

Enfolding History: Identities, Performances and Contexts in an Early Ethnographic Album from Natal, South Africa

Christopher Morton

To cite this article: Christopher Morton (2023) Enfolding History: Identities, Performances and Contexts in an Early Ethnographic Album from Natal, South Africa, History of Photography, 47:3, 185-202, DOI: [10.1080/03087298.2024.2366048](https://doi.org/10.1080/03087298.2024.2366048)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03087298.2024.2366048>



© 2024 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 28 Jun 2024.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 503



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Enfolding History: Identities, Performances and Contexts in an Early Ethnographic Album from Natal, South Africa

Christopher Morton 

Email for correspondence:
christopher.morton@prm.ox.ac.uk

The histories of anthropology and photography are closely entwined, and nowhere more so than in southern Africa, where new European settler colonies emerged at around the same time as technology transformed people's ability to represent the places and people they encountered. This article explores the early ethnographic photography of the settler colony of Natal, South Africa, through the identities and contexts of one mid-1860s album. The article reveals a rich and burgeoning photographic culture in the colony, with numerous practitioners creating and copying images of African people for a variety of colonial audiences. One hitherto overlooked photographer in particular emerges from this story, who I here argue was probably the resident border agent Capt. Joshua Walmsley, whose racial 'type' images of Natal Africans were collected and published in many European scientific circles in the period. The album thereby constitutes what might be described as an incunabulum of the nascent sub-discipline of visual anthropology, a document that enfolds many interrelated histories that help us understand how European anthropology came to visually create its subject.

Keywords: *South Africa; KwaZulu-Natal; carte de visite; ethnographic photography; visual anthropology*

This article explores the early photography of African people from Natal, South Africa, through the prism of an album compiled in the mid 1860s. Much about the album, its compiler and its contexts remains unclear. Yet it is an object that enfolds within its pages a layered set of local contexts and colonial histories that we might understand, if we let them speak and if we listen.¹ What this article seeks to do is reveal the historical evidence that exists, put forward a case for its provenance, photographers and immediate social contexts, and to argue for its significance as one of the most important early photographic documents from Natal, one of significant importance to both the history of South African photography as well as the sub-discipline of visual anthropology. In the context of studies on South African photography, the nineteenth century is relatively less studied than the momentous twentieth. Yet it is in the mid nineteenth century where so many of the social and political roots of the colonial project that shaped subsequent history are to be found, and photography was deeply implicated in its methods of racial

1 – See Tina M. Campt, *Listening to Images* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017).



categorisation, expression and articulation. As the scholar Patricia Hayes has argued, 'in southern Africa in the late nineteenth century, photography is related to the history of exploration, colonization, knowledge production and captivity'.² The album discussed here is a material and visual trace of this troubled history. Yet to reduce it to its colonial and oppressive dimensions would be to deny the agency of the local African people who populate its images, to deny alternative readings of the album and to deny ways of reclaiming it as an object of African heritage.³ The article presents new findings about the album's photographic contexts in Natal, as a product of complex settler/African relations in the period, as well as its kinship to a wider visual discourse on the African population of Natal in late nineteenth-century anthropological literature. The article also explores its genealogical relationship with performances of the same images in other ethnographic collections in Europe and South Africa, showing how the reproduction, dissemination and recontextualisation of early ethnographic photography formed part of a lively debate on South African identities within European scholarly and colonial circles.

The Natal Album

In the collections of the Pitt Rivers Museum at the University of Oxford, UK is a small, leather-bound album, with fifty gold-framed arched window apertures for the insertion of cartes de visite.⁴ All fifty of these windows have photographs inserted into them, and all but two of them represent Natal African people, mostly of the Durban locality, the other two images being portraits of Indian subjects. On the first page is an ink inscription that reads 'Arthur Spring, Natal, S. Africa, 1865'. The inscription, along with two others that are dated 1866 elsewhere in the album, allows us to date the compilation of the album reasonably accurately to this time period, and the photographs thereby represent the work of some of the earliest practitioners of the carte de visite format in Natal.

On every page of the album, Spring has added captions in pencil above the window mount. Most of these captions repeat heavily stereotyped and racist views of the local Natal African population, including how they earned money from colonial settlers, and stereotypes of their cultural and racial characteristics. The hierarchical and reductive attitudes of European settlers towards the local African population is exemplified in Spring's caption to one studio photograph of a young African man (figure 1), in which he comments that such young men are 'knowing and impudent rascals generally'. This comment, along with several others in the album, seemingly arises from Spring's characterisation of the youth's pose, square to the camera, with hands on hips; a confident and assertive pose that Spring, and no doubt many of his contemporaries, read as potentially threatening. Nearly every caption in the Spring album also contains the historical, and now extremely offensive, K- word then used by settlers for the Natal African population. I return to the question of how the photographs present ethnicity, and the complexity of doing so in this period, later in this article. The captions that address colonial views on race often focus on the way male and female subjects aged – a common colonial preoccupation – for example, 'Old married man, as old as they are generally to be found'. Yet in amongst these highly stereotyped captions are the two that are signed and dated by Spring, and which bear more personal statements. The first is a full-length portrait of a young man photographed against a plain backdrop, with the caption 'Natal servant, a nurse – nursed and brought up one of my children. Arthur Spring, 1866' (figure 2). The second is a studio portrait of two Indian men, with the caption 'Calcutta c-s imported to Natal. These were two of my servants – Arthur Spring, 1866'. These two captions insert personal relationships into an

2 – Patricia Hayes, 'Power, Secrecy, Proximity: A Short History of South African Photography', *Kronos: Journal of Cape History*, 33, no. 1 (2007), 139–62 (141).

3 – For a discussion of the reductionist tendencies of such analyses in their denial of local agency and power, see Christopher Morton and Elizabeth Edwards (eds), *Photography, Anthropology and History: Expanding the Frame* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 3.

4 – The dimensions of the closed album are 15 cm (height) by 12 cm (width). Catalogue records and images of all photographs in the Spring album can be found in the Pitt Rivers Museum's online collections <<https://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/collections-online>>, using the search 1998.67*.

Figure 1. Page of the Arthur Spring album, showing inscription and carte de visite of a Natal African youth by Fry & Co. of Durban, early 1860s. Courtesy Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, UK [1998.67.21].



album of otherwise socially distanced 'types', placing the subjects and the compiler within a social network that speaks to early settler/African relations in Natal in the mid 1860s. They also raise questions about the photographs: did Spring commission these portraits of his servants? Did they have their portrait taken to send to family in India, and give Spring a copy?

