

PREFACE

This volume consists of papers originally presented at the International Symposium on *Unwritten Testimonies of the African Past* which was held in Ojrzeń near Warsaw on 7th and 8th November, 1989. The Symposium was attended by over 50 participants, including 18 contributors from Austria (*in absentia*), Belgium, German Democratic Republic, German Federal Republic, Great Britain, Holland, USA, USSR and Poland.

Despite some six months postponement of the deadline for sending in the papers, four contributors failed to provide us with their final texts. It is with the greatest regret that we have to resign from publishing them. Space limitation did not allow us also for publishing the summaries of the discussion in this volume. Our tape recordings have been preserved, however, in a good condition and we still hope to use them in the *Studies of the Department of African Languages and Cultures* (SDALC).

The general theme of the Symposium covered four main kinds of sources and testimonies: 1. language data, 2. oral tradition, 3. ethnological data, 4. archeological data. According to the intention and scientific potential of the organizers, the priority was given to the exploration of linguistic methodologies and data as sources for the historical inferences.

Among the total of 18 papers presented, the first day of the Symposium was almost entirely devoted to the discussion of 9 papers dealing with such linguistic issues as genetic relationship of Chadic languages and peoples (Frajzyngier & Ross, Jaggar, Jungraithmayr), Bantu paleolexicography (Coupez), etymologies of external loan-words in African languages (Brauner, Mukarovsky, Schadeberg), animal and plant names in Chadic languages (Frajzyngier & Ross, Pawlak), phonological diachrony in Eastern Bantu languages (Okhotina).

Linguistic investigation can be applied as a tool to the study of prehistory of a people. Such observation has been

confirmed by Z. Frajzyngier who presented the results of his and W.C. Ross's reconstructions in the paper entitled *Methodological Issues in Applying Linguistics to the Study of Prehistory*. The authors based their study on fifty names for animals in sixty-two Chadic languages. They have used materials from Kraft's *Chadic Wordlists* (and occasionally from some other sources) and - in determining the cognates - they have recurred to Newmans' sound correspondences. Taking into account the possibility of reconstruction, they have discovered that the names of animals found in and around the human habitat have a slower rate of change than the names of animals not found in the human habitat. Thus the division of animals into domestic and wild, traditionally applied in historical works, has been replaced by more adequate one, at least for the Chadic peoples. The authors came to conclusion that it is not possible to make claims about the origin of a human group on the basis of reconstruction of the animals' names, because animals from all distinguished groups based on degree of retention (easily reconstructed and well retained, reconstructable but poorly retained and unreconstructable) were found to inhabit the same geographical area. From among two methods of conducting linguistic reconstruction, i.e. examining the data in a small subgroup and looking at synchronic data from various languages of the whole family, the authors advocate the global approach to data in Afroasiatic family.

Another set of semantically selected lexical data related to the Chadic linguistic area is a basis for N. Pawlak's paper (*Historical inferences to be drawn from Hausa names of plants*). The author attempts to identify, following the internal linguistic criteria (existence of synonyms, compounds, names for specific parts of the plants, variation in form), the oldest names of plants in Hausa vocabulary. Basing on these results she comes to the conclusion that Hausa speakers have for a long time inhabited the savannah and/or the desert region.

P. Jaggar in his paper entitled *Some 'Unexpected' Form-Meaning Correspondences between Hausa (West Chadic-A) and Guruntun (Gùrdùṅ) (West Chadic-B) - How do we explain them* takes into consideration two morphological formations - abstract nouns of sensory quality and affected-subject verbs - which to date

were thought to be exclusive to Hausa. It turns out, however, that similar derivational operations with a remarkably close form-meaning resemblance are also found in Guruntun, a West Chadic-B language of the South Bauchi group (10.000 speakers). Although historical evidence points to long-established commercial contact and population movement from Hausa-speaking areas to the Southern Bauchi region, Jaggar rules out the possibility of contact-induced borrowing from Hausa and proposes that true cognation is the most likely explanation of resemblance in abstract nouns of sensory quality whereas the affected-subject verbs probably represent an independent but parallel innovation. Those findings are of remarkable significance for the study of comparative West Chadic. A more accurate historical picture will emerge with the increase of descriptive data on languages closely related to Guruntun.

