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Mapping in colonial times: *La Côte française des Somalis et contrées avoisinantes* by Alexandre Meunier (1908-1909)

Cartographeur en période coloniale : La Côte française des Somalis et contrées avoisinantes par Alexandre Meunier (1908-1909)

Cartografiando en el periodo colonial: La Côte française des Somalis et contrées avoisinantes por Alexandre Meunier (1908-1909)

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forgotten French cartographer working for the "Service ry, contributed heavily to the production of maps over the aps, were 3 maps (Djibouti, Harrar and Addis Ababa) on *La ées avoisinantes*, published in 1908-1909. The maps are map design and their thematic contents as well as their ontext of the time and the institutional aspects surrounding d. Beyond the wish to give Alexandre Meunier a place he 7, this paper intends to shed light on this particular type of amble in the Horn of Africa where Italy, Great Britain and ia. It shows how apparently ordinary maps contributed to lomacy.

rtographe, oublié de nos jours, travaillait au Service re des colonies et contribua intensément à la production de rmi ces cartes, trois d'entre elles (Djibouti, Harrar et Addis t 1909 dans *La Côte française des Somalis et contrées porte sur leur conception graphique" et leur contenu rs colonial de l'époque. Sont également pris en compte le institutionnels de la production des cartes. Au-delà de la*

volonté de donner à Alexandre Meunier une place qu'il devrait avoir dans l'histoire de la cartographie, cet article cherche à montrer l'originalité de ce type de carte produit à l'apogée de la conquête coloniale dans la Corne de l'Afrique, où l'Italie, la Grande Bretagne et la France rivalisaient dans leurs appétits sur l'Abyssinie. Ainsi, quelques cartes à première vue assez ordinaires ont contribué aux rivalités coloniales et à la diplomatie internationale.

Alexandre Meunier (1870-1942), fue un cartógrafo francés olvidado en nuestros días que trabajó para el "Servicio Geográfico" en el Ministerio Colonial, contribuyendo en gran medida a la producción de mapas sobre el imperio colonial francés. Entre sus cartas, destacan tres (Djibouti, Harrar y Addis Ababa) sobre la costa francesa de los somalíes y áreas próximas, publicadas en 1908-1909. En este trabajo, estas se analizan en cuanto a su diseño, contenidos temáticos y su discurso colonial, tal proceso circunscrito en el contexto geopolítico de la época y aspectos institucionales en torno a su publicación. Más allá del deseo de otorgar a Alexandre Meunier el lugar que merece en la historia de la cartografía, este artículo buscó visibilizar la originalidad de este tipo de cartas, producidas en un contexto de disputa en áreas coloniales del Cuerno de África, donde Italia, Gran Bretaña y Francia rivalizaron en Abyssinia. Se concluye que los mapas en apariencia ordinarios, contribuyeron a las rivalidades coloniales y diplomacia internacional de la época.

Index terms

Mots-clés : Afrique, cartographie, colonialisme, souveraineté

Keywords : Africa, cartography, colonialism, sovereignty

Palabras claves : África, cartografía, colonialismo, soberanía

Full text

- 1 In 1908-1909, 3 maps were published under the title *La Côte française des Somalis et contrées avoisinantes* by the Service Géographique des Colonies, with a clear mention of the name of the author: Alexandre Meunier. These map sheets of Djibouti (1908), Harrar (1908) and Addis Ababa (1909) are at a scale of 1:500,000 (Figures 2, 4 and 6). Their geographical extent is shown here on the background of the map of Abyssinia published in 1908 by the War office of Great Britain (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Location of Meunier's maps assembled on a map of abyssinia (War Office 1908)



Figure 2 Djibouti map (Meunier 1908, a)

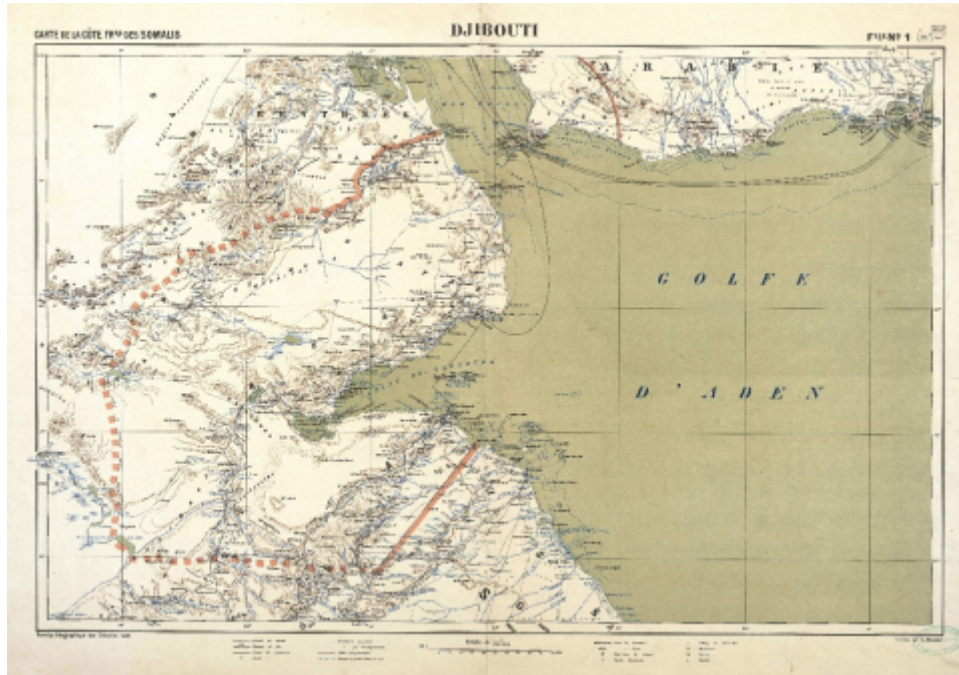


Figure 3 Portion of Djibouti map (Meunier 1908, a)



Figure 4 Harrar map (Meunier 1908, b)



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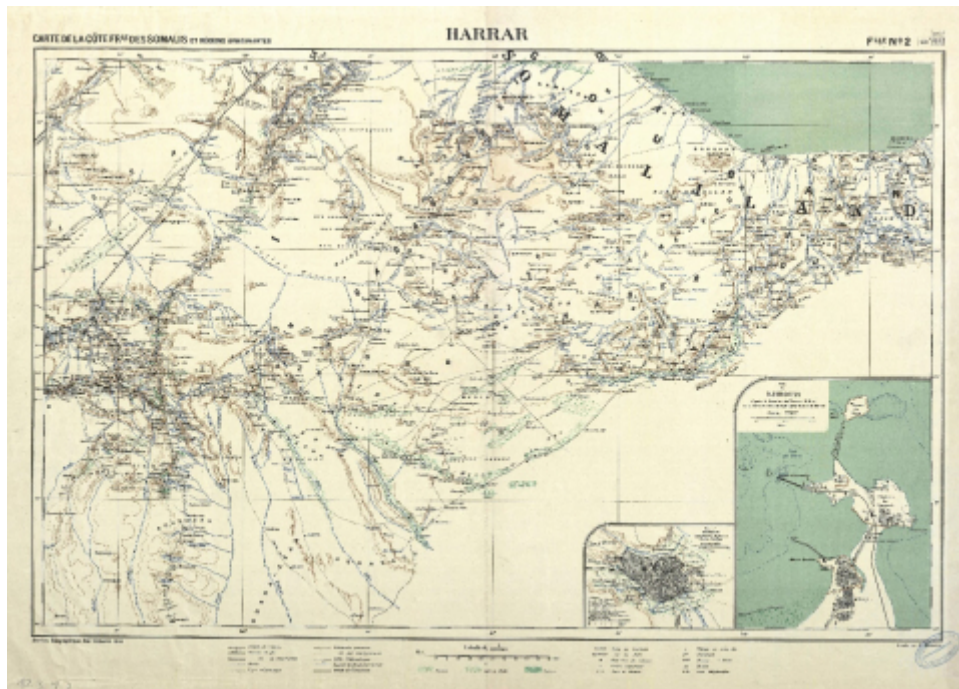


Figure 5 Portion of Harar map (Meunier 1908, b)



r 1909)



