



Katarzyna Dąbkowska
Dagmara Bożek

Henryk Arctowski

In a World of Thoughts

BOSZ



BoSz Szymanik i wspólnicy sp. jawna
38-722 Olszanica 311
Biuro: ul. Przemysłowa 14, 38-600 Lesko
tel. +48 13 469 90 00, +48 13 469 90 10
fax +48 13 469 61 88
biuro@bosz.com.pl
www.bosz.com.pl

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I am grateful for not being forgotten.

Henryk Arctowski





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Introduction

In July 2012, I saw an inscription 'Arctowski'. It was inscribed on one of the wooden boards of the signpost in front of the main entrance to the Polish Polar Station Hornsund on Spitsbergen and indicated a distance with an estimated length of 16,252 km in a straight line. The Polar South was very far away at that time, and the only thing I knew then was that the Polish Antarctic Station bearing the name from the signpost was located there, on King George Island. I first met Henryk in November 2015. He looked at me from his portrait by Ewa Rakusa-Suszczewska hanging on the wall of the mess of the scientific base in the Antarctic, which had seemed so distant to me three years earlier. Looking at Henryk, I wondered if he had really worn a fur coat and why he had not put on a hat in the conditions of overwhelling cold. Later I learned that the picture refers to the photograph in which the polar explorer is eternally 26 years old and a participant of the first expedition that wintered in the Antarctic at the end of the 19th century.

▲ ▲ ▲

In 2009, I was on Spitsbergen, where I made a documentary about the so-called polar fever. It is a specific kind of longing experienced by people who visit these remote areas of the world. I think I had felt this syndrome for a long time, even before I travelled anywhere. The Arctic only confirmed this diagnosis; as a result, immediately after returning, I started looking for a way to get to Antarctica. In the summer of 2018, walking around Powązki Cemetery in the Wola district of Warsaw, I happened to see the modest tombstone of Henryk Arctowski. This was my first encounter with Henryk and since then, for some inexplicable reason, I could not stop thinking about him.

In 2019, I wrote a letter to Arctowski – that is, to the Polish Antarctic Station – because I was looking for a way to get there and make a documentary about its patron. I received a reply to my email from Dagmara, who was working there as a logistician – unfortunately, she could not help me at that time. We did not know each other. Both of us forgot about that letter,

which did not result in anything at the time. But I think that this short moment when our paths crossed was the first time Henryk winked at us from some parallel world. He has done that quite often since then. Sometimes we even respond to him.

Henryk got his way on 30th May 2020. This was the day when I met Dagmara for the first time, although we both felt like it was the hundredth time. It was Daga who found me. She was writing her third book, this time about female polar explorers, and wanted to talk to me about my very modest polar experience. It turned out that our goals, dreams and even lives were interwoven at many points but, most surprisingly, we were fascinated with the same man. Arctowski is usually presented as an elderly scientist - a hunched professor with a white beard casting a serious look from behind his glasses. However, we feel most closely attached to the Henryk in the portrait from the expedition to Antarctica. This is also something that connects us to him: we were 26 years old when we, like him, visited polar areas and this changed our lives. Maybe this is why he is so close to us and we call him by his first name.

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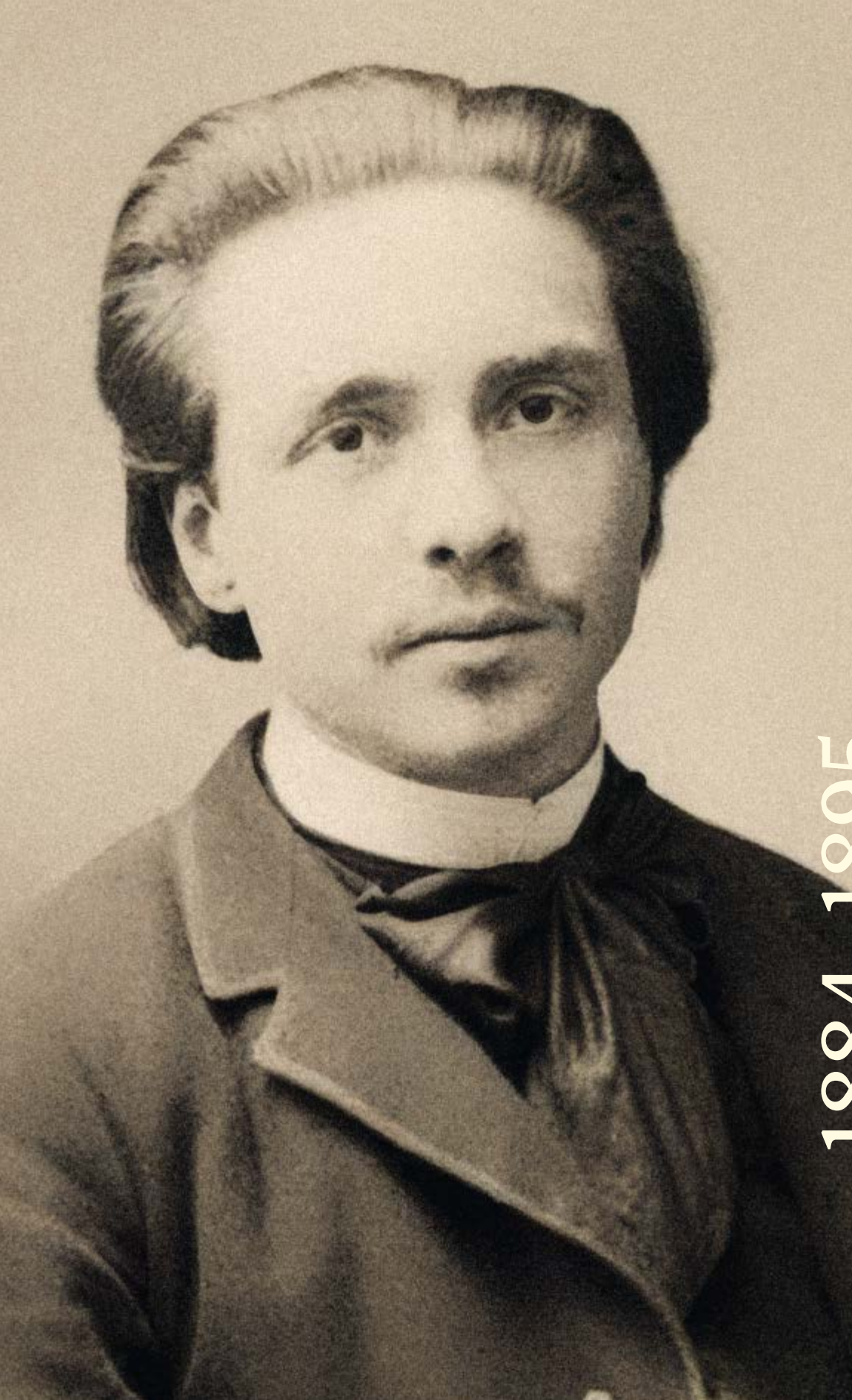
I remember that when we met, Kasia was very specific: 'You will write a book about Henryk.' And I knew they had been friends for a long time. The only thing I could do was ask for an invitation to this acquaintance.