The opposition between 'Centre' and 'Periphery', which since the beginning of Chadic linguistic classification has played an important role in scientific research, was reconsidered and summarized by H. Jungraithmayr in his contribution '*Centre and Periphery*'. *Chadic Linguistic Evidence and its Possible Historical Significance*. The author pointed to some common retentions in the West-East Periphery (apophonic nature of verbal constructions, distinction between masculine and feminine forms in the 2nd and 3rd persons of pronominal sets, limited vocalic inventory) as opposed to the innovations in the centre (increased number of vowels innovatively developed by contact with neighbouring Adamawa languages and a great number of consonantal phonemes explained by the appearance of secondary features like labialization, palatalization, prenasalization and general tendency towards clustering of the consonantal phonemes). He came to conclusion that the Chadic linguistic periphery with a number of morphological and phonological archaic features close to those in Berber, Cushitic, Ancient Egyptian and Semitic represents an ancient area of the early Chadic speakers where they first took refuge after having abandoned their Central Saharan cradle. Between the Mandara Mountains and the Bauchi Plateau the central area is situated which proved to be most evolutionary and innovative in the linguistic respect being a

reflection of a particularly turbulent social and cultural/historical past which has left its mark on this region over the latest 3-4.000 years.

Reconstructed proto-languages often served for speculations concerning the state of civilization and the environment of different peoples. Loan-words also provided useful evidence as it is visible from the paper of H. Mukarovsky (*in absentia*) entitled *Remarks on some Eurafrican and Persian Loan-Words in African Languages*. Since in African linguistics the possibilities of research of that kind are not well exploited so far, the author investigated some 10 etymologies starting from the most ancient documented African language, i.e. Egyptian. Contrary to the title of the paper, H. Mukarovsky claims first that it is Egyptian roots that gave rise to such European words like *hippopotamus* and *desertum*. The Latin language was spoken in Northern Africa for more than 800 years and influenced not only the North African Berber. Mukarovsky has found its traces in Fulfulde, Serer, Wolof and Hausa suggesting that some other terms might have been brought to Western Sudan not by the Arabs (as thought before), but rather by Persian-speaking peoples and in pre-Islamic times too. African etymologies offer a new challenge to explorers of African history.

It is visible from N.V.Okhotina's case-study entitled *One Remark upon Bantu Plosive (k)* that the description of a particular language phenomenon when viewed simultaneously from different perspectives (synchronic and diachronic) does not loose by adequacy but only broadens our ideas about it. She re-analysis the behaviour of phoneme /k/ in prefix (ki-) and in front of causative suffix -ya in Swahili and in some other Eastern Bantu languages from the diachronic point of view.

T.C. Schadeberg in his paper *Historical Inferences for Swahili Etymologies* expresses an opinion that the spontaneous popular interest in etymology stems from the conviction that in the history of each word there is a tiny piece of the history of the community that speaks this language today. Having presented the ways in which new words are created and having answered the question why new words are constantly needed, in section 3 the author made some interesting historical inferences from the

etymologies of a set of terms related to playing cards with special reference to the traditional and modern Swahili terms. One such obvious historical inference is that playing cards were brought to East Africa by the Portuguese and that playing cards was first taken up by more recently arrived members of the work force rather than by the socially leading class of the old Swahili-speaking towns. In the concluding section 4 the author states that etymologies are testimonies of the past, or - more carefully worded - they are hypotheses about the past.

Historical connections between peoples may result not only in reciprocal words' exchange but also in development of common grammatical features. A. Zaborski in his contribution *Ethiopian Language Subarea* distinguishes in Ethiopia six overlapping languages subareas which are the result of the contact and interference between Ethiosemitic and Cushitic, Cushitic and Surma, Cushitic and Nilotic as well as between different branches of Cushitic and even of Ethiosemitic. He concludes that it is probably impossible to find an Ethiopian language not influenced by other language/languages.

In order to preserve Ethiopian cultural heritage a special Department of Oral Literature in the Academy of Ethiopian Languages has been established. At present, the research work of the Department is concentrated on eight Ethiopian languages (Amharic, Oromo, Tigrinya, Wolayta, Sidamo, Hadiyya, Gedeo and Kembata). R. Richter in her paper *Proverbs - an Old Literary Tradition in Ethiopia* emphasizes the unique role of proverbs in Ethiopian history and society. She takes into account only those ones which have been translated into Amharic. The proverbs are especially susceptible to the process of 'internationalization' and they reflect not only old literary tradition of the Ethiopian peoples but also preserve some traces of the longstanding contacts of this country with other parts of the world.

