

Memory of the World Register - Nomination Form
South Africa - The Bleek Collection

Abstract

The Bleek Collection consists of papers of Dr W.H.I. Bleek (1827-1875), his sister-in-law Lucy Lloyd (1834-1914), his daughter Dorothea Bleek (1873-1948) and G.W. Stow (1822-1882) relating to their researches into the San (Bushman) language and folklore, as well as albums of photographs. Bleek developed a phonetic script for transcribing the characteristic clicks and sounds of the ½Xam language which is used by linguists to this day. Although some of the material was published by Lucy Lloyd and Dorothea Bleek, a great deal remains unpublished.

The material provides an invaluable and unique insight into the language, life, religion, mythology, folklore and stories of this late Stone Age people.

Identity and Location

Name of the Documentary Heritage: The Bleek Collections of San (Bushman) studies

Country: South-Africa

State, Province or Region: Western Cape

Address:

A : Manuscripts & Archives Department
University of Cape Town Libraries
University of Cape Town
Private Bag
Rondebosch 7701
South Africa

B : Special Collections Section
South African Library
5 Queen Victoria Street
Cape Town
postal address
P.O. Box 496
Cape Town, 8000

Name of Institution: A. University of Cape Town B. South African Library

Legal Information

Owner:

A. University of Cape Town. The papers were bequeathed to the University by Miss D. Bleek, daughter of Dr W.H.I. Bleek, and her niece Dr K.M.F. Scott.
B. South African Library

Custodian:

A. Mrs L. Hart
Manuscript and Archives Department

University of Cape Town Libraries
telephone (+27 21) 6503123
facsimile (+27 21) 6897560
e-mail: lesley@uctlib.uct.ac.za

B. Ms J. Loos
Head of Special Collections Section
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facsimile (+27 21) 244848
e-mail: jloos@salib.ac.za

Legal Status:

Category of ownership:

University of Cape Town (corporate ownership); South African Library (public ownership)

Details of legal and administrative provisions for the preservation of the documentary heritage:

University of Cape Town preserves the material and makes it available in terms of the bequest; South African Library has preservation and reference functions under National Libraries Act, 1985

Accessibility:

University of Cape Town grants access to any serious researcher. South African Library grants access to any serious researcher after reasonable notice

Copyright status:

© University of Cape Town; © South African Library

Responsible administration:

Collections in the Manuscripts and Archives Department of the University of Cape Town Libraries are managed according to internationally accepted principles, and are housed in correct climatically-controlled conditions.

At the South African Library which is the national preservation library, the material is stored under internationally accepted conditions, both physically and environmentally, within the financial constraints of the Library.

Identification

Description:

The Bleek Collection consists of papers of Dr W.H.I. Bleek (1827-1875), his sister-in-law Lucy Lloyd (1834-1914), his daughter Dorothea Bleek (1873-1948) and G.W. Stow (1822-1882) relating to their researches into the San (Bushman) language and folklore, as well as albums of photographs. The collection of the South African Library is smaller than that of the University of Cape Town.

The largest and most important part of the collection consists of the notebooks in which Bleek and Lloyd recorded the language and mythology of the ½Xam, a now extinct hunter-gatherer society, which formed part of the Southern Bushmen or San. These notebooks comprise over 12000 pages. In these notebooks were written ½Xam words or narrative, with the English translation.

Bleek developed a phonetic script for transcribing the characteristic clicks and sounds of the ½Xam language which is used by linguists to this day. Although some of the material was published by Lucy Lloyd and Dorothea Bleek, a great deal remains unpublished.

The collection includes lexicons, Bleek family records, biographical information and correspondence with the family and colleagues in many parts of the world. The material provides an invaluable and unique insight into the language, life, religion, mythology, folklore and stories of this late Stone Age people.

Bibliographic details:

A. University of Cape Town, The Bleek Collection, BC 151

B. South African Library

The W.H.I. Bleek Collection: MSC 7

The Lucy Lloyd Collection: MSB 294

The G.W. Stow Collection: MSB 472

The Folk-lore Journal Collection: MSB 604<

Visual documentation:

A. University of Cape Town: Visual material is included in the collection in the form of photographs of the Bleek family, sketchbooks containing tracings of rock art, photographs of San people and G.W. Stow's original drawings published in *Native Races of South Africa* in 1905.

B. South African Library: Bushman folklore album of photographs (and related background material compiled by the Library), as well as photographs in other sources in the Special Collections Section. Also annotated drawings (mainly of plants) made by the San living with the Bleeks.

