Reports

The 150th Anniversary of the German Oriental Society

(Die Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft [DMG])

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The first German union of Orientalists, which designates an association of scholars in the numerous fields of Asian and African studies, was founded in Leipzig in 1845. One of its outstanding founding members was Heinrich L. Fleischer, then professor of Arabic philology at the University of Leipzig. Among some outstanding personages in the field of humanities in the first half of 19th century Germany are men like August Wilhelm and Friedrich von Schlegel, Wilhelm von Humboldt and Franz Bopp whose works established the basic principles and methods of comparative Indoeuropean and general linguistics and set the scene for the fruitful application of this newly acquired knowledge to the various research areas of Africa and Asia. Names and achievements of scholars like Richard Lepsius in the field of Egyptology and early African philology, Georg F. Grotefend, a pioneer in the decipherment of the cuneiform script, Friedrich Rückert, an outstanding translator of Arabic poetry, Jakob Wackernagel, the author of the "Altindische Grammatik", and Richard Wilhelm in the field of classical Chinese literature may stand representative for many others.

From its outset the main concern of the "Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft" (DMG) has been the deepening and diffusion of our knowledge of oriental cultures and languages. The achievement of this aim was sought through measures like

- the edition and support of scientific publications as well as the promotion of special research tasks;
- the existence and management of the specialized Oriental library in Halle/Saale;
- the organization of the "Deutsche Orientalistentage" (DOT; German Orientalist Conferences).

Since 1964 the DMG has been able to establish the following research outposts in the Near East and beyond:

- the Oriental Institute in Beirut/Lebanon;
- a branch of the Beirut Institute in Istanbul/Turkey;
- the Nepal Research Centre (NRC) in Kathmandu/Nepal.

The first issue of the Journal of the German Oriental Society, the *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* (ZDMG), appeared in 1847. The Journal is now in its 145th year. The DMG also edits the monograph series "Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes" (AKM; Treatises on Oriental studies) the first issue of which appeared in 1857.

Further editorial and research activities include the well established series of text editions, *Bibliotheca Islamica* (BI), as well as the Inventory of Oriental Manuscripts in Germany ("Verzeichnis der Orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland [VOHD]) and the Dictionary of the Classical Arabic Language ("Wörterbuch der klassischen arabischen Sprache" [WKAS]), and ambitious enterprise which was begun in 1957 and of which two letters, ie *Kaf* and *Lam*, have been so far completed. Another important DMG series are the *Beiruter Texte und Studien* [BTS], a highlight of which has become Donalds Little's "Catalogue of Islamic Documents from al-Haram aš Šarif in Jerusalem".

Today the Society comprises more than twenty special areas of research, among which are the Ancient Orient, Egyptology, Africanistics, Semitic Studies, Arabic Studies, Islamic Studies, Judaic Studies, Old Testament Studies, The Christian Orient, Turcology, Preislamic Iran Studies, Islamic Iran Studies, Indology, Tibetology, Central Asian Studies, Thai Studies, Sinology, History of East Asian Arts, Korean Studies, Southeast Asian Studies, Japanology. Thus, thousands of cultures and languages spoken by about two thirds of the entire world population existing at present as well as 5000 years into the past (Ancient Orient, Egypt, China, India) represent the objective and spheres of interest of the Orientalists.

One of the most successful and rewarding research projects conducted under the auspices of the DMG has been the *Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project* (NGMPP) initiated in 1970. In the course of the past 25 years more than 140.000 manuscript titles comprising almost five million pages have been micro-filmed. This collection of Hindu and Buddhist texts concerning historical as well as literary documents written in Sanskrit, Nepali and Tibetan is the largest of its kind. The original films are stored at a special microfilm institution in Kathmandu and are accessible to the interested public.

This year the German Oriental Society celebrates its 150th anniversary at its place of origin in Leipzig. On this occasion it expresses its firm conviction that whatever political conflicts and problems now prevail or will arise in the future in different parts of Asia and Africa, the only hope - if there is any at all - to solve them lies in a history-oriented approach - taking into account the immense cultural heritage of the innumerable language communities found on both continents - that has been developed and successfully applied by Orientalists over the past one and a half centuries. It is hardly conceivable that international politics will be able to cope with the enormous and complex problems which will be arising in Asia and Africa in the future without making use of the Orientalists' detailed insights into the complexity of oriental societies, cultures, religions, languages and thought structures. The German Oriental Society should make a special effort to assist politics in its peace-seeking endeavours by making available and accessible its scholarly wealth and experience in successfully dealing with this area of the world which will certainly have an important impact on the political and economic situation of mankind in the next millenium.

Herrmann Jungraithmayr, Chairman of the DMG