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Etnobotanika w Polsce – przeszłość i terażniejszość

Ethnobotany in Poland – past and present

SUMMARY

The interdisciplinary character of ethnobotany derives from its subject-matter and requires the cooperation of scholars from different academic disciplines, mainly botanists, ethnologists, linguists, sociologists and pharmacists. The immediate conclusion is that ethnobotany is a synthesis of many disciplines that deal with human beings and their environment – both natural and cultural. The main goal of this article is to point out to the development of ethnobotany in Poland and to sum up what has been achieved this discipline so far.

The present article describes different works which focus on the application of the plants, on knowledge and beliefs concerning them, both in Polish folk culture and in contemporary rural communities. The main criteria of selecting the works was the content of information connected with the topic but this information was not always the main interest of the authors. Besides, some of the works were omitted because of the richness of literature; for example those concerning herbalism (in the meaning of herbal medicine), pharmacognosy, agriculture, gardening, craftsmanship and major part of popular scientific works.

It was the interest in culture that marks the beginning of ethnobotany in Poland, and not an interest in usable plants. This is why the humanistic approach has been dominant in Poland up to the present day, and among researches there are more ethnologists than botanists.

The history of ethnobotany in Poland can be divided into three periods:

1. the beginnings of interest in folk culture – until the half of 19th century; according to romantic ideology, it was believed that the relics of pre-Christian culture can be found in folk culture, which was a great stimulus for researchers;
2. the period of intensive research from the half of 19th century until the First World War; ethnography became a scientific discipline, there was a growing interest in material culture and in usable plants
3. the period between 1918 and 1939, marked by the first attempt at synthesis of the work in ethnobotany, and monographs about the usage of plants
4. post-war period, with a growing number of works, and mainly ethnographers dealing with the ethnobotanical issues

The article discusses the basic works and tendencies in the history of phytotherapy and plant gathering, as well as rites and folk knowledge connected with plants and the presence of plants in language (both in dialects and literature).

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