

A TECHNOLOGICALLY DISADVANTAGED HERITAGE - A CASE STUDY OF MORIJA ARCHIVES

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A. OVERVIEW

Morija Archives hosts a unique collection, begun by the first missionary to Masitise mission, Rev. Ellenberger (1835-1920). This valuable collection was preserved and augmented by several missionaries to Lesotho, most notably Rev. Jaccottet with his extensive work on the linguistics resulting in his Sesotho English Dictionary (1956), and Rev. Albert Brutsch (1916-2004). The collection falls under the ownership of the Lesotho Evangelical Church (LEC), which was previously known as the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society (PEMS). The Archives holds material which forms part of the unique history of the Basotho nation. This treasure includes colonial records such as Blue books and other post-independence law and government reports, a wide range of manuscripts in the form of missionary correspondence, church registers, the first newspaper in Lesotho dating back to 1863 to date, called *Leselinyana la Lesotho*. There is also a wide collection of material in French, the most valuable being *Journal des Missions Evangeliques*, and a few books in German as well. The Linguistic section contains material in many other African languages that form certain links with the wider mission work in Africa, the largest being books written in the local official language, Sesotho. There are millions of photographs, maps, several monographs, dealing with Lesotho scenery and mission work in general. The history of education is housed within starting with articles in some PEMS mission journals, *Basutoland Witness*, growing into government ministerial reports. Music is on a high note with collections of the first hymnals resounding throughout the southern part of the African continent in the local *Sesotho* language, *Lifela tsa Sione*, composed by some missionaries, growing into other components of well-known Yoruba music, and elements of the most renowned Basotho composers of choral music such as J.P. Mohapeloa and others.

B. SCOPE

This paper hence, seeks to showcase the importance of this collection, and how best to ensure that these Records are preserved herein in the best way possible in their different formats, yet the reality of it being that they are unfortunately located in a milieu of a technologically disadvantaged third world country, even creating hiccups and hurdles in exposing it to the Lesotho nation, its neighboring territories, the wider African Diaspora, as well as the rest of the world. The aim is therefore, to continuously bring this precious heritage to date with most recent publications, not leaving out the most crucial element of preservation being the upgrading of the electronic systems that will stretch our horizons even further in this ever growing techno-world, in order to satisfy the demands of the researchers worldwide and the public it serves.

C. EARLY PUBLICATIONS

The earliest and indeed most precious publications housed within Morija Archives are mainly “19th century Sesotho books, ...numerous items in French, several English and one or two German books” (Lassare, 1987). The Sesotho books include the most ancient bible commentaries such as *Topollo e entsoeng ki Yesu Kereste (1840)*, which was also translated into Xhosa by Richard Haddy. The list of all publications that follow, as printed with details in the end pages of Lassare’s book, not only lists books dealing with church liturgy and other bible based publications, but move towards the direction of grammar books. This collection later included novels in the local language, outstandingly the well-known novel of its first kind to be known in the whole of southern Africa by a renowned author of all times Thomas Mofolo, with the publication of his first novel *Pitseng that came out* in 1907. Another prominent record in the native language is the church newspaper *Leselinyana la Lesotho*, which was the first of its kind in Lesotho and it became most popular throughout the country, with its publication now celebrated as having reached its 150th mark, from 1863-2013.

The Morija Archives have become the Depository for all church records of the PEMS/LEC church, so all church registers of the 19th century up to present are housed within - that is the whole range of minutes books, marriage, membership and baptismal registers. These remain the most useful records in the country with special reference made to the recent exercise by government to issue each citizen with a birth certificate and other identity documents.

By the turn of the century correspondence, especially in French, had also reached its peak as letter writing was the only form of communication at the time. Letters of the first missionaries, Casalis and Arbousset, together with others who joined the mission later such as Dieterlen have made a mark in history with their collection of correspondence which depicts all the changes that occurred brought about by Christianity and colonialism henceforth. Moshoeshoe’s letters by Casalis for instance show actual conversations of agreement as treaties were signed between The British colonial government and Basutoland which later became a colony under British protection as a result. Colonialism added a touch of the Queen’s tongue with many colonial reports written in English. In order to reach a much wider readership, missionary history books originally in French were translated into English such as the famous *The Basutos* by Eugene Casalis.

