

MAKSIM GRIGOREVICH LEVIN, 1904–1963

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WITH THE DEATH of Maksim Grigorevich Levin on April 18, 1963, Soviet and world anthropology have lost an outstanding scientist. At the time of his premature death, Levin was Deputy Director of the Institute of Ethnography, a division of the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R., Head of the Section of Physical Anthropology of the same institution, and member of the Editorial Board of *Sovetskaya etnografiya* (Soviet Ethnography).

Levin was born on October 19, 1904, in the town of Slonim in Belorussia, where he spent his childhood and early youth. In 1919, a year after the death of his father, a physician, he left for Moscow and at the age of 16 entered Moscow University to major in physical anthropology. Here he enjoyed the tutelage of D. N. Anuchin, one of the founders of scientific physical anthropology in Russia. After Anuchin's death in 1923, he studied under V. V. Bunak. When he had completed his university studies in 1926, Levin was accepted as an "aspirant," a post-graduate research student, in the Institute of Physical Anthropology of Moscow University. At the same time he began his work in the Section of Folkloristics of Moscow Central Ethnographic Museum.

The scientific versatility of Levin's principal teacher, D. N. Anuchin, affected him to a considerable degree. Like Anuchin, who was not only an outstanding physical anthropologist and archaeologist but also equally at home in ethnography and geography, Levin developed these same skills to the highest degree and with his insight for applying the findings of these disciplines contributed much to knowledge of the general anthropology of the northeastern quadrant of Asia.

Levin made a number of lengthy field trips to various parts of Siberia. In 1926 he traveled in the little-known region of Tannu-Tuva. In 1927 he visited the Tungus of the northern Cis-Baykal, and in 1929 he visited the Altay region. In 1930 he was sent by the Museum and the Committee of the North to the Nogayevo *kul-turbaza*, an educational center for the Lamuts (Evens) of the Okhotsk coast. Accompanied by his wife, he spent over two years in and near this locality. Archaeological materials which he collected during his many trips along the Ok-

hotsk coast enabled him to formulate the first scientifically based ideas on the economy of the former inhabitants of this coast. Although he was primarily interested in archaeological reconnaissance and excavation, he did not neglect the discipline in which he eventually was to become most active, and he carried out somatological and anthropometrical studies of the Evens, Evenks, Kamchadals, and Russians inhabiting the general region. Since the materials he assembled included, for the first time, a Russian population in various stages of assimilation, he was able to construct an intergroup scale for the evaluation of variations of traits within the limits of the Mongoloid and Europoid major groups. These materials took on added significance because they were collected by one investigator and were therefore strictly comparable.

After his return from the Soviet Far East, Levin renewed his researches at the Museum of Ethnography and was also appointed to several responsible scientific-administrative posts, among them the curatorship of the Siberian Section. In 1939 he was transferred to the Institute of Physical Anthropology of Moscow State University, and there he further increased his scientific and administrative activities. He conducted courses in the Ethnography of the Peoples of the U.S.S.R., the Anatomy of Man, General Ethnography, and the Anatomy of the Human Brain. His administrative posts were those of Scientific Secretary of the Institute and Executive Secretary of the Editorial Board of *Antropologicheskii zhurnal* (Journal of Physical Anthropology). Notwithstanding all these duties of research, classroom presentation, and administration, Levin registered as an extramural student at the Second Medical Institute of Moscow in order to deepen his already extensive knowledge of comparative anatomy and human biology. He completed the courses with distinction in 1940.

Toward the end of World War II, the Institute of Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R. was being reorganized and Levin was invited to become a senior scientific worker there. In July, 1944, he was appointed Deputy Director of the Institute, a position which he held until his death. After 1949 he

was also Head of its Section of Physical Anthropology. In these responsible posts the abilities of Levin, the scientist and organizer, unfolded in full brilliance. His profound knowledge of diverse fields, a remarkable oratorical gift, strength of will, and at the same time humaneness toward his fellow man, helped him to establish with honor his scientific concepts and to make clear his case even to persons far removed from ethnography or physical anthropology.

