

Zeitschrift: Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Religions- und Kulturgeschichte = Revue suisse d'histoire religieuse et culturelle = Rivista svizzera di storia religiosa e culturale

Herausgeber: Vereinigung für Schweizerische Kirchengeschichte

Band: 118 (2024)

Artikel: Memories in tension : the collateral activities of missionaries in southern Africa between exploration and exploitation in the 19th century

Autor: Rossinelli, Fabio / Ciaglia Filiberto

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-1075867>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 31.03.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

Memories in Tension – The Collateral Activities of Missionaries in Southern Africa between Exploration and Exploitation in the 19th Century

Fabio Rossinelli/Filiberto Ciaglia

When one speaks of mission and colonisation in the 19th century, great figures like David Livingstone come to mind. He was not only a missionary, but also an explorer. On behalf of the *London Missionary Society*, he penetrated and mapped vast portions of southern Africa previously unknown in Europe, publishing a travel narrative that became a bestseller in the 1850s.¹ The success of this operation allowed him to collaborate with the *Royal Geographical Society* and the British Crown on other colonial expeditions on which the future of British imperialism in Africa would largely depend.²

The case of Livingstone is well known, but it is no exception. Many European missionaries left for the African continent. Their official mandate was the evangelisation of the indigenous peoples, as well as educating them about the social and sanitary norms of the Western system. The mission was therefore seen and experienced, both by the missionaries themselves and more generally in the West, as a ‹moral entrepreneurship› – a sociological concept particularly suited to our case.³ In addition to this, however, the missionaries pursued various collateral activities that also allow us to speak of ‹scientific and economic entrepreneurship› – this is our argument.

In our contribution, we will study some missionaries who, in contrast to Livingstone, are little known. They came in particular from Italy and Switzerland and served French-speaking European missions. They operated in Southern Africa in the 19th century (also) as explorers and as businessmen.

¹ David Livingstone, *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa*, London 1857.

² John MacKenzie, *David Livingstone – Prophet or Patron Saint of Imperialism in Africa: Myths and Misconceptions*, in: *Scottish Geographical Journal*, 129 (2013), 277–291.

³ Howard S. Becker, *Outsiders. Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*, New York 1963, 147–153.

This article is based on a collection of bibliographic and archival data compiled by the authors as part of a collaborative project between the *Italian Geographical Society* (Società Geografica Italiana, Rome) and the *Waldensian Cultural Centre Foundation* (Fondazione Centro Culturale Valdese, Torre Pellice).⁴ These two entities share a common past: Italian pastors trained in the Waldensian Church, such as Giacomo Weitzecker and Louis Jalla, were often missionaries and explorers in Africa.⁵ They worked on behalf of the *Mission of Paris* (Société des Missions Évangéliques de Paris, 1822), and in parallel collaborated with geographical societies, just like Livingstone before them.⁶ A number of Swiss people also passed through Paris. With French logistical support, the first station of the Swiss Mission based in Lausanne (Mission Romande, former Mission Vaudoise, 1874) was founded in Southern Africa.⁷ These missionaries were also correspondents of geographical societies in a transnational network of exchanges that aimed to establish utilitarian knowledge for European expansion, and in which actors from more marginal countries such as Italy and Switzerland participated.

Based on our database and set in the transimperial history approaches⁸, this study will show the process of construction of the missionaries' scientific knowledge (first section), as well as the phase of exploitation for economic affairs (second section). For the purpose of this paper, the four examples chosen out of the one hundred and forty-three currently in our database are of Thomas Arbousset, Louis Jalla, Paul Berthoud and Honoré Schlaefli. Their diverging and converging – and often connected – trajectories will shed new light on the multifaceted nature of missionary activities in a colonial context. Above all, they will allow us to interrogate a missionary memory that was intrinsically in tension, not only because personal relationships consisted of both collaboration and rivalry, but also because their collateral activities were both publicised (science) and hidden (business).

⁴ The database is accessible online at: <<https://missioniprotestanti-africaustrale.org>> (13 Aug. 2024). It currently contains 1766 entries, including biographies of 143 missionaries, 269 places they visited, 608 primary sources and 313 works of secondary literature. The database will become interactive in late 2024.

⁵ Claudio Cerreti, *Le molte missioni di Giacomo Weitzecker, pastore valdese nella «Terra dei Basuti»*, Roma 1993; Davide Rosso (ed.), *Giacomo Weitzecker e Luigi Jalla. Missionari e geografi valdesi in Africa australe a fine Ottocento*, Torre Pellice 2019.

⁶ For a (non-exhaustive) overview of the role of geographical societies in colonial imperialism, see Robin Butlin, *Geographies of Empire. European Empires and Colonies c. 1880–1960*, Cambridge 2009, 275–324.

⁷ Jan van Butselaar, *Africains, missionnaires et colonialistes. Les origines de l'Église Presbytérienne du Mozambique (Mission Suisse) 1880–1896*, Leiden 1984, 23–24.

