
Research value of 19th and 20th centuries unpublished diaries of missionaries and others in the Unisa Hesse Collection of German Africana

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Abstract

The Unisa Library's Hesse Collection of German Africana has acquired a number of very valuable and unique diaries over the years. Diaries have an exceptional cultural historical value and can provide new thoughts and new information, but above all they can also provide warmth and life. This is something that an official record seldom achieves. The study of archival documentation, including diaries, tends to heighten the understanding of the study of history as a deductive process. This article focuses on the possible research value of diaries to contemporary scholars in subjects such as missiology, theology, geography, anthropology and history. The missionary diaries in the Unisa Archives provide information on subjects such as land ownership, social and cultural history, folklore, the development of African languages as written languages, genealogies of tribal chiefs, traditional medicines, religious and educational matters, etc. As a result of the transcriptions of the handwritten Sütterlin Schrift manuscript German diaries, 21st century researchers have easier access to the information in the diaries. Furthermore, the article describes the diaries of Otto Robert Belling, Otto Posselt, Carl Kadach, Johan Albert Nachtigal, Carl Adolf Gustav Hoffmann, Hermann Friedrich Kuschke and his wife Adele Steinwender. It is hoped that the study will promote and encourage the exploration and usage of original diaries for research purposes as they may well help to stimulate new academic research.

Key words: Diaries, missionaries, Hesse Collection of German Africana, archives

1 Introduction

Over the years the Archives and Special Collections, which is part of the Unisa Library, have acquired a number of very valuable and unique collections which are invaluable to present and future researchers. In an article called Making history live, McFadden (1998) argued that "in this age of computers and online information sources, it is easy to forget that students should also be taught how to handle and conduct research using primary documents". By using archives, which includes diaries, students learn to write from original source materials without having to rely on interpretations found within published histories. The study of archival documentation tends to heighten the understanding of the study of history as a deductive process. Most of Unisa's archival collections were donated and not purchased. These collections are kept under archival conditions and may be accessed via the computer catalogue, printed catalogues and other finding aids. The focus of this study is on the possible research value of the diaries to contemporary scholars in subjects such as missiology, theology, geography, anthropology and history and to encourage further exploration of the Hesse Collection.

2 Background to the Hesse Collection of German Africana

The Hesse Collection was initiated by Dr AO Hesse (1904-1979), a German lecturer of Berlin missionary stock who taught at Unisa from 1958 to 1972. Over the years, many unpublished diaries (mainly 19th and 20th centuries missionaries of the Berlin and Hermannsburg Mission Societies), biographies, original manuscripts, publications and rare

periodicals were added to the collection. Not all the diaries are original, as many of them are carbon copies or photocopies. In 1981 the Library bought and added 28 volumes of photocopies of transcribed archival materials (which include diaries of the Rhenish Mission) collected by Dr H Vedder under the title *Quellen zur Geschichte von Sudwest-Afrika*, to the Hesse Collection.

The missionary diaries provide information on subjects such as land ownership, social and cultural history, folklore, the development of African languages as written languages, genealogies of tribal chiefs, traditional medicines, religious and educational matters, etc. The fact that the diaries are written in German, however, has unfortunately made them inaccessible to many of the younger local researchers as fewer South Africans nowadays study German. In addition, the old cursive Gothic handwriting is virtually obsolete and to most of us it could just as well be hieroglyphics. The Library is grateful to people such as Dr Hesse and others who have assisted with the transcription of the German diaries in the Collection. Thanks to these endeavours, 21st century researchers have easier access to the information in the diaries. In some cases, Dr Hesse transcribed and translated the German handwritten text directly into Afrikaans. Although these translations are useful to Afrikaans researchers with no knowledge of German, it has less value for others. In the Collection there is also the German diary of Superintendent Karl Otto Ernst Müller (1873-1961) which Ursula Nicolson has translated and abridged into English for the benefit of her family members who do not understand German (Nicolson 2005).

3 Diaries transcribed by Dr Hesse

Dr Hesse transcribed several diaries of the German missionaries which are discussed below.

