

## Conference Paper

# Forty Years Without Luria With Luria

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## Abstract

The article compares five Luria International Memorial Congresses in Russia and some Luria Memorial Conferences abroad to prove the intensive and extensive development of Lurian approach. Such a development was assured by Lurian international school of psychologists (his colleagues, disciples and followers) who work or worked in different branches of psychology. The Lurian approach or Lurianism is defined as a combination of systemic and cultural-historical approaches. The specific Lurian approach in neuropsychology is determined by its subjects' orientation. It means, that the Lurian neuropsychological analysis is not centered on a disease (its symptoms and severity, functional and cognitive disturbances), but on a subject: his personal experience, health concepts, coping strategies and attitudes, social interactions and so on. Lurian neuropsychology is a 'unified theory of cerebral and mental functions'. It explains why Lurianism still rests a source for development of both fundamental and applied psychology.

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## 1. The History of Luria International Memorial Congresses

*The first Luria readings*, organized by E.D. Homskaya, took place on November 24–25, 1987, in ten years after Luria's death and in 85 years after his birth. 200 specialists from 18 cities of USSR and 2 foreign countries (China and Argentine) participated in four sections dealing with different problems of medical psychology: the perspectives of the development of medical psychology, actual problems of the clinical neuropsychology, interhemispheric asymmetry and interhemispheric interaction, neuropsychological aspects of the rehabilitation: psychopharmacology and reeducation. Besides, the round table 'Brain and Mind' underlined the need for generalization of numerous new experimental evidences in neuropsychology. B.V. Zeigarnik opened this conference

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with the words that Alexander Romanovich Luria became a founder of neuropsychology in result of his theoretical and methodological achievements in general psychology. These words were decisive to transform Luria International Memorial Conferences from medico-psychological into interdisciplinary ones.

In two years, on November 16–18, 1989, the *International Luria readings* in Moscow became interdisciplinary and included 220 participants from 20 cities of the USSR and 3 foreign countries: Poland, Cuba and Bulgaria. Among six sections there was one dealing with the problems of general psychology.

The professor of Copenhagen University Anne-Lise Christensen – a disciple of Luria, who came many times to Moscow to study Luria's methods of neuropsychological assessment under Luria's supervision and then she published their description in English [1] – has organized the *International Luria Lectures in Denmark* on June 20–23, 1990 [2]. They took place at the Center for Rehabilitation of Brain Damage at Copenhagen University, directed by Anne-Lise Christensen and applying Luria's principles of neuropsychological rehabilitation. Specialists from 5 countries (Denmark, Finland, Rumania, USA, and USSR) have presented lectures on problems of neuropsychological assessment and rehabilitation, as well as on functional organization and levels of cognitive processes. A special addition to the group of psychologists was the participation of Elena Luria, the daughter of A.R. Luria, who took everybody into the atmosphere of her father's important ideas and great activities.

In November 1992, the *Second International Luria readings* took place in Moscow. There were two particular features of this meeting: the plenary report of O.K. Tikhomirov 'The value of Luria's works for main problems of general psychology' and two new round tables – 'Developmental neuropsychology' and 'Neuropsychology of aging', inaugurating these new branches of neuropsychology that became primordial at all consecutive Luria International Memorial Conferences.

The next *First International Luria memorial conference* at September 24–26, 1997 was devoted to 95th anniversary from Luria's birth and 20 years from his death. It was the first Luria International Memorial Conferences, where all branches of psychology were presented at nine sections and two plenary sessions. 400 participants from 60 different cities, (including 23 cities of Russia) and from 17 countries (Argentina, Bulgaria, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Holland, Israel, Italy, Mexico, Norway, Poland, Russia, South Africa, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, and the USA) demonstrated the influence of Luria's ideas on the development of contemporary psychology (particularly neuropsychology) in Russia and elsewhere.

