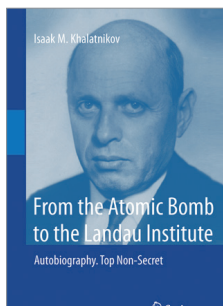


# RECENSIONI



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## FROM THE ATOMIC BOMB TO THE LANDAU INSTITUTE

AUTOBIOGRAPHY. TOP NON-SECRET

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There was much expectation for the English translation of this book, after the very successful Russian editions (three editions in 2007, 2008 and 2009!) under the title "Дядя, Кентаур и Другие (Dau, Centaur and others). Top Nonsecret". Dau was the nickname of Landau, Centaur that of Kapitsa, and the others – well, the reader can easily figure out what a constellation of giants, "Khalat" included, represents the "others". Reading the story of the Soviet atomic and hydrogen bombs told by one of the most distinguished members of the celebrated Landau's school, directly involved with Landau in the Nuclear Bomb Project, certainly gives a great emotion. Khalatnikov was one of Landau's closest collaborators and his successor at the guidance of the world-renowned Institute for Physical Problems, then Landau Institute for Theoretical Physics, of which he was the creator and first director from 1965 to 1992. The immense contribution of Isaak Khalatnikov to theoretical physics does not need to be reminded. His fundamental papers in quantum electrodynamics, cosmology and relativistic astrophysics, relativistic hydrodynamics and superconductivity, and his book on the theory of superfluidity stand among the physics classics of the second half of the 20th century. The book is indeed an autobiography, but Khalatnikov's life is so closely intertwined with the spectacular development of Soviet physics and mathematics during the cold-war years and the eventful facts of the nuclear race, that the reader will actually find in this book substantial aspects of our recent history, part of which is unedited. It is interesting to learn, for example, what happened after the sketches of the US atomic bomb got from Los Alamos to Beria's pocket. Or how the H-bomb was

realized with no external input, and a great suspense for a little mistake found in the calculation when everything was ready for the experiment! Everything is told with wonderful sense of humour and wit, and each episode actually turns into a high parade of legendary scientists, first inside the Soviet Union, then, with the gradual opening to the West started in the seventies, in all the most prestigious institutions worldwide. As promised by the title, the book is certainly a must for those interested in the scientific aspects of the nuclear weapon race, but I would rather advise the book to all colleagues who are fascinated by the bunch of scientists who succeeded in overcoming the Landau Minimum, thus entering the Landau's school Olympus. Isaak, besides letting me have the original Russian edition, gave me the rare privilege to read, just two years ago, the English manuscript. Besides my great delight and emotion in dwelling on these fascinating pages, I have to regret that the English translation, prepared by Russian colleagues who know English rather than by English colleagues who know Russian, falls short of the extraordinary value of the book. For some reason my careful fixing of numerous typos spread all over the English manuscript, as well as many stylistic changes, never reached the managing translation editor, and the manuscript was printed as it was. Thus the reader is asked to be indulgent towards the present edition, expecting that a success similar to that of the Russian edition will rapidly let us read a second edition with a new translation.

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