The portrait of the nurse does not seem to be a studio portrait, but one of a series of physical type photographs in the album, more about which later. So, the perhaps unanswerable question remains how Spring's nurse ended up as the subject of such a photograph. Did Spring offer him to a photographer as a subject for a physical type image? Another studio portrait of two men from Madras also contains an inscription in Tamil script on the mount card, which has been suggested may give the two names of the men (figure 3).⁵ The fact that it is annotated in Tamil gives us pause to consider an intended Indian audience. Was this inscription written by one of the men, who then gave the photograph to Spring? If so, it speaks to a dynamic photographic culture in mid 1860s Durban, in which not just European settlers participated.

Biographical information about the compiler of the album, Arthur Spring, remains sketchy. He is noted in the list of settlers that arrived in Natal before 1857, and indeed we know he was there by 1854 since he married Caroline Hunt (the

5 – It has been suggested that the Tamil script reads 'Morso' and 'Potle', possibly the personal names of the two men pictured.

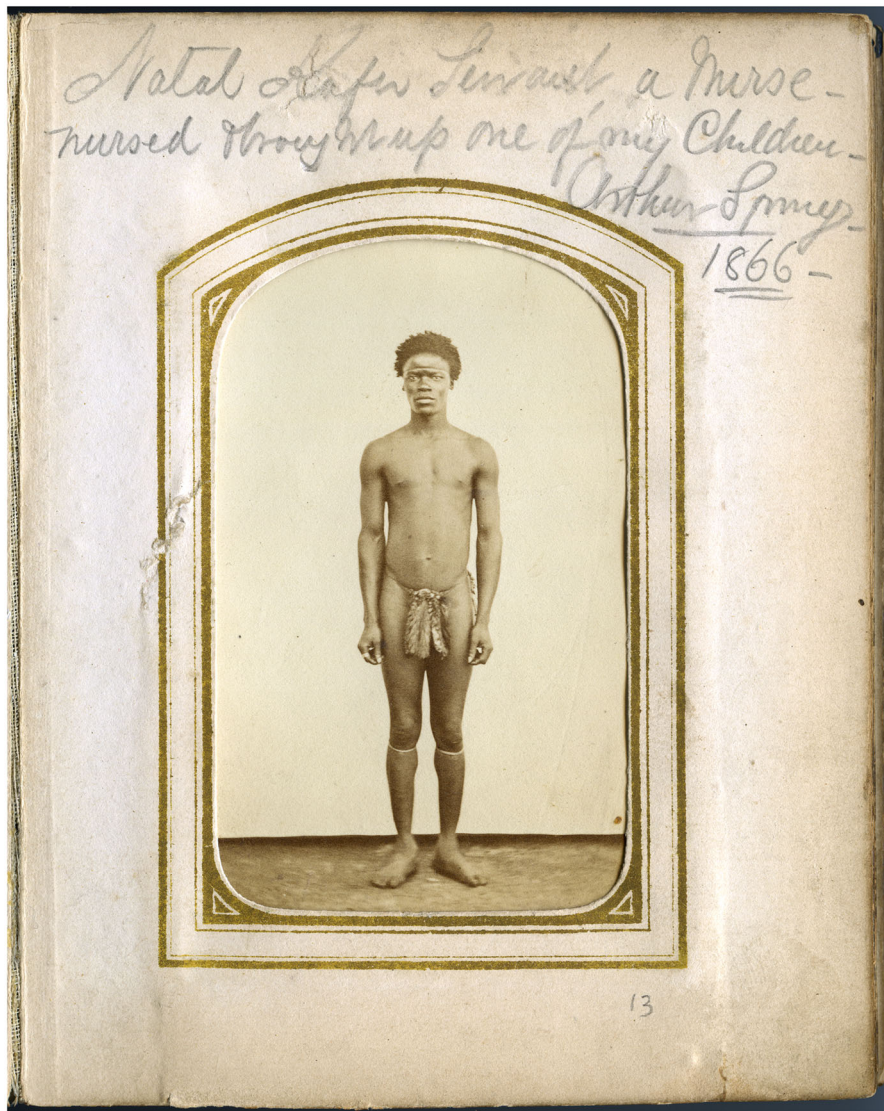


Figure 2. Page from the Arthur Spring album, showing dated inscription and carte de visite of a Natal African man by Joshua Walmsley, early 1860s. Courtesy Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, UK [1998.67.13].

daughter of John Hunt, a Durban timber merchant and later Mayor of Durban 1865–66) in September 1854. His occupation is then noted as ‘Gentleman’ (having a private income), but by 1856, on the birth of their daughter Caroline Elizabeth Spring, he is noted as a clerk in the Commissariat Department, this being a civilian organisation funded by the British Treasury to provide non-military supplies to the British army. In 1858 he had risen to Commissariat Officer, as noted on the birth certificate of their daughter Fanny Rebecca Spring. However, by 1863, on the birth of their son Arthur Hunt Spring, he is noted as a ‘Gentleman’ once more, seemingly having resigned his Commissariat position. Arthur Spring is also recorded as having in 1861 joined the freemason Port Natal Lodge, established in Durban in 1858. All of these details come from original public records, but aside from this, little else is currently known. Spring does feature in a family tree on the genealogical website Geni, where his dates are given as 1832–1930, but no source for this information is noted. What can be said on the basis of what we do know is that Spring was most likely a middle-class Englishman of some, although limited, private means on arrival in Durban, and that he made a favourable marriage into the

Figure 3. Carte de visite from the Arthur Spring album, with Tamil script below print on mount, early 1860s. Spring's caption reads: 'Madras c-s imported to Natal'. Courtesy Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, UK [1998.67.42].



family of successful merchants who would later form the timber and construction company Hunt, Leuchars and Hepburn. With employment in the Commissary office, membership of the masonic lodge and a father-in-law as mayor, Arthur Spring seems to have become a well-known and well-connected member of Durban society in the 1850s and 1860s. This is also reflected in his having the means to seek out and assemble a substantial collection of cartes de visite of African subjects into an album, to showcase to friends and relations his knowledge of, and personal relations with, the local African population.

The Arrival of Photography in Natal

As soon as the daguerreotype process was launched upon the world in 1839 and its first practitioners began business, photography spread quickly to settler communities around the world. South Africa was no exception to this phenomenon, with the Parisian Jules Léger taking the first daguerreotype photographs in South Africa in Gqeberha (Port Elizabeth) and Grahamstown in 1846 on his way back to France from India, for any sitters willing to pay one pound ten shillings for a likeness.⁶ Another daguerrotypist, Carel Sparmann, was advertising at the same time as Léger, but in Cape Town. From 1849, some calotypists – using the negative-positive process developed by W. H. Fox Talbot – also began commercial photography in Cape Town, such as A. W. Roghe, a German emigrant from Frankfurt.

