

AN ARCHIVIST'S ERROR? NOTES ON THE ORIGIN OF TWO FARM NAMES IN THE WESTERN CAPE

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In discussing the origin of the names *Bakkeley Plaats* and *Vredendal*, two adjacent farms in the western Cape Province, a former chief archivist wrote:

"In the 17th century the Dutch had an encounter with an unfriendly tribe of natives who had stolen cattle of another Hottentot tribe and the Europeans. The latter, to commemorate the fight, named this place *Bakkeley Plaats* ... Shortly after a treaty of peace was made with the natives at a place a little further on. This place they called *Vredendal* ..."¹

Reference to the verbatim copies of the *Dagberegister* for 17 May 1668 (one of the sources cited by Botha) reveals that on that day some Hottentots brought a letter from Saldanha Bay, sent by a corporal Bosman to Commander C. van Quaelbergen. Bosman reported that a great number of Hottentots, called Namaquas, stole the stock of some other Cape Hottentots as well as ten head of cattle and 30 sheep belonging to the Dutch. In the ensuing fracas two or three "van de onse" ("of our men"), presumably the Company's men at the Saldanha Bay post, were wounded and three Hottentots "onder de voet leyden" (wounded or killed). The following day a letter was sent to corporal Bosman instructing him to send ten men with a wagon and merchandise to the Namaqua in an attempt to continue bartering for stock. They were, however, not to mention the stolen animals and their attitude was to be nothing but defensive, showing no hostility towards the Namaqua.²

On 25 June 1668 Bosman reported to the commander (by then Jacob Borghorst) that the party had been unable to make contact with the Namaqua, even though they had crossed the Olifants River. They had run short of provisions and had to return to Saldanha Bay.³ There is no reference to any battle in the vicinity of the Olifants River, and it seems quite clear that the stock theft and ensuing battle took place at or near Saldanha Bay.

In the second source which Graham Botha cited (the journal of Van der Stel's Namaqualand expedition), the following excerpts are relevant:

20 September 1685: "... we came once more to the Eliphants [*sic*] River where it flows through high and rocky hills stretching SW. After we had gone over another high sandhill we came to a flat called the Backeleij Plaets with the river on one side and the mountains on the other, where we camped".

21 September: "After it had been reported to the Hon. Commander that there was a kraal of Hottentots in the vicinity, namely Gregriquas, three men were ordered to go there to visit them and to persuade them to come to us with their huts and cattle. But when the men came there, they had left the previous evening, out of fear that their cattle would be taken from them, because they had risen up against their captain who had been appointed by the Hon. Company ..."

23 September: "... the Hon. Commander tried to solve the dispute concerning the said Gregriquas, part of whom were gathered here, by way of many counsellings by the Hon. Commander to do so, seeing that they were a small tribe and to fight amongst one another was bad, and that other Hottentots could so much more easily rob them of their cattle. Whereupon they promised to return the cattle ... to the aforesaid Captain and furthermore to live in peace with one another".⁴

It seems quite clear that the Namaqua were involved in the first incident, the "Gregriquas" (formerly known as the Chariguriqua) in the second. Even if it is assumed that corporal Bosman mistook the tribal identity of the 1668 raiders, it is unlikely that, seventeen years later, they would still have had the stock they stole; moreover, there is no mention of the stock stolen from the Company. Furthermore, the peace made by Simon van der Stel was *among* the Gregriqua, not between them and the Dutch.

The fact that the name "Backeleij Plaets" was used without comment in 1685, suggests that by that time it was in common use. However, it does not appear in the journals of any of the earlier expeditions to the area. As far as can be ascertained, the only reference to any sort of trouble in the western parts of the Cape that could have given rise to the name appears in the journal of Frederik de Smit of the 1662-1663 expedition to the Namaqua under the leadership of Pieter Cruythoff. The party left the Olifants River on 8 December 1662 and on the night of 27 December they were attacked by people they supposed to be "Souquas" (later



C.G. Botha (1893-1973).

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¹ C.G. BOTHA, *Place names in the Cape Province ...* (Cape Town and Johannesburg, 1926), p. 15; the sources cited are "Journal 17.5.1668" and "Journal of Van der Stel's trip to Namaqualand 21.9.1685."

² Cape Archives Depot, Cape Town (CA), VC 5 Verbatim Copies, Day Book 1667-1670, pp. 246-248.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

⁴ G.C. DE WET and R.H. PHEIFFER, *Simon van der Stel's journey to Namaqualand in 1685* (Cape Town and Pretoria), pp. 316-319.

known as Bushmen), who severely wounded four of their men, one almost mortally. The text, however, makes it quite clear that this incident occurred considerably further north than the Olifants River,⁵ which runs through the farm Bakkeley Plaats.

A possible contributory source of the incorrect association of the Vredendal district Bakkeley Plaats with the incident of 1668 is Godée Molsbergen, who mentions it briefly and adds a footnote: "Vandaar die plaatsnaam *Bakkeley-plaats*".⁶

The guide-book to Vredendal repeats a version of the Botha story,⁷ and a local tradition is that the Hottentots killed in the battle were buried by the Dutch.⁸ This gave rise to speculation that graves on a vacant plot of land on the north bank of the Olifants River, at the junction of Vredendal's Voortrekker Street and the Lutzville road, might be those of the Hottentots killed in the battle of Bakkeley Plaats.⁹ The stone-capped graves were oval, suggesting extended burials, and some had simple headstones, both features indicating the adoption of European burial practices.

