STUDIES IN ANCIENT ART AND CIVILIZATION 20
Krakow 2016

Marta Wawrzynkiewicz
Krakow

WŁADYSŁAW SZCZEPAŃSKI'S JOURNEY THROUGH ARABIA PETRAEA IN 1905 AND 1906

Abstract: *This paper presents the figure of Władysław Szczepański – a Polish Jesuit and a world-renowned biblical scholar interested mainly in biblical archaeology and philology, whose journey through Arabia Petraea has been forgotten and is rarely mentioned nowadays. The first part of Szczepański's journey of 1905 was focused on the eastern part of Arabia Petraea, the Jordanian and Galilean regions. Szczepański was accompanied then by Henri Lammens, Louis Jalabert and Urban Holzmeister. In 1906 Szczepański and Franz Fellinger became the first people to enter the area of the Sinai Peninsula after the border between Egypt and the Ottoman Empire was established anew. This time the scholars concentrated on the western part of Arabia Petraea, which is according to Szczepański, after Israel, the most informative area for every biblical scholar. When Szczepański returned from his expeditions he published two volumes: 'In Arabia Petraea. On the Basis of a Journey of 1905' and 'In Sinai. On the Basis of a Journey of 1906'. Those two publications shed light on the unknown and forgotten Arabia Petraea – they picture its geography, climate, and ancient history with references to biblical records and the present-day life of its inhabitants.*

Keywords: *Władysław Szczepański; Arabia Petraea; Sinai; Serabit el-Khadim; Wadi Maghara*

The area of the Sinai Peninsula lies within what is known as Arabia Petraea. The peninsula is the only land bridge not only between two continents, but also between two important cultural spheres along the Mediterranean Sea coast – Egypt and Levant. Naturally it has always been the place where

DOI: 10.12797/SAAC.20.2016.20.12

those two different cultures meet and mingle. The desire to gain control over the peninsula stemmed from its geopolitical location and the need for territorial expansion, but mostly from its position as the main copper mining region for ancient Egypt. The rich deposits of copper and turquoise put Sinai in a position of a mainspring of the conflict between the two cultural convergences. For these reasons, Sinai is a unique place, where the Egyptian and Levantine cultures mixed, influenced each other, and combined in a way which bore cultural fruit, such as the Proto-Sinaitic script, which developed in the most important site in Sinai, Serabit el-Khadim.

The first person to mention Serabit el-Khadim was Carsten Niebuhr (1772), who reported visiting the site in his book published after his campaign in 1762. It took a longer time to rediscover Wadi Maghara – in 1809 the German traveller Ulrich Seetzen arrived at this ancient mining site. In 1845, Serabit el-Khadim and Wadi Maghara were investigated by Richard Lepsius' (1852) expedition, followed by Major C. K. Macdonald's survey in 1845–1846 and 1867, and even his stay in Maghara between 1854 and 1866. The British Ordnance Survey of Wadi Maghara and Serabit el-Khadim was made by Charles William Wilson and H. Spencer Palmer in 1868–1869. The 'father of Egyptology' Sir William F. Petrie (1906) was aware of the significance of Sinai. In 1904–1905 he organised an expedition to the peninsula and published the results. Petrie drew the attention of other scholars who decided to follow in his steps, writing more and more books on this topic. At that point the figure of the Polish Jesuit appears.[1]

[1] After Szczepański's journey to Sinai the peninsula was visited by many other great scholars: in 1929 an expedition to Serabit el-Khadim was led by Arthur Hjelt; in 1927, 1930 and 1935 Kirsopp Lake directed other expeditions; in 1936 Serabit el-Khadim was surveyed by Richard Starr and Romain Butin; and in 1947–1948 William F. Albright took part in an expedition held by the University of California. Between 1967 and 1982 many surveys were undertaken within the Sinai Peninsula by Israeli scholars, but unfortunately most of the results were not published. In 1978 and 1979 excavations at Serabit el-Khadim were conducted by Itzhak Beit-Arieh. In 1956–1957 and 1967–1973 the site was also explored by Beno Rothenberg, who didn't hesitate to also visit Wadi Maghara in 1968. In 1996 both sites were investigated within the South Sinai Survey project by Dominique Valbelle, who concentrated her research on Hathor's temple – as a result an ongoing program of excavations and restoration of the temple started in 1993. In 2000 the Survey and Excavation Project in Egypt (SEPE) began, a long term project focused on the mining actions in ancient Sinai and the interactions between Egypt and South Sinai, conducted by Gregory Mumford. Since 2014 a project held by Ludwig D. Morenz has been working in Serabit el-Khadim – the latest results have been already published within the new series *Studia Sinaitica* (2014).

Władysław Szczepański[2] was born on the 21st of May 1877 in Biała in the Silesian Beskidy mountains. He began to study philosophy at the Jesuit College in Nowy Sącz in 1898 and theology at the Jesuit College in Krakow in 1900. He was ordained in Krakow in 1903. His interest in biblical archaeology and aptitude for learning languages led to his delegation to St. Joseph's University in Beirut in 1904,[3] where he studied eastern languages, geography, history and biblical archaeology. On graduating from the university he made his way through Istanbul to Crete, then took a journey around Greece to finally arrive in Rome. From October 1907 to mid-1908 he continued studies at the University of Innsbruck, where he lectured on the Assyrian language. In 1909 he became a professor of Palestinology, biblical archaeology and the Hebrew language at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome. During this period of his life Szczepański published a very important book, *Geographia Palaestinae antiquae* (1912) and started work on a new Polish translation of the New Testament, done not with the help of the Vulgate, but on the basis of the original Greek text. While doing that he also took into consideration the results of archaeological excavations. This episode in his scholarly activity was very meaningful and pioneering, because his research preceded the agreements of the Second Vatican Council, in the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation called *Dei verbum*, recommended preparing new translations of the Bible on the basis of original texts. Szczepański took part in organising the theological faculty at Warsaw University. Apart from lecturing in Biblical and Oriental Studies, he held biblical seminars and meetings for those interested in biblical archaeology. With financial support from Pope Pius XI, Szczepański managed to travel to the Near East once again: between March and August 1922 he visited Egypt, Sinai, Palestine and Syria. The outcome of his

[2] Biographical information about Władysław Szczepański was obtained from: Klawek 1926; Ejsmont 1967; Nowak 1983; Śródka 1998; Cieślak 2011.

