

received – 06.2020
accepted – 06.2020
DOI: 10.5604/01.3001.0014.2476

WITOLD DOBROWOLSKI (1939–2019)

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Professor Witold Dobrowolski departed this life unexpectedly on 25 January 2019, when at his best in creative and scholarly activity. He left the position in Polish science he had taken over half a century before as an unquestioned expert in Etruscology and Greek pottery. Affiliated with the National Museum in Warsaw (MNW) throughout all of his career, he worked there uninterruptedly from 1960 to 2011, passing every single step in a museum employee career, having started as an Assistant up to the Curator of the Ancient Art Gallery during the last ten years of his work for the Museum. It was at MNW that his academic personality took on its final shape and developed; he, in his turn, stamped on the history of the institution which after WW II owned the richest ancient art collections in Poland.

However, as for Prof. Dobrowolski's academic career, it was continuously connected with the University of Warsaw and its Faculty of History where he first studied Mediterranean archaeology in 1956–62, was conferred the doctoral degree in humanities in 1974, and his post-doctoral degree in 1993. It was also at the University of Warsaw that ten years before his retirement, he shared his time between the museum responsibilities and running courses at the Institute of Archaeology. Before this teaching episode, he had lectured at the Universities of Torun and Lodz, at the currently-called Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński in Warsaw, or at the Academies of Fine Arts respectively in Warsaw and Gdansk.

Just like in the case of many post-WW Polish Mediterranean archaeologists, Prof. Dobrowolski's career was also greatly impacted by Prof. Kazimierz Michałowski (1901–81), who was the supervisor of his MA thesis titled *Etruscan Bronzes at the National Museum in Warsaw* (1962). Apart from his academic and university activity, K. Michałowski served at the time as Deputy Director of MNW; there he established a circle of his students and fellow archaeologists participating in excavations in numerous Mediterranean countries, but also studying the Museum collections. It was that circle of people that Prof. Dobrowolski, still a student, joined in 1960. Seen from this perspective

his interest in Etruscology can be understood better: not only because of the presence of Etruscan historic objects in the Museum, but also due to the fact that Michałowski was perfectly aware that the discipline was thriving in Italy, the knowledge instilled in him still in Lvov by his mentor Prof. Edmund Bulanda (1882–1951) the author of an extremely interesting study called *Etrurja i Etruskowie* [Etruria and Etruscans] (Lwów 1934). An important role in this respect was also played by the contacts Prof. Michałowski had with Massimo Pallottini (1909–95) and Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli (1900–75), the connections taken over in due course by Prof. Dobrowolski.

In a sense, together with the first publications of Prof. Dobrowolski, contemporary Etruscology was born in Poland, and it was by no accident that precisely in the 1960s some important publications on these topics were translated into Polish, with Prof. Dobrowolski contributing as their editor, e.g., M. Pallottino, *Etruskowie* [The Etruscans], translated by J. Maliszewska-Kowalska (Warszawa 1968). Without going into details of Prof. Dobrowolski's studies at the time, it is interesting to emphasize his consistency in the scholarly activity. Ten years of his studies of different historic objects from the Museum collections yielded promptly a textbook on Etruscan art (1971). Meanwhile, images of published sea creatures inspired his doctoral dissertation titled *On Some Greek Myths in Etruscan Art in 6th–5th Century BC. Phantasy Sea Fauna* written under Prof. Anna Sadurska (1924–2004), with K. Michałowski serving as one of the reviewers (1974). This range of topics accompanied Prof. Dobrowolski for years to come until they climaxed in his book *Mity morskie antyku* [Sea Myths of Antiquity], (Warszawa 1987), demonstrating at the same time that he would willingly retackle topics analysed earlier.

It goes without saying that while studying Etruscan art it is impossible to neglect Greek artistic and cultural influences that spread on the Italian territory, also through the painterly decoration of Greek pottery, therefore it was only natural for Prof. Dobrowolski to take interest in the historic collections of Greek vases in Poland, amassed predominantly



1. Józef Poklewski ca 2005

at the National Museum in Warsaw. However, let us emphasize that his interest did not only stem from searching iconographic and stylistic analogies with Etruscan art, but from his sincere admiration for form and drawing in Greek art which he analysed in universal categories, as much as historically conditioned. Therefore, Prof. Dobrowolski occasionally objected when defined as an Etruscologist, since he was becoming gradually more aware that behind various peripheral and superficial phenomena of the Etruscan world what truly hid was compelling Greek art, being actually the only one that incites deeper aesthetical sensations, forcing artistic reflection. Incidentally, not going into its definition, he was also critical of Roman art when viewed against form and coherence of Greek art.