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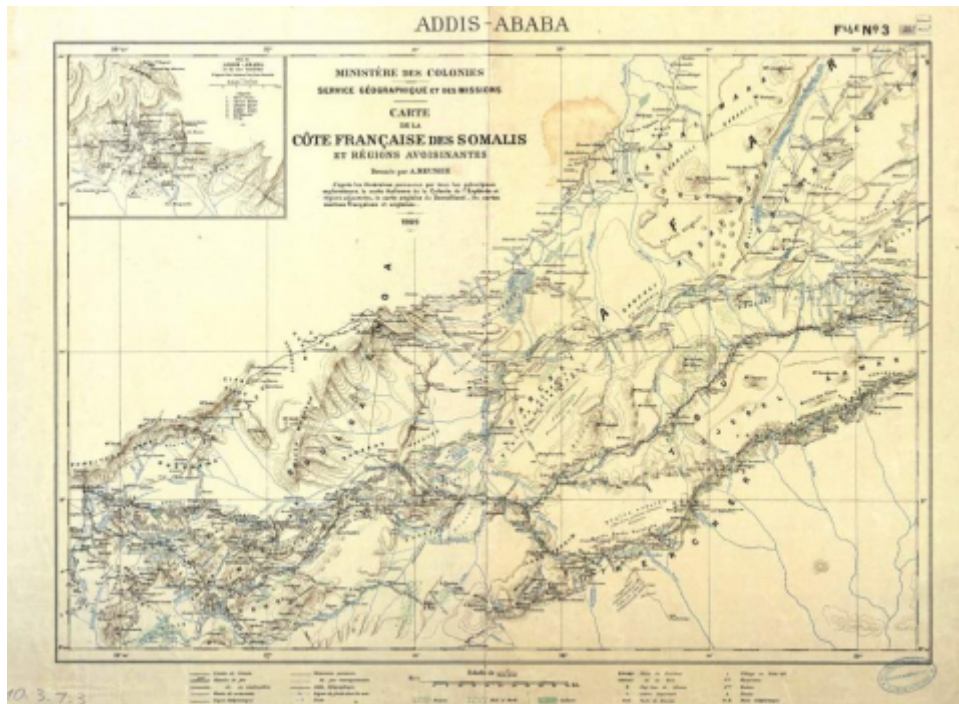


Figure 7 Portion of Addis Ababa map (Meunier 1909)



The mapping project

- When the mapping project started is found in a report to the Minister from the Director of Political and Administrative Affairs, dated the 27th of February 1908:¹

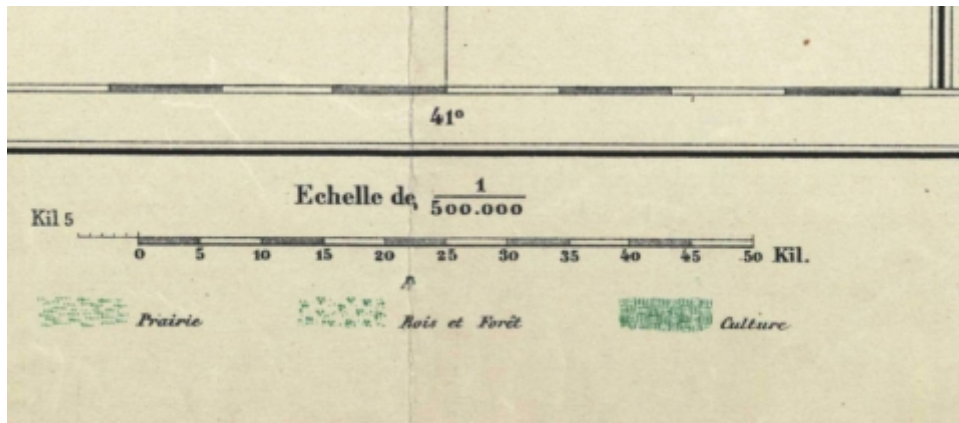
Par lettre en date du 22 mars 1904, M. le gouverneur de la Côte française des parterment que le conseil d'administration avait nent d'une carte de la colonie, tel qu'il lui avait été rielle du 18 décembre 1903.²



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jibouti and Harar, were projected, including the first ibouti and Dire Daoua. These maps do not belong to along to any map series, not even to a map “category”: phic maps, infrastructure and communication maps, s...and more. It is not possible to assign them to any have an uneven format; the latest Addis Ababa map nd Djibouti maps (Figure 1). Some minor differences om each other, and one can wonder why the map key 't show any areal symbol for vegetation, when the two assigned to “prairies, culture” and “bois et forêts”

nd Addis maps



Aims: Contents analysis by contextualizing: involving actors and the geopolitical situation

- 4 Analyzing maps in this case can only be done properly by doing more than analyzing the information displayed. It has to include the historical circumstances of the making of the maps and the actors involved. This can be done by identifying and investigating the participants in the production process, by specifying the roles of other actors apart from the mapmaker himself, and by describing how institutions operationalized their map production. This will shed light over the contents of the maps: the information variables themselves. One will therefore associate the geopolitical context in the considered area with the actors involved as well as the information contents displayed on the maps. Analyzing maps ranges therefore from technical issues to geopolitical and ideological contents.
- 5 What was Alexandre Meunier's place as a mapmaker in his time, despite the fact that he seems to be nearly invisible in the recent and contemporary history of cartography?³ Could the fact that Meunier's maps do not belong to any defined category of maps explain the disdain for his works? Is there anything special about colonial maps and do they fall into a particular category?
- 6 Beyond using 'traditional' methods for map reading and analysis as done by geographers by first extracting and describing each theme or layer of information separately and their graphical design, GIS is an adequate tool. It was done by using a standard GIS⁴ to geo-reference and assemble the three original maps. Each digitized layer could be clearly visible when displayed separately and much easier to describe⁵.



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and on maps, primarily the discourse of power, Brian dening in map analysis. Any map can be seen as the goal, programme or strategy, and particular uses. One tion of all map elements: the title, the extent of the ction, the choice of graphic symbols and the text in nalysis as it was advocated by Harley. Applying this en done for some years. It is definitely clear that ct was not 'pure knowledge' but one of the most colonial enterprises. This view is exemplified in a and his colleagues (Singaravélou, 2008). Both in that le of geographical knowledge is clearly characterized: *knowledge did play a key role in the military conquest nized territories'* (Blais *et al.*, 2011, 146).

en looking back to the beginning of the 20th century, onial enterprises were themselves quite clear in their ng, how mapping colonial territories would increase

their geographical knowledge and how important that task was for them. This is evident from a quite explicit note about West Africa in *Actes de la société de géographie*:

Cartes de l'Afrique occidentale française - Les missions scientifiques qui depuis quelques années sillonnent nos diverses possessions, le zèle infatigable de nos administrateurs et commandants de cercles, l'activité incessante des officiers de notre armée coloniale, ont éclairé d'un jour tout nouveau les connaissances géographiques que nous possédions jusqu'ici sur nos colonies de la côte occidentale d'Afrique. Aussi a-t-il paru intéressant au ministère des colonies d'utiliser les documents les plus récents qu'il avait reçus sur ces régions et de faire dresser une carte d'ensemble destinée à ceux qui s'occupent des questions coloniales. MM Meunier et Barralier, dessinateurs au Service géographique du ministère des Colonies, ont été chargés d'exécuter ce travail qui vient d'être terminé. (La Géographie, 1904, 154)⁶

- 9 In analysing the case of Italy, which had a similar cartographic service in its colonial ministry, Casti and Burini (2008, 1) point out that "by belonging to the particular cartographic institution the mapmaker contributes to supporting a specific political and ideological product". According to them, such cartographic services "coordinate and control the entire colonial cartographic production and to complete derivative maps for not only state offices but also to the general public" (Casti, Burini, 2008, 5), the ultimate goal being the legitimacy of the colonial project:

In colonial cartography, for instance, particular cartographic institutions attempted to answer the needs of those who under various auspices were responsible for working within the colonial project, formulating a cartographic production that, however articulated and varied, was wholly directed towards demonstrating the practicability and legitimacy of the colonial project (Casti, Burini, 2008, 3).

Institutional actors: The Colonial ministry, the Service Géographique of the Ministry and the Committee of the Service Géographique

- 10 One of the tasks in this work is to demonstrate the role of particular institutions in charge of the cartographic production. In this case it will be to analyse the role of a particular service: this service was a mapping unit under the Colonial Ministry. The service was responsible for not only collecting all existing information for producing maps but also organizing missions for the collection of information from various countries. It was created January 31st, 1889. Its structures and its duties were later specified in a publication by Antony Georges (1901). In 1902 this relatively autonomous



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administration of the Ministère des Colonies. At that time in France and the French Empire was done by the Ministry of the Service Géographique de l'Armée or the Ministry of the Colonies. The colonial authorities wanted an additional unit, centralizing cartographic production in this new and relatively small structure.

The Service Géographique started to publish the first of Meunier's maps in 1902. A new committee was created in charge of colonial cartography: the Comité Géographique du Ministère des Colonies⁷ (lit. the Committee of the Colonial Ministry). Documents in the Service Géographique of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs made reference to the Committee in charge of supervising the publication

of the Service des affaires politiques et administratives, the Ministry of the Colonies in charge of supervising the activities of the Service Géographique. In 1908, the Minister⁹ announced the constitution of a provisional list of its members, as well as its structure. The list follows:¹⁰

Constitution d'un Comité du Service Géographique

Paris le 16 janvier 1908

Arrêté :

Le ministre des colonies

Ce comité est composé de la manière suivante:

- L'inspecteur général des travaux publics des colonies, Président
- Un officier supérieur du Génie ou un ancien Chef du Service des Travaux publics aux Colonies
- Un représentant du Service géographique de l'armée
- Un professeur de l'Université
- le sous-Directeur de l'Afrique chargé du Service Géographique au Ministère des Colonies
- Le sous-Directeur de l'Asie, de l'Amérique et de l'Océanie au Ministère des Colonies
- Un rédacteur à l'administration centrale du Ministère des Colonies.¹¹

13 A few days later, on the 21st of January 1908 a letter was sent to the Ministry of Education asking for a member from the academic community to be nominated as a member of the Committee responsible for supervising the Service Géographique's activities. Paul Vidal de la Blache, one of the founders of the French academic human geography, was accepted by the Minister on February 1st. It should be noted that Vidal was the only academic member of the Committee. A programme for the Committee was circulated on the 29th of February, announcing a first meeting on the 5th of March.

