



*Jan Widacki:  
Historia badań poligraficznych  
(literally:  
“history of polygraph  
examinations”),  
Kraków 2017*

When the Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski Kraków University Publishing House (Ofcyna Wydawnicza AFM) released a book by Jan Widacki entitled *Historia badań poligraficznych* (i.e. “history of polygraph examinations”), you realised with quite surprise that the issue of polygraph examinations had not been investigated from the historical point of view yet. Existing publications only treat historical questions in a cursory manner, without an attempt to investigate the controversial subject from the perspective of history. In this sense, Jan Widacki’s essay into the history of polygraph examinations must be welcomed not only with appreciation but with a particular caring jealousy, as he has found an interesting chink in literature.

The work follows the clear, logical pattern that makes it the understanding of questions connected to polygraph examinations possible even to the uninitiated. The line of argument opens with reflections on the essence of lie (deception) and the earliest attempts at its detection, delving into the primordial times from the border between prehistory and history (the passages on the Vedas and the history of King Solomon) to show how realisations and reflections resulting from common sense and drawing from life's experience have gained scientific foundations (Chapter Two) with time. The author meticulously introduces the reader into the rudiments of disciplines (experimental psychology, physiology, study of emotions) relevant to the aforementioned examinations, presents the silhouettes of researchers, and describes (providing the necessary illustrations) the devices they used. In the third chapter, the author continues the previous subjects, presenting the first attempts at lie detection based on scientific foundations. Like anywhere else in the text, the reader will be pleased to find certain anecdotal threads (e.g. about Lombroso on p. 68), which nonetheless are much more than just an ornament or a testimony to the author's erudition, as they serve a very specific and practical goal by illustrating the claims he makes. Yet the greatest curiosity is satisfied by the chapter on the first attempts at the practical use of instrumental detection of deception (pp. 83–104), which discusses the development of polygraph examinations mostly against the background of the history of transformation of the law enforcement and judiciary systems in the United States in the earlier half of the 20th century. It is worth adding that the period as such was a fascinating moment in the development of the system, for example, in reference to civil rights (in the opposition to police practices, at times downright brutal), which is why the discussion of various, often surprising ideas (e.g. the use of scopolamine, see p. 96) practiced at the time by the creators and practitioners (Keeler) of polygraph examinations calls for very high appreciation.

Chapter Five is based on the juxtaposition of Reid's and Lykken's ideas, with an emphasis on the critical attitude towards the latter. Offering a subjective criticism of the book, which after all a reviewer is entitled to, you have an impression that this is where the current subjects, discussed against contemporary doctrine, including issues that are powerful bones of contention (especially in Poland) between individual authors begin to take the upper hand in the book. This fact is connected to the change of the narrative which shifts from a fascinating chat (which in no way does depreciate it, just the other way round) into something more of an academic lecture. The closer we move to contemporary times (chapters Six and Seven, and Widacki brought his considerations up to what he defined as "the end of the history of the polygraph", i.e. the late 1980s and the early 1990s), the more critical comments the author levels at the applied methods, practices, and judgements.

In a review, it is worthwhile to devote some attention to the formal layer. As mentioned earlier, the work is not only an interesting collection of insight into the development of polygraphy, but it has an additional profound educational value, not only on the forensic and process plane. Moreover, it is an absolute touchstone in terms of beauty and clarity of the language (a rarity today!), which makes its study and understanding easier also for non-specialists. The book can certainly be recommended to all the readers: both those advanced in forensic studies due to their academic or professional involvement and to the ones who are only taking the first steps on this beautiful path. With a formal tongue in cheek, yet with an absolutely stiff upper lip when it comes to the substance, a reviewer can say that the author managed to write a book edifying both the professor and the student.

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