



Tadeusz Smoleński (1884–1909) A Pioneer of Polish Egyptology

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Abstract: The Polish scholar Tadeusz Smoleński is worthy of remembrance by the international scientific community, particularly in light of the commemorated in 2024 140th anniversary of his birth. Pursuing his studies at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Smoleński developed an interest in Egyptology while convalescing in Egypt. This interest led him to become one of the pioneers of Egyptian archaeology in East Central Europe. In Cairo he undertook rigorous studies under the tutelage of the renowned French Egyptologist Gaston Maspero, rapidly attaining remarkable outcomes and formulating a future academic career. He translated ancient Egyptian texts, published scientific articles and prepared a doctoral dissertation while initiating excavation work assigned to him as a citizen of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Moreover, he demonstrated an interest in the ethnography of the region as well as contemporary political events in the Middle East. However, he suffered a sudden relapse of his illness, necessitating his return to Kraków, where he died at the young age of 25.

Keywords: history of science, Central Europe, history of Polish Egyptology, Austro-Hungarian Empire, Smoleński Tadeusz Samuel

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The 140th anniversary of Tadeusz Samuel Smoleński's (**Fig. 1**) birth, a Polish scholar of exceptional intellectual ability and tragic personal circumstances, is commemorated in 2024. Eminently gifted, Smoleński displayed remarkable ambition and unwavering assiduity.



1. Tadeusz Samuel Smoleński, portrait and signature.
Preserved in the family archive (Courtesy
of the Smoleński family).

His potential for becoming a universally renowned scholar and a pioneering figure in Central European Egyptology was evident.¹

Several Polish researchers have conducted studies on the biography and works of Tadeusz Smoleński. These include Stanisław Jan Gąsiorowski, Jerzy Pilecki and Krystyna Stachowska, as well as the latest findings and organisation of his biography and achievements (after 2000): Karolina Grodziska, Joachim Śliwa and Leszek Zinkow.²

Smoleński was born on the 16th of August 1884 in Jaworze (German *Ernsdorf*), on the border of Austrian Silesia. Tadeusz's father, Stanisław Smoleński, was a balneologist and, at the end of the nineteenth century, the director of the health resort, established in 1862 and particularly popular among members of the aristocratic and financial elite. In 1899, Smoleński's parents passed away. Orphaned, he was taken under the guardianship of relatives in Kraków. The family ensured the continuation of his rigorous education and, perhaps influenced by his uncle, Władysław Smoleński, a professor of history, Tadeusz embarked on historical studies at the Jagiellonian University. He focused his scholarly interests on the sixteenth century. In the course of his studies, Smoleński contracted severe

¹ On the initiative of the Archaeological Museum of Kraków, two anniversary events were organised to celebrate the 140th anniversary of Tadeusz S. Smoleński's birth: on November 23, 2023, the exhibition 'In the Footsteps of Polish Pioneers of Ancient Egypt Research' was opened, and shortly afterwards (December 14, 2023), the symposium 'Egypt Rediscovered' was held. For more information see website *Śladami polskich pionierów*.

² Gąsiorowski 1948; Pilecki 1960; Stachowska 1990; Grodziska 2000; Śliwa, Zinkow 2010; Śliwa 2019. See also: Bierbrier (Ed.) 2019: 437.

tuberculosis. In an effort to receive appropriate treatment and recuperate, he sought out a facility in the countryside. However, he was advised to proceed to Egypt due to the country's favourable climate, conducive to the alleviation of ailments of that nature.

TADEUSZ SAMUEL SMOLEŃSKI IN EGYPT

In the spring of 1905, Smoleński arrived in Egypt. His initial destination was Būr Saʿīd (Port Said), where he encountered Mieczysław Geniusz, a Polish engineer engaged in the technical installations of the Suez Canal.³ Geniusz remained a close friend of Smoleński until his death. Together, they undertook an expedition up the Nile, which extended as far as the First Cataract in Aswān, during which they conducted comprehensive explorations of various sites, including the Karnak Temple Complex. It can be reasonably assumed that this period was pivotal in the development of Smoleński's fascination with ancient Egypt and Egyptology. After several months, he relocated to Cairo, where he began his study visits at the Institut français d'archéologie orientale and at the Egyptian Museum (he was an almost daily reader in the library there), under supervision by Gaston Maspero, Director of the Egyptian Antiquities Service.⁴

