

# RZEWUSKI'S TRAVELS WITH GOLIUS

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There is no doubt that the travel journals from the Middle East left by Waław Seweryn Rzewuski (d. 1831) and the treatise on oriental horses, collected and published under the title *Sur les chevaux orientaux et provenant des races orientales*, constitute an invaluable research source for studies such as biography, historiography, ethnography or linguistics. Although the work has been made available to a wide readership,<sup>1</sup> it can be expected that, due to the abundance of material collected in it, it will be decades before it is comprehensively studied. This article analyses one of the linguistic aspects of the work, highlighting the complexity of the related issues and research perspectives, as well as the benefits of gaining a broader understanding of the journals' author and the creative process behind them.

The work contains a large number of oriental words, mainly of Arabic origin, most of which were written with the Latin alphabet. However, several thousand are quoted in the original Arabic spelling - these words are the subject of this study. Even a cursory

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1 W. S. Rzewuski, *Sur les chevaux orientaux et provenants des races orientales*, vol. 1, f. 61r - <http://polona.pl/item/476498> ; vol. 2: <http://polona.pl/item/472484> [accessed 28.04.2020]. Translation of the quotations are based on the English edition: W. S. Rzewuski, *Concerning the Horses of the Orient and Those Originating from Oriental Breeds*, Warszawa 2017.

ry analysis of them reveals a very heterogeneous language. Some words undoubtedly originate from the purest Arabic language, in which each vocal sign was placed with pious care, without the nonchalant carelessness typical of Rzewuski. Some words cause difficulties, as nobody knows or remembers the meanings used by the author, and there are still other words that raise doubts, with spellings that are erroneous or distorted to such an extent that it would be impossible to guess their meaning if had the author neglected to describe them in French. A more detailed analysis makes it possible to distinguish something like linguistic layers, internally coherent in terms of form and factual matter.

A meticulous study of the Arabic lexis collected in *Sur les chevaux orientaux* reveals the close relationship between its most extensive and expressive layer and the material collected in *Lexicon arabico-latinum* by the eminent Dutch orientalist Jacob van Gool (d. 1667), known as Jacobus Golius. We know that Rzewuski had the lexicon in his book collection and that he frequently used it, but the scale of its impact has not been appreciated thus far. This fact is important due to the specificity of the dictionary, which, for Rzewuski, became one of the most important sources of knowledge about the Bedouin language and customs. The dictionary is a compilation and translation of medieval Arabic lexicons. The compilation was based on two general dictionaries: *Tāj al-Lughā wa-Ṣiḥāḥ al-ʿArabiyya* by al-Jawharī (d. 1003) and *Al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ* by al-Fayrūzābādī (d. 1414). The author enriched his lexicon with entries from several more specialised encyclopaedic dictionaries by al-Rāzī (d. 925), al-Maydānī (d. 1124), al-Zamakhsharī (d. 1143), Ḥamawī (d. 1225), Ibn al-Bayṭār (d. 1248) and al-Damīrī (d. 1405). He also based the entries on two late medieval foreign-language dictionaries: the Arabic-Persian *Kanz al-Lughā* and the Arabic-Turkish *Mirqāt al-Lughā*.

It should be added that in the Arab-Muslim culture, philological studies were originally subordinated to theology, which means that the main purpose of developing multi-volume lexicons was to improve the study of the language of the Quran and the understanding of other sources of Muslim law. For this reason, these

lexicons contain vocabulary obtained from a very limited group of texts – mainly pre-Muslim poetry, which may have its roots in the beginning of our era,<sup>2</sup> as well as various works from the first three centuries of the Hijra, that is, no later than the 9<sup>th</sup> century. The vocabulary quoted by Arabic lexicographers is often no longer used, and there are doubts as to its correct meaning. Hence the context is often cited in the form of a fragment of poetry or a quotation from which the lexicographer took a specific word.<sup>3</sup> Later authors did not have much to add, so they quoted the definitions of their predecessors and compiled earlier works, discarding entries they deemed redundant and adding new ones if they gained access to new sources.

