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REVIEW OF A SCIENTIFIC MONOGRAPH

A PAGE FROM THE HISTORY OF POLISH AFRICAN STUDIES.

REVIEW OF A SCIENTIFIC MONOGRAPH FROM AFRICAN STUDIES TO THE WIDE WORLD OF THE SOUTH: A PAGE FROM THE HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WARSAW

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ZE STUDIUM AFRYKANISTYCZNEGO W SZEROKI ŚWIAT POŁUDNIA. KARTA Z DZIEJÓW UNIWERSYTETU WARSZAWSKIEGO

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ABSTRACT

In 2026, a work of exceptional scholarly and documentary value appeared on the publishing market. It is rare for a study to emerge with the primary goal of not only reconstructing the history of a specific academic community, but also preserving its institutional memory and chronicling the achievements of several generations of researchers. Such is the case with this volume, which charts the evolution of arguably the most important Polish school of research on the Global South. Its origins date back to the Center of African Studies at the University of Warsaw, established in 1962 on the initiative of Professor Stefan Strelcyn, a world-renowned Ethiopianist. The very concept of this book, co-authored by a group of over 30 scholars, demonstrates a deep awareness of the history of science as an integral element in the development of contemporary academic disciplines. The volume stems from the conviction that institutional memory is not merely a sentimental value, but a crucial element in ensuring the continuity of scientific research, shaping the identity of the academic community, and building the awareness of future generations of researchers.

KEYWORDS: *African Studies, Scientific Monograph, Bouche Osochowska, Global South, African Studies Center*

In the introduction, the volume's editor outlines the motivations for undertaking the project, emphasizing the need to preserve the legacy of the University of Warsaw's African Studies Center and the organizational units that continue its activities. At the same time, it should be emphasized that the authors' intention was not merely to create a chronicle of events, but rather a multidimensional portrait of the academic community, its representatives, ideas, and international relations that have co-shaped Polish African studies for decades.

The broad, and therefore bold, approach to the subject deserves particular recognition. The authors do not limit their narrative to the history of a single institution, but present it as part of much broader developments in disciplines such as African studies, socio-economic geography, regional studies, cultural anthropology, development economics, and, more generally, research on the countries of the Global South. As a result, the monograph goes beyond the typical anniversary work, becoming a source of knowledge about the evolution of Polish scientific thought concerning development processes occurring outside Europe.

Another significant advantage of the publishing concept is the deliberate integration of several research perspectives. The publication integrates historical studies, problem-based studies, participant memoirs, scholarly biographies,

archival materials, and an extensive lexicon of researchers. This narrative structure allows the reader to view the development of African Studies from both institutional and personal perspectives. The history of science is presented through individuals, their fieldwork, teaching and organizational activities, and international scholarly collaborations.

The well-thought-out structure of the entire volume is also noteworthy. The monograph is divided into three complementary parts: historical, memoirs, and documentary-biographical. This arrangement reflects the logic of reconstructing the history of a scientific institution – from its origins and organizational development, through research and teaching activities, to the presentation of the achievements of those who contributed to the academic community. As a result, the publication is not limited to presenting facts but allows for a grasp of the mechanisms that shaped the academic school and the network of research collaborations developed over the decades. The table of contents clearly demonstrates the consistent implementation of this concept, with separate sections devoted to the history of the Center, research and teaching activities, memoirs, and a lexicon of researchers.

It's worth emphasizing that the reviewed publication also has a significant international dimension. From its inception, the University of Warsaw's African Studies Center has operated as a center collaborating with numerous academic institutions worldwide, conducting fieldwork, and participating in the international circulation of knowledge. This monograph documents this aspect of its activities, showcasing the contribution of Polish researchers to the development of global African studies and studies of developing countries from an interdisciplinary perspective.

The concept of the monograph deserves very high praise. The authors have succeeded in creating a work that harmoniously combines scholarly, documentary, historical, and community functions. The publication's clearly defined objectives were consistently achieved, and the multi-author format allowed for a comprehensive overview of the development of the University of Warsaw's African Studies Center. The result is a publication that transcends the framework of a traditional historical monograph, constituting a lasting contribution to research on the history of Polish science, African studies, and regional studies. As a result, the work reconstructs the process of shaping one

of the most important centers for research on Africa and the countries of the Global South in Central and Eastern Europe. It should be added that the authors have not limited themselves to presenting a chronology of events, but have also attempted to explain the mechanisms behind the development of the academic community, its organization, research directions, and its impact on the development of Polish regional studies.

