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The history of the appointment of V.M. Bekhterev to the Imperial Kazan University

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Abstract

In this article, based on archival data and literary sources, the history and reasons for the appointment of V.M. Bekhterev to the Imperial Kazan University are described. Since the sixties of the 19th century, anatomy and physiology professors, as well as clinicians and psychologists of Kazan University, started comprehensive studies of the nervous system within the framework of a specially created psychophysiological department of the Society of Naturalists. Kazan scientific community was familiar with the experimental work of V.M. Bekhterev, the assistant of the Imperial Military Medical Academy, and considered him capable of continuing research on nervous system, which was actively carried out in Kazan. The professors of the medical faculty needed a like-minded person like V.M. Bekhterev at the university to support their scientific views on the role of the nervous system physiology in human mental phenomena formation, as well as to continue the nervous system complex studies, which were started in the framework of the psychophysiological department of the Society of Naturalists. The initiator of the invitation of V.M. Bekhterev as a physiology professor was N.O. Kovalevskiy, who was actively studying the nervous system physiology and supporting the young professor in his scientific and organizational activities for almost the entire period of his work in Kazan. Vladimir Mikhailovich was unanimously elected by the Council of the Faculty of Medicine, and despite being sent on a business trip abroad, he became a head of the Department of Psychiatry at Kazan University from August 1, 1885.

Keywords: Bekhterev, Kovalevskiy, history of psychiatry, history of psychology, Kazan University.

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The scientific activity of Vladimir Mikhailovich Bekhterev (Fig. 1) became a bright page in the history of Imperial Kazan University. As a young 28-year-old professor of psychiatry, he became chair in 1885 and brilliantly implemented his research and organizational skills. A series of events preceded the invitation of V.M. Bekhterev to Kazan.

On January 29, 1884, due to his deteriorating state of health, A.U. Frese, Director of the Kazan district hospital and Psychiatry professor of the Imperial Kazan University, could no longer lecture to students and turned in his resignation letter to P.N. Maslennikov, the trustee of the Kazan educational district [1].

On February 4, 1884, professor A.U. Frese died, and his positions as a professor of Psychiatry at the Kazan University and Director of the District Psychiatric hospital remained vacant.

On March 29, 1884, at a medical faculty meeting of the Imperial Kazan University, two candidates for the teacher of psychiatry position were presented, associate professor of Kharkov Univer-



Fig. 1. V.M. Bekhterev. Yelabuga State Historical, Architectural, and Art Reserve Museum.

sity P.I. Kovalevsky and privat-docent of the Military Medical Academy V.M. Bekhterev [2].

Pavel Ivanovich Kovalevsky (Fig. 2) was known to the Russian scientific community for his anatomical, physiological, and clinical studies and his work in forensic psychiatry.

In his scientific and practical activities, P.I. Kovalevsky continued to develop the ideas of

A.U. Frese, by whom he was trained in the Kazan district hospital in 1878. Since 1879, associate professor P.I. Kovalevsky performed duties as the senior doctor of the Kharkov provincial hospital and the head of the psychiatric hospital. The last circumstance was especially noted by the professors who introduced him, E.V. Adamyuk, an ophthalmologist and N.A. Vinogradov, a therapist. They expected that after the invitation of P.I. Kovalevsky to the university, his administrative skills and organizational experience would be considered by the Ministry of Internal Affairs. He would become the best candidate for the director of the Kazan district hospital.

Professors E.V. Adamyuk and N.A. Vinogradov may have already discussed this with P.I. Kovalevsky because, at a faculty meeting on March 29, 1884, they reported that Pavel Ivanovich “expressed his consent to the transfer to Kazan.” Because of the lack of a professor’s wage, he agreed to an assistant professor’s salary [3].

