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BARBORA PŮTOVÁ

NATURAL HISTORY OBJECTS, CASTS AND RECONSTRUCTIONS AND THEIR ROLE IN SCIENTIFIC WORK IN THE 19th AND 20th CENTURY: KAREL ABSOLON'S COLLECTING ACTIVITY

ABSTRACT: The first part of the study deals with trade with natural history objects that reflected, at least in the 19th century, the increasing interest in collecting artefacts, their identification and description, protection, exchange, sale and artistic reconstructions. Natural history dealers contributed to science popularization and to the nascence and development of collection building activity by memory institutions and universities. They procured specimens not only to museums and cabinets, but also to private collectors and they functioned as intermediaries when collections were being sold. The study does not omit the fact that also museums played the role of intermediaries in selling or exchanging items, alongside with other memory institutions and/or researchers. At the beginning of the 20th century, many natural history dealers either extended or reduced their portfolios with casts of palaeoanthropological fossils. The study goes on to describe societies that ensured trade with natural history objects or making casts of palaeoanthropological fossils such as R. F. Damon & Co. in the United Kingdom, Les Fils d'Emile Deyrolle in France and Dr. F. Krantz, Rheinisches Mineralien-Kontor in Germany. The second part of the study focuses on the archaeologist Karel Absolon (1877–1960) who gathered casts and specimens in the 1920s and 1930s, motivated by the view of establishing a new institution and museum called the Anthropos Pavilion of the Moravian Museum in Brno. The study uses Absolon's correspondence to explain the process and specification of his orders of dozens of casts and reconstructions from R. F. Damon & Co. He placed his first big order in 1928 to acquire material for an exhibition in a special pavilion called Man and His Ancestry that he prepared in the same year for the Exhibition of Contemporary Culture in Czechoslovakia at the Brno Fair. His second big order in 1936 was a follow-up to Absolon's efforts, being fully aimed at establishing an institute or museum that would be called Anthropos. The objective of the study is to present Karel Absolon's correspondence from the period of the First Czechoslovak Republic as specific testimony of the manner of his scientific work that was based on a wide range of

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international contacts, sharing and disseminating findings and contacts and ways of acquiring (through trade and exchange) specimens, casts and reconstructions with the purpose of building collections and exhibitions of world museums.

KEY WORDS: Karel Absolon - Collecting artefacts – Natural history objects - Casts - Reconstructions – Natural history dealers – R. F. Damon & Co. - Les Fils d'Emile Deyrolle – Dr. F. Krantz, Rheinisches Mineralien-Kontor

INTRODUCTION

Trade with natural history objects

Trade with natural history objects played an important role in the development of science in the 19th century. Development of this type of trade corresponded with an increasing interest in collecting natural history objects and artefacts, their identification and description, protection, exchange, sale and artistic reconstruction. Trade with natural history objects encompassed zoological, botanic, geological and palaeoanthropological specimens, fossils and cast as well as archaeologic and ethnographic objects and replicas. Trade with natural history objects was ensured by collectors, natural scientists and other experts in the field who did not have the chance to make their professional interest part of their daily job, some of them were professionals who sought for another source of income due to the low salaries paid to scientists. Entrepreneurial activities in the field of collection and exchange of natural history objects often provided funds for expert activities, establishing institutions, extending the network of personal contacts and creating opportunities contributing to the growth of scientific findings. For instance, sale of specimens was an important part of scientific career of the UK natural scientists Henry Walter Bates (1825–1892) and Alfred Russel Wallace (1823–1913). At the same time, this was a consequence of the growth of interest in natural history that did not provide directly sufficient education and professional background in the given field. Besides selling natural history objects, dealers also provided encouragement for young collectors, job opportunities, possibility of training in natural history and they stimulated sale of expert publications and popularised natural history (Sheets-Pyenson 1988, Arment 2004). Some were specialists and scientific authorities who wrote research papers, others functioned as representatives of museums and commercial or trade institutions. Many of them resided in business centres, mainly in London, Amsterdam, Hamburg and other big cities. By 1895, 52 dealers were situated in Berlin, 33 in Vienna, 26 in London and 17 in Paris. The network of sellers in some countries was characterised by geographic density, since many big cities, e.g. in the United Kingdom, always had at least one small dealer running a business with natural history objects. In the U.S., there were over 100 natural history dealers by the end of the 19th century (Barrow 2000, Coote *et al.* 2017).

Natural history dealers contributed to science promotion and creation or at least expansion of collection building activities by memory institutions or universities and they cultivated various forms of sponsorship supporting scientific effort. They supplied museums, cabinets as well as private collectors with specimens, they also functioned as intermediaries in selling collections of natural history objects. After all, museums could also mediate sale or exchange of specimens with memory institutions. The most frequent form of expanding collections was "by exchange, by private treaty (including with dealers), or by auction." (Lucas, Lucas 2014: 68) In the1850s, all European metropolises including Berlin, Vienna and Naples, had natural science museums. At around this time, museums started collecting artefacts in a systematic and methodical way, which contributed to the growth of international trade with the aim of complementing their collections with natural history objects. Although natural museums were established in the early modern period, their role and number expanded significantly. Museums responded to the growing interest in collecting and they gradually lost the aura of an elite activity, since they became a public space for visitors that allowed for learning and acquiring knowledge through study of natural history objects. By 1900, there were around 250 natural science museums in the United Kingdom and the United States, 300 in France and 150 in Germany (Sheets-Pyenson 1988, Barrow 2000).

Despite geographic distances and diversity of social, cultural, scientific and economic entities, there were many contact places and networks. For instance, the Swiss palaeontologist Louis Agassiz (1807–1873), the founder of Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard University, obtained natural history objects for his museum through extensive correspondence. Social capital often flourishes when individuals share similar values that are regularly enhanced through interaction within a specific community. Social capital created by regular personal interaction often decreases when influenced by variables such as distance and time (Svendsen, Svendsen 2004). However, the interest in collecting natural history objects transcended the networks of personal relations and contacts on many occasions in the 19th century. Collection often depended on positive reputation that functioned as an effective source of trustworthiness and a form of branding among a more general public of collectors. That was the reason why dealers expressed their reliability through activities that repeatedly affirmed their professional status. Furthermore, their reputation and publicity were supported by auctions and articles in newspapers providing evidence of their expert knowledge, credibility and reliability (Sheets-Pyenson 1988; *Figure 1*).

