

# THE GRAPHICALIZATION OF DESCRIPTION

DRAWING AND PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE FIELDWORK JOURNALS AND MUSEUM WORK  
OF HENRY BALFOUR



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Royal Anthropological Institute

***Anthropology & Photography No. 10***

ISSN 2397-1754

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First published 2018

*Cover image: Photograph of a bow-drill being used in Assam, India, overdrawn in ink by Henry Balfour, circa 1922.  
© Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford (1998.548.1)*

ISSN 2397-1754

ISBN 978-0-900632-52-5

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## Introduction

This essay explores the use made of drawing and photography in two 1920s fieldwork journals compiled by Henry Balfour (1863–1939), a museum anthropologist and the first Curator of the University of Oxford's Pitt Rivers Museum. Whilst I describe these manuscripts as fieldwork journals, in keeping with how Balfour and many of his contemporaries would have understood them, they are quite different in nature from the more private scientific notebooks of the social-anthropological fieldworker in the post-Malinowskian era. Instead, these manuscripts are likely to have always been available to curatorial staff in the museum as research documents, kept with the rest of the museum's documentation for cross-checking information about the artefacts collected on these trips; their cultural contexts as well as their circumstances of usage and acquisition.<sup>1</sup> These fieldwork journals have therefore been well-used primary sources of museum documentation for many years, and the fact that they have always been considered as such rather than as more private notebooks is important to how we should approach them.

For the distinctions that Balfour and those around him made between personal research and private notes on the one hand and museum research, collecting and documentation on the other, was entirely unclear. More importantly, it wasn't necessarily a question that would have had much meaning to Balfour; the museum's research was his research, and his collecting and

documentation was the museum's. This blurring of personal and institutional agendas was much more a feature of nineteenth-century museum anthropology than in the nascent individualistic university anthropology of the 1920s, but for those curators trained in the 1880s, such as Balfour, these perspectives remained dominant, bringing individual and institutional identities together through an ever-expanding network centred upon the museum, its donors, students and researchers – a relational museum in which people were collected as much as objects (Gosden and Larson 2007:5).

In this piece, then, I seek to understand Balfour's use of visual data gathering in two of his 1920s journals – Naga Hills 1922 and Kenya/Uganda 1928 – from a number of different historical perspectives. Firstly, I examine the influence of his broad observational training in the natural sciences on the way his ethnographic observation, description and display developed in the Pitt Rivers Museum. I then move on to discuss how the practice of drawing from direct observation in the field continued for a number of anthropologists, such as Balfour, in the twentieth century, and the valency and currency that such drawn observations had as evidence. I also consider how such drawn observations were used alongside photography in the period, the context that each medium was considered most appropriate for, and the perceived scientific value of each medium. Finally, I assess to what extent issues of objectivity and subjectivity in anthropological field methods in the period were of particular significance, when what was more pressing was the work of cultural translation, the work of the trained 'weaver' of anthropological knowledge within the didactic setting of the ethnographic museum and its various audiences.

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<sup>1</sup> The journals are known to have been regularly referred to in the museum after Balfour's death, but even during his lifetime Balfour made reference to them in the volumes of the museum's accessions, directing colleagues to passages where further information might be found. See, for instance, the accession book entry for 1931.26.1, where he states 'I saw this pot being made v[ide] notes in my diary – H. Balfour.'



Figure 1 Henry Balfour in the Upper Gallery of the Pitt Rivers Museum, c.1905. Photograph probably by Alfred Robinson. Courtesy Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford (1998.267.94.5).

### **The anthropologist as weaver**

Henry Balfour was born in Croydon in 1863. As an undergraduate at Oxford, Balfour studied Natural Sciences, graduating in 1885 having specialized in biology and animal morphology. He was taught by Henry Nottidge Moseley, John Obadiah Westwood (an entomologist and palaeographer) and Edward Bagnall Poulton (an evolutionist who was then lecturer in zoology). Moseley had become Linacre Professor of Human and Comparative Anatomy in 1881, and

was to have a significant influence on Balfour and his thinking. Moseley had travelled to Ceylon in 1871 and later joined HMS *Challenger*'s four-year scientific voyage around the world from 1872–6, having gained significant experience and knowledge of indigenous peoples in the various places the ship visited. It was also partly Moseley's influence that ensured that Pitt-Rivers' extensive ethnographic collection was accepted by the University of Oxford in 1884, and it was under his care that the collection was put when

it arrived in the University Museum a year later. Searching for careful and diligent recent graduates to help with the considerable task of arranging the new displays in Oxford, Moseley turned to Balfour and Walter Baldwin Spencer for help. Moseley wrote to Balfour to warn him that,

*It would be pretty hard work of all sorts making little drawings, writing and typing out very neat labels, writing catalogue descriptions, arranging things in cases, mending and batching and cleaning, helping a carpenter fix things on screens, looking up objects of all kinds in illustrated books, Cook's travels etc.<sup>2</sup>*

Balfour's initial job offer was for one year, but he quickly started negotiating with the university for a more permanent position. By 1889 he was known as the 'Sub-Curator of the Pitt Rivers Museum', and in late 1890 he was appointed Curator, with the same status as the professors working in the University Museum. He held this position until his death, at the age of seventy-five, in 1939.

Balfour called himself at the end of his career a 'comparative technologist'. He was comparative across space, in that he was interested in questions of invention, mutation, distribution and dissemination of technologies and object forms; but also across time, in that he was deeply interested in the stages of culture that societies pass through and the possibilities of ethnologists to shed light on prehistory, for instance in the potential for Australian ethnography to explain palaeolithic cultures in Europe. This comparative approach was shaped by Balfour's hands-on experience of ordering, arranging and

displaying objects from Pitt-Rivers's typological series (Figure 1), which he adapted heavily and augmented with what he considered new evidence of the grafting of new ideas to existing ones, and the branching of object types globally. The combined intellectual understanding of an object and its physical relationships to other objects on display was so intrinsic that Balfour's teaching usually took place in the museum galleries themselves.<sup>3</sup> As one former student later remembered,

*Our work with Henry Balfour was done entirely in the Pitt-Rivers Museum, of which he was Curator, before exhibition cases which frequently were supplemented with trays or handfuls of additional specimens... The handful of notes which he brought to the peripatetic lecture were suggestive of Darwin's use of every scrap and kind of paper; they were any size and shape, sometimes interspersed with press clippings and portions of letters.*

*(Wallis 1957:786–7)*

Although Balfour didn't engage directly with sociological theory, his early papers (for instance, Balfour 1890) show the influence both of the sociocultural evolutionary approach promulgated by Augustus Pitt-Rivers, ideas such as cultural 'survivals' from Edward Burnett Tylor,<sup>4</sup> as well

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<sup>3</sup> Balfour began teaching formally at the University of Oxford with a series of lectures in 1893. He continued to lecture and tutor interested students there, until a committee for anthropology and a diploma syllabus were established in 1905, after which he taught in the museum until the late 1930s.

<sup>4</sup> Tylor's concept of survivals was described by him as 'processes, customs, and opinions, and so forth, which have been carried on by force of habit into a new state of society different from that in which they had their original home, and they thus remain as proofs and examples of an older condition of culture out of which a newer has been evolved' (Tylor 1871:16).

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<sup>2</sup> Pitt Rivers Museum Manuscript Collections, Pitt Rivers Museum Papers, Box 1 (foundation volume), II October 1885.

as German anthropology. Writing about what he saw as the symbiotic relationship between the fieldworker and the armchair anthropologist at the end of his career, he used the analogy of the field-working ‘spinners’ of ethnographic data and the more generalist ‘weavers’ of anthropological knowledge:

*The spinner’s responsibility is, then, to supply substantial, well-scrutinised threads (in the form of fully attested facts) to the weaver, who will unite them by the textile process, and will create not only a fabric but a pattern as well, by interlacing the ‘warp’ of facts with the ‘weft’ of argument’.*

(Balfour 1938:8)

Writing in 1995, the anthropologist Mary Douglas reflected on having been given Balfour’s Spinners and Weavers to read overnight by Balfour’s successor as Curator of the Pitt Rivers Museum, T. K. Penniman, when she was applying to read for the Diploma in Anthropology at Oxford. The division Balfour made between fieldwork-data gathering and the generation of theory, she said, ‘started me worrying about whether facts can exist without theory’ (Douglas 1995:262). This is a question with which we are now familiar, but for Balfour and his contemporaries, theory was generated when cross-cultural comparisons and relationships were generated, and was not something that should influence data gathering in any one particular place or time. This attitude was summed up by the folklorist Andrew Lang, in his statement that ‘travellers and missionaries have begun to read anthropological books, and their evidence is, therefore, much more likely to be biased now by anthropological theories than it was of old’ (Lang 1901:335).

One of Balfour’s particular areas of evidence ‘spinning’ was on the subject of evolution in decorative art, developed in various papers and lectures he gave in the early 1890s, and which resulted in his only published monograph (Balfour 1893).<sup>5</sup> In this research, Balfour showed how copying, achieved with differing degrees of accuracy, was the main agent producing variation in designs.<sup>6</sup> Copying led to degeneration as well as innovation; equally, meanings could be lost over time, leaving design ‘survivals’ from an earlier cultural stage. It is this interest in copying in Balfour’s theoretical work on the evolution of design that I will return to in relation to his practice of fieldwork photography and drawing. But it also has deep connections, beyond the scope of this essay, to institutional practices and technologies of image reproduction for illustration and display within the museum context that Balfour engaged in constantly.

