

WORLD WAR ONE IN THE VETERINARY SCIENCES MUSEUM OF THE UNIVERSITY OF TURIN

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Abstract. The Veterinary Sciences Museum was inaugurated in 2016, in Grugliasco (Turin, IT); its collection documents the history of the Veterinary School of Turin (now Department of Veterinary Science), from its origins to the present day, whilst explaining the scientific progress of veterinary medicine through the evolution of its instruments. Of particular note, the Museum preserves some items concerning the World War One: the diorama which depicts a battlefield infirmary for quadrupeds; an old autoclave and a blowpipe, similar to those employed in the historical laboratories of Via Nizza, Turin, for producing the anti-pyogenic serum "Lanfranchi-Finzi". As well as this, it also contains many written documents, describing the activities of the Veterinary School during the WWI and so providing information on the influence of the conflict on the veterinary field, as well as the contribution of veterinary medicine to the Great War.



Figure 1. The Veterinary Sciences Museum of the University of Turin, IT.

The Veterinary Sciences Museum (*Figure 1*), with its reconfiguration, was opened to the public in May 2016, for the occasion of the “AgroVet Festival”. This event, organized annually at the university campus of Grugliasco (Turin), during which some activities qualified as “Third mission”, meaning all purposes other than research and teaching (such as knowledge dissemination and exchange), are carried out and contribute to one of the main activities of a museum: communicating to the public.

By means of surgical equipment, anatomical preparation and stuffed animals, the Museum narrates the scientific progress of veterinary medicine by the preservation of its instrumentation that show the evolution of scientific techniques. Unfortunately, most of those used by the School of Veterinary Medicine have been lost, due to various causes: the changes of School headquarters for example (Venaria Reale, Chivasso, Fossano, Turin and most recently Grugliasco, in 2000) or events during the Second World War, such as a bombing raid in 1943 which destroyed the wing of the building that was housing the Faculty normal anatomy museum.

In addition to the preservation of exhibits, the Museum deals with several aspects of veterinary profession: scientific research, animal care and food safety. Alongside the collection of surgical instruments dating back to the nineteenth century, anatomic preparations from pathological organs are shown in a special room, equipped with forced ventilation cabinets and called “Perroncito Museum”, as it preserves what remains of the collection of parasites created by Prof. Edoardo Bellarmino Perroncito.

Moreover, the Veterinary Sciences Museum documents the close relationship between farriery and veterinary medicine: the collection of hooves and normal and therapeutic horseshoes, contributed to the old surgical pathology Institute by Warrant Officer Amedeo Galzenati, shows different diseases which used to occur to quadrupeds (mainly perissodactylis and cloven-hoofed animals) and explains the profession of the farrier, which not only forges horse shoes but also manages illnesses linked to incorrect gaits or anatomical abnormalities.

The Museum also preserves some items regarding World War One.

The diorama shown in *Figure 2*, built by CSI Model in Alessandria (IT), exhibited in 2004 during the 35th International Congress of the World Association for the History of Veterinary Medicine in Grugliasco and given to the Museum by the Veterinary College of Alessandria, depicts a battlefield infirmary for quadrupeds of WWI.

These facilities employed several veterinary students and took care of animals (horses, mules, donkeys) which came with the fighting army.

During WWI, the Veterinary Military Services had to took



Figure 2. The diorama about battlefield infirmary for quadrupeds.

care and hospitalize sick and injured quadrupeds and prevent and circumscribe epizootic diseases.

Infirmaries were mobile establishments used for the temporary shelter and care of quadrupeds and the supply of veterinary material to the various units and corps. Two infirmaries were usually assigned to each army corps and 150 or more sick or wounded quadrupeds could be temporarily sent for care and treated there, while the slightly sick ones were treated directly in the departments. Daily and monthly reports were drawn up on the state of health of the animals hospitalized and a register of those treated was also kept. Some infirmaries were also created in isolated places for quadrupeds suffering from infectious diseases such as glanders or anthrax.

The autoclave and the blowpipe shown in Figure 3 are similar to those used in the military veterinary laboratory, directed by the complementary captain Guido Finzi during WWI, when the Veterinary School was an institution of higher education that provided officers to the Veterinary Military Services. It was thanks to the scientific contribution of prof. Alessandro Lanfranchi and prof. Guido Finzi that the polyvalent anti-pyogenic serum "Lanfranchi-Finzi" was produced. Originally employed for the treatment of purulent wounds in animals, this serum was subsequently used in humans as well.

The study of the Veterinary Sciences Museum exhibition finds valuable support in the papers of the archives of the Faculty and in its historical collection of books, some of

which were owned and often annotated by the authors themselves.

Concerning WWI, the Museum also preserves written documents, which describe the activities of the Veterinary School during those years; Figure 4 depicts an extract of the "Journal of Veterinary Medicine", founded in Turin in 1852 by prof. Giovanni Battista Ercolani, who



Figure 3. An old autoclave and a blowpipe for the production of anti-pyogenic serum during the WWI.

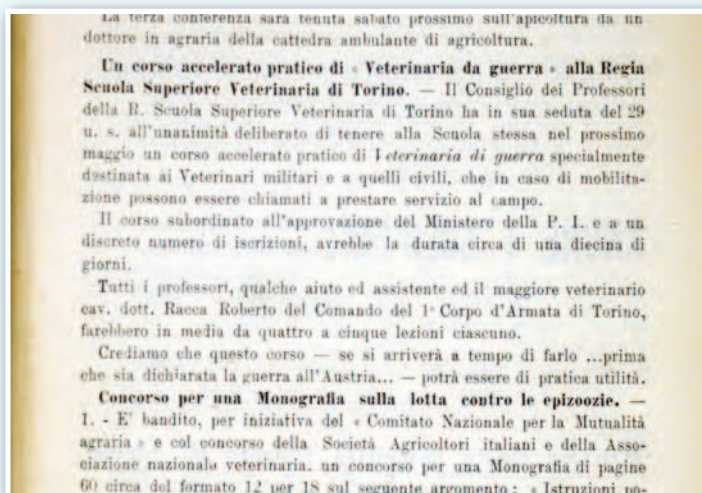


Figure 4. Extract from the "Journal of Veterinary Medicine" (May 1915), LXIV, n. 19, 1915, p. 439.

was the first Director when the School was located at Via Nizza, Turin in 1859. This journal reports the decision of the School to launch a practical course of «Military Veterinary Medicine» in 1915, upon the request of veterinary students. The course was held by civil lecturers from the School and military teachers.

The Museum also preserves documents given by private individuals, such as the collection of letters and pictures from veterinary officer Francesco Luigi Colletto, in service during both world conflicts. Among his papers, a quite moving handwritten letter addressed to his girlfriend in November 1918 describes the emotions felt on the last day of war. The Museum also exhibits Colletto's military uniform from the Second World War.

With all its activities, the Museum allows the historical memory of the Profession to be preserved and handed down to future generations of veterinarians through a rich collection of instruments, anatomical preparations, books and documents. In this way, it not only carries out a mere function of preservation, but also plays an important educational role on behalf of the community.

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