Early life. France and Belgium



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- 51 → Inventions
 - 54 → Liège
 - 57 → At an exhibition in Paris
 - 60 → A step into adulthood
 - 66 → With a new surname into the world of science



1884-1895

Inventions

In 1871, when Henrik Artzt was born, the first commercial ice factories had just begun to operate. Although this sounds at least like an intriguing prophecy from the perspective of our hero's polar future, it is only one of many examples that Henryk was born in an incredible epoch that abounded in inventions and discoveries. This inevitably had to influence the state of mind of young people, their dreams and professional plans, particularly if someone was as ambitious as Henryk, studied in France and in Belgium and spoke a few languages. The 1870s was the era of steel and electricity, a period of the development of physics and chemistry, and the industrialisation of many countries in Europe, America and Asia (mainly Japan). Before Henryk's eyes, the accelerating locomotive of progress not only shone with electric light, but also could be heard on the telephone invented by Alexander Graham Bell in 1876 and, after a while, turned into a motor car designed by Carl Friedrich Benz in 1886. In a few years, the Wright brothers would start the era of aviation, to which Henryk will also contribute in the future. Adding the invention of a cinematograph by the Lumière brothers (1895) and the patenting of a radio wave-based communication system by Guglielmo Marconi and Alexander Popov (1896), we will have a full view of the framework circumstances of the first 25 years of Henryk's life. By that time, our hero had already lived in a few countries and had studied various fields of knowledge among the young scientists who would change the world in the future, including Maria Skłodowska and Albert Einstein. Henryk admired the Eiffel Tower built in Paris in 1889 but also the recently completed Statue of Liberty in New York - symbols of a new world and new possibilities. In this unusual era of inventions, scientific and geographical achievements are another important aspect, as there were still the areas that nobody had reached yet and that could still be named in honour of the explorer's country or its rulers, or, above all, sponsors of the expedition.

At the turn of the 20th century, the world is accelerating, expanding and going upwards. The borders of visibility and audibility disappear, and

distance no longer plays a crucial role in communication. The industrial revolution also has a side effect that nobody is aware of yet – environmental pollution, but Henryk is one of the pioneers of research on climate change. Another phenomenon is also taking place: the world is expanding in terms of the ways it can be experienced and, at the same time, it is shrinking and becoming more accessible thanks to the media. In Henryk’s lifetime, television and radio come into being, and new methods of transport make it possible or even necessary to send information to previously unreachable places.

Henryk reads and talks about it all, but he also takes part in it as a member of the elite of European scientists specialising in Earth science. How much does this stimulate the curiosity of the world and courage in asking questions, shifting borders and setting new directions of thinking? In those times, the feeling of living in the most modern era possible was so strong that in 1899 the patent office in New York announced the need to cease its activity, arguing that all potential inventions had already been invented.

The articles from this period trying to predict the future seem so naive today. They sound humorous but not quite prophetic. For instance, *Gazeta Narodowa* dated 1st July 1896 foretold how the automotive industry would change London and what the availability of the “long-distance speaker” (telephone) would result in:

→ In the final years of this century, contemptuously called ‘fin de siècle’ from time to time, astonishing events and very interesting incidents occurred one after the other.¹

The journalist lets his imagination run wild, writing about universal telephony that could make it possible to warn someone against danger or fire or call an ambulance or a carriage. Before paying a visit to anyone, we will make sure that this person is at home. And, most importantly, lovers could hear each other – or, as it is called, kiss audibly – more quickly. There will be no wars any more – upon learning about a threat, someone will fly a balloon over the army and drop a dynamite hail on it from an “air

¹ ‘Najnowsze odkrycia i wynalazki’ [‘Latest discoveries and inventions’], *Gazeta Narodowa*, 1st July 1896, p. 1.

carriage”. Moreover, we are only a step away from “X-rays to the scanning of thoughts,” the journalist wrote.²

→ London will become even quieter after the spread of ‘auto-cars’ or ‘moto-cars’, as they call ‘horseless carriages’. ... Here and there, bicycles and tricycles change into quadricycles on which the whole family rides, strenuously swinging their legs. A moto-car will save any effort of muscles. A 25-mile trip on such a motor-car will cost around 4 pennies for the mysterious electric force spent. No cabman will do anything like that for such money. A joker warned: ‘Dear English audience, you will have to eat your own horses.’³

But, at this moment of our story of Henryk, we should perhaps say: ‘hold your horses’. Not so fast – let us stop these galloping thoughts and not race ahead so boldly. Let us stop with Henryk at the moment when our hero is only 13 years old and all of these discoveries and inventions do not bother him so much, because he has much more important matters to worry about. He is moving to another country – to Belgium.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

Liège

It is 1884. Henryk is just starting another stage of his life. After his unpleasant - maybe even traumatic - experience in the Inowrocław gymnasium, young Artzt is transferred by his mother - or, according to some sources, by both parents - to Belgium.

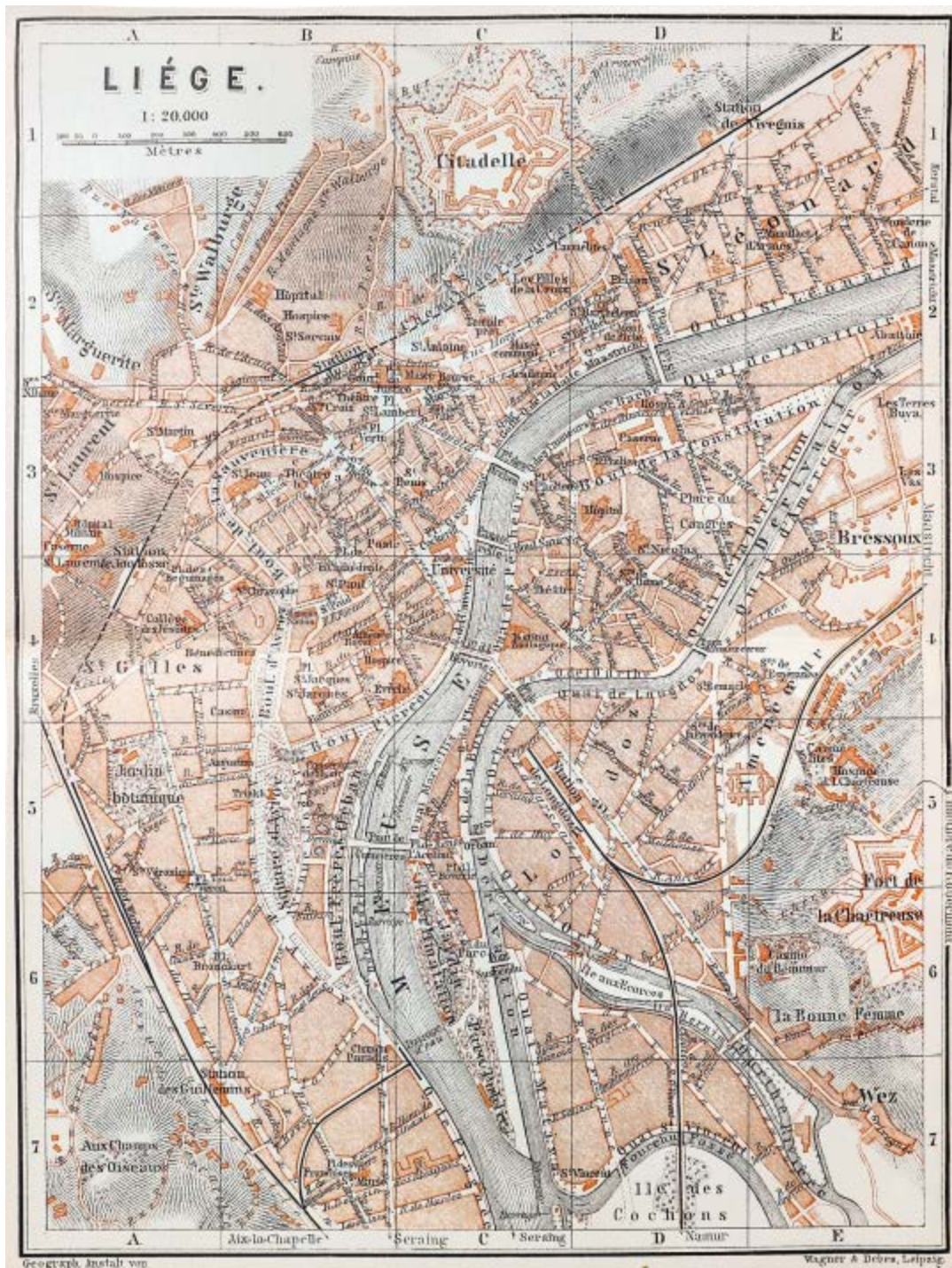
Henryk writes about his further education:

