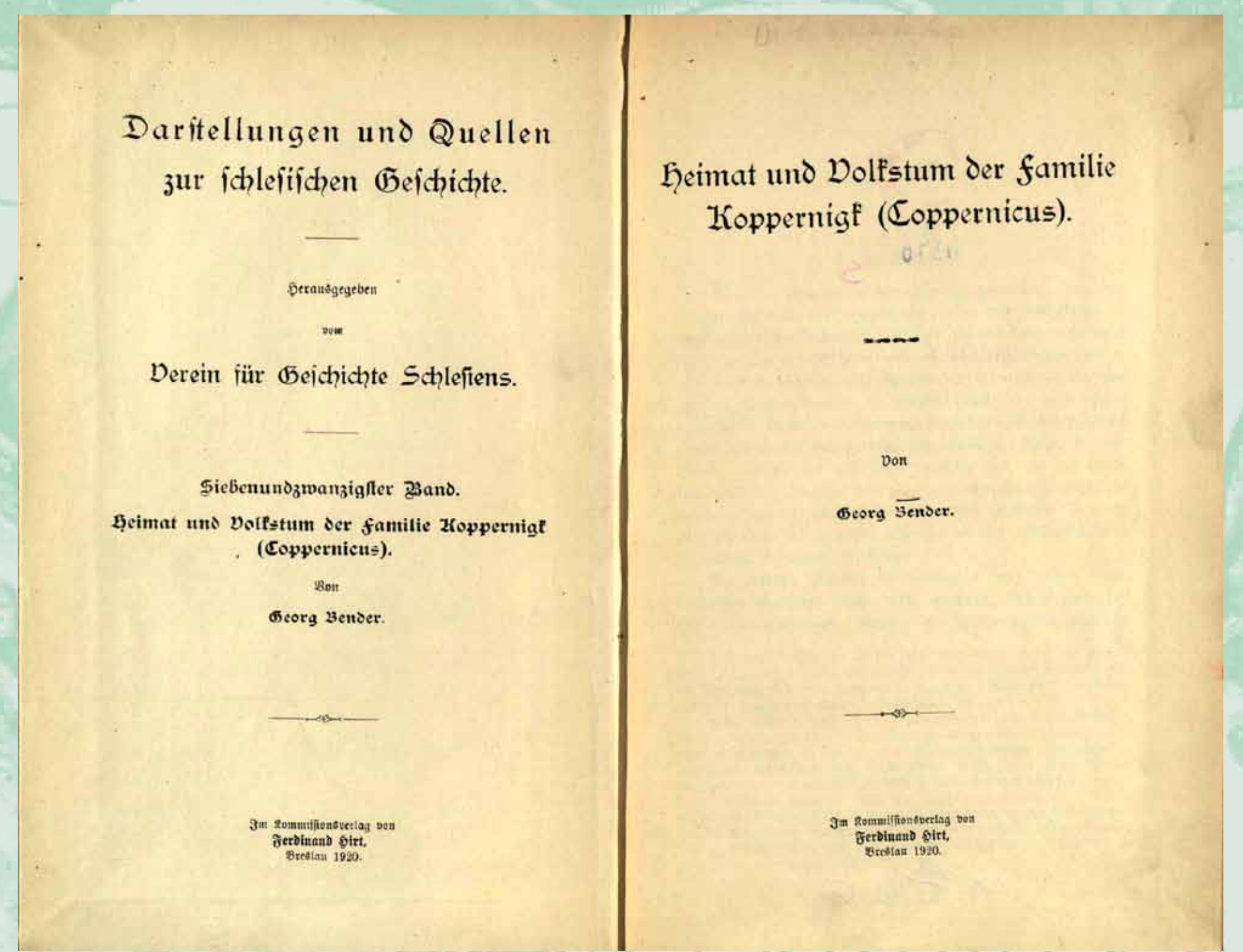




View of Koperniki village today



G. Bender, *Homeland and nationality of the Kopernigk (Coppernicus) family, Presentation and sources of the Silesian history*, The Society of the Silesian History, Vol. XXII, Wrocław 1920; ,

NATIONALITY

Should we identify Copernicus' nationality following current criteria, the basic facts to be considered are clear. The astronomer was born and educated in the Kingdom of Poland; he and his family were loyal subjects of the Polish king; he worked in and for this country, and for its inhabitants, his whole life. Not surprisingly, the most famous astronomer of the world is perceived at present as a Pole by the majority of the most recognized encyclopaedias.

Martin Luther, German leader of the Protestant Reformation, Copernicus' contemporary and opponent of his theories, regarded him as a Pole and referred to him as a "Sarmatic fool" ("Sarmatian" was at that time a term for a nobleman of the Kingdom of Poland).

However, five hundred years ago nationality was not a clear-cut term. Copernicus was born in a city where German was an official language. His father's family originated from Silesia and almost certainly had Polish origins, whereas his mother's family was rather German and most likely he spoke German at home.

Czesław Miłosz, Polish poet and Nobel Prize laureate in literature, wrote in *A Treatise on Poetry*: "In Copernicus' time a notion of nationality as we understand it today did not exist. He was a student at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, wrote in Latin and was a subject of the Polish king". Miłosz perceived the 20th century Polish-German dispute on the issue as an absurd battle of two nationalisms.

Norman Davies, British historian with a considerable standing in Poland, writes that "Copernicus was largely indifferent to nationality, which was a common approach in his time; nevertheless, he considered himself a local patriot". Davies agrees with Miłosz on the fact that Copernicus had a German language cultural background, while he was fluent in Polish and his working language was Latin.

Copernicus as a scholar may have seen himself simply as a servant of the Earth and the scientific truth (see the next poem). Certainly, we all have an equal right to be proud of him and his oeuvre.



View of Pszenno village, ca 1941



Pszenno village today

Nicolaus Copernicus
(1473 Thorn – 1543 Frombork)

what kind of questions are these
where the stars fly to
and which bird the sun is

I, Mikołaj from the Frombork tower
who am I?
ich liebe dich, sagte meine Mutter
No, there is no centre of the universe.
Earth - I, your servant, dug the whole garden
watered all the roses

stars fly out of my pen
I spin the planets with ink
they fall on me like peaceful nights
like meteorites in August
they register the earth's trajectories
wer bin ich doch?

I was only a gardener, Earth
I wrote De Revolutionibus
from the length of the nights
from the silence of thoughts
the papillary lines of the stars
spoke through my hands
took over the pen
signed themselves with my life

I did not have a father or a mother
Niclas Koppernigk
Barbara Watenrode
that comet that fell on Kraków
and the fertile soil of Toruń
carried me with their strength through the darkness of history
on the walls of Elbląg I defended
the light from darkening
I moved moons
aside for the rays of science

I repeat, I was only a gardener here
I looked after all the roses

©Grażyna Wojcieszko
©for translation Sarah Łuczaj