Shifting frameworks for understanding otherness


Maas, T.A.J.

Publication date
2020

Document Version
Other version

License
Other

Citation for published version (APA):

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.
Chapter 1
Before Van Riebeeck:
Framing the Khoi

But although knowledge is primarily intuition, for finite knowers such as human beings intuition by itself can never be knowledge. In order to be knowledge finite intuition requires concepts or thought, for it needs to be determined as thus and so.

Bird, G. (2010, 508, emphasis in text)

In this chapter I trace the framing of the Khoi by European explorers between 1488 and 1652. The landing of Jan van Riebeeck at the Cape in 1652 continues to mark the starting point of much of South African historical pedagogy. Yet, the history of contact with Cape natives and the trickle of accounts about them into Europe had been continuous ever since the Portuguese discoverer Bartolomeu Dias was the first European to round the Cape of Good Hope in 1488. Of all African peoples, the Cape Khoi rank amongst the most extensively documented by Europeans in the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries. These documents thus present a unique opportunity to push back South Africa’s written history by 164 years. More than that, they show that the image of the Khoi in 1652 is not so much a starting point for history as an intermittent point in a process that continues to unfold into the present. What are the dominant frameworks that the Europeans applied to understand a people foreign to them? How did these frameworks influence Europeans’ image of the Khoi? Descriptions of the Khoi stood at the birth of a renewed wave of attention for foreign peoples that the Age of Discovery (15th-17th century) would spark. Eyewitness accounts and empirical observation began to show the limits of ancient and biblical worldviews. As such, European accounts of the Khoi also mark the start of modern ethnographic observation.

This chapter provides the background of developing European knowledge frameworks against which to appreciate Grevenbroek’s 1695 treatise about the Khoi, discussed in the next two chapters. I first elaborate on the earliest Portuguese explorers that rounded the Cape and their observations about the Khoi. I put particular focus on biblical worldviews and remarks about skin colour to point out how new information expanded European expectations of the Khoi, and African people generally. Advancing
chronologically, I then discuss English and Dutch accounts to reveal the dominant criteria descriptions of the Khoi adhered to, which led to a more systematic European discourse on their culture. Aspects of language, behaviour, and law and religion came to provide arguments for a dismissal of Khoi civility, expressed mostly as a negation of (European) Christian culture. At the same time, however, more precise observations prompted reflection on the dominant biblical worldviews of the time. By the time Van Riebeeck landed at the Cape in 1652, cracks were showing in the very frameworks that had come to determine the outward gaze of Europeans towards the Khoi. I end this chapter with a brief discussion of Van Riebeeck’s mission letter and conclude that already before 1652 discourse about the Khoi was continuously in flux.

**Portuguese callers (1488-1580)**

The Cape natives entered the European stage as herdsmen.¹ In 1488, Bartolomeu Dias, the Portuguese officer who can claim the first attested double rounding of the Cape of Good Hope by a European, had lost all sense of direction in a storm and was dangerously low on supplies. At the height of his perils, he ‘sighted land in a bay which we called the Angra dos Vaqueiros, because of the many cows seen there, watched by their herdsmen’.² The author goes on to dwell on the herdsmen some more:

> And since they [the herdsmen] had no language which could be understood, we could have no speech with them; but rather drove off their cattle inland, as if terrified at such a new matter, so that we could learn no more of them than that they were blacks, with woolly hair like those of Guinea.

¹ Throughout this chapter I cite manuscripts and supply my own translations, unless otherwise stated, and unless the source text is Portuguese or Spanish, in which case I primarily relied on Raven-Hart (1967) and Johnson (2012), the former amended by colleagues in the department where appropriate (see Introduction). The following readily available studies provide transcriptions, translations and references, though with no claims to exhaustiveness: Axelson (1954; 1973), Coke (1957), and Raven-Hart (1967). Abbreviated references are used for series of the following historical societies: Van Riebeeck Society (VRS); Linschooten Vereniging (LV); Hakluyt Society (HS).

² The Royal Portuguese historian and chronicler João de Barros (1496-1570) is the main source for information about Dias’ journey: Barros (1552). Raven-Hart (1967) relies on the 1778 reprint. According to Axelson (1973, 100), ‘[t]he royal instructions which were issues to Dias have vanished and so have all the actual records of his voyage, like those of Cão’s’. Barros wrote about 60 years after Dias’ journey, serving Dom Manuel I and Dom João III, who reigned Portugal from 1494-1521 and 1521-57 respectively.
It is not known how long Dias remained at Angra dos Vaqueiros (Bay of Herdsmen), but the natives did not show themselves again. Dias’ report led the great Cape historian G.M. Theal to conclude: ‘Thus no information concerning the Hottentot inhabitants of the South African coast, except that they had domestic cattle in their possession, was obtained by this expedition’. This ignores that the extract reveals that the Khoi were described as ‘blacks’ and that their language ‘could not be understood’. Moreover, the comparison of their hair with that of ‘those of Guinea’ suggests that the herdsmen were, uncommon for the time, appreciated in a comparative frame of reference.

In line with this, in ‘Ethnography and Ethnology in the Sixteenth Century’ (1964), the ethnographer John Rowe maintains that the origins of modern anthropology are to be sought in the 15th century:

[Although] what we find in the fifteenth century [is] little more than a point of view which made anthropological observation possible, [it constitutes] the beginnings of an interest in differences among men.

Dias thus brought home some knowledge of people on the southern extremity of Africa whom Europeans had never contacted before. Physical and readily observable characteristics allowed a compare-and-contrast with other people. Significantly, the Cape natives’ status as herdsmen (rather than their external characteristics) is foregrounded by the framework through which the hungry crew sees them. The remark that ‘we could learn

---

3 Battered by the storm, Dias’ vessels needed some refitting, so the fleet was there for several days at least (Raven-Hart (1967)). The Bay of Herdsmen is probably the inlet which since 1601 has been known as Mossel Bay, approximately 300 kilometres east of modern-day Cape Town. Cf. Theal (1907, Volume 1, 33).

4 Theal (1907, 33-34). Maylam (2001, 29) notes that Canadian-born Theal reflected 19th century ethics at the Cape: ‘For all his prolific historical output, G.M. Theal, for instance, merely assumed that the racial order was a natural, normal state of affairs that had long existed and did not require investigation’. See also Saunders (1988, 70).

5 Cf. Rowe (1964, 3): ‘It is unusual in sixteenth century ethnographic accounts to find comparisons made with other contemporary native peoples; most men who made ethnographic notes had no prior experience of their own with non-European peoples’.

6 Rowe (1964, 1).

7 Portuguese expeditions were dispatched in the hope that they would establish a profitable trade route to the fabled riches of India. Axelson (1973, 19) writes that by the middle of the 12th century, ‘Portugal had attained what are essentially her present frontiers. Bound by unfriendly and often actively hostile Spanish kingdoms and Muslim principalities, Portugal was forced to look at the seas not merely for communication with the rest of Christendom, but also for essential trade’. According to Johnson (2012, 15), ‘The constant foe for Portugal was Islam, and the function of Portuguese writers was to justify Portugal’s military expansion’. Newitt (2018, 14) argues that ‘Portuguese expansion was a direct by-product of Portugal’s poverty, not wealth. [...] With the land yielding poor returns, the nobility had always been inclined to seek its fortunes through armed exploits’.
no more of them’, moreover, implies a desire to know them in a way that goes beyond their external characteristics.

When Dias set sail for the Cape, biblical and ancient Greek and Roman literature had been shaping European expectations about African people for centuries. On board his two ships, Dias carried four women – Guinean convicts – who were to be set ashore at different places, trek inland, and report to the next white men they would see. It was hoped that, through their efforts, a king called Prester John, who was believed to reside in the interior and to be able to point the way to India, would be reached. ‘Presbyter Johannes’ was said to rule over a Christian nation lost amid the Muslims and pagans of the Orient. João de Barros, the official historian of the Portuguese Court, motivates Dias’ journey accordingly:

And because [...] whenever India was spoken of, mention was always made of a powerful King called Prester John of the Indies, who was said to be a Christian, Therefore [sic] it appeared to King João that by means of him some route to India might be found [...]. Also it seemed to him that if his ships followed the coast which they were now discovering [West of Africa] they could not fail to reach the Prasum Promontorium at the end of that land. Therefore, in the year 1486 he decided to send both ships by sea and men by land [...].

The semi-legendary figure of Prester John held sway over the European imagination from the 12th to the 17th century. In 1165, a sensational letter began to circulate around Europe, purported to have been written by Prester John: ‘I am lord of Lords. Under heaven, I surpass in riches and virtue and power all other kings upon the whole earth’. His dominions were thought to border the Earthly Paradise and to contain such treasures as the Fountain of Youth. Responding to the letter and aiming to contact Prester John, Pope Alexander III (1159-1181) dispatched a messenger to Africa, who was never heard of again.