As it could be expected, the *Second International Luria memorial conference*, commemorating the centennial anniversary of his birth in September 2002, was even larger: 700 participants from 39 cities of Russia and 31 countries: Belarus', Bulgaria, Canada, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Holland, India, Iran, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kirghizstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Mexico, Norway, Poland, Russia, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, the USA and Uzbekistan. 22 sessions in all branches of psychology, 3 evening lectures developed the ideas of A.R. Luria in 4 main directions: 1) general psychology (namely, the cultural-historical psychology) and the psychology of normal and abnormal personality; 2) general and clinical neuropsychology; 3) developmental neuropsychology; 4) psychophysiology and psychogenetic. New for Luria International Memorial Conferences was an International Competition of presentations by young researchers that became a must for all consecutive Luria conferences. Another innovation was a video-bridge between New York and Moscow, which also became traditional for all consecutive Luria conferences. The participants of the Second International Luria memorial conference were deeply impressed by the visit to the A.R. Luria 'dacha' (country house), where we could see his personal belongings and even to take own photo in Luria's arm-chair. A visit to the tomb of Luria preceded the memorial session.

The same year Luciano Mecacci has organized *the International Conference on 'Brain and Mind'*, celebrating the centennial anniversary of Luria's birth in Florence (Italy) in September 2002. All presentations emphasized the wealth of Luria's contributions to the international psychological and neuropsychological science.

*The third International Luria memorial conference in Belgorod* on October 10–12, 2007 was predominantly specified in problems of applied neuropsychology, but one section dealt with cultural-historical psychology. In 5 years, two international interdisciplinary conferences in Moscow celebrated the 110<sup>th</sup> anniversary from Luria's birth: Memorial workshop on September 20–22, 2012 and *Moscow International Congress* on November 29 – December 1, 2012. The both conferences counted 19 sessions (including International Competition of oral and poster presentations by young researchers), 2 round tables and a video-bridge with the USA. 313 participants from 15 countries (Belarus', Brazil, Columbia, Germany, Israel, Italy, Mexico, Poland, Portugal, Russia, South Africa, Spain, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, and the USA) and from 23 different Russian cities took part in these memorial conferences.

The last International Luria memorial Congress – *The Fifth International Luria Memorial Congress in Yekaterinburg* on October 13–16 2017, revealed to be one of the most important in the history of Luria memorial conferences: 504 participants from 32 Russian

cities and from 25 countries (Australia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus', Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kirghizstan, Mexico, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Slovenia, South Africa, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the USA) The theme of the Congress was 'LURIAN APPROACH IN INTERNATIONAL PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCE', which means that it included topics from such disciplines as cultural-historical psychology; neuropsychology and neurosciences; developmental neuropsychology, including problems of early neurocognitive development of children; neuropsychological rehabilitation of neurological, mental and psychosomatic patients; remediation of learning disabilities; neurolinguistics; neuropsychology of individual differences; psychogenetic; psychophysiology; general, social, developmental and teaching psychology; psychology of health; ergonomics; and psychology of the subject of professional activity. Many international institutions took part in the organization of this Congress: Russian Ministry of Science and Education, Russian Academy of Education, Yeltsyn Ural Federal University, Moscow Lomonosov State University in collaborating with Russian Psychological Association (RPA), American Psychological Association (APA), the Institute of Vygotsky in Portugal, Kemerovo Federal University, Tomsk State University, International Society of Applied neuropsychology (ISAN), International Society of Cultural-historical Activity Research (ISCAR), Center for Integrating Neuropsychology and Psychology (CINAPSI) in San Paulo, Irkutsk Research Center of Family Health and Human Reproduction, Moscow Research Center of Developmental Neuropsychology, named after A.R. Luria. The variety of forms of work was impressive: 15 sessions (including International Competition of oral and poster presentations by young researchers), 6 master-classes, 2 evening lectures and a video-bridge with the USA. A highlight of the Fifth International Luria Memorial Congress was the large number of international contributions: presentations, submitted jointly by representatives from different countries. It makes this Congress an international forum of psychologists. The memorial session took place in Kisegach, in the sanatorium; where during the World War II A.R. Luria directed a rehabilitation hospital for brain-injured soldiers and created his theory of neuropsychological rehabilitation. The visits to the former operation room, to the museum of the hospital, the laying flowers to the memorial board of A.R. Luria rest unforgettable for all participants.

Therefore, Luria International Memorial congresses became a very important psychological interdisciplinary forum. The eminent psychologists all over the world considered an honor to participate in it. Table 1 obviously demonstrates the intensive and extensive development of Lurian approach.

