

VII. ACRONOTUS CAAMA:- THE HARTEBEEEST.

PLATE VII.

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ACRONOTUS CAAMA.—THE CAAMA OR HARTEBEEEST.

*Hartebeest* of the Cape Colonists.—*Intooseel* of the Matabili.—*Caama* of the Bechuana and Kafirs.

GENERIC CHARACTER.—Adult male about five feet high at the withers, and nine in extreme length. Crupper very drooping; shoulder very elevated; carcase robust; head remarkably narrow, heavy and long. The whole animal made up of triangles. Horns seated upon the summit of a beetling ridge above the frontals; very close together, and almost touching at the base; robust, divergent, and again approximating, so as to describe an imperfect lozenge, with double flexures strongly pronounced, turned obtusely forwards, and again acutely backwards, thus forming a zigzag of two angles; the points directed horizontally to the rear, and the whole embossed with five or six prominent knots on the anterior surface only. Coat—short, close, and glossy. General color bright orange-sienna, with a deep red and crimson cast, abruptly streaked and painted as follows. A black spot at the base of the horns above the forehead, continued behind, and terminating in front of the ear. A black streak down the nose, commencing below the eyes, and terminating at the nostrils. Chin black. A narrow black list stripe down the ridge of the neck. A black streak down the front of each fore-leg, commencing about mid-shoulder, and gradually diminishing in width; another down each hind leg, commencing about the middle of the buttock—all terminating in an angular band above the fetlock. A triangular spot of white immediately above the black on each buttock, and a yellow spot above each eye. Tail reaching to the hocks, covered with posteriorly directed glossy black hair. Legs slender, with taper hoofs. Ears whitish, long, pointed, and flexible. A half muzzle. No suborbital sinus, but a constant mucous discharge of a waxy nature. Eyes wild, high in the head, and of a fiery red color.

Female precisely similar but on a slighter scale, with more slender horns; fainter in color, and of a hue approaching to yellow and cinnamon. Mammæ two. Almost extinct within the limits of the Colony. Inhabits the open plains of the interior, beyond the Orange River, in considerable herds.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE CAAMA OR HARTEBEEST.

Will Scarlett he did kill a bucke,  
And Hodge he killed a doe,  
But Little John killed a Part of Greece,  
Fibe hundred foot him fra.

Joy on that heart, said Robyn Hood,  
Shot such a shot for me,  
I'll ride my horse a hundred miles,  
To find a match for thee.

AFRICA was looked upon by the ancients as the land of Zoological prodigies. It is not possible to open the works of those amongst them who have treated of the natural productions of the country, without finding some passage, in unison with the general opinion of the time, that in this wild quarter of the globe, nature sported even to prodigality, and was profuse of monsters in her chartered libertinism.\*

The subject of the annexed portrait, which is undeniably entitled to a very distinguished place in the catalogue of animal eccentricities, throughout the more Southern regions of the Continent represents the Bubalis (*Βουβαλος*) of Northern Africa, which was known by that title to Aristotle, Oppian, and Pliny, and is styled by the Arabs, the *Bukr el Wash*, or cattle of the forest. In size and character the two species very closely resemble each other,—the principal distinctions being, that the black daubing on the legs is wanting in the latter, and that the flexures of its horns are less strongly pronounced than in the Hartebeest. Both animals are alike found in small flocks, headed by three or four stout males, which, adopting the law of *detur fortiori*, expel the less powerful adults of their own sex, and oblige them to form a society of their own. Their single combats are frequently fierce and bloody. Dropping down on their knees to fight, and placing the forehead parallel with the ground by bringing the nose between the fore-legs—brow to brow, like rams, they batter each others' skulls with the greatest fury—their gnarled and angular horns rattling together with a great noise, and not unfrequently becoming so fast locked in each other, as to be disengaged with difficulty—the wounds inflicted during these sanguinary tournaments being jagged, and often of a very extensive nature.