The desire to locate Prester John’s lands had already entertained the earliest Portuguese explorers of the west coast of Africa. Geographical knowledge from Greek
antiquity helped them in their efforts. In 1415, Prince Henry (Henrique), son of King João, had two clear reasons for leading the then biggest Portuguese armada to date – 20,000 men in about 200 vessels – to north-west African shores: firstly, he wished ‘to learn about lands that lay beyond the bounds of European knowledge’, meaning beyond ancient knowledge of the world. When Barros, in his account of Dias’ journey, mentions the Prasum Promontorium, a term coined by the Greek cartographer Ptolemy (2nd century), he is referring to the extreme southern boundary of ancient knowledge of Africa, which Portuguese navigators would keep pushing south, until they assumed Mozambique to be

Figure 1.1 Earliest known map showing the full extent of Africa (1554), by Sebastian Münster. The (Latin) caption reads: ‘Map of the whole of Africa, as well as a comprehensive description, stretching even beyond Ptolemy’s furthest bounds’. The lands of Prester John are plotted south of a split in the Nile (‘Sedes Preste Iohan’), whose source, after Ptolemy, is placed in two lakes fed by waters from the Mountains of the Moon. Notable details include the lush forest in the middle of the Sahara and the one-eyed ‘monoculi’. Ptolemy is considered the high-water mark of Ancient geographical knowledge and cartography. Having disappeared from European consciousness after the fall of Rome (5th century), his *Geographia* (*Cosmographia*) was rediscovered in the 13th century, and the Byzantine scholar and monk Maximus Planudes drafted a series of maps designed to depict the world as Ptolemy would have drawn it. Woodcut map, with added colour, 26 x 35 cm. Münster, S. (1554), *Cosmographia universalis*, Basel, 10r.
Prasum. Secondly, Prince Henry wished to spread the Christian faith. He hoped that ‘in some remoter region’ his captains would discover ‘a Christian prince who would join him in campaigns against the enemies of the faith’. On the earliest obtainable map of the whole African continent (1554), the realms of Prester John were located in modern day Ethiopia (figure 1.1, previous page): ‘The King of Ethiope (whom we commonly calle Pretoianes or Presbiter Ihon) is a man of suche power, that he is reported to haue vndre him three skore and two other kings’, the German Hebraist Johannes Boemus wrote in his Manners of all Peoples in 1520. A century later, despite repeated failed attempts to locate Prester John, the English ship surgeon Ralph Standish still admitted to the belief that ‘this land of Cape de Bona Esperaunce is within the region and gouvemment of Prester John: the Counttrey being firtille ground and pleasant and a counttrey verie temperatt [...]’.

Functionally, the exact locus of Prester John never really mattered, as ‘Prester John became a symbol to European Christians of the Church’s universality, transcending culture and geography to encompass all humanity’. The narrative supported the idea that Africa, like the rest of the world, had originally been populated by Christian peoples. The Khoi, it was assumed, had become isolated from these roots to the extent that their Christian fire had diminished to an almost unrecognisable flicker under thick layers of heathen nativeness. Already before Dias’ and Prince Henry’s time, then, an essentially Christian framework underpinned perceptions of the native inhabitants of African shores, as well as the European understanding of the perceived differences among men.

Although 16th and 17th century cartographers knew that Ptolemy could not have located the Prasum at more than lat. 15° 30’ S., the term stuck. In 1726, the Dutchman François Valentyn writes in his Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indië (Volume II, Chapter 6): ‘dat het Prasum promontorium een en ’t zelve met de Kaap der Goede Hoope is’, thereby expressing the popular opinion that the Cape of Good Hope was Africa’s southernmost point.

As with Dias, there are no accounts left by Henry. One is dependent on the account by the Portuguese Royal archivist and the prince’s personal biographer Zurara (Azurara), a contemporary of Prince Henry, translated into English by Beazly and Prestage (1896-1899).

The land of Prester John was in fact variously located between India and East Africa. Hodgen (1964, 136-7) writes that ‘According to the best medieval opinion, [Ethiopia] possessed an ‘Indian’ or Asian component as well as an African’. Marco Polo, for example, wrote that Prester John was identical with the Tartar Ung Khan, but he also declared that Christ was the sovereign of Abyssinia.

‘Three skore and two’: three times twenty plus two, thus 62 kings. Boemus (1520, Chapter 3 (‘Of Ethiope, and the ancient maners of that nation’)).

Dias did not deliver the Portuguese king João II a route to Prester John, nor to India. On-shore contact with the Cape natives was not established until the next Portuguese journey, under the leadership of Vasco da Gama, about 10 years later. He would be the first to barter with the Khoi and successfully voyage to India. On the morning of Saturday 8 July 1497 – not quite five years after Columbus sailed to the so-called New World in the west –, favourable winds pushed Da Gama south along the coast of Africa. Near a place he named Santa Ellena, modern day Saint Helena Bay, Da Gama reported that the land seemed sterile and uninhabited. Yet on his second trip to shore, two Khoi appeared, ‘going about gathering honey on the moor’. While Da Gama was too busy ascertaining the position of the fleet by means of the sun to notice the two Khoi men appear, his men stealthily surrounded them and captured one. They made the latter a prisoner and took him to their ships, where he dined with the commander. An Angolan slave was put in the Khoi’s company in an effort to overcome the language barrier, but to no avail. The next day the Khoi man was put back ashore with some trinkets, and soon a party of 15 to 20 Khoi appeared on the beach.

The following account by a member of Da Gama’s crew reveals Portuguese expectations of the people along the coast:

---

19 Dias gave the Cabo de Boa Esperança (Cape of Good Hope) its name, owing to the prospect that the Portuguese could entertain of reaching India by this route. It was also referred to as Cabo Tormentoso (Cape of Storms). Dias was forced to turn around near modern day Mossel Bay. Barros writes that the seamen argued that no one had ever brought home such tidings as they would. Dias then had them sign an oath of secrecy and ordered the turn-around. What particular part of the Cape peninsula he landed at on his return is unknown, as is the date of landing. Dias had left Tagus, Portugal, at the end of August 1486. In celebration of the 400th anniversary of Dias’ feat, a replica of his Caravel sailed from Portugal to Mossel Bay in 1988. It can today be seen in the Mossel Bay Museum.

20 Dias arrived back in Lisbon in December 1487. Upon his return, the king decided that another journey be undertaken to find out if the sea stretching away from the southern extremity of Africa would in fact lead to India. Under Dias’ supervision, ships were constructed.

21 Vasco da Gama brought home to Portugal an account of the sea route to India, colouring in the final stretches of the east coast on maps of Africa (Theal (1907, 71)): ‘soon as much was known by the Portuguese concerning the East African coast as we are acquainted with to-day […]’. Da Gama’s exploits are celebrated in the famous epic by Luís de Camões (circa 1524-1580). Stanza 1 of his Os Lusíadas (The Lusiads), as translated by William Julius Mickle (1776), goes: ‘Arms and the Heroes, who from Lisbon's shore, / Through Seas where sail was never spread before, / Beyond where Ceylon lifts her spicy breast, / And waves her woods above the watery waste, / With prowess more than human forced their way / To the fair kingdoms of the rising day: / What wars they waged, what seas, what dangers passed, / What glorious empire crowned their toils at last’.

22 The place still bears this name. The town of St. Helena Bay is located about 150 kilometres north of Cape Town. On a clear day, Table Mountain is visible from it.

23 Velho (repr. 1861). Velho almost certainly took part in Da Gama’s journey. The translations of reports from Da Gama’s journey are from Axelson (1954, 1ff.). Translations are also available in HS I, 42.
In the land the men are swarthy. They eat only sea-wolves and whales and the flesh of gazelles and the roots of plants. They wear sheaths on their members. Their arms are staffs of wild olive trees tipped with fire-hardened horns. They have many dogs like those of Portugal, which bark as those do. [...] And the land is very healthy and temperate, and has good herbage.24

External descriptors and habits seem to have been the primary means to identify a people. Skin colour, diet, clothing and weapons are noted as being different from those at home, while it is remarked that both the Portuguese and Khoi keep many dogs. The commander’s effort to put an Angolan slave (‘a negro’) in the Khoi prisoner’s company, furthermore, shows that he entertained expectations about connections between African languages, and possibly African people more generally.25

The next day, ‘there arrived about two hundred blacks, large and small, [at the shore,] bringing with them about twelve cattle, oxen and cows, and four or five sheep; and when we saw them we went ashore at once’. Looking on from aboard the ships, the Portuguese watched the gathering turn into a modest festivity:

They [the Khoi] at once began to play on four or five flutes, and some of them played high and others played low, harmonising together very well for blacks from whom music is not to be expected; and they danced like blacks. The Commander [Da Gama] ordered the trumpets to be played, and we in the boats danced, and so did the Commander when he again came to us. When this festivity was ended we went ashore where he had been before, and there we bartered a black ox for three bracelets. We dined off this on Sunday; and it was very fat, and the flesh was savoury as that of Portugal.26

Even though the Portuguese had never seen the Khoi dance, there clearly existed certain preconceptions about their dancing. They would dance ‘like blacks’, thus differently from the Portuguese, and advanced cultural forms of expression such as harmonised music were not to be expected.

In Portuguese accounts, ‘black’ seems to be used as a generic term for African people, referring to many tones of non-white. In ancient and medieval times, differences in skin colour were noted but remained a mostly unmarked identifier: ‘before the sixteenth century in western Europe there was little attempt to categorise groups, or differentiate

24 Raven-Hart (1967, 3).
25 See my observations later in this chapter about the importance of language in providing a Christian lineage for the Khoi.
26 Note the reversal of the later stereotype that all black people are musical. There is some disagreement between the sources about the order and location of the events; some place them in St. Helena Bay, some in Mossel Bay. Theal (1907, 55) locates them in St. Helena Bay but provides no rationale.
between them, on the grounds of race or colour’.\(^ {27}\) In a legacy from ancient times, white-black relations were based on a long and easy familiarity and on mutual respect.\(^ {28}\) However, around skirmishes with the Cape natives surfaced an appreciably discriminatory change in the word’s semantics.\(^ {29}\)

When a friendly intercourse between Da Gama’s men and the Khoi had been kept up for some time, a soldier by the name of Fernão Veloso was granted leave to visit the dwellings of the Khoi and to obtain some knowledge of the style of their habitations. His visit, however, did not go as planned. There is no proof of treachery from either side but the reports agree that Veloso retraced his steps back to shore in great haste, with the Khoi tailing him. A crew member aboard one of the ships reported:

And the said Fernão Veloso, as soon as he came opposite the ships, began to shout, while the men remained concealed in the brushwood. We were still at supper; but as soon as we heard him we put ourselves into the sail-boat. The blacks began to run along the beach; and they came as near to Fernão Veloso as we were. When we were about to pick him up they began to attack us with assegais [...], wounding the Commander and three or four men.\(^ {30}\)

The next day, the Portuguese set sail. When the fleet next moored on Cape shores one late afternoon, Da Gama decided it would be safer to wait for morning before going ashore and that they would take weapons as a precaution.