What became the source of growing interest in natural history and its findings were economic, technologic, social and cultural changes. This was further enhanced by the progress in scientific knowledge (cumulation of findings and scientific taxonomy), practical skills (taxidermy and conservation science), technology (transport and communication) and trade organization (business logistics). All of the aforementioned contributed to the development of international commercial trade with natural history and zoological products. Business communication, documents (invoices, powers of attorney, etc.) and payments were sent by mail, later by telegraph. Cash and loans for business transactions concerning natural history specimens were crucial, but barter was also important. Exchange of information and objects of scientific interest between scientific institutions was a well-established practice in Europe in the 19th century. Many private and public collections and museums expanded their inventories at that period by trading duplicate or – from the perspective of their specialization – unused objects. Furthermore, clearer and ever more sophisticated scientific classification of vegetable and animal species allowed for exact gathering of natural history specimens, determining their fixed prices and understanding the importance of

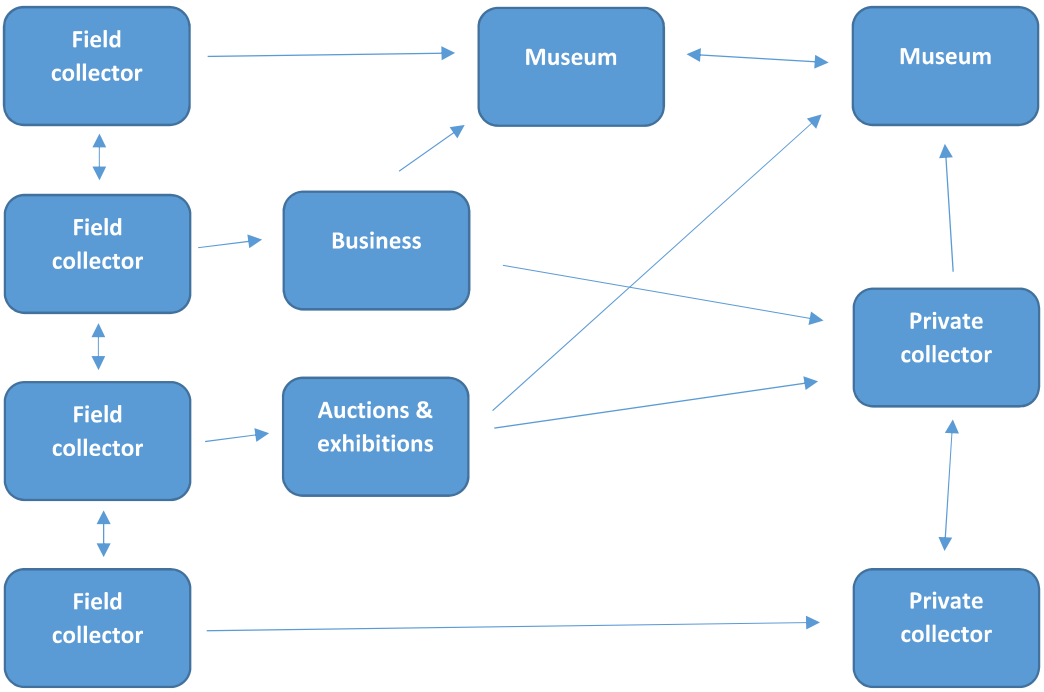


FIGURE 1: The supply chain of the natural history trade. © Coote *et al.* 2017.

scientific values linked with bartering and systematic collection of objects. Determining fixed prices was facilitated by museum's exchange lists, exhibitions, magazines and selling catalogues that included important findings and basic information about products and preferences of prospective and actual takers (Cowie 2014, Coote *et al.* 2017).

Collection of natural history objects became not only an expert activity, but also popular amusement that was incited by publications and reports by colonial administration officers, dealers and travellers. Natural history objects also served as decoration in households where they represented new fashion trends rather than serious interest in collecting or scientific study. Collection of natural history objects was complemented by the market with animal skins and bird feathers. This is the reason why taxidermists were one of the first expansive sellers of natural history objects. Their origin can be traced down to the discovery of protective and preservation methods and techniques of bird feathers and animal skins that occurred at the end of the 18th century. However, taxidermists were not the only ones who strove for preservation of animal skins. Also, hunters wanted to preserve their prey in the form of permanent hunting trophies that adorned their homes serving as confirmation of their hunting skills. The passion for decorative use of parts of animal bodies was a period extravagancy strengthening the popularity of zoological gardens (Cowie 2014). The growth of interest in natural history objects caused that some taxidermists piled up snail shells, preserved insects, prehistoric fossils, exotic minerals and other natural history objects in the second half of the 19th century. The boundaries between taxidermists and sellers of natural history objects thus slowly disappeared. "And at a time when natural history was firmly focused on collecting and formal certification procedures for naturalists were minimal or non-existent, the boundaries between commercial and scientific naturalists were quite fluid." (Barrow 2000: 497)

Propagation of the ideas of romantism provided an intellectual framework for critique of the new industrial order as well as space for estimating aesthetic and spiritual values of nature. At the end of the 19th century, it was evident that attitudes to nature as well as motivation leading to collection of natural history objects started to transform. Animated nature gained more and more recognition and the same applied to its description, analysis and scientific interpretation. Many private and especially commercial collections of natural history objects are considered illegitimate or even illegal. While some sellers could not respond to such changes in business terms, others tried to adapt to the changing conditions. For instance, they started focusing on colleges and universities that required representative collections of flora and fauna. Demand for this type of collections increased alongside with implementation of natural history into the system of schools and other education institutions. Expanding the opportunities of expert taxidermy and professional career in the field of natural history opened new perspectives. Many commercial-oriented natural history dealers got the chance to get a university degree in various natural history subjects (Barrow 2000, Cowie 2014, Coote *et al.* 2017).

Trade with casts and reconstructions

The popularity of casts was stirred up in the 16th and 17th century by enthusiasm for collecting products of nature and artefacts. Their owners often had plaster casts of sculptures, while some artists such as the French sculptor Bernard Palissy (1510–1589) cast their objects directly from bodies of living animals (Shell 2004). Casts became part of Wunderkammer in the 18th century, particularly in Central and Northern Europe where market with replicas of antique sculptures started prospering (Frederiksen, Marchand 2010). However, their popularity did not reach the peak until the 19th century that saw establishment of new institutions; many of them preferred plaster casts to live models used in drawing, painting and sculpture courses due to financial reasons. What contributed to the increasing demand for plaster casts in the 19th century was that new museums were being opened. Big and small museums repeatedly used plaster casts when forming their collections, since they did not have sufficient funds for buying original artworks. From the educational perspective, plaster casts were actually considered more favourable as they allowed museums to compile comprehensive collections at one place (Schnalke 2004, Malone, Marchand 2010). "The quality of a reproduction is of the greatest importance. In an original work of merit there is a subtleness of treatment." (Caproni, Brother 1911: 4; *Figure 2*).

