

EARLY ROCK ART RECORDS IN THE COLLECTIONS OF THE PITT RIVERS MUSEUM, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the early rock art holdings of the Pitt Rivers Museum and their place in the history of rock art recording. The focus is on the Museum's small but interesting collection of photographs of rock art, dating back to 1894. The photographs and few copies are mostly provenanced and comment is made on the sites' current conditions. Those photographs that can not be provenanced are also included. The Museum's oldest and largest collection of records, made by Louis Tylor, is not covered. Although no attempts at interpretation are made, it is hoped that this paper will encourage others to study the Pitt Rivers Museum's holdings for themselves.

INTRODUCTION

The Pitt Rivers Museum cares for several late nineteenth and early twentieth century copies of southern African rock paintings (Table 1). In the course of researching these holdings the collections of tracings and photographs discussed here were examined; the most important and earliest comprise those made in 1893 by Louis Tylor in the Wasbank and Giants Castle areas of the KwaZulu-Natal Drakensberg. Though several holdings remain unprovenanced, we feel it important to place all of them on record and to comment briefly on those that are oldest and thus likely to be of greatest historical significance. Five pieces of painted stone detached from rock shelters in the Stormberg Mountains of the Eastern Cape by Edward J. Dunn (collected in 1877 and donated in 1936) will be considered in a future publication on the Dunn collection (see also Dunn 1931:112-114). The Pitt Rivers Museum also housed an important collection of copies of rock paintings made prior to 1906 by Helen Tongue. This collection was handed over to the Rock Art Research Unit (San Heritage Centre) of the University of the Witwatersrand in 1986.

Rock paintings and engravings occur throughout southern Africa. They began to be reported by European visitors in the eighteenth century (Morais 1984) and were first published in the early nineteenth century, for example by Alexander in 1837. This pre-empted more systematic recording in the latter half of the

nineteenth century, with the efforts of Stow (1930) in the present Free State and Eastern Cape Province and of Hutchinson in KwaZulu-Natal (Ward & Maggs 1994) being particularly prominent. Subsequent decades witnessed more widespread efforts to document and preserve rock paintings and engravings in the face of what was already perceived to be their deterioration and loss through natural exfoliation, human vandalism and other causes (*e.g.* Wilman 1911).

THE COLLECTIONS

Marianhill photographs

Among the many ethnographic photographs in the Pitt Rivers Museum are several purchased in 1896 that bear the stamps and numbers of the Marianhill Mission in KwaZulu-Natal. Four of these photographs are of rock paintings. Vinnicombe (1976) records that such photographs were taken in the late nineteenth century by Brother Otto Mäder of the Trappist Mission at Reichanau in the Pholela Valley. His involvement in the restoration of religious paintings in Germany before coming to South Africa appears to have been the origin of Brother Otto's interest in Bushman art. Three of the four photographs held by the Museum are of images that he used to illustrate a paper that he later published on this subject (Otto 1908). Several painted slabs, detached from painted rock shelters are now held by the Marian-hill Mission and by the Feldkirch Teachers' College, Voralberg, Austria (Vinnicombe 1976).

Table 1. Early southern African rock art records in the Pitt Rivers Museum.

