

The Dictionary “*Russian Botanists*” by Sergey Yu. Lipshits: the history of an unfinished project

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The biographical and bibliographical dictionary “*Russian botanists*” by Sergey Yu. Lipshits¹ was a unique bibliographic project; it remains an essential guidebook for historians of biology in Russia. It contains biographical and full bibliographical entries for *all* botanists and other scholars engaged in botanical research in Russia in the 18th – mid-20th centuries. What makes the dictionary an invaluable resource for the history of botany (both social history and history of ideas) is the fact that it contains data not only on the leading scientists but on minor figures as well, even if the entries provide only a brief biographical account and a short outline of academic activities. However, only the first four volumes of the dictionary (up to the letter K) came out

¹ Биографо-библиографический словарь Русские ботаники. Сост. С. Ю. Липшиц. В 4 томах. Москва: издательство МОИП, 1947–1952.

of print, and a few copies of the proofs for the fifth volume (the letters M-L) have been preserved. Why did the project remain unfinished?

The project was initiated by Sergey Yu. Lipshits who compiled the dictionary.² Probably he was the most brilliant bibliographer in the history of Russian botany. He was born in 1905 in Vilna (present-day Vilnius). He spent his childhood in Ufa where he became interested in botany: while studying in a local secondary school, he went out on botanical excursions, collected herbaria, worked in the city museum. In 1926 he graduated from the Biology Department of the School of Physics and Mathematics of Moscow University. From 1921 he participated in various expeditions to Bashkiria, the South Ural, Kazakhstan, Central Asia, Tien-Shan, and Kamchatka: the geography of his field trips was expanding. His research was mostly concerned with plant systematic and plant geography. In 1930s many expeditions, in which he took part, were related to the search for native rubber plants. Quite soon Sergey Lipshits earned a reputation of a good specialist in this field.

In 1937 academician Nikolai D. Zelinskii, the President of the Moscow Society of Naturalists (*Moskovskoe obshchestvo ispytatelei prirody* – MOIP), offered S. Lipshits a position of the academic secretary of the Society. In the same year S. Lipshits published his first articles on the history of botany.³ It was in these early years of working for the MOIP when Lipshits embarked on his project of compiling the dictionary. As his friends and colleagues Daniil V. Lebedev and Moisei E. Kirpichnikov⁴ noted, Lipshits' interest "in the history of sci-

² М. Е. Кирпичников, В. И. Грубов. К творческой биографии Сергея Юльевича Липшица. — Бюллетен МОИП. Отделение биологии. 1984. Том 89. № 3. С. 149–162; Е. М. Лавренко. К 60-летию С. Ю. Липшица. — Ibid. 1965. Том 70. № 6. С. Р. 143–145; Е. М. Лавренко. Памяти Сергея Юльевича Липшица (1905–1983). Из воспоминаний. — Ibid. 1984. Том 89. №. 3. С. 163–166; Д. В. Лебедев, М. Е. Кирпичников. Сергей Юльевич Липшиц. К 60-летию со дня рождения. — Ботанический журнал. 1965. Том. 50. № 5. С. 1469–1480; Т. А. Работнов, В. Н. Тихомиров. К 80-летию С. Ю. Липшица. — Бюллетен МОИП. Отделение биологии. 1984. Том 89. № 5. С. 123–129.

³ С. Ю. Липшиц. Забытый любитель-натуралист лекарь И. Г. Ильин. — Землеведение. 1937. Том 39. № 4–5. С. 468–472; Idem. Материалы по истории русской ботаники. О ботанической инструкции данной студентам отправляющимся в Китай (1818). — Бюллетен МОИП. Отделение биологии. 1937. Том 16. № 2. С. 114–120; Idem. Путешествие садовника Семена Морцовкина в Южную Сибирь (1818–1821). — Известия Всесоюзного географического общества. 1937. Том 19. № 3. С. 458–466.

⁴ Daniil Vladimirovich Lebedev (1914–2005) and Moisey El'evich Kirpichnikov (1913–1995) were specialists in plant systematics and botanical bibliography, they worked in the Botanical institute (BIN) in Leningrad.



Sergei Lipshits, 1975 (Archive of Botanical Institute, Russian Academy of Sciences)

ence... arouse from his intense interest in science as a phenomenon of human culture”.⁵ Apart from his publications concerned with the history of particular Russian naturalists, S. Yu. Lipshits published a book on the history of the MOIP — “*Moscow Society of Naturalists for its 135-years history*”,⁶ and initiated a series of monographs on Russian naturalists.⁷ These are the facts, while here I would like to provide my own interpretation for Lipshits’ turn to the history of science. I would

suggest that Lipshits, when he began working for the MOIP — the oldest Russian society of naturalists, with its archives, manuscripts and collections — could not remain indifferent. Probably he believed that it was his duty to rescue the names of his predecessors from oblivion. When he began his research on the history of natural sciences, Lipshits realized “the need for a radical solution for the study of sources for the history of Russian botany”.⁸ That was how the very idea of compiling the dictionary emerged for the first time. Lipshits discussed it with academicians Vladimir I. Vernandsky, Vladimir L. Komarov, Nikolai D. Zelinskii and many other colleagues.

In 1938 Sergey Lipshits started collecting sources for the project. Quite likely, at first he did not realize the scope of work that had to be done. In 1942 he published an appeal to Russian botanists.⁹ Its

⁵ Д. В. Лебедев, М. Е. Кирпичников, 1965. С. 1472.

