

# European travellers to Central-West Africa in the 19<sup>th</sup> century

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE English, French, German

## DESCRIPTION

As a result of European-West African encounters from the 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards, European traders in the early modern period were knowledgeable about West African coastal areas, though details about the interior and trade there were jealously guarded by African merchants. Interlopers were obstructed – and at times assassinated – in their attempts to explore inland routes and the African hinterland (Spittler, 'European explorers', p. 402). Hence, knowledge about large parts of (West) Africa was for a long time vague and largely inaccurate. From the late 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards, however, European explorers set out to fill in the blanks on the African map. Men like James Watt (c. 1760-95), Mungo Park (1771-1806), Friedrich Hornemann (1755-c. 1801), Dixon Denham (1786-1828), Hugh Clapperton (1788-1827), Gordon Laing (1794-1826), René Caillié (1799-1838), Richard Lander (1804-34), Heinrich Barth (1821-65), Friedrich Gerhard Rohlfs (1831-96) and Gustav Nachtigal (1834-85) all undertook expeditions to the West African interior to explore the sources and courses of its main rivers and visit its empires.

The exploration of Africa received a boost with the establishment of learned societies in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and first half of 19<sup>th</sup> century (e.g. the African Association, 1788; the Société de Géographie, 1821; the Royal Geographical Society, 1830). These societies stimulated and funded expeditions and published their findings. The resultant travelogues had a wide readership across Europe and were cited in contemporary popular and academic publications, as well as missionary periodicals, such as the *Church Missionary Gleaner* and the *Methodist Review*. The *Church Missionary Atlas* summarised their significance for mission work as follows: 'The continent of Africa has been of late years wonderfully opened up to Europeans. Recent travellers have been active and successful in geographical researches. [...] A highway is thus being prepared for the entrance of the Gospel amongst its millions of fetish-worshippers and ignorant Muslims' (CMS and Lake, *Church Missionary Atlas*, p. 11).

European knowledge of the West African interior before the 19<sup>th</sup> century was limited and imprecise. Ever since the accounts of Leo Africanus in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the town of Timbuktu and tales of its reputed wealth had captured the imagination of the European public, but no European set foot in the city till the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Gordon Laing, the first European to get to Timbuktu in 1826, was killed shortly after he left the city and his papers were never retrieved. The report of the first European who lived to tell about his stay there shattered Europe's romantic image of the town. In 1828, the French explorer René Caillié 'found the mysterious city [...] to be a rather squalid, middle-sized Sudanic town with no sign of the great splendours described by Leo Africanus.' Heinrich Barth, who visited Timbuktu in 1853, was also disenchanted. He estimated the total number of inhabitants at around 13,000 and considered 'the only remarkable public buildings in the town' to be 'the three large mosques' (Collins, *Western African history*, pp. 82, 92).

Meanwhile, another West African city had begun to capture the European imagination: the Hausa polity of Katsina. Prosperous and cosmopolitan, by the early 18<sup>th</sup> century Katsina had become the principal entrepôt of the interior trade and replaced Timbuktu as the main centre of Islamic scholarship in West Africa. Many of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century explorers therefore sought to reach Katsina and its neighbouring states, but the European exploration of Central West Africa took place at a time of profound political change. In 1804, the Fulani *shehu* ('religious leader', used as a title) Usman dan Fodio (1754-1803), launched a jihad against the Hausa states, an event that brought about the establishment of the Caliphate of Sokoto (1803-1903). During the first decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, all the Hausa states were conquered and incorporated into the caliphate, and its continued expansion both westwards and into Yorubaland, as well as the rise and fall of other Muslim states in West and Central Africa, destabilised the region for most of the first half of the century.

The first European traveller thought to have arrived in the Hausa states was Friedrich Hornemann, a German explorer engaged by the [British] Royal African Society. Fluent in Arabic and Turkish, Hornemann and his travelling companion Joseph Frendenburgh, a German convert to Islam, joined a caravan of merchants and pilgrims travelling from Fez to Central Africa (Bornu and Katsina) in 1798. A letter written in Marzuk on 6 April 1800, indicating that he was about to join a caravan to Bornu from where he hoped to reach Katsina, is Hornemann's last extant written message. Evidence suggests that he arrived in Kano (Northern Nigeria) later that year, and from there joined a caravan to the commercial hub Rabba in



Illustration 6. Hugh Clapperton and his party received by the Sultan of Bornu, Shehu Muhammad al-Amin al-Kanemi

Nupe. He is thought to have died en route to Rabba in 1801. His journals documenting his stay in Katsina are lost.

