



# DACB NEWS LINK

www.DACB.org DACB@bu.edu

## From the Director



It is only fitting to acknowledge the key role being played by Michèle Sigg, the DACB's Project Manager. For ten years (2002–2012) of the DACB's sojourn at the Overseas Ministries Study Center in New Haven, she worked full time—redesigning and overseeing our website, corresponding with contributors, facilitating oral history workshops in various parts of Africa, and overseeing DACB Project Luke Fellows—twenty-two in all. She continues to oversee the day-to-day management of the project at Boston University. She now works part-time while she pursues PhD studies at Boston University. Her research focuses on the work of French Protestant missionaries and female

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Canadian Friends	2
New Assistant	1–2
Featured Biography	3
Website Update	3



African Christians in Francophone Africa. She hopes that her work will contribute to the further development of the French version of the DACB which, for lack of personnel and contacts in Francophone regions, lags behind the English version. Currently, the French site contains a mere 486 biographies. Biographies of women throughout Africa only number 233.

(Continued on page 4)

## Boston University to Host 2015 Biography Conference

In October of 2015, Boston University School of Theology will host the first DACB co-sponsored conference on African Christian Biography.

The writing of biography has become a major form of documentation for the growing world Christian movement. The purpose of this conference is to reflect upon the progress made by the first twenty years of the *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*, an award-winning web-based documentation project founded in 1995, and to identify new directions in the use of biography and autobiography for the study of African Christianity. The goal of the conference is to produce an edited volume.

Dr. Lamin Sanneh will be our keynote speaker and several other renowned scholars in the field of African Christianity or in the art of biography writing will be among the speakers.

Look out for the official call for papers later this year. It will be circulated to our readers and will be made available on the DACB website.

**Dana L. Robert, Ph.D.** Director, Center for Global Christianity and Mission; Truman Collins Professor of World Christianity and History of Mission, Boston University School of Theology; DACB Editorial Committee

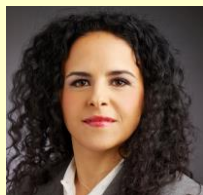


## New Editorial and Technical Assistant for DACB Office

Samantha (Sam) Roebuck has just joined the work of the DACB as our editorial and technical assistant. Born in Zimbabwe, she comes from a family of missionaries. Both her great grandparents and her grandparents were missionaries of the United Methodist Church. Her grandparents were also professors at the University of Zimbabwe, teaching anthropology, sustainable

development, and the sociology of education. Sam graduated from Cambridge University with a Bachelor's degree in English Literature. After a few years of English teaching and working in publishing, she is finally pursuing her dream of studying for a Master of Divinity degree at Boston University School of Theology. In spite of living abroad for much of her life, Zimbabwe is in many ways (Continued on page 2)

## Canadian Friends of the DACB



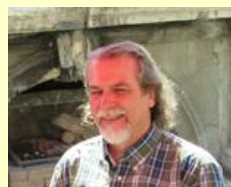
**Suzi Bonk** is founder and president of Sofalogic Inc., a management consultancy firm that provides business planning services for corporate, philanthropic, and charitable clients. Specializing in feasibility testing,

business case evaluation, and GIS mapping, the company services and oversees the development of new products and emerging enterprises. She served as the chairman of Agape Table (a service for the homeless in Winnipeg) for five years, and is active on the Board of the Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre.

**Doug Koop** is a Spiritual Health Specialist (chaplain) at the Health Sciences Centre in Winnipeg. Prior to that he served twenty-five years as an editor with the *Christian Week* newspaper, covering Christian faith and life in Canada. Africa has always been important to him. He was born and raised in Ethiopia, and also lived and worked for eighteen months in Mombasa, Kenya.



**Ray Dirks** has been the curator/director of the Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery in Winnipeg since 1998. An accomplished artist, his interest in documenting the lives of ordinary Africans came into focus while he was working for two years as a book illustrator for the Mennonite Brethren church in the Democratic Republic of Congo (then Zaire). After returning to Canada in late 1985,



his paintings centered on revealing and honoring the dignity of the people he had met in Zaire. His curated exhibitions, featuring contemporary art from fifteen countries, have toured throughout North America. In 2002, he served as artist-in-residence at OMSC in New Haven because of his work in Africa (see his artwork below, courtesy of the OMSC "Previous Artists in Residence" page [www.omsc.org/artists.shtml](http://www.omsc.org/artists.shtml)). In 2006, Dirks was invited by the Church of Christ in Congo to cover the Democratic Republic of Congo elections as an accredited photographer. He has been invited to workshops or mounted exhibitions in Kenya, Ethiopia, Sudan, and Zimbabwe, including at the National Gallery of Zimbabwe in Bulawayo.