| Political division | Collector / copyist | Year of collection | Accession number | Brief description of holding |
|----------------------|---|--------------------|--|--|
| South Africa | | | | |
| KwaZulu-Natal | Louis Tylor (copyist) | 1893 | 1894.15.8.1-97 | 97 Copies of rock art from the KwaZulu-Natal Drakensberg |
| | Louis Tylor (collector) | 1893 | 1894.15.1-6 | 6 pieces of painted stone from the KwaZulu-Natal Drakensberg |
| | Brother Otto Mäder (photographer) | 1894 | C2/3/.a | 1 b/w photograph from Sangwana 1 (elephant hunt) |
| | Brother Otto Mäder | 1895 | C2/3/.c | 1 b/w photograph from Sangwana 1 (cattle) |
| | Brother Otto Mäder | 1894 | C2/3/.d | 1 b/w photograph from an unidentified site (two eland) |
| | Brother Otto Mäder | 1895 | C2/3/.b | 1 b/w photograph from an unidentified site (horse and rider) |
| | Unknown photographer | Pre-1915 | Box B 13, Dossier | 1 b/w 'negative' photograph from Game Pass Shelter, Kamberg |
| Eastern Cape | E.J. Dunn | 1877 | 1940.10.35.1,2 1940.10.36.1,2 1940.10.37 | 5 pieces of painted stone from the Stormberg |
| | Dr. Schönland (photographer) | Pre-1915 | Box B 13, Dossier | 3 b/w photographs from Glen Craig rock art site |
| | Unknown photographer | Pre-1915 | Box B 13, Dossier | 1 b/w photograph from Cold Springs station. |
| | Unknown photographer | Pre-1915 | Box B 13, Dossier | 1 b/w photograph from Sunnyside |
| Northern Province | Mr. Ormesby (photographer) | 1912 | Box B 13, Dossier | 2 b/w photographs from Sand River, Soutpansberg. |
| Free State | Mr. Philipson (photographer) | 1910 | ----- | 3 b/w photographs of the rock art on the farm 'Vencedor' (see below) |
| | Mrs. E.F.B. Wilson (copyist) | 1912 | 1912.25.1 | Copy of rock art on the farm 'Vencedor' (now 'Badenkop') |
| | M. Wilman (copyist) | 1916 | 1925.46.39, 40, 41 | 3 copies of rock art from Westbury |
| | Reproduction by H. Aling of a copy by M. Wilman | Pre 1913 | 1913.47.1 | Cattle raid scene from Modderpoort. |
| Uncertain Provenance | Unknown photographer | Pre-1915 | Box B 13, Dossier | 1 b/w photograph from Leeuw river (unidentified site) |
| Lesotho | | | | |
| | M. Wilman | 1910-13 | 1913.47.2 | Reproduction of a pair of blue cranes from Ha Baroana. |
| Zimbabwe | | | | |
| | d.d. R. Tarrant | Pre-1915 | Box B 13, Dossier | 2 b/w photographs from Delta farm, Marondera |
| | d.d. Meynell | Pre-1915 | Box B 13, Dossier | 2 b/w photograph from the central Matopos, North of Mt. Impu |
| | Franklin White (photographer) | Pre-1915 | Box B 13, Dossier | 1 b/w photograph from near World's View, Matopo Hills |

The first of Brother Otto's photographs in the Pitt Museum's collections (Fig. 1) is numbered 500 and dated 1895, this was published by Vinnicombe (1976: 117). The image depicts an elephant hunt with three human figures attacking an elephant, one human figure is carrying long spears and another may be firing a

rifle, a white horse is depicted at the top right of the scene.

A second photograph (Fig. 2, numbered 353 and dated 1894) is of another scene described by Vinnicombe (1976:118). The photograph shows a human figure on the left of the frame behind a group of 13



Fig. 1. Rock paintings at Sangwana 1, KwaZulu-Natal.

cattle some of which are mottled, there are two eland towards the front of the cattle and a horse in the centre of the group, two further small horses are below and to the right of the cattle, there is also an unidentifiable four-legged animal below the cattle; all the animals are moving from left to right. To the right facing the oncoming animals is a standing human figure, this may be a European, wearing trousers and carrying a rifle.

Both photographs (Figs. 1 & 2) are of Sangwana 1 (2929CD15) in the Underberg District of KwaZulu-Natal. The paintings from this site were copied by Betty Mills in 1954 (Vinnicombe 1976); however, it is not clear whether the absence from the copies of several elements that are depicted in the photographs reflects the standard of the copyist or deterioration in the paintings during the intervening sixty years.

