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The James Stuart Archive Research Tool

Created by the Five Hundred Year Archive, a project of the NRF Chair in Archive and Public Culture.

The Research Tool is an experiment in research infrastructure development. It links each page of the published *James Stuart Archive of Recorded Oral Evidence Relating to the History of the Zulu and Neighbouring Peoples* (6 vols.) to the photocopies of James Stuart's original handwritten notes (used and annotated by one of the editors in preparing the volumes for publications). This means that researchers are able, with a single click, to check the published translation against a photocopy of the original handwritten notes.

The Killie Campbell Africana Library, which holds the original handwritten notes, has given permission for the photocopies pertinent to only one interlocutor, Socwatsha kaPhaphu, to be made available online. We are thus currently unable to provide the annotated photocopies of the handwritten originals for this interlocutor, and this means we are also unable to provide the Hyperlinked Archival Research Tool for this interlocutor. [Click here](#) [link to come] if you wish to add your name to a public appeal for open digital access to the originals, either on this site or in any other format.

James Stuart Archive Research Tool Introduction

James Stuart was a colonial official and a prolific recorder of oral historical materials in Natal in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He was born in 1868 in Pietermaritzburg, the capital of the British colony of Natal, and grew up with a good knowledge of isiZulu. He was educated in Natal and at a public school in Sussex, England. In 1888 he was appointed clerk to the resident magistrate in Eshowe in the recently annexed British colony of Zululand, became a magistrate in the colony in 1895, and subsequently served as acting magistrate in a number of centres in Natal. In 1901 he was appointed as assistant magistrate in Durban.

In the Natal rebellion of 1906, Stuart served in the Natal Field Artillery and in the intelligence service of the colonial forces. In 1909 he was appointed Assistant Secretary for Native Affairs in the colony's Native Affairs Department. After the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910, he was transferred to Pretoria. He took early retirement in 1912, and returned to Natal. The following year he published *A History of the Zulu Rebellion, 1906*, which remained the standard work on the subject until the 1960s. He was in London in 1914-15, and on military service in France with the South African Native Labour Contingent in 1916-17. In 1922 he left Natal with his wife Ellen and two young sons, and settled in London.

In the late 1890s Stuart began devoting much of his spare time to interviewing people – particularly elderly African men – with a knowledge of the history of African societies in Natal (into which Zululand was incorporated in 1897), and, to a lesser extent, in Swaziland. He recorded his conversations with them in detail in a gradually growing collection of written notes. At the same time, he read widely into the history of Natal. His aim was to make himself the leading authority on what he called 'Zulu' history and custom, with the larger purpose of being able to inform the making of native policy in the colony, which he saw as based on ignorance and misunderstanding of the historical Zulu system of governance. He pursued his researches until his departure from Natal, ultimately amassing notes of conversations with a total of some 200 interlocutors.

After he moved to London, Stuart used his notes to compile and publish five isiZulu readers for use in schools in Natal. In the late 1920s he was actively engaged in research into Natal and Zulu history in the British Museum. The later years of his life are obscure. He died in London in 1942. In 1949 his widow sold his corpus of papers to Killie Campbell, a noted collector of Africana in Durban. In 1970, Colin Webb, a historian at the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg set up a project to publish Stuart's notes of his conversations with African interlocutors. Since 1971, six volumes of Stuart's notes of his conversations, edited and translated by Colin Webb until his death in 1992 and John Wright, have been published in the in-progress series, the *James Stuart Archive Of Recorded Oral Evidence Relating To The History Of The Zulu And Neighbouring Peoples*. Wright and fellow editor Mbongiseni Buthelezi are currently working on a seventh volume.

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The first step in the publication process was selection of what to publish and what to leave unpublished. From the start, the editors' aim was to publish material attributed by Stuart to specific, named interlocutors, as distinct from his own syntheses and memoranda. To this end John Wright worked through the collection to identify what the editors considered to be pertinent historical material. Between 1971 and 1973 the identified material was photocopied for the editors by the staff at the Killie Campbell Africana Library. In the late 1970s Wright did a second search through the whole collection and further material was photocopied for the editors. The editors reorganized the identified material chronologically under the name of each person interviewed by Stuart, or in the case of discussions with more than one interlocutor, under the name of the main interlocutor, as determined by the editors. Webb and Wright then proceeded to prepare this material for publication, starting with "Antel, Mr" and proceeding alphabetically to "Zwayi ka Mbombo".

Wherever Stuart's original notes were in isiZulu the editors translated the text into English but rendered the translated text in italics to signal where translation had occurred. The editors were similarly careful to indicate in the published texts where they had emended the text or excluded material. The editors embedded references to the original Stuart notebooks at the head of each pertinent block of published text, and embedded references to the original page numbers in the left-hand margins of the published text. The published texts were further closely annotated and indexed, following principles that changed over time. Between 1976 and 2014 this editing work resulted in the publication of the first 6 volumes of the *James Stuart Archive of Recorded Oral Evidence*, totaling some 2400 pages of typed-up text.