The professors’ initiative was understandable. After being appointed hospital director, A.U. Frese was invited to Kazan University, and he combined the positions. Fearing that the new director appointed by the Ministry of Internal Affairs might be “not a very capable teacher,” they decided to invite a scientist who, like A.U. Frese, along with scientific and pedagogical activities, could head the Kazan district hospital and, as its director, would retain the clinical base of the university.

This proposal was made by professor N.A. Vinogradov is also not accidental since the course of psychiatry at the Kazan University was organized in 1865 by the Department of Private Pathology and Therapy headed by him. Per the university charter, on June 18, 1863, he was responsible for “the systematic and clinical exposition of the doctrine of nervous and mental diseases” [4].

Professor-physiologist Nikolai Osipovich Kovalevsky presented an alternative presentation at the medical faculty meeting (Fig. 3). Professor of Forensic Medicine I.M. Gvozdev also signed his submission to the Faculty Council: “*Since the death of our esteemed comrade A.U. Frese, the faculty will have to attend to the replacement of psychiatry at our University, then I will allow myself to draw the attention of the faculty to a person who can fill the vacancy with dignity. I mean privat-docent of the Imperial Military Medical Academy Bekhterev...*” [3].

In his presentation, professor N.O. Kovalevsky briefly cited the biography of Vladimir Mikhailovich and spoke about his scientific activities, emphasizing the experimental direction of his research: “*From the day he graduated from the course to the present, Mr. Bekhterev has worked*



Fig. 2. P.I. Kovalevsky. Museum of the History of the V.M. Bekhterev Republican Clinical Psychiatric Hospital.



Fig. 3. N.O. Kovalevsky. Proceedings of the Society of Naturalists at the Imperial Kazan University, vol. 20, Kazan (1889).

determinedly in his chosen specialty. Without content with mere observations of clinical material with nervous and mental suffering, Mr. Bekhterev devoted a great deal of work to experimental studies of the nervous system. Having developed a remarkable technique that enabled him to perform some of the most difficult vivisections on animals, and at the same time having great observation skills, Mr. Bekhterev acquired an independent view of the functions of various parts of the central nervous system and thereby founded for himself a scientific basis for elucidating pathological phenomena. We see the fruits of Mr. Bekhterev's labors in a long series of his articles on psychiatry, nervous pathology, and nervous physiology... The data which I was able to collect from Mr. Bekhterev's writings, I submit to the faculty for judgment and propose their author as a candidate for a vacant position in the subject of psychiatry. It would be desirable that the faculty, in view of the importance of psychiatry in the field of medical sciences and in view of the scientific merit of the candidate, ballot him for the title of Extraordinary Professor” [3].

N.O. Kovalevsky attached a list of Bekhterev's works to his report.

The desire of the esteemed scientist and respected Russian physiologist N.O. Kovalevsky to invite a young St. Petersburg privat-docent V.M. Bekhterev to the Imperial Kazan University was not accidental. Professor Kovalevsky focused his research on the experimental study of the nervous system physiology and rightly believed that Bekhterev's research work in Kazan would continue in this direction.

N.O. Kovalevsky, in the 1870s, headed the Society of Naturalists of the Imperial Kazan University. He was one of the organizers and an active participant in the psychophysiological section created under him. Its goal was the *"reduction and integration into [a] unified whole of all special experiments and cases concerning the physiological functions of the nervous system and the mental phenomena of the life of humans and other animals"* [5].

The idea of creating a psychophysiological section, which assumed the expansion of research on the activity of the nervous system by establishing its relationship with the clinical manifestations of mental activity, was expressed by the Kazan professor-zoologist N.P. Wagner on August 25, 1869, at the Second Congress of Russian Naturalists in Moscow. He was convinced that developing the most critical general problems of science is beyond the power of individual scientists, and it should be undertaken by *"entire properly organized corporations of scientists founded specifically for this purpose"* [6].