Prof. Dobrowolski unquestionably remained under a strong influence of R. Bianchi Bandinelli's thoughts, and it was by no accident that he decided to translate into Polish his classical study titled in Polish *Archeologia klasyczna jako historia sztuki* [Classical Archaeology as History of Art] (Warszawa 1988), where he added an extensive afterword, analysing Bandinelli's views, at times being polemical, also in the context of the development of classical archaeology in Poland. What Prof. Dobrowolski took from Bianchi Bandinelli is the characteristic view that ancient art can and should affect the present day; interestingly, Prof. Dobrowolski's guide to Greek pottery at MNW begins with the question what a painted Greek vase may mean to a contemporary man (1977, p. 5). Together with Bianchi Bandinelli he responded that it constituted a historical record, and additionally that it could provide genuine aesthetical impressions. As a result, ancient art, and actually Greek art, constitutes continuously topical part of human heritage that cannot be reduced to yet another neo-classicism or academism.

It was studies in Greek art, mainly through vase painting, form, and drawing that led Prof. Dobrowolski towards a deeper knowledge of the characteristic features of Etruscan art, presented in his book on Etruscan painting

(1977). However, his international renown, actually recently recalled by Stephan Steingraber at a congress on ancient painting (2018), stemmed from his documentation of Etruscan tombs from the 18th century when he discovered the forgotten contribution of Franciszek Smuglewicz (1745–1807), a Polish painter residing in Rome on a longer basis, to the publication of some tombs in Tarquinia by James Byres. This very discovery, which he delved into deeper for years and studied in the historical context, together with the iconographic analysis of the painterly documentation, became the basis for Prof. Dobrowolski's post-doctoral dissertation titled *La peinture étrusque dans les recherches du XVIII^e siècle*, and published in three extensive papers (1990–92).

Studies of the Greek vases at MNW required taking into account also the history of the collections, so quite naturally Prof. Dobrowolski dealt with Stanisław Kostka Potocki (1755–1821), author of e.g. *O sztuce u dawnych czyli Winkelman Polski* [On Old Art, Namely Polish Winckelmann] (1815), and his purchases of ancient objects in Italy, or the excavations at Nola, Campania, as well as with the future fate of the collections from the Wilanów Palace, residence of the Potocki family for quite some time. The years' long studies yielded the publication of a detailed catalogue of ancient vases and the history of the Wilanów collection (2007) which actually owed its survival after WW II to numerous MNW employees, for decades patiently reconstructing and conserving particular vases.

Similarly, the famous collection of Izabela Działyńska (1830–99) née Czartoryski transferred by the late 19th century from Paris to the Gołuchów Palace, and partially recovered from the Russians after WW II (1956), was another object of interest for Prof. Dobrowolski, constituting a meaningful example of Polish collecting of classical antiquities. In this way he entered the tradition of antiquity in culture and society in different historical periods, thus returning to the basic question posed by Bianchi Bandinelli on the meaning of ancient art in the history of European culture.

Interestingly, the research into the tradition of antiquity in Polish and European culture fascinated Prof. Dobrowolski more and more, to the extent that in the recent years, actually not obliged by his professional responsibilities, he dedicated his entire interest to the issue. I know how proud he was of his publication on the painterly decoration programme in the White House of the Royal Łazienki, or on the Temple of Diana in the romantic garden of Arcadia (Nieborów), as well as on the ancient quotes, mainly on Greek vases in the academic paintings by Henryk Siemiradzki (1843–1902).