Of most relevance to the Spring album, however, is the development and popularity of the carte de visite print format in South Africa. The South African press had begun to note its popularity in England from 1857, as a new fashionable form of visiting card. Yet it was the 1860 publication of a Royal Album of cartes de visite by J. E. Myall that led to the growth of the market for this photographic format as a collectable, and its popularity was just as fervent at the colonial periphery. The carte de visite phenomenon had begun a few years earlier in France with André Disderi's 1854 patent for a camera that could expose eight 6 cm by 9 cm exposures onto a single wet collodion plate. The first carte de visite camera seems to have been used by Frederick York of Cape Town, but it was his business successor Arthur Green who first used it commercially. In the several years following, carte de visite photographers quickly emerged in many other South Africa towns. Importantly, this cheaper format was now affordable to many more people than earlier processes, and stories were rife in the local newspapers of unscrupulous practitioners producing inferior products. Many businesses began to include photography as a sideline to their main trade, such as chemists and jewellers, hoping to cash in on the huge demand for collectable photographs. Much of their business was producing affordable portraits, but they would also copy existing photographs into the new carte de visite format for people to share widely and collect, which is most likely what we see in large parts of the Spring album.

6 – See Marjorie Bull and Joseph Denfield, *Secure the Shadow: The Story of Cape Photography from its Beginning to the End of 1870* (Cape Town: Terence McNally, 1970).

The Carte de Visite Photographers in the Album

Of the known photographers represented in the album, among the most well represented (fourteen prints) were produced by Benjamin William Caney (1842–95), who moved from England to Durban in the late 1850s, founded a jewellery store in 1860 and opened a new three-storey building including a photographic studio in 1865, the same year as the album's compilation. B. W. Caney, and two of his brothers who also emigrated to Durban, came from a family in which photography was already practised, their father William having been a watchmaker and studio photographer in Lincolnshire, England, in the 1850s. Another fourteen photographs are mounted on cartes de visite stamped as Fry & Co. of Smith Street, Durban, but another two show the same women and so can be confidently attributed to this studio. The fact that they were being sold by Fry & Co. is not evidence that the studio took the photographs – they may have been obtained by the company with permission, and sometimes without permission, to reproduce and sell. A further three cartes de visite bear the stamp of William Bowman of Pietermaritzburg on the reverse, although the fact that he was still selling his stock of Brock & Bowman photographs in 1865 is attested to since the word 'Brock' has a line drawn through on the reverse of one carte de visite and the word '& Co.' added – Bowman was in

business with James Saumarez Brock for a brief period in 1863–64 in Pietermaritzburg.

Also represented in the album are five vignetted portraits of African subjects, by an unidentified photographer. The subjects (all men) are pictured in a similar manner, seated, showing an unclothed upper body and facing the camera, and several of them seem to have been taken outside. Whilst it is not known who took these portraits, they are consistent with an ethnographic style of African portraiture exemplified in the work of Gustav Fritsch, who took more than two hundred portraits of southern Africans during a tour of the region in 1863–65.⁷ As research into the early history of photography in the region develops, more examples of such portraiture by colonial settlers who practised photography are emerging, such as the portraits of R. J. Mann, a doctor and then Superintendent of Education in Natal until 1866, who took similar vignetted portraits of African subjects at around the same time.⁸

7 – See Keith Dietrich and Andrew Bank (eds), *An Eloquent Picture Gallery: The South African Portrait Photographs of Gustav Theodor Fritsch, 1863–1865* (Johannesburg, South Africa: Jacanda Media, 2008).

8 – See Jeff Guy, 'IMIFANEKISO: An Introduction to the Photographic Portraits of Dr R. J. Mann', *Safundi*, 15, nos 2–3 (2014), 155–78.

Identifying the Grey Blanket Photographer

Seven photographs in the Spring album are of particular interest. These cartes de visite carry no stamp on the front or reverse and so are unlikely to have been sold by a studio but have possibly been copied in this format by one. With their distinctive deployment of a plain (possibly grey) blanket on which the African subjects stand or sit, and a blank white backdrop, the 'grey blanket photographer' is without doubt an individual making images in the 1860s informed by anthropologically informed ideas of racial 'type' photography. The figures are single portraits mostly, occasionally in pairs, and arranged by the photographer to show some stereotypical activity, such as fighting, taking snuff, eating, holding spears or carrying babies. A number of the same images, and more besides, also feature in an album (Album 167) in the National Library of South Africa in Cape Town and are recorded as having been 'presented by the late Capt. Walmsley' (handwritten note at top of page 39). This crucial piece of documentation, along with the fact that nearly all the images deposited by Walmsley in Cape Town are in the same style with backdrop and blanket floor covering, leads me to conclude that this photographer was very probably Capt. Joshua Walmsley (1819–72), the eldest son of the businessman and Liberal politician Sir Joshua Walmsley of Liverpool (figure 4). Walmsley served in the army in Natal and subsequently became the colony's Resident Border Agent at Chantilly near the border with Zululand on the Thukela River, on land seemingly owned by his father. Walmsley's home is mentioned in a book published for new settlers to the colony, where it is noted that:

Chantilly, the property of Sir Joshua Walmsley, and the residence of the redoubtable Border Agent, Capt. Walmsley. A lovely spot is this; with the river running down a forest-clad valley, over a rocky bed, on one side, and with hills besprinkled by umbrageous forest trees on the other. The gallant occupant keeps up some little state here, and has quite a retinue of henchmen and well-disciplined followers ... A strict surveillance of the border does Capt. Walmsley maintain, as many a trader and refugee can testify.⁹

9 – John Robinson, *Natal: An Old Colonist's Book for New Settlers* (Durban: Robinson & Vause, 1872), 50.

When the contents of Album 167 in Cape Town were transferred at some later date to newer albums, a note was added that they were 'presented by Capt. HM Walmsley' – Joshua Walmsley's brother, Hugh Mulleneux Walmsley (1822–82). This brother served in the British and Ottoman armies in India, before returning to England in the mid 1850s, when he began to write books. His only real connection to South Africa is that he published a book based on his younger brother Joshua's



Figure 4. William Daniels, 'Portrait of Captain Joshua Walmsley', 1848. © Victoria & Albert Museum, UK [370-1872].

