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The First Hundred Years of Kaunas Anatomists' Research Work

On January, 27, 2020 there was the hundredth anniversary of the foundation of Higher Courses in Kaunas, the first higher education center in the independent Lithuania in the Lithuanian language after occupation of Vilnius by the Polish army in 1919. On January 29, 1920 the first lecture of Human Anatomy marked the commencement of Kaunas Anatomy School. There were 3 periods of Kaunas anatomists' scientific activity: the period of independent Lithuania — between the 1st and 2nd World wars; the Soviet occupation period, and the period of restored Lithuania. During the 1st period (1920—1940) the Lithuanian anatomical and anthropological school was created. The founder was Prof. Jurgis Žilinskas (1885—1957), who graduated Juryev (Tartu) University in 1912. During the 1st World War he was working as a surgeon in the Russian Red Cross Hospital. In 1919 he returned to Lithuania and started to work as a surgeon in the Military Hospital of Kaunas. He played an active part in the organization of the Faculty of Medicine and was appointed Lecturer of Anatomy and Surgery. After the establishment of the University of Lithuania he became the head of the Institute of Anatomy. J. Žilinskas was a student of a famous German anatomist, anthropologist, and embryologist August Rauber (1841—1917). Žilinskas modelled the Lithuanian Anatomy School on the German School. Prof. Žilinskas strived to develop the research school of Lithuanian Ethnic Anthropology and Craniology, based on archeological investigations; somatometric and anthropometric examinations of 5011 Lithuanian soldiers (21—22 years old) and 1006 inhabitants of Lithuania Minor (Prussian Lithuania). The Soviet occupation suspended these investigations. Prof. J. Žilinskas was blamed for spreading racist ideas in the science and was dismissed from the University. After the 2nd World War (1945—1990) the research work was controlled by the Soviet Government. The war disrupted the work of Anatomy School of Kaunas. The student of Prof. J. Žilinskas, Assoc. Prof. Artūras Jurgutis (1909—1967) stayed in Kaunas and supervised the 1944—1967 reconstruction of the Kaunas Anatomy School. He started to develop dedicated Neuroanatomical research. Stimulus for that was his specialization as a neurologist as well as political opportunities. During this time Assoc. Prof. A. Jurgutis defended his doctoral thesis “Variations of the Human Brain Weight and Size.” It was the first doctoral thesis done by Kaunas Neuroanatomical School and defended in the Academy of Sciences of the USSR (1957). In the 1970s, the research interests shifted to cardiovascular research. In the 80s extensive human

and experimental animal histochemical investigations of heart in norm and pathology were started. The Kaunas anatomists became the leaders in the field and their scientific works (1977—1982) were incorporated into the USSR — the USA scientific programme “Sudden Death” and achieved international acclaim. So in the postwar years, Kaunas anatomists by ceaseless scientific work accomplished international level and successfully managed the school of Neuromorphological Research (it yielded 24 Doctors of Science) that carried on after restoration of Lithuanian independence in the 90s. Nowadays Kaunas anatomists are making immunochemical, luminescent, confocal, and electron microscopic investigations, their research articles are published in scientific journals worldwide, and their research results are successfully used for creating invasive methods for treatment of rhythm disturbances of the heart.

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