3.1 Otto Robert Belling Anglo-Boer War Diary

In 1961, Dr Hesse did the transcription and translation of a complete diary from the original German Gothic handwriting into Afrikaans. It was the Anglo-Boer war diary of Otto Robert Belling (1867- 1961). The diary describes the period January 1900 to September 1902 in the Belling family's life. It was a time of turmoil. Belling, his wife Stienie and children were taken as prisoners of war by train and ox-wagon to Lourenco Marques from where they sailed for Lisbon and then sent to the Caldas da Rainha Camp. The family experienced separation, loneliness, hunger and much hardship during their stay in Portugal from 7 April 1901 until their return to Pretoria on 20 July 1902. Prof OJO Ferreira (2000) makes special reference to the important research value of the Belling diary in his publication *Viva os Boers!: boeregeïnterneerdes in Portugal tydens die Anglo-Boereoorlog, 1899-1902*. In his introduction, Ferreira says *Kriptiese en noukeurige dagboeke soos die van OR Belling ...was feitlik onontbeurlik by die datering van gebeurtenisse en die identifisering van persone*. A diary can be a very valuable reference source to researchers who need to have the correct information about the exact names, dates of persons, events and occasions.

3.2 Otto Posselt's Diary (1877-1884) & Carl Kadach's Diary (1877-1898)

In 1962, Dr AO Hesse completed the transcription of Missionary Otto Posselt's diary. Bound together in this volume is also a fragment of Missionary Carl Kadach's diary as well as his reports covering the period 1898-1904 when he worked at Lobethal station in Sekhukhuneland.

Otto Posselt (1850 -?), a missionary of the Berlin Mission, arrived in 1875 from Berlin and worked at Phatametsane and Khalatlolu stations in the northeast of the old ZAR.

Life at the mission stations was hard - the missionaries had to build houses, schools and churches under difficult circumstances; they also suffered financially because of the locust menace, drought and cattle diseases. In addition the ongoing tribal wars between Mapoch and Mamphuru caused them and their converts much hardship. Posselt often mentions the exact biblical texts which he used in his sermons - this gives the researcher an indication of the religious instruction messages that were preached by the missionaries during the last quarter of the 19th century. Posselt often expressed nostalgia for Europe. On receiving a letter from home on 29 March 1877, he writes in his diary, *Gott sei Dank, nach langer Zeit ein Brief aus der Heimat. So ein Brief ist wie eine Oase in der Wüste* (p 11). The work ethics of the indigenous people caused him much frustration. He despairs their lack of the fruits of Christianity such as love and diligence. The final straw at the end was the nervous breakdown of Posselt's wife which led to his resignation from the mission society. In 1885 the family emigrated to Brazil.

Carl Kadach (1851-1912) became a victim of malaria shortly after his arrival from Europe. The disease afflicted him for the rest of his life and it made him very miserable at times. He had a talent for languages and translated a school reader into Sotho while working as a Berlin missionary at Botshabelo. The missionaries expected their converts to adhere to strict Christian moral ethics. They felt disappointed that many children were born out of wedlock at the mission station - out of the 46 children at the Lobethal station in 1904, 7 were born without their parents being married. Kadach also tells us in his diary that sixty-six persons were baptised at the mission station that same year (pp 285-286). The endurance, faith and perseverance of the German missionaries to spread the gospel in Africa in the face of setbacks and difficulties, remains admirable.

3.3 Johan Albert Nachtigal's Diaries 1861- 1899

Dr AO Hesse's 1973 monumental transcription of Johan Albert Nachtigal's two handwritten diaries allows researchers easy access to about 2000 pages of important genealogical, ethnological, geographical, anthropological and missionary data. Of special interest are the genealogical tables of the Bapedi, Swazi and Zulu tribal chiefs which Nachtigal compiled with great detail and accuracy. Both the original and the transcribed diaries are housed in the Unisa Archives. The pages are numbered and Dr Hesse also added an introduction as well as a chronological index to the transcription. This search ability increases the usefulness of the diaries. In the introduction, Dr Hesse gives an overview of the history of mission work, dating from 1737, in Southern Africa. The Berlin Mission Society sent the first missionaries to the Cape and Free State in 1824. They were Gregorowski, DA Kraut, AF Lange, Joh Schmidt and August Gebel. Ten years later a mission station Bethany was established with the assistance of Adam Kok, the Griqua leader, in the Free State area. The Hermannsburg Mission was established in Natal in 1854 and three years later they started working among the Bechuana in western Transvaal at the request of President Pretorius. Well-known names of missionaries of the Hermannsburg Mission include Johann and Heinrich Backeberg, Georg, Heinrich and August Behrens, Heinrich Christoph and Heinrich Wilhelm Schulenburg, Johann Penzhorn, Christoph, Karl and Heinrich Dedekind, Heinrich Johannes, Thomas and Ferdinand Jensen, Egmont Harms, Johann and Rudolf Tönsing and many others.

