



Janina Oszast
1908—1986



Janina Oszast handing a bunch of flowers to Professor Władysław Szafer on the occasion of his nameday at Zawoja in 1961. Next to her Professor Bogumił Pawłowski

Phot. L. Stuchlik

DR HAB. JANINA OSZAST
1908—1986

Janina Celina Oszast was born in Cracow on February 2, 1908, and was bound up with this town all her life long. Here she attended school and in 1927—1934 studied at the Faculty of Philosophy and Natural Sciences, Jagellonian University. Under the supervision of Professor W. Szafer she accomplished her master thesis entitled "Stosunek modrzewia polskiego (*Larix polonica* Rac.) do modrzewia syberyjskiego (*Larix sibirica* Ledeb.) — studium biometryczne" (The relationship of the Polish larch (*Larix polonica* Rac.) to the Siberian larch (*Larix sibirica* Ledeb.) — a biometrical study). She taught biology at the Ursuline grammar-school in Cracow till the outbreak of the World War II and, after the German occupant had closed the school, devoted herself to pedagogic work at clandestine courses. At the same time, with great zeal she committed herself, as a soldier of the Home Army (Armia Krajowa), to other forms of underground activities and in appreciation of her merits was promoted to the rank of captain. She was also awarded the Gold Cross of Merit with Swords and the Cross of Valour of the 1st and the 2nd grade by the commanding staff of the Home Army (Armia Krajowa).

In 1946 she embarked on her scientific career, first, for a short time, as an assistant in the Department of Pharmacognosy, Jagellonian University, and next, from 1950, was permanently connected with the Department of Palaeobotany directed by Professor W. Szafer, even if nominally she was employed by the Carpathian Geological Station, Warsaw Institute of Geology. From 1956 until her retirement in 1978 she worked at the Institute of Botany, Polish Academy of Sciences, in Cracow. Dr. Oszast was an enthusiastic naturalist and experienced palynologist, her scientific interest being focussed chiefly on the history of vegetation and climate in the youngest era of the Earth history. She started her study with an investigation of the Late Glacial and Holocene deposits from Żuchowo (Oszast 1957a), in which she was the first in Poland who determined pollen of a broad range of herbaceous plants and to read the influence of prehistoric men on vegetation from the palynological profile. She was also the first in Poland to determine pollen grains of Ephedra in the deposits of the last glaciation.

Simultaneously with the studies of Quaternary deposits (Oszast 1957a, Oszast & Środoń 1968, Dżułyński et al. 1968, Dżułyński et al. 1969, Oszast 1970a, 1980, 1983, Oszast & Stuchlik 1970) she carried out investigations of the Tertiary, which at that time, i.e. at the beginning of the fifties, were pioneer studies in Poland and in Europe. She was ingenious and inquiring in solving methodical problems concerning palynological studies (Oszast 1957c). Dealing with various type of mineral sediments, hard to macerate, she modified old methods or sought new ones (Oszast 1967) being, for instance, the first to use hydrofluoric acid in palynological analyses in Poland. In her studies she started determination on Tertiary

sporomorphs on the basis of the natural system in contrast to the broadly used artificial system involving only the morphological characters of sporomorphs, as a rule useful exclusively for stratigraphic purposes. This was a novelty in the palynology of the Tertiary and, at the same time, the beginning of the Polish palynology of the Tertiary in its botanic aspect (Cracow centre) in opposition to the geologic-stratigraphic school (Warsaw centre). She obtained her doctorate in natural sciences at the Institute of Botany, Polish Academy of Sciences, in Cracow on presenting her thesis containing the results of a pollen analysis of Miocene clays from Stare Gliwice in Upper Silesia (Oszast 1960).

In the sixties she started a palaeobotanic study of deposits collected during the Polish geological expeditions to Mongolia (Oszast 1970a, 1980), the first work made by the method of pollen analysis on materials from that country.

However, most attention and long years of work she gave to the history of vegetation in the Tertiary of Podhale. Particularly important were her studies of deposits from Mizerna, where the Plio-Pleistocene boundary was located and defined (Szafer & Oszast 1964). The results of palynological studies and those of Professor Szafer's investigation of the fruit-seed flora of Mizerna (Szafer 1954) permitted the first attempt at the reconstruction of changes in the development of vegetation in southern Poland at the decline of the Tertiary and at the beginning of the Quaternary. It was besides the first work on the fossil flora of that age in Europe and Mizerna still belongs to the most important localities, as regards the palaeobotany of that period. In following years J. Oszast studied materials from Huba, Krościenko and, mainly, from deep boreholes in the western part of the Nowy-Targ Basin: Domański Wierch (Oszast 1970b, 1973) and Czarny Dunajec (Oszast & Stuchlik 1977). The results of these studies, especially of the nearly 1000-metre-thick profile from Czarny Dunajec, were of decisive importance to the determination of the boundary between the Miocene and the Pliocene in the forefield of the Western Carpathians and, together with the results of earlier studies, permitted a synthetic approach to the development of the Neogene plant cover of this area.