A third photograph (Fig. 3, numbered 502, dated 1895) depicts a human figure on a horse. Only dark colours are visible and the horse is darker than the rider who is not at all clear. The horse is shown with tail down next to its back legs, head down, neck curved and front legs bent slightly as if rearing. The site remains unidentified, however, V. Ward (pers. comm.) suggests that its overall style is suggestive of the southern KwaZulu-Natal Drakensberg.

The fourth and last of the Marianhill photographs at the Museum (Fig. 4) is numbered 364 and dated 1894. The main elements are two eland, one above the other,

of which the uppermost is slightly larger. Both face right and have white heads, necks, legs and underbellies, but with darker faces, bodies and horns. The upper animal also has four vertical lines on its neck. Once again, the site at which this photograph was taken remains unknown. There is another figure painted within a pale area of rock where a flake has come off. This is reminiscent of those at Melikane (Orpen 1874), Libesoaneng (Smits 1973) and Bamboo Mountain (Vinnicombe 1976) as it seems to be a therianthrope bending forward at the waist and supporting its weight on two sticks.

Box 13 photographs

Box Number 13 in the Museum's archives includes a dossier labelled 'Bushman paintings'. Inside are 14 photographs, drawings, press cuttings and two letters from R.N. Hall to Henry Balfour, the Museum's first Curator. All seem to have been gathered together by Balfour over a number of years. Nine photographs from a total of six sites come from South Africa, while five Zimbabwean photographs come from three, perhaps four, separate locations. All were acquired prior to 1915. Some of the photographs from Zimbabwe may have been forwarded by Hall to Balfour, although there is no direct documentation of this in the Museum's archives. Having 'excavated' (if that is the right term) at Great Zimbabwe, Hall (1912) developed an interest in



Fig. 2. Rock paintings at Sangwana 1, KwaZulu-Natal .



Fig. 3. Rock painting at unidentified site, KwaZulu-Natal.



Fig. 4. Rock paintings at unidentified site, KwaZulu-Natal.

Zimbabwe's rock paintings and claimed to have recorded more than 300 sites, though Peter Garlake (1997) dismisses most of his observations as unscholarly and derivative. Both of his letters to Balfour invite comment on his publications on rock art, examples of which from the *Rhodesia Journal* were enclosed with them. The first letter, dated December 9th 1909, also makes reference to the enclosure of 'reproductions' of several paintings, but no trace of these has been found in the Pitt Rivers Museum's archives.

Three, perhaps four, of the South African sites represented in Box 13 lie in the Eastern Cape Province near Grahamstown. A set of three photographs comes from Botha's River, Glen Craig. The first photograph shows three rows of images, two on an upper step of rock face directly above the third row. The top row consists solely of a single kneeling antelope facing right. The second row consists, from left to right, of two antelope moving right, two standing human figures holding stick-like objects, and a third human figure running right carrying a bow. The third row consists of one or possibly two antelope facing right, and further to the right, a single human figure holding a long stick-like object. The second photograph contains six human figures arranged in three groups. The first group is in



Fig. 5. Rock painting at Botha's River, Glen Craig, Eastern Cape Province.

the top left of the frame, and consists of two figures both carrying stick-like objects, the figure on the left is facing right whilst the other figure is not clear; the second group, directly below the first, has three figures all carrying what may be flywhisks; to the left of the figures is a smaller and less clear figure. To the right of the previous two groups is the third and final group consisting of a solitary figure facing left and carrying an indeterminate object, or objects, in one hand. The third photograph (Fig. 5) shows a clearly male human figure striding to the left and holding what may be a recurved bow in his right hand and a vertical stick in his left. A group of four lines (arrows?) emerges from close to the man's right wrist and four further lines (arrows?)

