

# Basel Mission Picture Archive Project History

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# Starting Point

As a communications network the Basel Mission, like other missionary societies, made early use of photography. The first Basel missionary in West Africa to take photographs was Wilhelm Locher, who was active with a camera in southeastern Ghana in the 1860s. At the same time his colleague C. G. Richter was taking photographs in what are now the Indian states of Karnataka and Kerala. The Mission also began at this time to acquire images from professional photographers working in coastal cities in Africa and Asia. Photographic images began to be reproduced as engravings in the Mission's publications both for home and overseas consumption.

It is clear that in practice over the generations photography has remained an important activity among Basel missionaries. In the 1890s and early 1900s, for example, Basel Mission explorers in Cameroon took cameras with them on their journeys to open up new mission districts. Yet pioneer photography plays no part in the traditional identity of this Basel Mission or even in its insiders' oral tradition. The formidable Fritz Ramseyer (Basel Missionary in Ghana from 1864 to 1908), still a name to conjure with in Ghana, has been completely forgotten as a photographer, although he took many excellent photographs, starting at the latest in 1888. By the time, in the 1980s, scholars from outside the Basel Mission began to point out that there had been photographs in Basel Mission hands in earlier decades, which would be of considerable anthropological and historical significance if they could be found, the collection of old photographs in the Mission House had fallen into decay and disregard.

Dr Christraud Geary, now Conservator of African Photography in the National Museum of African Art in Washington DC, was primarily responsible in the early 1980s for focusing attention on the need to recover and re-catalogue our holdings of old photographs. It was during the period when she was a frequent visitor in Basel that the potential dimensions of the collection began to be visible. We began to realize that we had vintage prints dating back to the 1860s. We also began to realize that the collection numbered not just a few thousand images but tens of thousands. Indeed, even after our project planning had reached a detailed stage, we found a small attic in the Mission House in Basel stuffed with yet more materials relevant to the history of photography in the organization, including thousands of glass plate negatives from the late 19th century.

In 1988 Dr Geary set up an exhibition in Washington on "German Colonial Photography at the Court of King Njoya, Cameroon ... 1902-1915", and included a number of vintage prints on loan from the Basel Mission archive. This made it finally clear that Basel Mission photography is far more than merely documentation of missionary activities, narrowly defined. It is a major potential source on indigenous social history everywhere where the organization has been active. And people began to realize that it reflects a much broader and more humane contact between missionaries and the indigenous population than some of us had expected. Dr Geary's characterization of what is probably the outstanding photographic oeuvre in the Basel Mission archive deserves to be repeated in this connection: "... one photographer [among all those who took photographs in Bamum before 1915] ...overcame the limitations inherent in the ethnographic way of picturing the Other. Anna Wuhrmann, a [Basel] missionary teacher, developed close friendships with the Bamum people. In her photography she "...created strikingly intimate images that are almost modern in their conception" (Geary, Christraud M.,

Images from Bamum, German Colonial Photography at the Court of King Njoya, Cameroon, West Africa, 1902-1915 , Washington 1988.)

During the 1980s the collection was attracting steadily increasing attention. Two problems began to worry archival staff, however. Firstly, since the original organization of the collection had fallen into decay, there was no reliable system for identifying individual images, or ensuring that a specific image, once published, could be located again. And it began to be clear that research itself could represent a threat to conservation. The photographs could only be consulted as original prints, using the photographs themselves as a form of card-index. They were thus exposed to various kinds of environmental stress, especially the changes of temperature and humidity when they were being moved between storerooms and the archive's reading facilities. In the course of handling they were also being rubbed against each other and friction damage began to be visible.

Alongside the need to ensure access to the collection for western scholars working on Africa and Asia, a further major concern began to make itself felt. The potential interest in these pictures in the regions where they were originally taken is enormous. But making photographic reproductions for customers in Asia and Africa is expensive and, ultimately, frustrating. In regions where the organization of libraries and archives is weak, repeated requests can be sent to Basel for copies of the same well-known image. Although in principle good reproductions exist, and are publicly available there, people still depend on the archive in Basel to supply them with copies. At the same time people in far-off communities — like Abetifi in Ghana or Bali-Nyonga in Cameroon — rarely have the chance to visit Basel, and we had no means of communicating to them the full variety of images in our collection, numbered in the hundreds, which document their history. In an archive like that of the Basel Mission, problems of international access are posed in an especially pressing way.

It was at this stage that the Christoph Merian Foundation in Basel suggested that a pilot project be worked out using modern media to tackle the specific problems of conservation and international access we were facing. In order to prepare this project proposal the anthropologist Barbara Frey Näf joined Paul Jenkins, who had been responsible for the Basel Mission archive since the early 1970s. At the same time the Foundation suggested the formation of a Technical Advisory Group which played a key role in establishing the procedures which helped to convince the Foundation that the project was both worthwhile and viable. In 1988 the Christoph Merian Foundation approved a grant of SFr. 200,000 to enable us to take the first steps with the procedures we had proposed - on condition, however, that the Basel Mission found other donors prepared to support the project. This condition was fulfilled by the early months of 1990. A project team was recruited and work began on 1st July 1990.

