A map and its copy of Governor Simon van der Stel's expedition to Namaqualand (1685): an enquiry into their visual values

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This article deals with a VOC map and its copy by an anonymous French cartographer of Governor Simon van der Stel's expedition to Namaqualand in 1685. The original map of the journey, drawn between late 1685 and early 1686, is not only a document of the expedition to the Copper Mountains, but has specific visual qualities which were modified in the copy. We consider that a thorough comparison of the two maps, their visual display, the relationship of the image to the text, and the background information on which both of them are based may lead to interesting observations on how an unknown territory was represented and why.

Like any work of visual art, a map reveals the "intelligence of sight" (a phrase coined by Barbara Stafford) of a cultural period and exemplifies its visuality and manner of pictorial conceptualisation. Furthermore, the examination of two visual artefacts representing the same reality in different ways will reveal the dissimilar purposes for which they were made and the divergent intentions, cultural background and training of the draftsmen. It follows that the purpose of a map cannot be confined within the bounds of a mere sign system since it can have multiple

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multiple meanings: besides being an aid to navigation and thus a document, it may also be a work of art destined for collections. Moreover the study of maps implicates the scholarship relating to intellectual and material history and can therefore borrow liberally from art history which is an intersecting discipline. Thus David Woodward\textsuperscript{4} describes the history of cartography as “an interdisciplinary field”.

The extensive field of Dutch colonial cartography is fairly well known,\textsuperscript{5} but the appropriation of VOC maps by third parties who copied them remains largely unexplored. The Namaqualand expedition map, a testimony of the first recognition of a territory where the governor wanted to develop new economic resources, is part of a hidden reality. This particular category of maps has recently been investigated in the case of other colonies in America and Asia,\textsuperscript{6} but the very particular case of a Dutch map and its French clandestine counterpart will tell us more about two distinct cultural conceptions of land representation and the different interests of each nation in colonial exploration, and it may open up a new dimension in the history of Dutch-French colonial relationships.

The most famous seventeenth-century VOC maps were set out on textile paper or parchment in lead pencil or silver point by the cartographer or land surveyor and then reworked by illustrators or illuminators,\textsuperscript{7} called “kaartafzetters”, “verluchters” or “illuminators”. Commercial cartography required printed maps embellished with more colours than the sober colours used by land surveyors. Therefore a new group of specialised craftsmen came into being who lent prestige and pictorial impact to mapmaking through artistic training. During the second half of the seventeenth century mainly watercolours were applied in thin washes. The practitioners who produced individual maps were expected to have a good command of pictorial composition and artistic expression. Although our maps may not have been elaborated in such a workshop, they derive from this tradition of artistic cartography and their status therefore remains ambiguous. It is doubtful that they were intended for purely practical purposes. In particular, the Dutch account of Governor Simon van der Stel’s journey to Namaqualand, as set out on one of the maps examined in this article, contains a range of ornamental elements exemplifying the wish of its patrons to signal their social and cultural status.

Soon after they settled in the Cape peninsula, the Dutch became interested in the interior of the land, motivated by the desire to know the hinterland populations and to explore the possibility of discovering the kingdom of Monomotapa, which has been mentioned on many charts of Africa since the Middle Ages and was believed to be the site of large deposits of gold.\textsuperscript{8} After a series of journeys that were overshadowed by adversity, the settlers had gained some knowledge of the land and its inhabitants to the north, up to the Oliphants River which was reached in 1661.\textsuperscript{9} In 1681 some Namas brought gifts of copper to Governor Simon van der Stel who afterwards decided to further explore this northern area which could bring wealth to the Cape-based community. Half a year later the Governor decided to send the Swedish born VOC official Olof Bergh on an inland expedition, repeated the next year, to discover the exact location of the Copper Mountains described by the Namaquas. The schematic chart of the 1682 expedition still exists.\textsuperscript{10} It only gives an account of the inland route followed along the coast which explorers of that time mainly knew from sea maps and charts. On Van der Stel’s map the most important positions marked are supplemented with long lists of detailed legends, constituting a kind of summary of the most important places described in the journal. This system of combined drawing and written description follows the pattern of previous expedition maps, such as Olof Bergh’s, map, except that the visual impact of his map is undoubtedly inferior to that of Van der Stel’s.

