

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

TIM COUZENS, *Murder at Morija: Faith, Mystery, and Tragedy on an African Mission*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003, xx + 468 p.

In December 1920 six people sat down for an afternoon meal at Morija, the headquarters of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society (PEMS) in Basutoland (Lesotho). Almost immediately afterwards they fell variously ill, depending on the amount of soup each had consumed. By the next morning five had recovered but one of the party was dead: sixty-two-year-old Edouard Jacottet, distinguished missionary and scholar, had been murdered by poison, and the crime was never solved.

Who killed Jacottet, and why? These are the questions Couzens leads his readers to ask in Part One of *Murder at Morija*. Like the title, the first forty pages of the book give the impression that one is being prepared for a murder mystery. Here Couzens introduces the scene of the crime, the people involved, and the specific events leading up to and following Jacottet's murder. But Part Two, the most extensive portion of the book, presents readers with a rather drastic change: here Couzens shifts gears from the details of the Jacottet killing to the much broader history of precolonial and colonial Lesotho. *Murder at Morija* is ultimately more concerned with this history and with the trajectory of the PEMS therein rather than with what happened on that fateful afternoon in December 1920; hence the title of the book is somewhat misleading.

The sections of the book describing Lesotho's history and the growing presence of the PEMS during the 19th and 20th centuries are meticulously researched. Despite difficult years, Couzens accredits the overall success of the PEMS in Basutoland to King Moshoeshoe and the Basothos' initial receptiveness to the Christian message. Yet Moshoeshoe himself was never baptized, and each generation of missionaries, led by such figures as Thomas Arbousset, Alfred Casalis, Charles Mabile and Jacottet, faced challenges and setbacks in bringing Christianity to a people who practiced circumcision, bohali (the transfer of cattle as payment for marriage) and polygamy. Couzens also considers the personal lives of the missionaries and their families, the influence of French and Swiss Protestantism on the Basutoland mission, and such events as World War I in Europe and conflicts between Afrikaner and British settlers in southern Africa. The arrival of Catholic missionaries beginning in 1862 is shown to have further complicated the work of the PEMS.

In Part Three Couzens returns to the Jacottet murder case. After discussing several historical instances and legends of murder-by-poisoning, the author presents his own analysis of Jacottet's mysterious death. Couzens' suggestions as to who killed Jacottet and that person's reasons for doing so are convincing, and are moreover supported by detailed considerations of alternative possibilities. The book's conclusions point towards the fates of the people involved in the Jacottet case and the long-term consequences of this missionary's death on the work of the PEMS in Lesotho.

Murder at Morija includes lists of relevant missionary families, the House of Moshoeshe, Basotho pastors and British colonial administrators, as well as maps of Lesotho and PEMS mission stations. In addition, pages 449-462 provide an overview of Couzens' sources in writing the book. While these elements are helpful, *Murder at Morija* remains a challenging read. Efforts to bring its two subjects together are hampered by a tension between the apparent need to convey an overabundance of historical details on the one hand, and the author's venture into the genre of mystery writing on the other. As an historical-scholarly exploration of Lesotho the book is thoroughly researched; as a mystery it provides a captivating account of an unsolved crime. Yet the blending of the two creates its own set of problems. Academics might be disappointed with the lack of engagement with current scholarly debates, while those expecting a southern African murder mystery are likely to be overwhelmed by the sheer amount of historical information provided.

While some strategic editing and reorganization would have benefited this work, Couzens' attempt to provide both a history and a crime narrative bring to the fore deeper-lying tensions between diverging literary genres. Clearly such tensions are not easily resolved. Aside from these reservations *Murder at Morija* will be of interest to a wide audience, including historians, anthropologists and sociologists working in southern Africa, scholars and others concerned with problems of disciplinary and literary boundedness, and readers who are interested in history and who have the time to read and digest this impressively researched volume.

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