

A note on biography

Idess Biežuńska was born on 1 January 1917 in Warsaw, in a Jewish family, as a younger daughter of Elias Biežuński, an affluent merchant and owner of tenement houses, and of Dyna Prawda. She was called Iza at home, and she officially changed her name in November 1947. After graduating in 1934 from the Janina Świącicka secondary school (which had a strong focus on the humanities), she began her university studies at the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Warsaw, where she pursued History and Classical Studies. From the very beginning, she took a keen interest in lectures in Ancient History. While a student, she attended the ancient history seminar by Zdzisław Zmigryder-Konopka and the seminar by Tadeusz Walek-Czarnecki. Following the latter, she graduated with an MA in Philosophy with specialization in History, having successfully submitted her master's thesis *Emancypacja kobiety greckiej w świetle źródeł papirusowych* [Emancipation of a Greek female in light of papyrus sources]. She did not complete her Classical Studies. In her third year of studies, she worked together with professor Zmigryder-Konopka in order to make the bibliography of ancient history and over time took the project over. In autumn 1938 she became the research assistant to Zdzisław Zmigryder-Konopka at Wolna Wszechnica Polska [a private university established in Warsaw]. She also held the position of research assistant at the University of Warsaw – informally only, because of her Jewish origin.

Iza Biežuńska spent the Second World War in Warsaw. She stayed in the Warsaw Ghetto until July 1942. She managed to escape and was in hiding under the name of Janina Truszczyńska. Throughout her stay in the Ghetto, she was involved in secret teaching of History and Greek in two Jewish girls' schools, the Felicja Mirlasowa Secondary School in ul. Długa 50 and the Cecylia Goldman-Landauowa Secondary School in ul. Przejazd 5. During the Nazi occupation Iza Biežuńska lost almost her entire family. The only survivor was her sister, who had left for Bordeaux a few years earlier, having married a French physician.

Between September 1944 and February 1945, she stayed outside Warsaw, first in Pruszków and next in Jeżów. She resumed her professional career as soon as she returned to Warsaw. In May, she gained employment at the Department of Science and Higher Education at the Ministry of Education. In result, she had considerable impact on the restoration of Poland's educational system. On 1 September, she was also offered a post of senior research assistant at the Chair of Ancient History, Institute of History, University of Warsaw.

In 1947, she completed her PhD dissertation under the guidance of J. Manteuffel, entitled *Z zagadnień niewolnictwa w okresie hellenistycznym* [Slavery in the Hellenistic period]. In the same year, she married Marian Małowist, an outstanding historian and researcher specializing in the period between the 14th and 17th centuries, with whom she shared her scientific interests.

She submitted her post-doctoral (habilitation) dissertation entitled *Poglądy nobilitas okresu Nerona i ich podłoże gospodarczo-społeczne* [Nobilitas views in the Nero's reign and their economic and social background] in 1951. In the period between her habilitation and retirement in 1987 she worked at the Institute of History of the University of Warsaw first as Head of the Chair and next Department of Ancient History. In 1954 she became associate professor [profesor nadzwyczajny] and in 1973 she was awarded the title of full professor [profesor zwyczajny].

Iza Biezuńska did not restrict her professional activity to the University of Warsaw alone. Throughout her scientific career, she maintained international relations with outstanding scholars from various universities worldwide, in particular with French scientists. As early as in 1947 she was awarded a scholarship from the French government. From 1971 she was a member of Pierre Lévêque and Ettore Lepore's team, at that time under development. Her interest in slavery led to the establishment of the team under the name Groupe International de Recherches sur l'Esclavage Ancien. In 1959, she delivered a lecture at the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres in Paris. Between 1971 and 1972 she was visiting member of Clare Hall at the University of Cambridge. She stayed in Princeton twice (1974–1975 and 1980) on the invitation of the Institute for Advanced Study. From 1981 to 1982 she held the position of *Gastprofessor* at the University of Hamburg. For several years, she maintained close ties with the University of Besançon, where she frequently delivered lectures. As a result, she was awarded the *honoris causa* degree in 1982.

As soon as she returned to the university, Iza Biezuńska-Małowist sat on the editorial board of the journal *Przegląd Historyczny* [Historical Review], where she was responsible for the texts on antiquity. She was also a member of the Polish Papyrology Association and in 1961 organized the proceedings of the International Congress of Papyrologists in Warsaw. In 1986, she became chair of the Council of Antique Culture at the University of Warsaw. She was also one of the editors of two antiquity journals, *Klio. Beiträge zur Alten Geschichte* (from 1959) and *Eirene. Studia graeca et latina* (from 1964).