→ In 1880, I was sent to Germany, where I started attending gymnasium. In 1884, I was put in a boarding house in Liège, where I continued preparatory studies for the royal Athenaeum. In October 1888, I enrolled in the University, where I listened to lectures for candidates for physics and mathematics studies during one year. I was interested in astronomy, and I practised the use of the theodolite under the direction of Mr De Ball in September of the same year^[4]. Unfortunately, I was forced to abandon my interests by my parents, because they persuaded me into studying chemistry... I will certainly regret this for a long time.⁵

Inowrocław is around 940 km away from Liège in a straight line. Today, it is possible to travel the distance between these two cities by car in ten and a half years, excluding stopovers. In the second half of the 19th century, Europe was entwined with networks of railway lines - a means of transport that began to develop dynamically in that century. The German Empire was the leader of the railway industry, with a share of almost 20% in the territory of Europe in 1878. Twenty years later, the total length of railway lines in the Old Continent was 263,145 km, which meant an increase by 104,335 km compared to 1878. It is difficult to determine the course and duration of Henryk's trip to Belgium, but it must have been a huge experience for a 13-year-old.

⁴ Theodolite - a geodetic instrument for measurements of vertical and horizontal angles.

⁵ K. Jażdżewski, J. Balcerska, 'An important letter of Henryk Arctowski to Adrien de Gerlache' ..., p. 104.



● A map of Liège, 1897

In the second half of the 19th century, the Kingdom of Belgium was one of the most industrialised countries of Europe but a relatively young state - it had declared its independence as a result of the revolution in 1831, freeing itself from the rule of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands. Since 1865, its king had been Leopold II from the Koburg dynasty, who became the ruler of the Congo Free State, a colony in Central Africa. The following years were to show how ruthless and extensive his policy towards the local population and natural resources was.

Situated close to the border with the German Empire, Liège began to develop dynamically under Belgian rule, becoming a major industrial city and one of the first European centres of steel production. It was the seat of John Cockerill's company producing industrial machinery, or the FN Herstal - an arms producer. In the 1880s, because of its strategic location, the city was also fortified according to a design by Henri Alexis Brialmont.

Established in Liège in 1850, Athénée Royal was the school where Henryk began the next stage of his education. It was a school for boys - a counterpart of the modern secondary school. We can guess it was a huge change in the life of a young man who suddenly moved abroad, far away from home, and was forced to speak French every day. However, he must have adapted quite well to these conditions, because he graduated in 1888 and then enrolled in the University of Liège, where he studied mathematics and physics with the intention of devoting himself to astronomy, which had absorbed him so much in childhood. Although Henryk would live in Liège in the future, the city which he fell in love with, where he entered adulthood and later often came back, was Paris - an inspiring, fascinating and timeless place.

At an exhibition in Paris

Women in long dresses emphasising their waist, with fanciful coiffures, men in tuxedos and bowler hats. The social status indicated by umbrellas protecting against the sun, canes and the use of carriages. Omnipresent cabs, with rickshaws and bicycles making their way between them. Streets full of the hubbub, the drumming of horses' hooves, newspaper boys' calls. A shot of boys sailing boats on the pond in the park gives some respite from the hustle and bustle of the big city. But even here, one of them is chased away by an umbrella from behind the frame when he carelessly comes too close to the camera. The latter evidently arouses interest among passers-by: some stare at it in disbelief, some with hostility, and others with curiosity. No wonder, it is a technological novelty after all – the first camera was patented in England by a Frenchman Louis Le Prince in 1888.



● The Paris Exhibition, with the Eiffel Tower in the background



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The Belgica



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- 101 → Departure
 - 110 → Antonio
 - 115 → The course of the expedition
 - 134 → Artocho
 - 139 → A conflict
 - 143 → The great return



1897-1899

Departure

→ It was also during these last days that our two best sailors - the Norwegians Knutsen and Johansen - were engaged in the place of two others who had left the ship. Now, too, the question of the medical officer was settled, for at the last moment we found ourselves without a doctor on board, the last of the three Belgian doctors who had been engaged having calmly remained at home after mature reflection. It was by means of the telegraph that Dr. Cook, of Brooklyn, arranged to go with us, and as there was no time for him to come to Europe, he joined us at Rio de Janeiro. These facts, and many others which I could cite, show how difficult it is to organise an expedition when one's resources are limited. It is true that there is no lack of volunteers. Each day of our stay at Antwerp people came asking to be taken with us, and de Gerlache received several hundred applications by letter, but these were for the most part from adventurers who had no idea of hard work, and who would have been incapable of rendering us the least service¹

wrote Henryk in his memoirs of the expedition, which were published in *The Geographical Journal*, a British scientific journal issued by the Royal Geographical Society since 1831, in October 1901.

Staffing problems were a permanent part of the voyage of the *Belgica* - the desire for adventure could not replace an opportunity to earn money, particularly because part of the crew received less than modest remuneration, and others (including Henryk) fully resigned from it. For the time being, however, all problems seemed to have been solved, particularly the lack of a doctor, about which even the Polish newspapers wrote, publishing Arctowski's expectations concerning the desirable candidate. 'He must be healthy, strong, friendly...' declared Henryk. Did doctor Frederick Albert Cook meet these requirements? This was to be seen during the journey, because the doctor joined the expedition in South America in October 1897.

¹ H. Arctowski, 'The Antarctic Voyage of the *Belgica* during the Years 1897, 1898, and 1899' ..., p. 357.

Being a person absorbed in dreams of great polar achievements and, at the same time, able to build an atmosphere of sensation around himself, Cook ensured that his participation in the expedition was publicised. 'He will hunt the South Pole,' heroically assured the heading of a mention in *New York Journal* dated 2nd August 1897. The continent itself – Antarctica – was called the 'Wonderland' to which Captain de Gerlache would 'lead the explorers'. The word 'pole' could attract media attention, but it was still in the realm of dreams of the expedition members – their goal was to explore the mysterious *Terra Australis incognita* further south than its predecessors, which at the end of the 19th century was limited to the area around the Antarctic Peninsula. Nevertheless, the plans were ambitious, as the journey was to last two years (in the second year of the expedition, four persons would stay over wintering in Antarctica). During this time, the ship, under the command of Georges Leconte, was to return to Australia to replenish stocks and to take back the daredevils left on the Antarctic ice in the following summer season.

