

**COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT PRACTICES
AT THE TRANSVAAL MUSEUM, 1913 - 1964 :
ANTHROPOLOGICAL, ARCHAEOLOGICAL
AND HISTORICAL**

by

ELDA GROBLER

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Supervisor: Prof. F. Pretorius
Co-supervisor: Prof. O.J.O. Ferreira



The Old Museum, Boom Street, Pretoria, 1915

Collection: National Cultural History Museum, HKF 862



The new building of the Transvaal Museum, 1912

Collection: National Cultural History Museum, HKF 16757

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ABBREVIATIONS

dd	dated
NA	National Archives, Pretoria
N a/n a	No author
NCHMA	National Cultural History Museum, Pretoria, Archives
n.d.	No date
n.p.	No page

SUMMARY

A museum has to care for the objects in its collection to the best of its ability. The concept collections management emerged in the 1960s, when accountability for collections became a strong incentive for museums to develop modern collections management practices. In the process of establishing accountability (the effective implementation of practices to ensure adherence to collections policies on the accessioning, care and disposal of objects in a museum collection) many museums encountered problems such as the lack of access to detailed information about the objects in collections, a proliferation of accession numbers and inadequate location control. These problems were also encountered at the National Cultural History Museum, Pretoria.

This research reveals the way in which the historical, anthropological and archaeological collections at the Transvaal Museum, predecessor of the National Cultural History Museum were managed from 1913 to 1964. This period was chosen for the following reasons:

- J.W.B. Gunning, the director of the Transvaal Museum, was succeeded by H.G. Breijer in 1913. The year 1913 is thus a clear starting point for research and a new beginning, a watershed, at the Museum.
- The year 1964 marked the inception of an autonomous museum, the National Cultural History and Open-Air Museum, and the discontinuance of responsibility, after a period of 60 years, for the anthropology, archaeology and history collections at the Transvaal Museum.

The development of the Transvaal Museum as a natural history and a history museum, is traced. In 1953, for the first time, a trained professional officer was appointed for the history division at the Museum. After 1953 there was an increased awareness (from a professional point of view) that historical, anthropological and archaeological collections require specialized curatorial care. Modern collections management principles, although they were not called by this name, featured effectively in the handling of the historical collection in particular, for the first time in more than 50 years.

Aspects such as departmental organization, the staff, expansion of collections, policies, documentation and conservation are investigated. An evaluation of the factors that played a decisive role in collections management practices for the historical, anthropological and

archaeological collections shows that a combination of aspects has to be considered in order to understand the practices that were followed and the changes that were made.

Key words: accessioning; anthropology; archaeology; catalogue; classification; collections; collections accountability; collections management; cultural history; documentation; ethnology; FitzSimons, Vivian, Frederick, Maynard; history; museology; objects; register; Roodt-Coetzee, Jacoba, Aletta, Johanna (Kotie); storage; Transvaal Museum

OPSOMMING

'n Museum moet na die beste van sy vermoë die voorwerpe in sy versamelings versorg. Die konsep “versamelingsbestuur” het eers in die 1960's ontstaan. Aanspreeklikheid vir versamelings was, veral vir museums in die Verenigde State en die Verenigde Koninkryk, 'n sterk dryfveer om moderne versamelingsbestuurpraktyke te ontwikkel. Soos die proses van aanspreeklikheid (die effektiewe implementering van maatreëls om te verseker dat die beleid vir registrasie, versorging en die afskrywe van voorwerpe in 'n museumversameling nagevolg word) begin vorm aanneem het, het baie museums voor probleme soos die gebrek aan gedetailleerde inligting oor die voorwerpe in die versameling, 'n vermenigvuldiging van aanwinningsnommers en onvoldoende bergingskontrole te staan gekom. Dié probleme is ook by die Nasionale Kultuurhistoriese Museum, Pretoria, ondervind.

Hierdie navorsing toon aan hoe die antropologiese, argeologiese en historiese versamelings in die Transvaal Museum (die voorloper van die Nasionale Kultuurhistoriese Museum) in die tydperk 1913 tot 1964, bestuur is. Die periode is om die volgende redes gekies:

- J.W.B. Gunning, die direkteur van die Transvaal Museum, en voorheen direkteur van die Staatsmuseum van die Zuid-Afrikaanse Republiek, is op 25 Junie 1913 oorlede. Hy is deur H.G. Breijer, wie se aansoek op 11 Desember 1913 deur die Museumkomitee goedgekeur is, opgevolg. Die jaar 1913 was dus 'n nuwe begin, 'n keerpunt, vir die Museum en ook 'n goeie beginpunt vir die navorsing.
- Dieselfde geld vir die jaar 1964. In dié jaar het die Nasionale Kultuurhistoriese Museum onafhanklik geword, en na 'n periode van net meer as sestig jaar was die Transvaal Museum nie langer vir die antropologiese, argeologiese en historiese versamelings verantwoordelik nie.

