

“My Meetings with Th. Dobzhansky”: Interview with Mark B. Adams

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The interview subject is Mark B. Adams, historian of biology, associate professor, Pensilvania University, USA, meetings with Theodosius Dobzhansky, Dobzhansky’s personality, his library and relations with his colleagues.

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Mikhail B. Konashev: When did you meet Th. Dobzhansky first time and why?

Mark B. Adams: I met him first at the AAASS “Synthetic Theory of Evolution” conference (organized by Ernst Mayr) — 3 days (Boston) in 19?? Met him again in California (Davis / Yosemite) in summer 1974.

Mikhail B. Konashev: How long was that meeting in California?

Mark B. Adams: Doby picked me up at the airport, and we drove to his research station in Yosemite (cabin, plus sleeping outdoors in sleeping bags). I spent the week with him and several of his graduate students. They were up early collecting, working, labbing; after lunch each day, the others would take a nap or whatever, and Doby and I would sit for a couple hours and chat (5 or 6 days). I recorded the interviews on magnetic tape. We alternated days doing the interview in English and Russian.

Mikhail B. Konashev: Did you keep the record of talking with him? Or typewritten text of this record?

Mark B. Adams: Recorded; later, transcribed and typed out by wife of emigre Wharton economist/prof (Aron Katsenelenboigen). Last time I looked, I couldn’t find it; but I’m sure it is here somewhere.

Mikhail B. Konashev: Was this meeting intereting and useful for you as historian of Russian genetics and eugenics?

Mark B. Adams: Obviously.

Mikhail B. Konashev: What do you know about his library? What is its fate?

Mark B. Adams: When Doby moved from Columbia to Davis at the invitation of his latest student, F. Ayala, he sorted through everything, through away much, and kept only a few personal books. (I believe the deal at Davis was that Doby had a lab and graduate students). He had a small house in Davis where I spent a couple days with him after we got back from Yosemite, met the Ayalas, etc. His extensive reprint collection became the core of the extensive reprint collection of the Genetics Department (under Ayala) at Davis. A large room, full of reprint boxes along the side of one wall; I used and went through them, getting xeroxes (and occasionally spare copies) of his Russian reprints. I believe his scientific books were integrated into the biology library there, but don’t know for certain.

Mikhail B. Konashev: What your personal impression of Dobzhansky? Had he mostly high spirits or at least sometimes was sad?

Mark B. Adams: At the time, he knew he had leukemia, and his wife had died years before, so he was a bit fatalistic, but always seemed quite friendly and in good spirits when I was with him. He did like to get to bed early, and would occasionally sun himself in the back (“for vitamin D”).

Mikhail B. Konashev: Could one say he was alone or he was afraid of death?

Mark B. Adams: Yes, of course: he missed his wife (didn't get along with his daughter's husband, the Yale anthropologist Coe), and was alone — except for his work, his grad students, his colleagues, and the Ayalas. His closest friend was I. Michael Lerner at Berkeley. (I had been invited back to interview Doby again, and was visiting Berkeley, in Lerner's office, on the way to visit him, when Lerner got the call that he had died...)

Mikhail B. Konashev: Did he like jokes? And what kind?

Mark B. Adams: I don't remember "jokes" per se, but he did have a sense of humor, was witty, and was quite witty (he liked the well-turned "bon mot").

Mikhail B. Konashev: About what you told with him outside interview time?

Mark B. Adams: The formal interviews (sitting down, recording) were almost entirely about his memories of Russia, Filipchenko, Kiev, the early years, and Russian geneticists/figures (and the year-long visits of Karpechenko and other Russians to California, along with a camping trip for Vavilov when he visited)... etc. But the other times we also talked about a wide range of things, including his reminiscences of E. B. Ford and others he knew from his past. (No mention of his problems with Sturtevant, though, about which he was quite sensitive.)

Mikhail B. Konashev: What were Dobzhansky's relations with Ayala in that period?

Mark B. Adams: Ayala was his latest student, "made good" at Davis, where he was chair of genetics an important scientific figure there. Doby was his teacher — old, retired, and alone. So Ayala sort of indulged and looked after him, gave him a place to work and stay, invited him to parties. Sort of a scientific "son", with the roles now reverse...

Mikhail B. Konashev: As I know copy of some parts of Dobzhansky's diary was made for you. Copy of what parts do you have?

Mark B. Adams: I didn't see his travel diaries (some were published by the APS, I think). The copy that was made for me was of Doby's "Oral History" interview (part of the Columbia series). Informative, and interesting, but not very full scientifically (Barbara Land, who did the interviews, didn't know Russian or genetics or science, so what Doby told her was the version of things for an "uninformed American" (e. g., he told her he was Greek Orthodox — when I asked him about it (surely he was RUSSIAN Orthodox), he told me he'd just said that to her because that was the only "Orthodox" church she had heard of, so that's what he told her.)

«Мои встречи с Ф.Г. Добржанским»: Интервью с Марком Б. Адамсом

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Главная тема интервью, которое М. Б. Конашев взял у Марка Б. Адамса, историка биологии, адъюнкт-профессора Пенсильванского университета (США) — встречи Марка Б. Адамса с Ф.Г. Добржанским, его личность, его библиотека и его взаимоотношения с коллегами.

Ключевые слова: Ф.Г. Добржанский, синтетическая теория эволюции, эволюционная генетика, личность, культура.