D. EFFORTS TOWARDS BETTER PRESERVATION

Taking on the baton passed down by great Archival record keepers from the conception of the Morija Archives to present, has been a long and difficult journey. Starting with Rev. D.F. Ellenberger’s efforts to manually “catalogue..lists...of unpublished manuscripts” (Lasserre, 1987), and his great successors like Jacottet, whose collection travelled over the oceans to “be preserved in the [PEMS] headquarters in Paris to rescue from his house after his death”, only to be retrieved later and brought back home to Morija “..as part of an important [linguistic] archival collection that would be increasingly useful to researchers with the passage of time.” (Gill, 2005). It had been hoped that the earliest Ellenberger catalogue would be typeset at Morija printing Works in 1987, the mission press that was run by Ellenbeger himself, but at the time a better technological option was suggested to be printing it on a an

Amstrad PVW8256 word processor instead. Present day efforts, in a milieu of an ever growing technology is such that modern policies were formulated, with increased training to slowly gap the bridge between the technologically barren heritage centres such as Morija Archives and highly developed ones elsewhere.

1. POLICIES

Recent heritage policies have been drafted with the aim to include more technologically advanced systems in Africa as a whole over the last ten years through efforts made especially by Africa2009 campaigns in their endeavor to reach out to all African nations in a practical way to boost awareness and technical skills. However much as plans have been mapped out properly there remains the domineering problem of lack of funding and technical know-how. Governments and curriculum developers in Africa are rather slow in this regard of including the very basic courses that will increase knowledge on the most fundamental needs of today. However, with great outreach awareness building campaigns carried out by WIPO over the last five years in Lesotho and indeed other LDCs in Africa, there is an apparent shift and change in perception as a result of most obvious technological developments and unprecedented globalization that has forced policy makers to establish mechanisms for stimulating innovation and access to knowledge especially with regard to technological transfer.

2. TRAINING

i. Attachments

There has been great pressure built up over the past two decades for most heritage centres in Africa to receive proper training with regard to good preservation of heritage. Morija Archives took the initiative also to act at that stage to link with other documentation centres such as The Cory Library and The English Library, both based in Grahamstown in South Africa, for attachments and training in 1998 and again in 2001. Similar regular opportunities arose once more with other institutions such as the National Archives in Bloemfontein, South Africa . These links served to raise better awareness in exposing the employees of Morija Archives to persist in creating better electronic data retrieval methods, and join the rest of world in slowly turning our backs on old card catalogue systems.

ii. Technical Training

Africa2009 was a major initiative that took it upon its shoulders to invite all African countries to part-take in technical courses that would better equip heritage workers with basic skills with funding from ICCROM, UNESCO and other world leading sponsors in culture and heritage sectors. Involving practical field sessions one would easily manipulate acquired skills to upgrade their own Heritage for better preservation, such as designing simple databases, and making proper inventories that would meet the expected standards in an ever advancing techno-world.

iii. Workshops

The Documentalist took advantage of all workshops offered aimed at forming links for better information and tackling disturbing situations of backwardness together nationwide as Information centres, Libraries and other heritage sites.

3. DATABASE

In the absence of sufficient funding to purchase highly recommended software for library and archival collections, such as In Magic, in the past ten years, efforts were made to run a practical Word document inventory. However recent developments are such that a more affordable option of an autotomized database to suite our unique collection on MYSQL, using XAMMP software is in the process of being finalised to start cataloguing records with the help of a call-in consultant for future on-line research with over 200 records already listed.

4. DIGITIZATION

Through the courtesy of Family Search International (FSI), and Yale University, training took place in mid-2013 resulting in 1000 images being digitized daily per project, as the two are running parallel at the moment and soon leading to their closure.

5. WEB LINKS - not yet developed as preliminary processes are still in their very infant stages.

E. CHALLENGES AND DISADVANTAGES

1. RURAL SETTING - 45km south of the capital city, Maseru

Although Morija was foreseen as the centre of development at one stage, as the first French missionaries set up their first mission station in 1833, erecting new western buildings, and even developing water and drainage systems, to our dismay it remains quite rural yet with great potential for development. Perhaps it should have only been perceived this way in the absence of other foreign interventions, since it appears that the British overtook and prioritized other centres like Maseru, Leribe and others for their own administrative purposes. The missionaries even took a step further to establish a power-station called Morija Electric Light (MEL) as far back as 1947 (*Basutoland Witness*, 1947) , which only functioned for certain hours in the evening. Sadly, even today with all national efforts made, power cuts frequent this institution, even the village at large, calling for extra backup to boost electronic devices in order for work to continue, otherwise the whole village hangs in limbo.

