

Our Masters

Professor Rafał Czerner

Abstract

The article is dedicated to honouring the memory of Professor Rafał Czerner – a respected academic teacher, a scholar of ancient and medieval architecture, the author of fundamental studies on the market-block developments of Silesian towns and numerous publications on Egyptian architecture and the conservation of monuments in Marina el-Alamein, and long-time head of the Department of History of Architecture, Art and Technology as well as Chair of the Scientific Discipline Council of Architecture and Urban Planning at the Faculty of Architecture of Wrocław University of Science and Technology.

Key words: Rafał Czerner, Wrocław, Marina el-Alamein, archaeology, architecture, monuments conservation

Professor Rafał Czerner, DSc, PhD, Eng., Architect, long-standing Head of the Department of the History of Architecture, Art and Technology and Chair of the Scientific Discipline Council for Architecture and Urban Planning at the Faculty of Architecture of Wrocław University of Science and Technology, passed away on 3 May 2024. His departure left an immense void, yet above all it preserved warm memories of a good and honest man, a kind and humorous colleague, and an outstanding scholar and educator. He will always remain with us as our Master, Friend, and Mentor (Fig. 1).

Rafał Czerner was born on 3 March 1958 in Wrocław. He completed his studies at the Faculty of Architecture of Wrocław University of Science and Technology in 1982. He obtained his doctoral degree in technical sciences in 1990 and his postdoctoral (habilitation) degree in 2003. The title of Professor was conferred upon him in 2012.

In 1982 and again from 1983 to 1991, Rafał Czerner completed professional internships with the architect and structural engineer Stefan Du Chateau in Paris, and with the architect Konrad Szabelewski in Monaco (working on the revitalisation of the town of Castillon, France). In 1990 and 1993 he pursued conservation studies at the International Course on the Conservation of Architectural Heritage at the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) in Rome, as well as at the 10th International Course on Stone Conser-



Fig. 1. Rafał Czerner in August 2008 (photo by G. Bąkowska-Czerner)

Il. 1. Rafał Czerner w sierpniu 2008 (fot. G. Bąkowska-Czerner)

vation organised by ICCROM and UNESCO in Venice. In 1992 he undertook professional practice in the office of the conservation architect Yves Boiret, *Architecte en chef des monuments historiques*, in Paris.

From 1983 onward he was employed at the Institute of the History of Architecture, Art and Technology at the Faculty of Architecture of Wrocław University of Science and Technology, holding the following positions: assistant (1983–1993), assistant professor (1994–2003), assistant professor with habilitation (2003–2008), associate professor of Wrocław University of Science and Technology (from 2008), and full professor (from 2012).

Between 2005 and 2014 he served as Deputy Director of the Institute of the History of Architecture, Art and Technology at the Faculty of Architecture, and from 2014 he held the position of Head of the Department of the History of Architecture, Art and Technology. In 2020 he was appointed Chair of the Scientific Discipline Council for Architecture and Urban Planning at Wrocław University of Science and Technology. In 2019 Professor Rafał Czerner was honoured with the Wrocław University of Science and Technology Award with Diamond Distinction (Fig. 2).

Rafał Czerner's scholarly interests were closely connected with the history of architecture and the preservation of architectural heritage, and were pursued in parallel across four fields: the history of medieval architecture, the history of ancient architecture, the history of contemporary architecture, and monument conservation. His studies and research on medieval architecture focused on Silesia, particularly on secular medieval urban architecture (Czerner 1994; 2002). Working predominantly within interdisciplinary architectural–archaeological teams, he examined numerous burgher houses and churches in Silesian towns.

His most highly regarded contributions concerned the so-called intra-market building complexes, as well as the market squares and town halls of several major Silesian

cities, including Wrocław (Czerner, Lasota 2000). These studies resulted from architectural and archaeological investigations undertaken in connection with conservation, renovation, and reconstruction works carried out on these structures – often on an unprecedented scale. This enabled the formulation of a new research direction, at that time pioneering in Poland and still of leading significance: the comprehensive reconstruction of the spatial development of medieval urban centres based on integrated architectural and archaeological research combined with the analysis of written sources. As a result, Professor Czerner developed new research methodologies and assembled an exceptionally extensive body of study material.