Many natural history dealers expanded or narrowed their portfolio with fossil casts at the beginning of the 20th century by fossil casts. Casts represented a promise of impartiality that was to separate scientists striving for scientific analysis and explanation from enthusiastic but insufficiently competent laypeople. Three-dimensional casts mediated a specific object in a way

FIGURE 2: Oval plate, Bernard Palissy, 1550, lead-glazed earthenware. © The Museum für Angewandte Kunst, Cologne, Germany.

that description, paintings and later even photographs could not capture in its entirety (Sysling 2016). Casts were used by museums, particularly by their anthropologic and ethnology departments that required portraits of ethnically different groups of human population and prehistoric representatives of the *Homo* species. Original fossils were far too precious and valuable, which is why anthropologists and archaeologists in the early stages of human evolution research provided other researchers in different parts of the world with exact casts for their descriptive studies and comparative anatomy. The general public knew fossils from the press and they expected to get a chance to see them in public museums (Stocking 1990, Pyne 2016). Fossil casts allowed for dissemination of scientific findings and enhanced the information flow between researchers, scientific institutions and museums. The approach to fossil casts was guaranteed and supervised by the fossil discoverer or a specialised expert and a commercial company that made the casts, set their price, distribution channels and sold them to museums.

Significant companies with natural history objects and casts

Leading companies that traded natural history samples or made casts of paleoanthropological fossils were R. F. Damon & Co. in the United Kingdom, Les Fils d'Emile Deyrolle in France and Dr. F. Krantz, Rheinisches Mineralien-Kontor in Germany. Their origins date back to the 19th century. Les Fils d'Emile Deyrolle in Paris and Dr. F. Krantz, Rheinisches Mineralien-Kontor in Bonn carry on their business even these days.

R. F. Damon & Co. was established by the UK geologist and natural history dealer Robert Damon (1814–1889) from Weymouth who arranged numerous acquisitions for palaeontological, geologic and mineralogy collections in world museums. In his early business stage starting at the end of the 1840s, Damon

focused on selling and reselling natural history samples in the 19th century. He also traded with sea animals conserved in alcohol and crystals and minerals that related to his professional interest (Cooper 2006). Damon gathered a collection of fossils in Dorset (his collection was purchased by Natural History Museum in London in 1890), some of them accompanied his publication *Handbook to the Geology of Weymouth and the Isle of Portland* (Damon 1860). Later he was joined in his efforts by his son Robert Ferris Damon (1845–1929). In the period starting in the 1880s his company supplied natural history samples to British Museum and Natural History Museum in London, National Museum of Victoria in Melbourne (Australia) and in Canterbury Museum in Christchurch (New Zealand). At the end of the 19th century, his company extended its portfolio by manufacture of plaster casts of fossils for palaeontologists and archaeologists that museums used for their collection, education and exhibition purposes (*Figure 3*).

R. F. Damon & Co. responded to the growth in discoveries of hominin fossils and it focused on manufacturing casts of skulls, jaws and teeth of prehistoric representatives of *Homo* species and its evolutionary ancestors. The company consulted exact execution of the casts with expert institutions (museums and scientific societies), discoverers, fossil experts, casts were often made under their personal supervision. In some cases the company had the chance to work with fossil originals, sometimes it made use of secondary drawings and casts made by researchers such as the U.S. zoologist James Howard McGregor (1872–1955), the author of casts of Neanderthal male from La Chapelle-aux-Saints (No. 456, 490–492) and restored Gibraltar skull (No. 468–469), casts of Cro-Magnon Man (No. 493–495) or restored model of *Pithecanthropus erectus* skull (No. 464a). As to great apes and primates, R. F. Damon & Co. turned directly to zoological gardens, anthropological departments of world museums, or it used findings of anthropological expeditions. In order to facilitate selection of the goods it frequently published and extended its catalogue with fossils and specimens with specific numbers and colour options (*Figure 4*).

FIGURE 3: The reconstruction of human evolution, approx. 1950. Casts by R. F. Damon & Co. © Private collection.

F. Damon & Co. made casts of fossil findings of *Pithecanthropus erectus* (No. 463–467, 570), discovered by the Dutch physician and anatomist Eugène Dubois (1858–1940) in 1891 in Java (Shipman 2002). Other ones included casts of Piltdown Man (No. 428–432), purported fossil remains from 1912: the company was the first to make them for commercial use. The cast was made by the UK taxiderm and casting specialist Frank O. Barlow under supervision of the palaeontologist Arthur Smith Woodward (1864–1944), (Spencer 1990, Johanson *et al.* 2016). In the 1920s the company flourished and transferred its headquarters to London. In 1924, the South African anatomist and anthropologist Raymond Dart (1893–1988) discovered an authentic skull of *Australopithecus africanus* (Taung child). Shortly after the description of *Australopithecus africanus* was published in *Nature* (1925) he ordered fossil casts (No. 524–526) from F. Damon & Co. (Pyne 2016). "Two series of casts were produced by Damon, the first from casts of Taung, and the second from the original fossil." (Falk 2011: 47) At the beginning of the 1930s the company received permit from the Canadian paleoanthropologist Davidson Black (1884–1934) to make casts of fossil remains of *Sinanthropus pekinensis* (No. 510–511, 529, 530–533, 544–554) and later of other discovered skulls of a hominin that is today considered to be an example of *Homo erectus*. Casts of *Sinanthropus pekinensis* skull were made by the German anatomist and paleoanthropologist Franz Weidenreich (1873–1948). The original skulls were lost when transported from China to the United States in 1941 (Haviland *et al.* 2010, Soukup 2015). Weidenreich's casts that give us a vivid picture of what they looked like "have come to take the originals" (Pyne 2016: 145)

Mineralien Geschäft von Krantz in Germany had a similar role to the one of F. Damon & Co. in the UK. It was founded in 1833 in Freiberg by Adam August

FIGURE 4: A discussion on the Piltdown skull, John Cooke, 1915. Back row: F. O. Barlow, G. Elliot Smith, Charles Dawson, and Arthur Smith Woodward. Front row: A. S. Underwood, Arthur Keith, W. P. Pycraft, and Sir Ray Lankester. A painting of Charles Darwin on the wall. Geological Society of London. © Falk 2011.

