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SCIENTISTS IN OLD GDANSK: 19th AND 20th CENTURIES

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THE GREATEST FAME among the most outstanding citizens of Gdansk surely belonged to Artur Schopenhauer (1788–1860). His family house in 114 St. Spirit's (św. Ducha) Street (after the pointless change in numbers – 47) was reconstructed after the war. The family also possessed the summer residence in Polanki Street (III Manor house). After Gdansk was seized by the Prussians, the Schopenhauer family, with 5-year-old Artur, moved to Hamburg. The trips and longer stays abroad facilitated foreign language learning. After the death of his father, who tried to prepare his son for the job of a merchant, the future philosopher started studying in Gotha and Weimar, and later in Goetingen and Berlin. In 1813 he obtained his doctor's degree in Jena, for his thesis *About the Fourfold Elements of the Sufficient Reason Rule*, which became the basis of his philosophical system. This rule, formulated in an a priori postulate, is the basis of our cognition: *nothing exists without a reason* or *always and everywhere everything exists owing to something else*. The thesis impressed Goethe very much, and he wrote in Schopenhauer's album the famous advice: *If you want to enjoy your own worth, you have to enjoy the worth of the world*. Artur, however, pursued his own way, full of pessimism. Having quarreled with his mother, he went to live in Dresden, where he wrote the treaty *About Seeing and Colors*, and the fundamental work, published in 1818 – *The World as Will and Imagination* – the testimony of genius and erudition of the 30-year-old author, expressed in wonderful language. To Goethe's question *Will nature finally explain itself?*

Figure 1. The Family House of Arthur Schopenhauer in 114 St. Spirit's Street (47 at present) – before the war

Figure 2. Arthur Schopenhauer

Figure 3. Paul Simson

Schopenhauer answers: *the world is the self-knowledge of will. The world we see exists only in the imagination of the subject, yet this does not mean that it is unknowable. As bodies in the space, we are the object of objective cognition, and at the same time the beings endowed with will, which is homogeneous, eternal and indivisible, outside time and space, without reason and aim. Its essence is the insatiable aspiration to reality. Thanks to intellect the world in a twinkling of an eye appears as representation, with all the forms, subject and object, time, space, magnitude and causality. The will observes itself.*

In 1820, after returning from his trip to Italy, Schopenhauer receives in Berlin assistance-professorship, and, after winning the dispute with Hegel, starts his lectures – without success. Feeling discouraged, he gives up. In 1831 he finally leaves Berlin. Since 1833 till his death he lives in Frankfurt am Main. Here the following works are published: *About Will in Nature*, *About Free Will*, *Two Problems of Ethics*, and *Parerga and Paralipomena*, containing among others *Aphorisms about Wisdom of Life*. His outlook upon life was most popular at the beginning of the 20th century – he was for example very popular among the artists of "Young Poland." His pessimism if often only superficial. Is it, for example, possible to find pessimistic the view about the indestructibility of real life? *The fact that we exist in the present results, after consideration, in the fact that we have to exist always. We can not drop out of existence, as one can drop out of space.*

As Garewicz writes, *we do not have to share Schopenhauer's views to acknowledge his greatness*. It is astonishing that the greatest genius in the history of Gdansk is still waiting for the restoration of the plaque marking the house he was born in!

Let us once again return to the Nature Society. An outstanding role had in it Mateusz Wolff (1724–1784), mentioned before. Born in Chojnice, he was a successful doctor for the Czartoryski and Lubomirski families, and for the military school in Warsaw. Later he moved to Tczew, where he conducted astronomical observations and came in touch with the Society. In 1775 he moved to Gdansk. He settled in Coal Market (Targ Węglowy), at

Figure 4. Hugo Conventz

Figure 5. Adolf Butenandt

the Cistercian inn, where he organized his private observatory. In 1780 he opened a well-equipped Society's observatory on Bishops' Hill (Biskupia Górka). The new institution was famous for the accuracy of astronomic observations. Wolff also counted the geographical longitude and latitude of the observatory, being exact up to one second. After his death the observatory was run by Juliusz Koch. In 1813 the observatory was pulled down. The instruments were partly placed in the new observatory organized in 1866 in the tower of the house at 26 St. Mary's Street, which since 1846 had been the seat of the Society – hence the name – Naturalists' House. There were 4 astronomical observatories in Gdansk before the war (!). The Nature Society worked till the last war.

In the 19th century history in Gdansk was on a very high level. It was the merit of such scientists as Gothilf Löschin (1790–1868), Teodor Hirsch (1806–1991), and Paul Simson (1869–1917). Hugo Conwentz (1855–1922) and a geographer Paul Sonntag (1864–1922) – the creators of the modern nature protection – gained worldwide fame. In 1880 a Nature Museum was created (in the Green Gate), with the second in the world amber collection. Since its creation in 1904 the Technical University in Gdansk becomes an outstanding center of scientific life. The first rector was the famous mathematician Hans Mangoldt (1854–1925). The worldwide fame was enjoyed by such physicists as Walter Kossel (1888–1956) and Carl Ramsauer (1879–1955), architecture theoretician Friedrich Ostendorf (died in 1915), and biochemist Adolf Butenandt (1903–1995) who was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1939 for his work performed here, among others the hormone synthesis. For its 90th anniversary the Technical University awarded the scientist (who was still alive at that time) the *honoris causa* doctorate title.

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