14 All of the above-mentioned details show how quickly the Ministry had proceeded. It seems that the ministry was in a hurry to establish the Committee in order to solve problems existing in the Service Géographique. One of their first tasks was to accelerate and monitor the completion and the publication of the maps of the Côte française des Somalis. Alexandre Meunier, who was working on the maps of the Côte des Somalis was at once involved as their main partner in the discussions with the Committee. A letter was even sent to the Minister with a request for additional funds for the mapmaker Meunier, who had been working overtime.

15 A main event happened; as the mapping project was nearing completion, it expanded to include regions of Ethiopia along the planned railway line up to Addis Ababa:

Grace à ces éléments et aux nombreux matériaux concernant les autres régions qui ont été coordonnés avec intelligence et méthode par Mr. Meunier, agent cartographe, la nouvelle carte du Service Géographique des colonies constitue un document de premier ordre. Les services qu'elle est appelée à rendre sont d'autant plus précieux qu'elle est la première carte représentant d'une façon détaillée non seulement nos possessions de la côte des Somalis mais encore l'ensemble des territoires éthiopiens ou sont engagés les intérêts politiques et financiers de la France.¹²



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omatic situation had changed, the initial mapping luding in the map the (not yet built) railway line from is could only be done by adding a third map sheet.

the mapmaker: Alexandre

he Service Géographique et des Missions¹⁴ of the ighly active mapmaker and produced many maps, at ions in the world. In his lifetime, Meunier's map nd praised in several articles and reports published in rie, Raveneau, 1900, 309;¹⁵ Privat-Deschanel, 1908, De Martonne, 1931), as well as in the specialized *the Coloniale Illustrée* (1911; 1913). In an article by up production is mentioned three times (Privat

Deschanel, 1908, 347, 349, 350) and the last mention, about the map of Dahomey, is particularly positive:

*La carte de Mr. A. Meunier est la première carte générale du Dahomey. Construite en 1906, elle a été constamment modifiée et tenue à jour jusqu'au mois de mai 1908. Elle est très complète et paraît très exacte... sans être définitive elle constitue un progrès réel et fait honneur à Mr. Meunier, déjà connu par plusieurs travaux importants.*¹⁶

- 18 In 1925 he even received a prize from a research fund, the Fondation Trémond (Le Génie Civil, 1925, 567): 'Ce prix est attribué à Mr. Alexandre Meunier, géographe au ministère des colonies, pour son œuvre cartographique sur l'Afrique Occidentale Française.'¹⁷ The only critical evaluation to be found of Meunier's maps is in a review of colonial maps written by Emmanuel de Martonne, on the Côte française des Somalis (De Martonne, 1931, 195):

*L'unique document d'ensemble existant est la carte au 500000 en 3 feuilles publiée en 1908 par le Service Géographique du Ministère des Colonies et dont la dernière édition remonte à 1922, c'est la carte d'exploration tout à fait vague en dehors de quelques points précis.*¹⁸

- 19 Data on Meunier's biography are scarce. The Bibliothèque Nationale only had information about his maps, as well some low-resolution scans¹⁹ of his maps. Meunier is seldom mentioned by scholars after the 1930s. One exception is Imbert-Vier (2008, 167; 2016), who mentions his map of the Côte française des Somalis. By contrast, a relatively recent article on the mapping of Ethiopia (Ferraresi *et al.*, 2006) does not contain any mention of Meunier's maps. In common with De Martonne (1931), Imbert-Vier (2008, 33) had some reservations about the quality of information concerning place names in particular, as well as about the borders depicted on Meunier's map. Odile Goerg (Goerg, 2004) is the only author to have analysed the conditions, the process involved, and the contents of a map produced by Meunier, *La carte de La Guinée française*, published in 1902. It can be concluded, that if in his time, Meunier was a respected cartographer, he was almost totally forgotten after WW2.

A changing geopolitical context

- 20 The geopolitical situation was changing rapidly at the beginning of the 20th century, leading to new alliances and treaties. In the case of the Red Sea area, Italian, English, French, and Egyptian powers had been involved. In London in 1906, French, Italian and English powers reached an agreement, a treaty on sharing territories of influence in East Africa. They had recognized, after the defeat of the Italians in Adoua, the strength of the "impossibility of using force to expand in the region. The new treaty and the new relationship between the new treaty and the "diplomatic" in his writing about the case of a railway line in



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not dealt with in the series of Anglo-French treaties which sealed the 'Entente Cordiale'. But a disposition of Mr. Delcassé's policy to make British the French official policy in Abyssinia a test of the 'Entente Cordiale'. (Lennox-Gilmour, 1906, 52)

With these events, including Rosanna Van Gelder de (2003). The 1906 treaty led to a delimitation of the borders. Later on, the French diplomat Klobukowski, who signed a treaty with Emperor Menelik in 1908, that is the first of Meunier's map sheets (Djibouti). The new rules of trade between the Ethiopian kingdom and the French colonial ministry felt a strong need to

produce a concrete document describing the extent of its position in the Horn of Africa following the evolution of relationships between powerful nations at that time.

22 From 1884, with the governor of the territory of the Côte française des Somalis, Léonce Lagarde, actions were taken to connect the territory to the neighbouring territory, under the rule of Ménélik, King of Choa, later emperor (Negus) of Ethiopia. Several colonial powers, including France, Italy, Great Britain, and even Egypt, Germany, and Russia, were competing with each other in the Red Sea area. However, the French Government was not ready to support an active policy in Abyssinia, as stated by Rosanna Van Gelder de Piñeda (1995, 97): "*Le gouvernement français n'est pas encore prêt en 1890 à soutenir une présence en Abyssinie malgré les demandes incessantes de Ménélik et des commerçants.*"²⁰

23 Changes came later. Trade and relationships between the Côte française des Somalis (1896) and Abyssinia increased particularly when the first segment of the railway had almost reached Dire Daoua in 1903. The railway line was originally created to link Djibouti and Harar. However, it was never extended to Harar but terminated at Dire Daoua, due to various difficulties and financial issues leading to the bankruptcy of the original company responsible for its construction.

24 The international context was evolving: increased international tensions, particularly colonial rivalries between France and Germany, led to new alliances. Rosanna Van Gelder de Piñeda states:

Entre août 1905 et février 1906, les gouvernements anglais et français, devant l'influence croissante des allemands à la cour et dans les compagnies coloniales africaines dont les chemins de fer sont la clef de voûte du développement, sont obligés de s'accorder sur un simple partage de l'Ethiopie en sphères d'influence (1995, 386).²¹

25 By 1905, with the creation of the Entente Cordiale, the alliance between France and Great Britain introduced a new agenda for the territory. France, Great Britain and Italy negotiated with each other to end their rivalries and the negotiations were concluded with a tripartite agreement, signed in London in 1906, acknowledging French possessions on the Côte des Somalis. Two relatively recent and useful articles (Markus, 1964) and (Keefer, 1981) analysed the 1906 agreement. Following this treaty, a new solution had to be found for the bankrupted railway company in order to resume the construction of the railway line towards Addis Ababa. Klobukowski spent several months (between 1907 and 1908) in Addis Ababa in order to negotiate with Emperor Menelik on solutions for the shaping of a new railway company in which the French would have a key role. This Franco-Ethiopian treaty of 1908 was analysed by Lukian Prijac (Prijac, 2003). The inclusion of the third map sheet, the Addis Abeba map, happened as a direct consequence of the negotiations and agreement between the French diplomat Klobukowski and Negus Menelik concerning the new railway company railway line to Addis Ababa.



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d system of reference- concept of 'régions

nap (Meunier 1909)



26 The first of Meunier's three maps is titled *Djibouti*, with the following subtitle *Carte de la Côte française des Somalis* (Figure 2). The geographical area covered by the map is as described in the title.

27 On the second map, the Harrar sheet, the subtitle is slightly modified: *Carte de la Côte française des Somalis et régions avoisinantes*. Accordingly, the mapped area covers parts of neighbouring countries, but not any part of the French territory itself.

28 For the third map sheet, on Addis Ababa, the title is even more questionable (Figure 9), it has the same subtitle: *Carte de la Côte française des Somalis et régions avoisinantes*, yet the mapped area belonged exclusively to the Kingdom of Ethiopia and no part belonged to the Côte française des Somalis or any neighbouring country.

29 Even more disturbing is that neither Ethiopia or Abyssinia is mentioned in the map titles or elsewhere on the maps. One can assume that titles were chosen consciously. In fact, several members of the Committee had already expressed their concern about what they called a 'detail':

MM. Bouteville, Renard, Vidal de la Blache et Bourgeois présentent quelques observations de détail. Ils attirent notamment l'attention sur les inconvénients diplomatiques qui pourraient résulter du fait d'avoir englobé l'Éthiopie toute entière dans une carte qui porte le titre de Côte française des Somalis, titre qui s'cartes ne comprenant aucune parcelle du



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is all too late, as it was done at a meeting on the May 1908, and had already been published.

