

**Historia botaniki i archeobotanika w poszukiwaniu danych
o użytkowaniu roślin w średniowiecznym Krakowie**

**History of Botany and Archaeobotany in Search of Data
on the Uses of Plants in Medieval Cracow**

SUMMARY

Studies on the old botanical literature bring results interesting for archaeobotany – a discipline dealing with plant fossils preserved in archaeological layers which underlie town pavements and monuments. In the last decades, many publications appeared concerning subfossil floras of European towns, ranging in age from the early Middle Ages to the modern times, but only recently archaeobotanists have attempted to confront their results with the information derived from written and iconographic sources of more or less the same age. In accordance with this trend the interests of both authoresses of the article have met, the one working in archaeobotany, and the other in history of botany. By comparing the oldest written documents with plants known from excavations, the historian seeks for the answer to the question to what degree the ancient inhabitants of Cracow were familiar with its flora and what botanical problems they were interested in. The archaeobotanist looks for indications in the old prints and manuscripts which of the potentially available vegetal sources, documented by plant remains were, in fact, exploited by people in the past.

Cracow may be counted among the best studied European towns as far the prehistoric flora is concerned. The subfossil flora of Cracow in the period in question includes 349 species of vascular plants (480 taxa including only generic determinations) and 32 moss species. Plant fossils are represented, for the most part, by uncharred (seldom charred) fruits and seeds, rare impressions, wood charcoal, leafy shoots of mosses, pollen and spores, as well as by numerous, usually indeterminable fragments of leaves, stems and the other vegetative organs.

Cracow – a seat of the oldest Polish university (founded in 1364) is the place where the earliest written materials on plants appeared. Printed books were issued not until the 16th century, the earliest works were of manuscript character. In spite of the fact that these materials were written in the late Middle Ages and at the Renaissance, they considered much earlier times, recording the oldest knowledge on plants which was transmitted by oral tradition. Among manuscripts the most important was the *Antibolomenon* (1472) by Jan Stańko (ca. 1430-1493) containing over 500 species of plants all over the world, great part of them occurring in Poland. As far as the old prints are concerned two original Polish herbals i.e. illustrated encyclopaedias of useful plants, mainly medicinal, were published in Cracow. They were *Herbarz Polski* [The Polish Herbal] (1595) by Marcin of Urzędów (1500-1573) and *Zielnik* [The Herbal] (1613) by Szymon Syreniusz (1541-1611). These herbals included ca. 800 species, and gave the first floristical notes, ecological data, and vast information on the usage of plants in the old Poland.

Relying on existing studies on the old literature it is to be assumed that at least 179 (50%) species known from the excavations are included in the old written sources. They are both indigenous plants occurring in natural communities of the environs of Cracow, archaeophytes

naturalized in this region long ago, and foreign species as well, Mediterranean and Asiatic ones, cultivated in the fields and gardens. The old written sources tell us that plants played an important role in everyday-life, as a source of food, medicine, wood, and staple used in almost all branches of handicraft. They also played a significant role in the folk religious and lay rites.

This paper is only a sketch of a very wider problem of relationships between plants and people in the medieval and the Renaissance Cracow. Presentation of this issue in a more versatile way demands further cooperation of archaeobotanists and historians of botany.

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