

Obituary note: Mirosław Jerzy Leszka

(April 4, 1963 – August 24, 2024)

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*A ty mię nie zostawaj, wdzięczna lutni moja,
Ale ze mną pospółu pódź aż do pokoja
Surowego Plutona: owa go [to] łzami,
To temi żalasnemi zmiękczywa pieśniami [...]
Gdzie by też tak kamienne ten Bóg serce nosił,
Żeby tam smutny człowiek już nic nie uprosił?
Jan Kochanowski (c. 1530–1584), *Tren XIV**

On the morning of August 24, 2024, Professor Mirosław Jerzy Leszka passed away suddenly following a short, severe illness. He was an outstanding scholar, historian, Byzantinist, medievalist, expert in the history of medieval Bulgaria, long-time academic lecturer, and employee of the Department of Byzantine Studies at the Institute of History, the Faculty of Philosophy and History of the University of Łódź (Poland), and one of the most gifted students of the founder of the Łódź school of Byzantine studies, Professor Waldemar Ceran. He co-founded the Waldemar Ceran Research Centre for the History and Culture of the Mediterranean Area and South-East Europe, the *Ceraneum* (University of Łódź). He was also a co-founder, co-editor-in-chief (2011–2021), and editor-in-chief (2021–2024) of the scientific journal “*Studia Ceranea. Journal of the Waldemar Ceran Research Centre for the History and Culture of the Mediterranean Area and South-East Europe*,” a member of the editorial board of the “*Series Ceranea*,” a chairman of the editorial committee of the publishing series “*Byzantina Lodziensia*” (2012–2024), which led to the publication of 35 volumes. He was our great Colleague, Mentor, and genuine Friend, on whom we could always rely. He was a good man.

Born in Zgierz on April 4, 1963, Mirosław Jerzy Leszka worked at the University of Łódź since 1996, first as an assistant professor, then (2006) as an associate professor, and since 2016 as a full professor. His interest in the history of Byzantium was linked to the studies he undertook at the University of Łódź, where for three years (1984–1987), he attended a master’s seminar in Byzantine history conducted by Prof. Waldemar Ceran, which resulted in the thesis entitled *Intronization of the Early Byzantine Emperors*. In the following years, under the supervision of Prof. Waldemar Ceran, he prepared a doctoral dissertation entitled *Usurpations in the Byzantine Empire from the 4th to the mid-9th Centuries*, which he defended in November 1995, receiving the degree

of Doctor of Humanities in History, conferred on him by the Council of the Faculty of Philosophy and History of the University of Łódź on December 14 of that year. In this dissertation, published in 1999 in the form of a monograph,¹ he outlined the causes of usurpations and their place in the political system of Byzantium, the forces backing usurpers, the impact of usurpations on the condition of the state and, finally, the procedures for legalizing power gained by coup. Mirosław J. Leszka continued his research on usurpations, publishing the results as scholarly articles.

When Mirosław J. Leszka was working on his habilitation, new directions emerged in his research. At that time, he began to explore, on the one hand, the Byzantium's relations with the Slavs, especially the first Bulgarian state (with the support of Kiril Marinow, currently dr. hab. and associate professor at the University of Łódź, the co-author of their many joint projects dedicated to the history of medieval Bulgaria), and on the other hand – prosopographical research on the Eastern Roman and Byzantine empresses in the 4th–15th centuries (after many years of work, its crowning achievement was a book written with his wife Małgorzata, a doctor of Byzantine studies and a student of Prof. Waldemar Ceran).²

