

The Lepidopterological Manuscripts of Ch. PERTHÉES (1739-1815)

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Not only published, but also unpublished data on the insects written in the eighteenth century are of great significance, from the historical point of view. Thus I would like to bring attention to one of the first manuscripts on Lepidoptera written by Charles PERTHÉES (1739-1815), the geographer of the last Polish king Stanisław August PONIATOWSKI. PERTHÉES lived in Warsaw working on the cartography of the Polish Kingdom, but the major part of his time was devoted to insects. Of 9 volumes of manuscripts carefully bound by another entomologist of that time, S. B. GORSKI, in 1836, five were devoted to the Lepidoptera.

The first of them, originally dated January 1779, is a curious catalogue in which each of 37 pages is divided into 20 squares. In each square PERTHÉES figured a lepidopteron, and provided its number and name if known to him. In the same volume there are two further works, viz., "Remarques générales sur plusieurs espèces dont toute la transformation ne m'est pas connue" having 27 pages, and another catalogue entitled "Owady krajowe [=insects of the country]; Classis III. Lepidoptera Linn." constructed similar to the former catalogue, but without any drawings. The "Remarques ..." is one of the first copybooks concerning life-histories of the Lepidoptera with interesting sketches of the early stages as well as of some imagines. The first notes in it are dated 1774.

Another work is an excellent "Atlas" (Fig. 1) consisting of an illustration- and text-volume, unfortunately not dated. Its 32 plates are divided into 85 "tabulae" showing life cycles of the Lepidoptera and often the food plants. The colour figures are incredibly beautiful, very accurate in all aspects. The insects are painted in a very specific way, with an artistic interpretation exclusively characteristic of PERTHÉES. The text-volume was probably not defined as apart from the descriptions of larvae, there are lists of observations, with the precise dates (the last being in 1797), and some sketches of various stages of the life cycle.

I shall mention here also a volume without an original title which in my opinion is of great value for present lepidopterists. This is an excellent

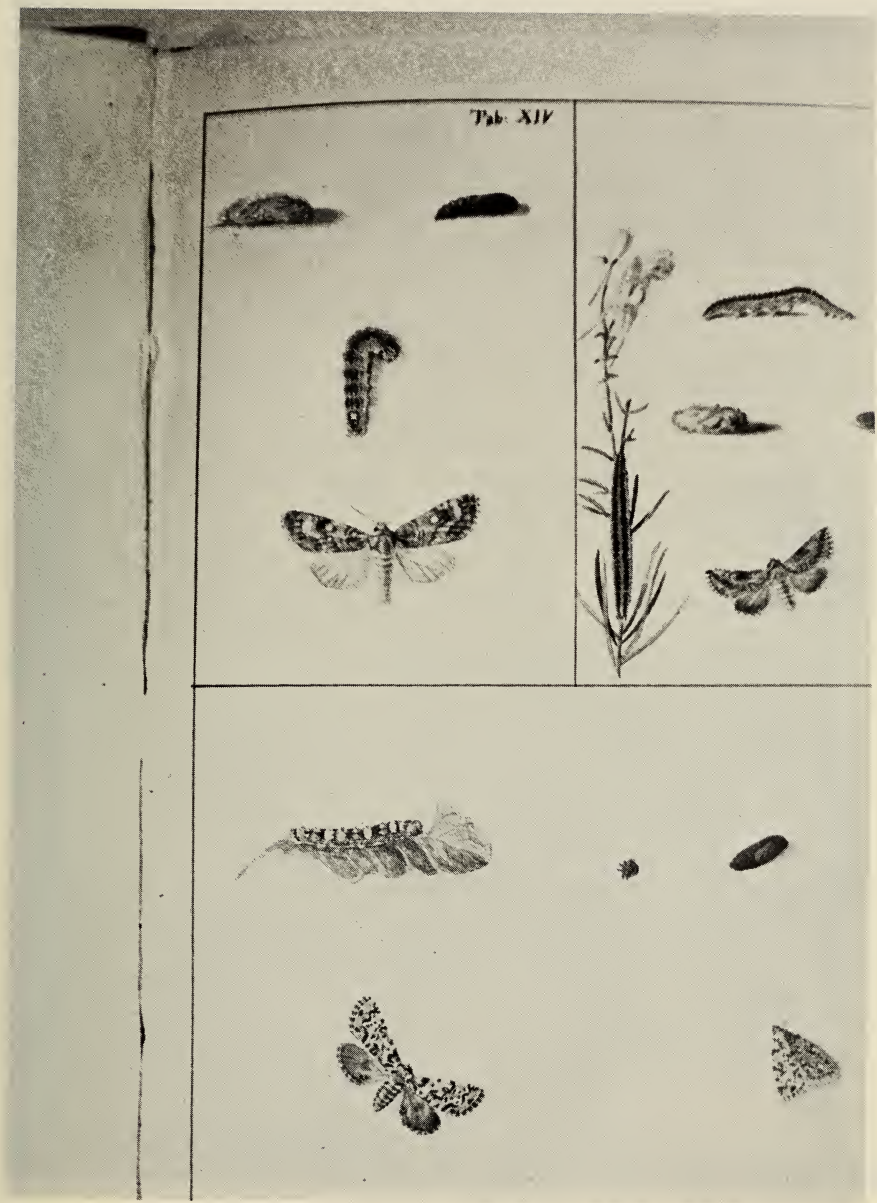


Fig. 1. Plate of the "Atlas" by Ch. PERTHÉES.