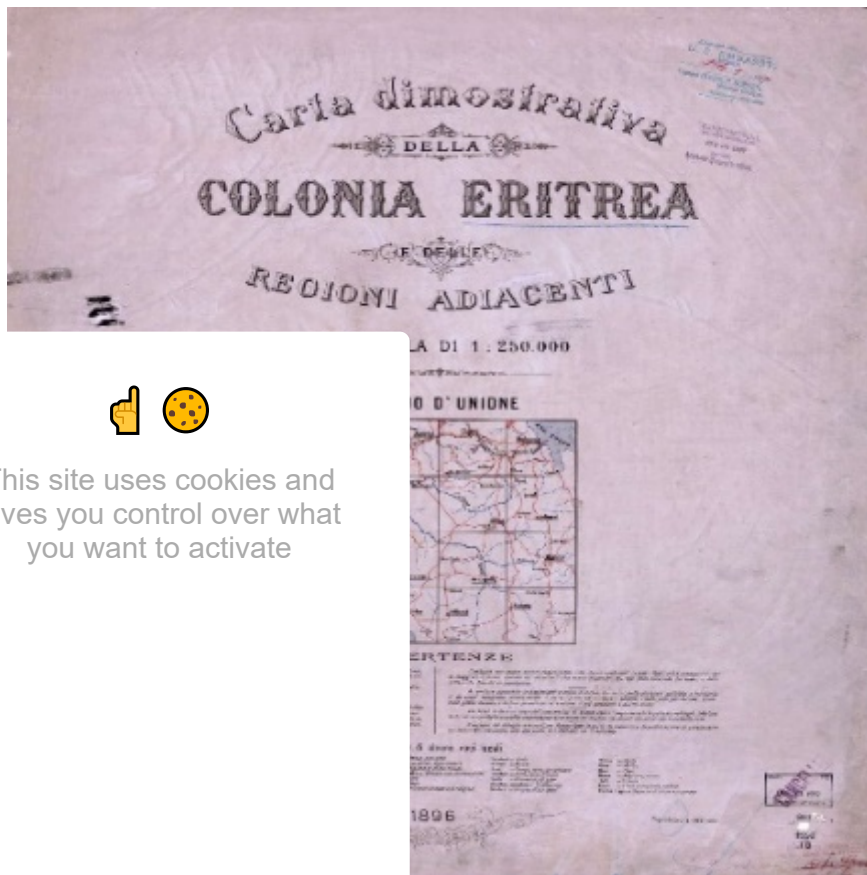
the concept of '*regions avoisinantes*' (neighbouring regions) was in common use at that time. For example, the use of the term on maps of Eritrea by including *regioni adiacenti* (neighbouring regions) (Figure 10). The qualification for the use of the term was with a somehow neutral *regione adiacenti* and later even to possessions (*carta dei possedimenti*, Figure 11). The stretching of the concept of "dépendance" is the *Atlas de l'Afrique française* (Pelet, 1902), where one can find the *Carte de la Côte française des Somalis* including almost all of Ethiopia and even part of the

fluenza, Italian map (anonymous 1896)



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Figure 11 Regioni adjacenti on Eritrea map (istituto Geografico Militare 1896)



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dependence – French map (Pelet 1902)



32 After the Battle of Adoua (Adwa) in 1896, the colonial powers were forced to reduce their ambitions in Ethiopia. However, European countries still had some difficulties in accepting the fact that Ethiopia was independent and not under their influence. Despite reiterated expressions of official recognition of Ethiopia's independence, it seems that they still had a (not really) hidden agenda, a tendency to consider Ethiopia as an extension of their presence in Djibouti (in the case of France), Eritrea (in the case of Italy) and Somaliland (in the case of Great Britain). An expression of the competition between colonial powers is still to be found on Meunier's Harrar map sheet, where 'English Somaliland' is merely named 'Somaliland', without any mention of it being a British possession.

33 The discussion of the use of the term *regions avoisinantes*, a neutral concept, leads to the relatively new concept of 'hinterland', a more political concept involving some power relation even if is quite close to *regions avoisinantes* and fits quite well with the situation depicted on the maps: "in colonial usage, the term (hinterland) was applied to the surrounding areas of former European colonies in Africa, which, although not part of a colony itself, were influenced by the colony."²³ The point made here is that since the 1880s, and particularly after the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885, colonial powers either agreed or disagreed on defining parts of Africa as their particular zones of



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of 'influence' and 'hinterland' were used for territories without an effective occupation. In practice, the 'hinterland' concept was used with coastal territory the right to claim political control of inland territory.²⁴ Another term expressed this idea came from 1906 about a mission led by Lieutenant Collat: "the fundamental mental attitudes of contemporary colonial policy were being used to gain access to new markets in Africa or

*Est Africain entre Dire-Daoua, le terminus actuel de la route Addis-Abeba, et la capitale de l'Abyssinie, forment la zone d'influence de Ménélik dont notre possession de Djibouti est le point de départ (1906, 740)*²⁵

the Côte Française des Somalis under French control to gain access to the wider Abyssinian kingdom.

The system of reference on Meunier's maps

35 The margins of Meunier's maps do not show any reference to the geodetic system that was used. Moreover, there is no information about the ellipsoid, the projection, or the datum. There is a grid of coordinates based on the Paris meridian²⁶ yet not explicitly. It may be seen as an expression of French nationalism. Some 25 years earlier, at the Congress of Geography in Washington in 1884, the Greenwich meridian was adopted for all cartographic work. During much of the 20th century they were still using the French system based on the Paris meridian, together with additional Greenwich references (as is still the case today for topographic maps).

Map features: the map keys

36 Only linear features and point features, such as some places, locations, and settlements are represented in the keys (Figure 13, Figure 14) on all 3 map sheets. Several features are infrastructures and administrative elements. The information is what was observed, measured, and reported by European travelers over 70 years and reflects what interested them.

Figure 13 Key part 1

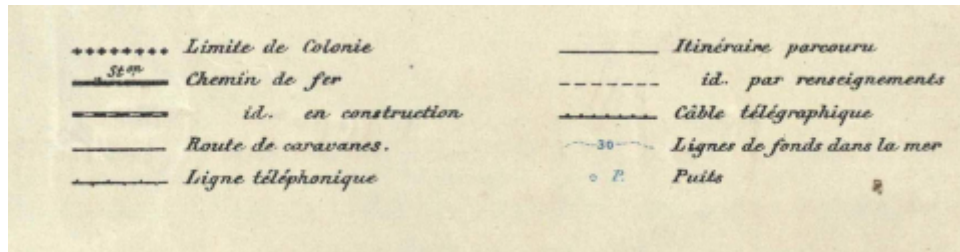
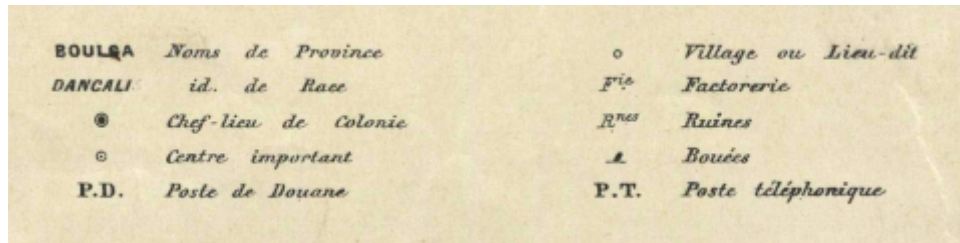


Figure 14 Key part 2



37 Earlier in this text the map key for Harrar and Addis Ababa map sheets was shown (on Figure 8) with areal symbols for vegetation. None of these are found on the map key for Djibouti. This difference is the consequence of the requirements from the the first map (Djibouti) was already published.



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e maps represents a huge undertaking in terms of ling all sources. Meunier's three maps were based on 5e of earlier maps made by French, English or Italian depicting the expeditions of various explorers and 70 years, were also used as sources of information. in colour (four colours) as lithographic prints. The luded inset maps of the cities of Harrar, Djibouti and aps were original works but had been obtained from om Paulitschke and Mondon-Vidaillet in the case of s administration and the French marine in the case of ne city map of Addis Ababa is not mentioned.

39 The Service Géographique itself had its own map library where a relatively small collection of maps and itineraries for the Côte française des Somalis and for Abyssinia was kept.²⁷ It is likely that another source would have been used, namely one of the maps from Richard de Regnaud de Lannoy de Bissy,²⁸ who explicitly wanted to map all itineraries followed by foreign travellers in the whole of Africa. The revised edition of the Gondar map sheet no. 29, by Regnaud de Lannoy de Bissy, shows the routes of about 40 travelers up to 1897 (Figure 15). More than 10 years later, c. 20 of the itineraries were included on one of Meunier’s maps, together with new ones. Other itineraries, about 17 of them were probably recorded from maps in the map library of the Service Géographique. Apparently, Meunier did not systematically record all of his sources, unlike Regnault de Lannoy de Bissy, who reported, in a three-page document,²⁹ the sources he had used for the Gondar map sheet, recording no less than 58 maps and documents, as well as 28 published books.

Figure 15 Traveler' itineraries on Regnault de Lannoy - Map of Gondar, 1897



40 Meunier did not leave such a list of details; the short list included in the inset’s title simply mentions ‘les principaux explorateurs’ (the main explorers), together with British, Italian and French map sources (Figure 9).

