listens, stiff, and shudders a little  
 from time to time. So we get up  
 at least, to wait for the morning paper  
 and for sunrise, or for whatever it is  
 in snow or rain she knows is there.

★ ROBERT WALLACE teaches English at Case Western Reserve University. His most recent books are *Girlfriends and Wives* and *Writing Poems*.