⁸ Damiano Matasci/Jerónimo Miguel Bandeira, *Une histoire transimpériale de l'Afrique: concepts, approches et perspectives*, in: *Revue d'histoire contemporaine de l'Afrique*, 3 (2022), 1–17.

Mission and exploration: a loving relationship. From the earth to the stars in Lesotho, Zambia and Mozambique

In the beginning, on invitation from the *Mission of London*, missionaries from Paris travelled to Lesotho (at that time Basutoland). Thomas Arbousset (1810–1877) and others arrived in 1833.⁹ With the approval of the chief of the Sotho, King Moshoeshoe¹⁰, they not only established missionary stations but also dedicated themselves to the geographical study of the country. Arbousset's exploration in the mountains of Lesotho has been described in historiography as an experience that «preceded Livingstone in combining mission with exploration»¹¹, and his travel account has been regarded as a fairly respectful view of the Basotho people.¹² His journey interested the geographical societies of Rome and Paris and others: Arbousset was in fact the first European to explore the Mont-aux-Sources and the Blue Mountain. His reports did not fail to provide geological, climatic and naturalistic details of the mountain range, including explanations of «that bluish tint» found in the altitudes.¹³ This adventure full of dangers was told as an individual success story of colonial explorations. However, we would like to stress, in accord with the decentralised and non-Eurocentric approach of historian Wendy N'guia Kahma, the role of indigenous guides.¹⁴ They were often invisibilised in the narratives of mountain explorers, both in Africa and Europe – yet they played an extremely important role.¹⁵ Indigenous workers of the Arbousset's exploration lived in the places described by the missionary, were familiar with them, co-planned the journeys of the foreign explorers and accompanied them, and last but not least took charge of their equipment. Arbousset, like his Western colleagues, did not report any significant news about these workers: he wrote a few words anonymously, often stigmatising its «savage life», and in one case mentioned the name of one of its members – the young «Monaile».¹⁶ There is a

⁹ Alfred Boegner, *Livre d'or de la Mission du Lessouto: soixante-quinze ans de l'histoire d'une tribu sud-africaine, 1833–1908*, Paris 1912, 163.

¹⁰ On this actor and his reign, see Timothy Keegan, *The Dynamics of a South African Kingdom: Nineteenth-Century Lesotho Reassessed*, *South African Historical Journal*, 30/1 (1994), 109–120.

¹¹ Marc Spindler, Arbousset (Jean) Thomas, in: Gerard H. Anderson (ed.), *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions*, Cambridge 1999, 26.

¹² Bert Zurings, *Tussen kolonialisme en postkolonialisme: Thomas Arboussets Excursion missionnaire dans les Montagnes bleues*, in: *Acta Academica*, 39/2 (2007), 85–117.

¹³ Thomas Arbousset/François Dumas, *Narrative of an Exploratory Tour to the North-East of the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope*, Cape Town 1846, 66.

¹⁴ Wendy N'guia Kahma, *Cartographie missionnaire et savoirs vernaculaires au Lesotho au XIX^e siècle*, in: *Comité Français de Cartographie*, 210 (2011), 149–162.

¹⁵ Andrea Zannini, *Controstoria dell'alpinismo*, Roma-Bari, 2024; Delphine Froment, *Gravir le Kilimandjaro entre 1861 et 1889. Expériences locales, appropriations européennes et hybridations culturelles*, in: *Histoire des Alpes*, 28 (2023), 177–191.

¹⁶ Thomas Arbousset/François Dumas, *Narrative of an Exploratory Tour to the North-East of the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope*, Cape Town 1846, 42.

research gap on the topic of re-evaluating the role of such important collectivities left on the margins of historiography.¹⁷

However, the missionary waves following that of Arbousset expanded the reach of the *Mission of Paris* into other territories in Southern Africa. This expansion needed the recruitment of new young volunteers, and this is what François Coillard (1834–1904) did with promotional campaigns throughout Europe.¹⁸ In 1881, in a famous speech he gave in Italy, he convinced many Waldensian pastors to leave and go overseas, including Louis Jalla (1860–1943). Having consecrated a missionary in Torre Pellice in 1886 after completing his training between Paris and Edinburgh, Jalla embarked with his wife Marie Turin for Barotseland (today a province containing large areas of Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo). The wife's role was central to her husband's career. As with native guides, women were often overlooked in official mission records.¹⁹ Jalla, however, became an expert on the customs and traditions of the Barotse people, as well as a correspondent of the geographical societies of Rome, Geneva and Neuchâtel. The author of approximately fifteen publications listed in our database, he wrote a monograph on his long journey from the Cape of Good Hope to the Great Lakes region.²⁰ This journey, made in 1905, was facilitated by the inauguration of the railway line through Victoria Falls. This was an area that Jalla, with Marie Turin, Swiss missionary Auguste Goy, as well as eight native transporters whose names are unknown, had already scouted in 1889 on behalf of the *Mission of Paris*.²¹ His stay in Southern Africa, characterised by geographical mobility and intellectual production, eventually made Jalla a point of contact for other European settlers or visitors. For example, an Italian military officer, writing about his journey to Victoria Falls in 1909, advised all Italians interested in penetrating this area to get in touch with Jalla, as the latter «knows this country very well» – the invitation was even «not to miss the canoe trip up the Zambezi to his home.»²² In the same year, the president of the Geneva Geographical Society (Société de Géographie de