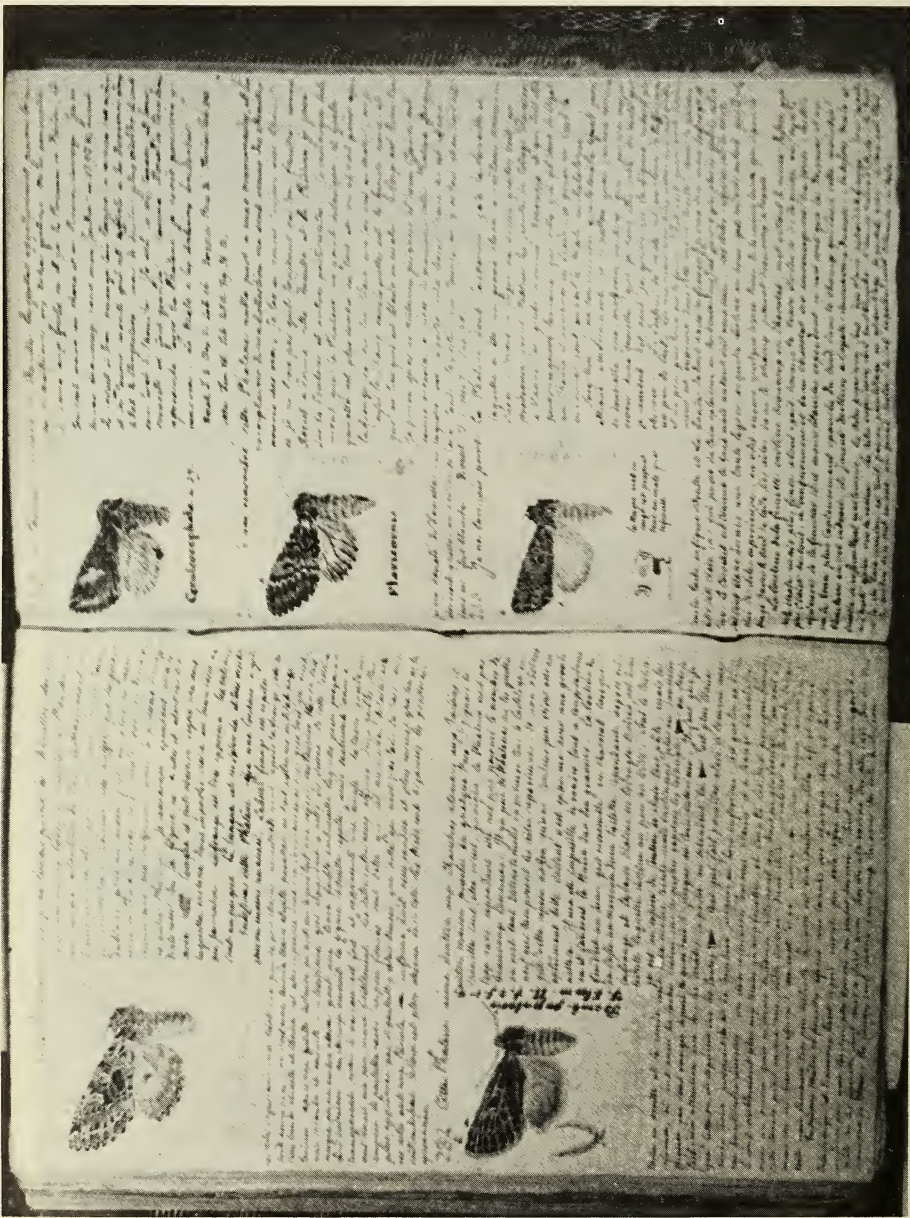


Fig. 2. Two pages of the manuscript "Papillons ..." by Ch. PERTHEES. Dr. J. ŚWIECINSKI phot.

monograph (Fig. 2) of the Polish Lepidoptera, of which only two parts ("Papillons diurnes & crépusculaires" and "Papillons nocturnes"; both titles applied by S. B. GORSKI) endured to our times.

PERTHÉES, with mastery, figured 291 butterflies and moth species, this time showing their left sides, often providing some necessary additional sketches of the pattern or showing specific characters with arrows. For many butterflies, only the reverses are given, in others both surfaces of the wing and the two sexes are provided. The text accompanying the figures deals with the morphology, early stages, bionomy and distribution of the particular species. All species are easily recognised thanks to perfect illustrations. His own determinations were almost always correct and were based on a rather complete literature of that time as one can judge by the notes and references. The distribution data by PERTHÉES are of great importance as one can realise the changes arisen over almost two centuries. I should mention here only a few examples. PERTHÉES writes that *Parnassius mnemosyne* was common near Warsaw in 1777 and *P. apollo* was widely distributed at least in southern Poland. He also collected *Pericallia matronula* at Warsaw. Unexpected information concerns the *Saturnia* species. One of them, *S. pavonia*, is common throughout Poland, but *S. pyri* (named by PERTHÉES *Phalaena pavonia major*) is an enigmatic species. PERTHÉES recorded it from the vicinity of Cracow, Sandomierz and Siemiatycze. The third of them is *S. spini*, collected in Warsaw. The "amathors" as writes PERTHÉES collected many larvae in 1775 and 76. These are the only data for this species in Poland.

The accuracy of observations and scientific language of PERTHÉES have much in common with good modern publications. PERTHÉES turned much attention towards the so called Microlepidoptera and he was also fond of the larvae and bionomy. On the basis of larval morphology he proposed some changes in the systematic positions of particular species.

And finally some words on his collection. In January 1779 he owned 681 species and in that number were 206 "Tinees", in 1783 already 876 species and in 1795-1020 species. The number of specimens was also high, as one can judge from the number of observations and a notice by PERTHÉES showing in which cabinet were placed particular species. Unfortunately the collection has been lost during difficult times of our history and the manuscripts were never published.