

# obituary

## A. R. Luria

ALEXANDER ROMANOVITCH LURIA, the distinguished Soviet neuropsychologist, died in Moscow on 14 August, 1977, at the age of 75.

He was born in 1902 and educated at the Universities of Kazan and Moscow, where he took his degree in psychology, later qualifying also in medicine. A talented experimental psychologist, his best known work was concerned with the analysis of psychological disabilities resulting from war wounds of the brain. But his interests covered a wide range of themes in experimental psychology, in particular problems of language and its acquisition in young children. He paid several visits to this country and a number of his books have been translated into English.

Luria's earliest work was concerned with the analysis of motor disorganisation provoked by conflict and stress. This was based on a long series of experimental studies carried out at the State Institute of Experimental Psychology in Moscow in the 'twenties and published as a book which appeared in English translation in 1932. Although deriving in some measure from Jung and Peterson's work on word-association and the psychogalvanic response, Luria was concerned with the disruption of volitional movement rather than with autonomic changes and did much to extend the use of objective method in the study of emotional stress.

Rather surprisingly, his work owed but little to Pavlov, who at much the same time was investigating experimental neuroses in dogs by conditioned reflex techniques. While Luria held Pavlov's physiological work in the highest esteem, relations between physiology and psychology in the Soviet Union have never been close and few Soviet psychologists espoused behaviourism. As with the great majority of Soviet psychologists, Luria's outlook was far from Pavlovian and his work was wholly confined to the study of human experience and behaviour.

The most important figure in Russian psychology after the Revolution was L. S. Vygotsky, Luria's predecessor in the Chair of Psychology in the University of Moscow and a man who influenced him greatly. Vygotsky's main interests lay in child development, more especially in the study of



language and its relation to intellectual growth. Following Pavlov's suggestion that the main differences between human and animal behaviour are bound up with the evolution of language, Luria concerned himself particularly with the acquisition of language in young children and its effects on the learning of motor skills.

Although relatively little of this work was translated, he brought much of it together in a series of three lectures delivered at University College London in 1958 and subsequently published as a short book under the title of *Speech and the Regulation of Normal and Abnormal Behaviour* (1961). More physiological in tone than Vygotsky, Luria followed him in his full acceptance of the importance of language in the intellectual development of the child. In this respect he stands far closer to Piaget than to Pavlov.

Interested as he was in the acquisition of language, Luria was even more concerned with the nature of its dissolution. His studies of aphasia, somewhat in the tradition of Hughlings Jackson and Henry Head, remain perhaps as his outstanding contribution to neuropsychology. During the last war, Luria was closely concerned with the assessment of psychological disability in brain-injured servicemen and in formulating programmes of rehabilitation based upon thorough psychological examination. His book on *Traumatic Aphasia* (1947, English translation 1970), is especially noteworthy for its detailed analysis of the various patterns of linguistic disability resulting from brain injury and their

relationship to the site and extent of the cerebral lesion.

Some years later, his considered views on the problems of cerebral localisation together with an exposition of his methods for eliciting specific psychological deficits were set out in a noteworthy monograph. This was *Higher Cortical Functions in Man* (1963, English translation 1966), which has had wide influence. Although putting forward no new theory or model of higher nervous activity, the subtlety and intuitive skill displayed by Luria in devising simple methods for analysing cortical defects and evaluating their significance represents a major achievement.

Apart from his scientific preoccupations, Luria was a man with lively human sympathies who achieved an unusual degree of empathy with the victims of brain injury. Among these was the distinguished physicist, L. D. Landau, to whose rehabilitation after a severe head injury Luria devoted quite outstanding skill and care. Nor were his ministrations limited to the famous, as is witnessed by his moving account of the visual and symbolic difficulties of a completely unknown young scientist who had sustained a penetrating occipitoparietal war wound of the dominant cerebral hemisphere. This case is described in *The Man with a Shattered World* (1972), a semi-popular book written with unusual sensitivity and very considerable literary skill. As has been well said elsewhere, Luria was a very warm human being and a deeply compassionate and concerned physician with something of the artist in his composition.

Alexander Luria was a holder of the Order of Lenin and received many other honours from his own country and further afield. He was a foreign member of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States and an Honorary Fellow of the British Psychological Society. He was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Science by the University of Leicester. He is survived by his widow, herself a medical scientist, and daughter.

O. L. Zangwill

## Jean Maetz

JEAN MAETZ died tragically in a road accident in Scotland on 16 August, 1977. He was Chief of the Groupe de Biologie Marine of the Département de