¹⁷ On the journey just mentioned, see J. Dreyer, Thomas Arbousset and François Daumas in *The Free State: Tracing the Exploratory Tour of 1836*, in: *Southern African Humanities*, 13 (2001), 61–96.

¹⁸ Jean-François Zorn, *The Transforming Gospel. The Mission of François Coillard and Basuto Evangelists in Barotseland*, Geneva 2004.

¹⁹ This is a shortcoming we have helped to rectify with a StoryMap available to the general public. See Filiberto Ciaglia, *Pioniere in Africa australe. Il ruolo delle donne*, 2022, in: <<https://arcg.is/1rGnj0>> (13 Aug. 2024).

²⁰ Louis Jalla, *Du Cap de Bonne Esperance au Victoria Nyanza. Notes de voyage*, Florence 1905.

²¹ Louis Jalla, *Une visite aux Chutes Victoria*, in: *Journal des missions évangéliques*, 64 (1889), 377–383.

²² Margherito Guidotti, *Alle Cascate Vittoria dello Zambesi*, in: *Bollettino della Società Geografica Italiana*, 43 (1909), 764. Original quotes: «conosce benissimo questo paese»; «di non tralasciare la gita in canoa che consiste nel risalire lo Zambesi fino alla sua dimora».

Genève), Alfred Bertrand, also stopped with Jalla while he reported to his colleagues in Rome.²³

Another name of interest for our purposes is Paul Berthoud (1847–1930), who with Ernest Creux (1845–1929) arrived in Lesotho in 1873 to work under the direction of the *Mission of Paris*. They also represented, for the first time, the Swiss Mission, thanks to a reciprocal agreement signed between Paris and Lausanne at the synod of 28 November 1871.²⁴ During his missionary career, which included travels from Lesotho to the Transvaal to Mozambique, Berthoud was very prolific in his studies. He produced no less than fifty publications, including numerous correspondences for the colonial geography journal *L’Afrique explorée et civilisée*.²⁵ Among other things, he produced meteorological statistics in Mozambique for the Portuguese Empire and studied Bantu languages, such as Tsonga and Ronga, to translate the Bible into vernacular idioms. Less well known in historiography are his observations in 1910 on the passage of Halley’s Comet, contemplated from the Mozambican station of Rikatla and published in the bulletin of the *Geographical Society of Neuchâtel* (*Société Neuchâteloise de Géographie*).²⁶ This text by Berthoud meticulously describes, day by day, the passage of the celestial body. It is accompanied by nine astronomical tables that graphically reproduce the path of the comet. The phenomenon analysed is inscribed among the close constellations and accompanied by a table that classifies the stars by size, highlighting their apparent magnitude, and thereby making it possible to guess the intensity of the luminosity of the stars’ nucleus and wake. We mention this study not only to stress its originality, or to highlight the transversality of the knowledge cultivated by the missionaries, but also to underline Berthoud’s Eurocentric and pretentiously civilising approach. He rejected the hypothesis of an indigenous consciousness about the regular occurrence of this kind of event:

«It was a unique and magnificent spectacle, well suited to making us feel our smallness. It is understandable that an apparition of this kind can strike terror into the hearts of ignorant and superstitious populations; and this would not have failed to happen to the savage Blacks who surround us, if we had not been able, thanks to the

²³ Alfred Bertrand, *Nel paese dei Basuto*, in: *Bollettino della Società Geografica Italiana*, 43 (1909), 1166.

²⁴ Jean François Zorn, *The Missionary Societies of Francophone Europe: Their Relationships and Engagement in the World during the First Half of the Nineteenth Century*, in: Jean D. Decorvet/Tim Grass/Kenneth J. Stewart (eds.), *The Genevan Réveil in International Perspective*, Eugene (Oregon) 2023, 242.

²⁵ Fabio Rossinelli, *Une enquête historique sur «L’Afrique explorée et civilisée» (1879–1894)*, la revue de Gustave Moynier, in: *Le Globe*, 161 (2021), 163–184.