The interdisciplinary nature of the publication deserves particular recognition. A single volume integrates the work of cultural anthropologists, geographers, economists, ethnologists, political scientists, sociologists, orientalist, and specialists in socioeconomic development. This broad perspective allows us to view the work of the African Studies Center as a space for collaboration between multiple academic disciplines, which was one of its most important organizational and research features.

The monograph's originality, however, lies primarily in its unique source material. The publication draws on relatively few archival materials, institutional documents, and, above all, eyewitness accounts, biographies, and memoirs of those who co-founded the African Studies program. A significant portion of this material is being made available to a wide scholarly audience for the first time, allowing the monograph not only to synthesize existing knowledge but also to contribute new findings to research on the history of Polish African studies. As a result, the publication is both a synthetic and a source-based work, significantly enhancing its cognitive value.

Another significant achievement of the author is the creation of a multifaceted picture of the scientific community by juxtaposing a classic historical narrative with biographical and memoir materials. This approach captures not only the institutional development of the research unit but also the process of establishing a research school and the network of academic relationships that for decades have guided the development of Polish research on Africa and developing countries.

The timeliness of the issues addressed is also significant. In an era of growing importance of the Global South in the global economy and a shifting geopolitical landscape, the publication takes on an additional dimension. The history of research conducted by the African Studies Center and its successors becomes a point of reference for contemporary analyses of globalization, regional

development, international cooperation, and North-South relations. Thus, the monograph is not limited solely to a historical perspective, but inspires further research on contemporary socio-economic transformations taking place outside of Europe.

The entire work should therefore be considered an original and significant contribution to the development of research on the history of science, including African studies and regional studies. The monograph fills an existing research gap and should likely become a point of reference for subsequent studies on the history of Polish research on the Global South.

From a methodological perspective, the reviewed monograph demonstrates a high level of scholarly craftsmanship. The authors consciously depart from the monographic model in favor of a multi-authored work, whose construction is based on the triangulation of diverse sources of knowledge. The use of archival materials, documents, scholarly publications, eyewitness accounts, and memoirs enables a multifaceted reconstruction of the history of African Studies and its subsequent transformations, minimizing the risk of a one-sided interpretation of the events analyzed.

The consistent use of methods appropriate to the historiography of science and institutional memory research is noteworthy. The authors critically analyze source materials, collate information from different periods of the institution's operation, and compare individual memories with archival documentation. This ensures the narrative maintains a high level of credibility, even though some of the material is based on the accounts of participants in the events described.

Another methodological strength is the balance between factual analysis and historical interpretation. The authors avoid excessive descriptiveness, striving to explain the reasons for organizational changes, evolving research directions, and the role of individual scholars in building the position of African Studies. This makes the publication not only documentary but also analytical.

A limitation, however, stemming from the nature of a collective work, is the heterogeneity of the authors' approaches. Individual chapters differ in the scope of analysis, narrative style, and degree of scholarly research. However, this does not significantly detract from the overall value of the work, as the editors have managed to maintain substantive coherence and logical continuity of the presented content. Consequently, it must be concluded that

the adopted methodology is appropriate for the publication's purposes and has been consistently implemented.

In terms of its composition, the reviewed monograph was prepared with great editorial care and demonstrates a high degree of substantive order. The publication's structure reflects the developmental logic of the analyzed scholarly community, guiding the reader from the origins of African Studies, through successive stages of its organizational evolution, research and teaching activities, to the recollections of participants and an extensive lexicon of researchers.

The adopted tripartite structure is considered apt from both a cognitive and didactic perspective. The first part of the monograph establishes a solid historical foundation, presenting the process of institutionalizing African studies and the development of successive organizational units at the University of Warsaw. The second part gives the publication a humanistic dimension, presenting the history of the institution through the experiences of its employees, collaborators, and alumni. The third part, containing a scholarly lexicon, constitutes a valuable compendium of documentary knowledge, significantly enhancing the enduring scholarly value of the entire work.

