

EDITION OF THE DIARY  
OF THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND ETHNOLOGICAL  
CARAVAN OF THE EXPEDITION TO CENTRAL AFRICA  
IN 1907–1909 BY JAN CZEKANOWSKI  
<https://doi.org/10.31577/aassav.2025.34.1.06>

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The aim of this article is to present a new Polish publishing initiative related to the publication of the *Diary of the anthropological-ethnological caravan of the expedition to Central Africa in 1907-1909*, by Jan Czekanowski, an eminent Polish anthropologist. This publication contains rich source material, which has been provided with the necessary editorial apparatus and published in the original languages (German, French and fragments of texts in local languages) together with a translation into Polish. The two volumes of this publication, supplemented by a selection of photographs by the author, contain a total of 2350 pages. The descriptions of the material and spiritual culture of the peoples studied in the pages of the diary are a valuable source of research: the measurements taken for physical anthropologists, the extensive dictionary listings for linguists and the musical notations for musicologists. The myths about the origins of the peoples and dynasties under study recorded by Czekanowski provide excellent material for a comparative study of the role of myths in the formation of social bonds. The historical data recorded forms a valuable basis for the study of the history of the countries in this African region, and the observations of social relations at the turn of the century constitute a valuable contribution to the analysis of contemporary ethnic conflicts in the region.

**Key words:** Jan Czekanowski, diary, Central Africa, East Africa

Jan Czekanowski (1882–1965) was an eminent Polish anthropologist, the founder of the internationally recognised Polish school of anthropology, a Slavist and the author of works on the ethnogenesis of Poland. At the start of his academic career, as a graduate of the University of Zurich, the author of a doctoral thesis in physical anthropology (*Untersuchungen über das Verhältnis der Kopfmasse zu den Schädelmassen* 1907) and an assistant in the department of African studies at the *Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde* in Berlin (now the Ethnological Museum in Dahlem), he was invited to join the expedition to central and eastern Africa (1907–1909) organised and led by Adolf Friedrich, duke of Mecklenburg; as the ethnologist and anthropologist of the expedition.

The expedition's route was to have led from Mombasa via Lake Victoria to Ruwanda, and then along the Central African Rift, to reach the Ituri-Aruwimi and Uele river basin. However, this plan was modified after a few months in Africa, due to the serious health problems of two of the participants. In January 1908, from Irumu, located on the Ituri River, the expedition headed straight west to return to Europe, via the Congo River and then across the Atlantic, almost a year earlier than in the original plan. Only Czekanowski, with the agreement of the expedition's organiser and partly thanks to his own funding, continued his research – in accordance with the original plan, extending it to include the borderlands of southern Sudan. The Polish explorer stayed in Africa for almost 24 months, from May 1907 to April 1909, more than a year longer than the other members of the expedition.

The route of Jan Czekanowski's research trip crossed the territories of six contemporary African countries: Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan (then the territories of British East Africa, German East Africa, the Congo Free State and British-administered Sudan). The length of the route, calculated from the start of the march from Bukoba on Lake Victoria to the arrival at Gondokoro on the Nile, was approximately 7,000 km. The average length of a day's march was between 20 and 30 km (Czekanowski, 1917, p. 10-11).

Although Jan Czekanowski's education and research interests during this period were primarily in physical anthropology, when conducting research in Africa he expanded this field to include issues of cultural, social and political anthropology. He researched political systems, oral traditions and literature, the organisation of the economy, agricultural productivity, forms of trade and money, history, demography and languages learned along the way. The photographs he took are of exceptional importance to scholarship, as are the material culture collections he acquired, preserved with a detailed description of where they were purchased and with an extensive commentary.

Czekanowski spoke German, French, Russian and Polish, but, very importantly, also Swahili. He communicated easily with the colonial administrators, as well

as with the missionaries from whom he received organisational assistance, information and scientific materials, collected especially by the White Fathers. He communicated with the expedition staff by himself; with the help of an interpreter, he spoke to local rulers, village heads and often to ordinary people.

Czekanowski presented the results of his scientific research in a monumental five-volume work entitled *Forschungen im Nile-Kongo-Zwischengebiet*, intended to be an integral part of the collection *Wissenschaftliche Ergebnisse der Deutschen Zentral-Afrika-Expedition 1907 – 1908 unter Führung Adolf Friedrichs, Herzogs zu Mecklenburg* (1910 – 1927), consisting of the work of the other members of the expedition: a topographer, geologist, meteorologist, botanist and zoologist.