# Project Narrative

## **Staff**

### **1990 to 1998**

For most of its course the project has run on one full-time position, divided among 3 part-time staff members, either people with MA degrees or advanced students. We benefited greatly from the stability of this group. From the beginning Barbara Frey Näf was Project Manager with a 50% appointment. The two other members of the team with whom the work was begun remained with the project till well beyond the half-way mark and their successors saw the work through to its end. We benefited additionally by being able to use working-time of two people financed from outside the project. For two years the Basel Mission (German Branch) was able to secure the assistance of a German anthropologist who was responsible for coordinating the project with the archival holdings of this organization in Stuttgart, and who also supported us in Basel in the early stages of cataloguing. Towards the end of our work a Swiss student spent part of his alternative service time as a conscientious objector in the project, partly cataloguing, and partly editing the growing database. A number of other students carried out the practical training required by their courses in anthropology or librarianship in the project.

The project depended absolutely on the motivation, skills and accuracy of the people doing the detailed work with the photographs. They became paragons of science, working in a language which was not their own (English), evaluating visual sources for the history of non-western cultures, manipulating modern computer software and evaluating original documentation written in the old German (Sütterlin, or "Gothic") handwriting. Above all they maintained their curiosity about the details of the next image to be catalogued over years of work.

### **Staff List and Advisers**

Barbara Frey Näf, Project Manager

Paul Jenkins, Basel Mission Archivist

### **Project Staff**

Ariane Dannacher Brand (June 1997 - January 1999)

Claudia Herth Fritz (September 1990 - July 1996)

Regula Iselin (July 1990 - May 1997)

Martin Schrader (September 1997 - January 1999)

Pamela Stathakis (October 1997 - January 1999)

### **Co-ordination with Basel Mission (German Branch):**

Anna Pytlik (January 1991 - December 1992)

### **Advice on geographic and ethnographic terms**

Michael Albrecht (China)

Guy Thomas (Cameroon)

### **Advice on conservation and identification of photographic processes**

Christoph Brandt (Fondation suisse pour la restauration et la conservation du patrimoine photographique, Neuchâtel)

Peter Horner (Museum of Cultures, Basel)

**1999 to 2007**

Dr. Paul Jenkins, Head of Archives and Library of **Basel Mission**, until 2003

Dr. Guy Thomas, Head of Archives and Library of **mission 21 / Basel Mission**, from 2003 onwards

Barbara Frey Näf, M.A., Curator of the Collection of Historical Photographs of **mission 21 / Basel Mission**

Internships by: Michael Albrecht, Dieter Alpstätg, Michael Chollet, Nicole Fürstenberger, Ludwig Gantner, Yves Niederhäuser, Nicole Peduzzi, Daniel Suter

## **Stage one: 1990-1993:**

Defining the parts of the collection to be included in the project; basic cataloguing; the execution of the agreed technical procedures; the creation of an interactive system for computer-steered access to a body of c. 28,000 images, 1990-1993

This stage saw the implementation of the technical procedures agreed at the commencement of the project (see stage 2). With the help and advice of the members of the Technical Advisory Group we were able to commission the Bavarian firm Herrmann and Kraemer to re-photograph the images on long-lasting Ilfachrome Micrographic film, using cameras with many automatic features which the firm has developed. Herrmann and Kraemer co-operated with the Zürich firm Furrer + Partner AG in achieving the electronic transfer to a CRV disc, a "write once" laser videodisc (SONY), which we used for the image-bank. For this first stage we adopted the widely-used flat-file database Q&A from Symantec Inc. as an easy-to-use storage and retrieval software. This was linked to the laser video disc drive by a simple "resident" program.

The realization of the technical concept had to go hand-in-hand with basic archival work in the collection. We decided that it would be feasible to attempt to incorporate about 30,000 images in the project. Those holdings to be omitted from the project had to be defined (Table 3a). Each image taken into the project was given a unique reference number which indicated its physical location in the collection. As these reference numbers were being allocated, we began a process of outline cataloguing. The database which was developed at this stage was the basis for the full cataloguing in later phases of the project. But it also made it possible to keep the large numbers of images which were being sent to Herrmann and Kraemer for re-photographing under exact and efficient control. This was a point of major concern, since the images were having to be put into a new format and a material-based sequence to facilitate the photographic work in Garmisch-Patenkirchen. It was essential to be able to recreate this sequence, so that we could locate each image automatically in the rolls of film we received back, and subsequently, on the laser disc.