Another element that cannot be ignored when discussing the subject of Arabic lexicography is language. The Arabic literary language has not changed substantially since it was codified in the 8<sup>th</sup> century. Any well-educated Arab has a good command of it. However, it should be remembered that it is not a natural language, and no one has ever spoken it as their mother tongue. It was created by Arabic grammarians, probably on the basis of the Quranic language, but enriched with a large body of vocabulary from various dialects of the then Arabian Peninsula, and then archived. The differences between the literary language and spoken Arabic, which itself can be divided into countless dialects, are so great that it is considered as *diglossia*. Thus, what Rzewuski writes is not true:

The code of law is simple. It is the Quran. Few know how to read it, all understand it, because the Bedouins speak *naḥwī* Arabic which

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- 2 The oldest non-anonymous Arab poet, whose work dates back to the 5<sup>th</sup> century and has been preserved until now, was 'Adī ibn Rabī'a (d. 531), also known as al-Muhalhal. It is him that mediaeval compilers of poetry indicated most often as the creator of *qaṣīda*, the Old-Arabic lyric narrative poem. See: Muḥammad ibn Sallām al-Jumāhī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shu'arā'*, Bayrūt 2001, p. 38. However, it is possible that part of the preserved literary output of this period may in fact be far younger. The first scholar to question the authenticity of pre-Muslim poetry and claim that a part or even its entirety may have been written only in the first centuries of Islam was Ṭāhā Ḥusayn (d. 1973). See: idem, *Fī al-Adab al-Jāhili*, Al-Qāhira 2011.
  - 3 M. R. Zammit, *A Comparative Lexical Study of Qur'ānic Arabic*, Leiden, Boston, Köln 2002, pp. 17–18.

is the pure and grammatical language in which the sacred book is written.<sup>4</sup>

It is not an isolated opinion. It comes from a deeply rooted stereotype that of all Arabs, only Bedouins maintain a pure and correct language (to this day, a common belief is that dialectal differentiation is the result of a departure from literary Arabic, and therefore a kind of linguistic corruption).<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Arabic sources say that the linguistic disputes raised by grammarians from the opposite schools in Kufa and Basra in the first two centuries of the Hijra were often settled by Bedouins. We can also find traces of their old dialects in today's literary language. However, it is not true that their dialects should be similar or identical to the language of the Quran, nor that they speak the language of literature. Rzewuski seems to ignore the fact that spoken Arabic, whether spoken by an illiterate Bedouin or an educated city-dweller, is something completely different in terms of phonetics, grammar, and lexis. Therefore, the ease with which he accepts words - archaic words, derived from medieval Arabic - from Golius is not surprising. The spelling itself and the phonetics behind it reveal that they are an element of the literary language and do not belong to any dialects of the spoken language. He has no qualms about placing them in the mouths of the Bedouins and telling us that this is the testimony of their language.

Rzewuski is very keen on using Golius. Explanations of the quoted words are often a more or less faithful translation of the dictionary entry into French, and sometimes Rzewuski does not even bother to translate them and quotes in original (Latin). In the first case, we are dealing with an indirect translation from Arabic without consulting the original, so it is natural that the meaning of some words is not quite clear, becomes blurry, and sometimes loses its original meaning completely. Numerous examples of this are provided by Rzewuski's lists of horse and wind names, which

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4 *Sur les chevaux...* vol. 1, f. 61r.

5 *A Comparative...* pp. 38-39.

consist almost entirely of words taken from Golius. For example, a *wahwah* is, according to the list mentioned above, a “fiery and agile horse”, while Golius, like al-Fayrūzābādī (to whom the Dutch scholar refers), maintains that it is “a fit and skilful horse”.<sup>6</sup> The discrepancy in the definition given by Rzewuski is undoubtedly the result of the phenomenon mentioned above. Al-Fayrūzābādī, when describing the horse, uses the word *ḥadīd*, the basic meaning of which in Arabic is sharp. However, when used in relation to people, as the lexicographer himself notes, *ḥadīd* means someone who is bright, learned.<sup>7</sup> Golius very cleverly finds the equivalent of this word in the Latin *acer*, which means both a clever person and a sharp object, but - unlike the Arabic equivalent - it also refers to taste, meaning acrid or burning. This is probably why Rzewuski translates the word in French as *ardent*, which means burning.