Professor N.P. Wagner proposed to create such a psychophysiological section in Kazan, explaining his decision by the presence of the necessary scientific forces for implementing such research: *"not to mention a sufficient number of people interested in and involved in this subject, here in Kazan, there is still the only institution in Russia where you can find enormous material for psychiatric cases"* [7]. The professor referred to the first in Russia, Kazan district psychiatric hospital that opened on July 1, 1869.

On September 20, 1869, the first meeting of the psychophysiological section was held in Kazan, including anatomist P.F. Lesgaft, histologist K.A. Arshstein, physiologist N.O. Kovalevsky, biochemist A.Ya. Danilevsky, zoologist N.P. Wagner, pathologist A.V. Petrov, hygienist A.I. Jacobi, philosopher and psychologist M.M. Troitsky.

The meeting minutes revealed [8] that the idea of joint development of the most critical issues in the study of the nervous system was met with interest by many teachers at Kazan University. These individuals were not initially included in the team of participants but came with a desire to partici-

pate in the work of the section. Thanks to this, it became possible to expand the initial research program approved in Moscow significantly. The number of research issues in anatomy, histology, and physiology of the nervous system and psychology has increased. In addition, professor of forensic medicine I.M. Gvozdev, professor of ophthalmology E.V. Adamyuk, and professor of pharmacology I.M. Dogel joined the activities.

In March 1870, the second meeting of the psychophysiological section occurred. Two reports were heard, namely "On the manifestation of the first traces of nervous activity in shapeless animals," by N.P. Wagner and "On the innervation of eye movements," by E.V. Adamyuk. The third meeting never happened. Professor N.P. Wagner transferred to St. Petersburg University in 1870, but the section remained inactive for the following year.

In 1871, in connection with the Lesgaft event, eight more professors left the Imperial Kazan University, including P.F. Lesgaft and A.Ya. Danilevsky. After their departure, the psychophysiological section could not resume its work [5, 9].

The Society members attempted to attract new scientific forces. However, they produced no results, despite organizing two awards of 75 rubles each "For the best original works on the anatomy and physiology of the nervous system, as well as empirical psychology" for young specialists [10].

Nevertheless, a short period of work in the psychophysiological section of the Society of Naturalists produced results. The organization of a special psychophysiological department consolidated the scientific schools that had already been formed at the medical faculty of Kazan University. This launched the beginning of the nervous system study by the methods of the natural sciences in association with psychology, which developed in those years as a branch of philosophical knowledge. After the formal closure of the section, joint studies of the nervous system and its connection with human mental phenomena were continued by medical faculty professors of the Imperial Kazan University in subsequent years already outside the Society of Naturalists.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the Kazan neurohistological school was founded. Even before the invention of K.A. Arnstein in 1887, a new intravital staining technique of nerve elements with methylene blue in the Department of Histology of the Imperial Kazan University neuromorphological studies were actively conducted. Since 1875, under the guidance of professor K.A. Arnstein, a cycle of peripheral nervous system histology studies was performed, mainly focusing on the structure of nerve endings and sensory organs [11].

Professor of physiology, N.O. Kovalevsky was actively involved in the study of the nervous system. After his teacher, F.V. Ovsyannikov, was elected as an academician and left for St. Petersburg, N.O. Kovalevsky headed the experimental physiological laboratory of the medical faculty, which later became the largest center for the study of physiology in Russia.

In the laboratory of professor N.O. Kovalevsky, research was conducted on a wide range of problems. An important place was given to the study of nervous system physiology. The humoral mechanisms of excitation transmission in the autonomic nervous system were studied, and peripheral reflexes, reflex interactions between respiration and blood circulation [6]. More recent studies by N.O. Kovalevsky and his students focused on analyzing cerebral cortex architectonics.

Studying the physiology of the nervous system, Professor Kovalevsky could not ignore its relation to mental processes. He devoted his speech “How physiology regards life in general and mental life in particular” to this problem, which he presented on November 5, 1876, at the solemn annual meeting of the Imperial Kazan University.

