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In memoriam Hanna Szymańska (1944-2010)

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HANNA SZYMAŃSKA (1944–2010)

IN MEMORIAM
HANNA SZYMAŃSKA (1944–2010)

HANNA SZYMAŃSKA, archaeologist and art historian, died in Cracow on 25 September 2010. For most of her professional life she focused on Graeco-Roman Egypt. She was a renowned field archaeologist as well as scholar dealing with different aspects of Egyptian art of the Ptolemaic and Roman period. For many years she was connected with the Warsaw papyrological milieu by bonds of friendship and professional cooperation.

Hanna Szymańska graduated from the Department of Mediterranean Archaeology of the Jagiellonian University in 1967, having defended a Master's Degree thesis entitled *Antique Terracotta Reliefs in the Cracow Collection*. In 1968, Hanna left for Paris, where she gained professional experience with prof. Odette Sargnon, whom she assisted with the publication of Sargnon's book on Cretan Mycenaean jewellery (*Bijoux préhelléniques*, which appeared in Paris in 1971). Later on, Hanna took an interest in antique archaeological collections of the the Princes Czartoryski Museum, Branch of the National Museum in Cracow. At that time she was employed in the Archaeological Museum in the same city. Her first paper entitled 'An agent of Władysław Czartoryski in Egypt' was published in the *Meander* periodical in 1970.

Hanna was devoted to conservation and restoration of artefacts – Egyptian sarcophagi, Coptic and Peruvian fabrics, etc. She was also

engaged in the organisation of numerous exhibitions, including *Antiquities from Umbria* (1990); *Ancient Peru* (1999); *Marea – Polish Excavations in Egypt 2000–2004* (2005); *Peruvian Fabrics from the Collection of Władysław Kluger* (2008). Hanna also prepared two highly praised permanent exhibitions: *Gods of Ancient Egypt* (its modern arrangement was outstanding even by European standards) and *Peruvian Collection of Władysław Kluger*. Interdisciplinary research on a Ptolemaic mummy of a priestess (acquired by Tadeusz Smoleński during excavations in el-Gamhud in 1906) conducted under her supervision in 1995, was the first of its kind in Poland. The project lasted five years and resulted in the publication of the volume entitled *Mummy. Results of Interdisciplinary Examination of the Egyptian Mummy of Aset-iri-khet-es from the Archaeological Museum in Cracow* (Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences, Cracow 2001).

In the years 1984–2000, Hanna was appointed Secretary at the editorial section of the annual *Materiały Archeologiczne* (Archaeological Materials). For many years she cooperated with the international encyclopaedia *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*.

She prepared her doctoral thesis entitled *Stylistic Trends in Coroplastics of Graeco-Roman Egypt* under supervision of prof. Maria Ludwika Bernhard and defended it in 1979 at the Faculty of Philosophy and History of the Jagiellonian University. Hanna's further research resulted in her habilitation in 2007 on the basis of her book *Terres cuites d'Athribis*, a publication of artefacts from excavations in Tell Atrib in Egypt in the years 1985–1991 (Association Egyptologique Reine Elisabeth in Brussels, Brepols Publishers, 2005). Unfortunately, her untimely death prevented the completion of her work on the next volume intended to encompass the period from 1992 to 1999. Similarly, Hanna's long term studies on the basilica in Marea, one of the largest churches in Egypt, are left incomplete.

Hanna Szymańska is the author of 94 peer-reviewed scientific and popular articles. Her vast research interests mainly revolved around the art of Greek, Roman and Byzantine Egypt. She focused primarily on the coroplastics, especially terracotta figurines. This kind of ancient plastic art aroused little interest among scientists for quite a long time. Thorough and lengthy research led Hanna to conclude that the figurines can be regarded as 'small sculptures', which provide valuable information on

diverse aspects of religious, social and even political life. She put the terracotta statuettes in the broad context of Egyptian, Greek and Oriental art from various periods, which allowed her to draw original conclusions based on analysis of influences and inspirations. This research turned out to be truly groundbreaking, as it allowed to expand the source base and, thus, terracotta figurines became another key factor in dating cultural centres from the Greco-Roman period of the Egyptian civilisation.

Hanna participated extensively in fieldwork: in the years 1973 and 1975 in excavations in Novae (Bulgaria), 1979 and 1989 at Kom el-Dikka in Alexandria; 1999–2000 in the French-Polish excavations in Dendera. Since 1991, Szymańska regularly took part in excavations organized by the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology of the University of Warsaw (in Tell Atrib 1991–1995, as a member of the Mission supervised by Karol Myśliwiec, and in 1998–1999, when she personally directed the excavations on that site). Since 2000, she was also in charge of the excavations of the Polish Archaeological Mission in Marea in Egypt, a site dating from the Byzantine period.

Szymańska held numerous grants from renowned institutions, such as the Ministry of Education of Egypt (1979, 1989), Hardt Foundation at Geneva (1983), Deutsches Archäologisches Institut in Berlin (1992, 1993) and Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst at the University of Trier (1996). In 1998, she received a Mellon Research Fellowship for Study at the American School of Classical Studies in Athens, and in 2004 – a grant from the Lanckoroński Foundation in London.

Hanna was also involved in educational and popularising activities. She gave regular lectures at several universities: in Cracow, Trier, Cairo, at the *École Française d'Athènes*, and in Warsaw. She presented numerous papers at international congresses (Rome 1995, Cairo 1996, Turin 2001, and Alexandria 2006, 2008). For several years she was a lecturer at the Faculty of History and Cultural Heritage of the Pontifical University of John Paul II where, since 2007, she held the Chair of History of Ancient and Medieval Art.

Despite so many duties she could not remain indifferent towards political changes in Poland since the 1980s. At the very beginning she was actively involved in the 'Solidarity' movement. In 1980, she was elected

Secretary for the Committee of the ‘Solidarity’ Union at the Archaeological Museum in Cracow. She also participated in the activities of the outlawed Kraków Industrial Society, initiated by Mirosław Dzielski and known as the ‘right-wing salon’, indeed an independent organisation. The fact that prior to the Society’s official registration on 30 September 1987, its secret meetings took place in Hanna’s and her mother Irena’s apartment is evidence of their courage. It should be added that the house was under constant surveillance of the communist Security Service (Służba Bezpieczeństwa). These secret meetings, organised under the pretext of ‘social evenings’, were attended by famous liberal intellectuals. The programme of the Society was based on freedom values and served as a springboard for discussing key issues related to Poland’s economic, political, social and intellectual transformation. Papers presented at the meetings usually resulted in heated discussions.

Hanna really loved life and enjoyed company, and she was the true life and soul of any gathering. She channeled her optimism and inexhaustible energy into new research and sharing her knowledge with others. Her students waited excitedly for new lectures, especially those referring to Alexandrian art. Despite illness, Hanna always had time for those she felt responsible for. She supervised the archaeological mission in Marea (Egypt), taught and worked on new articles until the very end. In the last days, aware that she was passing away, Hanna bore her physical and mental suffering with remarkable dignity and calm. But the sense of helplessness and powerlessness against the ultimate event left its indelible mark on her friends and relatives. All what remains now is to keep her in our memory forever.

[*Krzysztof Babraj*]