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Iza Biezuńska-Malowist and the Young Papyrologist

In this very personal and — as it were — pointilliste contribution to this volume, I wish to recall some earlier memories of Iza Biezuńska-Malowist and of visits to Warsaw, and also to take the opportunity to acknowledge some of the important influences that Iza had on my intellectual life, on my development as an ancient historian. Our relationship started of course as one of student and mentor but I like to think that over the many years that we were in contact it developed into one of friendship. And this was a relationship that for me was important in opening up both approaches to history and a fuller awareness of life outside the narrow bounds of home in what we now call the UK (then we knew it as Britain).

I should like to start by describing our encounters, which lasted from 1962 until I suppose her death in 1995, though the last time I saw and talked with Iza was in 1988. For her that period represented just the last third of an eventful life; for me in contrast these were formative years, and in looking back I shall try to highlight the importance of such contacts in the international world of scholarship — something that I think meant as much to Iza as to those of us who were living in ‘the west’. In doing this I’m fully aware of the problems of memory — what we do and what we don’t recall — and I am grateful to others involved in our encounters for aiding me through their files and different memories of the time.¹

I first met Iza in the late summer of 1962 in Aix-en-Provence at the Second International Congress of Economic History, where she acted as a session chair.² I had graduated as a BA from Cambridge in 1961 and after a year’s break was about to start research as a PhD student back in Cambridge. I was in Aix, however, with my whole family — my father (Frank William Walbank) was attending the meeting while my mother was in a local clinic having her appendix removed — and, together with my brother and sister and a lively group of young

¹ I should like to thank Michael H. Crawford and John A. Thompson who, at different times, shared my visits to Poland and Włodzimierz Lengauer both for the invitation to contribute to the memorial celebrations in November 2015 and for checking various dates.

² See *Deuxième Conférence Internationale d’Histoire Économique, Aix-en-Provence 1962*, vol. I, *Trade and Politics in the Ancient World*, ed. M.I. Finley, Paris: Mouton 1965.

researchers, we youngsters enjoyed the non-lecture side of congress life, eating in the University cafeteria (where wine came with lunch), and sitting and talking in cafés along the Cours Mirabeau. To some extent we interacted with the older congress delegates but, as is often the case with the young, we were mostly bound up in ourselves, preferring the ‘exciting’ company of our own contemporaries to that of older delegates. I did not then do more than *meet* with Iza, who despite her approachability belonged to ‘them’ rather than to ‘us’.

Once I started research and was groping around for a topic that would interest me I was urged by my doctoral supervisor Moses Finley to consider looking at the wealth of papyrological sources and to contact Professor Biezuńska-Małowist, who would help to guide me in the mysteries of papyrology and introduce me to Hellenistic Egypt. I regret to say that I did not then make use of this tip. I was young and very shy — and foolish too! Instead I found my own subject and spent time in Brussels working with the Belgian papyrologist Jean Bingen. It was only seven years later in 1969 that I became fully conscious of what I had missed. By then I had finished my doctorate and obtained a Junior Research Fellowship in Cambridge, as well as getting married. In September 1969 there was a five-day meeting in the beautiful setting of the Abbé de Royaumont, some 30 km north of Paris where, under the auspices of the 6^{ième} Section of the École Pratique des Hautes Études, a small international group of around twenty scholars met to discuss ‘Problèmes de la terre en Grèce ancienne’. Moses Finley directed the meeting and in 1973 edited a publication of the papers we gave. I spoke on the opium poppy (grown for oil not opium) as a Greek innovation in Egyptian agriculture; Iza’s paper was on landed property in Roman Egypt with particular emphasis on the Roman element.³ It was a memorable week and for me an important one in developing my self-confidence. Iza and Moses conspired over how they would run things. They decided that the youngest person there — that was Dorothy (me!) — should introduce the first session, the next youngest the next session, and so on through the week. Well — though somewhat daunting for me and other youngish participants — that broke all ice and set up an excellent atmosphere; and so for the rest of the week friendly and constructive discussion went on non-stop both in and out of sessions.

This for ancient historians was the era of structuralism, of viewing history (in French, the main language of the meeting) ‘dans le temps et l’espace’, new approaches that were not always easy for us to grasp. One’s first academic meeting can be formative in how one feels about a discipline; this was a particularly happy experience in which the young historian was made to feel at home in the exciting company of senior academics. I now began to know Iza, and to learn from her.