Levin gave a good deal of his time to scientific editing. For many years he was Editor of the Institute's *Kratkiye soobshcheniya* (Brief Communications) and a key member of the Editorial Board of *Soviet Ethnography*, as mentioned earlier. In addition he took part in editing and also contributing to some of the separate publications of the Institute, notably the volume "Peoples of Siberia" in the series *Narody mira* (Peoples of the World) and the monumental *Historical and Ethnographic Atlas of Siberia*.

To physical anthropology Levin gave most of his energies. In this discipline his contributions were many. They ranged from studies of the origins of pygmy types to the classification of racial types in central Asia and Kazakhstan, and they included such major themes as a construction of a genealogical classification of the physical types of Siberia, a study of the complex Ainu problem, a broad comparison of the data of physical anthropology and ethnohistory and their application to the solution of the ethnic origins of Siberian peoples, the physical anthropology of the Japanese, of the Eskimos, and others. The many expeditions of Levin to the various corners of Siberia were in part the means of gathering new or supplementing or confirming old data for the various problems in which he was interested. In 1947 he worked among the peoples of the lower Amur basin and the island of Sakhalin, in 1952 among those of Tannu-Tuva and Buryat Mongolia, and after 1957 he traveled to the Chukchi Peninsula annually, the last time in 1962, although already gravely ill. During these field trips he did not limit himself to somatological investigations; he also collected ethnographic materials, took blood samples of the various groups, and carried out archaeological investigations. The results of these investigations of many years were reported in Levin's basic monograph, *Ethnic Anthropology and the Problems of Ethnogenesis of the Peoples of the Far East*, published in 1958. This



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has been translated into English and published by the University of Toronto Press for the Arctic Institute of North America under the title, *Ethnic Origins of the Peoples of Northeastern Asia* (Anthropology of the North: Translations from Russian Sources, No. 3). This work is yet to make its impact felt in broader circles. Among its achievements are an exposition of the autochthony of the Eskimos in the Bering Sea area, the southern ties of the Ainu, the distinctive ethnic history of the Nivkhis, the demonstration of intensive and ancient ties among the peoples of eastern Siberia, western Siberia, and China, and other important and hitherto unresolved problems.

Levin's works on the origins of reindeer- and dog-breeding among the peoples of Siberia are of special significance. He became interested in this subject in 1930, and his first short article on this subject dates to that year. The gradual accumulation of additional materials and the analysis of extensive literary sources enabled him to publish in the 1950's several detailed

studies in which he presented clear-cut classifications of the types of harness-dog and reindeer breeding. The mastery of historical analysis, so characteristic of Levin, is in full evidence in these studies. For instance, when he established the Altay-Sayan upland as the region of origin of the type of economic utilization of the reindeer characteristic of the Samoyedic peoples, he at the same time introduced impressive complementary ethnographic material that pointed to this region as the place of origin for the Samoyedic peoples themselves.

Several of Levin's articles reveal his keen interest in the history of physical anthropology in Russia from its beginnings in the 18th century to the present. In 1960 he summarized these historical views in a book *Essays on the History of Physical Anthropology in Russia*.

An outcome of Levin's long years of classroom lecturing was the university text, *Principles of Physical Anthropology*, which he wrote with a colleague, Ya. Ya. Roginskiy. It is regarded as the best collection of the facts of physical anthropology in the Russian language and, although of high technical content, it may be perused with profit even by the nonspecialist, so clear is the wording.

In the foregoing paragraphs I have tried to say something about the scientific, academic, and administrative achievements of M. G. Levin. This information has been taken from his "official" obituary published in *Sovetskaya etnografiya*, correspondence with his colleagues, and perusal of his works. However, it would be a great injustice not to mention the other side of the man. Even though I met Levin briefly on only three occasions to discuss some points concerning the translation and editing of his book, I could not help but notice and enjoy the charm of his personality, his original wit, his warmth and affability. He was not only an excellent scientist but also an excellent man.

The appended bibliography represents only part of some 150 articles and books that were written by Levin. Some of these were the product of collaboration with others.

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