

## Kaden, Heiner: Kurt Schwabe

Sächsische Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig (in Kommission bei S. Hirzel Stuttgart/Leipzig (sold and available via: S. Hirzel Stuttgart/Leipzig), 2011, 285 p.; ISBN: 978-3-7776-2129-6 (written in German), 44.00 €

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Everybody who spent the most important part of his life as an electrochemist in the now defunct German Democratic Republic will have encountered the person(ality) placed in the focus of attention in this book in some way, whether as his thesis advisor (Schwabe supervised more than 200 doctoral students and 500 diploma students), as a visiting scientist (mostly from the former Eastern bloc countries), as the reader of one of his textbooks, or simply as a student at Dresden University of Technology, where he was a professor from 1949 until 1970, actually in various functions, he was active there more than 10 years longer.

Presumably because of his astonishing influence in numerous functions, as a professor and as the rector of Dresden University of Technology, as the president of the Saxonian Academy of Science (where both the author of this biography and the reviewer have the honor of being elected ordinary members), as the head of a very active research institute, the author of several textbooks and as advisor of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) government, he enjoyed general respect and admiration. After the crash of the GDR and the deep fall of many more or less famous persons of this political system, many saw high esteem turned into deep suspicion. This certainly was justified in many cases because of a too

deep involvement with the political system, exploitation of personal advantages up to suppression of other citizens, etc. It would be grossly unfair to subject Schwabe to the same; actually in quite a few cases, he was fairly critical of his government and its institutions.

The book illuminates the career of this eminent scientist with great care and much attention to every detail. It convincingly describes that scientific success was based on an almost unbelievable enthusiasm and amount of personal engagement. Because of the many connections between Schwabe's life and work and the GDR society and industry, the book also provides an interesting piece of historic record.

Although the vice president of the Saxonian Academy of Sciences has highlighted the wide research horizon of Schwabe calling him a keeper of the scientific spirit, the person described here in much detail somehow lacks an important facet of human beings—the interest in art, culture, and many things going beyond his scientific interests. Presumably, the apparent absence of this dimension somehow limits admiration by many even today. The almost excessively detailed table of contents with numerous levels appears to be a specialty of the author; it is somewhat confusing and not exactly helpful.

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