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*Filming the Sites*

Not long ago I gave a lecture at Vitebsk University on the topic of Polish Mediterranean archeology and I showed some of my films from Egypt, Syria and Sudan. When describing the work of Kazimierz Michałowski, I used the literary term *epic poem*. After my lecture I was asked to explain what had been my intention in selecting such a complex and demanding term. My answer was more or less the following: “It is without hesitation that I use this word, for what other term could possibly withhold the sheer weight of the mental and physical endeavour, the emotions and patience of hundreds or, maybe, thousands of people, i.e. researchers and workers, engineers and artists, technicians and journalists, employed in teams of special forces, which these archeological enterprises seemed to be. For almost half a century, amidst the vastness of the Michałowski tract, stretching from Crimea, through Syria, Cyprus, Egypt to Sudan, these enterprises engaged the lives of a whole array of ambitious people involved in great and small discoveries in capital cities of many countries and in important centres of antiquities: Mirmeki, Palmyra, Nea Paphos, Alexandria, Egyptian Thebes, Faras, Kadero, Old Dongola and many, many others. The place names stand for temples and palaces, theatre and Imperial baths, whole cities’ districts and monasteries. And these in turn include master paintings, statues, mosaics, thousands of objects and whole trainloads of ceramics, which are the very substance of archeology. Thus I dared to use the word *epic*. This is how I perceive the union of an idea with its spiritual and material development, over a period of many years”.

I see this as a case of positive romanticism. Professor Michałowski, apart from being an outstanding researcher and an exceptionally able organiser, was also a “deviser of adventures”. Right from the beginning I, too, was strongly influenced by this aspect of the enterprise. I was impressed by colleagues who managed to tear themselves away from an exotic place and continue their laborious studies in libraries. For many years I did likewise, but with less enthusiasm than the kind of involvement with which I dedicated myself to filming. From “my” very first archeological site in Nea Paphos in 1969 where the splendid “mosaic of Theseus” was revealed, I was accompanied by my camera and a contract for a documentary film for TV. The Professor and other managers of different archeological missions did not object to my passion; quite the reverse, they came to my aid even at times when my filming reached beyond the territory of the sites themselves. And this was when I filmed the contemporary landscape, which in these countries never stands apart from the world of the past. Those film “break-aways” were, in some way, in tune with the exceptionally open formula of archeological works adopted by the Professor. It was his wish that the *chantier* should be accompanied by different complementary disciplines and he supervised with great care a rigorous scientific approach to research studies.

My first film was a report from Egypt, and the first extensive shots showed, among others, scenes of Wojciech Kołataj placing the first column on the top of the theater’s auditorium in Alexandria, and the work carried out in the baths, which were then still a part of deep excavations.<sup>1</sup> To make my second film I ventured out, in 1972, on to the wide waters of Lake Nasser, where the ruins of Amada, Kasr Ibrim and Philae were emerging

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<sup>1</sup> *The Secrets of Kom el-Dikka*, cf. Annex, No.1.

from the water.<sup>2</sup> This “tiny Venice”, as Philae then seemed to be, and the experience of moving by boat between the pylons and columns of Isis’ temple strongly influenced my decision about my occupation in the future. In this film I also recorded the works on the third terrace of the Hatshepsut Temple in Deir el-Bahari.

Later, for some time, I linked the job of an active archeologist, mostly in Alexandria, with the profession of a film-maker, a chronicler of archeological works and findings.<sup>3</sup> But when martial law ended, and it turned out that TV was ready to accept as many as three films per year from me, I had to give up archeology as such and devote my time to the making of a cycle of films about European great cities. But even in this work, I always searched for antiquities, being fully aware that this was the subject closest to my interests, where I could refer to the knowledge acquired through Professor Michałowski and the works of my father, Jan Parandowski.

It is quite possible that I would have continued with the “European” films had it not been for the invitation of Włodzimierz Godlewski to Khartoum in 1986. With his support I made a film which was technically difficult, because it required artificial lighting to record the Sudanese collection of the famous Faras paintings. In fact, I managed in this film to bring together the two great collections of these murals – the one in Warsaw and the one in Khartoum – and this film is therefore unique, being the first presentation of both collections according to a topic-based approach. I showed the English version of this film in many countries, sometimes at archeological conferences. It was also shown on Czech, Hungarian and Bulgarian TV.<sup>4</sup>

My decisive return to the ancient places took place in 1987, when Stefan Jakobielski invited me to Old Dongola. I made then two extensive films about the archeological sites in Old Dongola and Kadero, with a background of impressive, monumental landscapes of Meroe, fragments of the Nile river and of the desert.<sup>5</sup> This meant that I could make use of the opportunity to show the grandness and true range of Polish archaeological sites in the Sudan in this larger context. And I find it important to add here that in those times, professional video cameras were not widely used for these kind of enterprises, for they hardly ever left the TV building. Thus I always used a 16 mm film camera, and I still use one today.