Mirosław J. Leszka considered himself a continuator of the research carried out in the Łódź centre for Byzantine studies by Professor Halina Evert-Kappesowa. His activity in this field produced the monograph entitled *The Image of the First Bulgarian State Rulers in the Byzantine Written Sources. The 8th to the First Half of the 12th Centuries*, published by the Łódź University Press in 2003,³ based on which he received his doctoral habilitation on February 19, 2004, and which later contributed to his promotion to the position of associate professor at the University of Łódź (September 15, 2006). This dissertation, like most of Mirosław J. Leszka's scholarly works, was characterized by a broad treatment of the subject. It included the Bulgarian rulers from both the pre-Christian era (from Asparuch to Presian, with special emphasis on the figure of Krum) and from the years after official Christianization: Boris-Michael, Symeon and Peter. Around that time, Prof. Mirosław J. Leszka showed his didactic side, giving lectures on the history of the Slavs to first-year students of South Slavic philology at the Faculty of Philology of the University of Łódź.

Another important area of Mirosław J. Leszka's scholarly research during this period was the history of early Byzantine Constantinople, initiated as part

1 M. J. LESZKA, *Uzurpacje w cesarstwie bizantyńskim w okresie od IV do połowy IX w.*, (Byzantina Lodziensia, IV), Łódź 1999.

2 M. B. LESZKA – M. J. LESZKA, *Bazyliśa. Świat bizantyńskich cesarzowych IV–XV w.*, Łódź 2017. Selected articles addressing this topic: M. J. LESZKA, Empress-widow Verina's political activity during the reign of emperor Zeno, in: W. Ceran (ed.), *Mélanges offerts à Oktawiusz Jurewicz à l'occasion de son soixante-dixième anniversaire*, Łódź 1998, 128–136. Id., The role of Empress Verina in the events of 475/476 – revisited, *BSI* 75, 2017, 30–42.

3 M. J. LESZKA, *Wizerunek władców pierwszego państwa bułgarskiego w bizantyńskich źródłach pisanych (VIII – pierwsza połowa XII w.)*, (Byzantina Lodziensia, VII), Łódź 2003.

of the research project he supervised: *Constantinople – New Rome and Its Citizens, the 4th – Early 7th Centuries* (2007–2010). They resulted, first of all, in significant contributions to the development of the multi-author monograph: *Constantinople – New Rome. The City and the People in the Early Byzantine Period*⁴ and numerous articles. Issues of particular interest to Prof. Mirosław J. Leszka included the perspective of individual rulers toward the capital city, social unrest, and the attitudes of Constantinopolitans toward the elemental disasters they experienced.

In subsequent years, Prof. Mirosław J. Leszka focused his scholarly interest on Symeon I the Great (893–927), one of the most prominent rulers of medieval Bulgaria, during whose reign Old Bulgarian culture experienced a multi-faceted growth, including writing in the Old Church Slavic language. A careful reconstruction of the biography of this monarch – for whom, *nota bene*, the Professor had an affection – and outlining the situation of the Bulgarian state at the turn of the 10th century, with particular emphasis on its relations with the Byzantine Empire, gave rise to the monograph entitled *Symeon I the Great and Byzantium. From the History of Bulgarian-Byzantine Relations in the Years 893–927*. Published in 2013 as part of the renewed series “Byzantina Lodziensia”⁵, it – along with many other publications: multi-author monographs, edited volumes, scholarly articles, reviews, and conference papers – paved the way for his appointment as a full professor (January 22, 2016). It is worth noting that the aforementioned book received an extremely positive reception in Balkan scholarly circles. Furthermore, it was translated into Bulgarian by Galina Filipova, published by a renowned scholarly publisher in Sofia (2017),⁶ and reviewed positively in foreign periodicals.⁷ Prof. Mirosław J. Leszka also presented the results of his research on the era of Symeon I the Great in scholarly articles.⁸

4 M. J. Leszka – T. Wolińska (eds.), *Konstantynopol: Nowy Rzym. Miasto i ludzie w okresie wczesnobizantyńskim*, Warsaw 2011. Mirosław J. Leszka authored or co-authored following chapters: ‘Powstanie Konstantynopola i jego dzieje od IV do początku VII w.’ (‘The rise of Constantinople and its history from the 4th to the early the 7th centuries’) – together with P. Filipczak, M. B. Leszka, and T. Wolińska; ‘Kształt urbanistyczny miasta’ (‘Urban shape of the city’) – with S. Bralewski, K. Marinow, and T. Wolińska; ‘Cesarz, dwór i poddani’ (‘Emperor, court and subjects’) – with T. Wolińska.

