

The Centenary of the Great Russian Revolution of 1917: Scientific Outcomes

The Academy of Sciences in 1917

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Abstract—The two Russian revolutions and the Civil War of 1917–1922 radically changed the vector of the Academy of Sciences’ development and the fates of its associates. Documents from the unique collection of the Academy’s archive, testifying to the efforts of the scientific community to keep the Academy as a center of science and enlightenment in the watershed epoch of the country’s development are presented.

Keywords: Archive of the Academy of Sciences, saving of academic treasures, reorganization of the Academy in 1917.

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The legal basis of the activities. The Academy of Sciences approached the year of 1917 with the charter of 1836, which had proclaimed its members “the top learned estate” of the Empire. Under Nicholas I, the Russian Academy, created back in 1783 by Catherine II as the country’s main liberal scientific center, was liquidated and in 1841 merged into the Imperial St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences as the Second Department, that of Russian Language and Literature. Thus, starting from 1841, the Conference (General Meeting) of the Academy comprised members of three departments: Physics and Mathematics, Russian Language and Literature, and History and Philology. As of January 20, 1917, the Conference consisted of 40 people. More than half of the academicians (21 people) represented the two liberal departments, Russian Language and Literature and History and Philology. This was the elite of domestic science, the empire’s main expert community, which professed the principle of serving the people through the development of science and enlightenment.

The structure and staff. In 1917, the Academy included 19 “academic” establishments, including the Archive of the Conference, the Library, five laboratories, a station, three museums, a cabinet, two observatories, and a learned correspondent in Rome under the Department of History and Philology. “In communication” with the Academy was the Caucasian Museum in Tiflis, and 19 commissions worked under the General Meeting and departments. After the beginning of WWI, the main building of the Academy of Sciences housed Hospital no. 185 for the wounded. The Board

of the Academy supervised auxiliary establishments—a Printer with a Type Foundry and a Book Depository. The Academy’s staff, legislatively approved by the emperor in 1912, by 1917 consisted of 220 associates, half of whom were research workers.

Financing. The financial investments into the Academy were quite high at that time. According to the public expenditure framework of the Russian Empire for 1914, the Ministry of Public Education, to which the Academy of Sciences reported, received 5.1% of the expenditure budget. However, even with these expenditures for education, out of the adult population of 40 million subjects of the Russian Empire, 23 mln (57.4%) remained illiterate because of estates-related and ethnic restrictions. By the number of students per 10000 residents, Russia was in the last place among leading European countries. The severe shortage of people with secondary and higher education hindered the economic and cultural development of the country.

In 1917, the empire spent nearly 3 mln on scientific establishments, including 1.113 mln (about 37%) for the Academy of Sciences. Several Academy-affiliated establishments (the Nicholas Central Astronomical Observatory at Pulkovo, the Main Physical Observatory in St. Petersburg, the Sevastopol Biological Station, the Russian Archaeological Institute of Constantinople, and the Imperial Archaeographic Commission) were funded by separate lines in the ministry’s budget.

Personnel. In 1915, after the death of Grand Duke Konstantin Konstantinovich of Russia, who had headed the Academy for 26 years, the Academy of Sciences found itself without a president. In 1916, P.V. Nikitin, its only vice president, also died. Starting

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from May 15, 1916, the Academy was headed by Acting Vice President, Academician A.P. Karpinskii (from 1916); Permanent Secretary, Master of Sanskrit Literature Academician S.F. Oldenburg (from 1904); and Chairman of the Department of Russian Language and Literature, historian of Old Russian culture Academician A.A. Shakhmatov (from 1906). During 1917, Professor of the Imperial Moscow Technical School physicist P.P. Lazarev; classical philologist and epigraphist A.V. Nikitskii, attached to the Ministry of Public Education; Professor of Petrograd University antiquity researcher and archaeologist M.I. Rostovtsev; Senior Curator of the Hermitage, historian of arts and Orientalist Ya.I. Smirnov; and Professor of the Petrograd Polytechnic Institute economist P.B. Struve were elected ordinary academicians. According to the Charter of 1836, Corresponding Members of the Academy of Sciences, Professors of Moscow University Russian historians A.A. Kiesewetter and M.K. Lyubavskii; classical philologists N.I. Novosadskii and M.M. Pokrovskii; Ordinary Professor of Petrograd Polytechnic Institute statistician A.I. Chuprov; Professor of Kazan University, Slavic philologist M.P. Petrovskii; and Ordinary Professor of Petrograd University papyrologist G.F. Tseteli were not on the payroll and did not participate in sessions of the Conference. Corresponding members were involved in the work of academic commissions and the review of scientific works nominated for academic prizes. In 1917, state official P.N. Ignat'ev and lawyer and criminologist N.S. Tagantsev became honorary members of the Academy. Foreign members in 1917 were not elected.