41 The Comité was involved in the redaction of the map. It is recorded that in a meeting on the 14th of March 1908 "M. Meunier auteur de la carte est introduit sur la demande de Mr. Vidal de la Blache. Mr. Meunier indique les différentes sources auxquelles il a puisé les éléments de son travail."³⁰ Mr Bouteville’s first request was for an additional list of the maps used. Vidal de la Blache meant that the list had to be included on the map itself, not as a separate brochure.



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ie thematic contents and ier’s maps

on on Meunier’s maps consist of:
 r courses, water points and sources, settlements and
 nd telegraph lines, the railway line, ethnic groups,
 ts, wildlife, natural vegetation, agriculture and a few
 ins, particular points of interest etc..
 e information shown on Meunier’s maps is not the
 vey. That is to say, the topography is incomplete, as is
 getation, and agricultural land.

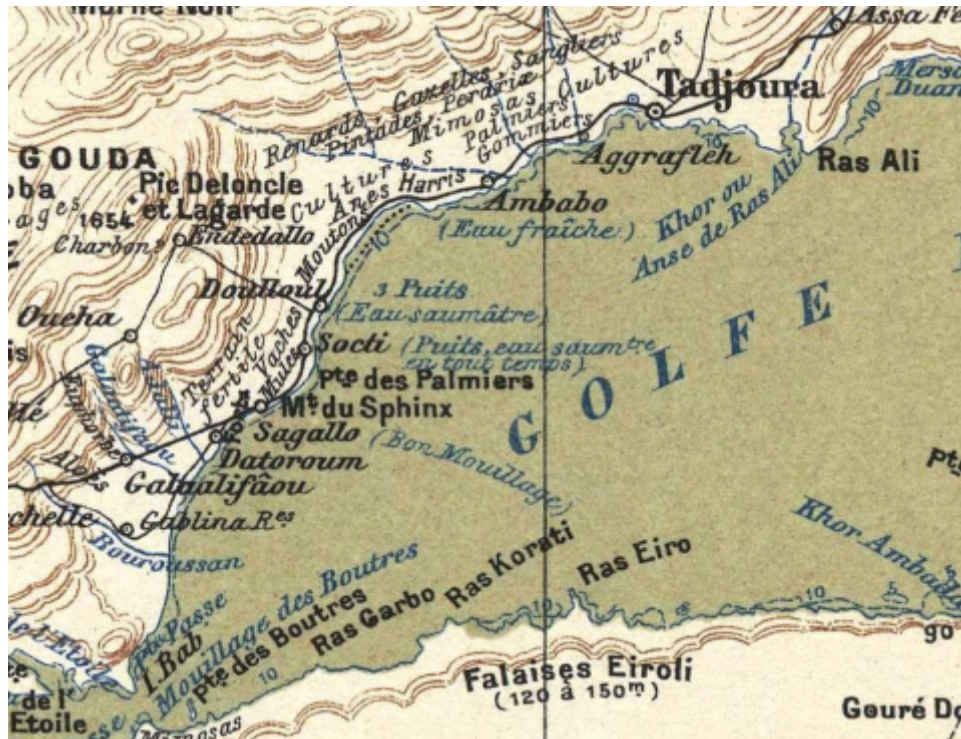
Using text or graphic symbols

45 There is also an issue related to the use of text information instead of graphic symbols. It is true that the main weakness of Meunier’s maps is that all too much information is only expressed in text form. It was discussed in a Committee meeting. At the meeting on the 8th of June 1908, Vidal de la Blache made the following request:

Que soient mentionnées dans la légende les formations végétales et les animaux encombrant la carte et nuisant à sa clarté’, and to ‘réduire le nombre des indications écrites pour les remplacer par des signes dont l’explication est donnée dans la légende.’³¹

46 However, Meunier did not, or could not follow the ‘instructions’ given to him by the Committee. This is also why we found differences between map keys about vegetation.

Figure 16 The dominance of text information



47 For example: Along the coast and West for Tadjoura (Figure 16) information variables for vegetation, agriculture and wildlife are presented only in text form, in black, with the same fonts and same text size. *Renards* (foxes), *gazelles*, *sangliers* (wild boar), *pintades* (guinea fowl) and *perdrix* (partridge) are mixed up with *cultures*, *vaches* (cows), *moutons* (sheep) and *mules* and with *gommiers* (gum trees). Consequently, no visual life is possible. Using text form allows for many ded in one map, but at the same time hinders any

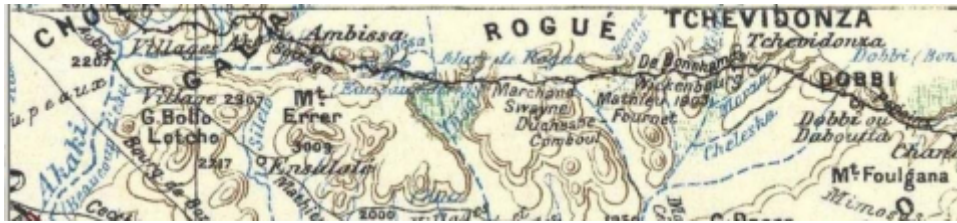


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of information

sely filled with information. This is the case along the r and around Addis Ababa (Figure 5, Figure 7, Figure

ong the railway line (Meunier 1909)



- 49 A few areas on the maps remain 'empty', such as those in the lower Awash, west of Assab. They are desert areas that had not yet been explored (Figure 18); they were not explored before Wilfred Thesiger (Thesiger, 1998) did it in the 1930s.

Figure 18 Unexplored areas Djibouti map - (Meunier 1908)



Routes and itineraries

- 50 Many routes are plotted on Meunier's three maps, both traditional routes used by indigenous travelers and caravans and those based on the travels made by more than 40 explorers. It is not easy to separate local caravan routes from the European travelers' itineraries. There is no point in doing so, since the travelers all used existing local caravan routes. It must be clear that none of the routes were 'discovered' or 'opened' by European explorers. Together, the mapped routes form a dense pattern extending from the various points on the coast towards the interior of the country (Ethiopia), to Ankober and Addis Ababa, and in the case of the northern areas of Ethiopia (outside the map frame) to Wollo and Dessie (Figure 19). The railway line is shown on all 3 maps, both part of the existing line between Djibouti and Dire-Daoua, and the projected line of the railway that was built after the map was produced.³² This shows the central



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is a kind of backbone in the territories that were explored of Djibouti. One can also see that there are several roads and another along the routes. The routes were changed due to local difficulties encountered. Also shown on the maps are the caravan routes towards northern Ethiopia through the Aoussa in the region of Harrar. The central economic role and central position of Harrar for the region is evident and routes from Zeila and Djibouti extend towards Addis Ababa. The itineraries of European travelers are shown on the map with the actual year of their travels (Table 1, Figure 19). In a letter made by the Committee on the 14th of March 1908, Bouteville informed Meunier that "*Il serait désirable de recueillir les noms des explorateurs et les dates des voyages.*"³³

Routes and caravans

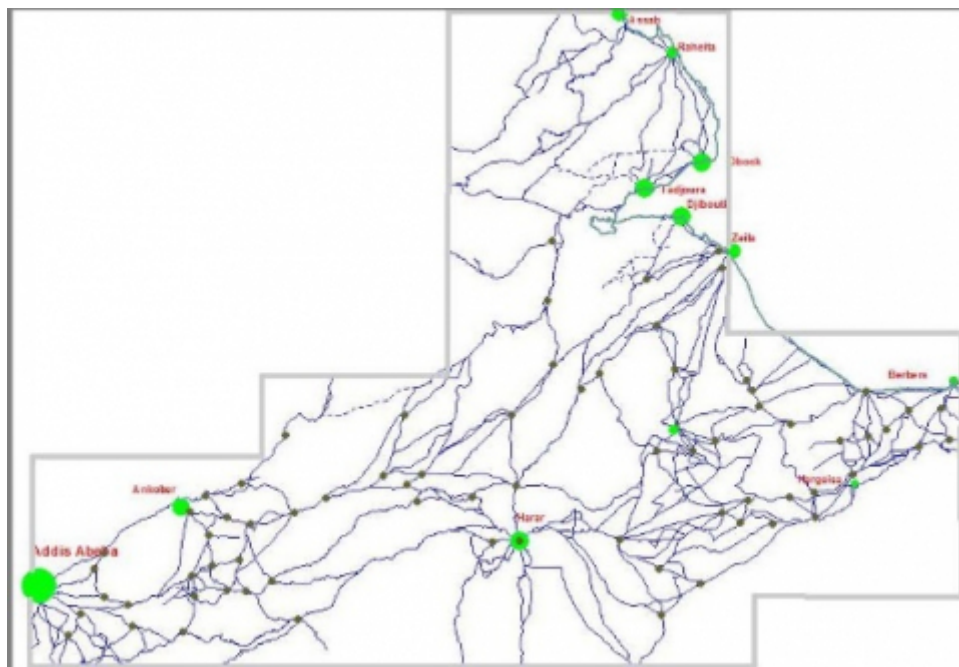


Table 1 European travelers whose itineraries are shown on Meunier’s maps

Traveler	Date start	Date end	Nationality
Rochet d'Héricourt	1839	1842	F
Béke	1840	1842	GB
Henri Lebrun	1840		F
Harris	1841	1843	GB
Burton	1854		GB
Cecchi	1876	1881	It
Martini S.	1878		It
Cecchi and Chiari	1878	1879	It
Giuletti	1879	1881	It
Jules Métra	1879	1880	F
Frigiero	1880		It
			It
		1885	F
		1884	It
			It
			D
		1888	It
		1887	It
			It
			F
		1893	It