It is necessary to explain the nature of Smoleński's Egyptological studies in Cairo. University tutors of the young history student, faced with the necessity for him to go to Egypt due to health reasons, decided not to interrupt his historical studies but to utilise the opportunity to prepare a specialist in a discipline that the Jagiellonian University in Kraków did not have. They provided him with letters of recommendation, and Maspero agreed to initiate the young scholar into the intricacies of Egyptology. The successful completion of the first test a few months later resulted in Maspero fully endorsing the idea and supporting the candidate. Under Maspero's guidance, Smoleński commenced work on his doctoral thesis, which he intended to defend in Kraków, with the University offering moderate financial assistance to its student.

Tadeusz Smoleński was financially supported by his family and the Kraków Academy of Arts and Sciences. Although the modest scholarship necessitated supplementary income through various odd jobs, he was enthusiastic about exploring this novel discipline, namely Egyptology. His academic articles demonstrated promising results and he made considerable progress towards a doctoral thesis. At the time of his death, his dissertation was nearing completion, although it was not published until after his death. The text, 'Północne ludy morskie za Ramzesa II i Minefty' ['The Northern Sea Peoples During the Reign of Ramses II and Merneptah'] was published in Polish in Kraków in 1912,⁵ and in French in Cairo, as 'Les peuples septentrionaux de la mer sous Ramsès II et Minéptah' in 1915.⁶ Smoleński aspired to establish and then head a university chair dedicated to the study

³ Śliwa 2019: 77–78; Majewska 1999.

⁴ Bierbrier (Ed.) 2019: 307–308.

⁵ Smoleński 1912.

⁶ Smoleński 1915.

of the history of the ancient Near East in Jagiellonian University, Kraków. Maspero's obituary noted: '...sa mort y est pour tous une perte et un deuil personnels. Rarement débutant manifesta des aptitudes aussi heureuses'.⁷

One of the requirements of the scholarship awarded to Smoleński was his regular reporting to the Kraków Academy not only of his own progress in Egyptology but also of the broader introduction of this *de facto* obscure discipline to the domestic academic community at that time. He met these obligations with assiduousness and tenacity, publishing scholarly texts. As early as 1906 Smoleński provided a comprehensive analysis, titled 'Sur l'état actuel des recherches égyptologiques', which appeared in the *Bulletin International de l'Académie des Sciences de Cracovie, Classe d'histoire et de philosophie*.⁸ He subsequently published other works, including 'Austro-węgierskie wykopaliska w Górnym Egipcie 1907 roku' ['Austro-Hungarian excavations in Upper Egypt, 1907'], 'Sprawozdania z czynności i posiedzeń Akademii Umiejętności w Krakowie' ['Reports on the Activities and Sessions of the Academy of Sciences in Kraków'].⁹ In Polish-language scholarly journals, including *Kwartalnik Historyczny. Organ Towarzystwa Historycznego* [*Historical Quarterly Journal. Publications of the Historical Society*] and *Przegląd Historyczny* [*The Historical Review*], he provided a comprehensive account of international research activity in Egypt, compiled an Egyptological reference bibliography and conducted reviews of current publications in Egyptology. Furthermore, he disseminated Egyptology in the popular press, particularly in the Lviv (*Lemberg in Galizien* [*Lviv in Galicia*]), the daily newspaper *Słowo Polskie* [*The Polish Word*] and in the Kraków newspaper *Czas* [*Time*].