²⁶ Paul Berthoud, *La comète de Halley vue de Rikatla en mai 1910*, in: *Bulletin de la Société neuchâteloise de géographie* (1910), 416–430. We have found one trace of these observations in the astronomical literature: Ruth S. Freitag, *Halley’s Comet. A Bibliography*, Washington 1984, 39.

forecasts of astronomers, to predict to them in advance the passage of the strange visitor [...] This memory will be a point of reference for their civil status; it is to the comet that we will refer in order to fix the dates of events.»²⁷

Among missionaries considered in relation to the horizontality of their explorative and intellectual experiences, the episode of the Swiss Honoré Schläefli (1858–1940) should also be mentioned. The missionary distinguished himself by a challenging expedition along the Olifant and Limpopo rivers, conducted in 1889 in the company of his colleague Henri Berthoud (Paul's brother) and motivated by the need to investigate the possibility of establishing Swiss missionary stations in those territories.²⁸ In the extensive travel report, published in the *Bulletin of the Geographical Society of Neuchâtel* of which Schläefli was a member, physical and anthropic details of the route taken between Valdezia (in the Transvaal) and Nkomati (in Mozambique) are described. The area between the Salati and Olifant rivers was described as limited to the exclusive population of monkeys – with an explicit reference to the evolutionist theories of Charles Darwin.²⁹ Of this work, we would like to consider, in particular, the cartographic and visual representation kit (seven maps and two figures, obtained with the help of the contribution of the famous Swiss cartographer Maurice Borel of Neuchâtel).³⁰ It allowed scholars to photograph the layout of the documented territories through a significant toponymic repertory, emphasising the hydrographic restitution and the location of minerals involved in mining activities. With regard to the considerations on mineralogy and exploitation of the soil, the specific attention paid to these aspects certainly went beyond the mere intentions of territorial knowledge. These intentions were also aimed at a collection of data that was undoubtedly functional for those who, in this case from the Swiss angle, had an interest in gaining knowledge of the most promising sites: «This road runs directly east along the Murchison Range as far as Spitzkop, a distance of about thirty kilometres. The gold miners have opened it up, and dynamite detonations tell us that they are at work [...] This country is rich in copper ore, which the natives know how to work; we found an

²⁷ Paul Berthoud, *La comète de Halley* (cf. note 26), 417–418. Original quote: «C'était un spectacle unique et grandiose, bien propre à nous faire sentir notre petitesse. On comprend qu'une telle apparition puisse semer la terreur parmi les populations ignorantes et superstitieuses; et cela n'aurait pas manqué d'arriver chez les Noirs sauvages qui nous entourent, si nous n'avions pu, grâce aux prévisions des astronomes, leur prédire à l'avance le passage de l'étrange visiteuse [...] Ce souvenir sera un point de repaire pour leur état civil; c'est à la comète qu'on en référera pour fixer les dates des événements».

²⁸ Patrick Harries, *Butterflies & Barbarians: Swiss Missionaries & Systems of Knowledge in South-East Africa*, Oxford 2007, 114.

²⁹ Honoré Schläefli, *De Valdezia à Lourenço Marques*, in: *Bulletin de la Société Neuchâteloise de Géographie* (1893), 145.

³⁰ Antoine Wasserfallen, Maurice Borel, in: *Dizionario storico della Svizzera*, 2003, in: <<https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/it/articles/046677>> (13 Aug. 2024).

old furnace in ruins where this metal was milled. Iron is also abundant, and along the way we picked up large chunks of almost pure ore. One product is still missing: coal! There are probably deposits of it yet to be discovered.»³¹ As we will see in the next section, all this production and dissemination of knowledge about southern Africa by the missionaries we have studied was not limited to the intellectual field or to the advancement of science, but included very concrete economic and speculative aspects that involved them personally.

*Mission and business between marriage and divorce:
economic speculation in the Transvaal*

«It seemed very strange to us that these gentlemen [missionaries Berthoud and Creux] could take such a decision regarding one of their colleagues [missionary Schlaefli], when they themselves were allowing themselves to speculate in risky ventures which could have had unfortunate consequences for the Mission. We are referring to the losses incurred by the [Mr and Mrs] Berthouds in the <Transvaal Board of Executors [and Trust Co]>.»³²

This letter, which reached the Swiss Mission headquarters in Lausanne in 1893, was written by Jean DuBois (1869–1922), a Swiss businessman who emigrated to the Transvaal and was descended from a rich watchmaking family in Neuchâtel. He openly accused Paul Berthoud (and his wife) of gambling with Mission money in risky speculations in the South African country, with the involvement of a major trust company.³³ His missive openly defended the missionary Honoré Schlaefli, who was also from Neuchâtel. According to DuBois, Schlaefli was the victim of an unfair decision based on accusations by Berthoud

³¹ Honoré Schlaefli, *De Valdezia à Lourenço Marques* (cf. note 29), 144, 146. Original quote: «Cette route se dirige directement à l'Est et longe le Murchison Range jusqu'au Spitzkop, sur une longueur de trente kilomètres environ. Les chercheurs d'or l'ont ouverte, et des détonations de dynamite nous annoncent qu'ils sont à l'œuvre [...] Ce pays est riche en minerais de cuivre que les indigènes savent travailler; nous avons trouvé en ruines un ancien four où ce métal était fondu. Le fer abonde également; nous recueillons, chemin faisant, de gros morceaux de minerai presque purs. Un produit manque encore: c'est la houille! Il en existe probablement des gisements à découvrir».