Some two decades later, in 1822, the Scottish naval officer and explorer Hugh Clapperton and the Scottish physician Walter Oudney (1790-1824) set out to chart the course of the Niger. Joined by the soldier explorer Dixon Denhem in Marzuk, the men reached Kukawa, the capital of the Bornu Empire, in February 1823, where they were hospitably received by Shehu Muhammad al-Amin al-Kanemi (1776-1836). Bornu had successfully resisted Fulani expansion, though the incessant wars with the Sokoto Empire had resulted in the revitalisation of Muslim practice in Bornu.

Clapperton experienced the strained relations between Bornu and Sokoto first-hand. His plan to reach the Niger via Sokoto was thwarted by

Sultan 'Alī ibn Muhammad Bello of Sokoto (r. 1817-37). When Clapperton arrived in Sokoto in March 1824, Bello prohibited his onward journey and he was forced to return to Kukawa, to find that Oudney had died. He and Denham returned to Europe in 1825 without achieving their aim. An account of their travels was published in 1826 under the title *Narrative of travels and discoveries in Northern and Central Africa in the years 1822-1823 and 1824*.

Shortly after his return, Clapperton set out on another Niger expedition. Together with his assistant Richard Lander, along with Captain Pearce and Dr Morrison (both of whom died within a month of each other), he set out to reach Sokoto via the Bight of Benin. Again, tensions between Bornu and Sokoto disrupted the expedition. When Clapperton and Lander reached Sokoto in July 1826, al-Kanemi and Bello were at war. Because of Clapperton's acquaintance with the former, Bello detained Clapperton in Sokoto, where he died in April 1827, leaving Lander the sole survivor of the expedition. Lander eventually returned to England with Clapperton's papers, and the narrative of Clapperton's second journey was published posthumously in 1829 as *Journal of a second expedition into the interior of Africa*. Lander also published *Records of Captain Clapperton's last expedition to Africa ... with the subsequent adventures of the author* and undertook two more exploration tours of the Niger in the 1830s.

The most comprehensive 19<sup>th</sup>-century West African expedition was conducted in the 1850s. Between 1849 and 1855, the German scholar-explorers Heinrich Barth (see the entry on Barth in *CMR* 22) and Adolf Overweg (1822-52) joined an expedition headed by the British missionary and abolitionist James Richardson (1809-51). They crossed the Sahara together and then set out on different routes. After Richardson died in 1851, Barth became the leader of the expedition, trekking across the Sahel, visiting Agadez, Timbuktu, the Masina Empire, the Sokoto Caliphate, Bornu and several other polities in Central Africa, while Overweg departed for Kukawa to chart Lake Chad (where he died). Barth, who was well versed in Arabic and Islam and the only survivor of the expedition, is still considered one of the most comprehensive and authoritative 19<sup>th</sup>-century sources on West and Central Africa. Shortly after his return, he published a five-volume travelogue of his African explorations, with simultaneous editions in both German and English: *Travels and discoveries in North and Central Africa*.

The reports of Barth's contemporary Friedrich Gerhard Rohlfs (1831-96), also a German national, are much more succinct. Disguised as an Arab, he travelled from Tripoli via the Sahara and Lake Chad, and along the River Niger to present-day Lagos, a journey he documented in his travelogue

*Quer durch Afrika*. In Kukawa, he met with Umar of Bornu, al-Kanemi's son, who inquired after Barth, whom he nicknamed Abd el-Kerim, and stayed in the 'Christenhaus' where Barth, Clapperton, Denham and Overweg had also lodged (*Quer durch Afrika*, pp. 89-91). Unlike Barth, who was an admirer of African Muslim scholarship, Rohlfs was rather hostile towards Islam, which he called 'the most intolerant religion'. He contradicted the idea that Islam could contribute to the civilisation of Africa and even attributed the golden age of the 'Abbasids and al-Andalus solely to Christian influence (Rohlfs, *Land und Volk*, pp. 3, 7).

