AN ELOQUENT PICTURE GALLERY
The South African Portrait Photographs of Gustav Theodor Fritsch, 1863 - 1865
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Edited by Keith Dietrich and Andrew Bank
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Acknowledgements

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Keith Dietrich and Andrew Bank September 2008

Preface Keith Dietrich

In 1863, a year after completing his degree in medicine at the University of Berlin, the 25-year-old Dr Gustav Theodor Fritsch embarked on an expedition to South Africa at his own expense with a view to conducting an anthropological study of the indigenous people of the region. Fritsch’s journey was primarily motivated by his scientific interests, particularly in comparative anatomy and anthropology. At a time when many conflicting theories were being advanced in the area of race studies, he sought to reach his own conclusions by conducting primary research in the field. His background in the natural sciences also equipped him to conduct detailed botanical, entomological, osteological and zoological observations.

Fritsch’s three-year expedition through southern Africa gave rise to two major publications, namely his Drei Jahre in Süd-Afrika: Reise-skizzen nach Notizen des Tagebuchs zusammengestellt (Three Years in South Africa: Travel Sketches Compiled from Notes in a Journal, hereafter referred to as Drei Jahre), which was published in 1868, and his Die Eingeborenen Süd-Afrikas ethnographisch und anatomisch beschrieben (The Natives of South Africa Anatomically and Ethnographically Described, hereafter referred to as Die Eingeboren), which was published in 1872. While his travel account, Drei Jahre, was aimed at a broader public readership and therefore written in a more popular and conversational vein, Die Eingeboren is a scholarly publication that stemmed from his academic interest in anthropology, and particularly the anatomy and customs of the indigenous inhabitants of the country.

Compared to earlier traveller-scientists who visited South Africa, such Peter Kolb, Anders Sparrman and William Burchell, Fritsch’s contribution to the anthropological literature on indigenous people from southern Africa was unique. He was an accomplished photographer and collected a comprehensive body of photographic records on his travels that were used as source material for the illustrations in his Drei Jahre and Die Eingeboren, and for the etchings in his Atlas, which accompanied Die Eingeboren. The photographs include portrait and full-length studies of individuals, images of groups of people, scenes of African and colonial settlements, and landscapes.

Of all these, it is the portraits that far outnumber the rest, and despite their anthropological intention, the quality of the portraits is quite extraordinary.

Fritsch’s books and articles have never been translated into English and only a few of his photographs have been published. The material, therefore, remains relatively unknown and his research on South Africa has consequently not been given any exposure. The primary aim of this book, therefore, is to bring together a comprehensive collection of Fritsch’s southern African photographs, particularly his portraits.

Fritsch’s travel account is by no means a dispassionate narration by an unforgiving ‘Bekicher’ (detached) observer, as he often refers to himself. Throughout his work the reader is reminded that the subjective experiences and observations of the writer form the main focus of the volume. Yet his descriptions bring to life the interaction of groups and their idiosyncrasies in a period of social and cultural transformation and adaptation, something that is often missing in contemporary travel accounts, in which African cultures are usually described as static and timeless. Notwithstanding the state of flux in this transitional period of colonial history, when the power and traditional way of life of local communities was being considerably eroded and undermined, the presence of the local people is asserted through the medium of photography.

Today we recognise that the cultural diversity of South Africa constitutes one of our major national assets. This book sets out to draw on this dynamic by uncovering the rich resources within our cultural heritage, particularly works of cultural and historical importance from overseas collections, and making them accessible to the South African public. The 234 of Gustav Fritsch’s South African photographs reproduced in this book were retrieved from the Ethnologisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz (from the collection of the RACFU) (EM- SMB). Four of his South African portraits have also been sourced from the National Library of South Africa Visual Collection, Cape Town Campus (NLSC), and one has been sourced from the Berlin Society for Anthropology, Ethnology and Prehistory (RACFU).

National Arts Council of South Africa
We know frustratingly little about the private life of Gustav Theodor Fritsch. For a man who came to play a prominent role as a scientist and public intellectual in Berlin for some fifty years – from the 1860s through to the 1910s – he left remarkably few remains with which to piece together any coherent story about his personal development or inner life. This is as true of visual as of documentary records. Ironically, while we know a considerable amount about the photographic ideas of Fritsch and about the many hundreds of photographs that he took during his career, there are just a few photographic images in which he himself appears.

The only surviving portraits of Fritsch are two cabinet-size prints that feature in one of the 39 albums in the Africa Department of the Museum of Ethnology in Berlin. This album (no. 21) was compiled by Richard Neuhauss, then photographic archivist of the Berlin Society for Anthropology, Ethnology and Prehistory. It is entitled ‘Pictures of African Researchers’ and contains portraits of the leading Africanists of Fritsch’s generation. The two images of him were taken by different photographers, probably a few years apart – one by J.C. Schaarwächter in October and the portrait reproduced here by Carl Günther just a few years later. There is a severe consistency about these portraits, both of which feature the jacket, the substantial grey beard, the askant glance and a distant gaze.

The only other photograph of Fritsch that we have been able to trace is one in which he appears in a group portrait of members of the Berlin Society for Anthropology, Ethnology and Prehistory probably taken around 1880, to judge from the approximate age of Fritsch in this photograph (he was about 40). Here we can make out a jacket, parted hair and full beard, but given the shadow on his face and his downward glance, there is no means of making eye contact with the subject, of eliciting more sense of personality from this photograph.

The closest we get to an image of Gustav Fritsch as a young man and Fritsch as the photographer of the elegant ‘picture gallery’ of southern African portraits which are the centrepiece of this book comes in an illustration in his travelogue, Drei Jahre in Süd-Afrika, published in Breslau in 1868, two years after his return from his three-year-long African travels. This is one of a few illustrations in which Fritsch the travelling scientist, or ‘impartial observer’ as he described himself in the Preface, is inserted into the foreign landscape to which he introduced his popular German readership. The angle from which we see Table Mountain in the background suggests that the photograph on which this illustration was based was taken on the lower slopes of Lion’s Head, most likely in the late months of 1863 shortly after Fritsch’s arrival in Cape Town. There is enough similarity with the Fritsch of the late 1870s photograph to confirm that this is indeed the traveller’s self-image. Here he is attired in the manner of the gentleman traveller with jacket, walking stick and hat for protection against the African sun.

Such then are the visual fragments. What of the documentary traces? The libraries and archives in Berlin, unfortunately, contain no collection of private papers for Fritsch, comparable to the collections of his more famous colleagues in the Berlin Society, like Rudolf Virchow or Felix von Luschan. One of Fritsch’s granddaughters has kept a few letters that he wrote to his mother from southern Africa in 1864 and 1865, but this is all we have in the way of private papers. The only more substantial source of data is a single official form on which Fritsch recorded information about his life. He was then in his early eighties, as the form was filled in on his eventual retirement after more than fifty years of work at the King Frederick William University in Berlin (today’s Humboldt University). Given the format, the information consists primarily of personal achievements and, as such, is more revealing of the public than the private man.
Here we read (and the occasional brief biographical sketch confirms) that Gustav Theodor Fritsch was born on 5 March 1838 in Cottbus. His home town lay about a hundred kilometres downstream and south-east of ‘Athens on the Spree’, as Berlin was then often known. From biographical surveys of Fritsch’s father we learn that he was a land surveyor named Ludwig, and that his mother’s name was Sophie. We know that his father died in 1841 when the young boy was just three years of age. He was therefore raised by his mother,5 who helps to explain the deep sense of personal debt expressed towards her in the acknowledgement on the title page of his southern African travelogue, “To a loyal mother dedicated with heartfelt gratitude”.6

The pink form in the university archive relates that Gustav began school at a gymnasium in Cottbus, as one might expect, but then moved – perhaps in his early teens – to the Maria-Magdalena-Gymnasium in Breslau. His home town lay about a hundred kilometres downstream and close to the Polish border. He matriculated here in 1857, and then at the age of 19 enlisted for a year in the Prussian army as a volunteer infantryman. In all likelihood his regiment, the 2nd Regiment of the Guards, would have been stationed in Breslau. As a photographer, the aspect of his career that most closely concerns us in this book. For information on his photography and associated travels and academic career, we are forced to turn to his published writings, beginning with his southern African travelogue. Here we learn that he left Plymouth on a self-funded expedition to southern Africa in August 1862, a year after his graduation ceremony in Berlin. He had already spent some time reading in the libraries of Berlin, Paris and London. After arriving in Cape Town in early September, he stayed at a German guest house in the centre of town and spent a further five months reading documents and published works in the Grey Library, curated by his more famous fellow graduate from Berlin, Wilhelm Bleek. Michael Godby suggests in his essay in this volume that there is little evidence of a warm relationship between the two, but did mention others whom he met at the South African Library, notably Edward Layard, the curator of the South African Museum (then housed in the same building). However, we do know that Fritsch later donated at least 48 prints of his southern African portraits to the Grey Library and an inscribed copy of his travelogue to Wilhelm Bleek shortly after its publication. The inscription in Fritsch’s handwritings reads: “Dedicated by the Author to his Esteemed Friend, Dr Bleek.”

While he had quibbles about the misspelling of Grey (as ‘Gray’) and elements of Bleek’s system of racial classification, there is no doubting the laudatory tone. “The present work gives the results of his scientific anthropological studies, on account of which he undertook the expedition. The author, who is an excellent photographer, took himself on his travels the photographs of more than a hundred natives, representatives of different races; each head being in profile and en face. Most of these photographs (specimens of which can be seen in the Grey Library) to which he himself kindly presented a good many were afterwards etched in copper, and thus form the magnificent atlas accompanying the letter-press text of this work. We particularly direct our readers’ attention to this part of the work, as it is one which even those who do not understand German can fully appreciate. But the fact is that the author has with great industry collected, arranged, and gone through the great mass of the existing published (and even much unpublished) material, for a knowledge of the Natives of South Africa south of the tropic of Capricorn; and, in consequence, his work has become an indispensable compendium for any one who may in any way occupy himself with the anthropology and ethnology of these regions.”

Most of Fritsch’s “native portraits” were taken during his first, year-long expedition, from November 1863 until November 1864, which took him through the Eastern Cape, the Orange Free State and south of the tropic of Capricorn; and, in consequence, his work has become an indispensable compendium for any one who may in any way occupy himself with the anthropology and ethnology of these regions.”

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The papers in the university archive are silent on Fritsch’s career as a photographer, the aspect of his career that most closely concerns us in this book. For information on his photography and associated travels and academic career, we are forced to turn to his published writings, beginning with his southern African travelogue. Here we learn that he left Plymouth on a self-funded expedition to southern Africa in August 1862, a year after his graduation ceremony in Berlin. He had already spent some time reading in the libraries of Berlin, Paris and London. After arriving in Cape Town in early September, he stayed at a German guest house in the centre of town and spent a further five months reading documents and published works in the Grey Library, curated by his more famous fellow graduate from Berlin, Wilhelm Bleek. Michael Godby suggests in his essay in this volume that there is little evidence of a warm relationship between the two, but did mention others whom he met at the South African Library, notably Edward Layard, the curator of the South African Museum (then housed in the same building). However, we do know that Fritsch later donated at least 48 prints of his southern African portraits to the Grey Library and an inscribed copy of his travelogue to Wilhelm Bleek shortly after its publication. The inscription in Fritsch’s handwritings reads: “Dedicated by the Author to his Esteemed Friend, Dr Bleek.” Wilhelm Bleek’s co-researcher and sister-in-law, Lucy Lloyd, used the high-quality illustrations in this very copy of the travelogue as a way of accumulating vocabulary in the highly complex Xam language in the early days of their now famous research project on Xam language and folklore.9,10

10. We also know that Bleek effusively promoted Fritsch’s later scientific study on southern Africa, Die Eingeborenen Südafrikas, and especially his photographic portraiture in a review written for readers of the local intellectual journal, the Cape Monthly Magazine.

11. While he had quibbles about the misspelling of Grey (as ‘Gray’) and elements of Bleek’s system of racial classification, there is no doubting the laudatory tone. “The present work gives the results of his scientific anthropological studies, on account of which he undertook the expedition. The author, who is an excellent photographer, took himself on his travels the photographs of more than a hundred natives, representatives of different races; each head being in profile and en face. Most of these photographs (specimens of which can be seen in the Grey Library) to which he himself kindly presented a good many were afterwards etched in copper, and thus form the magnificent atlas accompanying the letter-press text of this work. We particularly direct our readers’ attention to this part of the work, as it is one which even those who do not understand German can fully appreciate. But the fact is that the author has with great industry collected, arranged, and gone through the great mass of the existing published (and even much unpublished) material, for a knowledge of the Natives of South Africa south of the tropic of Capricorn; and, in consequence, his work has become an indispensable compendium for any one who may in any way occupy himself with the anthropology and ethnology of these regions.”
The first phase was the southern African photographic work of the mid-1860s, which forms the focus of the first part of this volume and the essays by Michael Godby and Andrew Bank in the second. One of the central issues raised in these two essays is how the 'honorific' portraits that Fritsch took during his two years of travels, many of African chiefs and mission converts, relates to the racial attitudes expressed in his travelogue. Godby argues that the artistic tradition in which Fritsch located his portraits of 'racial types' encouraged this 'honorific' framing of his subjects at a time before the 'repressive' aspect of portrait photography had developed. This, Goddy suggests, is how we can square the 'honorific' portraits with the often dismissive attitudes towards African expressed in the text of his travelogue. My own essay proposes that the racial attitudes Fritsch expressed in his travelogue were still relatively open-ended and consistently ambiguous. While there is certainly evidence of stereotyping and expressions of frustration with Africans whom he encountered, my reading of the narrative suggests that it is not out of keeping with the 'honorific' tradition in which he cast his portraiture. I attempt to highlight the depth of Fritsch's curiosity and engagement with African culture, particularly in the latter stages of his journey, contrasting this 'ethnological' (or culturally oriented) attitude and the tone in his writing style with the much harsher and strongly physical emphasis of his anthropological writing in his scientific study of 1872, Die Eingeborenen, where the portraits were accordingly re-presented and interpreted in the text according to bodily characteristics rather than culture.

