

## Recenzje

Tadeusz M a j d a (ed.), *Szkice z dziejów polskiej orientalistyki*, vol. V, Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa 2010, 219 pp.

The fall of communism over twenty years ago meant a huge change in all fields of political and social life in Poland. It has also influenced the academic world opening it to the West, making Western publications, predominantly English ones, more available to the Polish scholars. Additionally, the popularization of the Internet has helped Poland to catch up with the vanguard of the Global Village – at least to some extent. There have been unpredictable side effects though – a general drop in academic contacts with the former Soviet Union countries on the one hand, and on the other hand, a subconscious feeling, shared especially by many younger scholars, that all most valuable academic production has been created in the West. Sadly, the achievements of Polish researchers are often underestimated, or even forgotten, not only by the public opinion in the home country, but also by their successors.

The fifth volume of *Szkice z dziejów polskiej orientalistyki* (“Essays on the History of Oriental Studies in Poland”), edited by Prof. Tadeusz M a j d a from the Warsaw University, aims at filling this gap with regard to the Oriental Studies – a relatively new discipline in Poland, which has produced several eminent scholars though and is still developing.

The book consists of six essays along with their short summaries in English. The opening article, by Marek M. D z i e k a n, acquaints the reader with the turbulent history and numerous activities of the Committee for Oriental Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences, established in 1952 as Oriental Committee headed by of Prof. Ananiasz Z a j ą c z k o w s k i. The Committee releases the yearbook “Rocznik Orientalistyczny” and a series of “Prace Orientalistyczne”; the list and description of the most important publications are included in the text.

The second essay, written by Barbara M i c h a ł a k - P i k u l s k a, is devoted to the history of Arabic Studies in Cracow. The author gives a comprehensive description of this history – from its beginnings in 1919 (when due to the initiative of Prof. Tadeusz K o w a l s k i the first Seminar on Oriental Philology was organized at Jagiellonian University), through the years when Professors Tadeusz L e w i c k i, Roman S t o p a, Andrzej C z a p k i e w i c z and Maria K o w a l s k a were subsequently Heads of the

Department, until the present day. Suffice to say that presently such subjects as Arabic language and grammar, in addition to history and culture of the Arabs and Islam, are all taught at Jagiellonian University.

The same famous names are cited among those of luminaries of Polish Oriental Studies in the third essay by Jerzy Hauziński, which is a rich overview of the studies on the history of Muslim world conducted in Poland after 1945. Summarizing 65 years of research in such a varied discipline as Oriental studies, is not an easy task, yet J. Hauziński manages to give an excellent and balanced view on the issue. From his essay one may learn about the split which occurred in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – some scholars devoted themselves to study languages, literature and religion, while others focused on the history of the states and people of the Middle East. The author notices the efforts of non-Orientalists, mainly historians, to deepen their knowledge about the Muslim world. Currently, the relations between the Christians and Muslims are studied, as well as minor sects or branches of Islam (i.e. Isma'ilism). The latest trend is to develop studies on the contemporary history and politics in the Middle East, thus scholars whose background is political science or international relations join those who graduated from Oriental Philology departments. The article ends with an abundant bibliography of Polish works on Muslim history and culture, among which there are many translations from original languages.

In a subsequent essay, Zbigniew Landowski pays a tribute to Dr. Ryszard Piwiński, who passed away in Warsaw on the 8<sup>th</sup> of December, 2007, at the age of 60. The author, who had been a student and then a colleague of late Dr. Piwiński, revives the memory of the deceased – an outstanding academic teacher and scholar, Arabist and Islamist, a prolific writer specializing in the beliefs of Arabia and Islamic philosophy (his PhD dissertation entitled “The Concept of Human Being in the Philosophical System of Al-Farabi” was successfully completed under the direction of Prof. Józef Bielawski). Piwiński spent his whole academic life in the Institute of Oriental Studies, the Warsaw University, published two books (best known being *Mity i legendy w krainie Proroka* (“Myths and Legends in the Prophet’s Land”), Warsaw 1983) and a number of articles on the philosophy, culture, religion and society of Arabia. According to Landowski his former lecturer was a man of broad knowledge blended with wit and passion.

The fifth essay has an encyclopedic value – it is a presentation of the Mesopotamian myths by Krystyna Łyczkowska. The culture of the ancient Middle East has not been profoundly explored by Polish scholars. That is why it is even more important to gather information about all Polish achievements in this field. As K. Łyczkowska reminds, the history of the research on Babylonian texts began in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the discovery of “The Flood Tablet”, relating part of the Epic of Gilgamesh. After reading this story, the interest arose not only among biblical scholars, but also among Orientalists. In Poland, the myths from Mesopotamia were initially translated on the basis of contemporary European studies (Adolf Święcicki, Antoni Lange, Rev. Władysław Szczępański). Before World War II, Assyriology was studied in

Lvov and Cracow, then also in Warsaw. Although Polish collections do not include clay tablets and researchers are forced to use copies of cuneiform texts, in recent years a vast selection of Sumerian and Babylonian myths has been published in Poland. The summary of the most important myths is included in the article.

The aim of the last essay is to present a profile of an absolutely outstanding scholar – Bronisław Piłsudski (the older brother of the famous Marshal Józef Piłsudski), whose life and work is known and appreciated in the world, yet not in Poland. Alfred Majewicz begins his article with a remark that the book entitled “Materials for the Study of the Ainu Language and Folklore” written in Polish by Piłsudski in 1912 has remained the best ever published on the topic; moreover, it will remain such as the Ainu culture was absorbed by the Japanese one just two generations after Piłsudski’s death. Fascinating, though harsh, and even tragic life of Marshal Piłsudski’s older brother, served as a scenario for several documentaries and films: sentenced for an attempt to kill the Russian tsar, Bronisław was sent to exile and as a result spent almost twenty years in Sakhalin Island, but also Vladivoslok and Japan, studying aboriginal cultures and languages, as well as propagating education among the natives. He collected an enormous material of invaluable ethnological data, which was later largely lost and scattered (Piłsudski spent his last years in poverty in the Western Europe). His work (i.e. original phonographic records of Ainu folklore) has been rediscovered and reconstructed just recently, mainly due to the research project of ICRAP (International Committee for the Restoration and Assessment of Piłsudski’s Work). As a consequence Piłsudski’s name has been cited directly just in the last twenty years more than one thousand times. His scholar achievement is one of the two or three most important Polish accomplishments in world humanities in the last century. An almost complete bibliography of Piłsudski’s works is appended at the end of the article, followed by photographs related to the text.

Having acquainted with all these essays, shortly summarized here, a Polish reader may feel pride that such fine scholars contributed to Oriental Studies. It could be regretted though, that works of the majority of them are not known abroad (Bronisław Piłsudski’s postmortal fame is rather exceptional). The idea of developing humanities in a country that does not belong to the Anglo-Saxon world, and at the same time promoting one’s findings abroad, is difficult to achieve. Surely, young Polish scholars specializing in Oriental Studies who face this dilemma, have an easier task – at least two, if not three generations of luminous academicians have paved the way, leaving a huge number of books on the topic, as well as translations from oriental languages into Polish.

In the preface to the volume reviewed here, Tadeusz Mąjda expresses hope that it will be highly useful not only for the Orientlists, but also for all interested in the Middle and Far East. I fully agree with him, strongly recommending this book, as each scholar should begin his/her work from getting acquainted with the achievements of previous generations.