Krantz (1809–1872) who was to take over his father's pharmacy, but archaeologic sites in Saxony attracted him so much that he started extending his own collection, getting in touch with collectors and experts from the whole of Europe. He established his company at times when first independent mineralogic and geologic institutes emerged at universities and they needed high-quality material so that they could educate their students. That is why Krantz moved his company to Berlin in 1837 and then to Bonn in 1850. His villa on the banks of the Rhine was frequented by personalities from University of Bonn such as the German natural scientist Alexander von Humboldt (1769–1859), the German geologist and palaeontologist Heinrich Ernst Beyrich (1815–1896) and the German geologist and mineralogist Eugen Geinitz (1854–1925). Krantz's private collection, purchased by Gerhard vom Rath for Universität Bonn (University of Bonn) in 1875, was the basis of Mineralogisches Museum der Universität Bonn (Mineralogical Museum of the University of Bonn). After relocation his company changed name to A. Krantz, Rheinisches Mineralien-Kontor. The company focused on creating collections and teaching aids for mineralogy, petrology, palaeontology and later also palaeoanthropology. After August Krantz passed away in 1888, the company was run by his nephew Friedrich Ludwig Robert Krantz (1859–1926) who focused primarily on crystallography. On his initiative, the company was renamed F. Krantz and later Dr. F. Krantz, Rheinisches Mineralien-Kontor (Rosenbauer 2003, Schwedt 2019). At that time, it started making

casts of *Homo* and his ancestors including, for instance, Neanderthal skeletons and skulls (Le Moustier and La Chapelle-aux-Saints; *Figure 5*).

Collecting and reconstruction activities in France are linked with Les Fils d'Emile Deyrolle. Its history dates back to 1831, when the entomologists Jean-Baptiste Deyrolle opened his shop at 23, Rue de la Monnaie in Paris. His son, the entomologist Achille Deyrolle (1813–1865), continued in his business and he expanded the flourishing company, originally focused on taxidermy activities, later selling natural history specimens, particularly of insects. In 1866, the company was taken over by the natural scientist Émile Deyrolle (1838–1917) who carried on the taxidermy business and specialized in selling trophies and insects. "In its heyday, from the 1870s to the 1920s, Deyrolle employed more than 300 people, and its activities went well beyond mounting and trading specimens." (Aloi 2018: unpag.) In that period, he cumulated his interest in natural science and observing insects: his collections became the object of interest of specialized experts and rowing number of laypeople. From 1888, the company located at 46, rue du Bac. in Paris, acquired natural history specimens (minerals, rocks, shells, fossils etc.), scientific equipment (microscopes), animal preparation, anatomic models, archaeologic, anthropologic and ethnographic casts, educative leaflets and natural science publications (*Figure 6*).

FIGURE 5: Brochure advertising Dr. F. Krantz, Rheinisches Mineralien-Kontor. © Private collection.

Orders placed by Karel Absolon with big companies trading with natural history specimens and casts

All the three companies, R. F. Damon & Co., Les Fils d'Emile Deyrolle and Dr. F. Krantz, Rheinisches Mineralien-Kontor, continuously acquired new items for museum collections in the U.S., Australia and Europe including what is today the Anthropos Pavilion of the Moravian Museum in Brno. The pivotal role in this aspect was played by the archaeologist Karel Absolon (1877–1960), the prominent personality of the Czechoslovak inter-war archaeology that was respected by top European experts and general public. His effort to gather a set of natural history casts and specimens was driven particularly by his motivation to establish a new institute and museum (Anthropos) under the Moravian Museum. It cannot be omitted that Absolon's legacy included catalogues of several companies focused on manufacture of natural history specimens and casts such as Joh. Anders from Frankfurt am Main offering archaeologic and ethnographic artefacts (Joh. Anders, undated; *Figure 7*).

Absolon's correspondence documents his communication with Les Fils d'Emile Deyrolle that took place mainly in the first decade of the 20th century. Requirements for collaboration came also from the part of the French film which required from Absolon specimens of European and exotic insect species (Les Fils d'Emile Deyrolle, October 31th, 1911). Absolon had catalogues of Les Fils d'Emile Deyrolle offering archaeologic, anthropologic and ethnographic casts that included, for instance, casts of Upper Palaeolithic artefacts from French sites of La Madelaine, Laugerie-Basse and Mas d'Azil (Les Fils d'Emile Deyrolle, undated, 1909). Although cooperation with Dr. F. Krantz, Rheinisches Mineralien-Kontor is not documented, Absolon had its catalogues from the 1920s with a wide offer of anthropologic casts and anatomic models (Dr. F. Krantz, Rheinisches Mineralien-Kontor, undated).

Absolon had the most intense written contact with R. F. Damon & Co. from which he ordered dozens of casts and specimens. Several company catalogues preserved in his legacy through which it can be identified which casts and reconstructions he bought from the company (R. F. Damon & Co., 1920a, 1920b, undated a–e). Absolon corresponded with the

FIGURE 6: Educational poster board by Les Fils d'Emile Deyrolle, 20th century. © Private collection.


MAMMIFÈRES
PRIMATES
199
CHIMPANZÉ
Anthropopithecus troglodytes
Congo
GORILLE
Gorilla Gina
Gabon
ORANG-OUTAN
Simia Satyrus
Bornéo
GIBBON
Hylobates Rafflesii
Sumatra
NASIQUE
Nasalis larvatus
Bornéo
HAMADRYAS (Cynocephalus hamadryas)
Abyssinie
OUISTITI (Hapale jacchus)
Brésil
HURLEUR (Mycetes seniculus)
Guyane
COLOBE (Colobus Guerera)
Abyssinie
Mobilier et Matériel pour l'Enseignement. — LES FILS D'ÉMILE DEYROLLE, 46, Rue du Bac, Paris 7e

FIGURE 7: Karel Absolon in front of the original entry to the Moravian Museum at the Episcopal Court, 1920. © Archive of the Anthropos Institute of the Moravian Museum.

company from the beginning of the 1920s. At this time, he started establishing a Pleistocene department under the Moravian Museum which he enriched through artefact exchange, his own research, purchase of collections from researcher's legacy, collectors' collections and purchase of casts, reconstructions and specimens (Kostrhun 2003). His correspondence with R. F. Damon & Co. did not concern only orders, Absolon also presented period archaeologic discoveries in Moravia, contacts with foreign researchers and he sent casts of the most important Moravian findings to the company for them to assess. However, the company did not comply with Absolon's requirement for decreasing the price for casts or their exchange for original artefacts affirming "we do not usually make any reduction on our list prices." (R. F. Damon & Co., December 22th, 1924*; Figure 8*).

