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Two Hungarian Explorers in Africa:

Sámuel Teleki <1845- 1916> and László Almásy <1895-1951>

Two important world wide famous Hungarian explorer and Africa researcher had a lot of personal and professional connections with Austria. Transylvania (recently Romania)born, count Samuel TELEKI (1845-1916), citizen of Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy friend of crown prince RUDOLF, explorer of the great lakes in East-Africa and Ladislaus ALMASY (1895-1951), researcher of the desert, explorer of Zarzura. ALMASY was born and died in Austria, and his grave is in Salzburg. Their cultural and scientific heritage is our common treasure.

Godfather of a volcano in Kenya Sámuel TELEKI (1845 - 1916)

TELEKI was born to a noble family in Sáromberke (Dumbrvioara), in Transylvania. He studied natural sciences at the universities of Göttingen and Berlin. He often went on hunting in Transylvania with Rudolf, the Habsburg heir to the throne, and these hunting trips inspired him to go to East Africa.

The expedition - with 300 porters - left the island of Zanzibar in 1886. They reached the volcano of Mount Meru along the Pangani river, then they climbed Kilimanjaro, the highest peak in Africa. Sámuel TELEKI was the first man to walk on above the snow-line on Kilimanjaro. They continued their journey on the land of the Kikuyu and reached Mount Kenya: it was again TELEKI, who first reached the snow-line there.

After successfully traversing the land of the Kikuyu, they arrived at Lake Baringo. They journeyed to the north and reached a large water surface, which they named Lake Rudolf. They discovered a 646m high active volcano on the southern shore of the lake, which was named TELEKI Volcano by Ludwig VON HÖHNEL, the cartographer of the expedition.

The companion of Samuel TELEKI in the expedition was an Austrian marine officer, Ludwig VON HÖHNEL, who was born in Bratislava (formerPozsony, Preßburg) and 12 years his junior (30 years old when the expedition started). HÖHNEL was his faithful helper all through the expedition, although he frequently had poor health during the expedition. HÖHNEL was the chronicler of the expedition and his merit is the recording of descriptions of unknown regions, plants and animals and the geographical exploration.

Also from ethnographical aspect, TELEKIS expedition can be regarded as one of the most successful exploration ventures by Hungarians. TELEKI and his companion, HÖHNEL, reported on several tribes then unknown to scholars (the Turkana, Resiat, and Rendille), while their description of other tribes (the Massai and Kikuyu) modified the picture formed previously about these people. In addition to the description of the tribes visited, they collected material representing their culture. Part of this collection is owned by the Hungarian Ethnographical Museum (338 objects), some pieces were lost or taken abroad.

They learnt from the local Resiat tribe that there was another large lake to the north. They experienced great hardship before they found the lake, which they named Lake Stefanie.

The expeditin elevated TELEKI to the partner of the greatest explorers of Africa. He first received scientific recognition in 1889 in Cairo, when he was elected an honorary member of *Société Chédivial de Géographie*.

His expedition mapped areas that were completely unknown to Europeans in his time. It also adds to the merits of the expedition that they gave a reliable account of unknown or lesser known African tribes. Their ethnographic collection became the base of the African collection of the Hungarian

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National museum. The plants they gathered were studied by recognized specialists of the time. The herbarium contained 237 species, and almost half of it was not previously known to scientists. Six flowering plant species bear the name of TELEKI, and the best known of them are *Lobelia TELEKII* and *Senecio TELEKII*.

Researcher of the Sahara, Explorator of the Zarzura László ALMÁSY (1895-1951)

He was born as the second son of György ALMÁSY, the Asian traveller, in 1895 in Bernstein, Burgenland (Borostyánkő). He studied engineering in Eastbourne, then he began working in the Steyr motor works in Austria. He visited the Sahara for the first time in 1926, when the Austrian car factory asked him to test its vehicles under desert conditions. He drove almost 2700 kilometers along the Nile.

ALMÁSY started a flying school in 1929 in Cairo, then he worked as a trainer of stunt pilots near Cairo-Heliopolis. Although his love of machines and adventures has originally attracted him to Africa, he gradually became interested in the land in a more scientific and objective manner. He loved the desert and the Arabian people, and he soon mastered their language.

He was acquainted with the Egyptian prince, KEMAL EL-DIN, who dedicated his life in exploring the unknown areas of the Libyan Desert. Under his influence, ALMÁSY began exploring the Gifl Kebir Plateau, where he discovered the oasis of Zarzura - known from Arabian legends - in 1933. He was accompanied by László KÁDÁR, a geographer, whose main task was to map the blank unexplored areas of the Libyan Desert. His studies of desert morphology in the Sahara produced several new results. He was first to describe the so-called "*Libyan dunes*", which run for several hundred kilometres in the desert.

ALMÁSY explored the caves of Mount Uwaynat in the same year; the rock wall paintings he discovered proved that the area used to have more rain. The sensational pictures of these paintings, however, were published for the world to see by Leo FROBENIUS - a recognised Africa researcher of his time -, who claimed them as his own findings. ALMÁSY wrote a book on his exploration of the Libyan Desert, which was published by the Royal Geographical Society of Egypt in 1936.

In 1935, he gave an account of a tribe living near the Aswan High Dam, who called themselves Magyarab. Historians think that the Hungarians may have settled there as captives of the Turkish army in the 16th century, during the reign of Sultan SULEIMAN.

Although ALMÁSY made important discoveries, he got almost no official recognition. His books on Africa, *Driving in Sudan* and *The unknown Sahara* soon became popular not only among specialists. He was called up for military service in 1941. At German request he was sent to Africa, where he became an advisor to ROMMEL. He was wrongfully accused of collaboration in Hungary in 1945, but he was acquitted by the People's Court in Budapest. He spent the last years of his life in Egypt, in his second homeland. He was a close friend to several great figures in recent Egyptian history, including King FAROUK and Pasha TAHER.

He died in 1951 in Salzburg. He learnt on his death-bed that he had been appointed Director of the Egyptian Desert Research Institute. His romantic peripatetic life was adapted for the screen, and this world famous Anglo-American film, *The English Patient*, received nine Oscars.

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