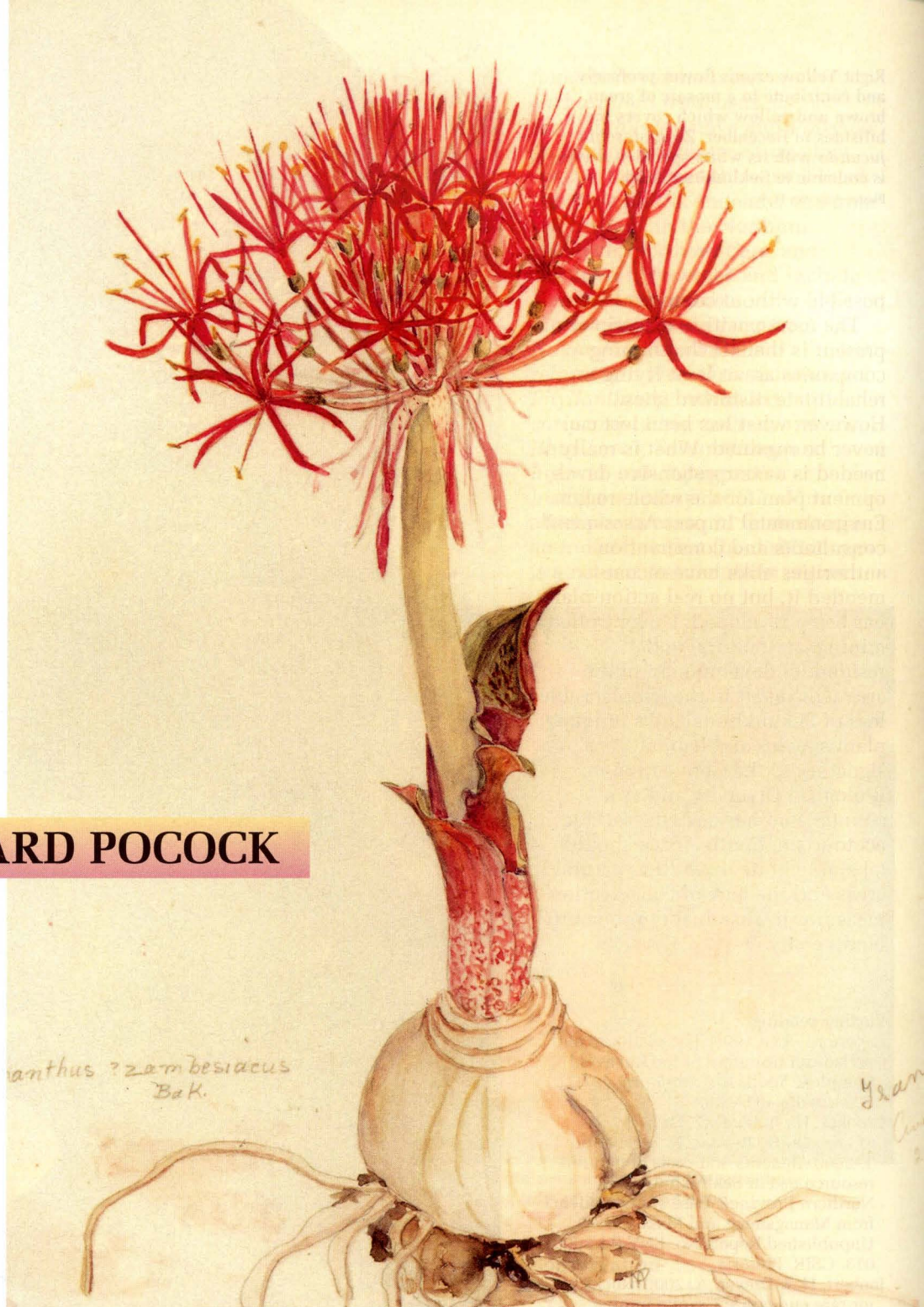


MARY AGARD POCOCK

BOTANICAL ARTIST AND INTREPID EXPLORER

by **Tony Dold**,
Selmar Schonland
Herbarium,
Rhodes University,
Grahamstown



One of the water-colour paintings Mary Pocock did while on an expedition with Dorothea Bleek. It is captioned *Haemanthus ?zambesiacus*; [from] Tsane, Cwelei. 28/09/1925.

Mary Agard Pocock, known to her friends and family as Mamie, was born on the 31 December 1886 at Rondebosch in Cape Town. After completing her secondary education in England, she gained a B.Sc. degree in botany, geology and mathematics from London University in 1908 and later an Honours degree in 1921. After a short term of lecturing at Wits University (1923) she joined the staff of Rhodes University's botany

department (1924-1950s) where in 1942 she was instrumental in establishing the Rhodes University Herbarium (RUH) which was incorporated into the Selmar Schonland Herbarium (GRA) in 1993. The Pocock collections, comprising approximately 28 000 specimens have been housed in the Selmar Schonland (formerly Albany Museum Herbarium) since 1967. The majority of her collections are marine algae, although she had a particular interest in the

genus *Volvox*, which provided her with a Ph.D. topic. Mary established the tradition of algology at Rhodes University, which was continued by Prof. Isaac, and thereafter Prof. Stan Seagrief.