For all his life Witold Dobrowolski remained the man of the National Museum in Warsaw, come rain or shine, and the institution continued the lodestar in his private life and career. Therefore, even after he had become professor at the University of Warsaw, his thoughts always remained with the Museum to which he continued faithful until the end of his days. I had the privilege of watching his museum passion for many years, and when we accidentally met during a conference in Warsaw in 2017, his first words were: *those were the days at the Museum, weren't they?*

Let us emphasize that after WW II, the National Museum in Warsaw, headed by Prof. Stanisław Lorentz (1899–1991),

who was assisted by outstanding art historians: Kazimierz Michałowski and Prof. Tadeusz Dobrzeński (1914–99), but first and foremost by Prof. Jan Białostocki (1921–88), was an extremely important and attractive cultural and intellectual centre. At that point it faced a major mission to accomplish: to save and preserve the national heritage that had survived, but also to promote culture and art among Polish society, which was perfectly clear to its employees, including Prof. Dobrowolski. At that time if anyone was seeking any information on works of art in general, or on definite historic objects, they would not turn to the University, but to the National Museum. Under such circumstances it was only natural that Prof. Dobrowolski often played the role of a consultant for different Polish museums, private collectors, journalists, editors of encyclopaedias and compendia on art history.

In the effort to promote art in society, the Museum's Ancient Art Gallery was involved in mounting numerous temporary exhibitions in many Polish towns: larger and smaller, close, and distant. Particularly committed, Prof. Dobrowolski enjoyed doing it. He created dozens of thematic exhibitions of ancient art, but also of the antiquity tradition, often assisted by his close co-workers: Aleksandra Majewska, Sabina Grzegorzówka, and Krzysztof Załęski. At times, the exhibitions were accompanied by small guides.

In the hard times of post-WW II Poland these initiatives were much more important than it seems from today's perspective. With no internet and the Schengen Area, they were the only possible contacts with another reality, if only historical. I occasionally had an opportunity to participate in such displays mounted by Prof. Dobrowolski, always struck by his vision of a museum display as an intellectual and aesthetic challenge. When arriving in small museum centres, he often found that the display rooms and cabinet did not meet the requirements of displaying historic monuments brought from the Warsaw museum, yet under the circumstances Prof. Dobrowolski would 'orchestrate' the situation, and resorting to his knowledge and artistic taste, almost out of nothing he was able to create a museum reality afterwards appreciated by all. Such moments demonstrated his perseverance in overcoming difficulties, but first of all his passion and love for historic museum objects, the emotions he would hide under regular circumstances.

After WW II, the largest in Poland, the most complete, but also the most modern gallery of ancient art was created at MNW; a kind of a 'Musée Central' of the Communist regime, it was to continue its impact on subsequent generations of Poles for decades to come. With time, along the progress of the academic research and of conservation works, the display was renewed and remodelled following new concepts and ideas, to a great extent also defined by Prof. Dobrowolski. Similarly as in the case of temporary exhibitions, he perceived the permanent exhibition at MNW as a reflection of the current state of research of his and other scholars, that was why he continued to alter it, switching exhibit places or adding new ones and new topics. In this manner he was able to gradually distinguish regional workshops of Greek pottery, or to arrange the display of Etruscan art as an introduction to Roman art. It was thanks to his excellent expertise that he was able to search for such exhibits in the Museum's storage that perfectly complemented

the display, to the extent that international visitors to the Museum were struck by the fact that despite its small size, the display seemed complete in its message.

Obviously, the Ancient Art Gallery at MNW as a challenge did not satisfy all Prof. Dobrowolski's expectations, since he also judged it as a certain aesthetic value. In the old times in order to reach the Gallery offices, one had to cross the display; quite often, when entering the office in the morning, Prof. Dobrowolski would reproach everybody, including himself, that an important vase was badly exposed and poorly visible, or a sculpture was not attractive as seen in the perspective of the room. Also during temporary displays, he would 'torment' his colleagues constantly replacing exhibits, even changing their display cabinets, searching for the best possible exposition. As a matter of fact, it is a shame that the old display of ancient art was dismantled without a second thought on its historical value as a testimony to Prof. Dobrowolski's research and that of many scholars in post-WW II Poland, with no guarantee that the new gallery, still in preparation, will be by definition better.