Honorary academicians in the Sector of Belles-Lettres of the Department of Russian Language and Literature, established in 1899, were outstanding writers, opinion journalists, literary critics, theater directors, and actors. L.N. Tolstoy, A.P. Chekhov, V.G. Korolenko, I.A. Bunin, and others were elected honorary academicians. In 1902, A.M. Peshkov (Maxim Gorky) was elected an honorary academician, but, due to the disapproval of Nicholas II, the election was annulled on the basis of the law on people under investigation, because Gorky was under overt surveillance on a charge of crime against the state. As a result, two honorary academicians—Chekhov and Korolenko—quit the Academy as a mark of protest. After the February Revolution, on March 24, 1917, the Sector of Belles-Lettres of the Department of Russian Language and Literature recognized Peshkov an honorary academician in compliance with the election of February 25, 1902. Theater director K.S. Alekseev (Stanislavsky) and playwright and actor A.I. Sumbatov-Yuzhin were elected academicians in 1917 within the same section.

Many members of the Academy were liberals and enthusiastically greeted the abdication of Nicholas II and his younger brother Grand Duke Michael Aleksandrovich of Russia and the formation of the Provi-

sional Government. However, the General Meeting of March 24, 1917, did not react to these events and only “took note” of information about the change of power in the country. Five files of the Chancellery of the Conference of the Academy of Sciences from March 4, 1917, to January 13, 1923, have a common title “On Issues Emerging in the Context of the Coup d’État.”

The political views of the academicians were very different, although most of them adhered to liberalism. V.I. Vernadsky, Oldenburg, A.S. Lappo-Danilevskii, A.S. Famintsyn, Shakhmatov, Rostovtsev, and Struve were prominent members of the Constitutional Democratic Party. Only few academicians were right-wing, including the monarchist V.N. Ipat'ev; N.P. Kondakov, a member of the Club of Russian Nationalists; and A.I. Sobolevskii, a member of the Union of Russian People. Many scientists soon became disappointed with the results of the February Revolution and expressed concern about the fate of the country in personal correspondence.

Academicians who were members of the Constitutional Democratic Party engaged themselves in new state construction and actively participated in the activities of the Provisional Government and its committees, commissions, and ministries. Oldenburg, who was a member of the Central Committee of the Constitutional Democratic Party, in May 1917 became a member of the Extraordinary Investigation Commission to investigate the activities of tsarist ministers and later (July–August), the Minister of People's Education. In August 1917, Vernadsky was appointed Deputy Minister of Education; he was in office until the October coup, but, fearing arrest, had to flee surreptitiously to Ukraine. M.A. D'yakonov, Lappo-Danilevskii, and Rostovtsev were elected members of the August Moscow State Conference.

From the Imperial to the Russian Academy of Sciences. On March 4, 1917, the leadership of the Academy of Sciences sent an address to the Provisional Government, signed by Karpinskii and Oldenburg, proclaiming the Academy's readiness to afford “its knowledge and means that can serve Russia to the government that enjoys public confidence.” This was announced on March 24, 1917, at an extraordinary General Meeting, but the academicians merely took it into account.

On March 29 and April 20, 1917, the Academy applied to the Minister of Education with a request to rename it from the Imperial to the Russian Academy of Sciences on the grounds that its activity “embraces all Russia.” According to an order of the Provisional Government of July 11, 1917, “the former Imperial Academy of Sciences shall henceforth be named the Russian Academy of Sciences.” The decree, approved by the Governing Senate, was officially published on October 25, 1917, on the day of the October coup. The Academy had been using its new name since the decree of the Provisional Government, without wait-

ing for its approval by the Governing Senate. While the 11th issue of the main academic edition, sent to the printer on June 15, was entitled *Bulletin of the Academy of Sciences*, the title of the 12th issue as of September 15 was already *Bulletin of the Russian Academy of Sciences*.