Beyond intellectual tools, he often had to prepare his working environment in the most literal sense. He used his manual skills to build tables, cabinets, small instruments, and even to repair office equipment. One day, a colleague found him in the former institute library repairing a typewriter. Surprised, she asked what he was doing.

– *I'm writing an article*, he replied simply.

– *Then why have you taken the typewriter apart?*

– *Because the "s" isn't working.*

– *Can't you finish first and fix it afterwards? Or take it to be repaired?*

– *No, in fact I can't, because I'm writing about Środa Śląska!*

Rafał Czerner approached fieldwork with great seriousness and deep personal commitment, yet at the same time he often spoke about it with humour. One could frequently hear him say, for example, that he was "sitting in a ravine". He would sometimes put on a straw hat and – parodying a French accent – complain that a proper French archaeologist ought to be digging in Egyptian sand rather than in Silesian mud.

This, of course, was connected with the second area of his scholarly interests, which over time came to dominate his academic output: ancient architecture and the conservation of its remains at archaeological sites. He participated in numerous research expeditions to Macedonia, Bulgaria, and Egypt, collaborating with distinguished scholars. He conducted studies on ancient Egyptian, early Christian, and Hellenistic–Roman architecture.

In 1984 and 1985 he took part in the investigation and conservation of the Roman theatre at Heraclea (Bitola, Macedonia). From 1986 he was a permanent collaborator of the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology of the University of Warsaw. In 1986 he joined the Polish–Egyptian Conservation and Archaeological Mission at the Temple of Thutmose III in Deir el-Bahari, Egypt, where he worked until 2000, conducting studies on the temple's architecture and overseeing the conservation of its in situ remains – initially as deputy director and, from 1992, as director of conservation works (Fig. 3).

The discovery of the remains of the Temple of Thutmose III in 1961 was one of the greatest achievements of Polish Egyptology. Building upon the architectural reconstruction developed after the discovery by Professor Jadwiga Lipińska and later by Professor Stanisław Medeksza, Rafał Czerner contributed further significant findings based on his own research.



Fig. 2. Presentation of the Golden Badge of Wrocław University of Science and Technology with Diamond in 2023 (source: family archive photograph provided by G. Bąkowska-Czerner)

Il. 2. Wręczenie Złotej Odznaki Politechniki Wrocławskiej z Brylantem w 2023 r. (źródło: fot. z archiwum rodzinnego udostępniona przez G. Bąkowską-Czerner)



Fig. 3. Rafał Czerner during work at the Temple of Thutmose III, Egypt (source: family archive photograph provided by G. Bąkowska-Czerner)

Il. 3. Rafał Czerner podczas prac w świątyni Totmesa III, Egipt (źródło: fot. z archiwum rodzinnego udostępniona przez G. Bąkowską-Czerner)



Fig. 5. Rafał Czerner with workers in Marina el-Alamein, Egypt, in 2011 (source: family archive photograph provided by G. Bąkowska-Czerner)

Il. 5. Rafał Czerner z robotnikami w Marina el-Alamein (Egipt) w 2011 r. (źródło: fot. z archiwum rodzinnego udostępniona przez G. Bąkowską-Czerner)



Fig. 4. Rafał Czerner during conservation work in Marina el-Alamein, Egypt, in 2012 (source: family archive photograph provided by G. Bąkowska-Czerner)

Il. 4. Rafał Czerner podczas prac konserwatorskich w Marina el-Alamein (Egipt) w 2012 r. (źródło: fot. z archiwum rodzinnego udostępniona przez G. Bąkowską-Czerner)



Fig. 6. Rafał Czerner on scaffolding in Marina el-Alamein, Egypt (source: family archive photograph provided by G. Bąkowska-Czerner)

Il. 6. Rafał Czerner na rusztowaniu w Marina el-Alamein (Egipt) (źródło: fot. z archiwum rodzinnego udostępniona przez G. Bąkowską-Czerner)