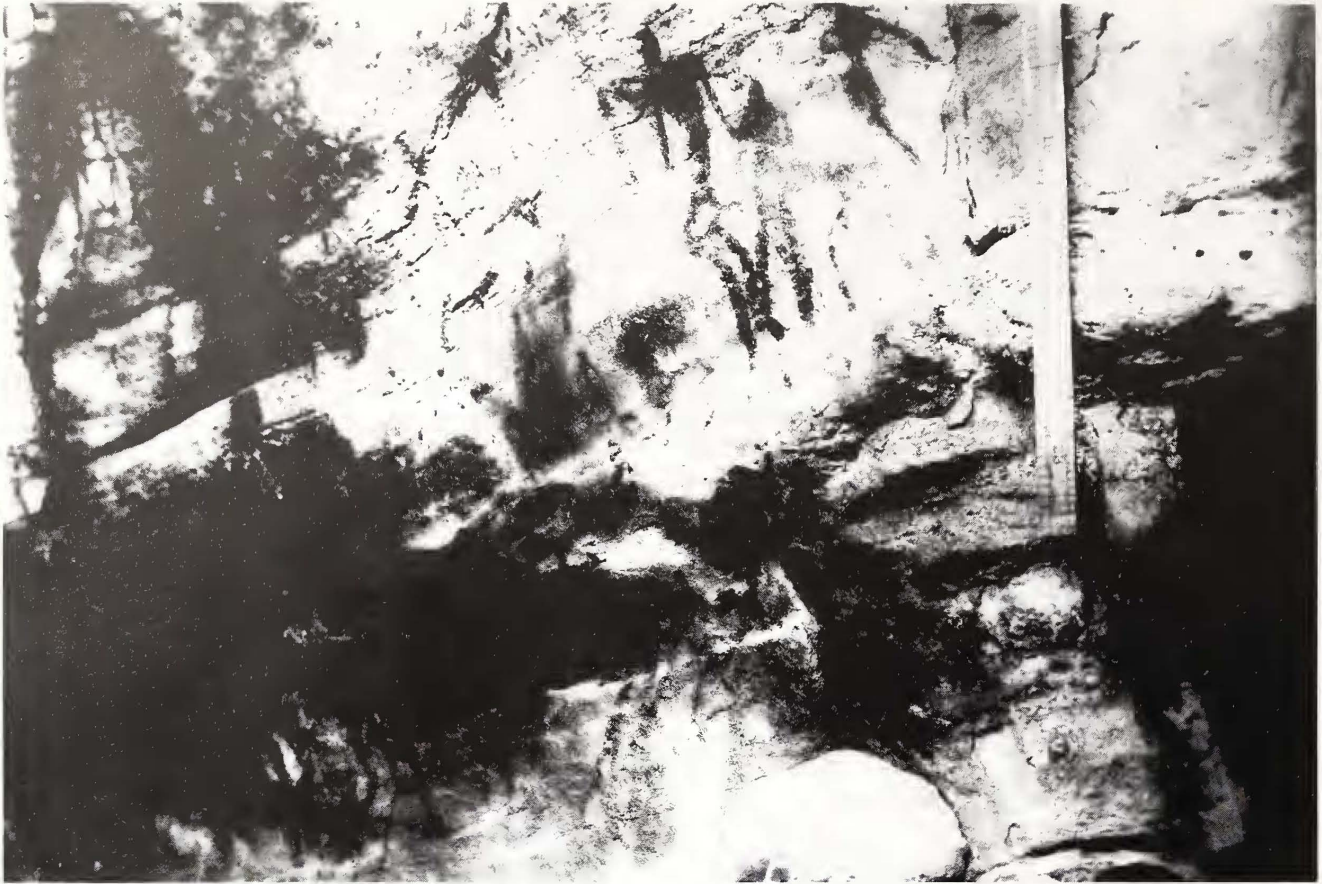


Fig. 6. Rock paintings at Cold Springs Station, Eastern Cape Province.



Fig. 7. Rock paintings at Game Pass Shelter, KwaZulu-Natal.



Fig. 8. Rock paintings from Sand River, Northern Province.

project over his right shoulder. This site was visited by Hewitt in the 1920s, excavations were later carried out by Courtney-Latimer in 1948, and it has been subsequently visited by several archaeologists. L. Webley (pers. comm.) has recently documented the presence of numerous graffiti covering the rock face and a more final threat posed by nearby dam construction. Albany museum does not know of any older records of the Glen Craig rock art.

