

Moscow doctor A.G. Dreytser – author of “The Notes of an Ambulance physician”*

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Abstract

We have attempted to present the scientific biography of Alexander Grigorievich Dreytser, the author of “The Notes of an Ambulance physician” – a popular documentary work on the life of Moscow and Muscovites during the Great Patriotic War. We have reconstructed the main points of life and activities of A.G. Dreytser and discovered a number of facts in his biography related to his studying at Strasbourg University (1911–1914) and Imperial Moscow University (1915–1917), participation in the First World War and activities in 1918–1941. The analysis of the materials stored in the State Archive of the Russian Federation, the Central State Archive of the City of Moscow, the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art, as well as the personal archive of the Dreytser family, allowed us to clarify many points related to Dreytser’s life and activities during the time prior to the creation of *The Notes*. This article is based upon the results of a comparative analysis of the texts of *The Notes* and A.G. Dreytser’s Ph.D. dissertation “The Material on the Question of Sudden Death: According to the Data of Morgues, Moscow City Emergency Stations and the Department of Clinical Examination of the Central Polyclinic of the People’s Commissariat for Health of the USSR”. This article considers the hypothesis of the unity of the events that took place in Moscow during the Great Patriotic War and were described in the dissertation and *The Notes*. More complete historical and biographical data on A.G. Dreytser allowed us to prove the documentary nature of *The Notes*, expand the scope of known facts about the organisation of medicine during the war and clarify some circumstances of the history of Russian medicine as a whole.

Keywords

history of medicine, Soviet medicine, A.G. Dreytser, “The Notes of an Ambulance physician”, Historical-Biographical Method, World War II, World War I, Imperial Moscow University

Introduction

Many scientific works, studies and literary works are dedicated to the activities of Soviet physicians during the Great Patriotic War. Alexander Grigorievich Dreytser (1890–1970) made history in Russian culture as the author of “The Notes of an Ambulance Physician” (Moskva prifrontovaya...), a popular documentary work on the life of Moscow and Muscovites during the Great Patriotic War, based upon personal notes and the archive of the author. Virtually no scientific and documentary work on the life of Moscow in 1941–1943 doesn’t go without mentioning the notes of Dr. Dreytser, who showed

events, life and relationships of its inhabitants during the difficult years of war as seen by an ambulance physician.

Despite the importance of this historical evidence of the activities of physicians in front-line Moscow, there’s no information about the author of this work in the special literature. Modern information technologies allowed the creators of various Internet resources to repeatedly copy the text of “The Notes of an Ambulance Physician”, distorting information about A.G. Dreytser, a Moscow doctor and scientist, a man with remarkable destiny, a witness to many significant historical events of the past century.

The reconstruction of A.G. Dreytser’s biography was carried out on the basis of archival sources stored in the State Archive of the Russian Federation, the Cen-

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tral State Archive of the City of Moscow, the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art, as well as the personal archive of the Dreytser family.¹

A.G. Dreytser's Biography excerpts

Alexander Girshevich Dreytser was born on the 12th of October 1890 in a Moscow merchant family. Soon afterwards, the family moved to the city of Lodz (under the Russian Empire until 1917, now Poland) where A.G. Dreytser spent his childhood and youth. He received his secondary education at the Lodz Commercial School (a four-year programme), and sat his Certificate of Maturity exams in the First Voronezh Gymnasium in 1911 (Fig. 1). Such migration around the country was caused by orders on the percentage rate for admission of Jews and Poles to gymnasia and universities, issued in 1887. In this regard, A.G. Dreytser received his further education abroad, which was a common practice for Jews at the time.

In 1911, Alexander entered the Medical Faculty of the University of Strasbourg located in Alsace and therefore situated in the territory of the German Empire in the period in question (which is currently the territory of France). There he finished three full courses and passed the preclinical examination for foreigners with a total score of “good” on the 12th of March 1914, which is confirmed by the Certificate issued to him and signed by Fehling, the Dean of the Medical Faculty of the University of Strasbourg (fig. 2).²

From March to July 1914, A.G. Dreytser was a house officer in the clinic of the University of Strasbourg and “performed patient examinations and chemical and microscopic research, partially independently, partially under the direction of [further text is illegible – E.D., E.P.] a doctor” (fig. 3).³ Whilst studying at the University of Strasbourg in Germany, A.G. Dreytser met L.I. Mandelstam, the future outstanding Russian

and Soviet physicist and Academician of the USSR Academy of Sciences, who at the time was an assistant to K.F. Braun and taught a course in applied physics, and later on became Alexander Grigorievich's patient.⁴

The First World War disrupted Alexander Grigorievich's plans. On the 1st of August 1914 he, like several thousand of his compatriots (students, holiday-makers and tourists, businessmen, transit passengers), found himself in a difficult position in the territory of a country that had entered the war with the Russian empire, since “all men, who are Russian nationals from 18 to 50 years of age, who fell into the category of liable for military service, were subject to arrest and received the status of prisoners of war” (Abdrashitov and Kruchkov 2011). The information about this period in Alexander Grigorievich's life is very scant – there are only a couple of lines in his autobiography submitted to Imperial Moscow University: “I was caught by the war in Germany. Released in October 1914”.⁵ Apparently, he went through all the trials that all Russian citizens who temporarily found themselves in the enemy territory, had to face (Abdrashitov and Kruchkov 2011).

The following fact shows the attitude of the German medical professional community to the events of the summer of 1914. It was on the 1st of August 1914, when the status of Russian nationals, who found themselves in Germany and Austria-Hungary, and their subsequent internment was announced, that the clinic of the University of Strasbourg, in which A.G. Dreytser worked as a house officer, and Dr. Seterau personally, prepared a certificate confirming this fact and recommending him as “showing great eagerness and diligence”.⁶

In Russia, “in July and December 1914, and then in the spring of 1915... 1,438 acting physicians were called to arms” (Gladkikh 1997, p. 19). In October 1914, through the Russian Red Cross, A.G. Dreytser volunteered to join the army and, according to the Regulation on Acting Officials enacted on the 19th of June 1894 by the Highest Approval,⁷ was enrolled as an acting doctor, despite the fact that he wasn't a student of any Russian higher education institution.

¹ The archive was compiled by his son, Honoured Scientist of the Russian Federation, the USSR and the RSFSR State Prize laureate, Doctor of Technical Sciences, Professor of the Moscow Aviation Institute, Genrikh Alexandrovich Dreytser (1934–2004).

² TsGAM (Central State Archive of the City of Moscow). F. 418. I. 329. C. 937. P. 3. [Certificate of passing the preclinical examination for foreigners, issued to Alexander Dreytser from Moscow, Russia, on the 12th of March 1914 (copy)]. The information on the signing of the Certificate by Dean of the Faculty of Medicine Fehling is confirmed by a notarised translation of this document stored at TsGAM.

³ TsGAM. F. 418. I. 329. C. 937. P. 8. [The Certificate of Candidate of Medicine Alexander Dreytser's internship at the University Clinic in Strasbourg, issued on the 1st of August, 1914. Translation from German certified by Notary Public Ilyashevich in Minsk, on the 25th of September, 1914 (copy)]. The originals of the Certificates were lost during the First World War.

⁴ Personal archive of the Dreytser family.

⁵ TsGAM. F. 418. I. 329. C. 937. P. 9. [Autobiography of A.G. Dreytser, submitted to Imperial Moscow University].

⁶ TsGAM. F. 418. I. 329. C. 937. P. 8. [The Certificate of Candidate of Medicine Alexander Dreytser's internship at the University Clinic in Strasbourg, issued on the 1st of August, 1914. Translation from German certified by Notary Public Ilyashevich in Minsk, on the 25th of September, 1914 (copy)].