In the final decades of the nineteenth century Egyptology experienced a period of remarkable dynamism. This was accompanied by a surge in archaeological excavations, which yielded a plethora of spectacular ancient artefacts that ignited widespread interest in Egypt across broad segments of society.¹⁰ A competition of sorts emerged between nations vying for prestige and significance in archaeology. The archaeological presence in Egypt served to quantify this prestige and significance for scholars from various countries. France, Great Britain, Germany and Italy were the principal driving forces behind this scholarly endeavour, while the Austro-Hungarian Empire, among European powers, joined this movement relatively late.¹¹ Austria-Hungary seems, belatedly, to have recognised its absence and have understood the significance and necessity of participating in prestigious archaeological research for the development of its imperial status. They bestowed the relatively modest endowment of their museums in Vienna and Budapest with ancient Egyptian artefacts, especially in comparison to, for instance, the Musée du Louvre in Paris, the British Museum in London and German or Italian museums. In the first decade of the twentieth century, however, two significant circumstances emerged: the official representative

⁷ Maspero 1910: 91–96.

⁸ Smoleński 1906: 65–84.

⁹ Smoleński 1907a: 19–20.

¹⁰ Reid 2003; Thompson 2015.

¹¹ Jánosi 1997; Vörös 2007; Czerny, Navrátilová 2021; Śliwa 2021.

of Austro-Hungarian diplomacy in Egypt, Polish Count Tadeusz Koziębrodzki (Thaddäus Graf Bolesta-Koziębrodzki), had developed an interest in antiquities since his arrival in Cairo in 1904 ('Diplomatische Agentie').¹² He sought to enhance the stature of his Vienna establishment and even began to build a modest collection. Austria-Hungary's prestige was also a concern for the affluent Hungarian merchant Fülöp Back, co-owner of a large trading company, who represented its interests in Cairo.¹³ He took the initiative to finance Austro-Hungarian excavations. Accordingly, he solicited Gaston Maspero, as Director General of the Excavations and Antiquities of Egypt, to identify an appropriate site for their research endeavours. Back proposed and anticipated that Eduard Mahler,¹⁴ an orientalist and mathematician, who would later be instrumental in establishing Hungarian academic Egyptology, would lead the archaeological mission. However, Maspero decisively delegated this role to his proficient student, Tadeusz Smoleński – a formal citizen of Austria-Hungary. The locations selected for the excavation were the village of Šārūnā, known in ancient Egyptian as *Hut-nesu*, situated approximately 200 kilometers south of Cairo, and the adjacent village of al-Ġamhūd, where they made valuable findings.

In January of 1907, Smoleński commenced an expedition to the site, with the objective of investigating a tomb from the Old Kingdom period. In addition, he unearthed the remains of a Ptolemaic temple, where inscriptions in hieroglyphics revealed links to Ptolemy I Soter and Ptolemy II Philadelphus. Although a number of splendidly decorated monumental stones (**Fig. 2**) were dispatched to Vienna and Budapest (two of which, through the efforts of Koziębrodzki, reached Kraków but were lost),¹⁵ Fülöp Back considered that the outcomes were insufficiently compelling. Consequently, Smoleński relocated to a site nearby, al-Ġamhūd, where the excavations proved significantly more fruitful. A vast necropolis from the Ptolemaic period was uncovered, yielding 47 sarcophagi and coffins painted with vibrant colours and containing mummies, in addition to numerous other funerary equipment: stelae, figurines, vessels and others.¹⁶ For the sake of scientific reliability, it should be noted that Smoleński was only a beginner researcher. He made some mistakes in assessing his findings, and his successors repeatedly corrected various errors.¹⁷

A deterioration in Smoleński's health precluded further participation, necessitating his return to Cairo. Excavations at al-Ġamhūd proceeded under the direction of Aḥmad Kamāl,¹⁸ who also authored the concluding account.

¹² Śliwa 2019: 140; cf. McEwan 1982: 137–139.

¹³ Vörös 2007; 2008; Bierbrier (Ed.) 2019: 27.