Gustav Nachtigal, another 19<sup>th</sup>-century German explorer to Muslim West Africa, was also fluent in Arabic. A military surgeon, he undertook a series of expeditions to Central Africa between 1869 and 1875. He explored the unfamiliar territory of the central Sahara and visited Bornu and the sultanate of Wadai (present-day Chad). The slave-raids and treatment of slaves he witnessed during his travels made him an ardent supporter of colonial intervention, resulting in his appointment by Otto von Bismarck as special commissioner for West Africa in 1884. Nachtigal's three-volume travelogue *Sahārâ und Sudan* was published between 1879 and 1889.

Such travelogues offer a window into understanding the patchwork of the Islamic states and the nature of Islam and Muslim life that existed in 19<sup>th</sup>-century West and Central Africa. Travellers visited, among others, the Bornu Empire, the Sultanate of Bagirmi, the Sultanate of Wadai, the Sultanate of Mandara (also called Wandala), the Caliphate of Sokoto, the Massina Empire, the Sultanate of Darfur, the Adawama Emirate and the Imamate of Futa Jallon. They document the politics, history and geography of the various empires as well as the trade opportunities they offered. Together, the travelogues reveal the volatile political situation of the region over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. When Hornemann travelled to Bornu, Kano and Nupe around 1800, the region was relatively stable and the Hausa states were still independent polities. Some 25 years later, the Hausa states had been incorporated into the Caliphate of Sokoto and the Sokoto Empire had turned its attention to Bornu, Mandara and Yorubaland. Denham recorded that incessant Fulani jihads had forged a coalition of the Shehu of Bornu and the Sultan of Mandara to fend off Sokoto incursions, the alliance being sealed by a marriage between the Shehu of Bornu and the daughter of the Sultan of Mandara (Denham, *Narrative*, p. 89). Sokoto and Bornu had reached a temporary stalemate when Denham and Clapperton visited Kukawa in 1824. However, a mere 16 years earlier, in 1808, Fulani jihadists had sacked the Bornu capital Birni Ngazargamu and plundered the surrounding area (Denham, *Narrative*, p. 118). While

in Sokoto, Clapperton realised that Muhammad Bello was wary of anyone travelling from Bornu (Clapperton, *Narrative*, p. 70). Two years later, during Clapperton's second expedition to Sokoto in 1826, relations between Sokoto and Bornu had again deteriorated, and the two empires were at war once more.

Denham also reported on other conflicts in the region: in the 1820s there were military clashes between Bornu and the rising Wadai Empire as well as between Bornu and Bagirmi (Denham, *Narrative*, p. 163, 165). By the time Nachtigal visited the area, Wadai had become a powerful sultanate and had conquered Bagirmi in 1870, enslaving ten thousand of its population (Nachtigal, *Sahāra*, vol. 2, pp. 727-8). Similarly, when the North African Muḥammad al-Tūnisī lived in Darfur as a merchant between 1804 and 1814, the Sultanate of Darfur was at the peak of its power and al-Tūnisī documented its prosperity in his travelogue *In Darfur. An account of the sultanate and its people* (first published in 1845). By the time Nachtigal visited in the 1870s, the sultanate had begun to fall apart and the eastern province of Kordofan had gained a form of independence (Nachtigal, *Sahāra*, pp. 294-5).

Travelogues do not merely document the clashes between empires but also hint at the power struggles within them. Clapperton, for example, was visited a number of times by Muhammad Bello's brother, Ateeko, who had vied with Bello for the succession as Caliph of Sokoto. Fearing that Bello would misconstrue his association, Clapperton kept his distance from Ateeko (Clapperton, *Narrative*, p. 74). When Rohlfs visited the Lamido of Bauchi in 1866, a *malam* (religious scholar) from Kano called Ssala had incited an insurgence against the Fulani overlords. The troops he rallied had conquered large parts of the sultanate and threatened the capital at the time of Rohlfs's visit (Rohlfs, *Quer durch Afrika*, p. 140).

It was via these travelogues that knowledge of these West African Muslim empires reached the European public. The *Church Missionary Gleaner* in 1889, carrying information about the 'powerful Mohammedan states, the ruling races of which are Mandingo, Fulah, and Hausa', declared: 'Our knowledge of all these territories is mainly due to the travels of Barth (1850-55) and Rohlfs (1866-67)' (CMS, 'The Society's missions', p. 40). The military prowess of the states and their commitment to Islam made a deep impression. The popular 19<sup>th</sup>-century magazine, *The Fortnightly Review*, published an article that concluded: 'Believe me, the greatest foe that European civilization has to fight during the next century will be African Islam' (Johnston, 'Are our foreign missions a success?', p. 488).