The success of the expedition depended on many factors, but certainly one of the most crucial question was how the whaling ship would handle such as difficult and long route. Would it withstand the storms, winds, ice? This is how Henryk described the *Belgica*, which would be their home for the coming months:

→ The ship was a three-masted barque, 100 feet long, with a displacement of 250 tons, and auxiliary engines of 150 horse-power. The hull was protected by a casing of hard wood, to add strength and afford protection against the friction of the ice. Aft, on the deck, were placed the cabins of the officers and of the scientific staff, while in the fore part, under the bridge, a laboratory was rigged out. While these preparations were being made at Sandefjord, in Norway, the complete scientific equipment was ordered from the best makers in Europe, and our instruments were thus brought together from Paris, Vienna, Copenhagen, London, Berlin, Jena, etc.²

Henryk does not mention the forecastle, where common living quarters for the crew were located. In terms of living conditions, it was the worst place, and those who would live there for the long months of the Antarctic journey were ranked lowest in the hierarchy of the expedition members.

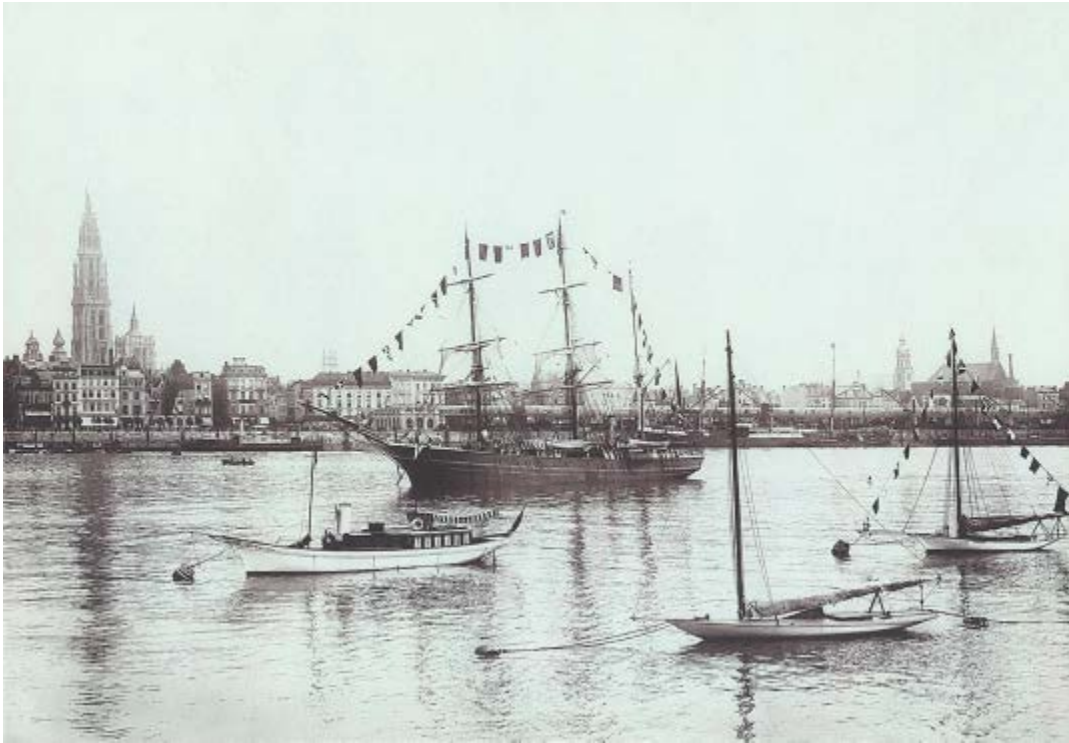
² *Ibid.*, p. 355.



● The heading concerning the *Belgica* expedition in the *New York Journal*, august 1897

One of the photographs in the collection of the Belgian Library in Hasselt, the capital of the Limburg province, presents the *Belgica* in full bunting at the moment of leaving the Antwerp port down the Skalda River on 16th August.³ We can see smoke rising from the funnel and a densely built quay in the background. The cheering crowd saying goodbye to the adventurers can only be imagined, because the photograph captured only a few persons on board smaller vessels accompanying the ship. The future polar explorers must have felt excitement bordering on fatigue – the noise of farewells started at 8 a.m., when a cannonade rang out in the Yacht Club, the white-red flag of which proudly flew on the top of the *Belgica*. De Gerlache, his deputy Georges Lecointe – a friend of Emile Danco, who would be responsible for geophysical observations during the expedition, and Arctowski, who are standing on the deck and receiving ovations and smiles coming from each side, have yet another reason to be sleepy. The official farewell lunch in the Yacht Club with representatives of city authorities and admiralty, about

³ *The voyage of the Belgica to the Antarctic (1897-1899)*, <https://www.discoveringbelgium.com/voyage-of-the-belgica/> [access: 25th January 2023].



● The departure of the *Belgica* from Antwerp, 16th August 1897

which *Het Handelsblad*, one of the most important Antwerp newspapers, reported on the day of the departure of the *Belgica*, had ended at 3:00 a.m.⁴ The fact that Henryk – the only foreigner among native Belgians and one of the most trusted people of the ship commander – was invited to take part in the lunch proves his position as the scientific director, which is mentioned by many sources.

Meanwhile, works in the port lasted until the last day. At the same time, members of the press talked to the crew to collect materials for the articles that would later appear in reprints and translations in international titles. The Warsaw weekly *Niwa* wrote (as the journalist admitted, on the basis of ‘German newspapers’):

→ The so-called American basin of the Antwerp port lies quite far away from the city centre. There are kerosene tanks all around it. The basin is full of noise

⁴ ‘Lunch der Yacht Club’, *Het Handelsblad*, 15th-16th August 1897, <https://uurl.kbr.be/1105319> [access: 25th January 2023].



and activity. Hundreds of busy, diligent hands are bustling to supplement the equipment of the *Belgica* ship – the pride of Belgium intended to explore the surrounding areas of the South Pole.⁵

● The departure of the *Belgica* from Antwerp, 16th August 1897

The article also contains a very interesting description of a meeting with representatives of the crew: Lecointe, Danco and Emil Racoviță – written as Rocovitza. The Polish text contains a remark that the Germans objectively admit that Arctowski is a Pole, but they twist his surname into ‘Aretowski’. According to the further part of the text, Henryk is ‘a true type of scholar with a beard and spectacles. The field of his research is geology and meteorology. He will study the physics and chemistry of the ocean in the Polar Region seas.’ After his meeting with the originator of the expedition, the journalist noted:

⁵ ‘Polak w drodze do Bieguna’ [‘A Pole on his way to the Pole’], *Niwa*, no. 34, 9th (21st) August 1897, pp. 673–674.

→ When I met Gerlache, he was a bit tired; his eyes were red and he lost weight, but he was still the same person as before. He is a serious and fully mature man, even though he is only 30 years old. There is nothing about him that betrays a sailor who rose from a cabin boy to the rank of captain. His figure of average height is very elegant; it may seem limp, but you can sense his strong muscles, refined nerves and the brave soul of an explorer who will not be afraid of any danger. After a few minutes of talking, you immediately feel that this reticent man will accomplish the undertaken task if he has at least some luck. He showed me the *Belgica* ship on his own.⁶

In a text dated 27th August 1897, *Gazeta Lwowska* gave a detailed account of a visit to the ship:

