

ANNA KOŁODZIEJSKA

WHEN DREAMS REACHED POLYNESIA OR POLES EVEN FURTHER THAN THE FAR EAST

In this article, I will focus on recalling some Polish traces in a vast area that could seem to be inaccessible to Poles – the archipelagos of the Pacific Ocean. This area, occupying almost one sixth of the entire globe, with its 25,000 islands, was discovered by the Europeans as the last. Even in the early 16th century, Europe was still unaware of its existence, which is not to say, of course, that these were uninhabited lands. The first Europeans to arrive in the area in the 16th century were the Portuguese and Spanish seeking to establish new trade routes. In 1520, Ferdinand Magellan, a Portuguese subject in the Spanish service, sailed into the waters of an unknown ocean and named it *Mar Pacifico*. I am far from suggesting that Magellan had Polish roots, but it would soon turn out that adventurers and explorers from the lands upon the Vistula River enlisted on ships sailing to discover new lands, paradises on earth and an unknown legendary land that had only just been suspected – Australia. However, Australia is not the main topic of this text. I will focus here on the Poles who reached the islands of Oceania, an area divided into three main parts: Polynesia – the largest one, Melanesia and Micronesia. At first, geographical discoveries concerned only small portions of the vast area, and it was only in the second half of the 18th century, when the English and the French took over the rule of the seas, that significant map corrections were made. However, if we think of Poles, we must remember it was a difficult period for the Polish statehood. The Polish territories were multi-ethnic during the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and nationality was also treated and defined differently during the following partitions.

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In 1868 France organised the first exploration expedition around the world under the command of de Bougainville. Among other things, the travellers visited the island of Tahiti, which had been discovered the same year. The crew included Prince Charles de Nassau-Siegen, who settled in Warsaw in later years and was naturalised¹. He was also mentioned on the pages of Mickiewicz's "Pan Tadeusz" as "Książę Denassów" [the Prince of Denasses] (in Wojski's story)². He became famous by publishing his memories of this expedition. Later King Stanisław August Poniatowski invited him to come to Poland, where he accepted citizenship and married. At the time, however, undoubtedly the most famous explorer of the Pacific Ocean islands was Captain James Cook. Among his crew, during his second round-the-world expedition in 1772-75, were two naturalists from Gdańsk – Johann Forster and his son Georg Forster³. Their ancestors came to Poland from Scotland. They later married German and Polish women. The elder of the Forsters was a pastor and also a well-known naturalist. In 1754, his son Georg was born, who proved to be very talented linguistically. After moving to England, he translated Bougainville's just-published work on travelling around the world into English. Unsurprisingly, when the opportunity to take part in Cook's expedition came up in the same year, they were both keen to participate in it. This expedition was to be the first to circumnavigate the Earth in the Eastern direction. On reaching New Zealand, Jan Forster was, on the one hand, delighted by the beauty of the landscape, but on the other hand, he noted down his observations about the negative impact of the European visitors on the Maori people. The naturalists were also able to carry out research on the archipelagos of Tuamotu, Tahiti, the Cook Islands and Tonga. They later visited Easter Island, the Marquesas and made the first landing on New Caledonia. The Forsters kept a diary, recorded geographical discoveries, made drawings of the islanders and collected specimens of plants and stones. Their work was soon published (1776). In 1784, Georg, at the invitation of the National Education Commission, returned to Poland and took up the chair of natural history and botany at the university of Vilnius.

In the 18th century, more islands were still being added to the map of Oceania. At the time when the Constitution of 3 May was being drafted in Poland, the famous mutiny on the *Bounty* took place. The English sailors put

¹ T. SŁABCZYŃSKI, *Podróznicy polscy w Australii i Oceanii*, Warszawa: Globograf 2020, pp. 25-29.

² A. MICKIEWICZ, *Pan Tadeusz*, Warszawa: Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza "Czytelnik", 1985, p. 154.