As well as documenting the political landscape of West Africa, the travelogues are also a rich resource for the day-to-day practice of Islam in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Denham, for example, attended the celebrations of 'Īd al-Fiṭr and 'Īd al-Kabīr, as well as Mawlid, the Prophet's birthday, in Bornu in 1824 and observed that, whereas the main social activity for 'Īd al-Fiṭr was wrestling, during Mawlid the women took the stage, performing dances. Barth, who was in Bornu during the 'Īd al-Fiṭr festivities in 1851, noticed that for Muslims of Bornu the festival was an occasion to buy new clothes and he recorded that, apart from the 'Īd prayer, the main celebration consisted of a parade by the shehu and his court. Clapperton observed that Muslims in Bussa marked the end of Ramaḍān with the ritual 'drinking the Qur'an', whereas Denham observed that 'drinking the Qur'an' was also used to perform an exorcism. Rohlfs, who was in the sultanate of Djauro, just south of Bauchi, during the 'Īd al-Fiṭr celebration of 1866, observed that Muslims and non-Muslims alike took part in the festivities (Denham, *Narrative*, pp. 130, 141, 144, 156, 162, 195; Barth, *Reisen*, vol. 3, pp. 13-19; Clapperton, *Records*, p. 225; Rohlfs, *Quer durch Afrika*, p. 145).

The travelogues make clear that the degree of rigour with which Islam was practised differed from place to place. Denham noted on numerous occasions that Muslim practice in Bornu was quite strict. For example, Muslims in the town of Agornou were affronted by the pictures Denham showed them and told him they considered it a sin 'to write people', i.e. to make drawings of people (Denham, *Narrative*, p. 64). Denham was also struck by the severity of the sentences passed by the Shehu of Bornu; adultery in particular was harshly punished (Denham, *Narrative*, pp. 140, 160). Yoruba Islam on the other hand, according to Clapperton, was 'a loose Mahomedanism, the most pious of which can only say their prayers and are called malam or learned' (Clapperton, *Records*, pp. 188-9). Rohlfs reported that Sultan Muhammad of Wadai and his relatives had been notorious in the region for their cruelty and inebriation (Rohlfs, *Quer durch Afrika*, p. 120).

All travellers were questioned about their faith, even men like Caillié and Hornemann, who for most of their travels posed as Muslims. Denham records that, despite the courteous reception in Kukawa, he was frequently greeted with 'the contemptuous appellation of kaffir, kelb, insara, unbeliever, dog, christian' (Denham, *Narrative*, p. 158). Denham, Clapperton, Barth, Rohlfs and Nachtigal, who were identifiably Christian, all engaged in extensive discussions about the Christian faith. Clapperton recorded some of these conversations in great detail.

One of Clapperton's Muslim interlocutors was 'Alī ibn Muhammad Bello, the Sultan of Sokoto. In his discussion with Clapperton, the sultan displayed his extensive knowledge of contemporary world politics (referencing e.g. the British conquest of India) and proved better versed in Christianity than Clapperton himself:

He asked me a great many questions about Europe, and our religious distinctions. He was acquainted with the names of some of the more ancient sects, and asked whether we were Nestorians or Socinians. To extricate myself from the embarrassment occasioned by this question, I bluntly replied we were called Protestants. 'What are Protestants?' says he. I attempted to explain to him, as well as I was able, that having protested, more than two centuries and a half ago, against the superstition, absurdities, and abuses practiced in those days, we had ever since professed to follow simply what was written 'in the book of our Lord Jesus' as they call the New Testament, and thence received the name of Protestants. He continued to ask several other theological questions, until I was obliged to confess myself not sufficiently versed in religious subtleties to resolve these knotty points, having always left that task to others more learned than myself. (Clapperton, *Narrative*, pp. 62-3)

Another of his interlocutors was a relative of the sultan. This man, whom Clapperton calls 'Abdelgader', raised a variety of issues with him:

Abdelgader was particularly inquisitive about our religious observances, prayers, the worship of images, and the eating of pork. I told him we were commanded by our religion to pray without ceasing; but as no people on earth does it as they ought, we generally pray at stated times. The worship of images, with which I was repeatedly charged, I indignantly abjured. Of course I represented the eating of pork as a mere matter of policy. My Mahomedan catechist next inquired, with some degree of ridicule, as to the doctrine of the Trinity; and turning to his countrymen who were present, without waiting for my reply, exclaimed, in allusions to the three persons of the Godhead: – 'Father, Son and Uncle'. In this Mahometans are wont to turn to scorn the pure morals inculcated by Christianity, both in precept and in practice. (Clapperton, *Narrative*, pp. 38-9)

