

Tomasz Derda

In memoriam Tomasz Eugeniusz Górecki (1951-2017)

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IN MEMORIAM
TOMASZ EUGENIUSZ GÓRECKI
(1951–2017)

ON SEPTEMBER 29, 2017, we were suddenly deprived of the presence of Tomasz Eugeniusz Górecki, archaeologist and ceramologist, who had a profound expertise in the culture of Christian Egypt, and a dear friend not only to myself but also to other editors of the *JJurPap*.

He was born on 17 November 1951 in Warsaw. In 1968 he took his final exams at the Stanisław Wyspiański Comprehensive Secondary School in Warsaw. In 1970, he went to study history at the University of Warsaw. Having dropped out a year later, he went on to study Christian archaeology at the Academy of Catholic Theology (later referred to as ATK, and today Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University). The ATK had offered university courses in archaeology several years earlier, spurred on by the spectacular results of excavation work conducted under the supervision of Kazimierz Michałowski in what was known as Christian Nubia, first in Faras and later in Dongola. Paintings from the Faras Cathedral, saved from the flooding of the Nile following the construction of the Aswan Dam, had been transferred to museums in Khartoum and Warsaw and attracted great interest from art historians.

Tomek (it is natural for me to call him by his short name) was among them – his MA dissertation dealt with the iconography of holy warriors

as observed in the wall paintings of the Faras Cathedral.¹ Thus he became attached to Nubian painting for the rest of his life. He played a vital role in extraordinarily vibrant discussions on this fascinating phenomenon organised in Warsaw, intermittently publishing short research papers² and taking part in the cataloguing of archaeological finds.³ For most of his professional life, he was literally surrounded by Faras paintings as an employee of the National Museum in Warsaw (from 1976), first in the Department of Ancient Art Conservation and later in the Gallery of Ancient Art. In 1996 he became the curator of the newly established Collection of Early Christian Art (later incorporated into the Collection of Ancient and Early Christian Art, also under his supervision).

In the same year, Tomek embarked on his adventure with field archaeology, beginning with the excavation work in Dongola. In 1979, he took part for the first time in excavations in Egypt as a member of the Polish archaeological mission to Kom el-Dikka in Alexandria. From then on, he would visit Egypt every year until 2016, taking part in numerous surveys at various sites. Over the years he became a leading ceramologist, a seasoned expert in the pottery found at ancient sites of Egypt – a specialist much in demand not only among Polish archaeologists (he also worked for the Austrian mission in Abu Fano,⁴ and the German mission in Min-

¹ This work was published in the form of a long article entitled ‘Z problematyki ikonografii świętych wojowników w malarstwie ściennym katedry w Faras’ (with a summary in French: ‘Problèmes d’iconographie des saints militaires dans les peintures murales de la cathédrale de Faras’), *Rocznik Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie* 24 (1980), pp. 173–259.

² Tomasz GÓRECKI, ‘Archangel and Saint Mercurios – new iconographical interpretation of the two murals from Faras Cathedral, Nubica. *International Annual for Ethiopian, Meroitic and Nubian Studies* I/II (1990), pp. 535–540.

³ Tomasz GÓRECKI, ‘Katalogbeiträge Nrn. 63–80 (129–145)’, [in:] W. Seipel (ed.), *Faras. Die Kathedrale aus dem Wüstensand. Eine Ausstellung des Kunsthistorischen Museums Wien und des Nationalmuseums in Warschau. Kunsthistorisches Museum* 23. Mai bis 15. September 2002, Wien 2002.

⁴ Helmut BUSCHHAUSEN, Jenny ALBANI, Alexander DOSTAL, Tomasz GÓRECKI, Hermann HARRAUER, Fathih Mohammed KHORSHID, Barbara MENCARELLI, Wolfgang PAHL, Volker VOGEL, ‘Ausgrabungen von Dair Abu Fana in Ägypten im Jahr 1990’, *Egypt and the Levant. International Journal for Egyptian Archaeology and Related Disciplines* 4 (1994), pp. 95–127; Helmut BUSCHHAUSEN, Jenny ALBANI, Carolin BOHLMANN, Günther DEMBSKI, Tomasz GÓRECKI, Fathih Mohammed KHORSHID, Monika LANTSCHNER, Barbara MEN-



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shat Abu Omar and Buto). His documentation of ancient artefacts was carried out with unbelievable attention to detail. He would put his heart and soul into it and perform his work with great dexterity and at a quick pace. Examining the artefacts in a highly perspicacious manner, he always tried to consider their archaeological and social contexts. Acknowledging and appreciating the role of ceramology in the study of history, he was a patient and passionate teacher in his field of expertise and explained its intricacies not only to interested dilettanti (like myself), but also to younger generations of aspiring ceramologists.