In the 90’s I was free to travel and I could film, alternatively, Polish themes (Warsaw, Nieborów), European (Siena, Rome, Naples, Dublin, Paris) and Egyptian (Cairo, Fayyum).<sup>6</sup> My colleagues from TV were surprised when I offered them the film *Dongola* in 1993.<sup>7</sup> I had by then moved on from “archeological chronicles” to not quite documen-

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<sup>2</sup> *From the Country of Amun*, cf. Annex, No. 2.

<sup>3</sup> *The Secrets of Kom el-Dikka*, cf. Annex, No. 1; *From the Country of Amun*, cf. Annex, No. 2; *Meeting the Architecture of Egypt*, cf. Annex, No. 3; *Alexandria ad Aegyptum*, cf. Annex, No. 4; *Monasteries in the Desert*, cf. Annex, No. 5; *Egyptian Monumentalism*, cf. Annex, No. 6.

<sup>4</sup> *Paintings from Faras*, cf. Annex, No. 7.

<sup>5</sup> *Flint-stones, Churches, Pyramids*, cf. Annex, No. 8.

<sup>6</sup> *Fayum*, cf. Annex, No. 9.

<sup>7</sup> *Dongola*, cf. Annex, No. 10.

tary films, but rather film essays, though *Dongola*,<sup>8</sup> *Golden Nubia*,<sup>9</sup> *El-Gaddar* and *The Syrian Tale*<sup>10</sup> were comprising many scenes showing the work and discoveries of Polish archeologists.

From the perspective of nearly fifty documentary films, of which half concern the world of ancient Egypt, Sudan and Syria (also Lebanon), I feel obliged to share my conclusive remarks as to the character of this enterprise and its prospective value.

I view this experience, first and foremost, as a genuine adventure, not in the sense of a row or uproar, but as a way of getting acquainted with the world. When talking about archeology I once used the term *play of times* in the same way as we use the expression *word play*. It is quite obvious that – if the film camera registers technical procedures only at one site, then we are dealing with an example of a more or less successful record of a method and with the image of a single phenomenon. But in places where there exist the remains of different times and epochs, one is able to go back and forth between them, or, in other words, to manipulate, in the positive sense of the word. An excellent example of such film possibilities is *Dongola*, dealing with an enormous Polish concession encompassing 150 hectares.<sup>11</sup> Here, one is able both to focus on one site, for example, Kom H – rich in monastic architecture and paintings, and to extend the film image further by showing drawings, plans, and copies of inscriptions. All this can provide sufficient content for a documentary film, though it will be quite plain and redundantly simplified. Old Dongola was in itself a metropolis and an ecclesiastical centre inhabited for many centuries almost until our times, as can be certified by the so called “dead village” located on the *plateau*. The Nile River runs right next to it, and there exist palm groves, Muslim cemeteries with “gubbs/qubbas”, huge city walls, a palace-mosque on a cliff, ruins of several churches including cathedral, and many other forms. It is important to find a film convention which is able to portray everything in the right proportions, otherwise the viewer might build for himself the image of an isolated ruin – interesting, but stripped of its true context. And that would make picture completely false. It would be even better to include in the film monumental landscapes from other periods and from other parts of the same country or region. The viewer would then be given a chance to grasp an outline of the chronology, or, at least, would be provided with some (another) point of reference. What is more, this way of filming archeology, forces the film-maker, if only for editing reasons, to build a richer image and the change of place results in interesting interludes, such as, for example, film panoramas of beautiful landscapes. This was the approach I adopted in films about Old Dongola, Nuri, Al-Naqa and Meroe in the Sudan,<sup>12</sup> or about the Orontes Valley in Syria, where on one of the hills, Michał Gawlikowski’s team reveals the mithreum in Hawarte. I filmed the mithreum itself over two seasons – from the very beginning witnessing the first pick strike and then successively the uncovering of each painting, after the ceiling