⁶ С. Ю. Липшиц. Московское общество испытателей природы за 135 лет его существования (1805–1940). Исторический очерк. Москва: Издательство МОИП, 1940. 135 с.

⁷ A number of books on Nikolai A. Zarudny, Nikolai A. Severtsov, Vasili F. Oschanin, G. I. Fisher von Waldheim, Ivan N. Gorozhankin, Geogrii S. Karelin and other scholars were published in this series edited by Sergei Lipshits.

⁸ Д. В. Лебедев, М. Е. Кирпичников, 1965. С. 1472.

⁹ С. Ю. Липшиц. Справочник Естествоиспытатели России и СССР. — Природа. 1942. № 5–6. С. 126–127; Idem. — Советская ботаника. 1942. №. 4–5. С. 91.

text suggests that at this stage of his project Lipshits planned to compile a reference book on *all Russian naturalists*; it would be a three volume edition with the first volume devoted to botanists. However, soon it became obvious that it would take ten volumes just to publish the entries on Russian botanists only.

During the Second World War Lipshits was actively collecting materials for his dictionary. As he reported in a letter to a colleague: “We work on the dictionary literally all days and nights”.¹⁰ In fact at the time Lipshits had many other assignments that required his attention: he was acting as the academic secretary of the MOIP (the society had its sessions at least twice a month), he was working on various projects carried out by the MOIP Commission “Science for the defense of the Motherland”. Apart from that, Vladimir L. Komarov, the President of the Academy of Sciences and the Russian Botanical Society, entrusted Lipshits with the task of editing “*Botanicheskii Zhurnal*” — the leading academic journal on botany in the USSR. In 1942-1945 Lipshits was almost alone in carrying out the editor’s work. Also, we should not forget awesome conditions of everyday life in Moscow in the war years.¹¹ However, Lipshits managed to maintain his correspondence with many botanists across the USSR.¹² Thanks to his vast correspondence he learned about the most obscure publications, about botanists from all parts of the Soviet Union. He asked some of his colleagues to be in charge of data collection on a certain region. His colleagues were fascinated with Lipshits’s project and were extremely supportive.¹³ Still, it is almost unfathomable that such enormous enterprise was carried out just by one man (his colleagues suggest that Lipshits completed about 95 per cent of all the work involved in com-

¹⁰ Letter by S. Yu. Lipschiz to P. A. Genkel’ from 14.12.1942. MOIP Archive. 1942. № 1536. P. 2–2ob. Pavel A. Genkel was a botanist and a phytophysiologist.

¹¹ Once after an air-raid Lipshits and some other MOIP employees had to remove 1500 buckets of broken glass from the MOIP premises. See: Letter by S. Yu. Lipshits to V. L. Komarov from 27.07.1942. Archive of Russian Academy of Science (Arkhiv Rossiyskoi akademii nauk – ARAN). 277 (fund)—4 (inventory)—898 (file). P. 7.

¹² The third inventory of the Lipshits collection (his correspondence) contains 723 files (Peterburgskii Filial Arkiva Rossiiskoi Akademii Nauk – hereafter PFA RAN – St. Petersburg Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences Archive. Fund 835, inventory 3).

¹³ Not all botanists were immediately prepared to support the idea and facilitate the execution of Lipshits’ project. His correspondents advised Lipshits to give a talk about his *Dictionary* at the BIN in order to explicate the concept and potential benefits of his project; they told him about their own efforts in propagating and explaining it.

piling the dictionary). In 1945 Lipshits was already working on the manuscript of the sixth volume (letters N-O-P).¹⁴

After the war the efforts of the MOIP, and especially of the MOIP “Defense Commission” received official recognition. The society received from the government a substantial sum of money — 500,000 rubles — paid at once, plus an annual grant of 300,000 rubles.¹⁵ In 1945 Sergey Lipshits was awarded with the Badge of Honour (*Orden “Znak pocheta”*). Projects on history of Russian science that were launched by the MOIP before the war nicely fitted ideological demands of the day: it was the time when the priority of Russian scholarship in every field of knowledge was asserted. Therefore in the early years after the war the MOIP, while planning its activities for the future, emphasized the need to continue carrying out its projects on “the study and dissemination of the history of Russian science, the protection of its priority in all the fields of natural sciences”.¹⁶ In 1950 the MOIP established its section for the history of natural sciences. In 1949, upon Stalin’s personal instructions, the MOIP received permission to retain its own publishing house, notwithstanding a general trend towards integrating smaller publishing houses into larger units and the initial proposal to merge the MOIP publishing house with the “Sovetskaya Nauka”.¹⁷ The future of the MOIP, Lipshits and his project seemed to be secure.

However there were negative signs as well. In the spring of 1945, the Academic Council of the Institute of Botany in Leningrad (*Botanicheskii Institut* – hereinafter BIN) voted for awarding the degree of Doctor of biological sciences to Lipshits. The President of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR Vladimir L. Komarov supported the Council’s move to submit the documents to the Higher Certifying Commission (*Vishaya attestacionnaya komissiya* - VAK) for its approval. Lipshits’ friends

¹⁴ E. M. Лавренко, 1984.

¹⁵ Decision of the Council of Ministers of USSR from 13.04.1946 about the expansion of the activity of society was signed by I.V. Stalin. MOIP Archive. 1950. № 1795. P. 7–8.

