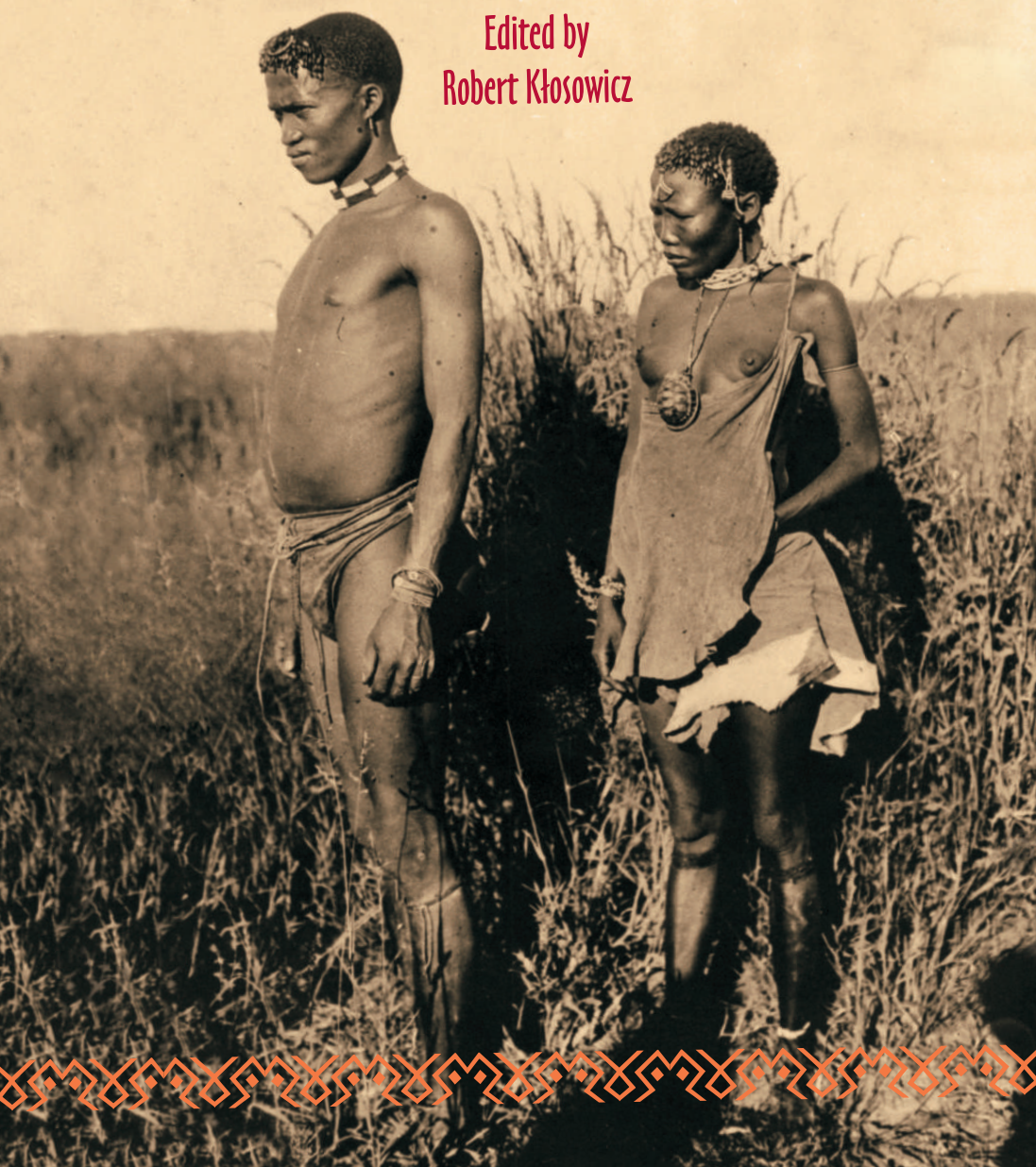


PIONEERS OF AFRICAN STUDIES IN KRAKÓW



Edited by
Robert Kłosowicz



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In memory of Professor Roman Stopa (1895-1995)