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Annex, No. 10.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Annex, No. 11.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Annex, No. 12.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Annex, No. 10.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Annex, Nos. 8, 10, 11.

had been removed. My efforts to include both seasons in one film were, I believe, successful. At the appropriate moment, when the commentary and picture refers to pagan times, I moved to the nearby Apamea, and when it concerns the Christian epoch, I showed the cloister complex built around St Simon Stylites near Aleppo.<sup>13</sup> In a similar, non-stationary way, I filmed Kom el-Dikka in Alexandria, trying to establish links between this enormous complex of ruins and contemporary Alexandria. In *Alexandrea ad Aegyptum*, I made Mitwaly, the now deceased foreman, the main “character” of the film. His figure served as a mobile signpost, moving through different districts of Alexandria.<sup>14</sup> I also made efforts to, as if, reconstruct the ancient city by applying wide-angled shots of the gulf and of the streets’ system, which had retained the old orientation. In almost all of my films I used the method of a spell “There is not, and yet – there is” suggesting, not to excess I believe, the survival of the basic features of the city or place, at least in general strategic or landscape aspects. This concerns especially *Dongola*, *Golden Nubia* and *The Syrian Tale*.<sup>15</sup> In films about Sudan and Syria I tried to show the continuity of customs, the survival of certain human types<sup>16</sup> and of methods of agricultural husbandry.<sup>17</sup> The contrary formula or motto: “There is, but there is not” remains in agreement with the poetic convention of film which contains “magical” elements in its technique of editing as a kind of mystification. This picture “magic” and the accompanying “matter-of-fact”, non-sensational commentary form a good combination. And where the word “sensational” is concerned, in all of my films I have avoided expressions such as: “exceptional”, “successful” or “triumphal”. These are the words which are by nature alien to the medium of film, for in the sphere of the image there is something very real and even ordinary, no matter – how exotic the background is, or how dynamic is the scene.

At this point, I would like to quote a fragment of my essay, entitled *Film and Stones*, for it refers to the very nature of my inspiration:

“... I have the right to search for universal premises beyond those of my own experience, even if it is most intimate and obvious. At the most general level, the answer emerges out of quite an exceptional confrontation. Mircea Eliade writes: “The hardness, roughness and durability of matter are the hierophants in the religious consciousness of primeval man. There is nothing more direct and independent, more noble and terrifying than the majesty of rock displaying its true force, or a granite block rising with audacity up to the heavens. Because, to begin with, stone e x i s t s.”<sup>18</sup>

Jerzy Płażewski begins his work on the language of film with a characteristic title of its first chapter: “The language of film e x i s t s.”<sup>19</sup> These two instances of existence can be united – the durable with the transitory. A mixture which is, indeed, fantastic and which is

<sup>13</sup> *The Syrian Tale*, cf. Annex, No. 12.

<sup>14</sup> *Alexandrea ad Aegyptum*, cf. Annex, No. 4.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Annex, Nos. 10, 11, 12 respectively.

<sup>16</sup> Especially in: *Fayyum*, cf. Annex, No. 9.

<sup>17</sup> Especially in: *The Syrian Tale*, cf. Annex, No. 12; *Dongola*, cf. Annex, No. 10; but also in: *Fayyum*, cf. Annex, No. 9.

<sup>18</sup> M. ELIADE, *Traktat o historii religii*, Warszawa 1966, p. 215.

<sup>19</sup> J. PŁAŻEWSKI, *Język filmu*, Warszawa 1982, p. 16.

poetic at the very point of entry, as if at the outset of a definition. This issue is followed by my silence, for all other comments would be either a form of individual expression or a kind of grammar game. The same is not true in the case of stone being the subject of a film motif...

Stone and word. They support each other: the stone adds a serious note to the sentences and they, in turn, somehow bring the stone to life – they move it in the lyrical sense; and with stone in the background – they produce much stronger imaginary pictures than when confronted with more “chimeric” motifs, such as: forest, fire or water. These last ones bring about associations; the stone arouses the imagination.

Stone and music. They form an ideal partnership in a film sequence, especially – the lower tones’ register. Music in the environment of stones seems to drum with a double echo, or it sounds when reflected from a glossy surface. Stones love the piano, the organ and sometimes the flute, and they do not quite agree with the violins. They cannot stand bells or the fife. Sometimes they demand an orchestra, yet they hate the voice.

