

The African Chapter in the Scientific Life of Professor Michał Kobusiewicz

Romuald Schild^a

PREFACE

I met Michał for the first time in the spring of 1959 while recruiting young archaeologists to work on the excavation of the Final Palaeolithic and Mesolithic camps of Rydno Complex, a Stone Age red ochre quarry and socio-economic centre. A fresh MA in archaeology, I was then working as a field manager for Stefan Krukowski, an unorthodox prehistorian, directing work in the very significant Rydno Project in Central Poland. During the project, young Kobusiewicz turned out to be a competent, eager student and a good field companion. We spent the next field season together on a foot-survey along the Late Glacial left bank Vistula terrace between Włocławek and Płock in Central Poland. We slept in farmers' barns, cooked one-dish meals in a pot that we carried fastened to our backpacks, and duly recorded many, today classic, Mesolithic sandy sites. Since these early years of our acquaintance, our professional, as well as private lives, became closely intertwined. We worked jointly in many Combined Prehistoric Expedition (CPE) missions in Egypt and at several sites in his cherished "prehistoric Arcadia", or the Wojnowo Region in Western Poland.

There are two sizable independent slices of archaeological research carried out by Michał Kobusiewicz: the Prehistory of Northeastern Africa and the Final Palaeolithic and Mesolithic archaeology of the European Plain. Additionally, he has been engaged in comparative studies of Prehistoric foragers in Europe and North America at the end of the Pleistocene.

^a Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Polish Academy of Sciences, Al. Solidarności 105, 00-140 Warsaw (Poland); e-mail: romuald.schild@gmail.com; ORCID: 0000-0003-2701-0623

THE COMBINED PREHISTORIC EXPEDITION

Let us tackle the first expression of Michał's fascination with human Prehistory. It all began in the winter of 1967 when he, together with Drs Waldemar Chmielewski and Hanna Więckowska joined the Combined Prehistoric Expedition (CPE), in work led by Dr Joel L. Shiner, operating in Central and Eastern Sudan in the Debba and Kashm El Girba areas. The group concentrated on surveys and limited excavations of Palaeolithic and Neolithic settlements and ceased activity in the same year. Two years later, Michał joined another project of the CPE directed by Fred Wendorf in Egypt. The 1969 field season began a long, although intermittent association with the CPE, which ended with his retirement in 2010. The last three years before his retirement, Michał served as the director of the expedition.

While in the field with the CPE, Professor Kobusiewicz took part in several significant projects such as:

1. The Northern Fayum Project, Lower Egypt, 1969 season. The work concentrated on the Quaternary geomorphology, and Stone Age archaeology of the lakeshore dwellers.
2. Bir Sahara and Bir Tarfawi Basins in the Atmur el Kibeish Peneplain (Southwestern Desert of Egypt), 1973, and 1974 seasons. Initial excavations of Final Acheulian and Middle Palaeolithic sites.
3. Nabta Playa Basin (Southwestern Desert), 1975 and 1977 seasons; initial excavation of sites E-75-6 and E-75-8.
4. Bir Kiseiba Project, Southwestern Desert, 1979, and 1980 season. Excavation of the El Gorab complex settlement (site E-79-4).
5. Wadi Kubbaniya Project, north of Assuan, 1978, 1982, and 1983 season. Excavation of several Late Palaeolithic campsites.
6. Gebel Ramlah cemeteries, Southwestern Desert, discovered by Kimball M. Banks and Michał Kobusiewicz in 2000 during a survey along the southern outskirts of the Eocene Plateau, 2001–2003 seasons. The excavations directed by Michał revealed the richness of these first Final Neolithic (Predynastic) cemeteries found in the Western Desert of Egypt, and opened the way to the subsequent essential discoveries in the Gebel Ramlah area.
7. The Central Sinai Salvage Project, 1996 season. The mission excavated several new prehistoric sites ranging in time from Middle Palaeolithic to Bronze Age. Three sites in the Sinai were dug by Michał and published in 1999. Among these was a Middle Palaeolithic Split Rock Shelter whose lithic assemblage falls within the time horizon of the Nubian Levallois method.

The work of the Combined Prehistoric Expedition gave rise to an abundant flow of publications in which Professor Kobusiewicz had a considerable share as an author and

co-author of many important papers. Of these, one must mention the reports on site E-79-4 in El Ghorab Playa published in the volume dedicated to the Bir Kiseiba Project in 1984. There are also six reports on the Halfan, Kubaniyan, and Ballanan-Silsilian Late Palaeolithic sites in Wadi Kubbaniya, printed in 1980 and 1989 in the monographs of the Wadi Kubbaniya Project.