The Portuguese explorer Antonio de Saldanha (1503) built on the connotation of blackness in relation to the Khoi, being the first to explicitly warn about the nature of ‘the natives of that land [Africa]’.\(^ {31}\) At first, the Cape presented itself to him peacefully.\(^ {32}\) Bartering was unfolding in all tranquility until the Portuguese suddenly found themselves ambushed:

\(^{27}\) Maylam (2001, 15). See also Snowden (1991, 65-73) and Cox (1948, 326): ‘In the Middle Ages [...] we find no racial antagonism in Europe’. Instead, differences in religion were used to support more normative judgments.

\(^{28}\) See also Van Wyk Smith (2009).

\(^{29}\) From my readings, ‘blacks’ or ‘swarthy’ appear as the most common European denominators for sub-Saharan Africans in this period, sometimes accompanied by explanatory phrases such as ‘of swarthy appearance like those of Sta Ellena Bay’. The addition of geographic descriptors might have served to help future expeditions to identify and contact the right people for barter.

\(^{30}\) Raven-Hart (1967, 4).

\(^{31}\) Velho (repr. 1861), as translated by Axelson (1954, 1).

\(^{32}\) There was even occasion for leisure. Barros reports that ‘[Antonio de Saldanha] climbed a mountain, very flat and level on the top, which we now call “The Table of the Cape of Good Hope, from whence he saw the end of the Cape”’ (Barros (1/7/2; 1/7/4), translated by Raven-Hart (1967, 14; 16)). Antonio de Saldanha is credited with the first European ascent of Table Mountain (via Platteklip Gorge).
[The first time,] they [the natives] brought a cow, and two sheep, according to their custom of bartering with our folk; but the second time they had set up an ambush of some two hundred men.33

In the end, Barros writes, ‘the said Antonio de Saldanha found himself in peril of his life in going to help one of his men, and did not escape scot-free from them, being wounded in one arm’. Barros concludes that ‘the people at the coming of Antonio de Saldanha showed themselves to be very treacherous and not to be trusted’. Later Portuguese expeditions asserted that the ‘blacks’ were volatile, unpredictable, impolite and, ultimately, uncivilised, that is, non-Christian in their behaviour. It was surmised that these ‘blacks’ could not be the people of Prester John. The observation became an epithet: the treacherous blacks.

A definite low-point for the Portuguese overseas was the journey of commander Francisco d’Almeida (1510), who died in the first recorded slaying by the Khoi. Returning from his viceroyalty in Portuguese India, Almeida confidently steered his fleet to Table Bay, then called Saldanha Bay. He knew that after the potentially perilous storms and cliffs of the Cape, a sheltered bay awaited them, where fresh water could be taken in and opportunities for barter might present themselves:

And since [the fleet] had need of water, and behind the Cape was a watering-place called ‘of Saldanha’ [...] the Viceroy ordered the Pilots to take the ship there [...] and have leave that [...] some men should go to barter with the blacks [...] with pieces of iron or cloth.34

After successful exchanges of iron for cattle, a group of about 12 Portuguese accompanied the Khoi to their village inland. What then transpired is unclear. Barros reports that ‘negroes took [the Portuguese’s daggers], and also other things that they fancied’.35 One of the servants of Almeida’s men then seeks

\[\text{to revenge himself [...] under the pretext of carrying certain things he had bought, [a servant of the Viceroy] brought along two of them [the blacks]; and since they, suspecting him of malice, were unwilling to come to the shore, and he somewhat forcibly compelled them to do so, they threw down what he had bought, and so misused him that he presented himself to the Viceroy with his face bloodied and some broken teeth.}36\]

33 Velho (repr. 1861), as translated by Axelson (1954, 1).
34 Barros (2/3/9), translated by Raven-Hart (1967, 9). Many of the early accounts refer to Table Bay as Saldanha Bay, since Saldanha was the first to report having moored there.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
After this, matters took a violent turn. Almeida marched about 150 armed men on the Khoi village, seizing children and cattle. Barros reports about the Khoi that they were ‘about one hundred and seventy in number, attack[ing] with stones and assegais of fire hardened wood, against which their weapons were useless’. Using their cattle as moving shields, the Khoi forced the Portuguese to retreat to their ships in disarray. 75 Portuguese were killed, among whom Almeida and 11 senior officers. Barros concluded his account of the defeat as follows: ‘[our men] were killed by sticks and stones, hurled not by giants or armed men but by bestial negroes, the most brutal of all that coast’. The defeat came at a time when the Portuguese were swiftly consolidating their overseas interests. In the eyes of the Portuguese historian the Khoi are a people with a primitive mode of warfare. The lack of a civil method of warfare, Barros implies, makes the Khoi inferior to the Portuguese. Calling the Khoi ‘brutal’ means that they are deemed to lack all signs of (European, Christian) civility. As a result, the Khoi are considered bestial in the literal sense. This dichotomy between man and beast, civil and uncivil, is enforced in the oppositional discourse of warfare.

After a steady rise in Portuguese activity around the Cape, ‘[t]he story of Almeida’s humiliating end in Table Bay interrupted Portugal’s sequence of military and naval victories in Africa and Asia’. Still, the Kingdom of Portugal was resolute in its determination to secure commerce in the Far East. A resolution for all outbound fleets was passed, which outlined in detail how sailors were to engage with native people:

---

37 Barros, Da Ásia, 302. Theal’s translation of Barros (1896; 1907) is not always reliable, coloured as it is by the ethics of the 19th century Cape: he has ‘Hottentots’, which is first used in the 17th century (see ‘Classifying the Khoi (1600-1652)’ in this chapter).

38 When the Portuguese returned to the shore to bury the Viceroy’s body, they found it ‘laid low, with a lance through his throat [...] despoiled of all its clothing’. They immediately left ‘this barbarous place [...] and set sail for the Kingdom [of Portugal]’. Johnson (2012, 31) provides a concise literary-historical survey of how the Khoi victory over Almeida in 1510 has been remembered, showing how the lessons drawn from it have mutated from a humiliating slaying by ‘bestial negroes’ to an inauguration of ‘South Africa’s tradition of anti-colonial resistance’.

39 Warfare would become a stock parameter of early modern ethnography.

40 Johnson (2012, 11). After the initial spurt of Portuguese calls around the Cape between 1488 and the 1520s, they avoided the Cape in favour of Angola and Mozambique. In 1575, Manoel de Mesquita Perestrello was ordered to explore and describe the African shore from the Cape of Good Hope to Cape Correntes. In 1576, he was the last Portuguese commander to call at the Cape before the English began to explore its shores in 1579. His Roteiro is available in reprint (Perestrello (1939)) and translated in Theal (1897, I). When Mesquita Perestrello discussed the ‘Cape of Good Hope’, he recalled that ‘here João de Queiros and almost all his crew were killed in the year 1505’. The slaughter thus continued to weigh heavily on Portuguese minds.
The instructions of the [Portuguese] king [Manuel] were that where they came peace and friendship were to be offered to the inhabitants on condition of their accepting the Christian faith and engaging in commerce, but if these terms were refused, relentless war was to be made upon them.  

Christianity shaped the framework within which the Portuguese believed their trade networks and overseas societies would thrive. Relations between the Portuguese and local people were not overly favourable anywhere on African shores. By 1500, Muslims had come to inhabit large stretches of the east African coastline, up to and south of the Zambezi, and were nearly everywhere hostile, according to Portuguese accounts. Appeasement through peace and friendship would from now on be the Portuguese policy in the area. Any threat to it, however, justified a ‘relentless war’ being waged upon the aggressor. Prince Henry’s concerns of almost a century earlier about securing barter and trade, and spreading Christianity in campaigns against the enemies of the faith had come to underpin Portuguese dealings with the Khoi, or indeed any native people.

The Portuguese brought home to Europe infinitely more first-hand knowledge about the African peoples than there had been before. As a result, external and readily observable characteristics, like skin colour, gained importance for assessing a people’s character and civility. As Margaret Hodgen argues for early modern ethnographic observation, ‘outward appearance was taken to be an index to inward character and potentiality’. The Portuguese accounts I have discussed in this section show how actions were interpreted as indicative of the ‘nature’ of the Khoi and that of black people in general. In addition, Christian faith, or rather the observed lack thereof, came to take a central place in the

41 Theal (1907, 91-2). The resolution must have been deemed of the utmost importance, as Da Gama only returned to Portugal on 28 August 1499 – a short window to comply with the stringent terms of the latest Resolution. In March 1500, at the end of the monsoon season, thirteen ships sailed for the east, carrying 1,200 soldiers and sailors – far exceeding the size of any fleet dispatched in the world at the time. (The approximate times at which the different monsoons set in were known, and February and March were the best times to take advantage of them, sailing to the East.) In the 19th century, Germans would offer the same terms to the people of Zanzibar and Zimbabwe (cf. the ‘Letter to Major Von Wissmann’, in: James, Lawall, and Patterson (2005)).

42 Cf. Hodgen (1964, Chapter 7).

43 Barros, commenting on Almeida’s actions, concedes that the Portuguese could also have learned a Christian lesson from the events: ‘God allowed this to happen as an example to the living, that they may learn to be more anxious to gain a good name than to acquire wealth’ (Barros, Da Ásia, 306, in: Johnson (2012, 11)). The chronicler Gaspar Corrêa (d.1562) also exhorts his countrymen: ‘[a]s it is always the character of the Portuguese to endeavour to rob the poor natives of the country of their property, there were some sailors who tried to take a cow without giving what the negroes asked for it’ (Corrêa, Legends, 46, in: Johnson (2012, 13)). He concedes that the Khoi acted in self-defence, as they legitimately ‘feared we might wish to build a fortress there also and take their watering place, and thus they would lose their cattle’.