⁷ Code of Laws and Orders of the Government for Medical and Sanitary Issues in the Empire. Saint Petersburg, 1895–1896. Issue 1–3; Medical and Sanitary Legislation in Russia. Legalisation and Orders of the Government. Saint Petersburg, 1913.

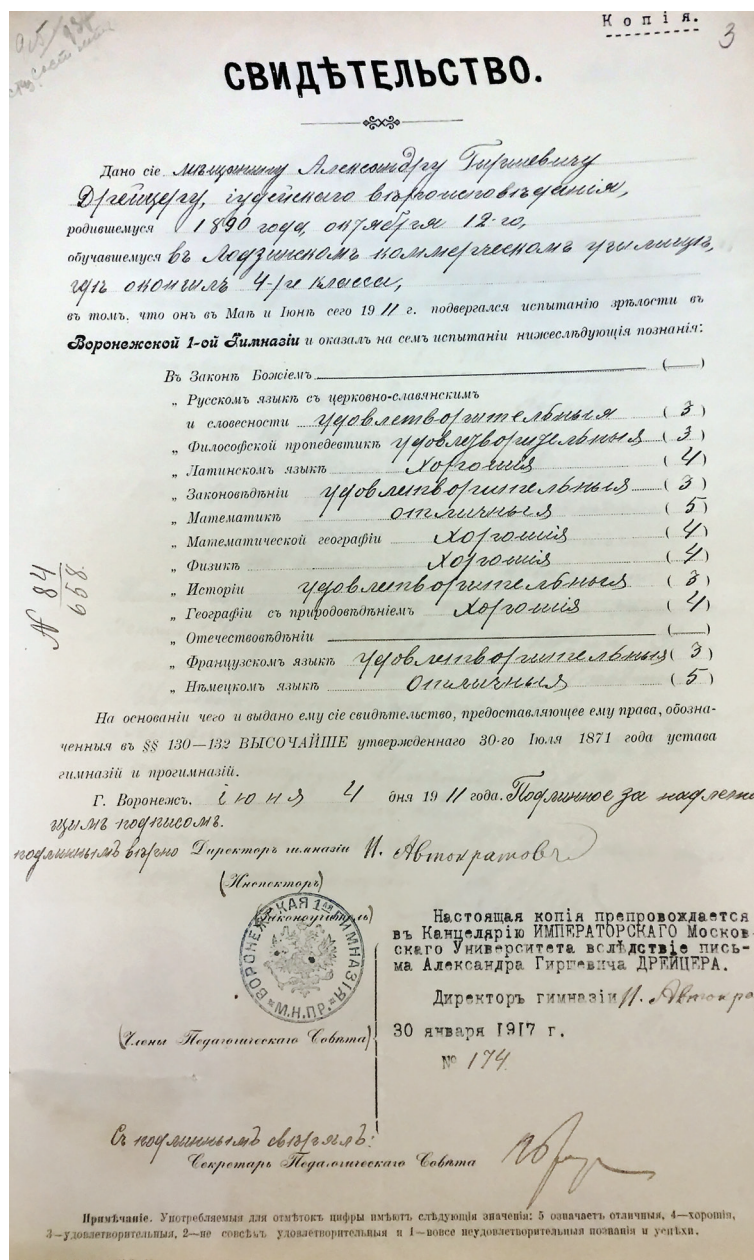


Fig. 1. A copy of A.G. Dreytser’s “Test of maturity” certificate from the First Voronezh Gymnasium.⁸
TsGAM. F. 418. I. 329. C. 937. P. 2.

⁸ Text on the picture: No. 84 658

Certificate

Issued to the commoner Alexander Girshevich Dreytser of Jewish religion, born on the 12th of October 1890, who studied at the Lodz Commercial School and finished 4 years, testifying that in June 1911 he underwent his maturity test at the First Voronezh Gymnasium and showed the following knowledge:

The Law of God,

Russian language and Old Church Slavonic Satisfactory (3)

Philosophical propaedeutic Satisfactory (3)

Latin Good (4)

Law Satisfactory (3)

Maths Excellent (5)

Physics Good (4)

History Satisfactory (3)

Geography and Nature studies Good (4)

French Satisfactory (3)

German Excellent (5)

On the basis of which this certificate was issued to him, granting him the rights indicated in §130–132 of the Gymnasium Guidelines enacted on the 30th of July 1871 by Highest Approval.

Voronezh, 4th of June 1911

Authentic and true:

Head of the Gymnasium I. Avtokratov (signature)

This copy is transmitted to the Office of the Imperial Moscow University due to Alexander Girshevich Dreytser’s request.

30/01/1917

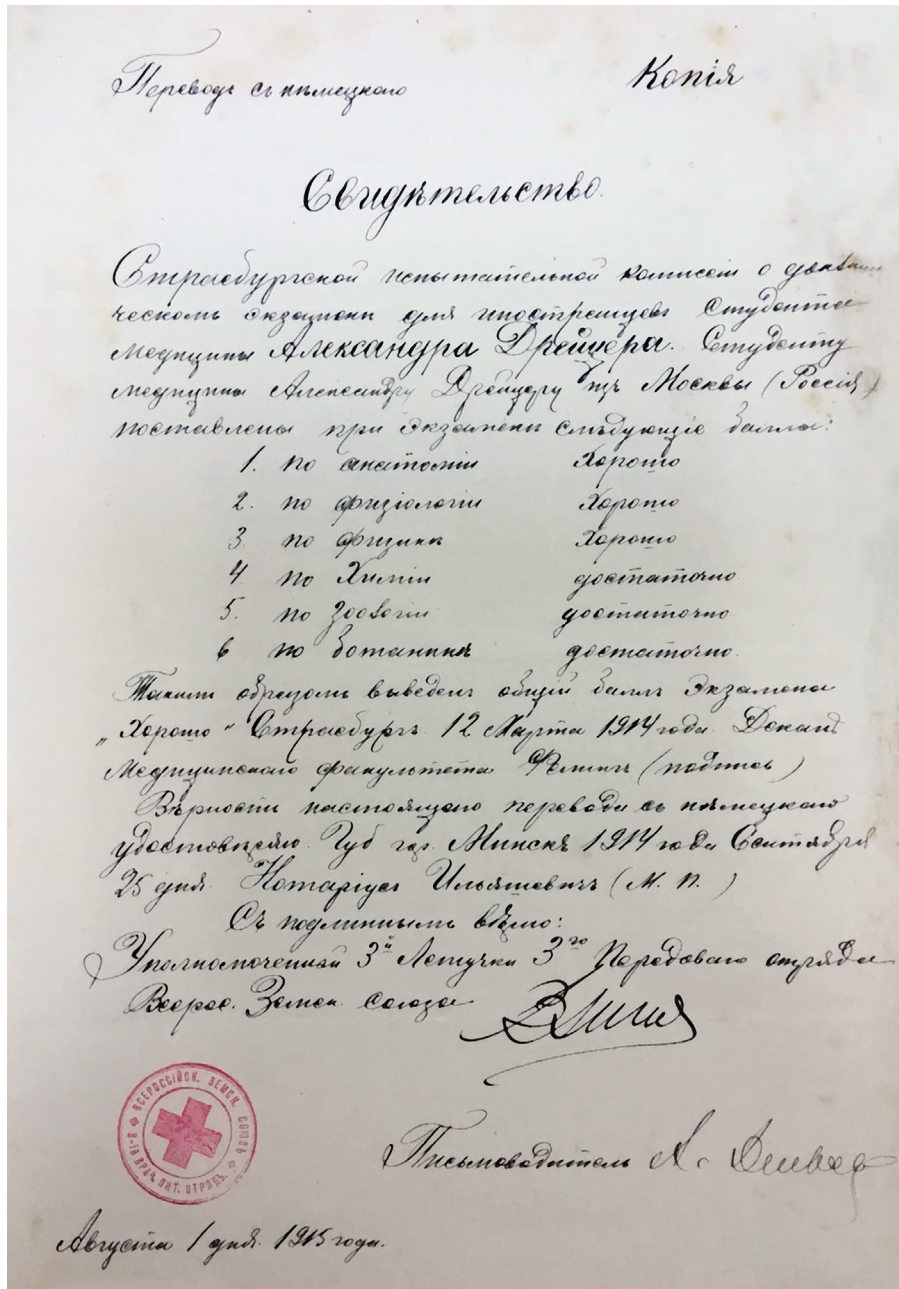


Fig. 2. Copy of the certificate confirming that A.G. Dreytser passed preclinical examination at the University of Strasbourg.⁹