*Beest*, in the language of the Hollanders, bearing exactly the same signification as *beast* with the English grazier, the Colonial nomenclature bestowed upon this animal may correctly be rendered, the *ox-stag*, or *cervine-cattle*. The Hartebeest was formerly common in all parts of the Cape, but persecution has gradually reduced the strength of the species to a single herd, the surviving remnant having now been taken, like the Bonti-boks at Swellendam, under the special protection of Government—no one being suffered to compass their destruction. This species is liable to the fatal distemper already noticed as originating in a kind of *bots*, probably the larvæ of an *Aestrus*, which force their way into the nostrils, and consume many of the larger African game quadrupeds. The head of the Hartebeest is literally crammed with these queen-ant-looking maggots, numbers of which are constantly expelled by the process of snorting. The calves, which are produced singly in April and September, are tractable and readily domesticated; and so distinctly are all the peculiarities in the horns of the Bubalis marked on those of certain ox-like animals which are represented in antique Egyptian sculpture as harnessed to a chariot, that it has become a question whether that animal was not formerly used by the people of that country as a beast of draught. In their paintings the wild ox is often too much made to resemble a common ox; but it is nevertheless sufficiently evident that the artist had in view the Bubalis, or Barbary cow; and the Theban sculptors, who had a better opportunity of becoming acquainted with that animal, have succeeded in delineating its character far more satisfactorily than the painters of Beni Hassan.

William Twici, grand huntsman to King Edward the Second, and author of a skilful treatise upon the gentle art of venerie, would unquestionably have included the Hartebeest among his "beasts of sweete flight." Although the great elevation of the withers, and the singular obliquity of the back towards the crupper, give the animal a grotesque and somewhat awkward appearance when galloping, its paces—long, *oily*, and beautiful—form the very *beau ideal* of racing action. Moving at a smooth and swinging canter, throwing the hind quarters well under the body, brandishing the glossy black tail, and carrying the huge beamy head in the most stylish manner, its beetling brows surmounted by a lozenge-shaped coronet of embossed horn, and its brilliant orange hues eccentrically variegated with abrupt black markings, all sparkling in the sun, the Caama—notwithstanding its three-cornered build—cuts a very majestic appearance. Followed, it frequently stops; and turning proudly towards the foe with a most sapient look, sneezes with great violence—an overt act of folly, which was noticed drolly enough by Bewick,

\* Quarterly Review for May 1839. p. 189.

who, in speaking of this animal, says, "when it has once got ahead of its pursuers, it is very apt to turn round and stare them full in the face!"

Wild through their red and sable hair,  
Look out their eyes with savage stare—

and in a thinly-wooded country, destitute of brushwood, they would really almost appear to be playing a game at hide-and-seek with the hunter—ever peeping at him from behind the trees, so that they may be easily killed from horseback, although they generally contrive to keep out of the range of the pedestrian marksman. The longest shot that I recollect to have made during our expedition, sealed the death-warrant of the magnificent male specimen here portrayed, parts of whose splendid robe had assumed the deepest crimson dye. Stupidly sticking himself up as a target at four hundred and twenty yards, he converted his heart into the bull's eye; and the caravan passing presently afterwards, we slung the carcase behind one of the waggons, and brought it on to the bivouac. But although remarkably dark-coloured and venison-like in appearance, the flesh of this species was nevertheless invariably lean, dry, and tasteless, and on no occasion proved worth the trouble of carrying.

In the course of my sylvan rambles, I not unfrequently came upon the fresh and sometimes even reeking remains of the Hartebeest, in the very scene where it had been surprised and rent by some beast of prey—the many bleaching skulls and worm-eaten horns, which are to be seen strewed over the plain, in regions nearly, if not totally, depopulated, fully attesting the success that has attended the carnivorous prowler, the lion and the *hyæna venatica* more especially. Like the wild dogs of India, these dogs of the African desert, which are yclept by the Colonists the *wilde honden*, take the field in large organised packs, seldom failing by their perseverance to weary out the swiftest antelope, whilst the confederacy enables them to subdue the strongest, with which, single-handed, their slender form would render them incapable of coping. Nor does king *Leo*, as affirmed, restrict himself to game that he has killed himself. I one morning shot a noble bull Hartebeest out of a large herd that had been capering before me for some distance—their red and yellow painted bodies glittering in the sun, in one of the green glades at the foot of the Cashan mountains; and having cut off his great hammer head, the hooked and knotted horns of which were splintered from age and hard thumps received in many a well-fought *duello*,—concealed it in a bush, and continued my sport. Meeting one of our Matabili guides shortly afterwards, strolling about by himself, seeking for something to eat, I directed him to the place, and requested that when he had finished his dinner, he would be so obliging as to take the head to the waggon. Passing the spot on my return, I was surprised to perceive my friend perched on the summit of a mimosa tree, making signs towards a neighbouring bush; the half-devoured carcase—of which the fore-quarters only remained—together with the heavy foot-prints of a lion stamped around the spot, rendering the real state of the case at once intelligible. Having however fortunately taken the rough edge off the royal appetite, his shaggy Majesty did not deem it worth his while to interfere with the removal of my humble share of the spoils—although, since the truth must be spoken, I confess to having afforded him the briefest time that might be, to ponder over the subject, before taking my departure.