Of the photographs of other Eastern Cape sites, the first from a site named by Balfour as 'Cold Springs Station', this is taken from a distance; in the middle of the rock face is an image showing a woman with a digging stick, and possibly another human figure, although this is not clear. To the lower right are several baboon/human-like figures on all fours, and higher on the rock face many short vertical strokes. The site's location is currently unknown despite efforts to relocate the site in May 2000. It is possible that the site has been misnamed in the dossier as another site known as 'Paradise', and recorded as such by Hewitt in 1920, does fit directions to 'Cold Springs' given by Balfour in his diary. A second photograph (Fig. 6), depicts several elongated human figures, one of whom is bent at the waist to the left in the clear group on the upper right. One or more figures on the left of the frame may be graffiti. The photograph is from a site on the farm Sunnyside near Salem. Though recorded on more than one occasion since and still, in the 1990s, in good condition, this photograph too is probably the oldest documentation available for this site.

A fourth site, Leeuw River, is represented by a

single photograph showing two human figures moving right, carrying something between them on their shoulders suspended from what appears to be a stick. Unfortunately, the provenance of this painting is not given and no further information is available about it.

Box 13 also contains a single negative reproduction (Fig. 7) of a panel of eland and cloaked and running figures from the well-known site of Game Pass Shelter in the KwaZulu-Natal Drakensberg. Wrongly identified in the dossier as lying in 'Basutoland', and printed back to front, this is among the oldest records for this important and now publicly accessible site (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1992).

The final group of photographs from South Africa in Box 13 were taken by a Mr Ormesby in 1912, and come from Zand River Poort (*sic*) in the Soutpansberg, Northern Province. One (Fig. 8), shows two male individuals with bows, one of which has the string drawn back; this individual also has six short lines through his stomach and back, perhaps representing the pain reputedly felt by people about to go into trance (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1989). A second photograph (Fig. 9) illustrates seven probable kudu in a line moving right, with a male human figure running right situated below and to the left. This figure is carrying a bow in one outstretched hand and several other objects in the other. Below the human figure is an unidentifiable four-legged animal. Both photographs were passed to the Pitt Rivers Museum by a Mr Glaske of the Transvaal Education Department, Pretoria, who had met Balfour during the latter's visit to South Africa in 1910. Though damaged by graffiti, this site has been well recorded and has Eiland ceramics on its surface, suggesting contact between local hunter-gatherers and farmers (W. Fish, pers. comm.).

Box 13 also includes five photographs of rock art sites in Zimbabwe. Two come from Delta Farm, Marondera. One (Fig. 10) shows what appear to be five zebra, an antelope and an elephant superimposed, in darker paint, on at least 6 faded images of people; all are moving from left to right. The animals are in four rows with two zebra in the top row, three zebra in the second, two antelope in the third, and an elephant in the last row. Behind the elephant is a human figure, in a darker paint, similar to that used for the animals. Above the animals is a single seated human figure bent forward at the waist facing right. The other photograph (Fig. 11) illustrates a single large elephant moving from right. Both were given by Mr Robert Tarrant, the owner of the farm, to a family friend, Mr Dowson of the Lion Brewery, Oxford, who then gave them to Henry Balfour. From surviving correspondence we know that the photos were taken in 1914.

Two further photographs (Figs. 12 & 13) were donated by R. Mennell in 1908. Mennell was among the first to report stone artefacts from the Matopo Hills, and in 1908 collaborated with E. Chubb to photograph the paintings at the well-known site of Silozwane (Mennell & Chubb 1908). The two photographs are provenanced



Fig. 9. Rock paintings from Sand River, Northern Province.

only to 'central Matopos north of Mt Impu', but, pending confirmation in the field, it seems likely that they may represent some of the images at Silozwane.

