In Memoriam of Professor Jerzy Kruppé

Professor Jerzy Kruppé passed away on 9 February 2022. Even though more than six months have gone by since his funeral, his memory is very much still alive, and, admittedly, it will be difficult for me to stay clear of a subjective perspective on his personality and achievements. After all, every eulogy is defined by who writes it and what they remember. What I will recall here, then, is the Professor's last twenty or so years, which he devoted to academic work at the University of Warsaw's Institute of Archaeology. It is at this stage of his life that I had the privilege to know him, learn from him, and with time discover what he found important, or simply interesting. I was sure back then, as I am now, that he was an extraordinary person who not only taught but also formed attitudes to scholarship and to life.

I met the Professor in 1998 as a second-year university student. In hindsight I cannot say that I remember this initial meeting very well, but that is because this memory overlaps with many subsequent ones. Perhaps, too, the academic year is such a plain time that it does not allow us to record the moments when we first meet the people who would accompany us for the rest of our lives. The first lasting memory was the oral exam concluding his late mediaeval and early modern archaeology class. According to legends circulating among students, this was a demanding trial, extending far beyond the usual examination time. On top of that, one also had to know all there was to know about the artefacts hoarded in Room 27 of the Institute's old seat on Żwirki i Wigury Street. The reality confirmed these speculations. More than that. An exam in name only, it was a conversation about the Middle Ages concerning all aspects of material culture, in which one neither felt jittery about the situation or the interlocutor nor counted questions. Maybe that is why I no longer remember how many hours it lasted and the nervousness, tiredness and stress I must have felt. On many occasions, I have tried to recreate these conditions during the exams I administered, but the results, I fear, have been dim in comparison with this first experience.

Most of the students who were able to wade through the exam went on to participate in excavations at Puck Castle. At that time, this was a crucial stage in the professional education of future late mediaeval and early modern archaeologists. During my university years, only a few people would take part and the very fact of participation left a lasting impression. It was also a place of special memories connected with the Professor. Young students at the time, we perceived him as an aged man. This line would blur, however, during joint work and the afternoons and evenings spent down at the Cassubian or the Kalaś. Spending leisure time with the director is common during fieldwork, but I am probably not the only one who is aware how special the Puck experiences were. This was more than fraternity. The distance was still there, but the conversations felt intimate. It is impossible now to recall all the topics, but they concerned both archaeology and our emotions, beliefs and plans. This intimacy spread beyond our table; the Professor would chat up a considerable portion of the regulars, thereby engaging us with the local community. Some of the acquaintances made there and then have remained until today.

The Professor's favourite fieldwork activity was washing the artefacts. He recommended it to everyone who wanted to know what had been excavated. For us, this was the first opportunity to have a face-to-face talk with him on the subject we all found crucial: the topics of our master's theses. The ideas we put forward, even those vague or far-fetched, with time took shape. It always seemed to us that the idea was ours alone, and the talk just helped crystallize it. Only afterwards did we come to see how creative the Professor was in steering the conversation so as to help us verbalize our ideas. It was at that point that we realized the value of these individual encounters, whose atmosphere was much like the one we knew from exams or seminars.

Yet my most vivid student memory is working on my master's thesis. To this day, the experience is unforgettable to me. It was not easy to behold one's proudly submitted text strewn with corrections, questions, remarks and comments. For most of us, it was a trial you had to face. Luckily, you were not alone. The Professor's demanding nature co-existed with his keenness to answer all the question marks – even if this took hours and was not always easy. Owing to that, we knew how to continue our work and what words to use to achieve greater clarity. Our texts became the source of numerous anecdotes about forbidden phrases: 'underpinning the… wait, is this a coat?', 'within the frame… must be a painting', 'the very fabric of… are we talking textiles?'. Still, whenever I myself tutor bachelor or master's candidates, I am reminded of his

patience and wisdom. This was more than instruction, it was academic upbringing given one step at a time.

In my student years, I was scarcely aware exactly who we had contact with and what we participated in. I took these experiences to be my own, but in reality they were, in a sense, canonical and belonged to a group of people. They were not limited to university education, and, years later, we can see they were part of a broader vision. It is far from usual to be able to grow as an academic under the wings of a fully accomplished scholar who is focused not on building his position but on developing your ideas, even if just in the context of your master's thesis. An overview of our topics allows us to attempt to reconstruct the Professor's areas of interest within archaeology. Our initial topics were never of a general character. The research problem usually started with one artefact or one detail demanding explanation. Granted, as undergraduates, we were only able to fathom the archaeological world from the perspective of those singular finds. The Professor would transform that detail into a point of departure for a broader topic, requiring extensive research and study. The quality of the resulting theses is confirmed by the fact that many of them got published and are still referenced. In sum, they marked the scope of the Professor's interests, which encompassed architecture as well as ceramic vessels, tiles, fishing weights, barber-surgeons' cupping glass, glass vessels, window panes, wooden items, all sorts of militaria, styluses, metal heel plates, leather items, lead seals… and even garlands and pins. To me, this enumeration is not just a list of topics: each point is associated with a specific person who would later become a long-standing acquaintance. All in all, without doubt, the Professor's area of interest centred around Humans and the objects that surround and define them. This knowledge was most important to him and, as it turns out, also most captivating.

