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“Von Unterschiedlichen Tänzten”

Georg Schroeder’s Diary and the Tradition of Dance Culture in Gdańsk in the Second Half of the 17th Century

ALEXANDRA KAJDAŃSKA

In 2005 Prof. Andrzej Januszajtis, the well-known scholar of the history of Gdańsk, told me about the diary of Georg Schroeder. He proposed a small research project concerning Schroeder and the background of dance in 17th-century Gdańsk. This is when I became interested in Schroeder’s writings and started my research into the history of the dance culture in my hometown.

Georg Schroeder was a city councilor and wealthy collector in Gdańsk. He was born in 1635 as the son of the merchant Ludwig Schroeder. As common at this time, Georg enjoyed a well-rounded education that also included dance, gymnastics, fencing, and other physical exercises. This educational system, which was brought to Gdańsk by the Jesuits and mentioned by Gottfried Taubert in his treatise *Rechtschaffener Tanzmeister* from 1717,¹ was very popular in Poland. Schroeder started his career as supervisor (*Munzwardein*) of the Gdansk mint. In 1657 he undertook a grand tour of Europe, visiting Germany, England, the Netherlands, France, and Italy. He sojourned for a time in Leipzig and Leyden, where he often participated in public discussions. He returned to Gdańsk in 1663. In 1688 he became an assessor and also city councilor. He was married three times, and died in 1703.² Schroeder owned a large collection of books that reflected his interests and passions, including numismatics, manuscripts, the theatrical arts, and mathematical instruments.

The Manuscript

Schroeder’s manuscript (Ms. 673) is preserved in the Gdańsk Library of the Polish Academy of Sciences.³ This diary consists of loose pages (folios) written in ink, containing many pen drawings. The cover of the diary displays beautiful hand drawings—monograms in the owner’s hand—and the title *Georgii Schröders Dantiscani in Patria Consulis Anno 1703 fato functi Quodlibet oder Tage Buch von Allerhand Anmerkungen*. The diary is written in Low German, so-called *Plattdeutsch*. At the bottom of the cover is a stamp of the Bibliothek zur Danziger Stadt (Library of the City of Danzig). After conservation, the loose pages of this work were bound, and the manuscript is available to researchers in the form of a book (fig. 1).

The diary documents a cross section of the author’s interests, including everyday life in Gdańsk, and ranges back to his youth. Among many other things, he wrote about theatrical performances organized during the Dominican Fair, current fashions, and

well-known Gdańsk personalities. He recorded events connected with art, with the paintings of his cousin Nathaniel Schroeder, and described drawings from Braun and Hogenberg's well-known *Theatrum urbium*.⁴ In his diary we also find recipes for the famous Gdańsk spirits and liqueurs, and number of medicines.



Figure 1: Title page of Georg Schroeder's Diary.
Gdańsk Library of the Polish Academy of Sciences

