

A German translation project in the Noser Library

David Lloyd
John Burton

Abstract

The Noser Library at Divine Word University has substantial German language holdings relating to Papua New Guinea, which are inaccessible to English-speaking citizens. Funds have been received from the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in Canberra to translate three German-language books from the late 19th and early 20th centuries into English and the paper discusses how they were selected and possible future steps to translate more works from the Noser collection.

Key words: German New Guinea, translation, library, archives.

Introduction

The history of German New Guinea is a neglected area. Papua New Guineans have every right to be resentful of having a European power come along and declaring that their country does not belong to them anymore, but the writings of the early German traders, settlers and missionaries do give an insight into the way the native people lived shortly after contact. Some of the early German colonists were prolific writers, and they were writing about New Guinea as they found it, before Western influence changed the way of life. The first missionaries of the Society of the Divine Word (SVD) were Frs. Eberhard Limbrock, Franz Vormann, and Joseph Erdwig, and Bros. Eustochius Tigges, Canisius Hautkappe and Theodulph Schmidt, who arrived in Madang on 13 August 1896 (Society of the Divine Word, 1980, p. 7). Among these and others were prolific writers, who were interested in local customs, and reported on them as fairly as could be expected, given the religious beliefs that guided their lives.

Scholarly use of exploration period literature in British New Guinea

The travels of the early explorers of New Guinea who published in German are far less well known than those who published in English. There are plenty of examples where scholars have made use of the exploration period literature of British New Guinea. For instance, accounts of the clashes between the government and the Binandere, 1894-1897, and events surrounding the deaths of George Clarke and John Green in the Northern Division became well known to English readers shortly afterwards through the writings of Sir William Macgregor and Charles Monckton (e.g. Macgregor, 1894; Monckton, 1921; cf. Joyce, 1974; Lutton, 1986). They also, as one might expect, entered the realm of Binandere indigenous knowledge. John

Waiko, a Binandere himself, was able to distil this in his ANU doctoral thesis eight decades later (Waiko, 1980).



Figure 1. 'Bushimai. Chief of the Binandere people'.

Example of English language documentation (Monckton, 1921, facing p. 80) becoming interwoven with Papua New Guinean indigenous knowledge and scholarship. Bousimai was 'the most influential warrior who had command of a wide political network on the river' according to Waiko (1980, p. 175). The events he was caught up in, leading eventually to his appointment as a Village Constable, are discussed at length by Waiko, through the knowledge of Binandere elders passed on to him as oral history (1980, Chapter 4).

Waiko's integration of early colonial literature and Binandere oral history may be taken as a paradigm for those who may wish to interpret their own history in those parts of the Momase and New Guinea Islands Regions that are covered by colonial literature in German.

German New Guinea

By contrast, accounts in German of such things as Ernst Tappenbeck's Ramu expedition, Artur Stollé's Kaiserin-Augusta-Fluss-Expedition, and the proposed joint German-British Airship Expedition of 1914, to name a few, are barely known at all to English-speaking scholars. A notable example of the few early works in German that have been translated into English is Richard Parkinson's *Dreissig Jahre in der Südsee* (Parkinson, 1907), translated by John Dennison, and republished by the Sydney archaeologists Peter White and Jim Specht, as *Thirty years in the South Seas* (Parkinson, 1999). Currently, the University of Otago has an ongoing translation project, also with John Dennison translating, and he and

Glenn Summerhayes as editors. Their last translation was of *Neu-Guinea* by Maximilian Krieger, originally published in Berlin in 1899 (Krieger, 2017).

But much more of the writings of the early Germans remains untranslated, and, in the words of Andrew Moutu of the National Museum and Art Gallery, ‘locked in German’. Moutu went on to appeal to the Papua New Guinean and German governments for funding to translate the German material (*The National*, 2015).

Noser Library holdings

The Noser Library at Divine Word University (DWU) holds approximately 650 German language books, and extended runs of periodicals such as *Deutsche Kolonialzeitung: Organ der Deutschen Kolonialgesellschaft* (‘German Colonial Journal: Organ of the German Colonial Society’), *Kleiner Herz-Jesu Bote: Missionschrift für das katholische Volk* (‘Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart: Missionary writing for Catholics’), *Steyler Mission-Bote* (‘Messenger of the Steyl Mission’) and *Amtsblatt für das Schutzgebiet Deutsch-Neuguinea* (‘Gazette of the Protectorate of German New Guinea’). It also holds every issue of the SVD anthropology publication, *Anthropos*, which has many articles in German from SVD priests based in New Guinea (see Figure 2).



