



Universität
Basel

Research Project

Dissertation Affentranger: From Berlin to Mozambique and back: Wilhelm Peters and transcultural knowledge production

Project funded by own resources

Project title Dissertation Affentranger: From Berlin to Mozambique and back: Wilhelm Peters and transcultural knowledge production

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Organisation / Research unit

Departement Geschichte / Geschichte Afrikas (Tischler)

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Status Completed

This PhD project contributes to the history of science of the nineteenth century. It employs a constructivist concept of science. Thus, science is not seen as a system of universal truth but as the result of social interactions and it is persistently under negotiation. Using the example of the German zoologist Wilhelm Peters (1815-1883), the ways knowledge on Africa was produced, how it circulated and how it was consumed and perceived shall be investigated. Peters conducted an extensive scientific voyage to southeast Africa in the 1840s. Based on this "fieldwork" in southern Africa and its related networks, Peters rose to the top of the academic hierarchy and became a patron of science in metropolitan Berlin. In this role, as a university professor and director of the Zoological Museum, he played a crucial role in establishing zoology as a scientific discipline.

Rejecting a diffusionist Eurocentric perspective which perceived science as originating in Western metropolises and subsequently being carried to the peripheries, this project departs from the point that scientific knowledge, e.g. on Africa, was the result of interactions of different kinds between actors of distinct cultural backgrounds. Hence, this project will reveal that the natural history knowledge on Africa, produced by Peters, was the result of negotiations and exchanges with Africans. It

The project is mainly based on archival research. A large body of original and to a large extent unpublished sources on Wilhelm Peters, his career and his travel to Mozambique exist and have not been paid any scholarly attention to. Among them are letters, an extensive travel journal and drawings which shall be closely read and interpreted within their context.

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