44 See also Boxer (1963).

45 Hodgen (1964, 392).
evaluation of the Khoi vis-à-vis European man in the accounts of all European maritime powers.

**English and Dutch accounts (1580-1615)**

Although the Kingdom of Portugal practised secrecy about its trade routes and related knowledge, word about the challenges and successes of the early Portuguese expeditions spread, as did information on lands and peoples encountered. In 1552, Barros published his series of chronicles about Portuguese explorers, which was widely read and translated across Europe.\(^{46}\) In 1592, nine Amsterdam merchants commissioned Cornelis de Houtman and his brother Frederik de Houtman to Lisbon to learn what they could about newly developed sea routes to the East Indies: the people encountered, the spices traded, etc. They were arrested and incarcerated when they were caught trying to smuggle classified navigational charts back to Holland, but eventually released on ransom. By the time the English and Dutch set sail for the Cape in the final decades of the 16\(^{th}\) century, they had been able to familiarise themselves with accounts of ‘blacks’ to some degree.\(^{47}\)

An English account from an expedition that was dispatched from Plymouth in May 1591 illustrates that skin colour became pivotal in a description and evaluation of the Khoi. On 29 July, lieutenant Edmund Barker reports that the ships made it to Saldana Bay, ‘neare the Cape of Buona Esperança’:

> [...] and there came unto [us] certain blacke salvages [sic], very brutish, which would not stay, but retired from [us]. [...] We got here a negro, whom we compelled to march into the country with us, making signs to bring us some cattell. [...] But at this time we could come to the sight of none; so we let the negro go, with some trifles. Within 8 dayes after, he, with 30 or 40 other negroes brought us downe some 40 bullocks and oxen, with as many sheepe; at which time we bought but a few of them. But within 8 dayes after, they came downe with as many more [...]\(^{48}\)

There is no mention of violence, suggesting that the observation that the Khoi are ‘very brutish’ evokes an inherent connotation of ‘blacke salvages’. May and Barker also show

---

\(^{46}\) Barros modelled his chronicle *Decadas da Asia* [...] on Livy’s *History of Rome*: Though he never went farther east than the coast of modern-day Ghana, Barros ‘probably saw more documents on his subject than any man before or since’, the British historian of sixteenth-century Malaya Ian MacGregor (1955, 41) writes, quoted in Dion (1970, 21). The *Decadas* have never been translated in their entirety.

\(^{47}\) Bender (1978, 12–3). On the exchange of knowledge in early modern Europe, see Blair and Grafton (1989).

\(^{48}\) HS II, 586ff. (Edmund Barker). The English at this time still relied on sign language in their communication with the Khoi.
that, besides colour, there were other parameters used to describe a people, such as clothing.

In the later 16th and 17th centuries, sets of ethnographic characteristics were developed. Albrecht Meier’s book *Certain briefe, and speciall instructions for gentlemen, merchants, students, soouldiers, mariners, etc.* (1587) was influential in this. It dealt with the collection of artefacts and instructed travellers on what should be observed and recorded. Very much inspired by Classical antiquity, it sought to familiarise every traveller with the archetypical writer of Greek epic Homer, ‘seer of many Regions, and of the manners of many Nations’. The list of aspects to be observed includes ‘manners, honestie, humanitie, hospitalitie, love, and other morall vertues of the Inhabitants’, ‘the disposition and spirit of the people’, ‘the fare and dyet of the region’, ‘How the king or prince is allied with his neighbour Princes, and who are his confederates, and who not’, language, and religious practices.

Meier’s work filled a void, as the VOC only drew up detailed instructions for commanders’ log books in 1643. By 1589, Meier’s instructions had been translated into English and were used widely, also outside captain’s logs. The organisation and features observed in many private diaries and accounts shows its influence. Indeed, ‘there was the large company of uninstructed voyagers upon whom devolved the important task of making the first face-to-face judgments of the native peoples’. These European travellers brought home knowledge about peoples that had remained untreated by the revered authors from antiquity. At the same time, ancient literature and a Christian worldview framed the European outward gaze.

---

50 It was revised in 1669: *Memorie voor de kooplyden en andere officieren; waer op sy [...] sullen hebben te letten, omme de heeren bewinthebberen [...] punctuelijk te onderrichten*, Middelburg: P. van Goetthem. A copy was sent to Batavia, arriving there 1 December 1670. It is reproduced by Van der Chijs (1885, 604-5), and discussed by Delmas and Penn (2011) and Delmas (2013).
51 Hodgen (1964, 407). Meier’s work also found another application: publishers would ‘buy’ seamen’s narratives, and edit them into a travelogue, or compile travelogues themselves, often combining first-hand stories with previous knowledge and their own understanding. Famous is the example of the Utrecht bookseller Simon de Vries (+/- 1670); see Baggerman (1993).
52 In medieval times, the genre of travel writing *(ars apodemica)* had largely been confined to recitations about the comforts and discomforts of pilgrimages to the Holy Land. From the 15th century, with the Age of Discoveries, Hodgen (1964, 185) writes, the travel guide as a literary genre gained wider application. 16th century travel literature falls into two groups: the first containing useful information for the traveller to faraway lands, and the second prescribing what travel accounts should include.
The accounts of three Dutch and English sailors from the late 16th and early 17th century make clear the advances in ethnographical observation that had been made in Europe since the Portuguese expeditions and the changes in the criteria used to describe Khoi culture. On 2 April 1595, a year after returning from Portugal, Cornelius Houtman served as ‘chief merchant’ on the first Dutch fleet to round the Cape of Good Hope and to proceed on an expedition to the East Indies.\(^{53}\) Aboard was Willem Lodewijckz, a midshipman with the Chamber of Amsterdam, who would keep a meticulous log of the fleet’s whereabouts and adventures.\(^{54}\) On 4 August, the fleet moored near the Cape for a week to refresh. A skiff took several men ashore to scout. Willem Lodewijckz looked on from aboard, and saw Khoi appear from the bush:

Meanwhile seven black men came to the skiff, who had followed the track of our men who had gone inland. [...] Our men had given them some knives, cloth, bells, and little mirrors, as also some woollen clothing, but this they did not know what to do with, and therefore threw it away. They were given wine, and biscuit which they ate, and as evening was coming on our men returned to the ship.\(^{55}\)

With the Dutch spending more time in the vicinity of the natives, Lodewijckz took the opportunity to gather material for an extensive ethnographic account. I cite it at some length, as the extract gives a good idea of how far empirical observation and its systematic organisation had come since the Portuguese first encountered ‘the blacks’ a century before:

These folks are in stature somewhat less than those here [he wrote the account from Sumatra], red-brown in colour [...] entirely naked but for an ox-hide around them like a cloak and a wide thong of leather round their waists, of which one end hung before their privities. Some wore little wooden boards under their feet instead of shoes. Their ornaments were bracelets of ivory and red copper, polished seashells, also Paternosters [large beads] of bone and wood, and various cicatrisations burned into their flesh. They always stank greatly, since they besmeared themselves with gat and grease. We could find none of their dwellings, far less of their women. We saw most of them make fires under bushes, which they did very quickly by twisting one piece of wood against another: thus they passed the night, and such fires we saw every night in various places. When we killed any oxen

\(^{53}\) The fleet rounded the Cape four months into the voyage to the east, on 2 August, and on the next day passed ‘C d’Aguilhas [l’Aguilhas]’. It did not call at the Cape on the outbound trip. As the Dutch did not distinguish between different tribes, it makes no difference to my argument that their encounter did not take place at the Cape. Out of 249 crew on four ships (Mauritius, Hollandia, Amsterdam and Duijffken), only 87 returned. The voyage was nonetheless a symbolic victory for the Dutch over the Portuguese. In 1598, the Houtman brothers led another journey, during which Cornelius was killed and Frederik imprisoned. During the latter’s confinement, he compiled the first Dutch-Malay dictionary, and later, in 1619, he made one of the earliest sightings of Australia.

\(^{54}\) Lodewijckz is well known for his chart of the Java Sea and his histories of the East Indies, written after this journey to the east and translated throughout Europe. LV 7; 25; 32.

\(^{55}\) LV 7 as translated by Raven-Hart (1967, 16). Ibid. for the other citations in this paragraph.
they begged for the entrails, which they ate quite raw after shaking out most of the dung, or stretched it over the fire on four sticks, or warming up a little of the paunch ate it up. I could learn no more of them but that they speak very clumsily, like the folk in Germany [...] who suffer from goitre [...] Also they had some pieces of dried meat hanging around their necks, and little bones.

Lodewijckz describes what he sees and entertains relevant comparisons to paint a picture of the Khoi’s basic physique. Employing a structured, eloquent, unwavering style, he observes rather than interprets the actions of the natives. With photographic detachment he describes the stature and demeanour of the Khoi, before detailing their clothing, ornaments, way of making fire, and feeding habits. Where data falls short, it is significant that he reports that he cannot comment on that aspect of their culture, as with the homes and the women. Comparing his account with that of two of his contemporaries provides further evidence that a more fixed ethnographic set of criteria was developing.

In 1595, Franck van der Does, cadet aboard the Hollandia, wrote a ‘Short relation of the Inhabitants’ (Cort Verhael vanden Inwoonders):

They [the natives] are short in stature, ugly of face, the hair on their heads often looking as if singed off by the sun. [...] They go quite naked but for the tail of a small wild animal before their privities, which are little covered by it. Also [...] the skin of a wild beast hung around their necks, which [...] on the outside has the hair still on it. In place of shoes they have two double pieces of leather under their feet. [...] They have very neat weapons [...] shaped like a spear, an inch thick and eight or nine feet long, some with iron points and some without [...] their speech is just as if one heard a number of angry turkeys [...] little else but clucking and whistling [...] And indeed it looked as if they would have eaten some of us, since they made little ado of eating raw guts, from which they had little scraped out the dung with a finger. 56

The similarity of the ethnographic parameters invoked by Lodewijckz and Van der Does is remarkable: they both mention skin colour, clothing (or the lack thereof), feeding habits and weapons. Moreover, the encounter with the natives’ speech again invites a comparison, this time with turkeys, to which I will return below. 57 However, in comparison with Lodewijckz,

56 LV 25.
57 Not all accounts were as elaborate as the ones by Lodewijckz and Van der Does. Some writers mention only one or two details about the Khoi. An anonymous account from the Hollandia (LV 25), for example, mentions the Khoi language in passing and refers to the ornaments and spears that they wore and carried. The author describes the Khoi as wearing ‘the tail of a fox or other tail covering their maleness’, as having ‘under the feet [...] pieces of skin in lieu of shoes’, and as carrying ‘spears with wide iron points’. This account also features the first attested description of the Khoi speech as ‘clucking like turkeys’, which would become a stock phrase. A third account adds that ‘their speech is just as if one heard a number of angry turkeys’ (Franck van der Does, Cadet in Hollandia, Cort Verhael, in: LV 25). Interestingly, the latter account adds that the Dutch first did not dare go ashore, because they feared that ‘the African savages would kill and eat us’. (On telling different peoples apart, see ‘Classifying the Khoi (1600-1652)’ in this chapter.)
Van der Does draws more comparisons, notably with beasts. His image and judgment of the Khoi calls to mind that of the Portuguese accounts a century earlier.