They illustrate adjacent and conjoining areas of the rock face and show a complex scene, the most prominent feature of which is an animal-headed snake moving to the right and placed directly above a horizontal crack in the rock-face. On the back of the snake are at least 22 figures, all but one moving left to right. Of these figures at least two are clearly baboons whereas the rest are human, although in a variety of postures, including standing and on all fours.

The most prominent of the figures are the five nearest the head of the snake, one of whom is bending forward and down towards the ground. The tail of the snake is not unlike that of a scorpion. Below the crack in the rock are at least 40 human figures, the majority organised in a line. Two of these figures are extremely elongated and their necks appear to disappear into the crack. Below the snake's neck and to the upper right of these last human figures is a small group of three antelope and several other human figures. To the left of the snake's tail (Fig. 13) is another complex scene principally consisting of elongated human figures, many of which have no visible head.

Two of these figures appear to be superimposed on a giraffe and an antelope respectively; both animals are moving from right to left. Most of these figures appear

to be standing still, but some are striding. Above this complex of figures, to the left of the snake's tail, is a single small lying antelope, with its head turned to the right. Some way below all these painted images on Fig. 3, and perhaps on the far right of Fig. 12 are some grid-like patterns.

The final photograph in Box 13 comes from a site near World's View in the Matopos and was donated by Franklin White before 1915. It shows a number of people and two antelope and may come from the World's View rock-shelter that White (1905) excavated at the beginning of the twentieth century. Finds from this and another site excavated by White in the Matopos are now housed in the British Museum (Mitchell in press).

Vencedor/Badenkop

As mentioned above, in 1910 Henry Balfour, then Curator of the Museum, made one of several visits to South Africa. Between lecture stops he took the opportunity to visit several archaeological sites. One such stop was at Harrismith, Free State, where he lectured on August 15th. In his diary Balfour records visiting a nearby rock art site, of which he also made a sketch, in the company of Dr E.F.B. Wilson:

Drove out to Wessels farm, to part occupied by Mr Philipson, to see a good Bushman rock-shelter,

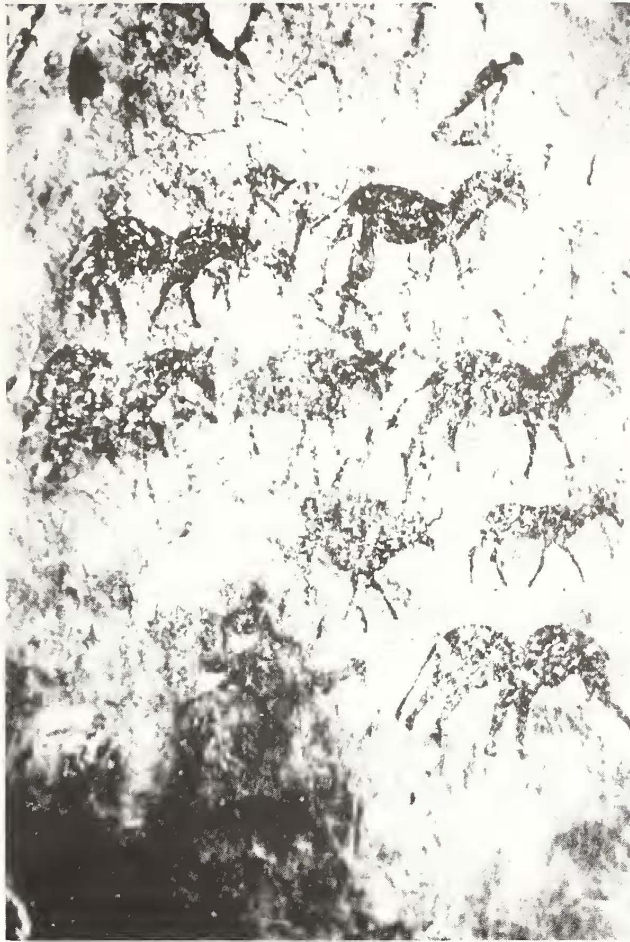


Fig. 10. Rock paintings at Delta Farm, Marondera.

with some very fine paintings, eland and other buck, many human figures some with animal heads etc. The paintings very numerous, partly defaced, some in two or three colours, others monochrome (red), cases of superposed (*sic*) designs. Mr Philipson promised to take photographs & send them to me. The rock shelter is about 4 miles from Harrismith & stands a little away from the base of a high rock Kopje (Balfour 1910).

