

[Missions, museums and scientific collections: when missionaries spread the word of science](#)

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With the organization of this international workshop, we hope to gather historians, anthropologists, sociologists, philosophers and other researchers to come back on the ambiguous ties that might have brought missionaries and scientists together in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Missions and sciences have long been considered as irreconcilable opposites in the study of missions and sciences alike – whether we speak of natural sciences or the study of man and mankind. European missionaries often were under the suspicion of reading the world and its inhabitants with “Biblical spectacles”, which necessarily led to biased, erroneous, unscientific analyses and conclusions. Yet many Christian missionaries stationed overseas nourished an unbounded interest in anthropology, ethnology, botany, or geology, both as amateurs and professionals, and therefore contributed to the development of those sciences at home. Can one be a thorough scientist and an avowed Christian? This question lies at the heart of the many tensions and collaborations that led missionaries and scientists to work together and confront their scientific materials and findings, notably at the end of the 19th century and the turn of the 20th century. Missionaries could sometimes be precious sources of data for armchair scientists, or even theoreticians of natural and human sciences, thanks mainly to their privileged position as “in-betweeners”, which allowed them to collect information, artefacts, stories and other specimens that were widely sought after by European institutions. Such collaborations could be translated into the integration of missionaries to scientific networks that welcomed them on a national and international stage (clubs and societies) and published their findings in their journals and *bulletins*.

One of the most obvious manifestations of this growing interest in collaboration was probably the active role that some French, British or Swiss missionaries played in collecting artefacts directly from their mission field, which was of course made easier by their linguistic skills and their connections among the indigenous populations studied: among their potential converts, they could find willing contributors who would help them fill the stocks of European museums of anthropology for instance. This workshop wishes to examine those overseas collaborations, those comings and goings between Europe and overseas territories, which have not yet been thoroughly looked into by historians of missions, historians of science and historians of museums. Another aspect this workshop will echo is the interest missionaries often nourished in the cultures and environment they came from, leading them to collect both material and immaterial artefacts when they were on furlough. This practice

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corresponds to the emergence of the study of folklore in many European countries, which borrows its methods to the burgeoning sciences of anthropology and ethnology in the second half of the 19th century.

Potential topics include, but are not limited to:

- Missions and natural sciences
- Missions and the study of man and mankind
- Missions and museums (both at home and in the colonies)
- Missions and European folklore
- Collaborations between missionaries and scientists, scientific institutions and museums
- Missionaries and professional and amateur networks of science
- Joint history of missions and sciences

Funding is available to cover travel expenses and your staying in Le Mans. Please send paper proposals (300-500 words, in French or in English) and a short bio before **September, 15, 2016**, to Maud Michaud (Maud.Michaud@univ-lemans.fr), Serge Reubi (serge.reubi@gmail.com), and Vincent Vilmain (Vincent.Vilmain@univ-lemans.fr).

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