

On Danko Brncic Juricic

Sobre Danko Brncic Juricic

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When in 1952 I returned to Brazil from Dobzhansky's laboratory, where I was a fellow of the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Departamento de Biologia of the University of São Paulo, then directed by eminent Prof. André Dreyfus, I received two fellows that became outstanding geneticists. They were Danko Brncic, from Santiago, and F. M. Salzano, from Porto Alegre, who recently was elected as member of the U. S. National Academy of Sciences. At the same time, came Prof. Hampton L. Carson, then Professor at St. Louis, to spend a semester with us to do research and deliver a course on cytogenetics. Prof. C. Pavan was then working on population genetics of *Drosophila* and starting his research on *Rhynchosciara*. The laboratory was very alive, and I was very lucky to have Danko and Salzano working with me. Our problem was to compare the degrees of chromosomal polymorphism in closely related species of *Drosophila* with different ecological amplitudes. The work involved a great deal of travelling to places ecologically different. We found positive correlation between chromosomal variability and size of the geographical distribution and ecological versatility. Our results were published in *Heredity* 7: 193-202, 1953.

Danko, as Salzano, were outstanding in all the courses as well as in the research and since then became very close friends of everybody in the Department and greatly admired. The same occurred regarding Rosa, Danko's wife. An excellent artist Rosa helped Danko greatly and, while in Brazil, dedicated part of her time to study our modern painting and architecture.

When Danko and Rosa came there was, as frequently occurred at that time, a failure in the postal service. We did not receive their letters and did not know when they would arrive. They came on a Saturday and appeared in the laboratory Monday morning. During the two days they were behaving as good tourists in São Paulo and surroundings, Danko told that in the parks and close to the trees in the streets he was terrified looking for snakes. He said that there were no

snakes in Chile and that he heard a lot about snakes in Brazil and specially in São Paulo. Probably this was due to the international fame of the Institute Butantan, located in São Paulo, where serum against venom of snakes is prepared. Despite the fact that Pavan and myself tried to dissuade him and that in all the collecting he never saw a snake he did not totally trust our tropical nature. However, instead of snakes, he met an unexpected enemy, *Simulidae*. They are very small black flies that feed on blood. The larvae live in very oxygenated water and the adults are frequent around mountain rivers as in the places he went collecting with us. After our first collecting, he came to the lab, with a totally different phenotype. His nose looked like a giant carrot and his usually delicate face as round as and red as a pumpkin. Fortunately he had nothing more serious than the aesthetic damage and one day of fever. This occurs when the person is exposed to the flies in the first time. From then on he had no more problem but never trusted our nature. Danko, with his intelligence and sympathy became a dear friend of everybody in the Department and obtained great success scientifically and socially. He had a very nice sense of humour. He enjoyed when somebody in the lab classified him as "The southern most geneticist", as he was born in Punta Arenas. He became a dear friend of the laboratory. Pavan, myself and everybody were very sad when Danko and Rosa had to return to Santiago after the period of the fellowship ended. Afterwards Danko went back to Santiago and later to Dobzhansky's laboratory at Columbia University with a Rockefeller Foundation fellowship and obtained the expected success.

Dobzhansky, Pavan and myself went to Santiago in 1956 and had the pleasure of visiting Danko's laboratory and meeting his disciples, and seeing his success as a leader of the research on population genetics in Chile. He was very wise studying species and populations of *Drosophila* living in the diverse ecological regions that succeed from north to south in the very long

country and produced very significant papers. He took us to marvellous places like Portillo, Puente del Inca, Valparaíso and Viña del Mar, not speaking of Santiago itself. I had again the pleasure of living close to Danko and Rosa at Austin, Texas, in September-October 1969 when he had a Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship.

Danko was an excepcional person. He was a leader on evolutionary genetics in South America. He was able not only to produce important original publications on his research but to leave well

formed disciples to continue the work in the field opened by himself. He was a great scientist, a very good humanist and an excellent human being.

It is not possible to write to Danko without remembering Rosa. She is a first rate artist who altruistically devoted most of herself to help her dear husband. We, geneticists, have to be gratefull to her.

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