

OPENING ADDRESS

Distinguished Guests!

Dear Colleagues!

Ladies and Gentlemen!

On behalf of the Organizing Committee of the International Symposium on *Unwritten Testimonies of the African Past* you are cordially welcome to Ojrzanów, a small village in the vicinity of Warsaw, which is believed to become a marking point in the history of the philologically inclined Africanistics as represented by the Department of African Languages and Cultures in the University of Warsaw. This Department, being part of the Institute of Oriental Studies, continues a long tradition of teaching and scientific research in the field of African studies. They started in the late fifties, in the then Department of Semitic Studies under the direction of the late Professor Stefan Strelcyn, and went through two intermediary organizational forms: Department of African and Semitic Studies under the guidance of Professor Witold Tyloch (1969-1975, now Head of the Department of Ancient East Philology, Egyptology and Hebrew Studies) and Department of the Near East and Africa headed by Professor Józef Bielawski (1975-1977, now Professor Emeritus). On the basis of this tradition, in 1977 an independent Department of African Languages and Cultures was created and for ten subsequent years it was skilfully administered by Professor Joanna Mantel-Niecko.

The aim of our Symposium is twofold. Firstly, it was thought to celebrate the modest jubilee of decennium of the Department of African Languages and Cultures and to pay homage to the achievements of its former Head, Professor Joanna Mantel-Niecko. Secondly, being an interdisciplinary research team, we always felt the need of a large, many-sided look at a problem. In the field of African studies, we considered the reconstruction of the African past as a priority task. That is why we decided to propose the topic *Unwritten Testimonies of the African Past*.

Scarcity of the written source materials for the rediscovery

of the African past results in a need to look for some auxiliary disciplines for the history proper like linguistics, cultural anthropology and archeology. The necessity of pluri- and interdisciplinary approach to the African history rises some methodological problems. Divergence of results having been achieved by different disciplines is an additional stimulus to juxtapose and to discuss them. In such context, and judging from the summaries of the papers sent in, we expect that the main problem of the Symposium would be the verification and actualization of the methods of the diachronical analysis on the basis of the synchronical data which are provided by language, culture, social institutions, oral traditions as well as archeology.

When despatching first circular, we proposed four main themes of our Symposium:

1. Linguistic divergence and convergence as reflecting population mobility and inter-ethnic contacts,
2. Historical inferences on the basis of lexicon and onomastic sources (paleolexicography, toponymy, anthropology, etc.),
3. Cultural diffusion in the light of confronted findings of linguistics, ethnology and archeology,
4. Oral tradition data as confronted with other (mainly written) testimonies.

All the proposals of papers are in line with those themes and they allowed us to divide them into two groups. Those dealing with the linguistic testimonies of the African past were thought to be presented on the first day of the debates. The theme of the second day sessions is more diversified and deals with oral versus written and archeological testimonies. On the second day a general debate session is also planned during which the problems of interdisciplinary congruency (or incongruency!) and complementarity would be discussed.

Exploration of data like this is by no means a first attempt in the international scholarship. We simply follow, in a modest way, such academic meetings like regular seminars on *Language and History in Africa* held in the School of Oriental and African Studies in the early seventies, an international Symposium on *L'Expansion bantoue* in France (1977), regular scientific gatherings of the MEGA Chad dealing with the history and prehistory of the Chad Lake Basin and others. It is for the first time that the Department of African Languages and Cultures

ventures to confront, in a direct way, its own works in progress with the results achieved by scholars from abroad. Strong priority given to the historical exploration of the linguistic data and oral tradition does reflect, to a certain degree, the profile of our institution.

This Symposium is being held in a decisive period for the future of our country and nation. It is a time of various hardships but also of a great hope and expectation. By organizing this international meeting we wanted to contribute our little towards increase of understanding and co-operation between the Africanists from both the West and East, as well as from Africa.

When preparing this scientific meeting we greatly profited from the material and moral support of many institutions and private persons. First of all, we would like to express our deep gratitude to the Authorities of the University of Warsaw who kindly agreed for our venture and covered a substantial part of the expenses. Our great thanks are due to the Christian Pax Association which kindly provided us with accomodation and rendered all its facilities accessible to us. Among sponsors and spokesmen of our Symposium it is pertinent to praise the authorities of the Polish-African Friendship Society, Polish Committee of Solidarity with the Nations of Africa, Asia and Latin America, Polish Committee for UNESCO and, last but not least, Department of Non-European Countries of the Polish Academy of Sciences.

It is a great honour for *Alma Mater Varsoviensia*, and especially for the Department of African Languages and Cultures, to entertain so famous scholars of an international rank. You have come, dear Colleagues, from many countries of Europe and from as far as the United States and Africa guided by the irresistible wish to confront your scientific findings and to exchange views. But it is also *signum temporis* that we can extend our hospitality to you here, in Poland.

Not all the invited scholars could attend our Symposium due to some other important obligations or obstacles. Some of them had to resign from the participation in the very last moment. We are especially sorry that not all African colleagues could join our company. Many scholars sent us congratulations on a

successful transaction of the meeting as well as regrets at not being able to take part in the Symposium. We obtained occasional letters with the best wishes from Professor Bogumił Witalis Andrzejewski, Doctor Graham Furniss, Professor Bernd Heine, Prof. Olga Kapeliuk, Professor Dierk Lange, Professor Wilhelm Möhlig, Professor Hans Mukarovsky, Professor Paul Newman, Professor Rajmund Ohly, Professor David W. Phillipson, Doctor Victor Porkhomovski, Doctor Simeão Suindoula, Prof. Henri Tourneux, Professor Alessandro Triulzi and Doctor Petr Zima.

I feel honoured to inform you that we have also obtained a letter with the congratulations from the Honourable Minister of National Education, Professor Henryk Samsonowicz, who himself is a historian and sympatizer of African studies.

In final words of this address, on behalf of the Organizing Committee of the Symposium I wish you all good luck and much success in the professional meetings as well as in personal contacts. May your sojourn in Poland abound in the best impressions and leave behind many pleasant memories.

S.P.