

Templin, Brigitte; Gottfried Böhme (Hrsg.): *Jobelmann, Hans, Aus Afrika. ... Tagebücher, Briefe, Zeichnungen und Photographien 1907-1909*. Lübeck: Schmidt-Römhild Verlag 2017. ISBN: 978-3-7950-5238-6; 264 S.

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Recent years have seen a growing interest in German colonial history. Not only have there been a lot of new publications over this decade. Furthermore, with the 2016 exhibition „Deutscher Kolonialismus“ in the German Historical Museum, debates about the renaming of streets in many German cities, and the (hesitant) official recognition of the Herero and Nama genocide, colonialism is finally becoming a part of public memory in Germany. As the current discussion about the Humboldt-Forum in Berlin shows, this new movement is intertwined with an interest in the history of museal collections.¹ As most museums were founded in the 19th century, the bulk of their overseas collections stems from the colonial period. All over Europe, scholars as well as activists apply the methods of provenance research to the origin of collections from the Global South. How were these collections acquired? Which scientific or political ends did they serve? And what should be done with them in the future?

The origin of colonial objects and knowledge are also the main interests of the book edited by Brigitte Templin and Gottfried Böhme (p. 14). It contains the private papers of Hans Jobelmann, a young German who traveled to the south of German Cameroon and to Spanish Guinea in 1907. For Templin, the volume seems to be a spin off product from her earlier editorial work. Until recently, she worked as director of the Völkerkundesammlung der Hans-estadt Lübeck. Since 2012, she published three volumes of Günther Tessmann's memoirs, the museum's most prominent collector.² When the Lübeck museum sent out Tessmann's „Pangwe-Expedition“ to the Fang-people of Spanish Guinea in 1907³, Jobelmann worked as its taxidermist and scientific illustrator.

In his private papers, Jobelmann painted a vivid picture of the expedition and of everyday life in a remote part of colonial Cameroon and its adjacent regions. Cameroon surely is Germany's least researched former African colony. Also, only very few new sources from private archives have become available to the public in recent years.⁴ This makes the edition of Jobelmann's papers, which are held in the Böhme family archive, a highly welcomed contribution for historians working on colonial Cameroon.

The editors start with a short introduction, giving additional information about Jobelmann's early life and family. It also summarizes his experiences in Cameroon and Spanish Guinea and closes with comments on the editorial work (pp. 9–15). Jobelmann's two diaries are the main body of the book, the first one beginning with his arrival in Hamburg in August 1907 and ending in December 1908 in southern Cameroon, the second ending in February 1909 shortly before his death. In addition to the diaries, the editors included Jobelmann's report on a journey into French Congo, a Batanga fairy tale, a poem, and, most importantly, Jobelmann's letters to his family, as well as some drawings and photos from the Fang expedition and his life on the southern border of Cameroon.

Jobelmann, born in 1888 in Berlin to a family of artists, arrived in Cameroon in September 1907 together with Tessmann. They traveled south into neighboring Spanish Guinea.

¹ See for example Larissa Förster / Iris Edenheiser / Sarah Fründt / Heike Hartmann (eds.), *Provenienzforschung zu ethnografischen Sammlungen der Kolonialzeit. Positionen in der aktuellen Debatte*, s.l. 2018; Anna-Maria Brandstetter / Vera Hierholzer (eds.), *Nicht nur Raubkunst! Sensible Dinge in Museen und universitären Sammlungen*, Göttingen 2018.

² Günter Tessmann, *Mein Leben. Tagebuch in 12 Bänden. Lübecker Beiträge zur Ethnologie Bde. 2, 3, 4*, edited by Sabine Dinslage and Brigitte Templin, Lübeck 2012–2015.

³ See Günter Tessmann, *Die Pangwe. Völkerkundliche Monographie eines westafrikanischen Negerstammes. Ergebnisse der Lübecker Pangwe-Expedition 1907-1909 und früherer Forschungen 1904-1907*, 2 vol., Berlin 1913.

⁴ See Leben Tessmann / Michael Kißkalt, *Das Tagebuch des Richard Edube Mbene und sein missionshistorischer Kontext*, Stuttgart 2014; Heinrich Vieter, „Die Jugend ist unsere Zukunft“. *Chronik der katholischen Mission Kamerun 1890-1913*, Friedberg 2011.

Upon reaching the Fang region, they built a base in Nkolentangan, where they commenced their research and their collection of objects albeit not without being faced with the odd quarrel. Almost constantly, Jobelmann suffered from Malaria and other diseases, whilst Tessmann frequently showed dissatisfaction with the quality of Jobelmann's drawings. In January 1908, they decided that Jobelmann should return home. He left Tessmann but missed the steamer to Hamburg. Stuck in the tiny colonial town of Campo, Jobelmann was employed by Werner Schladitz, a German elephant hunter and would-be planter living nearby. He decided to give Africa a second chance and worked as Schladitz' assistant on his small plantation in Meloko. There, he served as overseer, rubber trader, and collector of ethnographic as well as zoological objects. However, once again, he fell ill, and ultimately died of Malaria in May 1909 at the age of 21.