³ T. SŁABCZYŃSKI, *Podróznicy polscy*, pp. 29-37.

their captain in a lifeboat in the middle of the ocean and first returned to Tahiti to get the girls, and then hid on Pitcairn Island, which may have already been discovered, but was wrongly marked on maps, so that no one found them for many years. In the 19th century, exploration of that area continued, but it was not until the middle of that century that emigrants from Europe began to appear, wanting to settle permanently “at the end of the world”. At that time, however, in Poland it was already the mid-partition period. Whether for political or economic reasons, or in search of career opportunities that were difficult in the conquered country, Poles were leaving their homeland for various parts of the globe. However, Oceania in the 19th century was usually too far away for economic migrants. Polish compatriots were more likely to try their luck in Australia. Nevertheless, there were exceptional people and situations. National uprisings in Poland were significant moments in this process.

From the Romantic generation, Mickiewicz and Słowacki’s contemporaries, came several great scientists who contributed to the exploration of Oceania. One of the most important explorers was the world-renowned geologist, Paweł Edmund Strzelecki⁴. Born near Poznań in 1797, he emigrated to England in the 1830s. Strzelecki was the first Pole to organise an individual scientific voyage around the world. He set off in June 1834. After making many discoveries on the American continent, he sailed to Oceania in 1838. His speciality was research in geology – which is always extremely important for powers wishing to exploit particular territories – and geography, i.e. making more detailed maps, specifying the surface of the land – which provided further necessary data for countries interested in subjugating new areas. Ethnographic observations followed. Strzelecki first landed on the Marquesas (an archipelago in the central Pacific, today part of French Polynesia, an overseas territory of France). Soon after, however, he went to Hawaii, which was then still a sovereign country, visited only by whalers, merchants, adventurers and a few Protestant missionaries. Strzelecki spent a lot of time observing the world’s largest volcanoes located there. These investigations culminated in a scientific publication and the introduction into science of the Hawaiian name Halemaumau, denoting the great lava lake in the crater of the Kilauea volcano. After Hawaii, Strzelecki sailed to Tahiti, where Queen Pomare IV reigned. The explorer developed a closer relationship with the ruler, whom he advised on judicial matters. He then travelled

⁴ L. PASZKOWSKI, *Edmund Strzelecki Podróżnik-odkrywca-filantrop*, Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM 2021.

to New Zealand, where England was just beginning its expansion and the Maori chiefs were still officially in power. In 1839, the same year as Strzelecki's stay, the New Zealand Colonisation Company bought up large areas of land from the representatives of local tribes. In hindsight, the arrangement was unfair and served many abuses, and the treaty with the chiefs concluded two years later served to introduce British domination. From this point onwards, European settlement began in earnest, strengthened by the English policy. During his stay, Strzelecki made sightseeing expeditions and came into contact with Maori tribes. He later set out for Australia, then poorly explored, especially in the central part. His discoveries and maps were ground-breaking; he identified the highest peak on this continent, which he named Mount Kościuszko. He also discovered gold... A gold rush would soon erupt, attracting thousands of prospectors from all over the world. Gold had also been discovered in New Zealand. One of the gold and adventure seekers there was a Pole Sygurd Wiśniowski. He later worked as a journalist and went down in the history of Polish literature as the first to introduce exotic subjects related to distant lands.

After the November Uprising, two other educated Polish engineers and cartographers took a circuitous route to Polynesia: Adam Joachim Kulczycki and Aleksander Zakrzewski⁵. When in the early 1840s France formally took possession of Tahiti, the two engineers were summoned and entrusted with topographical work and the preparation of accurate maps. While Zakrzewski concentrated on his work as a cartographer, which he pursued for five years in the Society Islands (Tahiti is at the centre of them) and then left, Kulczycki stayed in Oceania for the rest of his life. He developed his scientific activity, founded an astronomical and meteorological observatory in the capital of Tahiti, Papeete, he took up geological research, and clarified the geographical position of the other islands. He also made maps of the Tuamotu archipelago and the island of Efate in Melanesia. He was later director of the observatory on New Caledonia. He died on Tahiti in 1882.

