

Manchurian Plague of 1910–1911 in newspaper cartoons (part 2)¹

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The article presents an analysis and interpretation of the satirical illustrations published in the Harbin newspaper *Novaya Zhizn* on the events connected with the pneumonic plague epidemic in Harbin (1910–1911). Bureaucracy and the ineffectiveness of a number of medical measures were subject to criticism. The satire in *Novaya Zhizn* was mainly aimed at finding those guilty for the epidemic. In the winter of 1910–1911, the board of the Chinese Eastern Railway sent a group of epidemiologists to Harbin. The group was headed by Professor D.K. Zabolotny, who became one of the initiators of vaccinations against the plague, and the elimination of rodents, which were the infection's presumed vectors. The relationship between Harbin doctors and Zabolotny was tense from the very beginning, growing into an open confrontation in April 1911. At the end of May 1911, a group of doctors announced that Zabolotny did not allow Harbin doctors to attend the Mukden conference. Officially, the conflict was not resolved, as Zabolotny urgently left Harbin for Transbaikal, where his expedition for the first time isolated the causative agent of the plague from tarbagans. Harbin's various social groups at that time had different views on the events related to the plague epidemic. In this article only one view is studied – that of the Russian-speaking community in Harbin, reflected in a series of cartoons from the *Novaya Zhizn* newspaper. The illustrations that have been analyzed show that the events related to the pulmonary plague epidemic in Harbin and the serious differences that arose at that time in the medical environment did not remain unnoticed by the Harbin public and confirm the public interest in health care and its medical representatives.

Keywords: *plague, epidemic, China, the social history of medicine, D.K. Zabolotny, periodicals, Manchuria*

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Harbin cartoons of Professor Daniil Zabolotny

A key member of Russia's delegation at the Mukden Conference was Professor Daniil Zabolotny.² Harbiners had first got to know the bacteriologist from Saint Petersburg in December

1910, when he first visited Manchuria. Zabolotny strongly criticised the anti-epidemic measures taken by the Harbin Public Administration (HPA) and the Chinese Eastern Railway (CER), and this made him many enemies. Later assessments of the actions of the Russian authorities in the fight against the plague before Zabolotny's arrival depend mainly on the writer's location: whereas Vikenty Bogutsky (from Arkhangelsk) and Yevgeny Kastorsky (from Irkutsk) regard them as inadequate, Manuil Khmara-Borshchevsky and P. S. Tishenko (both from Harbin) suggest that "the doctors sent from Russia to fight the epidemic brought nothing new to what was already planned" for the fight against the plague [1–3; 4, p. 137].

One of Zabolotny's recommendations regarded as "senseless" was his suggestion of

¹ What follows is a continuation of Part 1 of this paper, published previously in this journal (*History of Medicine. 2017; 4(2): 134–145*).

² Daniil Kyrylovych Zabolotny (1866–1929), a Russian, Ukrainian and Soviet microbiologist and epidemiologist, was one of the pioneers of Soviet epidemiology. He was a member of the Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian SSR from 1922, and its president in 1928–1929, and a member of the Soviet Academy of Sciences from 1929.

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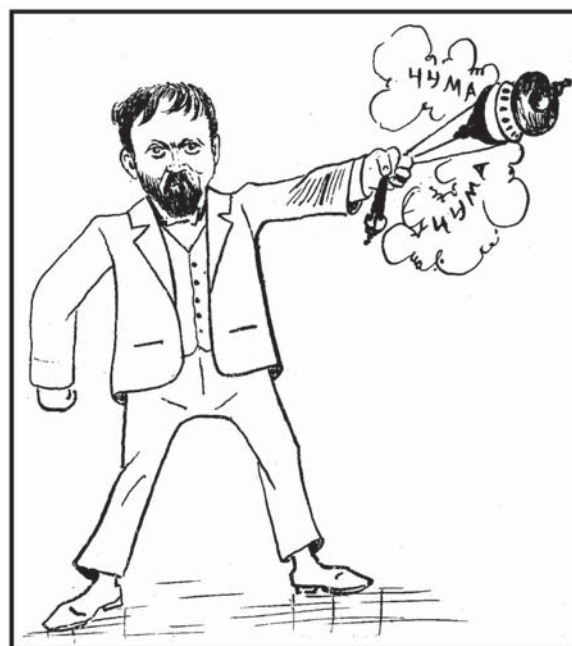
getting rid of rats. Rats had been known since the 19th century to carry (e.g. bubonic) plague. Accordingly, when Odessa, where Zabolotny was also a consultant, was hit by a bubonic plague epidemic in the summer of 1910, rat eradication was made a top priority [5, 6]. In the Manchurian plague of 1910–1911, the role of rats and fleas in transmitting the infection was not proven. Russian doctors in Harbin studied approximately 400 rats, but could not isolate a pure *Yersinia pestis* culture in any of them. The plague was merely suspected in three animals examined under the microscope [7, p. 55–56]. It is to this episode that the artist of a *Novaya Zhizn* cartoon depicting rats reading out a petition to Professor Zabolotny (Fig. 1) refers.

