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## PHOTOS OF THE TELEKI EXPEDITION AND THE EMERGENCE OF PHOTOGRAPHY IN AFRICAN FIELD-STUDIES

In 1887-1888, the Hungarian Count Sámuel Teleki, accompanied by the Austrian naval officer Ludwig Ritter von Höhnel, led an expedition to certain regions of Equatorial East Africa, a region mostly unknown to Europeans of the time. From a scientific point of view, it was definitely the most successful expedition by Austro-Hungarian citizens in the history of Africa's exploration. On the 3.000 km long journey they discovered Lake Rudolf and Lake Stephanie (today Lake Turkana and Chew Bahir). They were the first to see an active volcano (Teleki's Volcano) in the middle of a continent<sup>1</sup> and surveyed a great part of the East African Rift Valley – two facts that spawned new theories in geology.

Teleki was the first to reach the snow-line on Mount Kilimanjaro at 5.300 m, and the first explorer who set foot on Mount Kenya, climbing up to around 4.300 m. Teleki and Höhnel made many observations on the climate, flora and fauna of the territories visited.<sup>2</sup> They collected more than 400 ethnographical objects, most of them from Maasai and Kikuyu tribes.<sup>3</sup> Their observations and the description of different peoples living along the route provided important

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- 1 On Höhnel's map (1894), the volcano is marked „Teleki Volcano“, later changed to „Teleki's Volcano“. This statement of the expedition was criticised most. The world-famous French-Belgian geologist, Haroun Tazieff claimed in the 1950s that Teleki and Höhnel were wrong, the volcano could not have been active in 1888 (Tazieff 1960: 225-226). Recent researches suggest however that the mistake was made by Tazieff, Teleki and Höhnel could indeed have seen volcanic activity on the small mount (Borsos and Móga 1986: 113).
  - 2 In addition to the descriptions of the botanical and zoological environment, the travellers brought home a valuable collection of plants and animals. „In the herbarium of altogether 237 species, 32 new flowering plants, 1 new fern, 32 new mosses, 4 new liverworts and 9 new lichen species were identified“ (Farkas 1988: 47). „They also brought home many trophies, but only a few survived the Second World War. From a scientific aspect, the most valuable catches are the reptiles collected, since as many as three new species were identified among them, all chameleons“ (Kádár 1988: 42).
  - 3 All objects were donated by Teleki to the National Museum in Budapest. Today, 338 items are held in the Ethnographical Museum in Budapest. 52 items were sent to Vienna to the Anthropological-Ethnographical Department of the Natural History Museum in 1889. The original collection of 407 items contained the possessions of 11 different peoples. The majority of the items came from Kikuyu (31%) and Maasai (22%) tribes. Most of the objects are weapons (38%) and jewels (34%), the rest are clothes, pots and tools. The value of the collection must not be underestimated, as it shows the material culture of African peoples before the invasion of European goods. This can best be seen by the high rate of traditional materials in the jewels: 60% of them are without European glass pearls (Borsos 1998: 75-84).

contribution to our knowledge about the ethnography of Africa.<sup>4</sup> The scientific results of the journey were published by Höhnel in several articles and in a book written in German and translated into Hungarian and English. Most Hungarian scientists agree that from a scientific point of view, the Teleki Expedition has been the most successful expedition ever led by Hungarians, meaning not only those in Africa.



*Kikuyu warriors, Erdélyi 1977: 35.*

Considering their findings, the unique collection of photographs taken by the travellers definitely has to be mentioned. These photos did not get much attention until their originals were published. This can be explained by the fact that the narrative of the expedition was illustrated mainly by drawings, even though many of them were made after photographs.<sup>5</sup>

**Der vollständige Artikel ist in Heft 19/2 2004, Seite 113 bis 135, abgedruckt. Das Heft kann per Mail oder im Buchhandel (ISSN: 0938-2964) bestellt werden.**

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- 4 To evaluate the ethnographic descriptions of the Teleki expedition, refer to the author's book on this topic (Borsos 1998), in which he compared the expedition's narratives with the accounts of other African travellers.
- 5 The German (Höhnel 1892a), the Hungarian (Höhnel 1892b) and the English editions (Höhnel 1894) are nearly identical in terms of illustrations.