

Professor Roman Teisseyre – Reminiscence

Leszek CZECHOWSKI

Space Research Center, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, Poland

I met Professor Roman Teisseyre when I was a research assistant looking for a doctorate advisor. It is to be noted that at those times the so-called New Global Tectonics (presently the Plate Tectonics) and the theory of convection in the Earth's mantle had just begun to be developed. Being interested in such problems, it was difficult for me to find an advisor. I don't think any geophysicist in Poland was doing adequate research at that time. For the Professor, however, this was not a problem! He accepted my research topic without any hesitation. And he immediately impressed me with the openness of his mind and the scope of his scientific interests.

He demonstrated a similar wideness of horizons when he undertook the editing of the 6-volume monograph *Physics and Evolution of the Earth's Interior*¹. In some respects, this work will remain a testament to a certain epoch. The development of geophysics has gone in a slightly different direction, which does not change the fact that this is a monograph where scholars will find the theoretical foundations of many areas of geophysics that are beautifully laid out.

But it's not about the Professor's scientific merits that I wanted to write here. That will probably be done better by others. I wanted to point out his ability to understand other people. And, at the same time, maybe make you laugh a little?

It once happened that I urgently needed to obtain Professor's signature on some documents. I no longer remember the details, but they are not important in this context. In any case, one late afternoon, with a folder of papers, I found myself at the door of his apartment (Filtrowa Street, Warsaw).

When I entered, it was immediately apparent that I came at a very good moment (from my point of view) because I found myself at a party with a dozen or so guests. The company, as expected at the Professor's home, was of a good international standard. The cordiality with which they welcomed me made me immediately feel like being among friends. The conversation in this rather mixed company did not prevent me from making generous use of the well-stocked table. My attention was quickly drawn to the platters, numbered (!) and filled with a variety of cheeses. As I approached them, a friendly lady appeared and handed me a piece of paper with a pencil and explained that a traditional competition for cheese experts was about to take place. You have to recognize what each cheese is called and write it on the slip of paper.

¹ International monographic series; 6 volumes, published between 1984 and 1992, Elsevier-PWN.

Whether there was a prize, I don't remember. In any case, I understood that I was among people for whom cheese is more than a piece of food. And that if I succeeded, I would impress the company a little.

Well, those times Poland was practically ruled by the man who, according to a popular joke, was a new Copernicus, since he "stopped the meat, moved the cheese, his name.....". Anyone who had the opportunity to live in those times will easily complete this rhyme². But this does not change the fact that even in the heyday of communist Poland, the number of cheese varieties was quite limited. At the moment, I mostly remember the unusual green-blue and very salty rokpol. If I think carefully, the following still come to mind: gouda, oscypek (smoked sheep cheese), and edam. About the existence of many other cheeses in the world, one could figure out mainly from literature and movies. On my mind, there were some camemberts, roqueforts, cheddars, emmenthaler, and similar indefinite names. So, I completely didn't expect success, but it would have been silly to spoil the guests' fun. I started with the nearest platter....

After a while, my testing of cheeses was coming to an end. Finally, I sampled the last piece and handed the written note back to the Grand Jury.

I returned to the table, intending to continue getting acquainted with the delicious sandwiches and wine. In a few minutes or so, I saw the Professor, with a puzzled expression on his face, approach me and give secret signs. When we were in a safe corner, where the other guests could not hear us, the professor began to explain in a whisper:

– Mr. Leszek, hmm, silly thing, but you made a mistake only once! And you see, we have a guest here from France. This lady, at the window, our authority on cheese. A well-known connoisseur. Perhaps you would resign for her?

I didn't expect such a result! After all, I pointed out at least half of the cheeses at random. But at the same time, I felt a bit like Mrs. Miniver when Lady Beldon³'s granddaughter came to her with a somewhat similar request. However, I looked longer at the very distinguished old lady, and then I realized that indeed the only solution consistent with the rationale of this Universe is for her to win the competition. Any other solution would be a violation of the Laws of Nature and would be prone to cataclysm.

A quarter of an hour later, I approached the jury that held the written pieces of paper and said that I had made a mistake and would like to correct one cheese. The good-natured ladies agreed. Well, and I was able to make the proper corrections.

And by the end of the party, the world got a little better for this gourmet lady. She clapped with joy after the contest results were announced. Delighted, she said she hadn't lost her taste yet. She looked around and added that young people still have a lot to learn.

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² For those who don't speak Polish or are too young to remember: „wstrzymał mięso, ruszył serek, jego imię Edward Gierek”, paraphrase to the saying about Copernicus, who „stopped the Sun, moved the Earth ...”. Edward Gierek was the First Secretary of the Polish Communist Party, de facto leader of Poland in 1970–1980, when there was a shortage of meat (note added in translation).

³ Something should also be said about the film *Mrs. Miniver*, because the film (of 1942) is somewhat forgotten. And wrongly so. If one were to look for a film that served humanity the most, it would probably be this modest melodrama. Winston Churchill once said that this film had done more for the war effort than a flotilla of destroyers. In those hard times! The film also won 6 Oscars, but this is probably of interest only to film historians.