Czekanowski's independent five-volume work surpassed, however, in volume the combined output of other researchers, prepared additionally with the help of specialists outside the expedition team. Both the *Forschungen* and the other articles on Africanism by the Polish researcher, published in Polish and German scientific journals, are still of great scientific importance to anthropologists, historians, linguists and sociologists. They also provide invaluable information on the history and sources of the cultural and ethnic identities of the inhabitants of the region. Their value lies both in the richness of the information they contain and in the amount of its detail, which characterises all publications by the Polish researcher.

The basic source of all of Czekanowski's African publications was the *Diary of the anthropological and ethnological caravan of the expedition to Central Africa in 1907–1909* (original: *Tagebuch der anthropologisch-ethnologischen Kolonne der Zentralafrikaexpedition in den Jahren 1907–1909*), written according to the organisers' requirements on an ongoing basis, day by day, throughout the expedition, containing both detailed information about the course of the expedition and the research carried out, as well as all records of a scientific nature.

The text of the *Diary* is written mainly in German, although there are also extensive passages written in French, passages of one or two sentences in Polish and Russian, and texts and nomenclature in local languages. This voluminous collection was deposited by the researcher's daughter and heir, Anna Czekanowska-Kuklińska, in the Manuscript Cabinet of the University Library in Warsaw, where it is currently held. From a purely technical point of view, this collection is one of two copies, the second copy of which was deposited in the *Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde* in Berlin. The *Diary* has never been published before – neither in Poland nor in Germany.

One of the main reasons why these materials were not published in Poland was the outbreak of the Second World War. In 1937, the researcher received a proposal to publish an abridged, Polish-language version of the text of the *Diary*. At the time, the plan was to publish a total of three volumes, entitled respectively: *To the Sources of the Nile* (*Do źródeł Nilu*), *Into the Forests of Aruwimi* (*W głąb lasów*

*Aruwimi*) and *On the Frontiers of the Sudan* (*Na rubieżach Sudanu*). The only copy of the text of the first part of the diary, which appeared in print in the spring of 1939, was destroyed during the Warsaw Uprising in 1944 along with the entire archive in which it had been stored. Therefore, after the war, only the undestroyed second of the planned three parts of the text of the diary was published in 1958 as the volume titled *Deep into the forests of Aruwimi. Diary of an expedition to central Africa* (*W głąb lasów Aruwimi. Dziennik wyprawy do Afryki środkowej*) (Czekanowski, 1959). In the following years the author planned to reconstruct part one and prepare for publication the third part. However, the researcher did not have enough time to publish the complete text of the Polish version of the *Diary*. He died in 1965.

In 2014, on the initiative of the Polish Africanist Society, the *Diary of an African journey*, being a study of an extract from the first part of the *Diary*, prepared by Jan Czekanowski between 1951 and 1954, was published in Polish (Czekanowski, 2014).

At just under 150 pages, this slim volume contains five chapters that include memories of the author's school and student years, the circumstances of the invitation to take part in the African expedition, a description of the preparations for the expedition up to the embarkation of its members on 13 May 1907 on the ship 'Bürgermeister' in Naples. This was followed by a presentation of the various stages of the first months of the voyage: by sea, via the Suez Canal and the Red Sea to Mombasa, and then overland, by rail from Mombasa to Port Florence, then the terminus of the Kenya-Uganda Railway, and by steamer across Lake Victoria to Bukoba, where the expedition members arrived on 9 June.

Also in Polish, the journal of the Polish Africanist Society "Afryka" also published two articles relating to selected stages of the journey.

The first of these, published in 2015, was entitled *Diary of Jan Czekanowski's African journey June – November 1907: reconstruction of events* (*Dziennik podróży afrykańskiej Jana Czekanowskiego czerwiec – listopad 1907 r.: rekonstrukcja wydarzeń*) (Bar, 2015). It was an attempt to bridge the gap between the content of the publications published in 1958 and 2014.

The second, published a year later, was entitled *Diary of Jan Czekanowski's African journey – the last leg of the journey (31 March – 1 April 1909): reconstruction of events* (*Dziennik podróży afrykańskiej Jana Czekanowskiego – ostatni etap podróży (31 marca – 1 kwietnia 1909): rekonstrukcja wydarzeń*) (Bar, 2016).

It related to the final stage of the research, covering the period from the end of March 1908 to 1 April 1909, and coincided in content and chronology with the unfinished volume *On the Frontiers of the Sudan*.