[3] St. Joseph's University in Beirut was initiated and organised in 1836 by another Polish Jesuit – Father Maksymilian Ryłło. He was born in 1802 in Podorosk. After he was banished with the Belarussian Jesuits from Russia, he went to Rome and joined the convent. He was well known as a missionary who entered into communication with the representatives of the Eastern Church. Apart from the Jestuite missions in Syria, Malta and along the Nile (especially in Egypt and Sudan), he conducted some archaeological researches. In 1838 Ryłło introduced Pope Gregory XVI to his project, whose aim was the creation of an academy in Beirut or Aleppo. Despite some unfavorable reactions to this idea, the Pope decided to support Ryłło's idea and founded St. Joseph's University in Beirut – known at that time as Collegium Asiaticum. Ryłło died in 1848 in Khartoum, but in 1900 he was transported and interred at the cemetery in Al-Matariyyah, which lies today within the northern district in Cairo (Grzebień 1992, 504–506; Fedirko 2009, 24–27).

fourth journey was a three-volume series: *Najstarsze cywilizacje Wschodu klasycznego: Egipt* (1922), *Babilon* (1923), *Egea i Hatti* (1923) (*The oldest civilisations of the classical East: Egypt, Babylon, Aegea and Hatti*) and also *Palestyna po wojnie światowej* (1923) (*Palestine after the World War*), in which he described how the Near East had been influenced by the World War I. Unfortunately, Szczepański was in declining health, and when he was to take over the custody at a newly created branch of the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Jerusalem, he was unable. On his way to Jerusalem, he took a break in Innsbruck, where he died from complications after kidney surgery, on the 30th of May 1927.

The year 1904 was when Szczepański first came into contact with archaeology, and he decided to pursue the archaeological path, which led him to Sinai. When he crossed the threshold of the Jesuit Saint Joseph University in Beirut, he quickly discovered that Beirut would be a great starting point for scientific journeys to Palestine, Egypt, Syria, Arab and Sinai. Despite the significant archaeological and historical meaning of the Sinai Peninsula, Szczepański's journey through Arabia Petraea has been forgotten and is rarely mentioned. His journey is all the more remarkable as this Polish Jesuit was the first person to cross the desert of Sinai after the boundary between Egypt and the Ottoman Empire was restored in 1906. The reports from his travels were printed in *Przegląd Powszechny*, at that time published by Jesuits in Lviv. His notes and stored data were so comprehensive that in 1907 Szczepański decided to publish a book, *W Arabii Skalistej. Na podstawie podróży odbytej w r. 1905* (*In Arabia Petraea. On the basis of a journey of 1905*) and a year later the second part titled: *Na Synaju. Na podstawie podróży z r. 1906* (*In Sinai. On the basis of a journey of 1906*). This article is mostly based on those two books.[4] Szczepański's publications are a very reliable and precise source of knowledge about the Arabia Petraea region. After more than a 100 years the maps of Sinai he created with the help of Bedouins and his topographical descriptions are still a valuable source for scholars. These two books won him renown in the academic world, and the volumes were translated into other languages. Even if Szczepański did not conduct any archaeological excavations on his own, he devoted most of his life to archaeology, and so became a famous and appreciated biblical scholar. The majority of his publications were archaeological dissertations.

[4] Later on, the cumulated version of both books was also published in German: *Nach Petra und zum Sinai: zwei Reiseberichte nebst Beiträgen zur biblischen Geographie und Geschichte* (Innsbruck 1908) and some chapters were even translated to Arabic and Italian.

He is also known as the author of a hypothesis about the topographical location of the battle of Rephidim and the place where the Israelites crossed the Red Sea – both are still mentioned in discussions on those topics. It is very important to Polish archaeology that Szczepański was aware of the significance of the work of foreign scholars, and also focused on introducing their thoughts and research results on Polish soil.

As mentioned above, Szczepański had the good fortune to be the first man to visit the Sinai Peninsula after the so-called setting of the Southern Border in 1906, established between Taba and Rafiah. His two main publications about this are a kind of popular-science journal written by the traveller, who simply wanted to shed some light on the forgotten and mysterious Arabia Petraea, the province south of Palestine, on both sides of Wadi Arabah. His reports are a broad source of information about this region, about its geography, history, climate and the living conditions of its inhabitants. Following his interests, Szczepański emphasized references to stories and figures from the Bible. Thanks to that he took notes about archaeological places and artefacts. This is how he reached his main goal: his books were now fresh reasons for renewed interest in biblical archaeology both for researchers and the interested layperson.

The first expedition to Arabia Petraea (8th July–17th July 1905)

The first expedition set off on the 8th of July 1905, focused on the eastern part of Arabia Petraea, the Jordanian and Galilean regions, led by geographer and historian Professor Henri Lammens. Professor Louis Jalabert was responsible for archaeological and epigraphical observations. First-hand information about the climate, landscape, inhabitants and antiquities, mainly those with biblical backgrounds, was collected by Professor Urban Holzmeister and Władysław Szczepański himself. The journey started in Beirut, from where the professors of Saint Joseph University took a train to 'the city of gardens', Damascus. One place they visited there was the Umayyad Mosque, where the head of John the Baptist is kept.[5]

The researchers travelled with the help of the Hejaz Railway, which was still under construction at that time.[6] Starting at El-Kadem railway

[5] The information about the first expeditio-n to Arabia was obtained from Szczepański 1907.

