
Anna Nodzyńska

Cracow

GEORG SCHWEINFURTH'S NACHLASS
IN THE JAGIELLONIAN UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY

One of the most prominent and definitely the most versatile figure among the XIXth century Africa explorers, Georg Schweinfurth, is also one quite forgotten. Born on December 29th, 1836 (Riga), botany student at Heidelberg, Munich and Berlin, specialising in Nile valley flora, first reached Africa shores on Christmas Day 1863, to return multiple times and finally leave for good almost half a century later. He belonged to the generation of scholars with broad interests, who didn't narrow their research to one discipline only. Thoroughly dedicated to his studies, Schweinfurth scrupulously gathered any piece of information encountered, to build a comprehensive, multifaceted picture of the lands he visited.

The very first expedition took him to Egypt and Sudan, along the shores of the Red Sea till Suakin and further inland to Khartoum. Having immediately attracted scholarly attention, he set off for his most famous journey – to the interior of East Africa – mysterious, unknown region called Equatoria. With the flow of the White Nile and Bahr el-Ghazal, through the lands inhabited by Diur, Dinka, Bongo, Niam-Niam, to the territories of Mangbettu, the three years long expedition proved very fruitful. Schweinfurth's detailed, colourful description of encountered tribes, published under the title "Im Herzen von Afrika" brought him instant fame, while the discovery of river Uelle (19.03.1870), though incorrectly associated with Chad system, was to become his greatest geographical achievement.



Georg Schweinfurth (E. Bayard, *Le tour du monde*, 1860)

Founder of the Ägyptische Geographische Gesellschaft (1872), two years later can be found in Kharga Oasis, his next goal - Arabian Desert (1876). He declined the seat offered by the Leipzig University, in order to travel unrestricted by other duties and focused on the Fayum region - conducting first palaeontological research there in 1879 and discovering Middle Kingdom temple Qasr el-Sagha (1884). Following decade is spend mostly outside Egypt - from Lebanon, island Sokotra (1881), unexplored shores of Tobruk (1883), hills of Ethiopia and Yemen republic (1889) to Erithrea (1891,1894). Even-

er journey prompted new publications - their number estimated to be above 400 - as well as impressive amount of objects sent to Europe: plants, rocks, artefacts. New century brought new expeditions - this time westward - Tunisia and Algeria but eventually Schweinfurth concentrated solely on Egypt. He finally left the country in 1914 to die in Berlin on September 19th 1925¹.

Schweinfurth's legacy, his Nachlass – notes, letters, publications and travel diaries, incorporated later into the Manuscript Department of Preußische Staatsbibliothek, are currently being held in the Jagiellonian Library. Their journey to Cracow was long and dangerous, in order to reconstruct it, one must go back in time to the year 1941, when the first phase of Berlin's library great evacuation began². The most valuable objects, hidden just before the war's outbreak

¹ Max Linke, *Georg Schweinfurth und sein Wirken als Geograph*, Petermanns Geographische Mitteilungen 121 (1977), p. 247-251; *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 67, No. 1 (Jan. 1926), pp. 93-94; Konrad Guenther, *Georg Schweinfurth. Lebensbild eines Afrikaforschers. Briefe von 1857 – 1925*, Stuttgart 1954.

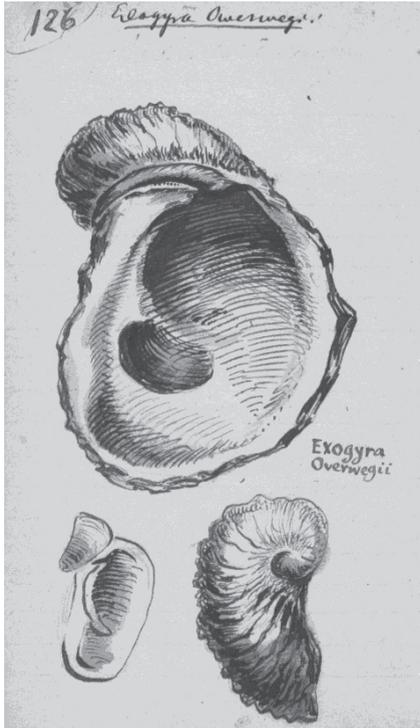
² History of Prussian Library eastern deposits based on: Werner Schochow, *Bücherschicksale : die Verlagerungsgeschichte der Preußischen Staatsbibliothek : Auslagerung, Zerstörung, Entfremdung, Rückführung : dargestellt aus den Quellen*, Veröffentlichungen der Historischen Kommission zu Berlin, Bd. 102, Berlin/New York 2003.