These technical procedures were completed by the end of 1992. This date is important. It helps to explain why, at this stage, the images were not digitalized for CD-ROM purposes but transferred onto a video disc. In our view, at that time, the procedures for digitizing images for storage and access had not been standardized well enough to justify our going in this direction, and the amount of electronic storage then needed for 28,000 digitized images was far beyond the kind of hardware we could expect to purchase and amortize. In any case, the video system has proved its worth, giving pictures of good quality and working very quickly. The recall time for an image is, on average, half a second.

Thus, by the end of this stage of the project, we had a well-functioning interactive system in place. This naturally facilitated the further work on the project. It also meant that researchers were now working with the images on screen, and no longer consulting the originals directly. The image bank began to be used in teaching at the University of Basel, starting with a Block Seminar in 1993 on the integrated use of written and visual sources in investigations of indigenous social history in the period of early colonial contact in the Cameroon Grassfields.

## **Stage two: 1994-1997:**

Originals into deep storage, first experiences with comprehensive cataloguing

At the end of the first stage, new sources of financial support had to be found for the work. Partly because of the size and potential significance of the project, and partly in order to pursue the search for funds, an Academic Advisory Board (Table 3c) was established under the chairmanship of Professor Martin Schaffner (History Department, University of Basel. This body was able to secure substantial support for our work from foundations promoting teaching and research in the University of Basel. It was at this stage, too, that we were very much heartened to receive substantial support from the Getty Grant Program in California.

On their return from the re-photographing process, the original photographs were rearranged according to their archival shelf-marks, and returned to our air-conditioned strong-room. Our new conservation and access policy was implemented. In the second stage of the project we began work on the more detailed cataloguing, including all the dimensions of information which were to be included in the final database (see chapter 3 below). Responding to the University of Basel's concern to build up teaching and research in African history, we decided to carry out this cataloguing in the following sequence: Cameroon, Ghana, China, India, Europe, and, finally, Indonesia. However, at an early stage we also catalogued a substantial body of China photographs, in order to be sure that cataloguing criteria, which were being developed in an intensive process of study of the African photographs, could be applied to images from Asia also.

The cataloguing process was supported by constant reference to written materials in the Basel Mission Archive. This made it possible to aim at precise and detailed identifications of the photographs and their contents. However, this link with the MS archive presented us with three considerable problems. Firstly the MS archive is large; there are, for example, ca. 50 meters of shelving containing the main series of missionaries' reports from overseas up to 1914. It is also a record created under difficulties in a bygone age - its data is sometimes inconsistent, and often needs careful interpretation. The danger was clear: exhaustive searches for information on photographs and the situations they record would take too long. We had, therefore, to restrict the cataloguing process to clear procedures using certain classes of information only, above all, the registers of mission personnel with their dates of overseas service.

The second problem was that the Basel Mission archive has always attracted a large number of readers, and the new facility for studying photographs increased this attractiveness. The networking which developed between project staff and visitors to the archive, with their special fields of expertise, was interesting. But measures had to be adopted to control the flow of the latter in order to allow project work to continue at an appropriate speed.

Thirdly the interests of users of the archive are wide, and we realized from the start that our access tools would have to be designed to be used (a) by people from many different academic disciplines, (b) by academics and non-academics, and (c) by people of very different cultural backgrounds. Thus, on the one hand, we decided to use English as the language for the cataloguing, but we also realized that existing keyword systems for anthropology and art history in English were not adequate for our purposes (see chapter 3 below). Not least for this reason, stage two of the project started with an exploratory period of free and open cataloguing. This moved, however, into a sometimes difficult period of systematization once the database was large enough to allow preliminary editing.

In this second phase of the project we continued to use the flat-file database Q&A. It proved to be stable and to perform well within the parameters it offered, but its relatively primitive editorial functions slowed us down severely once we began to attempt to systematize our use of place-names, keywords, etc. This motivated us, from 1994 on, to evaluate alternative software, including special applications which existed for museums. We decided eventually to commission Thomas Arnold, who had already done work of this kind for the Cantonal Archive in Basel, to design an application of Microsoft ACCESS for our purposes. Our choice fell on ACCESS because this software costs relatively little, but fulfilled our needs, and is a widely recognized standard in the computer industry. It is also clearly no cul de sac. Its scope of activity can be extended via an SQL Server into an internet application, for example. The finished database system, containing the cataloguing work which had been done up to that point and which had been transferred into the new software, was handed over to the project leadership in the spring of 1997.

### **Stage three, 1997-1998:**

Extending the cataloguing to cover all the images on the video disc

The final phase of the project was characterized by the implementation of established cataloguing procedures using the ACCESS relational database. The experience which we had gained, especially with cataloguing the Cameroon and China holdings in stage two, was applied to the remainder of the images in the project. At the official closing date of the project, all the c. 28,000 images had been catalogued, with the exception of part of the India collection and the relatively small collection of photographs from Indonesia. Some significant editorial work on the database also remained to be done.

