



Stefan Kazimierz Pieńkowski (1885–1940)

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Stefan Kazimierz Pieńkowski (Fig. 1) was a Polish neurologist and psychiatrist. He was born on 27 August 1885 in Warsaw. His medical and scientific career was mostly associated with the Jagiellonian University of Cracow (UJ). He devoted his life to studying encephalitis lethargica, hysteria, brain injuries, the heredity of mental disorders and the pathophysiology of alcoholism and nicotineism [1].



Fig. 1 Stefan Kazimierz Pieńkowski. Photo from www.ipsb.nina.gov.pl

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In 1903, Pieńkowski graduated from a secondary school in Warsaw. One year later, he passed the secondary school leaving exam (Matura) in Zlatopil (Ukraine) and entered UJ to study medicine, which he graduated in 1911. In the years 1908–1910, he also specialised in both bacteriology and biology and embryology in UJ [1, 2]. In the years 1911–1914 and 1919–1923, he obtained the position of an assistant at the Jagiellonian University Clinic for Nervous and Mental Diseases [3], which was in those times was headed by the great Polish neurologist Jan Plitz [3, 4].

During World War I, in the years 1914–1916, Pieńkowski enlisted in the Russian Army, in which he served as a doctor. In the years 1916–1918, he held the position of the Department Head of Clinic for Neurology and Psychiatry of the Military Hospital in Zhytomyr (Ukraine). In 1923, Pieńkowski moved to Warsaw where he worked until 1928 as the Department Head in Ujazdowski Hospital. Then, for the next two years, he moved to Paris, where he specialised in the field of neurology, psychiatry, physiology and electrotherapy. Pieńkowski received the habilitation title both in neurology in 1926, and four years later in the field of psychiatry [1, 2]. From 1932 to 1939, he worked as the head of Jagiellonian University Clinic for Nervous and Mental Diseases [3].

In years 1928–1939, Pieńkowski was an editor of the quarterly Polish Neurology. He was conferred with high Polish state orders: The Order of Polonia Restituta and Gold Cross of Merit (twice). He was a member of the Neurology and Psychiatry Association of Cracow (later known as the Neurology Association of Cracow) and also a member of the Polish Academy of Learning [2].

In his scientific career, Pieńkowski researched a wide range of topics, for example, encephalitis lethargica, hysteria, brain injuries, the heredity of mental disorders and the pathophysiology of alcoholism and nicotineism [1]. The results of his studies were published in both Polish and French journals [5, 6].

One of the fields of his interests was encephalitis lethargica. He proved that psychiatric disorders are commonly seen in patients with encephalitis lethargica and that these symptoms are similar to those observed in extrapyramidal system

disorders. Pieńkowski also analysed motor disabilities in such patients [5, 6].

Another field of his interest was war psychoneurosis. Relying on data collected in Ujazdowski Hospital in the years 1919–1930, he analysed the pathogenesis of hysteric symptoms, especially physical ones, in patients with war psychoneurosis. In this work, he concluded that the most psychoneurosis attacks were due to psychiatric injuries. He also noted that symptoms of psychoneurosis were often noted in patients with head trauma [7].

In the years 1935–1936 in Poland, there was an ongoing discussion about the “eugenic act”, according to which marriages of physically and mentally healthy people were promoted, but marriages of mentally or physically ill people were considered illegal. The act also addressed the issue of forced sterilisation, not only of infirm people but also of drug abusers, people who did not want to work or three-time serial offenders. It is worth mentioning that similar laws were promulgated in Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Germany. Pieńkowski fought against this law. He argued that genes responsible for mental diseases are mostly recessive, so sterilisation based on phenotype was worthless [8]. In 1936 during the XVI Polish Psychiatry Convention, after many presentations, including that by Pieńkowski, the statute against “eugenic acts” was declared [2, 8].

In 1939, due to the outbreak of World War II, Pieńkowski joined the Polish Army. After the Soviet invasion of Poland (17 September 1939), he fell into captivity and was an intern at the Kozelsk prison camp. The time of captivity was very hard for Pieńkowski. He had to walk about twenty kilometres per day with almost no food supply and was transported in inhuman conditions by trains intended to carry animals. Later on, he obtained the role of the camp hospital adviser [2]. Throughout his stay in the camp, Pieńkowski kept records of expenses, daily camp routine and more important camp events. In his records, there was also a place for short scientific notes about topics which he wanted to address after the

war, for example, “syphilis of the central nervous system”, “psychotherapy”, “vascular syphilis”, “subconsciousness disorders”, “obsessions and phobia”, “vegetative neurosis” and “hyperkinesia” [9].

Pieńkowski was murdered on 11 April 1940 by the Soviet Union in Katyn [1, 2, 9]. His symbolic tomb is located in Rakowicki Cemetery in Cracow. [10]

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