The publication of material from the Stuart Collection in readily accessible form has done much to stimulate research into the history of the wider Swaziland- KwaZulu Natal region in the nineteenth century and preceding eras. Only occasionally, however, do scholars making use of this material consult the original texts housed in the Killie Campbell African Library in Durban, despite the editors' insistence that their published text is a very particular rendition of the originals and cannot substitute for them.

Passages originally regarded by the editors as 'non-historical' were omitted from the earlier volumes: their policy in this regard changed in the later volumes. Materials have been taken out of their original contexts and re-ordered chronologically under the name of each interlocuter. Passages originally in isiZulu have been translated into English.

Because of the particular skills required in translating and annotating often arcane praises, the editors made the decision to defer working on them until the volumes of other texts had been completed. In part, researchers use the published version because consultation of the originals requires either a personal visit to the research facility or making a special request for a copy of the original from the library staff. Visits or requests cannot readily be set in motion on every occasion that the original needs to be checked by a meticulous researcher. Any increase in personal visits means an escalation in the rate of handling the originals at the library, while requests for copies of originals puts the already hard-pressed Library staff in danger of being swamped by demand. Minimally, there is a pressing need for the collection to be digitized to enable the library staff to respond to a high volume of requests. In 2015, following an offer from the Five Hundred Year Archive (FHYA) project to fund and undertake the full digitization exercise for the Library, the Library indicated that it was commencing in-house digitization of the originals. It is not clear at the time of writing how much of the original Collection has, in fact, been digitized.

In the second decade of the twenty-first century, scholars view access to the original texts, especially where they were recorded in isiZulu, as far more of a priority than was the case when the volumes were first conceptualised in the early 1970s. They are also interested in the full corpus, English and isiZulu, out of which the published texts were selected. The published texts remain an excellent and highly accessible guide to the originals, but there is an urgent need for researchers to be able to use them in tandem with the originals, including the material omitted by the editors. Ideally, researchers should be able to flip backwards and forwards between the easily legible typescript in the published volumes and Stuart's hand-written notes. In an electronic format, the published texts could further be word-searched in a way that moves beyond the limits of the existing published indexes. Electronically searchable published texts would thus become a guide to the unindexed and electronically unsearchable handwritten texts. Scholars using the published texts as guides to the unpublished corpus in this way would need to become familiar with the interventions and working methods of the editors so as to know when to look beyond and behind the published texts to see what changes were effected by the editors.

While the publishers, jointly the Killie Campbell Africana Library and the University of KwaZulu- Natal Press, have agreed to make the published texts available electronically and hence electronically searchable, the Library, as the custodians of the original Collection, are at the time of writing (2017), not willing to make the handwritten originals available digitally except in a sample instance of Stuart's notes with a single interlocutor. In that one instance, the Library has given permission for the FHYA to place the handwritten notes of Stuart's conversations with Socwatsha kaPhapu online and link them to the electronic version of the published texts. At each point in the electronic published version of the testimony of Socwatsha where the editors have cross-referenced to the original handwritten texts, the user of the online published Socwatsha text is able to switch across to the same point in the handwritten text. In addition, the FHYA has provided a variety of other useful electronic connections across the texts. In the process the FHYA attempted to deal with all the digital and epistemological challenges involved in linking the two kinds of texts (see the [FHYA website](#)). The FHYA has done this to demonstrate on-line the usefulness of linking the two versions, to draw attention to the importance of the handwritten originals, and to advocate publicly for having the linked versions readily accessible to researchers online.

The FHYA then explored what it would entail to do this for the entire body of published text. For this experiment, the FHYA electronically linked the full corpus of editors' handwritten photocopies used by John Wright, marked up with his pencilled editorial annotations, to the editors' published text. The research tool in hand is the result of that experiment. It is not for commercial distribution but is simply a prototype for testing and demonstration purposes and is open to ongoing modification.

The full value of the prototype will only become apparent if it is published openly on the internet. Here content would be indexed by search engines, creating new linkages with existing online material for a global audience. Analytics and tracking software would make available further information about what content is accessed, from what geographic location, via what specific link or keyword. This data provides a layer of information about users that can be analysed in numerous ways. Pertinently, from the point of view of the custodial institution, in this case, the Killie Campbell Africana Library, it would provide a variety of measures about forms of use that go well beyond the signed visitors' book that such institutions have used as their primary metric and justification for funding allocations. Furthermore, by making the content openly available with a linked, but distinct facility for public contributions (one of the features of the FHYA), interested members of the public and other institutions with related materials would be encouraged to engage with the Collection, offering additional information and resources and providing varied and unique perspectives.

Should the Killie Campbell Africana Library ever wish to support a linking exercise of this nature the FHYA would offer the sample e-book to the Library as a useful exemplar or even final product, at no cost. The FHYA's aim in developing the prototype is to deal with the logistical and technological problems involved in linking the published volumes and the handwritten texts, to demonstrate the value of the full corpus of linked handwritten and published texts, and to lobby for it to be publicly accessible in a linked format.

Sources

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