Important features of the catalogue which were stabilized at this stage of the project include lists of the persons portrayed and photographers, with the biographical data which was used to derive information about locations and dates of photographs, a list of photographic studios represented in the collection, a hierarchically arranged set of keywords which allows searches to take place at various levels of generality/specificity, and a list of specific locations, grouped regionally and nationally. (We were grateful for the assistance of two experts in Cameroonian and Chinese geography in tackling the problems which we faced in these two areas).

During this phase we also turned our attention to "life after the project," and especially the question of an electronic publication of the collection and its database. This is an essential further step if the holdings of images from Africa and Asia are to be returned in a practicable way to the regions where they were taken. A trial CD-ROM of 350 Cameroonian photographs was made to test the transfer of images and data to this medium, but on the decision of the Academic Advisory Board this extension of our work was put on hold until the actual project itself had been completed.

This third phase was not only dominated by the need to catalogue large numbers of photographs with all deliberate speed. Financial support for the last year of project work was not easily forthcoming, so project staff was forced to spend time which could have been more profitably invested in other matters in a search of funding from foundations, which was only partially successful. Work on the project was able to continue till 31st December 1998 only because the Basel Mission was prepared to give a provisional financial guarantee not foreseen in its budget for that year.

## ***The Pictorial Collection in the Basel Mission Archive***

The following is a detailed overview of the different parts of the collection. It also makes it clear which parts of the collection were not included in the project which is the subject of this report.

\* The core of these holdings is the so-called "official collection" of c. 15,000 selected photographic images, which was started about 1900, but contains older series. This collection was originally designed for publicity and information purposes. It was no longer being systematically maintained when the Second World War ended. 10,200 images of this collection were included in the project. The images clearly datable to the years after 1945 were omitted - except in the case of images from China, which for the sake of completeness were included up to the expulsion of the missionaries in 1949-50.

\* There is a collection of portraits of all male missionaries taken as they left Basel to travel overseas for the first time. This numbers 2,200 images, was begun in 1818, and documents the changing techniques of portraiture in the 19th century, from hand-drawn pen-and-wash likenesses (230 items) through the early photographic techniques (Daguerreo- and Ambrotypes, 84 and 49 items, respectively) to photographic prints made from negatives. This part of the collection has been included in the project in its entirety. As far as we know the earliest photographs in the collection belong to this series, portraits of the missionaries Dillmann, Conrad and Süß taken, we assume, as they completed their preparatory courses in 1850.

\* The so-called "Remainder Category" contains all the photographic prints which have entered the Archive from private hands (donations, legacies) and all the photographic albums. Particularly important are the ca. 100 albums which, taken together, contain approximately 6,000 images, including most of the very earliest images from overseas. However, for reasons of quality and significance (collections of "snaps" from the inter-war period!) only 9,800 of the ca.20,000 images in the "Remainder Category" have been included in the project.

\* Ca. 3,700 glass-plate negatives have survived from the turn of the century, probably more by chance than design. Ca. 2,000 negatives from the African collection have been included and appear in the image bank as positives generated during the process of re-photography. For all other negatives references to the positive print were established.

\* The "Sample Book" of wood engravings collected for use in Basel Mission publications in the second half of the nineteenth century contains 1,340 images. About one-third is xylographs, i.e. wood engravings based on photographs. The Sample Book has been included in the project in its entirety.

\* From ca 1890 — and perhaps even earlier — lantern-slide series were created for use in the Mission's publicity at home. There are about 8,000 such slides in the collection. Many slide-lectures can be reconstructed on the basis of surviving copies of duplicated texts which were provided as a spoken commentary to be read out as the slides were being projected. The slides are mostly images derived from prints in the "official collection" (paragraph 1 above) and can thus be

regarded as duplicates. For this reason only 760 slides have been included in the project, mainly as examples of complete slide series.

\* Ca. 2,100 images have been included as loans in the project: photographs from the archival collection of the former Basel Mission Trading Company, and the contents of a number of albums still in family hands (including an album owned originally by a maternal great-aunt of Hermann Hesse. One of her brothers was a Basel missionary in South India in the mid-19th century). These loans have been included in the project to complement holdings in the Basel Mission archive.

\* A total of 28'400 images were included in the project on which we report here. Their geographical distribution is as follows:

Cameroon	6,100
Ghana	5,900
China, including Hong Kong	3,750
India (including a small collection of professionally shot photographs from Sri Lanka)	5,900
Kalimantan, Indonesia	1,550
Europe	4,100
Miscellaneous: America, Japan, West Asia, Africa (other than Ghana & Cameroon)	1,100

About 50% of these images date back to before 1914.