Owing to its influence on the authorities, the Academy managed to become more autonomous and to review a number of articles in the Charter of the Imperial St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences of 1836. The February Revolution removed estate and ethnic privileges and the requirement that academicians mandatorily live in St. Petersburg (previously, to live outside the capital, academicians of the First and Third departments had been obliged to obtain the emperor's permission). The first extraordinary General Meeting after the fall of tsarism, on March 24, 1917, adopted the finalized edition of changes in the articles of the Academy's Charter, which substantially reinforced the democratic foundations of managing the scientific community: thenceforth president and vice president were to be elected. The General Meeting discussed the terms of the administrative positions; by a majority of votes, it was decided to elect the president and vice president from ordinary academicians for a term of five years.

On May 15, 1917, an extraordinary General Meeting held the first democratic presidential election in the history of the Academy of Sciences, and Academician Karpinskii was unanimously elected to this post. The vice president could not be elected because of the lack of a quorum: mathematician A.A. Markov withdrew, and two-thirds of the votes, requisite under the Charter, could not be gathered. The academicians had to ballot, and botanist I.P. Borodin was elected Acting Vice President. Judging from the minutes, it was Vernadsky who won the minimal support, only one vote.

At the extraordinary General Meeting of March 24, 1917, Chairman of the Commission of Museum Directors Academician Borodin proposed to organize a commission of the directors of all scientific establishments of the Academy, without limiting it to the directors of museums alone, and to invite to work in it one representative with a deciding vote from the scientific staff of each establishment to compile a draft provision on councils under the academic establishments. This proposal was approved by the Conference. On May 15, 1917, Chairman of the Commission of Directors Borodin announced the main theses on the procedure of managing scientific establishments of the Academy of Sciences (laboratories, museums, and libraries): each scientific establishment was managed by its council, supervised by a director academician; the council was the organ responsible for the status and activity of this establishment; it consisted of the director as its chairman and "all people on the scientific staff. The council is entitled to involve persons engaged in important studies in the establishment on

a deciding-vote basis. In museums, councils also include members of the Academy specializing in the respective field. In the case of a tie, the vote of the chairman tips the balance." These rules were approved by the Commission of Directors on May 14, 1917, and the next day taken into consideration by the Conference of the Academy of Sciences. Thus, the Council of Directors of RAS Institutes and the academic councils of RAS establishments have been working for 100 years and still adhere to the main rules elaborated back in May 1917.

The creation of new academic establishments. The February events activated the institutionalization of Russian science. The academicians involved in state construction independently formed a focused policy in the sphere of science and education to overcome the country's cultural backwardness. Back in January 1917, a joint session of the Commission on Studying Natural Productive Forces and the War Chemical Committee discussed a project on the creation of a network of state research institutes, targeted to solve mobilization tasks in the conditions of WWI. This network included, in particular, the Institute of Physicochemical Analysis, the Institute for the Study of Platinum and Other Noble Metals, and the Institute of General and Applied Chemistry. Supposedly, these institutes were to begin working from January 1, 1918; in fact, however, they began their work in the Soviet period.

On February 4, 1917, the General Meeting decided to create a Commission for the Study of the Tribal Composition of the Population of the Borderlands of Russia under the chairmanship of Permanent Secretary Oldenburg to collect statistical data, compile descriptions of peoples, and prepare ethnographic maps of not only the interior of the country but also its borderlands. Since the academicians were aware that it was impossible to study the country either with regard to natural history or on a liberal-arts basis by efforts of the 220 people on the Academy's staff, they were lobbying the creation of a broad network of research institutes, laboratories, and scientific stations across Russia. On the same day, participants in the General Meeting discussed a project of creating a Palestine Committee under the Academy to prepare for the launching of the Historical-Archaeological Institute in Palestine. The only domestic scientific establishment abroad, the Russian Archaeological Institute of Constantinople, had folded its operation at the beginning of WWI. Director of the Russian Archaeological Institute of Constantinople F.I. Uspenskii transferred the institute's activity to the conquered areas of the Ottoman Empire and headed a military archaeological expedition to Trabzon. In June 1917, the first academic institute, the Caucasian Historical-Archaeological Institute in Tiflis under the leadership of Academician N.Ya. Marr, was set up, for the creation of which the Provisional Government allocated over P26000.