The Rhenish Mission Society was established in 1828 in South Africa. The first missionaries to arrive in the Cape were Paul Lückhoff, Gustav Zahn, Johann Gottlieb Leipoldt and Theobald von Wurmb. By the end of the 19th century there were forty Rhenish missionaries working in the Colony. Schools and churches became the focal points of the

mission stations. In South West Africa the missionaries had a difficult time. A settlement was established in 1864 at Otjimbingue which later developed in a training college, the Augustineum, for the training of teachers and evangelists.

According to Dr Hesse, one of the differences between the German and English missionaries was their attitude towards the indigenous languages. The British missionaries used the English language to spread the gospel, whereas the Germans concentrated on the use of the vernacular. The German missionaries made valuable contributions to the development of African languages on the continent. The first Zulu dictionary was compiled by the Berlin missionary Döhne. The first grammar and dictionary in Northern Sotho were the work of Missionary Karl Endemann. Other missionaries who wrote in Sotho include Hoffman, Knothe, Kuschke and Trümpelmann. Pioneering publications in the Herero language were compiled by the missionaries Hugo Hahn, Von Viehe, Kolbe and Irle. Dr H Vedder of the Rhenish Missionary Society was responsible for a San grammar.

Nachtigal started his missionary career in 1861 in Sekhukhuneland. He, Alexander Merensky and Carl Grützner received permission from the Bapedi Chief Sekwati, father of Sekhukhune, to establish a mission station at Khalatlolu. In the diaries Nachtigal gives vivid descriptions of cases of cannibalism, tribal wars and feuds, droughts, famine, the locust menace, the interaction with the Boer population (sometimes rather negative), baptism and wedding ceremonies, buildings they erected for converts, school examinations, synod meetings etc. During the time at Khalatlolu, Nachtigal often visited the other Berlin Missionaries Posselt, Döhne, Endemann, Koboldt, Merensky, Trümpelmann and others. There are many references to the cruelties of Sekhukhune and Mapoch in the diaries. In 1863 Brother Grützner, wife and child had to flee to the Boers in order to escape the wrath of Mapoch. Unfortunately, Nachtigal had to abandon the station in 1866 because of opposition from Sekhukhune. He too had to flee for his life. Nachtigal then founded a new mission station and school at Lydenburg. In May 1870 he returned to Germany for medical treatment for a throat infection. This treatment was not successful and he resigned during July 1875. He remained at Lydenburg until 1879 when he moved to Stellenbosch. In a letter of recommendation by Sir Bartle Frere to the Secretary of the Imperial and Royal Geographical Society in Vienna, dated 17 February 1880, Frere writes Mr Nachtigal's health having broken down, he returns to his native country, under medical advice and will, I hope during his stay in Europe publish some of the results of his labour in African Geography and Ethnology. He has, I believe, ever maintained the highest character for integrity and accuracy in his scientific researches (Part 1, volume 2, pp 278-279).

In 1883, Nachtigal and his second wife Marie Helene Oelze returned to Detmold in Germany. His book *Die altere Heidenmission in Sud-Afrika*, was published in Berlin in 1891. Eight years later, Nachtigal died in Germany.

4 Diaries transcribed by others

Besides Dr Hesse, there are diaries in the holdings transcribed by other people.

4.1 Carl Adolf Gustav Hoffmann's Diaries 1894-1910

The almost 500 hundred pages (single spacing) of transcription of the Berlin Missionary Carl Adolf Gustav Hoffmann's (1868 - 1962) eight volume diary, makes fascinating reading. The diaries cover the years 1894-1910. Hoffmann's literary style is completely different to that of the other rather serious German missionaries of his time. He used humour and poetry - both German and English, to tell us about his life as a missionary. Of special interest in the diaries

are Hoffmann's beautiful and sensitive illustrations - some in colour, and the pen sketches of the mission stations, the African people, his colleagues, animals (domestic and wild) and the landscape.

The Hesse Collection Archives have both the original and the transcribed diaries in its holdings. Hoffmann started his missionary career with Ernst Pauli in Mashonaland in Zimbabwe. His geographical descriptions are very detailed. The reader is transferred back a century in time and presented with clear descriptions of the mission stations and schools, the kraals, clothing, tattoos, hairdos, artwork (earthen and wicker ware), traditional medicines, music instruments etc. of the indigenous people. These images are further enhanced by the delightful and sometimes amusing drawings. Hoffmann's detailed descriptions have an important anthropological value as the geographical area, as well as the tribes is always clearly identified. His in- depth knowledge and analysis of the Sotho language and idioms are of special linguistic interest.