## **Donors and Advisory Board**

### **Donors**

Ecclesiastical Institutions and Foundations  
Emil Brunner Foundation, Zürich, Switzerland  
Evangelical Church of Baden, Karlsruhe, Germany  
Evangelical Church of the Palatinate (Pfalz), Speyer, Germany  
Evangelical Church of Württemberg, Stuttgart, Germany  
Evangelical-Reformed Church of Canton Zürich, Switzerland  
Internal Newsletter of the Basel Mission House, Basel, Switzerland  
Johannes Oekolampadius Foundation, Basel, Switzerland  
Reformed Church of Canton Luzern, Switzerland  
Commercial firms and private individuals  
Anonymous  
The Epting-Baumann-Henking family, Germany and Switzerland  
H.-E. Moppert, Basel, Switzerland  
Union Trading Company, Basel, Switzerland  
Cultural and academic foundations  
Christoph Merian Foundation, Basel, Switzerland  
Ernst Göhner Foundation, Zug, Switzerland  
Federation of Migros Co-operatives, Zürich, Switzerland  
Fund for the Promotion of Teaching and Research, Basel, Switzerland  
Getty Grant Program, Santa Monica, California, USA  
L. & Th. La Roche Foundation, Basel, Switzerland  
Lottery Fund, Canton Basel-Stadt, Switzerland  
Max Geldner Foundation, Basel, Switzerland  
Stanley Thomas Johnson Foundation, Bern, Switzerland  
Swiss Academy of Humanities and Social Sciences, Bern, Switzerland

### **Advisory Board**

#### Technical Advisory Group 1989-1993

Dr Gustav Furrer  
Furrer + Partner, Zürich

Marcel Jenni Esq.  
Department of Reproduction and Photography, University Library, Basel

Prof. Hanspeter Rohr  
Cantonal Hospital / Medical Faculty, University of Basel

#### Academic Advisory Board, 1993-1999

Prof. Martin Schaffner (chairman)  
Department of History, University of Basel

Dr. Christraud Geary

National Museum for African Art Washington, D.C.

Lorenz Homberger Esq.  
Rietberg Museum, Zürich

Prof. Meinhard Schuster  
Department of Anthropology, University of Basel

Prof. Hanspeter Rohr  
Cantonal Hospital/Medical Faculty, University of Basel

Prof. Gerd Spittler  
Department of Anthropology, University of Bayreuth

Prof. Albert Wirz  
Department of African History, Humboldt University Berlin

# Modern Media and Basic Archival Problems

Technical procedures simultaneously orientated to long-term international access and the solution of problems of conservation

The project design as agreed in 1988 foresaw the following steps

- Re-photographing a large number of the images in the Basel Mission archive collection using a high-density color film designed for maximum long-term chemical stability.
- Transferring the images from this film to an electronic medium, thus allowing them to be consulted on screen, and offering a feasible form for mass duplication or publication for access outside Basel.
- Linking the electronic medium with a database both for purposes of cataloguing and research.

Our intention was to "kill two birds with one stone." Re-photographing the images was a pragmatic measure of conservation for the collection as a whole. Whatever changes the originals may undergo in the middle-term future, we have a stable documentation of their state in 1991-1992, and this should survive unchanged for something like a century. Re-photographing the images was also, however, a measure to facilitate the transfer of the images from one medium to another (including electronic media) and, indeed, to make this possible for the collection as a whole at an automatic level.

These procedures were implemented in the project's first stage. We continue to believe that the re-photographing process, using stable high-density color film, provides the most reliable way of storing the maximum of visual information over the longest period of time possible. Furthermore, since it uses photographic technology, it is not subject to uncertainties in the future development of electronic storage and reading systems. In the early 1990s, in addition, at almost every stage in the transfer to a video disc, we were using technologies which were well-established, so that we could exploit to the full the possibilities of rapid, automatic and therefore inexpensive transfer of the images from one medium to another that were already in full industrial use in other connections.

We are still confident that the procedures used provide us with a platform for exploiting future technical developments. Since the re-photographed images are stored in the form of 36mm photographic film, we have little doubt that they can be transferred automatically to any new electronic medium which offers itself with the kind of ease we experienced with the transfer to a laser video disc early in 1993. We look forward to a move into the modern digital world (CD-ROM and/or Internet) in the near future.

It is worth while adding that, although the great bulk of the photographs included in the project are monochrome prints, we are convinced that the use of color film was appropriate and, indeed, necessary. Working with the collection has shown us that reproduction of, for instance, sepia-toned monochrome vintage prints with modern black-and-white film and photographic paper is an extremely delicate task in which aesthetic values and even visual information can easily be lost.

