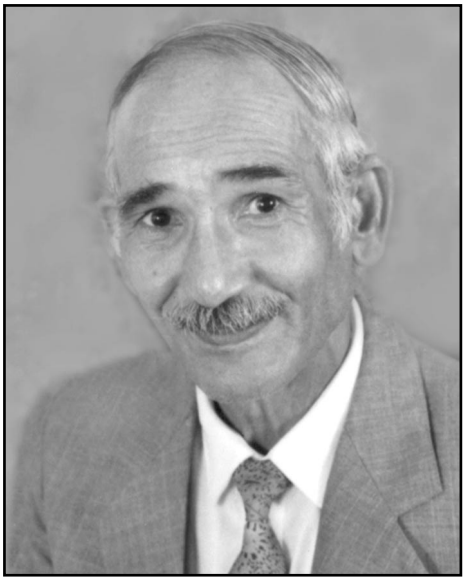

Abou Al-Youn Barakat
1939-2002

Our dearest Friend, a Man of the greatest qualities of the heart, true science and kindness pure, Abu Al-Youn Barakat, Ph.D. in Egyptology and archaeology, dean of Sadat City University, professor of Egyptology at numerous universities in Egypt (Sohag, Tanta, Cairo, Alexandria) and visiting professor of archaeology at the universities in Yemen (Sana'a) and Saudi Arabia (1980-1990), passed away on September 28, 2002.

Dr. Abu Al-Youn Barakat started out as inspector of the then Egyptian Antiquities Organization in West Thebes (al Qurna) in the mid 1960s. It was there that he first met Polish specialists working at Deir el-Bahari. Having won a Ph.D. degree from Warsaw University in 1975, he resumed his duties at Thebes, rising quickly through the ranks to become the Director General of the entire West Bank and member of the Permanent Council of the Supreme Council of Antiquities of Egypt. In 2000, he was awarded the Order of Merit, the highest Polish distinction for foreigners, in recognition of his dedicated – even in the face of various not always favorable political developments – assistance to Polish specialists working in the field of restoration and archaeology on numerous sites in Egypt.

With the death of Dr. Abu Al-Youn Barakat Science has suffered an irremediable loss. It is a pity that he wrote little, for he had that unique gift, of which only the best of scholars are truly possessed, to bring to life a real world out of any material, however poor it may be. His acquaintance with and deep understanding of historic Egyptian monuments and his broad practical field knowledge caused every word that he did write to be highly appreciated by the most eminent scholars. But it was in teaching that Dr. Abu Al-Youn Barakat found his true vocation. Like the Piper of Hamelyn, he guided hoards of enchanted students through the important archaeological sites of Egypt, teaching them history and archaeology directly from the monuments, a hands-on approach far distant from the stuffy lecture hall. In this respect, he truly possessed "baraka" – He was inspiring, permeating young people with an understanding of the Pharaonic past. To see and hear Him was to witness the fervor of His brilliant eyes, sensitive hands and the deep wisdom of his straightforward lecturing style – the true quintessence of five millennia of the glorious culture of His ancestors, otherwise much better attested on the monuments of Ancient Egypt than in present-day achievements.

Dr. Abu Al-Youn Barakat had one other characteristic that is seldom seen nowadays. He was ready to witness the truth – Ma'at in the best sense of the term – even at his own expense. Firm in his opinions and always one to defend them with true passion, He nonetheless remained open to the arguments of the other side, quick to recognize their superiority, if he thought it right. This rare quality gave him unlimited authority among the Qurnawy people from the beginning of his work in the Thebes district. He had come there as a young man and, as one born in Middle Egypt, a complete "stranger" to this closed and set world, yet within a short time the word of "doktoor Abu" (as he was called there) acquired a magical power and was sufficient to put an end to all animosities, some lasting for decades, among even the most prominent and impetuous members of the local community.

Dr. Abu Al-Youn Barakat did not attain any top posts in the officially recognized administrative hierarchy, yet that was never an objective with him. But in the hearts of those who were fortunate to know him – to meet him at the very least – He will occupy a forever hallowed place. Without Him not just Egypt, but the world, will not be what it was. Let us be consoled, however poor the consolation may be, that in the "Otherworld" He is surely following this "direct path" that he had already taken during his lifetime, "the path of those whom the God hast blessed, not those against whom He art wrathful nor of those who are astray" (Qur. I, 6-7).

Maciej Witkowski