Figure 3. NoserArchives. PNG newspapers stacked in the Noser Archives repository, Divine Word University, Madang, PNG, with Fr John Tschauder’s collection of papers on PNG history stored in filing cabinets in the background, May 2001. Photograph: Ewan Maidment.

Figure 2. Archival material in the Noser Library in 2001.

Source: Maidment (2007, Figure 3).

These books were collected over the years by SVD priests and brothers, in particular Father John Tschauder, who arrived in New Guinea in 1938 and remained, apart from some short stays in Australia and home visits, until he died in 1996. Tschauder was acutely aware of the problem of the lack of translations and set about translating the sections concerning New Guinea from the German colonial publication *Deutsche Kolonialzeitung* and the SVD journals *Herz-Jesu Bote* and *Steyler Mission-Bote*.

Deutsche Kolonialzeitung contains reports of the new German colonies in Africa, China and the Pacific. Some were newspaper-style reportage, and some were written by the men on the ground, quite often Dr. Hahl, the Imperial Governor. The

translation by Tschauder of the 1896 issues contains a long report on the German Colonial Expedition of that year, as well as extensive reporting on the colonial debates in the Reichstag. In the 1897 translation there is a long series of reports by Ernst Tappenbeck of his and Dr. Lauterbach's expedition into the interior from the coast at Stephansort, including descriptions of first encounters with the people in the mountains behind the Rai Coast.

Kleiner Herz-Jesu Bote and *Steyler Mission-Bote* were journals that reported on the SVD missions around the world. *Kleiner Herz-Jesu Bote* of 1895-1897 as translated by Tschauder gives the first report of the new mission in Kaiser-Wilhelmsland by Eberhard Limbrock. The translation of Limbrock's first letter after arriving in New Guinea includes "We slept on the floor, and we have no chairs. There is no table either, we had moved into an unfurnished home. To have some sort of a table we unhinged the door, rested one end of it on the window sill and other on a wooden sawhorse. For the time being there is then no danger that we could possibly sin against holy poverty."

Later issues go on to describe the growth of the mission, and increasingly include some ethnological reporting.

These translations by Tschauder are kept in the archives of the Noser Library, and in 2018 were scanned and made available in the Friendship Library online catalogue.

The Noser Library also has many filing cabinets of German-language material. Much of it is from the German New Guinea archives, which must have been seized by the invading Australian force of 1914 and transported to Canberra, where they are now in the National Archives. Father Tschauder collected this material, and must have deemed that it is important, but unfortunately it is untranslated, and probably untranslatable, given that most of it is in handwritten gothic script.

The translation project

In 2016 David Lloyd visited former DWU Vice-President Neil Hermes in Canberra and discussed with him the problem we had with the German books; he suggested that an approach might be made to the German Embassy in Canberra to see if they would be interested in a translation project.

Having done this, the result was that some months later Gerda Winkler, Counsellor/Deputy Head of Mission of the Embassy got in contact. She came to Madang for a visit, where library staff arranged a display of some of our German material, which she found extremely interesting, and said that she would be very supportive of an application for funding to translate some books. Ms Winkler has been very supportive all the way through the project and has given it much of her valuable time.

DWU made a successful application to the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in Canberra. With the funds received we were able to purchase a high-

quality Image Access Bookeye 4 Professional scanner, and to pay for professional translation of 3-4 books. To engage professional translators is an expensive exercise, and we were fortunate in receiving a large enough grant to accomplish this.

What books?

To establish what we should scan from our collection, a list of our holdings was circulated on the ASAONET listserv¹ seeking recommendations. There was an enthusiastic response from scholars around the world, for example Prof. Dan Jorgensen of the University of Western Ontario recommended Florence Weiss's *Kinder schildern ihren Alltag* ('Children describe their everyday life'), saying 'The ethnography of childhood is sorely neglected; Florence Weiss's *Kinder schildern ihren Alltag* is a superb exception to this rule, and fills an important gap in the impressive Iatmul archive.'

Drs Robin Hide and Michael Bourke of ANU wanted a translation of *Wildpflanzen in der Ernährung der Grundbevölkerung Melanesiens* ('Wild plants in the diet of the basic population of Melanesia') by Barbara Treide. Hide stated that 'In the colonial period, German research on the botany of New Guinea led the field.'