Let us further define what is Luria's approach or Lurianism.

TABLE 1: Statistics of different Luria Memorial Congresses.

Year	Name of the Congress	Number of participants	Number of Russian cities	Number of countries	Number of sessions	Number of master classes, evening lectures, scientific excursions or round tables
1987	The first Luria readings	200	18	3	4	1
1989	First International Luria readings.	220	20	4	6	0
1990	Luria Lectures in Denmark	100	1	5	4	0
1997	First International Luria memorial conference.	400	23	19	11	1
2002	Second International Luria memorial conference, commemorating the centennial anniversary of his birth.	700	39	31	22	6
2012	Moscow International Congress dedicated to the 110 <sup>th</sup> anniversary of A.R. Luria's birth.	313	23	15	19	3
2017	The Fifth International Luria Memorial Congress in Yekaterinburg	504	32	24	15	7

## 2. Lurianism

J. Peña-Casanova [3] puts down the most important features of 'Lurianism' (the term, proposed by him in 1989):

- a philosophical background;
- a theoretical framework;

- an open clinical methodology; and
- an open mind to new approaches.

Luria's approach or Lurianism is based on systemic cultural-historical approach. The whole life of A.R. Luria, starting from the youth was a successive construction of this approach. In 1922 the twenty years old, Luria formulated in his first book 'Principles of real psychology' the main principles of 'real' psychology [4, p. 295]:

- *To deal with the concrete personality, the living human being, as a **biological, social and psychological unity***
- To study individual regularities, uniquely determined sequences, that is, to combine a description of individual, unique processes with the study of lawful, regular processes.
- To study an individual human mind as a whole and particular mental phenomena as functions, which are elements of this whole, that develop in a specific human personality, with the possibility of change through the transformation of social conditions.
- To study individual values of the examined psychological phenomena for the life of the actual personality.

This first Luria's book 'Principles of real psychology' precludes the future cultural-historical approach and the theory of extracerebral origin of functional systems, that is the generation of new integrated brain systems under the influence of historical and cultural factors, objective and external to the brain and created in the course of the history of human society, not merely modifying, but making higher mental functions possible [5–7]. *We need to step outside the organism to discover the sources of specifically human forms of psychological activity* [8, p. 31].

'Thus the development of language—one of the first subjects studied by the young Luria—was never seen by him as an automatic development of "language areas" in the brain, but as resulting from the interaction of mother and child, from the negotiation of meanings between mother and child, as being in the mode of interaction or "betweenness," and this as a prerequisite for, and needing to be structuralized in, the developing neurolinguistics systems of the brain' [5, p. 188]. These new acquisitions have a cultural (instrumental) origin, a dynamic psychological structure, and a dynamic brain (body) organization as well.

As A.R. Luria wrote: «This period of my life was a search for my own way in psychology. Fifty years later I realize, that this period was very important for me as a

psychologist. Nevertheless it seems, that in the next periods I studied absolutely different problems, the central subjects of my first studies remained unchanged [8, p. 14]. Due to it, Luria has created a meta – theory of human mental functions.

‘Each speaker will point out some aspect of the work of Luria, depending on the way in which they are familiar with his research: as a pupil and/or coworker, as a psychologist or neuropsychologist, or as a historian of psychology, neuropsychology or culture. Despite the variety of presented topics only a part of his vast and complex scientific activity is taken into account, which runs the risk of over-simplifying Luria’s theoretical and methodological contributions’ [9, p. 2]. With this, if we accept that all parts of Luria’s theoretical framework are identical in principle and directly shaped by his cultural-historical approach, one could overpass the seemingly fragmentation of Luria’s works.

The specific Lurian approach in neuropsychology is determined by its subject’ orientation [10]. It means, that the Lurian neuropsychological analysis is not centered on a disease (its symptoms and severity, functional and cognitive disturbances), but on a subject: his personal experience, health concepts, coping strategies and attitudes, social interactions and so on. At this aim, Luria introduced two main features in the neuropsychological assessment:

- a flexible investigation strategy and
- a predominant orientation on the process of test fulfillment instead of its results.