Although the photographic work of Fritsch was confined to the mid-1860s, he remained the Society's unofficial expert on southern African history and ethnography during subsequent decades, often presenting his portrait photographs and travel illustrations at meetings. On the eve of the publication of Die Eingeborenen, at the December 1871 meeting, Fritsch gave a public presentation of his southern African portrait photographs, commenting in detail on the processes of their production and defending the integrity of the process of translation from photograph to etching. During the 1870s Fritsch commented frequently on the physical characteristics and rock art of the Bushmen, including remarks about the veracity of a portrait photograph of Wilhelm Bleek's main informant, K abolish, which had come before the Society through Bleek's old mentor, Richard Lepsius, and on his conviction that certain rock art drawings located by missionaries in Damaraaland were indeed the work of Bushmen. On the occasion of a 15-year-old Sotho boy being presented before the Society at a meeting in 1873 (one of many such Volkstypen), Fritsch provided his peers with a detailed account of the history of the Sotho up to recent times. As at the time of the Anglo-Zulu War, Fritsch presented background information on the history and ethnography of the Zulu, including the story of the rise of Shaka. There was a visual dimension to his presentation on 21 February 1880. We Fritsch discusses the end of the Zulu wars by using many photographs and drawings. It is likely that his own portraits of the Zulu, focusing on their hair-styling practices, were among the illustrative materials that he used. There is also evidence that Fritsch exploited fresh opportunities to recycle his southern African photographic collection and present them to new audiences. A fellow member of the Free Photographic Society, Dietrich, requested a copy of Fritsch's photographic results from his travels in 1861 and was able to produce a copy of the photographs for his museum in Berlin. It is likely that these portraits were sent to a number of other photography and ethnological collections in Europe, including the British Ethnological Society in London and the University of Manchester. The portraits were accordingly re-presented and interpreted in the text according to bodily characteristics rather than culture.
The importance of visual methods in the emerging German anthropological approach of the new German school, and that of Berlin in particular, has been argued that visual methods were at the very centre of anthropological theory and practice in the 1890s. Broeckmann demonstrates that Fritsch developed a sophisticated visual approach as he went to promote the superior photographic method over other visual forms of documentation, the importance of close collaborative relationships between photographers and the scientists or publishers who commissioned their work.

Some six years later, Fritsch embarked on a photographic field-trip to Persia and Egypt, which he described as his final expedition. Fritsch was an amateur photographer who became a member of an earlier astronomical expedition to observe a solar eclipse. But his trip was affected by his inability to find evidence of any surviving photographs from 1868. The photographs that Fritsch took in 1881 represent a departure from the genre of individual portraiture and landscape photography that he had accumulated on his journey through southern Africa. A large brown rectangular box in the Asia Section of the Berlin Museum of Ethnology contains a selection of these images: 12 cabinet-size prints pasted (probably by Richard Neuhauss) on to three cardboard sheets. A man, a Greek, to his left he holds a blackboard, in front of which is a railway line, with trees on either side of it. In the background the railway is surrounded by a town, with houses and churches. Fritsch’s other acknowledged area of expertise was photography. The impetus for his interest in the subject was undoubtedly the spiritual and anthropological community is still open debate. While Andreas Zimmermann has argued that visual methods were at the very centre of anthropological theory of the Orient, Fritsch presented an illustrated lecture which included photographs of market scenes and excursions to the ‘black type’ of photography as a modern anthropological kind.

Fritsch’s work as a travelling photographer in the Orient still displays a degree of eccentricity and diversity. He wrote articles in the Zeitschrift für Ethnologie on the representation of the human body in the Orient, and on 20 November 1893, it enabled as “old African”, our chairman a steady hand a stick to calm the agitated masses.”

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balancing a very large rock above his head, in an obvious visual echo showing skeletal formation, musculature and classical posture. Plates models to the 'normal-ideal' bodies of German athletes whom Fritsch was in the bodies of contemporary Europeans, who seemed to resemble could be tested against this 'norm'. Fritsch's primary interest, however, the abstract 'canon' had been defined, and the book includes a detailed). Once this

notably from the theory of proportions set out by the Greek sculptor 'canon of proportions' and 'racial beauty'.

admission of the failure of his earlier quantitative scientific model of the 'Native races of South Africa', in 1911 he complained about measurement by physical anthropologists and racial theorists. Whereas but also what he came to consider as an excessive reliance on meas-

pipe open Fritsch's (1911) study, as science to photography as (racially motivated) art. As Lewerentz out in his contribution to a 1875 handbook for travellers and which

Here we can clearly see that Fritsch had made the transition from photography as science to photography as racially motivated art. As Lewerentz emphasises, the photographs of European bodies that Fritsch presented in this book were taken with mixed motives: partly as a quest to compile a portfolio of 'racial types', and also partly (I would argue) as a way of celebrating the diversity and complexity of the peoples and cultures encountered on his travels. The second reason for showcasing these portrait photographs is that, regardless of the exact motives of the man who hid behind the cloth, he was (as Wilhelm Glocke acknowledged at the time) an 'excellent photographer'. It is as well to remember that these portraits were taken no more than 25 years after the invention of photography, and that they compare very favourably in quality to the best portrait photographs that were then being produced in 1908 and 1899. As the book's title indicated, a much more abstract sense had by now come to serve as the model of racial measurement and com-

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that his photographs and the photographs reproduced in the pages that follow, and in particular on the portraits of the peoples of southern Africa that are the centrepiece of this book! How are we to view visual images that were taken no more than 25 years after the invention of photography, and which existed in the early 1910s and 1920s would have been in keeping with that of the Nazi ideologies of the new generation?

The third reason, one that numerous essays in this volume touch on, is that, regardless of his intentions, a photographer who set out with (at least partly) racial ideas

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ENDNOTES


3  In his incisive study of the ‘canon of proportions’ and ‘racial beauty’.

4  See the essay by Anne Lewerentz in this volume.


6  Theirs are a very fluid concept of framing. The very ability

7  Fritsch's primary interest, however, was not in determining the exact motives of the man who hid behind the cloth, he was (as Wilhelm Glocke acknowledged at the time) an 'excellent photographer'. It is as well to remember that these portraits were taken no more than 25 years after the invention of photography, and that they compare very favourably in quality to the best portrait photographs that were then being produced in 1908 and 1899. As the book's title indicated, a much more abstract sense had by now come to serve as the model of racial measurement and com-


9  On the use of the visuals in Fritsch's many publications, see the essay by Anne Lewerentz in this volume.

10  See the essay by Anne Lewerentz in this volume.

11  In his incisive study of the ‘canon of proportions’ and ‘racial beauty’.

12  The very ability to capture the unvarnished – in Fritsch's case, this was somewhat easier because his subjects were mainly the peoples of southern Africa – encourages this sense of visual images spilling over


Gustav Fritsch’s contribution to southern African travel and anthropological illustration was unique. His detailed photographic records of peoples and landscapes he encountered on his travels were both original and pioneering. Until the latter part of the nineteenth century, photographs had played a minor role in travel and anthropological illustration. Earlier travellers-ethnographers, such as Peter Kolb, Anders Sparmann, François Le Vaillant, Samuel Daniell, William Burchell, George French Angas and Thomas Baines, relied on second- or first-hand field sketches as source material for their studies and illustrations. Their field observations were generally first captured on paper in pencil and wash, water-based paints and ink wash drawings, which were then later worked up into illustrations that appeared in popular and scientific literature.

The technological shortcomings in the printing process of the time as regards the reproduction of photographs were not a serious impediment to Fritsch’s exclusive reliance on photographic means of recording. The wood engravings and etchings illustrating his books are all closely and accurately based on the photographs he took on his travels. His visual material was not merely of aesthetic interest, as are the illustrations of Daniell and Angas, or simply sketches to enliven the text. Their field observations were generally first captured on hand field sketches as source material for their studies and book illustrations. Their field observations were generally first captured on paper in pencil and wash, water-based paints and ink wash drawings, which were then later worked up into illustrations that appeared in popular and scientific literature.

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Given that Fritsch’s portraits were taken around mission establishments for this reason that his portraits were taken around mission establishments, he constantly referred to misconceptions against the background of Fritsch’s concern with race studies which preoccupied his academic career, his photographs of individual peoples from southern Africa are highly ambiguous in meaning. I have consciously tried to avoid giving my own critical interpretations of the photographs, provides a contextualising description of both the photographs and texts in order not to divert attention from their complexity.

The sequence of the photographs in Part One follows the steps of Fritsch’s journey through southern Africa. Fritsch often stressed the difficulties he encountered in photographing people for the purpose of his studies. As he ventured northwards on his second journey to Bechuanaland, he met with increasing problems. By the time he reached Shoshong he saw no reason to continue, as he found that people there were far too difficult to photograph. Given the photographic techniques used at the time and the organisational intricacies in setting up photographic shoots with the co-operation of his subjects, considerable skill was required to produce accurate and reliable images. Fritsch was also sent on securing accurate measure-ments of the faces of his subjects, for which he used callipers. In his Atlas Fritsch discussed the co-ordinates of his measurements and provided a table recording the measurements of the people he photonographed. He mentioned that some of his data had been lost and that many subjects did not allow him to measure them. For both his photographic and mensural work, therefore, Fritsch had to rely on mediations (Mittlersonnen) — often white missionaries, magistrates or traders — who could communicate his instructions to his subjects. It is possible for this reason that his portraits were taken around mission stations, villages and towns where mediators were available, or where his subjects understood Dutch or English.

With some exceptions, Fritsch followed a fairly exact procedure when taking his portraits, in order that the scale of the subjects’ heads was more or less in proportion to each other and that any form of photographic distortion was minimised. The subjects were seated upright on chairs at a consistently fixed distance from the camera and each person was photographed in full frontal and side views against a light background, which framed the heads and torsos. With the frontal portraits the eyes were fixed more or less on the lens and the faces positioned upright so that both ears were visible. With the side views the subjects’ faces were again held in a vertical position with the lower jaw parallel to the ground. In both Die Eingeborenen and Atlas, Fritsch discussed the importance of having both front and profile views in order to obtain the ‘correct’ facial measurements. He commented that the differences in the noses from these views were so great that sometimes the two images could seem to be of different people.

In a letter written to his mother from Cape Town on 1 February 1866, Fritsch mentioned having consulted ‘186 portraits, 179 images, 52 stereoscopes’ and 60 views.’ Nowhere does he give a detailed account of the photographic process he used. From 1853 the wet collodion process was already in use. It required that glass plates be photo-sensitive on site, exposed while still wet, and developed immediately thereafter. Fritsch mentioned that while in Cape Town he began testing a new method. ‘I used these days to prepare myself for a new photographic process that I thought of utilising on my journeys through the country.’ He noted that he had taken the opportunity of taking prepared dry plates on his visits to Camps Bay.7 The success of these tests led him to use the process on his excursion to Robben Island and his excursions to Table Mountain.8 It seems likely that Fritsch used the faster wet collodion plates for his portraits and experimented with the dry-plate process for his landscape photographs.

Part One

Emulsions, memories and histories

Keith Dietrich

Keith Dietrich studied design and fine art at Stellenbosch University and the National Higher Institute of Fine Arts in Antwerp, Belgium. He holds a DLitt et Phil in Art History from the University of South Africa (Unisa) and has worked at the University of Pretoria and Unisa. He is currently Chair of the Department of Visual Arts, Stellenbosch University, and his areas of research include painting, book art and cultural studies.

Task of Part One is to present his photographs in a way that allows them to speak for themselves in respect of what Fritsch was seeing and recording as an anthropological traveller and photographer. Part One therefore closely follows Fritsch’s travel narrative and, alongside the photographs, provides a contextualising description of both the places he visited and the people he photographed, together with a summary of the observations he made in his travel accounts. Seen against the background of Fritsch’s concern with race studies which preoccupied his academic career, his photographs of individual peoples from southern Africa are highly ambiguous in meaning. I have consciously tried to avoid giving my own critical interpretations of his photographs and texts in order not to divert attention from their complexity.

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Dry-plate techniques were still in their infancy at the time. These dry-plate processes had been introduced by the early 1860s, namely the dry collodion, collodio-albumen and tannin processes, the last two proving to be the most successful. With the dry-plate process a number of plates could be prepared and kept for several days, though it remains unclear what dry-plate method Fritsch used. Compared to the wet collodion process, where the exposure time in good lighting conditions was roughly 20 seconds, the dry-plate method needed double or triple the exposure time. When taking photographs of Mfengu people in Port Elizabeth, for instance, Fritsch mentioned that the subjects had to sit still for 20 seconds, and in his Atlas he wrote of his frustration when his subjects moved during the exposures and how he had to adjust the focus and take the exposures before the plates dried out.

