

CENTRE FOR AFRICAN STUDIES

HONORARY PROFESSOR SAUL DUBOW
OF
MAGDALENE COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
PRESENTS A PUBLIC LECTURE FOR THE CAS PRECOLONIAL
CATALYTIC RESEARCH PROJECT



The Abbé Henri Breuil, renowned French prehistorian and expert on indigenous rock art, is best known for his pioneering work in France and Spain. He also spent important time in South Africa, which he first visited first in 1929 and where he was based from 1942-1951 with the support of Jan Smuts. While attached to the Archaeological Survey based at the University of the Witwatersrand, Breuil explored many rock art sites in southern Africa including a remarkable frieze in the Brandberg mountains of Namibia. Here Breuil advanced a controversial theory that the so-called 'White Lady' of the Brandberg depicted a woman of Mediterranean origin who might have come to Africa from the Minoan court of Knossos. This paper explores how Breuil's speculative race-based theories concerning civilisational origins flattered white South Africans' view of themselves and their rights in the country. It shows how Breuil's status as a European expert and his extensive patronage networks allowed him to forge close connections between government and academics as well as professional and amateur archaeologists. It raises questions about the politics of knowledge production in South African archaeology. And it explores the constraints faced by younger South African colleagues who remained unpersuaded by his diffusionist explanations of settlement and human creativity in Southern Africa.

Professor Shadreck Chirikure (Archaeology - UCT) as discussant.

Date: 4 September 2018

Time: 15h00

Venue: CAS GALLERY

"HENRI BREUIL, THE 'WHITE LADY' OF THE BRANDBERG, AND THE POLITICS OF THE PREHISTORIC IMAGINARY".