¹⁶ The order of Higher Education Minister S. V. Kaftanov “On MOIP activity” from 18.10.1950 № 1877, October 18, 1950. MOIP Archive. 1950. № 1798. P. 1–8; MOIP planning for 1949. P. 1. MOIP Archive. 1949. № 1772.

¹⁷ One of those who helped the MOIP to retain its publishing house was the Chief academic secretary of the Academy of Sciences academician Alexander V. Topichev. Letter by N. D. Zelinskii to A. V. Topichev from June 1949. MOIP Archive. 1949. № 1785. P. 78.

had already congratulated Sergei Lipshits with his doctoral degree.¹⁸ The Commission did not confirm Lipshits' doctoral degree without providing any explanation. By that time Lipshits had already published several books; many of his publications had been considered as a valuable contribution not only to fundamental science but also for applied research. But even letters of support written by academicians Vladimir L. Komarov (1869–1945), Vladimir N. Sukachev (1880–1967), Nikolai D. Zelinskii (1861–1953), corresponding members of the Academy of Sciences Nikolai V. Tsitsin (1898–1990), Aleksandr A. Grossgeim (1888–1848) and many other prominent scholars failed to solve the problem.¹⁹ Sergei Yu. Lipshits had never been awarded with the doctoral degree.

After the death of the most influential advocate of the *Dictionary* - Vladimir L. Komarov in December 1945, Lipshits was forced to justify his project carried out at the Institute of Botany. In 1948 he lost his position of a senior researcher at the BIN, "as all the work on the project "Russian botanists" at the institute had been terminated".²⁰

The Moscow Society of Naturalists also faced problems. In the late 1940s relative independence of the society was drastically curtailed. In 1949 the Ministry of Finance audited the MOIP. Among many detected transgressions there were excessive amounts of money paid "against the approved budget and the standard fees set by other publishing houses for technical and literary editorial work".²¹ The MOIP was also accused of making negative profit while publishing the *Dictionary*.²² In 1950 the Moscow University Library attempted to transform the MOIP Library into one of its divisions.²³ The MOIP was constantly

¹⁸ Letter by T. A. Rabotnov to S. Yu. Lipshiz from 26.05.1945. PFA RAN. 835–2–29. P. 1–13. Tikhon A. Rabotnov was a prominent specialist in plant geography, ecology and phytosociology from Moscow.

¹⁹ The file on awarding the degree of doctor of biological sciences to Sergei Yu. Lipshits. PFA RAN. 835–2–29. P. 1–13.

²⁰ In 1944–48 Lipshits besides his position in MOIP occupied position of senior researcher at the BIN. See: Personal file of Sergei Yu. Lipshits as an employee of the BIN, 1944–1948. PFA RAN. 273–3–1618. P. 18.

²¹ Report of the MOIP Council on the Society's activities in 1945–1950. MOIP Archive. 1950. № 1795. P. 39.

²² We should not take these statements at face value; it was a fine piece of Soviet bureaucratic demagoguery. In the early 1950s the Agitprop, while criticizing the MOIP publishing house for its losses, at the same time was accusing the publishing house of the All-Union society for nature protection for its 'pursuit of profits'. Russian State Archive of Social and Political History (RGASPI). 17–132–544. P. 47, 139.

²³ Minutes of the meeting MOIP Council for 1950. MOIP Archive. 1950. № 1792. P. 38–39.

drawn into conflict with the Ministry of Higher Education and Moscow University. New buildings were constructed for the University but the MOIP received no office space there, although earlier, in 1933, it allowed the University to occupy its premises in exchange for a smaller office.²⁴ The MOIP retained its own publishing house and even managed to expand its activities, however it failed to get the list of its staff approved.²⁵ In September 1950 Lipshits left the position of the Society's academic secretary — officially he stated his poor health as an excuse for resigning. However, if we take into account the rampant anti-Semitism of the day unleashed by the government, it is more plausible that he was forced to resign because of his Jewish background.

In 1947 the first volume of the *Dictionary* came out of print, it was soon followed by the second one. His friends and colleagues congratulated him on his “first brilliant victory”.²⁶ They knew how much energy Lipshits had spent on solving various technical issues involved in compiling and publishing the first volume. Many botanists wrote positive reviews, they were looking forward to the next volumes. However Lipshits' account of the history of botany was not acceptable for the Soviet regime, despite official declarations about the need to study the history of Russian natural sciences. For the Soviet authorities his history was too unbiased and explicit. “*The Materials for the History of the Academy of Sciences in the Soviet period (1917-1947)*” ‘edited’ by the President of the Academy of Sciences Sergei I. Vavilov (1891-1951) were more in tune with the times.²⁷

The first volume of the *Dictionary* contained biographies of such “unacceptable” scientists as: Gennadi I. Anufriev, who was not killed in the Second World War (as Lipshits believed) but “turned out to be a traitor” and fled with the retreating German army,²⁸ Robert I. Abolin, the entry on whom in the *Dictionary* contained some refer-

²⁴ Липшиц. Московское общество. С. 66.

²⁵ MOIP Archive. 1949. № 1784. P. 4, 7, 59, 70; 1950. № 1819, etc.

²⁶ See: Letter by B. A. Tichomirov to S. Yu. Lipschiz from 16.10.1947. PFA RAN. 835–3–273. P. 69. Boris Tikhomirov was a plant geographer and plant ecologist, researcher of Polar region, who worked in BIN.