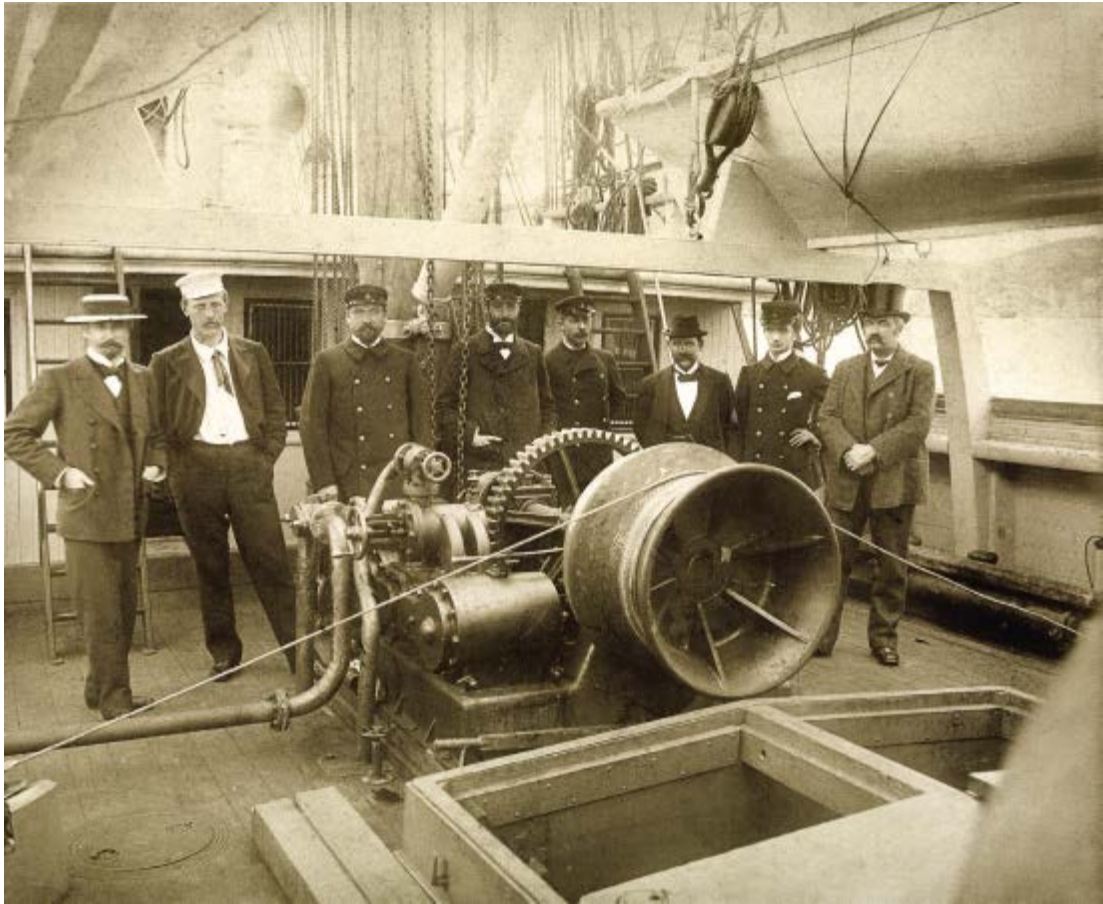
→ Painted in bright colours, as required by nautical fashion, the *Belgica* ship appears to be an object of light yet strong construction. A relatively narrow hull, like on all ships of northern seas; a rather low platform; the masts are equipped with a whole set of sails, and there are two harpoon cannons on the front deck. ... The cabins and stores are very small but utilised in full. The internal walls are upholstered with felt to retain warmth. The ship is loaded with masses of coal in bricks and anthracite; a huge stock of tallow candles has also been accumulated in order to light the ship during winter. The laboratory is admirable just for the sake of it; the ship has a large scientific library and a large music box to make the inevitable hours of boredom and melancholy more pleasant. Everything glows with extraordinary cleanliness. Richly decorated with paintings, the captain's cabin appears to be a very cosy and pleasant corner. 'We will have everything we need,' said Mr Gerlache when guiding the correspondent around the ship, 'let us only hope that luck is on our side.'⁷

A note in *Kurjer Warszawski* dated 20th August 1897 supplements the aforementioned photographic image of the moment of departure of the *Belgica*:

→ The whole city of Antwerp set out for the Skelda shore - more than 2,000 strangers shouting and bidding farewell to the brave travellers who want to sacrifice

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ 'Wyprawa do bieguna południowego' ['An expedition to the South Pole'], *Gazeta Lwowska*, no. 195, 27th August 1897, p. 4.



their lives at the altar of knowledge. From 9:00 a.m., we can hear the sounds of cannons on all steamships in the port, with flags of all nations flying on them and triumphantly bidding farewell to the young missionaries who keep faith in the progress of science near the end of this century.⁸

We also learn that in the heat of the farewells, Henryk ‘shakes the hand of a famous geographer Élisée Reclus, to whom he has been talking for a long time’.

⁸ ‘Wiadomości zagraniczne. Korespondencje specjalne *Kurjera Warszawskiego*. Antwerpja, 17-go sierpnia. Wyprawa belgijska do bieguna południowego’ [‘News from abroad. Special correspondence in *Kurjer Warszawski*. Antwerp, 17th day of August. A Belgian expedition to the South Pole’], *Kurjer Warszawski*, no. 299, 20th August 1897, p. 3.

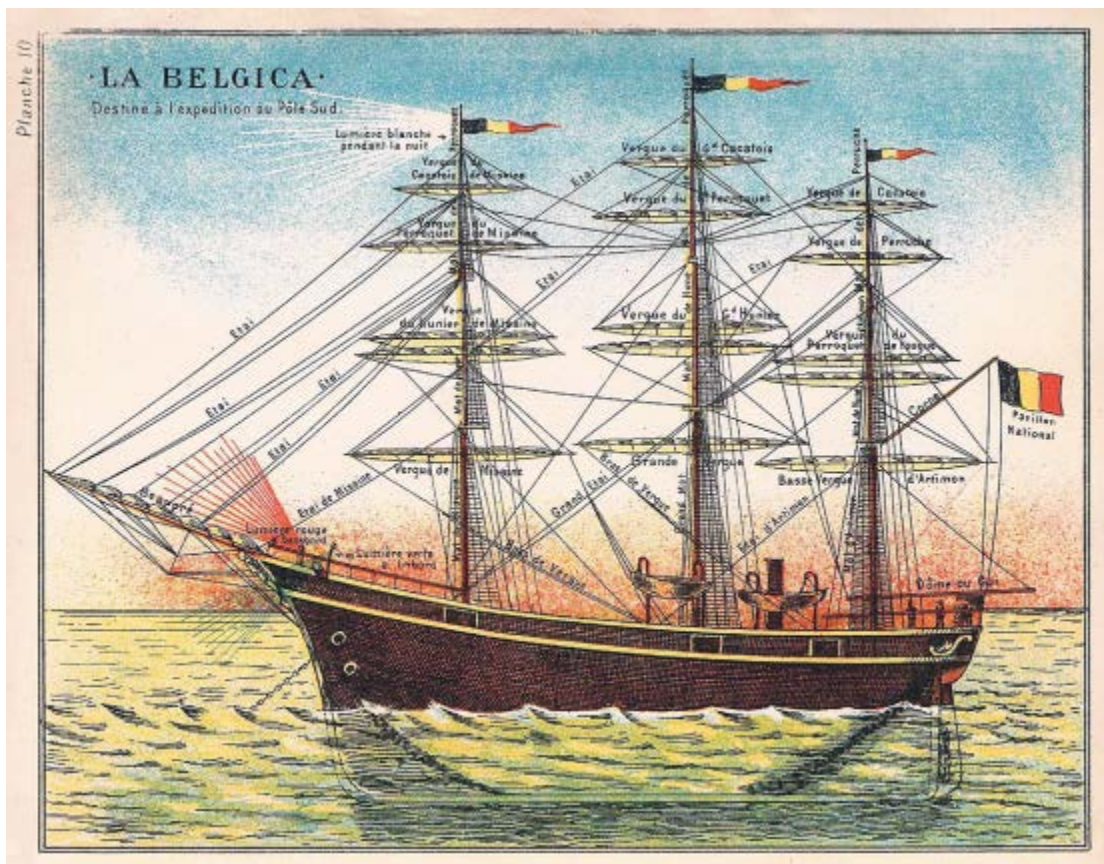
● Fridtjof Nansen (second from the left) visiting the deck of the *Belgica*. Fifth from the left: Roald Amuldsen



● The *Belgica* before its departure to Antarctica

Élisée Reclus, a Frenchman by birth, was the author of a 19-volume work *La Nouvelle géographie universelle, la terre et les hommes*, for which he received the Gold Medal of the Paris Geographical Society in 1892. In the same year, he started working at the University of Brussels, so it cannot be ruled out that both scholars had met earlier. We do not know what they were talking about and what Henryk was thinking when standing on board the *Belgica* and looking at the cheering crowds. After all, so many did not believe that his journey towards the white mysterious continent would start at all. Despite this, he did not lose his enthusiasm and faith in the sense of his actions, which can be seen in the sort of manifesto that he published in the *Wszecławiat* weekly in January 1897.