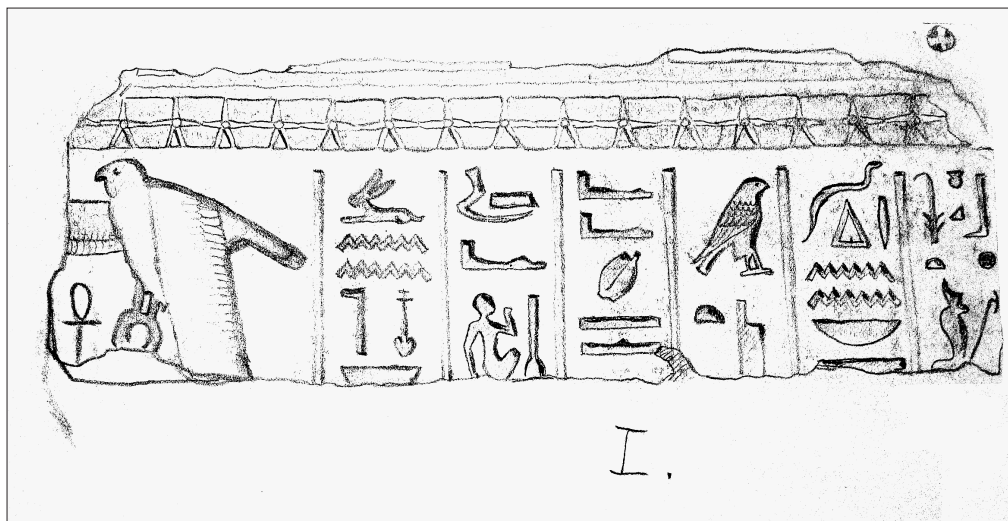
¹⁴ Bierbrier (Ed.) 2019: 298–299.

¹⁵ Wessetzky 1977; Śliwa, Zinkow (Eds) 2010: 12–13, 56.

¹⁶ Śliwa 2002; Györy 2007; Śliwa, Zinkow (Eds) 2010: 11–12, 58.

¹⁷ See observations and corrections of researchers from the University of Tübingen who started excavations at Šārūnā in 1984; e.g. Schenkel, Gomaà 2004, later also in cooperation with the Museu Egipci de Barcelona; e.g. González *et al.* 2009.

¹⁸ Bierbrier (Ed.) 2019: 246.



2. One of the Ptolemaic blocks discovered in Šārūnā, currently in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest. A drawing by Smoleński, preserved in the family archive (Courtesy of the Smoleński family).

EXCAVATION RESULTS AND MUSEUM COLLECTIONS

Following the official division of the finds by the Department of Antiquities, a significant number of artefacts were incorporated into the collections of the Hofmuseum (now Kunsthistorisches Museum) in Vienna.¹⁹ In Budapest, artefacts were initially housed at the Nemzeti Múzeum Néprajzi Tárában [National Ethnographic Museum] and were transferred to the Szépművészeti Múzeum [Museum of Fine Arts] in the 1920s. They remain at the latter institution as an integral part of the Egyptian exhibition.²⁰ Four coffins and several minor artefacts were donated to the Kraków Academy of Arts and Sciences currently housed in the Archaeological Museum of Kraków.²¹ In a further decision, the authorities in Vienna resolved to allocate one coffin (along with the mummies) to each of the museum collections within Austro-Hungarian Transylvania (Principality of Transylvania): Kolozsvár (now Cluj-Napoca). The coffin is currently held at the Muzeul Național de Istorie a Transilvaniei [National Museum of Transylvanian History]. The second coffin is displayed at the Muzeul de Etnografie Universală Franz Binder – Complexul Național Muzeal Astra [Franz Binder Museum of Universal Ethnography] in Nagyszeben (now Sibiu). Additionally, individual coffins from al-Ġamhūd were transferred *via* The Egyptian Museum

¹⁹ Wessetzky 1977; Satzinger 1994: 89.

²⁰ Irsay-Nagy 2003; Kóthay 2020. Cf. also at the website *Szépművészeti Múzeum Budapest*.

