

Obituary

TOMASZ HABRASZEWSKI

Thomas Habraszewski was born in 1939 in Kołomyja (then in the south-east of Poland, now – Ukraine). In 1957 he started his degree in Oriental Studies at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow. He learned Turkish as his special subject and Arabic. In 1962 he wrote a thesis on the description of Sudan given by Evliya Çelebi, a famous Turkish traveller of the 16th century, in his *Siyâhet-nâme* (“Travel Book”). He graduated from the University with an MA in Turkish studies.

Later on he worked for some years at the Section of African Studies of Warsaw University (Oriental Department). In 1969 he emigrated to Great Britain where he was employed for many years as an announcer at the Polish section of the BBC.



Tomasz Habraszewski married in England and lived in London with his wife and two children till the last year of his life. He retired in 2004 and returned to research on Çelebi's book, which had always been his real passion. He made efforts to identify meticulously every detail of the Sudan as described by the famous Turkish traveller. Studying publications on Sudan written in various languages he tried to elucidate all the obscure passages of this difficult Turkish text so that the picture of 17th century Sudan and its inhabitants (Arab and Negro) could be reconstructed as precisely as possible.

Almost every year, after 2004, Tomasz Habraszewski published notable articles in *Folia Orientalia*. He was in contact with a number of scholars who appreciated his knowledge and perseverance in the research he conducted.

The life of Tomasz Habraszewski ended abruptly. In October 2012 he came to Poland in order to take part in a reunion of his school friends in Łańcut (south-east of Poland). This he did successfully but on October 25 he was fatally knocked down by a car on a zebra crossing in the town of Rzeszów.

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I was first to know Tomasz Habraszewski in 1957 when we started our degree in Oriental Studies at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow. He decided to specialize in Turkish language and I – in Persian. We both took a joint course in Arabic. At that time there was no native speaker teaching Turkish or Persian at our University. But we had an Arab who taught us his mother tongue. And the practical learning of living languages was our great passion. Tomasz and I we both learned Arabic with great zeal.

That common interest in languages was to make us live in the same room of the hall, next year. We were four to our room: two students of Turkish language, one of Arabic and me specializing in Iranian studies.

In 1961 we had to part company as I went to Yerevan to study the Armenian language. Thomas took his degree in Cracow next year and left for Warsaw. Later on he emigrated to Britain. By reason of his work in the BBC he could not maintain contacts with his friends in Poland so as not to make troubles for them on political grounds.

The break before our next meeting lasted many years. It was only after 2005, when Thomas retired and came to the new Poland, free of Soviet domination, to see his relatives and friends that we renewed our friendship. From then on we met in Cracow every year in the autumn when Tomasz used to visit Poland. I was very happy to see him again and to hear from him via e-mail. Reading Tomasz's letters was always a pleasure for me, as his sense of humor was very fine.

Tomasz had a talent for languages. He knew, besides Polish as his mother tongue, Turkish and Arabic, Western languages: English, French, German. Also Russian and some Hungarian. His pronunciation of those languages was almost perfect.

When he came to Poland in October 2012 he rang me up and promised to see me in Cracow some days later. But he did not appear. I grew uneasy and after some weeks I telephoned our mutual friends to learn what had happened. And I was informed about his tragic accident. I can hardly believe that we shall never meet and talk again as it had been my joy in the past.

Andrzej Pisowicz