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Anna Sadurska (1921-2004)

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ANNA SADURSKA
(1921-2004)



She died in March, aware of the coming end, full of dignity, wisdom and courage. Surrounded only by a few of her nearest relatives, avoiding at this hardest hour the compassion and sadness of friends, former colleagues from work, once her students. A professor with doctoral and habilitation degrees, Classical archaeologist and philologist: an eminent scholar, meritorious instructor and teacher, a wonderful human being. “Mother” of Polish Classical archaeology, of research on the reception of “archaeological” Antiquity in Poland, world renowned expert on Palmyra and a scholar of Roman iconography.

Professor Anna Sadurska was born in Warsaw. In 1945-49 she studied Classical philology and archaeology, the latter under the guidance of Kazimierz Michałowski, of whom she was not only a highly regarded student, but also a close associate in his museum and university

activities, as well as in archaeological fieldwork. She also took over the university Chair (later Institute) of Mediterranean Archaeology after Michałowski retired in 1971. Much earlier, however, she embarked on a scholarly career, first in the Ancient Art Department of the National Museum in Warsaw, where she began work in 1949, and then, from 1951, at Warsaw University. She received her PhD that year, based on a dissertation that was published two years later, concerning inscribed Roman sepulchral monuments in the collection of the National Museum in Warsaw¹. Her accidental, albeit sensational discovery in the Museum stores of a famous and believed for 200 years to be lost “Tabula Iliaca Rondanini” conditioned to some extent her choice of topics for research. She concentrated on a field on the fringes of Classical philology and iconographic studies, one for which she was most suitably prepared. The result

¹ *Inscriptions latines et monuments funéraires romains au Musée National de Varsovie*, Warszawa 1953; Professor Sadurska’s full bibliography was included in a commemorative volume published in 1990 by her friends and students: *Études et Travaux*

15, 1990, p. 20-29 and in the newest “*Archeologia (Warszawa)*”; in these reminiscences only a few major publications will be referred to.

² *Les tables iliaques*, Warszawa 1964

was an excellent monograph, still cited as a Bible by all students of Homeric iconography: *Les tables iliaques*². This was followed by numerous publications of ancient objects in Polish collections and a growing interest in Polish (but not only) ancient art collecting: the effects of this love of Antiquity were to be found in Polish museums, but scholars relishing in the new perspectives provided by Michałowski's development of "Mediterranean archaeology" had no mind to devote themselves to their study. She passed on this passion to her students: in effect, several dozen MA theses and PhD dissertations, as well as articles and books were written and many exhibitions prepared. In writing and publishing, lecturing and running seminars, finally supervising the work of her students, Professor Sadurska established a school that constituted a breakthrough in the research traditions in Poland. Solving the mysteries of collections of antiquities found in Polish territory can definitely be attributed to her deep interests in this subject. The next step in this direction were iconological studies devoted to antique programs and antique copies in Polish art; in this area, however, she published little, preferring to leave the field to Polish art historians. She helped by lecturing on the history of ancient Greek and Roman art for students of art history at Warsaw University.

Yet her principal didactic work was devoted to students of Mediterranean archaeology at the University. She spent fifty years lecturing on the archaeology of ancient Rome, the history of ancient art, history of archaeology. She also gave public lectures popularizing her research in the fields of collecting antiquities, epigraphics, art and iconography, but also the archaeological fieldwork she herself directed.

Thus, even before she published her catalogue of Roman portraits in Polish collections³, a pioneer work even on an European scale, she had already participated repeatedly in Polish "Mediterranean" excavations directed by Professor Michałowski. It all started with Mirmeki in the Crimea. Then came Athribis in Egypt and her beloved Palmyra in Syria. Initially working under the guidance of the "Professor", she later replaced him as head of excavations. Hers was an incredible discovery – the tomb of the Alainê family, which she published shortly⁴. Quickly she became a world renowned expert on Palmyra and the crowning achievement of her work in this field was a catalogue of Palmyrean portrait⁵, which

was honored with a prestigious international award (*Premio europeo di Archeologia*) in 1994 in Venice. The dream of all archaeologists, Palmyra was the topic of many of her lectures for the Polish public, her radio and television appearances and popularizing publications⁶. The publications were numerous and they served their purpose, drawing young people eager to learn about archaeology and students eager to listen to her lectures. While the popularity of archaeological sensations is transitory and easily replaced – at least in the Polish panorama of Mediterranean research – by newer achievements, their scholarly publication remains current for a long time. Among these the most important ones are those with the broadest distribution and deepest reception. Among these university textbooks should be mentioned in first place as works that become obsolete most slowly and are read most widely. Sadurska's *The Archaeology of Ancient Rome*⁷ was written a quarter of a century ago, but it has yet to lose its appeal and timeliness; indeed it seems to be the first and presumably the last classic Polish-language textbook in the field, written in a manner so synthetic, so pertinent in the choice of discussed issues that it resembles the best that ever came from the pen of the greatest humanists.

Professor Anna Sadurska was widely known in the international community of Classical archaeologists; she was on friendly terms with the greatest scholars of the 20th century. A participant of many international worldwide archeological congresses, she lectured all over Europe, was a member of the German Archaeological Institute, member of many editorial committees, editor of various volumes and publishing series. She was active in the Polish Philological Society; from the very beginning she was a member, then president and later honorary president of the Committee of Ancient Culture of the Polish Academy of Sciences. She provided guidance for over a hundred MA students and promoted six doctors.