Edited by
Robert Kłosowicz



Kraków

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Jacek Kukuczka 

Seweryn Udziela Ethnographic Museum in Kraków

ROMAN STOPA'S UNKNOWN PHOTOGRAPHS

Sketching a Portrait of the Khoisan Peoples



*If I take a picture of a man
waiting for a bus at a bus stop,
the picture must show more
than a man waiting for a bus.*

Arno Fisher

FROM TODAY'S ethnographic perspective, Prof. Roman Stopa's profile could be presented as follows: a linguist, ethno-musicologist, the author of many scientific and popular science publications, expert in the languages and cultures of the Khoisan,¹ especially the San

¹ In the transcription of the term 'Khoisan' in Polish, there are a number of ways used to spell it: Kojsan, Khoisan, Koisan, Koi-San and Koin-San. The Polish-language article applied the Polonized version 'Koj-san', used by Zygmunt Komorowski in his text *Kultury Czarnej Afryki* [Cultures of Black Africa] (Ossolineum, 1994). In other Polish-language publications, e.g. in the collective work *Ludy Afryki. Przegląd regionalny* [Peoples of Africa. Regional overview] (Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu

(Bushmen), but also the Khoikhoi (Hottentots). For many years, he was a professor and lecturer of African languages at the Jagiellonian University, one of the few Polish researchers and scholars to conduct independent research projects in Africa. In 1935, he spent some time in South-West Africa (currently Namibia and Botswana) among the San and Khoikhoi, as well as among the neighbouring Bantu peoples. In the course of his linguistic field studies in Africa, he gathered a unique ethnographic collection, presenting the material culture of the San, presently located in the collections of the Seweryn Udziela Ethnographic Museum in Kraków.

If we were not to mention the photographs, in essence it would not matter much – the description would still seem complete. However, even though it was formed on the margins of the linguist's scholarly activities, this small collection (amounting to only 21 photographs) seems worth mentioning from the ethnographic point of view (especially from that of the dynamically developing subdiscipline of photographic anthropology). All the more so, as we are dealing here with a collection, which – on the one hand – is difficult to identify precisely, while – on the other – is unique for Polish conditions, casting light both on the ethnographic collection and on the context of Prof. Stopa's stay in Africa.

In contemporary anthropology/ethnography, and – more precisely – in anthropological reflections on depicting/representing the non-European world, photography is an excellent example, revealing different ways of per-

Warszawskiego, 1985), the spelling Khoisan is applied. In the English translation of this article, we have also used the spelling Khoisan.

ceiving and recording cultures. Photography, understood as images (icons) of culture, should in their definition be considered as:

- a tool for scientific description, enabling the sensory cognition of reality (an illustration to supplement a narrative description);
- an independent work of art with high aesthetic value;
- and – finally – a ‘statement’ forming an autonomous narration, which has to be seen as a story about the world, but also a project of viewing the world.²

Therefore, photography is treated not only as a document, registering cultural facts characteristic for a particular place, but also as a record of the ideational and aesthetic preferences of its creators. The photographs themselves may function not only as a documentary and scholarly illustration, but can take on the character of an informal story about the world.

If such a defined function of photography were to be applied in reference to the photos left behind by Prof. Stopa, they would without a doubt ideally fulfil the conditions of the first category, i.e. a tool for scientific description (an illustration supplementing a narrative description). However, taking into account the Professor's approach to the societies he analysed, the deep humanism he himself emphasized and the respect he showed the Bushmen and

² M. SZTANDARA, *Słów kilka o fotografii. Propozycje badawcze i możliwe interpretacje*, [in:] *Antropologia wobec fotografii i filmu*, ed. by G. PEŁCZYŃSKI, R. VORBRICH, Wydawnictwo UAM, Poznań 2004, pp. 27-36.