The governor of Hadiya also interrogated Clapperton, inquiring whether the hospitality extended to him would be reciprocated to Africans in Europe:

'You are a Christian, Abdullah?' – 'Yes.' 'And what are you come to see?' – 'The country.' [...] At this he smiled, and again asked 'Would you Christians allow us to come and see your country?' I said, 'Certainly.' – 'Would you force us to become Christians?' 'By no means; we never meddle with a man's religion. – 'What!' says he, 'and do you ever pray?' – 'Sometimes; our religion commands us to pray always; but we pray in secret, and not in public,



except on Sundays.' One of his people abruptly asked what a Christian was? 'Why, a Kafir,' rejoined the governor. (Clapperton, *Narrative*, p. 50)

Similarly, Denham was interrogated about the Bible and told that 'because it says nothing about Saidna Mohammed' it must be false and that Denham would surely 'be sitting in the third heaven amidst the flames' (Denham, *Narrative* p. 95). Likewise, the wazir of Bornu, al-Hajj Bashir, interrogated Barth on what he considered an objectionable practice, this being the consumption of alcohol, and told Barth that although he was eager to establish trade relations with Europeans, he intended to prohibit the sale of alcohol and Bibles by Europeans (Barth, *Reisen*, vol. 2, p. 382). Rohlfs was interrogated by the sultan of Mandara about his views on the prophethood of Muḥammad (Rohlfs, *Quer durch Afrika*, p. 112).

The ubiquity of slavery and slave-raiding expeditions in Muslim West Africa is another recurring theme in the travelogues. Caillié, Watt, Clapperton and Barth all comment on the local economies' dependence on slaves. During his visit to Timbo (Sierra Leone) in 1794, James Watt estimated the ratio of slaves to free people at about 5 to 1, whereas Clapperton approximated that about half the inhabitants of Kano were enslaved (Watt, *Journal*, pp. 51-2; Clapperton, *Narrative*, p. 38). Several explorers also explicitly flagged Muslim involvement in slave-raiding and trading, whether as a by-product of jihads among non-Muslims or as the result of Muslim mercantile slave-raiding expeditions. Denham, who even participated in a Bornu and Mandara slave-raiding expedition in 1823, observed that Islam was used as a pretence for war and slave-raiding (*Narrative*, pp. 76-113). He personally witnessed the devastation brought about by the raiding Fulani, encountering more than 30 Bornu towns that were 'completely razed to the ground' in the 1808 jihad, who had also ransacked the former Bornu capital Birni Ngazargamu and enslaved many of its inhabitants (Denham, *Narrative*, pp. 118). Further south, the Fulani jihads also wrought havoc. When Clapperton travelled through Yorubaland on his second West African expedition, he observed the wreckage and devastation caused by the Fulani jihads that had beset the country, burning villages, killing people and selling the young into slavery (*Hugh Clapperton* p. 168).

Almost all travellers encountered slave-caravans on their journeys, some with as many as 750 captured individuals (Barth, *Reisen*, vol. 2, p. 424). Rohlfs and Nachtigal, who visited Bornu in late 1860 and the early 1870s, estimated that on a weekly basis as many as 1,500 enslaved were sold at the Kukawa slave market (Fisher, *Slavery*, p. 106), and Nachtigal approximated that in the 1870s the Sultanate of Wadai alone exported as many as 15,000 slaves annually (Fisher, *Slavery*, p. 100). Both Hornemann and

Barth recorded that tribute payments often included slaves. According to Hornemann, the conquered polity of Kashna had to pay an annual tribute of 100 slaves to the Sultan of Bornu (Hornemann, *Missions to the Niger*, vol. 1, p. 121). Barth was told that the Lamido of Adamawa, Muhammadu Lawal bi Adama (r. 1847-72), had to pay the Caliph of Sokoto an annual tribute of 5,000 slaves as well as horses and cattle (Barth, *Reisen*, vol. 3, p. 601). According to Barth, nowhere in Africa was slavery more rampant and more large-scale than in the Emirate of Adamawa; many of its inhabitants owned as many as a thousand slaves, who were used for farming and for slave-raiding expeditions (Barth, *Reisen*, vol. 2, p. 600).

