

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36719/2663-4619/119/43-48>

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Oriental Lexicon in the Works of Adam Mickiewicz (On the Objective Reasons Behind This Creative Approach)

Abstract

This article analyzes the functional and aesthetic significance of Eastern lexicon in the works of Adam Mickiewicz, emphasizing the role of cultural and historical factors in shaping his romantic-orientalist worldview. The author argues that Mickiewicz approached Eastern culture not merely with exotic curiosity, but through deep scholarly and creative engagement, drawing on Persian and Arabic sources, as well as religious and mythological elements in a distinctly artistic manner. His works—such as *Sonety krymskie* (The Crimean Sonnets), *Aryman i Oromaz*, and *Droga nad przepaścią w Czufut-Kale*—feature a rich array of toponyms, sacred terms, mythological references, and everyday vocabulary that reflect this intercultural sensitivity.

Keywords: *East, romanticism, lexicon, orientalism, poetry, creativity*

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Adam Mitskeviçin yaradıcılığında Şərq leksikası (Bu yaradıcı yanaşmanın obyektiv səbəbləri haqqında)

Xülasə

Məqalədə Adam Mitskeviçin yaradıcılığında Şərq leksikasının funksional və estetik əhəmiyyəti, onun romantik-orientalist baxışlarının formalaşmasında mədəni-tarixi amillərin rolu təhlil olunur. Müəllif göstərir ki, Mitskeviç Şərq mədəniyyətinə sadəcə ekzotik maraqla deyil, dərin elmi və yaradıcı münasibətlə yanaşmış, fars və ərəb mənbələrindən, dini və mifoloji elementlərdən bədii şəkildə istifadə etmişdir. Onun əsərlərində “Sonety krymskie”, “Aryman i Oromaz”, “Droga nad przepaścią w Czufut-Kale” kimi nümunələrdə toponimlər, sakral anlayışlar, mifoloji və məişət leksikası xüsusi yer tutur. Şairin bu yanaşması təkcə fərdi zövq deyil, həm də dövrün Avropa və rus romantiklərinin ortaq estetik meyillərinin tərkib hissəsi kimi dəyərləndirilir. Mitskeviç Şərqə olan marağını yalnız təsvir vasitəsi kimi deyil, həm də interkultural mətn quruculuğunun əsas elementi kimi təqdim edir. Məqalə həmçinin onun orientalizmə olan münasibətinin Bayron, Höte və digər müasirləri ilə müqayisəsini apararaq, polşa romantizminə xas olan dərin humanist və psixoloji nüanslara diqqət çəkir.

Açar sözlər: *Şərq, romantizm, leksika, orientalizm, poeziya, yaradıcılıq*

Introduction

Mickiewicz's treatment of the East goes beyond mere decorative function; it represents a core element of intercultural textual construction. This approach is interpreted not only as a manifestation of his personal aesthetic taste, but also as part of the broader set of shared artistic tendencies among European and Russian Romantics of his era. The article also compares

Mickiewicz's orientation toward Orientalism with that of Byron, Goethe and other contemporaries, highlighting the distinctive humanistic and psychological depth characteristic of Polish Romanticism.

The consistent reference by renowned world classics to lexicon borrowed from various languages in their creative works—regardless of degree—has always attracted the interest of literary scholars, linguists, and translation theorists. It should be noted that today, favorable conditions have emerged for the theoretical and practical analysis of the micro and macro components of literary texts, as well as the denotative content of a given work as a whole. From this perspective, the comprehensive philological analysis of various authors' texts serves to reveal their creative strategies on both aesthetic-artistic and purely lexical levels (Mickiewicz, 1998, p. 5).

It is evident that the author's consciousness does not blindly reproduce reality through language; rather, the author selectively composes and integrates events, features, and qualities that hold significance to them, thereby constructing a subjective model of reality shaped by individual thought.

Before identifying the origin or semantic characteristics of a specific literary work or the components of a text created by a prominent master of words, it is essential to consider the objective cultural and historical factors that have influenced their creation. As one scholar notes, "A literary work extends far beyond the boundaries of its text. It is perceived in the context of reality and in relation to it. Cities, villages, nature, historical events, and elements of national daily life all form an integral part of the work and cannot be excluded from its interpretation" (Babenko, Kazarin, 2006, p. 31).