Hottentots, the photographs taken and collected by the Polish researcher of the Khoisan peoples can be treated as a project/way of perceiving the world. Professor Stopa underlined that in order to gain deep knowledge of a language, it is not enough to study its phonetics, grammar or literature, but primarily one should learn about the conditions in which the language functions within its own environment. Prof. Stopa owes such an attitude, among other things, to the above-mentioned humanism, but also to his own emotional approach towards Africans – an approach he never tried to conceal. It is worthwhile to cite a short fragment from Stopa's preserved notes, which provides a good overview of the 'mission' he perceived as part of his research in Africa:

„[...] this is not Livingstone's journey nor a trip in the style of the expeditions of the Prince of Mecklenburg (in which our distinguished Jan Czekanowski participated). The aim of my travels was primarily linguistic research among the Hottentots and Bushmen, especially phonetic studies into their pronunciation, into the way in which they 'click', how they connect these clicks with vowels and consonants, what types of clicks there are and what they express [...]. Humans, or relatively science, have the right and obligation to arrive at the sources of human speech [...], as speech is the prime tool of thought, human development and culture.³”

³ „[...] to nie jest podróż Livingstone'a ani podróż w stylu wyprawy księcia Meklemburskiego (w której wziął udział nasz wybitny antropolog Jan Czekanowski). Moja podróż miała na celu przede wszystkim badania językowe u Hotentotów i Buszmenów, a zwłaszcza studia fonetyczne nad ich wymową, nad sposobem w jaki oni 'mlaskają', jak łączą oni owe mlaski z samogłoskami i spółgłoskami, jakie są rodzaje tych mlasków i co one

One word is especially significant in this quotation: culture. Travelling to Africa, this relatively young, forty-year-old researcher was a well-prepared linguist, with knowledge of the language (languages) he was interested in. Less than a year later, he returned not only a linguist, but also an ethnographer – an experienced (due in part also to various failures and challenges) fieldworker, conscious of the significance of the social processes and cultural changes taking place, which – as should be noted – he wanted to record.

These concisely described circumstances have made it possible today, 80 years after his journey, to work on the ethnographic and photographic collection he gathered. However, the collection would not even have come into existence if it were not for the journey itself and – to use ethnographers' slang – if not for the so-called 'field'. Thus, it would be worthwhile to provide a short outline of the temporal, geographic and cultural background of Prof. Roman Stopa's stay in Africa, as the ethnographic collection and preserved photographs are the effect of events that took place in present-day Namibia and Botswana (and partially also South Africa) in 1935.

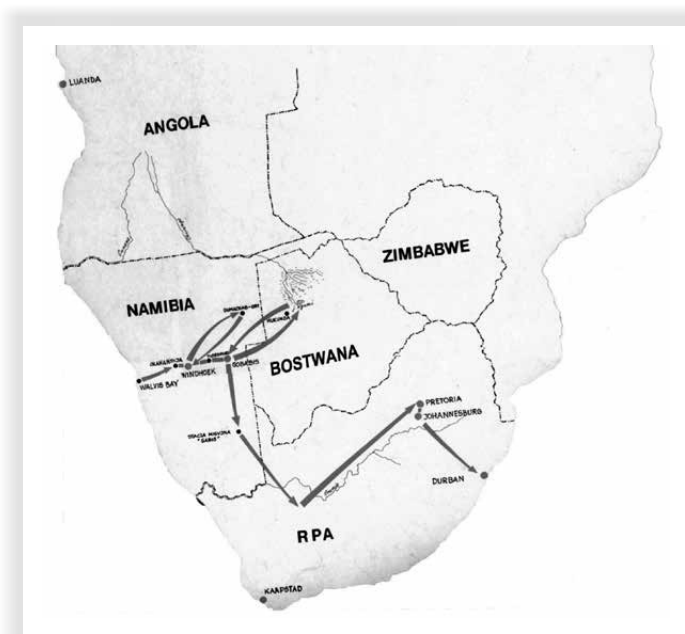
In March 1935, together with his wife, Maria (an important fact from his biography!), Roman Stopa – following a journey by ship along the western coast of Africa that took a few weeks – arrived in Walvis Bay, a strategic port

wyrażają [...]. Człowiek, względnie nauka, ma prawo i obowiązek dotrzeć do źródeł mowy ludzkiej [...], bo wszakże mowa to pierwszorzędne narzędzie myśli, rozwoju ludzkiego i kultury”: Quoted after the handwritten notes and records from his travels, located in the Academic Archives of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences and the Polish Academy of Sciences in Kraków (Roman Stopa K III – 125, ref. no. 16, 54 and 88).