The annexed scene lies in the immediate environs of the Cashan mountains, where the Hartebeest occurred in the greatest abundance—the herds often containing so many as two or three hundred individuals. Gambolling and luxuriating over the grassy downs, they revel in the shady recesses of the odoriferous mimosa groves which abound in those unfrequented solitudes—their gaudy colors presenting a most brilliant contrast to the foliage of the "green-wood-tree," against the stem of which they are constantly raking their rough horns, until they have acquired a complete coating of bark.

In South African scenery, the nests of the pismire form a very singular feature; some, arising from the solitary plains in the form of a pile of gigantic sugar loaves, or reminding the spectator of a Christmas cake;—whilst others, shaped like the humble cabins of the Bushman tribe, resemble a native kraal or village. The country over which we passed, was usually covered with these latter dome-shaped mounds of clay, from two to four feet in height, which were almost invariably scooped out, either by the long nails of the ant-eater, or by savages, so as to resemble a baker's oven. In wet weather especially, or during a dearth of fuel, these ant-hills were our stoutest allies; but, on the other hand, the Hottentots not unfrequently put the strength of our waggons to the test, by driving carelessly over them—the structure, although honey-combed, being often sufficiently hard to resist the pressure of the wheel, and thus throw the vehicle off its equilibrium. The kitchen fire having one rainy night been kindled with great difficulty in one of these friendly mounds, and the tea-kettle placed over an artificial chimney therein, the light, which could not be produced by any other means, served as a beacon to one of the Hottentots, who having gone in advance to reconnoitre, had contrived to lose his way. A lady at the Cape, looking at the annexed drawing, inquired with great simplicity, "whether that," placing her fair finger on the ant-hill, "was not the house in which the Hartebeest resided?" Some one had the ill manners to laugh, whereupon she rejoined, "Beavers build houses, pray why should not the poor Hartebeests also?"