TsGAM. F. 418. I. 329. C. 937. P. 3.

⁹ Text on the picture:
 Translation from German.

Copy.

The Certificate of the Strasbourg Examination Commission on the preclinical examination for a foreign medicine student Alexander Dreytser. Medical student Alexander Dreytser from Moscow (Russia) was given the following points for the examination:

Anatomy	Good
Physiology	Good
Physics	Good
Chemistry	Sufficient
Zoology	Sufficient

Botany Sufficient

Thus, the total score of the examination is "good".
 Strasbourg. 12th of March 1914. Fehling, Dean of the International Faculty.

I certify the fidelity of this translation from German.
 Minsk. 25th of September 1914. Notary Public Ilyashevich (M.P.)
 Authentic and true:

Commissioner of the 3rd Field Detachment of the 3rd Vanguard Detachment of the All-Russian Zemsky Union

Signature
 Dreytser A.G. Signature

1st of August 1915.

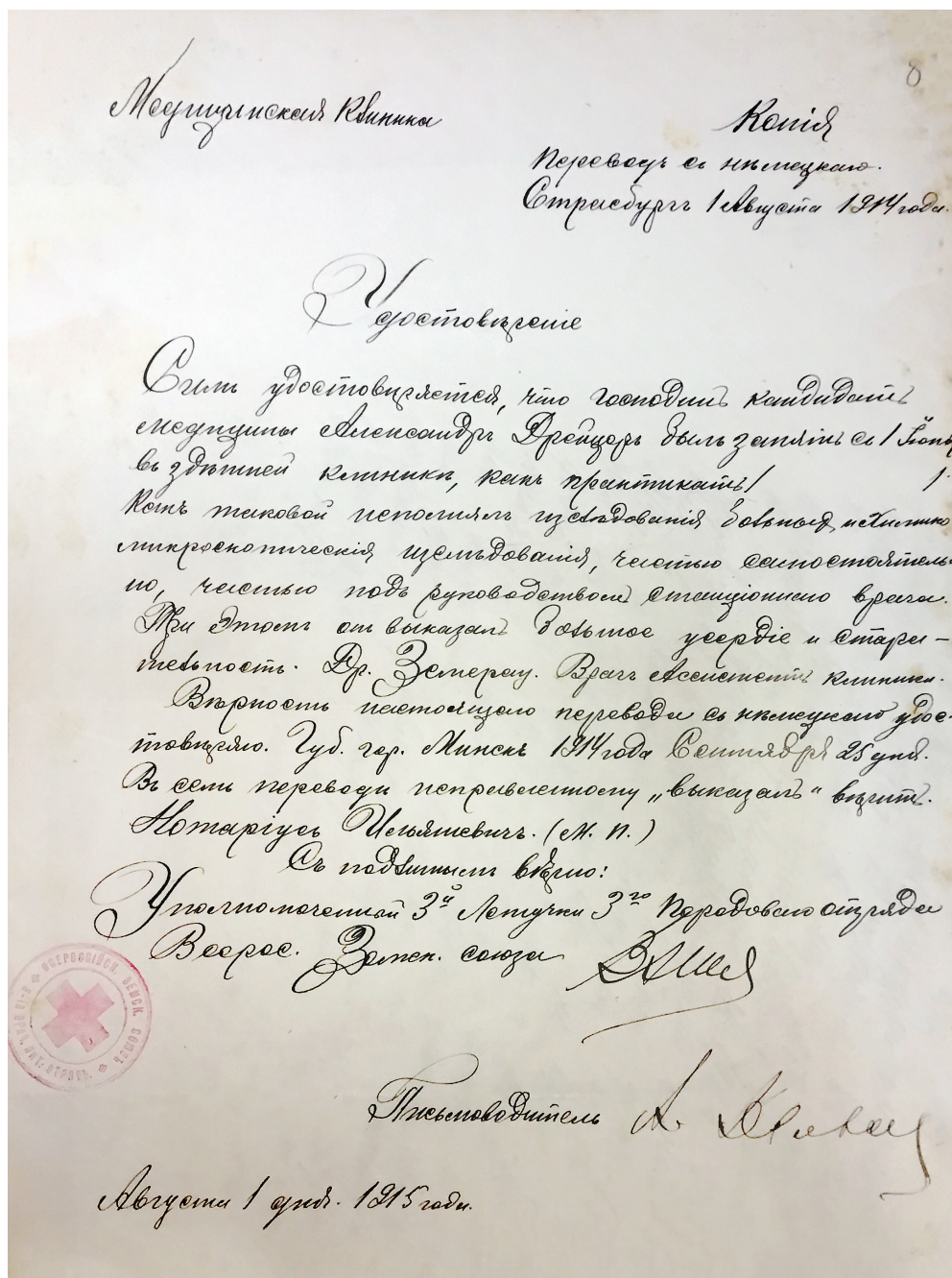


Fig. 3. Copy of certificate of passing by A.G. Dreytser of practical classes at the Strasbour University Hospital.¹⁰
TsGAM. F. 418. I. 329. C. 937. P. 8.

¹⁰ Text on the picture:

Medical Clinic
Translation from German
Strasbourg, 1st of August 1914.

Certificate
This document certifies that Candidate of Medicine Alexander Dreytser was employed at the clinic as a house officer. He performed patient examinations and chemical and microbiological research partially independently, partially under the direction of a staff physician. He showed great eagerness and diligence in his work.