²⁷ Материалы к истории Академии наук за советские годы (1917–1947). Под. Ред. С. И. Вавилова. Москва, Ленинград: Издательство АН СССР, 1950.

²⁸ Русские ботаники. Том. 1. 1947. С. 67; Draft letter by S. Yu. Lipshits to I. V. Stalin. Late 1947 or early 1948. PFA RAN. 835–2–64. P. 14.

the research team led by Nikolai I. Vavilov³³ as one of the leading schools of botany in Russia / the USSR. Moreover, in the second volume Lipshits tried to publish the entries on Nikolai I. Vavilov³⁴ and Dmitriy A. Gerasimov — a specialist in plant geography and in the peat studies who fell victim to repressions and perished.³⁵

The notorious August session of the VASKhNIL (the All-Union Academy of Agricultural Sciences) (1948) made the situation even worse. Many entries had to be rewritten in order to pay at least a lip-service to ‘the victories of the Michurin’s biology’. Lipshits was forced to make these concessions. In the preface for the third volume (which was published only in 1950) he glorified the achievements of the ‘Michurin’s biology’ and extensively quoted Trofim D. Lysenko.

For the third and subsequent volumes the MOIP formed the editorial board which discussed the content of the entries and the list of entries. There were a number of prominent botanists on the board: academician Vladimir N. Sukachev (the editor-in-chief), Pavel A. Genkel, Ivan E. Glushchenko, Mikhail V. Gorlenko, Nikolai E. Kabanov, Evgenii M. Lavrenko, Tikhon F. Rabotnov. In certain cases the editorial board had to consult with “competent institutions”, i.e. with the party, police and the state security authorities. For example, the board sought advice of Yuri A. Zhdanov (the Head of Science Department of the Party Central Committee) concerning the entries on Anton R. Zhebrak and Pyotr M. Zhukovskiy, who had been severely criticized at the August session of VASKhNIL.³⁶ In the end the entry on Zhukovskiy was included in the *Dictionary*,³⁷ while the one on Zhebrak was not, even if it conformed to the official line by

³³ Nikolai I. Vavilov (1887–1943) was a prominent Russian geneticist and plant breeder, who was also active in science policy and research administration. On the basis of various research institutions and centers that had been established in the late imperial Russia within the framework of the Ministry of agriculture, he created the VASKhNIL with its institutions. Vavilov was arrested in 1940 and died in prison.

³⁴ Proofread version of the 2nd volume. P. 11–21. PFA RAN. 835–1–154.

³⁵ *Ibid.* P. 254–256. PFA RAN. 835–1–154.

³⁶ Letter to U. A. Zhdanov. November 1949. MOIP Archive. 1949. № 1784. P. 3.

³⁷ Making final comments in his article on Pyotr M. Zhukovskiy, Lipshits wrote: “At the August session of the VASKhNIL Zh. spoke in defense of Morganism-Mendelism. However, by the end of the Session Zh. admitted that his speech had been a grave mistake and made a second statement claiming that he entirely agreed with the Michurin’s biology and would work for its future development for the benefit of our great Motherland and its people”. (Русские ботаники. Том 3. С. 300).

pledging the editors' allegiance to the ideas of Michurin's biology. The unpublished article on Zhebrak contained a very brief overview of the scholar's biography, the list of his works and a detailed exposé of his "faults" as a geneticist and a plant-breeder. In order to get the lists of Zhebrak's and Zhukovsky's works published, Lipshits was forced to make these claims that were obviously wrong.³⁸

For the fourth volume (and for subsequent volumes that he planned) Lipshits made a concession to the Agitprop (The Agitation and Propaganda Section of Central Committee of the Communist Party): the volume 'does not include some botanists who have few publications and also those for whom we failed to collect biographical data'.³⁹ This approach contradicted the original concept of the *Dictionary*: to provide *full* bibliography of botanical research in Russia.

Certainly, the future of the project was already problematic when the first volume had come out of print. In early 1948 Lipshits wrote a letter to the Agitprop.⁴⁰ The drafts of his letters to the Agitprop have been preserved in archives, as well as a draft of his letter to Stalin.

³⁸ In proofs for the third volume the entry on a plant breeder and geneticist Anton R. Zhebrak says: "Zh. applied wrong methods of the Mendel-Morgan's genetics..."; '...committed an unpatriotic act: published in a foreign journal an article, in which he expressed his solidarity with a number of reactionary foreign scholars, adherents of Morgan and Mendel, he misrepresented the situation in the Soviet biology, made a number of unjustified and inappropriate remarks about academician T. D. Lysenko, etc. Zh's article and behavior have been criticized by academic community. Zh's works written from the perspective of formal Morgan-Mendel genetics have been thoroughly criticized at the August session of the VASKhNIL (1948). In his letter to the editorial board of "*Pravda*" Zh. attempted to prove that he had not shared the position of Mendelism-Morganism. At the same time assured that he '... considered unacceptable for himself to maintain the positions which the Party Central Committee recognized as wrong'. In its reply to Zh. the editorial board of *Pravda* declared that it could not accept a number of erroneous statements made by Zh. By citing some fragments of his works, it clearly proved that Zh. had been extolling the founders of Mendelism-Morganism, that he had never used I. V. Michurin's methods in his experiments, had never recognized that acquired characteristics could be inherited, that Zh. and his laboratory have no real achievements. However, the editorial board of *Pravda* took notice of the statement made by Zh. and stated that his future behavior would show whether his words were sincere or not'. Proofs of 3rd volume, p. 286. PFA RAN. 835-1-155.