²¹ Thanks to many years of work on the Museum's collection and Smoleński's achievements, the coffin and mummy of Aset-iri-khet-es were subjected to conservation and comprehensively examined with the participation of specialists in various fields, including through computed tomography; Babraj, Szymańska 2001; see also Babraj, Szymańska 2000: 7–12, 17–26, 65, 104–115.

in Cairo to the Allard Pierson Museum in Amsterdam (The Netherlands), to the Hermitage in Saint Petersburg (Russia) as well as to smaller collections in Burgdorf (Switzerland) and Werl (Germany). Some artefacts were included in the Prague collections (Czechia) and are now in the Náprstek Museum of Asian, African, and American Cultures. It bears noting that in 2007 in commemoration of the 90th anniversary of the incorporation of objects from al-Ġamhūd into the Budapest collections, the Szépművészeti Múzeum organised a special exhibition, accompanied by the issuance of commemorative publications.²²

Despite his deteriorating health, Tadeusz Smoleński attempted to resume his excavations in al-Ġamhūd at the beginning of the following year, 1908.²³ In addition, he conducted preliminary explorations at another archaeological site located in the vicinity on the opposite, western bank of the Nile, at al-Hībah (ancient Egyptian name – *Tayu-djayet*).

The outcomes of the study were encouraging, although Smoleński lacked the opportunity to pursue further research at the site. Three years later, in 1911, the Austrian archaeologist Hermann Junker initiated an archaeological excavation at the site,²⁴ supported by the wealthy German merchant and antiquities enthusiast Wilhelm Pelizaeus.²⁵ At that time, Smoleński also spent a brief period at the Coptic monastery of St. Samuel in the mountainous Jabāl al-Qalamūn region, located to the south of the El-Fayyūm oasis. But even this period of repose was dedicated to studying Coptic architecture and culture.²⁶

While conducting archaeological excavations with local workers, he noted the daily lives and activities of residents in a contemporary Arab village. His observations were published in the form of a comprehensive, scholarly article entitled ‘Lud górno-egipski’ [‘Upper-Egyptian folk’] in the journal *Lud. Kwartalnik Etnograficzny* [*The Folk. Ethnographic Quarterly Journal*].²⁷

In April of the same year, with Mieczysław Geniusz, Smoleński undertook a two-week excursion through the Levant. They visited a variety of locations, among them Beirut and Damascus as well as the ancient ruins of Baalbek. However, he regretted not being able to see Palmyra. Other destinations included Haifa, Tiberias, Nazareth and Mount Carmel. He also made practical use of the opportunity to travel by sending regular, detailed and engaging reports to the newspaper *Słowo Polskie*, in which he revealed a keen observational skillset and spirited temperament that was distinct from his serious scientific persona.

THE LEGACY OF TADEUSZ SMOLEŃSKI

In examining the activities of Tadeusz Smoleński in Egypt, it is important to recognise that they were remarkably concentrated, occurring over a period of only approximately four years. His research into the material and spiritual heritage of ancient Egypt, which encompassed

²² Győry 2007; Vörös 2007; 2008.

²³ Stachowska 1988.

²⁴ Jánosi 1997; Bierbrier (Ed.) 2019: 242–243.

²⁵ Bierbrier (Ed.) 2019: 358.

²⁶ Partyka 1985 (this article is somewhat cursory and contains a few errors); Muc 2008: 99–102.

²⁷ Smoleński 1907b: 267–281.

both archaeological excavations and philological studies, including the translation of texts from hieroglyphs and the planned publication of several texts from the ‘canon’ of ancient Egyptian literature (e.g. Papyrus Westcar fragments) in Polish, represented only a portion of his broader explorative passions.²⁸

Furthermore, his contributions to archaeology extended beyond the excavation of his own sites involving numerous significant scholarly analyses of artefacts not directly connected to his own work. His publications cover studies of Greek inscriptions and texts from Egypt, in which he had previously demonstrated an active interest. These were published in the context of a wider engagement with the newly discovered Oxyrhynchus Papyri.²⁹

His noteworthy humanistic erudition, remarkable for his age, permitted him to author not only scholarly dissertations but also popularising texts, including a multitude of journalistic correspondences (which he sent on numerous occasions), editorial analyses, witty columns as well as reviews and contributions within the fields of philosophy, literature, history, ethnography and even current politics. Regarding the latter, it is essential to highlight Smoleński’s emotional engagement with the tumultuous events of early twentieth-century Egyptian internal politics.³⁰