Following the Mukden Conference, the members of Zabolotny’s scientific expedition spent May–June 1911 continuing their experiments on monkeys, seeking to assess the importance of immunisation, and how long plague bacilli could survive in corpses, and to study epizootics in



Fig. 1. Around the plague.³

³ “Intrigue” // *Novaya Zhizn*. Illustrated supplement. March 14, 1911. P. 4. Caption: “Mr. Professor, do not persecute us: we have nothing to do with it, and those three allegedly plague-infected rats have come from Odessa.”



Профессор Заболотный находит, что нельзя Харбин считать благополучным по чуме и надо держать противочумную организацию наготове.

Fig. 2. Professor Zabolotny finds that...⁴

tarbagan marmots [7, pp. 140–141]. Meanwhile, Zabolotny continued to be active in public life in Harbin, participating in the weekly physicians’ meetings, where the results of the epidemic were discussed, and giving comments to the local press. By mid-May 1911, no new cases of plague had been registered for 2.5 months. Zabolotny’s warning that “Harbin cannot be considered safe from the plague, and anti-plague arrangements need to be kept at the ready” was considered alarmist. A cartoonist depicts him with a smoking thurible⁵ (Fig. 2).

The further the epidemic receded into the past, the more satirical the attitude shown to the physicians, they became yesterday’s heroes, in the *Novaya Zhizn* cartoons. It was not only the visiting professor and the local physicians whom the newspaper satirised: there were also caricatures of CER doctor Grigory Malov,⁶ who

⁴ *Novaya Zhizn*. Illustrated supplement. May 16, 1911. P. 2. Caption: “Professor Zabolotny finds that Harbin cannot be considered safe from the plague, and anti-plague arrangements need to be kept at the ready”.

⁵ It is possible that this cartoon refers to a Russian expression meaning “to develop an activity”.

⁶ Grigory Ivanovich Malov (1859 – after 1927) was a CER doctor from 1897, fought in World War I, and worked as a doctor at commercial colleges in Harbin in the 1920s.



Fig. 3. Doctor Malov catches flies on a plague grave.⁷

studied whether the plague could be passed from the corpses of its victims to laboratory guinea pigs via flies [3, p. 323]. For example, a *Novaya Zhizn* cartoon from March 1911 shows rats making excuses to Professor Zabolotny, while satirical illustrations from issues in May show some flies addressing Doctor Malov (Fig. 3).

“The Epilogue of the Harbin Plague”

The saying that history repeats itself, the first time as tragedy, the second as farce, often attributed to the German philosopher G.W.F. Hegel, applies perfectly to the pneumonic plague epidemic in Manchuria 1910–1911. This was clearly a humanitarian disaster, taking the lives of tens of thousands of people in just months. However, on June 20, 1911, the Harbin newspaper *Novaya Zhizn* published a series of satirical cartoons under the overall heading “The Epilogue of the Harbin Plague”.⁸ These cartoons depict life “behind the scenes” in Harbin’s medical community in April–June 1911.

As mentioned above, the tension between the Harbin physicians and Professor Zabolotny first arose at the height of the plague, in the winter of

1910–1911. To give both sides their due, however, this tension initially stayed within the medical community, and did not spill over into the periodical press.