in British South-West Africa (encompassing territories in present-day South Africa and Namibia). After taking care of the necessary official state formalities, the Stopas embarked on their trip to Okahandja, one of the oldest municipal centres (neighbourhoods) in Namibia at that time, where they stayed from 26 March to 14 May, as guests at Rhenische Mission, a Protestant missionary and research centre. It was there, surely after taking into account the suggestions put forward by Dr Vedder, a distinguished linguist and Roman Stopa's 'research advisor' while in Africa, that he planned his research and travel route. From Okahandja, the Stopas moved to Windhoek, the capital of present-day Namibia, from which they travelled to the Gumaxab Ost (Gumuchab Ost) farm, run by the Wiśniewskis, a family of Polish emigrants and farmers. For the three weeks of his stay there, Dr Roman Stopa conducted comparative linguistic studies among the San and Khoikhoi employed at the farm. On 30 June, Roman Stopa once again travelled to Windhoek, from which a few days later he and his wife set out east, to Gobabis, a mission and settlement on the edges of the Kalahari Desert. He spent over two months there. During this period, he embarked on possibly his only trip into the heart of the desert, reaching as far in the north-eastern direction as the Okavango wetlands (in present-day Botswana). During this journey lasting over a dozen days (in the context of the photographs, it is especially important to note that he probably did not travel alone), he encountered the San living still in relative isolation from the Whites and leading an almost nomadic hunter lifestyle. During his stay in Gobabis, Roman Stopa also bought a collection of photographs from a man called Rudebutz (?). In mid-September, once again via Windhoek, the Stopas travelled to Tsumeb and

the north-east territories of mandatory South-West Africa, where they spent a few days in the (Protestant?) mission there. Unfortunately, the inhospitable approach of the nearby German farmers towards the young Polish scholar made it impossible to do any research near either this settlement or neighbouring Grootfontein. However, in Prof. Stopa's preserved personal notes there is mention that during a stay lasting a few days in Grootfontein, he purchased more photographs from a German called Scheit. The Stopas once again spent the end of September in Windhoek, this time as the guests of another Polish family, the Rudzieckis. During this stay, Roman Stopa bought some pyrographs (made using a technique involving burning an image onto a wooden board with an iron tip – currently in the collections of the Kraków Ethnographic Museum) from some Ovambo staying in town. From Windhoek, Roman Stopa and his wife slowly moved in a southern direction, finally stopping in Keetmanshoop. There, the Kraków-based linguist was able to come in contact with some representatives of the Khoikhoi from the Nama group and conduct some research among them. In turn, during his stay in southern Namibia, Roman Stopa went on a few-day-long escapade to Lüderitz on the Skeleton Coast. Towards the end of October, the Stopas journeyed to Cape Town, where they stayed until mid-November 1935. From there, they moved to Johannesburg and Lake Chrissie, arriving in Durban on 11 December. They left Africa by ship, travelling to Hamburg, which they reached on 11 February 1936. He arrived in Poland, in his home town of Kraków, at the beginning of March.⁴

⁴ Prof. Roman Stopa's travel route and the places he stayed in South-West Africa have been established based on his handwritten



Il. 1. A schematic map depicting the places in which Roman Stopa conducted research or travelled to in 1935 within present-day Namibia, Botswana and RSA (Map from the exhibition “Bushmen and Hottentots. The archaic cultures of South-West Africa” held at the Seweryn Udziela Ethnographic Museum in Kraków in 1995).

This concise description of the route he travelled and places where he conducted research is, of course, an extremely short overview of the seven-month-long stay. Some of the listed places are currently Southern African

notes, notes from his journey, receipts, tickets and other archival material gathered in the Archive of Science of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences and Polish Academy of Science in Kraków (Roman Stopa K III – 125, ref. no. 54).

metropolises or large – for Namibian circumstances – towns, while others are still only points on a map, difficult to identify (farms, stopovers on the route of his journey through present-day Botswana). However, the aim is not just to precisely reconstruct the ‘movements’ and destinations reached by Prof. Stopa during his research – like on a chessboard, but rather to take a broader look at the legacy he has left behind. It is important to note that Prof. Roman Stopa’s achievements are usually considered from the point of view of linguistics – as they naturally should, while it is in fact possible, and even necessary, to analyse them from different perspectives. For the purposes of this text, let us refer to these perspectives as anthropological or ethnological.