Die ontwikkeling van die Transvaal Museum as 'n natuurhistoriese en historiese museum is ondersoek. In 1953 is daar vir die eerste keer 'n vakkundige beampte in die geskiedenisafdeling van die Museum aangestel. Dit is gevolg deur 'n toenemende bewustheid (vanuit 'n kuratoriale oogpunt) dat die antropologiese, argeologiese en historiese versamelings gespesialiseerde vakkundige kennis, wat van natuurhistoriese praktyke verskil het, nodig gehad het. Moderne versamelingsbestuurpraktyke, wat egter nie so genoem is nie, is vir die eerste keer na 50 jaar effektief toegepas, veral in die geskiedenisafdeling. Die nuwe

werkswyse weerspiël 'n verandering wat uiteindelik tot die totstandkoming van 'n onafhanklike museum in 1964 sou lei.

Aspekte soos wysigings in organisasie, departementele organisasie, personeel, die groei in versamelings, beleidsake, die dokumentasieraamwerk en bewaring word ondersoek. 'n Ontleding van die dokumentasie in die Transvaal Museum sluit die verskillende stadia waaraan 'n voorwerp onderworpe is, naamlik die oorweging van die voorwerp vir insameling, die aanwinning en die tydelike verwydering of vervreemding van die voorwerp uit die museum, in.

'n Evaluering van faktore wat 'n deurslaggewende rol gespeel het in versamelingsbestuurpraktyke in die Transvaal Museum toon aan dat 'n kombinasie van aspekte oorweeg moet word om te begryp waarom sekere praktyke nagevolg en waarom wysigings aangebring is.

Sleutelwoorde: aanwinning; antropologie; argeologie; berging; dokumentasie; etnologie; FitzSimons, Vivian, Frederick, Maynard; geskiedenis; katalogus; klassifikasie; kultuurgeskiedenis; museumkunde; register; Roodt-Coetzee, Jacoba, Aletta, Johanna (Kotie); Transvaalmuseum; versamelings; versamelingsaanspreeklikheid; versamelingsbestuur; voorwerpe

OPSOMMING

'n Museum moet na die beste van sy vermoë die voorwerpe in sy versamelings versorg. Die konsep “versamelingsbestuur” het eers in die 1960's ontstaan. Aanspreeklikheid vir versamelings was 'n sterk dryfveer om moderne versamelingsbestuurpraktyke te ontwikkel. Soos die proses van aanspreeklikheid begin vorm aanneem het, het baie museums voor probleme soos die gebrek aan gedetailleerde inligting oor die voorwerpe in die versameling, 'n vermenigvuldiging van aanwinningsnommers en onvoldoende bergingskontrole te staan gekom. Dié probleme is ook by die Nasionale Kultuurhistoriese Museum, Pretoria, ondervind.

Hierdie navorsing toon aan hoe die antropologiese, argeologiese en historiese versamelings in die Transvaal Museum (die voorloper van die Nasionale Kultuurhistoriese Museum) in die tydperk 1913 tot 1964, bestuur is. Die periode is om die volgende redes gekies:

- J.W.B. Gunning, die direkteur van die Transvaal Museum is in 1913 deur H.G. Breijer opgevolg. Die jaar 1913 was dus 'n nuwe begin, 'n keerpunt, vir die Museum en ook 'n goeie beginpunt vir die navorsing.
- In 1964 het die Nasionale Kultuurhistoriese Museum onafhanklik geword, en na 'n periode van net meer as sestig jaar was die Transvaal Museum nie langer vir die antropologiese, argeologiese en historiese versamelings verantwoordelik nie.

Die ontwikkeling van die Transvaal Museum as 'n natuurhistoriese en historiese museum is ondersoek. In 1953 is daar vir die eerste keer 'n vakkundige beampte in die geskiedenis-afdeling van die Museum aangestel. Dit is gevolg deur 'n toenemende bewustheid (vanuit 'n kuratoriale oogpunt) dat die antropologiese, argeologiese en historiese versamelings gespesialiseerde vakkundige kennis nodig gehad het. Moderne versamelingsbestuurpraktyke, wat egter nie so genoem is nie, is vir die eerste keer na meer as 50 jaar effektief toegepas, veral in die geskiedenis-afdeling.

Aspekte soos wysigings in departementele organisasie, personeel, die groei in versamelings, beleidsake, die dokumentasie en bewaring word ondersoek. 'n Evaluering van faktore wat 'n deurslaggewende rol gespeel het in versamelingsbestuur-praktyke in die Transvaal Museum toon aan dat 'n kombinasie van aspekte oorweeg moet word om te begryp waarom sekere praktyke nagevolg en waarom wysigings aangebring is.

