



Academician Vladimir Vernadsky's office: A witness to a very full life



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ABSTRACT

The Memorial Office-Museum of Academician Vladimir I. Vernadsky (1863–1945) contains important memorabilia illustrating the life of this outstanding scientist, thinker, politician and statesman. He is remembered for creating a new approach to the natural sciences based on the ideas of geological continuity and universality of life in space, and for defining the concepts of the biosphere and the noosphere.

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1. Introduction

Academician Vladimir I. Vernadsky (1863–1945) was one of the most prominent Russian scientists of the 20th century. Besides being a geologist, crystallographer, mineralogist, geochemist, biologist and biogeochemist, he was also a philosopher, a historian and an organizer in science. In addition, among scientists he was a major public figure both in prerevolutionary and Soviet Russia. The results of Academician Vernadsky's scientific activities can be seen from his publications, which number over 700 titles, but these do not display his inner feelings. The Memorial Office-Museum of Academician Vernadsky is located in the Vernadsky Institute of Geochemistry and Analytical Chemistry, Russian Academy of Sciences, in Moscow. The museum was opened in May 1953 commemorating the 90th anniversary of Vernadsky's birth. This museum is Vernadsky's home office with the interior (furniture, personal items, books, paintings and photographs) removed from his last apartment in Durnovsky Pereulok 1b in Moscow. This Office-Museum gives us a glimpse of the times in which he lived and worked (Ivanovskaya and Neapolitanskaya, 2000).

The main goal of this paper is to describe the Memorial Office-Museum of Academician Vernadsky representing information about Vernadsky's office and library as well as the materials exhibited there. The description is accompanied by information about Vernadsky's life, his family and friends, working atmosphere and activities. This information allows one to look into Vernadsky's inner world and connect him with the contemporary epoch.

2. Vernadsky's office

Vernadsky's office contains some inexpensive Viennese furniture; Vladimir and Natalia Vernadsky bought it for their Saint-Petersburg apartment in 1886, after their wedding. Wherever Vernadsky lived, a desk invariably was the centerpiece of his office (Fig. 1). He wrote all of his major works, as well as letters, documents and diaries on the small redwood desk (Fig. 2). For instance, Vernadsky was writing his first textbook, "Lectures on crystallography", at that desk at the end of the 19th century (Vernadsky, 1894, 1896). Moreover, at this desk and until nearly Vernadsky's last day, he was writing his fundamental but unfinished work "Chemical structure of the Earth's biosphere and its environment" (first published in 1965 after V.I. Vernadsky death), which had principal significance for the new natural science he was creating. The books and journals on the desk at present are those that Vladimir used in the weeks preceding his death. Among them, there are several issues of the British journal *Nature*, which Vernadsky followed since his student days, scientific papers and books in foreign languages. Vernadsky could read 15 languages of the Romance, Germanic and Slavic groups. In the middle of the desk, one can see several pages of a manuscript about living matter, a fountain pen, an ink stand, a blotter pad, and other writing accessories. A genuine 1940s telephone is set at the corner, and in the center, a bronze sculpture and three small photo portraits showing his wife, niece and father. On the right, one can see a reading lamp with a green shade and a silver tray with newspapers. The issue of "Pravda" dated December 20th, 1944 features an article on "Nazis' atrocities in Lithuania". This article greatly affected Vernadsky, and may have contributed to a cerebral hemorrhage leading to the scientist's death on January 6, 1945.

A plain hard armchair covered by green broadcloth is placed at the table (Fig. 3). To the left side of the desk, a comfortable couch allowed

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Fig. 1. The desk of V.I. Vernadsky in his Memorial Office-Museum.

him to sit with feet outstretched. The scientist loved to sit in a rocking chair when receiving visitors or Natalia Yegorovna, who used to read aloud to him in Russian, German, English or French. Near the desk, there is a small folding table with books and journals for leisure reading, during breaks. There are science journals in various languages, books in Russian such as “About Lenin” by Stalin, “Isaac Newton”, “Culture of ancient Russia”, “Outline of Armenian history”, as well as books in Ukrainian, Polish and English.

There is a comfortable armchair and a small oak table to the right of the desk. Placed on the table are books published posthumously, for example, two volumes on “Thoughts of a naturalist” (Vernadsky, 1975, 1977), “Chemical structure of the Earth's biosphere and its environment”

(Vernadsky, 1965), “Living matter” (Vernadsky, 1978), “Works on biogeochemistry and geochemistry of soils” (Vernadsky, 1992), “Diaries, 1917–1921” (Vernadsky, 1994a), “Living matter and biosphere” (Vernadsky, 1994c), “Works on geochemistry” (Vernadsky, 1994b), “Publicistic articles” (Vernadsky, 1995), “Articles about scientist and their creative activities” (Vernadsky, 1997), “Diaries, 1921–1925” (Vernadsky, 1998), as well as works on crystallography, biogeochemistry, radioactivity in rocks, and history of science, among others.

There is a low couch with cushions placed between two windows. An antique roll-top desk is located at the left corner of the room. This desk space provided an additional surface for the numerous books and papers. Also on this roll-top desk, there is a photo of Vladimir Vernadsky

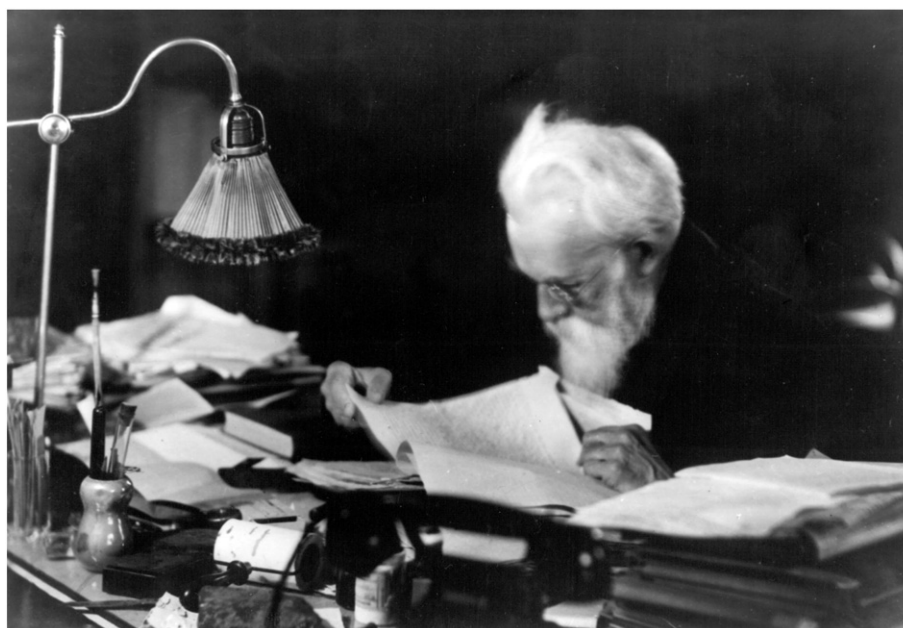


Fig. 2. Vernadsky at his home office (1940).

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