

ACADEMIC CHRONICLE

A report on the promotion of the book *Krystyna Śreniowska. Moje życie* Łódź, June 20, 2018

ON June 20, 2018, in the Hall of the Council of the Faculty of Philosophy and History of the University of Lodz (UŁ) the book titled *Krystyna Śreniowska. Moje życie* [Krystyna Śreniowska. My life] was presented, compiled and prepared for printing by the employees of the Institute of History (IH) – Professor Jolanta Kolbuszewska and Professor Rafał Stobiecki, and published by the University of Lodz Publishing House (Łódź 2018). This event is part of a series of celebrations related to this year's 70th anniversary of the Institute of History of the University of Lodz. The meeting was attended by the staff of the Lodz *Alma Materis*, members of the democratic opposition community in the People's Republic of Poland, in which K. Śreniowska had been involved for years, as well as her students, friends, family and representatives of the Lodz University Publishing House.

The meeting was opened by the director of the IH, Professor Dariusz Jeziorny PhD, who welcomed the audience and briefly outlined the agenda of the event. He was then followed by Professor R. Stobiecki. In the introduction, he mentioned that the publishers of Śreniowska's memoir were guided by three fundamental goals. Firstly, they wanted to remind the academic community of the author, who belonged to the generation of founders of the University of Lodz. Secondly, they considered the memoir to be an important source of information for the history of the university. Thirdly and finally, this publication is part of the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the IH and, in a sense, marks its public inauguration. The fate also dictated that the memoir came out

at a very special moment – during the time of a growing crisis of Universitas and heated disputes on the future of the academia and its place in social life.



1. Director of the Institute of History of the University of Lodz, Professor D. Jeziorny, speaking at the promotion of K. Śreniowska's memoir. Behind the table: (from left) Professor J. Kolbuszewska, Professor D. Jeziorny, Professor R. Stobiecki. Photo: M. Karkocha

In the subsequent part of his speech, Professor R. Stobiecki presented the life and the scholarly career of the author of memoir. Krystyna Maria Śreniowska, née Oppenauer, was born in 1914 in Lviv into an intelligentsia family. In 1933 she graduated from the Adam Mickiewicz Private Middle School for Women and shortly afterwards enrolled at the Jan Kazimierz University in Lviv. She studied history and at the same time attended the supplementary School of Diplomacy at the Faculty of Law of the same university, which she graduated from in 1936. Before the outbreak of the war, she started working as the editorial assistant of 'Kwartalnik Historyczny' [Historical Quarterly]. (She collaborated with this periodical again after 1945, writing articles and reviews). A year later she moved to Cracow, where she first completed a two-month unpaid internship at the Czartoryski Family Museum Library,

and then took a similar position at the Jagiellonian Library. The outbreak of World War II found the young student of history in Lviv. In November 1939, while seeking employment, she was sent to the Ossolineum, at the time of the Soviet rule, where she was employed in the Manuscripts Department. In the following year she married Stanisław Śreniowski, historian of the state and law, who worked at the University of Lviv. In the spring of 1942, the young couple moved to Cracow, and then settled in Warsaw, where Śreniowska became involved in clandestine education and worked in a kitchen run by participants of the Warsaw Uprising. In March 1945, the future professor and her husband settled in Łódź, where she was employed in the Department of Social History of Antiquity and the Middle Ages at the then newly established University of Lodz. For the next forty years, until 1985, she remained affiliated with this university, except for a short period when she worked at the Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences (in 1953–1961). In 1956 she obtained her doctoral degree (at that time referred to as a candidate of sciences) based on her dissertation on Stanisław Zakrzewski. Eight years later she completed her postdoctoral studies (*habilitacja*) on the cult of Tadeusz Kościuszko (dissertation: *Kościuszko. Kształtowanie poglądów na bohatera narodowego 1794–1894* [Kościuszko. The evolution of views on the national hero], Warsaw 1964) and was granted the title of a docent. In 1992, she was appointed full professor.

Śreniowska's scholarly output covers several areas. Initially, she studied the history of Jagiellonian Poland. This subject was the main focus of her master's thesis and short papers published before World War II. After 1945, when, due to external reasons, it was impossible to continue researching the Jagiellonian era, she turned towards a new academic discipline, namely the history of historiography. In time Śreniowska, alongside such figures as Marian Henryk Serejski, Jan Adamus, Franciszek Bronowski, Andrzej Feliks Grabski and Józef Dutkiewicz, became a leading representative of the Łódź centre for historiographic research. Her first major work in this field was a monograph devoted to Stanisław Zakrzewski. In the sixties of the 20th century and later, the main subject of her work was historical memory and awareness, with particular emphasis on the Kościuszko tradition. Krystyna Śreniowska also studied émigré historiography and published articles on methodology (including the category of time).



2. Professor J. Kolbuszewska discussing the structure and content of the memoir. Photo: M. Karkocha



3. Professor W. Puś on K. Śreniowska during the debate. Photo: M. Karkocha

Over the years of her work at the University of Lodz, the author of the diary made some great contributions to the academic community. In 1969–1972 she was the head of the Extramural Studies at the Faculty of Philosophy and History, and in 1981–1985 she was the deputy director of the Institute of History. Importantly, she was one of a handful of independent members of the Institute's staff who were openly involved in the political opposition. She supported the initiatives of the Workers' Defence Committee (KOR), the Social Self-Defence Committee (KSS) of KOR, was member of the Solidarity Trade Union (NSZZ), and helped students during the famous strikes of 1980–1981, which concluded with the signing of the Łódź Agreement and the registration of the Independent Student Association.