5 M. J. LESZKA, *Symeon I Wielki a Bizancjum. Z dziejów stosunków bułgarsko-bizantyńskich w latach 893–927*, (Byzantina Lodziensia, XV), Łódź 2013.

6 M. J. LESZKA, *Симеон Велики и Византия. Из историята на българо-византийските отношения през 893–927*, Sofia 2017.

7 M. KOKOSZKO, Symeon the Greatest, *Palaeobulgarica* 37, 2013, 85–88. Z. PENTEK, Mirosław J. Leszka, Symeon I Wielki a Bizancjum. Z dziejów stosunków bułgarsko-bizantyńskich w latach 893–927, *Balkanica Posnaniensia* 20, 2013, 237–239. Z. A. BRZOZOWSKA, Mirosław J. Leszka, Symeon I Wielki a Bizancjum. Z dziejów stosunków bułgarsko-bizantyńskich w latach 893–927, *BSI* 72, 2014, 374–377. G. MINCZEW, Mirosław J. Leszka, Simeone I Il Grande e Bisanzio. Storia delle relazioni bulgaro-bizantine negli anni 893–927, *Studia Ceranea* 4, 2014, 308–311.

8 I.a. M. J. LESZKA, The question of the Bulgarian patriarchate during the reign of Symeon I the Great and Peter I (a short survey), *Bulgaria Mediaevalis* 7, 2016, 329–338. Id., Was

The year 2011 was a breakthrough for the Byzantine community in Łódź – it was then that the interdisciplinary Research Centre for the History and Culture of the Mediterranean Area and South-East Europe, named the *Ceraneum* after Prof. Waldemar Ceran was established within the organizational structure of the University of Łódź. Prof. Mirosław J. Leszka was one of the most active co-founders of this centre, involved primarily in its publishing activities: the creation of a scholarly periodical of international character and, over time, reach, “*Studia Ceranea. Journal of the Waldemar Ceran Research Centre for the History and Culture of the Mediterranean Area and South-East Europe*”, as well as the “*Series Ceranea.*” Moreover, with Kirił Marinow, they brought together a team of several people at the *Ceraneum* Centre, conducting research on Byzantine-Slavic relations in the broadest sense, but largely focused on medieval Bulgaria. The first major initiative of this group was to prepare a study of the history of the first Bulgarian state from the time of Christianization to the end of its existence for the Polish Scientific Publisher PWN: *The Bulgarian Empire. Politics, Society, Economy, Culture. 866–971.*⁹ This monograph, co-authored by Mirosław J. Leszka and Kirił Marinow, included modest contributions by two young researchers; at that point, doctoral students or “freshly minted” doctors of history – and at the same time – graduates of Slavic studies: Jan M. Wolski (currently employed at the *Ceraneum* Centre) and Zofia A. Brzozowska (currently dr. hab. and associate professor at the University of Łódź, working at the Faculty of Philology of the University of Łódź).

The years 2015–2018 saw the most ambitious undertaking of the aforementioned group, i.e., the realization of an international scientific project, funded by the National Science Centre, entitled *The Bulgarian State in 927–969. The Epoch of Tsar Peter I.* The head of the grant was Mirosław J. Leszka, and its co-author Kirił Marinow. Aside from Jan M. Wolski and Zofia A. Brzozowska, the team also included Bulgarian scholars from the Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski and the University of St. Cyril and Methodius in Veliko Tarnovo. For the two young researchers, participation in this project meant their first employment in academic positions at the University of Łódź and provided an opportunity to continue their research work after their doctorate. Adding them to the team allowed Prof. Mirosław J. Leszka to broaden the *spectrum* of research: as Paleoslavists, they were able to work with sources (including manuscripts) in Old Church Slavic.