I certify the fidelity of this translation from German.
Minsk. 6th of September 1914.
In this translation, the corrected "showed" is to be trusted.
Notary Public Ilyashevich
Authentic and true:
Commissioner of the 3rd Field Detachment of the 3rd Vanguard Detachment of the All-Russian Zemsky Union

Signature
Dreytser A.G. Signature

1st of August 1915

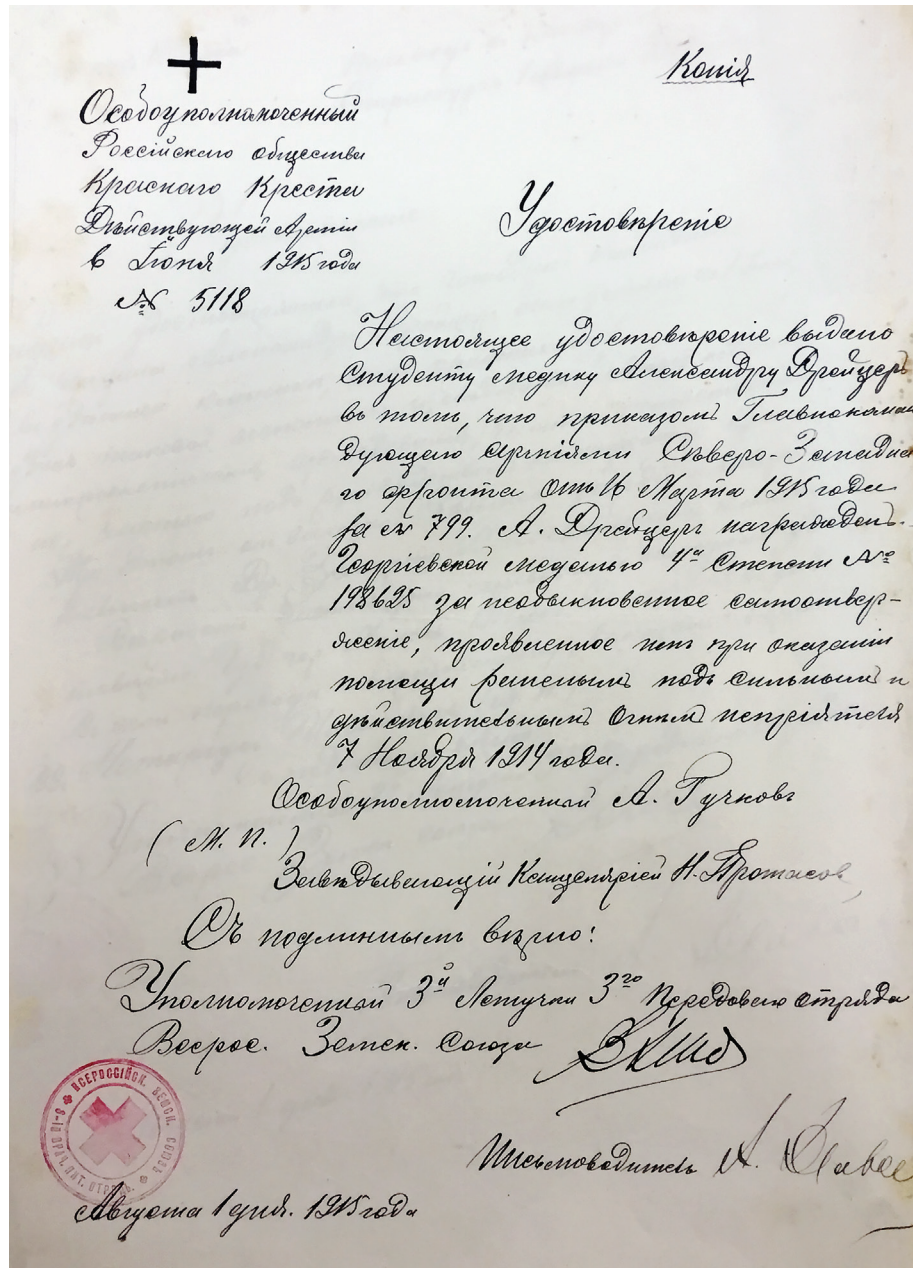


Fig. 4. Copy of the certificate of awarding A.G. Dreytser the Medal of St. George 4th class.¹²
 TsGAM. F. 418. I. 329. C. 937. P. 7.

From the 2nd to the 22nd of November 1914, A.G. Dreytser participated in the Battle of Lodz (Kolenlovskiy 1940). A.G. Dreytser, participating in the battle for the city in which he spent his childhood and youth, was “awarded the Medal of St. George 4th class No. 1988625 for the extraordinary dedication shown by him in assisting the wounded under strong and real enemy fire on the 7th of November 1914”¹¹ (fig. 4).

¹¹ TsGAM. F. 418. I. 329. C. 937. P. 7. [The certificate issued to medical student Alexander Dreytser on awarding him with the Medal of St George 4th class, signed by the Red Cross Special Plenipotentiary A.I. Guchkov (copy)].

¹² Text on the picture:

Special Plenipotentiary of the Russian Red Cross Society of the Active Army
 6th of June 1915.
 No. 5118

Certificate

This certificate was issued to medical student Alexander Dreytser to confirm that by order of the Commander-in-Chief of the armies of the North-Western Front of the 16th of March 1915 (illeg.) 799. A. Dreytser was awarded the Medal of St George 4th class No. 198615 for the extraordinary dedication shown by him in assisting the wounded under strong and real enemy fire.

Special Plenipotentiary A. Guchkov.
 Head of Office N. Protasov
 Authentic and true:

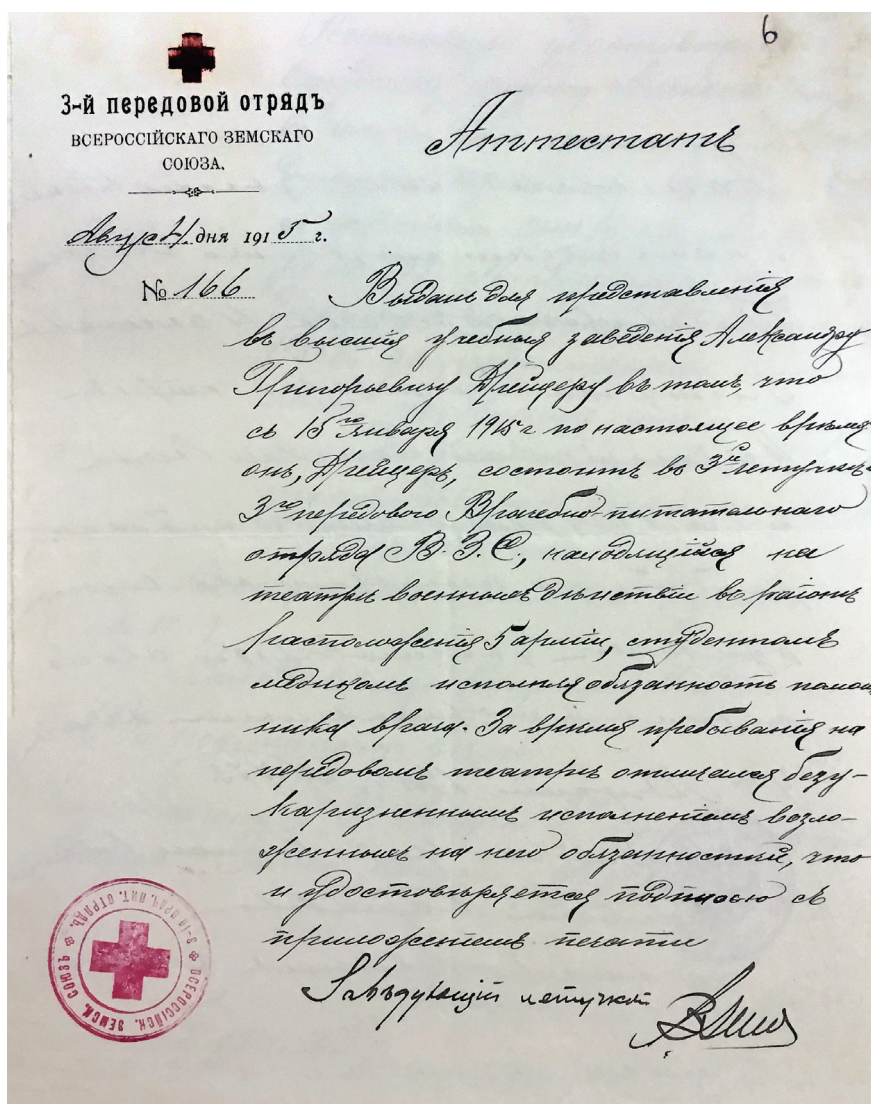


Fig. 5. Copy of the certificate of awarding A.G. Dreytser the Medal of St George 4th class.¹⁶ TsGAM. F. 418. I. 329. C. 937. P. 7.