Among Balfour's lecture slides were discovered a letter from Mr Philipson dated August 18th 1910 and three black-and-white photographs, taken by Philipson, of the site and the art (Fig. 14). This information allows us to make sense of a rock art copy in the Museum's collections. Made by a Mrs E.F.B. Wilson, this copy was donated in 1912 and is provenanced to the farm 'Vencedor', now known as Badenkop. It shows four eland and eight human figures copied in pencil and then coloured on a piece of paper approximately 1130 mm x 450 mm. The images are not placed in relation to their position on the rock face, but are placed so as to fit on the paper in two rows.

Working from left to right, the top row of images consists of a large eland facing right, a standing Head-



Fig. 11. Rock painting at Delta Farm, Marondera.

less human figure facing right, a standing elongated human figure with arms outstretched in front facing left, and a human figure running to the left. The second row consists of a group of five standing figures facing right, two are wearing pointed headdresses, and two are carrying stick-like objects in front of them. To the right of the people is an eland painted at an upward angle facing right. In the centre of the row is the most striking of the images, a rear-end view of an eland with its head and neck stretched up and right at a 45° angle. The last image is a large eland with its head down facing right. Confusingly, the striking rear-end view of the eland in the middle of the scene is provenanced by Lee & Woodhouse (1974:25) to a site elsewhere in the Harrismith District, but there seems little doubt that Mrs Wilson's copy does come from Badenkop as the Wessels farm to which Balfour refers is probably the modern farm Wesselshoek, only 5 km distant from Badenkop.

Westbury

The Museum also holds five copies of rock art made by Maria Wilman, including early reproductions of a pair of blue cranes from the well known site of Ha Baroana in western Lesotho and of a cattle raid from



Fig. 12. Rock paintings from the 'central Matopos'.



Fig. 13. Rock paintings from the 'central Matopos'.



Fig. 14. Rock paintings from Vencedor/Badenkop, Free State.

Modderpoort, Free State. The other three copies, however, appear to be original and come from the site of Westbury near Clocolan, eastern Free State. Westbury is a small shelter, excavated by Thorp (1997), at which the paintings are still in good condition. Woodhouse (1988) published a group of eland from this site, believing it to be the first record of paintings from there. The existence of the Wilman copies shows that this was, in fact, not the case. All three copies are labelled 'Waterfall' and dated 1916. They consist of: a standing female figure facing left and holding a stick above her head (PRM 1925.46.39); a standing female figure facing right with one arm out in front, bent at the elbow to form a 'V' (PRM 1925.46.40); and a group of eland with 11 heads emerging from a crowd of undefined eland bodies (PRM 1925:46.41).

Louis Tylor Collection

This collection is too extensive to cover in this publication, however, Ward and Maggs (1994) detail the current state of the original paintings, and a forthcoming biographical publication on Louis Tylor himself provides some further information.

DISCUSSION

Though few in number, the fact that all of the photographs and copies we have discussed here were acquired by the Pitt Rivers Museum before 1916 in

itself makes them of historical interest as being among some of the earliest such records of southern African rock art. Today, more than ever before, southern African archaeologists and conservation bodies struggle to strike a balance between the need to record and protect rock art while simultaneously encouraging responsible public interest in it and access to it. Early records such as those we have described here, along with the drawings made by Tylor in the KwaZulu-Natal Drakensberg in 1893, can be used in this effort by providing a baseline against which to measure deterioration in the condition of rock-paintings over the past century (Ward & Maggs 1994). As one of the few institutions in Britain to hold copies of southern African rock art among its collections, we hope that interested researchers will now contact the Museum and make use of the material presented here.

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