Fritsch therefore had to transport not only his camera and tripod through the country, but also his darkroom tent and the highly combustible chemicals used for his glass negatives, which had to be prepared and developed in the field. The wet collodion process was very demanding and involved unpacking the equipment and erecting the portable darkroom tent. The glass plate that would form the negative was first polished, rinsed and buffed with a soft cloth, after which it was coated with a thin film of collodion emulsion and replaced by the lightproof holder. The holder was then detached from the camera and taken into the darkroom tent, where the plate was removed and developed. Within a few seconds the image would be visible, as the areas exposed to light in the camera turned to metallic silver. When the developing process was complete, the developer was removed by washing the plate in clean water. The developed plate would be taken from the darkroom and placed into a tray of sodium hyposulphate to remove the unused silver halides and then washed in fresh water, after which it was dried and sealed with a protective varnish.

As Fritsch mentioned giving one of his sitters a print of his portrait, it is likely that he made prints of his portraits in the field. Albumen coated paper was the common printing paper of the time. This process involved coating paper with an emulsion of egg white (albumen) and table salt (sodium chloride), which sealed the paper, creating a slightly glossy surface. The paper was then dipped in a solution of silver nitrate and water, which sensitised the surface to light, after which it was dried in total darkness. A contact print could be made with the glass negative by exposing the paper in direct sunlight until the image achieved the desired tonal range, after which the print would be fixed and toned with gold chloride to improve the print and stabilise it against fading. Fritsch's portraits were printed in the carte de visite format introduced in 1854, shortly after the invention of the collodion wet plate process designed for his African oxwagon, nearby which is the photographic tent. Upper reaches of the Umgeni River close to the falls (Drei Jahre, 165).
While in Cape Town, Fritsch obtained permission from the Colonial Office to undertake an excursion to Robben Island. He visited the island on Friday, 4 November 1863. At the time the island was used as a gaol for military and political prisoners and common criminals, as well as an asylum for lepers and ‘lunatics’. A group of Xhosa chiefs were among the most famous of its political prisoners.

The Ndlambe chief Siyolo had been sent to the island with his wife in 1855 after having been captured during the frontier war known as the War of Mlanjeni (1850–3). Here he was to remain for close on 17 years. In 1858 he was joined by other chiefs imprisoned after the Cattle Killings of 1856–7. By 1859 eight Xhosa chiefs were living at the inlet to the north of the island town, known as Murray’s Bay, including the Rharhabe chief Maqoma, the greatest Xhosa military commander of the century, and his wife Katyi; his brother Xhoxho, and Dilima, son of Phatho of the Gqunukhwebe. In 1862 the minor chief Stokwe, Phatho’s brother-in-law, who had in the interim been imprisoned in Cape Town, joined them. Shortly after Fritsch’s visit to the island, Dilima was released, but it was only in 1869 that Maqoma, Siyolo and Xhoxho secured their freedom and were allowed to return home. After an unsuccessful attempt to recapture his old land, Maqoma was sent back in 1871 to the island, where he died a few years later in the pauper ward.

In his travelogue Fritsch described how the chiefs at Murray’s Bay lived in huts similar to those found in Xhosaland. These were covered by tarpaulins and the prisoners slept on mattresses on the ground. Fritsch took photographs of Maqoma, Xhoxho, Siyolo, Stokwe and Dilima (see Figs. 2–11), noting in his book that ‘in return for some tobacco and one shilling per head, they readily allowed themselves to grant me their worthy presence for a while’. Fritsch related how he prepared to take the portraits, though ‘not without encountering some difficulties, as sitting still by no means seemed necessary to them’. While being photographed, Maqoma, for example, ‘quite cheerfully rubbed his nose ... some of the pictures therefore left much to be desired ...’

As a physician, Fritsch also took particular interest in the general infirmary and was accompanied on a tour of the hospital by Dr William Edmunds, who had been appointed as the Surgeon-Superintendent in 1862. Fritsch noted that more than a hundred patients were kept there, including people suffering from eye diseases, arthritis and leprosy, as well as a group of ‘lunatics’. Fritsch recorded that he had never seen such sick people in his life. It appeared to him that anyone who had a skin disease was labelled a leper. Although he does not mention taking portraits of patients, it is fair to assume that his photograph of a leper (Fig. 12) was taken on Robben Island.
Stokwe als Gefangener, Ngqika-Häuptling, Robben-Island, Tafel-Bay.
Stokwe, Mbalu chief, Robben Island, Table Bay.
(EM-SMB/32/924-923)

Seyolo als Gefangener, Ngqika-Häuptling, Robben-Island, Tafel-Bay.
Siyolo, Ndlambe chief, Robben Island, Table Bay.
(EM-SMB/32/922-921)

Dilima als Gefangener, Ngqika-Häuptling, Robben-Island, Tafel-Bay.
Dilima, Gqunukhwebe chief, Robben Island, Table Bay.
(EM-SMB/32/926-925)
Ten days later, on 24 November, Fritsch departed from Cape Town for the eastern Cape in a horse-drawn cart. He took with him a passenger who needed a lift to Port Elizabeth, and they travelled via Swellendam, Mossel Bay, George, the Langkloof and Humansdorp, arriving in Port Elizabeth (Algoa Bay) on Sunday, 3 January 1864. He described Algoa Bay as a windy and desolate area, with few trees and many sand dunes that ‘seem like enormous stretches of snow’. While in Port Elizabeth Fritsch approached the local ‘shepherd’, who helped him find two ‘authentic’ Khoikhoi whom he wished to photograph. Yet even the influence of the official was not enough to allay what Fritsch described as their superstitious fears of the camera.

Fritsch wrote that he was unlucky with his anthropological studies in Port Elizabeth, though he did take portraits of two men, one of whom he identified in his Atlas as a Sotho called George (Figs. 13–14), who had grown up in the Colony, and the other called Bajadur, who is identified in the Dammann Album as a Mfengu servant (Diener) (Figs. 15–16). Given the difficulty he met with in photographing people, especially without the help of a mediator, it is likely that both these two men, being neatly dressed in European clothes, worked for whites and would have understood enough Dutch or English for Fritsch to communicate with them.

In Port Elizabeth Fritsch took the opportunity to walk along the beaches and explore the dunes, where he found interesting specimens of shells, birds and snakes for his zoological studies. On the morning of 19 January, he departed from Port Elizabeth for King William’s Town, the chief town of British Kaffraria. En route, he was delayed for two days at Grahamstown while having repairs done to his cart. He finally left for King William’s Town on Saturday, 23 January.

Port Elizabeth: 24 November 1863

Figs. 13-14
George, Sotho, Port Elizabeth, eastern Cape. (EM-SMB/32/949-950)

Figs. 15-16
Bajadur (Diener), Mfengu, Port Elizabeth, eastern Cape. (EM-SMB/32/953-954)
Fritsch left King William's Town for Queenstown on 26 January in heavy rain. On the way he stopped over at the Bethel mission station at Döhne, founded in 1837 by Pastor Jacob Ludwig Döhne of the Berlin Missionary Society. Sandile, son and successor of Nqika, was still a minor when his father died in 1829. His half-brother Maqoma, whom Fritsch photographed on Robben Island, ruled over the Rharhabe until Sandile came of age in 1842. Increasing restrictions on land and a severe drought in the eastern Cape led to mounting tensions, which erupted in 1846 in the seventh frontier war, the War of the Axe, between the Xhosa and British, in which both sides suffered serious casualties. Sandile proved to be a capable leader, keeping the British at bay and earning the respect of local leaders.

That same afternoon, Fritsch had the opportunity to photograph Sandile (Figs. 17–18), who wanted two litres of brandy for the honour. After further negotiations he agreed to accept just one bottle. As it was raining, Fritsch photographed Sandile through a door of the hotel, while Sandile sat indifferently on a chair outside. The event drew the attention of a crowd of curious onlookers. Fritsch also took a portrait of Sandile's first councillor, Somi (Figs. 19–20). In his account of the event, Fritsch mentions Somi's thick ivory armband, worn as a token of his rank. Fritsch was amused by the joyful astonishment and laughter of the crowd when they saw the image of Somi on the glass plate. He wrote: ‘never will I forget ... the slap of admiration on the shoulder with which His Majesty Sandile honoured me’ after seeing Somi’s image. Fritsch found the responses of these people very different from those he had previously encountered in the eastern Cape. It should be borne in mind that Sandile had already been exposed to the convention of portraiture. As with Maqoma and Siyolo, his portrait had been painted on a number of occasions by Frederick Timpson I’Ons while he was in detention.

Sandile, son and successor of Nqika, was still a minor when his father died in 1829. His half-brother Maqoma, whom Fritsch photographed on Robben Island, ruled over the Rharhabe until Sandile came of age in 1842. Increasing restrictions on land and a severe drought in the eastern Cape led to mounting tensions, which erupted in 1846 in the seventh frontier war, the War of the Axe, between the Xhosa and British, in which both sides suffered serious casualties. Sandile proved to be a capable leader, keeping the British at bay and earning the respect of local leaders. The British finally resorted to a war of attrition, destroying villages and crops, and Sandile was eventually forced to the negotiating table where he signed an oath of allegiance to Britain and was imprisoned for a time. His continuing opposition led him to participate in the War of Mlanjeni and to take the side of the ‘believers’ in the millenarian Cattle Killings.

Fritsch observed that at the time of his visit to Stutterheim, Sandile was still feared by the British and, in an attempt to ‘render him harmless’, was paid a daily salary of 10 shillings to ‘grant him the possibility to ruin himself by means of brandy’. For this sum, he remarked, they ‘so to speak’ appointed him as ‘chief of police’ over the nearby districts, where he had to keep peace in order that ‘the old divide and rule of the Romans was also applied here’.

The following day, 27 January, Fritsch took portraits of four other people: a man whose name is recorded in his Atlas as Ukaas (Figs. 19–20), in his account of the event, Fritsch mentions Somi’s thick ivory armband, worn as a token of his rank. Fritsch was amused by the joyful astonishment and laughter of the crowd when they saw the image of Somi on the glass plate. He wrote: ‘never will I forget ... the slap of admiration on the shoulder with which His Majesty Sandile honoured me’ after seeing Somi’s image. Fritsch found the responses of these people very different from those he had previously encountered in the eastern Cape. It should be borne in mind that Sandile had already been exposed to the convention of portraiture. As with Maqoma and Siyolo, his portrait had been painted on a number of occasions by Frederick Timpson I’Ons while he was in detention.

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The following day, 27 January, Fritsch took portraits of four other people: a man whose name is recorded in his Atlas as Ukaas (Figs. 19–22), two unidentified Xhosa transport-riders dressed in European clothing (Figs. 23–26), and a ‘Bastaard’ (creole) transport-ridge called Nelleka (Figs. 27–28). Given their dress and occupations, it is likely that these transport-riders spoke some English or Dutch and that Fritsch would have been able to communicate directly with them, without the help of a mediator. Fritsch remarked that some of these negatives were damaged by rainwater, which might account for the mark on the portrait in Fig. 25. He also included a wood-engraving of a naked Mfengu woman whom he photographed at Döhne (see Fig. 237), attributing her healthy condition to the fact of her working for an English family in Stutterheim.
Nelleka, transport-rider, Duhne, British Kaffraria.

Mfengu transport-rider, Duhne, British Kaffraria.

U’kaas, Tembu, Duhne, British Kaffraria.

Nekhlu, transport-rider, Duhne, British Kaffraria.
Fritsch arrived in high-lying Windvogelberg (modern-day Cathcart) in the pouring rain in the afternoon of 27 January. As he entered the town a group of Xhosa men approached on horseback. He was informed that it was Anta (half-brother of Sandile) and his followers. Fritsch had heard much of Anta – a British official called him ‘a haughty man [with] a good mind and [... noble appearance]’ – and was impressed by his size, writing that he was over 1.8 metres tall with broad shoulders. Fritsch decided to stay over for a day at Windvogelberg to make Anta’s acquaintance. The magistrate, Hugh Thompson, was fluent in Xhosa and facilitated Fritsch’s request to meet Anta at the inn the following morning. Anta accepted and arrived with his first councillor, Sazini.

Following their agreement on a bottle of brandy, Anta undertook to sit for the photograph (Figs. 30–31). Fritsch was struck by Anta’s resemblance to his half-brother Xhoxho, whom Fritsch had met and photographed on Robben Island.

Exceptionally impressed with Sazini (Figs. 32–33), Fritsch described him as a ‘beautiful example of a man with a well-built physique’; his facial features as ‘regular and noble, his hands small, with long, tapering fingers, a genuine aristocratic type who wore his ivory arm-bands and leopard-tooth necklace with pride’. It was perhaps Sazini he had in mind when describing the facial features of the Xhosa in Die Eingeborenen, where he wrote that one aspect of the ‘A-Bantu’ physique that could be described as noble (edel) was the fine and slender shape of the hands, which conformed to ‘what we [Europeans] would call the aristocratic type’.

Fritsch took two other portraits in Windvogelberg. These he recorded in his Atlas as those of a Thembu man called Isangani (Figs. 34–35) and a Xhosa man named Ngonde (Figs. 36–37). Besides these portraits, he also photographed Anta and his followers on horseback outside the Windvogelberg hotel (Fig. 29). This image is unique, both as a technical photographic achievement (one would have expected a considerably blurred photograph from a 20-second exposure involving so many horses) and as a rare historical document.