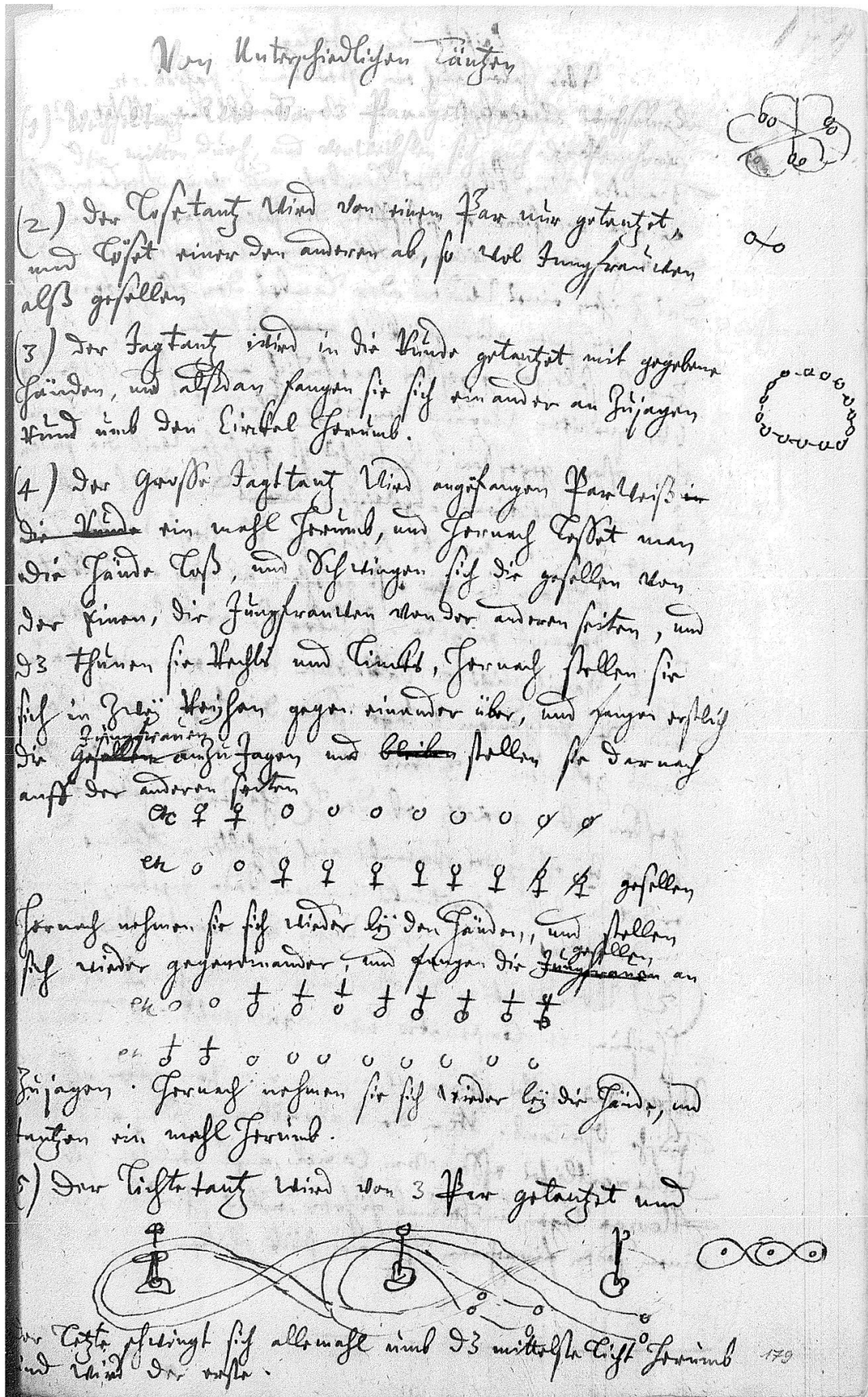


Figure 2: "Von unterschiedlichen Tänzten" from Georg Schroeder's Diary. Gdańsk Library of the Polish Academy of Sciences

Descriptions of dances

The chapter dealing with various dances (“Von unterschiedlichen Tüntzen”) is found on folio 174r (179) (fig. 2). The author lists five dances, with short descriptions and schematic drawings, and provides a short choreography for couples. Unfortunately, he does not describe the steps.

1. *Wechseltantz*. This is danced by only three couples, with the exchange through the center and changes with neighbors.
2. *Der Lesetantz* or *Losetantz*. This is danced by a couple, then one partner departs and the other chooses a new partner.
3. *Der Jagtantz*. Danced in a circle with joined hands, and then a chase across the circle.
4. *Der große Jagttantz*. At the beginning, this dance is danced once around by a couple, then the couple separates (cast off) and they do a balance to the right and to the left. The gentlemen stay on the one side and the women on the other (partner facing partner in two rows). Then the women started the chase, then change places (with the gentlemen). They again form a line, partner facing partner, and do a balance. The gentlemen start the chase. Then (after changing places?) they again take each other's hands (of the neighbors?) and once again dance around.
5. *Der Lichtetantz*. This dance was danced by three couples. When the last couple has danced around the middle candle, they change places and danced like the first couple.