We can get an idea of how the conflict played out from reports in the press. It appears that in spring 1911 the Harbin physicians expressed a desire to attend the Mukden Conference. CER surgeon Pavel Voskresensky was included in the Russian delegation as a representative of the HPA, but Doctor Budberg⁹ was apparently excluded. According to Budberg, in March 1911 he received notification from the police that if he wanted to say anything at the conference in Mukden, he would have to write down his report and submit it to the CER’s Chief Doctor for censorship.¹⁰

The first mention of the conflict in the press comes in a report in the Harbin newspaper *Noviy Kray* on a visit to the city by Mukden Conference participants on April 9–10th, 1911. This states that when Zabolotsky’s expedition was about to leave Harbin for Mukden, a group of doctors and students came to the station, and Doctor Budberg gave a speech on their behalf to them: “We, doctors who have worked to fight the plague in Harbin, welcome the honourable members of the international conference, and deeply regret that, owing to particular circumstances that have transpired here, we were deprived of the chance to present the materials we have for the international conference to discuss. Having chanced to find out your departure time, we have hurried to come and wish you every success in your productive work.”¹¹

Interviewed by the Saint Petersburg newspaper *Novoe Vremya* in August 1911, Zabolotny recalled the Harbin physicians with barely concealed distaste: “As pleasant and polite as the Chinese, Japanese and representatives of other powers participating in the conference were towards the expedition, and to me in particular,

⁹ Rozher Aleksandrovich Budberg (1867–1926), was a Russian doctor from a family of German background. In 1910–1911, he was a doctor at the CER hospital in Harbin.

¹⁰ *Vrachebnaya Khronika. Sibirskaya Vrachebnaya Gazeta*. No. 24. June 12, 1911. P. 288.

¹¹ *Chronicle. Noviy Kray*. No. 57. April 14, 1911. P. 2.

⁷ *Novaya Zhizn*. Illustrated supplement. May 24, 1911. P. 4.

⁸ *Novaya Zhizn*. Illustrated supplement. June 20, 1911. P. 4–5.

the taste left in my mouth from the various petty quarrels and disputes with certain colleagues from Harbin is no less bitter.”¹²

In the same interview, Zabolotny gave his views on the origins of the conflict: “The starting point for this whole episode came at the Mukden Conference... As agreed by the delegates from all the countries, I was to reply to the welcoming speech from Hsi Liang, the viceroy of Manchuria. In voluntarily giving up their right of address, and designating it to me, the delegates thus acknowledged Russia’s pre-eminence, and avoided wasting time on unnecessary ceremonies. Also among the representatives at the conference was Harbin’s Doctor Voskresensky. Considering himself a representative of a completely new and independent ‘power’, the Harbin city government, which survived only thanks to the charity of the Chinese railway, Voskresensky wanted to retain his own speech of response. But when he sought my advice, I found his address unsuitable, and also refused to include a greeting from Harbin in my own speech. The Harbiners took umbrage at this. They started a campaign against me in the press in the capital and some of the local press.”¹³

It should be noted that the conference was also the scene of a public conflict within the British delegation, between Dr. G.F. Petrie, from the Lister Institute, and Dr. G. Douglas Gray, physician to the British diplomatic mission in Beijing [8, pp. 87–88]. Even before the conference, the Japanese bacteriologists had split into two rival camps: the Imperial University of Tokyo and the Imperial Institute for Infectious Diseases, led by Professor Dr. Kitasato Shibasaburō [9]. The first

¹² Professor Zabolotny’s return to Petersburg. *Kharbinskiy Vestnik*. No. 2232. August 26, 1911. P. 3.

¹³ Professor Zabolotny’s return to Petersburg. // *Kharbinskiy Vestnik*. No. 2232. August 26, 1911. P. 3. Pavel Ivanovich Voskresensky (1868–1925), mentioned in this quote, joined the CER as one of its first doctors after graduating from the Faculty of Medicine at Moscow University. Even before construction of the railway began, he worked from 1897 in survey teams in Northeast China. He lived in Manchuria for roughly 15 years, and his career in public life began around the time of the 1910–1911 plague, when he was elected a representative of the HPA. Once the epidemic was over, Voskresensky returned home to Moldavia. After seeing active service in World War I, he headed the Moscow City Sanitary Station from 1917. In 1921, Voskresensky set up and headed the Moscow Sanitary Institute (now the F.F. Erisman Federal Hygiene Research Centre) at the station.

decades after the microbiological revolution were not only a romantic age of “germ hunters”, but also a time of fierce competition for scientific priorities.