Krystyna Śreniowska supervised two doctoral dissertations and several dozen Master's theses. For her didactic and organisational achievements she was awarded, among others, the Gold Cross of Merit (1973), the Medal of the University of Lodz 'In Service of Society and Science' (1975), the Award of the Ministry of Higher Education (1972) and the Commander's Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta (2009).

In conclusion of his speech, Professor R. Stobiecki stated that he remembered the Professor as a modest, courageous woman, a role model for many generations of Łódź historians. Her co-workers appreciated her for her independence, selfless kindness, her views on people, even if sometimes harsh, and the advice she offered. The presented memoir, in the opinion of the speaker, reflects her character well.

Next to speak was Professor Jolanta Kolbuszewska. She briefly discussed the structure of the book, the materials that served as the basis for the publication, and finally outlined the factual potential of Śreniowska's memoirs. The diary was completed as a typed manuscript circa 2000, by which time the author added handwritten amendments and notes to the text. The manuscript was delivered to Professor's family and students and was in the possession of Professor R. Stobiecki and Professor Zbigniew Romek from the Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences. All versions are the same and they have become the basis of the discussed edition. The memoir consists of 104 pages. Chronologically, it covers the period from 1914 to the beginning of the eighties of the 20th century (up until the return of K. Śreniowska's daughter, Barbara, from the internment camp).

The memoir ends abruptly, unfinished, and the published version retains that ending. The reminiscences are accompanied by three kinds of footnotes: biographic, factual and bibliographic. Punctuation and spelling have been modernised. In a number of cases, editors decided to leave out minor fragments concerning personal information on living persons if it has not been confirmed by the archives. Each such omission is indicated in the text.

As for the content of the memoir, Professor J. Kolbuszewska stated that it can be viewed from many standpoints. First of all, it is an extensive source of information about the generation of intelligentsia that was formed intellectually in the Second Polish Republic, and later, as a result of the cruel verdicts of History, was eradicated from their 'small homelands' and had to rebuild their lives in a new, unfamiliar and not particularly welcoming place. Secondly, Krystyna Śreniowska's memoirs offer the reminiscences of a woman who decided to pursue a difficult scholarly career, a woman who had to cope with extremely difficult experiences (the tragic death of her husband in 1957) and struggled with the hardships of single motherhood. Thirdly and finally, the memoir presented to the reader reflects the history of Lodz University and the community of historians. Śreniowska was critical of this milieu, which she expressed in strong and not always fair opinions.

In the subsequent part of her statement, Professor J. Kolbuszewska said that the memoir *Moje życie* was written in a unique fashion, reflecting the author's personality. It is dominated by short sentences, which rather sparingly outline the described events and situations. However, it does not mean that no emotions can be discerned. On the contrary, there is a whole range of them, from love to friendship, to disappointment and fear. The speaker expressed her hope that this book would be of interest not only to historians, historians of historiography and the staff of the University of Lodz, but also to representatives of other scholarly disciplines. At the end of the meeting she thanked the audience for attending, Professor Antoni Różalski, Rector of the University of Lodz, and Professor Maciej Kokoszko, Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy and History, for their financial support, and the Publishing House of the University of Lodz for printing the book and organising its promotion.

The final point on the agenda was a discussion. It was opened by the former Rector of the University of Lodz, Professor Wiesław Puś PhD, who shared his memories of K. Śreniowska and expressed his

high regard for her memoir. Among the speakers were Jerzy Grobis, professor emeritus of the University of Lodz, Professor Zbigniew Romek, former student of Śreniowska, Paweł Spodenkiewicz PhD, KOR activist interned under martial law, and Elżbieta Doncbach, activist of the opposition in the People's Republic of Poland. All of them shared their recollections on the author of the memoir as a steadfast, righteous woman, capable of challenging various societal norms, who led her life against the reality in which she had to live, and an extremely kind, friendly, caring person, devoted to her cause. Professor Romek stated that the book *Moje życie* perfectly reflects the personality of Śreniowska, while P. Spodenkiewicz PhD expressed his regret that she did not leave any more memoirs. The discussion also focused on the issue of omitting several excerpts from the diary at the stage of editorial work. Professors Z. Romek and Krzysztof Lesiakowski from the University of Lodz (IHU) considered this procedure to be completely unnecessary and bearing the characteristics of censorship. The son of the late Professor, Józef Śreniowski, a well-known democratic opposition activist, member of KOR, founder member of the KSS KOR arrested during martial law, who was the last to speak, was of a similar opinion. He said in a sense that both his parents were naive. They believed that it would be possible to build a Polish system in Poland that would not be a copy of the Soviet system. He addressed the fact that his mother was critical of the University because she had a different understanding of the role of higher education. She wanted to see university as a place of scholarly dispute, not just a place of education. It is a question of recognising a different model of the Academia. He also reminded that Krystyna Śreniowska was not fond of much ceremony. She was a modest person.

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