J. Oszast habilitated herself on the basis of her work on the Pliocene flora of Domański Wierch (Oszast 1973) at the Faculty of Biology and Earth Science, Jagellonian University.

Having formally retired from service, she still continued her research work indefatigably (Oszast 1978, 1980, 1983, 1984), now including also a new borehole at Mizerna. In addition to her published papers and those left in typescript, J. Oszast made a great many scientific expertises of both Tertiary and Quaternary samples and whole profiles for other authors (e.g. Szafer 1953, 1954, Środoń 1965, 1968, 1987), scientific institutes and industrial establishments.

She participated actively in the scientific life of the Institute, in national and international conferences, conventions of the Polish Botanical Society, a member of which she had been since 1932. She took part in Thursday Meetings of the Society for many years, but she never delivered a paper at them. Being undoubtedly gifted at teaching, she did not like public pronouncements. She always willingly placed her knowledge and experience at other workers' disposal and, above all, shared them lavishly with her younger colleagues.

Two days before her death, on 7 October 1986 she was awarded a Władysław Szafer medal on the occasion of the solemn Jubilee Session in connection with the centenary of Professor Szafer's birth and the 30th anniversary of the Institute of Botany. There was something symbolic in this occurrence, for Professor Szafer was her master and teacher. She kept him as a great scientist and man of distinction in her memory till the end of her life.

She was an exceedingly tough person and exacting from herself, by all appearances severe and sharp, but instinct with kindness, subtlety and toleration in relation to other people. Very helpful in matters of life and work, generous, immensely loyal, wise and independent, she was a true lady of charm and dignity.

Last of all I want to quote a few words from the funeral oration made above her coffin at the Rakowice Cemetery in Cracow: "Two characteristics of her singular personality were particularly striking. One of them was the conviction that the Fatherland is a great Cause, our common Cause, and the other was the conviction that Science is a fascinating adventure of the human spirit on the ways of search for the Truth. In spite of her severe life abounding in hardships, she maintained enthusiasm, freshness of outlook, optimism and deep faith in the sense of work building the edifice of Science and expanding the sphere of liberty. Severe on herself, in relation to others she knowingly and excellently joined her unselfish kindness with great demands as regards professional and social ethic."

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Materials concerning the life and work of J. Oszast are kept in the Archives of the Cracow Division of the Polish Botanical Society at the W. Szafer Institute of Botany, Polish Academy of Sciences, ul. Lubicz 46, 31-512 Cracow, Poland.

PUBLICATIONS OF DR HAB. JANINA OSZAST

1956. Nowe stanowisko *Dulichium spathaceum* Pers. w interglacialnych osadach z Józefowa koło Rogowa pod Łodzią (summary: New localities of *Dulichium spathaceum* Pers. in interglacial sediments from Józefów near Łódź). Biul. Inst. Geol. 100, Z Badań Czwartorzędu w Polsce, 7: 237—240.
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- 1957c. O niektórych nowych sposobach sporządzania preparatów pyłkowych. Wiad. Bot., 1 (1—2): 65—67.
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- 1970a. Wyniki badań paleobotanicznych nad trzeciorzędowymi i czwartorzędowymi osadami z zachodniej Mongolii (abstract: The results of palaeobotanical investigations of the Tertiary and Quaternary deposits in Western Mongolia). *Biul. Inst. Geol.*, 226. Z badań polskich geologów za granicą, 2: 485—501.
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1984. Analiza 39 prób pyłku łapanych dla celów badań alergicznych. MS. Archives of the Botanical Garden of the Jagellonian University, Kraków.

PAPERS IN WHICH J. OSZAST'S POLLEN DIAGRAMS WERE PUBLISHED

1953. Szafer W., Stratygrafia plejstocenu w Polsce na podstawie florystycznej (summary: Pleistocene stratigraphy of Poland from the floristical point of view). *Fig. 1 and 19. Roczn. Pol. Tow. Geol.*, 22 (1): 1—99.
1954. Szafer W., Pliocénська flora okolic Czorsztyna i jej stosunek do plejstocenu (summary: Pliocene flora from the vicinity of Czorsztyn (West Carpathians) and its relationship to the Pleistocene). *Fig. 9. Prace Inst. Geol.*, 11: 3—238.
1965. Środoń A., *Vitis silvestris* Gmel. in the interglacial flora at Suszno on the river Bug (East Poland). *Fig. 2. Acta Palaeobot.*, 6 (1): 33—44.

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1987. Środoń A., Flora peryglacjalna z Sowlin koło Limanowej (Vistulian, Karpaty Zachodnie) (summary: Peryglacial flora of the Vistulian age from Sowliny near Limanowa (W. Carpathians). Fig. 1. Acta Palaeobot., 27 (2): 53—70.