

BOOK REVIEW

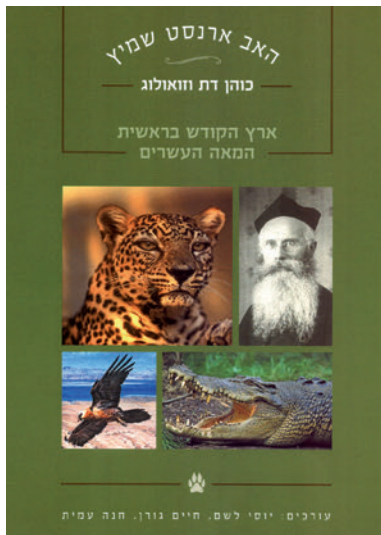
Leshem, Y., Goren, H. & Amit, H. (Eds). 2018. *Father Ernst Schmitz, Priest and Zoologist. The Holy Land at the Beginning of the 20th Century*. Carta Jerusalem, Israel. 226 pp., 216 ills, 22.5×28 cm. Hardcover. Dust jacket. ISBN 978-965-220-900-9. Price 90 NIS (Israel) or 40 USD (international, incl. p&p). Available from Carta Jerusalem, 11 Rivka Street, POB 2500, Jerusalem, 9102401 Israel; Fax +972-(02)-678-2373 or from Prof. Y. Leshem, yossile@tauex.tau.ac.il.

After nearly of a hundred years of undeserved oblivion, and after around twenty years of painstaking work, the book on the late Father Ernst Schmitz and his zoological collections is finally published.

The German Catholic priest and naturalist Father Ernst Johann Schmitz (1845–1922) was born in Germany, but spent most of his life on Madeira, managing the local Catholic priest Seminary and thoroughly exploring the wildlife of the island. He established a zoological collection of Madeira in Funchal, that turned later into the Museu

de História Natural da Madeira. In 1908 Father Schmitz, then 63 years old, was appointed by the German Association of the Holy Land to manage the German Catholic institutions in Jerusalem, then Ottoman Palestine. In addition to his numerous duties and despite his age he grew incredibly enthusiastic about nature research and in a few years assembled a nice and large collection of the local fauna (mainly mammals, birds, reptiles and insects), thus becoming one of the pioneers of the zoological research in the Land of Israel. In fact, he created the first natural history museum in the Land of Israel. Father Schmitz succeeded in procuring last representatives of the large terrestrial mammals (e.g. leopard, cheetah, Syrian bear, Arabian oryx), birds (e.g. Asiatic ostrich, fish owl) and reptiles (Nile crocodile), that later disappeared or turned extremely rare in the Land of Israel due to hunting and biotope destruction. He also

devoted much attention to insect collecting, with particular reference to ants. Father Schmitz died in Haifa, but the place of his burial remains unknown until present. His collections disappeared for years, until they were accidentally spotted by Prof. Yossi Leshem, raising dust in the stale basement of the St Paulus Hospice in Jerusalem. The rescued collections have been deposited in the Steinhardt Museum of Natural History, Tel Aviv University, and are now available for both scientists and public.



The book is opened by two prologues by the well-known Israeli zoologists Yoram Yom-Tov and Yossi Leshem, and concluded with an epilogue written by Yossi Leshem, these depicting the mysterious disappearance of Schmitz's collections and their even more bizarre rediscovery, the past and present of the zoological research in Israel, as well as the role of the late Father Schmitz in the exploration of the wildlife in Israel.

The book is divided into five sections, each with several chapters. The first section includes a short survey of the history of the German Catholics in the Holy Land in XIX–XX centuries and a biography of Father Schmitz, by the geographer and historian Haim Goren; a survey of the fauna and the faunistic research (mainly terrestrial vertebrates) in the Holy Land in late XIX – early XX, by the famous naturalist Uzi Paz; and a review of the zoological collections of Father Schmitz, housed in the Steinhardt Museum of Natural History, Tel Aviv University, by the zoologists Tamar Dayan, Shai Meiri and Laibale Friedman. The second and the third sections contain articles written by Father Schmitz and published in the German periodical *Das Heilige Land* in 1910–1923. The articles are translated from German into modern Hebrew, each appearing as a separate chapter. The 18 articles in the second section are devoted to fauna (large and small felines, rodents, bats, bears, hyenas, wild boars, buffalos, birds of prey, water birds, crocodiles, snakes, ants, locusts, freshwater fish, cave crustaceans etc.), and 15 articles in the third one – to culture and customs of the inhabitants of the Holy Land. The fourth section lists references mentioned in the text, as well as other sources pertaining to the subject and all papers published by Father Schmitz. The fifth section includes reproductions and translations of a few original documents concerning Father Schmitz, such as his appointment in the Holy Land, a letter written in his hand and signed by him, etc.

The book is generously illustrated with 216 images, including unique historical pictures (some of them published for the first time), recent color photographs of places, animals and collection exemplars, old and recent artistic drawings of animals, and nice and impressive old-style engravings of the landscapes, animals and hunting scenes from the books *Voyage in Orient* (Rudolph, Crown Prince of Austria, 1885, Vienna & Paris), and *Prince Friedrich Karl in the East, according to the diaries and hand drawings of his travel companions* (F.X. Gardner and H.K. Brugsch, 1884, Pforzheim).

I would like to emphasize the leading role of Prof. Yossi Leshem, who was the living spirit of the project and pushed the book through the years until its publication, like an ox pulling a wagon full of stones. Likewise, should not be underestimated the role of the late entomologist Prof. Jehoshua Kugler, a real enthusiast, who was fascinated by the rediscovery of the Schmitz's collection of ants and started to work on their redescription, but died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, leaving us to complete this task.

The book is written in Hebrew and is *a priori* aimed at the Israeli reader. However, the multitude of colorful illustrations, historical photographs and documents, and rich bibliography can be of particular interest also to all nature lovers and bibliophiles.

A.L.L. Friedman

Steinhardt Museum of Natural History