The second feature means that Luria’s tests are oriented not at the result of the assessment (pass or fail), but at its process and possibilities to make it more efficient. Consequently, a ‘neuropsychological assessment must not be limited to a simple statement that one or another form of mental activity is affected. The assessment must be a *qualitative (structural) analysis* of the symptom under study, which specifies the observed defect and the factors causing it’ [11, p. 306]. Only the qualitative analysis of possible symptoms in each test fulfillment and their possible correction (with or without the examiner’s help) through a dialogue form of assessment, including cues, constitute a basis for a consecutive scoring of results [10, 12]. This approach is of special value in neuropsychological assessment of disabled children, because Lurian battery, in contrast to psychometric methods, does not measure an achieved level of education (retrospective aspect), but a potential to education (prospective aspect), very significant for a remediation program [13]. ‘Only this type of research would enable a project of rehabilitation to be set up, made to measure for that person, to allow them to regain their lost world’ [7, p. 822].

Luria was convinced that the lesion of the same region should differently affect a musician or an engineer, since it was constrained by his/her personal background. Luria contrasted his neuropsychological approach to the North-American one. [7, 14]. This last required collecting a large series of patients with similar lesion site and size to verify, on a statistical basis, the specificity of the cognitive disorder. Luria thought that large sample were relevant, but the crucial point was the analysis of single cases, the specificity of their neuropsychological profile, the specific socio-cultural background that had contributed to the psychological development of that individual. Luria's case description is not limited to the cognitive impact of brain injury but attempts to show how brain damage affects the everyday functional life and personality of the subject, the emotional and psychosocial status of the brain-damaged person and his or her close relatives and friends.

It means, that Alexander Romanovich Luria understood science within the wholeness and richness of life. 'He always knew the necessity of the qualitative in science, and equally, of the historical, the biographical in science—at least if one was to study a living being, a human being'. [5, p. 184].

To inherit all these features of Lurianism in their complexity, integration and inter-influence means to inherit in full the legacy of Alexander Luria.

## 2.1. The influence of Luria's personality

The attractive force of scientific achievements is great but the attractive force of the personality of the researcher looking for these scientific achievements is as much important.

'Luria will be remembered not only as a great scientist, but also as an extraordinary man' [15, p. 224]. Everybody who met him reminds his vivacious and creative approach to intellectual problems, audaciousness and appetite for work, his invariable cheerfulness toward everybody, frankness and open mind, the treasure of his advice, the pleasantness of his friendship and owns debt of gratitude to him [15-17; 5, 6, 18]. Everybody had the impression, that he was 'the best man I ever met' [16, p. 170].

'He knew how to be happy of simply looking at the blooming tulips. ...Now I understand – maybe, to be happy in such things is the highest wisdom' [19, p. 19]

'When dealing with a genius, like Luria, for it is characteristic of genius to contain great contradiction and richness, but at the deepest level to resolve these into an ultimate unity' (5, p. 186).

The influence of Luria's personality on psychologists from all over the world is underlined as a significant part of his legacy

### 3. Conclusions

'Luria's creations are a scientific phenomenon, significance of which is not limited by deeds of the author himself but they open potentials for cognition development in new branches and orientations' [20, p. 68]. It explains why Lurianism still rests a source for development of both fundamental and applied psychology.

To summarize three main trends can be seen in the development of Russian neuropsychology after Luria:

1. Extensive further expansion of research and practice, that is, embracing numerous new domains and nosological patient groups.
2. Combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches.
3. A social and personality-based orientation

All the previously mentioned proves, that Luria's creative and comprehensive approach stimulates the further development of neuropsychology in Russia and throughout the world. This demonstrates the vigor and vitality of Luria's ideas. It explains also why the abstracts books of all Luria Memorial Congresses have the same epigraph:

**"People come and go, but the creative sources of great historical events and the important ideas and deeds remain." [8, p. 188]**

The Luria Memorial Congresses are not only an important international psychological forum, where exchange of ideas and fruitful interdisciplinary discussions take place, These congresses are the ultimate form of immortalizing his memory and of paying our intellectual debt to our TEACHER. They are the most vivid demonstration of the inventive contribution of his ideas and methodology to the further development of different branches of psychology.

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