2. THIRD WORLD SITUATION

The reality in most third world countries is sadly that development is much slower than usual. To a large extent one would somewhat view a third world country such as Lesotho tagging behind at snails pace trying its hardest to chase after the rest of the world which is faster moving. Although Lesotho envisions to be “well established technologically” as part of its prospective statement for vision 2020, there is no clear structure to quicken the progress towards the realization of this goal. Indeed if government

remains the main funding source for such developments, especially in the only two institutions of higher learning, endeavors of such nature remain inadequate. It is true that at the turn of the century perceptions and dreams were such that “newer technologies” would come into gear with “increase of space for archival materials and researchers, as well as provide for an all-purpose room for multi-media presentations and seminars..” (Gill, 2006), but that remains a dream. It is a frustrating, no win situation working with ancient software and machines that are long overdue for upgrading and improvements to fully meet the demands of the modern day fast moving techno-world.

3. LACK OF FINANCES

In a milieu of a third world country, finances are a huge challenge. The government only pays subventions for some staff members, but funding is extremely limited. The national budget favours other departments and ministries, with low priority on the Heritage & cultural centres.

4. LACK OF MANPOWER

The Archives have only one permanent employee, with one temporary assistant and one volunteer, for that matter therefore, the workload remains enormous. This calls for a better volunteer and internship systems both nationally and internationally.

5. OUTDATED LAWS AND DORMANT POLICIES

Much as government has dared to fill in long lacking gaps of drafting of policies, the problem remains continuous shelving of such policies, with priorities geared towards other responsibilities. For instance, the 1967 Archives Act that included the church Archives of Morija, as “the Morija Section”, seems to have been totally overlooked, leaving Morija Archives no sense of belonging. But fortunately with the growth of numerous mushrooming information centres, such issues are once more being brought to the round table meetings, even resulting in a much more recent Heritage Policy of 2011. The hope is that since major restructuring from 2004, action might be taken to reconsider long neglected heritage centres like Morija Archives.

6. LOW TECHNICAL SKILLS

The most appalling situation is such that there are very few trained archivists nationwide. According to the document explaining legal framework from the Registrar General’s Office “the National Science, Technology and Innovation Policy of 2006-2011, is expected to provide the country with new capacities to enhance competitiveness [even]..in the global market” yet there remains the “need to formulate policies that will [practically]..help guide such activities in the country” and their integration in retrospect.

Library Science was only introduced in 2009 as a course at the National University of Lesotho. However the same course is still at its most basic stages as it is only offered at diploma level, and one cannot proceed further to expertise level at this stage.

F. RECENT PUBLICATIONS AND RESEARCH PAPERS

Despite all odds the Morija Archives continues to catch the attention of many scholars and researchers worldwide, even unravelling hidden mysteries of the past in the form of book publications recently launched in Morija itself. These are:

1. *Quest for Peace: an Ecumenical History of the Church in Lesotho* by Craig Hinks (2009)
2. *The Evangelical Missionaries and the Basotho, 1833-1933* by Kybel G. de Clark (Phd. Thesis of Dr. of Literature & History, University of South Africa, 2000)
3. *Murder at Morija* by Tim Couzens (2003)
4. *Mekolokotoane kerekeng ea Evangeli Lesotho: Jubilee Highlights 1833-2008*
5. *Throwing Down White Man* by Peter Sanders (2012)
6. *A Short History of Lesotho* by Stephen Gill (1995)

Some theses are still in the process of being researched using primary source material housed therein by both masters and Phd. students from Italy, France, Garbon and USA mainly referring to the Ellenberger manuscripts, the old *Leselinyana* newspaper publications, as well as colonial records and handwritten correspondence in order to meet the requirements of their respective programs. Translation work is also a prerequisite in order to fully understand the material where language barriers may exist.

G. CONCLUSION

With continued exposure of this precious collection that links cultures in its diverse history, it is evident that more research papers and books will be published, in order to bring this treasure to life. One can clearly see how the preservation of these old records have helped to let today's generation to learn from the past. Thanks to the missionaries who preserved this treasure even under very difficult situations. The task remains with this generation, hence, to carry on the good work with best storage and preservation methods in order to pass it on to the future generations.

Although the process may be relentless, even moving at snails pace, somehow this heritage will surely reach its ultimate goal of being exposed even electronically on-line for future researchers.

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