As for the Russian delegation, once the Mukden Conference was over, the conflict between the doctors moved into the press. The press in the capital mentioned by Zabolotny was the *St. Petersburg Zeitung*, an influential German-language Saint Petersburg newspaper, which published anonymous reports on the Manchurian plague. The authorship of these telegrams did not remain a secret for long: twelve years later, they reappeared, slightly amended, in a book by Doctor Budberg [10, p. 162].

The conflict between the professor from the capital and the Harbin physicians flared up again at the end of May. The physicians who had fought against the plague (Budberg, Voskresensky, I.F. Akkerman, L.A. Olshevsky and V.V. Petrov),¹⁴ drew up a protest against Professor Zabolotny, whom they blamed for the Harbin physicians being excluded from the conference, and delivered it to him via student Leonid Isaev.¹⁵

At a meeting of Harbin physicians on May 30, 1911, Doctor Budberg declared: “It seemed that Professor Zabolotny, following the example of the other delegates, would remove all the obstacles preventing the Russian doctors from attending the conference, and would help them to take part in it, like the Japanese and other doctors. However, this was not the case. We see Professor Zabolotny like a lion at the conference gates, blocking access to it for the Russian doctors, while doctors from the most remote corners of the world have come to the conference.”¹⁶

¹⁴ Vasily Vasilevich Petrov (1872 – after 1940) worked for the CER until the railway was handed over to Soviet management in 1925, and was active in public life in Harbin. A man of radical views, both anti-Soviet and anti-Japanese, he was forced to leave by the end of the 1920s, and established a private practice in Manchuria (Bureau of Russian émigré affairs in the Manchurian Empire. Personal record of V.V. Petrov. State Archive of Khabarovsk Krai (F. 830. Op. 3. D. 36431. L. 1–2, 20).

¹⁵ Leonid Mikhailovich Isaev (1886–1964) was an outstanding parasitologist and epidemiologist. He initiated the founding of the Bukharan Tropical Institute (now the L.M. Isaev Institute of Medical Parasitology in Samarkand) in 1923, and remained its director all his life.

¹⁶ *Vrachebnaya Khronika. Sibirskaya Vrachebnaya Gazeta*. No. 24. June 12, 1911. P. 288.

In the subsequent discussions at the meeting, Professor Zabolotny had very harsh words for the group of doctors who had signed the protest, and declared that he did not think it was possible to offer a hand to such people. This angered Baron Budberg, who demanded that Zabolotny apologise for insulting the participants in the meeting. However, the baron was not supported by the others present.¹⁷

After the meeting, Budberg, via a representative (his second), challenged Zabolotny to a duel. The latter refused to apologise, and suggested taking the matter to the courts. For several days, the parties negotiated via intermediaries in an attempt to resolve the conflict.¹⁸

At this time (in early June 1911), news came of an epizootic among tarbagans on the Mongolian side of Borzya Station. The Ministry of Internal Affairs immediately sent an expedition to Harbin to investigate. On June 9, 1911, Professor Zabolotny, doctors P.V. Krestovsky and A.A. Churilina, and student Leonid Isaev hurriedly left for the Zabaikalye region.¹⁹

The next meeting of Harbin physicians, after a heated discussion, adopted the following resolution by a majority vote: "...meeting of physicians finds that at the meeting on May 30 nothing insulting was said by Professor Zabolotny towards any participant in the meeting, or those who have signed the declaration presented to Professor Zabolotny by student Isaev..."²⁰

Some of the participants abstained from voting.