Of particular interest is the beautifully printed monograph on the Gebel Ramlah cemeteries by Kobusiewicz *et al.*, published in 2010. It is a detailed account of the physical characteristics of the recovered skeletons, description of the assemblages of grave goods, as well as reports on the chronology, and geomorphologic context of the finds. Apart from the monograph, a series of separate papers discussing particular questions relating to the cemetery have been published in various journals.

Several papers authored by Michał address general questions. Among these is an early paper presenting the Prehistory of Northeastern Africa between 16th and 5th Millennia BCE (in Polish) published in 1976 (and 2006 in French), as well as a lengthy article on new ideas concerning the Neolithisation of Northeastern Africa (in Polish) published in 1981, and an article on the transition from Late Palaeolithic to Neolithic in Northeast Africa (in German) in 1980.

THE KADERO PROJECT

In 1982, Michał joined the Kadero Project run by his close friend, Dr Lech Krzyżaniak. The project operated under the auspices of the Polish Archaeological Mission in Cairo. His main job was to study and describe in detail the chipped stone assemblages and stone processing at this vast and rich key Khartoum Neolithic site located on the east bank of the Nile, close to Khartoum. The job took six field seasons in 1982, 1983, 1989, 1991, 1993, and 2001. It ended with an extended essay on the lithic implements from Kadero published in 2011, and two smaller studies printed in 1996 and 2009.

STUDYING THE ROCK ART IN DAKHLEH

In terms of longevity, perhaps the most extensive field project undertaken by Professor Kobusiewicz was the study of the rock art of Dakhleh. Based in the resthouse of the Dakhleh Oasis Project, then operated by Dr. Anthony Mills, the venture was called the “Dakhleh Oasis Petroglyph Unit”. The project, sponsored by the Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, Warsaw University, was inherited from Professor Lech Krzyżaniak after the latter’s premature death in 2004. Michał participated in the venture since 2000 and carried it until 2013 throughout ten field seasons, assisted by Ewa Kucewicz and Eliza Jaroni and later also by Dr Andrzej Rozwadowski and Paweł

Polkowski. Until now, twelve papers on the Dakhleh petroglyphs have been published by the group between 2007 and 2018.

ARCHAIC PERIOD AND OLD KINGDOM FLINT PROCESSING

Invited by Anthony Mills in 2000, Michał began to work on flint assemblages recovered from a Vth Dynasty settlement at Ain El Gazzaren in Dakhleh. The work took ten years and formed the skeleton of a pioneering monograph dealing with knapped flint processing in the Archaic Period and the Old Kingdom of Egypt. The book, published in 2015, presents a detailed typology and technology of the flint knapping during the Archaic and Old Kingdom periods as well as discussing the systems of flint procurement and distribution. It also portrays the social, religious, and prestige roles played by flint tools in the Early Bronze Age societies in Egypt.

THE RED SEA HILLS, BIR NURAYET AND GEBEL MAGARDI

In 2010 Dr Przemysław Bobrowski won a substantial Ministry of Science grant to study a rock art complex in the Red Sea Hills at Bir Nurayet discovered several years before by Krzysztof Pluskota and Arita Baaijens. Michał assumed the role of a consultant of the entire venture. The mission was concluded in 2012, yielding wealthy data on the prehistoric rock art mostly concentrated on scenes portraying cattle, however, also depicting many, probably later, scenes including mounted camels. The rock art complex is closely associated with the nearby Gebel Magardi, a lonely mountain of a phallic shape. A cache of phallic clay figurines dated to the 5th or 6th century BCE found close to the mountain, and petroglyphs depicting the mountain indicate a cult of fertility deeply embedded in the prehistory of the region.

BARGAT EL-SHAB PROJECT

In 2016, the Ministry of Science awarded Professor Kobusiewicz a three-year grant to continue the study, began by the CPE in 2005, of the Stone Age Prehistory of the Bargat El-Shab Playa Basin. The Playa lies in the south-eastern part of the Nubia Shab Peditain, very close to the Sudanese border. The group, composed of Przemysław Bobrowski, Maciej Jórdeczka, Fabian Welc, Hebatallah A. A. Ibrahim, Maria Lityńska-Zajac, Agnieszka Mączyńska, Mirosław Masojć and Paweł Wiktorowicz, excavated in the 2017 and 2018 field seasons the Ru'at El Asnam, Final Neolithic tumuli, and megaliths located around the playa.