Balfour kept sketch-books and journals for most of his travels. Between the late 1880s and early 1930s, Balfour travelled regularly in the academic vacations, visiting Africa, Australia, India, South America and Scandinavia, among other places. I am going to focus on two of his field diaries from the 1920s, as this is a period that best contrasts his approach to fieldwork methods with that of the new wave of social anthropologists in Britain being trained at the London School of Economics under Bronislaw Malinowski. Much of my own research has focused on the fieldwork

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<sup>5</sup> I am grateful to Eléonore Challine for pointing out that Balfour’s 1893 volume was published in the same year as one on the history of ornament (*Stilfragen: Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik*) by the German art historian Alois Riegl, although Balfour’s published work does not appear to show any awareness of Riegl’s work. Balfour’s contemporary, A.C. Haddon, also published *Evolution in Art: As Illustrated by the Life Histories of Designs* in 1895.

<sup>6</sup> Balfour 1890, 1893; Pitt Rivers Museum Manuscript Collections, Balfour Papers, Box 4A.



photography of one prominent member of that new generation, Edward Evans-Pritchard, who undertook fieldwork in South Sudan in the 1920s and 30s. As I have examined at length elsewhere (Morton 2009), there existed in this period a complex relationship between photography and other fieldwork methods, published texts and the agency of local people in shaping the photographic archive. The place of fieldwork sketching in this period has begun to receive some critical attention, especially Geismar's exploration of Bernard Deacon's fieldwork sketches on Vanuatu in 1926–7, where she traces the disconnections between his textual and sketched investigations, which sometimes led to a 'visual dead end', and puts forward the idea that sketching was, for Deacon, more of a 'form of (visual) thinking and an embodied and situated practice' (2014:105). There is also an important connection between Deacon's sketching (and photography of informant sketches) of sand drawings in Vanuatu, and that of Balfour's generation. In 1903, Balfour's former classmate in Oxford, W. Baldwin Spencer, donated a series of large fieldwork-sketched paintings of ground art that he had witnessed at the Wollungua totemic ceremony of the Warumungu people in the Tennant Creek region of Northern Territory. As ground art for a specific ritual, the indigenous designs were ephemeral, yet their copying by Spencer onto paper created a more permanent hybrid artwork, neither entirely indigenous nor European. This ambiguity in their identity meant that they could be displayed as 'Aboriginal art' objects for a number of years in the Pitt Rivers Museum, acting simultaneously as indigenous designs and also historical fieldwork documents.<sup>7</sup>

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7 Four of Spencer's drawings [1903.39.82–85] were exhibited in the Aboriginal Art display case in the Pitt Rivers Museum between 2009–16 when they were replaced with work by Aboriginal artist Christian Thompson.

Deacon's fascination with and extended sketching of sand drawings on Vanuatu similarly engaged with the way in which such ephemeral designs were integral to the transferral of cultural knowledge, as well as being 'indigenous theorization[s] of connectivity and cultural entanglement' (Gesimar 2014:109). Balfour's own fieldwork sketching shares some similarities with the sketching practices of these immersive and long-term fieldworkers, but differs markedly also, given the fact that he was touring and visiting locations in a more superficial way, albeit with a keen and observational eye for details that interested him. In this sense, he represents in his interests the visual interests and practices of a continuing material-culture strand of British anthropology based in the museum.

### **Nagaland, 1922**

The first fieldwork journal that I will consider relates to Balfour's visit to Nagaland in Assam, north-east India, in 1922, where he was the guest of former Oxford students and colonial administrative contacts, J.P. Mills (1890–1960) and J.H. Hutton (1885–1968). Mills wrote to Balfour in January of that year,

*It is indeed good news that you may really come out to the Naga Hills next autumn. Don't forget that I shall claim a large share of you. We will study both Nagas + birds together. There is no book that I know of on the ornithology of that part of the world, but I think when I get back + have a little time I can make out a fairly complete list of the birds from my notes...<sup>8</sup>*

It is not surprising that birds featured on Balfour's agenda for the trip; he retained an

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8 Pitt Rivers Museum Manuscript Collections, Mills Papers, letter to Balfour, 13 January 1922.

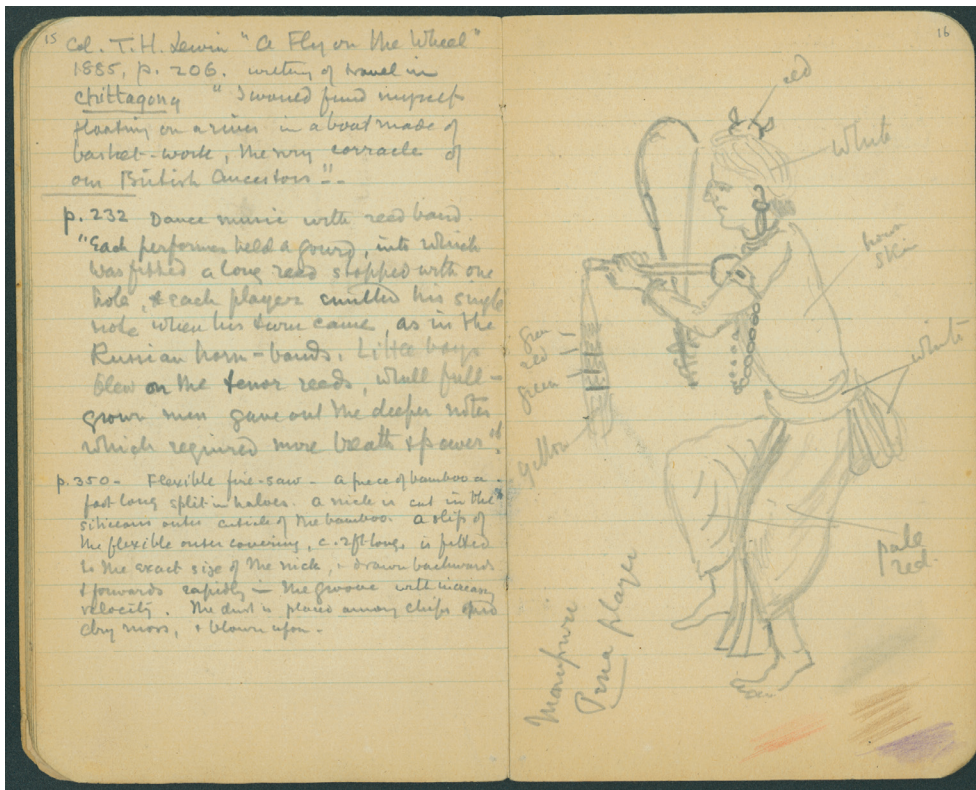


Figure 2 Spread (pp. 15–16) from Balfour's Naga field notebooks, showing a pena player. Pitt Rivers Museum Manuscript Collections, Balfour Papers, box 3, item 3. Image courtesy Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

interest in birds throughout his life and his journals include frequent references to them, as well as illustrations. Meanwhile, Mills and Hutton worked together to organize a tour of the area that would enable Balfour to 'see a bit of every tribe'.<sup>9</sup> During Balfour's stay in Nagaland between September and December, the men studied their collections (Mills and Hutton had both been sending objects to the museum for a number of years by the early 1920s). Mills had material he wanted to show Balfour in person before packing it up to send back to Oxford.<sup>10</sup> Balfour spent the early part of the trip travelling with Hutton, before the two men met up with Mills and Balfour continued to tour with him.

<sup>9</sup> Pitt Rivers Museum Manuscript Collections, Mills Papers, letter to Balfour, 6 June 1922.

<sup>10</sup> Pitt Rivers Museum Manuscript Collections, Mills Papers, letter to Balfour, 23 November 1922.

They collected objects for the museum as they went, and Mills was left in charge of packing and sending Balfour's collection after he had returned to England.<sup>11</sup>

Balfour's regular practice on the trip seems to have been to keep a small notebook with him during each day's touring, in which sketches and notes were kept, as well as jottings from books he was reading. In the evenings (or in the case of drawings, possibly much later) he would write up his journal account of the day. Figure 2 shows an example page spread from a field sketchbook in which the left side contains notes from a book by T.H. Lewin describing travels in India, particularly on musical performance; opposite these is a sketch of a Manipuri pena player who

<sup>11</sup> Pitt Rivers Museum Manuscript Collections, Mills Papers, letter to Balfour, 7 December 1922.