Sleutelwoorde: aanwinning; antropologie; argeologie; berging; dokumentasie; etnologie; FitzSimons, Vivian, Frederick, Maynard; geskiedenis; katalogus; klassifikasie; kultuurgeskiedenis; museumkunde; register; Roodt-Coetzee, Jacoba, Aletta, Johanna (Kotie); Transvaalmuseum; versamelings; versamelingsaanspreeklikheid; versamelingsbestuur; voorwerpe

PREFACE

This study arose to address the problems experienced in the documentation of collections in the National Cultural History Museum in Pretoria. My interest in museology, particularly collections management, began in 1978 when I was appointed as technical assistant in the History Section of the Museum. At the time the Museum was still located in the old building in Boom Street. There I could fully appreciate the unique characteristics of the many displays set up by Kotie Roodt-Coetzee, and those under her direct supervision. As time passed I also gained first-hand experience of working with the many and varied objects in the cultural history and history collections, and those in other storerooms in town – every corner of available space in Boom Street was filled to capacity and additional storage had to be utilized. The increase in the number of staff members did not always keep up with the growth of the collections, and documentation problems, some of them dating back 70 years or more, slowly but surely emerged in the management of these collections.

Kotie Roodt-Coetzee went on pension at the end of 1978. She was followed by two directors, Dr B. Cronjé and Dr U.S. Küsel. Another milestone came when the Old Museum had to be evacuated because it was flooded in 1990 and again in 1992, resulting in extensive damage to the building and the objects on display. The staff then moved to new offices and the collections and the workshops were housed in several additional buildings in Pretoria. Apart from the satellite museums, the Museum *per se* ceased to exist, but the collections continued to expand, albeit gradually, and collections management problems were aggravated by the divide between the curatorial staff, who were no longer closely associated with the collection, and the collections stored in different locations. These circumstances only improved when the old Mint building in Visagie Street, Pretoria was rebuilt as a functional museum. From October 2002 the staff and the collections of the National Cultural History Museum were then housed in a single building complex for the first time since 1912. This affords the collections management department the opportunity of solving documentation problems and other issues and to eliminate the possibility of similar problems occurring in the future.

During Küsel's tenure trends in the Museum itself and the South African museum scene in general, changed considerably. In April 1999 a major reorganization took place when the National Cultural History Museum, the Transvaal Museum and the South African National

Museum of Military History amalgamated as the Northern Flagship Institution. This move, in my opinion, resurrected the parlous situation that had led to the establishment of the National Cultural History and Open-Air Museum in 1964, because administering natural history and cultural history collections under a single management structure is far from ideal – as this research shows.

My interest in the collections and the chequered, indeed intricate, development of the Museum has focused my attention on factors that may well have contributed to collections management problems. Over the years I have faced many of these problems in my day-to-day work. In undertaking this critical analysis of the collections management practices for the anthropological, archaeological and historical collections at the Transvaal Museum during the period 1913 to 1964, I have thus been able to utilize my 27 years of experience at the Museum. On a museological level, this research also provided me with a challenge: to examine historic museum documentation and other collections management practices in detail and to establish factors that have inevitably led to changes and, in the longer term, to the establishment of the National Cultural History and Open-Air Museum. As far as can be ascertained no similar detailed analysis of historic museum documentation has been carried out for any other South African museum.

This research is in essence a museological study. Although the term “collections management” has only been in use from the 1960s, collections in museums have of course always been “managed”. Although initially it might well be thought that the term could not be applied to practices used as early as 1913, this research has proved that this is indeed possible. The structure of the study, in particular the exposition of the history of the Transvaal Museum in general terms, followed by an analysis of collections management practices during the same period, compelled me to use a similar discussion in different contexts. Although I strove to limit this repetition, or keep it to a minimum, it is to be hoped this is not seen as irksome or unnecessary. Then too, bearing in mind that this is a historic study, some terms, names and concepts that may now be regarded as pejorative or having racist connotations are used purely in their historical context in this thesis.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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To my family members I express my heartfelt thanks for their support and understanding; they were invariably there to smooth the path for me. Their encouragement, despite having to bear with my problems, was always graciously given.

I acknowledge with heartfelt thanks, tinged with sadness, the inspiration of Kotie Roodt-Coetzee, from whom I learnt the rudiments of museum practice. She taught me so much more besides; she instilled in me a love and respect for the objects in a museum as documents of the past. I therefore dedicate this thesis to her memory. The fact that she passed away on 22 September 2005, shortly before the completion and submission of this study, was a grievous loss to me personally and to museology in South Africa in general; her significant contribution in the field remains undisputed.