In other words, the expansion of the vocabulary of any given language, including the enrichment of the literary-creative lexicon, is not confined solely to its national lexical resources. It is impossible to ignore the roles of cultural-historical, socio-political, and socio-psychological factors in this objective process. The prominent linguist V. A. Zvegintsev once wrote that when analyzing linguistic processes, one should rely on concrete linguistic facts rather than engage in vague philosophical speculation, which he likened to "sailing in the sea without a compass" (Droga nad przepaścią w Czufut-Kale – A. Mickiewicz, 1899, pp. 191–192).

The cultural histories of world nations demonstrate that this process follows its own patterns. In certain cases, cultural factors may even diverge from or contradict socio-political realities. For example, despite the Akkadians' political and legal conquest of the Sumerians, they remained under the cultural influence of the Sumerians throughout history. A similar situation is observed in the case of Roman civilization, which emerged after Ancient Greece and continued to be deeply shaped by Greek culture.

Of course, in addition to the abovementioned and other unmentioned factors, it is essential not to overlook the writer's inner moral-psychological impulses and the objective demands of creative expression. In this context, the manifestations of the Romantic literary-artistic movement are of particular significance. In the majority of works by European and Russian Romantics, events are typically depicted against the backdrop of the mysterious East. This creative principle becomes especially prominent and purposeful in the literary legacy of artists with an orientalist worldview. A vivid example of this can be found in the oeuvre of Adam Mickiewicz, a powerful representative of Polish Romanticism (Sadykhov, 1975).

Research

Polish Romanticism was shaped against the backdrop of the struggle for the independence of a nation that had lost its sovereignty. One of the defining features of this form of Romanticism was the association many of its authors made between the salvation of their homeland and Napoleon's victory. Napoleon's eventual defeat further convinced them that no one else could bear the burdens of their national struggle—they alone would have to fight for their country. Only the children of the homeland could defend it (Aryman i Oromaz – A. Mickiewicz, n.d.).

Adam Mickiewicz, a leading figure in that struggle who endured imprisonment, exile, and persecution, gained exceptional authority among his contemporaries. One of the reasons for this was his openness to the cultures of other nations, particularly the ancient East. Mickiewicz and

many of his like-minded contemporaries were either trained Orientalists or individuals with a passionate interest in Eastern cultures. In literary studies, this dimension of Romanticism is often referred to as "Romantic Orientalism" or "Oriental Romanticism." The genuine aim of these Romantics was to study the richly historical Eastern world through a creative lens and, in doing so, contribute to the cultural development of their own nation.

As Yuri M. Lotman rightly stated, "Culture is a system that processes information by transforming all available resources from the surrounding world into meaningful data" (Lotman, 1992, p. 9).

It is precisely from this perspective that the European and Russian Romantics' turn to the East, as well as the tendency of creative individuals in general to draw upon the languages and cultural elements of other nations, is regarded in contemporary textological studies as part of the **intercultural category**—a phenomenon of culture. This category represents a characteristic of the text whereby "it maintains its dynamic nature through both vertical (cultural-historical and temporal) and horizontal (coexistence of texts within a shared space) relationships with other texts." In other words, "the content and meaning of a literary work is formed—either wholly or partially—through its relationship with another text." In such cases, "a text may incorporate the experiential legacy of a preceding culture" (Novruzov, 1990, s. 33).

By thoroughly studying the history, customs, and traditions of the East, Adam Mickiewicz sought to depict this region authentically in his literary works. It is worth recalling a quote cited by literary scholar Lyudmila Rogozheva in one of her studies on Mickiewicz's life and creative legacy. In a letter addressed to his friend Józef Kowalewski, the poet wrote: "*I have immersed myself in the depths of Orientalism, I am reading the history of Eastern literatures, and I have even translated a six-line poem from an original Persian text!*"

