

# In Memoriam

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BRONISŁAW GEREMEK  
(6 MARCH 1932–13 JULY 2008)

In the early afternoon of Sunday 13 July 2008 the media aired the shattering news — Bronislaw Geremek had been killed in a car accident. The state funeral held subsequently expressed the homage paid to one of the most distinguished Poles of the later 20th century and to his impact on the shape of democratic Poland and the new Europe. A statesman and a patriot had passed away. In this short *in memoriam* I wish to pay my respects to the historian, who reconfigured the study and our understanding of the past, who enriched it both in scope and ways of exploration.

Bronislaw Geremek was born into a Jewish family in Warsaw on 6 March 1932. German occupation of Poland not only cut short his childhood but also destroyed his entire world. Most of his family perished in the Nazi concentration camps of Auschwitz and Birkenau. His escape from the Warsaw Ghetto, along with his mother and elder brother, saved his life. At the end of the war he was living in a town of Wschowa, in Greater Poland, where Stefan Geremek, his foster father was a magistrate. A few years later Geremek returned to Warsaw, where in 1950 he graduated from high school and enrolled at the Department of History of the Warsaw University. His MA thesis of 1955 dealt with the economy of Prussia under the Teutonic Order in the first half of the 15th century (published in *Przegląd Historyczny* in 1956). He started his doctoral studies in the Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences, an institution he remained attached to until his retirement in 2001.

His intellectual background was formed by many different milieus, his traumatic childhood experience and different ideological choices of his youth as well as the close contacts established with distinguished Polish and French historians. During the nightmare of the German occupation he met Janusz Korczak and — as he admitted later — this ended his childhood dream of becoming a writer. His ghetto experiences, treated as a sealed chapter of his life, which he rarely opened and made only a few references to, made him the man he was. After the war his early ideological choices made under the influence of his foster father and outstanding teachers at the Wschowa high school led him to join the scout movement, still pervaded by a pre-war spirit as well as the Marian Society, but later — in Warsaw — to go the other way, and enthusiastically embrace the communist doctrine. He joined the Polish United Workers Party early, only to sever that connection in 1968, after the Warsaw Pact's invasion of Czechoslovakia.

It was the university studies that turned his interest toward the Middle Ages, an area of study to which he devoted his major research. His early academic

master, Marian Malowist headed a flourishing school of research on medieval economic and social history. His first students, later to become the stars of the Warsaw medieval and early modern school of history — Henryk Samsonowicz, Benedykt Zientara, Antoni Maćzak and Andrzej Wyrobisz — became Geremek's closest personal friends. They were a particular band of scholars often meeting in private in Geremek's Warsaw Old Town apartment to enjoy each other's company and debate historical issues. His professional career benefited also from long stays in Paris and his close cooperation with the *Annales* school. His first French scholarship at the VI Section of the École Pratique des Hautes Études took place in 1956. He returned there in 1957/8 and became a director of the Polish Cultural Centre at Sorbonne between 1962 and 1965. His masters there were Fernand Braudel and Maurice Lombard.

The friendship struck with Jacques Le Goff and Michel Mollat and his minute research of the Parisian archives made Geremek a historian of late medieval Paris and an expert in the history of the margins of society, an area of study which was just being discovered. His doctoral thesis on hired labour in late medieval Paris, published in Poland in 1962 and twice in France and Italy (*Le salariat dans l'artisanat parisien aux XIII<sup>e</sup>-XV<sup>e</sup> siècles. Étude sur le marché de la main-d'œuvre au Moyen Âge*) earned him international renown. His main title to fame, however, comes from his research on poverty and social marginality initiated in a group of scholars formed around Michel Mollat. His studies initially concerned late medieval Paris (*Margins of Society in Late Medieval Paris*, 1987; Polish edition in 1971) but later also larger areas of Europe between the 14th and 18th centuries. The series of studies published from the 1960s — in Tadeusz Manteuffel's and Corrado Barbagallo's *Festschrift* collections, in *Studi storici*, in Einaudi's *Storia d'Italia*, in *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, in *Enciclopedia Einaudi*, in various collections of articles were finally brought together and crowned in two books: *Poverty: a History* (1994, first edition in Italy in 1986) and *Les Fils de Caïn. L'image des pauvres et des vagabonds dans la littérature européenne* (1991, first edition in Italy in 1988). Both were written in 1978 in Washington D.C. during a stay at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and were published abroad since they could not have passed the censorship restrictions imposed on Geremek after martial law was introduced in Poland in December 1981. Before they were published, Geremek produced a collection of primary sources with an extensive commentary: *Inutiles au monde: truands et misérables dans l'Europe moderne (1350-1600)* (published in 1980).