From 1996 he served as a member and deputy director of the Polish–Egyptian Conservation Mission at Marina el-Alamein (Wrocław University of Science and Technology, University of Warsaw, and the Supreme Council of Antiquities of the Arab Republic of Egypt), and from 2011 he organised the mission and directed its fieldwork (Fig. 4). He rarely limited himself to planning or even to supervising the workers – who, incidentally, adored him (Fig. 5). He would climb the scaffolding himself and handle the stones, although his archaeologist colleagues regularly reminded him that stones were to be moved with one's index finger, and preferably without getting up from one's chair (Fig. 6). Passive observation of others at work was entirely foreign to his nature. Whenever his hands were free, he produced remarkably accurate situational sketches, capturing not only architectural details but also the character of the individuals participating in the excavations.

In Marina el-Alamein, from the very beginning, Professor Czerner conducted research on the architecture of the

ancient city dating to the Hellenistic and Roman periods, discovered there in 1986. He played a significant role in the scholarly development of the results obtained at this site. In addition to advancing knowledge of ancient architecture in a region where it had previously been little studied, his particular achievement lay in his analyses of architectural decoration and detail.

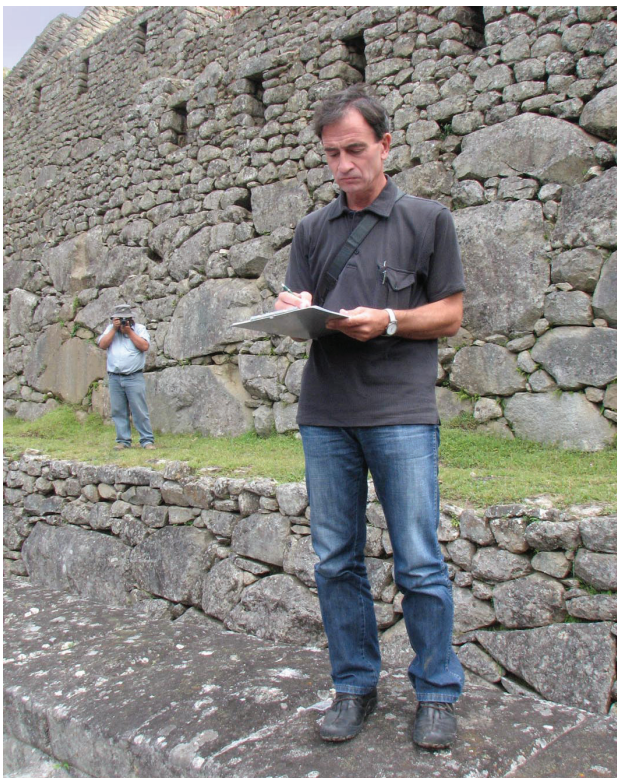


Fig. 7. Rafał Czerner working in Machu Picchu, Peru, in 2008 (source: family archive photograph provided by G. Bąkowska-Czerner)

Il. 7. Rafał Czerner podczas pracy w Machu Picchu (Peru) w 2008 r. (źródło: fot. z archiwum rodzinnego udostępniona przez G. Bąkowską-Czerner)



Fig. 8. Rafał Czerner giving a lecture at the Archaeological Museum in Lima (Peru) in 2008 (source: family archive photograph provided by G. Bąkowska-Czerner)

Il. 8. Rafał Czerner podczas wykładu w Muzeum Archeologicznym w Limie (Peru) w 2008 r. (źródło: fot. z archiwum rodzinnego udostępniona przez G. Bąkowską-Czerner)

Rafał Czerner produced the first scientific study of the unique and highly distinctive architectural ornamentation whose origins are associated with the region of Alexandria and whose most prominent concentration today is found at Marina el-Alamein. Together with the discoverer of the site, Professor Wiktor A. Daszewski, he introduced these forms into academic discourse as the “Marina type”. He characterised their similarities and differences in relation to Greek and Roman antiquity and identified their defin-

ing features. The results of these studies were published in 2009 in the British Archaeological Reports monograph *The Architectural Decoration of Marina elAlamein*, as well as in national and international articles (Czerner 2012; 2015; Bąkowska-Czerner, Czerner 2015; Czerner et al. 2017).