South African experiences, *The Ruined Cities of Zululand* (London: Chapman and Hall), in 1869.¹⁰ Joshua Walmsley himself is mentioned in several published accounts of military interactions with the Zulu population from the 1850s onwards due to his close connection with one of the most extraordinary characters of this period, John Dunn, a European settler who had been raised mostly among the local African community and who was in 1879 to play a critical role as intermediary between the British and the Zulu king Cetshwayo kaMpande (ca. 1826–84). Dunn and his wife Catherine had been married as teenagers and were living a precarious life in Zululand before meeting Walmsley, who suggested that they come and live with him and his wife Maria. Several years later in December 1856, Walmsley and Dunn attempted to intervene on the side of Mbuyazi in his succession battle against Cetshwayo at Ndondakasuka, but their tiny retinue could do nothing to prevent a massacre. A story published much later relates that Walmsley found an abandoned baby following his retreat from the battle, who he and his wife decided to adopt. Raised by the Walmsleys, the girl they named Nomanzi decided to marry a Zulu

10 – Hugh Mulleneux Walmsley rose to the Ottoman rank of colonel and described himself as such in the 1871 census: 'Ret. Colonel Ottoman Ind. Corps, late 65th Foot'. Information from <<https://williamgray101.wordpress.com>>

11 – See J. C. Van der Walt, *Zululand True Stories*, 5th edn (Natal: privately published, 2011).

12 – See Grey Ethnological Album (Album 167), references 14211–50, National Library of South Africa, Cape Town.

13 – It is perhaps interesting to note here that Walmsley's membership was of the more racially obsessed, polygenic ASL rather than the more scientifically heavyweight Ethnological Society of London, which may perhaps have informed his photographic method.

14 – Bentley Glass, 'Eighteenth-century Concepts of the Origin of Species', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 104, no. 2 (1960), 227–34 (228).

15 – Walmsley's map was later disparagingly remarked upon as 'of little value [...] appears to be little more than a fancy sketch' by W. J. Turner. Quoted in E. C. Rye, 'Books and Memoirs on Zululand', *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society and Monthly Record of Geography*, 1, no. 3 (1879), 201–205 (205).

man named Sifile, who paid Walmsley twenty head of cattle as a bride-price. It is said that Walmsley left the couple thirty-two head of cattle on his death.¹¹

Album 167 in Cape Town contains around forty cartes de visite associated with Walmsley, many single or paired portraits, using a blanket floor covering with white canvas backdrop, or next to a fence, and all of Natal African subjects. Some of the portraits are upper body portraits of seated men, in typical ethnographic 'type' format.¹² Aside from Walmsley's documented association with this album, there are a number of other convincing pieces of evidence that also point to his role as the photographer. Firstly, as already noted, the portraits are all taken outdoors, with the use of a blank backdrop and a ground blanket. This style of portraiture has distinctly scientific overtones, and indeed Walmsley was elected a Fellow of the Anthropological Society of London (ASL) in November 1867. As a member of this learned society, he would have been familiar with anthropological discussion at the time about how best to obtain photographs that would be of value to scientists.¹³ By the mid nineteenth century, the idea of the 'type' portrait, whether photographic or artistically drawn 'from life', referred to an image that was of an individual and yet represented the generally agreed form or character of a race. In evolutionary thinking, the concept of the relative fixity of races, whether monogenist or polygenist in origin, was widely held, along with the notion that cultural diversity was biologically determined. This concept has a common intellectual root with the natural sciences notion of a species 'type' of the eighteenth century. As Glass notes, 'the type [...] was more real than the variations from it. Individuals, being at best imperfect representations of the type, manifest deviations and variations from the perfect type, but these are of no permanent consequence in the unbroken filiation of the species'.¹⁴ The concept of the 'type' thereafter became a standard and familiar trope deployed in the nascent science of anthropology; it was also a quality applied to the person or thing which exhibited these qualities, or at least some of them. I will return to this crucial aspect of how these portraits spoke to contemporary viewers shortly. But here it is worth underlining Walmsley's awareness of current anthropological debates via the literature sent to Fellows, and his unrivalled access to subjects that were of great interest to the ASL. Further evidence of Walmsley's desire to gain recognition for his local knowledge is shown in the fact that he was also elected a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society and is noted as having donated in 1867 a map of Zululand and the adjacent country, compiled in 1864 from information he had supplied.¹⁵

The fact that Spring includes copies of these photographs in his album may suggest a personal connection between the two men, since there is no evidence that Walmsley's photographs were being sold commercially, although they may have perhaps been copied by a studio in carte de visite format, on an unstamped card. This might also explain how Spring came to caption one of Walmsley's images, a portrait of a woman with a small child on her back, as 'nursing her sister child', which may be taken to mean either her sister who is only a child, or her sister's child. How would Spring have known this very specific information, if not directly from someone such as Walmsley? Given Spring's experience in the Commissariat office in the 1850s, it is highly likely that he would have met Captain Walmsley, and perhaps this acquaintanceship afforded him the later opportunity to acquire copies of African portraits from him.

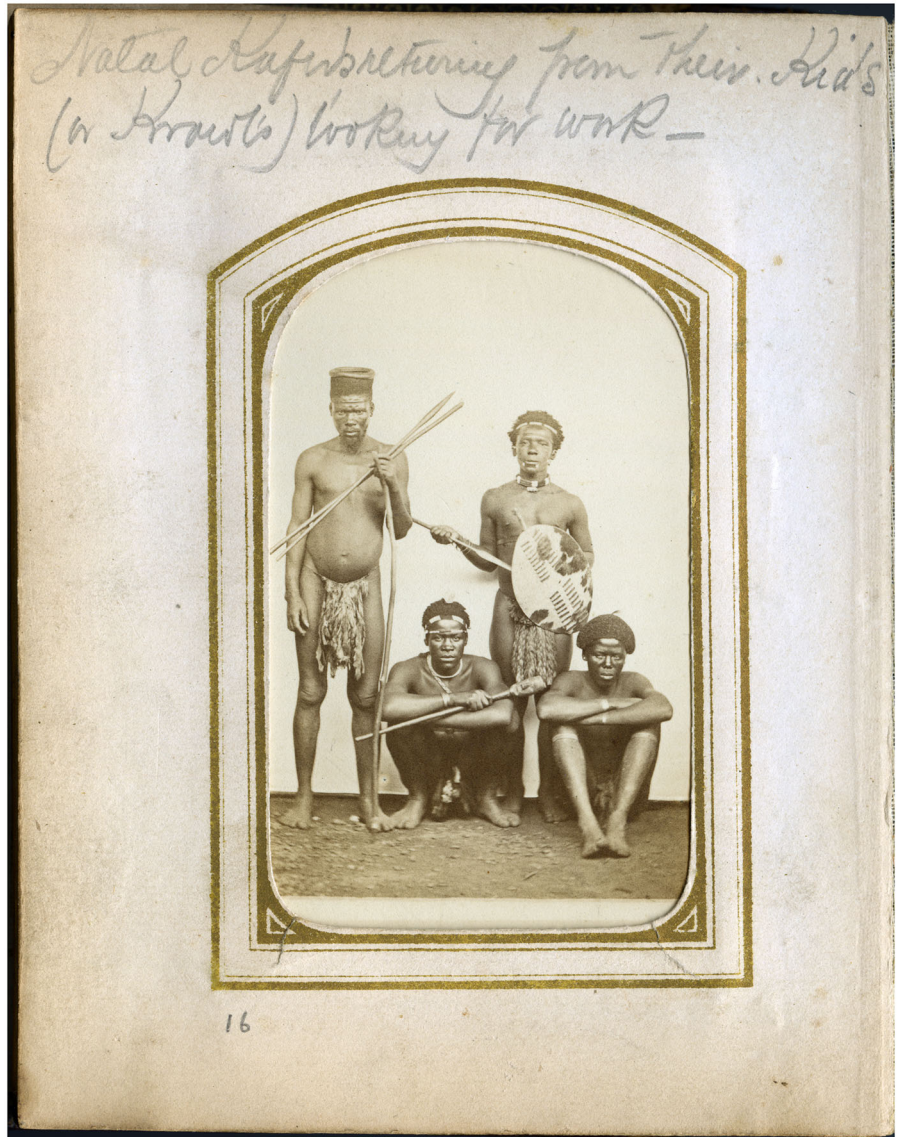
Beyond the Spring album, portraits almost certainly by the same photographer were also collected by other travellers in Natal at the very same time, and these reinforce the notion that it is the work of an anthropologically informed photographer on the Zululand border with the opportunity, influence and security required to create such imagery. In this period there are very few residents of Natal who fit this profile beyond Walmsley. Probably the most important collection of