Before leaving for Queenstown, Fritsch undertook an excursion to study San rock art in the vicinity of Windvogelberg. Fritsch was astounded by the paintings, describing them in considerable detail in his travel account. He noted in particular that some depicting armed European soldiers and horses had been recently executed, explaining how they had been painted using four colours, namely black, white, ochre and red. In recognition of the artistic achievements of San people, Fritsch dedicated a section of Die Eingeborenen to reproductions of their rock paintings, and later published an article on ‘Rock paintings near !Amelw in Damaraland’ in the Cape Monthly Magazine of 1879.

Windvogelberg (Cathcart): 27 January 1864

Fig. 29

Finta und seine Gevolge vor den Gasthause Windvogelberg.
Anta and his followers outside the inn, Windvogelberg, British Kaffraria.
(EM-SMB/32/1004)
Ngonde, Ama-xoxa, Windvogelberg, British Kaffraria.

Isangani, abaTembu, Windvogelberg, östliche Colonie.

Sazini, Mbalu, erste Rathgeber d. Hanta, Windvogelberg, British Kaffraria.

Nigeone, Ama-xoxa, Windvogelberg, British Kaffraria.

Figs. 30-31

Figs. 32-33

Figs. 34-35

Figs. 36-37
Having rested his horses for a day in Queenstown, Fritsch departed on 1 February for the Shiloh mission station, which he reached that afternoon. Shiloh had been founded in 1828 by the Moravian Missionary Society on the Klipplaat River near Queenstown, to evangelise among the Thembu. On the evening of his arrival Fritsch attended a religious service held for the community by a Sotho preacher, Johannes Nakin (or Nakeng) (Figs. 38–39), who also taught at the mission. He recalled that Nakin, who spoke in his mother tongue, made a great impact on his audience through the passionate way in which he preached. 43

Nakin’s parents had settled in Shiloh in 1828 after having fled from the Free State during the turmoil known as the Mfecane. His mother was the first person to be baptised at Shiloh. Johannes Nakin was born at Shiloh in 1832 and trained as a teacher at Genadendal, the first and largest Moravian mission situated near Caledon in the western Cape, between 1846 and 1853. 44 He was still living at Genadendal when Shiloh suffered considerable damage during the War of Mlanjeni. In 1847 the Governor of the Cape, Sir Harry Smith, had extended the border of the colony to the Keiskamma and Klipplaat rivers, and in 1851, when war broke out, Shiloh became caught between the opposing forces. The missionaries under Sebastian Gysin fled, accompanied by loyal Mfengu and Khoikhoi congregants, and the station was attacked from both sides. 45 On returning to Shiloh after the war, Nakin married a Khoikhoi woman, Emma Stompjes, in 1854. She was described by Gysin as ‘the fairest girl in Shiloh, and though much admired by her own countrymen, and even by Englishmen, has always maintained an unblemished character’. 46

Emma was the daughter of Carl and Wilhelmine Stompjes. Fritsch photographed Carl (Figs. 40–41), whom he described as ‘the oldest pupil [Schüler] at the mission’. Carl’s wife, Wilhelmine, was a Xhosa woman who played a significant role as an interpreter and facilitator between the Moravian missionaries and the Xhosa and Khoikhoi communities at Shiloh. In the early 1880s she had found her way from the eastern Cape to Genadendal, where she was baptised and received her Christian name. 47 In 1818 she joined the party of Johann Heinrich Schmidt to establish a mission station, Enon, at Witte River in the Uitenhage district, 48 and again in 1828 she accompanied a party under Johannes Lemmerz and Johann Friedrich Hoffmann to found Shiloh. 49 Her son-in-law Johannes Nakin was ordained as a missionary in 1870, and in 1884, the year after Emma Nakin’s death, he married Maria Stompjes. 50

Besides the portraits of Johannes Nakin and Carl Stompjes, Fritsch also took photographs of six other pupils at the mission whose names he recorded in his Atlas as A. Minell (Figs. 42–43) and Rosalie Schlinger, two Khoikhoi women (Figs. 44–45), Xibene, a Mfengu man (Figs. 46–47), Mani, a Xhosa man (Figs. 48–49), and Kwadana, a Thembu (Figs. 50–51). 51
Fig. 40-41
Karl Stompjes (Missionsschüler der Mission), Hottentot, Siloh, östliche Colonie.
Carl Stompjes, Khoikhoi, pupil at the mission, Siloh, eastern Cape.
(EM-SMB/32/747-748)

Fig. 42-43
A. Minell (Missionsschüler), Hottentot, Siloh, östliche Colonie.
A Minell, Khoikhoi, pupil at the mission, Siloh, eastern Cape.
(EM-SMB/32/748-749)

Fig. 44-45
Rosalie Schlinger (Missionsschülerin), Hottentotin, Siloh, östliche Colonie.
Rosalie Schlinger, Khoikhoi, pupil at the mission, Siloh, eastern Cape.
(EM-SMB/32/751-752)

Fig. 46-47
Xibene (Missionsschüler), Fengu, Siloh, östliche Colonie.
Xibene, Mfengu, pupil at the mission, Siloh, eastern Cape.
(EM-SMB/32/750-751)
Figs. 50-51
Kwadana (Missionsschüler), Tembu/Tambuki, Siloh, östliche Colonie.
Kwadana, Thembu, pupil at the mission, Shiloh, eastern Cape.
(EM-SMB/32/932-931)

Figs. 48-49
Mani (Missionsschüler), amaXosa, Siloh, östliche Colonie.
Mani, Xhosa, pupil at the mission, Shiloh, eastern Cape.
(EM-SMB/32/936-935)
Fritsch left Shiloh for Colesberg on Wednesday, 3 February. After having endured exceptionally rainy weather and poor roads between Lesseyton, Burghersdorp and Colesberg, he arrived at his destination on the afternoon of 7 February. He decided to stay in Colesberg for two days to rest his horses. The town lay close to the Gariep (Orange) River on one of the most well-travelled routes to the interior of the country used by traders, hunters and explorers. Formerly known as Toverberg (Toverberg, or Coleskop, is a prominent hill and landmark near the town), it was founded in 1830 on the site of the abandoned mission station Toverberg or Gracehill, established by the London Missionary Society in 1816, and was named after Sir Lowry Cole, then Governor of the Cape Colony.

While in Colesberg, Fritsch stayed in his cart as the hotel was infested with insects. Owing to heavy rains he was compelled to remain in the area for 14 days until the Gariep subsided enough to enable him to cross to Philippolis. He used his time exploring the botanical and zoological features of the area. Describing the small settlements or neighbourhoods of local people dotted around the town, he noted in particular the light from their fires during the evenings and the sounds of singing and dancing. During his stay in Colesberg, Fritsch took the opportunity to photograph individuals from diverse groups of Khoikhoi, San, Sotho and Tlokwa (known then as Mantatees). These included a San man named George (Figs. 52–53), the Sotho leader Stoffel (Figs. 54–55), two Tlokwa men, Willem and Jani (Figs. 56–59), and an unidentified Khoikhoi man (Figs. 60–61). Fritsch was very eager to photograph ‘authentic Bushmen’, as the ‘Xam of the Cape and southern Transvaal regions were widely recognised, by Dr Wilhelm Bleek and others, as being on the verge of extinction or absorption within colonial society as ‘coloured’ servants and herdsmen. He described photographing an old beggar named Job (Figs. 62–63), who had lived at the mission station, and commented that Job appeared to show no interest in the photographic process. Fritsch took a second, full-length photograph of Job, but this time naked (see Fig. 238). This image was reproduced as a wood engraving in Die Eingeborenen, where it is discussed in the context of anatomical features related to diet.

In his book Drei Jahre, Fritsch wrote at length on the extermination of the San people in South Africa. He discussed how, because of the depletion of game, which had been hunted out by the colonists, the San had resorted to cattle theft. This, in turn, had led to extensive hunting raids on the San by colonist commandos authorised by the landdrosts or local magistrates. Fritsch likened these raids to animal hunts in Europe. Afterwards, he wrote, the landdrosts would note with satisfaction the number of people who had been ‘executed without mercy’.

Colesberg: 3 February 1864
Job, Buschmann, Missionsschüler, Kolesberg, östliche Colonie.

Job, San, pupil at the mission, Colesberg, eastern Cape.

Figs. 56-57
Wilhelm, Ansarani, Colesberg, östliche Colonie.

Willem, Tlokwa, Colesberg, eastern Cape.

(EM-SMB/28/690-689)

Jani, Mantati, Colesberg, östliche Colonie.

Jani, Tlokwa, Colesberg, eastern Cape.

(EM-SMB/32/861-860)

Wilhelm, Bamantatisi, Colesberg, östliche Colonie.

Willem, Tlokwa, Colesberg, eastern Cape.

(EM-SMB/32/863-862)

Figs. 58-59
Hottentott, Kolesberg, östliche Colonie.

Khoikhoi, Colesberg, eastern Cape.

(EM-SMB/32/744-745)

Joh, Boechmann, (bierenschköfer), Kolesberg, östliche Colonie.

Joh, San, pupil at the mission, Colesberg, eastern Cape.

(EM-SMB/28/690-691)

Figs. 60-61
Khoikhoi, Colesberg, eastern Cape.

(EM-SMB/32/744-745)
When he arrived at the pontoon on the Gariep, on Wednesday, 17 February, Fritsch found a crowd of carts and wagons waiting to cross the river. As a result of this congestion he was told that he would only be able to make the crossing that evening. A farmer agreed to let Fritsch join him for an additional fee, but he found an even earlier opportunity to cross with a wagon and livestock and sent his assistant Jacob to negotiate their passage. This is the first time that he made any reference to a travelling assistant.

Having got to the other side, Fritsch set out for Bloemfontein, stopping over at Philippolis, the former residence of the Griqua captain Adam Kok, and at Boomplaats. He arrived at the Riet River on the morning of 24 February. Here he met a group of travellers stranded on the bank of the river waiting for the water to subside. By this time his provisions had run out and all he could obtain from another party were some rusks. He sent Jacob to a nearby farm to buy bread, but this also proved unsuccessful. Eventually a group of black men arrived on horseback and offered to take a letter to the mission station at Bethany, requesting bread. The missionary at Bethany, Carl Friedrich Wuras, came to Fritsch’s aid and helped him cross the Riet the next morning. Wuras had been sent to South Africa by the Berlin Missionary Society and established the station at Bethany in 1834 among the Korana in the Orange River Sovereignty. He invited Fritsch to visit Bethany, where Fritsch stayed with the missionary Meiffert, who helped him with his photographs.

Here Fritsch entered a region that had been ravaged by conflicts involving at various times Ndebele, Tlokwa, Sotho, Korana, Griqua, Boers and British settlers. The Korana were descendants of the Cape Peninsula group of Xhosa called Goxochoqua under the leadership of ‘Kora.’ After the Dutch settled at the Cape in 1652, they retreated inland towards the end of the seventeenth century, crossing the Gariep and then moving on to the present-day districts of Boedel and Bethany. In the mid-1840s the Korana captain Goliath Yzerbek and most of his followers left Bethany to join another Korana segment, after which the mission station gradually became populated by Tswana.

Fritsch recorded photographing seven people at Bethany, namely a San man with the name of Danster (a pupil at the mission school) (Figs. 64–5), two Korana men, Jochem and Gaar (Figs. 66-69), the Rolong man, Mokaue (who, Fritsch noted in his Atlas, had a deep scar on his neck from an assegai stab by an Ndebele) (Figs. 70-71), Mangue, a Gamalete man originally from the Ramotswa area in Bechuanaland (Figs. 72–73), a San man named Rooiman (Figs. 74–75), of whom Fritsch also took a full-length photograph (Fig. 76), and a Rolong woman named Linti (Figs. 77–78).
Mangue, Ga-malete, Bethanien, Oranje-Frystaat.

Mangue, Gamalete, Bethany, Orange Free State.

(Figs. 72-73)

Gaar, Korana, Bethanien, Oranje-Frystaat.

Gaar, Korana, Bethany, Orange Free State.

(Figs. 68-69)

Mokaue, Ba-rolong, Bethanien, Oranje-Frystaat.

Mokane/Mokaue, Rolong, Bethany, Orange Free State.

(Figs. 70-71)

Mokau, Ga-rolong, Bethanien, Oranje-Frystaat.

Mokau, Gamakau, Rolong, Bethany, Orange Free State.

(Figs. 66-67)

Jochem, Korana, Bethanien, Oranje-Frystaat.

Jochem, Korana, Bethany, Orange Free State.

(Figs. 74-75)

Manga, Ga-rekaloe, Bethanien, Oranje-Frystaat.

Manga, Gamakale, Bethany, Orange Free State.

(Figs. 72-73)
Figs. 74-75
Linti, Ba-rolong, Bethanien, Orange Free State. (EM-SMB/32/853-852)

Linti, Rolong, Bethany, Orange Free State. (EM-SMB/32/712)

Fig. 76

Figs. 77-78
Rooiman, Buschmann, Bethanien, Orange Free State. (EM-SMB/28/682-681)

Rooiman, San, Bethany, Orange Free State. (EM-SMB/32/712)
Leaving Bethany on the morning of Saturday, 27 February, Fritsch arrived in Bloemfontein that evening. His equipment had been damaged by water while crossing the Riet River and he needed time to restore it. He stayed in Bloemfontein for five months, residing with the German district surgeon and former mayor of the town, Dr C.J.B. Krause, and his wife, Frederika. 