We can agree with the *Sibirskaya Vrachebnaya Gazeta* correspondent who believed that "the question of whom Professor Zabolotny abused at the meeting, and who should take this abuse personally can scarcely be of interest to

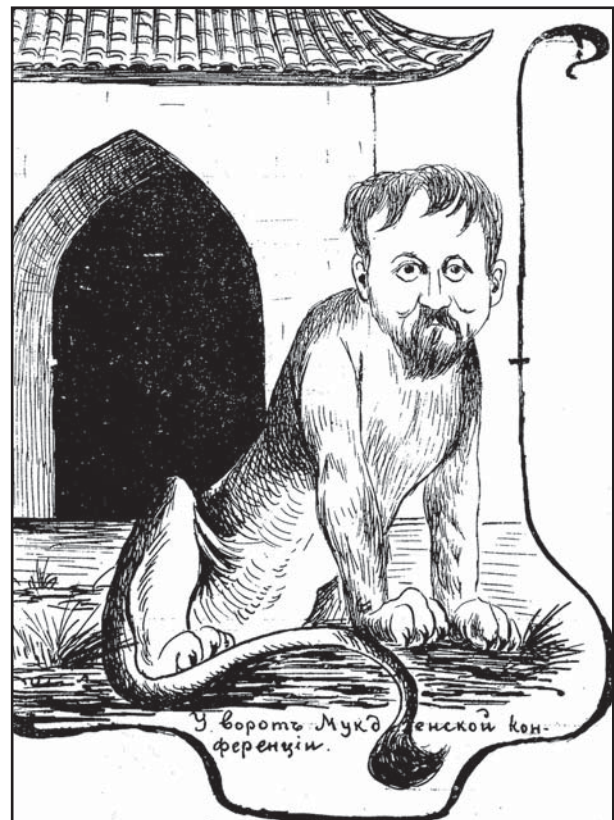


Fig. 4. The Epilogue of the Harbin Plague.²¹

anyone other than the Harbin physicians."²² Meanwhile, the initial cause of the conflict — whether Zabolotny was responsible for the Harbin physicians being excluded from the Mukden Conference — was not discussed again, and remained unresolved.

While the Harbin physicians were discussing the insult done to the honour of the baron and the physicians' meeting, Zabolotny's expedition to the Zabaikalye region managed to find a tarbagan carrying the plague.²³ The professor reported this discovery not in a scientific paper, but in urgent telegrams to the journal *Russkiy Vrach*.²⁴ And even though the plague-infected tarbagan was found by student Leonid Isaev, and N.N. Pisemsky, a CER doctor at Manchuria Station, and Doctor

¹⁷ On the conflict between Baron Budberg and Professor Zabolotny. *Novaya Zhizn*. No. 154. June 15, 1911. P. 3; Budberg, R. A. An open letter to the doctors discussing the incident with Professor Zabolotny. *Novaya Zhizn*. No. 155. June 16, 1911. P. 3.

¹⁸ Chronicle and minor news stories. *Russkiy Vrach*. 1911. 11(24): 1026; On the conflict between Baron Budberg and Professor Zabolotny. *Novaya Zhizn*. No. 154. June 15, 1911. P. 3.

¹⁹ Chronicle. *Novaya Zhizn*. No. 149. June 10, 1911. P. 2.

²⁰ On the conflict between Baron Budberg and Professor Zabolotny. *Novaya Zhizn*. No. 154. June 15, 1911. P. 3.

²¹ *Novaya Zhizn*. Illustrated supplement. June 20, 1911. Pp. 4–5. Caption: "At the gates of the Mukden Conference".

²² *Vrachebnaya Khronika*. *Sibirskaya Vrachebnaya Gazeta*. No. 26. June 26, 1911. P. 311.

²³ Chronicle. *Novaya Zhizn*. No. 156. June 17, 1911. P. 3.

²⁴ Chronicle and minor news stories. *Russkiy Vrach*. 1911. 11(25): 1056; "Chronicle and minor news stories" // *Russkiy Vrach*. 1911. 11(26): 1091.



Fig. 5. The Epilogue of the Harbin Plague.²⁶

P.V. Krestovsky, another member of Zabolotny's expedition, also identified plague-carrying marmots independently, it was Professor Zabolotny who got all the glory. In recognition of the expedition's success, he received a congratulatory telegram from Russian Prime Minister Pyotr Stolypin.²⁵

These developments are depicted in the "Epilogue of the Harbin Plague" series of satirical cartoons, published in the Harbin newspaper *Novaya Zhizn* on June 20, 1911. The first cartoon shows Professor Zabolotny as a lion, sitting in front of a traditional Chinese building (Fig. 4). This illustration was meant to remind Harbin readers of Doctor Budberg's comments regarding the professor from the capital, standing, like a lion, at the gates of the Mukden Conference and preventing the Harbin physicians from attending it.