³⁹ Editorial note. — Русские ботаники. Том 4. 1952. С. 6; For entries on botanists that excluded from publication by the editorial board (letters K, L, M) see PFA RAN. 835-1-48, 79, 83.

⁴⁰ Explanatory note by S. Yu. Lipshits to the Agitprop. PFA RAN. 835-2-16. P. 18-19; Letter by S. Yu. Lipshits to the Agitprop, late February, 1948. PFA RAN. 835-2-64. P. 11-12.

I do not know whether his letter to Stalin was actually sent, and if so, to whom it was delivered. The letter itself is a subservient appeal not to ruin the work that consumed ten years of the author's life and to give him a chance to continue his work on the project.⁴¹ Lipshits, as well the MOIP and many other scholars, was prepared to make substantial concessions just to continue to publish the *Dictionary*.

Lipshits received many letters of support from his colleagues — his friends and other scholars who did not know him personally. I would like to quote one of these letters written by Daniil V. Lebedev, a friend of Lipshits who was a very demanding critic: “I have been studying [the fourth volume] very carefully, and I have found no deficiencies (alas!). How can we praise you? There is nothing comparable to your work anywhere. Do you know, Sergei Yul’evich, I must frankly tell you something that we have been saying in private among ourselves: your ‘*Russian botanists*’ is a classic book in bibliography. The fourth volume makes it plain clear. Just don’t think too high of yourself!”⁴²

A few words should be said about the reviews on the *Dictionary* as a form of collegial support. Early reviews of the Lipshits’s *Dictionary* were quite typical of this genre of scholarly publications: generally, they were positive, while containing useful suggestions and criticisms. They appeared in a broad range of periodicals in the field of biology — from a well established journal with a solid academic reputation ‘*Botanicheskii Zhurnal*’ (‘Botanical Journal’) to Lisenkoist ‘*Agrobiologiya*’ (‘Agrobiology’) — primarily addressing academic community. Later botanists began to use reviews as the means to persuade the authorities that the *Dictionary* was indeed a valuable contribution to scholarship. Botanists wrote about patriotism, about establishing the priority of Russian scientists, about the applied issues discussed in the *Dictionary*. They claimed that no other country in the world had anything comparable to the *Dictionary*, e.g. that the Americans — a whole research institute in the US — attempted to carry out a similar project but failed, while in the USSR it had been accomplished by a single man, etc. They wrote about ‘the historic session of the VASKh-

⁴¹ Draft letter by S. Yu. Lipshits to I. V. Stalin. Late 1947 or early 1948. PFA RAN. 835–2–64. P. 13–15.

⁴² Letter by D. V. Lebedev to S. Yu. Lipshits from 16.05.1952. PFA RAN. 835–3–159. P. 92.

NIL': allegedly its resolutions were extremely beneficial for every botanist in the country. Even the steadfast opponents of Lysenko, such as Vladimir I. Polyanskii had to make these ritual claims.⁴³

The Agitprop officials paid attention to other things: they were not happy with a substantial number of foreign scholars who were mentioned in the *Dictionary* as influential for the rise of botanical research in Russia, with the social background of many botanists (amateur botanists, especially), they were irritated by entries and references to N.I. Vavilov's associates, to geneticists, to specialists in all other applied branches of biology who fell victims to the Stalinist repressions. As it turned out, the authorities were not interested in providing scholars with a good reference book containing detailed information on all Russian botanists. Only those scientists who were considered to be 'acceptable' by the Soviet ideologists were permitted to remain in the history of Soviet science – and their opinions were often unpredictable and inconsistent.

Remarkably, all scholars who raised their voice in support of the *Dictionary* (all of them!) emphasized the fact that it featured not only the leading scientists but also those 'minor' figures who left very few publications or collections of specimens, and for whom very few biographical data were known. It was this concept that botanists defended with a great vigor, yet at the same time it was the most unacceptable for the Agitprop. Botanists used various means trying to defend the project: they published reviews in academic periodicals, discussed the *Dictionary* at the meetings of their research institutes and academic societies, emphasizing the need to carry on the publication. Acting upon Armen L. Takhtadzhian's suggestion,⁴⁴ Boris A. Tikhomirov and other botanists at the All-Union Botanical Society and the Institute of Botany of the Academy of Sciences wrote a number of letters in support of the publication. The letters were addressed to the MOIP and to the president of the MOIP Nikolai D. Zelinskii.⁴⁵

⁴³ В. И. Полянский. Русские ботаники. Том 4 [Review]. — Ботанический журнал. 1952. Том. 37. № 4. С. 550–551.

⁴⁴ A specialist in plant systematics and phylogeny, later the director of the BIN.

⁴⁵ Letter by A. P. Takhtadzhian to S. Yu. Lipshitz from 06.04.1951. PFA RAN. 835–2–64. P. 27; Letter by the Botanical Society to MOIP. spring 1951. MOIP Archive. 1951. № 1862. P. 16; Letter by B. A. Tikhomirov to S. Yu. Lipshits. Early March 1952. PFA RAN. 835–3–273. P. 61; Letter from the Botanical Society to the President of the MOIP N. D. Zelinskii from 03.03.1952. PFA RAN. 835–3–273. P. 62.