The mission work is conducted against the backdrop of the wars - tribal wars in Mashonaland, the wars against Maleboch and the Anglo-Boer War. After some time in Johannesburg, Hoffmann was transferred to Arkona in Sekhukhuneland where he studied the Sotho language. From 1904-1934, Hoffmann worked with great success as a missionary at Mphome-Kratzenstein in the district of Duiwelskloof.

4.2 Hermann Friedrich Kuschke's Diary 1877-1882

Other interesting diaries are those of Hermann Friedrich Kuschke (1853-1927) and his second wife Adele Steinwender (1857-1945). The Kuschke diaries were translated into Afrikaans in 1965 by his son George. The transcription is incomplete, as George Kuschke was unable to translate the parts of the diary which were written in shorthand. Hermann Kuschke completed his apprenticeship at a printing works in Berlin. He started his mission career at Riversdale in 1877 where he became engaged to his first wife Virginie Zabler, a teacher. He had to wait for permission and approval from the Mission Directorate in Berlin before he was allowed to marry his bride. The Mission Directorate was a powerful body and all prospective wives of the missionaries first had to get official approval before they could marry. In 1879 Kuschke was transferred to Königsberg in the district of Newcastle. On his arrival in January, he found that the Missionary Prozesky had abandoned the station because of the Zulu wars. With a group of refugees, the mission station was restarted during February. Kuschke immediately started to learn Zulu. By 13th April he was ready to deliver his first sermon in Zulu (p 42).

Kuschke gives an interesting description of politics during the period of the first Anglo-Transvaal War of 1881. According to him the Boers under the leadership of Gen Joubert never misused the white flag during battles as is sometimes wrongly suggested. Kuschke's personal life was filled with hardship. His first wife Virginie Zabler, died in childbirth in 1883. She was ill. No doctor within 100 miles, no telegraph.....strong medicine, collapse, death. Next day 5 pm she and her child in the coffin; the funeral bell is tolling (p 58).

In 1908 the Rev Kuschke compiled a paper Natives of South Africa: a review and a forecast which he delivered at the Transvaal Missionary Association Conference. This paper gives us some insight into Kuschke's views on race relations and the reasons for his beliefs. The Transvaal Leader commented on these issues in its leader on 30 September 1908. According to statistics quoted by the Rev Kuschke, South Africa had at that stage 31 mission societies working in the country, 732 ordained European missionaries, 202 ordained native missionaries, and nearly 300 000 natives and coloured church members. Mr Kuschke might

have added that many of those who glibly decry missionaries could not live in Africa for a day but for the pioneering the missionaries have done.

4.3 Adele Steinwender's Diary 1885-1989

Adele Steinwender's diary starts in 1885 in Cape Town. She writes about her lonely life as governess for the Grützner children at Bethany in the Free State. Adele also played the piano at church services. In the diary she complains bitterly about the children's lack of discipline and the nonchalant attitude of the parents on the matter. Because she did not want the children to forget their German heritage, Adele did much to remind them about events in Germany. On 11 March 1888 she organised a memorial service for the children to commemorate the death of Kaizer Wilhelm (p 22). She contemplates the social pressures that a woman of a certain age has to marry. Fortunately the diary ends on a happy note on 19 December 1889. She is filled with happiness, knowing that she is deeply in love with Hermann Kuschke, the man whom she would be marrying the following year. This diary gives the researcher an insight into the lifestyle of an unmarried woman a century ago and the role played by society at the time.

5 Conclusion

These diaries represent but a fraction of the many diaries in the Hesse Collection of German Africana. The diaries offer researchers a fascinating view of the historical, cultural, educational, scientific and economic contributions made by German-speaking people in the 19th and 20th centuries to the development of this part of the world.

As archivist, I would like to promote and encourage the exploration and usage of original diaries for research purposes as they may well help to stimulate new academic research. For too long the focus of historical archival research has been the official records of government, local authorities and even church records. The value of these German diaries lies in the fact that they offer the researcher the opportunity to share the lives of individuals interacting against the backdrop of their past, to experience their struggle to adapt and to survive in a strange new country with many cultures and languages. Contemporary diaries are important as they often provide researchers with an accurate and realistic insight into the physical and mental circumstances of the diarists. The objectivity and empathy with which the German diarists view Southern Africa and its peoples, is at times quite remarkable. These 19th and 20th century diaries will always have an exceptional cultural historical value - not only can they offer the researcher fresh insights and new information, but above all they can also provide warmth and life. This is something that an official record seldom achieves.

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