³² Archives Cantonales Vaudoises (ACV), PP 1002 B 08.01–08.07, letter from Fehr & DuBois (the handwriting is by Jean DuBois) to Paul Leresche, 13 May 1893. Original quote: «Il nous a semblé très étrange que ces Messieurs [les missionnaires Berthoud et Creux] puissent prendre une pareille décision vis-à-vis d'un de leurs collègues [le missionnaire Schlaefli], alors qu'eux-mêmes se permettent de spéculer dans des entreprises ha[s]ardées qui auraient pu avoir des conséquences fâcheuses pour la Mission. Nous voulons parler des pertes subies par les [Monsieur et Madame] Berthoud dans la <Transvaal Board of Executors [and Trust Co]>».

³³ Anthon Ehlers, *Rural Trust Companies and Boards of Executors versus Country Attorneys: The History of Symbiotic <Bastard Relationships> in the Battle for Trust and Estate Business in South Africa to c. 1920*, in: *Fundamina*, 9 (2003), 78–93.

and Creux of unjustly enriching himself and inducing him to choose between the vocation of Christ or Mammon.

To understand the origin of this controversy and what was at stake, it is necessary to reconstruct the episode. It is not a question of telling an anecdotal story, but rather of understanding a global microhistory.³⁴ This story reveals interconnections and tensions at different levels: between mission and colonial business, but also between mission and state – although these two entities have often been contrasted in historiography.³⁵

In the last thirty years of the 19th century, following the discovery of gold, Swiss emigration to the Transvaal intensified. Prominent entrepreneurs from Neuchâtel arrived, such as Paul Perrin in Pretoria in 1872.³⁶ The Swiss Mission opened its first station in the Spelonken Mountains in 1875. Paul Berthoud, through Perrin, very soon sent geological samples and geographical information to his friend and colleague Prof. Eugène Renevier in Lausanne, who published them in a natural science journal.³⁷ Over time, the Swiss Mission in Southern Africa worked in the mining sector, providing social and spiritual assistance to the indigenous labour force and acting as an intermediary for working relationships between black workers and white entrepreneurs.³⁸ The economic exploitation of natural resources was an integral part of missionary activities. To such an extent that, in 1884, Prof. Renevier, President of the Swiss Mission Council, asked the government of Switzerland to establish a trade treaty between the Confederation and the Transvaal because of the existence in this country of «two mission stations where a certain number of our nationals are employed[,] also as industrialists.»³⁹ A bilateral treaty was actually concluded (1885), but this was not

³⁴ Romain Bertrand, Guillaume Calafat, *La microhistoire globale: affaire(s) à suivre*, in: *Annales*, 73/1 (2018), 1–18.

³⁵ See, for example, Ulrich van der Heyden/Holger Stoecker (eds.), *Mission und Macht im Wandel politischer Orientierungen Europäische Missionsgesellschaften in politischen Spannungsfeldern in Afrika und Asien zwischen 1800 und 1945*, Stuttgart 2005.

³⁶ Fabio Rossinelli, *Géographie et impérialisme. De la Suisse au Congo entre exploration géographique et conquête coloniale*, Neuchâtel 2022, 667.

³⁷ ACV, PP 1002 B 08.01–08.07, letter from Paul Berthoud to Jean Favre, 23 October 1874; Eugène Renevier, *Renseignements géographiques et géologiques sur le Sud de l’Afrique. Extraits des lettres du missionnaire P. Berthoud*, in: *Bulletin de la Société Vaudoise des Sciences Naturelles*, 13 (1874–1875), 384–390.

³⁸ Christophe Schaufelberger, *Mission, Minen und Wanderarbeit im südlichen Afrika. Das Beispiel der Mission Romande, 1894–1926*, Zürich 1985, 113, 122. See also: Arthur Grandjean, *La Mission romande. Ses racines dans le sol suisse romand. Son épanouissement dans la race thonga*, Lausanne 1917, 211.