The above-mentioned publications, although based on the original *Diary of the anthropological and ethnological caravan of the expedition to Central Africa in 1907 – 1909*, presented the reality of Jan Czekanowski's journey either in the

form of excerpts compiled by the researcher or a brief account of the remaining stages of his journey. Published in Polish, they were available only to readers of that language.

The resumption of work on the manuscript of the *Diary* was made possible thanks to the authorisation given by Anna Czekanowska-Kuklińska to a team appointed by the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences, comprising Michał Tymowski (as chairman), Anna Czekanowska-Kuklińska, Joanna Bar and Eugeniusz Rzewuski. In 2017, this team received funding for the edition of this work from the Polish National Programme for the Development of the Humanities. A few years earlier, as part of a grant carried out under the direction of Anna Czekanowska-Kuklińska, a partial transcription of the *Diary* was made, and the transcribed fragments were computerised. However, the work undertaken at that time needed further funds to continue, in order to carry out a critical analysis of the source texts and, above all, to publish them.

This ongoing publishing initiative has also received the patronage of the *Fontes Historiae Africanae* publishing series. In addition, in 2022, the project to publish the *Diary* was supported by a grant from the *Union Académique Internationale*, awarded to publish a selection of 30 photographs alongside the text of the *Diary*.

The manuscript of the *Diary* comprises two categories of notebooks. Each notebook was ultimately intended to contain 100 pages of writing. However, this is not a uniform collection; the diary is clearly divided into two chronological and thematic groups. The so-called 'large' notebooks, A-4 format, numbered from the first (vol. 1) to the tenth (vol. 10), are the basic record of the diary. Volumes 1-7 and the first part of volume 8 preserve the chronological order of the successive stages of the expedition and the field research carried out. They were written in the order of their numbering. The remainder of volume 8 and volumes 9 and 10 are filled with tables of anthropological measurements.

The so-called 'small' notebooks, format A-5 are a kind of supplement to the 'large' notebooks. They are numbered from 5.1 to 5.5. These notebooks will be included as an additional part of this edition in the future. Due to their specific nature, it was not possible to keep to the chronological criterion adopted for them. Furthermore, much of the text of the small notebooks was not discovered until 2022.

As mentioned earlier, duplicate copies of the individual volumes and notebooks of the *Diary* were created. They were formed by keeping notes simultaneously on two sheets, one of which remained inside the covers of the volume, while the other, perforated, was intended to be detached. The first of the two sheets was in the form of transparent tissue paper, while the second was plain letter paper. Between the two was inserted double-sided tracing paper, laid with the rough side downwards, towards the letter-paper, and upwards, towards the transparent paper, which was written on with an agate pencil [stylus], without ink. When

sprinkled with a fixative powder, the writing on both sides of the sheets became indelible, retaining its legibility to this day. The mirror image of the text on the back of the transparent page, was readable thanks to the transparency of the page. Thus, two copies of the same text were obtained, identical and written simultaneously. There were in fact two originals, although they are also called two copies of the text. The instructions for using this method are printed in four languages on the title page of the first volume and repeated in some subsequent volumes.

A circumstance of immense importance for understanding the state of the diary record was the ambitious research plan, which meant that Czekanowski rarely stayed in one place for more than a few days. Regardless of the conditions of travel at the time, the researcher was obliged to keep daily notes, continuing day after day, regardless of tiredness or health. This commitment arose both because of the conditions placed on the research participants by the expedition organiser and because of the objective awareness that what was recorded on an ongoing basis would not be forgotten and would form the basis of a later scientific publication.

The documentation carried out in the field also included valuable photographic material, with detailed descriptions. Glass negatives of photographs were sent to Germany. Individual shipments, the time they were sent, information on the number and subject matter of the photographs were recorded in the *Diary*. A significant number of these photographs with extensive descriptions are contained in volumes 3 and 5 of the *Forschungen*., the remainder of which are in the private collections of the writer's family. Also resulting from Czekanowski's fieldwork are phonographic recordings, which require a separate study by musicologists. In addition, Czekanowski purchased, received as gifts, collected and sent ethnographic collections to Germany. He included lists of individual consignments with the names of the objects in the local languages and in translation in his *Diary*. These collections, consisting mainly of everyday objects, can be found in various German museums.