Simeon the Great an expert on Roma history? On the value of Nikolaos Mystikos’ evidence, *Кирило-Методиевски студии* 25, 2016, 231–236. ID., Bulgarian rulers in the works of Liudprand of Cremona (Symeon I the Great, Peter I), in: S. Turlej – M. Stachura – B. J. Kołoczek – A. Izdebski (eds.), *Byzantina et Slavica. Studies in Honour of Professor Maciej Salamon*, Kraków 2019, 253–261. ID., The temperance and prudence of Simeon, the Bulgarian ruler in the letters of Nicholas Mystikos, patriarch of Constantinople. Some remarks, *Vox Patrum* 84, 2022, 93–104.

9 M. J. LESZKA – K. MARINOW, *Carstwo bułgarskie. Polityka, społeczeństwo, gospodarka, kultura. 866–971*, Warsaw 2015.

The project yielded three monographs and more than twenty articles¹⁰. The most important of the publications was undoubtedly a collective monograph authored by all the members of the project team, edited by Mirosław J. Leszka and Kiril Marinow, entitled *The Bulgarian State in 927–969. The Epoch of Tsar Peter I*. Published in 2018, co-edited by the Jagiellonian University Press with international distribution through Columbia University Press,¹¹ it is, to date, the most comprehensive volume of the “Byzantina Lodziensia” series. In nearly 700 pages, it contains a discussion of the political and military events of 927–969, as well as a range of issues related to Bulgaria’s geographic location at the time, the economy, daily life, administration, the system of government, the military, the official Church and the heterodox movement (Bogomilism) spreading in the 10th century in the Balkans, and culture in general. A separate part of the monograph is the analysis of the image of Peter in medieval sources and modern historiography, his cult as a saint, and the source image of the Byzantine-Bulgarian peace of 927. The Polish-language, abridged version of this study was published in the well-known biographical series of the Kraków-based, ‘Avalon’ publishing house.¹² In co-authorship with Zofia A. Brzozowska, the Professor also published a separate biography of Peter’s wife, Maria Lekapene,¹³ relating his earlier findings, developed in the course of his research on the place of women empresses in the Byzantine political system, to the Bulgarian context.

An important strand of Prof. Mirosław J. Leszka’s scientific research in recent years was prosopographical research on the political and military elite of the time of Zeno and Anastasius I, carried out as part of the project of the National Science Centre (2019–2024), which he supervised. He produced several articles and two monographs, co-authored by Szymon Wierzbński.¹⁴ In the course of the aforementioned research, Prof. Mirosław J. Leszka prepared texts dedicated to i.a. Areobindus, Armatas, Heraclius, Illus, John the Scythian, Leontius, Lilingis, Longinus, Zeno’s brother, Marcian, Patricius,

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- 10 I. a. M. J. LESZKA – K. MARINOW, Controversies on the reign of tsar Peter I (927–969), *Palaeobulgarica* 1, 2017, 23–39. M. J. LESZKA, On the reliability of Constantine Porphyrogenitus’ account of the “flight” of prince Časlav from Bulgaria, *Studia Ceranea* 7, 2017, 129–138. Id., The Bulgarians’ attitude towards the 971 expedition of John I Tsimiscus – some remarks, in: A. Nikolov (ed.), *Сборник в чест на 60-годишнината на доц. д-р Георги Н. Николов*, Sofia 2018, 416–429.
- 11 M. J. Leszka – K. Marinow (eds.), *The Bulgarian State in 927–969. The Epoch of Tsar Peter I*, (Byzantina Lodziensia, XXXIV), Łódź – Kraków 2018.
- 12 Z. A. BRZOZOWSKA – M. J. LESZKA – K. MARINOW, *Piotr I Święty, car bułgarski (ok. 912–969). Maria Lekapena, caryca bułgarska (ok. 912–963)*, Kraków 2018.
- 13 Z. A. BRZOZOWSKA – M. J. LESZKA, *Maria Lekapene, Empress of the Bulgarians. Neither a Saint nor a Malefactress*, (Byzantina Lodziensia, XXXVI), Łódź – Kraków 2017.
- 14 M. J. LESZKA – S. WIERZBIŃSKI, *Wodzowie Zenona (474–491) i Anastazjusza I (491–518)*, (Byzantina Lodziensia, XLIX), Łódź 2023. M. J. LESZKA – S. WIERZBIŃSKI, *Strategozi: early Byzantine military commanders in the times of Zeno and Anastasius (474–518)*, (Byzantina Lodziensia, L), Łódź – Kraków 2024.