Walmsley's photography is that assembled by Édouard Drouyn de Lhuys on a journey to South Africa in 1868, now in the collection of the Musée du quai Branly–Jacques Chirac. Drouyn de Lhuys (1805–81) was a French diplomat and foreign minister to Napoleon III in the lead up to the Austro-Prussian War of 1866, a political disaster for France after which he resigned. He undertook a journey to South Africa two years later and his collection of Natal African portraits were assembled into an album which he donated to the Musée de l'Homme in 1871. The prints in this album are larger than carte de visite and sharper, with more contrast and detail. We are likely looking here at prints made from the original wet plate negatives. This suggests that the cartes de visite in the Spring album are copies made in that more collectable format, by an unknown person. However, given that the versions of the photographs bequeathed to the Cape Town library were cartes de visite, he may well have made multiple copies in this format for distribution during the 1860s. The other interesting details in the Drouyn de Lhuys album are the annotations below some of the images, presumably by someone at the Musée de l'Homme, that indicate which illustration in Gustav Fritsch's 1872 book *Die Eingeborenen Süd-Afrika's* (Breslau: Ferdinand Hirt) the photograph was the source for. One example is a photograph by Walmsley in the Drouyn de Lhuys album, 'Zulus jouant au baton (Fritsch f.26)' (museum number: PA000003.14). In its engraved form in Fritsch's book, the image is reversed – this was usual when converting photographs into engraved form since the copied image would appear reversed when printed. Whilst it is possible that Fritsch's illustrations were based on the Drouyn de Lhuys album, it is even more likely that Fritsch acquired a similar collection on his own journey to South Africa between 1863 and 1865. It is known, for instance, that Fritsch entered Natal and stayed in Pietermaritzburg in September 1864, wanting to photograph Zulu people. However, according to Dietrich and Bank in their study of Fritsch's photography in South Africa, 'owing to his inability to find a suitable translator and intermediary, he was not able to photograph them'.¹⁶ Fritsch then spent a month in Durban and explored the vicinity, a period of time that would have given him ample opportunity to seek out and acquire Walmsley's photographs for his Atlas. Fritsch's own photographs are nearly all head and shoulders ethnographic type photographs.

Another important piece of the jigsaw comes from the further evidence of image versions in different collections. In one example, a portrait of three African women holding hands in front of a plain backdrop, standing on a blanket, the same image exists as prints in three European collections – one acquired by Drouyn de Lhuys in 1868, an album compiled by the naval officer John Edward Parrish in the mid 1860s in the British Museum and a slightly different version in the Royal Anthropological Institute collection, London (#35851). In the latter version, we see something different. The print is later, probably from the 1890s, with a glossy finish. The negative from which it has been printed is scratched, again showing that it has been printed later than the other two versions from the mid 1860s. Tantalisingly, this version shows that at least some of Walmsley's wet plate negatives from the 1860s were retained following his death in 1872 and were still being printed by someone. There are other important details in the Royal Anthropological Institute print, which has not been cropped like the other 1860s versions, since it shows the photographic backdrop set-up clearly, which includes thick poles set in the ground with a white sheet or tent material stretched between them, tied with rope. This is not the set-up of an itinerant studio photographer taking photographs for a day at a local kraal, but a more or less permanent photographic set-up at a location. We get this glimpse of backdrop paraphernalia in some of Walmsley's other photographs, particularly those showing pairs of African men taking snuff or in the stick fighting image. Again, this strongly points to

16 – Dietrich and Bank, *Eloquent Picture Gallery*, 76. The authors also suggest a connection between some of the Natal photographs reproduced by Gustav Fritsch and the contents of the Walmsley albums within the Grey Ethnological Album, but do not elaborate further (*ibid.*, 117).

Figure 5. Page from the Arthur Spring album, showing carte de visite of a group of four Natal African men by Joshua Walmsley, early 1860s. Inscription by Spring: 'Natal K-s returning from their kias (or kraals) looking for work'. Courtesy Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, UK [1998.67.16].



someone more or less permanently based at a location on the Natal–Zululand border in the mid 1860s with enough local influence and control to induce Natal African subjects crossing the border for trade or employment to be photographed.

Some of Spring's captions in the album, such as that shown in [figure 5](#), describe such economic migration, referring to men returning from, or heading for, their rural homes from work in town, which also strongly suggests the Tugela border, and is specific information that could have been provided by someone like Walmsley, as well as providing the opportunity for him to take photographs. Taken together, the evidence detailed here is strongly suggestive of Joshua Walmsley as the 'grey blanket photographer', a significant yet hitherto unrecognised early ethnographic photographer of 1860s Natal, whose images of Natal Africans in this period were widely collected, disseminated and published as visual representations of 'Zulu' people, despite how slippery this ethnic label was at that time.

