

## PREFACE

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Some time ago, the *Journal of Approximation Theory* decided to encourage articles devoted to historical aspects of approximation theory, for a more rounded and deeper depiction of our field. The article by P. Butzer and F. Jongmans, “P. L. Chebyshev (1821–1894): A Guide to His Life and Work” (1999, **96**, 111–138), was the first such article. We invite others.

For anyone who is seriously interested in the history of approximation theory, the article “The Theory of Best Approximation of Functions” by V. L. Goncharov which appeared in 1945 in the collection *The Scientific Heritage of P. L. Chebyshev. I. Mathematics*, pp. 122–172 (Nauka), is a must. This was the first major article that attempted to chronicle the beginnings of approximation theory in an unbiased and unpoliticized manner.

As this article was in Russian, and not particularly accessible, the *Journal of Approximation Theory* decided to undertake an English translation. We thank Vladimir Yegorov for his rough translation and Olga Holtz for her extraordinary job of completing the translation. To be sure, in order to smooth the reader’s path, the translation is not always literal, and comments relevant to this appear as footnotes marked with superscript italic letters. In addition, Professor Tikhomirov has kindly provided a commentary that puts some of Chebyshev’s ideas and results into a modern setting.

Professor Goncharov published his article in 1945. When reading this article today, one should keep this fact in mind. Approximation theory has since progressed tremendously and has developed in many diverse directions. Anyone attempting a history of approximation theory today, or even a history of Chebyshev’s ideas and contributions to approximation theory, would undoubtedly write from quite a different perspective. Yet the perspective from which Goncharov wrote is itself of interest. More importantly, we believe that there is much to be learned from this work and hope that the reader agrees with us.

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