

Obituarium

Jan Braun (1926–2015)

The passing of a Tutor and Master touches his disciples, evoking thoughts on the fleeting of life as well as on their attitudes in science. What remains in us of the Master's teachings? Are we true to what He taught us? Was it the right way? Did he persuade us to his views or have we rejected them as too difficult to accept?

Jan Braun was occupied with many fields of linguistics, but he was more than just a linguist. His education started with Classical philology and archaeology, moving on to Oriental philology: from the study of classical Greek and Latin through the Caucasian languages, to the cultures of the Ancient Near East, Hittite, Hurrian and Sumerian languages. This developed his exceptional skill in language analysis and gave him a broadened perspective on the study of languages within the scope of his interests.

He was born on 15 May 1926 in Łódź, in a family of teachers. Graduating in 1947 from a humanistic secondary school, he went on to study the classics in the Classical Philology Chair of the University of Łódź. In May 1949, he was given his first post as junior assistant in the Classical Philology Chair of the Faculty of the Humanities. In 1951, he graduated from classical philology, receiving a Master of Philosophy with a specialty in Classical archaeology. Working on his master's thesis on the ethnogenesis of the Etruscans, that is, the fate of the pre-Greek population of the Aegean and Asia Minor brought an unexpected deepening of interest in the Caucasian languages. His independent study of Georgian led him in the end of 1951 to embark on doctoral studies at the State University in Tbilisi where he specialized in Georgian studies. In Georgia, he researched the vocabulary of the Kartli dialect of Georgian. Four years later he received his doctoral title in philological studies and returned to Poland to start work at the University of Warsaw. He was first attached to the Chair of General Linguistic Studies, although he lectured also for the Oriental section. In 1958, he published a catalogue of Georgian manuscripts from the collection of the National Museum. This led to a philological study of the Georgian epic of Shota Rustaveli. He lobbied for a language course in Georgian, which was established in 1962 in the Oriental Institute of the University of Warsaw, followed by a two-year course in the Georgian language and culture.

His interest in the languages of the pre-Indo-Europeans and pre-Semites of Asia Minor led Braun to the Chair of Ancient Near Eastern Philology, where in 1961 Professor Rudolf Ransozek, then head of the Chair, taught him the basics of Hittite and Sumerian philology. Braun embarked on a study of the origins of Sumerian, proposing in effect a theory on the ties between Sumerian and the Tibeto-Burman group of the Chinese-Tibetan language family.

In 1964, he took up on his own request a lecturer's post in the Chair of Ancient Near Eastern Philology, developing Sumerian studies, while devoting himself at the same time to a study of the Basque language and its cognateness with southern Caucasian languages. In 1967–1970, he served as a senior lecturer and became a Reader at the Oriental Institute in June 1970.

His broad interests were reflected in Braun's extensive itinerary of journeys abroad: in late 1963 he was conducting research in Berlin and Leipzig, from December 1972 to April 1973 he was in Baghdad, lecturing at the local university and studying in the Iraq Museum. In 1976–1977, he gave a series of lectures at the request of Georgian authorities, teaching Basque linguistics at the State University of Tbilisi and preparing for publication a textbook of the Basque language. Simultaneously with his teaching he took part in international scientific conferences and congresses on Caucasian, Sumerian, Basque and Etruscan language themes: Tbilisi 1966, Paris 1973, Budapest 1974, Jena 1975, Paris 1977, Leipzig 1979, Bilbao 1980, Tbilisi 1982, Oslo and Perugia 1986, San Sebastian and Tbilisi 1987, Paris and Tbilisi 1988, London 1990, Maikop 1992, Bayonne 1993, Marburg 1994.

From 1970 to 1975 he headed the Ancient Near Eastern Philology Department. For thirty years he was also a member of the General Board of the Polish Oriental Society. He also sat on the Oriental Studies Committee of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the Consultative Group of the "Studia Antiqua" publishing series. In 1986, he was elected to the Societas Caucasologica Europaea. His habilitation in 1991 was based on a series of articles on the genetic relations between Basque and Kartli languages and in 1995 he received his nomination as a professor of the University of Warsaw. He supervised two doctoral theses. Five times he was distinguished by the Rector of the University of Warsaw for his didactic and teaching as well as organizational achievement. For many years he was Poland's sole expert on Georgian and broadly understood Georgian literature. In recognition of his output the Rector of the State University in Tbilisi awarded him the Ivane Jakakhishvili medal. In June 2002 he was elected a foreign member of the Georgian Academy of Sciences and in 2007 he received a *honoris causa* doctoral degree from the University in Tbilisi. In 2014 he was honored with the Order of St Grigol Peradze.

His passing on 29 June 2015 has remained in the memory of his associates and friends. Condolences were forwarded also by the Deputy Speaker of the Georgian Parliament, the President of the Georgian Academy of Sciences, Rector of the University of Tbilisi, Dean of the Department of the Humanities of the University of Tbilisi, Director of the Arnold Chikobava Institute of Linguistics and many Georgian friends.

Having studied with the Professor I well remember his strong conviction about philology being a science and the need for diachronic studies of each and every issue. He instilled in all of his students an in-depth and systematic approach to research and leisurely judgment. I remember him coming back with great energy from his voyages in Turkey, Italy, Georgia and the land of the Basques. We all have in mind still his classes on Sumerian grammar, which showed the immense breadth of his interests. We are glad we could participate in them.

Verses from Shota Rustaveli's epic poem *Knight in a Panther's Skin*, on which Professor Braun spent many an hour of study, illustrate well his life and works:

*Wisdom without action to confirm it is worth little.
The objective of reason is to take its place in the higher order of the world.*

Olga Drewnowska

A Complete Bibliography of Jan Braun

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