Fritsch did not seem to take much interest in Bloemfontein, describing it as a lawless society. He related how the Boers feared the indigenous people of the region and wanted little to do with them, and how it was seen as a scandal for a white person even to shake hands with a black person. In his travel account he said the Boers did not regard black people as humans, the speaker of the Volksraad referring to them as ‘scoundrels’ (schepsels). Blacks living within the Boer republic of the Orange Free State were not permitted to own land and could not vote or carry firearms. According to Fritsch, they were poor and very few worked for whites of their own free will. He described how men lived in locations on the outskirts of the towns or worked on the farms, saving money to return home and purchase livestock for their Lobola or brideprice.

Fritsch photographed six people from Bloemfontein, namely a Mfengu woman, Sarah (recorded as ‘the beautiful Sarah, servant of a trader in Bloemfontein’) (Figs. 79–80), a Mfengu man called Piet (Figs. 81-82), three Maaue (or Maauwa) men, January, Mazuan and Mawiledm (Figs. 83–88), a Sotho man with the name of Ziwa (Figs. 89–90), and an unidentified San woman (Figs. 91–92). In Die Einborenen, Fritsch noted that the name ‘Maaue’ was used to refer to dispersed or wandering groups of Sotho who roamed the Free State, and he described them as having similar features to people from the east bank of the Limpopo River. It is most likely that they were Matswana, who were related to the Pedi.

Fritsch was eager to meet Moshoeshoe, the renowned king of the Sotho, but was unable to travel to his headquarters at Thaba Bosiu on account of inadequate transport and mounting tensions between the Boer Republic and the Sotho Kingdom. While in Bloemfontein he used the opportunity to explore the vicinity of the town to pursue his botanical and zoological interests. He also joined a hunting party on an expedition to the Modder River.

Bloemfontein: 27 February 1864

Figs. 79-80

52 53
Januarius, Maaue, Bloemfontein, Oranje-Frystaat.

(MF548-538)

Figs. 87-88

Mazuan, Maaue, Bloemfontein, Oranje-Frystaat.

(MF548-538)

Figs. 85-86

Piet, Fengu (Fingoe), Bloemfontein, Oranje-Frystaat.

(MF548-538)

Figs. 83-84

Mawiledm, Maaue, Bloemfontein, Oranje-Frystaat.

(MF548-538)

Figs. 81-82

Piet, Moringa, Bloemfontein, Orange Free State.

(MF548-538)

Figs. 89-90
Figs. 91-92
Ziwa, Basuto, Bloemfontein, Orange Free State.
Ziwa, Sotho, Bloemfontein, Orange Free State.
(EM-SMB/32/870-871)

Figs. 89-90
Ziwa, Ba-suto, Bloemfontein, Orange Free State.
Ziwa, Sotho, Bloemfontein, Orange Free State.
(EM-SMB/32/870-871)

Buschmännin, Bloemfontein, Oranje-Frystaat.
San, Bloemfontein, Orange Free State.
(EM-SMB/32/870-871)
Having heard of the site of a massacre of San and Korana that had taken place in the vicinity of Boshof in 1858, Fritsch left the hunting party and crossed the Modder River with a view to studying the remains of skulls and bones at Prisonierskoppie. On Tuesday, 24 March he visited the site with a man from Boshof who was acquainted with the area. 70

By the late 1840s relations between the Korana, San, Taung, Tlokwa and Sotho, and the white trekkers in the region had become increasingly strained. In 1858 matters came to a head when the Orange Free State became engaged in war with the Sotho. The San captain Kausob, with the help of around 300 men who included the Korana captain Goluth Yzerbek, launched attacks against white farmers, killing some Boers and raiding cattle from their farms. 71 A commando of Boers and Mfengu under Field Commandant Hendrik Venter forced Kausob’s followers to surrender, after a battle in which Kausob and 129 of his followers were killed. Forty-three of the men captured were placed under Mfengu guards and sent to Bloemfontein to be tried. Outside Boshof, however, a commando of Boers attacked and murdered all the prisoners, and the place became known as ‘Prisonierskoppie’. 72

When Fritsch arrived at the site, he found the remains of the murdered prisoners, coming across mainly spinal and pelvic bones and pieces of skulls. He took two pelvic bones and three lower jawbones, and later obtained four skulls in Boshof. 73 While in Boshof Fritsch took portraits of the Korana captain Zwart Jaan and his father, Gerrit (Figs. 94–97), as well as four other Korana men, namely David, Klaas, Boos and Piet (Figs. 98–105). 74 It is evident from these portraits as reproduced in the Dammann Album that Gerrit, David, Klaas, Boos and Piet were asked to remove their shirts for the photographs. Fritsch also took a large-format cabinet card photograph of a group of Korana men sitting outside a store in Boshof (Fig. 93); some appear to be the same people who sat for his portraits. Zwart Jaan’s father, Gerrit, and Klaas sit next to each other on the stack of timber to the right in the back row, and Boos and David sit on the left-hand side. Piet sits in the front row, second from the left.

Commenting on the Korana subjects in Die Eingeborenen, Fritsch observed that this group exhibited variations in physical appearance that could be attributed to the influence of both the San and black people. According to him, the shorter stature of some Korana was evidence of San blood lines, while those with a darker skin tone and taller stature showed the influence of intermarriage with black people. He described Zwart Jaan as representing the latter type. 75 A full-length photograph of a 35-year-old naked Khoikhoi (‘Gonaqua’) woman from Boshof reproduced in the Carl Dammann Album (see Fig. 239) was also credited to Fritsch. This image is reproduced as a wood engraving in Die Eingeborenen. 76

Boshof: 22 March 1864

Fig. 93

Korana bei Boshof, Orange Free State.
(EM-SMB/32/736)
Klaas, Korana, Boshof, Oranje-Frystaat.
(Fig. 98-99)

Gerrit, father of Zwart Jaan, Korana, Boshof, Oranje-Frystaat.
(Fig. 96-97)

Klaas, Korana, Boshof, Oranje-Frystaat.
(Fig. 96-97)

Zwart Jaan (Häuptling), Korana, Boshof, Oranje-Frystaat.
(Fig. 94-95)

Zwart Jaan, Korana captain, Boshof, Orange Free State.
(Fig. 94-95)

Klaas, Korana, Boshof, Orange Free State.
(Fig. 94-95)

Gerrit, Vater des Zwart Jaan, Korana, Boshof, Oranje-Frystaat.
(Fig. 96-97)

Klaas, Korana, Boshof, Oranje-Frystaat.
(Fig. 94-95)

Zwart Jaan, Korana, Boshof, Oranje-Frystaat.
(Fig. 94-95)
Figs. 104-105
Boos, Korana, Boshof, Orange Free State.
(EM-SMB/32/768-769)

Figs. 102-103
Boos, Korana, Boshof, Orange Free State.
(EM-SMB/32/766-767)
Fritsch arrived back in Bloemfontein on 28 March. There he met Andrew Hudson Bain, a Scotsman who owned a farm between Bloemfontein and Kimberley, which he had purchased in 1849. It is known today as Bainsvlei. Fritsch accepted Bain’s invitation to visit his farm and travelled there on Friday, 8 April.77

Fritsch was fascinated by Bain’s collection of curiosities, which included stuffed heads of lions, hyenas and antelope mounted on the walls, bottles of preserved lizards and snakes placed on a shelf above the hearth, and an array of weapons and other cultural items hanging from the walls such as San bows and arrows, assegais, kieries and calabashes used as drinking vessels. Fritsch also mentioned garments mounted on leather mannequins and a glass cabinet containing human skulls.78 Outside, Bain had erected enclosures containing quagga, antelope and birds, and there were ostriches roaming around the garden.

The main object of Fritsch’s visit was a small community of San who lived on Bain’s farm and were in his employ. In his book he commented that, while photographing the San, some could not sit still, having smoked too much dagga. He noted that it appeared to be a practice among farmers to plant dagga for their workers in order to retain them. In his Atlas he recorded the names of the people he photographed at Bainsvlei (see Figs. 106–120), namely Ou Kaati, Rose, Carlo, Sanna, Kaati (of whom Fritsch also took a full-length photograph (Fig. 116)), Danster and Bosseck.79 Fritsch mentioned that the wrinkled skin characteristic of San people was already apparent in Carlo, the 13-year-old son of Sanna.80 He also reported having heard a story of how Carlo managed to tackle and kill a hyena unarmed.

Fritsch mentioned in his travel account the famous occasion of a few years previously when Andrew Bain invited Prince Alfred, the second son of Queen of Victoria who was on a tour of South Africa, to one of the biggest hunts ever staged in the subcontinent. This had taken place on his farm in 1860. At this spectacular event, 20,000 to 30,000 head of game were surrounded and herded by hundreds of Rolong servants towards the royal party. Prince Alfred and his friends shot 1000 head while another 5000 head were killed by the Rolong servants.81

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**Bainsvlei (Guaggafontein/Bain’s Farm): 8 April 1864**

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Figs. 106-120 ▶

Ou Kaati, Buschmännin, Guaggafontein, Oranje-Frystaat. (EM-SMB/32/695-696)

Ou Kaati, San, Bainsvlei, Orange Free State. (EM-SMB/32/695-696)

Rose, Buschmännin, Guaggafontein, Oranje-Frystaat. (EM-SMB/32/695-696)

Rose, San, Bainsvlei, Orange Free State. (EM-SMB/32/695-696)

Figs. 106-109 ▶
Figs. 110-111
Carlo, Buschmannann, Buschmännin, Guaggafontein, Orange Free State.
(EM-SMB/28/685-686)

Figs. 112-113
Sanna, Buschmännin, Guaggafontein, Orange Free State.
(EM-SMB/32/703-704)
Figs. 114-115
Kaati, Buschmännin, Guaggafontein, Orange Free State.
Kaati, San, Bainsvlei, Orange Free State.
(EM-SMB/28/683-684)

Buschmännin, Guaggafontein, Orange Free State.
Kaati, San, Bainsvlei, Orange Free State.
(EM-SMB/28/711)

Figs. 116

Figs. 117-118
Danster, Buschmann, Guaggafontein, Orange Free State.
Danster, San, Bainsvlei, Orange Free State.
(EM-SMB/28/691-692)

Danster, Buschmännin, Guaggafontein, Orange Free State.
(EM-SMB/28/693-694)

Figs. 119-120
Fritsch bade farewell to his Bloemfontein hosts on 23 July. Dr Krause took him some distance from the town, where he exchanged his cart for a passage on an oxwagon. Describing the wagon as heavy and clumsy compared to his horse-drawn cart, Fritsch walked most of the way on their month-long journey to Harrismith in the eastern Free State, arriving there on 24 August.62 He described the population of the town as poor and dependent on the surrounding farms for supplies, especially milk and meat. Despite the shortage of provisions, the Dutch couple with whom he boarded provided him with ample food.83

Fritsch rented an oxwagon from his host, and while waiting for the wagon to arrive, he used the opportunity for work on his photographic project. It was during his visit to Harrismith that Fritsch first photographed ‘coloured’ (farbige) people who described themselves as “Griqua”’. These were presumably Mickie and Piet Nero (Figs. 121–124), whose portraits were reproduced in the Atlas and the Dammann Album. Although they referred to themselves as Griqua, Fritsch was of the opinion that they lacked sufficient ‘white blood lines’, having very ‘short and woolly hair’.84 He also mentioned photographing several Zulu and Tlokwa (‘Mantatees’), whom he recorded in his Atlas as Booi, Umsugune and Louis (Figs. 125–130), and Jaantje and Malao (Figs. 131–134), respectively. In his Atlas he also noted that Booi had a ‘large and well-structured body’.85

Fritsch described these people as being ‘pure’ in terms of their ethnic origins, even though they mostly dressed in European clothes.86 This was also the case with a young man whom he photographed smoking dagga with a companion. Fritsch was particularly fascinated by the incident and noted how they smoked dagga from a wonderfully constructed pipe partly filled with water. He described them passing the pipe around, giving each other the opportunity to puff on it, blowing smoke in different ways and fantasising about the images they saw in the clouds of smoke.87

Figs. 121–122: Harrismith: 24 August 1864

Mickie, Harrismith, Harrismith, Orange Free State. (ImMM/12/753.1–754.)
Louis, Ama-zulu, Harrismith, Oranje-Frystaat.
Louis, Zulu, Harrismith, Orange Free State.
(EM-SMB/32/1051-1052)

Figs. 125-126

Piet Nero, Griqua, Harrismith, Oranje-Frystaat.
Piet Nero, Griqua, Harrismith, Orange Free State.
(EM-SMB/32/906-905)

Figs. 123-124

Booi, Ama-zulu, Harrismith, Oranje-Frystaat.
Booi, Zulu, Harrismith, Orange Free State.
(EM-SMB/32/898-897)

Umsungune, Ama-zulu, Harrismith, Oranje-Frystaat.
Umsungune, Zulu, Harrismith, Orange Free State.
(EM-SMB/32/908-907)

Figs. 127-128

Umsungune, Ama-zulu, Harrismith, Oranje-Frystaat.
Umsungune, Zulu, Harrismith, Orange Free State.
(EM-SMB/32/908-907)

Figs. 129-130
Figs. 133-134
Maloa, Matabele, Harrismith, Orange Free State.
Jaantje, Tlokwa, Harrismith, Orange Free State.
(EIM-SMB/10/967-968)
Fritsch stayed in Harrismith for almost a month, departing for Durban on Tuesday, 13 September. He crossed the Tugela, Bushmans and Mooi rivers, and stopped to photograph the magnificent view of the Umgeni River plunging into a deep gorge. Setting up his photographic tent, he proceeded to capture the scene. Then, while he was still packing his equipment, a fire, driven by the wind, swept across the veld. He worked throughout the night to restore his equipment, and was greatly disappointed that he had lost many of his negatives.

