



Photo by Marcin Krawczuk

ALEKSANDER KRAWCZUK (1922–2023)

On January 27, 2023, our Master and mentor, Professor Aleksander Krawczuk, passed away after having lived nearly 101 years.

Born on June 7, 1922 in Kraków, he formed a bond with this city that would endure for a lifetime. After his father's premature death, Aleksander Krawczuk and his two siblings were brought up by his mother, a teacher of Polish language and literature. The outbreak of World War II interrupted his school education, with Krawczuk continuing his studies at an underground school during the German occupation. Despite his young age, he participated in the resistance movement as a soldier of the Polish Home Army, the largest underground army in Europe.

After the war's end in 1945, studied classical philology and history at the Jagiellonian University. Having graduated in 1949, he became an assistant to Professor Ludwik Piotrowicz at the Department of Ancient History of the Jagiellonian University. Working under Piotrowicz's supervision, Krawczuk prepared a doctoral dissertation on the colonization

of veterans by Lucius Cornelius Sulla, published in 1960.¹ Krawczuk proceeded to obtain his habilitation degree in 1963, becoming a titular professor in 1985 and head the Department of Ancient History of the Jagiellonian University from 1980 to 1986.

At the beginning of his academic career, Krawczuk primarily studied sources pertaining to the history of ancient mining and metallurgy, publishing on, *i. a.*, Aristotle's depictions of slave labour in mining and metalworking. However, his main research interests were social and economic changes at the end of the Roman Republic, with a particular focus on how agrarian matters were used in political struggles² and on Roman citizenship grants by military commanders.³

Already in the early 1960s, had begun to engage in public outreach: in addition to academic dissertations and studies, he wrote popular books and essays, which gave him an outlet to present his thoughts on significant developments in ancient history and culture in a more popular manner. Crucially, all of Krawczuk's popular publications presented state-of-the-art knowledge and with full reference to relevant sources that were quoted in full. His first popular book was a biography of Caesar (1962), followed by biographies of Augustus (1964), Herod the Great (1965), Nero (1965), Pericles and Aspasia (1967), Alcibiades (1968), Cleopatra (1969) and many others—about forty books on various subjects in total.⁴ Most of these works have been republished several times, with many of them translated into English, Arabic, Bulgarian, Estonian, Latvian, German, Russian, Serbo-Croatian, Slovak and Hungarian. Thanks to their clear structure and engaging style, Krawczuk's books have won him a large and diverse readership. Some of these books veered closer to academic monographs, whereas other ones resembled fictional narratives, skilfully including events and motifs excerpted from the classical literature.⁵

Owing to his outreach activities and popular publications, Aleksander Krawczuk quickly became a renowned public figure. His essays on antiquity and its ties to the modern world were eagerly published in popular cultural weeklies. Among his other contributions, Krawczuk published a series of essays on biographies of Roman and Byzantine emperors and empresses, which were unfailingly issued week after week for several years and were popular enough to be republished several times in the form of a book.

A gifted orator, Professor Aleksander Krawczuk gave fascinating lectures that attracted large audiences of students. For almost fifteen years, he hosted an extremely popular television program on the history and culture of the ancient world (*The Antique World of Professor Krawczuk*). He keenly and frequently travelled around Poland to meet his readers, becoming Poland's most famous historian in the 1980s. The phenomenon of his

¹ *Kolonizacja sullańska*, Wrocław–Kraków–Warszawa 1960, pp. 91. The dissertation remains a valuable contribution, as confirmed by its translation into Italian that was published a few years ago: *La collonizzazione sillana (con note di aggiornamento di Federico Santangelo)*, *Simblos* 5, 2008, 7–99.

² Cf. *Gli agrari come partito politico nella Roma antica*, in: I. Biezuńska-Małowist (ed.), *Storia sociale ed economica dell'età classica negli studi polacchi contemporanei*, Milano 1975, 189–198.

³ *Virtutis ergo. Nadania obywatelstwa rzymskiego przez wodzów republiki*, Kraków 1963, pp. 171.

⁴ See T. Grabowski, M. Piegoń, B. Kołoczek, *Bibliografia Profesora Aleksandra Krawczuka za lata 1953–2017 [Bibliography of Professor Aleksander Krawczuk, 1953–2017]*, in: E. Dąbrowa, T. Grabowski, M. Piegoń (eds.), *Florilegium. Studia ofiarowane Profesorowi Aleksandrowi Krawczukowi z okazji dziewięćdziesiątej piątej rocznicy urodzin*, Kraków 2017, 7–12.

⁵ This is how he presented Plato's life and teachings (*Pan i jego filozof – rzecz o Platonie*, Warszawa 1970) and Artemidorus' *Oneirokritika* (*Sennik Artemidora*, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków 1972).

work and status as a populariser of ancient culture during the communist rule even became the subject of scholarly reflection.⁶

In addition to all responsibilities mentioned above, Aleksander Krawczuk was the Minister for Culture (1986–1989) and a Member of Parliament of the Republic of Poland (1991–1997).

Professor Aleksander Krawczuk—a humanist, erudite scholar, bibliophile, enthusiast and expert on the history and culture of his beloved Kraków—remained an extremely modest, kind and charming man, a consummate teacher that willingly gifted his students with his knowledge and advice. He will be remembered as such and fondly held in our cherished memories.

Edward Dąbrowa
Sławomir Sprawski

⁶ See E. Olechowska, Aleksander Krawczuk's Fascinating Antiquity, in: D. Movrin, E. Orzechowska (eds.), *Classics and Class. Greek and Latin Classics and Communism at School*, Warszawa–Ljubljana 2016, 337–356.