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### Review

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# Review

## The David Livingstone Spectral Imaging Project

David Livingstone's Manyema Diary suffered nearly as much as the Doctor himself during years of trekking across Africa. Today the diary is in a perilous state and remains inaccessible to the public in an effort to preserve its crumbling pages. It is in just such cases that digital publishing can make the biggest impact by displaying manuscripts that must otherwise be cordoned off from handling by even the most conscientious researchers. The David Livingstone Spectral Imaging Project was launched in 2010 in order to restore selected writings of Scotland's most prominent abolitionist, explorer, missionary, and, as this year's Bicentenary commemorations attest, a national icon. The Livingstone Project uses spectral imaging technology to restore to view a series of faded, illegible texts written during Livingstone's final African expedition. These include Livingstone's previously unpublished letter of 5 February 1871, known as the letter to Bambarre, and Livingstone's 1871 Field Diary, a personal account of the slave trade and events leading up to the notorious meeting with Henry Stanley.

The 1871 Field Diary adds yet another account of the Nyangwe massacre to those already known through the 1871 letter, the 1872 journal, the 1874 journals edited by Horace Waller, and Stanley's retellings. There are crucial differences that will be of public interest. For example, the 1871 Field Diary is written from the perspective of an eyewitness observer caught up in a bewildering set of events that initially defy comprehension; the author's shift from daily to hourly entries captures this sense of immediacy. By contrast, the existing accounts were written with the benefit of hindsight and the time necessary to shape events into a coherent narrative. The website's overview juxtaposes key differences among the various accounts and even ventures its own hypothesis (admittedly unprovable without further evidence) that Livingstone's party may have contributed to the Nyangwe atrocities.

The Livingstone Project demonstrates how digital technology can make us unexpectedly aware of the materiality of texts. This lesson is vividly brought out by Livingstone's diaries, begun on pocket-sized notebooks and continued on any available material including pages from a book of sermons, a Royal Geographical Society map, and old newspapers. The Field Diary itself was written across leaves cut from an issue of *The Standard*. The website usefully distinguishes between the 'undertext' (the newsprint) and 'overttext' (Livingstone's handwriting) when referring to such palimpsests. Livingstone's unorthodox methods of writing pose acute challenges to archivists since much of the diary was written using ink made from a local African clothing dye that has faded to the point of invisibility. Viewing the folia preserving Livingstone's handwriting made me think far more about the conditions of writing in nineteenth-century Africa than would have been the case if I had encountered the text through a printed transcription.

The story of the manuscript's recovery is itself a fascinating one – more Stanley than Livingstone in its sensational journey. The search began with Project Director Adrian Wisnicki's fruitless efforts to locate the manuscript of Livingstone's 1871 Field Diary. Trips to the National Library of Scotland and the David Livingstone Centre turned up illegible fragments. A plea for help sent to the email discussion forum hosted by the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading, and Publishing brought Wisnicki into contact with a spectral imaging team based in Maryland that was eager to try out their techniques, designed for parchment, on paper. After archivists recovered the Field Diary's missing pages, the Livingstone Project was formally announced in July 2010 with the publication of the letter to Bambarre, its first multispectral critical edition and a prototype for the forensic examinations to come.

The 1871 Field Diary is beautifully presented in vivid color images that are as impressive for their technological fluency as for their recovery of Livingstone's prose. The images preserve the best aspects of textual editing while also allowing for forms of textual manipulation, comparison, and

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searching that would be difficult, if not impossible, in print formats. The Multispectral Critical Edition of Livingstone's manuscript makes it easy for viewers to analyze the text by affording them multiple ways of doing so. One can scrutinize pages from the 1871 Field Diary, compare natural light images alongside processed spectral images of the manuscript, or judge the three versions of Livingstone's text alongside one another. The synchronized scrolling feature is especially useful for making comparisons, and the documents are available for download in PDF or XML formats. For me, the manuscript images are the website's most enticing feature. Apparently I am not alone in this sentiment. A colleague informs me that Wisnicki's presentation at a recent conference on Victorian literature drew gasps from the audience.

The website is easy to navigate according to the viewer's interests. Historians can go straight to the recovered manuscripts, bibliographers to the critical apparatus, and computational humanists to the data management objectives. The project speaks successfully to multiple constituencies that have little in common with one another. The supplementary material makes the website useful for viewers not familiar with Livingstone, but it will be most useful to experts.

The term 'critical edition' is not used lightly here. This is very much a scholarly rather than a popular presentation. The site takes considerable time to work through because it is so replete with scholarly apparatus. Additional features include a biographical account of Livingstone, bibliographic accounts of the manuscripts, an extensive reading list, and more. The 'Critical Notes' area, which describes the documents from an editor's point of view, contains everything from a description of Livingstone's methods of composition to an account of the website designer's XML encoding practices. There is even a press section – as close as the website gets to the sensationalism of Stanley.

The Livingstone Project's scrupulously documented account of manuscript restoration using spectral imaging technology will be a model for other scholars working in the digital humanities. The Project's exhaustive documentation reflects current interest among practitioners in the process of building an archive as much as in the archive itself. One of the most intriguing elements of digital history is its capacity to preserve the paper trail with a meticulousness that would be impossible in print media. The 'Project History & Archive' section of the website contains over sixty downloadable files chronicling each step in the restoration process. The key documents are available for download, of course, but so are many others that have traditionally been hidden from sight in finished editions. These include the initial grant application submitted to the National Endowment for the Humanities, the original index entry for Livingstone's manuscript at the David Livingstone Centre, and the email correspondence among participants. The website is not exaggerating when it promises an 'intimate' glimpse through such files. There is even a photograph of the staff having dinner together.

My one reservation is that the website tries to do too much. After all, the material presented here represents only a modest portion of Livingstone's overall body of work. Yet the project is an enormous undertaking involving nearly two dozen people. The designers might have presented the material with a smaller critical apparatus, and in doing so directed viewers to other scholarly resources to avoid duplicating material better documented elsewhere. The website would still be a valuable resource without much of the supplementary material. Sometimes less is more.

Nevertheless, the Livingstone Project exemplifies what humanities initiatives are capable of when sufficiently funded in these times of austerity. The eighteen-month collaboration between an international cohort of archivists, historians, programmers, and scientists was made possible through the support of, by my count, at least a dozen sponsors including the National Trust for Scotland, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the British Academy. The resulting website is one of the most impressive examples I have come across of the potential use of new media to enhance existing bibliographic methods. The use of spectral imaging to illuminate Livingstone's manuscripts with successive wavelengths of light is itself an innovative tool. Yet the leadership of a humanities scholar who understands the value of the manuscripts strikes me as equally important to the project's success. The website might not have been as effective in its presentation without the collaboration among different disciplines on display here.

One other advantage that digital editions hold over their print counterparts is that the website will continue to evolve in the years to come. The team has plans for future critical editions involving Livingstone's Bambarre Field Diary and selected letters from Manyema, and perhaps other

collaborative projects drawing on the holdings of the David Livingstone Center and the National Library of Scotland. Let us hope that we have not heard the last of the Livingstone Project.

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