He was also the initiator of social life among the “missionaries”, as members of the archaeological mission referred to themselves. Together with his wife, Grażyna Bąkowska-Czerner, and friends – Professor Stanisław Medeksza, Piotr Zambrzycki, and Wiesław Grzegorek – he formed an extraordinary dance-and-vocal ensemble, famed for its spirited performance of The Tokens’ *The Lion Sleeps Tonight (Wimoweh)*, known widely from Disney’s film *The Lion King*.

Since 2004, Rafał Czerner had been a member of the International Interdisciplinary Archaeological Expedition at Novae (Svishtov, Bulgaria), where he conducted studies on the architecture of the baths of the Roman legionary camp and the Byzantine episcopal complex (Biernacki, Czerner 2013). This work continued the longstanding research carried out by the site’s discoverers and their successors. His analyses resulted in a comprehensive study of the architecture of the episcopal complex, including reconstructions of its forms, functions, and the successive phases of its development and transformation.

In connection with his scholarly interest in antiquity, Rafał Czerner also undertook studies in ancient aesthetics, followed later by research in modern aesthetics and, ultimately, in the history of contemporary architecture – an area that likewise became an intensively developed field of his work (Czerner, Widera 2004; Widera, Czerner 2009).

All of his studies on ancient architecture had practical applications, as they were closely linked to the safeguarding and conservation of historic remains carried out within archaeological – and above all conservation – missions in the field. On the basis of his research results, comprehensive and later detailed conservation projects were prepared and subsequently implemented under his supervision. This body of work includes the execution of more than a dozen conservation and anastylosis projects for historic structures at the site of Marina el-Alamein, the long-term conservation of the remains of the Temple of Thutmose III in Deir el-Bahari, and the protection of relics at other archaeological sites.

In 2007, Rafał Czerner was invited to collaborate with the Polish Centre for Pre-Columbian Studies. He began this cooperation by delivering a series of lectures on the conservation of monuments at archaeological sites, while simultaneously consulting conservation work in Peru (Maucallacta, Cópán, Saqsaywaman, Machu Picchu) and Bolivia (Tiahuanaco) (Figs. 7, 8). In 2008 he participated in another delegation of the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education to Peru, at the invitation of the Centro Nacional de Cultura and the management of the Machu Picchu Archaeological Park. His work focused on conservation consultations within the park (Czerner, Martusewicz 2012). As a result of these activities, the Centro Nacional de Cultura in Cusco invited the mission members to continue their collaboration.

A specialised scholarly and professional background in the conservation of monuments enabled Rafał Czerner to develop the experience he had gained during advanced training organised by the international conservation cen-

tre ICCROM and UNESCO, through professional practice with the Paris conservator Yves Boiret, and through collaboration with art conservators from, among others, the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw and the Inter-University Institute for the Conservation and Restoration of Works of Art.

He was a well-known figure within the Polish academic community, respected and recognised as an authority in the study of medieval civic architecture and in the conservation of architectural remains at archaeological sites. In the latter field in particular – closely linked with his studies of ancient architecture – Rafał Czerner continues to be widely recognised and highly esteemed among scholars of Mediterranean architecture and archaeology in Poland and abroad.

The results of his research were published in prestigious academic journals and have been frequently cited by other specialists. His findings on the architecture of town halls and commercial buildings within medieval intra-market blocks have been referenced by researchers in Poland (Goliński 2001), as well as in the Czech Republic (Čapský 2006) and Germany (Bahleke 2005). His studies on the architecture of the temple of Pharaoh Thutmose III have been noted by Teresa Bedman (2000) and Dieter Arnold (1994). His work on the Hellenistic–Roman architecture of the site at Marina el-Alamein has likewise been cited (Bagnall, Rathbone 2004).