Dances and the customs

Dance was a part of daily life in Gdańsk. The dances described by Georg Schroeder represent social rather than court dances or ballets. It would seem that the citizens of Gdańsk preferred social dances because they were easier, and the dancers could be more effectively integrated. Many sources, such as the wedding ordinance (*Hochzeit-Ordnung*), inform us about the place of dance in daily life, and illuminate the role played by these dances, which were performed at balls, family celebrations, and weddings, but also in the country estates. They were also performed during the ceremonial entries of the Polish kings, where above all different intermedi made up of ballet, *moresca*, and guild dances were presented. A very important time for dance was carnival (*Fastnacht*). Carnival was often influenced by an old Polish custom known as *Kulig* (*Sledge-play*): a carnival procession of several sledges with musicians would drive up unannounced to various palaces and mansions. In the middle of these festive parties and dances, they would pick up the hosts, carrying them away at a full speed to visit the next house. At various stops during the course of these processions, they feasted, danced, played, sang. *Kulig* usually rode with its own band. The sleighs were driven by women wrapped in furs, while the men usually rode on horseback. Servants also accompanied them on horseback, with

torches to light the way at night. This was a typical Sarmatian custom. Gdańsk was famous for its *Fastnacht* and *Kulig* customs, which are mentioned in many sources. The most complete source is the well-known diary of Charles Ogier, which is dated 1635/36.⁵ Ogier mentioned customs and dances, even giving the names of the dance steps that he danced himself. He wrote that the patricians danced easy steps, such as *passus graves*. These dances were generally game-dances, but sometimes serious dances, like the Polish dance, or humorous dances. These dances were social rather than theatrical or court dances. On the other hand, he also mentioned a banquet at which French dances, such as branles and courantes were performed.

The dances described by Schroeder were not court dances, but rather social dances. Theatrical dances, like those of the French Baroque, did not become popular until the beginning of 18th century. In the first part of his *Rechtstaffener Tantzmeister*, Gottfried Taubert commented positively about the citizens of Gdańsk, who danced very well. This was due to the Jesuit school system, which was supported by King Vladislav IV, who was very partial to the theatrical and musical art, and popularized French and Italian Baroque ballets.

Wechseltantz (Polish: *taniec przemienny*)

The principle of this dance's choreography appears to be similar to a kind of Italian dance, such as the *Brando di Cales* from Cesare Negri's book *Le Gratie d'Amore* (1602, 1604). This dance is danced by three couples, who change figures in the round.

Der Lesetantz or *Losetantz* (Polish: *taniec wybierany*)

The description is the same as for the French *Branle de la Torche* or the Italian *Ballo dell Fiore*. These kinds of dances had a rule that one couple danced and then changed between the others dancers.

Der Jagtantz / *Der große Jagttantz* (Polish: *taniec goniony* / *wielki taniec goniony*)

These two dances were a kind of dance-game. They seem to show their folk origins. They were very fast dances very popular among young people, and often danced at the weddings. But the mayors of the city often forbade these types of dances in the *Hochzeit-Ordnung* (wedding ordinance). These dances were considered dangerous and frivolous, and therefore high leaps, and excessive whistling and shouting were banned. Also limited was contact between partners, which was regarded as indecent (Gdańsk *Hochzeit-Ordnung* of 1590, and that of Elblag from 1630).⁶ *Der große Jagttantz* was danced by many couples in a big circle and was rather dangerous. The steps resembled a pursuit, with the dance imitating a hunt. In the early 17th century, Anton Möller presented a drawing entitled a *Game play on air* in the *album amicorum* for Michael Heidenreich.⁷ This kind of dance-game survived until Schroeder's time. The notation of this dance appears to be similar to a country dance in Playford.

Der Lichtetantz (Polish: *taniec świecowy*)

The last dance is more complicated and seems more effective. Schroeder's drawing depicts three large candles in candlesticks. The three candlesticks are placed the equidistance apart, and the (3) couples dance a figure-of-eight between them. This dance may be fashioned after the traditional guild dances that were performed during the festive entries of Polish kings, for example, in 1646 by the furriers' guild for King Vladislav IV's new bride, Ludvika Maria Gonzaga.

