



The Lion of Palmyra as the new PCMA logo

The new logo of the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw, proudly derives from the Lion of Palmyra — one of the most recognizable artifacts from PCMA excavations.

The lion is a widely recognized symbol of power and dignity in all the cultures and periods investigated by PCMA teams. It is therefore well-suited for an institution exploring sites on three continents and covering several millennia.

Over the years, PCMA archaeological missions working throughout the Eastern Mediterranean and in northeastern Africa have discovered many different lion images. Some were carved in relief on the walls of the Temple of Hatshepsut in Deir el-Bahari (Egypt), others were painted on glazed ceramics from the Islamic period in Alexandria (Egypt) and on the walls of a mithreum in Hawarte (Syria); still others were carved on Bronze Age cylinder seals from Tell Arbid (Syria). Lions were imaged on Byzantine-period mosaic floors from Chhîm and Jiyeh (Lebanon) and sculpted on the supports of a stone bench in a palatial building at Old Dongola (Sudan). Yet the Lion of Palmyra is the most monumental and the most extraordinary of them all. Fierce with its bared teeth and powerful claws, it stands to protect a small gazelle nestling between its front paws, trustful of its guardian. The inscription carved on one of the Lion's paws warns of shedding blood in the temple..

The Lion of Palmyra is exceptional also because of how it is linked with the PCMA. It was discovered in Palmyra where the Centre's founder, Professor Kazimierz Michałowski directed one of the first Polish post-war digs. Fragments of the sculpture were discovered by the PCMA mission, restored by its conservator and displayed in front of the Palmyra Museum, becoming an international hallmark of this UNESCO Heritage site.

The Lion's history reflects in a nutshell what archaeology at the PCMA is all about: discovery, documentation, scientific publication, conservation and site management. Recent events in the region have added another turbulent chapter to the Lion's biography: destruction by fundamentalists in 2015, and a hurried rescue operation by PCMA conservators and archaeologists a year later, resulting in the removal of the battered remains to a, hopefully, secure location. The latest events underscore the fragility of the ancient heritage that is painstakingly uncovered by archaeologists, and the important role of institutions like the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw, in its preservation.