Furthermore, the documentation of the state of decay even of a monochrome image requires a colored photographic record, since deterioration of various kinds can be seen by changes in color.

# Catalogue Methodology

## Overview

Both in terms of time and cash-flow the major part of our project budget was devoted to cataloguing. This happened not only because of the number of images to be catalogued, but because, as we have indicated in chapter 1, the flanking information needed to locate a photograph in place and time was often not easy to obtain. In addition, our function as a pilot project and our intention to serve a multi-disciplinary and multi-cultural "readership" demanded innovative transdisciplinary and transcultural cataloguing.

This is a field in which the project's missionary society background perhaps played a certain role. As the record of an organization with a long holistic tradition of activity the Basel Mission's archive is of interest to scholars in a wide range of disciplines and not simply those concerned in a narrow sense with mission and church history. Thus this pictorial collection attracts people doing research in the fields of anthropology and art history - and in environmental sciences. Equally, the Basel Mission has spoken to a broad spectrum of people in the areas from which it draws support. To this day, a significant proportion of readers in the Basel Mission archive are not so much pursuing academic projects, as people interested in family and local history. At the same time the Basel Mission is an organization which has a long experience of the evils of valuing only a narrow view of the truth, and exists today as a fellowship with active participants in four continents, orientated towards dialogical relationships between people and religious groups. There was no question but that our cataloguing system should eschew "euro centrism" and facilitate the kinds of searches people from China, India, Indonesia, Ghana and Cameroon would like to undertake.

These local considerations in the Mission House Basel are of more than parochial significance. In one sense they can be seen as our struggle with a situation described globally by Hans Rütimann of the American Commission on Preservation and Access in relation to digitalized documentation: "the greatest problem in relation to the archiving of digitalized information is not technical but organizational. This includes the ... problem of achieving international cataloguing standards, a field in which we are trailing incredibly far behind the progress in technology." (Memoriav No. 2 1997, p. 15, our translation). And, indeed, for the record, we wish to stress that in doing the cataloguing work with this collection we tried to follow as far as possible the international standards available. The following two documents were of especial importance for guiding our work: Minimum information categories for museum objects - Proposed Guidelines for International Standards, issued 1994 by CIDOC, International Documentation Committee of the International Council of Museums. ISO 2788 Documentation Guidelines for the establishment and development of monolingual thesauri. But we found ourselves constantly facing the problem that international standards were not detailed enough in their coverage of matters which were crucial to our project.

At one level there are the different aspects of each image which we were concerned to reflect in our cataloguing system. An image is in one sense a physical object of a certain size, the product of a certain photographic technique and showing a certain state of preservation at the moment of cataloguing. It is also a carrier of visual information. It is a product of a particular author, i.e. photographer. And it is linked to original documentation (captions, dates in registers) which can provide decisive information about what is depicted and when the image originated.

At another level our cataloguing was an application of the familiar scientific demand for accuracy about sources. We have tried to make it unambiguously and systematically clear for every field of the database from what type of source the proffered information comes. There is a clear distinction between fields which quote original information and those whose information was generated by the work of the project team.

At yet another level we are conscious of the post-modern view of the provisional nature of historical knowledge - and therefore of the work of cataloguing. Our documentation of the photographs has been produced by a specific team of European researchers working with a particular pattern of knowledge and sources - and with a particular time-budget - in the 1990s. We have therefore also tried to set up a system in which new knowledge about an image and its contents can be incorporated in the database in Basel - in every case, of course, with information on the source of the proposals made. This is important. We may confidently expect the images in this collection to generate a considerable stream of new knowledge and new suggestions about interpretation, when they become generally available in the areas where they were taken.

The work of building up a catalogue which offers "transparency" to people of different disciplines, different levels of education, and rooted in different culture, goes beyond these general postulates, however.

It was clear that if the cataloguing language was to facilitate maximum access for the largest number of people interested, it would have to be in English. With one relatively small exception (the Duala- and Bassa-speaking regions which became part of French Cameroon after 1918) the pre-1945 Basel Mission worked in regions where English was and is the main international language - i.e. in what have been British colonies and in South China. Using English added, undoubtedly, to the difficulties and volume of our work. The documentation of individual images that exists in German, original picture-captions and other annotations, for example, now exist in the database not only as quotations of the original German text, but in English translation.

Transcultural readability made specific demands on our lists of geographical names, since it was clear that an individual name should be internationally recognizable, but also reflect the name actually used by the majority group of local people. As we have already noted, it is often difficult to find the modern equivalents of the names of small places recorded in our archive in the archaic - or even idiosyncratic - spelling of the missionaries before 1914. Our considerable investment of effort in this field has resulted in a coordinated thesaurus of 3720 geographical and ethnographical terms, however, which gives systematic access in both directions - from the old Basel Mission names to modern forms, and vice versa (see the specimen information on Chinese place-names in Table 5c). It is also, incidentally, possible to conduct searches at local, regional and national levels. And images whose precise locality cannot be identified are found by searches conducted at the regional or, if this also cannot be established, at the national level.