Absolon placed his first big order in 1928 from a company catalogue by R. F. Damon & Co. for an exhibition in a special pavilion called Člověk a jaho rod (Man and His Ancestry) that he prepared that year for Výstava soudobé kultury (The Exhibition of contemporary culture) in Czechoslovakia at the Brno Fair (Kostrhun 2003, 2018). Absolon's activity became part of the "showcase" of the young Czechoslovak Republic, its cultural policy and presentation of the state. The exhibition was interested for the visitors also with the fact that it included many modern museum elements. In terms of content, it presented the oldest history of the mankind and the prehistoric human. Absolon's order with R. F. Damon & Co. included casts of *Pithecanthropus erectus* (*Pithecanthropus erectus* (Java Man) is now known as *Homo erectus*; No. 463–467), Piltdown Man (No. 431–432, 447), *Homo rhodesiensis* (No. 472–476), Galilee skull (No. 478–480), Evolution of the human jaw (No. 437), Neanderthal Man from La Chapelle-aux-Saints (No. 491–492), Cro-Magnon Man (No. 494–495) and Flint implements (No. 427). However, the delivery of the specimens was accompanied with complications. "We think it will be possible to send most if not all of these in six weeks. We shall do our best to do so but it may be necessary to ask for a little longer time for some of them." (R. F. Damon & Co., March 27th, 1928) Exhibition of contemporary culture in Czechoslovakia started on 26 May 1928. R. F. Damon & Co. informed Absolon about the progress when making the casts and reconstructions on 8 May 1928: "We have been doing our best but have been very occupied with orders received before yours. (...) All the remainder will be finished as quickly as we can do them and sent in small boxes by parcel post." (R. F. Damon & Co., May 8th, 1928) Upon sending the last remainder of casts in mid-May, the company expressed its apologies to Absolon: "We are exceedingly sorry that you should have any anxiety about the delivery of your order" (R. F. Damon & Co., May 15th, 1928) At the same time, the company apologetically stated that it had tried to deliver the ordered casts before the opening of the exhibition. "We hope to hear that all the casts have arrived in time for your exhibition

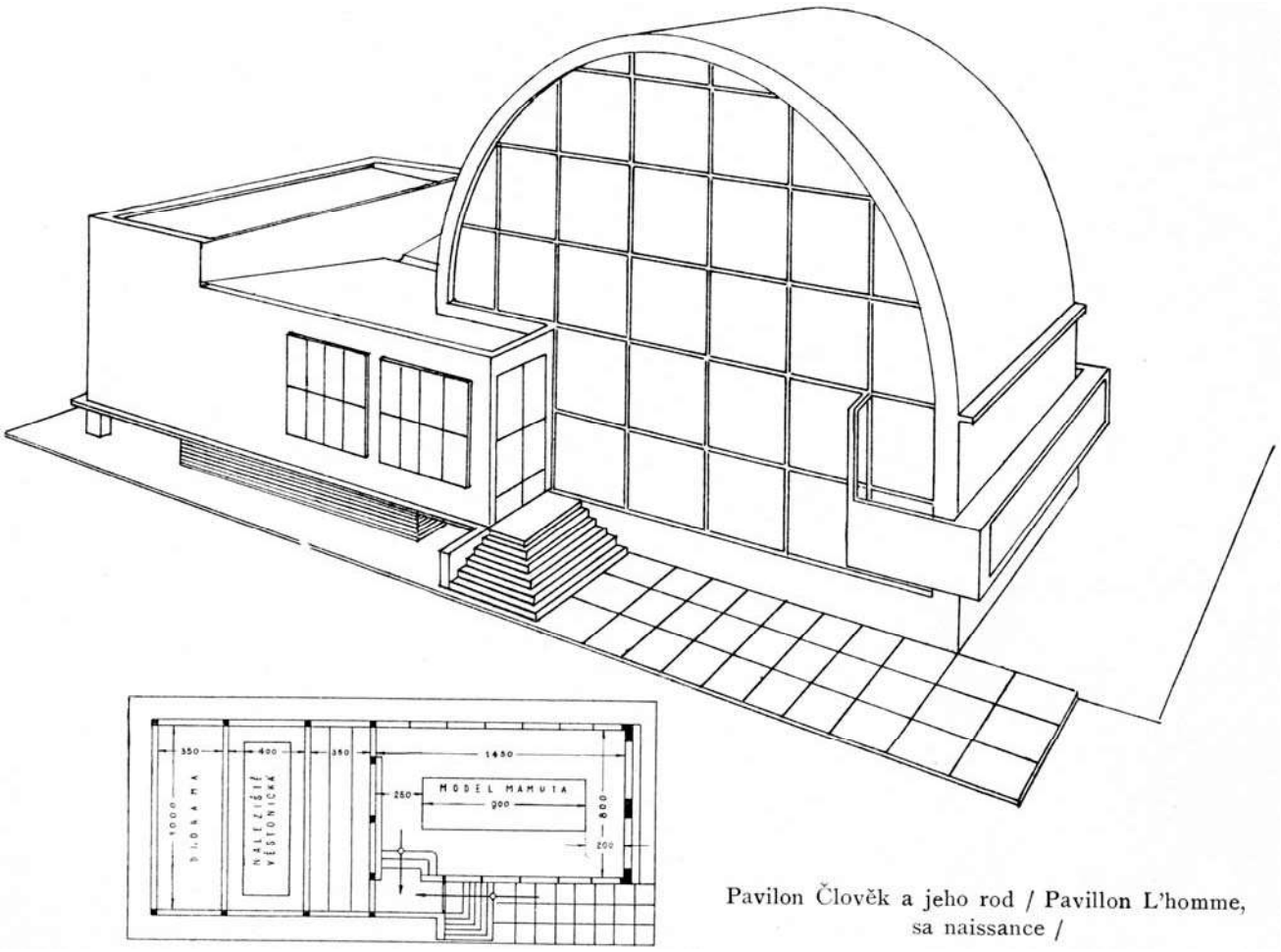


FIGURE 8: Drawing of the Pavilion of Man and His Ancestry with the inner arrangement of the exposition on an area of approximately 250 m^2. © Archive of the Anthropos Institute of the Moravian Museum.

and that you approve of them." (R. F. Damon & Co., May 15th, 1928) Even though Absolon received the casts in time, the Man and His Ancestry pavilion did not open until 8 June 1928. Nevertheless, this had little impact on the success of the exhibition. "The entire exhibition met with great reception and it became a visitor magnet." (Kostrhun 2003: 86; *Figure 9*).

After the end of the Exhibition of contemporary culture the exhibition Man and His Ancestry, complemented with new items, was transferred to the brick Prague Pavilion. The new Anthropos exhibition named – The Origin of Mankind and Birth of Culture opened on 1 June 1930. It included evolution of the human, skull and skeleton casts, comparative collections of chipped stone industries from French, Spanish, English and German sites. The exhibition closed down on 31 October 1930, but Absolon threw himself into reopening of the modified, complemented and newly installed exhibition in January 1931. Even this new exhibition that opened on 1 May 1931 included reconstructions of skeletons and skull casts (Kostrhun 2003). Absolon actually stayed in touch with R. F. Damon & Co. and he even endeavoured to meet in person and coming to their premises on his way to London, though in vain. "We have no shop or saleroom for the display of our casts, only a workroom in which space does not permit of much stock being kept. All our casts are made to order and business transacted by correspondence." (R. F. Damon & Co., October 20th, 1931; *Figure 10*).