The rich and diverse vocabulary employed by Adam Mickiewicz in his works written on Eastern themes and across various literary genres can, based on their functional content and thematic diversity, be conventionally classified into several groups: **Toponyms:** *Mekański, Ajudah, Stambule, Kabe, Egiptu, Syria, Dżars, Al-Alimî, Iran, Al-Kairu, Czufut-Kale, Czatyrdah, Alusztá, Bakczysaray*; **Sacral lexicon:** *Allah, Gabryel, minareci, muslim, namaz, mieszkaniac camid* (resident of a mosque), *odgłos izanu* (the sound of the call to prayer), *mieszkaniac*; **Mythological concepts and terms:** *Aryaman, Oromaz, Ebliisa* (Iblis), *Diwy, Gaura*; **Everyday life and cultural elements**, including clothing and forms of address: *effendi, kyzlar-aga, haremu, karawane, çalma* (turban), *kaszemirski* (Kashmiri); **Titles and administrative/military vocabulary:** *Mirzo, janczary* (janissaries), *sultan, payszách, faris*; **Historical figures:** *Girajow, Szanfari, Almotenabbi*; **Poetic imagery and metaphorical expressions**, such as: "*Lecz ich bulbul zabłyśnie — i wnet oko zmruży*" ("But their nightingale will shine — and soon close its eye").

This categorization highlights the breadth and depth of Mickiewicz's engagement with Eastern cultures, both linguistically and conceptually, reflecting not only a fascination with the Orient but also a nuanced literary strategy.

The works of the Polish people's orientalist poet, as well as the scholarly research dedicated to them, clearly demonstrate that Adam Mickiewicz's interest in the East stemmed from the wealth of information he personally gathered about the cultural history of the region. This interest was further nurtured by the deep creative passion he carried in his heart for many years. Mickiewicz did not use Eastern vocabulary for the sake of exoticism. On the contrary, throughout his works, the poet consistently sought to express his profound respect for the traditions of the East.

Skryła je niepamięci i czasu zasłona;
Nad niemi turban zimny błyszczący śród ogrodu,
Jak buńczuk wojska cieniów, i ledwie u spodu
Zostały dłonią giaura wryte imiona.
Sonety krymskie „Mogily Haremu” (Zivegintsev, 1980)

The lyrical protagonist (Mirza Zevvar), well aware of the Sharia-based concept of female modesty in the Muslim East, seeks forgiveness from the Prophet for having approached the harems accompanied by a foreigner. However, he adds that the foreign visitor “gazed upon the tomb only with tears in his eyes.”

Teraz grób wasz spojrzanie cudzoziemca plami, —
Pozwalam mu, — darujesz, o wielki Proroku!
On jeden z cudzoziemców poglądał ze łzami.
Sonety krymskie „Mogily Haremu” (Zivegintsev, 1980)

The role of the existing cultural and historical environment in shaping the orientalist views of the Romantic poet Adam Mickiewicz is undeniable. A significant period of Mickiewicz’s life was closely associated, to varying degrees, with contemporary Orientalists. The overlapping of Mickiewicz’s interest in the East with the intellectual pursuits of Vilnius University graduates such as the Orientalist Aleksander Chodzko may well have been influenced by other prominent figures of the time, including his acquaintance with Professor Mirza Jafar Topchubashov of Saint Petersburg University, as well as by O. Sienkiewicz and others.

As previously noted, neither Mickiewicz nor Polish Romanticism in general can be seen as isolated from the European literary milieu, nor should their emergence be regarded as accidental. On the contrary, the authors within this literary context were united by shared creative approaches and thematic similarities. These included turning to the historical past, composing original works based on folklore narratives, extensively and creatively employing motifs from antiquity and the Middle Ages, and offering new perspectives on the cultural history of the East.

It is also important to recognize that many of these authors exhibited traces of socio-utopian thinking in their historical and folkloric works. This was only natural: knowing that their ideals could not be realized in reality, Romantic authors often turned to fantasy or utopia as a means of artistic expression.

In general, while many European artists turned to the history and culture of the East, each approached it through a unique creative lens. For some—such as Byron, Mickiewicz, Heine, and others—the East served as a subject of poetic depiction and original inspiration. For others—like Stendhal or Shelley—Oriental motifs functioned more as expressive artistic elements that enhanced the aesthetic of the work. In Mickiewicz’s literary circle, there were also writers (e.g., A. Chodzko, George Sand) for whom the translation and popularization of Eastern folklore was a principal creative mission. These individuals proudly carried on the tradition established by passionate Orientalists such as F. Rückert, A. von Platen, and the great Goethe (Mickiewicz, 1976).