Dr Pascale Bonnemère of Centre de Recherche et de Documentation sur l'Océanie (CREDO) in Marseille, France, a long-time researcher among the Anga people of the Morobe/Gulf/Eastern Highlands borderland wanted a translation of all of the works of Hans Fischer, in particular *Negwa: eine Papua-Gruppe im wandel* ('A Papuan group in transition'), saying 'the Yagwoia [neighbour group to the Ankave studied by Bonnemère] occupy a special place in the history of the movements of the population which after centuries gave rise to the present-day configuration of the Anga-speaking family. They live now near the place where most of the groups claim their origin. Migrations could be more understandable if this book were translated.'

To select the books for translation, we decided that it would be easier if we chose titles that are out of copyright. German copyright law gives protection for 70 years after the death of the author. We contacted the relevant publishers and obtained clearance for them as a courtesy. Ms Winkler was a great help in doing this, both with her contacts and her skills in German, whereas I had to rely on Google Translate to compose letters to publishers.

The titles we selected for translation from among the recommendations were:

- *Im Bismarck-Archipel: Erlebnisse und Beobachtungen auf der Insel Neu-Pommern (Neu-Britannien)* by Richard Parkinson, published in 1887. The

¹ <https://www.asao.org/asao-listserv.html>

title roughly translates as ‘In the Bismarck Archipelago: Experiences and Observations on the Island of New Pomerania (New Britain)’.

- *15 Jahre beim Bergvolke der Baininger* (‘15 Years with the Mountain Baining people’) by Leo Brenninkmeyer, published in 1928 (Brenninkmeyer, 1928).
- *Die Küstenbewohner des Gazellehalbinsel: (Neupommern-deutsche Südsee) ihre Sitten und Gebräuche* (‘The coastal inhabitants of the Gazelle Peninsula: (New Britain, German South Seas) their manners and customs’) by August Kleintitschen, published in 1906 (Kleintitschen, 1906).

We wished to translate *Beitrage zur petrographie der Insel Neupommern* by Johanna Offermann, published in Berlin in 1916 (‘Contributions to the petrography of New Britain’), but we were unable to find the copyright owner. Ms Offermann was born on 16 November 1887 in Gelsenkirchen and died (apparently childless) in Hilstrup in 1969. She had three siblings, but we could not establish if they had children.

Note on Google Books

It should be noted that both Parkinson’s 1887 and 1907 titles, Kleintitschen’s *Küstenbewohner*, and the above-mentioned Ernst Tappenbeck’s *Deutsch-Newguinea* (1901) have been scanned by Google in their German editions, like many others of the era, but appear without previews on Google Books. This is because Google Books are uncertain whether the titles are in the public domain or have not obtained permission to show the text, in the same way as we could not with Johanna Offermann’s *Beitrage*.

However, some titles that Google Books has scanned, but does not itself show page views of, have found their way onto the (public access) Internet Archive.² The German version of Parkinson (1887) is an example, as is Landtman’s *Kiwai Papuans* (Landtmann, 1927).³ Various uploading tools exist to automate the process for books that are in the public domain,⁴ but ingenious programmers have apparently also found a way to download titles where Google Books only shows partial page views of, by revisiting the site over a period of days or weeks, for uploading to the Internet Archive, which may be how the books above found their way onto the site. Clark and Chawner (2014) discuss the case of fifty pre-1890 New Zealand heritage books that had been digitized and republished online yet have had some kind of restrictions placed on them, while Meadows (2017) discusses some of the copyright issues surrounding the Internet Archive’s interpretation of the Fair Use test and its e-library book lending practices.

² <https://archive.org/>

³ In this case, Landtman, a Finn, wrote in English. His work has been made more accessible for Papua New Guineans and scholars of Western Province alike, by David Lawrence (2010).

⁴ e.g. <https://tools.wmflabs.org/bub/>

Current status of the translated works

The scanning for our three books went smoothly, the texts were delivered to the translators, and the translations have been completed.

The library's plan now is to scan all the New Guinea content in the German language holdings, and to put them online once they are out of copyright. We will need to negotiate with the copyright owners if we want to make them widely available, otherwise they will have to remain on our internal system. Then we need explore fundraising options to finance more translations.

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The authors

David Lloyd is the Chief Librarian, Divine Word University.

John Burton is Professor of Papua New Guinea Studies and Director of the Centre for Social Research, Divine Word University.