In order to publish the *Dictionary*, the MOIP (an institution with a very modest budget) had to cover the production costs: to pay the salaries of the compiler and editors, their assistants and typists, to procure quality paper, cardboard and calico for binding, to provide the printing press. In the Soviet Union all these tasks were extremely challenging. When the paper finally arrived, its quality proved to be very poor; cardboard and calico were not delivered at all. In 1950 the President of the MOIP Nikolay D. Zelinskii had to address the President of the Academy of Sciences Sergey I. Vavilov asking him to interfere and assist the society in solving these problems.⁴⁶

In 1950 the MOIP and BIN began to negotiate: from the start it was suggested that the BIN would provide support for the publication on par with the MOIP. Indeed, the BIN already featured on the title page of the first volume of the *Dictionary* but in practice almost everything was done by the MOIP.⁴⁷ In September 1950, as it has already been mentioned, Lipshits was forced to resign from the position of the MOIP academic secretary⁴⁸ but he continued working for the MOIP on a contract basis. Having no permanent position at the BIN, he was doing contract work for the Institute contributing to *Flora of the USSR*.⁴⁹ It was only in 1953 when he received a permanent position at the BIN. He left Moscow for good and moved to Leningrad.

By late summer 1951 the MOIP found itself in a very difficult po-

⁴⁶ Letter by N. D. Zelinskii to S. I. Vavilov. MOIP Archive. 1950. № 1820. P. 5. Zelinskii's appeal to Sergei I. Vavilov could be explained by in two possible ways. The first reason was formal, it was mentioned by Zelinskii in his letter: the Dictionary had the name of the Academy of Sciences on its title page. The second reason Zelinskii did not mention but it could be easily guessed: the compilers of the Dictionary had enormous respect for the VIR, its staff and Nikolai I. Vavilov in particular. Presumably, Sergei I. Vavilov knew that Lipshits was trying to include an entry on his brother in the second volume.

⁴⁷ The support, which the BIN provided for the Dictionary, was rather limited: BIN employees (Kirpichnikov, Lebedev, Tikhomirov and a few others) provided Lipshits with required information, while in 1944–48 Lipshits was a part-time senior researcher in the BIN.

⁴⁸ His resignation was a painful loss for the MOIP. Several years later Vladimir N. Sukachev (the President of the MOIP at that time) complained that the society was not doing well and connected it with the fact that the MOIP had no academic secretary who would match Lipshits. (Letter by T. A. Rabotnov to S. Yu. Lipshits from 27.04.1955. PFA RAN. 835–3–225. P. 38)

⁴⁹ “Флора СССР” (1934–1964) in 30 volumes. The project was launched by the BIN under the supervision of Vladimir L. Komarov. It contains descriptions of the vascular plant species of the USSR.

sition. The entries written for the *Dictionary* could not be published without a prior discussion and approval of the editorial board. Technical issues, such as the supply of paper and cardboard, the day-to-day operation of the print shop and warehouse, the subscription for the *Dictionary*, required constant attention. There were problems with the distribution of the published volumes: some of them were left to rot in the MOIP warehouse,⁵⁰ while outraged subscribers who had not received their copies were sending letters of complaint to the MOIP. The MOIP publishing house suffered heavy losses.

Despite all these obstacles the fourth volume came out of print in 1952, at the same time the proofs of the fifth volume were ready for printing. Just a few months earlier, in the autumn of 1951, the BIN finally agreed that it would cover publication costs of the *Dictionary* beginning with its fifth volume.⁵¹

The Agitprop was of a different opinion. The fifth volume was never published. In late 1952 the Agitprop submitted to the Central Committee of the Communist Party the draft of the resolution: the publication of the *Dictionary* was to be terminated. The termination of the project was justified on the grounds that "the four published volumes of the *Dictionary* are full of meaningless biographical entries on the persons who are in no way related to science. The *Dictionary* propagates pseudoscientific works written by the adherents of Weissman and Morgan. In a number of cases it gives erroneous, allegedly 'objective' evaluation of scholarly research; it overestimates the role played by foreigners in the development of science in Russia".⁵² Instead, the Agitprop suggested to publish a three or four volume reference book 'on the prominent botanists of the peoples of the USSR'. At least, as the Minister of Higher Education Vsevolod N. Stoletov believed, it would placate academic community in general and academician Vladimir N. Sukachev in particular.⁵³ The party bureaucracy

⁵⁰ Information provided by Andrei K. Sytin.

⁵¹ See correspondence exchanged between the Vice President of the MOIP academician Pavel A. Baranov and the director of BIN Vasiliy F. Kuprevich. MOIP Archive. 1951. № 1869. P. 50–51; PFA RAN. 835–2–64. P. 25–27, 30–33.

⁵² The resolution of the Secretariat of the CC CPSU on the Dictionary "Russkie botaniki". RGASPI. 17–132–544. P. 145–146.

⁵³ A note written by the Agitprop to the Secretary of the Party Central Committee N. A. Mikhailov, December 15, 1952. RGASPI. 17–132–544. P. 137.

was evidently very much against the idea of publicizing biographical data on all Russian and Soviet botanists. As a result, the project was terminated, the MOIP lost its own publishing house, while its senior editor, G.N. Endel'man, was formally reprimanded.