Fritsch stopped over in Pietermaritzburg, the capital of the Colony of Natal, where he wanted to photograph Zulu people, whom he described as particularly well developed, compared to the Xhosa he had encountered: ‘Among the great number of Zulus who enliven the streets of Maritzburg I saw many splendid specimens whom I would have liked to have included in my picture gallery.’ But owing to his inability to find a suitable translator and intermediary, he was not able to photograph them.

On his arrival in Durban on Thursday, 6 October, Fritsch was obliged to surrender his three rifles as the colonial government in Natal had instituted a clampdown on the possession of firearms. This offended him and led him to arrange an early departure. Fritsch does not mention the people he photographed in Durban in his travel narrative, though in Die Eingeborenen he goes to some length in describing the hairstyles of the Zulu men he photographed there. ‘A national peculiarity which strikes one when viewing the portraits is the artistically formed hairstyles, the bizarre form of which contributes much to the wild expressions of the faces.’ Referring to the figures in his Atlas, Fritsch described how with young men the hair hung wildly around their heads in thin matted strings, as with the young Tsonga man, Umgumele (Figs. 137–138). In the case of Undewel (Figs. 135–136) the hair was dressed in a particular way by matting and mixing gum into the hair to form a ‘cap’ (Kappe). In other subjects, such as Ungeke (Figs. 141–142) combs were inserted into the hair so that the long matted strings stood upright and formed a type of ‘hair’ framing the head. Fritsch wrote that these marvellous hairstyles were the product of caprice and the individual taste of these Zulu ‘dandies’, and their creation took much patience, considerable effort being required to achieve these effects. These styles, he noted, were only indulged in ‘as long as the boys cannot be called warriors’.

With mature men, such as Umtambisa (Figs. 139–140) the ‘national hairstyle’ took the form of a crown built up on the top of their heads, the rest of the hair being cut short. Referring to the wood engraving in Die Eingeborenen (reproduced from the photograph in Fig. 241), Fritsch remarked that this hair styling took much time and effort to maintain, and that the hair had to be kept smooth with an ivory skewer. In the Atlas, Fritsch mentioned that Umtambisa had a snuff spoon stuck into his hair. In addition to these Zulu men, Fritsch photographed three indentured Indian labourers from Madras, including Wenketazami and Coota (Figs. 143–145).

During his month-long stay in Durban, Fritsch focused predominantly on his botanical and zoological interests in the area surrounding the town. He was invited to visit the farm of Joaehm Friedrich Kaiten, a German shipping agent and real estate broker from Hamburg. Here he had an opportunity to excavate a grave at a deserted homestead in Umlanga, with a view to learning how the Zulu buried their dead. On Monday, 5 November he boarded the RMS Dane for Cape Town.
Fig. 143-144
Indian Coolie, Madras, D'Urban.
Indian (from Madras), Durban, Natal.
(SANL/INIL/14200)

Fig. 145
Coota, Indian Coolie, Madras, D'Urban.
Coota, Indian (from Madras), Durban, Natal.
(SANL/INIL/14202)

Fig. 141-142
U'ngéke, Ama-zulu, Durban, Natal.
Utambosa, Zulu, Durban, Natal.
(SANL/INIL/14203)

Fig. 139-140
Utambosa, Ama-zulu, Durban, Natal.
Utambose, Zulu, Durban, Natal.
(SANL/INIL/14204)

Fig. 139-140
Utambose, Zulu, Durban, Natal.
Utambose, Zulu, Durban, Natal.
(SANL/INIL/14204)

Fig. 139-140
Utambose, Zulu, Durban, Natal.
Utambose, Zulu, Durban, Natal.
(SANL/INIL/14204)
Setting out his second journey to the north four and a half months later, Fritsch boarded the Saxon on 17 March 1865, and sailed from Cape Town to Port Elizabeth. He first travelled to Grahamstown to collect the oxwagon that he had sent ahead, and then went on to Cradock and Colesberg, en route to Griquastad. Arriving at the Gariep on 9 June, he experienced yet another eventful river crossing. He encountered a group of Tswana men crossing the river in a boat. They approached him for ‘lekkere warm water’ (alcohol). Having negotiated a bottle of gin and payment for assisting him, they disassembled his wagon, transported it across the river, and reassembled it on the right bank. Fritsch commented favourably on the physique of these Tswana men, who swam across the river while ferrying his belongings. The following day he continued his journey to Griquastad.

Griquastad had been established around the LMS mission station of Klaarwater founded by William Anderson and Cornelius Kramer in 1802. On his visit to Klaarwater in 1813, the Revd John Campbell persuaded the community, comprising Korana, San, Bergenaars, Tlhaping, ‘Bastaards’ (creole people), Oorlam (formerly bandit groups of colonial fugitives) and trekboers, to adopt the collective designation of Griqua, and change the name Klaarwater to Griquastad, or Griqua Town. By 1822 Griqua communities stretched along the course of the Gariep River from Griquastad to Philippolis and inland towards Kuruman. The captaincies included Griquastad (headed by Andries Waterboer), Campbell (the residence of Cornelius Kok), Daniel’s Kuil (where Barend Barends held sway), Boetsap and Philippolis (the town of Adam Kok). The first two decades of the Griqua nation were dominated by rivalries over leadership, family and mission loyalties, grazing land, water and hunting, as well as hostilities with other groups who had moved into the area. Notwithstanding their alliances with the Griqua, Britain abandoned them by handing over the sovereignty of the Orange Free State to the Republican Boers in 1854 and annexing Griqualand West in 1871 after the discovery of diamonds.

The subjugation of the once independent Griqua is evident in Fritsch’s description of his arrival at the desolate residence of Andries Waterboer at Griquastad on 13 June 1864. He described Waterboer as an intelligent and well-educated man, though Waterboer resisted Fritsch’s offer to take his portrait. Fritsch attributed this to Waterboer’s suspicion of Europeans in general, but more specifically to his dislike of having his face captured in a photograph. There are no records of Griqua people that Fritsch might have photographed while in Griquastad, though he did photograph four Tswana men there, who are recorded in his Atlas and the Dammann Album, namely Lerumo and Mossao (two Kgatla men) (Figs. 146–149), Hendrik (of the Nqatokutse) (Figs. 150–151) and April (‘Babidiji’, perhaps Bididi, who were attached to Mokgatle’s Fokeng in the Rustenburg district) (Figs. 152–153). While in Griquastad, Fritsch performed surgery on a woman who had developed a fatty growth. Her wound healed within three days. This incident earned him the reputation of being a learned doctor. Throughout his travels, Fritsch was constantly beset by people wanting medical treatment, and after his crossing of the Gariep River, news of his medical status appears to have gone ahead of him.
Figs. 152-153
April, Ba-bidiji, Griqua-Stad.
Hendrik, Bawanketsi, Griqua-Stad.
(EM-SMB/32/830-831)

Figs. 150-151
April, Ba-bidiji, Griqua-Stad.
Hendrik, Ngwaketse, Griqua-Stad.
(EM-SMB/32/819-823)
Having procured a new span of oxen, Fritsch set out from Griquastad on 24 June, travelling via Blinkklip (Postmasburg) to Kuruman. After a fairly harrowing journey characterised by a lack of water, he arrived at Kuruman on 31 June. Fritsch described Kuruman as a beautiful oasis in the Kalahari desert. He commented on the gardens and orange trees, the glimmering salt pans and magnificent sunsets. From the beginning of the nineteenth century, the area around Kuruman had captured the imagination of travellers and administrators, particularly Dithakong, the southernmost Tlhaping town to the northwest of Kuruman, known on maps of the time as Lattako, Lithakun or Takoon. In 1820 the great Scottish missionary Robert Moffat arrived in South Africa and, after having gained permission from the Tlhaping chief Motsho at Dithakong, established a mission station at Kuruman, which was to play a key role in missionary enterprise and colonial expansion in southern Africa. It was also to act as the northernmost springboard for further expeditions into the interior of southern Africa, such as those of David Livingstone.

Fritsch commented in detail on the indigenous architecture in Kuruman, noting that people were beginning to replace their traditional cone on cylinder dwellings with rectangular and square-plan buildings. He remarked that they did not have an eye for rectilinear construction, as walls would often break into curves. He described how the locals would congregate around the fires in their courtyards outside, smoking their pipes and exchanging news. Robert Moffat (Fig. 154), a large man with a great beard, then in his sixties, assisted Fritsch with his photography. Fritsch commented that photographing people was becoming increasingly difficult. He had to work outdoors and the weather was always interfering with his ability to obtain good images. Four portraits from Kuruman are recorded in Fritsch’s Atlas and the Dammann Album, namely the Rolong women Malitabe and Cuemyone (Figs. 155–158), the Tlhaping man Cuemyone (the records both as having the same name), and the Ratlou man Motlomeri (Figs. 159–162). The National Library of South Africa (Cape Town campus) also has a Fritsch portrait of Robert Moffat himself in its Grey Ethnological Album.

According to Fritsch, it was a rule at Kuruman for travellers to receive medical help and sufficient provisions for their ongoing journeys. He himself was provided with a generous supply of food that lasted from his departure on 13 July until he reached Ntsweng. Moffat also gave him some books with inscribed dedications which Fritsch regarded as valuable memorabilia. Kuruman: 31 June 1865

Kuruman: 31 June 1865

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Fig. 154

The missionary Revd Robert Moffat, Kuruman, Bechuanaland.

SANL/INIL/14196
Motlomeri, Ba-tlaru, Kuruman, Bechuanaland.

Cuenyone, Ba-tlapi, Bechuanaland, Kuruman.

Malitabe, Morolong, Kuruman.

Figs. 155-156
Aدبلا، رايتل، كارماتان.
Aدبلا، رايتل، كارماتان، بيشواندال.
(EM-SMB/32/549-550)

Figs. 159-160
Cuenyone، تلماي، بيشواندال، كارماتان.
Cuenyone، تلمه، كارماتان، بيشواندال.
(EM-SMB/32/846-847)

Figs. 157-158
Cuenyone، بيلماي، بيشواندال، كارماتان.
Cuenyone، تلمه، كارماتان، بيشواندال.
(EM-SMB/32/851-852)

Figs. 161-162
Cuenyone، تلمه، بيشواندال، كارماتان.
Cuenyone، تلمه، كارماتان، بيشواندال.
(EM-SMB/32/853-854)

Figs. 163-164
Mothaboe، Ra-ba)، كارماتان، بيشواندال.
Mothaboe، بايزي، كارماتان، بيشواندال.
(EM-SMB/32/855)
On 2 August Fritsch arrived in the Ngwaketse town of Kanye, founded by Makaba in the late eighteenth century. The town was situated in the hills that today define Botswana’s southeastern border with South Africa. Until the Ndebele invasion of 1832, the Ngwaketse were the most powerful Tswana merafe (‘tribe’). It was Gaseitsiwe who brought them together again in the 1830s, restoring them to their former standing.

The morning after his arrival, Fritsch wandered along the narrow lanes through the village, and was struck by the friendliness of the people and charmed by the manner in which they greeted a stranger. He found his way to the kgotla (the ruler’s courtyard) where he approached Gaseitsiwe (Figs. 164–165), who was surrounded by some of his followers. Close to Gaseitsiwe, to his right, sat his brother (possibly Segotshane) and brother-in-law, while three of his wives sat to his left. Fritsch sat down opposite Gaseitsiwe and handed him a letter from Robert Moffat. He was amused by the manner in which Gaseitsiwe and his people dressed. He described Gaseitsiwe as wearing a nightcap, nightgown (negligée), bed socks and printed cotton quilt draped over his shoulders, which, Fritsch wrote, he wore throughout the day.

Gaseitsiwe and his followers were at first wary of Fritsch, suspecting him to be an emissary of the Boers, whom they mistrusted after the Transvaalers took to war in the 1850s to subject the Tswana chiefdoms to their west. The following evening Gaseitsiwe visited Fritsch at his wagon, and in the course of the visit inspected his equipment. He was particularly inquisitive about Fritsch’s firearms and photographic equipment. Once Gaseitsiwe was satisfied that he had seen everything, their relations eased. The next day, Fritsch went to the kgotla to photograph Gaseitsiwe and some of his people. He first had to demonstrate that the procedure was harmless before he was permitted to photograph Gaseitsiwe. The group photograph taken in the kgotla (Fig. 163) closely resembles Fritsch’s description of his first audience with Gaseitsiwe when he arrived. He had also photographed Motuane (Figs. 166–167), Gaseitsiwe’s favourite wife (Lieblingsfrau), whom he describes as having an ‘intelligent and regal composure’, and whose hair was plastered with specularite powder (Eisenglimmer-Pomade) which caused it to glisten. In his Atlas, Fritsch also featured the portraits of Gaseitsiwe’s unidentified brother-in-law and a man named Mori (Figs. 168–171), as well as that a woman named Mantille (Figs. 172–173), describing her as a Vaalpenz Dirne (Bakgalagadi harlot) in the service of Gaseitsiwe. He noted that he was not permitted to photograph Mori’s wife, whom he regarded as a fine instance of Tswana beauty.