In the history of MNW's activity, Prof. Dobrowolski is also marked as the author and curator of many important temporary displays. In 1989, in Warsaw the huge travelling exhibition called 'The World of the Etruscans' was presented; it was the effect of the cooperation of different museums from the former Communist Bloc (Berlin, St Petersburg, Moscow, Budapest, Prague, and Warsaw) in which he was responsible for the Polish contribution, and curated the Exhibition in Warsaw.

Another major project connected with the release in 2001 of the successful film adaptation of the famous Henryk Sienkiewicz's novel *Quo Vadis?* by Jerzy Kawalerowicz was the Exhibition 'Around *Quo Vadis*. Art and Culture in Rome in the Times of Nero', the work Prof. Dobrowolski authored, and of which he was particularly proud, recalling it willingly, since on that occasion he managed to group in one place monuments from many Polish museums, as well as from reputed Italian ones; furthermore, he succeeded in grouping in one catalogue texts of important scholars showing a broad historical and interdisciplinary perspective stretching from the times of Nero and the first Christians, up to the times of Sienkiewicz and Henryk Siemiradzki's painting *Christian Dirce*.

Several years later the opportunity to mount a major exhibition was provided by the 2004 Olympics in Athens, in Warsaw celebrated with the display titled: 'The Olympics. Sports in Greek Art from the 6th to the 5th Century BC', the topic Curator Dobrowolski had studied for long. On that occasion, he succeeded in bringing to Warsaw items from Athens, Paris, Berlin, St Petersburg, and various Polish museums, obviously enjoying the necessary support of the whole team of the Ancient Art Gallery.

It cannot be denied that Witold Dobrowolski was an individual of a complex personality, arousing varied emotions, yet with much determination; capable of grasping the opportunities that emerged in his life, through hard work, he succeeded in consolidating his professional position, leaving behind the tough and unpromising childhood. He shared his passion, namely love for antiquity, with his fondness for Italy he often revisited, starting already in the early 1960s until the end of his days, thanks to different grants, participation

in excavations, e.g. with M. Pallottini in Pyrgi (1966), conferences, lectures, and other professional events, as well as private visits, since in Italy he left behind many friends. His love for Italy did not stem from his studies and the exquisite monuments that can be found there, but it was an extremely intimate relationship. Whenever recalling 'il Bel Paese', he

would not speak of splendid art works, but of something as exquisitely beautiful as the aroma of Rome when one gets out onto its streets early in the morning, this testifying to the fact that he knew how to appreciate life regardless of all the adversities.

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Abstract: The recollections of Prof. W. Dobrowolski focus mainly on his activity at the National Museum in Warsaw (1960–2011) and his scholarly accomplishments. The creator of modern Etruscology in Poland in the 1960s, he contributed greatly to promoting knowledge of Etruscan civilization among Polish society. He won his international fame with the documentation of Etruscan tombs and their painterly decoration in the modern period. Furthermore, W. Dobrowolski was an unquestioned expert in Greek pottery, particularly from the Vilnius and Gołuchów collections kept at the National Museum in Warsaw, and was capable of applying his deepened iconographic analyses to museum displays. His passion being Greek art as a universal and topical model for

artistic and esthetical values, he was greatly committed to promoting ancient art in Poland as an organizer of several dozen exhibitions at local museums, author of numerous encyclopaedic entries and chapters in art history textbooks. Moreover, he authored and curated some big and important exhibitions at the National Museum in Warsaw, where he also had a significant impact on the permanent Ancient Art Gallery which existed until 2011. Dobrowolski's studies in Polish collecting of ancient historical pieces in the 18th and 19th centuries paved him the way to important analyses of the presence of the Antiquity in European and Polish culture that were the academic focus in the last period of his life.

Keywords: Witold Dobrowolski, National Museum in Warsaw, Etruscology, Greek vases, Antiquity tradition.

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Word count: 4 333; **Tables:** –; **Figures:** 1; **References:** –;

Received: 06.2020; **Accepted:** 06.2020; **Published:** 06.2020

DOI: 10.5604/01.3001.0014.2476

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Competing interests: Authors have declared that no competing interest exists.

Cite this article as: Żelazowski J.; WITOLD DOBROWOLSKI (1939–2019). *Muz.*, 2020(61): 90-95

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