

## CONFERENCE PAPERS

### THE SOURCES FOR AFRICAN HISTORY: RETHINKING METHODS, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

International Conference Held at the Tunisian Academy of Sciences,  
Letters and Arts Beit Al-Hikma in Carthage, 13 – 15 April 2023

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The following pages present selected contributions from the international conference *The Sources for African History: Rethinking Methods, Challenges and Opportunities*, which took place from 13 to 15 April 2023, at the Tunisian Academy of Sciences, Letters and Arts Beit al-Hikma in Carthage. The conference was initiated by Silvester Trnovec of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Slovak Academy of Sciences in Bratislava, who is the main coordinator of the international project *Fontes Historiae Africanae / Sources for African History*. The project, under the auspices of the International Union of Academies based in Brussels since 1964, is devoted to editing and publishing sources on the history of the African continent.

The conference in Carthage, Tunisia, had significant international participation, bringing together specialists from 11 European and African countries, including Tunisia, Algeria, Mali, Guinea, Senegal, France, Belgium, Slovakia, Italy, Poland, and Great Britain. One of the main goals of the conference was to connect various institutions and historians involved in the *Fontes Historiae Africanae* project and to revive international communication and cooperation that had been disrupted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The focus of the conference was both to evaluate the current state and activities of the project and, more importantly, to introduce new topics, opportunities, and trends in research on manuscripts, documents, and archives related to African history.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For the full report, see 1201104104\_aas 2-2023\_TRNOVEC\_web.pdf.

The conference was hosted in the palace of the Tunisian Academy Beit al-Hikma and was opened by its president, Professor Mahmoud ben Rohmdan. Thanks to him and his team, the event provided not only a professional setting but also an inspiring environment for vibrant scholarly discussion. During two days, participants presented 20 scholarly contributions, accompanied by lively discussions.

In the following pages, we bring together selected papers from the conference that reflect the wide linguistic and geographic diversity of African historical sources, as well as various methodological approaches. The contributions chosen also address regions that have so far been underrepresented in the *Fontes Historiae Africanae* project, and which we aim to highlight more in the future.

We begin with the text of the opening lecture by Silvester Trnovec, the project's main coordinator from the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Slovak Academy of Sciences in Bratislava, which focuses on the key period of rethinking African history after the Second World War, the historical context of the *Fontes Historiae Africanae* project's emergence during the era of decolonization, and the current challenges facing the research on sources for African history. This is followed by an article by Silvia Neposteri offering an analysis and possible interpretations of the ancient Malagasy *sorabe* manuscripts from Madagascar. Muriel Roiland presents the results of her research on the mapping of North African manuscripts held in municipal libraries in France. Tahar Abbou's contribution introduces an important Algerian project aimed at identifying and digitizing ancient manuscripts held in traditional *Khizānāt* libraries scattered across Algeria. And finally, the article by Joanna Bar and Michał Tymowski discusses a Polish publication project concerning the diary of the Polish anthropologist Jan Czekanowski, based on his research expedition in Central Africa between 1900 and 1909.

At this point it is important to express our gratitude to the editorial board of the journal *Asian and African Studies* for providing the space to publish these conference papers. Their publication enables us to share at least a portion of the conference's content with the international academic community engaged in the research and publication of sources for African history.

Silvester Trnovec