In the next picture, the *Novaya Zhizn* cartoonist depicts participants in the protest against Zabolotny — Budberg, Voskresensky, I.F. Akkerman, L.A. Olshevsky and V.V. Petrov, giving each of them a portrait likeness (Fig. 5). The student

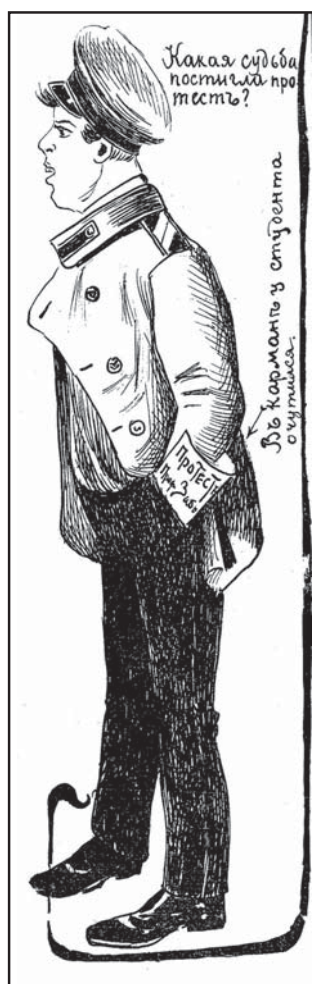


Fig. 6. The Epilogue of the Harbin Plague.²⁷

Leonid Isaev, through whom the protest was delivered to the professor, was not forgotten either (Fig. 6). The duel that almost took place between Budberg and Zabolotny is the subject of another cartoon, showing the quarrellers each holding a huge enema. Its caption ("Ivan Ivanovich and Ivan Nikiforovich") refers to a short story by Nikolai Gogol, and hints at the trivial cause of the conflict (Fig. 7).

The last cartoon in the Epilogue of the Harbin Plague series depicts Professor Zabolotny attempting to catch two small animals running off to either side, along with a revolver lying in the grass (Fig. 8). For the avoidance of doubt, the artist has written the word "tarbagan" on each of the animals. The caption ("A picture puzzle: where is Baron Budberg?") hints at the professor's "flight" from Harbin without the conflict being resolved. The fact that two animals are being hunted most likely alludes to the Russian saying "He who chases two hares will catch neither". This cartoon is a sign that the newspaper's management did not initially regard the findings of Zabolotny's expedition as a scientific discovery. Notably, the animals in the cartoon are more like dogs or cats than marmots: the Zabaikalye region is more than 800 km (500 miles) from Harbin, and the Harbiners did not know exactly what the animals looked like.

Zabolotny's scientific victory is also the subject of another cartoon, published in *Novaya Zhizn* on July 4, 1911 (Fig. 9). Here, Zabolotny is shown riding an animal (this time looking more

²⁵ Chronicle. *Novaya Zhizn*. No. 169. July 1, 1911. P. 3.

²⁶ *Novaya Zhizn*. Illustrated supplement. June 20, 1911. Pp. 4–5. Caption: "Secret plotters write a protest to Professor Zabolotny".

²⁷ *Novaya Zhizn*. Illustrated supplement. June 20, 1911. Pp. 4–5. Caption: "What fate befell the protest? It ended up in a student's pocket."



Fig. 7. The Epilogue of the Harbin Plague.²⁸

like a rat) and the caption (“Rescued by the tarbagan”) refers to the professor’s moral victory over the Harbin physicians.

Relations between the CER doctors and the members of Zabolotny’s expedition had been irreparably damaged. When a banquet was held in Zabolotny’s honour on July 4, 1911, by the officers of the Harbin garrison, of the CER doctors who had participated in the measures against the plague, only Felix Yasensky, the railway’s Chief Doctor, attended.³⁰ When Zabolotny returned to Russia, not one civilian doctor came to the station, not even Yasensky.³¹



Fig. 8. The Epilogue of the Harbin Plague²⁹.

²⁸ Novaya Zhizn. Illustrated supplement. June 20, 1911. Pp. 4–5.

²⁹ Novaya Zhizn. Illustrated supplement. June 20, 1911. Pp. 4–5.