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Menges	1894		D
Giannini	1895		It
Marchand	1896	1899	F
Comboul	1896	1900	F
de Poncins	1897	1898	F
Wickenbourg	1897	1898	D
Philippe	1897		F
Bottego	1897		It
de Bonchamps	1897	1898	F
Swayne	1897		GB
Lacroix J.	1898		F
Wickenbourg	1901	1902	D
Du Bourg de Bozas	1901	1902	F
Erlanger	1901		D
Duchesne-Fournet	1902		F
Erlanger and Neumann	1902		D
Mathieu	1903		F
Ozil	1908		F
Hunter and Fullerton	1882		GB
Traversi and Ragazzi	1886		It
Antinori and Chiarini	1876		It

51 In this table, the foreigners' travel activities in Ethiopia are mostly by the French (15) and the Italians (16) followed by the German (6) and the English (5). Among all published travel maps, two of them are included here. One for the mission led by Duchesne-Fournet (Figure 20) and the other by Bonchamps (Figure 21). They overlap, both Duchesne-Fournet and Bonchamps used the 'desert road' between Djibouti to



ournet mission (Duchesne-Fournet 1909)

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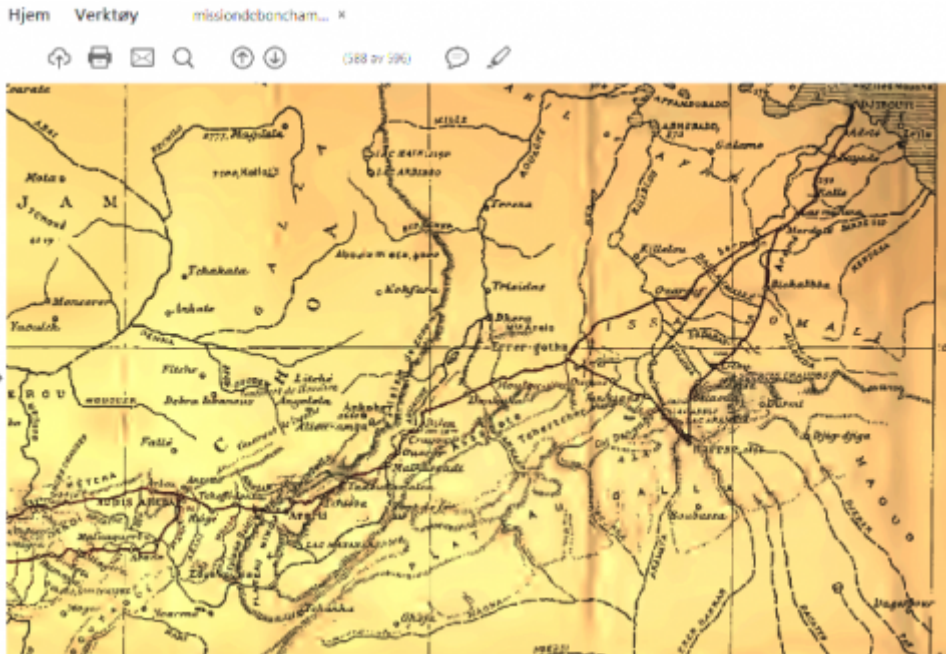
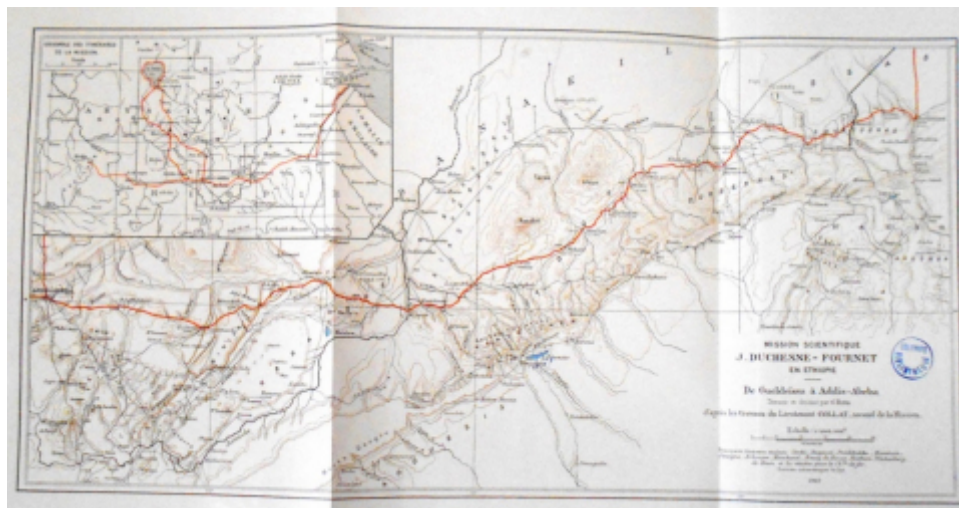


Figure 21 Route of the Bonchamps mission (Michel Charles 1900)



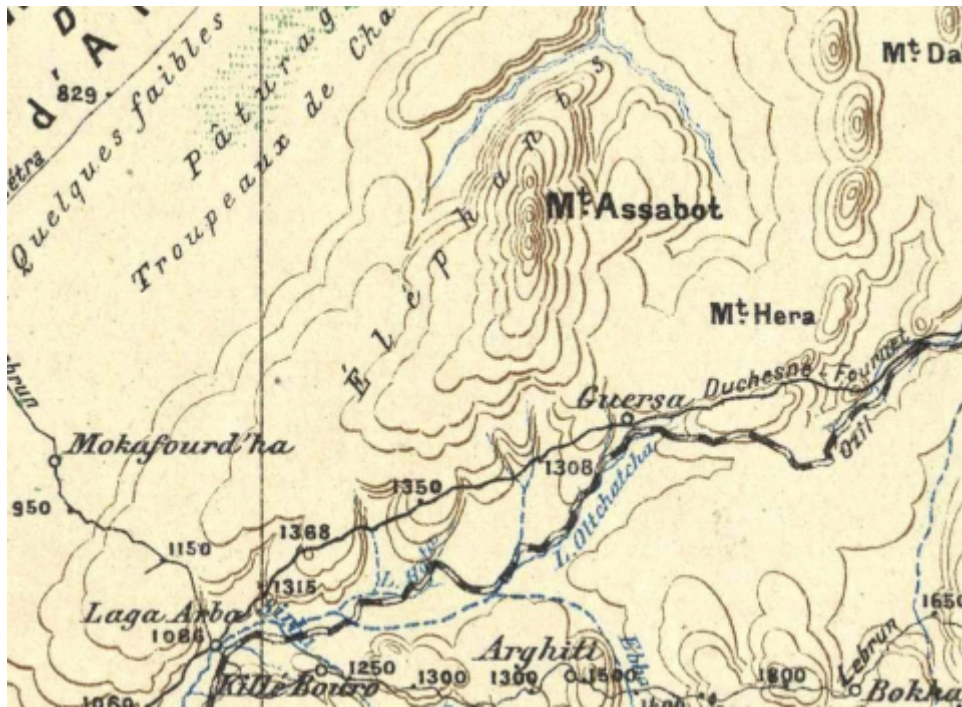
Topography and landforms

52 At first sight, it seems that the topography is depicted with isolines on Meunier's maps. In fact, these lines are 'pseudo-isolines', also known as 'form lines'. Overall, the Meunier's maps is quite simple yet enhanced with the with thicker lines, as can be seen in Figure 22.



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depict topography



- 53 Coordinates for X and Y seem to have been quite well established. For the third dimension, height points, it seems that most of them were not recorded on hilltops and mountains but most often along the trails. We can also see that the description of topography to the west of the south–north escarpment of Shoa and Wollo is more or less missing, giving the impression that the region, the highlands to the west of the escarpment was less relevant.

Hydrography and water

- 54 Besides quite detailed mapping of river courses, the presence of water (sources, wells or running water) is duly indicated on Meunier's maps, as well as the status of rivers, perennial and seasonal. This is done with an extremely high level of detail (Figure 23). One can find that associated with each spot there are details about the depth of wells, the quality of water, even its salinity, and particularly its presence all year round or at specific times of the year. Obviously, access to water was critical for all earlier travelers and therefore it was important to report such extremely valuable information. The extreme variety of qualities relating to water sources may also explain why they are not included in a key, together with specific symbols, but instead appear in full text on the map.



