

Zrozumieć sens historii. O profesor Zofii Libiszowskiej

To understand the sense of history. On Professor Zofia Libiszowska

SUMMARY

The article is not only a retrospective scholarly biography of Professor Zofia Libiszowska, a renowned Polish historian of international standing, but also, and above all, an attempt to show that it is both academic research as well the individual life story of a scholar that may exert an influence upon the evolution of a scholar's historiosophical views which allow that scholar to grasp the sense of particular historical epochs. Zofia Libiszowska (nee Gołuchowska) was born into an aristocratic family from the south of Poland (Galicja). She spent her childhood and youth in Lwów, where studied at the Jan Kazimierz University. The author of the article shows how vast a difference there was between the world in which Zofia Libiszowska lived before World War Two and the world in which she found herself in the after-war period, with its diametrically different sociopolitical circumstances. A young historian with social origins in the landowners' class, Zofia Libiszowska did not find it easy to find herself a place in the new reality. Her choice was the University of Łódź, which turned out to be where she worked till the end of her life. Professor Libiszowska's main area of interest was general history in a broad sense, including elements of the history of science and culture, and relating to directly or indirectly to the history of eighteenth century Poland. Professor Libiszowska believed that biographical study, which featured prominently in her research, should be the starting point for socio-political analyses, for attempts to understand the origins and significance of national liberation movements, and even for historiosophical studies. Source-based knowledge relating to France, Great Britain and the United States as well as to the dramatic history of eighteenth-century Poland, helped Professor Libiszowska to develop mature views on history, its subject-matter, its relation to politics and on the professional ethics of a historian.

In spite of the fact that, in the realities of after-war Poland, her career was not an easy one, Professor Libiszowska was opposed to all kinds of extremism and implacability, and she was also critical of all kinds of retaliation and revision in new political circumstances, believing that such an attitude testified to an inability to understand the course of history and to the immaturity of a historian. A historian, in her view, could not be a judge or mentor with respect to the period under research, but neither could the role of a historian be that of a passive observer, without a vision of history of his or her own.