Van der Stel’s journey of 1685-1686, undertaken with the help of two miners, followed on the tracks of previous journeys, consolidating efforts to find the desired semiprecious metal. The
Figure 1
Map of Governor Simon van der Stel’s expedition to Namaqualand.
(Copyright and photo credit: Nationaal Archief, The Hague)

Figure 2
Copy of the map of Governor Simon van der Stel’s expedition to Namaqualand.
(Copyright and photo credit: Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris)
Governor's interest in mining is reflected in a model of a “Bergwerk off Myne”, dated the year of his return from Namaqualand in 1686, which might be a vague project to exploit the new-found Copper Mountains.11

Different versions of the journal are known, including a unique series of sketches, attributed to Hendrik Claudius, a German apothecary residing at the Cape at that time, depicting landscape features and the fauna and flora observed during the journey. Most appropriately, the first drawing depicts the area of the Copper Mountains, the goal of this journey. These drawings, have already been published and analysed as documents of the journey,12 but the exact function and meaning of the maps have yet to be investigated.

It is very difficult to establish the authorship of the maps. The VOC had a land surveyor at the Cape since 1657. At the time of Van der Stel’s expedition Johannes Mulder fulfilled the official duties of a land surveyor, which were mostly limited to the drafting of property deeds.13 An occasional caller at the Cape, who would be almost impossible to track, could have contributed to the local cartography, and it is more probable that rather than Mulder, such a caller who was trained in the Netherlands could have been the draftsman of the Dutch version, since the signature mark, located close to Hooge Kraal, indicated as 2 on the map, attests that it was the work of a professional mapmaker.

The authorship of the French version is even more difficult to trace. However, that map bears the date 1688, erroneously referred to as the date of the journey. We know of other visual documents, dated between 1686 and 1689 and kept in the French military archives and the Bibliothèque nationale de France, which illustrate the Cape area and bear the signature of Lamare, a French engineer, who joined the famous expedition of the Jesuits to the Kingdom of Siam. This expedition left France in 1684 and called twice at the Cape. The name of this French engineer was mentioned by the Abbé de Choisy, a member of that same party, in his diary of the trip.14 This same writer gives an interesting account of Van der Stel’s expedition to the north the year before the French party called at the Cape. Choisy says the governor told them about the expedition he made in 1685 to the north where he could find nothing but very sociable people. This is all the governor said, apart from that “he’s not paid to tell us the secrets of the VOC”. However the French did manage to get further information, from another anonymous member of Van der Stel’s party who told about the mines and may have succumbed to the temptation to embellish the truth, speaking of gold and silver in order to get more money for his betrayal. On this occasion he may even have secretly passed the map on to the French, and Lamare may have used the opportunity to draw a copy of it. This anonymous individual also referred again to the “sweetness of the peoples living in these countries”.15 Lamare was supposed to send the maps from Bangkok to France, as stated in the report to the King of France written on 27 December 1687.16 In an account about vernacular architecture in Siam, including many details about local building materials and opportunities for further constructions, Lamare explains that he sent two maps of the Cape to France, one of the bay, the other of the town. He gives some military information about the defence of the sites, but says nothing about the Van der Stel expedition map which, presumably, contained too many economic details which better not be disclosed.17

Father Tachard, a Jesuit who was a member of the French party to Siam, revealed that Claudius transmitted some maps to the French: “M. Claudius [...] Ce savant médecin a déjà fait quelques voyages à six-vingt lieues avant, dans les terres vers le nord et vers l’est, pour y faire de nouvelles découvertes, c'est de lui nous avons tiré toutes connaissances que avons de ce pays, d'ont il nous donna une petite carte faite de sa main avec quelques figures des habitants du pays et des animaux les plus rares.”18 It therefore comes as no surprise that Van der Stel later sent Claudius to Batavia for having given too much information to the Jesuits.19
Accurate identification of our mapmakers would have contributed to our understanding of their background and training. Nevertheless, it is possible to figure out the diversity of sources to which our mapmakers had access. The general line of the journey was added, with the only help of the coordinates given by the journal, on a previously copied pattern supposedly coming from the large corpus of maps circulating throughout the ramifications of the VOC administration all over the world and duly authorised by the Dutch chambers of the Company. As the Dutch version of our map attests, the cartographer may also have used nautical maps, or notes previously taken from one such map, which was of the kind that VOC captains and sailors were mostly acquainted with.

The inland expedition maps therefore combine at least two different elements: a topographical map of the coast, incorporating the maritime knowledge of the continent, and an odological map (that is a map without metric dimensions) of the interior, based on the new knowledge gathered during the journey of the area traversed by the route. Some discrepancies result from the juxtaposition of two different and sometimes diverging sources on the same territory: Saldanha Bay, for instance, has been proportionally more reduced than its northern neighbour, but the party took much more time walking this portion than the previous one.

