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M. Ju. Volyanskaya <sup>a</sup>, O. E. Mandel <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Astronomical Observatory of Odessa University, Ukraine

<sup>b</sup> Polytechnical Institute, Odessa, Ukraine

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CONFERENCE

**ON THE HISTORY OF ASTRONOMY IN  
ODESSA. K. D. POKROVSKY**

M. JU. VOLYANSKAYA

*Astronomical Observatory of Odessa University, Ukraine*

and

O. E. MANDEL

*Polytechnical Institute, Odessa, Ukraine*

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The report is devoted to the life and activity of a well-known astronomer and astronomy teacher, corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, Professor Konstantin Dorimedontovich Pokrovsky, Director of the Astronomical Observatory of Odessa State University from 1934 to 1944.

The name of this scientist and his research works have not been mentioned for a long time. In 1944, soon after Odessa's liberation from Nazis, Professor Pokrovsky, at the age of 76, was arrested, put into prison and died during the investigation. He was never condemned officially, nevertheless his name was not referred to (except for the Tartu Astronomical Calendar (1)). His books were not published, and his activities were not reported. At present, when many names formerly excluded from literature, art and science, are being reinstated, Pokrovsky should take a worthy deserved place in this process.

K. D. Pokrovsky was born on the 11th (the Old Style 23rd) of May, 1868 in Nizhnij Novgorod in the family of an Orthodox Church priest. After finishing gymnasium in 1888 he entered the Physico-Mathematical Faculty of Moscow University. At that time there studied S. N. Blazhko and S. K. Kostinsky, F. A. Bredikhin and V. K. Tserassky being their teachers. After graduating from the University, Pokrovsky worked as an assistant extra-staff at the Astronomical Observatory of Moscow University, and in 1893 he left for Pulkovo where he was taught by R. Römer to make observations at the meridian circle. After 1895 he worked at Juryev (Tartu) University Observatory (Director in 1894–1908 G. V. Levitsky), carrying out observations at the meridian circle and refractor, and delivering lectures on astronomy and mathematics. In 1902 he defended Master thesis at Moscow University, entitled "The Origin of Periodical Comets". From

1908 through 1915 he was Director of Astronomical Observatory of Juryev University. When he was in charge of the Observatory, its edifice was being built, it was equipped with main instruments: 8" refractor, Fraunhofer refractor, Zeiss photographic camera, heliograph, Repsold refractor and others. There were expeditions arranged for observing solar eclipses in 1912 (annular) and in 1914 (total). In 1912, K. D. Pokrovsky defended his Doctor thesis at Moscow University, "The structure of the Comet's Tail of 1910I". In 1915, Pokrovsky was responsible for the difficult task of organizing the Observatory evacuation to Nizhnij Novgorod and further to Perm.

In 1916, a branch of Petrograd University was established, headed by Pokrovsky, and in 1917 it was transformed into Perm University. Pokrovsky became its first Rector. In 1919–1920 he taught at Tomsk University, and in September 1920, as a senior astronomer at Pulkovo Observatory, he observed comets, minor planets and binary stars with the 15" refractor, he also made observations of Neptune's satellites together with Neuymin at the 30" refractor, being a member of the Observatory Board. In 1927, Pokrovsky was elected as a corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences of USSR. In 1930–1932, he was Deputy Director of the Observatory. Simultaneously, he was teaching at the Military Engineering Academy, at the Leningrad Institute of Mines and Herzen Pedagogical Institute.

In 1934, K. D. Pokrovsky at the age of 66 headed Odessa Astronomical Observatory succeeding A. Ja. Orlov, his former colleague at Juryev Observatory. In 1936, the University Astronomy Chair was restored to Pokrovsky, as well as its post-graduate courses. Thanks to the efforts of A. K. Kononovich, and particularly to those of A. Ja. Orlov, Odessa Observatory had become a high-level research institution by 1934, its staff being well-qualified, its scientific directions distinct and well-defined. The new Director did not change research projects and plans drastically, and some projects only planned by Orlov were realized within the period of Pokrovsky's management.

It was with a zenith-telescope purchased by Orlov in 1932, that observations were carried out by I. Androsov and A. Tsesyulevich to investigate latitude variations throughout 1935–1939. From 1936 to 1938, B. N. Novopashnyi made observations of the declinations of 181 stars according to this zenith-telescope programme. After finishing this observations programme, the zenith-telescope was transferred to Poltava Observatory already headed by A. Ja. Orlov at that time.

K. D. Pokrovsky appreciated the necessity of cooperation with astronomical institutions, and in this respect he was a worthy follower of his teacher, F. A. Bredikhin, who established close relations between the capital' astronomical institutions and those in provinces, and thanks to whose recommendations, adequate astrophysical directions of research were developed in Odessa. While still in Pulkovo, K. D. Pokrovsky visited Baku (1928) and Kitab (1931) to advise the organizers of astronomical research.