Sometimes the shift in meaning is due to the inaccuracy of the Arabic source or the awkwardness of the Latin description. We deal with the latter in the description of a horse allegedly named by the Arabs *ḥurāq*, about which Rzewuski writes: “a horse that pushes itself vigorously”.<sup>8</sup> According to Golius, it is an “invigorated after galloping and frisky horse”.<sup>9</sup> In reality, however, *ḥurāq* is not the name of a horse, but only a component of a phraseology related to a horse. Al-Fayrūzābādī, referred to by Golius in his definition, writes as follows: “The horse is *ḥurāq al-‘adw* [lit. of a burning gait], if it was invigorated during the gait”.<sup>10</sup> Golius makes a mistake, which Rzewuski then repeats. It should be noted that *ḥurāq al-‘adw* is a kind of epithet. The words are used to praise a horse, but it is not its name. The same goes for almost all entries in that index, as well

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- 6 *Sur les chevaux...* vol. 2, f. 54v.  
Jacobus Golius, *Lexicon arabico-latinum contextum ex probatioribus orientis lexicographis accedit index latinus copiosissimus qui lexici latino-arabici vicem explere possit*, Amstelodamum M DC LIII [1653], col. 1742. Majd al-Dīn ibn Ya‘qūb al-Fayrūzābādī, *Al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*, Bayrūt 2005, p. 1256.
- 7 *Al-Qāmūs...* p. 276.
- 8 *Sur les chevaux...* vol. 2, f. 54v.
- 9 *Lexicon...* col. 599.
- 10 *Al-Qāmūs...* p. 873.

as for many other Arabic terms appearing in the work. This is due to the specificity of Arabic lexicons, which document the meanings of words in relation to the context in which they are used, so they are not fully abstracted, as is the case in modern dictionaries. The horse can be said to be *ḥurāq al-'adw*, probably because one of the poets described a horse in such a way in one of his poems.

However, an in-depth translation analysis is not required to document what a valuable source of knowledge about the Arabic language and culture Golius' lexicon was for Rzewuski and estimate the scale to which it influenced the work itself. It is enough to take the following fragment noted in the margin, referring to one of the two plants that Rzewuski remembered from his travels in the Middle East:

It is beneficial for the camels, while another that resembles it and which the Arabs call *'unzuwān* is unhealthy and causes pain to their entrails. This herb is of the species named *ḥamḍ* which is bitter and salty, and which Golius called *Oxygala crassa*. I believe, though I cannot be sure as my memory may be playing me false, that in the desert it is called *'amāqa* or *'imqā*. It grows to resemble a kind of wig, and no stem is ever closer to another than the distance of a foot or more. It covers vast areas and its territories multiply in the desert. It is also called *shih* (*Absinthium ponticum*). The Arabs use it as a simple against worms.<sup>11</sup>

In the passage quoted above, Rzewuski gives four names: *'unzuwān*, *ḥamḍ*, *'amāqa* or *'imqā*, and *shih*. He believes that they all refer to a plant he observed in the desert: a plant that “grows to resemble a kind of wig, and no stem is ever closer to another than the distance of a foot or more”. However, one can be sure that these names were not heard from Bedouins, and this is evidenced not only by their spelling, which, given by Rzewuski in the Arabic transcription, corresponds to the orthography of the classical language but also by several other factors.

