

# PRO MEMORIA

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## WIKTORIA ŚLIWOWSKA (26 JUNE 1931 – 27 DECEMBER 2021)

Late last year, at the age of ninety, one of the most brilliant Polish scholars of Polish-Russian relations in the nineteenth century, Professor Wiktoria Śliwowska, passed away. Like every person, she carried an entire body of experience, the volume and diversity of which would be enough for several people.

Wiktoria Śliwowska was born on 26 June 1931 in Warsaw. She was brought up with love for books and acquiring knowledge. Her father – Waclaw Zawadzki, a bibliophile and editor of the State Publishing Institute [Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, PIW], instilled this in her. Happy family life was cut short by the war, during which her mother, Sara, perished in the Warsaw Ghetto in 1942 (little Wiktoria was hidden under a bed at the time). Wiktoria was taken out of the ghetto in secret and hidden with relatives in the ‘Aryan’ part of the city. This lasted until the outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising. After its collapse, along with other residents of the capital, she was taken out of the city and ended up in Jaksice and then Siersza, where she met her father. Together they returned through Kielce to Warsaw in 1945. After the war, she studied in her hometown – Warsaw, but she finished her studies in 1953 in Leningrad at the Herzen State Pedagogical Institute. Besides a degree from an institution of higher learning and excellent knowledge of the Russian language and culture, she also found her lifelong companion there – René Śliwowski, her inseparable husband and later a translator and historian of Russian literature. René Śliwowski descended from a family of Polish emigrants who returned from France to Poland after the Second World War.

After returning to Poland in 1953, she began working in the newly-formed Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw, currently bearing the name of its founder – Tadeusz Manteuffel. In 1960, Wiktoria Śliwowska defended her doctorate, which

she wrote under the direction of Professor Stefan Kieniewicz. Its focus was on the Petrashevsky Circle – a group of young intellectuals active in the 1840s in Russia who criticised their country's backwardness (published as *Sprawa pietraszewców*; 1964).

At this time, Wiktoria Śliwowska also entered into a second and equally important area of her scholarly activity as her research – the editing of historical sources, which can undoubtedly be credited to her mentor – Professor Stefan Kieniewicz, one of the most brilliant Polish historians of the nineteenth century and particularly the 1863–4 Uprising. At the same time, he was the outstanding editor of source texts, considering them at times to be even more important than published monographs. The acquisition of this perspective on historical sources was often visible in Wiktoria Śliwowska's later work. She edited the memoirs of Peter Kropotkin, *Wspomnienia rewolucjonisty* [Reminiscences of a Revolutionary, published in 1959] and, in collaboration with her father – Waclaw Zawadzki, two volumes of the *Pamiętniki dekabrystów* [Memoirs of the Decembrists; 1960].

Throughout Wiktoria Śliwowska's academic life, two or even three currents of scholarly activity intertwined – research (the effects of which were monographs), editing historical sources and reviews of academic works. This third current of Wiktoria Śliwowska's professional activity is interesting, not only for purely academic reasons but for aesthetic ones as well, since she also attempted to confer an attractive literary form upon her texts. She believed that a review, besides its content value, should also be a pleasure for readers.

The possibility of researching Soviet archives and using their holdings enabled Wiktoria Śliwowska to write the monograph *Mikołaj I i jego czasy* [Nicholas I and His Times, published in 1965]. In this book, written with the nerve of a publicist, one can detect allusions to the situation in Poland at the time.

Wiktoria Śliwowska was always drawn to the subject of freethinking and opposition to the rulers of nineteenth-century Russia. Interest in this area brought with it a series of publications concerning, among others, Nikolai Sazonov (an associate of Adam Mickiewicz), Ivan Gagarin (a Jesuit), and one of the most important publications in this vein – the monograph *W kręgu poprzedników Hercena* [In the Circle of Herzen's Predecessors, published in 1971], which was Wiktoria Śliwowska's postdoctoral dissertation (habilitation). This book is unique in many respects since it discusses the forgotten, liberal,

nineteenth-century Russian émigré community, besides its large, mainly archival source base, excellent narrative and language. Two years later, with her husband, she wrote a biography of Alexander Herzen – *Aleksander Hercen. Życie i twórczość* [Alexander Herzen: Life and Works, published in 1973], and – remaining in the domain of interest in Russian freethinkers – a biography of Andrei Platonov (1983).