From the point of view of ethnography (ethnographic museology), during a period of linguistic research lasting only a few months, Roman Stopa was able to gather a unique collection, the only existing one within Polish ethnographic collections, consisting of objects illustrating the culture of the Khoisan peoples (mainly the San/Bushmen, but also the Khoikhoi/Hottentots).⁵ This collection was acquired directly by a researcher participating in a planned

⁵ Currently, the Museum collections contain 82 items, of which the majority (51) illustrate the material culture of the San (Bushmen), while the remainder (31) were acquired among the Khoikhoi, referred to colloquially as the Hottentots, the Ovambo and the Bakalahari (a Bantu group), as well as the Boers (Afrikaners), the white inhabitants of South Africa, descendants of Dutch settlers. The collection is currently lacking 15 natural items (jackal skins, ostrich eggs, etc.) and eight items of an ethnographic nature, which were either lost or destroyed during the German occupation (1939-1945), when the collections had to be partially moved. As a side note, it is worth mentioning the valuable collection of audio recordings – these are vinyl records registering Roman Stopa’s voice, his statements concerning the oral folklore (stories, tales and songs) of the

research project executed according to certain guidelines. In addition, upon his return, it was placed in museum collections and was later described and documented by Stopa himself as a consistent set of items. The beginning of World War II, as well as later issues with housing and organisational problems led to the collection being fully analysed and described only much later, in the 1998 monographic issue of the Ethnographic Museum's Annual, dedicated to non-European countries.⁶ However, these same items, regardless of the degree to which they have been described, analysed and published, have on many occasions been presented during temporary exhibitions both in the museum itself and outside Kraków.⁷

In the analyses of these ethnographic collections, the small but very valuable collection of photographs received from Prof. Stopa has been omitted (due in part to the doubts linked to how he came by them, as discussed further below). This collection of photographs (or rather iconographs, as they include, for example, a postcard) consists of only 21 items. In 1936, some of them ended up in

Khoisan peoples. In total, this collection consists of nine vinyl records (78 RPM).

⁶ J. KUKUCZKA, *Afrykańskie zbiory prof. Romana Stopy w Muzeum Etnograficznym w Krakowie*, "Rocznik Muzeum Etnograficznego im. Seweryna Udzieli w Krakowie" 1998, vol. 14, pp. 167-182.

⁷ Including *Bushmen and Hottentots. The archaic cultures of South-West Africa*, an exhibition accompanying the session dedicated to Prof. Roman Stopa, Ethnographic Museum in Kraków, December 1995 – January 1996; *Africa. The cultures of Namibia 100 years ago and today*, Ethnographic Museum in Kraków, July – September 2004; *Travellers. Collections of Polish travellers in the Seweryn Udziela Museum of Ethnography in Kraków*, Ethnographic Museum in Kraków, November 2001 – May 2002; *Polish descriptions of the world*, Museum of Ethnography. Branch of the National Museum in Wrocław, September 1995 – September 1996.

the Ethnographic Museum in Kraków along with the ethnographic collection, the remaining elements must have been handed over to the museum in the post-war period (or were only then inventoried). To this day, the photographs remain a mystery and a challenge for Africanists, while simultaneously – and without a shadow of a doubt – being an invaluable source of knowledge both about the San themselves and the social situation in the 1930s in South-West Africa. In addition, visual anthropology, which has been rapidly developing over the last decades, enables considering the recorded image as the source of a relationship between the researcher (linguist/ethnographer) and the researched subject (the San, the native people).