However, the aspect of cataloguing which demanded the greatest effort in achieving intercultural and interdisciplinary transparency of organization and vocabulary was the development of a list of keywords. As everyone involved in tasks of this kind knows very well, the problems which arise in this field can be extremely complex. Two examples may be given here.

We had to decide, for example, whether to use so-called "local terms" in our keyword system, i.e. terms which are used in one cultural setting only, like Maharaja or Omanhene. After long reflection we decided to avoid this but to instead rely on general terms which can be applied in searches with a geographical limiter (in this case "king" and "India", or "king" and "Ghana"). Of

course problems of definition crop up - but this will happen whichever route we take, and we do avoid by this method getting into discussions of the applicability of an indigenous term to a specific object or office. (The question of which chiefs in Ghana are really to be regarded as Omanhene is, for example, a subject on which controversy is vivid and persistent.) Furthermore, by adopting plain English keywords, as far as possible, and defining them in clear but general terms— e.g.,: "king: ceremonial and titular head of a political unit with a substantial claim to have been independent when it was incorporated in a colonial state" — we hope both to have facilitated searches by people who are interested primarily in one cultural region, and by people interested in comparative questions.

We may take as our second example the much larger problem presented by religion. In this case we have tried to avoid building up a system which one might call euro- or church-centric, or which gives qualitative prominence to the Christian religion. (The quantitative prominence of church and mission is, of course, inherent in the nature of this collection - on a rough estimate half of the photographs from overseas are a direct documentation of the work of mission and/or the development of indigenous local churches). But qualitatively, in our system, Christianity is treated like any other religion, and we offer users the opportunity to conduct searches on the phenomenology of any of the major religious traditions which the Basel Mission met, exactly as can be done with the Christian churches and Christian missions. In other words: a search for "sacral buildings and settings" leads one inter al to "church", "mosque", "shrine" and "temple" - and a search for "sacral objects and symbols" to "Christmas crib", "mask" and "prayer wheel".

This cataloguing system, applied to the 28,400 images we have on the video disc (for its vital statistics see Table 5a) has now been in daily use by project staff and researchers since the new ACCESS database became fully operational in the spring of 1997, and in general we are satisfied with it. At a technical level the software has shown itself to be stable. At an intellectual level the database has proved its versatility. For the project staff it has clarified and expedited the work of cataloguing. It has also proved its practicability for a wide variety of users. In recent months it has been used by Europeans or Americans with major projects in sociology, history and anthropology, and by people from China interested, for a variety of reasons, in documenting the history of the former Basel Mission Church there. Those of us who have worked on the project look forward to further evaluations of this part of our work from people who use the catalogue - and from people setting up cataloguing systems of a similar kind in other places.

## ***Database: Vital Statistics***

28,400 images fully catalogued and present on the videodisc.

Catalogue language: English (presentation of caption texts and other original documentation).

920 entities (albums, files, boxes of negatives with a common origin etc) catalogued as such.

6,000 different proper names of persons and institutions etc recorded

280 photographers

600 photo studios

185 institutions or firms appearing on photographs

5,100 named individuals appearing on photographs

3,720 geographical and ethnographical terms (including synonyms), the former arranged in a hierarchy so that it is possible to search by individual place, by region and by state

1,700 thematic keywords (including synonyms), arranged in 18 sections and 62 sub-sections

## ***Subjects: Keyword Hierarchy***

Formal description

### Environment

Physical environment

Botany

Zoology

### Architecture and settlement

Architecture and settlement, general

Types of buildings

Architectural space

Settlements

Type and material of construction

Architectural detail

Furnishings

### Economy and daily life

Economy, general

Agriculture and animal husbandry

Hunting and fishing

Forestry

Techniques of mineral extraction

Craft production

Industry

Trade

Service industry

Domestic economy

Energy supply

Water supply

### Music and art

Music and percussion

Art

Performing arts

### Recreation, enjoyment and indulgence

Sports and games

Rest and recreation

Festivities

Stimulants and drugs

### Anthropology of the body

Anthropology of the body, general

Clothing

Adornment

Headdress

Body decoration

Care of the body

Social structure and socialization

Gender, age and kinship

Life cycle

Socialization

Social stratification

Jobs and offices

Religion and philosophy (general)

Religion and philosophy (phenomena)

Sacral buildings and settings

Sacral objects and symbols

Religious activities

Rituals and festivals

Health care

Health care, general

Sickness and handicap

Prophylaxis

Education

Education, general

Schools

Professional training

Exhibitions

Communication

Travel and transport

Travel and transport, general

Infrastructure

Means and types of transport

Administration and government

Administration and government, general

Justice, law and punishment

State ceremonies and symbols

Armed forces

Conflicts, destruction and disaster

Special objects and materials

Technical objects and installations

Containers

Weapons

Materials

Objects (remainder)