Concurrently with her scholarly research, Wiktoria Śliwowska carried out editorial work and was part of a group of teams preparing editions of documents unique on a national or even an international scale. The first of these epochal publications was an edition of documents about the January Uprising of 1863–4. The international editorial team was led by Stefan Kieniewicz and Ilya S. Miller (later Vladimir A. Dyakov), and the planned fifteen volumes grew to twenty-five and appeared under the title *Powstanie styczniowe. Materiały i dokumenty* [The January Uprising. Materials and Documents, published in 1961–86]. Knowing the richness of the Soviet archival collections concerning the Polish independence movement, Wiktoria Śliwowska continued editorial work. Alongside Maria Janion and Vladimir Dyakov, she was one of the initiators of a subsequent series entitled *Polskie ruchy społeczno-polityczne i życie literackie 1832–1855* [Polish Social-Political Movements and Literary Life, 1832–1855], named the ‘green series’ from the colour of their covers and presenting the Polish national liberation movement in the first half of the nineteenth century (in time she became its primary editor).

From the middle of the 1980s, Wiktoria Śliwowska focused on issues related to Polish exiles to Siberia and into the interior of the Russian Empire. She enlisted an international group of scholars for this research, continuing it to this day. Thanks to their work, at the beginning of the 1990s, a name index of individuals exiled to Siberia for participating in the January Uprising came into being. The index contains information on 40,000 people and is located in the Tadeusz Manteuffel Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw. The information it has was collected from archives in Poland, Russia, Lithuania, Ukraine and Belarus.

The fruits of this work were also articles in academic journals, as well as monographs – *Zesłanie i katorga na Syberii w dziejach Polaków 1815–1915* [Exile and Forced Labour in Siberia in Polish History, 1815–1915, published in 1992], *Zesłańcy polscy w Imperium Rosyjskim w pierwszej połowie XIX wieku, 1815–1856* [Polish Exiles in the

Russian Empire in the First Half of the 19th Century, 1815–1915, published in 1998], co-authored with Elżbieta Kaczyńska and Anna Brus. There are other important works in this thematic vein: *Syberia w życiu i pamięci Gieysztorów – zesłańców postyczniowych. Wilno – Sybir – Wiatka – Warszawa* [Siberia in the Life and Memory of the Gieysztor – Post-January Exiles. Vilnius – Siberia – Vyatka – Warsaw; 2000], and also *Ucieczki z Sybiru* [Escapes from Siberia; 2003], which presented the subject of the escapes of Polish exiles from the eponymous Siberia in a literarily attractive way. The book generated significant interest, achieving commercial success and was translated into Russian in 2014.

In the same vein of this subject matter are the three-volume *Dziennik* [Diary] of Juliusz Glaubicz Sabiński (2009). Wiktoria Śliwowska considered this exceptional record one of her most important scholarly achievement. The diary was also translated into Russian.

Besides scholarly and academic work, Wiktoria Śliwowska was also a translator. Together with her husband, she translated Russian academic studies important to Polish history and Polish-Russian relations, into Polish. Among them are Natan Eidelman's *Lunin – adiutant wielkiego księcia Konstantego* [Lunin – Aide-de-Camp of Great Prince Konstanty; 1976] and *Paweł I, czyli śmierć tyrana* [Paul I, or Death of a Tyrant; Warsaw, 1990], Yuriy Stakelberg's *Pieczęcie powstańcze 1863–1864* [Seals of the Uprising, 1863–1864; 1988] and Olga Morozova's *Bronisław Szwarce* (1982).