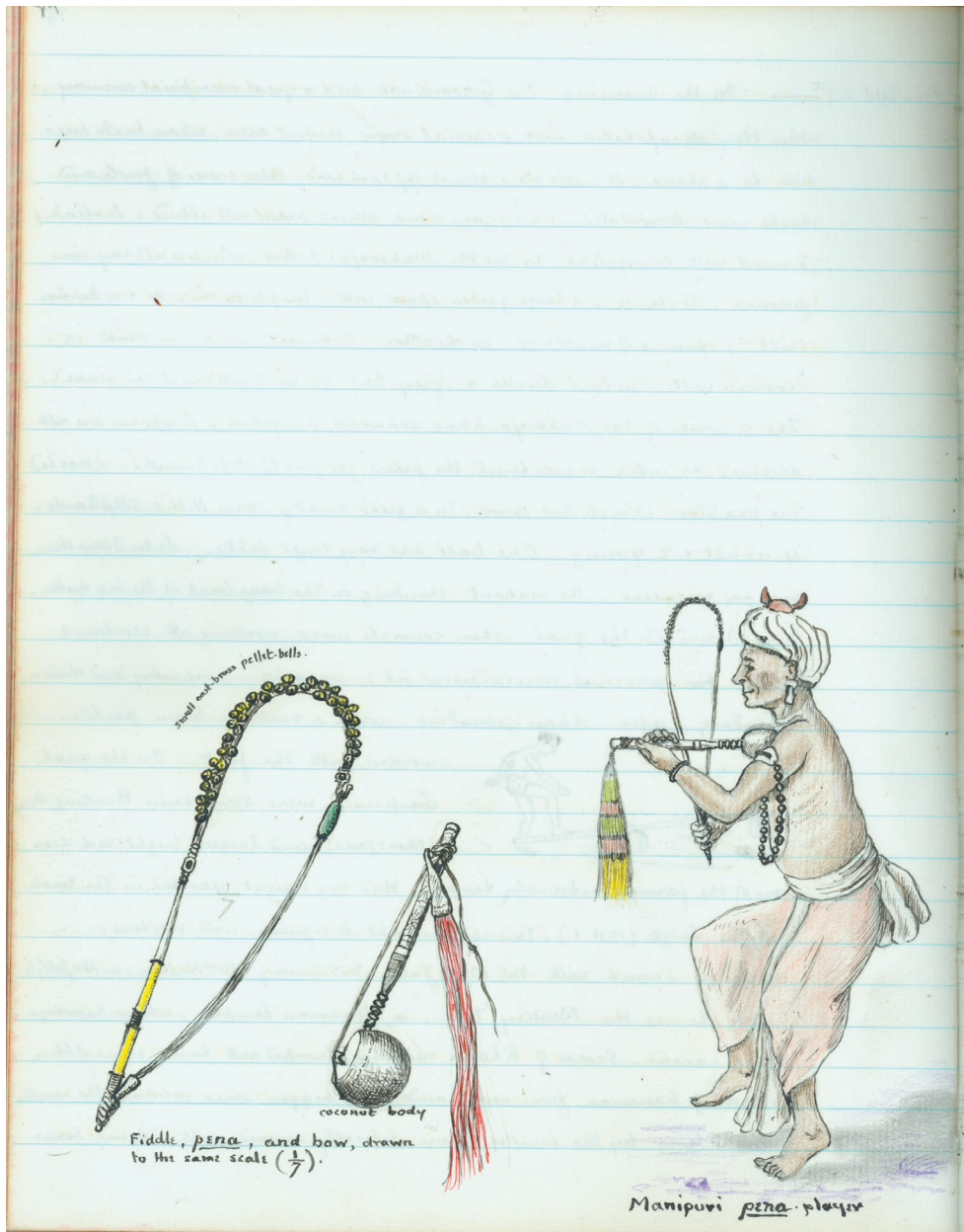


Figure 3 Page 79, Volume 1 of Balfour's Naga field journals, showing drawings of a pena and pena player. Pitt Rivers Museum Manuscript Collections, Balfour Papers, box 3, item 3. Image courtesy Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford (Balf\_1922NHills-Ass1\_79-R).

Balfour saw performing on Friday 29 September on the lawn in front of the residency at Imphal. The sketch is annotated with notes about the colour of the man's clothing, and even the various tassels on his instrument. Below the sketch are some test marks with coloured pencils, which Balfour seems to have done at the same time as

he made a fair copy of the sketch into his larger hardbound fieldwork journal (Figure 3), which also contains drawings of the pena and bow that Balfour has annotated as being drawn to  $\frac{1}{7}$  scale.

When we compare Balfour's sketch from life with the fair copy in the journal we can see his

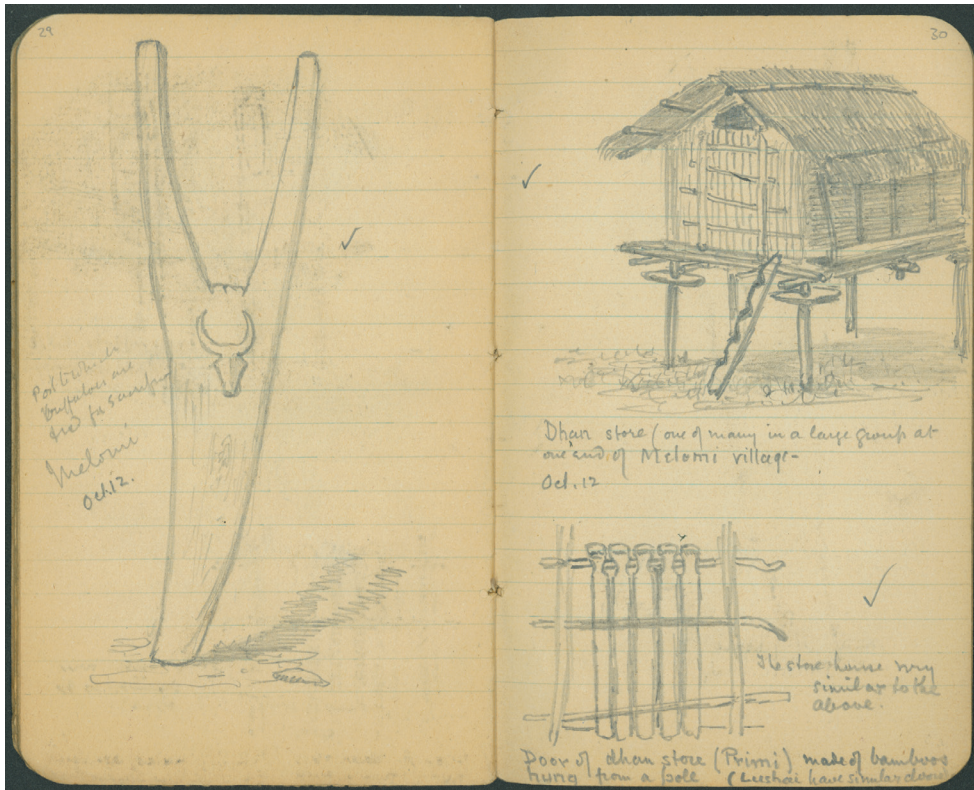


Figure 4 Spread (pp. 29–30) from Balfour's Naga field notebooks, showing sketch of a post used for buffalo sacrifice etc. Pitt Rivers Museum Manuscript Collections, Balfour Papers, box 3, item 3. Image courtesy Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

working method of observation and annotation turned into its final form. But in the pose of the sketched Manipuri *pena* player, we can also see that Balfour is more concerned with recording details of material culture (including clothing) than he is about recording the whole scene in front of him. The pose of the *pena* player is obviously an artistic recreation of the sort of movement made by the players witnessed by Balfour at the residency. In this sense, we can understand the player as merely a graphic description of the mode of operation of the *pena* instrument, rather than a graphic description of the player himself. For the most part in Balfour's journals, drawings of people are contextual carriers for bodily decoration, ornamentation or objects; Balfour was never particularly interested in the physical description of race or of social life. On another page, we read notes about the organization of

space and the method of construction of a Naga house, with a sketch of a gayal (*mithan*, *Bos gaurus frontalis*) head carving adorning the entrance. On the opposite page are observational sketches about the method of wearing a tight bark belt as well as a head ornament. When transferring sketches into the more formal journal, Balfour made a tick next to the sketch to remind himself that the drawing had been copied across. In this example (Figure 4), a sketch of a carved and forked post used for buffalo sacrifice and a raised granary store for crops have been copied into his journal, along with an additional drawing showing the Naga method of cutting hair using two *dao* blades (Figure 5).

However, worked-up copies of such field sketches were not only transferred into his journal. Some of them were copied again onto good art paper, and then pinned to a backing

