
Review: Early Dutch Exploration in South Africa

Author(s): E. H.

Review by: E. H.

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According to an enumeration made in 1913 the natives in employment were classified thus :

Tribe.	Transport riders.	Farmers.	Domestics.	Labourers.	Convicts, invalids and labourers employed by other natives.	Employed by Government.	Total.
Hereros	51	3	4,006	1,354	99	952	6,465
Ovambos	13	—	581	4,475	11	56	5,136
Hill Damaras	118	4	3,309	969	513	395	5,308
Hottentots	374	36	2,521	323	534	501	4,289
Bastards... ..	322	8	247	71	199	43	890
Bushmen	3	—	747	130	36	81	997
Bechuanas	95	—	43	1	—	3	142
Totals	976	51	11,454	7,323	1,392	2,031	23,227
Natives and coloured persons from abroad (mostly Cape boys)	6	—	563	3,289	1	64	3,923
Totals	982	51	12,017	10,612	1,393	2,095	27,150

EARLY DUTCH EXPLORATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

Reizen in Zuid-Afrika in de Hollandse Tijd. Uitgegeven door Dr. E. C. Godée Molsbergen. Eerste, Tweede, deel, Tochten naar het Noorden, 1652-1686, 1686-1806. (Werken uitgegeven door de Linschoten-Vereeniging, xi., xii.) The Hague : Martinus Nijhoff, 1915-16. *Maps and Plates.*

THE early history of exploration in the interior of South Africa has attracted less attention perhaps than that of most other parts of the world. The reason probably is that the extension of knowledge was a slow and gradual process, and was not bound up with the solution of any striking geographical problem, nor with the conquest of any rich countries promising immediate commercial advantages to European nations. Still the story is well worth the telling and deserves to be better known than it is to the present-day successors of the early pioneers. It is hardly realized to what extent the interior of the country, to some distance beyond the Orange River, had been brought to light by the persevering efforts of the Dutch adventurers (efforts rendered difficult by the inhospitable nature of much of the country) before the cession of the Cape to Great Britain. To rescue their achievements from oblivion is the aim of the Linschoten Society in undertaking the publication of a series of volumes, of which the two quoted above are a first instalment, treating of explorations towards the *north* down to the close of Dutch rule in South Africa in 1806.

These volumes are ably edited by Dr. E. C. Godée Molsbergen, who brings to the task abundant enthusiasm coupled with the industry necessary to sift out the material from the voluminous Dutch records bearing on

South African Colonial History. The task was far more formidable than that involved in the editing of most other publications of the kind, for the editor had to do not with a limited number of narratives to be merely reprinted and annotated, but with a vast body of records of varying importance, the gist of which, from the standpoint of geographical exploration, had to be incorporated into a more or less continuous narrative. At the same time the more important records deserved to be printed in full, and this has been done in the case of just twenty documents, which are printed from time to time (in large type) in their proper chronological sequence. The connecting links in the story are either in the form of much-condensed summaries, or are supplied by the editor in his own words, and are printed in slightly smaller type. In this way undue repetition of dry detail is avoided. Copious footnotes give references to the original documents or elucidate special points. Attention is given now and again to the growing body of place-names occurring in the records, and much light is thus thrown on the origin and true form of many names, since changed or corrupted, of which the history has hitherto been obscure.

The first part of the first volume, occupying more than half the total space, treats of one or two early visits of Dutch navigators to the Cape during more extended voyages, and of the first efforts of the settlers to acquire such knowledge of the interior and its resources as might help to make something more of the possession than a mere port of call on the way to the East. Progress during the seventeenth century was but slow, and no great advance had been made down to the great expedition of the Governor Simon van der Stel in 1685-86. Still, something had been done in the way of opening intercourse with the Hottentots and Bushmen, and the narratives printed are specially valuable for the information they supply on the condition and mode of life of the former before modification by contact with civilization or the decimation of some of the tribes by the epidemics which broke out later. Some of the expeditions were undertaken with a view to obtaining cattle and other supplies for the use of the settlement or the ships which touched there during the voyage to the East. Others, like those of Dankaert, Cruythoff, and Meerhoff, had a more ambitious aim, being made in the hope of discovering a way to the supposed powerful empire of "Monomotapa," which exercised on the minds of the Dutch pioneers from the south an influence similar to that which enticed the Portuguese into the interior from the south-east. The journals of the two last-named expeditions are printed in full, and are of interest in spite of their failure to realize the hopes of their promoters. Their small success caused discouragement, and in 1664 we find that the Governor and Council wrote home urging that no more difficult and dangerous journeys into the interior should be undertaken. Yet in 1669 came the mission of Hieronymus Croes to the "Obiquaes" and "Hessequaes," which had results of some importance as bringing the settlers into closer relations

with the interior tribes, more Bushmen than Hottentots. Some efforts were also made, in response to orders from home, to open an intercourse with the "Caffres" in the more distant interior, but they were without much result. Collisions occurred with the Hottentots about this time, but were brought to an end by the treaty concluded in 1677.