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in different sources of water

various sources of water

nne eau, eau saumâtre en tous temps, eau à 2 m. eau à 1 m. du sol en tous temps, eau potable toute breux puits abondants, eau chaude sulfureuse, puits fraîche, source d'eau chaude sodique, eau en été, und, water at 2 m, stagnating, hot water source, water g water all year round, well with salted water, many s usually dry, good fresh water, sodic warm water

'eau, profondeur et largeur, eau courante, à sec en it en été, rarement d'eau. Lacs: existant pendant la

(Much water, depth, breadth, running water, riverbed dry in April, good running water, summer torrent, seldom water. Lakes: only during the rainy season)

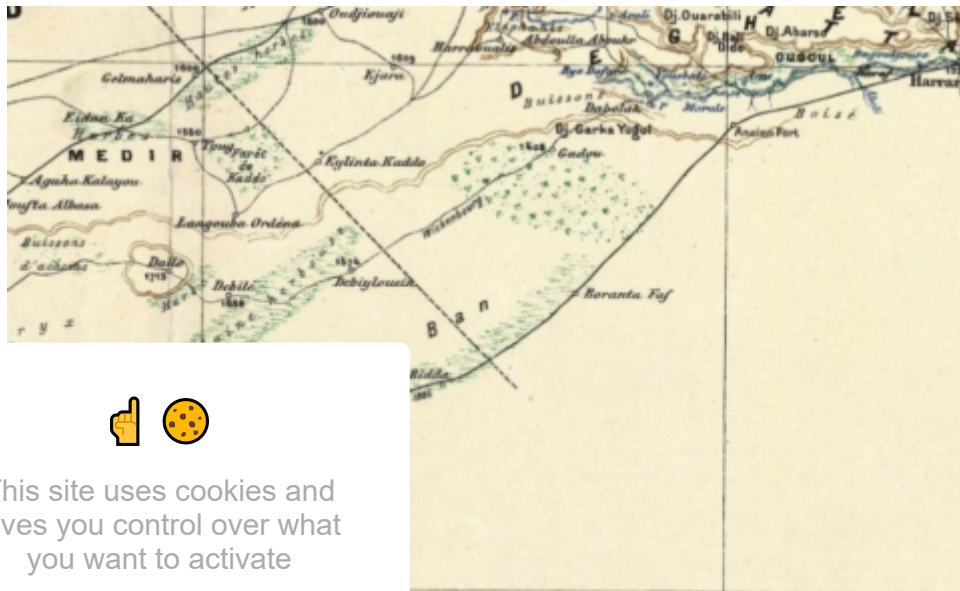
Figure 23 Extremely detailed information on water (Meunier 1908)



Natural vegetation, rangeland and agriculture

55 Forests, rangelands and pastures are sometimes shown on Meunier’s maps expressed by area symbols (Figure 24). Most often, natural vegetation is expressed in text form. When expressed with graphic symbols they appear to be located along main itineraries (Figure 25).

Figure 24 Vegetated areas (Meunier 1908, b)



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ation



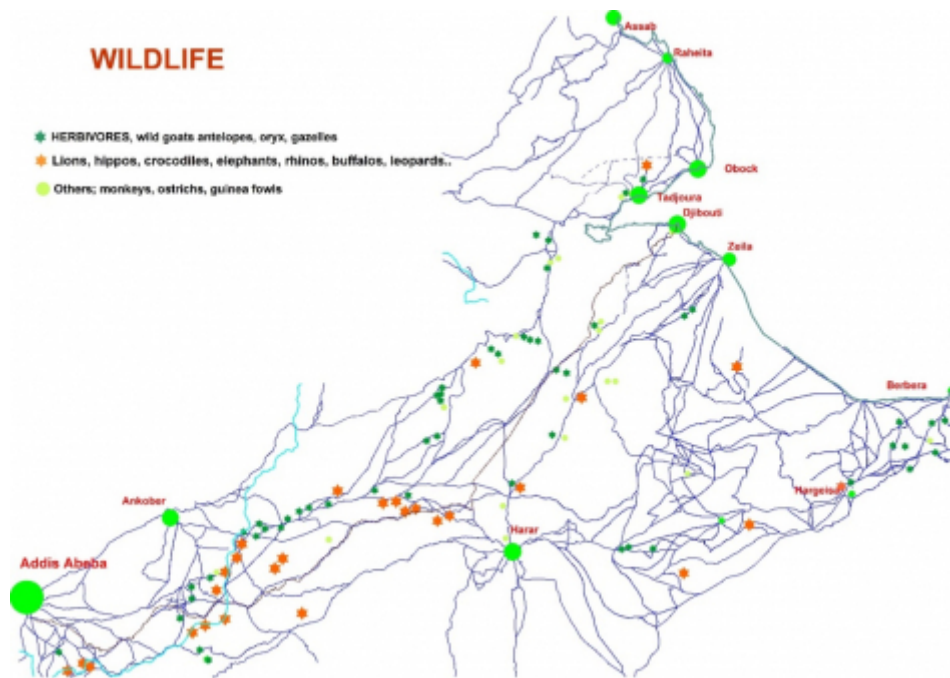
- 56 On Meunier's maps, cultivated land is usually indicated by text, area symbols are used only when the density of information allows for it. Densely populated areas are also areas with cultivated land and are already overcrowded with information of other features. In some places there are qualifiers that could only have been of interest to investors, such as a single occurrence of a *'Plaine propre à la culture du coton'*. Meunier complied with some of the requests from the Committee but not always. We mentioned earlier how Vidal de la Blache raised the question of how to display vegetation, in the procès-verbal of the Committee meeting of the 8th of June 1909.³⁴ However, the map sheet of Djibouti was probably already in print or published (1908) when Vidal de la Blache's request was expressed (Figure 16).

Wildlife

- 57 One can find many mentions of wildlife described in text form. By regrouping mentions of wildlife and digitizing them with point symbols under three categories (big game, herbivores and others), it produces a map showing a pattern for wildlife that quite closely relates to the travelers' itineraries (Figure 26). This is definitely not a general map of wildlife in the area; it is a map of wildlife observed along the travelers' itineraries. Information on wildlife was probably recorded for the benefit of 'noble and themselves. By participating in hunts in their search for the local nobility and the European travelers, did on of the wild fauna. Another reason given to justify ants from attacks by wild animals.



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Ethnic groups

58 On Meunier’s original maps, the lettering of the tribe names makes it difficult to visually separate them from other types of information about physical features, wildlife or vegetation. Creating a map where the text given to particular ethnic groups is shown with different colours assigned to main groups reveals the well-known geographical pattern separating Afar from Issas and from Oromo peoples. The names of the main clans and sub-clans among the Afar and Somalis are written across Meunier’s maps, using the same hierarchy and orientation as in the original maps, with only brief mentions of the Oromo (Gallas) in the southern part of the mapped area (Figure 27). Afar tribes occupied an area running diagonally from Awash to Assab and delimited by the territory occupied by Somali tribes in the south-east part of the region. The Oromo-Karayou, are located West of Awash River close to Afar people. The denominations used for tribes and clans follow the accepted definitions used at the beginning of the 20th century.

Figure 26 Ethnicity



Ethnic groups in Meunier's map



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The original and practical function of a colonial map

- 59 The first decision about the production of the first map was initiated in 1903 by the founder of Djibouti and former governor (1887-1899) of the whole territory of the Côte française des Somalis: Léonce Lagarde. At that time, there were no French maps of the territory. Priority was given to information collected on communications, infrastructural elements, places of power, and access to water that primarily served all the needs of European agents, whether they were travelers already in Ethiopia or planning to go there for commercial, administrative or military purposes, as well as 'sportsmen' who were most interested in hunting. The maps were primarily intended to serve as practical tools for merchants, travelers and others, particularly French colonial entrepreneurs. Obviously, these maps were made exclusively for the needs of Europeans and by Europeans in this specific period in colonial times, between the time of exploration and/or discovery and the time of administration of acquired territories.
- 60 Meunier's maps are remarkable in many ways. They represent good craftsmanship, given the level of technology at the time. They are remarkable when considering the amount of work that had to be done, by collecting, compiling, and combining very many diverse sources of information. This may explain why it took 4 years from the decision to produce the maps, to the first drafts discussed in 1908.
- 61 The amount of information variables included in the map is impressive, however it has obvious limitations, since it is based on observations made or collected by earlier European travelers and various military personnel. One also has to take into account that the scale of the maps (1:500000) does not allow for a high level of detail. In addition, the systematic use of text information limits or even excludes the perception of existing geographical patterns. The display of areal information is somehow erratic, sometimes done by areal symbols, but more often as text information with its inherent limitations for perception.

A broader geopolitical function

- 62 Beyond the visible contents of the maps, are included in this analysis the conditions of the production of the maps, as well as the role of the institutional actors involved in their making. Several actors played a role, both individuals and institutions. They represent contextual aspects that are not directly and clearly visible on the maps.
- 63 The first project for a map of The Côte des Somalis map was intended to create the very first map needed in this new territory. This map (the Djibouti map) was a shure titled *La Côte française des Somalis*, which had us 1905). The second map, the Harrar map, followed oua already defining a zone of influence. Given a new portant for the French colonial ministry to produce a : surrounding territories along the planned extension Ababa. The Ministry therefore proposed a third map : French political and financial interests were delimited. ided the French hinterland as far as to the capital of l beginning of 1909, the three map sheets had been the Ethiopian Government was not associated with



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der functions than their intended and practical use, was adjusted to fit to the turn of events in the owers, Great Britain, France and Italy, which were ordiale. In 1906, a deal followed between powers

involved in the region of the Horn of Africa about their respective possessions and zones of influence.