History:

Dr Bleek became interested in the study of the San in 1870 at which time he was curator of the Grey Collection at the South African Library in Cape Town. When he learned that there were 28 'Bushman' prisoners employed on the breakwater at the Cape Town harbour, knowing that the ½Xam language was fast disappearing and that this was a unique opportunity to document it, he began to record their language and folklore. Later, some of the San were released into his custody and lived at his home. His sister-in-law, Lucy Lloyd was trained by him to help him with his work, which she continued for some years after his death. Dorothea Bleek edited and published much of the research left by her father and aunt. In addition, she recorded San vocabularies, genealogies and rock art on

several expeditions. Her major contribution was the publication of the *Bushman dictionary* in 1956, eight years after her death, which incorporated the lexicon started by her father almost a century before and which was added to by Lucy Lloyd.

Bibliography:

None available

Management Plan

Statement of significance:

Access policy:

A. University of Cape Town

The Bleek Collection attracts many researchers from all over the world who consult the original documents. The notebooks of Bleek and Lloyd have been microfilmed, and the remainder of the collection is suitable for microfilming or digital encoding.

The University of Cape Town has no objection to supplying copies in either format to researchers provided the copying and postage costs are recovered. The Department does not have a specific preservation budget, but the University employs a qualified Conservator who is able to carry out any necessary preservation procedures.

B. South African Library

The collection is managed by graduate Librarians. Documents are used under close supervision. Copying is done by staff by appropriate means (either photocopying or photographic means) depending on the condition of the document concerned. There is a very limited conservation budget applicable to the whole library. The reading and storage areas have appropriate environment control (correct air temperature and humidity, and no UV light). Documents are stored in acid-free folders in storage boxes which are not of archival quality. The storage boxes are filed horizontally on steel shelving. The buildings are fitted with smoke detection throughout, and CO₂ fire-suppression systems in the storage areas and the reading rooms. None of the documents referred to in this motivation has yet received conservation treatment owing to financial constraints. Microfilming can be undertaken in-house.

Preservation procedures:

A. University of Cape Town

The collection is stored in acid-free pamphlet boxes in a temperature- and humidity-controlled stack. Exposure to light is limited by the use of time-switches in the stack and UV absorbing screens on the windows in the offices and reading room.

Good housekeeping practices are followed in that dust is kept to a minimum, and all additions to stock are subjected to fumigation to prevent the introduction of pests.

There is adequate security. There is an infra-red alarm system, smoke detection, CO2 fire extinguishers and burglar alarms.

B. South African Library

The South African Library has a disaster reaction plan. The Library employs one Conservator and has an excellently-equipped conservation laboratory. The Conservator requires further training, but no such training is available in southern Africa, and training in Europe or America is unaffordable. The Conservator attends seminars and workshops given by visiting specialists whenever available. There is no general preservation policy applicable to the whole South African Library, but the compilation of such a plan is highly desirable.

Preservation facilities:

A. University of Cape Town

The bindings of many of the notebooks has been strengthened without altering the character of the books. The University Library's Conservator is qualified in disaster recovery and treatment. The Conservation Department employs a highly-skilled conservator and an experienced assistant. In addition there is a Photographic and Microfilming Unit staffed by a photographer whose job it is to do preservation microfilming of the manuscript collections. Items seen to be needing attention are given to the Conservation Department for treatment.

Assessment against the Selection Criteria

Influence: This is a primary resource used by a great diversity of local and international scholars. The Collections formed the focus of an international conference in September 1991. A unique aspect of the Collections is the diversity of scholars who use it, including archaeologists, historians, linguists, anthropologists and art historians. Bleek and Lloyd's notebooks serve as a 'Rosetta Stone' which has enabled scholars to decipher the meaning of southern African rock art. Thanks to insights gained from the South African material, advances have been made in the study of Australian and European rock art.

Linguistically, it is a unique example of a language which is now extinct, and as such, is invaluable for linguists. Southern Bushman is a distinct language and representative of many Khoisan languages which are now lost to humanity.

Time: The society of the semi-nomadic ½Xam had existed for hundreds of years. The documentation about their language, life and mythology was gathered at the crucial moment of disintegration of this culture in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. Studies of other hunter-gatherer societies done elsewhere were undertaken later, when those societies were already drastically transformed by colonial expansion. The collection of this data was done fairly early, so it represents a unique, authentic early glimpse into the consciousness of hunter-gatherer societies.

Place: The Collections document a people of an under-researched area of South Africa, the arid Cape interior. This is one of the richest sources of information on this region that we have. However, it transcends this local significance in that it sheds light on all hunter-gatherer societies, not only in South Africa, but in the rest of the world.

People: The San peoples had a hunting and gathering lifestyle particularly well-attuned to their physical environment which they were had to adapt as they were gradually driven into the remoter and more arid parts of southern Africa by the encroachments of black and white pastoralists. They were responsible for some of the world's finest rock art, but otherwise had a very simple material culture. The culture collapsed owing to the intrusion of the new inhabitants who brought with them diseases, and undertook active measures to eradicate them.

