Polish Theriological Laboratories

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THE DEPARTMENT OF ANIMAL ANATOMY OF THE CENTRAL SCHOOL OF AGRICULTURE, WARSAW

KATEDRA ANATOMII ZWIERZĄT SZKOŁY GŁÓWNEJ GOSPODARSTWA WIEJSKIEGO W WARSZAWIE

The department consists of two laboratories, one devoted to Anatomy and the other to Histology and Embryology. Only the former will be dealt with here. Professor Kazimierz K r y s i a k has been Head of the Department, and of the Anatomy Laboratory since 1946. The Histology and embryology has been carried out under Professor Bronisława K o n o p a c k a.

The Department of Anatomy, being founded in 1918, is one of the oldest established departments of the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine in Warsaw. Since its inception, the successive heads of this Department have been Professor Eugeniusz K i e r n i k from 1918 to 1922, Professor Wacław R o s z k o w s k i from 1922 to 1929, and Professor Roman P o p l e w s k i from 1929 until 1939.

During the early years of its existence the work of organising the Department naturally handicapped scientific activity, and in addition two changes in the administration of the Department within a comparatively short period were not without their effect on the work. Although Professor P o p l e w s k i took over at a stage when the Department was relatively well organised, his great personal energy and enterprising spirit were most effective, and a pronounced improvement resulted. He was a proponent of the then new trend known as Functional Anatomy, and this was developed both in his teaching and in his research. The ten years Professor P o p l e w s k i spent in the Department of Anatomy of the Veterinary Faculty, before he was transferred to the Department of Human Anatomy, constituted the most creative period of his scientific career. Some of the fruits of his work during that time were 20 publications, either deriving from his own work

or that of his co-workers, the conferring of four doctorates and one habilitation, and most important of all, the production of a four volume text book entitled „The Anatomy of Animals", in which the subject is treated in a modern and original fashion.

The interruption of the Department's activities caused by the war lasted from 1939 to 1946, being prolonged by the destruction of one wing of the building housing the Department, the looting of its most valuable property and scattering of its equipment. The renewal of work in the Department during the post-war period demanded both from those in charge and from all of the staff the devotion of their entire time to remove the results of wartime destruction, and to re-organise teaching activities under unbelievably difficult conditions. The actual scientific work of the Department did not begin again as such until 1949. With a very few exceptions, it is concentrated in two basic directions — research on the anatomy of the bison and on animal material obtained from archaeological excavations. It should also be recorded that among the postwar achievements of the Department are four doctor's degrees and one habilitation.

Research on the European bison was preceded, as it proved later on, by a very happy stroke of organisation. The aim was simple — to ensure that material was always available and thus guarantee continuity of research work. The Ministry of Forestry, which is the body entrusted with the protection of the bison in Poland, gave its consent to the founding of a Research Centre on Bison Anatomy, coming under the Department, in 1949, and by the order of the Minister all bison remains, which must in the natural order of things from time to time become available, are consigned to the Centre. The European bison is a species which was rapidly becoming extinct. Poland's contribution to the preservation of this species is not only devoted but most effective, and will be more complete if attention is paid to this animal from the research aspect. The relatively large number of these animals in Poland in itself assigns this role to Polish science. These were the main reasons for the decision taken by those in charge of the Department of Animal Anatomy to form a research station belonging to the Department. The fruits of these decisions are today most encouraging. In addition to several publications dealing with detailed research on the anatomy of the bison, two dissertations for degree of doctor are practically completed, one dealing with the muscular system of the skeleton, and the second with the skin system of the animal. The aggregation within one scientific research centre of the largest possible amount of material on the European bison proved extremely profitable, and made it possible for us to correct certain statements, which had initially been based on somewhat too scanty material. At the end of 1960 the collection of material on the bison in the Department includes: 39 skeletons, 25 hides, 8 complete bodies, specimens of young animals preserved in order to make use of their „soft parts", 9 incomplete remains, 17 hearts etc. Considering that this collection concerns a species generally poorly represented, it must be acknowledged that it is one of the best specialized collections in the world. Work on this material is carried out in groups in the Department, in which the scientific staff of the Department itself chiefly participate, while specialists from

other research stations are invited to co-operate. The final result of these efforts is to be an „Anatomy of the Bison".

The second sphere of interest of the Department is formed by the research work, referred to above, on animal remains brought to light as part of the material excavated by archaeologists. These activities are our response to the „social orders" placed by archaeologists. Archaeology in Poland, especially during the postwar period, is an extremely live branch of Natural History. The extensive excavation work covering various stations, cultures, and settlement levels has resulted in our possessing abundant material represented by remains, chiefly bones, of animals in which man of the past was interested, either in the form of the animals he hunted, or those he kept as domestic animals. The results of these investigations are interesting not only to archaeologists, but also to biologists. We can discover from them what, for instance, was the participation of different species in the food of man, what was their economic importance, what was the territorial range of these animals, and thus information connected with historical zoo-geography and ecology, and what adaptations took place in the organism of the animal as the result of domestication, etc. Work in the Department on excavated remains is facilitated by our having suitable comparative material in the form of osteological collections of contemporary mammals.

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[1]) All papers (except nos. 31, 32, 38) has been published in polish with russian, and English, french or german summaries.

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