

IN MEMORIAM

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JAN BASZKIEWICZ
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Jan Baszkiewicz was a researcher, academic teacher, active in the field of academia, one of the most outstanding representatives of historical-legal sciences of the past fifty years. He earned a permanent place in the Polish humanities as a continuator of the tradition of the eminent Polish scholars of the history of political systems, like Oswald Balzer, Stanisław Kutrzeba or Juliusz Bardach, and as a researcher of the history of Europe. Successfully combining research with academic teaching, he was professor of Warsaw University, and one of the founders and the Chair of Political and Legal Doctrines at the University of Wrocław. In the latter institution he is also remembered as one of those who in 1968 openly supported student protests, as a result of which he was transferred to the University of Silesia in Katowice. In 1973 he returned to Warsaw and till his retirement worked at Warsaw University in the Institute of Political Science at the Faculty of Journalism and Political Science, passing through the successive stages of his academic career. Recognised as one of the leading experts on European political systems, in 1986 he became corresponding member and in 1994 full member of the Polish Academy of Sciences.

The fruit of the over fifty years of Jan Baszkiewicz's academic activity are over twenty books and much more than a hundred treatises, articles and critical reviews. It is not easy to ascribe his work to a traditionally understood academic discipline. He is claimed by historians *sensu stricto*, historians of law and political systems, anthropologists of culture, political scientists. Jan Baszkiewicz's works – as shown by Tomasz Jurek in his broad article entitled 'Jana Baszkiewicza Powstanie zjednoczonego państwa polskiego z perspektywy półwiecza' [Jan Baszkiewicz's *The Making of a Unified Polish State* half a century later], published in *Czasopismo Prawno-Historyczne* (1/2005) – constitute a good point of departure for further studies, stimulating as they do research into various problems of Polish and general history of state and law.

In time Baszkiewicz's interests spread to ever new fields of historic research. Taking as his starting point research into the history of political doctrines, he broached the questions of political and economic relations and

with much success the history of intellectual culture. He was familiar with foreign research and in his works made reference to the theoretical and factual achievements of many schools of history. His first book – *Powstanie zjednoczonego Państwa Polskiego na przełomie XIII i XIV wieku* [The Making of a Unified Polish State in the Late 13th and Early 14th Centuries] (1954) – was written in the period when Marxist methodology was binding, but in spite of the officially imposed interpretation of history and some preconceived views, it continues to serve as a point of reference for researchers who study factors leading to transformations taking place in Poland in the late Middle Ages. The author underlined economic factors, as well as social changes, as those which resulted in the unification of the state, and, a bit on the sidelines, the questions of ideology, common awareness of the state elites and political events. As it happened, almost half a century after the book was first published, the last of these questions, together with the outlined programme of research into the subject of state unification, constitute the author's most enduring achievement. He showed the described issues against a broader political background of Central and Eastern Europe, but also noted new processes emerging in the legal and political field. In fact these subjects seem to have been his favoured domain. Another of Baszkiewicz's well known books – *Polityka czasów Łokietka* [Politics in the Times of Ladislas the Short] (1968) – is in a way polemical in relation to the author's earlier findings, an updated picture, stripped of Marxist trimmings, of events which took place in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries.

In another of Baszkiewicz's works – *Państwo suwerenne w feudalnej doktrynie politycznej do początków XIV wieku* [Sovereign State in the Feudal Political Doctrine till the Early 14th Century] (1964) – we find a detailed, extensive analysis of one of the most important issues of political system in Europe. Researching the ideologies and laws which influenced the form the European states took on, the author analysed one of the key questions regarding sovereignty of state power. He painted a convincing picture of its functioning in early monarchies and later, in the period of wars for universal power, waged by the Papacy and the Empire. This was of fundamental importance – duality or more precisely, multiplicity of power was characteristic of Europe, especially its western part. Conflicts between the two parties concerned not only personal rivalry, as it happened in various periods and in various regions. They resulted also from different ideologies, different ideas about social order. The author also had some interesting observations on authority in early town communes towards the end of the first millennium and at the beginning of the second (sometimes also of village communes), which serve our better understanding of the specific features of this pluralistic political system in Europe. Universal authority – of the pope or the emperor, regional authority, state or local, 'national' or based on common ideology – these are issues, as researched by Baszkiewicz, not only of those past centuries, but in fact of today.

In his numerous studies Jan Baszkiewicz expanded his research to include the development of political thought in the Middle Ages, and the formation of political and legal doctrines from their mediaeval beginnings until the end of the seventeenth century. He wrote academic textbook of history of state and law in antiquity and in the Middle Ages (1974), and his work *Młodość uniwersytetu* [Early Days of the University] (1963) is a first-rate introduction to our knowledge of yet another authority – the *studium*, next to the *imperium* and the *sacerdotium* – in Europe.

From the late 1970s on Jan Baszkiewicz again changed his field of interest and began research into the history of France. He published an excellent history of this country (published in 1974, and then in 1978, 1995, 1999, 2004, 2008) and a number of larger and smaller contributions on the history of the French revolution, its programmes and slogans, as well as on the ‘revolutionary awareness’ of the French. He was also known as biographer of many historic figures. Robespierre, Danton, Henry IV and Louise XVI became heroes of his successive books either as prominent figures or representatives of the epoch.

In such a short contribution it is impossible to mention all works written by Jan Baszkiewicz. But it needs to be stressed that his work (as it rarely happens with outstanding humanists of the present epoch) has become known not only to scholars, but also to lovers of history generally. His colleagues will also remember his advice and critical remarks. He was not one of those scholars who operate exclusively from his study and classroom. He was one of those who spoke up on many matters important for the academic community and academic life in his country. His membership of the various bodies of the Polish Academy of Sciences and of the Central Commission for Academic Degrees and Titles, where his voice was respectfully heard and often influenced the final decision, assured him permanent memory as a scholar who treated seriously his academic vocation.

He left us suddenly, unexpectedly, though we all knew about his terminal illness. His friends, colleagues and students will always remember him as a distinguished scholar and teacher, as an outstanding promoter of learning.

trans. Bogna Piotrowska

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