Leo Frobenius (1873-1938). The German ethnologist’s vision of a “real, old, warm-blooded culture” in Africa was quite progressive in a time when Africa’s significant cultural achievements were not recognized. “I was the first ethnologist to go to the Interior of Africa, and up to date only a few have followed me there” (Frobenius, The Voice of Africa, 1913)
“And now the hour had also struck when we should sleep no longer under roofs of corrugated iron, but in airy verandas beneath a lofty palm-leaf thatch”

“It is not surprising that the natives never use a bridge if it is at all possible to ford the stream and prefer not to expose their valuable loads to the perils of these misnamed bridges”

Frobenius’ shoes after long journeys of hiking. However, railways, steam boats and especially horses were used most of the time

Building a temporary camp for the expedition in Lokoja. Here, Frobenius gathered the most renowned traditional experts and wrote down their oral traditions. He also recorded numerous folk tales.

The route of the expedition in Nigeria and Cameroon, 1910-1912. “Generous hospitality and spacious circumstance are met with everywhere and always”
Nigeria 100 Years Ago

Bida, Frobenius’ Nigerian friend.

“The successful realisation of the scientific expedition could hardly have been conceivable without the agency of so intelligent a native such as this man. He is chief of the black personnel, interpreter, travel organiser and principal negotiator in one person” (Carl Arriens)

The young engineer Albrecht Martius, who was responsible for sketching the architecture and tracing the ground plans.

Offloading the luggage in Lagos harbour. Part of the expedition crew has previously been hired in the German colony of Togoland.

The expedition’s painter and photographer Carl Arriens with his easel in a Tiv village. Frobenius laid much emphasis on visual documentation. Over 3,000 photos, sketches and paintings were produced by the expedition members in Nigeria.

Expedition camp on the banks of river Benue.

“When one of our sort arrives, pitches his camp, and settles down to work, comes the great real task of my vocation – namely, to make friends, excite interest, get collaborators”
In Ife, Frobenius got into trouble with the colonial authorities over the alleged theft of antique objects. "European administrators up-country are still full of sympathy for travellers whose mode of life so closely resembles their own. Where, however, an authority is firmly settled a body with the mobility of an expedition is an element of extraordinary disturbance"
Based on the wealth of information gathered during his expeditions, Frobenius delineated a worldwide history of cultures as well as a theory of culture called “cultural morphology”. He published over 50 books and educated many Europeans about the richness of African cultures.