³ D.J. Crawford, ‘The opium poppy: a study in Ptolemaic agriculture’; I. Biezuńska-Małowist, ‘La propriété foncière dans l’Égypte romaine et le rôle de l’élément romain’, [in:] *Problèmes de la terre en Grèce ancienne*, ed. M.I. Finley, Paris and The Hague: Mouton 1973, pp. 223–251 and 253–265.

Less than two years later, in spring 1971 Iza and Marian (the distinguished historian who was her husband) came to spend a year at the new college of Clare Hall in Cambridge. Clare Hall had been founded just five years earlier (in 1966) as the first college to emphasize research rather than the teaching of undergraduates. It was to be a community of scholars engaged in active research work, with graduate students and Cambridge academics together with an ever-changing group of visiting scholars who are housed and fed in the college. Clare Hall continues to boast a lively and informal atmosphere compared with that of other, older colleges, and Iza and Marian held — I hope also enjoyed — year-long fellowships there. We locals certainly benefitted from their presence and Iza played an active role in the Cambridge University Research Seminar in Ancient History then run by Moses Finley, who in 1970 had succeeded Arnold Hugh Martin Jones as Professor of Ancient History in Cambridge. The seminar was focused on Roman property. Once again the papers resulted in a later volume edited by Finley.⁴ My own paper on imperial estates, which in the first place had been confined to Egypt, was extended for the volume and — to my immense pride — a version was also published in Polish in 1975.⁵

How come, you may ask? Well early in 1974, I had been invited by Iza (together with my husband Michael Crawford) to visit the University of Warsaw and to give a lecture at the Papyrological Institute. So on 3 January we set out from home via Paris where we took the overnight train with couchettes to Warsaw. The train itself was going on to Moscow. That in itself was a new experience. We had earlier been in East Germany to work in the Pergamum museum, but a Russian train with a guard to each carriage with a samovar and constant supply of tea for the passengers was something entirely new and, in the event, rather welcome. Fortunately too, our guard turned a blind eye to the fact that we were transporting a long strip of metal, a decorative strip to run along the side of the Małowist car — a replacement Fiat part that could not then be found in Poland. That is probably the strangest piece of luggage I have ever taken by train.

Traveling long distance by train is something we do not now often do but I look back to such journeys with nostalgia. Passengers would generally build up a good rapport, share their food, communicate somehow with one another in a mix of different languages and put up with each other's snoring overnight. It was on the return journey from Warsaw in January 1974 that we met the most interesting fellow-passenger I can remember. He was the man responsible, he told us, for inseminating all the cows in Poland. Such a possibility — the product I assume of a centralised system of dairy farming with a mega sperm bank for the whole

⁴ M.I. Finley (ed.), *Studies in Roman Property*, Cambridge Classical Studies, Cambridge 1976.

⁵ D.J. Crawford, 'Imperial estates', [in:] Finley, *Studies in Roman Property*, pp. 35–70; 'Domeny cesarzy rzymskich w I–III wieku n.e.', *Przegląd Historyczny* 66 (1975), pp. 350–363 (with summaries in Russian and French).

country — was almost incredible to a young English couple. The details were fascinating and together we all enjoyed the food that Iza had managed to find for us for supper. But I digress.

Warsaw in early January 1974 was, I remember, very, very cold. We stayed in a hotel but spent most of the day, when not out, in the comfortable Małowist apartment at Brzozowa 10/4 with its wonderful library. Things were very hard in 70s Warsaw; food was not easy to find and consumer goods were few. The warmth of our hosts and all the others we met made up for all else. I well remember too the long sticks to be seen protruding out of the windows above with game — hares, pheasants or other fowl — attached to them, just out there in the air in a natural form of deep-freeze. That made for a sight of luxury! For, as Iza explained, many enjoyed contacts out in the country and despite the lack of goods in the official shops, as always when things are hard (I think back to wartime Britain of my youth) somehow people will manage.

We had a full programme of visits around the already rebuilt centre of the city — the National Museum was particularly memorable with the buildings and objects recently acquired from Nubia, from Faras and elsewhere, as part of the archaeological rescue mission set in place before the flooding of the area by Nasser's high dam at Aswan in Egypt. Professor Kazimierz Michałowski showed us round and it was a pleasure in November 2015 to go back and visit the fine new display. I spent time with the papyrologists and gave a talk on *skepē*, protection, in Egypt arising from some work I had been doing on a Berlin papyrus. More of this later, but this in fact was my *first* publication in a Polish journal, in the well-known *Journal of Juristic Papyrology*, with which I am happy still to be connected.⁶ One cold day we were taken out into the country to visit the palace of Nieborów, returning for lunch with Hanna and Bronisław Geremek. I had written my doctoral thesis and first book on an Egyptian village in the south Fayum (Kerkeosiris)⁷ and Hanna had done the same for the north Fayum village of Karanis.⁸ We had much to discuss, which we did with pleasure, and we kept up the connection, later on one occasion meeting up again in New York. It is so sad that neither of the Geremeks is still with us, but that is the case with so many of our Warsaw friends — I think of Zbigniew Borkowski or Jan Krzysztof Winnicki and others too. For the two of us, these were fascinating days and Iza acted as enabler and consummate hostess throughout our stay, introducing us to other colleagues — Anna Świerkówna of course and the young papyrologists of the time.