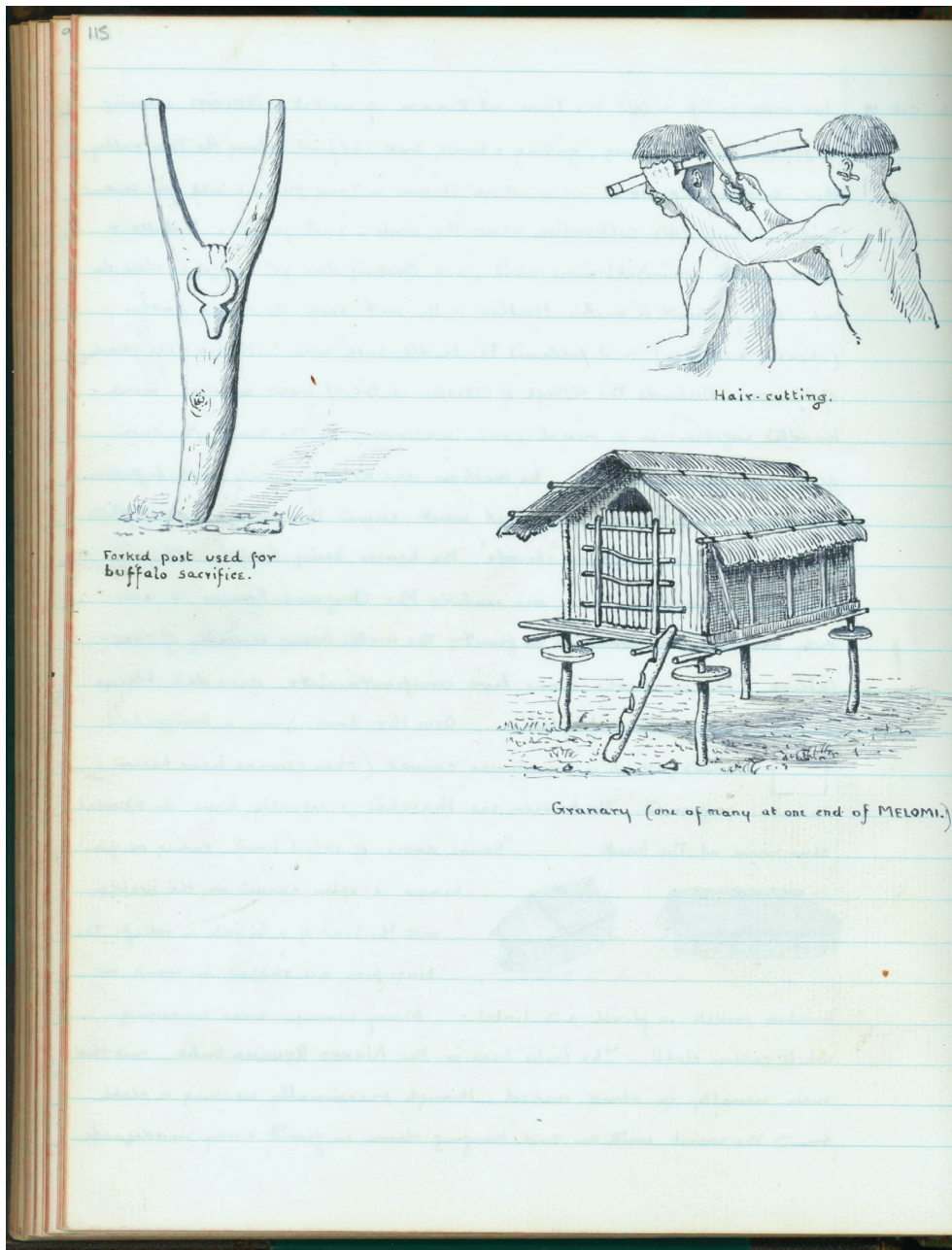


Figure 5 Page 115, Volume 1 of Balfour's Naga field journals, showing sketch of a post used for buffalo sacrifice etc. Pitt Rivers Museum Manuscript Collections, Balfour Papers, box 3, item 3. Image courtesy Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford (Balf\_1922NHills-Ass1\_115-R)

board or framed for display in the museum alongside the numerous artefacts sent by Hutton and Mills. One example in the archive is of skull trophies hanging outside a Konyak Naga house, evidently pinned and displayed for some time in the museum, with the vital information of

location and date observed annotated underneath it. In another such example (Figure 6) showing evidence of having been pinned on display for some time, Balfour brought together different sketches made on his trip that show different carved designs of boars' heads on the fronts

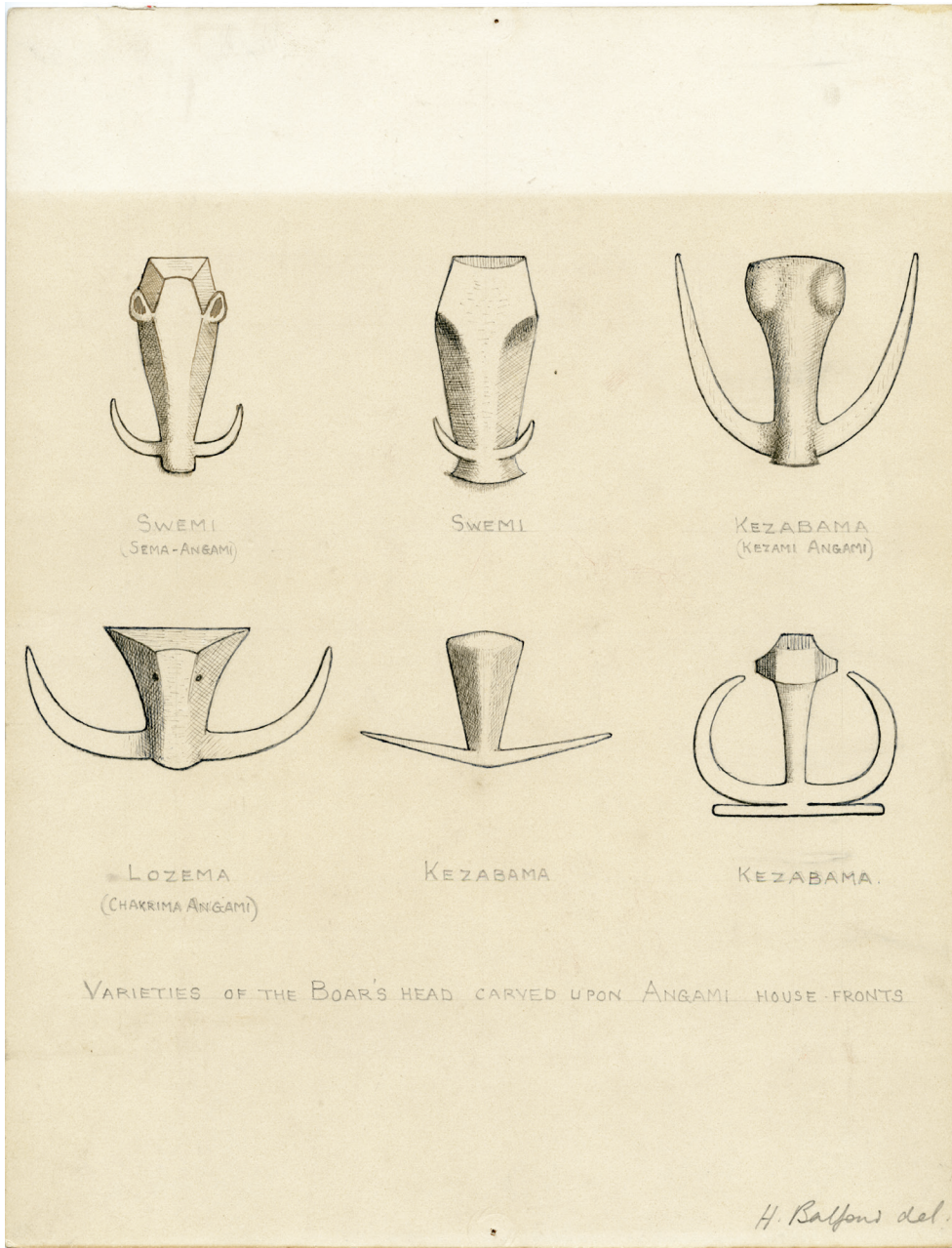


Figure 6 Sheet of drawings 'Varieties of the Boar's head carved upon Angami house fronts'. Pitt Rivers Museum Manuscript Collections, Balfour Papers, box 3, folder 2, item 11. Image courtesy Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

of Angami Naga houses. As I have mentioned, one of Balfour's theoretical interests was in the way artistic designs might become increasingly stylized in relation to their natural referent. In this case, Balfour's arrangement places his observed examples in relation to each other in order to

infer a degeneration of design from naturalistic on the left, to stylized on the right. In keeping with his sociocultural evolutionist training and inclinations, explanatory relationships across space and time are not considered as part of the comparison of forms.



Figure 7 An Ao Naga couple, with Balfour's shadow marked for cropping when printed. Northeast India, Nagaland, Yongyimti. Photograph by Henry Balfour, 1922. Image courtesy Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford (2004.136.67).

In addition to sketching Naga material culture, Balfour used a film camera, for example to record the elaborate decoration on the front of a building. Balfour's photography in Nagaland, however, was seriously marred, it seems either by a faulty viewfinder or his inability to use the camera correctly. Many of his negatives are poorly framed, meaning that the central subject matter is either too high in the frame or else is

at an angle.<sup>12</sup> Balfour has marked most of the affected negatives with crop lines to 'rescue' useable, or to eliminate extraneous, details, as in Figure 7, where in correcting the framing he also excludes the obvious shadow of the pith helmet he was wearing, and thereby also the colonial context of the image's production.

In other examples it is the framing or orientation that is corrected by crop lines, as in Figure 8, in which a group of women and children decorating hair are pictured. Notice how the crop lines (drawn in ink on the back of the film negative) suggest the removal of the woman to the left, partly due to the fact that what she is carrying on her back is not visible, but also because she is extraneous to the central subject of the image. As a new frame is drawn upon the image – instructing his photographic assistant at the museum on how to print it – a new set of spatial relationships between the subjects of the image is established, with its own pictorial relations in space and aesthetic and compositional desiderata.

With the establishment of a new drawn frame over a skewed camera frame, we feel the tensions inherent in what Deborah Poole has described as photography's 'excess of description' (Poole 2005) through Balfour's attempt to control the photographic distraction of things not properly represented at the photograph's edges. Whereas, with a drawing, Balfour chose what to represent without a surfeit of visual information

<sup>12</sup> Balfour's 1922 Nagaland negatives are 3.25 x 4.25 inch sized Kodak 124 film with mechanical frame number at the top, probably taken on a folding No. 3 Brownie camera. He probably bought this camera in 1905 (shortly after its launch) before his journey to South Africa, since his negatives from that trip are of the same size. It is possible that the Watson viewfinder became damaged during his Nagaland trip which led to framing problems. His 1928 negatives are 2.25 x 3.25 inch sized, again probably for a Kodak, possibly another Brownie or folding pocket Kodak.



Figure 8 A Konyak Naga family outside their home with girl having her hair ornamented (crop lines marked for printing). Northeast India, Nagaland, Shiong. Photograph by Henry Balfour, 1922. Image courtesy Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford (2004.136.71).

and context around it; the photograph had a central subject matter and yet was also visually 'noisy', unable, in the messy social and cultural setting of the fieldwork encounter, to exclude excessive descriptive information. We also get a new appreciation for the continuous working relationship between the artistically drawn and the photographically inscribed. Instead of seeing photography and drawing as either parallel methods or in antithetical competition within anthropology, Balfour, in particular, shows the way in which photography and sketching were starting points for the inscription of detail that could later move between technologies in their reproduction, display and dissemination.

