

HIDDEN HISTORIES: WOMEN AND SCIENCE IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

International Interdisciplinary Conference

7-8 May 2021

Submission deadline: 15 January 2021

<https://networks.h-net.org/node/73374/announcements/6624285/cfp-hidden-histories-women-and-science-twentieth-century>

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Ladies on the map: The case of a manuscript of the 19th century

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The manuscript referred to here is the 'Map of Travellers in Africa' produced by Friedrich Welwitsch (1806–1872), an Austrian botanist in the service of the Portuguese government. The National Museum of Natural History and Science, Lisbon, Portugal (MUHNAC) holds this document, which contains several travellers' names who worked in different parts of the African continent. Information that stands out from the map refers to six ladies' names: Barber, Elliott, Holland, Saunders, Tinné, and Turner. These ladies were colonial wives, companions, colleagues, invisible co-workers, but rarely assumed the protagonists' role, Tinné being the exception (Gartrell 1984). This paper aims to discuss women's involvement in knowledge production during the 19th century, especially the African Flora. Usually, women dedicated to natural history investigations did much of the time-consuming work, as sketching landscapes and structures, fossil-hunting, preparing botanical and zoological samples, and even contacting local experts (Kölbl-Ebert 2007). However, they obtained little academic credit because their work was habitually integrated into the publications of the men for whom they worked (Jackson and Jones 2007). Comparing with the other ladies, Miss Turner (fl.1820s) seems to be the most 'invisible' explorer among the other women. It is known that she collected plants in Sierra Leone around the 1820s, and part of the collection remains at Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (UK). On the other hand, Alexandrine Petronella Francina Tinné (1835-1869) is known for being the first European woman to attempt to cross the Sahara desert. Although these are two different cases of visibility, both contributed to knowledge production and the other ladies on the map. In bringing together their histories, this paper may reveal a network of support of women and men, of individuals and institutions, whether in Africa or in Europe, that allowed the investigation to be done.

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