[6] This huge venture was started in 1900 at the behest of the Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid II and was built mostly by the Ottomans, with German support. The railway, which according

station they took a two-day ride to Ma'an, about 480km from Damascus. The train was full of people and the corridors were crowded with baskets of food and bags of water. The researchers reconsidered why Nazim Pasha (the Governor of Damascus) had been reluctant to give them his permission and tried to dissuade them from this trip. While moving 30km/h and passing by the caravans they had enough time to think whether the journey was really such a risky one. Through the carriage's window they admired the never-ending plain of red hot volcanic rocks, which along with the incredibly high temperature had all the travelers seeing mirages. After a six-hour trip over a distance of 123km, the biblical land of Bashan (today Hauran Plateau) ruled by king Og, who was defeated by Moses, led them to the junction in Dera. Professor Lammens there had the chance to introduce to the other expedition members his friend and the chief engineer of Hejaz Railway, Heinrich Meissner. There, for the first time, the researches saw proof that Pasha had made some efforts to make their journey safe. Almost as soon as they arrived at Dera, the local *Kaymakam* with gendarmerie turned up on their way. Szczepański (1907, 65) mentioned that leaving Dera was like leaving civilisation behind, as suddenly 'everything seemed to be dead'. The stations didn't manage to change this impression – they consisted of the rails and a linen tent, and the only sign of life were few soldiers guarding the station. Not so far from Nasib the train broke down and the passengers had to wait for a new one to be brought in from Dera. Another obstacle awaited them outside Amman – it was the most difficult part of the way, going uphill at the edge of a precipice. To the travellers' horror the first try going up was unsuccessful, and the locomotive was forced to go back

to the plan was heading to Mecca, was supposed to be the manifestation of the Sultan's respect for the Islamic World. In fact it was a way to placate the rebellious Bedouins, who more often stood up for their freedom and independence. The railway made it easier not only to transport the army, but also to settle the fortresses. It was a very clever move to make the Islamic World pay for this enormous project. The 'Holy Railway' was funded mainly by Muslims, not only thanks to their goodwill gesture, but also thanks to compulsory offerings (they were even asked to give away the rams' and sheep's hides, which were sacrificed during the Festival of Sacrifice called Kurban Bayrami). The works progressed very slowly – after two years only 61km were finished. The robbery and murder of 400 pilgrims committed by the Bedouins near Mecca and a plague of cholera, allegedly caused by the water poisoned by Bedouins (it killed few thousand pilgrims and tens of thousands people in Egypt and Syria), sped up the workers. Engineers from all over Europe (except England) were asked for help and the needed stuff was transported from Europe to Beirut by boats. Still, the building of the Hejaz Railway was difficult: lack of water, incredible heat, diseases, and attacks by Bedouins caused the death of many workers. Szczepański was right that the railway's end station was after all in Medina, not Mecca, but he didn't foresee the reason for that – the outbreak of World War I (Szczepański 1907, 37–49).

down to the plain, where the engineer worked up enough speed to make it up the hill this time. Just about 30km south of Amman, Szczepański and his companions saw the remarkable Mshatta Palace, or what remained of this masterpiece, as Szczepański called it.[7] The train reached Qatrana, a station with stocks of water stored in Roman cisterns guarded by a great number of soldiers. Unfortunately, the expedition did not have the chance to visit the crusaders' Kerak Castle, located about seven hours on horseback from the station, as the train crew replenished the water supply and carried on with the journey. Along the western side of the rails ran an old road used by caravans and pilgrims heading to Mecca.

This is how the expedition entered Arabia. The so-called 'Arabic Island' is a place where Africa and Asia mingles. The southern, western and eastern border is quite obvious as it is marked by the Indian Ocean, but it is hard to draw the geographical border of Arabia to the north. However, Szczepański agreed that it embraces the whole peninsula with the border line from Gaza to Beersheba, the south coast of the Dead Sea, further to Kerak, Hauran, Palmyra and ending in Eufrat; it also includes the Sinaitic foothills. When the Polish scholar visited Arabia, it was sparsely inhabited by politically independent Arabic tribes and its central part was rather unknown. Szczepański drew his information about the peninsula's geography from, among others, the works of Carsten Niebuhr (1772), Johann L. Burckhardt (1829), and William G. Palgrave (1865–1866). Claudius Ptolemy in his *Geography* (…) had already divided the western coast of Arabia into two parts: Arabia Felix, so the happy one (the southern part) and Arabia Petraea, the rocky one (the northern part). Arabia Petraea includes the Sinai, Negev, the coastal areas to the south of the Red Sea, and the Moab plateau.

Heading south the landscape changed gradually, the sandy desert giving way to black rocks, a sign that the train was reaching Ma'an. It is only about 480km from Damascus to Ma'an, but the journey took 30 hours. In Ma'an the station's chief officer and a military policeman were waiting for the researchers. Professor Lammens requested four horses to be prepared for the next day, and although that was not a problem it turned out that

[7] Mshatta palace was discovered in 1903, and the Germans insisted so long on transporting it to Germany that the Turks finally agreed. The beautiful facade of the palace was announced to be a gift from Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid II to Emperor Wilhelm II and can be admired today in the Pergamon Museum in Berlin. When Szczepański's expedition reached Mshatta it was still unclear who had built the palace. Professor Lammens stated that it was erected by Sasanians in 5th century, while others attributed it to Persian people or Arabs. Today it is known that Qasr Mshatta was a winter residence during the Umayyad period (8th century) (Szczepański 1907, 65; Enderlein 1996).

there were no saddles, as Bedouins do not use them. Szczepański was lucky enough to have his own saddle he had brought with him from Beirut. The other members of the expedition eventually obtained some old saddles from an Italian trader who was working in Ma'an. Ma'an was the last town on the expedition's way – to the south from Ma'an there was no single permanently inhabited village until Aqaba.