11 Ibidem, f. 10r.

One can start by looking at the plant which he describes: “I believe, though I cannot be sure as my memory may be playing me false, that in the desert it is called ‘*amāqa* or ‘*imqà*”, where the word عَمْقِي ‘*imqà*, which is correct in Arabic, is transcribed as ‘*amaqī*, which is an incorrect interpretation of its rather complicated spelling.<sup>12</sup> It is impossible that Rzewuski, upon hearing this word spoken by a Bedouin, could write it correctly, taking into account its historical spelling, and he was also unable to pronounce it correctly. Both variants of the word, ‘*amāqa* and ‘*imqà*, undoubtedly come from Golius’s dictionary, but they were written next to each other as a result of a typesetter’s mistake because they mean something completely different. Immediately after the word ‘*amāqa* and before the word ‘*imqà*, there is an abbreviation: *Act. τς Conj. I.*, which we expand as *actionis nomen coniugationis primae*, i.e., a noun expressing an action defined by a verb in the first conjugation.<sup>13</sup> This is what ‘*amāqa* in Arabic means – “being deep” – because the verb to which Golius refers is *profundus fuit*, meaning “it has become deep”. Rzewuski apparently ignored the abbreviation and concluded that the word ‘*amāqa* was synonymous with the word ‘*imqà*, which was not listed graphically as a separate entry. There are also doubts as to the legitimacy of assigning the word ‘*imqà* to the plant described by Rzewuski because before it ceased to be used, it was probably a tree species. Although Golius writes that it may be “the name of

12 Today we will rather write عَمْقِي. A characteristic feature of the orthography used by Golius is the lack of a contemporary *alif maqṣūra*, regularly replaced by an unvocalised letter *yā'* preceded by a vocalisation sign – *fatha*. This type of transcription is consistent and should not raise any doubts as to its interpretation. It should be remembered that while today, in the era of printing, the orthography of the Arabic language is heavily codified, in Rzewuski’s time, when printing houses with Arabic fonts operated mostly in Europe and the handwritten book still reigned in the Middle East, writers had greater freedom in this matter. Various methods of writing letters and transcription of diacritical marks could cause some problems for the uneducated reader in their correct interpretation, as evidenced here by Rzewuski.

13 The Greek letters τς (abbreviation from τῆς) function as an article describing the feminine gender in the genitive and are designed to restore the syntactic relations between the individual members of the abbreviation lost as a result of truncating inflection endings. In this particular case, they refer to the word *coniugatio* and make it read in the genitive form as *coniugationis*.

a plant or tree in Arabia that pleases camels”, the source he refers to, namely al-Jawharī, says: “‘*Imqà*, vocalised by *i*, is a tree in Hejaz and Tihamah, and ‘*āmiq* is the camel that feeds on it”.<sup>14</sup>

Everything indicates that each of the names in their original texts referred to a different plant or group of plants, and Rzewuski freely combined them all to describe the plant he remembered. Thus, *shīḥ*, or wormwood – a name that is still common in Arabic today – is described by Golius as follows: “*Absinthium ponticum*, whose seed kills vermin”.<sup>15</sup> This information is also quoted by Rzewuski: “It is also called *shīḥ* (*Absinthium ponticum*). The Arabs use it as a simple against worms”.<sup>16</sup> Another name for this plant is ‘*unzuwān*, with the information that it causes bowel pain in camels. This remark was also taken from Golius, who writes that ‘*unzuwān* is “a species of plant of the genus *ḥamḍ* which, if eaten in large quantities, causes bowel pain in the camel”, which is a fairly accurate translation from al-Jawharī: “‘*Unzuwān* is a kind of a plant; if a camel ate it in abundance, its stomach will ache”.<sup>17</sup> Particularly noteworthy is the fact that this word was not in common use in the times of al-Jawharī, as shown by the fragment of Rājiz’s poetry (d. 762) placed after the definition – evidence that the word was in use in the meaning described. Golius’s remark that ‘*unzuwān* is a variation of *ḥamḍ* comes from Fayrūzābādī’s lexicon, who writes: “‘*Unzuwān* [...] is a plant of the [genus] *ḥamḍ*; if a camel ate it in abundance, it will ache its stomach”.<sup>18</sup> Golius writes that *ḥamḍ* is “a salty and bitter plant as well as concentrated whey”, while al-Jawharī notes that it is: “any plant that is salty and bitter, such as *rimth*, *ṭarfā*’ and *athl*”, i.e., varieties of tamarisk and clove.<sup>19</sup> Fayrūzābādī, to whom Golius does

14 Ismā‘īl ibn Ḥammād al-Jawharī, *Al-Ṣiḥāḥ. Tāj al-Lughā wa-Ṣiḥāḥ al-‘Arabiyya*, Bayrūt 1990, vol. 4, p. 1533.

15 *Lexicon...* col. 1328.