# Conservation and Restoration

We decided early on that measures of restoration, applied to individual photographic originals, could only be adopted in specific cases of evident urgency. Our reasons were partly financial, since restorative action, properly carried out, is very expensive. But we also considered that there are other, fundamental reasons for not attempting positive steps of restoration for the bulk of the photographs in our collection. As we see it, every photographic print or negative is subjected to the law of entropy, and is undergoing chemical changes which affect its quality at an unknown rate, depending on factors which are not always apparent and are understood only in the most general terms. This makes the methodology of attempts to reverse the process of decay extremely difficult to define in individual cases.

One might, of course, come to a rather different philosophy of conservation and restoration in a collection which consists of a relatively small number of individually outstanding photographic images ("works of art") which are regarded as a capital investment. In such a context, an active policy of restorative intervention may be appropriate. However, the pictorial collection in the Basel Mission archive consists of a relatively large number of images primarily of documentary value. This value is strongly enhanced by the density of the photographic record - i.e. the frequency with which the same people, objects, and events are photographed in the same place or district, at the same or different times. Some photographs in this collection may be, as individual images, of only modest value, aesthetically and even historically speaking. But every individual photograph can be a node in the kind of large network of sources one can put together in this archive to support specific historical investigations. This means that the very size of the collection is one of its strengths, and restoration interventions with individual images must be subordinated to stabilizing, by conservation measures, the collection as a whole.

In the face of this situation our conservation philosophy has been simple. Besides re-photographing originals using film designed for long-term stability and thus documenting for several generations of scholars their state at the beginning of the 1990s, we aim to store them under stable conditions and to subject them to as little handling as possible, relying on this to delay processes of decay in the originals as long as possible. After the completion of cataloguing an individual photograph will now only be taken out of the strong-room in extraordinary situations - e.g. if it is to be published as a high-quality print and we need to make a modern reproduction for this purpose, or if it is to be exhibited, under appropriate safeguards, as a vintage print.

In the mid-1980s Canton Basel-Stadt and the Swiss Confederation subsidized the building of a Kulturgüterschutzraum (a protected magazine for cultural objects of international importance) for the Basel Mission archive. This is a fire- and flood-proof storeroom with controlled atmospheric conditions. The pictorial collection is stored in this facility. A stable environment is thus assured. However, we do have the problem that at the time this store-room was planned it was not realized that separate accommodation for photographs and manuscripts is advisable. Since the storeroom also contains the manuscripts of the Basel Mission archive, a compromise must be found in setting the air-conditioning between the needs of photographic materials and manuscripts. Although the ambient temperature is satisfactory for most kinds of non-color photographs (18-

20°C) the relative humidity is rather high, at 45-50%. We are advised that optimum humidity for photographs would be 35% (+/- 5%) and for other archival materials 50-55%.

Within the Kulturgüterschutzraum the positives and negatives are stored in boxes constructed of "MicroChamber" cardboard which has been designed specifically for the storage of photographic images. Its interior surface is chemically inert, and the cardboard structure contains an active carbon filter. The large-sized albums are stored in boxes made from acid-free unbuffered cardboard. Within the boxes the individual images are separated from one another by paper produced by Munktell and specifically designed for storing photographs - it is porous and, again, unbuffered. With the glass plate negatives this takes the form of 4-flap envelopes. We use this somewhat porous material for images which have neither been restored nor completely cleaned, since we consider that this provides better conditions if slow chemical reactions are taking place than do airtight materials like Mylar film. For very delicate objects like daguerreotypes we use silver-safe papers, which are more airtight but also have a much finer surface structure. The paper inlays for albums are individually cut sheets of a soft tissue which is normally used as underlay material for restoring papers or photographs ("fleece", producer: Barcham Green & Co.).

The positives on paper and carton are, on the whole, not seriously dirty, and we did not attempt to clean them. The backs of the glass plate negatives and both sides of the glass lantern slides were cleaned with pure alcohol.

Although conservation has been our primary aim, we have had a small budget for restoration. Our original plan was to use it to stabilize the situation of our daguerreotypes, which were deframed in the 1960s. In recent months, however, in consultation with C. Brandt (Neuchatel), who also made an important survey of the physical condition of the collection in 1990, we have decided that since the question of the restoration of daguerreotypes is the subject of keen debate among experts at the moment, we would postpone work on this part of the collection. Instead we are having restoration and curative work carried out with our ambrotypes - equally a pioneer photographic technique which needs careful handling. We hope to raise further funds to carry through proper restoration work on our albums.