

Michał Tymowski, *Europejczycy i Afrykanie: Wzajemne odkrycia i pierwsze kontakty* [The Europeans and Africans: Mutual Findings and First Contacts], Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2017, 428 pp.

The new book by Michał Tymowski, an outstanding historian and Africa specialist, describes a fascinating moment in history: the civilizational and cultural clash of Europeans with the Africans on the African Atlantic coast in the fifteenth century. Michał Tymowski, the author of many works on the history of West Sudan including *Historia Mali* (History of Mali, 1979) and *Państwa Afryki przedkolonialnej* (States of Pre-Colonial Africa, 1999), editor and co-author of the monumental *Historia Afryki do początku XIX wieku* (History of Africa to the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century, 1996), has been publishing scientific articles on the theme of first contacts between the Portuguese and Africans for more than ten years. The reviewed book is therefore the culmination of the author's reflections on this problem.

The introduction contains a review of Portuguese authors and historians from other European countries who study this subject. Depending on the type of contact, anthropologists have introduced several basic descriptive terms for different types of cultural interaction: 'clash of cultures', 'cultural contact' and 'acculturation' — these are dealt with by the author in specific chapters of the book. Tymowski refers to the ideas expressed by Jan Kieniewicz in the book *Od ekspansji do dominacji: Próba teorii kolonializmu* (From Expansion to Domination: An Attempt of Colonialism Theory, 1986), but introduces his own detailed contributions, and limits the studied period to the first seventy years of contact between Europeans and Africans starting from 1434, when Portuguese sailed

around the Saharan Cape Nao in the region of Cape Bojador, until the first decade of the sixteenth century. These were, as we read in stories preserved from that epoch, fresh contacts not yet constrained by routine. Once Africa had been circumnavigated and India reached in this way by sea, the importance of contacts on the West-Atlantic coast decreased for the Portuguese, and in the sixteenth century became a well-known stage of a longer journey.

The basic materials documenting the first contacts are chronicles and stories told by the participants of these expeditions. The oldest chronicle was written by Gomes Eanes de Zurara (*Cronica dos feitos do Guiné*), an admirer of Prince Henry the Navigator the initiator of exploratory voyages. Zurara did not take part in the travels, but he gathered information from their actual participants. He praised the chivalric nature of the endeavours, which he demonstrated in his descriptions of armed clashes with Azenegs, Berber fishermen and nomads from West Sahara situated north of the Senegal River estuary to the Atlantic Ocean. The earliest direct accounts of peaceful meetings with Africans were made by merchants. The report of a Venetian inhabitant in the Portuguese service, Alvise da Ca da Mosto, regarding his two expeditions to Senegal and Gambia Rivers in the years 1455 and 1456 is of a great value. He initiated trade contacts with the Wolof and Serer people. This was a similar action to that of a Flanders merchant from Bruges, Eustache Delafosse, in the years 1479–80, who reached Guinea Bay and broke the Portuguese trade monopoly. The fullest summary of Portuguese expeditions to West Africa in the fifteenth century can be found in accounts from the beginning of the next century written by Valentim Fernandes and Duarte Pacheco Pereira. A great value of Tymowski's book is that he frequently quotes fragments of Zurara's chronicle and other texts from the fifteenth century, both in translation and in the original language, that is, Portuguese, Italian or Latin. This allows the reader the pleasure of reading the original language form of the message.

The book consists of four chapters with the following titles: 'Początki', 'Spotkania', 'Mniejszości wśród większości', 'Jedni o drugich', 'Powstanie obrazu innego' (Beginnings, Meetings, Minorities among Majorities, One on Another, Creation of the Image of Another). Each chapter is divided into sub-chapters focused on analysis of facts and phenomena referred to in the chapter's title. Chapter 1, 'Początki' (pp. 27–114) discusses the first contacts between Europeans and people from the so-called Dark Continent. The author analyses the phenomena of fear and courage connected with facing the unknown. After all, until Bajador Cape was sailed around in 1434, the common collective fear and belief had been that south of this geographic point prevailing conditions made life impossible. Once this specific barrier of fear was broken, the fear resurfaced, this time mixed with courage in the context of fights with Azenegs in the region of the Arguim and Tider islands. The Portuguese hunted there for slaves, although they were not always victorious and also lost their fighters in the fight. South of the estuary of the Senegal River the Europeans faced a different situation with the numerous local peoples. The area between Senegal

and the Green Cape was inhabited by Wolofs, who had several state organizations. South of there lived Serers, with their societies organized under a structure of chieftains and hostile toward the Portuguese, and on the banks of the Gambia River lived the Mande people, who were politically subservient to the state of Mali. Here the Europeans did not have the armed advantage over Africans; crossbows and bombards shot from caravels were confronted with the Africans' most dangerous weapon — bows with poisoned arrows. Getting into the river current, caravels had to cope with numerous canoes full of fighters. The fact that the Africans kidnapped by the Europeans never returned made those left behind believe that they had been eaten by the white people, which made them fight all the harder.

