The 120th Anniversary of Yu.I. Poljansky (1904–1993), a world-renowned protozoologist, magnificent professor, and charismatic human being

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March 15, 2024 marked the 120th Anniversary of Professor Yuri (Georg) Ivanovich Poljansky (1904–1993), a Corresponding Member of the USSR (Russian) Academy of Sciences; 1990ies.

Fig. 1. Professor Yuri (Georg) Ivanovich Poljansky, a Corresponding Member of the USSR (Russian) Academy of Sciences; 1990ies.

and university professor widely known everywhere around the globe where Protozoology is a recognized scientific discipline (Fig. 1).

A person of unsurpassed scholarship and general erudition, able to communicate well in three foreign languages (French, German and English) he captivated students by the fascinating features of biology of free-living and parasitic unicellular organisms, their cytology and genetics. Being a remarkable scientist and outstanding teacher, books and textbooks author and editor, Yu. I. Poljansky produced more than 300 publications, including monographs of lasting value, and had more than 60 graduate students, many of whom have acquired their own broad recognition in various fields of protozoological (protistological) studies.

The scientific career of Yu. I. Poljansky was long and fruitful. He was honored and awarded repeatedly over the years, both in his own country and abroad, although his professional occupation was interrupted by the World War II, and the aftermath of Lyssenkoism — the period when biology in the USSR experienced a most dismal time (Corliss J.O., Beyer T.V., Raikov I.B., Skarlato S.O. and Yudin A.L., 1994. J. Eukaryot. Microbiol. 41 (1): 88—89).

Prof. Poljansky’s areas of interest in biology were diverse and broad, but he was also responsible for quite a number of administrative duties throughout his career. Among the latter, several major, closely linked activities received much of his attention, organizational skills, and enthusiasm.

In particular, in 1957 he established the Laboratory of Cytology of Unicellular Organisms (LCUO) at the Institute of Cytology of the USSR Academy
of Sciences (later: INC RAS; https://www.incras.ru/) in Leningrad (St. Petersburg), of which he was a co-organizer and Vice-Director, and later — the Acting Director for one year. This Laboratory was actually a small protozoological institute within the frames of INC RAS where a number of outstanding Russian protistologists, for example, Professors I.B. Raikov, A.L. Yudin, T.V. Beyer (Fig. 2), and others have been working successfully and effectively for many decades. Over the years, the LCUO has transformed into a modern well-equipped research center for studies of cell and molecular biology, genetics, evolution and molecular phylogeny, cyt-ecology and bioinformatics of protists (https://www.incras.ru/laboratoriya-citologii-odnokletochnih-organizmov; Fig. 3).

Furthermore, in 1968, with LCUO as the pivotal center, Prof. Poljansky succeeded in establishing a new scientific Society of Protozoology aimed at maintaining close research cooperation between protozoologists in all parts of the Soviet Union and incorporating national research achievements into the vast international array of biological/protozoological knowledge. The Society’s first great event was organizing and hosting of the Third International Congress of Protozoology in 1969, in Leningrad. In the following decades, the Society of Protozoology grew to a membership of over 1,000 persons from various biological research institutions and universities all over Soviet Union, united by their deep interest in free-living and symbiotic/parasitic protozoa. Further, the All-Union congresses of the Society were held every 5 years in different cities of the USSR (Baku, Kiev, Vilnius, Leningrad, and Vitebsk).

In the 21st century, the three most influential large-scale international events were held and hosted by the Society of Protozoology (now — the Protozoological Society affiliated with RAS):
- V European Congress of Protistology and XI European Conference on Ciliate Biology (St. Petersburg, July 23–27, 2007);
- International Symposium “Ecology of Free-Living Protozoa in Terrestrial and Aquatic Ecosystems” (Togliatti, October 17–21, 2011);

Another cherished dream of Prof. Poljansky was...
to revive the protozoological journal and establish its production center in St. Petersburg. This idea was also fully implemented by his successors. Since 1999, the core of the Editorial Board of PROTISTOLOGY, An International Journal (https://www.zin.ru/journals/protistology/) has been based at LCUO. The free of charge open access Journal PROTISTOLOGY is peer-reviewed; it publishes 4 issues yearly containing original articles, reviews, and theoretical manuscripts on systematics, phylogeny, evolution and ecology of protists, as well as manuscripts on multicellular organisms tackling their phylogenetic, taxonomic and ecological relationships with protists. The Journal is produced in affiliation with the Protozoological Society RAS, Institute of Cytology RAS and Penza State University in cooperation with Zoological Institute RAS (St. Petersburg).

Thus, reporting today to the memory of Prof. Poljansky on his 120th Anniversary, we can appreciate that his disciples have preserved solicitously the important assets of Yu. I. Poljansky and continue to carefully implement and comprehensively develop his substantial protozoological initiatives.