The scholars were approaching the destination of this part of the trip. The expedition and its escort were heading towards Petra, the deserted Nabatean capital. The temperature was nearly 50 degrees in the shade and as Szczepański (1907, 79) said, 'in this dazzling atmosphere everything was taking on the colour of incandescent fire: the soil, rocks, sand and the thorny bushes. At the village of Elji (today Wadi Musa), before entering the 'city of the dead', the expedition took a rest and was hosted by the Bedouins, who are considered to be the direct descendants of the Nabateans. Petra itself was rediscovered by Burckhardt in 1812 and had been thoroughly searched by Rudolf-Ernst Brünnow and Alfred von Domaszewski (1904), who dedicated almost the whole first volume of their publication to Petra.[8] That was convenient for Szczepański and his companions, as they could focus only on the missing spots and on making up their minds about its contentious thesis. For two days, they admired the elaborated rock-curved architecture, such as El Khazneh ('The Treasury'), Ad Deir ('The Monastery'), Qasr al-Bint Firaun ('The Castle of Pharaoh's Daughter') and many others.

After visiting Petra, the expedition returned to Ma'an, from where on the 17th of July 1905 the scholars took a return train with the Hejaz Railway.

The second expedition to Arabia Petraea (18th July–7th August 1906)

In July and August 1906 Szczepański and Franz Fellinger,[9] a professor of biblical studies in Linz, went around the western part of Arabia Petraea. This time the expedition was focused on familiarizing people with the Sinai Peninsula – the area which Szczepański considered to be the most informative

[8] A thorough publication on Petra site was published recently by Wojciech Machowski (2015). Unfortunately the figure of Władysław Szczepański is not mentioned in this work and perhaps it would be worth completing the book with a few words about the Polish Jesuite.

[9] It's worth mentioning that thanks to the photos taken by Fellinger Szczepański got the chance to enrich his publication about Sinai with illustrations.

to every biblical scholar, along with Israel. That is why Biblical references are more common in his publication about the second journey.[10]

On the 4th of July Szczepański arrived in Cairo from Beirut, and was called for a meeting in the War Office. As mentioned earlier, the English Government had forbidden travel to Sinai during the conflict concentrated around the Gulf of Aqaba. Szczepański was supposed to be the first person to visit this area after the armistice, so additional meetings in the War Office, although inconvenient, came as no surprise.

As Fellinger had a delay in his arrival, Szczepański spent some time getting to know the local biblical locations. He went to the place where it is said the Holy Family found shelter while escaping capture by Herod's soldiers. Szczepański was willing to compromise the two known theses that the Holy Family had stayed either in Heliopolis or in old Cairo: he mentioned that it is possible that the Virgin Mary, Saint Joseph and Jesus spent some time in both places, especially as the Coptic scripts seem to prove that. Thus he decided to take a trip to Heliopolis – Al-Matariyyah, located in the north-eastern area of Cairo. The visitors would look for the house of Holy Family in vain, although according to historical records we should find the miraculous spring and the tree of the Virgin Mary under which the Holy Family sheltered. In fact, the spring had disappeared under the Nile sludge and the tree died, but the Franciscans managed to plant a new one in its place in the 17th century. In 1883 on the spot where according to tradition the Holy Family rested the Jesuits built the Chapel of the Virgin Mary, next to which the above-mentioned Polish missionary Maksymilian Ryłło is buried. After returning to Cairo, Szczepański went to Abu Serga Church, which had been visited by the Holy Family at the end of their journey to Egypt. It was located then within the Babylon fortress. In this oldest church in Cairo Szczepański saw the three niches reputed to be the sleeping places of the Virgin Mary, Joseph and Jesus.

While in the Coptic district of Cairo he met Porphyrios II, the Archbishop of Sinai, and the only person to give him permission to visit the Sinai Library. Obtaining permission wasn't easy, and after the unsuccessful attempts of some representatives Szczepański decided to try again on his own, which turned out to be a good decision. He also had a plan to do some sightseeing in the company of Tadeusz Smoleński,[11] but unfortunately they failed

[10] The information about the second expedition was obtained from Szczepański 1908.

[11] Tadeusz Smoleński was a historian and the first Polish Egyptologist. Because of some health problems he was forced to go to Egypt, which happened to be a turning point in his career. In Cairo he started studying Egyptology. under the guidance of a famous

to meet as he wasn't in Cairo at that time. In the meantime Szczepański visited Memphis and Sakkara, spending long hours in museums and libraries. After making final arrangements at the War Office he headed to Suez, where his journey actually should have begun.

On the 12th of July Szczepański travelled by train to Suez, where he waited for Fellinger until the 18th of July, when, after collecting enough food for about 20 days, they boarded the steamship to El-Tor in Sinai.

In the 19th century Sinai was a poorly known area. In encyclopedias or even in expert geographical books the description of Sinai was limited to a couple of lines, although in 1856 a valuable map of Sinai and Arabia Petraea was drawn by the classical scholar and cartographer Heinrich Kiepert, who based the map on the journey of Edward Robinson and Eli Smith of 1838 (Robinson and Smith 1856). Szczepański mentions the division of the peninsula into three areas: Badiet et-Tih, the desert of the north; Jebel el-Tor, the granite mountains of the south and east; and the desert el-Ka'a on the south-western coast.