John Davys was a pilot on an English ship that sailed three years after Lodewijckz and Van der Does. It anchored in ‘the Bay of Saldania [...] where there are three fresh rivers’ on 11 November 1598. Besides illustrating how a similar framework of ethnographic criteria was used across Europe around the turn of the 17th century, his account highlights the prominence of Biblical theories about the origin of people and their spread across the globe in early modern Europe’s worldview.

Like most of the other accounts, Davys’ starts off with the main stimulus for contacting the Khoi – barter – and provides basic information on Khoi physique, clothing and language:

The people [which] came to us with Oxen and Sheep in great plenty, which they sold for peices [sic] of old Iron and spike Nailes. [...] The people are not circumcised: their colour is Olive blacke, blacker then the Brasilians, their haire curled and blacke as the Negroes of Angola, their words for the most part inarticulate, and, in speaking, they clocke with the Tongue like a brood Hen, which clocking and the words are both pronounced together, verie strangely. [The Khoi] goe all naked, having only a short Cloke of Skinnes, and Sandals tyed to their feet, they paint their faces with divers colours, they are a strong active people, and runne exceedingly, and are subject to the King of Monomotapa, who is reported to be a mightie King, their weapons are only ha[n]d Darts. [...] They made great Fires upon the Mountaines in the Countrey.

Figure 1.2 T and O map (1472).
Early modern maps increasingly had to integrate new information with old traditions. A T and O map is a common medieval mappamundi that puts Jerusalem at the centre of the then-known world. It identifies the three known continents as populated by descendants of Sem, Iafeth and Cham, and follows the Homeric conception that the world was surrounded by an uninhabitable ocean.

The Cape Khoi are ranked with ‘the Negroes of Angola’ in terms of skin colour, and in this, they are seen as different from the people in Brasil. Besides pointing out the comparative method used to describe a people, I want to illustrate that Davys’ observations accord with the contemporary Christian theory about the spread of people across the globe.

When Boemus, in 1520 (three decades after the discovery of the New World), wrote that the world is composed of only three continents, or ‘thre partes, Affrique, Asie, and Europe’, he aligned himself with ‘thaunciente division of the earth’ and the biblical adage of the great deluge and dispersion of man.\(^{58}\) It was believed that after the great deluge, Noah’s three sons were dispatched to each populate one of the three known continents: Shem into Asia, lafeth into Europe, and Cham into Africa. On the basis of this belief, well into the 17\(^{th}\) century, all ‘blacks’ could be perceived as one people, originating from the centre of Christian faith, Jerusalem (figure 1.2, previous page, and figure 1.3, next page).\(^{59}\) Davys’ observation that the Khoi were not circumcised is highly relevant in this respect, as Jews adhered to this custom.\(^{60}\)

In the model of concentric dispersal over the earth, the Japanese at the far end of Asia and the Khoi at the southernmost tip of Africa were both geographically and in time the furthest removed from Jerusalem. The Khoi, from the Christian perspective, had become so far removed from the Christian navel of the earth that only a flint of the original faith could have been preserved. Davys’ statement that the Khoi were darker of skin than the ‘Brasilians’ makes sense in this regard: skin colour was thought to vary with exposure to the sun; the darker a people’s skin, the further and longer removed from the Christian centre they were supposed to have been dwelling. Amongst the Africans, the Khoi were seen as having suffered particularly much from the related degeneration and diffusion of the faith.\(^{61}\)

---

\(^{58}\) The Spanish presbyter Orosius (early 5\(^{th}\) century) divided the history of the world into eras, the first spanning from Adam to the great deluge, the second to Abraham, etc. Orosius regarded the Roman Empire as a link between Christianity and contemporary history.

\(^{59}\) Early modern and medieval maps expressed ideologies more than serving practical navigational purposes. This was a break with tradition. In antiquity, Herodotus had ‘disapproved of the work of contemporary mapmakers’ (De Bakker (2016, 82ff.)) because ‘they do not take “known unknowns” into consideration: “They draw Ocean flowing around the whole earth, portray the earth to be more perfectly circular than if it were drawn with a compass, and make Asia the same size as Europe”’ (4.36.2). He chose to describe the world in words and dismissed map-use from his heuristic agenda. Scholars doubt that Ptolemy included maps in his Geography.

\(^{60}\) The vast majority of travelogues state that the Khoi do practice circumcision.

\(^{61}\) Kindling the fire of Christianity among the natives was an aim of many journeys of exploration, but only in more recent centuries were efforts at converting native peoples used in defence of colonial practices (Bender (1978, Introduction)).
Davys’ reference to Monomotapa is another indication of the Christian substratum to his gaze. Monomotapa was a mythical land that, like the legend of Prester John, determined the early modern European horizon of expectations of Africa. It was believed that Monomotapa held the legendary gold mines of the biblical King Solomon. On the map

![Map Image](image)

**Figure 1.3 Liber chronicarum, ‘Secunda etas Mundi’ (1493).**

The map is after Ptolemy’s configurations to render a sphere on a flat surface. The border contains twelve windheads inspired by ancient literature, while Sem, Lafeth and Cham support the map in three of its corners. The Liber Chronicarum divides the history of the world into seven stages, according to a scheme laid out by Isidore of Seville. The second stage, depicted here, features a discussion of outlandish creatures that according to ancient and medieval tales inhabited the furthest parts of the earth. Seven are presented in the panel on the left, among whom a centaur, a four-eyed man from an Ethiopian tribe, and a (presumably African) man with a huge underlip. At a time when Dias had already circumnavigated the Cape, the Indian Ocean is wrongly depicted as an enclosed sea. (Schedel used as a model the mappamundi from an edition of the Cosmographia of the Roman geographer Pomponius Mela published in Venice in 1488.)

Schedel, S. (1493), Liber chronicarum, Nuremberg, 12v.

---

62 For literary representations of Southern Africa, and for more on the role of Monomotapa, see Huigen (1996). Scholars now generally agree that the empire of Great Zimbabwe (associated with a dynasty that ended around 1450) was the main centre for the sub-Saharan trade in gold. Scholars have tried to determine the exact location of Ophir, the area over which King Solomon ruled. The Portuguese term ‘Monomotapa’ is a direct translation of the African royal title ‘Mwene-mutapa’, meaning ‘prince of the land’ (Stewart (1989, 395)). An identification of Ophir with Sofala in Mozambique is mentioned by Milton in Paradise Lost (11:399-401).
of the famous Amsterdam cartographer Bleau – a standard for southern African topography for much of the 17th century – Monomotapa is shown to cover the entire extent of the continent from the Victoria Falls southwards (figure 1.4). Davys’ conviction that the inhabitants of the Cape are subject to the king of Monomopata shows the dominance of a traditional Christian worldview in interpreting ‘newly discovered’ people.

![Figure 1.4 ‘Aethiopia inferior, vel exterior’. Monomopata is envisaged to cover all of Southern Africa, and is part of Ethiopia, the land of Prester John. Copperplate map, with added colour, 37 x 48 cm. Blaeu, J. (1635), Theatrum orbis terrarium, sive atlas novus, Amsterdam, 15v.](image)

Functionally, as with Prester John, the locus of Monomotapa never mattered. However much descriptions of Khoi culture were gaining in detail, as long as open spaces continued to fill the heart of Africa on European maps, hopes of locating powerful, hidden realms of Christendom continued to provide a stimulus for journeys of exploration.63

---

63 The coastline of Africa had been known ever since Da Gama but the lion’s share of the African hinterland would remain blank on European maps until well into the 19th century. See the maps in Oliver and Fage (1973). For one example, the gold mines of Solomon of Monomotapa inspired Portuguese exploration westwards from Mozambique, and eastwards from the Cape by the Dutch and English. Between 1659 and 1686, the Dutch launched eleven expeditions from their Cape settlement to pioneer contact with the Monomotapa people and
As the European visitors at the Cape probed deeper into Khoi territory and culture, they began to realise that not all Khoi tribes shared the same traits in the same degree. Around modern-day Durban, for example, some 1500 kilometres east from Cape Town, it was noted that ‘the blacks’ did in fact circumcise. During the first decades of the 17th century, a gradual awareness developed that the Khoi were not one people but many. This, in turn, allowed for a mapping of the tribes’ various degrees of ‘remoteness’ from Christian habits. The incomprehensibility of the Khoi language to a European ear, for example, was advanced as proof that Khoi culture, as a consequence of the long separation from the Christian centre of the world, had deteriorated under continued exposure to animal sounds.

As an anonymous account from a 1601 English voyage has it, the Khoi ‘spake in the Cattels Language (which was never changed at the confusion of Babell), which was Moath for Oxen and Kine, and Baa for Sheepe’. This refers to the idea that, prior to the construction of the Tower at Babel, humanity was united in a single language. The writer assumes a human origin of the Khoi but deems it necessary to provide a Christian explanation for their seemingly un-Christian language. With the Christian nature of the Khoi unquestioned, and more detailed accounts of their culture becoming available, the question of where to place of the Khoi in the hierarchy of Christian man gained urgency.