However, before we take a critical look at the iconographic material gathered by Prof. Stopa, it is necessary first to describe this quite random – as it seems at first glance – collection of photographs. As in the case of the items, most of them record the San people, their everyday lives, duties and encounters with the Whites, but also the population from other ethnic groups (e.g. the Bantu). The remainder consists of portraits of Khoikhoi (Hottentot) and Ovambo men and women, as well as scenes from the lives of the Herero people.⁸ However, the fundamental question remains whether Professor Roman Stopa himself ever took any of the photographs? This question might seem strange in connection to this collection of photographs, if somewhat small, which thanks to him made its way to

⁸ It is worth mentioning that the collections of the Archive of Science in the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences and the Polish Academy of Sciences in Kraków also contain a few other photographs taken by Roman Stopa (or a person accompanying him) or acquired (purchased) by him during his travels across modern-day Namibia and Botswana.

museum collections and archives. In order to disperse any doubts, we can state today that he did indeed ‘author’ some of these photographs, later using them, for example, in his article *Kalahari i jej mieszkańcy* [Kalahari and its inhabitants].⁹ Two out of the five shots published there can be found among the above-mentioned 21 photographs in the collections of the Ethnographic Museum in Kraków. In addition, at least another two out of the remaining 19 depict this same group of San members, taken in identical circumstances, and thus they most probably come from the same film, from the same author, which we think was Roman Stopa. Therefore, we are relatively sure about the authorship of four (sic!) photographs. What about the remaining ones? In this case, we can only speculate. We can find out from the archival preserved notes on the back of the cards onto which the photographs were at one point attached using glue (!) that the author of some of them was Captain J. Nickl. Unfortunately, we know nothing about this person, as he is not mentioned by Professor Stopa in his memoirs and there is no trace of him in the preserved archival material among the items left by the Professor in the Archive of Science in the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences and the Polish Academy of Sciences in Kraków.¹⁰

⁹ R. STOPA, *Kalahari i jej mieszkańcy*, “Kontynenty” 1974, no. 9, pp. 20-21.

¹⁰ Stopa’s notes and fragments of his diary only provide a partial answer to these questions. Among other things, we can find out that during his stay in Gobabis between the 3rd July and 12 September 1935, Roman Stopa bought photographs from someone called Rūdebu... (surname illegible). In the general list of expenses he kept based on receipts and his own notes, we can find information that he spent in total 1F and 16s (shillings) on the purchase of photographs. This included 10 photographs bought in Windhoek, 5 each in Gobabis and Grootfontein, as well

One exception is a postcard depicting a Bushman woman carrying a child on her back, signed at the bottom with an inscription in English and Afrikaans.

On the basis of the preserved archival material and the comparisons made, we can state that some (lesser) amount of the photographs were taken by Professor Stopa himself or by a person who accompanied him during his travels and who gave him the photographs (or took them for him). The remaining ones are most probably purchases made in photography studies in Gobabis, Windhoek, etc.¹¹ Unfortunately, such issues with establishing the authorship of the photographs seem quite impossible to resolve. Despite this, the question of what kind of Africa we can see on the photographs remains pertinent. What do they say about the San, the Khoikhoi, the Bantu and the Whites living in

as 8 each in Lüderitz and Kolmanskoop, which amounts to 36 photographs. However, this does not ultimately answer the question whether these would include those currently in the collections of the Ethnographic Museum in Kraków, and – if so – which ones and how many (Roman Stopa K III – 125, reg. no. 54).

¹¹ At the time, this was a natural procedure – travellers and researchers purchased prints from those living in the colonies and photographers rendering their services, frequently the only ones to do so for hundreds of kilometres. They usually had at their disposal their own atelier, but – most importantly – the appropriate equipment, which allowed them to photograph the so-called anthropological types (photos in profile, frequently portraits, against an appropriately selected background and in a particular staffage) or to take photographs in the field. In this context, it is worth mentioning the silhouette and activities of the Polish photographer, Kazimierz Zagórski, who in 1924-1937 lived and worked in Leopoldville (present-day Kinshasa). His photographs – taken and distributed in hundreds of copies – have made their way into many collections and archives. For more on these topic, cf., among other publications: C.M. GEARY, *In and Out of Focus. Images from Central Africa, 1885-1960*, Smithsonian Institution, Washington 2002; K. MUSZYŃSKA, *Afryka zaklęta w fotografiach Zagórskiego*, "Fotografia" 2000, no. 19.