All further efforts to save the *Dictionary* were futile. The situation became even more desperate when in the early 1952, the head of the BIN, Vasilii F. Kuprevich, who was one of the strongest advocates of the *Dictionary*, was appointed as the President of the Byelorussian Academy of Sciences and left Leningrad for Minsk.⁵⁴ It took some time to find a replacement. When academician Pavel A. Baranov was finally appointed as the head of the Institute, he fell seriously ill and therefore could be of little help in defending the project. In 1952, for the whole year, the future of the *Dictionary* was kept in suspension.

In the late 1952 or in 1953 Lipshits' apartment was searched and the manuscripts of the sixth and subsequent volumes of his *Dictionary* were apparently seized by the KGB. Undoubtedly they were destroyed. Today it is virtually impossible even to establish the date and the particular details of the search, as the KGB kept files on the cases that had not been tried by court only for five years destroying them afterwards.

All the talks about publishing a reference book on 'prominent botanists' brought no result. Today it is difficult to say if there were some unknown obstacles, or Lipshits himself was against the project. If it had been carried out, it would have posed a very difficult problem of selection: who should be considered as an 'outstanding' scholar, and who should not? Some friends tried to persuade Lipshits to take on this task.⁵⁵ In the 1950s his friends and colleagues in their letters to Lipshits persistently addressed this issue.⁵⁶ In the late 1953 one more review of the *Dictionary* was published in *Lesnoye Khoziaistvo*

⁵⁴ Later Kuprevich, being a conscientious communist, had to comply with the Agit-prop resolution. See: A note written by the Agitprop to the Secretary of the Party Central Committee G. M. Malenkov. RGASPI. 17-132-544. P. 138.

⁵⁵ See for example: Letter by Kirpichnikov to S. Yu. Lipshits from 13.02.1953. PFA RAN. 835-3. № 124. P. 47ob.

⁵⁶ See for example: Letter of Kirpichnikov to S. Yu. Lipshits from 22.07.1955. PFA RAN. 835-3. № 124. P. 31; Letter to the MOIP Council by a full member of the Georgian Academy of Sciences L. Davitashvili from 20.08.1957. PFA RAN. 835-2-64. P. 43-44.

(a professional journal on forestry);⁵⁷ and in 1955 another one appeared in *Botanische Jahrbücher für Systematik, Pflanzengeschichte und Pflanzengeographie*.⁵⁸

In the mid-1950s Lipshits and his colleagues tried to resume their work on the *Dictionary*. *Botanichesky Zhurnal* published a note informing its readers that the BIN had begun working on a reference book 'Botanists of the USSR' that would contain biographical and bibliographical data. The journal invited botanists to send their autobiographies and the lists of publications to the BIN address and provided instructions on writing a CV. It named Pavel A. Baranov (the head of the BIN and a corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences) as the editor-in-chief, and Sergei Yu. Lipshits, Danil V. Lebedev, Oleg V. Zalenskiy as editors.⁵⁹ Vladimir N. Sukachev provided much support for the project.⁶⁰ Today we can only guess why their initiative never produced any outcome. So far I have failed to find any documents, in which the attempts to resume the publication were discussed. There is a reference that Sergei Yu. Lipshits was hoping to resume his work on the fifth volume — and not on a new abridged dictionary.⁶¹ In the mid-1970s the BIN and the Institute for the History of Science and Technology (IIET) raised the question again.⁶² In the late 1990s the BIN considered the idea of publishing only the fifth volume, yet no results were achieved.

A few copies of the proofs of the fifth volume have survived — they are preserved in the St. Petersburg branch of the Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences (PFA RAN), in the BIN Library, in the MOIP Library and in the reference section of the Russian State Library. The Lipshits collection housed at the PFA RAN contains working materials for the *Dictionary* — scholars' autobiographies, drafts

⁵⁷ А. И. Котов. Деятели отечественного лесоводства в словаре "Русские ботаники". — Лесное хозяйство. 1953. № 10. С. 94–95.

⁵⁸ Th. Eckardt. Russische Botaniker I–IV. — *Botanische Jahrbücher für Systematik, Pflanzengeschichte und Pflanzengeographie*. 1955. Bd. 76. Hft. 4. S. 45–46.

⁵⁹ Ко всем ботаникам Советского Союза. — *Ботанический журнал*. 1956. Том 41. № 9. P. 1413–1414.

⁶⁰ Letter by T. A. Rabotnov to S. Yu. Lipshits from 27.04.1955. PFA RAN. 835–3–225. P. 38.

⁶¹ М. Е. Кирпичников, В. И. Грубов, 1984.

⁶² Т. А. Работнов, В. Н. Тихомиров, 1984.

for some entries, notes on bibliography.⁶³ In 1953 Lipshits received a position of a researcher at the BIN Herbarium, and in 1958 he was appointed as a curator of its Siberian section.⁶⁴ Until his death he was doing research in the field of botanical bibliography, history of botany, and plant systematic.

* * *

Now, as I return to the subject of the conference, I would like to stress: when we are discussing national, Soviet, socialist, Nazi or imperial science, we should be very careful. A historian of science should distinguish between the rhetoric employed by scholars and their true convictions. A good scholar should remain faithful to the high standards of science and research, and these idealistic motives should not be forgotten when we study the history of science and analyze particular projects.

