

# In Memoriam

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ROMAN WAPIŃSKI

(8 March 1931 – 14 May 2008)

Dr. Roman Wapiński, professor emeritus of Gdańsk University, fellow of the Polish Academy of Sciences, died in Gdańsk on 14 May 2008. In the years 1951–1955 he studied history at Warsaw University, and after graduating worked in the Higher Pedagogical School in Gdańsk. In this new milieu he soon became a highly regarded scholar, and obtained his doctorate under the direction of Prof. Witold Łukasiewicz, and then habilitated at the Nicholas Copernicus University in Toruń. At the same time he held managerial posts at the Higher Pedagogical School and largely contributed to raising its rank and the creation of Gdańsk University in 1970. He headed its Institute of History for sixteen years, performing at the same time some other university functions, but, what is most important, has conducted intensive teaching activity for more than half a century. He conferred 300 M.A. degrees and 35 doctor's degrees, (14 of their holders became assistant professors and six — full professors). The heart of the matter lies not, however, in these, otherwise imposing, numbers. Roman Wapiński created a Gdańsk school of historical studies of the 19th and 20th centuries and was the highest authority both for scholars and students. In the local language he was identified by a single word — "Professor", not followed by any name — this is how he is still remembered by his younger colleagues and participants in the various activities, not only formalized, but also scholarly meetings that he organized till his last days. The last such weekly meeting took place on 17 March. Neither his teaching work, nor his activity as a scholar and researcher was limited by his retirement.

Roman Wapiński was an outstanding personality in the scholarly and cultural milieu of Gdańsk, hence he was entrusted with many social and academic functions and posts. He was President of the Gdańsk Learned Society in the years 1979–1985, President of the Gdańsk Branch of the Polish Historical Society, and President of the Scholarly Council of the Gdańsk Library of the Polish Academy of Sciences. He has long been very active in all-Polish academic life in which he played a very important role. In the 1980s and 1990s he was a member of the Chief Council of Higher Education and of the Central Commission for Academic Titles and Degrees. In the years 1999–2002 he was Chairman of the Committee of Historical Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences. In 1994 he became a corresponding member, and in 2004 a fellow of the Polish Academy of Sciences. He was also chosen a member of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences (PAU) in Cracow. He received a doctorate *honoris causa* of Wrocław University, as well as many awards and distinctions both general Polish and those conferred by Gdańsk.

A scholar's role does not consist, however, of the posts he has held, or even of the number of his pupils, although for a university professor this is also important, but first and foremost of his scholarly works, the books he has published, if they contribute something new to his field. Roman Wapiński has published 20 books and 400 articles. His area of interest was the political history of Poland from the 19th century till the latest times, and his work throughout the long period of his activity has evolved from traditional monographic approaches

to more synthetic works and outlines that entered into the field of social psychology and culture. First he concentrated on the history of Pomerania, especially of the years 1918–1939. He was interested, even at this early stage, in the history of political trends that differed from the communist working class movement, preferred by the authorities at that time. He devoted his doctoral thesis to the National Workers' Party in Pomerania. Later, he took up subjects of all-Polish scope, all concerned with political history, with a special emphasis on the political groupings and trends. He wrote about the National Democrats, but also took up biographical subjects, among others those connected with the centre-rightist milieu at large. He published the biographies of Roman Dmowski and Władysław Sikorski.

The last years of his life, more than a decade, have been devoted to a synthesis and a new approach to political history, which he has now presented in a much broader cultural and comparative context. Here we find a synthesis of the history of Polish political thought, one of a few works published during the last two decades, but also works that open completely new problems in the field under the Author's research. One of such books was *Świadomość polityczna w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej* (*Political Consciousness in the Second Polish Republic*), published as early as 1989. It was followed by such books as *Pokolenia Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej* (*The Generations of the Second Polish Republic*), where he analyzes the extremely important subject of generation changes in the social and political forum, *Polska i małe ojczyzny Polaków* (*Poland and the Small Homelands of the Poles*), where he examines the relations between the national and regional ties, *Polska na styku narodów i kultur* (*Poland at the Junction of Nations and Cultures*), where he presents the significance of various factors that influenced to the Polish national and social character, and even *O obyczajowości Polaków przelomu epok* (*On the Polish Morals and Manners at the Turn of the Century*), of 2006. These are only a few of the titles of his works. The political history he engaged in has become more modern and raised ever more subtle and profound social and cultural problems.

Roman Wapiński was active till the last moments of his life and certainly had still a lot to say. We have lost a reliable historian, a teacher of many generations of historical researchers and people active in the political arena.

Janusz Żarnowski