**Classifying the Khoi (1600-1652)**

By the start of the 17th century, cultural diversity had become a prominent issue in the mind of many a learned European. Distinguishing between different colours of skin was no longer sufficient to tell the divergent habits of ‘the blacks’ apart. How could ‘black people’ practice different habits, European man asked himself, while speaking mutually incomprehensible languages? Answering this question necessitated a more stringent set of ethnographic criteria, capable of distinguishing between African peoples. Rather than forcing cracks in the Christian worldview, closer observation facilitated a classification of diversities of mankind

gauge the riches of the mines. This was part of Commissioner Van Goens’ plan to gradually explore and unearth Africa’s secrets (‘De secreten van Africa meer ende meer te ontdeken’) (cited in: Boëseken (1966, 7-8)).

64 Journey under the command of Sir James Lancaster (1601), cited in Purchas (1905, 392ff.).

65 The confusion of tongues at Babel is the narrative that explains the fragmentation of human languages as told in Genesis 11:1-9. During the Middle Ages, it was supposed that the Hebrew language was used by God to address Adam in Paradise. In later centuries, but before the acceptance of the idea of an Indo-European language family, these languages were considered to be ‘Japhetite’ by some, claiming priority over Hebrew because they had never been corrupted as their speakers did not partake at Babel. See Dugdale (2016).
according to their (overall distance from) Christian ‘civility’ and capability to practice Christian virtues. Important criteria were law, religion and social organisation, and language and character.

The classification of the diversities of mankind urged a reconsideration of the place of man relative to all other known creatures. This relative ranking was referred to as ‘the chain of being’. It ordered all beings into a hierarchy, visualised as a ladder, with man situated between the more celestial rank and that of animals (figure 1.5). This visualisation

![Figure 1.5 Chain of being, visualised as a ladder. Ranking from bottom to top (in Latin, with images): stones, lower plants, plants, animals, man, heaven, angels, God. Sebonde, R. de (1512), Liber de ascensu et descensu intellectus, [?]. Reproduced from Armaingaud (1932, II, 63-4)).

---

had its origins in the Middle Ages, when the ecclesiastical hierarchy was meant to rationalise the feudal principle. The political institutions on Earth were understood to mirror the graded ranks of the heavens: God’s grace had invested His power in some to rule over many. In its medieval outline, the chain classified man as a being with life, feelings, intelligence, judgment and free will – the highest rank under the celestial angels. On the lowest rung of the ladder was the earth, categorised as a being without life, feelings, intelligence, judgment, or free will.67

The question was where to position the African ‘blacks’ and account for the diverging degrees of bestiality and uncivility that were noticed. The proposal of the 16th century Spanish Jesuit missionary José de Acosta, who had lived in South America for seventeen years, was particularly influential.68 Having studied the people of the New World, he proposes in the introduction to his *De procuranda salute indorum* (*The Natural and Moral History of the Indies*) (1589) that all ‘barbarians’ – which in practice meant all non-European, remotely Christian, people – be classified into three classes. Firstly, people with knowledge and use of letters, and a degree of ‘civility’ (like the Chinese); secondly, those who lacked script but possessed some form of organised government and religion (like the Mexicans); and thirdly, the savages, who, according to Acosta, were to be distinguished into those without organisation and those with the rudiments of organisation, who were assumed to be slightly more peaceably inclined.69 The chain of being allowed for the insertion of a rank for each of these classes between man and animals.

Significantly, the realisation that different ‘blacks’ were (dis)similar to Europeans in varying degrees had made it apparent that the Christian idea about the spread of people over the world left some matters unexplained. Spatially, the idea of the Noahiden repopulation after the great deluge was still thought accurate, in that it showed how the races had spread over the earth. Historically, however, it struggled to explain how and when ‘the blacks’ had split up. The chain of being resolved this by combining a spatial arrangement of forms with a historical or evolutionary development.70 This acknowledged the existence of differences between peoples and allowed these to be explained through

67 See, for example, Raymond de Sebonde (1457), *Theologia naturalis sive liber creaturarum*, which was translated by Michel de Montaigne a century later (Armaingaud (1932)).
68 See Rowe (1964, 5). On the academic network of exchange in early modern Europe, see Blair and Grafton (1989).
69 Acosta (1590, proemium, 115-123), translated into English as HS I.33.
70 Hodgen (1964, 389ff.).
their distance from the Christian centre or origin of the world, and their period of separation from this centre. Thus, the chain of being could explain why the Khoi language could not be understood and why it contained animal sounds, unlike the languages of many other African peoples, while not denying the Khoi a place in mankind’s shared origin.\(^{71}\)

Behaviour, language, and law and religion constituted three major criteria used to rank the Khoi – or any non-European people – in the chain of being. In their assessment of the civility of the Khoi, 17\(^{\text{th}}\) century accounts are indebted to the earlier Portuguese practice of interpreting Khoi behaviour and external characteristics as indicative of their nature and potentiality. The French writer Pière d’Avity, in his *Description Générale de l’Afrique* (1643), for example, discusses the Khoi under the two headings of religion and ‘moeurs’ (ethos); skin colour is treated as part of the latter.\(^{72}\)

From the mid-1590s onwards, Dutch and English callers described the Khoi as ‘very bold, but deare’, ‘very treacherous’, ‘very brutish’, ‘very thievish’, and remarked that ‘they betray you’, that ‘they will picke and steal, although you looke on them’, and that ‘you must be well on your guard against them, lest you be cheated by them’. An English fleet in 1608 provides examples of these accusations:

And many tymes, having sould them [the cattle] to us [the English], yf we looked not the better to them, they [the Khoi] would steale them agayne from us and bringe them agayne to sell; which we were fayne with patience to buy agayne of them without giving any foule language, for feare least they would bringe us no more.

As lykewyse yf they stole any thinge, yf yt weare of smale valewe, wee would not meddle with them butt suffer them to carry yt awaye; which they tooke very kindly, so soe much that they brough such

---

\(^{71}\) Explained as positive primitivism, the original values of early Christianity were thought to be preserved in the Khoi more purely, albeit under thick layers of nativeness. In the letter that Van Riebeeck sent to the Directors of the Company after his landing at the Cape in 1652, he asked for teachers to help him rekindle the Christian fire in the Khoi: ‘With regard to [what L. Janz writes of] the natives or their children learning our language, is deserving of notice, and no less a good thing, and consequently the propagation of our Reformed Christian Religion, which he seems to hope, is still better – wherein a good teacher would do the best service, if your Honors were pleased to consent to an expense, which is calculated also to tend to the better edification of your servants to be stationed here’ (quoted from Theal (1897, 11)). In contrast, negative primitivism interpreted the primitive state as corrupted and degraded. On the two interpretations of ‘primitivism’ in early modern anthropology, see Hodgen (1964) and Pagden (1982). On the binary of the primitive versus the non-primitive and the view that European self-awareness was possible only because of the Age of Exploration, see König, Reinhardt and Wendt (1989).

\(^{72}\) Avity (1643, Chapter ‘Cap de Bonne Espérance’).
When Metaphors the travellers inarticulate with to people aspect we endeavours

Trust became a scarce commodity at a time when the success of European overseas endeavours depended on opportunities to refresh and barter. A Dutchman in 1609 remarks that ‘the country people were lurking about our tents, so that alarm was given’. Cornelis de Houtman (1595) writes that ‘for iron we got beasts [from the Khoi], and [as a precaution] we shot them with muskets, whereat the natives were affrighted and began to run away’. This suggests that both the Khoi and the callers were always on their guard. Khoi behaviour is described as negations of Christian virtues, a custom which was corroborated by the Acosta’s and the chain of being’s binary between man and ‘barbarians’.

Language was another key element in assessing a people’s civility, and a recurring aspect in accounts about the Khoi since Dias. It is one of the readily observable features of a people – even if one lacks an understanding of the particular speech. Many European travellers were awestruck by Khoi speech, as for the first time in history, they were exposed to click sounds and a ‘new’ language family. The 16th and 17th centuries saw comparisons with hens, turkeys, apes, monkeys, sheep, birds, and geese. ‘[Their] speech it seemed to us inarticulate noise, rather than language, like the clucking of hens, or garbling of turkeys’. Metaphors from the animal kingdom were common and implicitly ranked ‘Hottentots’ with the animals. The German J. S. Wurffbain explicitly questions the human character of Khoi speech:

They do not in the slightest possess speech or a voice as men usually have, but they gargle and clap their mouth in a very particular way, yet, they somehow manage to understand one another.

In the early modern European frame of reference, although the Khoi – like the animals – managed to understand one another, their speech was far removed from the ‘proper

---

73 John Jourdain (1608). Quoted from HS II, 16.
74 Cornelis Claesz. van Purmerendt (1609), Journael [...], 1651. (Hague Archives Codex 4389).
75 Letter in LV 32.
76 See Nienaber (1963, 84), who, among many others, cited Thunberg, a Swedish physicist, who wrote in 1773: ‘When several Hottentots sit conversing together, the sound is very like the clacking of so many geese’.
77 Terry (1616), quoted from 1777 reprint. Terry was chaplain on the 1616 fleet under Benjamin Joseph.
78 Nienaber (1963, 85).
79 Wurffbain (1646), ‘[Sie] haben gantz keine Sprach oder denen Menschen sonst gewohnliche Stimme, sondern gurgeln und schnalzen auf eine gantz besondere Weise mit dem Mund, worbey [sic] sie jedoch einander unter sich verstehen können’.

39
human languages’ supposedly found in civilised nations. Lodewijckz (1595), as noted earlier, comments: ‘I could learn no more of them [the Khoi] but that they speak very clumsily, like the folk in Germany […] who suffer from goitre. […] in speaking, they [the Khoi] clocke with the Tongue like a brood Hen’.

