In returning to the original, unabrdiged text of the 1870 Field Diary, the current edition extends the critical approach and, in so doing, underscores that Livingstone’s personal story of travel – what he and subsequent scholars have most valued – is in fact the least interesting of the many, many stories found in the diary.

From another perspective, the text unearthed by our edition highlights that the most important dimension of the diary – especially from the vantage of 2017 – are the myriad direct observations Livingstone records about Central Africa and particularly Bambarre in 1870-71 (cf. Bridges 1977:4).

Although even the best of Livingstone’s biographers has called his writings from the period “intellectual rambling” (Ross 2002:218), reference to the 1870 Field Diary shows that Livingstone’s extended sojurn in fact produced a unique historical document, one without parallel in some ways, even among Livingstone’s own writings.

To create this record, Livingstone created a medial narrative style that doesn’t quite map onto Bridges three stages of production (Bridges 1987:180-90) and that, as we note elsewhere, oscillates between a field diary and a journal – at least as Livingstone normally created such documents.

The record does not focus on progression since not much “happens” to Livingstone and he does not leave Bambarre till the very end of the 1870 Field Diary, but rather captures the circulation of local and regional information in Bambarre, the Congo, East Africa, and beyond by layering a variety of historical and contemporary actors, events, and stories.

This immediate, kaleidescopic, and unvarnished record reflects Livingstone’s growing interest in African societies at the end of his life (Bridges 1977:6), and indeed a principal value of the diaries lies in what it tells us foremost about Africa (cf. Bridges 1973:165).

The diary details the encroachment of Arab traders into Central Africa.

It outlines step-by-step the impact of such encroachment on local social relations.

It details complex regional dynamics and the circulation of geographical, medical, agricultural, and other such information among an array of African and Arab individuals.

Finally, it presents the African populations of Bambarre, of other neighboring villages, and from farther afield in Legaland not just as passive victims of violence, but as evolving individuals that shift from guilability, to suspcion, and finally to resistance in their interactions with Arab traders and followers.

In other words, the diary represents a breakthrough – overlooked till now – in the representation of such local African populations by travelers and explorers like Livingstone.