The reason for choosing this subject was a speech a year earlier by Associate Professor of Philosophy A.I. Smirnov, who stated in his speech “On consciousness and unconscious mental phenomena” that mental phenomena cannot be the subject of the study of physiology [12]. According to the memoirs of those present at this meeting in 1875, “*at the end of the act [speech], professor of Physiology Kovalevsky said that he would answer him next year, and we looked forward to November 5, 1876*” [13].

In his speech, Professor Kovalevsky approved the position that “mental activity is impossible without a material substrate. Criticizing the ideas of vitalists about the existence of an ephemeral “vital force,” which was attributed to the regulation of all phenomena in the body, N.O. Kovalevsky explained the nature of mental phenomena from nervous system physiology. N.O. Kovalevsky finished his speech with words about the need to develop objective methods for studying brain functions: “*Physiology struggled with vitalism in physical phenomena in the life of the body by measuring methods ... by measuring methods, it is destined to dispel the darkness that prevails in the understanding of mental processes. The first rays of light in this dark realm have already flashed. All you need is persistent work, and the language of numbers will reveal to us the mysterious activities of the brain*” [14].

The speech by N.O. Kovalevsky had a broad resonance. Associate professor-philosopher A.I. Smir-

nov again criticized his views. His critical article with the statement, “The opinion about the materiality of mental life is not just proven, but simply absurd,” was published in a separate edition. In addition, it was duplicated in the same issue of the Proceedings of Kazan University, where Professor Kovalevsky’s speech was published [15]. Nikolai Osipovich’s speech was attended by the archbishop, who, according to a contemporary [13], was “offended” by his speech. In the St. Petersburg weekly *Tserkovniy Vestnik*, an article was published and signed by an author with the initials S.N.K. This author accused the professor of his “*crudely materialistic phantasmagoria was declared publicly, by the way, even before youth, still not at all uninfluenced by various anti-Christian and anti-religious doctrines*” and, therefore, unable to “*distinguish positively the scientific facts from arbitrary hypotheses*” [16]. N.O. Kovalevsky was supported by his assistant physiologist I.M. Shumkov, who published a response article, “On the issue of mental life,” expressing his complete agreement with the opinion of his teacher [17].

N.O. Kovalevsky was highly interested in an authoritative, like-minded individual in the person of V.M. Bekhterev at the university to support his scientific views and revive the psychophysiological section work of the Society of Naturalists.

At a meeting on March 29, 1884, Professors E.V. Adamyuk and N.A. Vinogradov, who introduced associate professor of Kharkov University P.I. Kovalevsky, did not know that on March 15, the Ministry of Internal Affairs had already appointed L.F. Ragozin, PhD (Medicine) to the Kazan district hospital director post. An essential addition to this appointment for the university was the order of Count D.A. Tolstoy as the Minister of Internal Affairs that “the hospital will continue to serve as a clinic for teaching nervous and mental diseases, and the teacher will be given the title of consultant of this hospital” [2]. Later, V.M. Bekhterev noted that the Ministry of Public Education insisted on these conditions [18].

We believe that separating the positions of professor of psychiatry and director of the Kazan district hospital was not accidental. The Ministry of Internal Affairs was unsatisfied with some aspects of A.U. Frese’s management of the hospital.

All 15 years of his work, Professor Frese adhered to the principle: “*the Government hospital aims to treat the mentally ill patients who give hope for recovery, while chronic patients should be treated in the territorial institutions*” [19]. In 1873, A.U. Frese implemented this concept and achieved the renaming of the District psychiatric hospital into the Kazan district hospital [20]. Also, in 1875,

he introduced the “Regulations on the Kazan District Hospital in the Name of the Mother of God of All Who Sorrow,” where he stated that the hospital was intended mainly for the mentally ill patients with hope for recovery. He allotted only a tenth of the total number of places for incurable patients, no more than 20 [21].