The history of the *Dictionary* demonstrates that a true scholar, when he or she is working in a repressive environment lacking social and political freedom, is forced to use the language expected from him/her by the authorities, to adapt it to fit his/her own scientific purposes. However, being a professional scholar, Sergei Yu. Lipshits could not or did not want to make his *Dictionary* a showcase for ‘the achievements of socialism’, or the Soviet Union, or the great Russian nation. He abstained from giving entries on fake peasant ‘geniuses’.⁶⁵ His *Dictionary* proved to be unacceptable for the Soviet ideology, regardless of all the lip-service he was forced to pay to the Michurin’s biology, to socialism and official patriotism. Unfortunately, the

⁶³ PFA RAN, F. 835–1.

⁶⁴ Sergei Lipshits was able to get a position in the BIN only in 1953. Up to March 1957 he was a junior researcher (A file on promoting S. Yu. Lipshits to the position of a senior researcher. BIN Archive. 273–10–31).

⁶⁵ There were scholars who were quite eager to make these ‘discoveries’. Thus, in June, 1949, V. I. Cherkasov (a senior researcher of the Institute for Meadow Studies) presented to the MOIP Botanical section a paper “On one Russian priority: the origins of potato”. In his paper Cherkasov claimed: all history of potato domestication had been falsified. The ancestors of modern wild potato had originated in Kamchatka and Alaska (“the Russian America”) where these plants had been domesticated by Russian peasants. After the great outbreak of potato blight of the 1840s Russian peasants breed out new varieties of potato resistant to the blight. See: MOIP Archive. 1949. № 1785. P. 49–54.

Agitprop was quite able to read between the lines and did not take all these references at face value.

The Soviet state ideology of the late 1940s—the early 1950s left its imprint on the language of the *Dictionary*. However, it contains objective information: it provides a reader with valuable data on scholars' biographies, on their research and academic publications. The book will remain a valuable resource not only for historians of biology but also for botanists, regardless of any ideological transformations in Russia. Even the entry on A. R. Zhebrak is of a certain value, as it contains the list of his publications. The history of the *Dictionary* has certain common features with Lipshits's early botanical research. When the Soviet regime was looking for domestic rubber plants, botanists went on field trips and examined plants in the vast areas that had been very poorly studied before. The demand for natural rubber disappeared but the results of their research on plant geography and taxonomy have retained their value ever since.

Sergei Lipshitsi leksikon „Vene botaanikud” – lõpetamata projekti lugu

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Sergei Lipshitsi koostatud teatmik „Vene botaanikud” on hindamatu teabeallikas kõigile Vene botaanika ajaloo huvilistele. Teos oli kavandatud kümneköitelisena ja selle väljaandja oli Moskva Looduseuurijate Selts. Tegelikult tegi suuresti üks mees – Sergei Lipshits (1905–1983), kes kogus materjale, koostas elulugusid ja bibliograafiaid. Teatmeteose eesmärk oli haarata võimalikult kõiki botaanikuid Venemaal XVIII–XX sajandil, sh amatööre.

Materjali kogumine algas 1938 ja jätkus Teise maailmasõja ajal. 1945. aastal sai Lipshits sõjaaegse tegevuse eest ordeni Austuse märk, kuid kõrgem atestatsioonikomisjon (VAK) keeldus tema doktorikraadi kinnitamisest. 1947 ilmunud leksikoni kaks esimest köidet järgisid enam-vähem esialgset plaani. Pärast 1948. aastal peetud üleliidulise põllumajandusteaduse akadeemia augustisessiooni, kus kilbile tõsteti lõssenkim, sattusid kõik vanad Mendelit järginud geneetikud põlu alla. Võimudele muutus häirivaks nii Lipshitsi juudi päritolu kui ka fakt, et ta oli oma leksikonis võtnud vaatluse alla ka represseeritud teadlasi. Projekti päästmiseks nõustus Lipshits jätma osa ebasoovitavaid isikuid välja ja kasutama mõne teise kohta käibivat nõukogulikku retoorikat. Neljanda köite puhul (1952) pidi koostaja lubama partei keskkomitee agitatsiooni- ja propagandaosakonnale, et väljaandes ei kajastata enam „neid teadlasi, kellel on vähe publikatsioone ja kelle kohta ei õnnestunud biograafilisi andmeid leida”. Esimese nelja trükist ilmunud köitega oli jõutud K-täheni.

1952. aastal keelas Agitprop edasise töö leksikoniga, „kuna see sisaldab vähetähtsaid isikuid, Weissmanni ja Mendeli väärõpetuste järgijaid ja liiga palju välismaalasi”. Kinni pandi ka Moskva Looduseuurijate Seltsi kirjastus. 1952 lõpus või 1953 alguses otsis KGB Lipshitsi korteri läbi ja konfiskeeris käsikirjad. Positiivsed

retsensioonid, kus rõhutati, et ameeriklastel ei ole nii väärtuslikku teatmeteost ja et iga patrioot peab teadma Vene botaanika ajalugu jms, kujutasid endast teadlaste kollektiivset toetusaktsiooni, kuid ei muutnud enam olukorda. Ei aidanud isegi kirjalik pöördumine Stalini poole. Viies köide (M–L) jäi ilmumata. Leksikoni viiendast köitest on säilinud mõned käsikirjad ja kuuendast visandeid Lipshitsi isiklike materjalide hulgas Venemaa TA arhiivis, ülejäänud KGB ilmselt hävitas. Lipshitsist sai aga 1953. aastal TA botaanika instituudi herbaariumi hoidja ja 1958. aastal Siberi-sektsiooni juhataja.