

INTRODUCTION

Andrzej Zaborski, *Dr.phil.habil.*, Professor Ordinarius of the Jagiellonian University of Kraków, where he holds the Chair of Afro-Asiatic Linguistics, belongs to a narrow group of the best specialists in the Semitic-African comparative linguistics division of contemporary scholarship. Professor Zaborski has lectured at many universities, including the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the University of Vienna. His academic achievement can be illustrated in the shortest possible way by the list of his handbooks and monographs which open up a view onto the panorama of his academic research: *The Verb in Cushitic* (1975), *Dialekt egipski języka arabskiego* (The Egyptian Dialect of Arabic) (1982), *Morphology of the Nominal Plural in Cushitic Language* (1986), *Handbook of the Oromo Language* (1990), *Wspaniały świat Oceanu Indyjskiego* (The Wonderful World of the Indian Ocean) (1998), his translation and commentary to the writings of Sulayman the Merchant, Abu Zaid as-Silafi and Buzurg Ibn Šahriyar. In recent years Professor Zaborski also edited *Oriental Languages in Translation*, a series of conference volumes (2002, 2005, 2008). Professor Zaborski's linguistic skills include Arabic with the Egyptian and Palestinian dialects, Modern Hebrew, the Cushitic languages Oromo and Beja, Amharic, Berber and Swahili. He has also conducted classes of the ancient Semitic and African languages: Akkadian, Classical Hebrew, Aramaic, Coptic, Syriac, medieval Ethiopian. His command of the modern Indo-European languages, English, German and French is admirable. His understanding of linguistic structures is perfect. It cannot be put otherwise: his way of describing linguistic phenomena, morphological, syntactic and phraseological structures reveals his faultless and thorough understanding of language, an understanding which reaches the deepest level of meaning. Professor Zaborski also specializes in translation. The theory and practice of translation he has been passing on to his students is strikingly modern, based on clear principles, and marked by a perfect understanding of a source language, and the art of its smooth, exact, idiomatic reflection in a translation language. His metalanguage, the language of description of the linguistic phenomena, is impressively rich, exact and informative.

As Head of the Orientalist Committee of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Kraków, Professor Zaborski developed it into an institution which hosted

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orientalists, linguists and archaeologists from all over the world. Under his supervision the Orientalist Commission became one of the most interesting and inspiring places for the exchange of ideas and international scholarship in Kraków. The “Folia Orientalia” illustrate another stream of his academic activities. The “Folia Orientalia” were founded by Professor Tadeusz Lewicki, a prominent Polish Arabist and the preceptor of Professor Zaborski. The history of this professional Orientalist periodical has come full circle. Professor Zaborski is now its Chief Editor.

The role played by Professor Zaborski in Polish Oriental studies, including *Altorientalistik*, cannot be overestimated. Polish scholarship has never developed large, influential Orientalist institutions equipped with spacious and well-funded libraries, like those in France, the United Kingdom, Germany, Holland, Italy or Austria, which have been carrying out and inspiring research for the past three centuries. In Poland we have never had well-established institutes of Assyriology, Egyptology or ancient Semitic Studies provided with comprehensive Orientalist libraries. However, as regards ancient Oriental studies, Professor Zaborski with his wide grasp of Semitic-African learning together with Joachim Śliwa, Professor of Oriental Archaeology at the Jagiellonian University, actually established such an institution in Kraków. In this way without a colonial empire and in a world burdened with the long lasting syndrome of political and consequently of cultural isolation the young generation of Polish students of the 1970ties and 80ties had a unique opportunity to specialize in ancient Oriental studies at the highest European standards. In the world of cultural and political clichés promoted by the contemporary mass culture and mass media Professor Zaborski’s scholarship is a source of true, unbiased and highly expert knowledge about Africa and Western Asia. It is proof of how much can be achieved in the humanities by individuals, their passion for research, their energy and determination. Professor Zaborski’s achievement brings hope that true erudition united with an independent intellectual attitude is still possible.

To conclude let me to strike a more personal note. This editor will never forget Professor Zaborski’s classes of ancient Oriental languages and his impressive and learned interpretations of the Hebrew *Song of Songs*, the Coptic apocryphal writings of the *Life of Joseph the Carpenter* and the *Gospel of Saint Thomas*, and his class of Syriac with the *Teachings of Addai* and the hymns of Saint Ephraim.

The volume which you have in your hands is an academic accomplishment, created by all of us, friends, colleagues, collaborators and students of Professor Zaborski and in his honour.

Tomasz Polański

on behalf of the Orientalist Committee
of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Kraków