The steamboat they took was rather small, going only eight nautical miles per hour, so it took about 14 hours to traverse the 230km separating Suez and el-Tor. Just before the ship made land a few officers, a doctor and a government representative came to welcome them in a lifeboat. The scholars arrived at the monastery, a branch of the main monastery of St. Catherine built on the spot of the old Orthodox church and monastery. They gathered the companions of their caravan, which consisted of only three camels and three Bedouins. As they still had a free afternoon, they visited the quarantine camp for pilgrims returning from Mecca, which was built to prevent the spread of cholera in Egypt and Europe.

In the middle of the night on the 20th of July, after celebrating Mass, Szczepański set off with Fellinger and the three Bedouins. They decided to take the eastern way to Jebel Musa, the first important stop of their journey. The sunrise depicted 'a lack of landscape' (Szczepański 1908, 94). Indeed, there was no tree, not even a hill. It doomed the caravan to sleepiness, and the hot sand made it impossible to even go for walk to revive. The heat was so unbearable that it 'closed even the mouths of the Bedouins' (Szczepański 1908, 94). After six hours, they finally reached Wadi Sle and entered the valley, bordered by almost perpendicular mountain walls. Afterwards they passed Wadi Tarfa overgrown with tamarisk, Wadi Rahabe, Wadi Rutik, Wadi Gurerat, and Wadi es-Seba'ije, where the Israelites' camp may have

French archaeologist Gaston Maspero and shortly Smoleński earned the acceptance and appreciation of the other scholars (Śliwa 2008, 196–200; Śliwa and Zinkow 2011).

been located, and arrived at last at Wadi ed-Der, above which Jebel Musa towers. At the Eastern Orthodox Sacred Monastery of the God-Trodden Mount Sinai, commonly known as Saint Catherine's Monastery, they were welcomed by the sound of bells calling for vesper service.

During their stay at the monastery they spent one day sightseeing, two days doing research in the library, and four taking the topography of the area. Szczepański briefly described in his book the labyrinth of buildings and alleys: Basilica of Transfiguration (located in the middle of the fortress, on the spot of the burning bush), the well in which Moses watered Jethro's drove of sheep, the chapels, the mosque (built to gain favour of the Arabs), little monks' cells scattered all over within the fortress' walls, other monastic buildings, the cemetery, and the beautiful garden. Szczepański spent most of his time within the walls in the library, next to the basilica. He was allowed to spend two hours a day in the library, but as he preferred to go there twice and stay longer, the monks agreed to let him study the manuscripts for two whole days, so 14 hours, instead of sitting there every day.

After spending hours in the library Szczepański and Fellinger set off on a trip to Mount Moses – Jebel Musa, which they felt to be the highlight of their journey. They couldn't wait to climb the mountain where God gave to Moses the Ten Commandments. The monotonous path led them to the chapel dedicated to the Virgin Mary and then through two stone arches (at the first one the pilgrims would confess their sins, and at the second they gave the 'confession sheet' to one of the monks). They entered the glade on which seventy of Israel's elders bowed down in front of God (*Ex* 24.9). The next stop was the little Chapel of Elijah, built above the cave in which Elijah stayed for some time and where he met God. Finally, they reached the peak of the mountain. Here both traditions, Christian and Muslim, meet: the Christian chapel on the east is next to the little mosque built on the west, right above Moses' cave. After celebrating a Mass, they went back to Elijah's chapel and climbed the north peak of Jebel Musa – Ras es-Safsaf, biblical Horeb. They went down and after visiting the Monastery of the Forty Martyrs in Wadi el Arbain, they went towards Mount Catherine. They spent the night at the top of the highest mountain in Sinai Peninsula and with the sunrise went back to the monastery through Wadi Lega.

The last stop before leaving Wadi ed-Der for good was the Rephidim battlefield and er-Raha plain – the place of the Israelite camp. The scholars passed through Wadi et-Tla'a, Wadi Genab, Wadi el-Frang, Wadi Medame and arrived at Wadi Erfaid – the valley of Rephidim. Afterwards, through Nakb el-Hawa they went to the er-Raha plain.

After returning to the monastery Szczepański and Fellinger started preparing for the 10-day journey ahead of them. They decided to take two commonly used trails, which lengthened the trip from seven, eight days to 10. The plan was to go through Wadi es-Seih to the valley of Firan, climbing Serbal, passing through the Mokatteb Valley to Maghara and Serabit el-Khadim, farther through the valleys of Suwik, Nasb, and Baba to the el-Marha Desert and along the Red Sea coast to the Cape Ras Abu Zenime and then following the Tajjibe and Sebeke Valleys and the Ujun Musa Desert straight to Suez.

On the 29th of July, they left Saint Catherine's Monastery behind and entered Wadi es-Seih – one of the longest, widest and most comfortable valleys to travel within the whole peninsula. Already on the next day they reached Wadi Firan, the largest of the Sinai's valleys, from where they enjoyed the most magnificent scenery – the view of Mount Serbal. The surface of the valley is scattered with limestone moraines which also create interesting geological forms. Between the palms, the little stone cottages inhabited by Bedouins caught the travellers' eyes, as Firan Oasis is the most fertile place on Sinai and the most welcome for Bedouins to live in. All around the oasis the old hermits' huts can be seen, and on the slopes of the mountains surrounding the valley the tombs carved in the stone are visible. The narrow path leading to Serbal's peak disappeared once for a time, making it even harder to climb the mountain. However, Szczepański admitted that it was worth it because of the beautiful view from the top of Serbal.