Despite these commonalities, it remains essential to emphasize the personal style and individual artistic focus of each Romantic writer or poet. The Eastern themes, which occupy a significant place in the works of both the young Mickiewicz and Pushkin’s admired Byron, reflect this individuality. The author of the “Oriental Poems”—Lord Byron—incorporated Eastern motifs throughout his oeuvre, including in his larger poetic works such as *Childe Harold* and *Don Juan*.

What is most interesting is that although these authors often addressed similar topics, they presented them from markedly different perspectives. For instance, the struggle between good and evil in the pre-Islamic East—often examined through the lens of Zoroastrian dualism—was typically represented in literary and philosophical sources in similar ways. Yet Byron and Mickiewicz interpret this struggle quite differently.

Byron’s focus, for example, in his depiction of Ahriman (in *Manfred*), maintains the fearsome and majestic power of the god of darkness to the very end. In contrast, Mickiewicz’s portrayal of Ahriman (in *Ahriman and Hormuz*) shows him burning and disintegrating in the overwhelming light of Hormuz’s divine radiance. The wings of evil tremble in awe as Ahriman realizes that he has been eternally deprived of the bliss of eternity and the beauty of life itself.

Zły duch pomyślił o szczęściu bez końca —
Ta myśl, ogromna jako świata brzemie,
Z takim ciężarem padła mu na ciemie,
Ze stracił siłę, runął nadół głową
Przez wieki wieków — i osiadł nanowo
W samym przepaści niezgłębionej środka,
W samym ciemności najgrubszej zarodku.
“Aryman i Oromaz” Z Zenda-Westy
(Semanticheskoye prostranstvo teksta, 2006).

Despite his profound admiration and respect for Byron’s passionate literary legacy, Adam Mickiewicz’s works are marked by a tone of humanism, refinement, subtlety, and, above all, psychological depth—characteristics distinctly representative of Polish Romanticism. Drawing upon Zoroastrian beliefs, Mickiewicz emphasizes in his works that humanity must continuously and actively strive for the triumph of Good and Truth over Evil and Falsehood.

It is also worth noting that Mickiewicz sought to maintain active creative contact with contemporary Orientalists. In 1830, while residing in Geneva, he wrote to his close friend, the Orientalist Aleksander Chodźko, stating: “*Azim Dervish!... Allahu Akbar – God is great. We read your poems here with great pleasure*” (Rogoyeva, 2013, pp. 99-100).

As a masterful Romantic poet, Mickiewicz’s successful use of similes, epithets, and other figurative devices based on Eastern lexicon and motifs in his works clearly demonstrates his deep familiarity with the worldview, beliefs, and overall cultural history of the Eastern peoples.

I zawisnął... Tam nie patrz! Tam spadła żrenica,
Jak w studni Al-Kairu o dno nie uderza.
I ręką tam nie wskazuj: nie masz u rąk pierza:
I myśli tam nie puszczaj: bo myśl jak kotwica,
“Droga nad przepaścią w Czufut-Kale”
(Sonety krymskie. Mogiły haremu – A. Mickiewicz, n.d.)

The reference to the “Well of Cairo” here pertains, as is known from the history of the Near East, to the deep well dug in the 12th century by order of Sultan Saladin. This well, renowned for its remarkable depth (88 meters), served the people until the early 20th century.

Conclusion

As can be seen, Mickiewicz—like many Russian and European poets and writers—sought to make the most of the highly favorable intellectual, translational, and creative environment that had emerged for the study of the East. In fact, as an active participant in these processes, the Polish poet stood in harmony with both his predecessors and contemporaries. It is precisely for this reason that Mickiewicz cannot be considered in isolation from either the European or Russian literary tradition.

Nevertheless, it must be emphasized that the abundant Eastern lexicon found in Mickiewicz’s oeuvre is not limited to scattered episodic descriptions. On the contrary, it is skillfully employed in highly artistic and aesthetically powerful works—such as qasidas, ballads, and sonnets—that are devoted to the cultural history of the peoples of the East.

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Received: 09.03.2025

Accepted: 11.06.2025