—Jonathan Bonk



*Sudanese Madonna and Child by Ray Dirks (Overseas Ministries Study Center Private Collection)*

## New Editorial and Technical Assistant

*Continued from page 1*



still home and she visits regularly. Her faith grew out of her family life in Zimbabwe, where she plans to complete her contextual education working with a Christian charity that helps women who are ostracized from their villages. After her three years in Boston, she hopes to follow in her grandparents' footsteps, pursuing her interest in the history of Christianity in Southern Africa and the life of the church in Africa today.

Reflecting on her work with the *DACB*, Sam said:

I'm particularly excited to be working on the *DACB* because it is a brilliant project: giving voice to stories that have not been widely heard; hearing the history from the perspective of

Africa's own people in their own voices. The variety of biographies reflects the rich cultural traditions of the continent and with every entry, you feel like you learn something new. I am excited to play a part in sharing knowledge from places and people that are underrepresented in the traditional textbooks. It is also exciting to be a part of something that feels as though it is still growing: there are still so many stories to be heard. I particularly hope to help grow the Zimbabwean portion of the dictionary and learn new things about where I was born.

## In Memory: Mahay Choramo (c. 1920 to 2014), Wolaitta Kale Heywat Church, Ethiopia

Mahay Choramo was a pioneer missionary who served the church for sixty-five years in the south and southwest of Ethiopia. Mahay is a Gamo name which means “tiger” in the local language.

Mahay was born in Kucha, in the southwest part of Ethiopia. A few years after his birth, the first expatriate missionaries, members of the Sudan Interior Mission, arrived in Soddo. Mahay was converted after hearing a sermon and he very soon felt a call to be an evangelist himself.

Preaching was a priority in his life. He was convinced that the preached word of God held a power that defeated Satan and transformed lives. For this reason preaching the Good News became his passion. Mahay accepted the fact that preaching and opposition went hand in hand because this was the experience of the early church in the book of Acts. In southern Ethiopia in the 1940s every non-Orthodox Christian was treated unjustly at the whim of any government official or landowner. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church condoned this opposition. Mahay expected opposition but he never resented or held grudges against those who opposed him.

Mahay worked as an evangelist among the people of Hamar, who are semi-nomadic pastoralists. Men typically wear a checkered skirt of cloth while women wear a cow-skin skirt. When they see men wearing clothes, the people of Hamar think that they must have some hidden disease. Nevertheless, Mahay also practiced being naked in order to reach them. He said, “Gradually I told them that it is better if we cover our body with cloth, and then they began to cover only some parts of their body.”

### State of the DACB Website

In the first nine months of this year the *DACB* web site has attracted over 410,000 unique visitors – an average of over 1,500 unique visitors per day. Of these, our most frequent visitors were from Nigeria, the U.S., South Africa, Zimbabwe, the UK, and Kenya. It is not unrealistic to think that with the current five-year initiative now underway across Africa, these numbers will increase exponentially as the *DACB* serves the academy, the church, and society in Africa. Numbers like these should make the site attractive to advertisers (publishers, churches, educational entities, businesses) whose missions complement those of the *DACB*, and should encourage supporters in the knowledge that their investments have yielded high returns, both tangible and intangible.



Mahay used many methods to reach out to the people, including a literacy program. Teaching served two purposes: to train people and to learn their language himself. He eventually was able to speak fluent Hamar. Giving out medicine was another strategy. He not only distributed medicine to sick people but also to their animals. The people of Hamar are very sensitive about their cattle, so when they saw their cattle healed, they became very attached to him. Nobody dared to kill him.

Mahay preached Jesus’ death and resurrection as the heart of the Good News, and he sometimes preached in the marketplace in the local language. He embraced people who were expelled by their families because of their faith in Jesus and invited them to live with him.

For his entire life Mahay was an active member of the Wolaitta Kale Heywat Church, whose members he considered his spiritual parents. Before going anywhere, he always asked for the blessing of the elders. The WKHC considered him one of their workers and occasionally sent him small sums of money. As the years passed, the WKHC repeatedly asked him to retire but since “retirement” was not a word he found in the Bible, he would beg them to bless him and release him to some unevangelized area.

On April 13, 2014, at 9 p.m., Ato Mahay Choramo passed away, aged 94, at his home in Soddo, Wolaitta.