Except R. Richter's contribution, all the other papers dealing with non-linguistic testimonies were grouped together and presented during the second day of the Symposium. The points of special interest were not only the complementarity but also the interrelationship of orality and literacy, i.e. how written texts can influence oral tradition and how to keep those sources

sufficiently apart from each other. This was illustrated by examples of such African areas of ancient literacy as Ethiopia (Crummay), West Africa (Piłaszewicz, Waliński) and East Africa (Adamowicz, Nowak, Rzewuski).

D. Crummay is engaged in a large scale project to collect information concerning historic land tenure in the Ethiopian provinces of Gondar and Gojjam. As co-author of the paper *Oral Tradition in a Literate Culture: The Case of Christian Ethiopia* he is of opinion that the written materials (grants and marginalia) contain vastly more information, much more precisely located in historic time, than do the accounts of informants. Still the informants play a number of vital roles by clarifying the original context of the documents, explicating obscure passages and technical terms, contextualizing the documents by describing subsequent developments in land-holding and by identifying place names. Although they fail on a number of important points (e.g. explaining some important terms or abbreviations), they illuminate the written record. Together, written and oral materials "stimulate reflection on the nature of culture and its relationship with society and polity".

The problem of seeming contradictions and complementarity of information as contained in oral traditions was discussed in detail by S. Piłaszewicz in his paper *On the Veracity of Oral Tradition as a Historical Source: The Case of Samori Ture*. He took into consideration two manuscripts on Samori in Hausa and Dyula languages, both based on oral tradition. Having compared few episodes of Samori's life as presented by those manuscripts, the author concluded that both sources are convergent to some extent. Facts presented in a vague way or being controversial in one of them are better understood in the perspective of the other one.

G. Waliński in his contribution *The Image of the Ruler as Presented in the Tradition about Sunjata* takes into account six records which are based on oral tradition. His aim is neither to establish an outline of a primary version of the story, nor to reconstruct the facts from Sunjata's life or from the early history of the Mali empire. He analyzes them on a deeper level in order to illuminate the idea of state government and to show the

legitimization of the founding myth. The virtues of Sunjata are examined in comparison with the qualities of Sumaoro, the ruler of Soso and his chief opponent. The author points to some seeming contradictions between Keita's court tradition and the Gambian traditions which reflect the same events from an antagonistic point of view.

E. Rzewuski in his paper entitled *Origins of the Tungi Sultanate (Northern Mozambique) in the Light of Local Traditions* presents the content of the three unknown texts in Swahili language concerning the genealogy of the Shirazi rulers of Tungi.

Among two other papers dealing with the East African oral historical traditions, one was focusing on the figure of the former traditional ruler of Bena people (Legère) and the second one presented the yet unexplored collections of oral traditions by Jan Czekanowski, Polish ethnologist and anthropologist (Nowak).

The contribution of B. Nowak entitled *Jan Czekanowski and his Version of Oral Traditions of the Interlacustrine Region Peoples* concentrated on almost unknown written sources (recording also oral traditions) for the history of the interior of Africa. Their author is a Pole, Jan Czekanowski, who took part in the greatest German expedition to East and Central Africa (1907-1908), headed by Herzog Adolf Friedrich von Mecklenburg. His diaries from the expedition belong to the most important sources for the history of the Interlacustrine region of Africa. The author divided them into 3 volumes: I. *To the Springs of the Nile*, II. *Deep into the Aruwimi Woods*, III. *On the Borders of Sudan*. Only the second volume has been published in Polish so far. Oral traditions contained in the diaries are invaluable source materials as one may judge from the fragments presented by Nowak. Unhappily, they are almost unexplored to date.

Perspectives of linking the findings of the archeology and ethnology were exemplified in only one research report from Mozambique (L. Adamowicz).

A general debate session was held at the end of the Symposium in order to summarize and evaluate its outcome and to analyse perspectives of a better communication between various disciplines contributing to the historical study of the African continent. Regret was expressed that the scholars from the

African continent as well as representatives of disciplines like ethnology and archeology were so much underrepresented at the Symposium. This was solely due to the lack of funds to pay the travelling costs. Many invited scholars could not attend the Symposium for this reason.

The Symposium on *Unwritten Testimonies of the African Past* was the first international gathering organized in Poland and dedicated to discussion of such a wide range of linguistic and historical topics in African studies. The wealthy outcome of its debates has confirmed the primary methodological importance of the theme and the urging need of having more opportunities for a further discussion of many questions and insights which were brought forward to the Symposium floor.

Stanisław Piłaszewicz

Eugeniusz Rzewuski