His group photograph of Ngwaketse women and children (Fig. 174) is particularly interesting in that the people depicted are curiously watching themselves being photographed. Here the spectacle is not only the subjects, but also Fritsch behind his camera. There is a strong sense of looking and counter-looking, mediated by the camera.

Gaseitsiwe displayed a keen interest in Fritsch’s medical skills, requesting him to pay a visit to a sick Tswana preacher who had been sent to the area by Moffat. On 5 August, accompanied by a guide, Fritsch visited the preacher at his village about three hours from Kanye. He had hoped to find skulls and bones in the vicinity, but acknowledged that the Tswana would never have allowed him access to such specimens, even had they been skulls of Tlokwa (‘Mantatees’) killed by the Tswana. Compelled to stay in Kanye for a little longer when he was unable to find servants who would travel with him, Fritsch finally departed on 16 August.

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Mori, Ba-wanketsi, Kanya.
Mori, Ngwanketse, Kanye, Bechuanaland.
(EM-SMB/32/836-837)

Figs. 170-171

Ba-wanketsi, Kanya.
Unidentified brother-in-law of Gaseitsiwe, Ngwaketse, Kanye, Bechuanaland.
(EM-SMB/32/817-821)

Motuane, Ba-wanketsi, Kanya.
Motuane (wife of Gaseitsiwe), Ngwaketse, Kanye, Bechuanaland.
(EM-SMB/32/841-840)

Figs. 166-167

Gassisioe, Häuptling der Ba-wanketsi.
Gaseitsiwe, chief of the Ngwaketse, Kanye, Bechuanaland.
(EM-SMB/32/809-813)

Figs. 164-165

Ba-wanketsi, Kanya.
Lived as first brother-in-law of Gaseitsiwe, Ngwaketse, Kanye, Bechuanaland.
(EM-SMB/32/847-851)

Mot, Ba-wanketsi, Kanya.
Mot, Ngwaketse, Kanye, Bechuanaland.
(EM-SMB/32/856-857)

Figs. 170-171
Figs. 174-175
Mantille, Ba-wanketsi, Khanje, Bechuanaland.
Mantille, Ngwaketse, Kanye, Bechuanaland.
(EM-SMB/32/842-843)

Figs. 172-173
Frauen und Kinder der Ba-wanketsi.
Ngwaketse women and children, Bechuanaland.
(EM-SMB/12/843-844)
At sunset Fritsch arrived in Moshupa (or Mosopa), a village north of Kanye. At an audience with Mosielele, chief of the Mmanaana-Kgatla, Fritsch handed him a letter from Robert Moffat, which greatly impressed Mosielele as he saw himself as Moffat’s friend and brother. Fritsch noted that Mosielele seemed to enjoy talking about his own strengths and virtues, and although Fritsch listened attentively, he doubted that Mosielele held very much power. Mosielele and his people originated from an area near to Pretoria but fled after being threatened by the Transvaalers, who wished to subject them to taxation and labour service, and sought protection from Sechele, the Kwenachief, at Dimawe. Although the Boers followed Mosielele to Dimawe and demanded that Sechele surrender Mosielele, Sechele stood his ground. After this stand-off in 1852, Sechele settled the Mmanaana in the Moshupa valley because of its natural defences, fertile soil and ample water.

Mosielele, like Gaseitsiwe, was especially interested in Fritsch’s medical skills and requested that he help him with a stomach ailment, which Fritsch attributed to his fondness for beer. After his consultation, Mosielele inspected Fritsch’s firearms and equipment, and was impressed with his powder horn, intimating that it would serve as an appropriate gift. Fritsch was intrigued by etiquette among the Tswana regarding the presentation of gifts, which, he noted, formed a kind of tax for crossing through their territories. It was important, he recorded, to remain diplomatic when negotiating and keep within specific boundaries. If a traveller offered a gift of his own accord, it was received gracefully, even though it might be small. However, if one transgressed protocol or left it up to the bargaining power of the kgosi (or chief), the traveller might be compelled to forfeit something of higher value.

Fritsch intended to stay in Moshupa only for a day but was obliged to remain for longer as the water in the village was not clean enough for the photographic process and had to be filtered for a few days before he could use it for rinsing his negatives. Despite these efforts, he only took three photographs while there, two of Mosielele (Figs. 175–176) and one of Moshupa (Fig. 177). During his stay he explored the environs, paying particular attention to his botanical and zoological studies and observing the people, their religious practices, and particularly their fondness for European clothing.
Fritsch departed from Moshupa on 20 August, outspanning over two nights before arriving on 23 August at Ntsweng (which Fritsch called Logageng) in the Molepolole area, where he met Sechele (Figs. 179–180) and the hunter and trader Joseph McCabe at the kgotla.

Fritsch was impressed by Sechele and described him as an imposing figure who reminded him of Anta. Sechele was dressed in a suit, cravat and Panama hat, and, said Fritsch, ‘played the role of a gentleman’. Sechele was excited by Fritsch’s arrival and was particularly impressed by his medical knowledge. Sechele was one of the most extraordinary Tswana leaders of this period. When he came to power in 1831, the Kwena were split into three sections, which he reunited in 1853. He allied himself with British traders and missionaries and was himself baptised by David Livingstone in 1848. He also resisted the Boers, who tried to subject several Tswana communities (such as Mosielele’s), and preserved ‘a tenuous autonomy between the white farms [of the Transvaal] and the Kalahari desert’. After surviving the attacks of the Transvaalers at Dimawe, Sechele moved his people to Ntsweng (known today as Old Molepolole) in 1863. During the 1880s he and other Tswana chiefs accepted British overrule. Sechele had three sons, Kgari, Sebele and Tumagole. Sebele (Figs. 181–182) was a well-educated man. He and two of his sisters were sent by their father to be educated at Kuruman. When Sechele died in 1892, a succession dispute ensued between Sebele and Kgari, and Sebele managed to drive Kgari and his people away from Ntsweng. During Sebele’s reign it seemed likely that the entire British Protectorate would be transferred to Rhodes’s British South Africa Company, a prospect that alarmed the Tswana chiefs, who had learned of the Company’s crushing of the Ndebele in what became Rhodesia. Sebele resisted the transfer and travelled to London with the Ngwaketse and Ngwato chiefs to oppose the plan. Their request that they should stay under direct British control was granted. Sebele was happy to be photographed and dressed himself for the occasion in a black ‘dress’ with a colourful silk cravat, ‘fez’, ‘mackintosh’ and riding boots, which, Fritsch noted, he wore on Sundays when he preached. Fritsch gave Sechele an albumen print of his portrait that included the fez, though the photograph used for his book excluded this. Fritsch also recalled that Sechele was very disappointed that the photograph did not include his boots. Apart from his descriptions of photographing Sechele, Fritsch said nothing of the other six photographs he took in Ntsweng. These include the portraits of Sechele’s son Sebele, the hunter Mozissi, the 12-year-old girl Mampok, Mapotla’s son Mapotla, who was living in Ntsweng in exile after he had fled from his father, the Ndebele woman Umbumbulu, and the Griqua man Piet. In his Atlas Fritsch remarked that Mozissi had stuffed his hat with black ostrich feathers, which he said ‘imitated European hair’. Ntsweng: 23 August 1865

Fig. 179: Morauxomo (Logageng), Stadt der Ba-kuéna. Ntsweng, town of the Kwena, Bechuanaland. (EM-SMB/32/880)
Sechelt, chief of the Kwena, Ntsweng, Bechuanaland.
(EM-SMB/32/824-825)

Sechelt, son of Sechele, Ntsweng, Bechuanaland.
(EM-SMB/32/816-820)

Mampok, Ba-kuéna, Logageng, Bechuanaland.
(EM-SMB/32/844-845)

Mozissi, Ba-kuéna, Logageng.
(EM-SMB/32/844-845)

Sechèli, Häuptling der Ba-kuéna
Sechele, chief of the Kwena, Ntsweng, Bechuanaland.
(EM-SMB/32/814-810)

Mozissi, Kwena, Ntsweng, Bechuanaland.
(EM-SMB/32/812-813)

Mampok, Kwena, Ntsweng, Bechuanaland.
(EM-SMB/32/814-815)

Figs. 179-180

Figs. 181-182

Figs. 183-184

Figs. 185-186

Figs. 103-106
Figs. 191-192

Piet, Griqua, Logageng, Bechuanaland.

U'mbumbulu, Logageng, Ba-kuéna Gebiet.

Figs. 189-190

U'mpotla, Sohn des Umselekazi, Matabele, Logageng, Ba-kuéna Gebiet.

Mapotla, son of Mzilikazi, Ndebele, Ntsweng, Bechuanaland.

Figs. 187-188

U'mbumbulu, Logageng, Ba-kuéna Gebiet.

Umbumbulu, Ndebele, Ntsweng, Bechuanaland.

Figs. 187-188

Umbumbulu, Ndebele, Ntsweng, Bechuanaland.

Figs. 191-192

Piet, Griqua, Logageng, Bechuanaland.

Piet, Griqua, Ntsweng, Bechuanaland.

Figs. 189-190

Mapotla, son of Mzilikazi, Ndebele, Ntsweng, Bechuanaland.

Figs. 187-188

Umbumbulu, Logageng, Ba-kuéna Gebiet.

Umbumbulu, Ndebele, Ntsweng, Bechuanaland.

Figs. 191-192

Piet, Griqua, Logageng, Bechuanaland.

Piet, Griqua, Ntsweng, Bechuanaland.

Figs. 189-190

Mapotla, son of Mzilikazi, Ndebele, Ntsweng, Bechuanaland.

Figs. 187-188

Umbumbulu, Logageng, Ba-kuéna Gebiet.

Umbumbulu, Ndebele, Ntsweng, Bechuanaland.

Figs. 191-192

Piet, Griqua, Logageng, Bechuanaland.

Piet, Griqua, Ntsweng, Bechuanaland.

Figs. 189-190

Mapotla, son of Mzilikazi, Ndebele, Ntsweng, Bechuanaland.

Figs. 187-188

Umbumbulu, Logageng, Ba-kuéna Gebiet.

Umbumbulu, Ndebele, Ntsweng, Bechuanaland.
Fritsch’s arrival initially created some tension among the white traders there as they did not like competition, but this was eased when they realised his visit was of a scientific nature. The number of traders is evident in Fritsch’s photograph of Ntsweng (Fig. 178), where at least eleven wagons are parked around the centre of the town dominated by Sechele’s rectangular house. As Fritsch’s wagon stood close to Joseph McCabe’s dwelling, he was afforded the opportunity to observe the trading that took place there. In his travel account he mentioned an occasion, of which there are two photographs (Figs. 193–194), when women and children brought water that they had carried for some distance in calabashes and earthenware receptacles, which they traded mostly for beads. Other produce included bundles of firewood, wooden bowls filled with wild fruits, roasted locusts, groundnuts, maize and sorghum, and milk. The milk was boiled in huge ‘tea pots’ to prevent it from souring, bringing with it an infestation of flies that were removed from the milk by hand. Fritsch described the excited mingling of the people and their chattering and shouting, barking dogs fighting over old bones, and ostriches picking up anything they could find from the ground. While the cacophony disturbed him, it did not at first appear to have any effect on McCabe, who remained calm all the while, consuming roasted locusts. Finally McCabe lost his patience and chased the crowd away.126

Once the area had been cleared, McCabe returned to his hut to await Sechele’s brother KgosiNdini and his associates, who had made an appointment to trade for firearms. The meeting began with an introductory conversation about the state of people’s health and news of the day before settling down to business. KgosiNdini checked the rifles, while karosses were untied, revealing ostrich feathers. The trading value of the feathers varied between 30 pieces of white feathers and one to two pounds of black feathers for a rifle, and up to 100–150 pieces of white feathers for a better-quality firearm. As an experienced trader, McCabe weighed the feathers with his hands and ran his fingers through them to test their elasticity and softness. He wanted to see whether KgosiNdini would offer more feathers or accept less valuable rifles, and after further bargaining, which involved more eye contact than verbal exchange, the deal was struck. Fritsch observed that only an experienced observer could understand the complexities of this cross-cultural negotiation.127
Fritsch took two other group photographs in Ntsweng, one of some Kwena men sewing karosses and another of women weaving an enclosure fence with branches (Figs. 195–196). Judging by the layout of the town in Fritsch’s photograph (Fig. 178), with the hill in the background and the wagons and thatched roofs of the huts (see Figs. 195 and 196), it is likely that these, and the trading photographs, were taken in the vicinity of the two wagons parked at the right-hand side of his photograph of Ntsweng.