Ruins of Der (G.Schweinfurth, *Grosse Oase* journal)

in so-called Panzerkeller, near the main library building, were then removed from the city due to incising air raids. Hastily prepared operation lasted about two months (September-October 1941), during which parts of local collection have been transformed to the three hideouts: monastery Beuron, castles Banz and Fürstenstein (Książ). Second phase of evacuation (1941-2) focused mainly on prints. The final, as well as biggest, started with summer 1943, last transport left Berlin in March 1945. Towards the end of war dozens of deposits in eastern Pomerania, Silesia, Sudetes and central-eastern Germany, held practically the whole collection of Preussische Staatsbibliothek. Miraculously, until the early 1945 these materials remained untouched. Then, with the “Oder Campaign” on the way, came the danger – only a small part of hidden books could be sent further west on time, the rest have been plundered or destroyed.

Georg Schweinfurth’s Nachlass was one of the five similar items in the Fürstenstein deposit, brought to the castle in one of two consecutive transports – October 27-28th and November 4-6th 1941, which included also various multilingual manuscripts, letters of German artists, scientists, as well as Music and Oriental Department collections. Second shipment, that came from Berlin between April 28th and May 2nd 1943, contained a large group of prints, among them mainly humanities-oriented Rara. Altogether, those 505 book-filled boxes constituted for what was the richest single eastern deposit of the Preussische Staatsbibliothek.



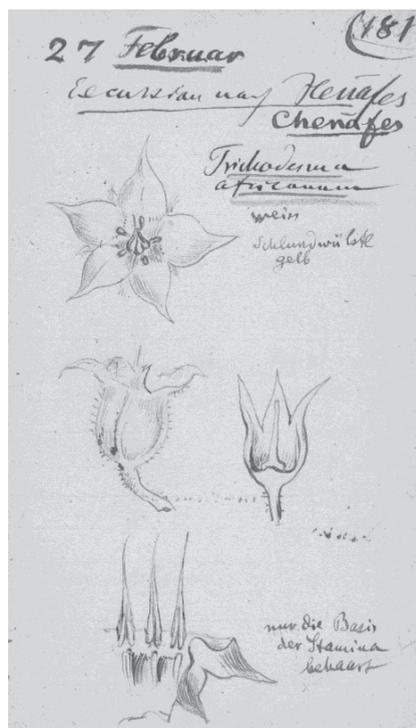
Illustrated page from the journal
Grosse Oase

One has to wonder at the fate of this priceless collection, were it not removed from its hiding place and taken to the nearby Benedictine monastery Grüssau (Krzeszów) on July 2nd 1944 at the direct, if surprising order of NSDAP. According to popular theory, Fürstenstein was to become Hitler's main quarters. Soviet army entered Grüssau on May 9th 1945 but the treasure was discovered much later – August 29th. A few months after the local monks were forced to leave (May 12th 1946), in early August, the whole Fürstenstein-Grüssau deposit started, under governmental supervision, its ultimate journey to Cracow. Secured for the time being in various temporary magazines throught the city, it was finally moved to the Jagiellonian University Library (December 1948).

Unfortunately, Schweinfurth's collection in Cracow is only partially complete – originally probably 173 elements: 169 numbered boxes and 4 without signature, compared to 120 at our disposal today - two distinct gaps appear between cases no. 67-81, 81-88 and 88-123. While the rich collection of letters seems to be untouched, among lost items were probably travel diaries. Boxes contents are grouped according to topic, each one labeled e.g. "Aegypten", "Geologia Afrika", „Colonial Fragen", with additional description inside. The information on these provisional covers and paper slips – names, titles or dates is not always reliable however, be it due to disturbance of their contents or later corrections. The simple system of arranging documents is essentially practical – case signed with a name can contain both letters exchanged or articles written by that person.