Granite and porphyry slowly gave way to chalk and sandstone, the sign that the expedition was entering Wadi Mukatteb, also known as Inscriptions Valley. The inscriptions had been already discovered by the first pilgrims – for example Cosmas Indicopleustes (2010), a 6th-century monk, mentioned in his *Christian Topography* that the Hebrew letters were engraved by the Israelites during the Exodus. Even 13 centuries later an Englishmen, Charles Forster (1852), considered that Cosmas was correct. He claimed that the inscriptions were the journal of Exodus, telling the stories of crossing the Red Sea, defeating the Amalekites and many others. As Szczepański (…) mentioned, Forster's lies and mystifications came to light thanks to books published on this topic by, among others, Pierre Victor Lottin De Laval (1859), Karl Richard Lepsius (1868) and Julius Euting (1891).

Szczepański and Fellinger were planning to take accommodation in major C. K. McDonald's house, which was built in Wadi Maghara, when McDonald made some efforts to mine turquoise between 1854 and 1866. His efforts were unsuccessful, because it turned out that the turquoise from

Maghara loses its beautiful tinge after some years in the sunlight. What they found were only some remains of McDonald's residence, but still they were enthusiastic about visiting the valley and hoped to see mines and steles covered with inscriptions untouched by time. Instead, they were devastated by what they saw. The steles were gone – it was even hard to recognise where they had stood and the mines had collapsed – and everything was ruined. The two scholars were happy to discover that indeed not everything was lost. In 1903 the Englishmen and the Bedouins started to extract turquoise from the Maghara mines. *Mafkat*,[12] as the area of Maghara valley and Serabit el-Khadim was also called, turned out to be an interesting and valuable place also for present-day miners who, unfortunately, didn't care about the old mines or the steles and destroyed many of them. Luckily, in 1905 Sir William Flinders Petrie visited Maghara valley during his journey to Sinai and reported the destruction of the site to the Egyptian government. In May 1906 (shortly before Szczepański's visit), the preserved monuments were transported to the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. This is why Szczepański's book filled in the gaps about Maghara's artefacts from what Petrie (1906) published after his own expedition.

Szczepański focused on preparing a topographical description of the area where the turquoise was mined. Having for tools only a compass, watch and pencil didn't make it easier for him – time measuring was his way of calculating distances in drawing the map. Two routes link Maghara with Serabit el-Khadim: the western one (through Wadi Sellal, Wadi Ba'ba and Wadi Suwik) and the eastern one (through Wadi Sidr and Wadi Umm Agraf). Szczepański and Fellinger chose the latter. Wadi Umm Agraf turned out to be too difficult for the camels, so the travellers had to deviate from the path a little bit and to go through Wadi Mugderah. Eventually, the new trail also became too steep and they had to get off the camels and traverse the path carefully on foot. It took them nine hours to cover the 40km-distance from Maghara to Serabit el-Khadim.

At the moment of arriving at Serabit el-Khadim, Szczepański understood why this site had been forgotten for such a long time. He was standing at the bottom of a mountain and couldn't see any single object which would show that from the ancient Egyptians' point of view they were in the most important place in Sinai. It also occurred to him why Carsten Niebuhr[13]

[12] According to Adolf Erman (1904, II) brak w references the term *Mafkat* means 'the green stone'.

[13] In 1762 C. Niebuhr (1772; 1774; 1778) during his journey insisted that Bedouins to lead him to the place with some stone monuments. The Bedouins thought he was referring

discovered Serabit el-Khadim simply by accident. Lepsius (1876) was the first person to deliberately state that Serabit el-Khadim was mainly a mining site.

There are eight valleys leading to the Serabit el-Khadim plateau, but all of them are very steep and rather dangerous. After the exhausting climb Szczepański concluded that the ancient Egyptians must have had a different, more accessible way to the plateau. Here he faced disappointment again – he was expecting to see a temple comparable with the ones in Luxor or Karnak, but the magnificent Hathor temple had been ruined. Thus Szczepański and Fellinger didn't spent much time in Serabit, only taking a short walk around.

The expedition set off and passed through Wadi Suwik to Wadi Nasb, where the heaps of greenish and brown slag lie as evidence of ancient Egyptian copper extraction. Unfortunately, the scholars got sick and were so tired that they found it reasonable to give up on visiting the mines and take a rest instead – even that was hard as it was 40 degrees in the shade. The next valley, Wadi Ba'ba, helped Szczepański and Fellinger to recover. The Polish Jesuit came to the conclusion that the last valley, which was like a gate to the desert, was the most beautiful one and regretted that its walls were so high that the sun could not illuminate the canyon.

Leaving Wadi Ba'ba was like leaving the granite core of Sinai. The expedition started the next phase of the journey with crossing the el-Marha desert, a northern continuation of el-Ka'a desert which spreads between the Red Sea and the western range of the Sinai mountains. The telegraph poles on the horizon were a sign that they were about 150km from Suez, about 35 hours of riding, a three-and-a-half-day journey. The strong wind blew up the sand, making it more and more difficult to travel, and impossible to observe the region. After nine hours, the travellers found shelter at Wadi Tajjibe and after a short rest decided to continue the ride. They passed Wadi Sebekeh and entered Wadi et-Tal, where they spent the night. On the next day, they carried on and among others passed by the Jebel Hammam Fir`aun – the mountain at the bottom of which according to the Bedouins' tradition the pharaoh sank after following the Israelites, who crossed the Red Sea here. After few hours of monotonous riding, the expedition arrived at Wadi Gharandel, which abounds in water. In this oasis in the shadow of the palm trees the scholars and Bedouins tried to rest, but the temperature was an intolerable 50 degrees. On the following morning,

to Serabit el-Khadim and took him there. In fact, he was amused with the site, but wasn't aware of what he found – he was sure he had discovered an Egyptian necropolis.

they went through Wadi Werdan and watched the landscape changing. The sand gave way to hard yellow-white bedrock, covered also with limestone and flint. When they entered Wadi Sudur and came nearer to Jebel Sudur, Szczepański and Fellinger recalled the history of Edward H. Palmer,[14] who had died there. They traversed other valleys: Wadi Matahnise, Wadi Marazi, Wadi Useilat and Wadi Ri'ene and finally came to the longed-for oasis Ujun Musa. Not only the scholars, but even the Bedouins were happy to reach the oasis and draw closer to civilisation after this exhausting 20-day-journey. All members of the expedition sighed with relief that they made it safe and sound. They spent the last night of their tour in the oasis of Moses' springs, as the Ujun Musa is called, and headed north for Arsinoe. There they crossed the Suez Canal by a kind of a moving platform. On the African side of the Suez Canal it turned out that the camels need to stay in a 2-day-quarantine.

