



***“Full Astern!  
Because the Past Has a Future!”***

In the academic year 2019/2020, the University of Warsaw celebrates the centenary of the establishment of the Chair of Prehistoric Archaeology, the kernel which gave birth to today's Institute of Archaeology. The said Chair was founded by Professor Erazm Majewski, a self-taught archaeologist whose ambition and extensive knowledge earned him the title of the country's first full professor of archaeology in Warsaw. About a dozen years later, on the initiative of Professor Kazimierz Michałowski, archaeologists from Warsaw started their excavations in Egypt. This way Professor Michałowski made Polish archaeology enter the international stage. Already in 1959, the Polish Archaeological Centre in Cairo was up and running, thus supporting further Polish archaeological investigations in Egypt, Sudan, and the Near East.

Today, the Institute of Archaeology of the University of Warsaw holds a place among the leading educational and research institutions in Poland and Europe. There, young would-be archaeologists are encouraged to follow the principle coined by Professor Michałowski – “to understand and cherish the past for a wiser and richer future”. It is by no means a coincidence that today's motto of the Institute is: “The past has a future!”.

Specialists from the Institute of Archaeology conduct numerous archaeological research projects which involve students doing their excavation practicum at various sites across the world. This way, the students make their first steps into the past by gathering first-hand experience of the material relics left by our ancestors. I truly believe that we all find it very satisfying and inspiring that researchers, scholars, lecturers, and students can work side by side. This creates unique bonds and atmosphere not only during the fieldwork but also in laboratories and classrooms.

Flexibility and dynamism are other integral characteristics of the Institute. Both have become particularly apparent over the last few years, when archaeology has experienced the digital revolution, which swept through the humanities. The digitisation, which surely lends our work much efficiency and precision, is not the only challenge the Institute has faced in the recent times. Another one comes from the fruitful cooperation with specialists of different disciplinary backgrounds – such as chemistry, biology, or physics – which has contributed significantly to the development of archaeology as an academic discipline and to our understanding of the past itself. Nowadays, what is still considered our iconic activity by the general audience and remains a genuine source of joy for the archaeologists – the excavations – is limited to necessary fieldwork. A century ago, when archaeology at the University of Warsaw was being born, excavations were essential and crucial for understanding the past. The field-based analyses of the discovered

artefacts used to be fundamental for explanation and reconstruction of the past cultures. Today, nearly all artefacts, sediments, pottery fragments, and other objects are analysed in laboratories. The traditional understanding of archaeology is waning slowly, but steadily. It seems that almost everything has changed during this one hundred years of archaeology at the University of Warsaw. Everything except for our passion and curiosity about the past.

We have already experienced the first technological breakthrough and now new possibilities are wide open. This, obviously, will bring in new perspectives and challenges. At this point, I am absolutely certain that archaeology is on a good path leading towards exciting research prospects and future achievements. Indeed, now more than ever, since the latest legal regulations enable much more dynamic development of our field at the University of Warsaw. This centenary, coinciding with a new ministerial enactment concerning higher education, should be seen by all of us as an invitation to make archaeology at our University even more vivid, flexible, and open to new trends and opportunities – worthy to be an independent discipline.

To conclude this introduction to our emblematic journal, *Światowit*, I rest assured, considering all the above observations, that in a few years, when the Institute will be celebrating its another anniversary, the vision that was outlined here will not lose anything of its adequacy, vividness, and authenticity. I have no doubts that our discipline has a great potential for further development, whereas the Institute will strengthen its position as a major educational and research institution recognised worldwide.

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