Photo 2. Farmers in a so-called donkmobil, South-West Africa (borderlands of present-day Namibia and Botswana), 1935. Photograph from Prof. Roman Stopa's collection. From the collections of the Seweryn Udziela Ethnographic Museum in Kraków.

South-West Africa in the 1930s? And last but not least, why did a linguist need such photographs?

The answer seems to be strongly linked to the Professor's personality, and the 'effect of the terrain' – as it is referred to in ethnography – is also extremely important. Prof. Stopa, conducting his research in the 1930s, could not ignore the broader context, especially the fact that he was conducting it during a period when not only the culture of the Khoisan peoples but also their language was undergoing dramatic transformations. The specific character of the time and place of research, spread across a large area encompassing present-day Namibia and Botswana, must

have inclined him to gather items and register on film the state of the preservation of the archaic tribal cultures he was studying. The places he visited (towns, missions, farms, but also prisons) made it possible to observe not only the San and Khoikhoi, but all the inhabitants of South-West Africa, and thus also the Herero, Damara, Ovambo, as well as the white settlers.

Thus, aside from the linguistic notes and music scores, we can also find among the things he left behind unique items he acquired – which is important to note – directly from the San he encountered and valuable photographs documenting the meetings, the people and places along the way. In two of them – probably the best out of the whole collection – we can see how the encountered Sans were ‘arranged’ for the photograph. Some of them are smiling, trying to find a place for themselves in front of the camera, perhaps interested or shy, while the others are looking in the indicated direction or at another person (as indicated by the shadow captured in the shot). We can see that the photographer was standing close to those being photographed, and had managed to establish contact with them (imagine the surprise the Bushmen felt when they met a white man on the edges of the Kalahari Desert who spoke use their language fluently!). In addition, there is a high probability that part of the ethnographic items (a container for ‘powder’ made from a turtle shell, adornments made from crushed ostrich eggs, and perhaps also a leather apron) are the same as the ones captured on the photographs. In addition, we can observe a ‘neckband’ worn on the men’s necks, probably made from glass beads, and thus an item characteristic for the adornment of the Bantu Nguni (Ngoni) peoples. Therefore, through access-

ing these photographs, we are restoring the personality of the objects, we can see how they were worn, but primarily we can see their former owners. This is the added value of this modest photography collection.

Aside from the Bushmen and Hottentots, we can also find completely different scenes on the preserved photographs. This is rather the effect of the photograph being taken in such a way that the photographed subjects might not have even been aware that they were at that precise moment being immortalised on film. This is easily observable in the photo in which some Herero women are placing an organic mixture on the structure (thatch) of a hut. Even the child accompanying them does not see the camera lens (or at least he or she is not looking in the direction of the photographer).

These are everyday situations, unpretentious, almost random – but, as a result, real. Of course, there can be no doubt that Prof. Stopa devoted most of his attention to an aspect that could not be rendered by any object or photograph, i.e. changes in the language of the researched ethnic group. However, by studying click languages, he also noted something that was occurring parallel to the culture: mutability, borrowings, mutual influences. Thus, it can be stated that Prof. Stopa's photographs are an example of the typical use of an image for research purposes. Simultaneously, Roman Stopa, an expert on the peoples he described, on their language and culture, perceived the people photographed and immortalised on photographs as obvious; he was not interested in the uniqueness or 'exoticism' of the San, Khoikhoi or Herero. His photographs reveal and preserve for us an image of unembellished everyday life and the normality of existence. There



Photo 3. The San (Bushmen), South-West Africa (borderlands of present-day Namibia and Botswana), 1935. Photograph from Prof. Roman Stopa's collection. From the collections of the Seweryn Udziela Ethnographic Museum in Kraków.