Covering a wide range of documents and papers, Schweinfurth's Nachlass gives good insight into his scientific work – numerous books from his private library, often with written dedication by their authors; concerning geology,

biology, geography – all main disciples of Schweinfurth's interest. Scientific journals like: "Gesellschaft für Erdkunde" or "Petermanns Geographische Mitteilungen" constitute a significant part among them, though more curious objects also happen, like the address book of Schweinfurth himself or the complete script of a comedy by one James Samua³. Coming across an interesting article, the German scholar had a habit of adding his own comments in the margin – continuing this practice in letters also. However, it is his vast correspondence, that draws most attention as an endless source of information on Schweinfurth's career, scientific studies and obviously, his interactions with other great minds of his time – Ascherson, Frobenius or Rohlf's.



Illustrated page from the journal
Grosse Oase

Separate from the letters, an interesting, varied collection of documents – legal papers, detailed spending lists from his voyages, specific contracts with coptic merchant Ghattas as well as invitations, cheques and even a complete last will of a certain German botanist – has been stored in two boxes. Their contents include also a very important letter listing all the items lost during the camp fire (1.XII.1870)⁴.

Another easily distinguished group of papers, quite impressive in number and variety, is formed by Schweinfurth's own notes. From meteorology data, geological profiles of almost every visited place, to hand written maps and drawings of coastlines or wadis, accompanied by numerous comments, names, comparisons, calculations etc. Some precise, painstakingly detailed, others just sketched in a hurry – altogether a vivid proof of the scholar's limitless curiosity.

³ *L'Aristocratica Allessandrina. Commedia in 3 atti di James Samua, professore di lingue ed autore del Teatro Araba, Caire 1875.*

⁴ Actually two letters from the box 44 – adressed to Duisburg: *Verluste am 1 Dec 1870* (10. XII.1870) and consul Hansal: *Verluste durch den Brand am 1 Dec 1870 in der grossen Seriba Ghattas in Djur* (11.XII.1870).

The last category, which cannot remain unmentioned in this short overview, are Schweinfurth's travel diaries. Sadly, it is also a group to have suffered most damage as only two boxes, numbered 81 and 88 of, undoubtedly, larger number remain. Eight existing diaries – small, leather bound booklets are described as follows:

- 81: „Wien. Weltausstellung Bologna 1873.Cairo. Oasenreise 1874. Belfast 1874.“, „Grosse Oase 1874“⁵, „Reise in Ober-Aegypten 1882, I.- III.“

- 88: „Berlin 1891. Berlin. Rom. Coblenz Salzwedel“, „Berlin 1892, 1893. Sommer. Winter bis Aegypten 1893 in Florenz“, „Aegypten vom 12 Febr. bis 25 April – 1893 im Assiut, Heluan. Chirroll Hügel“.

They are in fact quite dull: no lengthy descriptions or quick action – short, laconic entries, always carefully dated, served one case – recording data of importance to the author. A priority has been given here to the local names, to the point where Schweinfurth's notes and small indexes (itineraries) accompanying diaries are enough to reconstruct his route day by day.

True to his profession, he scrupulously records the examples of flora, completely with latin names, while hand made pictures provide further information – profiles, maps, intriguing artefacts or objects. Sketches of floral motives decorating Theban temples, with an attempt to identify them, being a good example. Coming across another scholar or just European during his journeys, Schweinfurth had a habit of writing down names, titles and curiously, quite often, level of proficiency in speaking German. Should someone mention his name in their publications, he was sure to comment on it however briefly.

Schweinfurth's diaries were not meant for printing and therefore providing the reader with an engrossing story. Apart from the lengthy, though partially quite illegible, description of Alexandria bombardment, the writer preferred short, precise notes – a thought, problem or information of value to him. Many subjects just breached here were thoroughly discussed in later publications.

The contents of Schweinfurth's Nachlass has never been properly examined or catalogued, which might explain almost complete lack of interest in it. A large number of XIXth and early XXth century prints, among them such

⁵ Diary titled *Grosse Oase 1874* has been found separate in late 2006, a note in the first diary of box 81 suggests that it originally belonged there.

fundamental texts as Carl Zittel's work on Libyan Desert⁶, remain untouched, while handwritten journey diary on Great Oasis has been identified only a couple months ago. Even the most superficial investigation of this particular collection will take time.

⁶ *Ueber den geologischen Bau der Libyschen Wüste. Festrede gehalten in der öffentlichen Sitzung der k.b. Akademie der Wissenschaften zu München zur Feier ihres einhundert und einundzwanzigsten Stiftungstages (28.März) am 20.März 1880 von Dr.Karl A. Zittel, München 1880.*