These works showed Geremek to be a 'total historian' reaching out to include economy, sociology, social psychology, economic and social history to provide a holistic view of the past, searching to penetrate the levels of mental structures in order to understand not only the phenomena of the *longue durée* but also those of change, which were of particular interest to him. The studies on the margins of Parisian society were primarily socio-economic, while later research concentrated on social and cultural values. From research of poverty and vice seen as common social behaviour, he went on to study impoverishment as stigma, to investigate the change in religious doctrines, to review the frame of social attitudes and social policies toward poverty, to show changes of its imagery and reactions to it. Last but not least he also investigated the issue of

social exclusion and the groups targeted for such procedures (articles on the Gypsies, lepers and heretics).

These important insights were enriched by a study in cultural history, an area he considered crucial at the time and employed new research methods to investigate. His interest stemmed in part from a project undertaken in the 1960s by Tadeusz Manteuffel, who envisaged a plan to write a comprehensive cultural history of medieval Poland. Geremek cooperated in its first volume (1985 edition), and from 1976 on he chaired for ten years a Group on Late Medieval Polish Culture, which he himself brought to life in order to prepare the second volume dealing with the 14th and 15th centuries. This monumental work conceived, edited and written by him and his students in the mid-1980s was published only many years later due to political constraints (*Kultura Polski średniowiecznej, XIV-XV w.*, 1997). His contribution to the studies on medieval culture is very little known outside Poland and yet perhaps it constitutes the most important part of his academic achievement. It is the best testimony of his distinguishing characteristic: openness toward new inspirations and new methods as well as his skill in reaching for unexplored primary sources. In this vein, he analyzed the Old Polish terms denoting the months of the year (essay in vol. I: 'Man and Time: The Unity of Medieval Culture'), laid the theoretical basis for the exploration of folklore and literature as historical sources, held conferences which sought to provide a Polish answer to research propositions formulated in the West of Europe (a conference in 1975: 'Elite and Popular Culture in Late Medieval Poland', published in 1978). The second volume of the comprehensive history of Polish medieval culture is a unique achievement in Polish historiography. Geremek abandoned the approach formulated by Tadeusz Manteuffel, who viewed culture as composed of two spheres, the existential and the spiritual. Geremek proposed that the aim of cultural history is not so much to describe an individual as a biological entity, gifted with fixed psychological and physical attributes, with his own urges and aspirations, but to show how these biological structures acquired meaning in relations between people, in modes of action through sensitivity and ways of thinking. His main focus were mentality and imagery (faith, attitudes toward death, sin, play, political culture and historical consciousness, concepts of perceiving space, feelings and modes of thought). To present these issues he attempted to penetrate the levels of culture: to show differences in the cultural equipment of different groups and milieus, their different models of expression, oppositions effected by stages of literacy, absorption of the norms of high culture and the tensions between *culture savante* and its popular counterpart. The most difficult parts, which required a complete methodological maturity and full command of the sources were written by Geremek himself ['Levels of Culture: Oral and Written Delivery', 'Man and Games: The Culture of Play', 'Public Life and Political Culture', 'Imagery of Space and Sense of Geography', 'Cultural Modernization'].

This was the last book he edited and partly wrote in the Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences. He was more and more drawn into the political activity of the Polish democratic opposition, which he joined in the late 1970s, becoming one of the leaders and teachers in the illegal Society for Educational Courses. For this reason, his academic career suffered: he was often refused a passport to prevent him from taking part in international conferences and

research projects. His political activity from August 1980 was well-known. At that time he joined the strike in Gdańsk Shipyard and became an adviser to Lech Wałęsa, but in fact much more — an author of strategy aimed, first, to introduce principles of democracy into public life and, later, to build a new and democratic Poland. Politics drew him away from what was formerly his greatest passion — a study of medieval history — but in consequence brought upon him a wave of repression. He was interned from 12 December 1981 to 23 December 1982, 'imprisoned' in Poland without a chance to travel abroad despite invitations from the most prestigious academic centres, and despite their protests, under arrest and in prison from 17 May to 29 July 1983, finally expelled from the Institute of History in 1985. He found employment in the Jesuit Writers' Library, his articles were published abroad or in the Catholic press in Poland. Formally he returned to the Institute of History only in 1989, but his time was henceforth devoted to politics: plans and programmes to implement a civil society in the new Poland (*The Idea of a Civil Society*, Research Triangle Park, N.C., 1992) as well as projects for the new European order (Bronisław Geremek & Robert Picht [eds.], *Visions d'Europe*, Paris, 2007). His academic research and teaching were now confined to the College of Europe in Natolin near Warsaw, where the Robert Bosch Stiftung erected for him a chair of European Civilisation.