The Medal of St George was awarded to those who, according to the Statute, couldn't be awarded for similar actions with the Cross of St George – for example, civilians: the Statute stated that the medal would be awarded to those “of nurses or orderlies who, whilst under strong and real enemy fire throughout the battle, showing extraordinary dedication, would assist the wounded or, in an event of extreme hardship, would carry the wounded or dead off the battlefield”.¹³

From the 15th of January 1915 A.G. Dreytser served in the 3rd Field Detachment (Field Dressing Detachment) of the 3rd Vanguard Medical Sustenance Detachment of the All-Russian Zemsky Union¹⁴ and was “a medical student acting as a medical assistant at the theatre of operations in the 5th Army. During his time at the front line he was noted for impeccable execution of the assigned duties...” (fig. 5).¹⁵

Commissioner of the 3rd Field Detachment of the 3rd Vanguard Detachment of the All-Russian Zemsky Union

Signature
Dreytser A.G. Signature

1st of August 1915

¹³ On the medal of St George. St George Page. Electronic resource. Access mode: <http://george-orden.narod.ru/statut1913s5.html>. Date of enquiry: 08/07/2018.

¹⁴ The activities of such units are shown in more detail in (Eremin 2013).

¹⁵ TsGAM. F. 418. I. 329. C. 937. P. 6. [Certificate issued to A.G. Dreytser on the 4th of August 1915 for presentation to a higher educational institution].

¹⁶ Text on the picture:
3rd Vanguard Detachment of the All-Russian Zemsky Union
4th of August 1915.
No. 166

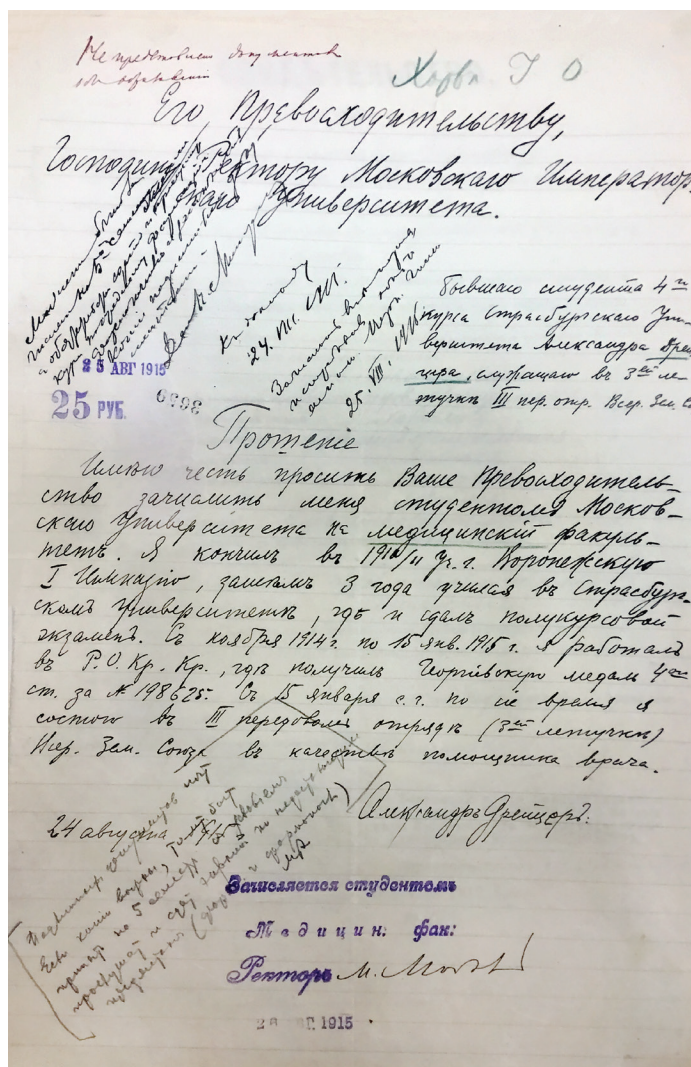


Fig. 6. A.G. Dreytser’s petition addressed to the rector of IMU to enrol him as a student at the Medical Faculty.¹⁷
TsGAM. F. 418. I. 329. C. 937.

On the 24th of August 1915 A.G. Dreytser appealed to the rector of the Imperial Moscow University (IMU) with a request to enrol him at the Medical Faculty as a student (fig. 6).

The request was granted and, having paid a “fee” of 25 roubles, Alexander became a student of IMU on the 28th of August 1915.¹⁸

Academic Certificate

Issued to Alexander Grigorievich Dreytser for presentation in higher education institution, confirming that from the 15th of January 1915 to the present he serves as a medical student and performs duties of an assistant physician in the 3rd Field Detachment of the 3rd Vanguard Medical Sustenance Detachment located in the theatre of military operations in the 5th Army. During his time at the front line he was noted for impeccable execution of the assigned duties which is certified by this sealed signature.

Head of the Field Detachment (signature)

¹⁷ Text on the picture:

To His Excellency Rector of Imperial Moscow University.
From a former 4th-year University of Strasbourg student Alexander Dreytser serving in the 3rd Field Detachment of the 3rd Vanguard Detachment of the All-Russian Zemsky Union.

Petition

I have the honour of asking Your Excellency to enrol me as a student at the Medical Faculty. I graduated from the First Voronezh Gymnasium in the 1910/1911, then studied at the University of Strasbourg for three further years and passed the semi-course examination there. From November 1914 to the 15th of January 1915 I worked at the Russian Red Cross Society where I was awarded the Medal of St George 4th class No. 1988625. From the 15th of January of this year I am a member of the 3rd Vanguard Detachment (3rd Field Detachment) of the All-Russian Zemsky Union as an assistant physician.

Alexander Dreytser
24th of August 1915.

¹⁸ TsGAM. F. 418. I. 329. C. 937. P. 1. [Protégé of Alexander Dreytser, a former student at the University of Strasbourg, serving in the 3rd Flying Detachment of the Third Advanced of the AZU, to His



Fig. 7. Lecture book belonging to a student of the senior department of the Medical Faculty of the IMU A.G. Dreytser.¹⁹ TsGAM. F. 418. I. 329. C. 292. P. 2.

The Lecture Book²⁰ (fig. 7) given to A.G. Dreytser on the 12th of October 1915 allows us to get a general idea of the content of medical education of that time and of the IMU lecturers whom he was fortunate to study under in 1915–1917, as well as understand under whose supervision his formation as a physician took

place and who influenced his world view and culture in general (Imperatorskiy Moskovskiy universitet... 2010).

A.G. Dreytser converted to Eastern Orthodoxy²¹ – on the 10th of February 1916 the rite of baptism was performed in the “Church of Hadrian and Natalia in Meshchanskaya Sloboda” (Hadrian Church, destroyed in 1936) (Imperatorskiy Moskovskiy universitet... 2010, p. 449–451) by reverent Mikhail Vasilyevich Slavsky (Father Mikhail).²² “A peasant woman of the Yaroslavl province, Anna Ivanovna Tugova” and Grigory Pavlovich Lyubimov (“free artist”, Russian and Soviet musical figure and ethnographer), upon whose first

Excellency Rector of Imperial Moscow University, from the 24th of August 1915, with visas].