It was time to say goodbye to the Bedouins, which was with difficulty and regret as the European scholars had grown fond of their Arabic companions. After it all, Szczepański and Fellinger called for a carriage and went back to Suez. This is how they finished their research, and at the same time, their great adventure. After leaving Sinai, Szczepański sat down to his notes, drawings and fresh memories and started writing the book about the first expedition to visit Sinai after the re-establishment of the boundary between Egypt and the Ottoman Empire. Szczepański's journey was an inspiration to other scholars, for example the Dominican monk father Urban Atanazy Fic (1929), who became a biblical archaeologist and also visited the lands of Arabia Petraea, and Józef Milik (2013), a significant researcher and translator of the Nabatean inscriptions.

[14] In August 1882 the English orientalist and explorer along with his companions was surrounded by the Bedouins. There are two versions of what happened next: one says that Palmer didn't want to be caught, so he decided to take a leap from the mountain and the other says that all members of the expedition were murdered in revenge to death of a couple of Bedouins, who had been killed by the Englishmen.

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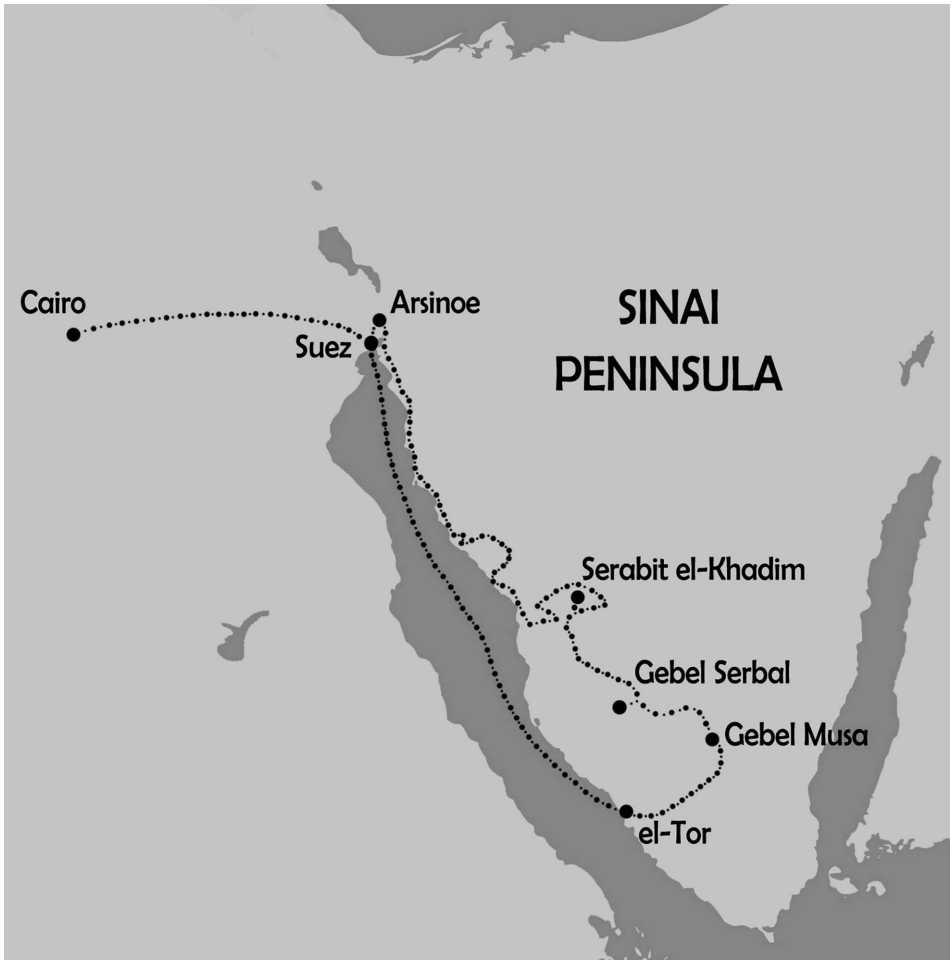
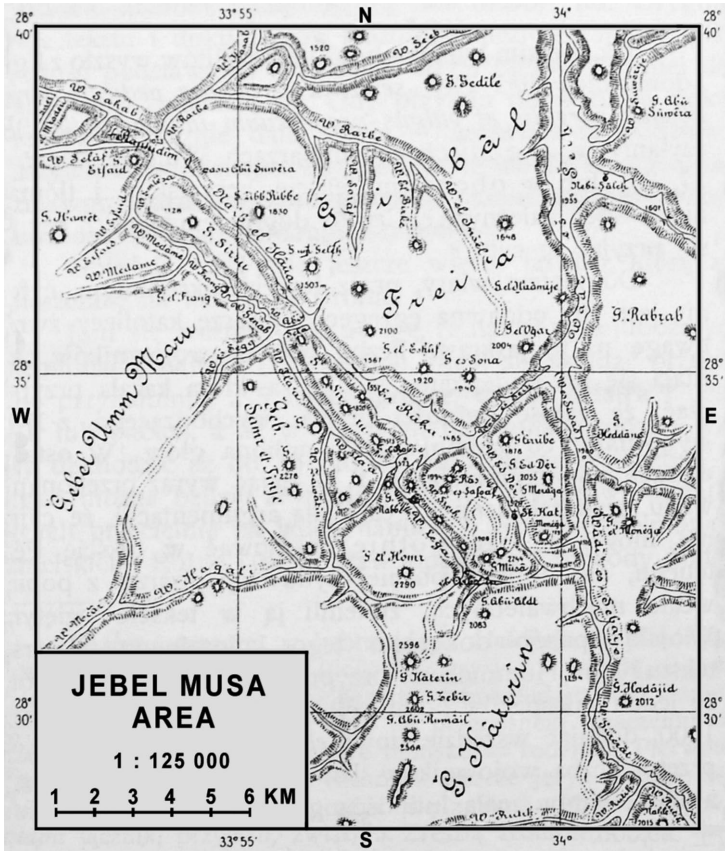
Marta Wawrzynkiewicz
c/o Institute of Archeology
Jagiellonian University
marta.wawrzynkiewicz@gmail.com