The consistent implementation of the principle of complementarity between the book's individual parts deserves particular recognition. The chapters complement each other, creating a multi-dimensional narrative in which the history of the institution remains closely linked to the history of the people who co-created its achievements. This provides the reader with not only a chronological account of events but also the opportunity to understand the mechanisms of the academic community and its influence on the development of Polish African studies.

The clarity of the individual chapters' composition and the appropriate balance between historical analysis, documentary material, and memoirs are also highly commendable. The extensive supporting documentation, including personal and geographical indexes and numerous illustrative materials, further enhances the publication's functionality and facilitates its use as a scholarly resource.



One of the most significant strengths of the reviewed monograph remains its exceptionally rich source base, which should be considered one of the most valuable achievements of the entire publishing endeavor. The authors and the editor have undertaken an impressive documentary effort, encompassing years of archival research, acquiring numerous materials scattered across institutional and private collections, and gathering accounts from participants who contributed to the history of the University of Warsaw's African Studies Center. This publication transcends the standard historical work, becoming simultaneously a source edition, a biographical compendium, and a documentation of the history of one of the most important centers of research on the Global South in Central and Eastern Europe.

The skillful combination of diverse source materials deserves particular recognition. In addition to administrative documents, reports, scientific publications, archival and bibliographic materials, the work also utilizes rich iconographic material, photographs, correspondence, memoirs, and eyewitness accounts. This broad spectrum of sources allows not only for the reconstruction of factual information but also for capturing the atmosphere of the academic community, interpersonal relations, and the mechanisms of functioning of an academic institution in a changing political and social environment.

The consistent critique of the sources is also worth emphasizing. The authors strive to contrast memoir accounts with archival materials, limiting the risk of subjectivity that often appears in memoir-style publications. This ensures a balance between personal narrative and the rigor of historical research. The result is a work of high scientific credibility that can be used as a primary source in further research on the history of Polish African studies, socio-economic geography, and regional studies.

The significance of this monograph extends far beyond the history of a single organizational unit at the University of Warsaw. In essence, it documents the birth and development of one of the most important Polish schools of research on Africa and the Global South, whose achievements have, for decades,

shaped the development of socioeconomic geography, development economics, cultural anthropology, political science, ethnology, and regional studies.

This publication is of fundamental importance to the African studies community. For the first time, the history of the institutionalization of Polish African studies is presented in such a comprehensive manner, revealing both its scholarly achievements and its organizational, teaching, and international context. The monograph organizes knowledge previously scattered across numerous publications, archives, and the memories of participants, creating a lasting foundation for future research on the history of Polish African studies.

The publication is equally significant for regional and global studies. The African Studies Center and its subsequent incarnations conducted research encompassing not only Africa but also Asia, Latin America, and the developing world in its broadest sense. In this sense, the monograph documents the evolution of Polish reflection on regional development and globalization, even before these issues became mainstream in contemporary social sciences.

The monograph's value for the history of science is also significant. The publication explores the mechanisms behind the emergence of the academic school, the process of educating successive generations of researchers, the development of international cooperation, and the role of academic institutions in building Poland's position in the global scientific community. As a result, the book contributes to the increasingly growing field of research on the history of scientific institutions and academic memory.

The publication therefore has not only historical value, but also significant educational, diplomatic and cultural potential.

The reviewed monograph is one of the most important studies documenting the history of Polish African studies, the geography of developing countries, and regional studies to have appeared in the Polish publishing market in recent years. Its value extends far beyond the confines of a historical or anniversary publication. It is a work of lasting scholarly, documentary, and cultural significance, likely to become a fundamental point of reference for future research on the history of Polish studies of Africa and the Global South.

It is particularly noteworthy that this publication aligns with current global research trends related to Africa's growing role in the global economy, international politics, and global civilizational processes. At a time when the African

continent is becoming one of Europe's most important partners in economic, investment, scientific, educational, and cultural cooperation, studies presenting reliable knowledge of its history, societies, and research achievements take on particular importance. The monograph not only documents the past of Polish African studies but also lays the foundation for the development of future relations between Poland and African countries, based on mutual respect, partnership, and a deeper understanding of diverse cultural and civilizational experiences.

In summary, this monograph is a work of high scholarly and documentary value, distinguished by its conceptual originality, rich source material, high-quality editing, and significant cognitive value. It is a publication that should find a permanent place in academic libraries and in the research workshops of historians of science, Africanists, geographers, anthropologists, development economists, and specialists in international cooperation.

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