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## A VISIT TO THE JAN DZIERZON MUSEUM IN KLUCZBORK, POLAND

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I have long been of the view that the most important honey-bee researchers of all time were Jan Swammerdam (1637-1680), François Huber (1750-1831) and Jan Dzierzon (1811-1906). While the first two are famous among biologists, the latter is little known outside of Poland and German-speaking countries.

Jan Dzierzon spent his long and very fruitful life in the area around Kluczbork in Upper Silesia (now in Poland, but at that time part of Prussia). By profession he was a priest, but his fame arises from his research in basic and applied honey-bee science. In 1845 he published his most famous -- i.e. most cited, although little read -- work, in which he set forth the idea that drones develop from unfertilized eggs. [For an English translation, see <http://www.ckstarr.net/cks/Dzierzon1845.pdf> ]. This hypothesis remained very controversial for some years before achieving general acceptance among biologists. Over the next decades, "Dzierzon's Rule" was extended to the order Hymenoptera as a whole.

Dzierzon occupied himself even more with practical aspects of beekeeping. He considered it very important that hives should be easy to manipulate and experimented with many different designs. The title of his first textbook (1847) translates as *Theory and Practice of the Modern Beekeeper*, and his life's work was a model of the unity of theory and practice.

Dzierzon wrote prolifically about beekeeping, always in German. His papers mostly appeared in the *Bienen-Zeitung*, a journal published in Bavaria that served as the main organizing publication of Central-European beekeeping from 1845 to 1899. I have known and appreciated Dzierzon's writings for many years, but until very recently I knew almost nothing about the man and his life. I did not even know for certain whether he spoke Polish. My visit to the Jan Dzierzon Museum in May 2008, then, took on the character of a pilgrimage.



Fig. 1. Front of the Jan Dzierzon Museum in an old castle, the entrance on the left. The high tower on the right is not part of the museum.

The museum, founded in 1959, is housed in an old castle in the middle of the town of Kluczbork (Fig. 1). The director, Mrs Janina Baj, gave me a personal tour of the four floors. Aside from exhibits, it has classrooms, and during my tour I passed by a class of enthusiastic schoolchildren.

The exhibits are well organized according to theme. The red thread through all of these is the relationship that beekeeping and the products of the hive have with everyday life then and now. The history of beekeeping is nicely illustrated by a progression of hive types, from the tree-hollows with minimal elaboration that remained in place in the forest to the modern Langstroth hive. If I have one criticism of the exhibits, it is that the captions give too little information, so that many interesting details remain unclear. One might also consider making some of the captions trilingual (Polish, German and English), as I expect Kluczbork receives many foreigner visitors in the summer.

