

*Studies and scientific research
of Polish mathematicians, physicists and astronomers
at the University of Göttingen (1895-1933)*

Travellers who come to Göttingen are welcome by the inscription at the railway station: “Stadt, die Wissen schafft”, i.e. “a city that creates knowledge”. It is Göttingen, a city of science, which for a long time was visited by scientists, as well those experienced who had already obtained several achievements, as well those young in the beginning of their careers.

At the turn of the 20th century many Polish mathematicians, physicists and astronomers were going to study at the University of Göttingen. This academic city was then very famous. It was Göttingen where Carl Friedrich Gauss (1777–1855), commonly regarded as one of the best mathematicians in the history of the world, known as “the prince of mathematicians” was doing research. His successor on the Chair was Peter Gustav Lejeune Dirichlet (1805–1859). In 1854 in Göttingen the famous habilitation lecture by Bernhard Riemann (1826–1866) was delivered. The contents of this lecture gave new and very important way of research; some of them are continued even nowadays. In Göttingen eminent mathematicians of the turn of the centuries, David Hilbert (1862–1943) and Felix Klein (1849–1925) worked as well. One may say that Göttingen became a “world Mecca of mathematics”. In 1904 Ludwig Prandtl (1875–1953) joined the university. Because of his influence, in Göttingen applications of mathematics in physics developed, which resulted in making Göttingen a leader centre in fluid mechanics and in aerodynamics. Also Hermann Minkowski (1864–1909) and Constantin Carathéodory (1873–1950), famous mathematicians and theoretical physicists were doing research there. Under scientific tutorial of mathematicians and physicists from Göttingen many scholars, who later were awarded Nobel Prizes in physics, were educated. many students who later were very famous, like Max Born, studied in Göttingen together with young Polish scholars.

Up to the end of the 19th century Polish scientists were rather not noted for mathematics and physics. However, at the first decades of the 20th century, Poland became world mathematical power. The phenomenon of the development of mathematics in Poland at the beginning of the twentieth century has been an object of research in Poland and abroad. We would like to join a new research problem in this field, i.e. the details of scientific trips of Polish scholars to Göttingen and their role in the development of science in Poland. This topic has been not investigated yet. In our opinion, it is of significant importance for obtaining a full image of the sudden development of science in Poland in this period. We want to prove that scientists from Göttingen had a significant influence to the topics of research undertaken by Polish scholars educated in Göttingen, their collaborators and pupils. We will try to show that the education of young Polish scientists at the University of Göttingen was one of reasons of a rapid development of science in Poland in the interwar period.