16 *Sur les chevaux...* vol. 1, f. 10r.

17 *Lexicon...* col. 1656, *Al-Ṣiḥāḥ...* vol. 3, p. 1174.

18 *Al-Qāmūs...* p. 697.

19 *Lexicon...* col. 653. I translate *oxygala crassa* as concentrated whey by analogy with the ancient Greek *ὀξυγάλα* or whey (*crassa* in Latin means dense). However, it cannot be ruled out that Golius meant some other dairy product with a tart



not refer to in this case, writes: “*ḥamḍ* is any plant that is salty and bitter, and it is like fruit for a camel, while *khulla* is one that is sweet and is like bread to him”.<sup>20</sup> It is clear from this that the word *ḥamḍ* is not used to denote a specific plant, but anything bitter, which makes it particularly attractive to camels. The 8<sup>th</sup>-century poet immortalised one such plant in his poem, calling it *‘unzuwān* and saying it caused excessive abdominal pain when eaten in excess.

This example reveals a method which, as is clearly indicated, Rzewuski used when writing his journal. It seems that while living among the Bedouins, he actually observed many of their customs and the world in which they lived. However, it seems he forgot to ask them, “how do you say this in Arabic?”. When the time finally came to write down his observations, he could no longer ask this question, so he resorted to Golius - the undisputed authority in the field of the Arabic language. He must have been sincerely convinced that all these colourful descriptions, which must have evoked vivid memories from the trip, actually referred to what he once had a chance to observe. As it turns out, however, his associations often misled him. This is best documented in the following fragment about the water reservoirs used in the desert:

All of the desert wells are either natural cisterns, immense porosities contained in a bed of solid rock, of which the upper crust, ordinarily one to two feet in thickness, has been pierced by a hole a foot and a half in diameter, or wells where the water slowly renews itself on its own. These are very rare. The former, the cisterns, are filled by rainwater. But all of these wells, after their water ceases to be stirred up by continual use, become covered by a layer of small green grasses, stinking and filled with a great number of small insects called *bars*, which means leprosy. [...] The word *baraş* means leprosy. It is possible and even probable that, in earliest times, using this water, permeated with this grass and spoiled by this mass of insects, was one of the causes of leprosy.<sup>21</sup>

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taste. The word *ḥamḍ* in modern Arabic means acid. Rzewuski apparently did not understand it and took it as the systematic name of the plant Golius wrote about earlier.

*Al-Şihāh...* vol. 3, p. 1072.

20 *Al-Qāmūs...* p. 640.

21 *Sur les chevaux...* vol. 1, f. 86v-87r.

To observe the phenomenon discussed, one should focus on the word *barş*, which, according to Rzewuski, is a term for insects with certain habits unpleasant for people. It can be said that Golius gives his imagination free rein by writing that the word defines “a small animal that breeds in a well”.<sup>22</sup> This is an exact translation from Fayrūzābādī: “*Barş* is a small animal that breeds in a well”.<sup>23</sup> This animal is undoubtedly a frog and not the vermin observed by Rzewuski and associated with leprosy. Although in today’s literary version of Arabic, the word means lizard and has a slightly changed vocalisation, pronounced *burş*, it should be remembered that distinguishing amphibians as a separate class is an achievement of the late modern era.<sup>24</sup> We can hear an echo of this lack of distinction in the word *wazagh*, meaning a frog in Persian, or gecko in Arabic. This is the same word that Golius, quoted by Rzewuski, uses after Ibn al-Bayṭār as a name for a lizard called *sāmm abraş*, which is said to cause leprosy by biting.<sup>25</sup> The etymological connection between the words *baraş* and *barş* (*burş*) undoubtedly exists, but it is of a different nature than what Rzewuski assumed. The reason for the association was probably skin changes resulting from leprosy and lizard-like scales or warts, with which the skin of amphibians is sometimes covered.