His enormous impact on Polish historiography and the success in the 1960s and 1970s of the so-called Polish school of historiography formed by Marian Malowist and his pupils as well as Witold Kula, Aleksander Gieysztor and Jerzy Topolski was not limited to his own research. Only occasionally did Geremek 'teach' in a sense of university-held courses, but his impact and inspiration came from personal contacts and discussions with younger historians, unfortunately never published, from critical reviews of studies undertaken for Polish periodicals, from the introductions to books of Western scholars translated into Polish and from innumerable review articles. These all showed the breadth of his interests, his refined intellectual taste and a radar-like precision in detecting important novelties, particularly in the area of new research methods. He easily reached the French, Italian, Anglo-American and German historical literature — not often accessible to others — and willingly shared his knowledge in a manner not devoid of a didactic temperament. He turned the attention of Polish historians to new problems and new ways of approaching medieval history. As an editor of *Acta Poloniae Historica* he made Polish historical writing known to the world. We all owe to him the knowledge of the *Annales* school, the *oeuvre* of Marc Bloch and Fernand Braudel, the direct contacts established with the VI Section of the École Pratique des Hautes Études. What he did for Polish historians was also a benefit for others: he brought the achievements of his Polish colleagues to the attention of the West. He was a master in combining Polish history with that of Europe, and in viewing Europe from a Polish perspective (*The Common Roots of Europe*, Cambridge, 1996).

Bronisław Geremek was highly praised by the international political community in which he enjoyed a singular respect. His achievements were commemorated by numerous honorary degrees and prestigious prizes by the most renowned universities. In many countries he was awarded with highest state decorations. Perhaps he even fulfilled his childhood dream and became a writer but not of *belles lettres* but of human stories of the past.

His fate and his own unique qualities lifted him even higher: he became one of the very few historians, who changed history.

(*transl. Paweł Dobrowolski*)

*Halina Manikowska*

STANISŁAW TRAWKOWSKI  
(9 OCTOBER 1920–24 NOVEMBER 2008)

On 2 December 2008, a group of colleagues, friends and disciples, consisting mainly of historians but including also representatives of other disciplines of science, paid their last respects at the Powązki Cemetery in Warsaw to Professor Stanisław Trawkowski, one of the most eminent Polish medievalists of the past century. We knew that the man we were consigning to the grave was a high-grade scholar who had left an indelible mark on our historical science.

Stanisław Trawkowski was born in Łódź on 9 October 1920 and finished a high school in that city. At the beginning of the German occupation when the town was incorporated into the Third Reich, he was expelled by the Germans to the General Gouvernement and, together with his family, settled in Warsaw. During the occupation he made two attempts to start clandestine university studies. He realized he might be arrested at any time because of his conspiratorial activity; he escaped detention but was sent to Germany for forced labour; he experienced the dramatic months of the Warsaw Uprising and the transit camp at Pruszków near Warsaw, which had been established by the occupant for the civilian population the Germans were deporting from Warsaw.

After the end of the Second World War, in different conditions which, however, were by no means easy, he started historical studies at the University of Warsaw, which he finished in 1950. As a young medievalist, he found employment in institutions which played an important role in the scientific life of those years, first in the Institute of Town Planning and Architecture (this is why his earliest studies dealt with this line of history), later he worked for some time as a secretary at the Directorate of Research into the Beginnings of the Polish State, which was of great weight for medieval studies.

His seven-year stint at the Institute of the History of Material Culture of the Polish Academy of Sciences (1954–61) turned his attention towards the history of settlement, some aspects of the history of material culture and economic history. It was then that he wrote two large studies: a monograph dealing with the Cistercian economy in Silesia in the 13th century (the basis of his doctoral thesis) and an outline of history for a wider public, *Jak powstała Polska* [How Poland Arose], which has had many reprints. As Stefan K. Kuczyński has aptly pointed out in the preface to Trawkowski's *Festschrift* (2000), 'How Poland Arose' has become not only 'a textbook on the history of Polish lands in the first millennium of our era but a synthesized monograph of that history, based on its author's profound erudition, deep knowledge of written, archaeological and linguistic sources and studies, as well as on his own reflections and of the past'.