Owing to her war experiences and her post-war knowledge of Nazi activity, her interests, which she shared with her husband, revolved around slavery. As she entered the autumn of her life, she resumed her studies on the topic that had occupied her attention at the beginning of her career: the situation of women in antiquity. In 1993 she published her last book entitled *Kobiety antyku: talenty, ambicje, namiętności* [Women of the antiquity: talent, ambition, passion]. Iza Biezuńska-Małowist died suddenly on 27 July 1995.

About the book

The paper aims to present the issue of slavery in the Hellenistic and Roman Egypt. Based on a vast set of normative sources and documents related to slave trade, the author presents a comprehensive analysis of the roots of slavery, use of slaves, relations between the slave, the state, and the owner, as well as the social and legal status of slaves.

The point of departure is the ways in which slaves were acquired in the Ptolemaic period and in the Roman times. The author discusses the slave trade and slavery market, the enslavement of abandoned children raised to become qualified slaves, as well as acquisition of slaves during the wars or as repayment of debt. The paper also elaborates on the control of the state over private slaves treated like a chattel by the owners, and on issues related to the slaves' registration after their birth or purchase. Further on, the paper features a detailed analysis of taxes, handling fees, and administrative fees payable for the registration of a slave, as well as of other formalities to be complied with by the owner. Apart from legal issues, the author also focuses on economics: the venue and method of slavery work both in households and in various sectors of the economy such as agriculture, mining, and craft. She also discusses the hiring of slaves for labour purposes.

The paper makes an attempt to outline the social, economic, and legal position of the slaves in the world of antiquity. Iza Biezuńska-Małowist stresses the fact that a slave's position was fully dependent on the owner's social and financial standing. She demonstrates that the slaves' position was also affected by their education and the relationship with their owners.

Next, she refers to matters connected with everyday legal practices. Under the general law, the slaves were treated both as an object and as a person, whereas under the property law they were recognized as part of the owner's assets. It was the owner who decided whether the slave had a status of an object, of a person, or both. Legal documents certifying the ownership of slaves are also reviewed: deeds of purchase, testaments and documents certifying that the slaves were treated as a pledge for a loan.

Domestic slavery is discussed, with particular emphasis on the slaves' role as family members. The author points to the fact that some slaves were bound to their owners, predominantly women, by lawful nuptial knots, or by customary extramarital ties. A slave is shown as a family member to whom the owner is attached, as evidenced by multi-generational service in one household. The author also discusses slaves getting married and founding

families. She stresses minor legal differences between the slaves and free people representing the lowest social strata. Iza Biezuńska-Małowist finally reaches the conclusion that legislation alone was not necessarily crucial for slaves' fate. The slaves' position was largely influenced by their financial standing and social status, which made it possible for them to function in the society in an ordinary manner.

Finally, the author brings up the legal prerequisites for freeing the slaves. There was little chance of them being freed. This occurred seldom if ever, and mainly by the last will of their owners, which meant that they were given freedom and part of the owner's assets, and could make a living as free people. As a rule, after the owner's death, the slaves were handed over to other family members because, as chattels, they were part of the estate.

Impact on historiography

Iza Biezuńska-Małowist dedicated her research to slavery as a result of her experiences during the Second World War. Having experienced slavery first hand, she made a decision to devote her life to this topic. Her almost 30 years' research resulted in a number of published papers on slavery, the slaves' quality of life, and legal and social status. Iza Biezuńska-Małowist crowned her long-time, much-admired research with the book entitled *Niewolnictwo w Egipcie grecko-rzymskim* [Slavery in Greek and Roman Egypt].

The first edition was published in two volumes, in 1974 and 1977, in French, under the title *L'esclavage dans l'Égypte gréco-romaine*. Both volumes are built in a similar manner and present, in order, the source of slavery, the use of slaves, the control of the state, and the social circumstances of the slaves. Her work was based mainly on papyrological material.

The development of research into ancient slavery and new publications in this area made it possible for Iza Biezuńska to reconsider the issues that she had raised before and rethink the sources that she had already examined. Her more than 30 years' work and in-depth research yielded an amended and broadened version of this extraordinary book, this time published in Italian, in 1984, under the title *Schiavitù nell'Egitto greco-romano*. The book was brought out in one volume, with a clear division into the Roman and Ptolemaic period. It was translated into Polish later on.

Iza Biezuńska-Małowist's book was the first publication with this degree of detail on slavery in a specific area of the Greek and Roman world. Although the book was written and published such a long time ago, it remains complete, exhaustive, and irreplaceable. This is mainly because until now, no one has endeavoured to research this issue again or study as insightfully the vast source material presented by the author.

Iza Biezuńska also authored several papers dedicated to slavery. Her work enjoys prominence in research into ancient slavery, and her scientific output has become an inherent part of global scholarly achievements.