

Biological sciences in France and Russia: international relations and scholarly interactions – A French-Russian Meeting at the Collège de France in Paris, September 15-16 2010

The meeting was organized by GDRI (CNRS International Research Group on the history of the Franco-Russian relations in neuroscience) headed by Jean-Gaël Barbara (*Université Pierre et Marie Curie*, France) and Alexander Frolov (Institute of Higher Nervous Activity, Moscow), in collaboration with Professor Alain Berthoz (*Collège de France, Chaire de Physiologie de la perception et de l'action*) who hosted the meeting at the *Collège de France*, and Professor Kolchinsky (Saint Petersburg Branch of the Institute for the History of Science and Technology of the Russian Academy of Science). The meeting aimed to study the privileged relations between French and Russian scientists from the second half of the 19th century on, in the life sciences. Eduard Kolchinsky presented his research on the impact of Georges Cuvier and Jean-Baptiste Lamarck upon the development of evolutionary theory in Russia in the 19th and 20th centuries. Although the existence of a Russian neo-Lamarckism was rejected, professor Kolchinsky showed how the ideas of Cuvier and Lamarck were nevertheless fruitful both in the making of experiments and building new theories, while the impact of Darwin was both more important, but non contradictory with the French scientists. Anastasia Fedotova, from the Institute of Professor Kolchinsky, focussed on Andrey N. Beketov, the father of Russian botanical studies. Although close to German science, Beketov published in French. He was raised by a French speaking nurse, and remained faithful to French culture, in particular when he studied de Candolle. In his experimental botanical work, Beketov was close to Lamarckism and he advocated for the adaptability of plants French authors praised. Igor Popov, also from Saint Petersburg, analysed the studies by Vladimir Kovalevsky in the field of Paleontology. Kovalevsky studied fossils of extinct horses and his work was rather well received in France, although never much quoted. He developed Darwinian trends in Paleontology against orthogenetic and Lamarckist views. Mikhail Konashev, from the Institute of Professor Kolchinsky, presented some relations between Teilhard de Chardin and Th. Dobzhansky on the new evolutionary synthesis and made explicit their common ideas. Sergei Fokin, from Saint Petersburg State University, gave a vivid account of the Zoological Station at Villefranche-sur-Mer, created and directed by Russian scientists between 1886 and 1931. The station was a meeting point for professors and students from all Europe. Alain Berthoz, from the *Collège de France*, described his long lasting endeavour in neuroscience pointing specifically the weight of the Russian tradition in theoretical behavioural studies in his own projects. Anna Samokish, from the Institute of Professor Kolchinsky, explained the French contacts of Yuri Polyansky, his visits to Paris, his teachings, his work in Roscoff biological station and his relations with P.-P. Grassé. Daniel Todes, of the Institute for the History of Medicine of the Johns Hopkins University, analysed the life and work of Ivan Pavlov through a French lens. He developed Pavlov's concerns in psychology and interpersonal differences developed at the French Psychological Society in Paris in 1925, where Pavlov explained with anthropomorphic terms psychological traits of his dogs, as his "Napoleonic dog". Pavlov analysed the subjective side of animal psychology based on emotions and the Gestalt theory and he defined "nervous types". Relations exist with Janet on these topics as well as between his pupil Timaffiev and Charcot. Pavlov visited Janet's patients as he was interested in psychiatry and developed experimental psychiatry when he tried to obtain a dog with neurosis. Irina Sirotkina, from the Institute for the History of Science and Technology of the Russian Academy of Science, focussed on the work of Nikolai Bernstein. She commented on his visit to Paris in 1928 and his French relations. His biomechanical approach was pivotal in many fields of biology, and also in the work of theatre

conductor Meyehoff. The efforts made by Victor Henri and Alfred Binet in advertising this science were presented. Yuri P. Golikov, Director of the Museum of the Institute of Experimental Medicine of the Russian Academy of Medical Sciences, described some connections between French and Russian scientists in the field of Experimental Medicine, with a specific mention to Louis Pasteur and Metchnikov. Marat Ioffe, from the Moscow Institute of Higher Nervous Activity, presented motor-movement coordination studies with a specific focus on French-Russian relations, mentioning V. Gurfinkel, M. Alexeev, Jean Baron and the International Society for Posturography (1969-1986). Finally, Alexander Frolov and Elena Biryukova, from the same Institute, described French-Russian collaborations on mathematical modelling of movement. The meeting was highly successful in bringing together much data and analyses on French-Russian relations in the biological sciences. Although poorly institutionalised and often loose, these relations merit a careful examination by historians and scientists since they reveal a close proximity of thought in many fields that were central in the development of science. Such historical researches point to the necessity to base analyses on personal relations and oral history, rather than history of ideas alone based on the reciprocal quotations of authors and text analyses.

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