Natal African Identities

In the Spring album, nearly all of the photographs are captioned as representing Natal Africans using the K- word; 'Zulu' identity is only mentioned twice, above two images of men photographed by Walmsley. Yet in the Drouyn de Lhuys album, and in their engraved form in Fritsch's book, many of these same images are captioned as representing Zulu people. Although there was an increasing European readiness to label all photographs showing people with a cultural similarity in Natal as 'Zulu', it is clear that many of the people photographed by Walmsley and others in this period would not have recognised such an identity. For European settlers, particularly following their interactions with Shaka kaSenzangakhona (1787–1828), the term 'Zulu' became well established in the literature by travellers, missionaries and traders. For most Natal Africans, much more local identities were of prime importance and the term 'Zulu' was used to refer to a particular descent group, especially within Zululand.¹⁷ By the 1860s the distinction between 'Natal K-s', meaning the African population of Natal, and 'Zulus' across the Thukela River had become increasingly blurred in the settler and ethnographic imagination, and inconsistencies in naming were common.¹⁸ In the lower Tugela district where Walmsley lived and worked as a border agent for instance, the Qwabe chiefdom is likely to have been the primary identity of the Natal African population.¹⁹ Indeed, as Mahoney argues:

What were the alternative identities available to Natal Africans at this point? Fear, hostility, and rejection – not identification or sympathy – characterized Natal Africans' attitudes toward Zulus. The Zulus' use of the derogatory name amaKhafula to refer to Natal Africans indicates that the feeling of antagonism and lack of identification was mutual.²⁰

In Natal, settler colonialism in fact led to an increase in the influence of local chiefships, mostly since Europeans had little other alternative to exercising control.²¹

A particularly good example of such European settler manipulation of Natal African politics is presented in one photograph in the Spring album, being a portrait of Ngoza kaLudaba, captioned in the album 'Celebrated K- Chief "Gooza"', standing in front of a 'beehive' hut, hands resting on the top of a staff (figure 6). Ngoza had been born in Zululand and fought in its army, but in the 1840s was working in a kitchen in Pietermaritzburg when he came to the attention of the Secretary for Native Affairs, Theophilus Shepstone. With Shepstone's backing, Ngoza was made a government chief (*mphakanyiswa*) of the Qamu chiefdom, and in 1860 he shot to fame during the visit of the High Commissioner and Prince Alfred to the area. In September, Ngoza was the leading figure in a ceremony involving around four thousand African men who performed war dances for the royal party. The event and its publicity, along with Shepstone's ongoing favour, effectively made Ngoza the most powerful Natal African chief.²² As Guy describes in his discussion of the visual representation of Ngoza in colonial literature of the period, at some point in the early 1860s Ngoza's fame led to a professional photographer visiting his kraal and taking portraits of him and his family. Guy names the photographer as Bowman of Pietermaritzburg,²³ but the cartes de visite in the Spring album of Ngoza and his family were produced by Fry & Co. of Durban, who may have copied and sold them. Drouyn de Lhuys also collected several larger print versions during his visit to Natal, and engraved versions appeared in Fritsch's volume captioned as Zulus in war costume. Shepstone's policy of assigning 'chiefless' Natal Africans and incoming refugees to newly created chiefdoms such as Qamu led to it becoming the largest chiefdom in Natal by 1869, the year that Ngoza died, after which it rapidly reduced in size and significance.²⁴

17 – Carolyn Hamilton and John Wright, 'The Beginnings of Zulu Identity: The Image of Shaka', *Indicator SA*, 10, no. 3 (1993), 43–46 (43); and Carolyn Hamilton and Nessa Leibhammer (eds), *Tribing and Untribing the Archive: Identity and the Material Record in Southern KwaZulu-Natal in the Late Independent and Colonial Periods*, 2 vols (Pietermaritzburg: UKZN Press, 2016).

18 – Michael R. Mahoney, *The Other Zulus: The Spread of Zulu Ethnicity in Colonial South Africa* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 58.

19 – Ibid, 57.

20 – Ibid, 57.

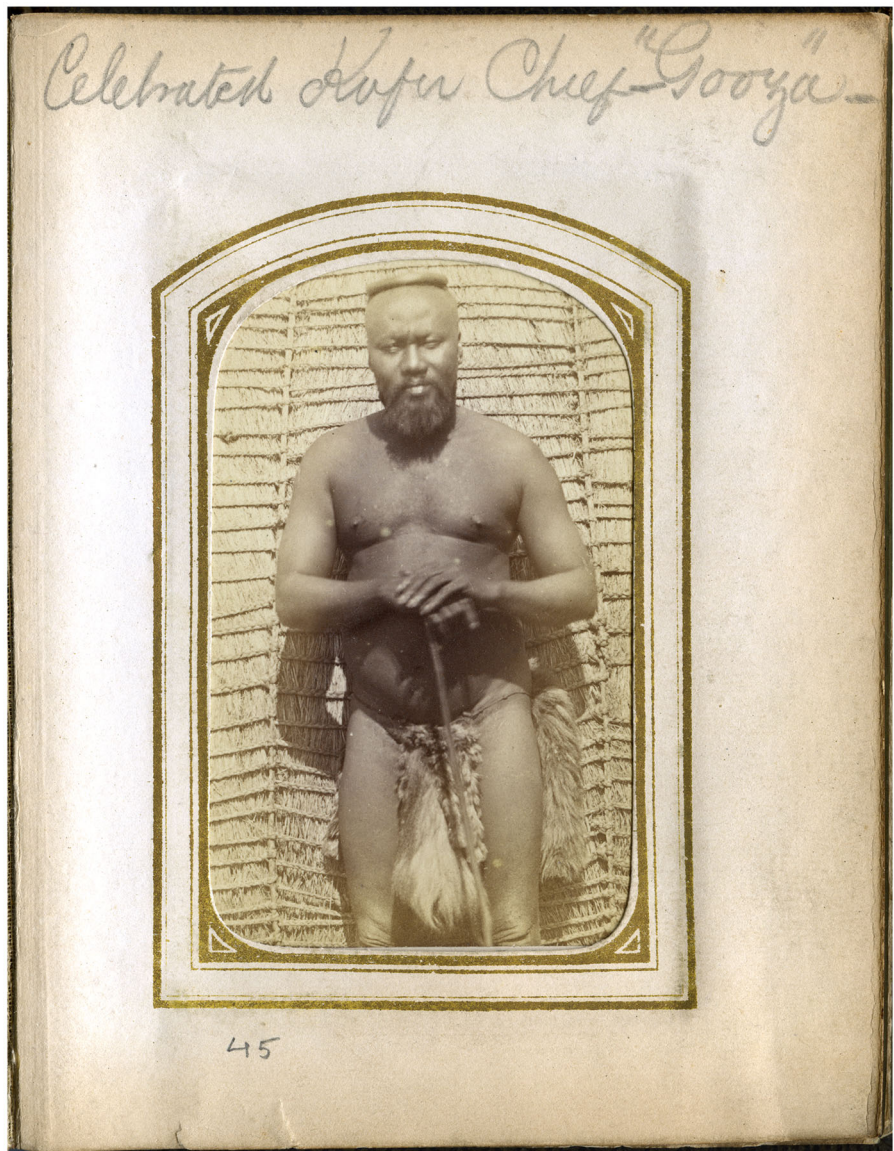
21 – Jeff Guy, "A Paralysis of Perspective": Image and Text in the Creation of an African Chief, *South African Historical Journal*, 47, no. 1 (2002), 51–74 (54).