Subject: Themes which emerge from this Collection are:- the system of consciousness of hunter-gatherer societies, which is a unique heritage of a distinct culture; the interaction of this culture with European colonialism and expansion; and the interaction between hunter-gatherers and other societies, including indigenous pastoralist societies.

Form: The tales recorded in the University's notebooks have enabled scholars to decipher rock art, not only in southern Africa, but in other parts of the world. The South African Library's documents consist largely of correspondence, drafts and galley-proofs of reports and articles, translations, grammars and word-lists, a resource which consists of widely-diverse original material without apparent internal coherence apart from the wider basis of its subject matter.

Social Value: These collections shed light on a unique religious system, a unique consciousness, a unique system of representation, all of which are now extinct, and this is almost the sole resource for knowledge of these systems of thought. Nonetheless, it does shed light on other hunter-gatherer societies and the way in which pre-capitalist hunter-gatherers interpreted their universe. These collections provide the only means of hearing one of the most fascinating of the 'lost voices' of humanity.

Rarity and authenticity: These documents are unique. They are consulted by scholars from all over the world because they are the only record of the ½Xam language and folk-lore, and, because the ½Xam are now extinct, it would be impossible to assemble this data again. The documents are demonstrably the work of the persons named. W.H.I. Bleek and Lucy Lloyd were employed by the South African Library and many of their papers have always resided in that Library's collections, while the material at the University was bequeathed by the family concerned

Consultation

Twenty Memory of the World prospectuses were mailed to the principal libraries with significant collections with a covering letter, inviting recommendations; a further six prospectuses were sent to Committee Members of JICPA (Joint Committee on Preservation in Africa, affiliate of IFLA) also with a covering letter. Altogether five nominations were received, and the nomination of the Bleek papers by the University of Cape Town was deemed to be the most valid from a world perspective.

Owner:**Custodian:****Regional or National Memory of the World Committee:****Independent institutions and experts:**

Megan Biesele
4811-B Shoalwood Avenue
Austin, Texas, 78756 USA
Dr Janette Deacon, National Monuments Council
P.O. Box 4367
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Thomas Dowson
Department of Archaeology, University of Southampton
Southampton, United Kingdom

Dr Mathias Guenther
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Prof. J.D. Lewis-Williams
Department of Archaeology
University of the Witwatersrand
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Prof. John Parkington
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South Africa

Dr Nigel Penn
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Dr Siegrid Schmidt
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Mr Karel Schoeman
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Ms Pippa Skotnes
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South Africa

Prof. M. Szalay
Volkerkundemuseum der Universität Zürich
Zürich
Switzerland
Prof. Tony Traill
Department of Linguistics
University of the Witwatersrand
Johannesburg
South Africa

Nominator

The nomination is being made by Mr P.E. Westra, Director of the South African Library and South African co-ordinator of the Memory of the World project. The University of Cape Town and the South African Library are severally the owners of the whole collection being recommended.

Contactperson:

Assessment of Risk

- a. political climate:* South Africa currently has a stable political climate, with a government sympathetic to the preservation of the nation's cultural heritage
- b. environmental conditions* are excellent
- c. physical condition* is not endangered, and the criteria in 7.2.5 are met
- d. preservation budget* is very small each year

Preservation Assessment

a. Collections consist of the usual range of mid-nineteenth century acid paper, but in good condition on the whole. There is a great deal that could be done in the form of preventative conservation, such as deacidification.

b. Some of the University's notebooks have been repaired and strengthened. The notebooks have been microfilmed. Negatives have been made of some of the photographs. For over a century, the material at the South African Library was stored in non-archival folders in glass-fronted cases; between 1991 and 1994, the material was sorted and placed into acid-free paper folders in non-archival storage boxes. In 1995 the whole manuscripts collection was transferred to a storage vault with environmental control meeting international requirements.

c. Both institutions are taking pains to maintain the collection. The South African Library has no present plans for treatment of the collection. Preservation microfilming may be considered.

d. At the University of Cape Town Libraries, the Curator of the collection is responsible for ensuring that the items needing preservation are treated. She and the Conservator discuss ways of preservation, and the Conservator is responsible for carrying out the preservation procedures.

The Conservator of the University is Mr Johann Maree (telephone (+27 21) 4807137, e-mail: jmaree@hiddingh.uct.ac.za). At the South African Library, preservation activities are similarly shared between the Librarians of the Special Collections Section and the staff of the Preservation Department. The Head of Preservation Department is Mr P.R. Coates (telephone (+27 21) 246320, facsimile (+27 21) 244848, e-mail: coates@salib.ac.za), and the Conservator is Mr A. Motsi (phone and fax as above).