Nowhere is this better illustrated than in Figure 9, where Balfour has drawn over a faded photograph to delineate the form of a woman using a hand-drill outside her hut. It is likely that Balfour has then used this to make a further copy of the drawn element, possibly in the museum

next to a bow drill. In this object the photograph's imperfect observation has been augmented with artistic delineation, a not uncommon procedure in the early days of trying to make use of poor field photography for display or publication. But Balfour has more than enhanced the photograph, he has traced over it fully to create an intermediate object between direct photographic recording in the field and its translation into published illustration, or the useful public display of an object's use and context in the museum. Here we see the actual reproductive procedure by which the nineteenth-century concept of illustration 'from a photograph' (Belknap 2016) was interpreted from an imperfect visual record, strengthening the lines of perception and understanding through the filter of 'trained judgment' (Daston and Galison 2007).





Figure 9 Poorly exposed photograph of a Naga or Manipuri person using a bow drill over which Henry Balfour has drawn. Photograph by Henry Balfour, 1922. Image courtesy Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford (1998.547.1).

### Kenya and Uganda, 1928

In June 1928 Balfour set off on a journey to Kenya and Uganda. He had previously passed through, several times, en route to South Africa, but this appears to have been his first significant visit, at the age of 65. As with his Naga trip of 1922, the trip seems to have been suggested by both long standing ethnographic interests and, more importantly, the existence of a colonial network to host and facilitate his travels and collecting activity. In contrast to his Naga journal, Balfour

has inserted photographs as well as drawings into his East African journal, probably some time after his return at the end of September. For instance he has pasted a photograph of the house of Oscar Watkins who hosted him whilst in Mombasa, as well as one showing the cove near the house. Above it is a sketch of a collared raven, which Balfour notes, in his diary, as plentiful in the area. On another page we see a photograph of his accommodation for the night at Whispers Farm, which belonged to Watkins's wife, a small

brick-built room with a thatched roof. Above it is a small drawing of an Africa woman's head, which Balfour describes in his diary for Sunday 22 July: 'Was rather intrigued by a black native nurse in nurse's uniform, + decorated with a very neat double row of small conical keloids across her forehead.' In both of these pages, as elsewhere in the journal, the use of photography and drawing mixes the registers of the snapshot of colonial life and the detailed description of ethnographic or ornithological observation. Balfour does not use drawing to record or illustrate the colonial social contexts of his visit, say by sketching his host's home – this function was conventionally performed by the snapshot photograph for the purposes of souvenir. As an ethnographer using drawing to graphically record data, rather than as an artist seeking to render the world around him artistically, the choice of which data-recording method to utilize is therefore a decision about the descriptive possibilities of each medium in any given situation. A good example of this is the inclusion of photographs of wildlife seen at a distance, pasted alongside sketches of two species of wildebeest as well as a hammerkop bird. As he was unable to get close enough for detailed photography, the photographs themselves do nothing other than authenticate the circumstances in which the animals were seen and the sketches made. On a page devoted to his encounter with flamingos at Lake Nakuru on 13 August, he notes 'I got pretty close to the birds + tried photographing them', but he supplements the photographs (in which the flamingos can barely be registered) with coloured drawings and two pasted-in feathers.

Balfour's interactions with African people were here, as elsewhere on his travels, facilitated by his various colonial hosts. On 25 July, for instance, we read that,

*After breakfast I went down to Deck's office + saw a number of Masai, some of whom I photo'd. Some were playing mancala. There were some very good types with fine features, others showing Kikuyu admixture ... A Meru youth was wearing through the left ear-lobe a cylindrical cigarette tin (for 50 cigarettes).*

Opposite this account are the photographs he mentions (Figure 10). The African men are all lined up for Balfour's camera, no doubt ordered to do so by Balfour's morning host, Deck, and his afternoon host, Hugo Lambert (a former student of Balfour's), at the veterinary surgery where the two groups pictured here were encountered. Next to the photographs is a sketch of how the Meru youth was wearing the cigarette tin in his ear, which Balfour subsequently copied and enlarged and which was at some time also affixed to the diary entry. In fact, Balfour also obtained the tin itself from the Meru youth – he doesn't say how – and it is today on display in the Pitt Rivers Museum alongside another such tin Balfour collected from a Nandi man, in a display case devoted to 'recycling', where another copy of the drawing is kept inside the tin.

Although much of Balfour's photography sets the context for his detailed drawn observations, such as the example of a Luo woman wearing a grass ornament set against views of the Victoria Nyanza, one very unusual sequence in Uganda shows the various stages in the making of a pot. Although the photographing of ritual or technological stages had become a well-established fieldwork practice by this time, Balfour's main focus seems to have been on the cross-cultural comparison of finished forms rather than on the technical processes of making objects themselves. For Balfour, the graphic depiction of process was mostly important as a demonstration of the operational context of

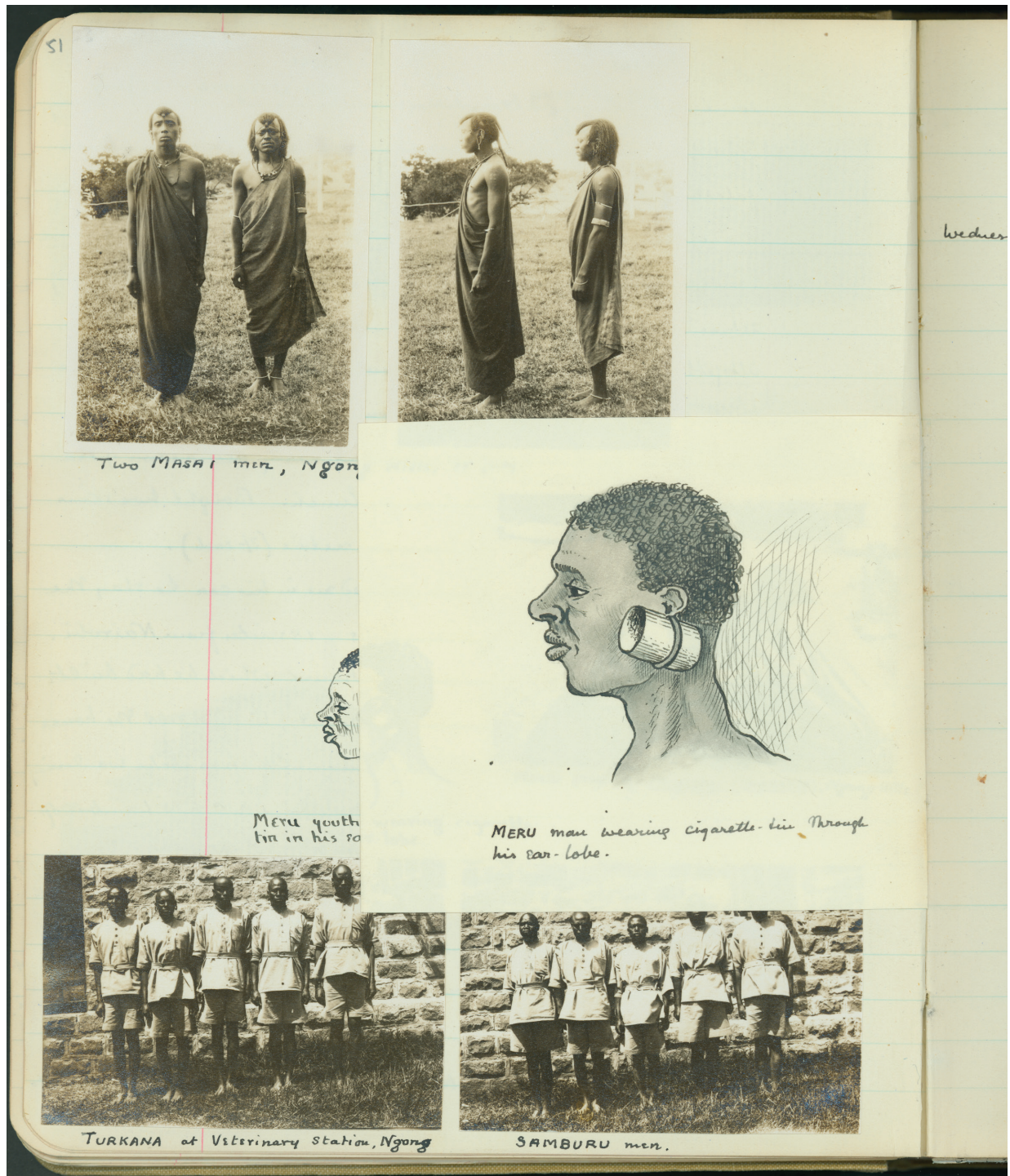


Figure 10 Page 51 from Balfour's 1928 Kenya and Uganda field journal. Pitt Rivers Museum Manuscript Collections, Balfour Papers, box 2, item 1. Image courtesy Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford (Image ref: Balf.1928Kenya&Ugan.51-R).

an object, rather than of its social or cultural embeddedness in a series or chain of processes of making.