³⁹ Schweizerisches Bundesarchiv (SB), E21#1000/131#24598*, letter from Eugène Renevier and Charles Cuénod to the Swiss Federal Chancellor, 24 April 1884. Original quote: «deux stations missionnaires où sont employés[,] aussi comme industriels, un certain nombre de nos nationaux».

enough. In fact, several voices linked to the Swiss Mission or the Neuchâtel business – including those of Ernest Creux and Philippe DuBois, the latter being the brother and business partner of Jean DuBois – asked for and obtained the opening of a consulate in Pretoria (1887).⁴⁰

During this period of intensified official contacts between Switzerland and the Transvaal, several Swiss economic expansion projects were launched by private entrepreneurs with state backing. The previously mentioned Paul Perrin, for example, set up a business consortium under the auspices of the *Geographical Society of St. Gallen* (Ostschweizerische Geographisch-Commercielle Gesellschaft), called the *Swiss African Company* (Compagnie suisse africaine) for the extraction of mineral resources. It was set up with the support of Federal Councillor Numa Droz, who in 1886 saw this project as «a patriotic work».⁴¹ Another member of this company, the correspondent Carl Fehr, Swiss Consul in Pretoria from 1894, founded the *Fehr & DuBois* holding company with the DuBois brothers, dedicated to gold mining – an operation directly related to that of Perrin.⁴²

If we mention these affairs, it is not only because they reflect the expansionism of a country without colonies in colonial Southern Africa, but also because, as we have seen, missionaries were at the forefront of this interlacing of private business and state manoeuvres. It was in this context that Honoré Schläefli, who had arrived in the Transvaal in 1886, secretly collaborated with the *Fehr & DuBois* holding company. However, this collaboration materialised not at the Murchison Range of which he had spoken in his travel report for the geographical society of Neuchâtel (and where *Fehr & DuBois* founded the *Gravelotte Gold Mining Company*)⁴³, but at the Salt Pan exploitation, where he was director of works, with hundreds of African and Afrikaner workers under his command.⁴⁴

The Salt Pan was in the Spelonken Mountains, a few dozen kilometres from the Valdezia mission station. Jean DuBois, co-owner of the holding company and a friend of Schläefli, joked about how Schläefli was «sent by the Swiss Mission to convert the pagan blacks and by *Fehr & DuBois* to keep them in this state by

⁴⁰ SB, E1004.1#1000/9#7489*, Federal Council Resolution No. 3074, 13 June 1887.

⁴¹ Archiv des Kulturmuseum St. Gallen, OGCG 13, letter from Paul Perrin to Bernhard Scherrer-Engler, 21 October 1886. Original quote: «une œuvre patriotique».

⁴² Fabio Rossinelli, Swiss Colonial Business in the Transvaal: The Involvement of the DuBois Family, Watchmakers in Neuchâtel (late 19th Century), in: Bernhard Schär/Mikko Toivanen (eds.), *Integration and Collaborative Imperialism in Modern Europe: At the Margins of Empire, 1800–1950*, London 2024 [in press].

⁴³ Charles Sydney Goldmann, *South African Mines*, London/Johannesburg 1895–1896, vol. 2, 25–27.

⁴⁴ Archives of Harvard University's Tozzer Library (AHUTL), ETHG. D 852 Box 1, letter from Jean DuBois to his parents, 13 June 1893.

salting them.»⁴⁵ The work commissioned by *Fehr & DuBois* was highly remunerative.⁴⁶ This allowed Schlaefli to personally bear a number of expenses related to the missionary work on the one hand and to his home in Valdezia on the other, but he then requested reimbursement of these outgoings from the headquarters in Lausanne.⁴⁷ Not only for these reasons, but also and above all because of different strategic views, in particular regarding the Valdezia evangelisation school of which Schlaefli was director, frictions increased and soon became untenable. In 1893, in a context of major controversy, he informed his colleagues that he was leaving the Swiss Mission: «When, a few weeks ago, I was asked if I would accept being appointed by the government as a doctor at the Petite Tabre gold mines, I accepted without hesitation.»⁴⁸ Schlaefli specified, however, probably in response to another letter of which no trace is preserved, that «it takes something other than the love of money to persuade a father to leave the certainty for the uncertainty that frightens him.»⁴⁹ Having moved with his family to The Willows, the luxurious mansion of the owners of *Fehr & DuBois* in Pretoria, Schlaefli pursued a colonial career in Southern Africa, serving the Boer Republic (later the British Empire) until 1920.⁵⁰

What do we know, however, about Berthoud's financial speculations? Absolutely nothing. A transversal analysis of sources and data, as we did for the Schlaefli case, starting with our database and expanding the range of archives, has yet to be carried out. At present we can, however, note two points. First, Jean DuBois knew Paul Berthoud (although he did not hold him in high esteem), and more generally the business circles in which the Swiss of the Transvaal were involved, including missionaries.⁵¹ The fact that the Neuchâtel-born entrepreneur expressly mentioned the *Transvaal Board of Executors and Trust Co.* provides, among other things, a very concrete avenue of research regarding Berthoud. Secondly, far from just concerning the few actors we have mentioned, the proximity of the missionaries to the colonial business circles in Africa fomented by the geographical societies in Europe concerned numerous other people, such as Giacomo

⁴⁵ AHUTL, ETHG. D 852 Box 1, letter from Jean DuBois to his parents, 23 April 1892. Original quote: «envoyé par la Mission romande pour convertir les nègres païens et par Fehr & DuBois pour les conserver dans cet état en les salant».

