

INTRODUCTION TO THE TRANSCRIPTION AND TRANSLATION OF THE GORDON TRAVEL JOURNALS

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The project of making the entire Gordon Atlas available on CD-ROM was initiated in discussions between Mr M.D. Haga of the Rijksprentenkabinet, Amsterdam and Professor Andrew Smith of the Archaeology Department, University of Cape Town. The intention was to place the entire corpus of Gordon drawings and writings on this web site.

Once the decision had been taken to begin the project, Professor Smith asked me to contribute towards it with my own transcriptions and translations of the Gordon Travel Journals. These documents could then be matched to the Rijksmuseum's portion of the Atlas so that the written work would complement the visual elements, thus augmenting and enhancing the whole field of research.

My first problem was that the manuscripts of the Journals had been written on an old typewriter in the late 1970's, in a remote area of Mpumalanga: that is -- some time before personal computers were in common use in South Africa. Unfortunately, after the lapse of twenty odd years, the condition of my original manuscripts had deteriorated while in storage and attempts at scanning the pages proved unsatisfactory.

The next step, in Cape Town, was to set up a small work unit under my supervision. I was fortunate enough to find two typists willing to contribute their professional and language talents to the job. Ms Annemarie Krzesinski-de Widt who is Dutch by birth, took over the transcriptions, revising and correcting the original versions with meticulous care. Ms Sherry Woods undertook the retyping of the translations, a long and painstaking task in its own right. I am grateful to the zeal and dedication of both participants.

In the preliminary pages of my biography, *Robert Jacob Gordon 1743-1795: The Man and his Travels at the Cape* (Cape Town, Struik/ Winchester, 1992) I placed an introductory section explaining the aims and methods used in transcribing and translating Gordon's papers and four travel journals. I can do no better than present that section here -- with minor modifications.

In working on the Gordon documents, I used photocopies of his papers in the Cape and Transvaal Archives. I also used a photocopy of the journals which was lent to me. In addition, I was given access to the original manuscripts in the Brenthurst Library, Johannesburg, which enabled me to decipher some of the words and passages that were faint or illegible in the copies. Whenever I needed to quote from Gordon's original Dutch, French or English, I aimed to transcribe his words exactly, however eccentric the spelling, however haphazard the punctuation. Indeed, his style was steadfastly erratic. In his journals and drafts, he seldom bothered to use capital letters, either at the start of a sentence or for place and personal names. Often the

spelling of a name, in fact any word, could differ when used twice in the same sentence. My transcriptions endeavour to reproduce these variants exactly.

Concerning the translations, on the other hand, I felt that some uniformity would be desirable, since I would not be quoting from his original text. Thus, in order to have a reference that was, to some extent, constant for place names, I generally adopted the spelling used in Gordon's 'great map' (Map 3 of the Gordon Atlas in the Rijksmuseum).

The names of people presented a separate problem. In most instances the first version given by Gordon was used, but where a name recurred frequently the commonest version was adopted. Complete uniformity however, was almost impossible, so I beg the reader's indulgence in this matter, pleading, at the very least, that some flavour of the original is retained when variant spellings occur. Nevertheless, though Gordon's handwriting was not neat or handsome, though he wrote all over the margins and jumped pages in continuing a sentence, it is astonishing how little of what he wrote is illegible. His handwriting remained as clear, decisive and vigorous as the man himself.