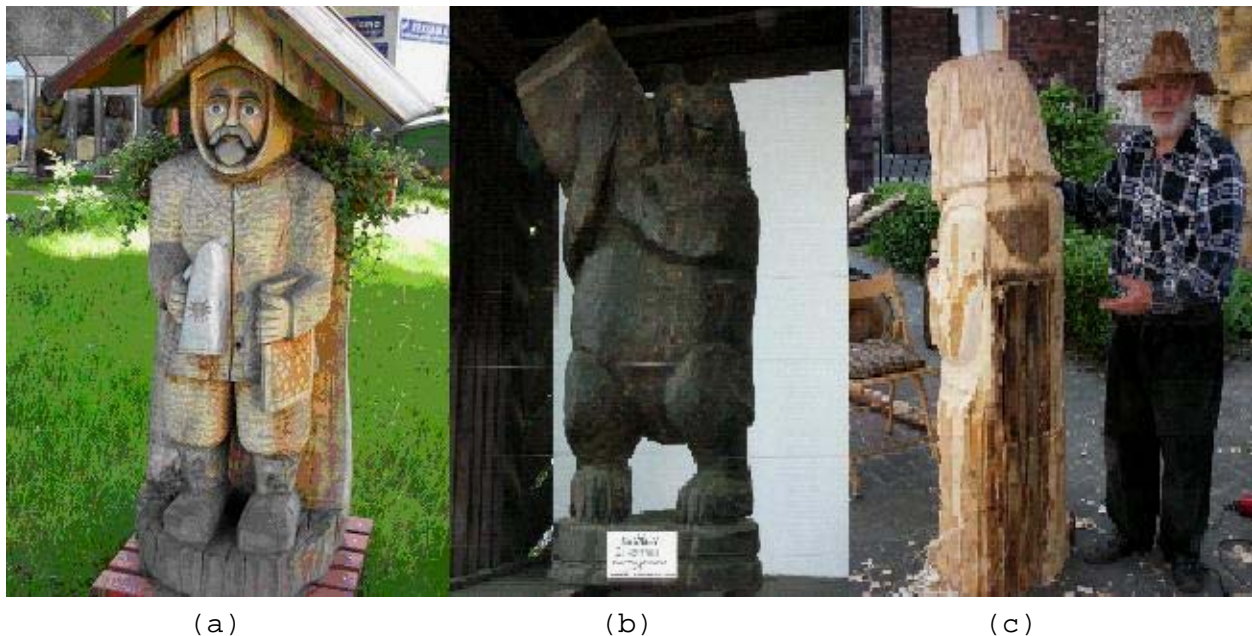


Fig. 2. Showing (a) Hive-statue in the form of a beehive. The hive entrance is in the lower-most button of his jacket. (b) Hive-statue in the form of a bear. This contains a pun, as the Polish word for bear, *niedzwiedz*, literally means "honey eater". If I understand correctly, the word originated as a euphemism in a time when one did not say the names of dangerous animals. (c) Hive-statues remain a living art in Silesia. At the back of the nest cavity the sculptor hangs a door, which can be opened to harvest honey. In all of these the bees fly in and out of a small hole at the front.

The relationship between beekeeping and folk arts is well emphasized. An especially impressive example of this is seen before one even enters the building. There is a tradition among Silesian folk sculptors of excavating a cavity in the back of large wooden figures to serve as a nest site for honey bees. The nest cavity is closed with a door,

while the entrance to the hive is a much smaller hole at the front of the figure (e.g. the bottom coat button in Fig. 2a). A row of such hive-statues stands in front of the museum, and in the garden behind there are more, mostly brightly painted. It was my good fortune that a group of sculptors was at that time engaged in making new hive-statues (Fig. 2c), a clear demonstration that this remains a living folk art. Many statues are of religious figures (e.g. St Ambrose), and I saw several of bears (Fig. 2b) and of Dzierzon, himself.



Fig. 3. Typical Dzierzon duplex hive in an open-air museum. Hives of this design are used only for display, as the museum's beeyard is entirely of Langstroth hives.

I assumed that these distinctive statues arose as a decorative elaboration of traditional hives, but Mrs Baj explained to me that it was just the reverse. They originated not from beekeepers but from sculptors, who hit upon the idea of blessing their wooden statues with the presence of honey bees. It is of course possible that, in the relatively unspecialized labour of old-time village life, these two "professions" were often united in one and the same person.

Dzierzon was born in the nearby village of Lowkowice, where he also died. His birth house is no longer standing, but we visited his grave and the house where he spent his last years. The garden of this house is today an open-air museum, where one can see several original Dzierzon hives (Fig. 3) and many of the hive-statues of which the Silesians are plainly so proud. Our excursion in the environs of Kluczbork was not only educational but extremely pleasant. It is quite grand, on a bright early-summer's day, to roam through the Silesian countryside.

Jan Dzierzon is a culture-hero in this part of Poland. A county in Lower Silesia is named for him, there is a Dzierzon Park in Kluczbork (Fig. 4), and without especially looking for them I noticed two Dzierzon Streets in the surrounding villages. The question of whether he spoke and wrote Polish is directly addressed in the museum. Although he had a German education, his native language was Polish, and he regarded himself as a Pole. I have seen letters that he wrote in Polish.

For the purpose of my historical researches, the high point of my visit was the opportunity to search the museum's archive. I had no need to go through the papers sheet by sheet, as there is an orderly inventory book. Among the 1676 recorded documents are several books and newspapers, but the core of the archive consists of about 1200 letters. Almost half of these are from the 1850s and early 1860s, a period of great significance in the history of honey-bee science. With very few exceptions, the letters are in German, including those that -- to judge by the surnames -- were written by Poles resident in Poland. Of special interest is a short exchange of letters with L.L.

Langstroth of the USA. Regrettably, there is no correspondence from Gregor Mendel.

What is most conspicuously absent from this rich trove of documents are letters from the key figures in the controversy surrounding Dzierzon's Rule. If Dzierzon had any correspondence with his main opponents in the pages of the *Bienen-Zeitung*, there is no trace of it in the archive. It is highly unlikely that such letters were simply destroyed, as there is also very little from Dzierzon's main allies, Berlepsch, Leuckart and Siebold. This puzzled me, as I had supposed that Dzierzon and his followers formed a true movement in honey-bee science. I now doubt that there was any such organized movement.

Let me close by noting that the Kluczbork and its surroundings are a very pleasant area. It is highly suitable for a family visit, even if not all are especially interested in what the museum has to offer. For further information, go to <http://kluczbork.pl/ver/en/>.

I thank Janina & Edward Baj for hospitality and local facilitation, and Sophia Pick for help with the original German version of this note.



Fig. 4. Jan Dzierzon is a culture-hero in Silesia. This out-sized bronze statue stands in Dzierzon Park in Kluczbork.