In Chapter 1's sub-title 'Śmierć i postawy wobec śmierci' (Death and Attitudes to Death) the author presents the causes and means of death which came about as the result of armed fights, due to sicknesses, food, or the Guinea Bay climate which was deadly for the white people. Chivalrous death in the fight against pagans, for God's glory, was noteworthy and commemorated with respect for the wealthy leaders (other soldiers died anonymously). Among Africans death claimed victims in the crowded cargo bays of slave-filled caravels waiting to be transported to Portugal. Free Africans were, according to the observations of Ca da Mosto, characterized by a 'contempt of death' in clashes with the Europeans; Africans brought to Portugal often died due to the changed climate and food, or as a result of trauma after being removed from the African environment.

In the next sub-chapter of Chapter 1 'Jak się porozumiewali?' (How Did They Communicate?), the author talks of organizing interpreters and translators in Portugal to facilitate contacts with African people. It turned out that the knowledge of Arab languages resulting from the presence of Portuguese garrisons in Morocco was useless in conversation with the Berbers, the Azenegs of the Sahara desert, and particularly south of the Senegal River, where dozens of different tribe languages were used. So black slaves, after christening, when they acquired sufficient knowledge of Portuguese language, were taught to become translators. The fates of these translators varied. After landing in Africa they were often either killed by the locals or escaped back to their people, but a certain number of them, accustomed to slavery and accepting life in Europe, fulfilled the tasks expected of them. Tymowski provides information on the creation of the first dictionary containing words from the *Akan* and *Mande* languages used at that time on the Gold Coast at the end of the fifteenth or the beginning of the sixteenth century, and he quotes some of them with the supposed translation. The last part of Chapter 1 is titled 'Zdumienie, zdziwienie, ciekawość i osobliwości' (Amazement, surprise, curiosity and peculiarities). 'In Zurara's chronicle' — writes Tymowski — 'curiosity and desire to get to know the unknown lands and people was placed among the five main reasons behind expeditions to Africa' (p. 93). Zurara emphasizes the Africans' astonishment when they encountered the caravels and alien newcomers. This astonishment was accompanied by fear, but also curiosity: at the beginning

of the sixteenth century there were even occurrences of courage and risk when some Africans would step onto caravel decks as free people. Alvise da Ca da Mosto reported a conversation with Budomel, the ruler of Kayor, who asked him about European religion. His questions related to God, the way of explaining the world, and man's place in it (p. 103). This ruler was curious for political reasons. But the Europeans were also interested in African gods, since they planned to baptize the pagans. They brought wooden figures of the local gods to Europe. Besides these fetishes, the Portuguese were surprised to see ivory sculptures of animals and people, including the white newcomers, made by Sapi people from the Sierra Leone area, and sculptures cast in bronze from Benin. Tymowski describes these artefacts in detail in the last chapter of the book.

Chapter 2, titled 'Spotkania' (Meetings), also consists of four parts. It contains discussion on the already well-developed forms of contact between Europeans and Africans. The first sub-chapter: 'Ucztowanie' (Feasting) shows the arrivals' efforts to build friendly relations with Africans; the most obvious and accepted way to achieve this, as throughout human history, was the invitation to feast, during which the parties became mutually acquainted. This was also an occasion to enter into trade transactions. The next sub-chapter 'Organizacja i przebieg pierwszych spotkań' (Organization and the Course of First Meetings) contains descriptions and Tymowski's critical analysis of three such meetings and feasts: between Valarte, a Danish knight in the Portuguese service, and Guitenia, the local Serer leader, between Alvise da Ca da Mosto and Budomel, the ruler of Kayor, and between Diego de Azambuja and Casamansa, the leader of the settlement on the Gold Coast in 1482. This last meeting was the most fruitful, since the Europeans obtained consent for construction of fortress Sao Jorge da Mina. Negotiations were conducted through the intermediary of interpreters educated in Portugal. The next sub-chapter: 'Miejsca handlu' (Trade Places) is a description of evolution of organizational forms of trade from the mid-fifteenth century conducted by the Portuguese with Africans. These forms included concluding such transactions on caravels, at the coast, or at the market in a guarded trading post, for example in Arguim at the White Cape or in Sao Jorge da Mina at the Gold Coast. The author's detailed analysis based on reports perfectly reconstructs these economic phenomena.