The important connection between drawing and collecting objects is also evident in Balfour's East African journal. One page of drawings (Figure 11) shows a Nandi man with cicatrice designs on his face, a Nandi man wearing a roll of paper through an ear lobe, and a further profile portrait described as a 'Nandi murderer', with an elongated ear lobe and ornament. Balfour's two drawings, in colour, of ear pendants, alongside, were obviously drawn after he had collected them for the museum. He later mounted these pendants for museum display in a small glazed box along with a drawing showing the method of wearing them in the ear. The journal therefore documents the context of their acquisition and use in the field, and their accurate drawn description enabled the cross-checking of the collected object to its field documentation. Given that Balfour's long curatorial experience by this date had been of working with objects with little or no field description of their context of use or collection, this form of careful field documentation also acted as a methodological model within the museum, as I have already noted in the common cross-referencing between accessions volumes and Balfour's field-diary entries.

### **Anthropology, drawing and museum display**

There has been considerable recent theoretical interest in drawing and sketching within anthropology. For Tim Ingold, drawing provides the basis for a new 'graphic anthropology' with an emphasis on phenomenology, as elaborated in his edited volume *Redrawing Anthropology* (2011). Through drawing, observation is reconnected with participation, and with description, as it is an act of 'making' in which anthropology is

involved in knowledge processes rather than in imposing analytical structures on the world. In a like manner, Michael Taussig has sought to connect drawing to his long-standing interest in sympathetic magic, asserting a connection between drawing as a picture-making act and its hold over both the drawer and the viewer (Taussig 2011). Like Ingold, Taussig seeks to reclaim drawing as an anthropological way of connecting with and knowing the world, a way of making contact with things unknown and unarticulated, an 'incomplete translation'. Both anthropologists are indebted to the earlier work of John Berger, who drew attention to questions of temporality in drawing, in contradistinction to photography. Whereas drawing was an act of 'making', photography for Berger was conceived as an act of 'taking'; the former conceived as a line, and the latter as a frame. Taussig echoes this in his suggestion that drawing contains an intimacy missing from photography, a movement towards and into the subject. For Ingold also, the camera represents the opposite to the sort of gesture he is advocating; drawing for him is about knotting, meshing and gathering, whereas photography imposes an outside frame. Berger, in particular, introduces the concept of the 'trace' to describe the relationship between the photograph and its referent. For Berger, a drawing 'contains the time of its own making', independent of the time of its subject matter, whereas a photograph inscribes time so quickly that 'the only time contained in a photograph is the isolated instant of what it shows' (Berger and Mohr 1982:95). The particular temporality of the observer familiarizing her- or himself with the subject of observation has also been noted by Nasim in his study of drawn observation in the history of astronomical observation (Nasim 2013). 'Familiarization at this personal, visceral, and

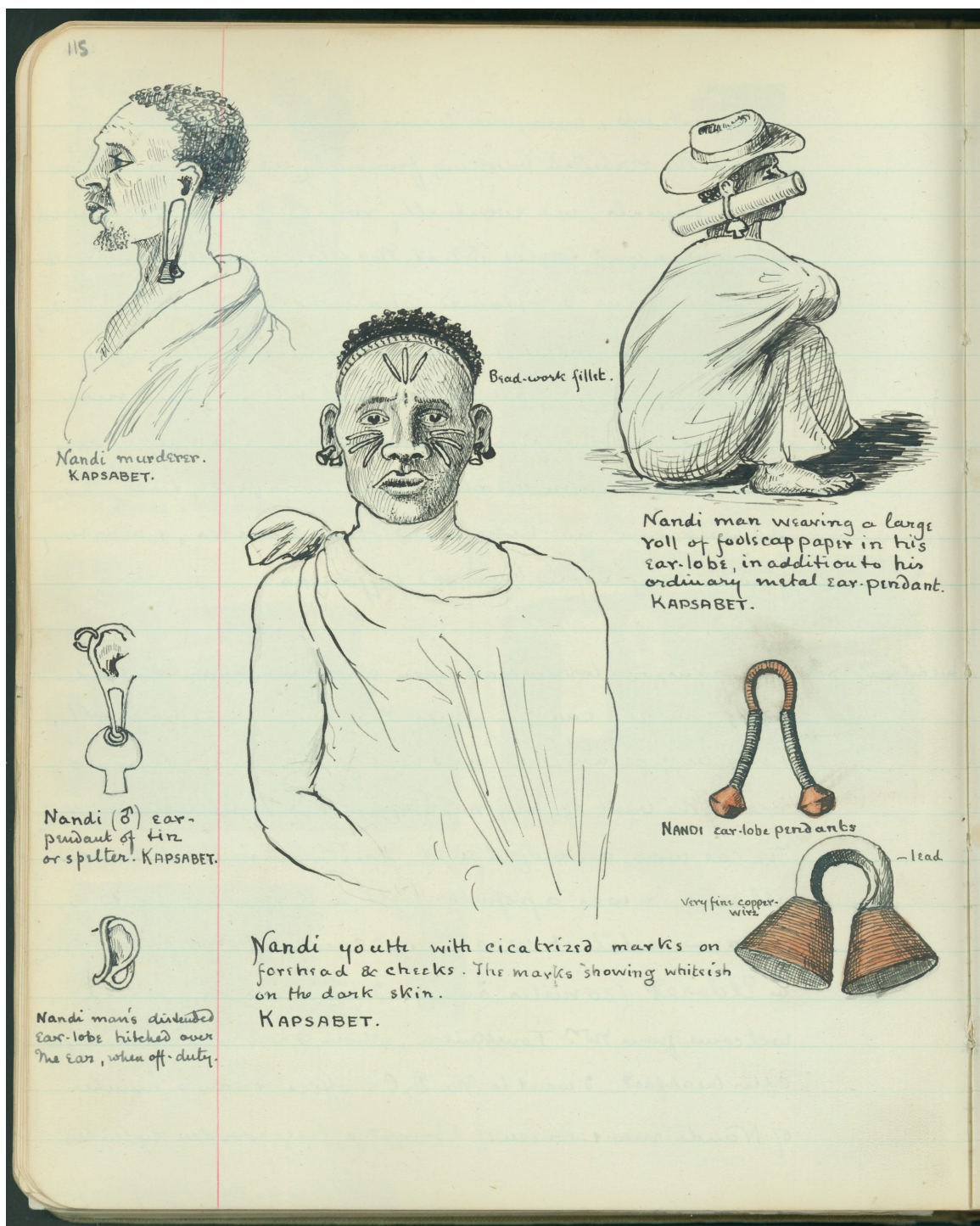


Figure 11 Page 115 from Balfour's 1928 Kenya and Uganda field journal. Pitt Rivers Museum Manuscript Collections, Balfour Papers, box 2, item 1. Image courtesy Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford (Image ref: Balf.1928Kenya&Ugan.115-R).

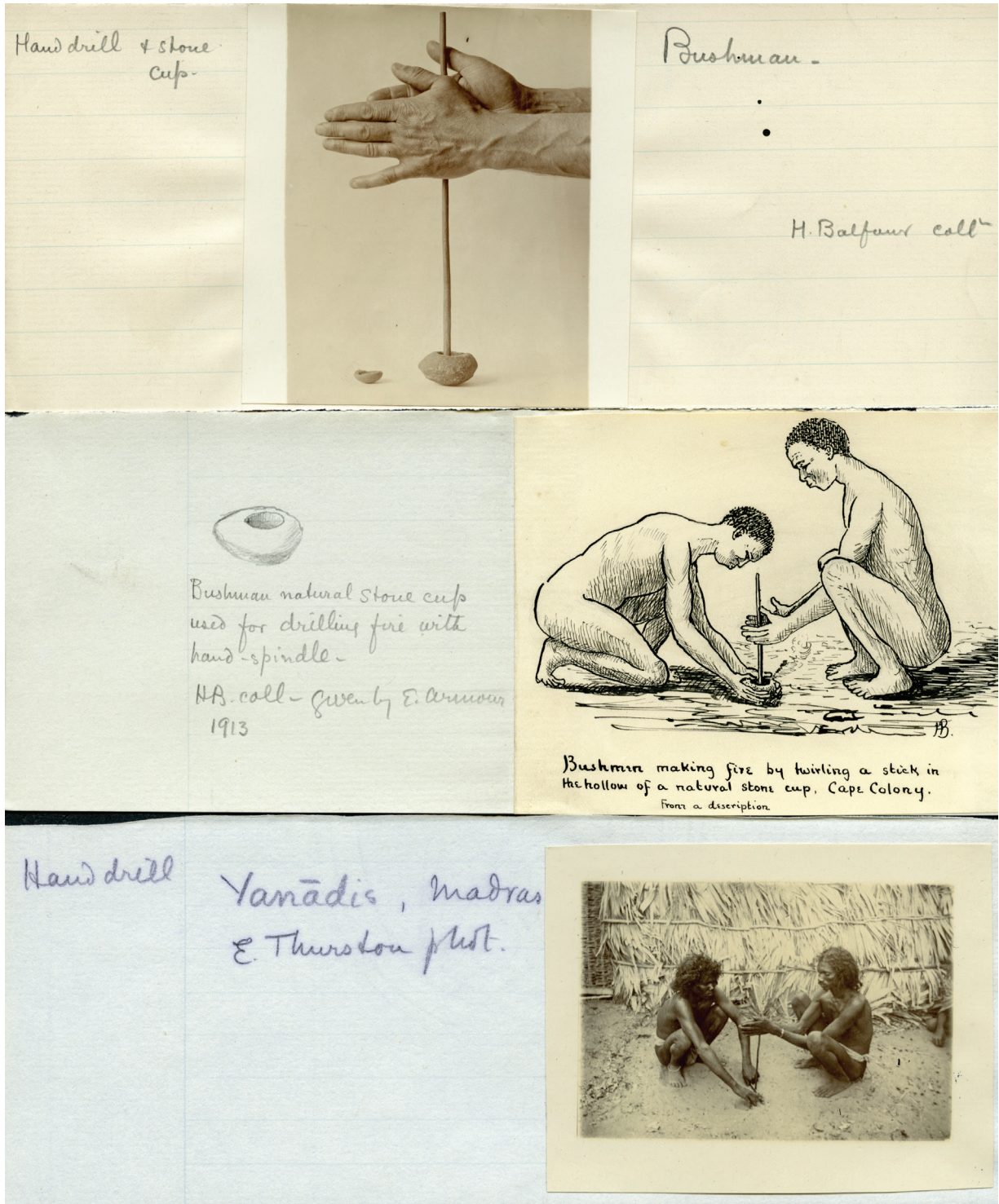


Figure 12 Three notes from Balfour's research file on hand drills. Pitt Rivers Museum Manuscript Collections, Balfour Papers, box 18, folder 2. Image courtesy Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

haptic level', notes Nasim, 'acquaints one (even in making one sketch) with what is being seen, with how to draw what is seen, and with an object's known, unknown, and challenging features.' (2013:16). Nasim offers a further important insight into the power of sketched observations in terms of their mutability as 'tools in the service of exploration, control, and perception', which distinguishes them from photographic representations (2013:10). Although photographs have an inherent mutability in their range of meanings, their relationship to processes of looking and visual translation are entirely distinct from drawing.