Fritsch did not like Ntsweng, finding it unhygienic, claustrophobic and infested with flies and other insects. He needed to get away into the open countryside. Being passionate about hunting, he arranged to go on a hunting expedition with McCabe’s son in the vicinity of Kopong, to the north of Ntsweng, after which he would return to the town. They arrived back in Ntsweng on 15 September, by which time Fritsch had changed his plans for returning to the Cape.128 Although he had originally planned to travel as far as Ntsweng, and then return to the Cape via the Transvaal and Free State, Fritsch decided to abandon this idea. Given that it was spring, it was too late in the year to venture through the strong summer thunderstorms and swollen rivers of the highveld. The political instability in these regions also made it insecure for travel. From the time the British had granted independence to the Boer trekkers in the Transvaal in 1852, the region remained in an almost constant state of anarchy. Besides the wars waged by the Transvaalers against the Tswana in 1852 and 1858, and against the Sotho chief Makapan in the northern Transvaal in 1854, the factional Boer politics were also in a state of conflict with one another. Although much of this strife had ended in 1864 with the unification of the Transvaal under President Marthinus Pretorius, Fritsch was concerned about Boer commandos in the Transvaal Republic who were sent out to apprehend and confiscate the wagons of travellers, even if they were foreigners. Travelling through the Orange Free State was even more unsafe, owing to the renewed war between the Republic and Moshoeshoe.129

Joseph McCabe had planned to send his son to Shoshong with two wagons and invited Fritsch to make use of one of them, an offer which Fritsch accepted. By going to the Ngwato capital, he could make up for not visiting the Transvaal, and at the same time concentrate his attention on looking for skulls, which he believed were abundant in the area. This arrangement also meant that he could rest his span of oxen in preparation for his return journey to Cape Town. On 26 September the party left Ntsweng, arriving in Shoshong on 2 October.130
In the 1850s, Sekgoma I established Shoshong as the capital of the Ngwato, the site being easily defensible against the Ndebele army. Shoshong developed into an important crossroad for trade routes from the south to Lake Ngami in the west and to Matabeleland in the northeast. Heinrich C. Schulenburg of the Hermannsburg Lutheran Missionary Society founded a station there in 1860, and after his withdrawal John Mackenzie, the last great Scottish missionary to the Tswana, reinstituted the station under the auspices of the London Missionary Society in 1862. By the time of Fritsch’s visit the missionaries Roger Price and John Mackenzie were conducting three schools in a town whose inhabitants numbered thirty thousand people.131

On their arrival, Fritsch accompanied McCabe to visit Sekgoma, who was sitting with his councillors under a mimosa tree. He was introduced as McCabe’s companion, but having heard about Sekgoma, Fritsch kept himself in the background. Fritsch described Sekgoma as a ‘sly, cunning and despotic character’. In his outward appearance, Fritsch wrote, he was unprepossessing and no different from his common subjects. Sekgoma appeared to be restraining himself and, when anyone looked at him, he would reel back with his one squint eye half closed. Fritsch thought that Sekgoma had once been a very different person: he had restored the integrity and increased the size of the Ngwato chiefdom and established its independence from the Ndebele. Fritsch ascribed his change of character to the onset of dementia and Sekgoma’s fear of growing opposition to his leadership.132

Khama (Kgama) (Figs. 197–198) and his brother Kgamane were not present at Fritsch’s first audience with their father, Sekgoma.133 Unlike his traditionalist parent, Khama had joined Schulenburg’s church even though his father objected to the practices of Christianity. At the age of 25 Khama converted to Christianity and was baptised in 1860. He received military acclaim when he wounded Lobengula of the Ndebele in 1863, and between 1865 and 1866 he revolted against his father and led the youth at Shoshong to adopt Christianity, a situation that gave rise to internecine strife among the Ngwato.134 Like Mackenzie and others, Fritsch set Khama up against Sekgoma as the Christian versus the villain. Perhaps Fritsch might have been correct in ascribing Sekgoma’s bitterness to the onset of dementia. Sekgoma had originally invited the missionaries to Shoshong for the purpose of educating Khama, and given Sekgoma’s powerful traditionalist beliefs, he was mortified when his sons rejected Tswana customs by refusing to undergo bogwera (initiation).135 The rift between the traditionalist Sekgoma and his Christian sons instigated one of the most unfortunate conflicts between Christianity and traditional religion in Tswana history,136 and the year after Fritsch’s visit, Khama and Kgamane, with the help of Sechele, drove Sekgoma from Shoshong and brought back Macheng as paramount chief of the Ngwato. A decade later, Macheng was overthrown by Khama, and Khama (known afterwards as Khama III or Khama the Great) ruled over the Ngwato for the next forty years, widely acclaimed as the model Christianised African chief.137

Shoshong: 2 October 1865
Fritsch remarked that he felt at ease in the presence of Khama, a degree of ease he had not yet experienced in the company of black people. This, he claimed, made him realise that it was not the colour of their skin that prejudiced him against the ‘Ethiopian race’. ‘I am glad’, wrote Fritsch, ‘by my acquaintance with Khama, to have the opportunity of mentioning a black man whom I would under no circumstances be ashamed to call my friend. The simple, modest, and at the same time noble deportment of the son of a chief awoke a delightful feeling.’

Sekgoma was a skilled ngaka (herbalist) and rainmaker. Once Fritsch’s medical background became known, the kgosi behaved indifferently towards him. He was weary of Fritsch and would not look him in the eyes. Fritsch’s photographic equipment added to Sekgoma’s fears, as many believed Fritsch to be a magician. Fritsch was especially anxious to conceal the fact that his primary reason for visiting Shoshong was to locate human skeletons, of which he believed there were a number in the vicinity because of a smallpox epidemic that had struck the area between 1862 and 1863, resulting in thousands of deaths. He persuaded Khama to show him where he could find skulls.

Khama agreed but pleaded with Fritsch to let nobody else know about it. When they arrived at the site they found only crushed skulls, which Fritsch believed to have been smashed by passersby with stones.

Fritsch took four photographs while in Shoshong. They include the portraits of Khama and the Ndebele men Mocotcane and Makuatse (Figs. 199–202), and a group photograph of Sekgoma, Khama, a hunter named Chapman, Joseph McCabe’s son and other unidentified Tswana men and white traders (Fig. 203). Fritsch made reference to this photograph in his travel account, writing that ‘once I caught the old fox (Sekgoma) when I took a photograph of a group of traders, and without knowing what was going on he was drawn into the middle, but after he had seen how successful I was, no power in the world would have made him sit down again’. Considering the deep animosity between Sekgoma and Khama, Fritsch’s coup in managing to capture both in a single image is of historical significance. The hunter he referred to as Chapman was most likely Edward George Chapman, a trader from Kuruman and not the hunter, trader and photographer James Chapman, who had left Walvis Bay for Cape Town a year before. Fritsch remarked that Edward Chapman was one of the most daring lion hunters of the time and that he had come to the rescue of an English hunting party from Natal who were being terrorised by a lion on their return from Mzilikazi’s country.

Fritsch spent a happy time at Shoshong, where he was entertained by John Mackenzie, John Smith Moffat (son of Robert Moffat) and Roger Price, who helped him with his researches.

Standing in the centre (in traditional dress): Sekgoma

Standing in the front (with hat and light suit): McCabe jnr, son of Joseph McCabe.

Standing behind McCabe (wearing a hat): Khama, son of Sekgoma.

Standing to the right of Khama (wearing a hat): the hunter Edward George Chapman.

Figs. 201-202

Makaula, Mokgosi, Shoshong, Bar-Karina Gebiet

Makaula, Mokgosi, Shoshong, Bechuanaland

(MBA 12585b 5b).

Standing in the centre (in traditional dress): Sekgoma

Standing in the front (with hat and light suit): McCabe jnr, son of Joseph McCabe.

Standing behind McCabe (wearing a hat): Khama, son of Sekgoma.

Standing to the right of Khama (wearing a hat): the hunter Edward George Chapman.

Shoshong, Bechuanaland

(MBA 12585b).
Unidentified portraits
In his book *Die Eingeborenen*, Fritsch provided a number of wood engravings depicting anatomical studies of naked people, three of whom he photographed. He discussed the well-proportioned body of a young, naked Mfengu woman from Döhne as being an exception to other individuals depicted in *Die Eingeborenen*, though he commented that the exceptional qualities were not particularly noticeable in the photograph (Fig. 237). As the woman could speak some English, Fritsch ascribed her healthy condition to her working for an English family in Stutterheim and to having grown up in 'civilised' conditions. He described her condition of steatopygia as being firm for her age, and noted this was not uncommon for a woman of 35 years. He discussed her condition of steatopygia in anatomical detail, and especially how it affected the posture of the back and the position of the pelvis. In his *Atlas* Fritsch remarked that, because of various obstacles, he did not succeed in photographing naked people apart from the few mentioned. He stated that only in the minority of cases did shyness or shame prevent people from undressing. In most cases, particularly with chiefs and students from mission schools, people were extraordinary proud of 'the rags with which civilisation has clad them', and for this reason they refused posing for their photographs, while in a few cases undressing was refused on account of prejudice.

In addition to his portraits and anatomical studies of naked people, in *Die Eingeborenen* Fritsch also provided a number of ethnographic studies of Zulu, Xhosa and Damara people, which range from group studies to posed studies demonstrating cultural activities and practices (such as dressing hair, fighting with sticks, smoking dagga). Whereas he acknowledged using James Chapman's photographs of Damara people, it remains unclear where he obtained the other photographs that form part of Album 32, as there is no evidence that he took them while in South Africa. Some of these are the same photographs (see, for example Figs. 240 and 241) as those presented to the South African Library (Grey Ethnological Album) and catalogued as 'Natives of Natal ... presented by the late Capt Walmsley'. Captain Joshua Walmsley was a retired British army officer and border agent on the Tugela River employed by the Natal government. There is no other evidence of the origin of these photographs. Dr Wilhelm Bleek also probably provided Fritsch with photographic material for *Die Eingeborenen*, as Fritsch acknowledged Bleek's photograph of a San man (Fig. 242) which he used as a source for one of the wood engravings.
Photography and reproduction

Because half-tone printing was still in its infancy at the time Fritsch published his books on South Africa, he was unable to have his portraits reproduced in these works. The illustrations were therefore translated from his photographs into wood engravings, etchings and lithographs. Fritsch did not describe the processes used to transform the photographs into printed illustrations, apart from the fact of his appointing Professor Hugo Bürckner, illustrator, woodcutter, engraver and etcher from the Academy of Arts in Dresden, to supervise the quality of the prints. Most of the illustrations were closely and accurately based on Fritsch’s collection of photographs and are some of the most skilfully executed mass-produced illustrations of the period. The images were photographically transferred to the woodblocks, etching plates and lithographic stones, to which a photosensitive coating was applied. The reproduction process was called photogravure (facsimile wood engraving), whereby contact exposures were made from the negatives on to the blocks and plates. After the image had been developed and fixed, the engraver, etcher or lithographer would manually reproduce the image without the intervening process of a draughtsman to redraw the picture. Figs. 243 and 244 show an example of a photograph and the etching reproduction from the Atlas. Wood engraving was the preferred means for book illustration at the time Fritsch published his works on South Africa. Because they were printed in relief, like raised type, it was possible to print the illustrations alongside the text. Wood engraving was, however, costly and time-consuming, and with photography/photographs could be photochemically transferred to the wood blocks for engraving. This was the process employed to engrave the wood-block illustrations for Fritsch’s Die Eingeborenen which accompanied Die Eingeborenen were executed as engravings, while lithography was used for the illustrations of bones and skulls at the back of Die Eingeborenen. Although Fritsch pioneered the role of photography in anthropological study, he recognised the drawbacks of photographic images and advocated a combination of photography and illustration where corrections could be made to images in the illustrations. This is certainly evident in some of the engravings from his Atlas, such as the alterations to the breast in the portrait of the San woman Rose from Bainsvlei. The full print of the photograph reproduced in the Dammann Album (Fig. 245) shows the unclear nipples of the woman, which were altered in the Atlas etching (Fig. 246). The etching of Job’s portrait in Fritsch’s Atlas (Fig. 248) depicts him without clothing. Either Fritsch took two separate sets of photographs of Job, one with and one without clothing, or the head from the portrait (Fig. 247) was superimposed over the naked body of the full-length photograph (Fig. 238) to produce a photographic image for reproduction in the Atlas (Fig. 248).

Of interest to this study is Fritsch’s awareness of the problems of visual material illustrating Africans that was produced by European engravers who had not personally observed the people they depicted. His constant references to misconceptions and erroneous interpretations in travel illustrations on South Africa support his contention that accurate ethnographic knowledge was not possible before photographic means of documentation. However, in spite of his obsession with an objective photographic documentation (transformed into wood engravings and etchings as illustrations in his books), even Fritsch’s ‘objective’ visual material does not provide an exact depiction of the people he photographed. Compared to the travel and ethnographic illustrations that originated as field sketches, however, the photographic process revealed nuanced traces of individual persons that we can read today in an entirely different context. Although Fritsch’s portraits were subject to his anthropological project undertaken in the context of his studies on race, the camera itself makes no hierarchical choices. It does not ‘see’ people, and makes no distinction between ‘native’ (Ziongebeeren) and ‘civilized’ (European). In contrast to Thomas Baines’s illustrations, for example, in which the viewer is confronted with a disembodied picture of the colonising process of Africa, the people depicted in Fritsch’s photographs are curiously watching themselves being observed. The spectacle is therefore not only Africa, but also the ‘impartial observer’ (unbefangene Beobachter) behind the camera. There is a sense of an encounter between Africa and Europe, with the observer and the observed engaged in looking and counter-looking, mediated by the camera.

Almost one and a half centuries ago, the light that reflected from the faces of the individuals who sat in front of Gustav Fritsch’s camera, was fixed on glass plates coated with collodion emulsion and printed and preserved on paper. Having retrieved these portraits from the archives of the Berlin Society for Anthropology, Ethnology and Prehistory in the Ethnological Museum in Berlin, and having reconstructed them in a new archive, we trust that by making them accessible to the South African public these portraits may now be reclaimed as part of our own cultural heritage.
An Eloquent Picture Gallery: The South African Portrait Photographs of Gustav Theodor Fritsch, 1863 - 1865
Exhibition Images - Stellenbosch University Art Museum