This principle was justified since the project for creating district hospitals, proposed by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, provided the newly built government institutions to conduct specific medical activities as the most difficult. Territorial institutions for the mentally disabled were preserved and assumed the function of caring for chronic patients “without the prospects for recovery” [22].

The difficulty of delivering patients from neighboring provinces to Kazan and the high payment for treatment that their relatives had to pay (from 8 rubles and 64 kopecks to 13 rubles and 26 kopecks per month) resulted in few acute patients in the hospital [22, 23]. For this reason, for the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the cost of maintaining the hospital in terms of one patient reached 580 rubles per year [24].

In 1873, the Minister of Internal Affairs of Russia, Adjutant General Timashev, after visiting the Kazan district hospital, stated in his report: *“Although the hospital is excellently arranged and maintained properly, the number of unoccupied places in it is so significant that the maintenance of patients is very expensive. The departments for the mentally ill at provincial hospitals are extremely unsatisfactory and are more similar to detention spaces than medical institutions...”* [19]. In the late 1870s, E.V. Pelican, the director of the medical department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, who was also dissatisfied with the empty beds, visited the hospital [19].

The patient division overseeing those in need of treatment and care was also dissatisfied with the local, territorial authorities who maintained the Kazan psychiatric hospital overcrowded with chronically ill patients.

“Unoccupied” beds were preserved throughout the years when A.U. Frese managed the hospital, despite his trips to neighboring provinces to search for “newly ill” patients for the hospital and appeals to colleagues in the Kazan Society of Physicians with requests to send acute mentally ill patients in their practice to the hospital [25].

Strict criteria for selecting patients, which A.U. Frese personally led many people to conclude that *“under the director-professor, the Kazan district hospital began to acquire the significance almost exclusively of a psychiatric clinic of the University, and as a result, its fundamental*

purpose as a district hospital was almost not fulfilled” [19].

L.F. Ragozin, who solved the problem with the occupancy of beds at the expense of patients of territorial institutions, also shared this view of A.U. Frese in 1884.

On April 3, 1884, an official notification of his appointment as the new hospital director was sent to the rector of Kazan University [26]. However, this became known at a faculty meeting on March 29: *“After reading these submissions, some members of the faculty announced that a government order had already been taken on the appointment of Dr. Ragozin as the director of the District hospital. In view of this, Professors Adamyuk and Vinogradov wished to withdraw their submissions. As for the introduction of professors Kovalevsky and Gvozdev, the faculty decided to stand Bekhterev for the vacant position”* [2].

P.I. Kovalevsky nevertheless headed the department of psychiatry in Kazan, but this happened later. In 1903, he was appointed to Kazan University and worked there for one year to receive the title of Honored professor. However, even before this period, Pavel Ivanovich collaborated with Kazan University. He came to Kazan in 1892 and 1894, when the Ministry of Public Education appointed him as the Chairman of the Medical Testing Commission at Kazan University [27].

We did not find a record of Bekhterev’s balloting in the archival documents, but Vladimir Mikhailovich later recalled that he was elected to a professorship in the Spring of 1884 [18].

Plans to take a chair in Kazan were violated in early May due to being sent on a scientific trip abroad. In June 1884, V.M. Bekhterev left for a scientific trip to clinics in Western Europe without waiting for the final decision on his appointment.

During his work in Leipzig, V.M. Bekhterev entered into correspondence with professor Vasily Markovich Florinsky, head of the Department of Obstetrics and Women’s Diseases at the Imperial Kazan University, whom he met in St. Petersburg in the Spring of 1884. In a letter dated October 25, 1884, V.M. Bekhterev expressed concern about a possible imminent transfer to Kazan: *“On the advice of Nikolai Osipovich Kovalevsky, I recently sent a memorandum (with my curriculum vitae) to the Ministry with a request of a transfer to the existing free chair of psychiatry and nervous diseases in Kazan. From a letter addressed to me by Prof. Merzheevsky in St. Petersburg, I learned that the Ministry had sent him to the head of the Military Medical Academy about this and that a review about me had already been sent to the Ministry. At the same time, a counter request was also made to*

the Trustee of the Kazan District. If the latter also gives a favorable review of me, then we must think that the resolution of the issue of holding the chair will not take long..." [28].