Houtman (1595) observes that when they speak, the ‘Hottentots’ ‘move about in a very strange way’, Davys (1598) writes that they talk ‘verie strangely’, and Terry (1615) finds that the language is ‘a very strange confused noise’. J. J. Kaerel jr. (1595) calls it ‘an unsuitable mumble’, Lodewijckz added that it is ‘much impeded communication’, and an anonymous Englishmen writes that the Khoi ‘spake in the Cattels Language’. These accounts put the Khoi closer to the animals than to mankind.

European explorers were very interested to find that dwellers of other continents could be considered to be savages and close to beasts. The savage (Latin: ‘silvaticus’, literally: forest dweller) had been a dominant category in medieval thought. He was a wild man, thought to sleep in the open and to subsist by hunting and gathering. Embodying the natural state of being, he was assumed to be un-civil and thus to have no religion or social or political structure. Many Europeans saw their ideas of the savage confirmed in the Khoi.

Implicit in European accounts is the idea that Khoi language cannot (or should not) be learned. Sir James Lancaster, the Englishman who called the Khoi ‘negroes’ in 1591, maintains that ‘[i]n seven weekes which we remained here in this place, the sharpest wit among us could not learne one word of their language’. Another Englishman, Sir Thomas Herbert, reports that

[t]heir words are sounded rather like that of Apes, then Men, whereby its very hard to sound their dialect, the antiquitie of it whither from Babell or no, the qualitie, whither beneficiall or no, I argue not. […] And comparing their imitations, speech and visages, I doubt many of them have better Predecessors then Monkeys. Which I have seen there of great stature.

Herbert clearly did not hold the natives in high regard; he calls them ‘canibals’ and ‘sauage Inhabitants’, and relates them to the ‘Anthropophagi’ and ‘Troglodites’ – mythical man-

---

80 Seyger van Rechteren (1629, cited in Raven-Hart (1967, 23-4)): ‘Haer geluyt / ofte spraech is als het kloeken der Hoenderen’.
81 ‘[S]eer vreemt met gedrachten [gebaren]’.
82 ‘Een ongeschickt murmelen’; ‘seer belemmert spreken’.
83 Rowe (1964, 5).
84 He was a favourite subject in European art between the 12th and 15th centuries. Cf. Berhnheimer (1952).
85 Herbert (1626, quoted in Raven-Hart (1967, 14; 16)). Grevenbroek also references these creatures: see Chapter 3.
eaters and savage cave dwellers that featured on early maps of the continent. To underline his point, he includes a list of 21 ‘Hottentot words’ that he had compiled himself, and to this added the numerals one to ten. Linguists nowadays would interpret such a list as evidence that the Khoi’s ‘inarticulate noise’ is in fact a language that aids communication. In 1626, however, Herbert’s list underlined doubts that the Khoi language could be traced back to Babel and thus called the civility of the Khoi into question. Herbert concludes that their language is closer to the animal kingdom than to human speech. This shows how, fifty years before Van Riebeeck, biblical worldviews still determined Europe’s outward gaze; ethnographic frameworks were based on the Scripture and ethnographic observations were interpreted to support this worldview rather than allowed to challenge it.

Moving forward from 1610, law and religion became affixed to descriptions of the Khoi. The observed lack of political and religious structure was an important motive in downgrading the Khoi to the realm of beasts in the chain of being. ‘In the logic of the Europeans’, the ethnographer Rowe observes, ‘[savages] must be men without law or government, and probably also without religion’. This idea was captured in a French rhyme: ‘sans roi, sans loi, sans foi’, that was found in many a 16th and 17th century book. Accordingly, the majority of English and Dutch accounts found that ‘They [the Khoi] live without law or religion, like animals’, or that ‘[The country people are] without any lawe or religione, but doo live like brute beasts’. In encyclopaedic fashion, the French navigator Pyrard de Laval (1610) also glosses over ‘Khoi facts’:

---

86 Nienaber (1963, 21ff.; 166ff.).
87 The words on Herbert’s list are all nouns and indicate that the prime purpose of their visit was barter: bracelet, brass, knife, (ostrich) egg-shells, quills, water, seals, ship, skin. Only one of the words is a verb: ‘to give’ or ‘to hand’. Some words in his list suggest a particular fascination of Europeans: woman, genitor, ‘mens stones’, womb. Cf. the 18th century objectification of Saartjie Baartman as the ‘Hottentot Venus’.
88 Although the Europeans did not learn Khoi language, some Khoi did master English. The native chief Xhore made history in 1613 in becoming the first Khoi (and perhaps the first black African) to be taken to England. The Khoi man, ‘who call’d himself Cooree […], was brought to London’. Yet, ‘[w]hen he had learned a little of our language, he would daily lie upon the ground, and cry very often thus in broken English “Cooree home go, Souldania [Saldanha Bay] go, home go”’. As the Khoi had no script for their language, sources write about the chief as Xhore, Co[o]r[r][ee], and Corie whilst some use his Anglicised name, (Chief) Harry.
89 Rowe (1964, 5). Rowe wrote about the New World. North Africa had been known to European man since antiquity. I noted several decades’ lag between Rowe’s observations and those about the Khoi but have not explored this further.
90 Avidy (1643, Chapter ‘Cap de Bonne Espérançe’) observes under the heading ‘religion’ that the Khoi ‘lack all form of law and religion, and for that reason, are called Cafres’ (‘[ils] n’ont aucune loy, ny religion, & pour ceste cause, on les nomme Cafres […]’). On the Arabic origin of the word ‘caffir’, meaning heathen, see note 99.
The people who live along this coast [the Cape of Good Hope] [...] are very brutish and savage, as stupid as can be and without intelligence, black and mis-shapen, with no hair on their heads, their eyes always running. They cover their privy parts with the hairy skins of beasts, and their backs with an entire large skin which they tie below the chin, leaving the tail hanging so that from a distance one might say that they had tails. The women have very long breasts, and dress like the men. They eat human flesh and entirely raw animals, with the intestines and guts without washing them, as do dogs. The men have as weapons only certain sharp darts with iron points on the ends. Further, they live without law or religion, like animals.  

Mentioning the lack of law and religion almost as an afterthought, Laval illustrated how its equation to animality needs no further comment – it in fact concluded his argument.

Laval is exemplary in his handling of the dominant, popular frameworks for the available knowledge of the Khoi in this period and in the judgment reached about them. With the place of the Khoi in the chain of being resolved as a savage, familiar motives were often reiterated rather than reinterpreted. I discussed in the Introduction that J.M. Coetzee describes this prevailing European image of the Khoi as inherent to the ‘echo chamber of the discourse of the Cape’. Knowledge about the Khoi did not actually advance, as the majority of 17th century European writers followed familiar criteria to confirm the common opinion that the Khoi were living without the Christian faith, and hence were bereft of all civility. One Dutchman was briefer than Laval and uses the criteria almost as a checklist: ‘[The people are] the most barbarous in the world, miserable, destitute of religions of any kind, civility, speech, and they go naked’. The Englishman Sir Thomas Roe wrote in 1615:

The land is fructfull, the people the most bareberous in the world, wearing the guts of sheepe around their necks for health and rubbing their heads (curled like Negroes) with dung of beasts and durte. These have no civility.

Another English account is equally brief:

---

91 Translation Raven-Hart (1967, 47).
92 What distinguishes Laval’s account from all previous ones is the lack of any indication that he actually interacted with the natives. His detached description is encyclopaedic in the claim to truth it suggests. In earlier accounts, a bartering scene typically leads up to digressions on the land and its people. The details in such narratives are a way to establish their authenticity. The content of Laval’s account, too, differs from others. I have not come across other sources that mention the natives’ running eyes or bald heads. Laval sojourned in South Asia (modern day India and surrounds) from 1601 to 1611 and wrote his account shortly after his return to France. Possibly, Laval did not disembark at the Cape himself, or added these elements. On the wider issue of ‘eyewitness accounts’ and compilations by people that never left Europe, see Baggerman (1993).
93 Coetzee (1988, Chapter ‘Idleness in South Africa’).
94 Quoted from HS II, 1.
[They] the Khoi are brutt and sauadg, without religion, without language, without laws or government, without manners or humanittie and last of all without apparel, for they go naked save onelie a ppees of a sheepees skyn.

By the 17th century, criteria like civility had acquired a definite meaning in ethnographic writing across Christian Europe. To have no civility was to have no (human) culture. When the first hopeful nudges towards a settlement at the Cape were made, English merchants seemed convinced that, due to the observed lack of civility in the natives, they could put the land to better (that is, more commercially viable) use, or perhaps needed it more urgently, than the Khoi. They thus staked their claim to Cape lands. The account of John Jourdain (1608) is interesting for indicating the possibility that civility be extended to the natives:

Beinge planted and sowne in due time, and kept as it ought to bee, if this countrie were inhabited by a civill nation, hevinge a castle or forte for defence against the outrage of those heathenish people and to withstand and offraine force, in shorte time it might be brought to some civilitie, and within fewe yeares able of it selfe to furnish all shipps refreshinge.95

Jourdain’s reasoning suggested that the civilised could justly stake a claim to land occupied by the uncivilised. Jourdain employed familiar concepts of the time to build a dialectic of us versus them.