¹⁹ Text on the picture:

Lecture book

Belonging to student of the Medical Faculty of the Imperial Moscow University

Alexander Grigorievich Dreytser

Issued on the 12th of October 1915.

No. 223.

In case of loss of the lecture book a duplicate is issued only upon admission of a written application with attached photo and 50 kopecks for typographical expenses.

Alexander Dreytser (signature).

²⁰ TsGAM. F. 418. I. 329. C. 292. P. 2 [A Lecture Book belonging to a student at the Medical Faculty of Imperial Moscow University, Alexander Grigorievich Dreytser].

²¹ TsGAM. F. 418. I. 329. C. 937. P. 13. [An extract from the metric book, part 1. On Birth. Hadrian Church in Meshchanskaya Sloboda].

²² M.V. Slavsky. Neomartyr, confessor who suffered for Christ during the years of persecution of the Russian Orthodox Church. Saint Tikhon’s Orthodox University. Electronic resource. Access mode: http://www.pstbi.ccas.ru/bin/db.exe/koi/nm/?TYZCF2JMTdG6X_buFeu0Ws_OeCeG0AeCKUe_8gUUE-1Ve8jgdO8ctk. Date of enquiry: 23/07/2018.

937
 В. Камышев
 Н. М. У.

Александра Григорьевича
 Дрейтсера студ. 4 курса
 мед. фак. Н. М. У. Про-
 фессора. в Москвѣ
 по Кривоарбатскому 14 д.

Прошу камышев на основании выданно-
 го в февраль 1916 г. метрику отъ-
 ступить меня в списках: Александрович
 Григорьевич Дрейтсер прав. конф., сына
 Александра Григорьевича проф. конф.

1916 ноябрь 23 Александр Дрейтсер

род. 12 окт. 1890 г. в Москвѣ, ~~сын~~ сын Купца,
 холост, ^{внук} ~~сын~~ о конф. с 1916-17 г.

Fig. 8. A.G. Dreytser's petition on the change of his patronymic in the lists on the basis of an extract from the metric book.²³

TsGAM. F. 418. I. 329. C. 937. P. 13.

name Dreytser's patronymic "Grigorievich" (fig. 8) was based, were his godparents.

On the 26th of March 1917, A.G. Dreytser passed the State Examination at Imperial Moscow University and was awarded the title of "Doctor" (Temporary certificate of the Moscow School District No. 344 of the 28th of March 1917). In the spring of 1917, he married Vera Ivanovna Meller.

²³ Text on the picture:

To the IMU office

From Alexander Grigorievich Dreytser

4th year student of the Medical Faculty of IMU,

living in Moscow on 14 Krivoarbaty st, b.2

I would like to ask the office to mark me in the lists as Alexander Grigorievich Dreytser of the Orthodox religion instead of Alexander Girshevich of the Jewish religion on the basis of a metric filed by me in February 1916.

Alexander Dreytser

23rd of November 1916.

Born on the 12th of October 1890 in Moscow, son of a merchant, single, illegible. From 1916 to 1917.

In April 1917, A.G. Dreytser was mobilised. He served as a Navy physician on the military ships of the Black Sea Fleet Kronstadt, Almaz and hydrocruiser Aviator²⁴ (under the command of Admiral A.V. Kolchak). He was dismissed due to the demobilisation of the army and navy in June 1918 (fig. 9, fig. 10).

There are no documents reflecting A.G. Dreytser's attitude towards the October Revolution or testifying to his participation in the events of the time. However, there's an interesting entry preserved in the questionnaire for the personal record of the People's Commissariat for Health: "Did not participate in the October Revolution, was in medical service".²⁵

On the 17th of September 1918 A.G. Dreytser was mobilised into the Red Army, and on the 23rd of Sep-

²⁴ The Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (RGALI). F. 1303. I. 1. C. 27. P. 1–13. (Service record of the chief of the district health department of the Oryol military district A.G. Dreytser of 1921 [copy]).

²⁵ State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF). F. A482. I. 42. C. 1827. P. 3–4.

tember 1918 he was appointed at the disposal of the Head of the Sanitary Administration of the 6th Army. Acting as the head of the Sanitary Unit of the 6th Army and the assistant to the Chief of the Sanitary Unit of the Northern Front during the Civil War, A.G. Dreytser, like many other Russian physicians, was involved in the fight against the typhoid epidemic. He was awarded a silver watch by the Revolutionary Military Council (RMC) for "excellent and diligent work" (Order of the Medical Unit of the 6th Army of the 15th of March 1920).²⁶

On the 8th of July 1920, by order of the People's Commissariat for Health No. 85, A.G. Dreytser was appointed Head of the District Sanitary Directorate of the Oryol Military District, and Head of the Ural District Military Sanitary Directorate by order of the People's Commissariat for Health No. 278 of the 27th of July 1921.

In February 1922, a telegram from the Head of the Main Sanitary Directorate No. 558/22 recalled A.G. Dreytser to the Main Sanitary Directorate to receive a new assignment which was no longer related to the army – on the 11th of March 1922, af-



Fig. 9. A.G. Dreytser, 1917–1918.
From the personal archive of the Dreytser family.



Fig. 10. A.G. Dreytser (2nd from the left) during his time as a navy physician, 1917.
From the personal archive of the Dreytser family.



Fig. 11. A.G. Dreytser wearing a ship physician's uniform. From the personal archive of the Dreytser family.

ter almost 8 years of service as military physician, A.G. Dreytser was demobilised (Certificate of the Commission for the secondment of medical personnel at the People's Commissariat for Health of 11/03/1922 No. 9685).

In subsequent years, A.G. Dreytser was the deputy of the Health Department of the Tashkent railway,²⁷ head of the subdivision for the maintenance of the moving masses of the Medical and Sanitary Department of Railways at the People's Commissariat for Health, head of the Medical Department of the Kazan Railway; served as a ship physician on the Soviet steamship which carried civil and freight traffic between Petrograd and London (fig. 11). In the 1930s, he worked at the polyclinic of the Central Commission for the Improvement of Life of Scientists (since 1931 – the Clinic of the Commission for Assistance to Scientists, and the Central Clinic of the People's Commissariat for Health since 1939). Alexander Grigorievich worked there for many years, providing medical assistance to many prominent figures of science and culture (fig. 12).

²⁷ GARF. F. A482. I. 42. C. 1827. P. 3–4.

According to A.G. Dreytser's diary,²⁸ he was in charge of the clinical examination of patients in the polyclinic for 17 years. Over the years, amongst his patients were: A.N. Krylov (1863–1945), L.I. Mandelstam (1889–1944), O.Y. Schmidt (1891–1956), P.P. Lazarev (1878–1942), V.G. Shukhov (1853–1939), A.N. Tolstoy (1883–1945), K.I. Chukovsky (1882–1969), S.Y. Marshak (1887–1964), M.V. Nesterov (1862–1942), R.N. Simonov (1899–1968) and others. A.G. Dreytser maintained personal correspondence with one of the patients – a famous novelist A.K. Vinogradov (1888–1946); A.G. Dreytser's letters, A.K. Vinogradov's draft letters to an outstanding Russian scientist and physiotherapist Sergey Alexandrovich Brunstein regarding A.G. Dreytser and the replies to them,²⁹ as well as the official responses of the People's Commissariat for Health and the Moscow City Executive Committee to the appeals of A.K. Vinogradov regarding A.G. Dreytser and the clinic of the People's Commissariat for

²⁸ Personal archive of the Dreytser family.