Mention should be made here of the most famous Polish dance, the *Chodzony* or 18th-century *Polonaise*. This dance reflects the specific location, culture, and policy of Gdańsk. At the time, many citizens wore Polish-style attire and danced in the Polish manner. In his memoirs, the English merchant Peter Dunbar mentioned a Polish dance danced by twenty couples (fig. 3):

One danced in the Polish style with approximately twenty couples [...] the wedding feast usually lasts from midday until late in the evening.⁸

These characteristics of Polish dances were confirmed by Gottfried Taubert.

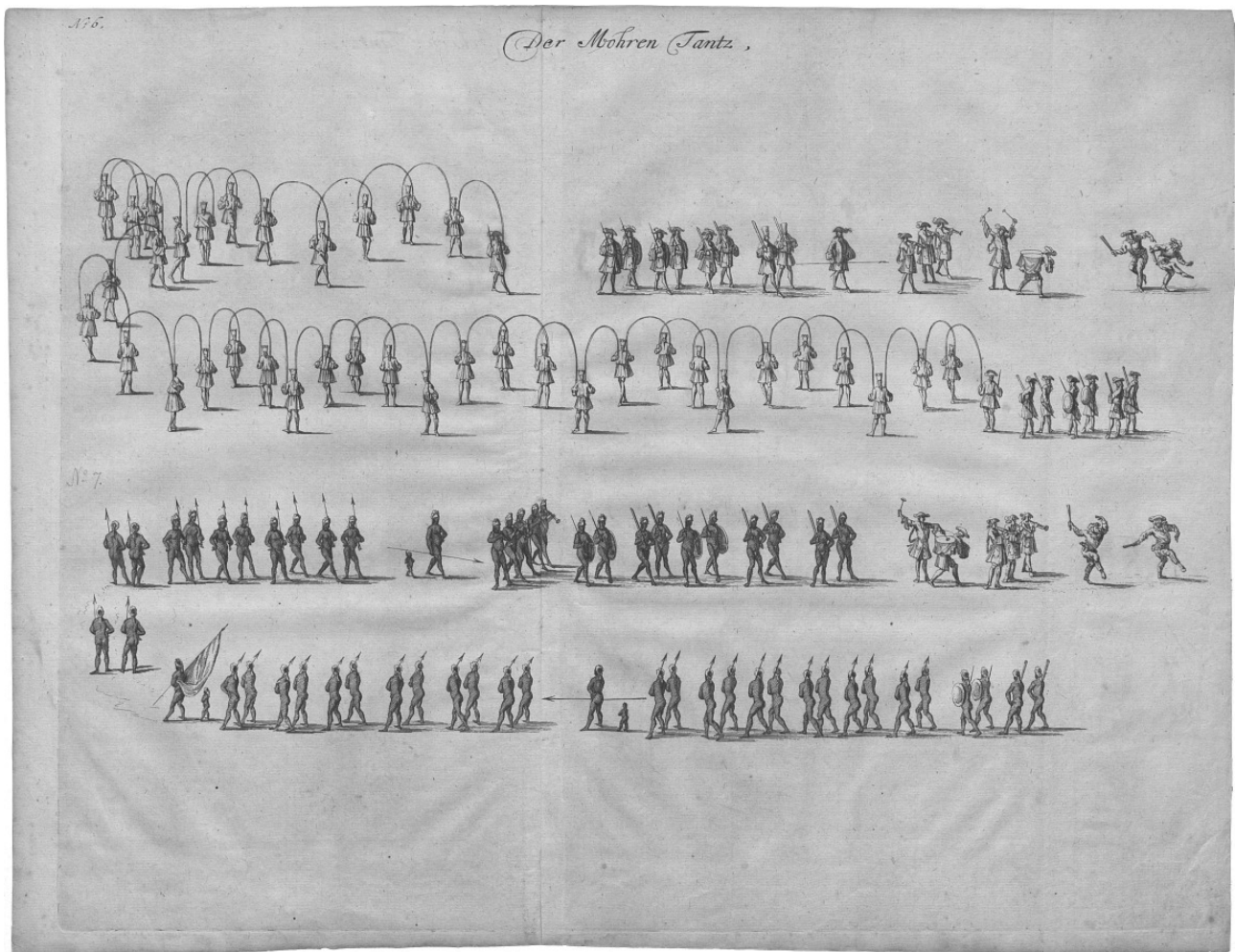


Figure 3: Anonymous: *Moresque Dance*. Copperplate.
From BEHR: *Aquillam Poloniae gladiis armatam*. Gdańsk Library of the Polish Academy of Sciences

Schroeder's life was rich in events connected with theater and dance. In view of his interest in theater, it seems likely that he witnessed the different dance performances organized by the various guilds for the royal entries and festivities. He observed dances such as *morescas*, which were a specialty of the furriers' guild,⁹ the sword dance of the shipmasters' guild, hoop dances, lantern dances, axe dances, foil dances performed by the shipmasters, dances with hoops and illuminated crowns by the furriers. The strong culture of dance in the guilds, which continued into the late 18th century, shows that theatrical dance was well developed in Gdansk. Very little information concerning the development of ballet there has been preserved. According to the sources, the ballet *Testi da Cantarsi*, presumably written by Jan Ernest Schmieden, was performed in 1660 upon the entry of Jan Kazimierz in Gdańsk,¹⁰ to celebrate the signing of Peace of Oliva that ended the Second Northern War (1655–1660).

Places for dance



Figure 4: Anton Möller: *The Patricians' Dance in Danzig*, ca. 1600. Reproduced in ROHDE: "Der Patriziertanz in Danzig" von Anton Möller. The original painting has disappeared.