An indispensable part of all the theses he supervised was a survey of written sources and research on the historical context. This, in fact, was also one of the main themes of his lectures: what can be learned from written sources as well as where to find and how to read them. What we failed to notice at the time was that we were being introduced not just to archaeology proper but also to historical archaeology. Only once I graduated did I have the opportunity to discover the breadth of the Professor's knowledge of history, which was, incidentally, evidenced by his many publications. This was the element of his archaeological canon that I probably see most clearly today. At the same time, he instilled in people fascinated with the Middle Ages an interest in what he referred to as the Old Polish Period, by which he meant the archaeology and history of the First Polish Republic, or the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, with its rich culture and, above all, diversity. I cannot be sure whether this was a deliberate strategy on the Professor's part or whether it resulted from his experiences and pursuits. Interestingly, when I look at archaeological problems that engage me nowadays, I notice that over time they increasingly concern the Early Modern times. The same applies to my colleagues who attended the same graduate seminar.

My acquaintance with the Professor continued after I graduated. This concerned many of those who had defended their master's theses under his supervision. Suffice it to say that for many of them, the seminar opened the gates to academia. It was post graduation that we had the chance to learn more of the Professor's story. The task proved difficult: as eager as he was to invite people into his archaeological world, he avoided private matters. Though he was an open person, speaking about himself was not in his nature. I was surprised to discover he had fought in the Warsaw Uprising, participated in the archaeological research during the post-war rebuilding of the city, and had done fieldwork in numerous other sites in Poland and abroad. This extensive contacts would often come to light during the study tours organized by the Students' Association for Old Polish Archaeology to Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine, the Czech Republic and Hungary, where he was always received with utmost respect. It was away from Warsaw, where daily hustle prevented us all from engaging in longer conversations, that he was most likely to share stories about himself and others. In hindsight, however, I see that with all the everyday busyness, he would always make time to meet and offer a good word or a piece of advice – whether this concerned the successive generations of students, the staff of the Institute or the doormen. This also gave rise to countless anecdotes, far too many to remember or count.

Participating in the research projects headed by the Professor allowed one to get a sense of his unorthodox approach to the investigated subjects. His thinking was never schematic, and most of his studies followed a complex and comprehensive line of reasoning. One might be forgiven to think he was led by intuition, but in fact his work was based on experience and an extensive knowledge of sources, which allowed him to pose key questions about realities of the past. That was also the reason why not all his deliberations ended up being published: some remained typescripts, waiting for the right moment. His work taught looking at the past in an original manner which appreciates the diversity of human personalities and, consequently, behaviours. He would often grow impatient when, back in our student days, we would try to generalize or to read too much into typologies of objects. That was also why his greatest works avoid unequivocal classifications. Perhaps owing to that they remain topical rather than fade away with time.

All these images paint the picture of the Professor's uniqueness, which I think was seen by everyone who had the privilege to meet him and work with him. He was an extraordinary man, but that was due to his or-

dinary, everyday behaviour. In situations like these he was simply natural and authentic. This also applied to all kinds of talks and consultations: he was always there to offer his opinion and advice, focusing on what was the essence of the problem and steering away from less important aspects. He was a person devoted to keeping memories alive, to preserving sources, not just archaeological ones but also those arising during our lifetime. He often demonstrated distance towards the articles he was writing or conferences he was planning, though he always treated them seriously. We were most surprised at his indifference towards his own achievements and published works – he liked to repeat he was 'an accidental professor'. Although this is understandable in the context of his biography, time showed that he was a Professor in every meaning of the word. Through thick and thin, he instilled in us the habits of honest work, inquisitiveness and acting in harmony with ourselves. But I owe him much more. That is why my memories of him, although solemn, are also warm – as if I was remembering my archaeological childhood, a time when you can still afford to follow a mentor and guardian. One who, even if at times strict and uncompromising, allows us to look with a slight tongue in cheek and reach beyond the horizon.

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