Presumably both mapmakers had access to a version, or several versions, of the expedition's journal and would have been trained to convert a written information into a drawing. These journals provide not only the coordinates of the selected spots of interest, but also some landscape descriptions that may be of use to the mapmakers in order to locate mountains, rivers or other features. As the journal attests, the explorers made extensive use of the geographical knowledge of the indigenous people they met along the journey. On the Dutch map, such knowledge is evident from the naming of some places in the local language. It is not certain that the expedition implemented the recommendations made to Van der Stel in 1682 by an inspector of the VOC on his visit to the Cape. After many problems encountered during previous expeditions, the said inspector duly advised the newly appointed governor to always add to the parties venturing inland a surveyor who would keep notes of the course taken from day to day, and of the mountains, valleys, forests, and rivers encountered along the way. If available on relevant occasions, the mapmakers could also rely on the maps drawn of the northern territories by previous explorers, such as the Van Meerhoff expedition to the Olifants River in 1661, and Olof Bergh's expedition of 1682-1683. Consequently, our mapmakers had a great variety of sources at their disposal (illustrated, written and oral) and their work consisted in the cautious selection of pieces of information and the elaboration of a synthesis. However, since most of these documents are no longer available, the specific sources they used can hardly be deduced from the two preserved maps.

Geographical knowledge increased greatly with the passage of centuries. The old maps will appear schematic and erroneous to the contemporary geographer, but when compared with recent maps issued by the South African Government Printer our maps are different because every map fulfills specific needs. The coordinates, as calculated by Van der Stel and recorded in the journal, correspond exactly with those of the Dutch version, but they vary approximately one degree from the modern versions. For example, the longitude of Cape Town is in fact 18°28". The colonies of the VOC made extensive use of the coordinates as applied in maps issued by the successive generations of the family of Willem Jansz Blaeu who were the official cartographers of the VOC in Amsterdam since 1633 (eg. the Map of Africa in his World Atlas of 1630). The fact that the map of Van der Stel's expedition was drawn according to some preexisting coastal map pattern is to blame for serious scale discrepancies, not only regarding the distance traveled, but also the nearest distances from numbered points on the line indicating the journey to the coast. It is notable that no continuous surveying calculation was made during the trip, and that the distances provided in the journal were obtained by subtraction from each other of the coordinates between two points.
two points of observation. Other distances are calculated according to the time required to reach a place. Location is therefore either correlated with the position of the observer facing the sun, or it is determined according to traveling time. This deviates greatly from mapping procedures used by the Dutch in the Cape area to survey land for the purpose of registered title deeds that made extensive use of the roede (Cape rood) as a unit of measurement.

The Dutch map of Van der Stel’s journey is an attempt to locate the route followed in relation to the spatial distribution of mountains and rivers as the most prominent geographical features, which are rendered by means of conventional schemata on the map. The signs used are either iconic or conventional: mountains are stylised and rendered naturalistically while lines are used to indicate rivers. Thus, the overriding character of the map is that of landscape representation. However, it differs greatly from a painting, since it has no fixed orientation for the spectator. The mountains are sometimes depicted as seen from the north, sometimes from the south. There is a possibility that the map was drawn with a view to its being placed on a table and scrutinised by several people standing around it.

According to Van der Stel’s diary the journey started at the fort in Cape Town (numbered 1 on the map), symbolically represented in plan and coloured red with the Dutch flag attached. The red line tracing the course of the journey starts at Hooge Kraal (2 on the map), where important people and the governor joined the party. The functions of the colours are explained in a note added to the cartouche. But this is only a partial explanation of the language used, and it is limited to the route followed. On the French version, which was not obliged to obey protocol, the plan of the fort became a red star, and the line indicating the course of the journey starts there, which is where the journey in fact began.

On the Dutch version the most important geographical features, rivers and mountains are rendered in shades of green. The outline of the coast is also green, but with yellow underlining.
The green shading used for Table Mountain, which runs into the coastline even in the flattest area of the Cape Peninsula, causes confusion of the colour coding. Likewise, confusion is created by the representation of Kasteelberg, close to number 7, and indicated as Riebeecks Kasteel, where mountains are interpreted by the French cartographer as a confluence of rivers. The course traced by the expedition is a red line, as is the coastline from present-day Elandsbaai onwards. We therefore deduce that red indicates the less explored part of the west coast and is thus symbolic of the unknown. The cartographer also applied conventional signs for hydrographic features. Seasonal rivers explored during early December 1685 are indicated as a dotted line, for example the great Sant River north of the Copper Mountains. Dots and crosses on the coastline indicate the depth of the water. In Table Bay depth soundings are indicated as even numbers. This information, which was appropriated from nautical maps, prefigured the enquiry commissioned by Simon van der Stel in 1687.25

On the other hand the French version is obviously more schematic. Even if it seems to be a simplified version, the lack of colour is no obstacle to the inclusion of information. Most notably, it distinguishes clearly between the hydrographic elements, which are coloured green, and all earth features — including the line indicating the course of the journey — which are coloured brown.