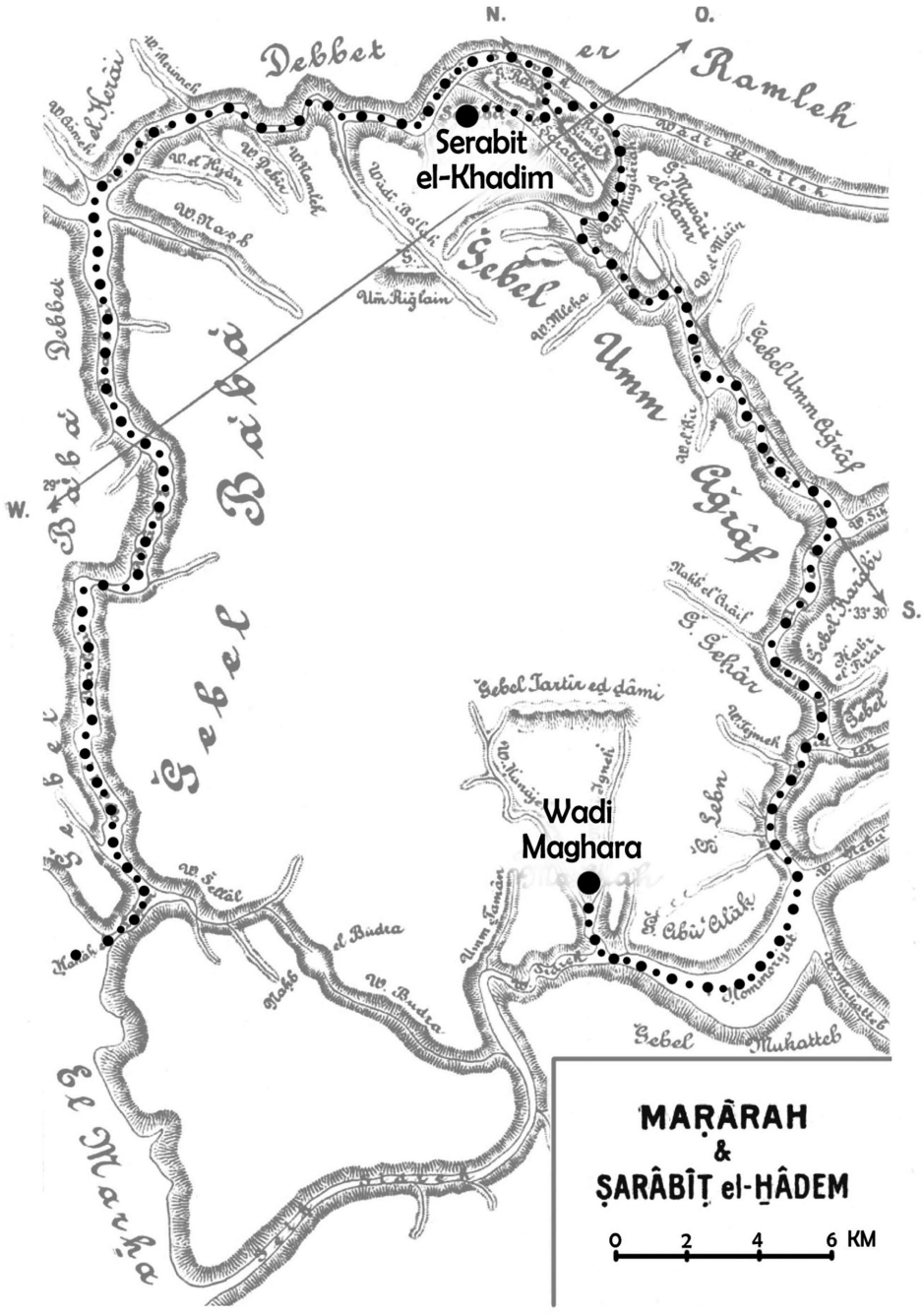
Pl. 1. Portrait of Władysław Szczepański. Reproduced from Śródka 1998, 255



Pl. 2. Map showing the route of Szczepański's second expedition to Arabia Petraea. Designed by the author based on H. Kiepert's *Map of the Peninsula of Mount Sinai and Arabia Petraea* from the itineraries of E. Robinson and E. Smith retrieved from http://www.geographicus.com/P/AntiqueMap/Sinai-kiepert-1856



Pl. 3. Map of the Jebel Musa area created by Władysław Szczepański.
Reproduced from Szczepański 1908, 201



Pl. 4. Map showing the route through Wadi Maghara and Serabit el-Khadim region during Szczepański's second expedition. Designed by the author based on Szczepański 1908, 307