Although she passed away in July 1977 at the age of ninety, her explorations and remarkable achievements are still relatively unknown and have only recently been published (in part) by Balarin *et al* (1999). Though she received many honours and was a

Fellow of the Linnean Society of London and the Royal Society of South Africa, and had received the distinction of a Doctor of Science (*honoris causa*) from Rhodes University, her greatest pride was the Crisp Medal given by the Linnean Society for outstanding algological work, an honour very rarely awarded. The majority of her thirty scientific publications focus on algae and her algal collection boasts thirteen holotypes, twelve isotypes and two lectotypes (see box on p. 176 for explanations) making it particularly valuable.

In 1925 Mary's adventurous spirit led her to join Dorothea Bleek on a seven month expedition across Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) and Angola to Lobito Bay on foot! To undertake an expedition into



Right A water-colour painting by Mary Pocock, captioned '*Pleiotaxis baurii*; [from] Kutsi near Muye, Angola. Abundant in sandy soil of open woodland.' The vernacular name *mukulawankima* is pencilled on the lower right hand corner, (unfortunately not shown in this reproduction). Below Mary Pocock, (far left) and her entourage of porters attracting the interest of villagers (locality not known). This is one of the photographs taken and developed on glass 'lantern slides'.



TYPES OF TYPES

The 'type' specimen is the single specimen on which the description of a taxon (group of plants) is based. This is usually a herbarium specimen. Most **type** material is kept in different coloured folders in the herbarium collections thereby enabling its rapid recovery. The types of types are as follows:

holotype the sole specimen either used by or designated by an author as the nomenclatural type of a species when the description is first published. Whenever a new taxon (group) is described it is imperative both to designate a holotype and state where it is deposited. Duplicates are known as isotypes.

isotype a specimen collected at the same time and from the same plant or localized population of plants as the holotype. These duplicate specimens are often separated and deposited in several institutions.

lectotype a specimen subsequently selected from the original material on which the name of a taxon was based. This is only necessary when the original author failed to designate a holotype.

Descriptions based on the *Penguin dictionary of botany*, edited by Elizabeth Tootill, 1984.



Painting by Mary Pocock entitled '*Combretum gnidioides*; [from] Cwelei. Low shrub in white sand. 27/09/1925'.

a virtually unknown region in the 1920s was not for the faint hearted! At the time the Angolan region was poorly explored and the first comprehensive botanical study was only published in 1939. Nevertheless the two women traversed approximately 1800 km on foot or by canoe with a team of seventeen porters to carry equipment and food.

The journey was timed to miss the wet season from November to April and coincide with the cool, dry winter months of May to August. The expedition started off by train from Cape Town to Victoria Falls and then by lorry to Livingstone and Katombora, Zambia. From here they travelled by dugout canoes or walked or occasionally rode in a 'machila', a hammock carried by a team of bearers. The first 350 km was up the Zambezi River (against the

flow), bypassing the many rapids on foot, to Sioma. Several week-long stops were made *en route* and short daily excursions made from the base camp allowing for more leisurely and detailed studies. The pitching of camp was left to the porters who arrived at a predetermined destination first, anxious to get rid of their bulky loads, including a large cooking pot for making bread and even a zinc bathtub! The menu, the responsibility of the principle guide, was meagre and monotonous, so much so that a visitor who joined them for a short while complained about the lumpy, burned maize meal porridge. The reply, reminiscent of Mary Pocock at her forthright best, was 'We are far too busy to cook and that is all the porters know how to make.' A single hen was also carried to provide eggs, however it unfortu-

nately only produced a single egg a day which Mary and Dorothea took turns at having for breakfast!

During the expedition Miss Bleek gathered information for her work *The Bushman's Dictionary* and other anthropological publications, while Mary collected plants and painted delicate and accurate water-colours of some of them. She also took many photographs that were developed on glass 'lantern slides'. Few of these are of plants but there are many landscapes and pictures of various campsites, unfortunately few are captioned. Dorothea also took many slides of San families, posing rather uncomfortably, some with musical instruments. The photographs (black and white prints) portray daily activities - even one of Mary washing her hair in a bucket. Several show lion and leopard spoor (around the camp?).



Above Camp site (locality not known) with Mary Pocock on the extreme left, painting her botanical specimens. This photograph was developed on a glass 'lantern slide'. Below Mary Pocock's water-colour painting of '*Eulophia* sp.; *Brachystegia* forest', (locality unknown).

Marianne Balarin (in an article in *Bothalia* written in 1999, see below) has established that 990 plant specimens were collected and that twelve of these were identified as possibly new to science. On returning by steamboat to Cape Town the majority of the specimens were sent to Kew where she spent some time working on them, however there are also some duplicates in the Schonland Herbarium. These, together with her photographs, water-colours, diaries and collecting books are housed in the Schonland Herbarium and some are reproduced here in *Veld & Flora* for the first time. Balarin and her co-authors list only thirty paintings but there are many more filed with the specimens in the herbarium that were inaccessible to her. All the paintings are on very thin cream coloured quarto

size paper. Although not shown here many of the paintings have accurate floral dissections in pencil and notes on habitat and local uses such as edibility together with local African names.

Mary Pocock left her estate and collections to the Albany Museum and a fund was established from this for the curation of her specimens that are consulted by algologists worldwide. Only recently a researcher from Cape Town has identified one of her collections as a new genus and is in the process of describing it. ♀

Further reading

- Balarin, M.G., Brink, E. & Glen, H.F. 1999. Itinerary and specimen list of M.A. Pocock's botanical collecting expedition in Zambia and Angola in 1925. *Bothalia* (29)1, 169-201.
 Jacot Guillarmod, A. 1978. Obituary. *Phycologia* 17, 440-444.
 Jacot Guillarmod, A. 1987. That amazing woman. *The Elephant's Child* (10)3, 14-17.

