

Johann Heinrich Abicht's Philosophy and his scientific and didactic activity at the Imperial University of Vilnius (1804-1816)

Johann Heinrich Abicht (1762-1816), a long-time professor in Erlangen, was employed to take the post of a professor of logics and metaphysics in Vilnius, in 1804, as a result of endeavours of Hieronim Stroynowski, the rector and main organiser at the University of Vilnius. It was the ambition of the university's authorities to establish a strong academic hub in Vilnius, which would attract the best specialists from among the reputed scientists in Europe. In this way many renowned scholars, whose achievements would enrich the history of Polish science, were attracted (among them: Frank, Groddeck, Bojanus, Capelli, Le Brune, Saunders, Langsdorf). Abicht earned recognition and won the rector's favour as an author of over 20 philosophical works. His employment in Vilnius was patronised by the scholar of Saint Petersburg, Nikolaus Fuß, and Johann Gottlieb Fichte. One might have supposed that Vilnius acquired an extraordinary thinker who appealed to the newest ideas. But it turned out that Abicht's inability to speak Polish made him give lectures in conventional Latin. The authorities of the university were adamant not to yield to numerous requests made by Abicht to conduct his lectures in German. In that period, only one Abicht's book was published in Latin, which was a record of some of his lectures in psychology.

For 200 years nobody could explain why the scientific activity of this previously prolific philosopher ceased. Today we may say that it never stopped, but it was channelled to a different field. When in Vilnius, Abicht, who had formerly been an author of numerous printed works, devoted all his efforts to writing lectures, for which he meticulously prepared outlines. They were handed over after his death to Vilnius University by his son Adolf, and preserved in Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine in Kiev. This impressive collection of manuscripts is now the main source of knowledge about the philosophy and its directions as it was taught for 12 years in Vilnius by the German professor.

The documents of university administration, which were preserved in Vilnius and Cracow, enable a reconstruction of Abicht's academic career in Vilnius (in particular his endeavours to extend courses in philosophy with classes in practical philosophy and psychology). There exist new sources which testify to Abicht's active presence in the field of polemics and its positive resonance (hypothetical beginnings of the new Polish pro-Kantian school of philosophy).

This project aims at recovering and elaborating on Abicht's philosophy from the Vilnius period. Indicating the sources of Abicht's conception and presenting its uniqueness against the background of European philosophy of that time. The study is based upon the source materials that had previously remained unknown, documents from Czartoryski's curatorship office, administration of Vilnius University and manuscripts of Abicht's lectures.

The implementation of this project will help fill in the gap not only in Abicht's biography (the few existing studies do not mention his scientific and educational work in the Vilnius period), but also the knowledge about the history of teaching philosophy in the Imperial University of Vilnius will be supplemented. First of all, the project will enable the supplementation and correction of the syntheses of Polish philosophy, whereas in the international perspective, gain insight into the development of Kantian philosophy in Europe.