From the 1980s onwards, Tomek would regularly take part in excavation works in Tell Atrib (known in antiquity as Athribis, modern-day Benha, about fifty kilometres north of Cairo), the results of which can be studied in his regularly prepared reports. He believed that it was an important archaeological site and continually studied the excavated material until the final years of his life, as can be seen in his recently published article synthesising the results of research of the late antique church found in Athribis.⁵

In 1988–2002, Tomek took part in fifteen consecutive excavation seasons in Naqlun (Fayum Oasis; we worked there under the guidance of Professor Włodzimierz Godlewski). The extraordinary richness of ceramic finds from the fifth to the twelfth or thirteenth century ultimately formed Tomek's research profile by endowing him with an exceptionally broad perspective. While studying this particular category of finds, he was never likely to overlook other research questions. This may be seen, for instance, in his minute documentation of food remnants found in various places, which we used in order to offer a tentative reconstruction of the diet of ancient anchorites. He would often ask with keen interest about the contents of the excavated documents which I studied, convinced as he was that it was indeed essential to share experience and

CARELLI, Wolfgang PAHL, Hans PLACH, Thomas PERTLWIESER and Karl SCHERZER, 'Die Ausgrabungen von Dair Abu Fana in Ägypten in den Jahren 1991, 1992 und 1993', *Ägypten und Levante / Egypt and the Levant* 6 (1996), pp. 13–73.

⁵ Tomasz GÓRECKI, 'Remnants of a Byzantine church at Athribis', [in:] *Christianity and Monasticism in Northern Egypt: Beni Suef, Giza, Cairo, and the Nile Delta*, ed. Gawdat Gabra, Hani Takla, New York 2017, pp. 239–252.

knowledge with others. Nearly thirty years have passed since then, but I keep in mind my vivid memories of our conversations about the actual meaning of the word *petalides* found on a small scrap of papyrus (*P. Naqlun* I 8): we knew well that these must have been some edible mussels (possibly a freshwater species, but it may have been a variety brought from the Mediterranean), but it was fairly difficult to explain the discrepancy between the document and the leftovers found in the digs.

Tomek played an irreplaceable role in our research community. Our study of documents and other written historical sources greatly benefited from his sound reasoning and his expertise in material culture. One of the most recent examples of this is his study prepared at the behest of Ewa Wipszycka (and appended to her book on the Alexandrian Church⁶) dealing with how the interiors of large churches were lit in antiquity.

Tomek resented working in a rush: time pressure was something he truly loathed. At times he felt compelled to disagree with the decisions taken by the executives of excavation work. His understanding of archaeology would finally become evident in the archaeological missions where he was in sole and unquestionable command. From 2003, he excavated tomb TT 1152 in the Theban necropolis (and its environs), where he meticulously documented this particular tomb built in the Middle Kingdom era and its transformations made by the anchorites who lived there from the sixth to the eighth century.

The hermitage in Sheikh Abd el-Gurna was the scene of a major discovery in 2005 – and a landmark moment in Tomek’s career – with the unearthing of well-preserved Coptic manuscripts in the waste dump in front of the tomb and close to a tower built by the anchorites. The first manuscript discovered there at the time is a papyrus codex with the *Canons of Pseudo-Basilus*; the second – a papyrus codex with an *Encomium*

⁶ Tomasz GÓRECKI, ‘Lighting of the church interior’, [in:] E. WIPSYZKA, *The Alexandrian Church. People and Institutions* (= *The Journal of Juristic Papyrology, Supplement* 25), Warsaw 2015, pp. 343–348 (Appendix B); see also: Tomasz GÓRECKI, ‘Ręczne (przenośne) candelabrum z bizantyńskiego kościoła w Athribis w Egipcie/ Hand (portable) candelabrum from a Byzantine church in Athribis in Egypt’, *Rocznik Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie*, New Series 3 (39) (2014), pp. 135–146.

of *St. Pisentbios*; and the third is a set of parchment leaves placed between two wooden covers containing excerpts from the book of Isaiah and a part of the *Martyrium Petri*.⁷ These finds are all the more significant when we consider that it is extremely rare to find such well-preserved ancient manuscripts during archaeological excavations. Equally significant for the study of this particular hermitage are the documents in the form of ostraca found on the site. Following Tomek's initiative, these documents are studied by Anne Boud'hors of CNRS in Paris, a renowned specialist who has published Coptic documents in their hundreds.⁸

As was his wont in Naqlun and in all other places where he worked, so too in the Theban hermitage did he pay great attention to the smallest of finds, such as an otherwise unimpressive shard of a late Roman transport amphora with hieroglyphic markings (made by the anchorite living in the hermitage? His disciple? or one of their guests?).⁹

I cannot emphasise enough the importance of Tomek's research in Sheikh Abd el-Gurna. Scholars studying the history of Egyptian monasticism have thus been offered a splendid example of a Pharaonic tomb transformed into a hermitage. Literary sources often tell us about such adaptations, but owing to the research carried out in Gurna we may now examine them as they appear in the terrain.¹⁰

⁷ The preparation of the manuscripts for publication is well under way under the direction of Alberto CAMPLANI and Federico CONTARDI (the Canons of Pseudo-Basilus) and Renate DEKKER (the Encomium of Pesunthios of Koptos).