This great opportunity and honor was also the experience of the present author, who having recalled here some dry facts from the biography of the great scholar that Professor Anna Sadurska was, would now like to add a few more personal reflections. A few words of public farewell to one of the most important persons in his life, for he was not given the chance to say a private farewell. These are the words of a student who of all her

³ *Les portraits romains dans les collections polonaises* [Corpus Signorum Imperii Romani, Pologne I], Warszawa 1972

⁴ *Le tombeau de famille de Alainê* [Palmyre VII], Warszawa 1977

⁵ *Les sculptures funéraires de Palmyre trouvées dans les hypogées* [Supplementi alla Rivista di Archeologia 13], Roma 1994

⁶ *Palmyra – narzeczona pustyni. Dzieje i sztuka*, Warszawa 1968; *Sztuka ziemi wydarta. Archeologia klasyczna 1945-1970. Najnowsze odkrycia i metody badań*, Warszawa 1972

⁷ Initially as academic scripts, then in book form in two volumes published in 1975 and 1980

students owed her the most, for whom she was a guiding light from his very first meeting with archaeology, who believed she would always be there for him and for whom her death is the greatest loss of his adult life, just as knowing her was the most important and determining element in his life.

It is hardly the time, still suffering from the pain of loss, to remember Professor Sadurska, to quote her stories and cite her words, discuss private reports. To those dry facts from her life that after all are well known to her friends, students and family, I wish to add my own private opinion of Anna Sadurska, a human being, a woman, a mother.

From the viewpoint of a man with university status, someone well acquainted with the archaeological community, author of publications and director of archaeological fieldwork, I do not shy from saying that Anna Sadurska was exceptional, not only as a professor, but also as a Person and Woman. She was the only female scholar who was capable of harmonizing family life with scholarly research of the highest grade. The only female scholar who got involved in the life of her students no less than in the life of her own children. She was also a scholar who availed herself of her contacts, work, achievements, even her own high financial status to share them often and willingly with these students. Her mental constitution was remarkable, her intelligence letting her distance herself from life and her own success. She appreciated real values, mocking quietly those conventional ones that we are happy to applaud loudly at conferences, academic councils, public defenses. She had a way of treating science with a pinch of salt, being aware of the conventionality of evaluations made of her work. Undoubtedly she prized real values, hardly counting among these conventional behavior, stereotypical assessment, compliments. She was aware of many aspects of life and lived a full panorama in which the greatest emphasis was certainly not on the number and quality of her own publications, the depth and cutting nature of her reviews, her popularity, and the number of archaeological discoveries.

She was aware of her mission and aware of the importance of what she was doing. Not free of typically feminine faults and human weaknesses, she still managed to keep the distance to her own person. She lived usefully, making sure to draw the fullest pleasure from her work. Research, discoveries and publications were not her purpose in life, but rather a path to follow. Maybe just one of several parallel paths?

We, her students, frequently differed in our opinions of her. Sometimes we labored under the crushing weight of her opinions, unable to appreciate the care she extended, even to the point of interfering in our private lives. Usually, even at the start of academic careers, contesting her opinions and rebelling against her dominating character.

It is only now that I see how easy it was to live believing in her authority and infallibility. She liked to take responsibility for our decisions and gave us the feeling of security necessary to pass emphatic judgment. How easy it was to live and work being sure of her assistance, advice, support, being sure that you could count on everything she had.

Professor Sadurska was there for me throughout my scholarly life. I drew heavily on her experience, her abilities, her contacts and potential. I listened to her advice, sometimes even with regard to my private life. Occasionally, I contradicted her views and opposed her way of practicing science. There were times that I was rebuked, rather wisely and gently. But as time went on she seemed less emphatic in expressing differences of opinions. I did not hear words of criticism, merely a look of dissatisfaction on her face would indicate that she felt otherwise. She showed great wisdom in accepting that we all have the right to make our own mistakes and there is no way to protect us from ourselves.

She showed real class leaving the University suddenly, practically from day to day, thus breaking with the bad tradition of a domineering and unhealthy activity after formal retirement, so frequent in our community. During her and my work at the University we saw a lot of one another, but these intensive contacts stopped when she left the Institute and I, carried by the enthusiasm of having to manage an academic institution, lost the ability to appreciate real values. Yet she found ways to return, giving advice, offering assistance, in private life as much as in professional and scholarly matters.

She invited me to visit her for the last time a month before her death. Embarrassed by the way she looked (she always thought of herself as a woman and a lady, wishing to be at her most appealing in the eyes of her male students), she asked me to sit down at the table as always and take notes. She dictated her own interpretation of the mosaic with scenes from the Achilles myth which the archaeological expedition I was directing had just discovered at Ptolemais in Libya. She emphasized the importance of the discovery, understanding intuitively (after all, Homeric themes had disappeared from her research over half a century ago) the uniqueness of the find and its importance for iconographic studies. She seemed like she had been twenty years earlier: energetic, youthful in spirit, helpful, wise. I will keep this memory of her, burdened however with the feeling that I have ran a debt that I know not how to pay back. Aware that I have had bestowed upon me a chance that few are given: the opportunity to benefit from meeting someone truly remarkable and outstanding.

Tomasz Mikocki,
written in Ptolemais (Libya) on Professor Sadurska's
birthday anniversary (1.09.2004)