Stone makes the cameraman a sculptor. Stone has nothing against being watched from all sides and it succumbs to the treatment of the chisel, which in this case takes the form of a ray of light. That what is formless and ugly can turn, at any minute, to a beautiful shape.

Among the advantages of stone I see its servitodal or even – mnemotechnical role. We stand in front of an enormous landscape somewhere in Sicily, or in the midst of the Nubian Desert. Almost every single alien motif, apart from a group of stones (a ruin) or a singular rock, can disrupt the harmony of the landscape. But these stone forms enriches the image and makes it more memorable, in a way similar to the function of rhyme within a poetic text, i.e. a poem.

Stone possesses an ethical potential. Stone in its natural form brings to the mind the hypothesis of future effort, and the one in the form of a building or a statue arouses our feelings of admiration for the work already done...

In my consciousness these thoughts are closely linked with the content of Professor Michałowski’s lectures I listened in the 60’s. Students of architecture and history of art remember very well his explanatory comments on the styles of Greek, and particularly Doric architecture (the principle of the triglyph). We learned from him the definition of rhythm in reliefs (the Parthenon frieze), which is formed by similar but not identical motifs. Our basic knowledge and concepts of ancient art were formed by the Professor’s lectures and reading of Władysław Tatarkiewicz’s *History of Aesthetics*. This knowledge was further supplemented by the Professor’s *Delphi*. Similarly, without his lecture on the Egyptian canon we would be blindly blundering about in the temples on the Nile...

The Professor wrote in his *Delphi*: “The message contained in ruins is always beautiful, but difficult to understand. When looking at ruins we succumb to the irresistible charm of objects from the ancient past – covered with the mold of time and submerged in the magic of fantastic tales and in the foreground of a landscape which they enrich with their presence. It is difficult then to differentiate between subjective associations that come to mind and bare facts. The special impact of ruins is mostly their romantic appeal.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> K. MICHAŁOWSKI, *Delfy*, Warszawa 1959, p. 65.

These words could serve as a motto to my latest Egyptian films: *Ślowacki's Egypt*<sup>21</sup> and *The Alexandrian Tram*,<sup>22</sup> and basically – to all the others...

P.S.

Several years ago I was asked by the Polish TV to put together a film which basically aimed to advertise Polish science since it belonged to the series of *The Successes of Polish Science. Archeology*. Everything was difficult in this process, and the materials, among others from Faras, were stale and of poor quality. I then remembered an interview with the Professor sitting in a Voltaire-style armchair and included his remarks in several places in the film. Suddenly, the whole film made sense and was given a tone of seriousness. I myself never dared to film the Professor, though there were many opportunities to do so, but then my camera had no sound recording options. I always put it off till later and then miscalculated my timing. Today, I regret this sincerely.

## ANNEX

### FILMOGRAPHY of Piotr Parandowski's films on Egypt, Sudan and Syria

1. *The Secrets of Kom el-Dikka.*

Photography, commentary: P. Parandowski. Realisation: K. Rogulski.  
Black and white. 20 min. Production: Tele-Ar, 1970.

Documentary from the streets of Alexandria and works conducted at Kom-el Dikka: restoration of a top the theater's auditorium, excavations in Imperial baths; the wedding of W. Jerke and W. Wagner in Cairo.

2. *From the Country of Amun.*

Photography, commentary: P. Parandowski. Realisation: K. Rogulski.  
Black and white film. 30 min. Production: Tele-Ar, 1972.

A cruise on a Nile barge from Aswan, through Amada, Kasr Ibrim to Abu Simbel; works on the third terrace of Queen Hatshepsut Temple in Deir el-Bahari; reconstruction works by the French team in the Great Temple of Amun in Karnak.

3. *Meeting the Architecture of Egypt.*

Photography, commentary: P. Parandowski. Realisation: K. Pieczyński. Black and white film. 20 min. Production: Tele-Ar, 1975.

A report consisting of two parts. The first one shows the village of Gourn el-Gedida in Luxor, the work of famous Egyptian architect Hassan Fathy, his house in Cairo and

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. Annex, No. 13.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Annex, No. 14.

an interview with him. The second part: M. Rodziewicz presents fragments of the uncovered “Byzantine district” at Kom el-Dikka in Alexandria.

4. *Alexandrea ad Aegyptum.*

Photography, commentary, realisation: P. Parandowski, Z. Parandowski. Colour film. 20 min. Production: Interpress-Film, 1980.