The last section of Chapter 2 deals with the 'Podróż wolnych Afrykanów i poselstwa władców afrykańskich do Portugalii' (Travel of Free Africans and African Rulers' Legations to Portugal). This refers to the exchange of deputations in 1456 between Portugal and Benin in the Bay of Guinea. In response to the Portuguese deputation which arrived with King John II's gifts for the ruler of Benin, the latter sent his representative — the chief of the Gwato — who was formally accepted at the Portuguese court. Both parties treated each other according to the principle of equality. Portugal was interested in trade and the Christianization of Benin, whilst Benin's king hoped to purchase firearms. Another instance of movement between the regions was the journey to Portugal in 1488 of the impeached ruler of the Wolofs, Bumie Jeleen. In exchange for

being christened and adopting the name Joao, the king of Portugal sent him back with a flotilla of twenty caravels and a plan to establish another fortress at the estuary of the Senegal River. The plan failed as Bumie Jeleen was murdered by the leader of the expedition. Relations with the Wolofs were not broken, but Christianization was no longer discussed because Islam was exerting a strong influence on the region from the north. King John II continued gathering information on Africa and its interior using the methods first undertaken by Henry the Navigator. Although in the mid-fifteenth century opinions regarding the 'barbarity' of Africans were common, by the end of the century the trade and diplomatic relations created a precedent for treating Africans on an equal basis. Tymowski suggests (p. 202), that in the 1530s and the following decades, the European sense of superiority over the African way of life became stronger. This was connected with stereotyping, the mass trade of black slaves, and the failure to Christianize the states and rulers of West Africa.

The Chapter 3, titled 'Mniejszości wśród większości' (Minorities among Majorities), contains descriptions of the lives of African slaves in Portugal and an analysis of the cultural and psychological aspects of their presence there. In 1441 the first group of African slaves was brought to Portugal. On this topic the author restricts himself to the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth century. It was impossible to count the black slaves in Portugal (which had approximately a population of one million). Those caught or purchased on the coast of Gulf of Guinea were also transported to the desert island of St Thomas, discovered in 1471 and used for sugar cane cultivation. It was a laboratory for the plantation economy transferred in the 1530s to Brazil. In the first part of this chapter the author quotes (pp. 210–11) an excellent fragment of Zurara's chronicle describing tragic moments of the division of slaves' families brought to the town of Lagos. Tymowski emphasizes that the object of his research is not the economic side of slavery, but the forms of cultural contact between the African slaves and the Portuguese. Giving names to slaves after christening or dressing slaves in a European manner were the forms of acculturation which incorporated these people into the local community, both women and men (the typical work of slaves being as domestic help). Sexual contacts created a new group of mulattos. As the existence of an African minority in Portugal became a fact, similarly — though for different reasons — a Portuguese minority was formed in Africa. This minority does not refer to the fortress crews, but rather several specific categories of white settlers. The author mentions the problem of exiles (*degradados*) and fugitives (*lancados*) settling in Africa at the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth century. Exile to Portuguese fortresses in Africa, to the Green Cape Islands or to St Thomas Island where climate was deadly for Europeans belonged to a category of the most severe punishments issued in Portugal, being sometimes a substitute for capital punishment. Sometimes the exiles managed to escape to communities of the African population, where they often integrated. Those who had mixed families there were called *tangomaos*. The author devotes the final fragment of the third chapter to the role of women in the Portuguese

expeditions to Africa. There were few Portuguese women in the predominantly male world of explorers, on the whole only those who were punished by exile to fortresses, or who worked there in the hospital or the kitchen.

The final, Chapter 4 titled 'Jedni o drugich: Powstanie obrazu innego' (One on Another: Creation of the Image of Another) (pp. 282–334) is a recapitulation of the European conduct toward Africans as presented by the sources cited in the previous parts of the book. The clash in the fifteenth century of the arrivals to the coast of West Africa, first the armed and then peaceful, with the local African peoples, getting to know their demeanour, way of life, customs, and social organization resulted in rejection of earlier misleading concepts about the 'barbarism' of Guinea inhabitants. Until the beginning of the sixteenth century, a feeling of superiority toward Africans did not arise on the Portuguese side; this was 'revived' by the mass trade in slaves. But we do not know how the Africans perceived the Europeans; we only have indirect reports based on Portuguese accounts. An external view of the Portuguese can be found in African art of the fifteenth and the sixteenth century in the form of ivory sculptures from Sierra Leone and bronze casts from Benin, which artistically present the image of a white man.

Michał Tymowski's book, a work showing erudition and wonderful documentation, is also an in-depth psychological study of the attitudes of people from two worlds obscure to each other at the time of their confrontation. The book is written in a communicative way so it is easy to read, especially since Tymowski has refrained from using footnotes and instead placed references to the authors whose works he has used in brackets inside the relevant sentences. He gives the surname and the year of publication of a given work, which enables the reader to find the work in the bibliography at the end of the volume. The volume itself is very extensive and I believe that Tymowski has used everything that has so far been published on European — African relations in the fifteenth and the sixteenth century. The book contains illustrations, two maps of West Africa, and a summary in English.

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