In her scholarly research, Professor Wiktoria Śliwowska mainly focused on Russian history and Polish-Russian relations in the nineteenth century. However, issues in contemporary history, especially events that she herself took part in, were not foreign to her. These subjects were tied to wartime experiences, which was reflected in the preparation and editing of a collection of accounts by Jewish children – *Dzieci Holocaustu mówią...* (1993). This unique book gained worldwide attention and was translated into several foreign languages – German, English (as *The Last Eyewitnesses: Children of the Holocaust Speak*) and Spanish. The same subject matter was taken up in *Czarny rok... Czarne lata...* [Black Year... Black Years..., published in 1996]. The subject of the Second World War, especially the Warsaw Uprising, was also taken up in the book *Płacz po Warszawie. Powstanie Warszawskie 1944. Dzienniki, Świadectwa* [Lamenting Over Warsaw. The Warsaw Uprising 1944. Diaries, Testimonies; 2014], which contained, besides her editing,

the reminiscences of little Wiktorja Śliwowska (whose surname was Załęska at the time).

After the political transformations in Poland in the 1990s, Wiktorja Śliwowska, as one of the first, participated in the editing of reminiscences of Poles affected by Stalinist repression. She took part in editorial work on *Tryptyk kazachstański. Wspomnienia z zesłania* [Kazakh Triptych. Reminiscences from Exile, published in 1992], the reminiscences of Anna Sobota, *W stepach Kazachstanu. Wspomnienia z lat 1939–1946* [On the Steppes of Kazakhstan. Memories from 1939–1946, published in 1993], Walenty Woronowicz, *Przypadki XX wieku. 20 lat na Wyspach Solowieckich i Kołymie 1935–1955* [Coincidences of the 20th Century. 20 Years on the Solovetsky Islands and Kolyma, published in 1994].

Towards the end of her life, along with her husband, Professor Wiktorja Śliwowska published an autobiographical book, *Rosja – nasza miłość* [Russia – Our Love, published in 2008]. This fascinating book transports the reader into the youth of its authors, presenting, often humorously, the not-always-happy times passed. The life wisdom it contains, at times peppered with self-mockery, makes it a pearl in Wiktorja Śliwowska's literary work.

Besides scholarly work, starting in 1965 (so from its inception), Wiktorja Śliwowska was also active in the Commission of Polish and Soviet/Russian Historians, which functioned within the framework of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the Soviet/Russian Academy of Sciences. From 1998 to 2008, she led it from the Polish side. A dozen or so academic conferences were organised at her initiative. In her view, regional academic centres should also be drawn into research on Polish-Russian relations, which she managed to accomplish.

Professor Wiktorja Śliwowska was rewarded for her scholarly achievements on numerous occasions: twice with the Klio Award (1999 and 2005), a special award of the *Przegląd Wschodni* (2000) and the PEN Club Award (2013). In 2003 the president of the Republic of Poland conferred her with the Order of Polonia Restituta Fourth Class, the Officer's Cross. She also obtained the *doctor honoris causa* of the Russian Academy of Sciences (2001) and Jan Kochanowski University of Kielce (2019).

A profile of Professor Wiktorja Śliwowska would be incomplete without remembering her as a person written with a capital P. It was hard to believe that this petite and pleasant woman was such a colossal titan of work, who left a qualitatively and quantitatively imposing

legacy of scholarly achievement. She was always open, direct and quick to break the ice in interpersonal contacts. She would also swiftly bridge the distance with people whom she trusted. She always tried to help those who needed her advice or assistance. She had her own opinion, which she knew how to defend, but not at any price, and logical arguments could bring her to her opponents and even lead her to change her opinion. She had a sizable temperament, including politically, which can be seen at times in letters or columns published in the press under the pseudonym 'Dama z pieskiem' [Lady with a little dog], in which she described her impressions and reflections from observing modern times as well as what was happening outside her window.

In our memory, Professor Wiktoria Śliwowska remains an excellent scholar, a witness to age, and above all, a Great Person. For some – esteemed Madam Professor, for others – Mrs Wiktoria, for yet others – Wiktoria, and for those closest to her – just Wisia.

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