22 – Ibid, 57.

23 – Ibid, 60.

24 – Mahoney, *Other Zulus*, 61.

Figure 6. [Possibly] Thomas Bowman of Pietermaritzburg, 'Page from the Arthur Spring album, showing carte de visite of Ngoza kaLudaba', ca. 1860. Courtesy Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, UK [1998.67.45].



As already suggested, many of Walmsley's photographs appear to relate to migrants crossing between Zululand and Natal. This is both indicated in the image content and reinforced in a number of Spring's captions in the album. Examples of this include a portrait of two men with their goods 'returning to their kraals after completing their time of work', 'Natal K-, works by the day or job', 'Natal K-s, returning from their kraals looking for work'. Migration between Zululand and Natal in the early 1860s was frequent, and overseen by Walmsley with a small group of African policemen, one of whom is included in the Spring album. Typically, immigrants from Zululand were unlanded and without a chiefdom that they belonged to.²⁵ Once in Natal they faced laws that would have sent them into indentured labour, so they would often seek the protection of a local chief to prevent this. As Mahoney describes, such immigrants were a source of new subjects for chiefs in Natal, especially in border areas like Walmsley's Lower Tugela, where most of the Qwabe lived.²⁶ In 1864, Shepstone estimated that, on average, around six hundred Africans entered Natal from Zululand every year, which would have afforded Walmsley plentiful opportunity to take photographs. There is therefore a real question as to whether most of the people photographed by Walmsley crossing

25 – Ibid, 67.

26 – Ibid, 71.

into Natal from Zululand would have identified as 'Zulu'. The picture is complex, and although a handful of Natal chiefdoms consisting of migrants from the Zulu kingdom probably did identify themselves as 'Zulu', the vast majority almost certainly did not.²⁷

27 – Ibid, 72.

An Incunabulum of Visual Anthropology

As an assemblage and as an object, the Spring album was intentionally created and captioned for a specific purpose and audience. The annotations in the album present the cartes de visite as ethnographic 'types', yet in amongst this in two places the captioning slips into the first-person, and Arthur Spring signs and dates the personal note. The annotations strongly suggest that the album is addressing an anthropological one, since the details about character, gender, age and occupation were all common preoccupations in scientific circles at this time. This is also strongly suggested by the fact that the album is homogeneous in its content; it is not a typical settler album of local landmarks and notables, with a few portraits of African people included at the end. Instead, the album has the feeling of someone who has gone out to source photographs representing 'native types' from local studios and photographers. In the case of Walmsley's photographs, Spring has either got a studio to copy prints as cartes de visite or, else, Walmsley had them copied in this format. Some of Walmsley's images were being copied and sold by Bowman of Pietermaritzburg, evidenced by the studio's stamp on the reverse; all of the others are unstamped, which may mean that a studio copied them privately for a customer onto unstamped cartes de visite. A strong case could be put forward that this album was compiled by Spring for an English friend or acquaintance who was seeking anthropological photographs. A tantalising further piece of evidence that may point to this is found in another album compiled at the same time by the ASL during its meetings. In this album are four of Walmsley's photographs, but the source for these is not recorded (figure 7). However, on another page is a carte de visite of a seated woman, with a note pasted underneath that reads 'A genuine Natal lady'. The note is addressed to an 'H.J.' and is dated 1 June 1867. The initials next to the date are not completely clear, but look to be 'A.S.' Could this be Arthur Spring? The handwriting, when compared to that of the Arthur Spring album, is certainly strikingly similar.²⁸

Although not conclusive, if Spring was the source of the cartes de visite from Natal in the ASL album, this might also help to explain why his album is in the Pitt Rivers Museum, since some collections that were formerly held in the ASL's Museum were acquired by General Pitt-Rivers when the ASL decided to sell its collections in 1881.²⁹ This would also possibly account for the lack of any acquisition information for the small Spring album, since it may have come with the founding collection, as the ASL album seems to have done. The link between the Spring album and the ASL album is also strengthened by their contemporariness, with the Spring album being signed 1866 and the print in the ASL album dated 1867. The possibility remains, then, that there was some personal connection at that time between an English anthropologist – initials possibly H. J. – and Arthur Spring, which resulted in his album of photographs being deposited with the ASL, and thence with the Pitt Rivers Museum.³⁰

The reason why I have gone into such detail about the Spring album and its photographic sources is that it represents an early attempt to apply photographic visual evidence of race in anthropology, a process from which contemporary visual anthropology eventually emerged. The Spring album's early date, representing the first few years of carte de visite photography in South Africa, its exclusive focus on

28 – Compare, for instance, the word 'Natal' on this note and in the Spring album, which is an exact match.

29 – The sale of the Anthropological Institute's ethnographic collections is described in a report of its Council; see *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, 10 (1881), 438–39.

30 – According to its records, there was only one Fellow of the ASL in the 1860s with the initials H. J., and that was Henry James Johnson, of London, who was elected on 6 December 1865. He does not appear to have had any obvious South African connections.