⁶ 'Skepe in Sokonopaiou Nesos', *Journal of Juristic Papyrology* 18 (1974), pp. 169–175.

⁷ *Kerkeosiris: an Egyptian Village in the Ptolemaic Period*, Cambridge Classical Studies, Cambridge 1971 (paperback reprint 2007).

⁸ H. Geremek, *Karanis, communauté rurale de l'Égypte romaine au IIe–IIIe siècle de notre ère*, *Archiwum Filologiczne* 17, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków 1969.

And now I must fast forward, forward through various papyrological and other international congresses, through Iza Biežuńska's two influential books on *Slavery*,⁹ which I still regularly consult, on my side through a divorce and, later, a second marriage, through a year in Princeton but mainly still in Cambridge, until 1988 when once again I was invited to visit Warsaw and to lecture here. And what a pleasure that was. Marian, alas, had died on the 30th of August that year so when John Thompson and I visited at the end of September — 29 September–6 October 1988 — Iza was just adjusting to her loss. Nevertheless, as before she again looked after us and entertained us magnificently, providing a full programme of hospitality with a whole array of colleagues and students. After my talk and discussions in the Papyrological Institute, we were taken for two days to Kraków. Back in Warsaw on different days we enjoyed two meals out with Anna Świderkówna, who somehow had the ability to persuade hotels to feed us — something not at all to be taken for granted in those straitened days — and were shown round the Royal Castle and city by Adam Łukaszewicz. Another day we had lunch with Adam Ziółkowski and his family, and spent a most memorable evening with Ewa Wipszycka and Benedetto Bravo (we well remember their kosher vodka). Yet another evening we were taken to the opera (where we coincided with Professor Józef Méléze Modrzejewski), and in the course of our visit we met many of those who are still my colleagues today. A young Tomek Derda, we remember, drove us all round town and to and from the airport in his small car (worried much of the time that it might run out of fuel). All of this was orchestrated by Iza. Looking back on it all, I do not know how she did it so soon after the death of her husband.

Well things have changed in Poland now. In 1989 the Berlin wall fell and the city we visited in 2013 for the 27th International Papyrological Congress was more like other cities of the west, though Warsaw remains a city acutely aware of its history as was brought home to us on August 1st. In the morning we visited the Museum of the Warsaw Rising and in the afternoon at 5.00 pm we came out from the University to stand on the street when the bells rang out and everything came to a halt for a full minute to mark the outbreak of the uprising. The twentieth century was surely a troubled one for the city of Warsaw as indeed for Poland as a whole, and in her life and experience Iza Biežuńska–Małowist was a survivor of many of its troubles.

I want to end with a personal expression of gratitude for all that Iza taught me. I go back to my first Warsaw visit in 1974 when I gave a paper on the role of protection in Ptolemaic society, which I presented as the other side to corruption. In discussion at home later Iza pointed out to me how culturally specific — even simplistic — were my reactions: the product of my own background and upbringing in a society with particular (puritanical) moral values. To understand the realities

⁹ *L'esclavage dans l'Égypte gréco-romaine*, vol. I, *Période ptolémaïque*; vol. II, *Période romaine*, *Archiwum Filologiczne* 30 and 35, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków 1974 and 1977.

of Ptolemaic Egypt, I needed to examine the structure of Ptolemaic society and to think more broadly about how other societies worked. I hope I took this lesson to heart.¹⁰ I remember it now so clearly. It is conversations like that with colleagues from different backgrounds that are so important in our development. For Iza too I think such contacts were important. A broad international context is crucial for what we do; this way we can learn from the experience of others. It is for this insight above all else that I want here to end by thanking Iza Biežuńska-Małowist.

¹⁰ As a result, see for instance D.J. Crawford, 'The good official of Ptolemaic Egypt', [in:] *Das ptolemäische Ägypten*, ed. H. Maehler and V.M. Stročka, Mainz am Rhein 1978, pp.195–202.