FIGURE 9: In 1928 Absolon's order with R. F. Damon & Co. included cast of Neanderthal Man from La Chapelle-aux-Saints (No. 492).

1934 was a year that saw about a substantial change in the arrangement of the Anthropos exhibition: it was moved to the Moravia Pavilion. The actual installation took place from February to June 1935, however, with no marked changed to the content of the exhibition. In 1936, the exhibition expanded to the adjacent Brno Pavilion. At that time, Absolon focused his strengths on establishing the Anthropos Institute and Museum. He planned the opening for 28 October 1938, on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the First Czechoslovak Republic (Kostrhun 2003, 2018). To this end, he ordered several dozens of coloured replicas including *Sinanthropus pekinensis* (No. 530–531, 533, 544–545), La Chapelle-aux-Saints skull (No. 456, 489a), Piltdown Man (No. 449), Restoration of the Mousterian skull (No. 444–446), Important detached jaw of Fossil Man (No. 139), *Homo heidelbergensis* (No. 486), Type skulls of living or recently living species of man (No. 500, 503–504), Moeritherium (No. 231), Palaeomastodon (No. 232), Boskop skull (No. 459–460), Wajak Man (No. 565–569), Fossil Man in Kenya (No. 557–564), Fish Hoek skull and mandible (No. 534), Men of Spy (No. 454), Cro-Magnon Man (No. 140–147), Baker's Hole skull (No. 521), Anthropoid apes (No. 522–523) and New casts of *Australopithecus* (No. 524–526) from R. F. Damon & Co. by the end of 1936. It took the company several months to process the order until it eventually informed Absolon about sending the casts in the middle of 1937: "The casts are now almost ready and can be sent off within a few days." (R. F. Damon & Co., April 15th, 1937). The subsequent war events thwarted the establishment of the Anthropos Institute and Museum (Oliva, Kostrhun 2019). The Anthropos Pavilion was actually opened as late as in 1962 and today it contains historically valuable casts ordered from R. F. Damon & Co. in the 1920s and 1930s (*Figure 11*).

Karel Absolon's strategy of building the collection, sharing findings and contacts

The continuously expanding exhibition of the Anthropos Pavilion documents Karel Absolon's capability to keep pace with the period development of science that reflected in the installation arrangement, manner of acquiring and using exhibits documenting the evolution of human ancestors as well as development of Palaeolithic cultures. The exhibition corresponded with museum and scientific activities in Western Europe and the U.S. Absolon fully used his research, promotional and organizational skills. His efforts were aimed at building a centre of science and museum presentation of the oldest history of human in Central Europe inspired, in particular, by Musée de l'Homme and Institut de Paléontologie Humaine in Paris and American Museum of Natural History in New York (Valoch 1993, Kostrhun 2003). On the background of this project it is even more understandable why he bought casts of the *Homo* species and its ancestors from R. F. Damon & Co. that complemented museum exhibitions of world institutes such as Museum of Natural History in London, American Museum of Natural History in New York or Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology v Cambridge to name the most prominent ones (*Figure 12*).

Karel Absolon's extensive correspondence witnesses of the fact that he inquired the possibilities and conditions of acquisition or exchange of

FIGURE 10: Showcases in the Prague Pavilion where comparative Palaeolithic collections from abroad were exhibited. © Archive of the Anthropos Institute of the Moravian Museum.

FIGURE 11: Adjustments of copies and reconstructions of anthropological finds of a Cro-Magnon from the Anthropos exposition in 1935. © Archive of the Anthropos Institute of the Moravian Museum.

FIGURE 12: In 1936 Absolon ordered several dozens of coloured replicas including *Sinanthropus pekinensis* (No. 530).

reconstructions and casts and specimens. Absolon also maintained rich contacts, both in person and in writing, not only with natural object and cast companies and dealers, but also with internationally recognized experts and researchers including curators of museum collections. For instance, with the U.S. palaeontologist William King Gregory (1876–1970), curator of Department of Comparative Anatomy of American Museum of Natural History in New York, accepted Absolon's suggestion to exchange plaster-casts of Předmostí for casts of skulls (Heidelberg, Gibraltar, Cro-Magnon a Chapelle-aux-Saints) by the zoologist James Howard McGregor and models of Mastodon and Mammoth by the U.S. painter and illustrator Charles R. Knight (1874–1953) in 1924 (Gregory, April 1st, 1924).

In 1924, Absolon approached the palaeontologist Arthur Smith Woodward, curator of the Department of Geology of the Museum of Natural History in London. He asked him with an offer to exchange casts from Předmostí for casts that he later bought from R. F. Damon & Co. (No. 431, 466, 472). Namely for a cast of Talgai skull and restored model of Piltdown skull, *Homo rhodesiensis* and a cast of molar teeth of *Pithecanthropus erectus*. Woodward first sent him a Talgai skull and a Galley Hill skull, but he lingered with delivering casts of Piltdown skull and *Homo rhodesiensis*. He did not have a mould for casting molar teeth of *Pithecanthropus erectus*. So, in May 1924, Absolon wrote to him that he had received a catalogue from R. F. Damon & Co. where the casts can be bought. He did not omit to accentuate in his correspondence the exceptional nature of the casts he had provided. "whereas the plaster-cast of Předmostí are dealt nowhere, they are to be have only in our museum and not allowed to be multiplied elsewhere." (Absolon, May 5th, 1924) Absolon and Woodward planned to visit the Piltdown site. They visited the site together in 1931. "It was a great pleasure to show you Piltdown." (Woodward, October 16th, 1931; *Figure 13*).

At the same time, Absolon asked the UK geologist William Dickson Lang (1878–1966), curator and later keeper of the Department of Geology of the Museum of Natural History in London, for casts of the Piltdown skull and the *Homo rhodesiensis* skull. "we hope to be able soon to send you casts of the Piltdown and Rhodesian skulls." (Lang, July 22nd, 1924) Lang promised to send him a consignment including left lower molars of Moeritherium and Paleomastodon in exchange for the sent collection of mammoth bones in 1928. It was not until 1936 when Absolon received a letter of apology stating that the order had not been processed yet. Therefore, Absolon inquired information by the end of the same year whether he would be sent casts from R. F. Damon & Co. – skulls of Moeritherium (No. 231) and Palaeomastodon (No. 232) in exchange for the parcel with prehistoric animals from Moravia. Independently of this correspondence, the company confirmed they would prepare the requested casts. "We have received an order from the British Museum to make for you (....) We understand these are to be sent by the British Museum as an exchange. We should like to thank you for requesting these specimens. We shall proceed immediately with their preparation." (R. F. Damon & Co., April 15th, 1937; *Figure 14*).