Maps were not considered an adequate medium to render landscape features as elements apart from of the indicated route. The intension to depict the landscape naturalistically is evident in the two drawings reflecting the Copper Mountains, which are included in the manuscript of Van der Stel’s journal kept at Dublin (edited by Gilbert Waterhouse). The stylisation of the Copper Mountains on the Dutch map is reminiscent of the depiction of the same place in outline drawings (figure 3). It seems to have been customary to complement the text and map descriptions of such explorations with sketches of landscape features, as attested by Olof Bergh's statement that he sketched the mountain ranges. However, these sketches cannot be traced in the archives and may be lost.26 The first landscape drawing of Van der Stel’s journey makes use of the correspondence between marked points and a specific legend, as on the map. The representation of the mountains is in the same style as that indicated by iconic signs on the map.

In some instances the Dutch cartographer decided not to depict some of the features referred to in the cartouche, but described in the journal.27 For example, the feature indicated as Honing Bergh (number 9) does not appear as a mountain range to the west of the line indicating the journey’s course. Furthermore, the number 9 is placed at a position from which the mountain was visible to the explorers, and not at the actual location of the mountain range. There is a discrepancy in the depiction of Piquet Berg too because it is a lower range than the Geberghten van vier en twintig Rivieren to the east, but its dimensions are shown disproportionately large, presumably because it was perceived the way it was drawn.

The river indicated between the Oliphants Rivier and the Bergh Rivier on the maps flows into the sea at the mouth of the Jakkals Rivier and then crosses the route of the expedition between Kanarieberg and Blouberg (the northern end of the mountain range called Olifansrivierbergen) which coincides with the bed of the Verlorevleirivier.28 This confusion about the flow of two rivers shows that the correspondence between the hinterland and the coast was not always verified, either by Van der Stel or by the cartographer. According to the French version this river ends some distance before it reaches the coast, which is most probably graphic evidence that the river flowed seasonally, which is common for in this area.

The Dutch version not only provides geographical information but is also embellished with colour and ornamental elements. The cartouche represents a cabinet reminiscent of the decorated wooden cabinet in some of the Dutch collections in which atlases, more especially the Blaeu volumes, were kept. The wind rose is of the type appearing on contemporary printed maps.
Allegorical figures, typical of the European practice of the time, are absent, but what identifies the map most conspicuously is the word “AFRICA” in red capital letters. However, with only three colours the cartographer succeeded in creating an attractive combination of art and geographical landscaping. It is clear from its elaborate and rich ornamental devices that the Dutch version went beyond a simple record of the trip.

In contrast, the French version is starkly factual with the emphasis on visual clarity, with little concession to decoration, and it contains fewer inscriptions. It is difficult to say on what basis the draftsman or cartographer made a selection. Curiously, he omits the legend in the cartouche but retains the numbered points shown in the Dutch version. While the Dutch version relies more on inscriptions and other textual annotations, the French version is more visual, that is less dependent on text and ornament. Paradoxically, therefore, the more artistic version is less visual and more dependent on textual explication.

The Dutch version was sent to VOC headquarters together with a copy of the journal. According to Waterhouse other copies or versions of both the journal and the illustrated documentation may have been circulating within the Dutch world. There is no evidence of what these maps were used for. For overseas people they could attest the resources of the Cape settlement and the vastness of the hinterland. In this respect a map intended for the VOC in the Netherlands – but known to the French – was obviously not important for the French public, but could have had economic and strategic importance. On the other hand a search for a mythical Monomotapa was, for the Dutch, a way to align their new-found colony with history and affirm its relevance in a barely explored continent.

Finally, a map is not a neutral instrument to locate places, but also a way to stake or register a claim to, or ownership of the land. Actually the maps discussed here were probably not used again for practical purposes in the field. Their symbolic impact is stronger than the mere factual information that they convey. In this respect, the two maps express different ways of representing land and concentrate on different features. Because of the requirement that a map should render reality faithfully, and the mapmaker’s obligation to elaborate a system of signs, the map is a privileged site for the perception of mimetic codes. Even if the two maps under discussion basically offer the representation of the same reality at the same time (and one has most certainly been copied from the other), their differences do not lie only in different ways of depicting a territory, but in the extensive range of visual values that they reveal.

