CELEBRATING THE 90th ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF THE ORIENTAL STUDIES AT THE BELGRADE UNIVERSITY

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Review paper

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Received: 04.06.2016

Accepted: 07.09.2016

ABSTRACT

This paper presents the overview of the development of the Oriental Studies at the Belgrade University, on behalf of the 90th anniversary of that Department. The paper focus itself on the beginning of the studies, later changes as well as the innovations brought by the contemporary times and the challenges of the university in changing. The authors emphasize the urge to innovate the curriculums and to follow all good trends and methodological approaches regarding the oriental studies.

Key Words: *Oriental Studies, Ottoman Studies, Belgrade University, Faculty of Philology, Fehim Barjaktarević*

INTRODUCTION

During the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th century, on the wave of liberation of the Balkan territories and their stepping out of the Ottoman administrative system, as well as relatively fast process of accepting the European values, the condition for creation of the scientific Oriental studies in the south-East Europe had been founded. In the first decades of the 20th century, the Oriental studies in this region had still been at its beginnings. Romania had just begun to think to establish the chair of the Oriental studies, Albania and Greece were not even ready to think about it, so it could be said that the Chair of the Oriental Studies established at the Belgrade University had been until that time, the only lantern of that particular branch of science on the Balkans, and the first founder of those studies professor Fehim Barjaktarević the only scientist in that particular field, who, with a couple of well based articles, had been considered among the best world experts for the Oriental studies (Okić, 1934).

The first university chair of the Oriental studies had been founded in Belgrade in 1926, (further reading: Mitrović, 1986 with the older literature) and its founder was professor Barjaktarević himself². As the already well known and respectable scientist in the European circles, F. Barjaktarević had come to Belgrade in 1925, after the invitation of Bogdan Popović.

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²Fehim Barjaktarević (Sarajevo, 1889 – Belgrade, 1970) had graduated in the Department of Oriental languages – Arabic, Persian and Turkish, with the Slav Philology at the Faculty of Philosophy in Wien, where he had finished also his Ph.D. Thesis dedicated to the pre-Islamic poet Abu Kabir al-Hudali with the famous professor R. Geyer as his supervisor, had been defended at the same University. The Thesis present critical edition of the most famous song of this poet – „La Lāmiyya d’Abū Kabīr al-Hudālī“, and it was published in the respectful journal called *Journal asiatique* (Paris, 1923, CCIII, 59-115). The next year (1919) he spent doing his specialization studies in London (University College), and from 1922-1924, he was in Algeria (Faculté des Lettres), with the outstanding expert for the Iranian Studies A. Masé, who created Barjaktarević’s interest for the Persian Literature, which has had the central role in his scientific and educational activities. He was elected associated professor in 1919, and got his tenure in 1939.

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At the Faculty of Philosophy, within the Chair of World Literature, he started to teach two subjects – Persian Literature and Turkish Language. As soon as the next academic year he established the independent Seminar for the Oriental Philology (officially confirmed on 15th July 1926), where he spent his full working period and taught several subjects, from the field of Arabic, Turkish and Iranian studies. He had published around 350 scientific works – books, monographs, studies, essays and reviews from the above mentioned field of studies, including the Islam studies in general (further reading: Mitrović, 1996; Mitrović 2004).

With his dedicated educational and scientific activities in our university surrounding, prof. Barjaktarević had accomplished a lot for the development, as well as popularization of Yugoslav, and within it Serbian Oriental studies. Of special importance is his contribution to the affirmation of our Oriental studies in Europe and also world-wide through his continuous attendance to the most important European scientific conferences dedicated to the Oriental studies (i.e. Encyclopedia of Islam), through cooperation with the most important European scientific societies (Deutsche morgenländische Gesellschaft, Société asiatique, Concordance de la Tradition musulmane), as well as with the numerous editorial boards of the most outstanding journals dedicated to the Oriental studies, such as: *Journal asiatique* (Paris), *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* (Wiesbaden), *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung* (Berlin), *Mitteilungen zur osmanische Geschichte* (Berlin), *Oriens* (Leiden), *Bibliotheca Orientalis* (Leiden), *Der Islam* (Berlin) and others (Tanasković, 2004; Mitrović 2004).

When establishing the Seminar, professor Barjaktarević had chosen the classical model for the Oriental studies largely accepted in Europe at the time – Oriental Philology within the scope of the Islamic Studies. Those principles had influenced him as a scientist as well. This conception was structured with civilizational and cultural values encompassed learning of languages, literature and cultures of the nations of the Islamic civilizational circle, primarily Arabs, Persians and Turks, which had contributed the most to the creation of the Islamic civilization.

Famous Serbian expert for the Oriental and Islamic studies, professor D. Tanasković had stated that under the prevailing influence of the West-European philological model and methodology dated from 19th century, the Yugoslav Oriental Studies had outgrown its pre-scientific local roots and became the scientific Oriental Philology, at the first decades of the 20th century. All, and

so far that number is not sufficient, chronicle writers as well as historians of our Oriental Studies are united in evaluation that it has been based on the philological vision of the practical needs and scientific strength of the Yugoslav scientific community bearing in mind the historical and geo-political context. The other orientation at that particular time was not possible to imagine, since the philological approach was dominant in the European Oriental Studies of the time, as well as in the local language traditions of the Oriental nations (Tanasković, 1986).