³⁰ Chronicle. Novaya Zhizn. No. 174. July 6, 1911. P. 3.

³¹ Chronicle. Novaya Zhizn. No. 177. July 9, 1911. P. 3.

The participants in these events did not like to remember them, so this uncomfortable subject tends to be absent from memoirs on the plague epidemic. The only exception we know of is a book by Budberg published in 1923, which has been analysed by Mark Gamsa [10–12]. The baron, who came from a family of Baltic Germans, married a Chinese woman and learned Chinese, presents himself as the sole protector of Harbin’s extremely poor Chinese population against the harsh bureaucratic machine of the Russian state, represented by the professor from the capital. This seems more likely an attempt to justify his actions during the plague of 1910–1911 than a desire to explain his actual motives.

The main versions of the causes of conflict are set out in newspapers and in Budberg’s memoirs. However, another factor may have contributed to the events. In the winter of 1910–1911, the participants in the conflict were seeing their accustomed social roles in Harbin change.

Members of the ancient Budberg (von Budberg-Böninghausen) family, originally from Germany, had lived in the Baltic region since the 13th century, and since the 18th had served the Russian Empire in military and diplomatic posts [12]. Around the turn of the 20th century, the Budbergs enjoyed close ties with the imperial court: Budberg’s mother was a maid of honour and personal friend of Empress Maria Feodorovna.³² Professor Zabolotny, by contrast, did not come from a noble family: he was born in Chobotarka, a village in the Podolia Governorate. And while Budberg graduated from the elite University of Yuryev (Dorpat), Zabolotny was a graduate of the Novorossiia University in Odessa and Saint Vladimir’s University in Kiev. By 1910, Professor Zabolotny was a successful bacteriologist and epidemiologist in Saint Petersburg, and had experience of representing Russia at international health conferences. He came to Harbin as an envoy plenipotentiary of the tsarist government.

After participating in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905, Baron Budberg opted to stay in Manchuria and throw in his lot with China, participating in life in the capital only as

³² *The sudden death of Baron Budberg*. Rupor. No. 1704. August 25, 1926. P. 3.



Fig. 9. Professor Zabolotny's triumph.³⁴

a newspaper correspondent.³³ These factors could also have played a role in the conflict between the two doctors.

Conclusions

The events associated with Manchurian plague of 1910–1911 were well-documented. They were widely discussed in daily newspapers around the world, and were the subject of extensive diplomatic correspondence between the foreign offices of different countries, and reports on the epidemic were published in many European and Asian languages. When the epidemic was over, photograph albums were published showing its consequences. More recently, publications by experts in visual representation have appeared [14]. At the Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities at the University of Cambridge, Dr. Christos Lynteris is currently leading a 5-year project, Visual Representations of the Third Plague Pandemic [15, 16].

As Yelena Sherstneva and Mikhail Poddubny note, “any historical era translates into everyday

life in its own way. It is the details of everyday life that convey the spirit and atmosphere of the time” [16]. In the literature on the history of medicine, visual sources are rarely the subject of research. Typically, authors use photographs, paintings, drawings and posters to “illustrate” their work, and do not analyse them in detail. The research by Sherstneva and Poddubny may be regarded as one of the exceptions to this [16].

In the 20th century, historians of medicine focused on the scientific and medical content of their sources, and newspaper cartoons did not provide such information. The cartoons studied in this article most likely reflect a patient's-eye view of medicine, in line with the approach used in the social history of medicine.

The cartoons analysed here, on the plague and the doctors fighting it, published in the Harbin press, reflect the view of a certain section of society on the epidemic and medicine. They reflect a negative attitude to the Chinese population and their traditions and way of life, and to the Chinese government's foreign policy. In these drawings, China is represented as a kind of backdrop against which Russian doctors lead the fight against the plague. The *Novaya Zhizn* cartoons present an exclusively “Russian history”, with no place for Chinese physicians educated in Europe, or for Japanese or British physicians, even though they worked alongside their Russian colleagues.