is no aura of mystery, exotic allure or theatrical staging. The photographs taken and gathered by the Polish linguist are a result of his research interests, personal sensitivity and involvement in the situation in which the studied Khoisan people were at the time. It is worth emphasizing that Prof. Stopa was free of the passion for discovering and immortalising cultures as untouched by the hand of white man as possible, so common among ethnographers (to this day). In contrast, for him the most important thing was language and it was not important whether he was speaking to someone dressed in ‘canonically pure’ attire, a modest leather hip apron and adornments made from crushed ostrich egg shells or whether the person was wearing fragments of clothing he or she had acquired from the Whites. This particular approach can also be observed in the collected photographs, in which – alongside the Sans and Khoikhois he met at the farms and in the deserts, their ‘more civilised’ kinsman – the Ovambo and the Herero – were also photographed.

We can note one more thing in the photos taken and acquired by Roman Stopa. This is in reference to a somewhat delicate subject, which might perhaps have influenced his later academic career. Professor Stopa was a staunch supporter of the thesis (if not to say the theory) that the San group, and – more precisely – their language is a remnant of ‘first fruits’, and in fact is an example of the “archaeology of human speech”. This controversial hypothesis required being grounded by other – anthropological and ethnographic evidence, as a result of which we can find such characteristic shots in the collection as a photograph of the San and a representative of the Bantu, which – by contrasting their height and body build – was supposed to



Photo 4. Herero women. South-West Africa (borderlands of present-day Namibia and Botswana), 1935. Photograph from Prof. Roman Stopa's collection. From the collections of the Seweryn Udziela Ethnographic Museum in Kraków.

provide support for the linguistic theories on the primitiveness of the former.

Are Prof. Stopa's photographs (i.e. the photographs gathered and taken by him) thus only a record – a tool to support a scientific, linguistic description? Or perhaps some of them are also a 'personal statement', a form of telling a story about the world? It is difficult to provide a single answer: perhaps any person who comes in contact with the photographs will have to judge each one separately by him – or herself. However, regardless of this evalua-



Photo 5. San (Bushman) women and children and a Bantu man. South-West Africa (borderlands of present-day Namibia and Botswana), 1935. Photograph from Prof. Roman Stopa's collection. From the collections of the Seweryn Udziela Ethnographic Museum in Kraków.

tion, thanks to these few photographs, we can today know much more about the people and cultures to whom Prof. Stopa dedicated most of his long life. Undoubtedly, from the perspective of time, the value of these photographs has only grown. They are perhaps 'sketches made on the margins' – seemingly only additional elements, somewhat less important, but nonetheless they reveal a reality difficult to render using just words. It is thanks to them, even more so than to the various objects and his scholarly publications, that a fragment of the world experienced by Prof. Roman Stopa in Southern Africa has been preserved.

Post Scriptum We cannot be 100% certain who took the photo published at the beginning of this text. We know neither the place nor circumstances in which it was taken. However, the photograph of the San group (family) in front of a *pontok* (a colloquial name used by Prof. Stopa himself to refer to their houses), if looked at from today's perspective, shows more (much more!) than simply a San group (family) in front of a *pontok*. This is precisely what makes photography so exceptional – the circumstances in which photographs are taken and the photographer's intentions are suspended and time reveals new fields for interpretations.

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For Kraków-based African studies, the 1930s were a turning point, during which the developing interest in Africa would bear fruit in the form of the first independent research projects conducted in the field – on the African continent. The best example would be the studies conducted by Roman Stopa (1895-1995), considered to be the father of Polish research into African linguistics, a professor of the Jagiellonian University, a world-renowned expert on click languages. In 1935, Roman Stopa conducted linguistic studies for a few months in the area of modern-day Namibia and Botswana among its indigenous inhabitants: the San and the Khoikhoi, at the same time collecting a significant amount of ethnographic material on the culture of the San peoples. Today, this unique collection is housed by the Seweryn Udziela Ethnographic Museum in Kraków.

In reference to the rich tradition of African studies at the Jagiellonian University and in response to the increasing interest in Africa and Africans, the idea emerged to form a research centre that would bring together Kraków-based Africanists, scattered across various University units. In 2014, by the decision of the Jagiellonian University Senate, the Jagiellonian Research Center for African Studies was created as an interdepartmental unit of the University.

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