→ Near the South Pole there is a huge space that has not yet been touched by the foot of civilised man. Can anyone surmise that the exploration of these territories forming a white spot on maps of the Earth at the end of the 19th century



would be hugely momentous for science? ... There are moments in the history of sciences when such and such discovery must be made, such and such research must be undertaken, or such and such philosophy must give way to new views on things and phenomena. ... there is something childish in the character of a man devoted to science: he is indifferent to human desires and seems not to experience them, but he gets carried away by the first unknown trifle and then he is able to forget about everything and abandon everything until he gets it under control. But the question of the Antarctic does not rank among trifles, and the momentousness of the scientific exploration of the South Pole region is so great that it can attract not only selected natures but also all those who are able to forget about prosaic activities of everyday life. Regardless of all difficulties, the question of the Antarctic will be undertaken and the issue will be solved - it has to be, because the inevitability of progress calls for it.⁹

● A poster presenting the Belgica ship

⁹ H. Arctowski, 'Antarktyka' ['The Antarctic'], *Wszechświat* 1897, vol. 16, no. 2.



● Antoni Bolesław Dobrowolski during meteorological observations

- 14th January - the ship starts to cross the Drake Passage
- 19th January - the expedition members see the so-called iceblink at 61°06' south latitude, that is the reflection of distant ice fields
- 22nd January - the expedition comes across the first submerged reefs of New South Scotland; during a storm, seaman Carl August Wiencke falls overboard and cannot be rescued, despite an attempt to reach him in the cold waters by the second-in-command, Georges Lecointe
- 23rd January - the *Belgica* sails into an unknown strait that initially receives the ship's name, but later it is renamed into Gerlache Strait
- 14th February - the ship heads towards Graham Land
- 15th February - the *Belgica* crosses the Antarctic Circle
- 5th March - the vessel is disabled in drift ice in the Bellingshausen Sea
- 14th March - Henryk Arctowski watches an aurora (called *aurora australis* in the southern hemisphere) for the first time
- 16th May - the beginning of the polar night
- 5th June - the Belgian Emile Danco dies
- 26th June - the cat Nansen, the only domesticated animal on the ship, dies
- 10th July - a severe attack of scurvy among the crew members

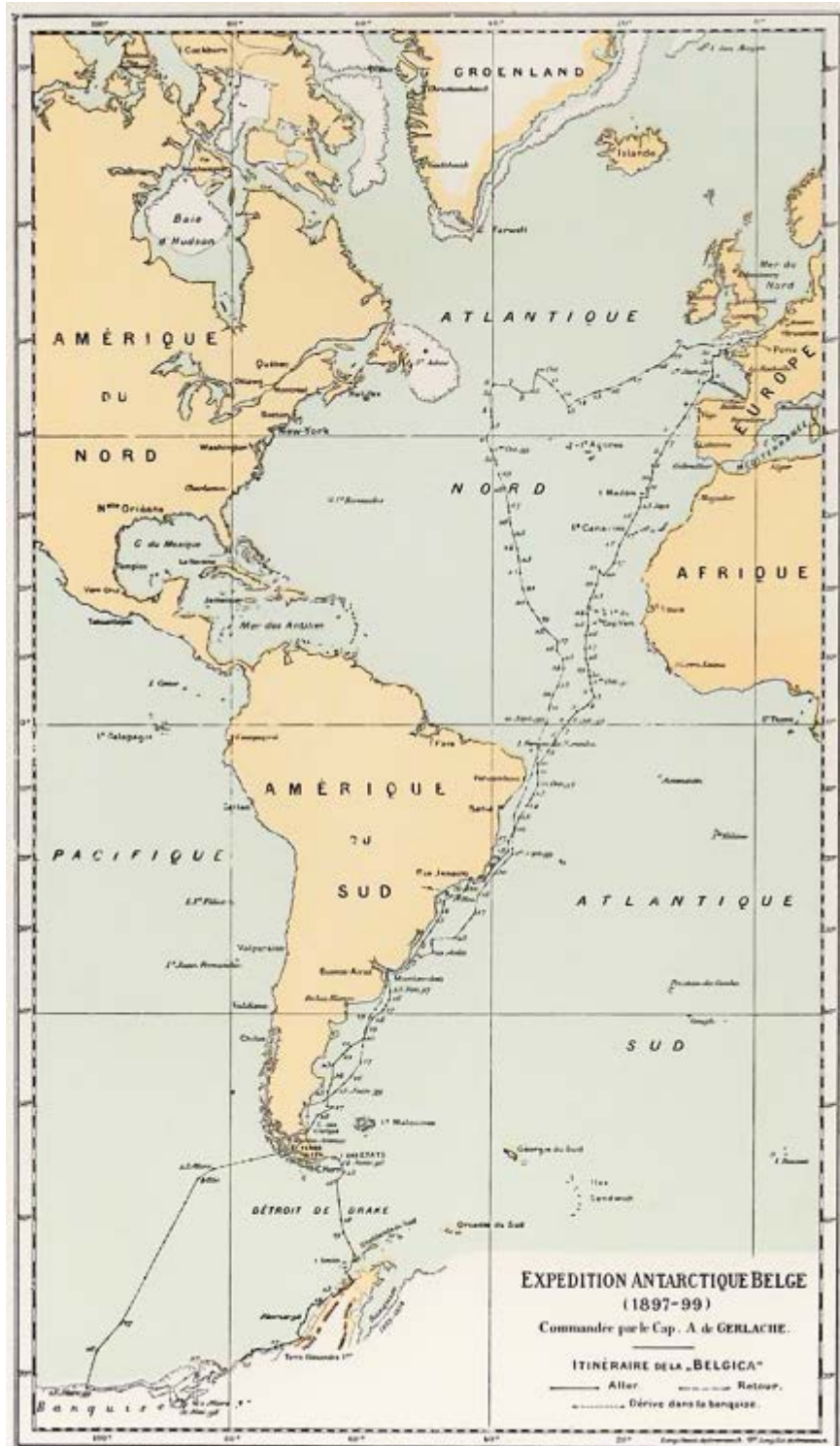


● Guests
visiting the *Belgica*



● The Equator
crossing
ceremony
on the *Belgica*

- Route covered by the *Belgica* in the years 1897–1899



- 15th July – many participants of the expedition show the first symptoms of mental illness
- 22nd July – the end of the polar night, the first sun rays appear (duration of the polar night: 63 days)
- 31st July – the first sleigh trip of Lecointe, Cook and Amundsen on the Antarctic sea ice (duration: six days)
- 8th September – the first unsuccessful use of the explosive tonite (160 sticks) for cutting a canal in the ice through which the ship could get out
- 16th November – the Norwegian Adam Tollefsen shows apparent signs of madness