Pharesmanes, Sabinianus the Great, and finally, Trocundes. Prof. Mirosław J. Leszka also devoted numerous scholarly articles to the times of emperors Zeno and Anastasius I.¹⁵

Research on the chronicle of Comes Marcellinus is another key area in the scientific output of the Professor, the final result of which is a monograph entitled: *Comes Marcellinus Vir Clarissimus. The Historian and His Work*, written together with Szymon Wierzbński, and published in 2022 as the XLV volume of the “Byzantina Lodziensia” series.¹⁶ It consists of an extensive chapter on the life and views of Comes Marcellinus, and an edition of the Latin text along with a Polish translation of the chronicle, as well as its continuation with an extensive commentary prepared by Prof. Mirosław J. Leszka.

Bulgarian subjects – as well as Byzantine studies – remained at the heart of Prof. Mirosław J. Leszka’s research for the rest of his days. In addition to the listed topics, the Professor studied the pagan period in Bulgarian history,¹⁷ as well as the reign of tsar Samuel and his successors, preceding the end of Bulgarian statehood in 1018.¹⁸ Moreover, the Professor closely followed the scholarly literature on Byzantium and the Slavic world, devoting many reviews to monographs published in various scholarly centers around the world. He was also engaged in popularization activities.

Prof. Mirosław J. Leszka’s interest in Eastern Slavic studies was sparked by his scientific collaboration with Zofia A. Brzozowska. Their joint expedition to Novgorod the Great culminated in a popularizing publication, richly illustrated with the Professor’s photographs: *Novgorod the Great. Historical &*

15 I.a. M. J. LESZKA, Armatus: a story of a Byzantine general from the 5th century, *Eos* 87, 2000, 335–343. ID., The career of Flavius Appalius Illus Trocundes, *BSI* 71, 2013, 47–58. M. B. LESZKA – M. J. LESZKA, Longinus of Cardala. Leader of the Isaurian revolt (492–497), in: K. Twardowska – M. Salamon – S. Sprawski – M. Stachura – S. Turlej (eds.), *Within the circle of Ancient ideas and virtues. Studies in honour of Professor Maria Dzielska*, Kraków 2014, 391–398. M. J. LESZKA, Portrayal of Anastasius I (491–518) in the Church History by Theodore Lector. A Few Remarks, *Res Gestae* 5, 2017, 73–82. ID., John the Scythian – a Slayer of Usurpers and the Isaurians, *Studia Ceranea* 10, 2020, 383–397. ID., On Leontius’ Origin and Career up until the Year 481/482, *Piotrkowskie zeszyty historyczne* 21/3, 2021, 9–18. ID., Lilingis, the Bastard Half-Brother of Illus, *Studia Ceranea* 11, 2021, 623–631. ID., Heraclius. A Commander in the Service of Leo I and Zeno, *Studia Ceranea* 13, 2023, 555–563.