Notes
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1 Published by Godde-Molsbergen (1916).
2 Pf. 114, Division 2, P. 1, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département des cartes et plans.
7 See Fockema and Koeman (1972: 98).
9 See the relative expeditions reports in the successive governor’s journals as published by Leibbrandt (1897, III: 202-211, 230-240, 256-263, 327-334; 190: 36-37, 92-93, 310, 312).
11 4-Vel-813, The Hague, Rijksargief.
12 See Waterhouse (1932: xi-xxviii).
14 “M. l’ambassadeur [of France] a dit au roi [of Siam], qu’ayant examiné ses places, et les trouvant en mauvais état, il lui offrit Lamare

15 “L’année passée, le gouverneur du Cap alla lui-même à la découverte. Il avait avec lui soixante hollandais, deux cents esclaves, et quelques Outentos, cinq chevaux, trente huit chariots à bœuf, et cent cinquante bêtes de charge. Il alla, dit-il deux cents lieux vers le nord, par un méchant pays, et ne trouva rien de remarquable; seulement quelques peuples bien faits, blancs, fort sociables, qui dansaient toujours […] Le gouverneur ne dit que cela: mais il n’est pas payé pour nous aller dire les secrets de la compagnie. Voici ce que dit un de ceux qui l’ont accompagné, homme de bon sens: qu’ils ont trouvé les plus beaux pays du monde, et cela est croyable, puisqu’ils y ont mené des chariots, que les peuples sont fort doux, qu’il y a des mines d’or et d’argent, et il nous a donné des essais. Que de temps en temps ils trouvaient de petites collines toutes d’albâtre et toutes de cristal, que ces mines sont à plus de cent cinquante lieues du Cap, à trois ou quatre lieues de la mer. Enfin ce qui fait croire qu’il y a quelque chose à faire là, c’est que le gouverneur y envoie présentement une grosse barque reconnaître les côtes et tâcher d’entrer dans les rivières” (Choisy 1741: 462-464).

16 Paris, Archives Nationales, Colonies, C1/23, f.221 r.

17 Lamare, Mémoire sur le royaume de Siam et autres pays de l’orient, Paris, Archives Nationales, Marine, 3JJ/368.

18 Tachard (1686: 66).

19 See the letter by Simon van der Stel to the VOC headquarters, dated 26 April 1688, as recorded by Leibrandt (1887)

20 For example: “Sant Rivier of bij d’Hott’gen’ tausi ‘tweelck in ’t duyts geseght is Buffels Rivier.”

21 “Een stuirmen en landmeter, sullen goede aantekenings moeten houden van de Coerassen en strekkingen, om te weten hoedanigen wegh sij gegaan, ende hoe veel mijlen sij tusschen ’t Oosten en Noord Oosten in een rechte linie van ’t Fort geweest zijn. Item de gedaanten der bergen, valeijen, boschren, rivieren, kreken, heuvelen, morassen, en voort de wegh die sij gaan nauwkeurigh in een kaart observerende en aantekenende, besonderlyk wat menschen sij genoemten” (Rijkhoff van Goens, Consideratien over de presente Constitutie der Landen aen en omtrent de Cabo de Boa Esperance gelegen, 23 April 1682, op cit [in Mossop 1931: 26]).

22 See, for instance, the copy in the Edward E Ayer Collection, the Newberry Library, Chicago.

23 “…stelde de cours Oost 5 gra 3 min noord en quamen naer dat wij 1 1/5 myl gemarcreeert hadden, te campeeren op een plaet genaemt de hooge kral, alwaer d’ E Hr Commandr des naermiddaghs ten mede quam te arriveren….” (Waterhouse 1932: 3).

24 “D’Heen reijs naa de Cooper Bergh volgens de Roode Linien. D’Optocht naa de strandt volgens de Swarte Linien”.


26 For example: “A heen, hebben ‘t gebergten voor ons heen afgetekent staet op fol. 4” (Mossop 1931: 98); “De Hottentots seijden aldaar d’Aacquaes craalen lagen en noch wel 4 dagen reijens was, aleer daerbij waeren hebben deszelfde afgeteekent, staet op fol. 7” (Mossop 1931: 108).

27 References to the Honigbergen appear in the journal on 1 September 1685 and 23 January 1686.

28 The river at number 14 on the Dutch version is now called Kruimsansrivier.

29 See Waterhouse (1932: xi).

30 Waterhouse (1932: xi).

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