Saving archives. Mayhem and arsons involving government institutions, manors of the nobility, palaces of aristocrats, and apartments of prominent officials stimulated government bodies and private people to hand over their collections of documents and books to the Academy of Sciences for permanent or temporary storage. On February 27 or 28, 1917, Head of the Conference Archive and the founder of the Pushkin House B.L. Modzalevskii and his colleagues managed to find a sleigh and save from fire the historical archive of the Third Department of His Imperial Majesty's Own Chancellery in the building of the Police Department, set on fire in these revolutionary days. In early March, by an order of the Ministry of Justice, signed by A.F. Kerensky, the Director of the Pushkin House, Academician N.A. Kotlyarevskii, was charged with taking all documents of the Police Department to the Academy of Sciences. On March 11, Minister-President of the Provisional Government Prince G.E. L'vov informed the Academy:

The Academy of Sciences is charged with the following: (1) to take for permanent storage the Archive of the former Third Section of His Imperial Majesty's Own Chancellery and the archive of the Police Department through 1905; (2) to undertake marshaling these archives; and (3) to disclose them as soon as possible for general use under the terms and conditions determined by the Academy of Sciences.

On March 20, the Petrograd Public *Gradonachal'stvo* [city administration—*Tr.*] addressed the Academy with a request to take documents of the Police Department and the Winter Palace because of their colossal sociohistorical significance. Among the papers of the historical part of the rescued archive, a letter of A.S. Pushkin to A.Kh. Benckendorff of May 7, 1830, was discovered, as well as documents (including censored letters) of some members of the Academy of Sciences, particularly Shakhmatov, Sobolevskii, and V.N. Peretz, listed as politically unreliable.

In 1919–1926, the archives of the Third Section of His Imperial Majesty's Own Chancellery and the Police Department (about 240000 files for 1826–1905), stored in the main building of the Academy of Sciences, were piecemeal handed over to the Historical-Revolutionary Archive, to Section VII of the National Archive Fund, from which they were subsequently taken to Moscow (today these documents are stored in the State Archive of the Russian Federation).

In March 1917, the Association of Russian Archival Workers was created with Academician Lappo-Danilevskii at the head (from April). The association actively joined the saving of private and state archives, libraries, and art collections. Among the saved archives and libraries are the collection of engravings and manuscripts from the palace of the Princes Dashkov, the family archive of the Counts Mordvinov, documents of the Lanskoï family, and the historical library of Grand Duchess Elena Pavlovna. From the

Ministry of Justice and the office of the Special Corps of Gendarmes, the Academy received for storage autographs of the music and text of the anthem "God Save the Tsar!" by A.F. L'vov and from the Chamber of Appeal, portraits of emperors. Until 1929, the Academy stored the original texts of the abdication of Emperor Nicholas II and his younger brother Grand Duke Michael Aleksandrovich of Russia in an envelope signed by Senator G.E. Staritskii (Vernadsky's brother-in-law).

Starting from 1906, the Manuscript Department of the Library of the Academy of Sciences had purposefully been collecting documents on the history of the liberation movement, WWI, and the two Russian revolutions, as well as illegal editions. In 1917, these documents, named the Archive of the War and Revolution, were planned to form the basis of the Memorial House of Freedom Fighters under the Academy, initiated by Gorky. Upon his return from emigration, V.I. Lenin familiarized himself with the archives of the war and revolution and those of the Police Department. Documents of the Constituent Assembly, the Socialist Revolutionary Party, and the Central Committee of the Constitutional Democratic Party were sent to the Archive of the War and Revolution.

A decade later, the fact that the Academy stored sensitive documents became the pretext for the Soviet authorities to unleash the "Academic case" (1929–1931), mass repressions and purges in establishments of the USSR Academy of Sciences, and compulsory transfer of the archival funds saved by the Academy to state archives.

The evacuation of academic treasures. Because of the breakdown of the front and the threat of German occupation, in September 1917, martial law was announced in Petrograd. The Academy of Sciences and the Association of Russian Archival Workers did their best to save scientific treasures accumulated over two centuries. The most valuable documents of the Conference Archive and materials of the Manuscript Department of the Academy's Library, the Asiatic Museum, Petrograd University, and the Archaeological Commission were evacuated to Saratov in four railroad freight cars (310 boxes weighing 2500 poods). Some documents from the Pushkin House, including autographs of Pushkin and M.Yu. Lermontov, as well as platinum tableware from the RAS Chemical Laboratory and gold coins from the Asiatic Museum were taken to the Russian Historical Museum (the present State Historical Museum). These valuables were successfully reevacuated in 1920–1922.