Although all of these theoretical frameworks are useful in approaching Balfour's use of drawing and photography, I have tried to suggest here that the fluidity that exists in his work, not just between acts of photographing and drawing, but also between the subsequent uses of the photographic and drawn object, means that any hard theoretical distinction between them is unproductive. As Grimshaw and Ravetz (2015) have rightly argued in their recent discussion of this issue in relation to filmmaking, any analytical separation between lens-based recording and drawing in anthropology ignores the historical fluidity between such practices. For Balfour, both drawing and photography shared descriptive possibilities. He might, for instance, use photography to illustrate the use of an artefact, yet combine this with field photographs, drawings and texts from a variety of sources: for example in his research on fire drills (Figure 12), in which a photograph is included of a San (Bushman) hand drill being operated by European hands, presumably in the museum, alongside a drawing of San men using a similar technique. However, the drawing was not drawn from life or from a photograph, but 'from a description', which also serves to highlight the

fluidity in Balfour's research between textual, drawn and photographed evidence.

There is then a tension in Balfour's practice, centred on the notion of copying. Whereas in his own research on the evolution of decorative art he proposed that the degeneration of natural forms into stylized variants may have been due to imperfect copying over time, he made frequent use of drawing to copy visual evidence from a variety of sources in order to make direct comparison. In a particularly striking example in his research papers (Figure 13), Balfour has redrawn examples of septum-piercing practices from sources including an engraving in a book by Friedrich Ratzel (top), a photograph of unknown provenance (bottom left) and a plate in a journal article by A.C. Haddon (bottom right). The diverse origins of this visual evidence are given equivalency and legitimacy through Balfour's 'trained judgment' in discerning the veracity and provenance of the information. By redrawing them and bringing these illustrations together on the same page, Balfour has used the potential for drawing to act as a highly mutable reproductive technology within the scientific framework of museum display.

Although the reproductive possibilities of photography were explored within the Pitt Rivers Museum to an extent in the early twentieth century, for instance in the creation of lantern slides for teaching or for producing prints of objects to share with other institutions and scholars, and although Balfour was an active collector and arranger of photographic archives for research (Morton 2012), he was much more likely to rely on his own hand to reproduce visual evidence and to illustrate the use of museum artefacts in the public space of the museum. This is not to say that Balfour was not cognisant of scientific concern with artistic bias when it came to anthropological evidence,

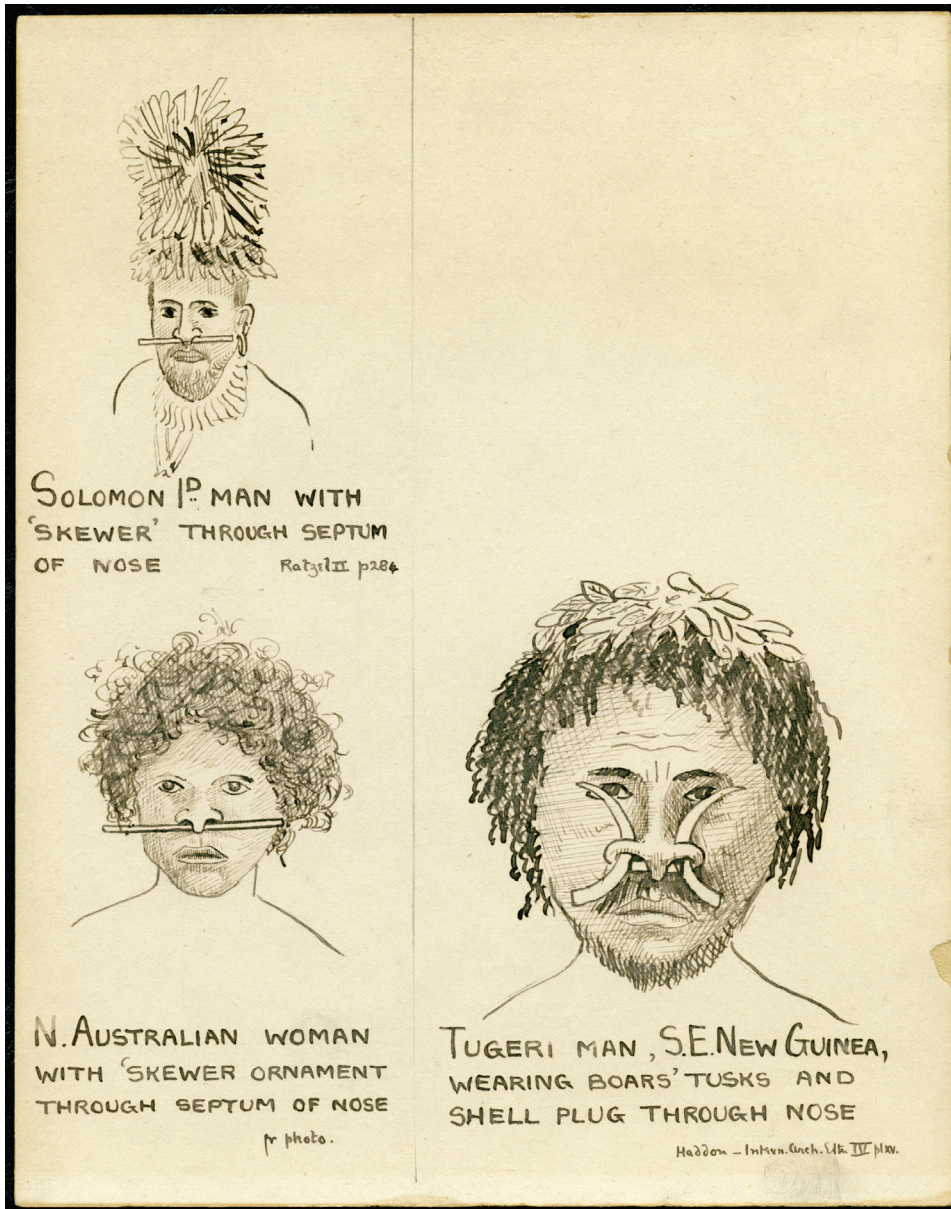


Figure 13 Sheet from Balfour's research notes on varieties of septum piercings. Pitt Rivers Museum Manuscript Collections, Pitt Rivers Museum Papers, box 9, folder 1, item 7. Image courtesy Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

indeed he was always careful to provenance the sources of his illustrations so that they might be checked, if necessary. And if his source was in itself an engraved illustration or drawn from life, the question for Balfour would have been the scientific reputation of the author. During 1931–2 Balfour and his assistant undertook a project to create a systematic archive of the museum's

photographs that could be interrogated both thematically and geographically (see Morton 2012). Curiously though, despite more than 600 prints and negatives existing in the collection attributed to him and dating to before this project, Balfour seems to have included less than 40 of his own prints, and around half of these were from his very recent 1930 trip to Nigeria.



