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Iza Biezuńska-Małowist (1917-1995)

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Iza Biezuńska-Malowist
(1917–1995)

IZA BIEŻUŃSKA-MAŁOWIST

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On 27th July 1995 died Professor Iza Biežuńska-Małowist, a distinguished member of the Association Internationale de Papyrologues, a former member of the Comité International of the AIP, an eminent classical scholar, great specialist in problems of slavery.

Iza Biežuńska was born on 1st January 1917. Her young days witnessed the fervent development of the restituted independent Polish Commonwealth.

Student of Warsaw University, she owed much to her masters, excellent historians, Zdzisław Zmigryder-Konopka and Tadeusz Wałek-Czernecki. Her first major publication was a monograph on the condition of women in Graeco-Roman Egypt: *Etudes sur la condition juridique et sociale de la femme grecque en Egypte gréco-romaine*, Hermaion, fasc. 4, Leopoli 1939 (now extremely rare, since most copies were destroyed in the war days).

The aggression against Poland in September 1939 and the occupation of the country meant a catastrophe also to the learned society in Poland. Universities were closed, education prohibited. Iza Biežuńska shared the fate of the Jewish community in the nazi occupied part of Poland. Her destiny was to go through the nightmare of the ghetto. She fortunately survived the holocaust (the help of her colleagues, Aleksander Gieysztor and Stanisław Herbst, must be mentioned in this place), but it is obvious that the horrible experience was an impact lasting for ever.

After the war, she was one of those who rebuilt the University of Warsaw in the destroyed city. For a certain time Iza Biežuńska worked in the Ministry of Higher Education and had a great merit in the reconstruction of the University education system in post-war Poland.

In 1947 Iza Bieżuńska completed her Ph.D. dissertation (*Quelques problèmes de l'esclavage dans la période hellénistique* (= *Eus Supplementa*, vol. XX, Warszawa – Wrocław 1949). A few years later, after the completion of a work on *Les opinions de la nobilitas de l'époque de Néron et leur fondement économique*, Warszawa 1952, she obtained *veniam legendi* in the University of Warsaw, and in 1954 became professor.

Iza Bieżuńska–Małowist made herself prominent by her research concerning slavery. It was, however, only a part of her larger interest in social history of the ancient world. The problem of enslavement of a human being by another human fascinated her certainly not without reminiscence of her own experience of the war time, and of the profound knowledge about medieval and modern slave systems, the knowledge which she shared with her husband, an eminent scholar, professor Marian Małowist. She always remained deeply rationalist in her scholarly approach to the problems she treated. She successfully assumed a role of a link between various ways of thinking about ancient slavery. She was also very critical to every opinion in that field that reflected any kind of ideological prejudice.

Iza Bieżuńska–Małowist was one of the editors of *Przegląd Historyczny* (“Historical Review”). She was also a member of the Editorial Council of *The Journal of Juristic Papyrology*. Since 1959 she participated in the redaction works of *Klio* and (since 1964) of *Eirene*.

Iza Bieżuńska–Małowist played an important role in the life of the Historical Faculty of the Warsaw University. She was an excellent educator, teacher of several present day professors of ancient history. She was an editor and redactor, a penetrating reviewer, a master of exquisite language.

Among her publications the following important works on slavery must be mentioned: *L'esclavage dans l'Égypte gréco-romaine*, Première partie: *Période ptolémaïque*, Wrocław – Warszawa – Kraków – Gdańsk 1974 (= *Archiwum Filologiczne* 30); Seconde partie: *Période romaine*, Wrocław – Warszawa – Kraków – Gdańsk 1977 (= *Archiwum Filologiczne* 35); *La schiavitù nell'Egitto greco-romano*, Roma 1984, and more general studies of slave systems: *Niewolnictwo*, Warszawa 1984 (together with Marian Małowist); *La schiavitù nel mondo antico*, Napoli 1991.

She published numerous articles dedicated to various problems of the condition of slaves and freedmen in the classical world. Professor Bieżuńska–Małowist was an active member of the Groupe International de Recherches sur l'Esclavage Antique (she organized three conferences of that Society in Poland).

She was member of the Committee for Classical Studies of the Polish Academy and of numerous international Societies.

Iza Biežuńska-Małowist organized the International Congress of Papyrology in Poland in 1961. She attended most papyrological congresses, represented her country in the Comité International de Papyrologues, lectured and researched abroad, including for example Princeton (N.J.) and Hamburg.

She was *doctor honoris causa* of the University of Besançon (1982).

She dedicated a lot of her zeal to the history of classical studies in the University of Warsaw.

Recently she returned to the favourite topic of her earlier days and published (in Polish) an interesting book on ancient women (*Kobiety antyku*, Warszawa 1993).

As *emerita* (since 1987) she was the president of the Council of Classical Studies in the University of Warsaw. On 2nd March 1995 with the usual indefatigable energy she organized a symposium concerning the dilemma of integration and specialization in classical studies which resulted in an extremely interesting discussion on the limits of specialization and on the interdisciplinary character of classical studies.

In this changing world, in which human thought is so much subject to fashion and emotion, to the *atai* that Zeus and Moira give to men, the place in Warsaw where Iza Biežuńska-Małowist for so many years gathered her disciples for discussion was an area of intellectual freedom and a spot of light, the light of rationalism and humanism.

[Warszawa]

Adam Łukaszewicz

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