⁴⁶ AHUTL, ETHG. D 852 Box 1, letter from Jean DuBois to his parents, 14 October 1893.

⁴⁷ ACV, PP 1002 B 08.01–08.07, letter from Honoré Schlaefli to Paul Leresche, 8 June 1893.

⁴⁸ ACV, PP 1002 B 08.01–08.07, letter from Honoré Schlaefli to Paul Leresche, 13 February 1893. Original quote: «Quand, il y a quelques semaines, on m'a demandé si j'accepterais d'être nommé par le gouvernement médecin des mines d'or de la Petite Tabre, j'ai accepté sans hésiter».

⁴⁹ ACV, PP 1002 B 08.01–08.07, letter from Honoré Schlaefli to Paul Leresche, 20 April 1893. Original quote: «il faut autre chose que l'amour de l'argent pour engager un père de famille à quitter le certain pour l'incertain qui l'effraie».

⁵⁰ La mort d'un missionnaire neuchâtelois, in: Feuille d'Avis de Neuchâtel, 25 April 1941.

⁵¹ AHUTL, ETHG. D 852 Box 1, letter from Jean DuBois to his parents, 5 December 1892

Weitzecker (mentioned in the introduction to our contribution) and Louis Jalla (for whom we have previously provided an analysis of his travels). These two Italian missionaries were, for example, involved in an exploration on behalf of the geographical society of Rome in the Kimberley mining regions⁵² – and Jalla, among others, was in contact with Jean DuBois himself, as well as Swiss missionaries in Southern Africa.⁵³ Missionaries, businessmen, statesmen, and in general the actors at the head of colonisation, represented an interconnected microcosm. As can be seen, this kind of investigation is largely absent from the historiography. Its development would make it possible to uncover a range of collateral activities, partnerships and tensions (both internal and external) linked to a more or less hidden business that rarely emerges from official mission sources, and emerges even less from the self-published historical memory of missionaries.

Conclusions

We conclude our contribution by returning to the concept of «moral entrepreneurship» mentioned at the beginning, which can frame the missionary drive in the colonial world of the 19th century as a vector of self-proclaimed civilisation. If the official or main activities of missionaries (evangelisation, education, health) fell under this type of entrepreneurship, their collateral activities also made them «scientific and economic entrepreneurs». In all cases, their contribution and support to colonial imperialism was constant. They positioned themselves as intermediaries between Europeans and the indigenous peoples of Africa; they knew the territory and they studied and researched nature and human beings. In short, they could provide support for colonial exploitation – in which they themselves participated. Missionaries were at the heart of transimperial relations, but historiographical attention has so far focused on the main activities in the image of Isabel Scheele's work.⁵⁴ Collateral activities are, however, an integral part of missionary history, as Claudio Cerreti, Patrick Harries and others have shown over the past thirty years – and as we ourselves argue.⁵⁵ As we have seen, missionary integration into the logics of imperialism also manifested itself in tendencies intrinsic to the latter: transnational collaboration in scientific matters, from exploration to the production of knowledge in the colonial world, and rivalry (even intranational)

⁵² Cerreti, *Le molte missioni di Giacomo Weitzecker* (cf. note 5), 47–54, 101–105.

⁵³ AHUTL, ETHG. D 852 Box 1, letter from Jean DuBois to his parents, 4 December 1891.

⁵⁴ Isabell Scheele, *Les relations transimpériales. L'exemple du Togo allemand et du Dahomey français à l'apogée de l'impérialisme européen*, Berlin 2021.

⁵⁵ Cerreti, *Le molte missioni di Giacomo Weitzecker* (cf. note 5); Harries, *Butterflies & Barbarians* (cf. note 28).

regarding prospects for economic exploitation. The tension between these two poles of alliance and competition is manifest.

Our invitation is to do more research in this direction – especially in the economic sphere, which is the least explored as it is also the most hidden from missionary memory itself – and starting from global micro-histories such as the one illustrated in the second section of this article. The missionaries we studied, in fact, highlighted their erudite activities (often published in books or journals) but not to their economic affairs (which remained in the shadow): almost as if to show a memorial consciousness as well. The invitation is also to use and implement our participative database as a shared research tool, from which we were able to produce this article. In a larger sense, if the focus on missionaries makes it possible to question the colonial role in Africa of countries that were not the main actors of the colonisation of this continent, another necessary step is to move the analysis to the African front. This would allow questioning, through archives and local knowledge, the role of the indigenous staff of the missions, as well as catechists, cadets, but also women – a whole series of people mostly marginalised or forgotten in historiography, who nevertheless contributed to the successes or failures of missionary history and whose memory must be re-evaluated.