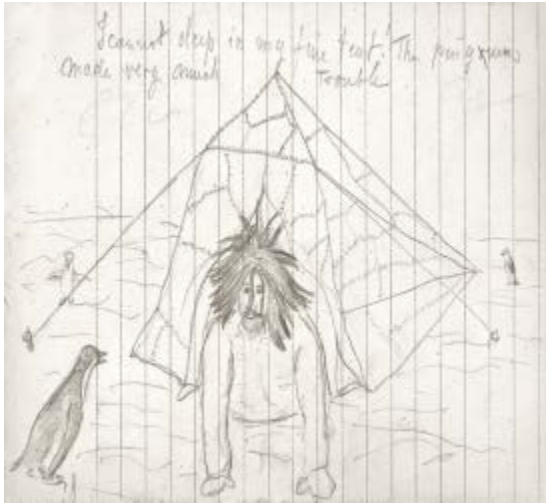
1899

- 7th January – at Cook's urging, the expedition members start cutting a canal in the pack ice in order to free the ship
- 12th January – the *Belgica* starts the engine and for the first time in many months begins a voyage through the pack ice
- 14th March – the ship sails out onto the open waters
- 28th March – the ship reaches Punta Arenas
- 14th August – the ship leaves Punta Arenas and sails towards Belgium
- 5th November – the ship reaches the port in Antwerp and the expedition is officially ended

We know very much about Arctowski's scientific achievements during this expedition. They are mentioned in numerous biographical notes and articles. Aleksander Kosiba divided them into six categories, quoting only some examples of Arctowski's numerous observations:¹⁹

→ **Geology:** the ascertainment of an analogy in geological structure between the Southern Andes, particularly of Tierra del Fuego, and the formation in Graham Land in West Antarctica, which confirmed Arctowski's hypothesis of the 'Antarctandes'.

¹⁹ A. Kosiba, 'Działalność naukowa Profesora Henryka Arctowskiego' ['The scientific activity of Professor Henryk Arctowski'] ..., pp. 11–12.



● Satirical drawings presenting Henryk by Emil Racoviță

Referring to Racoviță's drawings, the leader of the expedition wrote:

→ What a nice and witty history of the expedition could be put together from these caricatures! ... Arctowski, with the help of his inseparable assistant Dobrowski, put a stake for measuring the amount of fallen snow; in the corner of the magnetic observatory, we can see the head of Danco watching them; when Arctowski goes back on board, Danco, in the company of his assistant Dufuor, comes out of hiding and drives the stake with strong hammer impacts; then he returns to his observation point; Arctowski comes back to measure the fallen snow and, at the sight of the stake almost buried under the snow within such a short time, raises his hands in amazement ...³⁶

Was Henryk able to laugh at himself? Did he have a distance towards himself? Was he the mascot of the group, or was he ridiculed behind his back? We would love to know it, as the sense of humour is one of the most important traits of personality. Considering that Arctowski kept in touch with Racoviță or even visited him in Paris after the expedition, we would like to believe that they were friends. Thus, we can suppose that jokes in the ship's newspaper on the *Belgica* amused not only the crew but also the hero of these works. Or at least they did not cause any further conflicts between them, but they helped to relieve difficult emotions. And these were commonplace...

³⁶ *Ibid.*

A conflict

We do not know if there was one concrete reason, or a series of small reasons, or gradually rising animosity resulting from the positions and functions held on the ship by two former friends from student days. Suffice it to say that *A Diary of a Voyage to Antarctica* by Antoni Bolesław Dobrowolski is drastically different from the balanced accounts of the other expedition members. The author does not avoid blunt and harsh judgements and opinions about events and persons, as well as spite and criticism. His memories are very emotional and influenced by quoted events, and the author does not conceal his views, also political ones. The manuscript of the diary kept in the archives of the Museum of the Earth of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw, a few typescripts and the text in book form do not differ much in style. The reason is simple – the notes were not intended for publication. The diary was published in 1962, eight years after the author's death and sixty-three years after the return of the *Belgica* to the home port. Who gave their consent to the publication of private memories? Marek Dobrowolski, for whom Antoni was an uncle (the brother of his grandfather, Bolesław), could not find an answer to this question. Together with his wife Maria, they collected a large family archive with souvenirs of the outstanding ancestor, but we will not find information about his conflict with Henryk Arctowski here either. In the 1962 publication, certain fragments concerning childhood memories or scientific notes were removed, too explicit expressions were dotted out, and the spelling was modernised in some places.

In the editors' note, there is a fragment that may explain the origin of the conflict:

→ A.B. Dobrowolski ... was enlisted in the crew in the position of seaman. This led to a strange and difficult situation. Because of his intellectual level, Antoni was socially treated as a member of the *état-major*, and in respect of his duties, he was a part of the crew and had to do manual labour like other seamen did. This work did not leave him much time for scientific observations, which had

● Arctowski and Dobrowolski in Emil Racovița's drawing



been the main reason for him to join the expedition. That caused conflicts and a grudge against the expedition management.³⁷

Antoni served not only as a seaman but also as an assistant to Arctowski, whom he initially helped with his meteorological observations. In the course of time, the scope of Dobrowolski's scientific work began to expand, which gave him a strong basis for deeper research on snow and ice in the future. And this, in turn, led him to create foundations for a new science – cryology (the study of snow and ice) – and to publish his *opus magnum*: *The Natural History of Ice* in 1923.

Antoni was annoyed by Henryk's projects in which he had to participate. For example, when Arctowski asked him to create a makeshift probe for

³⁷ A.B. Dobrowolski, *Dziennik wyprawy na Antarktydę* [A Diary of a Voyage to Antarctica] ..., p. 24.



● Antoni Boleslaw Dobrowolski during meteorological observations

the measurement of sea water temperature: 'As usual, I argue with Henryk. He is annoyed with me, and I am annoyed with him. I blow him off.'³⁸ In January 1898, when the ship hit a submerged rock in the port of Harberton, Antoni wrote that 'Arctowski shitted his pants', and a few months later he openly criticised the method of Henryk's work:

→ Until Rio de Janeiro, he entered all observations because he wanted to show he was the 'boss' of meteorology, that he was 'responsible', and that entering the numbers collected by the 'service' into the mysterious register was a pontifical act. However, this priestly activity is quite arduous. My old man is not eager to work, although he likes pretending to work. He put the work off every week, and a heap piled up, being obviously even more arduous. So he eventually let it go. From Rio almost until hibernation he fell behind with the register. Notes

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

made on 'paper scraps' (his favourite system), on copybooks, in disorder; wind directions not corrected according to the compass; simply a mess.³⁹

In Henryk's memoirs, we can read:

→ The hourly meteorological observations carried on by Dobrowolski and myself formed our principal occupation. When it snowed, the snow crystals were examined and described; when there were clouds (particularly cirrus), Dobrowolski attempted to follow all their transformations, and especially to ascertain the direction of movement; and any optical phenomena were studied with the greatest care. Thus the days passed, not too quickly sometimes, in constant and assiduous labour.⁴⁰

According to editors of *A Diary of an Expedition to Antarctica*, when Dobrowolski wrote about the expedition a few times years later, 'he was always complimentary about its achievements and about its management.'⁴¹ But in another publication, a review of Dobrowolski's aforementioned book, we can read: '... it is a public secret (which we mention only for the sake of historical truth) that the author of *A Diary*... no longer maintained any personal or even scientific relations with one of the members of the expedition management; instead, he constantly spoke about him and his works in a manner far from what can be called "complimentary."⁴²

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 163 [spaced-out type introduced by the author].

