

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.

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