The above examples were to prove that one of Rzewuski’s most important sources – or perhaps even the most important one – was the Golius’s lexicon. This is where he obtained information about the spelling and meaning of specific Arabic words. Thus, he must have learnt a great deal about the life of Arabs in the desert. In view of all this, the question arises whether Rzewuski made notes while in the Middle East, which he could use to write his work. As

22 *Lexicon...* col. 256.

23 *Al-Qāmūs...* p. 613.

24 Edward William Lane also draws attention to the words *barş* and *burş* in: *Arabic-English Lexicon*, Beirut 1968, vol. 1, p. 188. He proposes a hypothesis that according to al-Fayrūzābādī, *barş* is a more correct form than the allegedly colloquial *burş*.

25 *Sur les chevaux...* vol. 1, f. 87v, *Lexicon...* col. 2209.

it was mentioned at the very beginning, the material he quotes in Arabic is heterogeneous and clearly multi-layered. It is possible that one of these layers may correspond to material from his travel journal. It refers to the most distorted script. It is not so extensive, and although it contains a considerable amount of lexis, it is limited mainly to geographical names - they document the next stages of Rzewuski's journeys. Some of the words for horse breeds should also be included in this group, although most of them certainly come from the treatise *Kitāb kāmīl al-ṣinā'atayn al-bayṭara wal-zardaqa* by Abū Bakr ibn Badr al-Dīn al-Bayṭār (d. 1340). It may also include a few other, much smaller parts of the manuscript, such as, for example, the methods of fortune-telling written on the margins. As for the distorted record, it can be presumed that it did not result from the author's incompetence or a hearing impairment, as it might initially appear. There are indications that the alleged travel journal was written only with the Latin alphabet. The distortions appeared only when Rzewuski wanted to restore the original Arabic spelling to the transcribed words, although he had probably never seen it before.

Strong evidence that Rzewuski relied on notes written with the Latin alphabet can be found in the translation of one of the three Arabian horse certificates quoted in Arabic graphics. There, we find the name of the month of the lunar calendar that does not appear in the Arabic text, *jumādā al-ākhir(a)*, which in the manuscript looks like this: *djoumas el aschir*.<sup>26</sup> The form of the last part of the name, whose only possible phonetic realisation is *āshir*, can be explained only if we assume that it was rewritten, misinterpreted, and corrected from the *achire*, which must have been in Rzewuski's original notes, and is the exact record of the Arabic pronunciation. Having forgotten what the word originally sounded like, he had to read it in accordance with the French pronunciation and correct it so that there was no doubt whether "ch" should be pronounced in the same way in Polish and German or French (this problem was

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26 *Sur les chevaux...* vol. 2, f. 57v.

not ultimately addressed by the author and this duality in the pronunciation of “ch” applies to almost the entire manuscript).

We also know that Rzewuski tried to write in Arabic words that he knew only in Latin script. An example of this can be found in the following passage:

Everyone knows the story of the great reservoir of the Sabaeen people, called by the Arabs *Si'at Ma'rib*, The Misfortune of Ma'rib. [...] The name *si'a* signifies *malum, infortunium, peccatum*. Ma'rib was the name of a Sabaeen king who had founded that dike. The surname of the founder, moreover, is surely derived from that fine and industrious enterprise, because the word *ariba*, the root of *ma'rib*, signifies industrious, learned, experienced.<sup>27</sup>