In the second half of the 19th century, another Pole, Jan Stanisław Kubary, stood out among researchers of Oceania. His achievements and published works in the field of ethnography are priceless, although done in a way that only a man lost in the world without a homeland can do. As an unusually linguistically gifted young man, after his experience of the January uprising, he ended up in Germany and from there – as a collector and researcher – he

⁵ W. DWORCZYK, *Dzień dobry Tahiti*, Warszawa: Czytelnik 1981, pp. 193-194; T. SŁABCZYŃSKI, *Podróżnicy polscy*, pp. 93-96.

went to Samoa and Micronesia. He lived with the natives on the islands conquered by Europeans, collecting, drawing and describing the local fauna and flora, and above all learning the social relations of the islanders. He called European politics there “a caricature of civilisation”. His entire life was associated with work on and for the islands of Oceania. He died in 1896 on Ponape. An important collector for Polish science, although coming from a completely different environment than Kubary, was Władysław Zamoyski, who in 1879 took part in an expedition to Australia and Oceania that lasted several years. Following this trip, his ethnographic and natural history collections came to Poland.

The second half of the 19th century was also the time when the first clusters of Polish emigrants appeared. Several Polish planters arrived in Hawaii from the United States. French exiles arrived in New Caledonia, among them Poles who were involved during the Paris Commune⁶. During the same period, Great Britain, keen to establish its presence in the new lands, was increasingly encouraging European settlers. The newcomers were tempted by cheap land and preferential terms of arrival, sometimes even passage was offered for free, with the possibility of working it off. There was also a lot of money to be made in transporting migrants to their “new homeland”. Of course, young, strong and healthy people planning to start families were welcome. Emigrant hunters emerged in Europe. This is also what happened on the Polish lands occupied by Germany. Poles in the Prussian partition, pushed to the margins of society, were tempted by the chance of a better life. They also often thought they were going to America, where their relatives had previously ended up. In this way, they were recruited onto migrant ships. The first group of Polish settlers arrived in New Zealand in 1872, and by 1876, 12 more ships had arrived with numerous groups of Poles on them. However, on arrival they were often registered as Germans, which was due to recording their place of birth as Germany or Prussia.

The work of the world-renowned anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski should not be forgotten either. His ethnographic and sociological observations made in the 1920s in the area of New Guinea and other Melanesian islands have forever placed him among the greatest researchers of Oceania⁷. Similarly to Kubary, he was convinced that during field research it was necessary to get into the natives’ shoes as much as possible and try to observe

⁶ T. SŁABCZYŃSKI, *Podróżnicy polscy*, pp. 184-185.

⁷ B. MALINOWSKI, *Zwyczaj i zbrodnia w społeczności dzikich. Życie seksualne dzikich w północno-zachodniej Melanezji*, Warszawa: PWN 1984.

the world through their eyes. This method was generally foreign to Anglo-Saxon science. In addition to Malinowski, we must mention the geologist and cartographer Józef Zwierzycki, who, like no one else, decided to enter the swampy jungle of New Guinea to study the geological structure and natural resources of these areas and the neighbouring islands⁸. This earned him the nickname “the Jungle Traveller”. The fruits of his work included accurate maps, as well as the discovery of oil, not to mention his publications describing cannibalistic practices among Papuans.

The inter-war period gave our compatriots the opportunity to develop their travel and scientific passions (e.g. the studies by the ethnographer Aleksander Lech Godlewski). The author of this short article feels obliged to mention the writer and journalist Arkady Fiedler, who learned about the German invasion of Poland while being in Tahiti⁹. He then made the decision, incomprehensible to many, to return to Europe and fight to defend his homeland.

Many soldiers of Polish origin fought in the Pacific during World War II. They were in units stationed at Pearl Harbour, in the US air force, navy and on submarines¹⁰. During these years of wartime turmoil, New Zealand again was the destination of many Polish refugees, this time children. Owing to the efforts of the Polish consul Kazimierz Wodzicki and his wife Maria, at the end of 1943, 733 orphans from a transit centre in Iran were sent to New Zealand. These were children who, together with their families, had been deported deep into the Soviet Union after the Red Army had entered Poland. After the USSR joined the fight against the Germans, those deported were released, but many adults did not survive. New Zealand responded to the appeal of the Polish Government in London to temporarily take care of the children found after deportation. After the war, those who arrived usually decided not to return to Europe. Today, about 4,000 people of Polish descent live in New Zealand.