The latter part of the first volume is taken up with the narrative of Simon van der Stel's well-known expedition above referred to. It was successful in opening a way to the "Koperberg," the copper region south of the lower Orange River, on the exploitation of which great hopes were built at the time, though the distance of the mines and the want of suitable transport rendered these hopes illusory. The narrative of this expedition is reprinted from the great collection of Valentyn (vol. 8, 1726), to whom we owe its preservation for posterity, as no copy is now to be found in the Dutch archives.

With the narratives printed in the second volume, the geographical interest in the story is heightened by the greater extent of country traversed, and much new information is placed on record regarding the country, its people, and fauna. Journeys were now made with a view to hunting the big game, and it was one of these—that of Jacobus Coetsee Jansz in 1760—that led to the first reaching and crossing of the Orange River, and contact with the "Great" Namaquas to the north of it. They had crossed to the northern side only some twenty years earlier, according to Coetsee's statement. This journey had as its direct result the still more important one of Hendrik Hop, sent in 1761 to continue exploration in this direction. The narratives make frequent reference to the meeting with and hunting of the giraffe ("Cameel" of the colonists), and show that, like the elephant, this animal was already in course of retreat to more remote districts. Another narrative printed in full records the adventurous wanderings of Hendrik Jacob Wikar in the remoter parts of the interior, and others are concerned with the more important and better-known expeditions of the Van Reenens, which considerably extended the Dutch knowledge of the country north of the Orange River up to Walvis Bay and beyond.

It would have added to the value of the collection could a detailed narrative have been given of the various journeys carried out by the interesting but somewhat elusive personage Colonel R. J. Gordon, a Dutch official of Scottish extraction who had so identified himself with the fortunes of his adopted country that he committed suicide on receiving the news of the cession of the Cape to Great Britain. He was an enthusiastic naturalist, and his name is commemorated by the South African plant known as *Stapelia Gordoni*, as well as by "Gordon Bay" and the district of "Gordonia." It is to him that we owe the naming of the Orange River, the mouth of which he reached for the first time (with Paterson) in August 1779. He had also been the first to sight the confluence of the Vaal with the upper main branch of the river two years earlier. Dr. Molsbergen

mentions these and other particulars about him in a note, but, though he does not positively say so, it is to be presumed that no detailed records of the journeys are in existence. The present volumes owe to him, however, an important feature for which our thanks are due, nearly all the plates being facsimile reproductions of drawings from the "Gordon Collection" lately acquired by Holland, after finding a home in this country for many years. Curiously enough, though referring incidentally to this collection in the prefaces to the two volumes, it is only in the footnote on the author of the drawings (in vol. 2) that the editor explains the history of the collection. Those interested in such matters will remember that it was advertised for sale by Messrs. Maggs Brothers three or four years ago, having been till then in the Duke of Sutherland's Library. Through the energetic action of Dr. H. P. N. Muller and a committee formed in Holland it was secured for that country in 1914 and is now in the "Rijks Prentenkabinet" at Amsterdam. The drawings are of special interest and value, and supply an excellent illustration of South African natives, places, and animals as known to their author, who was the first to send good drawings of the giraffe to Europe. The present volumes also include reproductions of an old drawing of Table Bay (apparently the one used by Valentyn for his collection) and of Simon van der Stel's map of his route to the copper district. Each volume has an analytical table of contents and a good index, and their general get-up is admirable.

E. H.

THE TRACK OF THE TOTAL SOLAR ECLIPSE, 1919, MAY 28-29

AT the meeting of the Royal Astronomical Society on March 9 the Astronomer-Royal called attention to the particular importance of the total eclipse of the sun which will be visible on 29 May 1919, civil date. The duration of totality is long, and the sun is, at the moment of eclipse, in the midst of a group of bright stars, which will provide an excellent opportunity of determining whether light-rays passing near the sun are deflected in accordance with the gravitation theory of Einstein—a question of extreme importance in the present state of astronomical speculation. The eclipse passes over the basin of the Amazon, the Atlantic Ocean, and the basin of the Congo to Tanganyika, and it is clearly a matter of some difficulty to select along this track the most suitable places for the establishment of observing stations. It is therefore desirable to collect information as to local conditions well in advance of the time when, if the war is over, it may be possible to send astronomical expeditions for this important observation. The following table, abbreviated from the Nautical Almanac for 1919, p. 421, gives the positions of points on the central line of totality :—