Smoleński’s commentary on the actions of the Egyptian national movement, particularly in correspondence with the aforementioned *Ślowo Polskie*, was notable for its parallels drawn between the Egyptian movement and Polish independence aspirations. He even had the opportunity to meet and engage in an in-depth interview with the leader of the movement, Muṣṭafā Kāmil Pāshā.³¹

To conclude this comprehensive portrayal of Smoleński, it is essential to highlight his contribution to lyrical poetry, which is characterised by an intimate and introspective style. Additionally, he translated works by other poets, *inter alia*, José-María de Hérédia.³²

Aware of Smoleński’s abilities, Gaston Maspero sought to provide financial stability for him in Egypt by agreeing in mid-1908 with the Egyptian authorities to appoint him secretary of the organising committee for the Second International Congress of Archaeology, scheduled to be held in Cairo in 1909 (**Fig. 3**). The official and honorary overseer of all such endeavours was the reigning ‘Khedive of Egypt and the Sudan’, ‘Abbās Ḥilmī Pāshā.

Smoleński fulfilled his duties with remarkable perseverance and dedication over the course of several months. This exertion likely exacerbated the preexisting frailty of his health. He journeyed to Kraków for the purpose of recuperation, having previously coordinated with Maspero an exact date for their forthcoming working encounter in Cairo. However, the meeting did not take place, and Smoleński died in Kraków on the 29th of August 1909.

This represented the conclusion of an epoch-making chapter in the development of Egyptology in Europe. Despite his young age Smoleński became an exceptionally

²⁸ Zinkow 2009.

²⁹ Cf. Śliwa, Zinkow (Eds) 2010: 127–145, 164–166, 182.

³⁰ Vatikiotis 1991: 169–245.

³¹ Zinkow 2020.

³² Śliwa, Zinkow (Eds) 2010: 339–342.

Mod. N° 133 bis, (C.G.)

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Administration } *des antiquités Égyptiennes*
Ministère..... } *des Travaux Publics*

Je certifie que M. *Tadeusz Smoleński*
occupe les fonctions de *Secrétaire du Congrès archéologique*
à Cairo

Imp. Nat. 1648-1005 15000 ex.

Le Chef de l'Administration,
Gaston Maspero

Fait à *Cairo*
le *1^{er} Juin* 1909.



3. A certificate stating that Tadeusz Smoleński serves as the secretary of the Archaeological Congress in Cairo, dated June 1, 1909, with the signature of Gaston Maspero. The document is preserved in the family archive (Courtesy of the Smoleński family).

accomplished Polish scholar, the first Polish Egyptologist highly dedicated to Egyptological work. Fortunately, this did not result in an end to the active involvement of Austria-Hungary in archaeological research on the Nile nor the collaboration of Polish scholars with the Kaiserliche Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien (now the Austrian Academy of Sciences). This collaboration was only disrupted by the outbreak of World War I.

It is of utmost importance to underscore the profound sense of collegial loyalty that pervaded the academic community. Previously mentioned Hermann Junker, was appointed Privatdozent and subsequently promoted to professorship at the newly established chair of Egyptology (now known as the Institut für Ägyptologie) at the University

of Vienna between 1907 and 1909. In point of fact, a professorship of Egyptology as part of African Studies (Institute für Afrikanistik und Ägyptologie) had been established earlier in 1873.

During his own archaeological expeditions, including those at the site of Ṭura near Cairo, in al-Gīza at the pyramids, in al-Kūbāniyya at the southern end of Egypt and in Nubia, Junker engaged in numerous forms of collaboration and also sent portions of the discovered artefacts to Kraków.³³

Egyptology is currently a thriving discipline in many universities across the region. Several Central European nations, Poles³⁴ among them, have established their own dedicated archaeological missions in Egypt, with their discoveries and achievements placing Egyptologists from this region at the forefront of global scholarship in the field. In numerous museums across Europe, visitors may now view fascinating exhibitions of ancient Egyptian artefacts. It is therefore of significant value to preserve the memory of one of the Central European pioneers of this discipline, a Polish scholar who has been all-but-forgotten and tragically remains unfulfilled in his scientific potential.

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³³ Stachowska 1972.

³⁴ For more information see website *Polacy nad Nilem*.

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