The circumstances in which the *Diary* was written down had an impact on the writing style, which is sometimes chaotic, contains spelling and grammatical errors, missing accents, incomprehensible abbreviations, transcription discrepancies, and is illegible in places. From a literary point of view, the manuscript is a collection of loose notes, often written in the form of incomplete sentences, and extensive collections of dates, numbers, names and dictionary material.

Despite his good knowledge of German and French, it must be remembered that neither language was the writer's mother tongue, and he filled in the missing vocabulary by inserting words in French or even Polish and Russian into the German text. This usually happened when Czekanowski was unable to find their equivalent in German, trying to find the right terms in languages more familiar to him.

The state of the record forced the editorial team to make a number of difficult decisions. It proved impossible to publish the material unchanged, as in many

passages the text would have proved unclear to the reader. If every such an error was highlighted and corrected, the text would become difficult to read. In such cases, the meaning of the passage needed to be made clear in translation, but we took care to keep such interference to a minimum.

In preparing to publish the work, it was decided that the main methodological aid would be the *Draft Publishing Manual for Historical Sources of the 19th and Early 20th Centuries* (*Projekt instrukcji wydawniczej dla źródeł historycznych XIX i początku XX wieku*) by Ireneusz Ichnatowicz (1962), intended for scholarly publications and well-known and respected in Polish historical editing.

We decided to publish the source material, after supplementing it with an editorial apparatus, in the original languages and in Polish translation.

A significant difficulty in the creation of the scientific editorial apparatus of this publication was to establish the correct (and standardised) spelling of geographical names, forenames and words in local languages. This difficulty was solved primarily by means of verification with other publications by Jan Czekański (especially the *Forschungen*...) and, in the absence of this possibility, with available historical and contemporary cartographic publications.

We have assumed that all proper names occurring in the text (first names, place names, etc.) will be given in the language and wording of the original, if the form used there was used consistently. In the case of divergent or difficult to read forms, the main reference, however, was the text of the *Forschungen*, as the final and officially published summary of the results of the research carried out during the expedition. A comparison of possible transcript discrepancies, contained in the manuscript text and the *Forschungen*, was made in the footnotes. In the footnotes, too, in accordance with the principle that all variations of spelling are valuable to researchers, any doubts about divergent versions of the spelling of the same name were pointed out and information relating to the illegibility of a particular word or part of a sentence was included.

Reference to the *Forschungen* is also made when there are problems in reading longer passages of difficult-to-read texts of legends or songs, written in local languages. It was assumed that the version of the *Forschungen*, even if modified for various reasons, corresponds closest to the author's intentions, and also minimises the possibility of misinterpreting (or even not being able to read) the original transcript.

The author's most important grammatical errors have been corrected, while archaisms in the text, both grammatical and lexical, have been left unchanged. The generally accepted abbreviations in German have also been left unchanged: both for measures and weights and for popular two-word abbreviations (z. B.: zum Beispiel). Whenever possible, an attempt was made to develop other abbreviations (e.g., those relating to military ranks or titles and ranks).

It should also be noted that the editorial team is fully aware of the inaccuracy and incompatibility of European terms, i.e. kingdom, king, monarchy, used in translation to describe the realities of traditional African socio-political units. We translate these terms in accordance with Czekanowski's terminology. In addition, account must be taken of the fact that indigenous and common terms for the monarchical system and its main components, which were understandable to readers from a Western cultural background, did not apply in the Inter-African area. Where possible, however, local names of dignities and offices were left as used by the author. Explanations of the meaning of words in local languages (e.g., Swalili) have, where possible, been included in footnotes, next to the first occurrence of the term.

Finally, the publication appeared in June 2023. The two volumes of this publication, supplemented by a selection of photographs by the author, contain a total of 2350 pages.

This edition of the *Diary* presents material for further study by interested researchers; like Czekanowski, we have not been able to identify and translate all the languages present in the text. In the footnotes, we try to show both some successes in translating such texts and the efforts that ended in failure.

In emphasising the importance of the present editorial project, it is worth referring once again to the best known items in Jan Czekanowski's work on Africanism, the volumes of the *Forschungen* published in German. In view of their different nature, it is worth referring to the value of the *Diary* as an invaluable source base, the richness of which is not reflected in the publication of the results of scientific research or the parts of the memoirs that were revised and supplemented by the author years later.