Another group of internationally renowned experts and researchers that Absolon contacted were

Karel Absolon's order placed with R. F. Damon & Co. in 1928	
No. 463 *Pithecanthropus erectus*	Skull cap
No. 464 *Pithecanthropus erectus*	Endocranial cast
No. 464a *Pithecanthropus erectus*	Restored model of endocranial cast
No. 465 *Pithecanthropus erectus*	Femur
No. 466 *Pithecanthropus erectus*	Two molars and one premolar
No. 467 *Pithecanthropus erectus*	Fragment of lower jaw
No. 431 Piltdown Man	Restored endocranial cast
No. 432 Piltdown Man	Flint implements (3 palaeoliths and 3 eoliths)
No. 447 Piltdown Man	Bone implement
No. 472 *Homo rhodesiensis*	Restored endocranial cast
No. 473 *Homo rhodesiensis*	Fragment of 2nd maxilla
No. 474 *Homo rhodesiensis*	Sacrum
No. 475 *Homo rhodesiensis*	Imperfect left femur
No. 476 *Homo rhodesiensis*	Complete left tibia
No. 478 Galilee skull	Exact replica of skull as found
No. 479 Galilee skull	Separate casts of the component bones (frontal sphenoid and malar)
No. 480 Galilee skull	Endocranial cast
No. 437 Evolution of the human jaw	A series of models of the right half of the lower jaws of Chimpanzee, Piltdown Man, Heidelberg Man, Neanderthal Man and Modern Man
No. 491 Neanderthal Man (La Chapelle)	Bust with flesh modelled on right half only
No. 492 Neanderthal Man (La Chapelle)	Complete bust
No. 427 Flint implements	Set of 16 casts of "Rostro-Carinate" flints, described and figured by Sir Ray Lankester in Phil. Trans., Roy. Soc. Series B. Vol. 202

Karel Absolon's order placed with R. F. Damon & Co. in 1936	
Nr. 530 *Sinanthropus pekinensis*	Skull with portions of frontals and parietals removed to show great thickness of bone
Nr. 531 *Sinanthropus pekinensis*	Base of skull
Nr. 533 *Sinanthropus pekinensis*	Skull, complete brain case
Nr. 544 *Sinanthropus pekinensis*	Locus B jaw. Juvenile
Nr. 545 *Sinanthropus pekinensis*	
Nr. 456 La Chapelle aux Saints skull	Endocranial cast
Nr. 489a La Chapelle aux Saints skull	Skull and mandible in original state

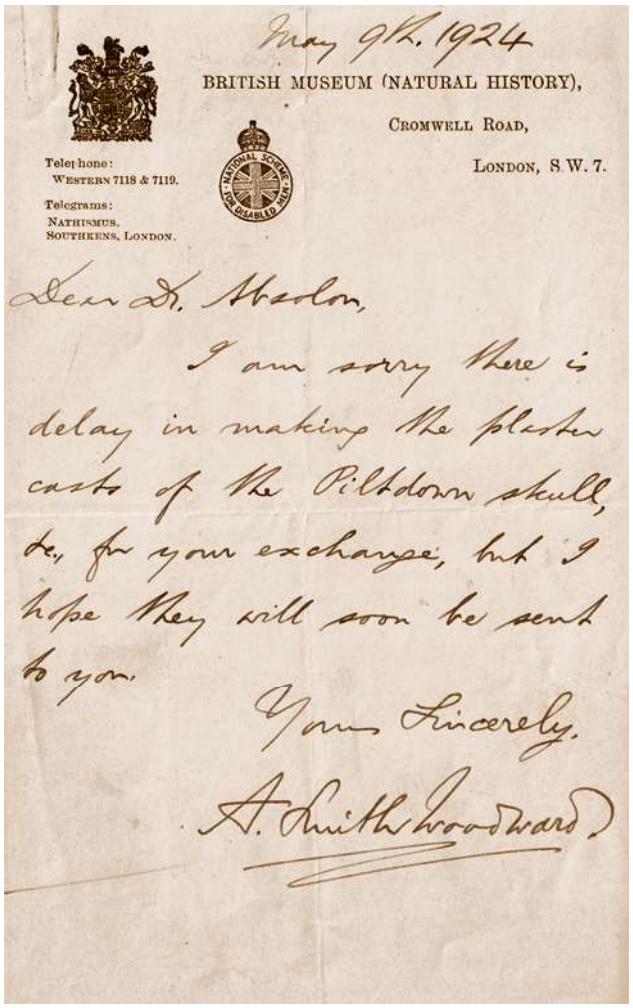
FIGURE 13: Karel Absolon's orders placed with R. F. Damon & Co. © Barbora Půtová.

Nr. 449 Piltdown Man	Set of 3 enlarged models of left 1st lower molars of Eoanthropus, Modern Man and Chimpanzee
Nr. 444 Restoration of the Mousterian skull	Restored skull
Nr. 445 Restoration of the Mousterian skull	Endocranial cast of Mousterian Man
Nr. 446 Restoration of the Mousterian skull	Endocranial cast of Modern Man
Nr. 139 Important detached jaw of Fossil Man	Malarnaud jaw
Nr. 140 Cro-Magnon Man	An important series of casts of human remains and examples of the art of Palaeolithic Man from the famous caves of the Dordogne, France. Almost perfect skull and mandible ("Old Man" of Cro-Magnon)
Nr. 141 Cro-Magnon Man	An important series of casts of human remains and examples of the art of Palaeolithic Man from the famous caves of the Dordogne, France. Imperfect skull and jaw (female) showing severely wounded forehead
Nr. 142 Cro-Magnon Man	An important series of casts of human remains and examples of the art of Palaeolithic Man from the famous caves of the Dordogne, France. Upper portion of cranium
Nr. 143 Cro-Magnon Man	An important series of casts of human remains and examples of the art of Palaeolithic Man from the famous caves of the Dordogne, France. Two imperfect mandibles
Nr. 144 Cro-Magnon Man	An important series of casts of human remains and examples of the art of Palaeolithic Man from the famous caves of the Dordogne, France. Complete left humerus
Nr. 145 Cro-Magnon Man	An important series of casts of human remains and examples of the art of Palaeolithic Man from the famous caves of the Dordogne, France. Right femur (shaft only)
Nr. 146 Cro-Magnon Man	An important series of casts of human remains and examples of the art of Palaeolithic Man from the famous caves of the Dordogne, France. Complete left tibia
Nr. 147 Cro-Magnon Man	An important series of casts of human remains and examples of the art of Palaeolithic Man from the famous caves of the Dordogne, France. Complete right fibula
Nr. 486 *Homo heidelbergensis*	
Nr. 500 Type skulls of living or recently living species of Man	Bushman (type skull with mandible)
Nr. 503 Type skulls of living or recently living species of Man	Tasmanian (type skull with mandible)
Nr. 504 Type skulls of living or recently living species of Man	Australian (type skull without mandible)
Nr. 231 Moeritherium	
Nr. 232 Palaeomastodon	
Nr. 459 Boskop skull	Skull cap, squamosal and portion of mandible
Nr. 460 Boskop skull	Endocranial cast

