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Halszka Osmólska (1930–2008)



Halszka Osmólska, Professor at the Institute of Paleobiology, Polish Academy of Sciences, an eminent scientist and friend of ours, passed away on the 31st of March 2008. Her death wasn't unexpected. Halszka was severely ill, and her state was deteriorating over the last few months. Still we were surprised and saddened when the end came so fast. Today, we realize how important was this modest elderly lady for our scientific activity.

Halszka was born on the 15th of September 1930 in Poznań. She started her university education in 1949, shortly after the end of the Second World War. In that year, she entered the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences of the Poznań University for first grade three years studies. In 1952 she moved to the Geologic Faculty of the Warsaw University to complete her master studies in 1955. She got her Ms of Science degree in paleontology on the basis of the thesis on trilobites: "Phacopidae from the Famennian of the Holy Cross Mountains". Some fifteen years of her scientific career were devoted to the studies of the Devonian and Carboniferous trilobites from Poland, and her PhD thesis titled: "Famennian and Lower Carboniferous Cyrtosymbolinae (Trilobita) from the Holy Cross Mts, Poland" has concerned this subject as well. It was defended at the Warsaw University and published in 1962 in *Acta Palaeontologica Polonica*. Her next thesis "Revision of non-cyrtosymbolinid trilobites from the Tournaisian–Namurian of Eurasia" defended in 1971 belongs to the same field.

Halszka began her professional life in 1953. As an undergraduate student, she joined as an assistant the first team organized by professor Roman Kozłowski at the Laboratory of Paleozoology resurrected after the war. In 1965 she got a permanent position in the Department of Paleozoology (now the Institute of Paleobiology Polish Academy of Sciences), first as an assistant, then as an assistant professor, and beginning with 1983 as a full professor in paleontology.

She changed her field only after the Polish-Mongolian Paleontological Expeditions have started (in 1963), and brought the dinosaurian material from the Gobi Desert. She was an enthusiastic member of the great-scale paleontological expeditions to the Gobi desert, and of number of smaller field trips. During last forty years of her scientific activity, Halszka was engaged in dinosaur studies, mostly Late Cretaceous in age, and her contributions covered a wide spectrum of taxa and various topics. She started with two collaborative papers, the first one on an enigmatic ornithomimosaurian *Deinocheirus mirificus* from the Gobi, represented by isolated huge forelimbs only. This material was a real challenge that introduced the authors into a theropod domain. The second paper was a perfect anatomical account on an ornithomimid *Gallimimus bullatus*. It enhenced Halszka's experience in theropod studies. She continued them her life long, while concentrating on small and medium-sized representatives of the Maniraptora belonging to Dromaeosauridae (*Hulsanpes*), Troodontidae (*Borogovia*, *Tochisurus*) and Oviraptorosauria (*Oviraptor*). These studies were of direct relevance to an understanding of avialan origin on the maniraptoran stem. Simultaneously she cooperated in studying different ornitischians, such as Protoceratopsidae (1975), Pachycephalosauria, (erected as a new ornithischian suborder by Maryańska and Osmólska 1974), and Hadrosauria from the Late Cretaceous of the Gobi desert on the large background of paleogeographic and stratigraphic distributions. Apart from a detailed anatomy, supplemented by a careful analysis of phylogenetical significance of particular characters, she has been interested in functional meaning of characters in biomechanics (Maryańska and Osmólska 1983) and physiological terms (Osmólska 1979, 1985, 1986). Seminal discussions on phylogeny within the theropods (Maryańska, Osmólska, and Wolsan 2000) and ornithischians (Maryańska and Osmólska 1984, 1985) complete the scientific output of Halszka Osmólska.

The knowledge and experience Halszka gained in such a large range of dinosaurian problems has been highly appreciated in the international vertebrate community, and she was invited as a coeditor of the most extensive modern compendium of the dinosaurian paleontology "The Dinosauria" University California Press (first edition 1992, the second fully revised edition 2004), and a coauthor of a number of chapters in this volume.

Halszka disliked administrative functions but agreed to perform such duties *pro publico bono*. In 1974–1981 she was the Vice-Director, then the Director (1983–1989), and the Vice-Director again of the Institute of Paleobiology Polish Academy of Sciences (1992–1995).

In 1975–1992, Halszka was the editor of *Acta Palaeontologica Polonica*. She was also a member of scientific councils of several institutes of the Polish Academy of Sciences. and a member of scientific committees of the Academy (Committee of Zoology, Committee of Geology, and Committee of Evolutionary and Theoretical Biology), a member of scientific societies: The Dinosaur Society, Society for the Study of Evolution, and a honorary member of the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology in USA. For her scientific activity, she gained several prestige awards, and was decorated, among others, with Polish Cross of Merit. Apart from all this, she gave lectures in vertebrate paleontology at the Warsaw University, acted as a tutor of undergraduate and graduate students and a supervisor of Ph.D. students. Halszka was a brilliant woman full of energy and sense of humor. She was a helpful and unselfish adviser to all of us working in vertebrate paleontology, a gentle, serene and wise colleague.

It was with deepest regret that we lost her. She will be missed and remembered long.

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