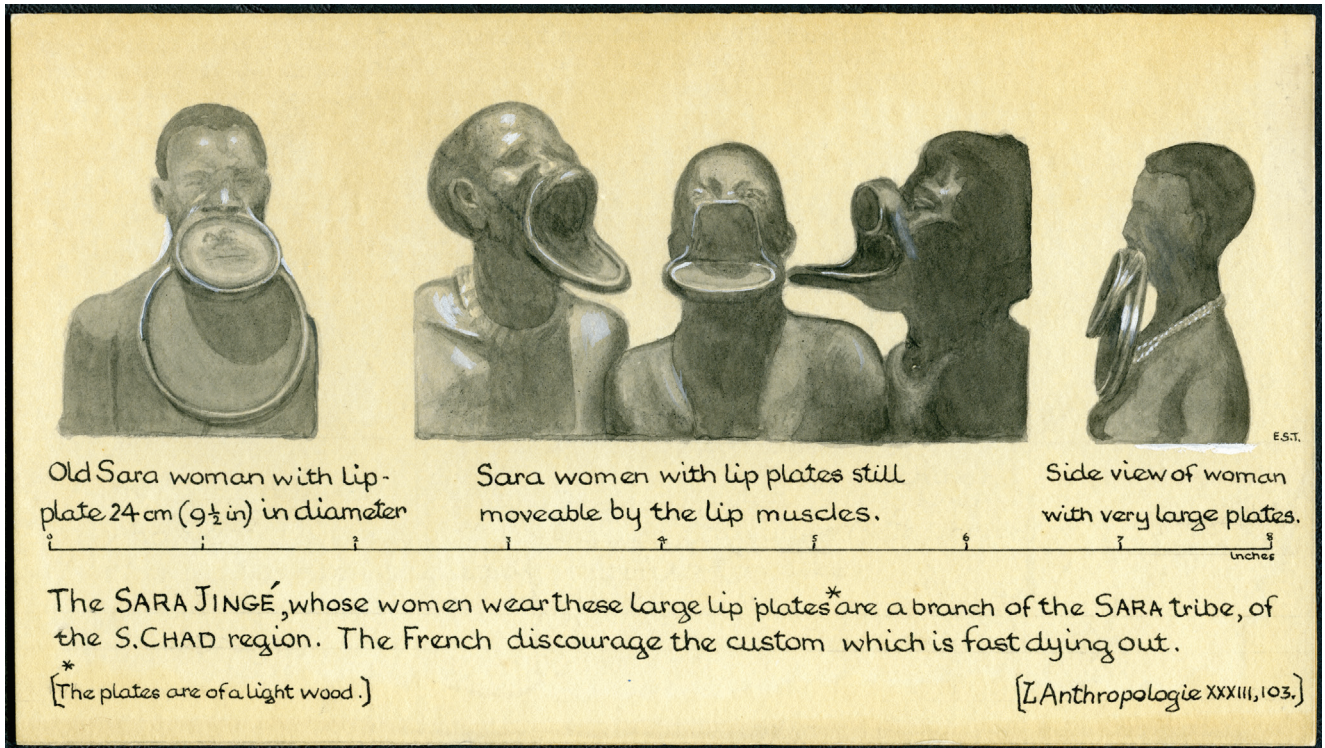


Figure 14 Illustration mounted on card by E.S. Thomas with notes by H. Balfour of Sara Kabba women from Chad wearing lip plugs, derived from three plates published in the journal *L'Anthropologie* in 1923 (Muraz and Getzowa, 1923). Pitt Rivers Museum Manuscript Collections, Pitt Rivers Museum Papers, box 9, folder 1, item 5. Image courtesy Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

It is unclear why he included so few these in the museum's archival series, but it is consistent with the relatively little attention he paid to his photographs, in comparison to his object collections. Although some of his photographs were pasted into his journals, many negatives and prints only came to light much later, occasionally among the papers of colleagues who had presumably borrowed them for research.<sup>13</sup> Occasionally, Balfour relies solely on the reputation

of the journal as a public source of information, and his museum illustrations explicitly retain the photographic nature of the original. In one striking example (executed by Balfour's museum assistant E.S. Thomas) (Figure 14), a composite of three images derived from plates published by Gaston Muraz and Sophie Getzowa in 1923 in the journal *L'Anthropologie* are brought together, along with a scale in inches and a text caption by Balfour (Muraz and Getzowa 1923). It is almost certain that this illustration was once placed in a vitrine alongside a pair of wooden lip plugs from Chad donated by the French administrator

<sup>13</sup> Balfour's collection of more than 200 negatives and prints from his 1922 Nagaland trip, for instance, only returned to the Pitt Rivers in 1997 when the museum purchased a collection of papers relating to Heinrich Meinhard (1900–75), a German émigré who began working at the museum in 1938 and who subsequently taught at Newcastle University.

Jules Marcel de Coppet in 1929.<sup>14</sup> In doing so, an evidential equivalence is being made between photographic, artistic and material modes of representation, a theme which runs right through Balfour's museum practice.

## Conclusion

Whilst sketching from photographs meant that Balfour could release the illustrative possibilities of an image from its particular temporal and contextual existence in a photograph for use in the museum space, he would also use the reproducibility of photographic technology to make copies of drawings, and by so doing interconnect their graphic possibilities still further. As I have argued in relation to Balfour's overdrawn photograph (Figure 9), any hard distinction between 'making' and 'taking', drawing and photography, is not one that Balfour would necessarily have recognized. His training in the natural sciences in the 1880s involved drawn observation as a key tool for accurately recording data. As a reviewer of the book *Photography of Bacteria* wrote in 1887, 'The time has not yet come when [photographs] can be said to have supplanted good and accurate drawings' (quoted in Tucker 2014:394), a position that Balfour would have readily understood. Although debates around the subjectivity and accuracy of artistically recording ethnographic information would not have been unknown to him, his own training and inclinations did not set theoretical obstacles between the observation and its record. Instead, both frequently came together in what I have described in this article as the graphicalization of description: the way in which information might move between texts

and drawings from life, or from descriptions or photographs, or from published engravings from drawings or photographs, from photographs from the field, of drawings or of engravings, and from lantern slides of drawings and photographs for teaching. The permutations of reproductive interchange between these media increased dramatically from the 1880s onwards, and Balfour's comparative approach to the study of material culture meant that the copying and reproduction of visual data was an important process of categorizing, sorting, archiving and formulating an argument. What took precedence in the fluid interchange between photography or drawing in the field, or indeed copying from published sources for museum interpretation, was the 'trained judgment' of the skilled worker in selecting authoritative data from trusted sources. Balfour acknowledges this in the work already cited, *Spinners and Weavers in Anthropological Research*, where he admits that:

*Great responsibility is thrown upon the anthropological 'weaver', who must needs be a skilled and broad-minded craftsman, and also a person of discernment, who can select and test for strain resistance and soundness the yarns which are supplied to him by the 'spinners'.*

*(Balfour 1938: 8)*

As I have discussed in relation to Balfour's 1920s field notebooks and journals in Nagaland and East Africa, Balfour's preference for the sort of close observation required for drawing involved a particular temporality suited to his research training and approach. As Berger noted, drawing contains its own time during which the observer re-makes the object of observation whilst the photograph instantiates only the act of taking the image. This is of course why the camera would become such a prolific tool of

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14 Pitt Rivers Museum accession number 1929.50.1. As of 2017 this pair of lip plugs was still on display in the museum's Lower Gallery in the body arts display (case 39A).

delayed observation, of observation after the event when field images might be scrutinized as a visual notebook long after fieldwork. In this sense, Balfour was typical of his generation of anthropologists. For instance, the following description from the fieldwork journal of A.C. Haddon on Mabuiag Island in 1888 reveals a very similar method to that of Balfour:

*They are greatly pleased when I show them pictures of books – or in my sketch books or rough prints of my photographs of themselves... Descriptions of 'get-up' for dances, etc. are elucidated by my making rough sketches of a man and then filling up in detail by degrees and great is their delight when the totality is before them. Sometimes I get them to take the pencil and fill in details themselves.*

(Haddon 1888:47–8)

Haddon's combined use of drawing and photography thus has many parallels with Balfour's approach, although it differs in respect to the depth of interactions with local informants surrounding such representations. As Philp notes, Haddon's photographs 'were thus part of a work in progress rather than a final representation' (2004:95), a process that I have similarly described above in relation to the fluidity between media in Balfour's museum practice. As Geismar notes in her analysis of Bernard Deacon's drawing in Vanuatu in the 1920s, 'sketching, like photography, can be understood not just as a depiction of bodies, but as an embodied way of knowing that contributes to a sense of scale or positioning during fieldwork.' (Geismar 2014:105). It is important to remind ourselves therefore that the act of sketching enfolded within itself important fieldwork temporalities and practices of looking, observing, positioning, engaging and interrogating the world. Balfour's training was as a natural scientist who brought

a keen interest in animal morphology to the 'anatomy' of material culture. As an intellectual product of 1880s Oxford, Balfour was typical in the scientific equivalency he gave to textual, drawn and photographic data, and the fluidity with which he moved between them. In this way he was typical of the period. Franz Boas's letters from the field in north-western Canada, for instance, contain occasional glimpses of the way in which drawing and the ethnographer's embodied experience of fieldwork interrelated, when he notes in November 1886 that he 'used the day for drawing, which, because of the cold, is no longer a very pleasant occupation' (Rohner 1969:59). For Balfour and his contemporaries then, a field photograph was just as likely to be the source for a clearly drawn illustration, without the distracting noise of its historical time and place of creation, as it was an authoritative account of what had once been witnessed by the camera. In the typological museum, history was a potential problem after all, as objects were offered for comparison across both time and space within the same vitrine and within a mostly ahistorical framework of either evolutionary change or the hybridization of ideas (Balfour's main departure from Pitt-Rivers's schema). By liberating the principal subject of a photograph from history through the practice of drawing, Balfour was able to bring both material objects and illustrations of their context and use together within the evolutionary schema of the museum's displays, in a way that photographs would tend to undermine through their very particular inscription in time and place.

### **Acknowledgment**

This essay was first presented at the study day 'Sur le vif: méthodes et pratiques de terrain', part of the project 'Photographie et dessin en

anthropologie (1900–1950)', organized by Camille Joseph and Anaïs Mauuarin, at the Institut national d'histoire de l'art, Paris, 8 April 2016. I would like to thank the organizers of the workshop for their assistance and initiative in arranging a study day on such an interesting topic, one which prompted this research. I would also like to thank the peer reviewers for their useful suggestions. A French version of this paper (translated by Camille Joseph) was published as 'La description graphique. Dessins et photographies dans les carnets de terrain et le travail de conservateur de Henry Balfour', *Gradhiva*, Vol. 27, 2018.

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**ISSN 2397-1754**

**ISBN 978-0-900632-52-5**

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