Vernadsky as Director of the Peter the Great Museum of Geology and Mineralogy organized the delivery of seven boxes with precious stones and minerals to Moscow; the articles were placed into an iron safe in the office of Moscow University's rector. The most valuable equipment, the library, and the archive of the Academy's Physical Laboratory were also evacuated.

uated to the old capital, to the Institute of Physics of the Moscow Technical School, and Academicians V.A. Steklov, N.S. Kurnakov, A.N. Krylov, Lazarev, and Ipat'ev were sent for a year to Moscow and other Russian cities for "scientific undertakings and participation in various defense studies requiring the use of mathematical, physical, and chemical sciences."

The Russian Academy of Sciences and the October Revolution. The Academy of Sciences decisively rejected the October coup. "Idealist academicians," who, according to Rostovtsev's apt description, "bore their cross of apostles of knowledge," could not reconcile with the violence suffered by the country under the Bolsheviks. On November 18, the General Meeting stated that "the latest events endanger the existence of the country, and the Russian Academy of Sciences should not keep silent in this exceptional time." No draft declaration was adopted by the 25 academicians present, and a commission was formed to compile the text. The address rejecting cooperation with the "soi-disant" Bolshevik government and supporting the Constituent Assembly was read by Lappo-Danilevskii at the extraordinary General Meeting of November 21, which was attended by half of the Academy's members, 22 out of 44. The majority supported this address, except for Academicians Steklov and Borodin. The address was confirmed anew at the Conference session of December 2, 1917, and was approved by the Council of Petrograd Scientific and Higher Education Institutions with Karpinskii at the head. The address began with the following words:

A great calamity has befallen Russia: under the oppression of the rapists who have seized power, the Russian nation is losing the awareness of its personhood and dignity; it is selling its soul and, at the cost of disgraceful and fragile separate peace, is ready to betray its allies and surrender itself to the enemies. What are those who forget about the country's cultural mission and honor preparing for Russia? They prepare internal weakness, heartbreaking disappointment, and disdain on the part of allies and enemies. Russia does not deserve this shame: the popular will entrusts the Constituent Assembly with responsible decision of its fate; it should secure the country from internal and external violence; it should ensure the growth of its culture and reinforce its position among enlightened states.

The year of 1917 became a major landmark in the history of Russian science. Having attained academic freedoms and democratic elections of the leadership, members of the Academy for the first time posed before the authorities the question about the necessity of cardinal reorganization of science and higher education in Russia, namely, to create an extensive network of research centers by knowledge area and to

increase the number of higher educational institutions, primarily universities, to prepare scientific workers. It was in 1917 when works on implementing the reforms of Russian orthography and the calendar were completed; the question about the creation of archaeological, historical-cultural, and biospheric protected areas across the country was posed for the first time; and many other urgent issues requiring early solutions of central and local authorities were raised.

Academician Rostovtsev wrote in his article "Science and Revolution" (1917), "We need not literate Russia but cultural Russia. Russia cannot be saved through the dictatorship of the masses: it will kill it. Salvation is possible solely... through the rise of culture, which is inconceivable without a strong, rich, and unified state." He believed that the main task of the authorities was to liquidate the gulf that had formed between the intelligentsia and the people, depriving Russian science of the foundation on which it was to rely. It was science that was meant to play the decisive and key role in the restoration of Russia: economic upturn is possible only in the presence of a country's cultural, i.e., scientific development.

The first, very cautious, contacts of the RAS leadership with representatives of Soviet power occurred in late January 1918, after the Constitutional Democratic Party had been abolished and the Constituent Assembly had been dissolved by the Bolsheviks. The Academy of Sciences, which had been left without budgetary support from January 1, 1918, had to adapt to the situation and cooperate with the Bolsheviks to save Russian science and culture. On January 24, 1918, at an extraordinary General Meeting, the Academy announced its readiness to cooperate with the People's Commissariat of Education "depending on the scientific essence of a problem... and on the availability of capacities."

The two Russian revolutions and the Civil War of 1917–1922 radically changed the vector of the Academy's development and the fates of its associates: the Academy lost one-third of its full members (some died of famine, malnutrition, and diseases, others left Petrograd, and still others emigrated from Russia). The rest were doing their best to preserve the Academy as a center of science and enlightenment, necessary for the Russian people in the watershed epoch of the country's development.

History has shown that many ideas formulated in 1917 were implemented over time by the RAS members who managed to survive in Soviet Russia and to pass the baton of scientific knowledge to the subsequent generations of domestic scientists.

Translated by B. Alekseev