Poles are also present, though in smaller numbers, in Hawaii and French Polynesia. Hawaii is home to the descendants of the former Polish emigration to the USA and Polish citizens usually working there on a contract basis. However, the region can boast an Honorary Consul – Bożena Jarnot since

⁸ T. SŁABCZYŃSKI, *Podróżnicy polscy*, pp. 219-227.

⁹ P. BOJARSKI, *Fiedler. Głód świata*, Poznań: Wydawnictwo poznańskie 2020, pp. 184-186.

¹⁰ T. BORÓWKA, *Nieznana wojna polskich bohaterów: od Pearl Harbor po Okinawę*, [in:] “Nasza Historia” <https://naszahistoria.pl/nieznana-wojna-polskich-bohaterow-od-pearl-harbor-po-okinawe/ar/c15-12957532> [accessed: 3.11.2022].

1998¹¹. The descendants of Polish emigrants from the beginning of the last century in French Polynesia have already assimilated to a large extent. Their origins can be recognised by surnames, such as Malinowski or Zebrowski. Today, the Polish community in the Society Islands amounts to about 30 people. They try to keep in touch with one another. They arrived in Tahiti or in the neighbouring islands as spouses to the French people or one of their parents was of Polish descent. To complete the picture, it is also worth mentioning the Polish missionaries present in New Guinea, the Verbites. Since the arrival of Father Alojzy Kaspruś in 1931, the Verbites have carried out educational and research activities in addition to their missionary work. In February 2022, Pope Francis appointed the Polish Verbite, Father Walenty Gryka, as bishop in Papua New Guinea. He is the fourth Pole to become a bishop in that country.

In the 21st century, it is definitely easier for Poles to reach the Pacific archipelagos. Despite the high prices, more and more Poles are choosing to spend their holidays there or are going there to practice water sports. Artists and scientists go there. Sailors are setting off on sea voyages with their yachts. There is no doubt that the number of Poles going there will increase, and some of them will decide to stay there for a little longer or forever.

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¹¹ B. JARNOT, *Moje Hawaje*, Honolulu: Agencja Jeremy RAM 2015, p. 69.

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WHEN DREAMS REACHED POLYNESIA OR POLES
EVEN FURTHER THAN THE FAR EAST

This article presents the presence of Poles on the islands of the Pacific Ocean, i.e. in Polynesia, Melanesia and Micronesia, which dates back to the 18th century. They were mainly naturalists accompanying explorers, independent researchers representing various disciplines (e.g. Edmund Strzelecki, Bronisław Malinowski), writers, journalists, World War II refugees, or missionaries. The text also briefly reports on the contemporary activity of Poles and people of Polish descent in the area.

Keywords: Poles on the islands of the Pacific; Edmund Strzelecki; Bronisław Malinowski; James Cook; Pahiatua children.

GDY MARZENIA SIĘGAŁY POLINEZJI,
CZYLI POLACY JESZCZE DALEJ NIŻ NA DALEKIM WSCHODZIE

Artykuł ukazuje obecność Polaków na wyspach Oceanu Spokojnego, tj. Polinezji, Melanezji i Mikronezji, która sięga XVIII wieku. Byli to przede wszystkim przyrodnicy towarzyszący odkrywcom, samodzielni badacze reprezentujący różne dyscypliny (np. Edmund Strzelecki, Bronisław Malinowski), pisarze, dziennikarze, uchodźcy w czasie II wojny światowej oraz misjonarze. Tekst pokrótce informuje również o współczesnej działalności Polaków i osób polskiego pochodzenia na tym terenie.

Słowa kluczowe: Polacy na wyspach Oceanu Spokojnego; Edmund Strzelecki; Bronisław Malinowski; James Cook; dzieci z Pahiatua.