16 M. J. LESZKA – S. WIERZBIŃSKI, *Komes Marcellin vir clarissimus. Historyk i jego dzieło*, (Byzantina Lodziensia, XLV), Łódź 2022. The article devoted to this topic: M. J. LESZKA, Marcellinus Comes on Emperor Anastasius. A handful of remarks, *Studia Ceranea* 12, 2022, 689–698.

17 I.a. M. J. LESZKA, Bulgarian khan Kardam and Byzantine emperor Constantine VI in the Chronography of Theophanes, *Palaeobulgarica* 4, 2013, 53–59. ID., The Byzantines in the service of the Bulgarian rulers in the first half of the 9th century, *Przegląd Nauk Historycznych* 165/3, 2017, 213–224. ID., The Bulgars and the Slavs in early medieval Bulgaria. The perspective of Byzantine sources, *Quaestiones Mediaevi Novae* 28, 2023, 33–45.

18 I.a. M. J. LESZKA, The Image of Gavril Radomir (1014–1015) in Byzantine Sources, *Levithan. Studiorum socii et potestatis scripta* 3, 2020, 607–610.

Cultural Guide to the Medieval Republic.¹⁹ In the past several years, as a result of cooperation with Zofia A. Brzozowska, as well as Prof. Teresa Wolińska, Mirosław J. Leszka undertook research on Byzantine-Arab relations (as part of the National Science Centre project), analyzing Byzantine polemical texts with followers of Islam.²⁰ Other Arabic themes undertaken by the Professor were included in several of his articles, some of which are forthcoming.²¹

The rich subject matter of research undertaken by Professor Mirosław J. Leszka is a testament to the breadth of his scientific horizons and scholarly fortitude. He published, individually or in co-authorship, fourteen monographs, as well as more than two hundred scholarly articles and reviews, often published in “*Studia Ceranea*.” His scholarly texts have been translated into Bulgarian and Russian and published abroad. Professor Mirosław J. Leszka enjoyed international repute. In 2019, the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Bulgaria awarded him the *Golden Age of Tsar Symeon* medal for his significant contribution to the promotion of Bulgarian history and culture. He was a member of numerous scientific bodies, including the Byzantine Commission of the Polish Historical Society, and the Commission of the Balkan Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences.

In the following years, as part of the National Science Centre project, which he supervised, surrounded by his colleagues, students, and friends, he planned to study translations of Byzantine historiographical texts into (Old) Church Slavic and their influence on the historiography of Southern and Eastern Slavs in the Middle Ages. Among the ideas to be implemented in the future, he mentioned one in particular: to develop a synthesis of Bulgarian history in the pre-Christian period. He will not put these projects into practice. Certainly – not in this world. Perhaps in another, a better one, where *death shall be no more; neither mourning, nor crying, nor pain, shall be any more*.

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19 Z. A. BRZOWSKA – M. J. LESZKA, *Nowogród Wielki. Historyczno-kulturowy przewodnik po średniowiecznej republice*, Łódź 2019.

20 Z. A. BRZOWSKA – M. J. LESZKA – T. WOLIŃSKA, *Muhammad and the Origin of Islam in the Byzantine-Slavic Literary Context. A Bibliographical History*, (Byzantina Lodziensia, XLI), Łódź – Kraków 2020.

21 M. J. LESZKA, The Arabs in the Chronicle of Constantine Manasses, *Studia Ceranea* 9, 2019, 593–602. Z. A. BRZOWSKA – M. J. LESZKA, The Qur’ān in Medieval Slavic Writings. Fragmentary Translations and Transmission Traces, *Vox Patrum* 83, 2022, 367–412. EIDEM, Michael Synkellos and His Lost Refutation of Islam in the Medieval Byzantine-Slavic Literary Tradition, in: O. A. Negoită (ed.), *Eastern Christians’ Engagement with Islam and the Qur’an (c. 8th–18th Centuries): Texts, Contexts and Knowledge Regimes*, Berlin – Boston 2025, 125–151.