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Medical practice and international networks Albert Schweitzer's Hospital in Lambarene, 1913-1965

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Hilfsverein für das Albert-Schweitzer-Spital in Lambarene.*

This project aims at a first thorough historical study of Albert Schweitzer's hospital in Lambarene in the period of its founder's reign (1913-1965). Based on an exceptionally rich and varied corpus of hitherto unconsidered archival material including thousands of patient records, a huge international correspondence, numerous notebooks and a large collection of photographs, it intends to describe the central characteristics of the hospital on both levels of daily practice and international networks and thus to locate it in the realm of Christian missionary, colonial, and humanitarian endeavours.

The project consists of two parts, one of which is devoted to medical practice. It will use a praxeological approach and thus pay particular attention to the plurality of options, the openness of situations, reciprocity and interaction. Besides the general description of daily procedures and measures, details of lodgings, physical examination, diagnosis and treatment it will ask for the consistency of these practices, the alleged stagnation of medical and hygienic standards and the importance of various categories such as religion and authority. As a result, it will reconstruct hospital culture and thus present a kind of historical, diachronic counterpart to hospital ethnographies written by anthropologists.

The second part examines the international network in so far as it helps us to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the personal, institutional and ideological background and the manner of operation of the hospital. In this respect, it will look at Schweitzer's promotional strategy and pay particular attention to the narrative structure of textual and visual communication.

In a combined examination of both these heavily intertwined areas of study the project will provide a kind of "analytical biography" of the hospital and thus act as a solid counterweight to the controversial popular perception of Schweitzer as humanitarian giant or as a paternalistic racist.

keywords: Albert Schweitzer, Lambarene hospital, medical practice, international networks, colonial medicine, philanthropic medicine, hospital culture, history of medicine in Africa

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