

In memoriam



Professor Wolfgang Kühnel (1934–2015)

On August 21st, 2015, after serious illness, passed away at the age of 81 years the exceptional anatomist, the long-standing Secretary General of the Anatomische Gesellschaft and Director of the Institute of Anatomy of the Medical University in Lübeck/Germany, Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Kühnel. We will remember Prof. Kühnel as an unusual person, rich in ideas scientist, outstanding morphologist, who evoked respect with his multiple interests and large

number of engagements, which he realized with pedantic accuracy as well as for his important contributions for the Bulgarian anatomy.

Wolfgang Kühnel was born on January 10th, 1934 in Bad Tölz, Saar, in a rich in traditions intellectual family. In 1946 his family ran away to West Germany – to the city of Staunau, Hessen, where in 1955 he finished the high school. During the same year he began to study medicine at the Philipps-University in Marburg/Lahn. He completed his preclinical education with excellence and continued as a scholarship holder of the Studienstiftung des Deutschen Volkes. On September 28th, 1958 he married Marianne Dietrich, famous scenic designer and artist. They had two children. During 1961 he earned his doctorate in medicine with the dissertation thesis: “Morphological and experimental studies on the hen’s allantois”. After that he started to work as Specializing-Doctor in the city hospital in Rendsburg.

On the January 1st, 1963 Dr. Kühnel became Assistant at the Anatomical Institute of the University of Marburg (Chairman: Prof. Dr. Gerhard Petry). During 1967 he habilitated and was appointed as prosector (senior assistant) of the Institute. In 1970 Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Bargmann appointed him as Associate Professor in the Institute of Anatomy of the Kiel University. In 1974 he was appointed as Director of the Department of Anatomy at the Technical University in Aachen, where he organized the preclinical part of the study for medical students. In 1982 he was elected, by tendering, for Chair of the Institute of Anatomy of the Medical University of Lübeck.

A substantial part of the life of Prof. Wolfgang Kühnel was connected with the Anatomische Gesellschaft. From June 5th, 1974 until 2005 he was permanent Secretary General of the largest Anatomical Society in Europe.

Prof. Kühnel held high academic posts such as: Vice-Dean of the Medical Faculty Aachen, Vice-Dean and Dean of the Medical Faculty and Vice-Rector and Rector of the Medical University of Lübeck. He was also Secretary General of the International Federation of the Anatomical Associations (IFAA) (in the period 1989-1996), and active member of many international organizations.

As a scientist Prof. Kühnel worked in the fields of the functional and experimental morphology, clinical and topographical anatomy, where he got and published important new results. He is also author and co-author of reinforced textbooks, revision books and atlases of Anatomy.

Professor Kühnel left its deep marks in the Bulgarian Morphology. As an anatomist with great experience he helped many Institutes with programs for integrated teaching in Anatomy and Histology, also provided information for current methods for fixation of corpses. He invited a lot of Bulgarian anatomists for specialization of modern methods and experimental approaches in the Institutes he worked at. His wife, Marianne Kühnel, has effectively contributed with her lovely festivities the foreign colleagues to feel very comfortable. As a result, more than 20 papers were published in prestige journals and presented at international congresses.

As Secretary General of the Anatomische Gesellschaft he markedly contributed to the rise of the international prestige of the Bulgarian morphological science and the integration of the Bulgarian Anatomical Society to the European Scientific Institutions.

Professor Kühnel invested a lot of time, efforts and organizational skills into the performance of Congresses of the Anatomische Gesellschaft in East European countries. For the first time this happened in Varna in 1981. The 76th Congress of the Anatomische Gesellschaft was held together with the 8th Congress of the Bulgarian Anatomical Society in the International Hotel in Zlatni pyasatsi (see the photo below). At the Congress more than 100 outstanding European anatomists and the same number of Bulgarian anatomists took part. The Congress had a great success. At this Congress Professor Wolfgang Kühnel was awarded Doctor Honoris Causa of the Bulgarian Anatomical Society for his contributions in the organizing of this event and its active support for the rise of the international authority of our Anatomy. He was also awarded Doctor Honoris Causa of the Medical University of Sofia.



The decease of Professor Wolfgang Kühnel is a heavy loss also for the Bulgarian Anatomical Society. We lost a very worthy, distinguished and unforgettable Person, Teacher, Scientist and a great friend of Bulgaria.

A few top publications of Professor W. Kühnel:

Kühnel W. 1965. Morphologische Untersuchungen am Amnion und an der Allantois (Kaninchen). – Z. Zellforsch., 66: 649-662.

Kühnel W., Krisch B. 1974. On the sexual segment of the kidney in the snake (Natrix natrix). – Cell Tissue Res., 148: 417-429.

Vassilev V., Andreev D., Kuehnel W. 1995. Scanning electron microscopy of the endomisial collagen in the rat paravertebral musculature. – Ann. Anat., 177: 85-87.

Wassilev W., Wassilev I., Andreev D., Kuhnel W. 2005. Morphological aspects of the problem “Anterior cruciate ligament”. – Verh. Anat. Ges. (Anat. Anz. Suppl.), 187: 71.

Prof. Dr. V. Vassilev, Prof. Dr. M. Davidoff