Memories in Tension – The Collateral Activities of Missionaries in Southern Africa between Exploration and Exploitation in the 19th Century

This article analyses the activities of several European missionaries who worked in Lesotho, Zambia, Mozambique and the Transvaal in the 19th century through the missions of Paris (*Société des Missions évangéliques de Paris*, founded in 1822) and Lausanne (*Mission romande*, former *Mission vaudoise*, 1874). The focus is on how these missionaries developed their personal interests outside their mandate. Knowledge and money were at stake. While some activities were made public, others were treated with the greatest discretion. This affected and shaped the way in which the missionary memory was constructed. The sources used for this study are listed in a database created by the authors themselves, with a multidisciplinary team in Italy: missioniprotestanti-africaaustrale.org (online since 2022, interactive from 2024).

Mission – South Africa – Knowledge – Money – Remembrance – Memory.

Erinnerungen in Spannung – Die Nebentätigkeiten von Missionaren im südlichen Afrika zwischen Erforschung und Ausbeutung im 19. Jahrhundert

Dieser Artikel analysiert die Aktivitäten mehrerer europäischer Missionare, die im 19. Jahrhundert in Lesotho, Sambia, Mosambik und Transvaal im Rahmen der *Pariser Mission* (*Société des Missions Évangéliques de Paris*, gegründet 1822) und der *Lausanner Mission* (*Mission Romande*, früher *Mission Vaudoise*, 1874) tätig waren. Der Schwerpunkt liegt darauf, wie diese Missionare ihre persönlichen Interessen ausserhalb ihres Mandats entwickelten. Dabei ging es um Wissen und Geld. Während einige Aktivitäten öffentlich gemacht wurden, wurden andere mit grösster Diskretion behandelt. Dies beeinflusste und prägte die Art und Weise, in der das Gedächtnis der Missionare sich konstruiert sah. Die für diese Studie verwendeten Quellen sind in einer Datenbank aufgeführt, die von den Missionaren selbst in

Zusammenarbeit mit einem multidisziplinären Team in Italien erstellt wurde: missioniprotestanti-africaaustrale.org (online seit 2022, interaktiv ab 2024).

Mission – Südafrika – Wissen – Geld – Erinnerung – Gedächtnis.

Mémoires en tension – Les activités collatérales des missionnaires en Afrique australe entre exploration et exploitation au 19^{ème} siècle

Cet article analyse les activités de plusieurs missionnaires européens qui ont travaillé au Lesotho, en Zambie, au Mozambique et au Transvaal au 19^{ème} siècle dans le cadre des Missions de Paris (*Société des Missions évangéliques de Paris*, fondée en 1822) et de Lausanne (*Mission romande*, ancienne *Mission vaudoise*, 1874). L'accent est mis sur la manière dont ces missionnaires ont développé leurs intérêts personnels en dehors de leur mandat. Le savoir et l'argent étaient en jeu. Alors que certaines activités étaient rendues publiques, d'autres étaient traitées avec la plus grande discrétion. Cela a affecté et façonné la manière dont la mémoire missionnaire a été construite. Les sources utilisées pour cette étude sont répertoriées dans une base de données créée par les auteurs eux-mêmes, avec une équipe pluridisciplinaire en Italie: missioniprotestanti-africaaustrale.org (en ligne depuis 2022, interactive à partir de 2024).

Mission – Afrique australe – savoir – argent – mémoire – souvenir.

Memorie in tensione – Le attività collaterali dei missionari in Africa meridionale tra esplorazione e sfruttamento nel XIX secolo

Questo articolo analizza le attività di diversi missionari europei che lavorarono in Lesotho, Zambia, Mozambico e Transvaal nel XIX secolo attraverso le missioni di Parigi (*Société des Missions évangéliques de Paris*, fondata nel 1822) e Losanna (*Mission Romande*, prima *Mission Vaudoise*, 1874). L'attenzione si concentra sul modo in cui questi missionari svilupparono i propri interessi personali al di fuori del loro mandato. Erano in gioco conoscenza e denaro. Mentre alcune attività venivano rese pubbliche, altre venivano trattate con la massima discrezione. Ciò influenzò e plasmò il modo in cui fu costruita la memoria missionaria. Le fonti utilizzate per questo studio sono elencate in un database creato dagli autori stessi, con un team multidisciplinare in Italia: missioniprotestanti-africaaustrale.org (online dal 2022, interattivo dal 2024).

Missione – Sudafrica – conoscenza – denaro – ricordo – memoria.

Fabio Rossinelli, Dr., Lecturer at the University of Lausanne, Centre of International History and Political Studies of Globalization, and Scientific Collaborator at the University of Geneva, Department of Geography and Environment; <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-7479-0427>.

Filiberto Ciaglia, PhD Student at the Sapienza University of Rome, Department of Letters and Modern Cultures; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2258-0072>.

