

## Background Briefing: Livingstone Online Q&A

**Livingstone Online**

### What is Livingstone Online?

Livingstone Online (<http://www.livingstoneonline.ucl.ac.uk>) is a publishing project based at University College London and in the Center for Digital Humanities and Culture at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. The website makes available online a scholarly edition of the medical and scientific manuscripts of David Livingstone (1813-1873); the missionary, explorer, naturalist and doctor.

### Why is it important?

Together, the variety and range of Livingstone's papers constitute a unique historical resource. Over 2000 letters and an array of diaries, journals, and notebooks survive but there is no one collected edition: the manuscripts are scattered across the world, although most are held by a small number of institutions in Britain and Africa. The texts covers a vast range of subjects, including family and religious matters, observations on African customs, geography, the slave trade and a wealth of information about the organisation of expeditions. A large number of Livingstone's manuscripts contain material on science (notably astronomy and meteorology) and medicine. Natural historical accounts of flora and fauna are prominent. Medical matters include both clinical observations and descriptions of African culture and geography that affect the health: Livingstone was actively seeking out healthy areas suitable for European settlement. Many of the manuscripts reveal the politics and social life of British scientific societies (notably the Royal Geographical Society) and other institutions in the nineteenth century.

### What material is available on Livingstone Online?

Livingstone Online publishes a database that lists the letters and other documents known to exist before 1985. This is based on two seminal works: G.W. Clendennen and I.C. Cunningham, *David Livingstone: a catalogue of documents* (Edinburgh: National Library of Scotland, 1979) and *David Livingstone: a catalogue of documents: a supplement* (Edinburgh: National Library of Scotland, 1985). The material listed in Clendennen and Cunningham is located in more than 80 archives and libraries; other material is in undesignated private hands. A few letters have been discovered since 1985 and, of course, others may still emerge.

To date Livingstone Online has published about 500 letters as originals, transcriptions, or both; together with essays and 'markups' (footnotes). Livingstone Online is also the co-publisher with the UCLA Digital Library of the David Livingstone Spectral Imaging Project (<http://livingstone.library.ucla.edu/>). It has collaborated with leading British archives and educational institutions, including the David Livingstone Centre at Blantyre, the National Library of Scotland (with its impressive John Murray Archive), the Bodleian Library, the Royal Society, the Royal College of Surgeons, the Library of The Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, the School of Oriental and Africa Studies (SOAS) of London, the Royal Society of Arts, the Royal Naval Museum at Portsmouth, and the Royal Geographical Society.