Nr. 565 Wajak Man	Wajak I. Skull
Nr. 566 Wajak Man	Wajak I. Portion of mandible
Nr. 567 Wajak Man	Wajak II. Skull pieces including a) frontal with supra-orbital ridges and malar; b) right temporal; c) occipital; d) parietal
Nr. 568 Wajak Man	Wajak II. Upper jaw
Nr. 569 Wajak Man	Wajak II. Mandible
Nr. 557 Fossil Man in Kenya, East Africa	Kanam mandible
Nr. 558 Fossil Man in Kenya, East Africa	Kanjera Skull No. 1, Fragments as found
Nr. 559 Fossil Man in Kenya, East Africa	Kanjera Skull No. 1, Restoration
Nr. 560 Fossil Man in Kenya, East Africa	Kanjera Skull No. 1, Endocranial cast
Nr. 561 Fossil Man in Kenya, East Africa	Kanjera Skull No. 3, Fragments as found
Nr. 562 Fossil Man in Kenya, East Africa	Kanjera Skull No. 1, Restoration
Nr. 563 Fossil Man in Kenya, East Africa	Kanjera Skull No. 1, Endocranial cast
Nr. 564 Fossil Man in Kenya, East	Portion of femur shaft associated with No. 3
Nr. 534 Fish Hoek	Skull and mandible
Nr. 454 Men of Spy	
Nr. 140 Cro-Magnon Man	Skull and mandible of "Old Man"
Nr. 141 Cro-Magnon Man	Skull and mandible of woman
Nr. 142 Cro-Magnon Man	Upper portion of cranium
Nr. 143 Cro-Magnon Man	2 imperfect mandibular rami
Nr. 144 Cro-Magnon Man	Complete left humerus
Nr. 145 Cro-Magnon Man	Shaft of right femur
Nr. 146 Cro-Magnon Man	Complete left tibia
Nr. 147 Cro-Magnon Man	Complete right fibula
Nr. 521 Baker's Hole	Skull
Nr. 522 Anthropoid apes	Bust of 5 years old Gorilla known as John Daniel 1st.
Nr. 523 Anthropoid apes	Left foot of the same
Nr. 524 New casts of *Australopithecus*	Skull in three parts, facial portion, endocranial portion and mandible
Nr. 525 New casts of *Australopithecus*	Above joined together and mounted
Nr. 526 New casts of *Australopithecus*	Uncoloured casts of the upper and lower teeth

Karel Absolon's orders placed with R. F. Damon & Co. preserved in the Anthropos Pavilion depository	
No. 492 Neanderthal Man (La Chapelle)	Complete bust
No. 494 Cro-Magnon Man	Bust with flesh modelled on left half only
No. 495 Cro-Magnon Man	Complete bust
Nr. 525 New casts of *Australopithecus*	Above joined together and mounted
Nr. 530 *Sinanthropus pekinensis*	Skull with portions of frontals and parietals removed to show great thickness of bone
Nr. 545 *Sinanthropus pekinensis*	

FIGURE 13: Continued.



May 9th. 1924

BRITISH MUSEUM (NATURAL HISTORY),

CROMWELL ROAD,

LONDON, S.W. 7.

Telephone:
WESTERN 7118 & 7119.

Telegrams:
NATHISMUS,
SOUTHKENS, LONDON.

Dear Dr. Absolon,

I am sorry there is delay in making the plaster casts of the Piltdown skull, &c., for your exchange, but I hope they will soon be sent to you.

Yours Sincerely.

A. Smith Woodward

FIGURE 14: Letter addressed by Arthur Smith Woodward to Karel Absolon. May 9th, 1924. © Archive of the Anthropos Institute of the Moravian Museum.

discoverers and experts in paleoanthropological fossils such as the Scottish anatomist and anthropologist Arthur Keith, British palaeontologist, the geologist Francis Arthur Bather and the British palaeontologist and anthropologist Louis Leakey. Absolon later purchased from R. F. Damon & Co. some of the paleoanthropological casts of findings that these scientists commented on, described or researched. Arthur Keith (1866–1955) ordered from Absolon casts of Předmostí for Hunterian Museum – The Royal College of Surgeons of England in London in 1924. In return, he arranged with R. F. Damon & Co. to make a cast of a Gibraltar skull for Absolon. "If you wish to have a cast of Gibraltar skull we could purchase one from the maker here and discount the price from the sum we owe to you." (Smith, April 16th, 1924) Absolon sent casts of Předmostí also to Francis Arthur Bather (1863–1934) thanks to whom he got "plaster casts of the Talgai and Galley skulls and the Rhodesian skull." (Bather, January 9th, 1925) Louis Leakey (1903–1972), after the Second East African Archaeological Research Expedition in Kenya in 1928–1929 asked Absolon for casts of Předmostí and Brno III skulls in exchange for casts of skulls from Kenya. "I shall be glad I hear from you and especially I know if you will exchange plaster-casts of skull." (Leakey, January 1st, 1929)

CONCLUSION

Karel Absolon's correspondence and personal contacts with natural history object and cast companies and dealers as well as internationally renowned experts and researchers did not serve only the purpose of purchasing or exchanging specimens and casts. They were also a platform for expert consultation, exchange of publication outputs (books and studies) and photographs, recommendations of experts, mediating references in other experts and support from sponsors benefactors. For instance, Arthur Smith Woodward recommended Absolon to turn to the Rockefeller Foundation when trying to establish the Anthropos Pavilion and refer to him. "I should be much pleased to recommend to them very strongly your application." (Woodward, November 12th, 1938). Absolon's correspondence from the period of the First Czechoslovak Republic is specific testimony of the way of scientific work that was based on a wide range of international contacts, sharing and dissemination of findings, contacts and ways of acquiring (purchase and exchange) specimens, cats and reconstructions with the purpose of building collections and exhibitions for world museums. Karel Absolon is a researchers, organizers and propagator who succeeded in integrating in the international network of experts and other significant personalities and he was able to use constantly his cultural and social capital in Central Europe. His collection building activity driven by his intention to establish the Anthropos institute and museum in Brno in the period of the First Czechoslovak Republic was comparable with principal trends in museum presentation in Western Europe and the U.S.

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Barbora Půtová*
Institute of Ethnology
Charles University, Faculty of Arts
nám. Jana Palacha 1/2, 116 38 Prague 1
E-mail: barbora.putova@ff.cuni.cz

*Corresponding author.