Where did the people dance? Balls and wedding festivities frequently took places in citizens' houses, and municipal events, including balls, were held in the Artus Court (*Artushof*). As Wilhelm Ferdinand Zernecke wrote in his 1843 Danzig guide book, *All of Gdańsk for Twenty Silver Pennies*:

It was used partly for commerce, partly as a place for loud fun.¹¹

A beautiful representation of a patrician interior is found in Anton Möller's *The Patricians' Dance in Danzig* (ca. 1600) (fig. 4). Here, we can see a large hall in which many people are shown in dance formations, with others seated along the wall, talking to each other and watching the dancers. On the left side, we see a group of musicians playing for the dance. The interior is very similar to that of the small town hall in Gdańsk. This interior did not change substantially until the 20th century. In the 18th century, wealthy citizens built halls for dancing in the then modern style, such as in the Uphagen House,¹² which had large dining and music rooms. Many holiday festivities were organized in suburban areas. Many wealthy patricians or aristocrats spent the spring and summer seasons at their estates in the countryside. Balls with the sports were held there, and people spent time in their gardens. From last quarter of the 17th century through the 18th century, theatrical spectacles and the ballets taught in the Jesuit school system were presented. The most famous estate was in Łapino (Lappin) that belonged to Adrian von der Linde, who built a huge Renaissance house with a large hall. The property was known as Zacharias Zappio's Green Well Manor.¹³ Two Polish kings, Jan III Sobieski and August II Mocny, visited this estate in 1677 and 1717, respectively. Many manors were built in Wrzeszcz and Oliwa (the latter district had about ten well-known manors) or even in the Sopot district—Stawowie (Hochwasser, i.e., High Water), which was later mentioned by Gottfried Taubert. Wilhelm Ferdinand Zernecke wrote:

Hochwasser is a beautiful estate between the Oliwa and Sopot districts. Five Gdańsk merchants built a house there for festivities and fun. They used it for balls, festivities, and plenty of feasts [...] from the house one has a magnificent view of the sea and the countryside.¹⁴