Since that civilization in its syncretic Ottoman form, had left deep and inerasable traces in our regions, the Oriental Studies certainly present the national scientific discipline, and the above explained concept, which suits at most our cultural tradition, created on the crossroad of civilizations, remains permanently as for our, as well as for the other Balkan countries. The plan and program of the Department of the Oriental Philology has not been created, as professor M. Đukanović has pointed out as early as 1963, according to the parameters of some foreign department, but according to our own scientific needs and resources. As our land had, for ages, been in direct contacts with the Turks who had left traces not only in the material, but also in the spiritual culture, that fact should be taken as the point zero for creation of the studies plan on this department: in order to research deeper our history, language, folklore and literature, where the Turkish influence was the strongest, it is of immense importance to study Turkish language and literature. But, since the Turks were carriers of a wider, Islamic influence, which has lasted, at least at some of our regions, until the outbreak of the Balkan Wars, for better understanding of the Turkish language and Turkish culture in general, with the outstanding Islamic notion, is of great importance to study the Arabic language as well. Last, but not the least, as the Persian literature had immense influence on the development of the Turkish literature, the latter could not be fully understood without at least basic knowledge of the previous. And speaking about the Persian language, conclude professor Djukanović, which would be, as the third in this Department a certain burden, along with the Turkish language course, the special course dedicated to the Persian elements in the Turkish language would be taught. Thus, in this frame, this Department was established, as Department for the Oriental Philology in its broader sense, encompassing the languages and literatures in the sphere of the Islamic influence. Teach, and the Introduction to the Oriental Philology one trimester (Mitrović, 1997; Mitrović 2002).

Beside the enlisted subjects, at that early period, from time to time were introduced special courses dedicated to the Ottoman Diplomats and Arabic Metric.

In year 1955 the Department had developed and the Department of the Oriental Philology (group B) was established. At that department the following subjects were taught: Hebrew language, Oriental archeology and Classic Archeology. The group of subjects related to the Hebrew Studies was taught by Dušan Glumac, Ph.D. Because of lack of students, this Department stopped its work in 1960.

During the academic 1960/1961 year The Faculty of Philology of the Belgrade University has been founded, by separating itself from The Faculty of Philosophy. It had become at the time academic and research institution per se. At the Department of the Oriental Studies, at that time, beside the Group of the Oriental Philology, where were taught during all four years of studies both Arabic and Turkish and its literatures, two new groups were established: Group for the Arabic language and literature and Group for the Turkish language and literature.

A decade later, at the Faculty of Philology, at the Department of the Oriental studies the systematic studies of Philology of Far East has started. First the Lectorat for the Chinese language has begun to work in 1974, and then two years later in 1976 also the Lectorat for the Japanese language. The courses were taught by Dejan Razić, Ljiljana Đurović and foreign lecturers. Those two lectorats have become, in 1985, the study groups. Despite all the obstacles, out of which the biggest one was lack of adequate teachers, those two groups have been developing in the last three decades, and today together with Arabic and Turkish Studies are among the most popular curriculums at the Faculty.

In 1990 at the Department of Oriental Studies had renewed the Hebrew Studies, by opening the Lectorat for the Hebrew language, which has stopped working in 2001 due to the human resources problem (Mitrović, 1995).

Lectorat for the Persian language has been established in academic year 1999/2000. From the very beginning, thanks to exceptional cooperation between the Department and the Cultural Center of Islamic Republic of Iran, the necessary human resources were found, as well as all other conditions (such as manual book of very good quality) for the successful study of Persian as the electoral language. The further development of the Iranian stud-

ies and changing of status of the lectorat to the study group would be of great importance for our field of science, since this discipline represents the link between the Oriental and Indo-European Studies. That would lead to establishment of the modern multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary concept of the Oriental Philology, which would be of great importance to our scientific community.

Middle East is of great importance today from the economic and geo-political point of view, because of its strategic position and immense natural resources. All above mentioned, has the influence to the modernization of the courses of the Arabic language at the Belgrade University, mainly regarding the teaching method and learning material³.

In that sense, on the basis of insight to the relevant European and American Chairs for Arabic and Oriental Studies, was created the curriculum with larger number of very attractive obligatory and electoral courses, with the duration of one or two trimesters. Those courses encompass several fields of oriental studies: Linguistic Arabic Studies (Business Arabic, Correspondence, Language of the Arabic media, Dialects of the Arabic Language, History of the Arabic Language, Arabic Grammar Schools, Arabic Lexicography, Arabic Language – Grammar Terminology, Contrastive Analyses of the Arabic and Serbian Language, Comparative Grammar of the Semitic Languages, etc.); Arabic Literature Studies (Classic Arabic Literature, Modern Arabic Literature, Pre-Islamic Arabic Poetry, Qur'an as the Literature Work, Verse in the Arabic Poetry, Literature of the „Mahjar“ Modern Literature of Maghreb, Arabic Drama, Arabic Popular Literature, Arabic Memoire Prose, Arabic Poetic, Literature and Politics in the Islamic World, etc.); Islamic Studies (Bases of the Islamic Civilization, Bases of the Islamic Law, Islam and Christianity, Islamic Fundamentalism, Non-Arabic Islam, Muslim Spain, Islamic Philosophy, Islamic Mysticism, Islamic Art, Calligraphy, Islamic Architecture, etc.), Studies of the Modern Arabic World (Middle East Geography, Economics of the Middle East, European Colonialism and Arabic World,)⁴.

³www.fil.bg.ac.rs/lang/sr/katedre/orijentalistika/arapski

⁴Ibid.

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