²⁹ RGALI. F. 1303. I. 1. C. 27. P. 1–13. (Letters from Vinogradov Anatoly Kornelievich to Brunstein Sergey [Alexandrovich] about the dismissal of doctor Dreytser Alexander Grigorievich from the clinic of the Commission for Assistance to Scientists [CAS], and Brunstein's reply. The Executive Committee of the Moscow City Council of Workers' Deputies' report to the Head of the clinic of the CAS about the impossibility of providing Dreytser with living space).



Fig. 12. A.G. Dreytser, the 1930s. From the personal archive of the Dreytser family.

Health where the writer was treated, and other documents (open letters, informative telegrams, copies of resort service improvement projects which A.G. Dreytser developed and shared with A.K. Vinogradov), are stored in the writer’s archive (RGALI).

In his letters to A.K. Vinogradov sent over the period from the 23rd of May 1936 to the 8th of April 1942, A.G. Dreytser brings up various topics: the health of the writer affected with tuberculosis; the organisation of his treatment and health maintenance in Tarussa (the city where A.K. Vinogradov would spend summer months and difficult periods of life); mutual aid in difficult life situations, and news. The content of the letters shows personal communication (including face-to-face meetings) between the writer and the doctor.

Approximately in 1940, A.G. Dreytser took a temporary (not less than a year) break from his work at the People’s Commissariat for Health Polyclinic due to family reasons and left Moscow. At that time he was interested in the problems of balneology, the development of new forms of health improvement and maintenance, particularly the organisation of swimming sanatoria and the improvement of the resort in Teberda³⁰. Having understood the doctor’s true reasons for leaving Moscow to work in the Caucasus resorts, A.K. Vinogradov began a campaign for protection of the doctor and returning him to Moscow, took over the correspondence with the Polyclinic’s administration and the People’s Commissariat for Health of the USSR on behalf of A.G. Dreytser’s patients. He demanded an explanation for the dismissal of the doctor and petitioned for his reinstatement. These events served as the subject of correspondence between A.K. Vinogradov and S.A. Brustein³¹, to whom he turned for support as a person who knew Dr. Dreytser and who was able to influence the situation.

“The Notes of an Ambulance Physician”

A.G. Dreytser is known as the author of “The Notes of an Ambulance Physician”³² (Moskva prifrontovaya... 2001) – a documentary work about life in Moscow during the Great Patriotic War.

Unfortunately, it is erroneously considered that *The Notes* kept in the Scientific Archive of the Institute of Russian History of the Russian Academy of Sciences³³

are the original diary of Dr. Dreytser. The reason for this error is that *The Notes* were included in the document base created by the “Mintz Commission” for writing the history of the defence of Moscow.³⁴

The Commission, formed by the decision of the secretariat of the MC (Moscow Committee) and the MCC (Moscow City Committee) of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks on the 10th of December 1941 to write the chronicles of the defence of Moscow, included I.I. Mintz, P.F. Yudin, P.N. Pospelov and others, and one of the areas of its work was the collection of personal documents of citizens, their testimonies about the war, and, above all, about the defense of the capital. A.G. Dreytser’s Notes with a dedication to I.I. Mintz were also amongst those documents.

However, as a documentary work *The Notes* were being retrospectively created in 1944–1945 based upon documents that A.G. Dreytser used whilst working on his dissertation “The Material on the Question of Sudden Death: According to the Data of Morgues, Moscow City Emergency Stations and the Department of Clinical Examination of the Central Polyclinic of the People’s Commissariat for Health of the USSR” for his Ph.D.; he passed his viva voce in 1945 (Dreytser 1945). In his personal notes A.G. Dreytser indicated that he considered it necessary to “compensate for his dismissal from the front due to his age”³⁵ (he turned 51 in 1941 and couldn’t be summoned to the active army), therefore several times a month he was on duty at the Ambulance Station at the Sklifosovsky Institute, combining those shifts with his work at the Central Polyclinic of the People’s Commissariat for Health.

The Notes were created as a documentary about the life of front-line Moscow seen by a physician. The material is presented in the form of short diary entries on days of duties, starting on the 3rd of August 1941 and ending on the 4th of December 1943. They are prefaced by a brief introduction and finished by the date written by the author, which proves once more that this is not a diary, but a work based upon diary entries and completed in 1944.

The question of the genre of A.G. Dreytser’s work is quite complicated. The researchers note (Mestergazi 2007a, Kostukova and Soni 2015, Muraviev 1987) that the term “non-fiction” remains controversial in the literary circles. The extraordinary diversity of Soviet non-fiction literature (reports, diaries, essays, biographies of historical figures, etc.) doesn’t allow for a clear distinction between journalism, non-fiction literature and feature stories (Muraviev 1987, p. 98; Mestergazi 2007b, p. 174).

Researchers identify two important features of non-fiction literature, or so-called “literature of fact” –

³⁰ RGALI. F. 1303. I. 1. C. 918. P. 1–26. (Dreytser Alexander Grigorievich’s letter to Vinogradov Anatoly Kornelievich with A.G. Dreytser’s attached reports on the organisation of swimming sanatoria and the development of the resort in Teberda).

³¹ Ditto.

³² Hereinafter – *The Notes*.

³³ Scientific Archive of the Institute of Russian History of the RAS. F. 2. Section VIII. I. 6. C. 2. P. 1–27. Typescript.

³⁴ Mintz Commission – the Commission for the History of the Great Patriotic War.

³⁵ Personal archive of the Dreytser family.

the presence of expressive means that most accurately and faithfully convey the tragic nature of the events of the 20th century (Muraviev 1987, p. 98); reality suddenly turns out to be “more fantastic than fiction, and facts are more eloquent than words” (Mestergazi 2007b, p. 174), which requires the author to minimise fiction and artistic fantasy. The use of authentic and accurate facts reflected in documents (historical, archival, statistical) by the author helps to achieve maximum realism – in documentary works life speaks for itself, not requiring any embellishment.

The Notes by A.G. Dreytser, based upon the author’s diary, can be called a series of documentary essays. The author didn’t use notes relating to the private life of his family. Events of a personal nature, such as spiritual upheavals that the author had to endure during those years, weren’t reflected in *The Notes*.

According to the testimony of A.G. Dreytser’s son, *The Notes* were sent to publishers but most of the reviews were negative – the author was pointed out that a number of fragments should be removed from the text (for example, a fragment about a Red Army soldier who had a certificate stating “has schizophrenia and is a psychopath – fit for military service” and came to Moscow to challenge the conclusion – the record of the 15th of February 1942, and much more, that showed the life of the front-line city without embellishment). Due to that, *The Notes* were never published during the author’s lifetime.

The first entry, dated the 3rd of August 1941, describes in detail the organisation of the work of the Emergency Station at the Sklifosovsky Institute. However, the issues of organisation of medical care in front-line Moscow are also broached in the entries of the 8th and 13th of August and the 4th of October 1941. Some entries are quite interesting – for example those describing the practice of sending women in labour to hospital through pharmacies: due to the lack of telephones in flats, many women would call emergency services from pharmacies to be taken away from there.

The author of *The Notes* mainly cites cases of “civilian” medicine, and not the ones related to the provision of medical aid to victims of military actions, for example, victims of air raids (3rd and 18th of August, 24th and 29th of October and the 4th of December 1941). However, all discussed in the book conveys the flavour of wartime and the life of the front-line city, such as emotional background and features of day-to-day life.