The international recognition of Professor Czerner's expertise is evidenced by his admission to the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), the International Association of Egyptologists, and the German architectural historians' association Koldewey Gesellschaft. Rafał Czerner actively participated in numerous academic conferences, most of them held outside Poland (Turin, Cairo, Rhodes, Syracuse). Among these were events of the highest importance: the International Congresses of Egyptology organised by the Egyptian Museum in Turin and the University of the Aegean, the International Symposium of World Heritage Cities, and the International Congress of Egyptology and Papyrology organised by the Istituto Italiano per la Civiltà Egizia (Fig. 9).

He delivered lectures at foreign academic institutions, including Universität Karlsruhe, the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú (Lima), the Museo Nacional de Arqueología, Antropología e Historia del Perú (Lima) (Fig. 8), the Colegio de Arquitectos del Perú (Arequipa), the Convento de Santo Domingo – Qorikancha (Cusco), the Museo Nacional de Arqueología in La Paz (Bolivia), the Museo de Tiwanaku (Bolivia), the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology (Cairo), the National Museum in Alexandria (Egypt), and during the Summer School in Piazza Armerina (Sicily, Italy). In 2018 he organised the international conference "Greco-Roman Cities at the Crossroads of Cultures", held at the Museum of Architecture in Wrocław (Fig. 10).

Rafał Czerner taught a wide range of courses, primarily at the Faculty of Architecture of Wrocław University of Science and Technology: seminars on the history of medieval and early modern Polish architecture and on aesthetics; design courses in the *Conservation of Architectural Heritage* and *Protection of the Cultural Landscape*; lectures on the *Conservation of Archaeological Remains*; and classes in freehand drawing, architectural and conservation inventory, and documentation. From 1998 he taught core lectures and seminars



Fig. 9. Rafał Czerner during a break at a conference on antiquity in Rome in 2010 (source: family archive photograph provided by G. Bąkowska-Czerner)

Il. 9. Rafał Czerner podczas przerwy w konferencji na temat antyku w Rzymie w 2010 r. (źródło: fot. z archiwum rodzinnego udostępniona przez G. Bąkowską-Czerner)



Fig. 10. Rafał Czerner giving a lecture at the Museum of Architecture in Wrocław, 2015 (source: family archive photograph provided by G. Bąkowska-Czerner)

Il. 10. Rafał Czerner podczas wykładu w Muzeum Architektury we Wrocławiu, 2015 (źródło: fot. z archiwum rodzinnego udostępniona przez G. Bąkowską-Czerner)

in the history of contemporary architecture, including courses in English within the ERASMUS programme, and in 2003 also for the Faculty of Interior Architecture at the Academy of Fine Arts in Poznań. He additionally taught a course on design principles in the spatial planning programme.

He supervised student research fieldwork, including (as part of a team) a series of four international Polish–German camps (Institute of the History of Architecture, Art and Technology and the Institut für Baugeschichte of the University of Karlsruhe) devoted to the inventory and study of wooden churches in Silesia. For his achievements in teaching he received numerous awards from the Dean of the Faculty of Architecture and the Rector of Wrocław University of Science and Technology. Yet the greatest reward for him was the recognition and affection of his students, who always attended his classes in large numbers and expressed the highest praise in course evaluations.

Rafał Czerner supervised five completed doctoral dissertations at the Faculty of Architecture of Wrocław University of Science and Technology, the first of which received a Distinction from the Minister of Infrastructure in 2009. The research results of this dissertation were published as a monograph, and the intensive continuation of studies in this pioneering field led to their presentation at international symposia and in academic articles. The thematic scope of the dissertations prepared under his supervision continued and expanded his own research interests: the history of contemporary architecture and studies on ancient architecture. He also contributed to the training of academic staff within foreign archaeological and conservation missions. He authored reviews of doctoral dissertations as well as one habilitation dissertation and its accompanying scholarly output. He served as a member and chair of numerous committees responsible for habilitation proceedings.

Particularly noteworthy is Professor Czerner's long-standing work on organising and refining the specialised study programme Heritage Conservation at the Faculty of Architecture of Wrocław University of Science and Technology (1998–1999). This was a pioneering achievement and remains the only full-time programme of its kind offered at schools of architecture in Poland.