65 At the same time, a solution had to be found for a new railway company and the construction of the railway line. The railway line, the trace of which had recently been established by Ozil's mission, was the backbone structuring the regional space. The deal on the new railway was reached in the negotiations between Antony Klobukowski and Ménélik, the Emperor (Negus) of Ethiopia in 1908. Thus, it is easy to understand why the mapping project was suddenly given a high priority by the French Government. The maps are colonial in many ways, not least due to their thematic contents. They evolved to become a claim, a strong message, for France's hinterland, a zone of influence or its *chasse gardée* at a given time and state of international relationships. This hinterland claim is quite wide, including even the capital of Ethiopia, the heart of the country.

Conclusion

66 To our knowledge, the Ethiopian/Abyssinian Government was never involved in nor even consulted by the French about the mapping of its own country. The fact that any mention of Ethiopia or Abyssinia is missing from the maps is disturbing. It looks like a clear indication of a lack of consideration for the sovereignty of Ethiopia. This was so serious that the members of the Committee themselves, despite their good conscience regarding colonial matters, felt obliged to say something about it, only it was too late as the maps had already been printed. The French colonial power, who years earlier had accepted the sovereignty of the country, more or less consciously still had some reluctance to admit Ethiopia's independence. The French kept some hope of annexing parts of the country, as was the case with Great Britain and Italy before the Italian defeat at Adoua.

67 These maps represent a clear diplomatic signal to their partners in a new alliance the "Entente cordiale" alliance. It is a signal created to oppose the expansion of another European power, Germany, eager to position itself as a colonial power. In 1922-23 a new edition of Meunier's maps was printed. It meant that the first one was sold out. Later, in the 1930s, with a new geo-political situation, the original status quo being disrupted with the Italian claims and later invasion of Ethiopia, renewed mapping activity by Italian and French mapping agencies rendered Meunier's maps out of date.

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Notes

1 ANOM, Ministère des colonies, Missions (1791-1933, 1944) – Comité du Service Géographique des Colonies (1908-1913) MIS 32, Travaux supplémentaires exécutés pour la carte de la Côte française des Somalis, Rapport au Ministre, 27 février 1908

2 ‘In a letter dated 23rd of March 1904, the governor of the French coast of Somali, Léonce Lagarde, told the Department that their Board of Administration had approved the project for establishing a map of the colony, as they had been asked to do in a ministerial letter dated 18th of November 1903.’ Léonce Lagarde was the founder of Djibouti and the former governor of the French territory from 1887 to 1899.

3 In *The History of Cartography, Vol. Six: Cartography in the Twentieth Century* (Monmonier 2015), the article (Collier, 2015) on Topographic maps in Africa by the French does not tell anything about Meunier’s maps at all and that Meunier is not listed in the volume register (personal communication, Prof. Michael Jones, 2021).

4 Didger 4, by Golden Software, USA

5 The maps created here cover the total area made by assembling all 3 Meunier’s maps on univariate maps (Figure 19, Figure 25, Figure 26, Figure 27) using graphic symbols instead of text.

6 ‘These last years, the scientific missions travelling across our many possessions, the unrelenting activity of our administrators and area commanders, and the activity of the officers of our colonial forces have thrown light on the geographical knowledge we had until now on our colonies on the West coast of Africa. Therefore, it seemed interesting for the colonial minister to use the most recent documentation he acquired on these regions in order to draw maps for the use of people working with colonial issues. Mr Meunier and Barralier mapmakers at the Service Géographique du Ministère des Colonies were given this recently performed task.’

7 We will call it, from now on: “the Committee”

8 ANOM (Archives Nationales de l’Outre-Mer), Aix en Provence. Ministère des Colonies, Missions (1791-1933, 1944), Service Géographique et des Missions, Commissions et comités (1892-1915), Comité du Service Géographique des Colonies (1908-1913) MIS 32.

9 Mr Milliès-Lacroix, a ‘radical socialist’, and colonial minister from the 25th of October 1906 to the 24th of July 1908 in the government headed by Georges Clemenceau.

10 The list includes high ranking officers and high-level civil servants from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, together with one well-known scholar from the University.

11 ANOM, (Archives Nationale d’Outre-Mer), Ministère des Colonies, Missions (1791-1933, 1944) Comité du Service Géographique des Colonies, MIS 32, Constitution d’un Comité du Service Géographique, Paris le 16 janvier 1908.

12 ‘Thanks to these elements and the numerous materials emanating from other regions that were intelligently and methodically coordinated by Mr Meunier, the cartographer, the new map from the Service Géographique des Colonies represents a document of remarkably high value. It will render valuable services, since it is the first map to represent in a detailed manner not only our possessions on the Somali coast but also all the Ethiopian territories where the French political and financial interests are engaged.’

13 Little biographical information is to be found in the Bibliothèque Nationale . However, one can read about his administrative career in the colonial archives (ANOM, Archives Nationales d’Outre-Mer). Meunier appeared to be a typical office mapmaker, appreciated for the quality of to become a ‘first class cartographer’. He was called a rt of his career, later mentioned as *cartographe* and finally d died in 1942.



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st of January 1889. In 1902 the relatively autonomous unit ration of the Ministère des Colonies. It was not under the Guerre or that of the Ministère de la Marine, in charge of rance. Other colonial mapping institutions operating in) production in Madagascar, Indochina, and French West l run by the French military as extensions of the Service

e nous offre une carte manuscrite de la Guinée française 300000’ (‘The house of French Guinea presents a map y Mr A. Meunier’).

first general map of Dahomey. Created in 1906, it has been til May 1908. It is very complete and seems to be very al progress and honours Mr Meunier, who is already well

andre Meunier, geographer at the colonial ministry, for his

18 'The only existing document on the whole area is a map at the scale of 1 to 500,000 in three map sheets published in 1908 by the Service Géographique du Ministère des Colonies. Its last edition is dated 1922. It is a quite vague exploration map, except for a few precise points.'

19 http://data.bnf.fr/15871701/alexandre_meunier/#allitems

20 'The French Government is not yet ready, in 1890, to support its presence in Abyssinia, despite the reiterated demands from Ménélik and traders.'

21 'Between August 1905 and February 1906, the French and English governments were forced to agree upon a simple sharing of Ethiopia into zones of influence, given the increasing influence of the Germans at the King's court and in the colonial companies in Africa, whose railway lines were the key pillar for development.'

22 'Mrs Bouteville, Renard, Vidal de la Blache and Bourgeois make a few comments. They bring attention to the diplomatic inconveniences that could occur because of the fact that most of Ethiopia has been included on a map titled *de Côte française des Somalis* [The French Coast of Somali], a title that is also reproduced on the map sheet that does not cover any part of the French territory.'

ANOM, Ministère des Colonies, Missions (1791-1933, 1944) – Comité du Service Géographique des Colonies (1908-1913) Procès-verbaux des séances, MIS 32.

23 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hinterland>

24 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin_conference

25 'These regions of East Africa between Dire Daoua the station at the end of the railway line between Djibouti and Addis Ababa, and the Abyssinian capital, form a kind of hallway to Menelik's empire, whose door is our possession in Djibouti.'

26 The Paris meridian is 20°20'13" East (i.e., east of Greenwich).

27 ANOM Ministère des colonies, Missions (1791-1933, 1944), Comité du Service Géographique des Colonies (1908-1913) MIS 116, Autres activités du Service, Inventaire des cartes.

28 Victor Amédée Richard Regnault de Lannoy de Bissy. Map of Africa in 63 map sheets produced between 1880 and 1888, by the Ministère de la guerre. The Gondar map sheet no. 29 covered Ethiopia, and a new revised and coloured edition was published in 1897.

29 <https://bibliotheque.numerique.chambery.fr/collection/itemm/25741-brouillon-de-la-notice-de-la-feuille-29-gondar>

30 'Mr Meunier the maker of the map is introduced upon a request from Mr Vidal De la Blache. Mr Meunier informs [the Committee] about in which diverse sources of information he found the elements of his work.'

ANOM, Ministère des colonies, Missions (1791-1933, 1944) – Comité du Service Géographique des Colonies (1908-1913) MIS 32, Procès-verbaux des séances, 2^{ème} séance- Séance du 14 mars 1908.

31 'Types of vegetation and wild animals drawn in the map and contributing to its lack of clarity have to be included in the map key [and to] reduce the amount of text mentions in the map to be replaced by graphic symbols whose meaning is given in the key.'

ANOM Ministère des Colonies, Missions (1791-1933, 1944) Comité du Service Géographique des Colonies (1908-1913), MIS 32, Procès-verbaux des séances.

32 The trace of that part of the railway line was established by the mission that had recently been led by Ozil in 1907.



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names of the explorers and the date of their travels. ANOM, 1-1933, 1944, Comité du Service Géographique des Colonies ces, MIS 32.

ssions (1791–1933, 1944), Comité du Service Géographique oaux des séances, MIS 32

of Meunier's maps assembled on a map of abyssinia (War

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map (Meunier 1908, a)

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	Title Figure 4 Harrar map (Meunier 1908, b)
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	Title Figure 5 Portion of Harrar map (Meunier 1908, b)
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