The reports about the slave-raids, the large-scale enslavement of conquered populations and the slave-driven economies in Muslim West and Central Africa received extensive media coverage in Europe. In 1889, *The Fortnightly Review* wrote :

Read – with patience if you can – the account given by Barth and Nachtigal of the manner in which the vile Mohammedan robbers and slave-raiders of Bornu, Adamawa or Bargirmi nearly destroyed the gentle, industrious, handsome Musgu people in the Shari districts, and then see if you can state with sincere conviction that the Mohammedans have exercised civilizing influence in Africa. (Johnston, 'Are our foreign missions a success?', p. 488)

Missionary publications also cited the travelogues. Referencing Barth, the *Church Missionary Gleaner* of 1859 wrote about the 'plundering expeditions' of the shaykh of Bornu, whose 'chief booty was [...] slaves', after which 'the country was wasted' and 'the poor inhabitants' were obliged 'to fly for their lives', while those left behind 'were either slaughtered or sold as slaves' ('The Musgu people', pp. 26-7). The *Church Missionary atlas* referenced Clapperton on the forced conversion of pagans to Islam and claimed that 'in many parts of Africa Mohammedans are trained from their infancy to slave-hunting expeditions among their pagan neighbours' (p. 19). In the heydays of the abolitionist lobby, the West African travelogues corroborated the entanglement of Islam and slavery, and implicitly paved the way for colonial intervention and mission among Muslims.

Travelogues are a complex genre with regard to Christian-Muslim relations. Explorers to the interior of West Africa rarely foregrounded their Christian identity. On the contrary, several 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century explorers, such as Hornemann and Caillié, posed as Muslims to facilitate travel and gain trust, though this was not always sufficient to dispel suspicion. Hornemann and his companion were accused of being Christian on various occasions and had to 'prove' their innocence by reciting and reading the Qur'an and by writing Arabic (Hornemann, *Missions to the Niger*, vol. 1,

pp. 34-5). Caillié even went to the extent of being circumcised in order to pass for an Arab Muslim trader. Nevertheless, as Mervyn Hiskett has argued, West African Muslims regarded European explorers as Christians rather than Europeans (Hiskett, *Development of Islam*, p. 223), for as Muhammad Umar has observed, 'religion was an important part of the cultural baggage that Europeans carried with them into the interior of Africa' (Umar, 'Islamic discourses', pp. 152-3). As the 19<sup>th</sup> century progressed, explorers (e.g. Clapperton, Barth, Rohlfs and Nachtigal) seem to have more explicitly styled themselves as Europeans than Christians, possibly because part of their mission involved establishing political and commercial relations between European countries and West African empires and polities.

#### SIGNIFICANCE

As noted above, while the travelogues in themselves cannot be construed as material on Christian-Muslim relations *per se*, the information they contain about Muslim empires in the West African interior and their expansion among non-Muslims are significant in terms of the awareness they raised in Europe and North America about ongoing Islamisation in West Africa. Among other things, the travelogues prompted a sense of missionary urgency among both Protestant missionary societies and Roman Catholic missionary orders, who interpreted these reports as evidence that West Africa had become the arena for a relentless religious rivalry between Christianity and Islam. Indirectly, therefore, the travelogues kindled missionary zeal and roused aspirations (especially among evangelical missionaries) to evangelise these Muslim communities. When, over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it became increasingly evident that Muslim conversion was not forthcoming, the detailed ethnographic observations recorded in the travelogues served as input for identifying groups of non-Muslim people living in the vicinity of Muslim empires and polities whose Christianisation, it was believed, would serve as a living religious 'barrier' to halt the expansion of Islam.

Missionary zeal was further fuelled by the reports of large-scale enslavement of non-Muslim groups in the West African interior. In an era when the abolition movement had begun to gain ground in Europe, the reports reinforced the conviction that Islam and slavery were inextricably intertwined, indirectly fuelling both political and missionary intervention. However, it would appear that there has been little or no systematic study so far of how and to what extent travelogues and exploration reports influenced and fashioned missionary thinking in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and especially of attitudes towards Islam (which they clearly reveal) and views on the nature and prospects for any form of dialogical relations between

Christians and Muslims, which for the most part may be inferred as being negative.

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Martha T. Frederiks