Figure 7. Page from the Anthropological Society of London album (compiled ca. 1866–67), showing four unmounted cartes de visite of Natal Africans by Joshua Walmsley, early 1860s. Courtesy Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, UK [1998.80 page 43].



ethnographic portraiture and its evident intention to be used within anthropological visual discourse make it a rare and important document in the history of South African visual anthropology, along with a handful of others including the Drouyn de Lhuys album, the Parrish albums and Album 167. The Spring album includes the work of emerging studio photographers in Durban and those with amateur anthropological interests such as Walmsley who were keen to photograph the local African population with whom they interacted. Such photographers catered to both a commercial market for collectable photographs of African people, bought by colonial residents and travellers stopping off at South African ports, as well as for more scientific purposes in providing illustrative 'types' for the racial theorists of European learned societies. Yet although the album contains many stereotyped captions by Spring, several also take us, as viewers, beyond this, to glimpses of African/settler relations in the early years of Durban's development as a colonial port, such as the portraits of Indian servants. It is important to remember when we look at the images in the Spring album that we are dealing with a very fluid photographic period, especially when it comes to the use of photographs in the infant discipline



Figure 8. Page from the Arthur Spring album, showing carte de visite of a woman carrying a basket of corn on her head, by Joshua Walmsley, early 1860s. Inscription: 'Natal K- woman hawking Indian corn (or mealies) for sale to whites'. Courtesy Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, UK [1998.67.6].

of anthropology. Although photography was becoming recognised as a potentially useful scientific tool, it was not until 1869 that the first scientific method for trying to record racial characteristics was published, the Lamprey method. As Edwards has noted:

Central to this early stage in visual anthropology was the 'photographic type'. The subject of investigation, reduced physically and metaphorically to 'type', largely denied cultural existence. In the recording of non-European people, reference to the 'scientific mode' of photography itself, in addition to being a means of collecting data, became of iconographical significance, denoting serious anthropological/scientific intent even if the application was spurious in a given context.³¹

This is exactly what we find in the Spring album. In Walmsley's portraits there is reference to well-established visual tropes that had emerged from art history in the portrayal of racial types, as well as the exclusion of excessive visual data through the deployment of a white canvas backdrop and blanket floor covering. This intentional exclusion of background, which would make the visual delineation of racial

31 – Elizabeth Edwards, 'Photographic "Types": The Pursuit of Method', *Visual Anthropology*, 3 (1990), 235–58 (255).

and cultural features more difficult to read, was also a denial of context, both spatial and historical. The figure is both placed as an African of Natal and yet simultaneously displaced through the colonial erasure of such context. The portraits also reference a long tradition of cultural stereotyping, with the women carrying baskets or pots on their heads, or children on their backs, and the men holding weapons or fighting with sticks. Spring also does this heavily in his captioning where he seeks to point out typical cultural traits as emphasised in certain images, as well as the sorts of employment Natal Africans found themselves doing such as selling corn or milk to settlers or washing their clothes (figure 8).

Although Edwards is broadly correct when she argues that, in this period, ‘the production of photographs of anthropological interest was largely outside the control of those who sought to use them as evidence’,³² the Walmsley images also show that there were some who worked in colonial settings making imagery specifically aimed at an anthropological audience.

Here we are left with the essential paradox of the ‘portrait type’ as exemplified in the Spring album, which is the way in which the photographs represent, in Edwards’s phrase, a ‘mental distancing of the subject by the viewer, the “type” as specimen’,³³ even whilst the photographer – Walmsley – and the album compiler – Spring – had close, even familial, connections to the African people in the images. This paradox, what might be termed proximal distancing, was a particularly colonial mental process, a paradox of colonial social relations that could sometimes flip at alarming speed from informal and friendly relations to the most extreme form of asymmetrical powerplay; that at any moment the indigenous subject might be reminded of the racist underpinnings of how they were perceived by being objectified and photographed in front of a plain backdrop. Walmsley’s proximity and familiarity with the African population on the Natal border enabled photographic opportunities that would have been difficult for others, as Gustav Fritsch found in Natal. These opportunities could then be converted into social capital in the form of photographic images that were in demand from the European scientific community, as can be seen in the way that Walmsley’s images were collected and reproduced in the mid 1860s as engravings by Fritsch, entering the collections of exulted figures such as Drouyn de Lhuys and many museum collections. It was probably via Fritsch that some of Walmsley’s portraits then made their way into the collection of the Berliner Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte and its major photographic dissemination project, the *Anthropologisch-ethnologisches Album in Photographien*, published in parts by the Dammann studio of Hamburg between 1872 and 1876. Walmsley’s scientific type photographs were particularly sought after for inclusion in this sort of anthropological endeavour, with an increasing clamour among scholars for photographs from the colonies. The reason for this was the overwhelming sense that only photography now had the credentials to describe race objectively; indeed, photography was formative in the very concept of objectivity itself.³⁴ As Fritsch wrote in 1874 ‘photographs can also serve as corrective to the individual perception inherent in even the best depictions by artists; photographs alone enable a reliable comparison’.³⁵ As an ASL member, Walmsley would have been fully aware of such debates about the reliability of visual data, and in response set out to create one of the earliest collections of anthropological portraits of Natal Africans.

Conclusion

Albums such as that compiled by Arthur Spring are composed not just of openings that show images and inscriptions, but also of layers of visual history that

32 – Ibid, 238.

33 – Ibid, 242.

34 – See Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (New York: Zone Books, 2007).

35 – Gustav Fritsch, ‘Anthropologisch-ethnologisches album in photographien’ [book review], *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, 6 (1874), 111.

sometimes intersect and enfold each other. By this I mean that the visual histories that they can be used to write are not always sequentially clear and in fact often resist a linear narrative, instead offering a series of connecting points and clusters of context and meaning that we can bring to understanding them. The cartes de visite in the Spring album are all 'performances' of images, brought together to tell a narrative that is often guided by Spring's own inscriptions around them. Further performances of the same images appear in other European collections, brought together as assemblages to 'perform' southern African identities to a European scientific audience. In this article I have opened a particular album to attempt an excavation of the visual history of anthropology in South Africa as it was created by one compiler in the mid 1860s in Durban. Inside are stories written around images, annotations that reveal the nature of local settler/African relations and its racist underpinnings. It is both a personal album as well as one addressed to an anthropological audience, attested to by its focus on race, age, gender, occupation and behaviour. It is revealing of a burgeoning photographic culture in early 1860s Durban, with a number of newly established studios represented, as well as the more scientific work of Joshua Walmsley, the erudite border agent. When the carte de visite phenomenon hit Durban in the early 1860s, the opportunity to take studio portraits of Africans in town became much more realisable, as did the relatively cheap copying of existing prints for wide distribution. This combination of the everyday output of the first carte de visite photographers' work in Durban is what we find in Spring's album. There is no direct evidence that Walmsley is indeed the 'grey blanket photographer', even if he is recorded as the source for a collection of the photographs; however, the evidence presented here, I believe, is circumstantially very persuasive. A complex and marginal colonial figure, Walmsley evidently lived and worked in close proximity to the Natal African population for many years, spoke the Zulu language and was frequently involved in local political intrigue. Yet as a member of a colonial learned society, he also entered into a photographic enquiry that othered this same familiar community to an extreme degree through racial typing. Here are enfolded the – to our minds – often contradictory aspects of colonial life in the period, and which had such far-reaching shadows in South African history.

ORCID

Christopher Morton  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3358-591X>