Works in different parts of Kom el-Dikka; scenes showing ancient (Graeco-Roman Museum garden, Serapeum, Pompey’s Column) and modern Alexandria (Mitwaly’s walk through the north-eastern districts).

5. *Monasteries in the Desert.*

Photography, commentary, realisation: P. Parandowski.

Colour. 20 min. Production: Interpress-Film, 1981.

A report from the monasteries in Wadi al-Natroun, St Anthony by the Red Sea and St Catherine at the Sinai introduced with some scenes from the Mary Girgis church in Old Cairo.

6. *Egyptian Monumentalism.*

Photography, commentary, realisation: P. Parandowski, Z. Parandowski. Colour. 25 min. Production: Interpress-Film, 1981.

The film is an attempt to grasp the essence of monumentalism in Egyptian architecture and sculpture through the example of the Pyramids in Sakkara and Giza, and the temples in Luxor, Karnak, Deir el-Bahari, Medinet Habu, Ramesseum, Elephantine, Edfu, Kom Ombo. The significance of sunlight in architecture and connections with the natural forms of the landscape.

7. *Paintings from Faras.*

Photography, commentary, realisation: P. Parandowski, Z. Parandowski. Colour. 20 min. Production: Interpress-Film, 1986.

With a few images from the Nubian Desert, the film shows – in thematic order – two collections of paintings from the Faras’ cathedral, preserved in Khartoum and Warsaw National Museums.

8. *Flint-stones, Churches, Pyramids.*

Photography, commentary, realisation: P. Parandowski.

Colour. 30 min. Production: Interpress-Film, 1987.

An extensive archeological report from the Sudan, partly 100% of sound track (interviews with W. Godlewski, S. Jakobielski, J. Dobrowolski). Successive sequences: bus ride Khartoum – Dongola, works in the Cruciform Church, Mosque, “dead valley” – Moslem cemeteries, work in the Mission’s house. Excavations in Kadero and extensive sequence from Meroe (the pyramids).

9. *Fayyum.*

Photography, commentary, realisation: P. Parandowski.

Colour. 20 min. Production: Interpress-Film, 1992.

Sightseeing shots with extensive sequences from the area of the Lahun, Hawara and Meidum necropolises and from Naqlun (archeological sites and conservation of paintings in the church).

10. *Dongola.*

Photography, commentary, realisation: P. Parandowski.

Colour. 20 min. Production: Interpress-Film, 1993.

The film presents three archeological posts in the area of the Polish concession in Old Dongola: work on the city walls led by W. Godlewski, Kom A, B. Żurawski with a paraglider and photo camera at the so-called "Mosaic Church", monastic buildings at Kom H.-S. Jakobielski and accompanying persons. Multiple scenes showing "Dongolan" landscape.

11. *Golden Nubia.*

Photography, commentary, realisation: P. Parandowski.

Colour. 23 min. Production: TVP (Polish Television), 1998.

Extensive report from the works of The Southern Dongola Reach Survey led by B. Żurawski and his team in 1998 .

A detailed account of the mission house in Bukubul and the expedition to Soniyat (Tergedum) and Kareima. Exploration of a Meroic grave and ground studies of a Kom in Baganarti. Numerous sequences of the Nilotic landscape.

12. *The Syrian Tale.*

Photography, commentary, realisation: P. Parandowski.

Colour. 25 min. Production: TVP (Polish Television), 1999.

The film begins with an introductory view of the ruins in Baalbek, the next sequences present: the Orontes Valley (Hama), the village Hawarte on the hills and successive scenes of uncovering the mithreum under the guidance of M. Gawlikowski, the ruins of Palmyra and landscapes of the "cities of the dead" in Sergilla and Bara, the ruins of Apamea and cloisters in Qala't Samaan.

13. *Following Słowacki in Egypt.*

Photography, commentary, realisation: P. Parandowski.

Colour. 25 min. Production: TVP (Polish Television), 1998.

The film presents impressions on Egypt by Juliusz Słowacki, from his journey to this country in 1842, as seen through his poems, journey' notes and letters.

14. *The Alexandrian Tram.*

Photography, commentary, realisation: P. Parandowski.

Colour. 25 min. Production: TVP (Polish Television), 1999.

A film about contemporary Alexandria, in the form of a poetic view or essay, including many sequences from the Siwa Oasis (Amun's oracle) and a view of Kom el-Dikka.