In the case of the *Forschungen* it is obvious that the purpose of that publication is different: it is a final summary of the scientific results of the expeditions. The work, on the other hand, has provided important historical data, thus providing a broad reliable basis for the creation of a history of the dynasties and former states of that African region for modern researchers. Unlike the *Diary*, however, it does not reflect the realities of the research conducted, the difficulties encountered by the researcher during the many months spent in the field, sometimes under extremely difficult living conditions.

In the *Diary* Czekanowski primarily recorded his own research experiences, sometimes drawing on the descriptions and notes of missionaries. The problematic diversity of the notes is impressive. It undoubtedly has enormous scientific significance as a comprehensive, original collection of diverse and reliable information of great intellectual value for researchers of African cultures, languages and history.

The descriptions of the material and spiritual culture of the peoples studied in the pages of the *Diary* are a valuable source of research for anthropologists, for



physical anthropologists the measurements taken, for linguists the the extensive dictionary listings and for musicologists the musical notations. The myths about the origins of the peoples and dynasties under study recorded by Czekanowski are not only historical sources, but also excellent material for a comparative study of the role of myths in the formation of social bonds. The historical data recorded provide a valuable basis for the study of the history of the countries in this African region, and the observations of social relations at the turn of the century make a valuable contribution to the analysis of contemporary ethnic conflicts in the region. This material, due to its richness, was only partly incorporated into the *Forschungen*.

From today's perspective, we can consider that African studies, although in the context of his overall scientific output it was not Czekanowski's only field of research, had an important place in his scientific output. The great value of Czekanowski's Africanist output was recognised in the studies of later researchers of these areas; his publications were cited in the bibliographies of many ethnological and historical works on Africa, both immediately after their publication and even today.

Half a century of active scholarly work led to notable achievements both in the field of physical anthropology (Czekanowski was the founder of an internationally recognised Polish school of anthropology) and ethnographic studies, in African and in Slavic studies. Indeed, the latter became the subject of Jan Czekanowski's research after he took up a university chair in Lvov in 1913, while Poland's regaining of its independence in 1918 contributed to his turning his attention to issues relating to the ethnogenesis of Poland. The entire scientific output of Jan Czekanowski, including his work on Africanism, has been discussed in many Polish publications. The great value of Czekanowski's Africanist output has been recognised in the studies of later scholars of these areas; his publications have been cited in the bibliographies of many ethnological and historical works on Africa, both immediately after their publication and nowadays (Baumann et. al., 1940; Denyer, 1978; Evans-Protchard, 1971; Murdock, 1959; Schebesta, 1952).

In 2002, Jan Czekanowski's Africanist legacy became the subject of an international scientific conference organised by the Institute of African Studies at the University of Leipzig and the Leipzig Ethnographic Museum, where participants presented papers on the significance of the Polish researcher's studies for German, French and Polish scholarship. This conference resulted in a volume entitled *Jan Czekanowski. Africanist Ethnographer and Physical Anthropologist in Early Twentieth-Century Germany and Poland* (Jones, 2002). In recent years, occasions to recall the value of Czekanowski's Africanist research have included the 3rd Congress of Polish Africanists, organised in 2012 in conjunction with the unveiling of the Szczecin monument to Jan Czekanowski – recognised as the Congress' patron – and the special issue of the annual *Laboratory of Culture* (6/2017), devoted entirely to Czekanowski's career and research.

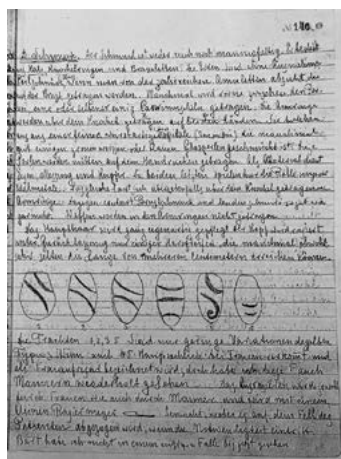
## List/subtitles of graphic elements



**Figure 1:** Jan Czekanowski, photo from the period of his expedition to Africa



**Figure 2:** Map with outline of Jan Czekanowski's research route (1907 – 1909)<sup>1</sup>



**Figure 3:** Excerpt from the Diary (within the text are also sketches of popular hairstyles), Kissaka, volume 2, card 140



**Figure 4:** Diary of the anthropological-ethnological caravan of the expedition to Central Africa in 1907 – 1909 by Jan Czekanowski, volumes 1 and 2 published in 2023

<sup>1</sup> CZEKANOWSKI, J., *Forschungen im Nil-Kongo-Zwischengebiet*, vol. I, p. 7.

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