So, A.G. Dreytser talks a lot about injuries – industrial, domestic, resulting from air raids and road accidents (3rd of August, 14th and 29th of November 1941, etc. One of the entries (19th of October 1941) reads: “Car accidents have become more frequent. On one hand, the darkness is to blame, and on the other – the fact that military drivers aren’t au fait with the capital’s traffic laws”). Despite the fact that most cases could occur during peacetime, the “military” specificity of

their causes is shown in the book. A young fitter who was repairing wires during an air raid and fell from a utility pole (8th of August 1941); a little girl who quickly learned to work a lathe and worked night shifts (28th of August 1941); a one-legged mother of three deceased and three more fighting soldiers of the Red Army who fell from a balcony (14th of August, 1942); elderly people and young children refusing to leave the city; military and civilian population – they all became characters of *The Notes*.

The reasons for the aforementioned cases of ambulance calls were certainly typical of both peacetime and wartime: childbirth (8th of August, 14th of October 1941, 19th of February 1942); acute exacerbation of chronic diseases (13th of August 1941, 14th of February 1941, etc.); heart attacks, epileptic seizures, etc. At the same time, behind syncope and heart attacks were the tragedies of war – deaths of loved ones; news of the kids’ demise on the battlefield (4th of September, 4th of October 1942); interpersonal relationships that became complicated during the war; reproachable and illegal actions of others (29th of November 1941). Suicide attempts, behind which were fear of war, despair, failure at work and death of loved ones, make up a special category of the aforementioned calls (23rd of August, 29th of September, 24th of December 1941; 14th and 24th of March, 4th of September 1942; 24th of April 1943).

Numerous wounds (including fatal) due to careless handling of weapons, non-compliance with the fire-arms safety, use of weapons in the heat of the moment whilst intoxicated (14th of January, 14th of March, 14th of June 1942; 24th of April 1943) were one of the undoubted features of wartime. Carbon monoxide and Blau gas poisonings as a consequence of day-to-day life in front-line Moscow were also a frequent cause of ambulance calls (29th of September, 24th of November 1941; 4th, 14th, 29th of January 1942).

Child injuries were a separate issue (19th and 24th of October, 29th of November 1941; 24th of May, 4th of June 1943). The children were left to their own devices, their fathers fought at the front, mothers were at work almost 24 hours a day, and grandmothers were queueing up to get rationed food for their food stamps. Having received medical care, children with injuries in front-line Moscow had no opportunity to undergo medical and social rehabilitation: “... a ten-year-old boy with no legs. He moves his body very quickly using his arms, ploughing the ground with the stumps of his legs. I ask him why he won’t make himself a makeshift skateboard, he says that there are no wheels available. He then reminds me that I personally took him to the hospital in September, when he got run over by a tram” (entry dated the 24th of May, 1943). The author describes another case – the mother of a child who was hit by a train, understanding his future fate, says to the doctor who’d stopped the bleeding: “Have you thought

about whether to save him or not? ... What do I do with him now – have you thought about it?!"

Another frequent cause for ambulance calls were social illnesses such as alcoholism (13th and 23rd of August, 14th of September, 14th of October 1941). However, the author notes that the psychological state was the reason for turning to alcohol – the depressed state of mind of Muscovites, the fear of death and occupation, the news of the failures of the Red Army and uncertainty about tomorrow. Cases of responding to poisoning by denatured alcohol and other vodka "substitutes" calls (13th of August, 19th of October, 14th of November 1941) are also described.

The Notes also describe interesting, curious and tragic cases. For example, one case related by one of A.G. Dreytser's colleagues was used by his writer friend A.K. Vinogradov. "Today one of our senior Ambulance physicians told us an interesting thing that happened. On Mokhovaya St., at the top floor, there lived a deaf and partially blind old lady aged about 75. She just couldn't grasp the rules of blackout and would always turn on the light in the evenings. Neither the housekeeper nor the police could do anything with the deaf thing. Late one evening, during a military alert, the light reappeared in her window. There was a shot through the window. Maybe it was a stray bullet, maybe a sentinel fired a shot to scare the disobedient citizen. The bullet hit the old lady's head; an ambulance was called. The old lady was dead and driven to the A&E; undressed. Under the guise of an 'old lady' there was a 40-year-old man" (entry dated the 18th of August 1941).

The Notes contain testimonies about the day-to-day life of ordinary people during the Great Patriotic War. At the same time as A.G. Dreytser's Ph.D. dissertation (Dreytser 1945) is being analysed, the human body is responding to the immense stresses of wartime.

The Material on the Question of Sudden Death

A.G. Dreytser's Ph.D. dissertation is dedicated to the study of sudden death. Despite the presented extensive historical material on this issue, the author notes the insufficient study of the stated problem and links it to the need to study not only human pathology, but also the system of domestic and other circumstances, and also sets the task of rationalising emergency care and preventative work.

By "sudden death" the author means cases when "being apparently well and efficient, a person dies completely unexpectedly for those around them from an unknown case" (Dreytser 1945, p. 138). In the author's opinion, the generally accepted forensic interpretation of sudden death as "swift death" needs to be revised.

The analysis of the data obtained in the Moscow morgues allowed the author to conclude that quite of-

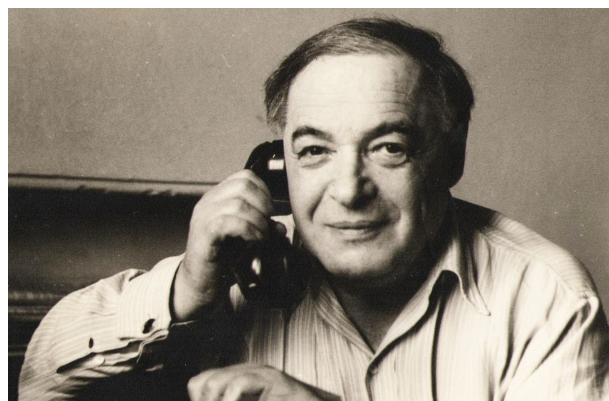


Fig. 13. A.G. Dreytser, the 1960s.

From the personal archive of the Dreytser family.

ten cases of death from a variety of reasons that can't be considered "sudden death" either in terms of time, or characteristic features or duration of the disease, are considered "sudden death". The author reveals the problem related to the fact that polyclinic institutions and ambulance stations don't have the opportunity to obtain autopsy results in cases of interest to them, which negatively affected the accounting for sudden death from acute infectious diseases.

The statistical material compiled by A.G. Dreytser showed that the main causes of sudden death were cardiovascular diseases, diseases of the respiratory system, central nervous system, gastrointestinal tract, and infections. The author studied in detail the genesis of sudden death and showed the significance of the results obtained for therapeutic and prophylactic work.

Currently, the original dissertation is kept in the Central Scientific Medical Library, and an electronic copy of it is presented in the Federal Electronic Medical Library of the Ministry of Health of the Russian Federation.

Conclusion

In 1950, A.G. Dreytser defended his Ph.D. dissertation (Dreytser 1950). The last years of his life he worked in a physical education clinic, published a number of articles on a healthy lifestyle (the *Physical Culture and Sport Magazine*, etc. (Dreytser 1967)) (fig.13). He died in 1970 in Moscow and is buried at Vvedenskoye Cemetery.

So, based upon the analysis of the archival documents (GARF, TsGAM, RGALI and the personal archive) and the use of the historical biographical approach, it was possible to restore the facts of A.G. Dreytser's biography preceding the creation of *The Notes*, to prove that the history of his life and work is inextricably linked with the history of our country and the development of medicine in general.

Historical biographical approach and comparative analysis allowed to prove the unity of the phenomena scrutinised by A.G. Dreytser both in *The Notes* and his dissertation. New complete historical biographical data

on A.G. Dreytser contribute to the expansion of ideas about the organisation of medicine during the war period and the clarification of the interesting circumstances of the development of domestic medicine.

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