In 1961 Stanisław Trawkowski started working at the Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences. This opened a period of his long-lasting (1961–90), close, firm ties with the Institute, a period in which he could combine his own research interests with the Institute's research programmes. He developed a lively scientific and organizational activity. At that time the Institute was directed by Tadeusz Manteuffel, a prominent, deeply respected expert in the history of the European and Polish Middle Ages. Stanisław Trawkowski regarded him as his master and held him up as a model historian. It was during the first years of his work at the Institute that Trawkowski wrote (1964) one of his greatest monographs, which dealt with the birth and early history of the Premonstratensian Order. The book formed the basis of the thesis which qualified him for assistant professorship. Even by its title, *Między herezją a ortodoksją* [Between Heresy and Orthodoxy], the book referred to Tadeusz Manteuffel's slightly earlier monograph *Narodziny herezji* [The Birth of Heresy]. Taking as his example the early history of the Premonstratensian Order, Trawkowski developed the idea shared by both researchers that heresy was a relative concept, for certain attitudes and ideas could be regarded as heresy not so much (or rather not only) because of their content but mainly because of the time and conditions in which they were proclaimed and practised. This work once again reflected its author's profound knowledge of religious and ideological phenomena in Western Europe in the 12th and 13th centuries. Of lasting value are also Trawkowski's smaller studies thematically connected with this monograph, which deal with the role of itinerant preaching in the West in the High Middle Ages and with obedience to the Church as a criterion for determining whether a view was to be condemned or regarded as orthodox.

Stanisław Trawkowski liked to return to subjects he had earlier researched, but this was always a creative return, enriched by the results of new analyses of sources and new reflections. He frequently returned to medieval settlement issues and German colonization in Polish territories in the 12th and 13th centuries, questions which had always attracted his attention. He presented many aspects of the political history of the first Piasts' monarchy, discussed the relations between the monarchy and the Church, and the history of Church institutions (e.g. the history of Silesian monasteries). Being a highly competent expert in the history of the Teutonic Knights' Order in the Baltic region, he took part in international debates on that question. His paper on Otto III's pilgrimage to Gniezno (in Jerzy Dowiat [ed.], *Ze studiów nad dewocją wczesnośredniowieczną* [Studies on Early Medieval Devotion], 1972) is still highly appreciated.

In the 1960s, Stanisław Trawkowski joined in the work of a team which, on Tadeusz Manteuffel's initiative, was preparing a synthesized outline of the history of medieval Poland's culture, contributing extensive chapters on the Poles' living conditions, an important part of the volume *Kultura Polski średniowiecznej X–XIII w.* [The Culture of Medieval Poland, 10th–13th Centuries], edited by Jerzy Dowiat (1985). Unlike the authors of traditional presentations of the history of material culture, Stanisław Trawkowski focused on the activities undertaken by communities to secure their life, relegating their artefacts to the background. In successive chapters dealing with the medieval Poles' concern for food, clothing,

body care and settled life, Trawkowski made excellent use of the research results obtained by various disciplines of science.

While perfectly describing the history of human groups (social groups and strata, political elites, communities of various types) Stanislaw Trawkowski was no less skilful in the art of biography. The entries he wrote for various encyclopedic publications, including the *Polski Słownik Biograficzny* [Polish Biographical Dictionary], are truly exemplary. Particularly worthy of mention is the entry dedicated to Saint Stanislaus, bishop of Cracow, which he wrote late in life. It reflects the most valuable features of this eminent historian's writing: solidity, conciseness, a balanced criticism of opinions expressed in old and new historiography, cautiousness in the formulation of hypotheses, presentation of possible new interpretations.

The best early and later studies selected by Stanislaw Trawkowski himself were published in 2005 by the Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences under the title *Opuscula medievalistica. Studia nad historią społeczną Polski wczesnopiastowskiej* [Studies on Poland's Social History during the Early Piast Period].

Stanislaw Trawkowski, whose critical apparatus bore the hallmarks of perfection, formulated his thoughts in an exact, careful way. His writings are precise, concise and clear. He did his best to inculcate his younger colleagues with his research solidity, gave them as much help as he could, and always showed them goodwill.

With great commitment he participated in the congresses of Polish historians and in medievalist conferences and symposia in Poland and abroad. He was an excellent lecturer who knew how to arouse the interest of his listeners. Discussions excited him, he loved to engage in polemics, but always kept his arguments on a high level, which testified to his personal culture.

He willingly assumed various scientific and organizational tasks, especially in the Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences. After the death of Tadeusz Manteuffel, he became head of the Department for the History of Medieval Culture (1971–5). With no smaller responsibility and commitment he later directed the Section for the Historical Atlas of Poland. For two terms he acted as deputy director of the Institute of History in the difficult years 1983–90. For many years he was a member of the Institute's Scientific Council and its successful chairman in 1996–8. He was editor of *Kwartalnik Historyczny* at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s. As regards other functions, outside the Institute, he was deputy chairman of the Scientific Council of the Jewish Historical Institute.

Trawkowski was a modest man, uninterested in high positions or honours. He enjoyed the respect of Polish historians (not only medievalists) and his authority was generally recognized. This found its reflection in the fact that three volumes of collected studies, with contributions by nearly all eminent Polish historians, were dedicated to him on successive anniversaries of his scholarly work. His services were officially recognized in 1999 when he was awarded the Commander's Cross of the Polonia Restituta Order.