Realizing the importance of spectral observations for stellar atmospheres study, he helped his first post-graduates—A. Shulberg and H. Goryaistov—so that their projects on spectrophotometry were approved and the opportunity was given of consultations at leading astronomical observatories of this country, Pulkovo and Simeiz. According to Pokrovsky's proposal, the Observatory took up the work on the "Faint Stars Catalogue", and observations of 645 stars (FCFS) began at the meridian circle.

At the same time, K. D. Pokrovsky continued traditional research related to micrometric comet observations in which he achieved fundamental results, on comet radiants in particular (the works of 1918–1919 coauthored with G. A. Shajn) as well as on visual binary stars. He succeeded in attracting the attention of Professor Mikhalskiy—a specialist on celestial mechanics—who had published a paper on the motion of the meteor swarm related to the Pons-Winnecke comet. Efforts were made on providing the KMET work and setting up a similar Committee in the republic. In 1935, the observations of sunspots were resumed at the Observatory. In 1936, Odessa Astronomical Observatory organized an expedition to Western Siberia (village of Vengerovo) in order to make observations of the total solar eclipse. The expedition was headed by Pokrovsky and, although 68 years old, the scientist showed wonderful organizing ability providing for delivery of, and mounting the instruments, for scientific observations in a village 75 kilometers from a railway station. He himself made observations, 6 excellent photographs of the corona were taken by him, and later on he carried out investigations of the photographs.

It should be noted that Pokrovskys' organizing ability was generally recognized much earlier. At the First All-Russian Congress of Astronomers in 1917, he was elected Vice-Chairman of the Council of All-Russian Astronomical Union, and at the 3rd (1924) and 4th (1928) Congresses he was elected Chairman of the Council of RSFSR Astronomers Association. In 1937, Pokrovsky was appointed the Dean of the Physico-Mathematical Faculty of Odessa State University. Following, probably, Pulkovo traditions he maintained friendly relations with his colleagues, and at dinner parties given by the Director continued this friendship with colleagues and post-graduates were invited too.

K. D. Pokrovsky took an active part in the popularization of astronomical knowledge. Leading Russian scientists were also actively involved in this because in order to achieve allocations for science from the state budget or from private donations, it was necessary to develop favourable public opinion and this depended upon the level of the population's education. At present, not much attention has been paid to this problem, especially during the last decades when science as well as national economy of this country were developing under the conditions of a total monopolization and secrecy, when the allocations for the development of this or that direction, this or that institution were determined by some authority.

The scope of information widely available proved to be rather limited, which allowed public opinion to be manipulated in a time-serving manner. As a result of all this, it so happened that some writers and representatives of technical intelligentsia are even calling for a substantial decrease in funding for fundamental investigations (on space research, nuclear developments, etc.). But the development of sciences such as mathematics, physics, astronomy provide a framework for the intellectual level of society, and for the possibility of rapid progress. They understand this pretty well in the developed countries where the popularization of science has a high profile, and they understood this in prerevolutionary Russia too.

In 1984, a famous "A Guidebook over the Sky. Practical Handbook for Astronomical Observations with a Naked Eye and with a Small Astronomical Tube" by K. D. Pokrovsky was published. It was probably the first Russian edition dedicated to amateur astronomers. The book ran into four editions, the fifth one was prepared as well but the war broke out and prevented

publication. Astronomers, both professionals and amateurs, used the stellar atlas by Pokrovsky, and he also published the history of astronomy too, wielding a skilful pen he described both biographies of outstanding Russian and Ukrainian astronomers such as Bredikhin, Belopolskiy, Kostinskiy, Glazenap and the activity of observatories (Pulkovo, Odessa). His manual of cosmography (for secondary schools) ran into many editions (not less than 7); M. G. Krein, as A. M. Shulberg testifies, considered it to be the best manual among all similar titles.

Both in Odessa and in the Ukraine, K. D. Pokrovsky continued with the wide popularization of astronomical knowledge, being the Chairman of OdVAGO (All-Union Astronomical-Geodesical Society), a member of the Society "Mirovedenje", and the Chairman of the commission of Academy of Sciences responsible for building planetaria in the Ukrainian Republic organized in 1940. In Odessa, at VAGO a workshop was set up for manufacturing astronomical instruments (gnomon, Glazenap ring) and for publishing popular science literature.

In 1941, K. D. Pokrovsky was 73 years old. He stayed in Odessa occupied by Nazis. In order to make a living he had to teach at the so-called Transnistriya University and at the same time he headed the Observatory. He died, as mentioned above, in 1945. Detailed studies are expected and desirable of the last years of this outstanding scientist, and it is clear enough that scientists such as K. D. Pokrovsky must take a deserved place in the history of Science.

### *Reference*

1. Tähetorni Kalender 1967, p. 50.