In 2022, together with an interdisciplinary team that included archaeologists, architects, and art conservators, Rafał Czerner established a new Polish–Egyptian Conservation Mission at El Darazya/Marina el-Alamein (Bąkowska-Czerner, Czerner 2023). He was its founder and director. Until the very last days of his life, he hoped to continue leading this mission. The newly identified archaeological site will remain his legacy for future generations of researchers.

Professor Rafał Czerner, apart from the international organizations already mentioned, also belonged to national scholarly associations, the most important of which were:

- Association of Monument Conservators
- Association of Art Historians
- Committee on Architecture and Urban Planning of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Wrocław branch
- Committee on the Archaeology of the Mediterranean Countries of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences (from 2016)

– Scientific Council of the Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures of the Polish Academy of Sciences (term 2019–2022).

The scholarly output of Rafał Czerner comprises 128 works. These include historical-architectural studies, architectural-conservation analyses, reports on the results of architectural-archaeological research and conservation work, as well as expert opinions and conservation recommendations. They concern sites in Wrocław and Lower Silesia, as well as foreign archaeological sites of antiquity, primarily in Egypt.

Professor Rafał Czerner was a world-renowned researcher, a person of versatile talents and exceptional intelligence. At the same time, he was remarkably modest, and any mention of his achievements was usually met with a joke or an embarrassed smile. Few people knew that he was closely related to Stanisław Lem, and only a circle of close friends knew the stories “from the Lem family couch”. When asked why he mentioned this so rarely, he replied that he did not want family history to be interpreted as claiming credit through a famous uncle.

Rafał Czerner was one of those rare people who, when faced with a choice between their own benefit and that of another person, would never choose their own comfort if it meant causing someone harm. Even when someone took advantage of his kindness and integrity, he simply could not act otherwise. Until his last moments he retained a boyish freshness and a brilliant sense of humour, combining them with a very high level of personal culture and tact. His charming anecdotes and situational jokes will remain in our memory. Once, as a joke, he and his colleagues – art conservators – fabricated a small triptych and planted it for another colleague at the spot where he was conducting excavations. They hid, waiting impatiently for the “epoch-making discovery”. When it finally happened, they tried to keep straight faces, but their creation turned out to be so good, and the discoverer's enthusiasm so great, that they quickly confessed and began apologizing.

Rafał also had plenty of self-irony. Once he joked about his eyesight, saying that either he had to buy glasses or I had to buy a bigger car, because if he couldn't see it in the parking lot, then the car must be too low. I protested that my car was not low at all, only sporty, which he answered with laughter. A few days later, when I asked whether he would hang the curtains in our freshly repainted office at the university, he replied that unfortunately he was “too sporty” for that task and would have to borrow a ladder. Another time, when he received a book about his favourite artist, Henri Matisse, for his birthday, I joked that before opening the present he had to promise that even if he already had something similar, he should pretend he didn't. He immediately exclaimed, “A book? Never! Not a single one!” He was already a full professor at the time. This joyful and kind Professor is the one we will remember, because although he never became the dean of the Faculty of Architecture, he was undoubtedly its heart.

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Streszczenie**Profesor Rafał Czerner**

Artykuł poświęcony jest upamiętnieniu sylwetki Profesora Rafała Czernera – cenionego nauczyciela akademickiego, badacza architektury starożytnej i średniowiecznej, autora fundamentalnych opracowań dotyczących zabudowy śródrinkowej miast śląskich i licznych publikacji poświęconych architekturze Egiptu oraz konserwacji zabytków w Marina el-Alamein, wieloletniego kierownika Katedry Historii Architektury Sztuki i Techniki, Przewodniczącego Rady Dyscypliny Naukowej Architektura i Urbanistyka na Wydziale Architektury Politechniki Wrocławskiej.

Słowa kluczowe: Rafał Czerner, Wrocław, Marina el-Alamein, archeologia, architektura, konserwacja zabytków