These satirical drawings are evidence that the Russian doctors who came to fight the epidemic were regarded as “alien”: their work was regularly ridiculed. That Harbin's Russian residents during the city's first decades had a particular identity has been noted by Canada's Olga Bakich, who has studied the Russian community in Harbin. She writes that the first Russian settlers to Manchuria thought that their stay in the region would be temporary, and maintained ties with their homeland, to which they believed they would, sooner or later, definitely return. According to Bakich, by 1913 the term “Harbin Russians” no longer meant the same as “compatriots”: the former encapsulated the unique experience of living in Manchuria, and one's self-identification as pioneers and builders not just of the railway, but also of “Russian affairs in Manchuria” [17, p. 55–56].

In this context, Zabolotny's comments that Doctor Voskresensky considered himself

³³ Budberg was twice arrested during World War I, on suspicion of spying for Germany, and eventually died in Harbin in 1926.

³⁴ *Novaya Zhizn*. Illustrated supplement. July 4, 1911. P. 1.

“a representative of a completely new and independent ‘power’, the Harbin city government” are especially interesting.³⁵ They indicate that not only did the Harbiners see the non-Harbiners as “outsiders”, the Russian doctors sent to Manchuria from Russia accused their local colleagues of “separatism”. Under Order No. 00593, issued by the People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) of the USSR on September 20, 1937, many so-called “Harbiners” (around 25,000) were subjected to repression. Bakich points out an interesting fact: in a USSR Politburo resolution extending the repressions, the nationalities mentioned include, in addition to Poles, Latvians, Germans, Estonians, Finns, Greeks, Iranians, Chinese, and Romanians, Harbiners [17, p. 60]. As such, the perception that the Russian residents of Manchuria were a particular community different from the residents of Russia dates back to well before the late 1930s.

No one studying the conflict between Zabolotny and the Harbin physicians can fail to notice that the two sides regularly turned to the central authorities in Saint Petersburg. Despite being located hundreds of kilometres from the border of the Russian Far East – the part of the Russian Empire most remote from the capital, the participants in the conflict appealed from the start to the Russian authorities in the capital, avoiding personal contact and intermediate authorities. From May through August 1911, they wrote complaints against each other to the Saint Petersburg newspapers *Birzhevye Vedomosti*, *Novoe Vremya*, *Russkiy Vrach*, *St. Petersburger Zeitung*, and so on, and from there the news ended up in newspapers in Siberia and Harbin. The deciding factor in determining the victor in the conflict turned out to be closeness to the authorities. The “German contingent” whose support Budberg sought, had lost its former influence, while Zabolotny had by this time established personal ties with L.N. Malinovsky, Chief Medical Inspector at the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and Boris Shapiro, Honorary Physician in Ordinary to the Imperial Court, and Medical Inspector in the Special Border Guard Corps, becoming a leading government expert in epidemiology. It was thanks to his connections

that Zabolotny received the congratulatory telegram from Prime Minister Stolypin, and this put an end to the conflict. Although the episode took place in China, the highly centralized nature of Russia’s government meant that it was easier for the parties to resolve the conflict through the Prime Minister than for them to reach agreement in person.

As Mark Gamsa notes,³⁶ the different social groups in Harbin at the time had different opinions on the epidemic. Among the Chinese, these included local and non-local employees of the administration, doctors of traditional Chinese medicine and specialists who had been educated in Europe, mid-level health workers, urban residents and peasants, merchants and paupers. For the Russians, (who included local residents, doctors who had come voluntarily to fight the plague, members of the scientific delegation, students and medical attendants, and civilian and military personnel), the epidemic had a different meaning. This list could be extended (with Japanese, American, French, and British observers and doctors), but it is not possible to reproduce the full “polyphony of historical voices” [10, pp. 182–183]. This article presents one contemporary view of the epidemic – that of just one section of Harbin’s Russian-speaking community.

In conclusion, it should be noted that, for all the cutting satire in the Harbin press, and its mockery of the anti-epidemic measures, the Chinese population, and the feud between the Russian physicians, we should not lose sight of the selfless work of the medical personnel involved in the fight against the plague, and its real threat to the inhabitants of all the nearby regions, or the importance of the scientific discoveries made by our compatriots.

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³⁵ *Professor Zabolotny’s return to Saint Petersburg*. Kharbinskiy Vestnik. No. 2232. August 26, 1911. P. 3.

³⁶ Gamsa’s work [10] is one of the best in English on the plague of 1910–1911.

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