



Maria Ludwika Bernhard
1908-1998

The life of Maria Bernhard covered three very different periods in Polish history, and she lived to see the promise of a new one. To all who have known her she epitomized the courage and optimism of a young person and the experience and good counsel of mature age, coupled with an ever-present warmth and openness toward all. To those who remember her, as the present writer, only from her later years, she somehow never seemed old, in spite of the difference in age.

Her first known ancestor was a grognard of the Napoleonic wars, who made the decision to settle on Polish soil. A century later his great granddaughter still held a French passport, maintaining strong links with the old country. At the same time, she never wavered in her commitment, sometimes against considerable odds, to the country where she had grown up and which she very definitely considered as her own.

She enrolled in Warsaw University in the 1930s to study art history and Classical archaeology, the latter with Kazimierz Michalowski, then a young professor appointed to the chair created for him at this University. She became his first assistant. Her Ph.D. examination in June 1939 was the last at the University before the outbreak of World War II.

The hostilities brought her incipient academic career to an abrupt stop; she was active instead in the Resistance movement. Although she never spoke much about this time, it is known that she had risked her life not only as a clandestine academic teacher, but also as a soldier, being the Warsaw commandant of the underground Home Army's women's service. She also distinguished herself in protecting whenever possible the collections of the National Museum in Warsaw against plunder and destruction.

After 1945 Maria Bernhard was active in both the University and the National Museum in Warsaw, where she acted as Curator of the reactivated Ancient Art Department. In 1954, she was appointed to the chair of Classical Archaeology at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków and taught there until her retirement in 1978. All the Classical archaeologists active in Kraków today count themselves among her pupils.

Professor Bernhard is known to Polish students mainly for her monumental "History of Ancient Greek Art" (four volumes, published between 1970 and 1989, later re-edited several times). The international scholarly community remembers her for the seven volumes of the "Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum", covering the collections of the National Museum in Warsaw. Greek painted pottery was indeed her favorite subject: Her last paper in 1996, like her first of 1936, concerned the former Erazm Majewski Collection and the so-called Majewski Painter.

In her long academic career, she did not forgo the chance to participate in archaeological fieldwork which started being carried out by Polish expeditions the moment it became possible in the late 1950s. She worked at Mirmekion and Kalos Limen in the Crimea, and was in charge of the Palmyra team when the 1967 war broke out. Leaving the safety of the oasis, she managed to reach the Center's quarters in Cairo, where she accepted responsibility for a small group of resident young people with her characteristic blend of courage and common sense.

For the last twenty years, she remained for those who visited her a trusted counselor and standing reference, both scholarly and humane.

Michał Gawlikowski

Oil portrait of Maria Ludwika Bernhard, painted in 1982 by Grażyna Korpala, Jagiellonian University Museum collection (Photo J. Kozina)