*--Biography compiled from two DACB biographies on [www.DACB.org](http://www.DACB.org).*

The project manager has made several improvements to the website to make it more mobile-friendly. These are important as close to half of our visitors view our content using mobile devices. These changes include: larger fonts for navigation tools such as menus, a larger Africa map, and more spacing between links.

I am thrilled that the *DACB* is being more and more widely utilized all over the world, and as I look forward to the next several years of *DACB* engagement with the counsel and support of the extraordinary Africa Advisory Council, it is hard to restrain my enthusiasm! It seems to me that the best is yet to come!

—Jonathan Bonk

Continued from page 1

Although I now reside in Canada, telephone, Internet and air travel make it possible for me to continue serving as Director of the *DACB* enterprise. Since most of my work is in Africa, and it is as easy to get to Africa from Winnipeg as it is from Boston, the scattering of our editorial committee poses only minor challenges. Thanks to the advice and assistance of an ad hoc “Canadian Friends of the *DACB*” committee (introduced on page 2) here in Winnipeg, I have been able to meet with a number of key people in some of Winnipeg’s academic institutions. Among these are Dr. Dean Peachey, Acting Principal of Global College at the University of Winnipeg; Dr. Pierre Gilbert, Dean of Graduate Studies at Canadian Mennonite University; Prof. Cameron McKenzie, Dean of Faculty at Providence University College; and Prof. Dr. E. Sibanda, chair of the history department at the University of Winnipeg. His special interest is African and Zimbabwean history, including biography. I expect that these meetings will foster opportunities for public lectures later this fall, thus spreading the news among potential stake holders—both supporters and contributors.

### In future issues, look for news about...

- Portraits of our *DACB* Advisors
- A regular e-letter for pastors featuring homiletical / inspirational versions of stories for use in preaching
- Anticipated co-sponsored regional academic conferences on African Biography
- An annual scholarly *Journal of African Christian Biography*
- A Noteworthy column: *Please submit news of persons, conferences and scholarly activities related to African biography and African church history to [dacb@bu.edu](mailto:dacb@bu.edu)*

Project Director: Dr. Jonathan Bonk  
Project Manager: Mrs. Michèle Sigg

Center for Global Christianity and Mission  
Boston University School of Theology  
745 Commonwealth Ave.  
Boston, MA 02215  
Email: [DACB@BU.edu](mailto:DACB@BU.edu)

### Planning and Future Projects

The ***DACB* Editorial Committee** met at Boston University on September 9-10. This meeting focused on strategic mid-term and long-range plans and fundraising. It also drafted a preliminary agenda for the first face-to-face **meeting of the Africa Advisory Council**, scheduled for **October 26-28** in Nairobi. On the table will be a prototype regional conference being projected for some time in 2015 on “Biography and Oral History in the Context of African Church and Academy.”

In **April of 2015 I will be visiting Zambia** in conjunction with the *DACB*, reconnecting with some of the people and schools that so warmly welcomed me on my first *DACB*-related visit to the country in February 2001, more than fourteen years ago.

On **September 12-15, 2015**, I will be traveling to **Lima, Peru** at the invitation of a group of Latin American academics who hope to do for Latin America what the *DACB* is trying to do for the continent of Africa. The *DACB* has so far served as the model for several initiatives focusing on subjects in the Chinese and Indian subcontinents. Of particular interest to readers of this newsletter might be the Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Christianity (<http://www.bdconline.net/en/>), incubated in the *DACB*’s New Haven offices in 2005-2006.

We envisage publication of an **annual journal** featuring some of the outstanding biographies that appear in the online database. Also under discussion is a regular **newsletter for pastors**, featuring stories that are particularly inspirational and instructive for congregations. More details about these initiatives will be forthcoming.

\*American donations in support of the *DACB* should be sent to:

*Dictionary of African Christian Biography*  
c/o Mr. Kevin Keith  
Boston Univ. Sch. of Theology  
745 Commonwealth Ave.  
Boston, MA 02215, USA  
<http://www.dacb.org/supportthedacb.html>

For information regarding wire transfers, contact Mr. Kevin Keith at: [kkeith@bu.edu](mailto:kkeith@bu.edu).

Canadian donations should be sent to:

*Dictionary of African Christian Biography*  
Attn: Business Office  
Providence University College and Seminary  
Otterburne, MB R0A 1G0, Canada

For information regarding wire transfers, contact Mr. John Laugeson at [john.laugeson@prov.ca](mailto:john.laugeson@prov.ca).