

László Csibi:
Count Samu Teleki, 1845-1916. His life and his expedition to
Africa in the light of written and pictorial sources

The volume undertakes to research and process the pictorial and written documents from the East African journey of one of the most famous members of the Teleki family of Szék, Count Samu Teleki, an expedition which is – for good reason – considered the main work of his life. One hundred and thirty-five years ago, the Count of Sáromberke, accompanied by the Austrian Ludwig von Höhnel and hundreds of porters, travelled through the lands of East Africa, at a time when the exploration of the “black continent” was far from complete. Since then, his name has been recorded as one of the world’s most renowned explorers, largely due to his pioneering work: he was the first to attempt to conquer Mount Meru, Mount Kilimanjaro and Mount Kenya, and his name is also given to several plant species and a volcano near one of the lakes he discovered and named after the heirs to the monarchy’s throne.

Much has been published about Samu Teleki over the years, with an endless series of superlatives to draw the attention of posterity to the Count’s commitment to science and discovery. But these writings have not ventured beyond the expedition and its results into a detailed exploration of the Count’s life, and more specifically into the periods before and after the central African voyage. The volume looks back on the journey, which has attracted international interest, from the perspective of more than a century, while also examining the life and work of the Count of Sáromberke. The multidisciplinary book is divided into three major sections: firstly, it collects written sources about Samu from the press and archival documents of his time, as well as from publications in Hungarian from the past centuries, and then it examines the written and visual records of his expedition to Africa.

All the works and publications that have come to light about the explorations of the Transylvanian count have a significant shortcoming: their authors failed to process the documents of the Teleki family. The research that has been published so far has almost without exception been based on the only source of the expedition, the travelogue of Samu Teleki’s companion Ludwig von Höhnel, which was published in German, then in English and Hungarian. After the nationalization, the documents collected from the Teleki manor in Sáromberke, which was destroyed in the final days of the Second World War, were transferred to the Cluj Branch of the Romanian National Archives, from where, as a result of the research work of the journalist and photoreporter Lajos Erdélyi in the 1970s, some of the photographs from the trip to Africa, which were kept in the Teleki collection, have first come to light. Erdélyi not only brought the memory of Count Teleki’s expedition back into the public consciousness, but the pictures he published almost immediately “came to

life”, and copies of them have been travelling the world ever since. Lajos Erdélyi did not undertake a detailed exploration of the Teleki family collection, his aim was only to copy the photographs of the exploratory journey. To the best of our knowledge, no further processing of archival documents took place in the following decades, and as a result, no documents from or related to the African voyage or of a private nature have been found.

The book contains five chapters, a detailed glossary, a bibliography (writings in German quoted from Samu Teleki’s diary) and a photo supplement.

After an introduction discussing the author’s objectives, sources and methods, the second part aims to present the biography of Count Samu Teleki. The chapter entitled *A true Hungarian gentleman* deals with Samu Teleki, known as the Africa researcher, in subsections according to the career model of David G. Mandelbaum, divided into different units. Through the various phases of his career, the manifold activities and aspects of his life are examined, such as: the Teleki family of Sáromberke; Samu Teleki, the soldier and politician; the relationship between Samu Teleki and Archduke Rudolf; Samu Teleki’s journey from the hunting expeditions in Görgény to Africa; Teleki Samu’s life and travels after the African expedition; Samu Teleki’s final years and legacy.

The third chapter, *“To write the name of the Crown Prince and Crown Princess forever on the map of Africa” – Count Teleki Samu’s motives in organising his expedition to Africa*, seeks to answer the question of what could have been Count Teleki’s motives in organising his journey. University theses and newspaper articles, hearsay and family legends have all dealt with the issue over the last hundred years, reaching different conclusions.

The fourth chapter, *“I was master of life and death for 2 years”: the written legacy of Count Teleki Samu’s journey to East Africa*, aims to uncover the documents from his voyage of discovery, with particular attention to the Count’s diary from his journey to Africa, which was brought to the United States of America by his heir. There have been several attempts to acquire this rare document in the past decades, but so far only one incomplete and poor-quality photocopy has been found in the collection of the Hungarian Geographical Museum. During 2017, the Michigan State University library provided the opportunity for on-site research, and this time, with the Teleki family’s contribution, a high-quality copy of the diary was made, which finally allowed for a thorough analysis. Also from the expedition are the letters preserved in the Austrian State Archives and at the Cluj Branch of the Romanian National Archives, the latter previously unknown to Teleki researchers. In addition to the portrait of Samu Teleki, the book presents the story of this great voyage of discovery from a new angle, using personal documents. At last, we can read about the Count’s journey to East Africa as experienced by Samu Teleki himself. Working through his diary and correspondence reveals new information in many respects, through which we can gain a better understanding of his personality.

Besides its achievements in ethnography and geography, the expedition led by Samu Teleki also left a significant mark on the history of photography. His surviving collection – with many unique items – is part of the universal history of photography. This legacy is explored and examined in the fifth chapter, *The visual legacy of Samu Teleki’s expedition*

to *East Africa*. Ludwig von Höhnel's travelogue was illustrated with drawings after some of the photographs taken on the African journey, which was a point of reference for Lajos Erdélyi and the author of this book in identifying them. The chapter discusses the photographic habits at the time of Teleki's expedition, and then examines the authorship of the photographs associated with Samu Teleki and their use in Höhnel's travelogue. In further subsections, the author examines the landscape and ethnographic photographs of Samu Teleki and the expedition participants, organized thematically, and the fantasy drawings based on photographs, which are known from Höhnel's book.

The volume concludes with a sixth chapter, entitled Summary, a bibliography of sources and a detailed glossary: *Explanation of Swahili words*; *Personal friends and relatives of Samu Teleki mentioned in his writings*; *Members of the caravan (based on the writings of Samu Teleki and the book by Ludwig von Höhnel)*; *Geographical names used with different spellings by Teleki Samu*; *Ethnonyms*; *List of Europeans who have helped with the trip and travellers*. In addition to the German-language writings quoted from Samu Teleki's diary, the volume concludes with a detailed photo supplement, which includes newly discovered and identified items, in addition to the photographs previously published by Lajos Erdélyi.

The aim of the book is to bring the name of Count Samu Teleki back into the public consciousness by publishing the available writings and photographs of the explorer, and not only to mark the 135th anniversary of his voyage of discovery. Today, amid the growing interest in the fate of the Transylvanian aristocracy, the question of the utilization of the castles, mansions, and manor houses that are returned to the ownership of homecoming family members and descendants is at least as important as the need to make their life paths and what they represented known to the general public.