THE DELTA OF THE NILE: KOM EL HISN AND MINSHAT ABU OMAR

As a highly recognized expert in Egyptian Stone Age flint processing, Professor Kobusiewicz has very often been invited to consult various Predynastic and Early Dynastic archaeological excavations or to study already recovered assemblages of chipped stones. One of these was the Kom El Hisn Project (1984, 1986, 1988) run by Dr Robert J. Wenke, then a Director of the American Research Centre in Cairo, and Dr Richard Redding. Kom El Hisn, in Western Delta, in the Early Old Kingdom, was the capital of a *nome* and an important economic centre and one of a few Old Kingdom sites excavated in the Delta. The primary target of the project was to learn what kind of relations the Egyptian State had with its provinces and what was the importance of the Delta for the Egyptian State structure (compare Wenke 2009: 110). In this respect, a study of the chipped and ground stone assemblages was a must because of the role played by stone working in the Early Dynastic economy. Prof. Kobusiewicz wrote extensively about the Kom El Hisn lithic material in several publications issued in 1988, 1989, 2015, 2016, and 2018.

In contrast to the Kom El Hisn Mission, there was another, rather short participation of Michał in The Nile Delta Project directed by Dr Dietrich Wildung of the Staatliche Sammlung Ägyptischer Kunst in Munich in 1988 season. This time it was in the study of the Predynastic site of Minshat Abu Omar in the Eastern Delta where Michał's expertise was sought.

SMALL JOBS IN SUDAN

There were also small jobs done on invitations from other expeditions in Sudan. In 1993, a few Stone Age sites were recorded by Michał Kobusiewicz and Jacek Kabaciński near the Temple of Kawa, north of Khartoum, during a mission lead by Dr Derek Welsby of the British Museum, and at El Gaddar, and Hambukol near Old Dongola, dug by Dr Krzysztof Grzymski of the Royal Ontario Museum. A year later, Kobusiewicz and Kabaciński returned to Hambukol and worked on a newly discovered large Middle Palaeolithic site that they labelled Jebel Kobkabba. A decade later, in 2003, a short survey in the Bayuda Desert, associated with the archaeological salvage work in the IV Cataract Area, terminates Michał's work relating to the Nile Valley.

A SURVEY IN BOTSWANA AND THE WORK IN TANZANIA

The survey in Botswana was a hectic assignment. In 1999, Marek Marciniak, a Verbite priest, and an archaeology devotee, invited Professor Kobusiewicz to Botswana for a month-long survey of various archaeological sites. The survey showed the tremendous archaeological potential of the country, including the Stone Age complexes there.

Michał spent the summer field seasons of 2004 and 2005 in Serengeti, Tanzania, working with the late Dr John R. F. Bower, his close friend and co-author of a book on prehistoric foragers in Europe and North America at the end of the Ice Age, published in 2002. They excavated the promising Late Middle Palaeolithic Loyongalani site, most probably associated with *Homo sapiens*. The bankruptcy of the Serengeti Foundation, who sponsored the project, terminated the work at the Loyongalani site.

DYMACZEWO AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR THE LATER PREHISTORY OF NORTHEASTERN AFRICA

In 1980, shortly before martial law was declared in Poland on December 13th, 1981, Michał Kobusiewicz of the Institute of the History of Material Culture, Polish Academy of Sciences (now the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology of the Polish Academy of Sciences) and Lech Krzyżaniak of Poznań's Archaeological Museum had initiated the first Dymaczewo Conference at Dymaczewo, a village near Poznań, dedicated to the Prehistory of Northeastern Africa. A few dozen researchers were gathered for the meeting, including several prominent figures in the field as John Alexander, J. Desmond Clark, Fred Wendorf, and Peter Shini. The gathering also instigated The International Commission for the Later Prehistory of Northeastern Africa. It is an intermittent conference meeting every four years, first in Dymaczewo and recently in Poznań in the facilities of the Archaeological Museum. Since the beginning, the conference has become very popular among scholars working in the field. In 2019, the 11th consecutive meeting took place in July 2019 in Poznań. Proceedings of this international symposium are published by Poznań Archaeological Museum in the series titled *Studies in African Archaeology*.

PARTING WORDS

The above personal remarks signal only a portion of Michał's achievements in the domain he practiced leaving apart the work done in Poland. Unquestionably, Michał is *un personnage* in World's Archaeology and a good, humorous storyteller. To those who might doubt these words, one can recommend Michał's memoirs written

with general readers in mind, entitled *Moje wspomnienia z archeologią w tle* (*My Memoirs with Archaeology in the Background*).

VERY SELECTED REFERENCES

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Wenke, R. J. 2009. *The Ancient Egyptian State. The Origins of Egyptian Culture (c. 8000–2000 BC)*. Cambridge.