The explanation of the meaning of the words, which, as Rzewuski argued, make up the name of the described reservoir, comes of course from Golius's lexicon.<sup>28</sup> However, it turns out to be more important to identify the second source of the cited argument. This is undoubtedly the *Description de l'Arabie* by Carsten Niebuhr (d. 1815), as evidenced by, among other things, the very characteristic spelling of the name *Si'at Ma'rib*, which in Niebuhr is called *Sitte Mareb*, and in Rzewuski's manuscript *Sitté Mareb*.<sup>29</sup> The word *sitte* certainly stands for the Arabic *sidd*, which is the dialectal pronunciation of the classical *sadd*, meaning a dam. *Sadd Ma'rib* is Arabic for “a dam of Mariba”, not the name of a reservoir, as Niebuhr mistakenly argued and Rzewuski followed. Rzewuski, looking for the meaning of the word *sitte*, must have found the word *سَيِّئَةٌ* *si'a(t)* in Golius's dictionary,<sup>30</sup> the pronunciation of which he misinterpreted as *sit* (which corresponds to the French reading of the word used by both travellers in Latin script). Convinced that he had found what he was looking for, he wrote it down in Arabic and explained it as described above.

27 Ibidem, vol. 1, f. 66r-66v.

28 *Lexicon...* col. 62, 64, 1232.

29 M. Niebuhr, *Description de l'Arabie*, Paris M DCC LXXIX [1779], vol 2, p. 120.

30 In modern literary Arabic, this word is *سَيِّئَةٌ* *sayyi'a(t)*.

All these examples, and others that have not been discussed here, speak volumes about the creative process that led to the creation of *Sur les chevaux orientaux*. Personal experiences were only one and perhaps not the most important source of knowledge that the author used in developing the materials. Although Rzewuski himself sometimes refers to other authors, including Golius and Niebuhr, he often omits references, which poses a risk that one might assign all the findings to Rzewuski. Before he is criticised, however, one should consider whether the perspective of his work is correct. It turns out that if one puts his workshop and working methods under the microscope, it seems more appropriate to perceive him not as a researcher but as a writer. Rzewuski did not carefully document the world as he observed it but used all available sources (including gained experience and personal observations) to create fiction, which was meant to be internally consistent, credible enough for the reader to believe, but also written in a wonderful way so as to seduce the reader. Rzewuski appears in it as a Bedouin prince, rushing through the desert on his favourite mare, Muftakhara. Maybe the words he used to describe a Bedouin refer to himself?

Driven by a taste for the marvellous, he yields easily to credulity. His belief is simple, his faith without boundaries, his curiosity great [...]. Offspring of his imagination rather than results of his calculation, his conjectures wander without direction towards the future, which absorbs all his thoughts.<sup>31</sup>

Nothing can hold back his thoughts, nothing can obstruct his view. The vast expanse strokes his flights of fancy. The richest of languages, most fertile in images, further intoxicates him with the charm of its diction. He speaks in pictures. He is listened to with enthusiasm. He set down the offspring of his reveries in his immense desert. He creates more than he invents. With him fiction owes more to the seduction of the marvellous than to neglect of the truth.<sup>32</sup>

*Translated by Alicja Rosé*

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31 *Sur les chevaux...* vol. 1, f. 18r.

32 *Ibidem*, vol. 1., f. 17v.

## SUMMARY

There is no doubt that Waław Seweryn Rzewuski was one of the most colourful personages of Polish Romantic era. In spite of numerous accounts of his life and work, still little is known about his travels and adventures. His own reports thereof are particularly conventionalized and purposefully mythologized, and cannot be trusted unconditionally if one wants to establish the truth. Therefore, the present article aims at deconstructing the legend enshrouding Rzewuski. Its author analyzes some of the linguistic aspects of Rzewuski's *Sur les chevaux orientaux et provenant des races orientales*, which is both a record of his travels in the Middle East and a treatise on oriental horses. Special attention is given to how Rzewuski was influenced by Jacobus Golius, the author of one of the most popular Arabic-Latin dictionaries, not only as far as linguistic questions are concerned, but also regarding the life and culture of contemporary Arabs. This analysis makes it possible to hypothesize about the circumstances of the creation of the treatise and about the creative process itself, in order to revise our understanding of his work.

**KEYWORDS:** Waław Seweryn Rzewuski, *Sur les chevaux orientaux*, *Concerning the Horses of the Orient*, Jacobus Golius, *Lexicon arabico-latinum*