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Udział Polaków w badaniach przyrody Syberii, a zwłaszcza Bajkału

The participation of Poles in the exploration of the nature of Siberia, especially of the Baikal region

SUMMARY

In the years 1772-1918, Poland remained torn into three parts incorporated into the territories of its enemies, the partitioning powers of Russia, Prussia and Austria. The situation of Poles was the gravest in the Russian-held part of Poland, and it is due to this fact that several armed uprisings were launched against the Russians, all of which, unfortunately, were unsuccessful. The Russians arrested the participants of the uprisings, tortured them during the investigation, and later deported them on foot into exile to Siberia, where they were usually made to do forced labour in mines (including zinc, tin, lead, coal or salt mines) beyond the Lake Baikal, in the so-called Dauria or Trans-Baikal Land. After a period of between several to more than a dozen years of forced labour, the insurgents were set free but subject to resettlement in other localities in Siberia, where they remained under police supervision.

The uprising that produced the greatest number of exiles, over sixty thousand, was the January Uprising of 1863. This wave of exiles included some of the most progressive and dynamic members of the Polish nation, steadfast patriots who had energy, courage and enterprise. They came from various milieus and had different educational backgrounds, but they were united by their national tragedy, their struggle against the Tsarist authorities, and their common plight in exile.

The Polish exiles of 1863, many of whom were deported to the Trans-Baikal Land, developed a great interest in the wild and majestic beauty of Lake Baikal, across whose ice-covered surface the transports of convicts made their way. The names of numerous Polish insurgent-exiles are linked with the exploration of the fauna, flora, geology, palaeontology and the limnology of the lake itself, as well as its basin and the surrounding mountain ranges.

The spiritual leader of that group of exiles and the initiator of the exploration of the Baikal region was the physician and zoologist Benedykt Dybowski. In the years 1868-1877, Dybowski and the agronomist Wiktor Godlewski, were the first to explore the limnological properties of Lake Baikal taking into account parameters used in modern limnology. They made a thorough investigation of the fauna of gamma-rids and fish in the lake, and discovered a multitude of new endemic species. They also investigated the ornithofauna of the Baikal region, sending several samples of birds to the Zoological Laboratory in Warsaw for an examination of the fauna on systematic and zoogeographical grounds by the eminent specialist, Władysław Taczanowski. Dybowski and Godlewski put forward the thesis that the fauna of Lake Baikal was distinct from the fauna of all the other lakes in the world.

Andrzej Czekanowski, a partly trained physician and geologist, investigated the geology of the Baikal basin, of the mountains that surrounded it, and of the island Olkhon on the lake. He claimed that Lake Baikal was a fresh-water remnant of the Jurassic period. He made three

bold expeditions to the Great Siberian Plain along the valleys of rivers flowing to the Arctic Ocean. Czekanowski documented his findings by numerous maps and collections. Because of severe depression, he committed suicide.

Jan Czerski was a very talented self-taught geologist and comparative anatomist. After being released from army service, he was helped in his studies by Czekanowski and Dybowski. Czerski explored the geology of the Baikal basin, the surrounding mountain ranges, the Olkhon Island, and the Tunking and Kitoi mountain ranges. He managed to establish their origin and their geological structure. In a cave on the Uda river he discovered a wealth of skeletons of Quaternary mammals, which he documented and classified. Czerski claimed that Baikal was the distended mouth of the of the Lower and Upper Angara Rivers, and it was connected with the sea only in the Pre-Silurian epoch, later becoming a fresh-water lake. Czerski reconstructed the development of the Quaternary period in Siberia and the evolution of the fauna of the region's fauna. He died in Verkhniy Kolymsk, in the midst of the taiga, at the age of 47, during an expedition along the Kolyma River. Russian science has assessed his research very highly.

Alfons Parvex and Władysław Księżopolski were the first assistants of Dybowski's at Kultuk on the Baikal. The former was involved in ornithological research, while the latter was concerned with the provisions of the expedition, meteorology and some botanical research.

Feliks Zienkowicz and Stanisław Wroński were two painters from Warsaw, who helped Dybowski in segregating his collections and made beautiful illustrations of gamma-rids and fish for his publications.

Józef Łagowski was a famous Irkutsk surgeon and botanist, who gave financial support to the research, as well as treating the exiles and visiting the researchers at Kultuk.

Mikołaj Härtung and Paweł Ekert were chemist from Warsaw. They visited Dybowski at Kultuk, and they specified the chemical composition of the salt springs and the salt lakes near Irkutsk.

Henryk Wohl, an exile of Jewish origin, was a dedicated friend of Dybowski's. He owned a hotel at Irkutsk, in which he allotted one of the rooms for the needs of the explorers. He frequently visited Dybowski and supported his research financially.

Michał Jankowski was the constructor of the "Nadzieja" [Hope] boat and participant in Dybowski's expedition along the Rivers Amur and Ussuri the shore of the Sea of Japan.

Leon Dąbrowski was friend of Dybowski's from Dorpat, and later at Sivakova, Darasun and Irkutsk. He was a jovial singer who made frequent walking trips to the explorers base at Kultuk.

Ignacy Eichmiller was a cabinet-maker who prepared a number of instruments for Dybowski's research. A fervent patriot, he was executed for insulting the governor of Irkutsk.

Mikołaj Witkowski was a carriage-driver and village organ-player, but thanks to teaching himself archaeology he became one of the foremost specialist of the archaeology of Siberia. He took part in two of Czekanowski's expeditions and was inspired in his research activities by Dybowski.

Apart from those mentioned, there were several more casual collaborators of Dybowski's.

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