

Spis treści / Contents

Preface	7
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Articles

Jerzy Bańczerowski, Jamila Oueslati, <i>Towards a Theory of Tense in Tunisian Arabic (A Preliminary Approximation)</i>	9
Brian Baumann, Oyin-i Geyigülüçci – <i>the Illumination of the Mind</i>	29
Joanna Białek, <i>The Tibetan Fiery Way to Nirvāṇa: Reflections on Old Tibetan mya ngan</i> . . .	60
Thupten Kunga Chashab, <i>The Life of Ngag Dbang 'Jig Grags, the Last Ruler of Rin Spungs, Based on the Text Rig Pa 'Dzin Pa'i Pho Nya, or "A Messenger of a Yogi"</i>	97
Marzenna Czerniak-Drożdżowicz, <i>Studying Indian Religions – Concepts and Directions</i>	128
Joanna M. Guzik, <i>New Japanese Civil Society: Kobe Earthquake of 1995 and Fukushima Accident of 2011 as Focal Points in the Development of the Japanese Civil Society After WW II</i>	145
Nathan W. Hill, <i>Tibetan First Person Singular Pronouns</i>	161
Matthew W. King, <i>Rivers of Clay, Silver and Safron Cloth: Apropos "A Brief History of Trashī Thösam Ling" (Bkra Shis Thos Bsam Gling Gi 'Byung Khungs), a Late Record of Yeke-Yin Kūriye's Twenty-sixth Buddhist Monastic Residence</i>	170
Aleksandra Matulewska, Kyong-Geun Oh, Daria Zozula, <i>Exponents of Deontic Modality in Korean, Indonesian, English and Polish: A Contrastive Translative Perspective</i>	185
Petra Maurer, <i>The Widow and the Adulteress. Aspects of Gender in Tibetan Sa Dpyad Geomancy</i>	212
Marcin Michalski, <i>Describing Written Moroccan Arabic: Some Methodological Issues</i>	232
Renata Rusek-Kowalska, <i>Poetics of Experience Based on the Example of Persian Carceral Narratives</i>	245
Bilegsaikhan Tamirjavyn, <i>Some Remarks on Ovoo Worship among the Dariganga Mongols</i> . . .	261
Monika Zin, <i>Narrated with Chisel and Paintbrush. On the Importance of Research into Art History for Understanding Buddhism – Some Examples</i>	274

Obituary

Agata Bareja-Starzyńska, <i>Remembering Professor Elliot Sperling (1951–2017)</i>	307
Lista Autorów / List of the Authors	312
Lista Recenzentów tomu / List of the Reviewers	313

Preface

The 5th International Conference of Oriental Studies – Concepts, Methods, Challenges and Perspectives was held on October 17th–18th, 2016 at the University of Warsaw. The Conference was organized jointly by the Committee of Oriental Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the Faculty of Oriental Studies of the University of Warsaw. During the Conference two hundred years' anniversary of the University of Warsaw (1816–2016) was celebrated. The anniversary was an occasion to reflect on the place and role of the Oriental Studies in the academia today. The aim of the conference was to discuss traditions and innovations applied in the work of the Orientalists. The participants shared the results of their research work, experiences and opinions.

The table of contents of the present volume of the *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* shows that the range of subjects which are pursued by the Orientalists is very vast. Basing themselves on a solid knowledge of the Oriental languages the scholars conduct their research applying different methodologies on classical and modern languages, literature, culture, history, religions and politics of the regions which were defined in the past as the Orient. Although the term since the publication of the well-known work by Edward Said became less neutral, nevertheless the label 'Oriental Studies' still covers the field of studies focused mainly on Asia and North Africa.

Nowadays the Orientalists apply different methodologies which have been developed within such disciplines as linguistics, philology and literature (including theory of literature, textual criticism, etc.), cultural anthropology, history, religious studies, sociology, and others; recently also political sciences are often being combined with the traditionally conceived Oriental studies. Therefore, it is obvious that Oriental studies which by nature belong to different disciplines are interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary. They cross boundaries and methodologies, compare different worldviews and bring new understanding of our common world.

Orientalists themselves noticed the problem how to define what they do in one term. It is rather seldom that they apply only one methodology or focus on one region. More often they attempt to draw a global picture of other peoples and cultures of Asia and Africa trying to describe, analyze and explain them exhaustively as set in their own regional context. Also the concept of the 'Other' has been taken into consideration in the context of globalization and confrontation of different cultures.

There are opponents to the concept of 'Oriental Studies' who insist that the objects and methods of Oriental studies should comply with the common (traditional) division of scientific disciplines. However, such claim does not take into consideration the very complexity of Oriental studies, say in a case of a scholar who is an expert on Arabic language (including its dialects) and literature, Islam, history, fine arts, and modern politics of the Middle East. Such a scholar would be called an Arabist and the term will express his or her field of expertise precisely. Therefore the Orientalists keep using the term 'Oriental Studies' as the most adequate.

Discussions among Orientalists during the conference showed their interest both in preserving and mastering old methods, such as for example philology, which serves as the basis to set up the place of the given text before it can be studied by scholars with the use of other methods, as well as to incorporate new methods, such as for example gender studies.

In the present volume one can find articles on linguistics which refer to vernacular (J. Bańcerowski and J. Oueslati), classical languages (J. Białek, N. Hill, M. Michalski) and to comparative linguistics (A. Matulewska et al.); classical philology (T.K. Chashab, M. King, R. Rusek-Kowalska), philology combined with the elements of astrology (B. Baumann), a study on religions (M. Czerniak-Drożdżowicz), gender studies (P. Maurer), sociology (J. Guzik), ethnology (B. Tamirjav), and art history (M. Zin). The papers presented in the volume offer a review of range of methods and topics covering regions from the Middle East via Inner Asia, India to the Far East and showing how rich and multidimensional the Oriental Studies are.

Marek Mejor
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