The most valuable and most detailed part of the book are Jobelmann's diaries. His letters are a worthwhile addition to them, but also the other parts of his papers may find utility. Jobelmann wrote about his work and his everyday experiences, but also reflected on his life, the world, and the strange new environment he found himself in. Therefore, his papers offer fascinating insights into his thoughts about African cultures and colonial life – the tension between „Neugier und Empathie, Ignoranz und Grausamkeit“ (p. 14), as the editors write. His diaries are in a spectacular contrast to the heroic tales published contemporarily by European colonial actors. Jobelmann also went on expeditions, killed in battle, and collected for German museums (pp. 65, 146, 100). However, he was full of doubts, half dead from disease, and pitifully homesick. Colonialism was not for everybody. Indeed, maybe most Europeans who went to the colonies suffered just like him.

Jobelmann's account is much more than a useful second perspective on Tessmann's Pangwe-Expedition. His writings give new insights into many fields of interest of scholars of German colonialism. As Jobelmann worked for museums before, while, and after he had been with Tessmann, collecting plays a huge role in his writings. Jobelmann gives a

lot of information on how he was able to get his hands on ethnographical or zoological objects. We learn that usually he and Tessmann bought objects from their owners. However, Jobelmann is very frank about occasional violent acquisitions of objects. For example, when he and Tessmann got into conflict with their Omwang-neighbors, he wrote in his diary: „Wir plünderten nun das Dorf auf Ethnographika hin und steckten die Häuser an“ (pp. 76–77). On other occasions, he accepted people's refusal to sell him objects (p. 71). We also learn about Jobelmann's personal thoughts on Africans and Europeans as he made numerous comments and observations on race, gender, and other facets of colonial life. The (fictional?) announcement of his engagement with a girl named Ua Mange is surely one of the volume's highlights (pp. 11–12).

Moreover, Jobelmann's account does not only tell us about how a young German perceived Africa, but also about how local societies and individuals encountered colonialism, its constraints and opportunities. We learn how Africans were able to shape everyday life in the colony according to their own interests. Jobelmann gives several examples of occasions when his African companions forced their will on him – be it the pace of marching or the forceful recruitment of laborers (pp. 64, 90).

The historical text is densely commented on by the editors, which facilitates the use of Jobelmann's papers. These comments are most valuable when they refer to the writings of Tessmann, Jobelmann's letters, or to the collection of the Lübeck museum, or when they explain Jobelmann's hints to contemporary culture and everyday-life. All in all, however, the comments leave an ambivalent impression. Sometimes, the criteria of what is addressed and what is not are not clear enough. Cape Verde is discussed; quinine is not (pp. 26–27). Likewise, it is mystifying why a scholarly commentary reads that the port of Kribi was „von schönen Wäldern umgeben“ (p. 34). While the language on Fang clans is very accurate, the editors use inaccurate and contested terminologies to describe African social institutions: like „Häuptling“ for African authorities or „Kauf-

preis“ (p. 59) for bridewealth. On other occasions, the commentary is simply false: When Jobelmann writes of „Schweinsfische“ (p. 24) while on route to Cameroon, the editors need five lines to explain that these are a certain family of fish. However, it so happens that the only habitat of this type of fish lies thousands of miles away from Jobelmann’s route. Jobelmann clearly means porpoises (Schweinswale in German). Unfortunately, comments are sometimes missing when they would have been very useful, especially in the context of economic life in southern Cameroon. Here, the interest of the editors in the history of collections takes its toll. Why is Jobelmann accounting in Dollar, and what does the word „Troß“ mean (p. 113)? Here, a look into the economic history of the region would have shown that the Dollar was only a fictional unit of account and that „Troß“ actually means „trust“, a system of credit widely used on the West African coast since the slave trade.⁵ Comments on these complex social realities would have been helpful for the understanding of Jobelmann’s time in Africa, and its use for African history.

Another point of critique concerns the letters. Templin and Böhme often omit certain parts. Elaborations on their selection-criteria could have been included.

Apart from these minor issues, the volume contains highly valuable information about life and work in southern Cameroon during the colonial era. The volume will be of much use for those working on the history of colonial collections in German museums, for scholars of the cultural history of German colonialism, but also for historians of Africa.

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⁵ See Albert Wirz, *Vom Sklavenhandel zum kolonialen Handel. Wirtschaftsräume und Wirtschaftsformen in Kamerun vor 1914*, Zurich 1972, pp. 74, 117.