⁸ The first set of documents from hermitage 1152 was published by Esther GAREL, 'The ostraca of Victor the priest found in the hermitage MMA 1152', [in:] *PapCongr.* XXVII, pp. 1041-1054; the rest shall be presented by Anne BOUD'HORS in three parts in our journal; part one may be found in this volume, pp. 45-100. As suggested by Boud'hors, 'in tribute to the outstanding archaeologist he was, the acronym for the documentation from hermitage MMA 1152 will be *O. Gournā Górecki*' (infra, p. 46).

⁹ Tomasz GÓRECKI, Edyta KOPP, 'Hieroglyphic signs scratched on a shard of an Egyptian Late Roman transport amphora', *Études et Travaux (Centre d'Archéologie Méditerranéenne de l'Académie Polonaise des Sciences)* 26 (2013), pp. 238-243.

¹⁰ Ewa WIPSYCKA has been a great admirer of Tomek's work; hermitage 1152 is studied at great length in her magisterial publications: *Moines et communautés monastiques en Égypte, IV^e-VIII^e siècles* (= *The Journal of Juristic Papyrology, Supplement* 11), Warsaw 2009, pp. 190-196, and *Second Gift of the Nile. Monks and Monasteries in Late Antique Egypt* (= *The Journal of Juristic Papyrology, Supplement* 33), Warsaw 2018, pp. 301-306.

In his final years, aware of the passing of time, Tomek set himself to synthesising his vast knowledge based on the experience gained at numerous sites in Egypt in which he had taken part over several decades. Very sadly, he published only one study, but it is extremely useful, none the less: it greatly adds to our knowledge of the amphorae of the Late Roman 7 type, so commonly used in the Eastern Mediterranean in the sixth and the seventh centuries.¹¹

Tomek and I entertained a number of plans for the future. It was only two weeks before Tomek's passing that we talked about the ostraca of Edfu. We were both firmly convinced that these finds, mostly kept in the National Museum in Warsaw, were worth revisiting. Over a decade ago, Tomek spliced together into one piece two shards containing different documents, which has led to a number of interesting historical conclusions.¹² The ostraca documents of Edfu are widely known for having been found in large sets and for this reason a systematic joint effort by a ceramologist and a papyrologist could have led to interesting results.

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Only after Tomek had passed away did I realise, recalling the memories of our joint work and stays in Egypt, that I had not spent so much time under the same roof with anyone else, other than my family. Always in Egypt: Cairo, Naqlun, Thebes and, recently, Marea. There is no need to tell fellow archaeologists about the difficulties of life during excavation work, when common space is shared between people who are not always amicably attuned to one another or can barely stand the presence of some of their colleagues. In such enclosed groups, Tomek was an invaluable

¹¹ Tomasz GÓRECKI, 'Phasing out amphora LRA7 in favor of new wine containers: preliminary remarks based on the finds from the excavations in Naqlun', [in:] Adam ŁAJTAR, Artur OBLUSKI, Iwona ZYCH (eds.), *Aegyptus et Nubia Christiana. The Włodzimierz Godlewski Jubilee Volume on the Occasion of his 70th Birthday*, Warszawa 2016, pp. 113–137.

¹² Tomasz DERDA, 'O. Edfou 192 and 193: Two documents on one potsherd' [in:] Katelijjn VANDORPE & Willy CLARYSSE (eds.) *Edfu, An Egyptian Provincial Capital in the Ptolemaic Period*, Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie van België voor Wetenschappen en Kunsten, Handelingen van het contactforum (Brussel, 3 September 2001), Brussels 2003, pp. 45–50.

companion. I cannot think of any situation where he would talk of anyone without respect and understanding or that he would dislike anyone. His sense of humour, subtle and utterly auto-ironic, was absolutely priceless. Like no one else, he could defuse tension with a single witty remark. No wonder then, that so many people were keen to work with him, not only on account of his knowledge and skill. To put it succinctly, he was simply a remarkable man.

One of Tomek's favourite places in Warsaw, if I may be allowed to make this presumption, was our library, the Library of the Department of Papyrology and of the Chair of Roman Law. He was a frequent visitor and would often stay a long while. We talked a lot, and not only about professional matters. Tomek was one of us, an essential element in our small world. It seems to me that we do not fully appreciate as yet how this small world has changed with his passing.

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Several years ago I showed Tomek a Greek inscription found in Naqlun (he was no longer working with us on that site). He took a look at it, smiled, and said with his characteristically warm and ironic smile 'This may come in handy.'

[†] *KE ANAΠAYCON*
THN ΨΥΧΗΝ Τ[ΟΥ]
ΜΑΚΑΡΙΟΥ ΘΩΜ[Α]
ΘΩΘ ΙΑ ΕΝΑΤΗC ΙΝΔ

† Lord, grant rest
to the soul of the blessed Thomas.
II Thoth of the ninth indiction.

Tomasz Derda



Naqlun. Grave stela of Thomas (Nd 09.592).
Photograph courtesy of PCMA