The possibility that these might be the graves of Hottentots killed in some battle was, however, dispelled during a rescue operation in 1983-1984 prior to the levelling of the plot for building purposes. Of the 45 graves excavated — about two-thirds of those that remained after the site had been disturbed by earlier quarrying operations — more than 30 were those of infants of six months or younger, the rest being those of juveniles or the aged; and there was no indication of violent death. The graves were of different types, suggesting that the burials had taken place over an extended period.¹⁰

Comparison of the plans attached to the title-deeds of the two farms¹¹ with modern maps tends to confirm that the burial ground was on the original Vredendal farmlands and not on those of Bakkeley Plaats, where there is said to be a similar burial ground which has not yet been investigated. The best information that can be obtained regarding the date of the burials in the Vredendal burial ground is that they took place between the initial granting of the leasehold on 30 November 1837¹² and, at the latest, about 1920.¹³

There is no actual local knowledge as to who was buried in the graves, but the evidence of the graves, their contents and the physical characteristics of the human remains suggests that it was the burial place of the Vredendal farm labourers and their families.¹⁴

⁵ CA, VC 37 Verbatim Copies, Journal and Day Registers of expeditions, 1659-1791, No. 3, no pagination. See also D. MOODIE (ed.), *The Record* (Cape Town, 1838; photostatic reprint Amsterdam and Cape Town, 1960), p. 263.

⁶ E.C. GODÉE MOLSBERGEN (ed.), *Reizen in Zuid-Afrika in de Hollandse tijd I* (Linschoten Society XI, The Hague, 1916), p. 134.

⁷ LIONS CLUB VREDENDAL, *Vredendal* (Cape Town?, n.d.), no pagination (see section on "History").

⁸ Personal communication by P. van Zyl.

⁹ Personal communication by P. Rau.

¹⁰ The results of this project by W.J.J. van Rijssen, M.L. Wilson and B. Kaufmann are in preparation.

¹¹ Deeds Office, Cape Town, Clanwilliam Quitrents, Fol. 1.

¹² *Ibid.* See also "Vredendal".

¹³ Personal communications by H. van Zyl and Mrs. J. Claassens. Mr Van Zyl, whose father came to farm in the Vredendal area in 1900 (and who was born in 1907), stated that the graves had been there as far back as he can remember ("sedert ek my verstand gekry het"), i.e. before about 1914. Mrs Claassens, born in the Okiep area in 1912, came to Vredendal before 1920. She lived across the road from the burial ground, and stated that there had been no burials there since that time.

¹⁴ See footnote 10 above.

It is concluded, therefore, that although Botha's suggestion regarding the origin of the name Vredendal may be based on fact, there is nothing to connect the incident of 1668 with the origin of the name Bakkeley Plaats. The name does, however, indicate that a battle of some sort did take place there; and it is possible that future research might yield the facts. ©

BOEKBESPREKINGS/ BOOK REVIEWS

J.S. BERGH en J.C. VISAGIE. *The eastern Cape frontier zone 1660-1980: a cartographic guide for historical research*. Durban: Butterworths, 1985. 83 pp. Geill. R42,94 (eksklusief). ISBN 0 409 11142 2.

Die Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedskrywing is betreklik arm aan historiese atlasse. E.A. Walker se *Historical atlas of South Africa* en E. Stockenström se *Historiese atlas van Suid-Afrika* het reeds in die jare twintig verskyn en is lank reeds versamelaarstukke. Selfs A.J. Böeseken se skoolatlas *Geskiedenis-atlas vir Suid-Afrika* uit die jare veertig wat reeds herhaaldelik herdruk is, is tans nie meer gereedelik beskikbaar nie. *The eastern Cape frontier zone* van Bergh en Visagie kom gevolglik soos 'n verkwikkende reënbus na 'n lang droogte. Dit breek egter nie die droogte op die gebied van historiese atlasse nie, want, soos die titel aandui, is dit slegs 'n streekatlas. Vir die student en navorsers wat in die evolusie van die vroegste grense van die Kaapkolonie en van die Oos-Kaapse ontwikkeling tot in die twintigste eeu geïnteresseerd is, is dit 'n waardevolle bron en gids.



Hoewel die subtitel suggereer dat die leser met 'n *kartografiese gids* te doen het, het die werk veel meer om die lyf. Die teks wat die bykans veertig kaarte toelig, berus op deeglike bronnestudie en argivale navorsing. Dit kan in die meeste gevalle met vrug geraadpleeg word selfs sonder verwysing na die kaarte waarop dit betrekking het. Die gebruiker mag selfs vind dat hy meer detailinligting uit die teks as uit die kaarte kan haal.

Binne die bestek van die opdrag wat die skrywers aan hulleself gestel het, word 'n wye terrein gedek. In die eerste hoofstuk word met behulp van 'n reeks kaarte 'n oorsigtelike uiteensetting gegee van die verspreiding van die inheemse bevolking, asook van die trekbewegings van die Blanke boere uit die weste en die Xhosa uit die ooste tot met die totstandkoming van die landdrostrik Graaff-Reinet in 1785 — waardeur die Groot Visrivier as die mees oostelike grens van die Kaapkolonie vasgelê is. Vervolgens word kortliks toeligting gegee met betrekking tot die situasie in die Kaapkolonie in 1800 en 1805, ook wat die vestiging en verspreiding van die Suid-Nguni betref.

Die hoofstukke wat uitsluitlik op die Oos-Kaap betrekking het, word ingelui met 'n bespreking en toeligting van ontwikkelinge aan die Oosgrens in die jare onmiddellik voor die koms en ten tyde van die vestiging van die Britse Setlaars in 1820, en die jare daarna. Die streekhistorikus sal veral geïnteresseerd wees in die uiteensetting van die veldkornetskappe in die landdrostrikte Albanie, George, Graaff-Reinet, Somerset en Uitenhage in die jare 1825-36.

Die opstellers gee besondere aandag aan uitstaande historiese episodes soos die Katriviernedersetting (1829-50), sir Benjamin D'Urban se grens-