A vexing issue in translating a work of this nature is the question of anachronisms. Words like *veld*, *outspan*, *inspan*, *vlei* or *krantz* were not in use in English at the time Gordon wrote. On the whole, therefore I tried to follow the terms used by Paterson, Gordon's contemporary, in translating words such as these. Consistency here was again difficult since each journal varies, if only slightly, in style and approach. Even so, the aim to ensure consistency was there. In turns of phrase, likewise, I tried to use locutions that were neither aggressively modern nor whimsically archaic. It will be noted that in the translations the word 'Caffer' is used instead of 'Kaffir'. To have abandoned this word entirely would have been historically inaccurate. Today, however, the term 'Kaffir' is offensive. It was, therefore, a happy compromise to use the spelling Gordon himself used in the Dutch, i.e. Caffer, thus preserving the historical nomenclature, but creating a distance from the modern form of the word. Similarly, in translating 'wilden' it may seem more correct to use the word 'savages' rather than my choice of 'wild people', but since 'wilden' is almost always applied to the 'Bushmen', and because Gordon manifestly had a real sympathy for these people, I chose to use the latter term, in this way keeping an etymological link between the Dutch and English. Again, the decision to use 'Bushmen' and 'Hottentot', with or without inverted commas, was also a difficult one. My reason for retaining these terms was that, in the first place, they were the words Gordon used in Dutch. i.e. 'Bosjesmans' and 'Hottentotten', and secondly, having reviewed the current controversy surrounding the words San and Khoi, it seemed better to keep the historical link with Gordon's terms than to use the words most commonly employed today. Indeed, Gordon was well aware of what these people called themselves. In a draft letter of 1779, addressed to his friend and mentor in the Netherlands, the Greffier Hendrik Fagel, Gordon wrote: ' . . . as far as I know Hottentots call themselves Quoi Queuna. However, in dialect . . . some say (Queina or Eina for Queuna. Literally, this means person people; Queuna being the plural of Quoi-person.' A few lines later he cites the word 'Saaneina' for 'Bushmen'.^[1]

Perhaps the last word on this subject of nomenclature should be left to M.L. Wilson of the South African Museum. Concluding a trenchant and comprehensive article, he

writes... "the choice of terms such as 'Hottentot' or 'Khoikhoi' or 'Bushman' or 'San' should be dictated by the context or individual preference. To those who see derogatory racist or sexist connotations in the use of any of the names (although 'San' definitely does seem to be derogatory), the words of the motto of the British Order of the Garter apply: *Honi soit qui mal y pense*, shamed be he who evil thinks" [2].

Gordon's own manner of expression in the journals is rough, even clumsy in places, and often monotonous with its meteorological and cartographical repetitions. No attempt has been made to render the style more elegant. The journals, in particular, were kept for information and primarily must be seen and read as such. (One can imagine, for example, Gordon turning to them when he advised Le Vaillant how to proceed with his travels.) However, they would have emerged in a very different form had Gordon gone on to write a book from them - which was almost certainly his intention. Indeed, several of Gordon's contemporaries refer to the fact that he intended 'to give to the world, from his own hand, a history of his travels'. In particular, it is sadly ironic to read the words of the Dutch naval officer, Rear-Admiral Stavorinus, who had met Gordon in 1778:

It is to be hoped that the death of colonel Gordon will not deprive the world of the invaluable results of his researches; and that, in whatever hands his papers may be, they will not be consigned to oblivion, or withheld from the public, who might justly form great expectations from his long residence at the Cape, his frequent journeys up the country and his well-known zeal for the promotion of knowledge. [3]

Finally, in considering the nature of the texts, and therefore the nature of the translations, it must be remembered that Gordon was writing his journals in the veld, under harsh conditions and whenever the occasion presented itself - which most probably was at night with poor illumination. This alone - the physical act of writing was a remarkable feat considering the distances he covered, the people and places he had to see, the often strenuous demands of mapping, as well as the need to hunt game for food and to reconnoitre a path for the wagon. He was, of course, aided in these tasks by his servants and companions. Nevertheless, it is clear from the narrative that he never shirked these duties and responsibilities. His pragmatic zeal, his daily regimen of writing in the field and his dedication to accuracy can only be admired by posterity.

FOOTNOTES

1. VC 595 in the Cape Archives, p. 123.
2. M.L. Wilson, ' "By any other name" The nomenclature of the Khoisan', mimeo, n.d., a paper read at the biennial conference of the South African Association of Archeologists, Grahamstown. It refers to a wide variety of views on the subject by most of the scholars, past and present, active in the field.

Smith, A.B. 1998. Khoesaaan orthography. South

African Archaeological Bulletin 53: 37-38.

3 J.S. Stavorinus, *Voyages to the East Indies*, vol. 3. P 456.