Conclusion

The culture of dance has a strong tradition in the history of Gdańsk. It was connected with economics, politics, and trade. Gdańsk is a city with a rich material and spiritual history in the past several centuries. The culture in this city was very distinctive, and flourished due to the fact that it was open to people from different nations and religions. The most obvious influences are those of the Dutch, German, Italian, English, and Polish cultures, which are clearly discernible in the arts, the economy, and the military architecture. A strong educational system contributed to the popularization of dance as a tool helpful in educating young people. Despite the Lutheran mindset, and the desire to avoid immorality, dance was an integral part of civic recreation. Through the availability of education, a willingness to spend public funds for the theatrical entries of the Polish

kings and for carnival, the townspeople displayed their wealth and independence, and strengthened their attachment to the city. Against this background, the life of George Schroeder appears to have been normal, but his interests and education led him to record interesting information about things and events that he witnessed. His chapter on dances, including his attempts to describe and analyze their styles, is an invaluable source of knowledge. It also provides background information for the development of dance in the 18th century, as described by Gottfried Taubert and Johanna Schopenhauer,¹⁵ and in the 19th century, as described by Albert Czerwinski¹⁶ and Marie Dufke.¹⁷

I would like to thank Andrzej Januszajtis for his advice concerning Georg Schoeder's manuscript.

Notes

- 1 <http://archive.org/stream/rechtschaffener00feuigoog#page/n0/mode/2up>.
- 2 *Preussische Lieferungen* 1, Leipzig 1755, pp. 385–388.
- 3 BERTLING/GÜNTHER: *Katalog der die Stadt Danzig betreffenden Handschriften der Danziger Stadtbibliothek*, vol. 1, pp. 372–384, 618.
- 4 BRAUN/HOGENBERG: *Civitates orbis terrarum*.
- 5 OGIER: *Dziennik podróży do Polski 1635–1636*.
- 6 KIZIK: *Wesele, kilka chrztów i pogrzebów*, p. 113.
- 7 See TYLICKI: *Rysunek gdański*, p. 81.
- 8 ROHDE: *Danzig in einem englischen Reisebericht aus dem Jahre 1653*, p. 61. “Man tanzte nach der polnischen Weise zu ungefähr zwanzig Paaren [...] Ihr Hochzeitsmahl dauert gewöhnlich von Mittag bis spät am Abend.”
- 9 WITCZAK: *Teatr i dramaty staropolskie*.
- 10 Jan Ernst Schmieden (1626–1707), Councillor of Gdańsk and patron of the city's library.
- 11 ZERNECKE: *Cały Gdańsk za dwadzieścia srebrnych groszy, 1843*, p. 46.
- 12 Jan Uphagen (1731–1802), councillor of Gdańsk, assessor, and bibliophile, who collected over fourteen thousand books, mainly on the humanities and reflecting the trends of the Enlightenment. His house (House of Uphagen) at Long Street 12 was rebuilt in 1775 in the Rococo style by Johann B. Dreyer. Intact until the Second World War, it was reconstructed after 1945 and opened to the public as the Uphagen Museum.
- 13 GAWLICKI: *Podmiejskie dwory mieszczan gdańskich*.
- 14 ZERNECKE: *Cały Gdańsk za dwadzieścia srebrnych groszy, 1843*, p. 168.
- 15 Johanna Schopenhauer (1766–1838) is known today primarily as the mother of philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer. She also wrote memoirs about her life in Gdańsk, *Jugendleben und Wanderbilder*, which were published posthumously in 1838 by her daughter. She mentioned dances that she danced at balls, such as *anglezy* (i.e., English country dances), menuets, mazurkas, quadrilles, Polonaises, and German dances. SCHOPENHAUER: *Gdańskie wspomnienia młodości*, pp. 212–214.
- 16 Albert Czerwiński (ca. 1831–1 June 1885 in Gdańsk) was a dance teacher in Gdansk. He had a dance studio at Joppengasse 4. The author of three important books: *Geschichte der Tanzkunst* (1862), *Die Tänze des XVI. Jahrhunderts* (1878), and *Brevier der Tanzkunst* (1879), a book about Thonot. Arbeau's *Orchesography*. He was also the author of several articles about dance for the Gdańsk newspapers, and wrote about Gottfried Taubert.
- 17 DUFKE: *Quadrille française (contredance)*.