

Livingstone's 1871 Field Diary: A Multispectral Critical Edition
(<http://livingstone.library.ucla.edu/1871diary/>)

The Livingstone Spectral Image Archive
(http://livingstone.library.ucla.edu/livingstone_archive/)

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In 1871, when the world had lost track of David Livingstone's acclaimed expedition in search of the source of the Nile River, Livingstone spent several months in Nyangwe, an Arab trading settlement on the eastern bank of the Lualaba River in what is now the Maniema Province of the Democratic Republic of Congo. His expedition had taken much more time than expected due to illness, accidents, forested terrain and the continuing resistance of his so-called "Banian slaves" (a group of liberated Zanzibari slaves who had been hired to assist him). Running out of provisions, he spent almost four months in Nyangwe negotiating for a canoe in order to continue his travels downstream the Lualaba. On the 15th and 16th of July, however, Livingstone witnessed a horrifying massacre of men and women who had come to the Nyangwe regional market and were slaughtered by slave and ivory traders and their armed auxiliaries. Livingstone was so shocked by these events that he aborted his further travel plans and returned to his operating base at Ujiji near Lake Tanganyika, where, in the weeks after his arrival, he famously met Henry Morton Stanley, who had been sent by the *New York Herald* to look for the lost British explorer. The meeting of these two men, and Stanley's iconic "Dr. Livingstone, I presume," came to resonate widely in the imperial imagination. Moreover, Livingstone's vivid description of the Nyangwe massacre, reaching the British public through a letter taken to England by Stanley after he left Livingstone in Ujiji, contributed to create the momentum for British abolitionists to suppress the Zanzibar slave trade in 1873.

This story is very well-known. In Victorian England, Livingstone had already established his fame as a missionary-explorer through his 1857 book *Missionary Travels and Researches* recounting an earlier transcontinental journey. Moreover, in 1874 Livingstone's friend Horace Waller posthumously published *The Last Journals of David Livingstone in Central Africa* on the basis of Livingstone's so-called Unyanyembe journal from 1872. Both Waller's edited journals and the 1872 version, (re)written by Livingstone himself from pocket notebooks kept during his travels, have been available ever since. The editorial differences between the 1874 *Last Journals* and the 1872 journal have been extensively described by Dorothy Helly in 1987 and reveal how Waller significantly altered several passages in order to create the image of Livingstone as an imperial hero.

This scholarly work of understanding the "making-of" Livingstone and his *Last Journals* in Victorian imaginations can now

be taken one step further. The original texts written during his last expedition (1866-1873), on which both the 1872 and 1874 journals are based, consist of seventeen notebooks sent to Britain both before and after Livingstone's death. These notebooks, which survive until today, were, however, interrupted by a significant chronological gap. During his travels through the Maniema area, Livingstone ran out of pocketbooks and started to keep his so-called Manyema diary (1870-1871) on maps, sheets, envelopes, book pages and newspapers, often using ink made from local berry seeds. A large part of this Manyema diary was missing until in 2009 and 2010 a volunteer archivist working for Adrian Wisnicki—an expert in Victorian colonial literature from the Indiana University of Pennsylvania—gradually discovered this “lost” field diary in the archives of the David Livingstone Centre in Blantyre, Scotland. Unfortunately, most of this text, written on 44 folia of *The Standard* newspaper, was illegible. Wisnicki, therefore, set up the *David Livingstone Spectral Imaging Project* to restore the diary's text by using spectral image processing in order to compensate for the fading of Livingstone's handwriting. In November 2011, the full text of the Nyangwe Field Diary (23 March - 11 August 1871) and several additional diary pages (11 August - 3 November 1871) have been made accessible as a free online public resource published by the UCLA Digital Library Program in Los Angeles.

The publication immediately drew considerable interest. The recovery of the “lost 1871 massacre diary” stimulated the imagination of the international press and Wisnicki's team skilfully played into this fascination by launching press releases about their results on the symbolic date of 1 November 2011 (or 1/11/11), that is, 140 years after the supposed Livingstone-Stanley meeting. The website itself offers the opportunity to read the recovered 1871 Nyangwe field diary next to the corresponding sections of the 1872 Unyanyembe journal and the 1874 *Last Journals*, thereby facilitating comparison between these three textual “stages.” The website also offers substantial background information on Livingstone's expedition, on the manuscript itself, critical notes on its structure and composition, a detailed history of the *David Livingstone Spectral Imaging Project* and technical information about spectral imaging, image processing and data management. Although the website could be made more user-friendly and more conveniently arranged—especially for non-initiates in data management and XML coding—its main strength lies in the processed images which reveal the almost tactile materiality of Livingstone's handwriting.

According to the website, the publication of the “lost” diary offers direct access to the “real” and “unedited” Livingstone, enabling readers to rehearse—as it were—Stanley's heavily mediated quest for the lost explorer. The diary would shed new light on the possible complicity of Livingstone's *own* expedition members in the Nyangwe massacre and show Livingstone as an anxious soul trying to grasp what was going on. The diary would also reveal his “spontaneous” anger and call for revenge, his doubts, horror, uncertainties and profoundly ambiguous attitudes towards “Arabs” and his “Banian slaves.” As

such, the diary would unmask the real “truth” in the heart of darkness and enable a further postcolonial “exploration” towards the “dark” complicity of the dedicated abolitionist hero. For instance, it contributed to a new biography by Stephen Tomkins, called *David Livingstone: The Unexplored Story* (2013). To a certain extent, the deconstruction of Victorian myth-making is legitimate and necessary, but such a deconstructive project should be wary of using the same tropes, terms and metaphors—“unexplored,” “rediscovered,” “lost,” “original record,” “inaccessible,” “a journey”—used by the explorers themselves and by those who went looking after them.

The claims made by Wisnicki and his team, their reappraisal of Livingstone’s project and their disclosure of his inner “darkness,” need to be backed up by considerable further research. For the time being, a first glance at the diary itself makes these claims look rather overstated. Indeed, the 1871 text does not offer much new information in comparison with the 1872 and 1874 versions. It is rather what is *not* written in the field diary, and what thus has been *added* in the later versions, that seems most interesting. Moreover, it is not so much the diary’s content as its material *form*—its texture, handwriting, spelling mistakes, frantic pace, its fragmentary nature, incoherence, erasures and corrections, blots and stains—that make this “discovery” of interest to scholars in postcolonial studies and African history. It is not so much an “unmediated” window on “raw” reality as a textual reflection of what Johannes Fabian (2000) has called the “ecstasis” of exploration. In part because it contains even *less* representations of “African voices” than the 1872 and 1874 versions, the 1871 field diary might not offer much new information for anthropologists and historians, but, as an often “ecstatic” manuscript, it certainly has great value.

Works Cited

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