⁴⁰ H. Arctowski, 'The Antarctic Voyage of the *Belgica* during the Years 1897, 1898, and 1899' ..., p. 380.

⁴¹ A.B. Dobrowolski, *Dziennik wyprawy na Antarktydę [A Diary of a Voyage to Antarctica]* ..., p. 24.

⁴² A. Rojecki, 'Recenzje, przegląd literatury i bibliografia' ['Reviews, an overview of literature and bibliography'], *Przegląd Geofizyczny*, Y. 7, vol. 4, date unknown, p. 282.

The great return

It was a happy day - on 14th March 1899, the *Belgica* found itself on open waters, breaking free of the pack ice in which it had been stuck for many months. The emaciated and mentally exhausted crew members dreamed of a decent bath and a normal meal. They also certainly had much to worry about. What situation would they find at home? How would they find a place in the reality from which they had been detached for so long? Adrien de Gerlache had to prove to the government and sponsors that their trust and money had not been in vain. Cook and Amundsen thought of further polar conquests. And what was in Henryk's head? What remained of this youthful enthusiasm bursting out of every sentence of the letter sent to the commander of the future Antarctic expedition in April 1895?

On 28th March, the ship reached Punta Arenas in Chilean Patagonia. The participants of the expedition rediscovered the world: some wallowed in the sand on the beach, saying hello to the mainland, and tried not to lose their balance on the streets when accustoming their legs to the immovable ground again. Having the first meal, going to the barber or putting on clean and undamaged clothes was a special experience.

In April, de Gerlache announced that he considered the expedition completed. The fantasies about the return to the Antarctic made by some crew members a few months earlier dispersed due to the shortage of funds

● The *Belgica* sails on open waters again, 14th March 1899



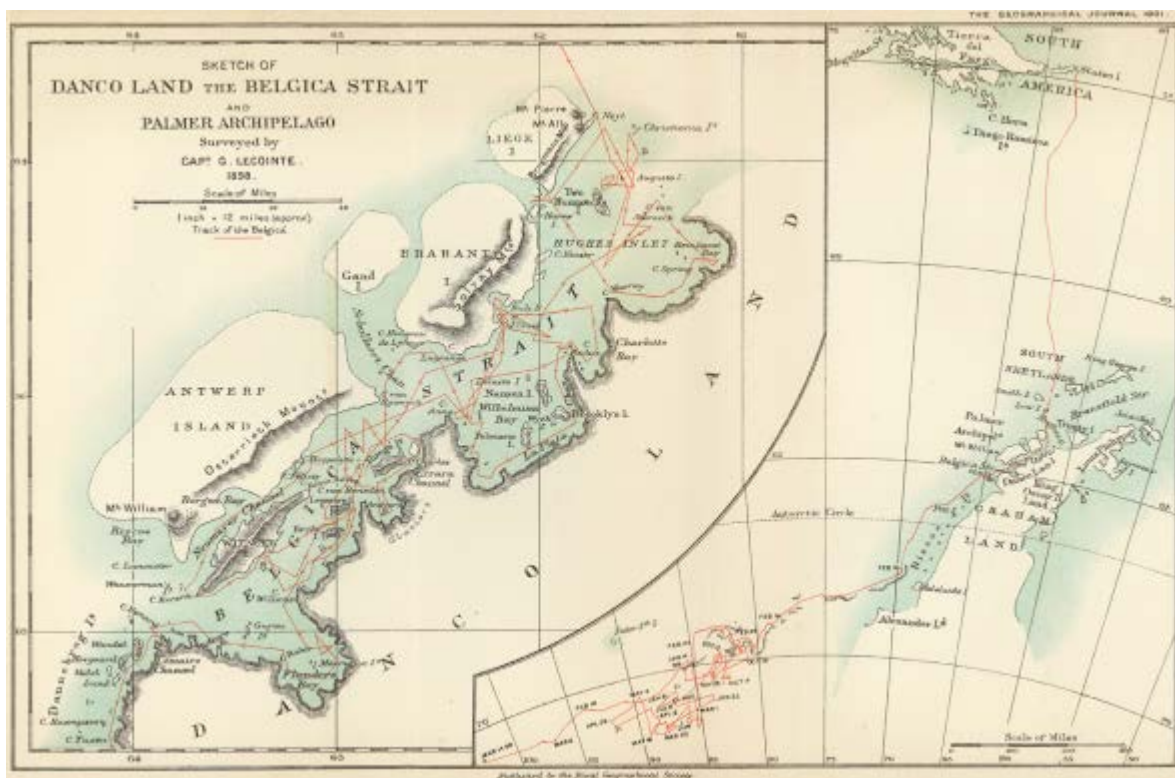


● A portrait of Henryk Arctowski from the *Belgica* expedition

and the lack of determination of most expedition members. Some of them, like Adam Tollefsen or Engelbret Knudsen, paid for the participation in the polar adventure with incurable mental illness and death; others, like de Gerlache, never fully recovered. We know that Henryk spent a few months in South America before returning to Europe.

In October 1901, Arctowski's account of the Belgian Antarctic Expedition, already quoted here a few times, was published in *The Geographical Journal*. It contains not only a concise and detailed description of the expedition as such, but also an assessment of its organisation:

- In three essential points the organization of the expedition was defective. Firstly, there was no written contract as between the staff and the leader of the expedition, and the functions of the several members were not sufficiently defined. Secondly, no written instructions were provided either by the Belgian Government, or by the Geographical Society, or by any other learned body.



And, thirdly, no definite programme for the voyage had been drawn up. The Belgian Antarctic Expedition maintained, therefore, the character of a private enterprise, in which the individual liberty accorded might easily have led to anarchy on board.⁴³

● Sketch of Danco Land the Belgica strait and Palmer Archipelago, 1898

Henryk indicated these three points with good reason - the example of the *Belgica* was not to be followed in these aspects. However, resignation from further expeditions was out of the question, too. The polar explorer aimed high, which he openly admitted a few paragraphs earlier:

→ We must steadily advance, and history will teach us how much more important, for the whole future of the human race, are the pacific conquests of science than all the wars of destruction waged between nations in arms.⁴⁴

⁴³ H. Arctowski, 'The Antarctic Voyage of the *Belgica* during the Years 1897, 1898, and 1899' ..., p. 357.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 354.



Henryk Arctowski

In a World of Thoughts

One of the giants of Polish science is undoubtedly Henryk Arctowski – a geographer, geophysicist, geologist, meteorologist, glaciologist and, above all, polar explorer. He was a very colourful person with achievements going far beyond the borders of Poland. This unusual scholar deserves a good biography – and this book is certainly one. The vivid and eloquent narrative, unique materials and a wealth of information and unknown



details from the scholar's life make this biography a real page-turner. This story is also a picture of the era in which the patron of the Polish Antarctic Station in the South Shetland Islands on King George Island lived and worked. Henryk Arctowski – a legend but also a man of flesh and bone: a husband, friend and scholar with human weaknesses and dilemmas. This book is a fascinating journey through the life of an outstanding Pole, and is a must-read for anyone interested in polar exploration, the history of science or the biographies of extraordinary persons.

Prof. Paweł Rowiński, PhD – Director of the Institute of Geophysics of the Polish Academy of Sciences, President of ALLEA (the European Federation of Academies of Sciences and Humanities)

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