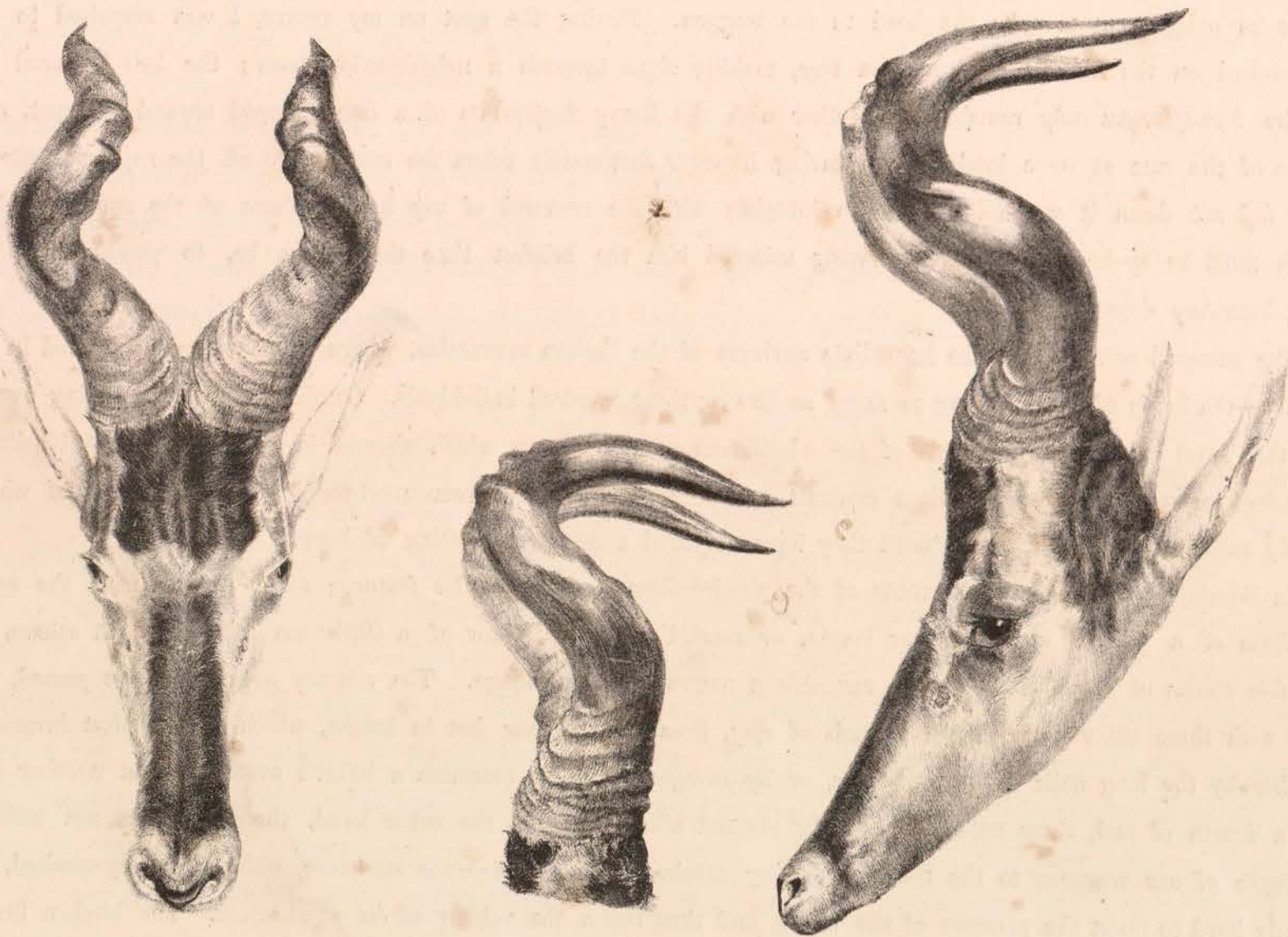
Two distinct animals are found in this part of the country, that alike burrow in the ground, and appear to subsist entirely upon ants and termites, uprooting the laboured works constructed by those minute and industrious insects, and leaving upon every habitation unequivocal marks of their desolating visits. Of these, the Earth-hog, or *Aard-vark*\* of the Colonists, is the most common; it is from six to seven feet in extreme length, scantily covered with coarse brown hair, and furnished with a slimy flexible tongue, capable of being protruded to the extent of eighteen or twenty inches beyond the atte-

\* *Orycteropus Capensis*.

nuated nose. It possesses the snout and ear of a hog, and withal, a pig-like expression of face. The fore-feet are provided with four robust nails, which, forming a complete rake, enable the animal to dig into the bowels of the mound; its taper tongue, covered with a glutinous secretion, being always in readiness to seize the swarming inmates as fast as they issue from their beleaguered abode. Never moving abroad during the day, this animal is rarely seen; and any attempt to unearth it usually proves unsuccessful—the beast continuing to burrow deeper during the operation, and digging out the soil with its long toe-nails, much faster than can his two-footed enemies, even when armed with an iron spade.

Differing greatly in external appearance, the equipments as well as the habits of the second species are yet essentially the same. Seen from a distance, the *Pangolin*, or *Manis*,\* might easily be mistaken for a small alligator, the neck being totally confounded with the head and body. The upper parts are clad in a complete panoply of flexible armour, consisting of numerous stout horny triangular scales, of a cockle-shell shape, overlapping each other like the tiles of a house, and presenting an appearance precisely similar to the bark of the brab-tree. Slow, gentle, and inoffensive, the Pangolin lives in holes, burrows, and fissures in the rocks, seldom wandering far from its lonely retreat; and although calculated neither by appetite nor by disposition for a life of predatory warfare, it can deride the attack of every beast of prey—possessing, in addition to its coat of mail, the power of rolling itself, like the hedgehog, into a ball—by which faculty this otherwise defenceless animal is rendered perfectly invulnerable to the assaults of its foes.

\* *Manis Temminckii*.



*Head and Horns of Hartbeest as preserved by Capt. Harris.*