By this time, on September 30, 1884, the Minister of Public Education I.D. Delyanov requested the opinion of the Manager of the Kazan Educational District on the appointment of V.M. Bekhterev for the vacant chair of psychiatry.

In his reply to the minister, P.N. Maslennikov, Trustee of the Kazan educational district, v, first supported Bekhterev's candidacy. After only two weeks, he suddenly changed his mind and informed the minister that so far, the appointment of V.M. Bekhterev had not yet taken place. He proposed that D.P. Skolozubov, MD, PhD, already teaching nervous diseases at Kazan University, head the Department of Systematic Study of Nervous and Mental Diseases [29].

Dmitriy Petrovich Skolozubov was appointed to Kazan University as Assistant professor of Nervous Diseases on January 14, 1884 [30]. Before Bekhterev's arrival, he was instructed to teach a course on mental diseases. He was pretty satisfied with this circumstance since immediately after his appointment to Kazan, he turned to the Council and then the University Board with a request to send him on a scientific trip to Paris "for a better acquaintance with the methods of clinical teaching of nervous and mental diseases by Professors Charcot and Magnana" [31]. An internship was granted to associate professor D.P. Skolozubov, and after returning in the fall semester, he presented his program of teaching mental diseases to students of the medical faculty.

At the same time, Bekhterev's arrival was expected at the Imperial Kazan University. In November 1884, Rector N.N. Bulich wrote about this to the Minister of Public Education: "*The Department of Psychiatry and Nervous Diseases, under the Charter of 1863, was divided between two teachers. Upon the death of Professor Frese, Dr. Bekhterev, privat-docent of the Military Medical Academy, was offered to take his place in the faculty ... Bekhterev's activities ceased only on the occasion of the introduction of a new University Charter which established a new procedure for holding the chairs...*" [32]. The university was preparing for the arrival of Bekhterev. In January 1885, the rector separately informed the medical faculty that salaries should be maintained for the invited professors, A.I. Jacobiy (hygienist) and V.M. Bekhterev when distributing the money allocated to the university [33].

I.D. Delyanov, Minister of Public Education, received the most flattering reviews about the exceptional abilities and scientific activity

of V.M. Bekhterev from colleagues of the young Doctor of Medicine. Professor I.P. Merzheevsky, his supervisor, wrote a letter to Leipzig to upgrade his qualification. The minister insisted that V.M. Bekhterev complete his business trip as soon as possible and take a chair in Kazan.

V.M. Bekhterev wished to continue his studies abroad and responded in a letter to the minister "*replaced a direct refusal*" of a professorship in Kazan with "*unacceptable, as it seemed to me, conditions on my part, which I considered necessary to put forward in response to the invitation paper of the Minister.*" He wrote that his work in Kazan required a particular clinic, creating and equipping a unique laboratory, and establishing an assistant position in the department [18, 34].

V.M. Bekhterev recalled that, to his surprise, in the response letter of the minister, the stated requirements were recognized as "*quite solid and subject to satisfaction ... It goes without saying, I was completely satisfied with such a result, and my studies are associated with redoubled energy ...*" [18].

V.M. Bekhterev was appointed an Extraordinary professor at the Imperial Kazan University in psychiatry on August 1, 1885 [35].

According to the memoirs of V.M. Bekhterev, the next "*nine years I spent at Kazan University rendered me a great service in scientific terms*" [34]. Having received the department in charge, the young professor of psychiatry determined the direction of his research independently. One result of his work was the publication of the fundamental work "Brain Conductive Pathways." He laid the main scientific fields of activity in Kazan, which V.M. Bekhterev developed in subsequent years.

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