

POLISH POLAR RESEARCH	18	3-4	247-249	1997
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CHRONICLE

Centennial celebration of the *Belgica* Expedition

The centennial of the *Belgica* Research Expedition to the Antarctica was celebrated from 16 to 18 August 1997 in the City of Antwerp.

The *Belgica* Expedition marked a very important stage in the history of polar research. Its participants were the first humans to winter in the Antarctica.

Adrien de Gerlache de Gomery, the Belgian navy commander, was the leader and organizer of the expedition. The crew consisted of nine Belgians and six Norwegians, among them Roald Amundsen, then 25 years old. Apart from the crew, a group of scientists took part in the expedition: two Poles (Henryk Arctowski and Antoni Bolesław Dobrowolski), a Belgian (Emil Danco), a Rumanian (Emil G. Racovitza) and an American (Frederick Cook). Henryk Arctowski, geologist, oceanographer and meteorologist was the scientific leader.

During the expedition some tragic events took place, and the ship was trapped in the ice for many months. Two people lost their lives, one became mentally ill, and all seriously suffered from scurvy. However, owing to their heroism and endurance the expedition achieved its aim. The geographic discoveries and scientific research they recorded and conducted were of great significance. Their observations made in the winter season were a great aid to the proper organization of future expeditions.

The centennial of the *Belgica* Expedition coincided with 20-year anniversary of the establishment of the Polish Scientific Station *Henryk Arctowski* in the Antarctica. In order to acknowledge the Belgian expedition and to emphasize participation of Poles in Antarctic research, a Polish Navy hydrographic ship with a group of scientists from the Polish Academy of Sciences as well as from several universities on board, led by Professor Stanisław Rakusa-Suszczewski, set out from Gdynia to Antwerp. The ship, also named *Arctowski*, led by the Commander J. Bogdanowicz, had taken part previously in an Antarctic Expedition. The commanders of the hydrographic service of Polish Navy, the Rumanian scientist, Dr. Emil Silvestru, the director of the Speleological Institute established by a participant of the *Belgica* Expedition Emil Racovitza, Mr. Zbigniew Hasztrakiewicz – a representative of the American-Polish society supporting the *Henryk Arctowski* Foundation, and a broadcast representative of BBC/Reuter also took part in the cruise.

The main part of ceremony was celebrated on the 16th of August, 1997, in the Town Hall of Antwerp. It was conducted by Gaston Baron de Gerlache, the chairman of the Belgian National Committee for Antarctic Research, son of Adrian, and a founder of the Belgian Antarctic Station in 1957. Representatives of the City Government, the President of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Professor Leszek Kuźnicki, who joined Polish delegation in Antwerp, numerous Belgian scientists, representatives of the Polish Embassy, the Polish delegation that arrived on *ORP Arctowski* and the de Gerlache family all took part in the celebration. Thoughtful speeches were delivered by the Belgian representative of the City government, by the chairman of the Royal Belgian Marine Academy Professor Ch. Konickx, and by Mr. Gaston de Gerlache from the Belgian side, as well as from the Polish side by the President of Polish Academy of Sciences, Professor Leszek Kuźnicki, the vice-chairman of the Committee on



Participants of the official dinner on the courtyard of the Royal Yacht Club of Antwerp. Sitting from the left: Comm. W. Kierzkowski – chief of the Polish Navy Hydrography Bureau; Prof. S. Rakusa-Suszczewski – head of the Department of Antarctic Biology, Pol. Acad. Sci.; Mr. Gaston Baron de Gerlache de Gomery – chairman of the Belgian National Committee for Antarctic Research; Prof. L. Kuźnicki – president of the Polish Academy of Sciences; Prof. K. Jażdżewski – v-chairman of the Polish Committee on Polar Research; Comm. C. Mermans – president of the Royal Yacht Club of Antwerp; Lieut. Comm. J. Bogdanowicz – Captain of ORP *Arctowski*; Lieut. Comm. M. Soetemans – Captain of BNS *Belgica*. Standing from the left: Mr. H. Hannon – Tour Operator of Antarctic Cruises, Prof. A. Kostrzewski – A. Mickiewicz University of Poznań; Mr. W. Kozak – Polish B.B.C. Correspondent / Reuter; Dr. E. Silvestru – head of the Institute of Speleology *Emil Racovitza*; Lieut. Comm. A. Kowalski, ORP *Arctowski*; Prof. P. Węgleński, University of Warsaw; Comm. J. L. de Gerlache; Prof. R. Ligowski – University of Łódź; Lieut. Comm. K. Kubicki, ORP *Arctowski*; Mr. Z. M. Hasztrakiewicz – American member of the *Arctowski* Foundation board; Prof. Ch. Koninckx – president of the Royal Marine Academy; Lieut. W. P. Verstrepen; Prof. K. W. Opaliński – Institute of Ecology, Pol. Acad. Sci.; Comm. B. de Gerlache; Prof. K. Zdzitowiecki – Institute of Parasitology, Pol. Acad. Sci.; Lieut. J. Morris, BNS *Belgica*; [Prof. A. Myrcha] – University of Białystok; Dr. Claude De Broyer – Inst. roy. Sci. nat. Belgique; Mr. A. de Vos – v-president of Royal Marine Academy; Cpt. D. Kolator, ORP *Arctowski*; Mr. P. van den Sande – director of Antwerp Zoological Garden. The photograph taken by Prof. H. Szaniawski – head of the Institute of Paleobiology, Pol. Acad. Sci.

Polar Research, Pol. Acad. Sci., Professor Krzysztof Jażdżewski, and head of the Department of Antarctic Biology, Pol. Acad. Sci., Professor Stanisław Rakusa-Suszczewski, and by Dr. Emil Silvestru from the Rumanian side. All the speakers emphasized the great international significance of the *Belgica* Expedition and its influence on subsequent Antarctic investigations. Following the speeches a short film was shown based on photographic and drawing documents from the historic expedition. After the official part of the ceremony a reception was offered by the City of Antwerp and the Belgian National Committee for Antarctic Research. In the evening visitors were invited to a solemn dinner at the Royal Yacht Club of Antwerp.

The next day a social meeting was organized in the halls of the Antarctic Section of the Antwerp ZOO. On the same day both ships were open to the public, which attended in great numbers.

The whole ceremony was very symbolic. ORP *Arctowski* was greeted by her Belgian recent counterpart BNS *Belgica*. On board of the *Belgica* was the grandson of Adrian de Gerlache, also a commander of the Belgian Navy and also an Antarctic explorer, Bernard. Gaston and Bernard de Gerlache, who are continuing the Belgian traditions in polar research initiated by their ancestor Adrian, entertained their counterparts, who are similarly continuing the Polish and Rumanian traditions initiated by Henryk Arctowski and Emil Racovitza at a dinner. The dinner took place at the same Royal Yacht Club where a farewell dinner was offered to the participants of the *Belgica* Expedition a hundred years ago.

The ten year-old great granddaughter of Adrian de Gerlache, bearing the symbolic name Adeli, charmed everybody with her beautiful eyes, which match the colour we all know only from the sky over Antarctica.

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