In 16th and 17th century Europe, complex concepts like civility and moral virtues (often grouped under religion) were commonly used to bring order to a rapidly expanding world. The Dutch scholar Justus Lipsius, for example, writes in A direction for travaillers [sic] (1592):

The sight, consideration and knowledge, of sundry rites, manners, pollicies and governments is the most conducie to true wisdom about the world, especially when they are compared together ‘perfectlie’.96

Similarly, Montaigne, in his famous essay Of Canibals (Les Cannibales, circa 1580), despite his critique of religion, ‘was one of a long line of scholars for whom savagery was merely civilisation stripped of everything that made it admirable and hence was envisaged by a

95 John Jourdain (1608), reproduced in HS II, 16. In hindsight, this report’s visionary power is astounding: the initial settlement in 1652 would be centred around a castle, marking the separation between Khoi and European.
96 Lipsius (1592), quoted from Hodgen (1964; 187).
resort to negatives’.97 Using the tribes of Brasil as examples, he portrays savagery as the ethnological antithesis of European society. For Montaigne, a primitive social environment was typified by the absence of the advantages the residents of the European enjoy in letters, law, governments and husbandry. Carl Linnaeus – however forward-thinking a botanist he might have been – also entertains the opinion that the human race was composed of the homo sapiens, among which was the fair, sanguine and brawny European, and the homo monstrosus, among which he reckoned ‘the less fertile Hottentots’ and ‘the beardless Americans’.98 Many of the reports on the Khoi discussed so far shows similar reasoning.99

Whether Europeans entertained a view of the Khoi that can be described as positive or negative primitivism, whether they defined savagery as a series of negatives to European life, or whether a negation of civility was employed to deny the Khoi their place in the Christian chain of being, in the eyes of both learned men and unschooled sailors, the savage was either an inferior man or a superior animal. It goes beyond the scope of this study to review in detail just ‘when and how the genus Homo was bisected’ into civilised and non-civilised back in Europe.100 Suffice it to say that the shift in opinion was not sudden and not necessarily induced by men of learning.

It must be remembered that to place all savage peoples in the same classification was by no means to confer identity upon them. The Cape Khoi differed from the people of Mozambique and it did not take the Europeans long to concede that even the Cape was populated by different peoples. Specific terms were developed to mark these differences. ‘Cafres’ was an early generic term for southern African natives, first found in a Portuguese source from 1506, meaning ‘unbeliever’.101 The Portuguese occasionally used the term in
Dutch transcription, such as in ‘Kafferkuyl Bay’ in a Portuguese source from 1576.¹⁰² In 1685, the Frenchman Nicolas Gueudeville would still write that the inhabitants of ‘Kaffraria’ are ‘Cafres, mot Arabe qui signifie hommes sans loi’.¹⁰³ The term continued to be widely used by English and Dutch settlers alongside the Dutch ‘Hottentot’.¹⁰⁴ The latter is first found in a document by the sailor Jón Ólaffson 1623.¹⁰⁵

The Frenchman Jean Baptiste Tavernier in a 1649 report holds that the words ‘Hottentot’ and ‘Cafres’ are interchangeable: ‘But of all the people that ever I saw in all my travels, I never saw any so hideous nor so brutish as the Comoukes, [...] and those of the Cape of Good Hope, whom they call Cafres, or Hosentotes’ (emphasis in text).¹⁰⁶ Under a 1680 dictionary entry Caffarie, the land’s inhabitants are indeed called ‘Hottentots’:

Caffarie gemeenlijk, oock wel Cafferrie, en Costa de Caffres by de Portugesen, of het Landt der Caffers by de Hollanders, waer van de inwoonders by de onse veeltijds de Hottentots genaemt worden, bysonder de zuidelijckgelegene, en die haer omtrent Cabo de Bona Esperanca onthouden, en dat om haer belemmertheid en wanhebbelijkheid van spraeck.¹⁰⁷

With the expansion of ethnographical theory, the practice of naming a land after its people – of which Caffarie is an example – became the custom. It attests to a dawning consciousness that the Africans were regarded as ‘blacks’ but that this term was not

¹⁰² Cf. Perestrello (1575; 1939)). Theal (1897, I) surmises that Kafferkuyl Bay refers to present-day Stilbaai.
¹⁰³ Gueudeville (1685, 67) treats ‘Kaffraria’ as a region in ‘L’Ethiopie Inferieure’ (‘Southern Ethiopia’): as noted earlier, much of the map of Africa was still an empty blank.
¹⁰⁴ The provenance of the word ‘Hottentot’ has been the subject of discussion among amateur and professional historians alike since it was coined in the 17th century. Interpretations range from it being the people’s name for themselves to it being an onomatopoeia that reflects how the Khoi’s guttural speech sounded to the Europeans. Nienaber (1963, 32ff.; Chapter 5; Chapter 6) provides a useful overview.
¹⁰⁵ He wrote that the natives ‘danced for us [...] in return for bread and kerchiefs, and they went wholly naked, covering only the parts where modesty constraints. Their dance was after this fashion: on uttering the word “Hottentot!” they snapped two of their fingers and clicked with tongue and feet, all in time’ (cited in HS II, 53). In 1640, Nicolaus de Graaff commented that he and his fellow Dutchmen ‘made an earthen wall [...] against any attack by the Hottentots’ (De Graaff (1640, 42)).
¹⁰⁶ On Tavernier, see note 61 in Chapter 2. Tavernier’s biographers claim that at the time of publication in 1676, 27 years had passed since his travels, which gives 1649 for his visit. Tavernier’s experiences have the form of a long narrative without any dates. English translation by John Philips, 1678, cited from Hodgen (1964, 52).
¹⁰⁷ VroeMiddelnederlands Woordenboek (WNT), sub voce ‘Cafferrie’. ‘Hottentot’ was the term used in official VOC documents and in Van Riebeeck’s log from 1652 onwards. Van Riebeeck made no effort at defining the term, which gives reason to suppose that by 1652, at least in the Dutch context, it had become part and parcel of discourse about the Cape. Fredrickson (1981, 34) argues that reports from this time ‘gave the “Hottentots” the general reputation of being the most bestial people yet encountered by Europeans in the course of discovering and conquering new lands’. Rhodie and Venter (1960, 43) highlight Van Riebeeck’s effort to put up an almond hedge to separate white inhabitants from the Khoi as an early attempt at territorial segregation, an interpretation that Sleigh (1993) disputes.
accurate enough to distinguish between the different peoples dwelling in the southern part of the continent. Simple geographical denominators such as ‘Strandloopers’ told the different kinds of ‘Hottentots’ and ‘Cafares’ apart and described what they did there: Strand-loopers roamed the shores. In 1634, less than two decades before Jan van Riebeeck’s landing at the Cape, Peter Mundy was among the first callers to explicitly distinguish between two groups of ‘Hottentots’.108 Using the familiar colour denominator ‘black’ (‘Swart’), Mundy argues that the inland group was the more civilised of the two – although civilised, of course, is a relative term here:

The People here [around Table Bay] are in ColLOUR Swart like those in India or Mulatoes in Spaine. The Men have verye little or noe beards, being also without Religion, Lawe, Arte or Civility that we could use. [...] Those that are hereabouts (by reporte) are of a baser sort and live in fear of others called Saldanha men, whoe are farther in the land.109

Although the distinction could hardly have been more rudimentary, it should be appreciated that Mundy used particular ethnographic parameters to distinguish between native peoples and tell apart various levels of civility.

The split between inlanders and coastal people would recur in later accounts. Johan van Mandelslo, a Dutchman who called at the Cape in 1639, corroborated a distinction between two groups of natives:

The inhabitants of this country are of two sorts: some which live very miserably by the waterside, but without ships or boats. They live on herbs, roots and fishes, and especially on the dead whales which are cast ashore by storms, which must serve as their best food. They are called the Watermen, because they live by the shore. The other sort, which live further inland, are called Soltanimen, from which this bight is called Saldanha Bay. They live somewhat better than the Watermen. They also do not cultivate the soil, which is excellent and rich and produces all sorts of ground- and tree-fruits. But they have lovely cattle, sheep and goats.110

---

108 Mundy’s 1634 manuscript is preserved at the British Museum Library. I quote from the reprint in HS II, 35.
109 Ibid. (321-2). Mundy, quoting sources from 30 years before, makes a comparison between ‘blacks’ and ‘Mulatoes’. Nienaber (1963, 23) suggests that Hadda, a Khoi man who was taken to Bantam in 1629 and returned home the next year, was Mundy’s source.
110 Translation Raven-Hart (1967, 152). Although Van Mandelslo probably relied on personal observation of the Khoi, his etymology is reversed, as both the bay and the people are named after the Portuguese explorer Soldanha (1503). Van Mandelslo (1658, 124-5): ‘De Inwoonders van deze Contrey zijn tweederley soorten. […] Eenige welk aan ‘t water doch zonder Schip of Boot zeer armelijck leven onderhouden zich met Kryuden Wortelen en Visschen byzonder met de doode Walvissen welke door storm aan ‘t Landt gesmeten worden dit moet haar beste Spijs zijn. Men noemt haar Water-mannen dewijl sy aan Strant woonen. De andere soort welk verder in ‘t Landt woont worden Soltaniman genoemt daar af dezen boezem Soltani Baay genoemt
The Watermen are depicted as scavenging hunter gatherers, while the Solthanimen, who also do not practice agriculture, at least herd cattle. For Van Mandelslo, the Solthanimen thus observed a higher standard of life. Yet, however differently their cultures may manifest themselves, the two groups were still ‘blacks’. Van Mandelslo’s conclusion about the natives’ civility is familiar parlance:

The people found here [at the Cape] are black, uncivilised and beast-like in their life and speech, more resembling beasts than men; they give off a nasty smell because they smear all their bodies with fish-oil, so that they shine from it.\textsuperscript{111}

Similarly, the Dutchman Jan Sigmund Wurffbain on a 1646 journey found that the inhabitants of the land ‘indeed look much like men but in manners and the rest of their way of life they more resemble the unreasoning beasts’.\textsuperscript{112} Although the geographical denominators attest to increasing detail in ethnographical observation, conclusions about Khoi life remained unchanged:

[The Khoi are] very uncivilised, [living with] no laws, policies, religions or ordinances […]. [They are] nothing other than wild heathen, dirty and stinking men, in their customs more beasts than men. […] [They have] no Christian civilisation.\textsuperscript{113}

The Khoi thus continued to be ranked below Christian man. As observations became little more than epithetons that confirmed existing frameworks, knowledge about the Khoi, in Coetzee’s words, turned into prejudices.

To conclude, the first prolonged stays of Europeans at the Cape confirmed discourse about the Khoi as savages. The English took possession of the Cape on 24 June 1620, ousting the Dutch in the process. They declared that ‘it was concluded that to intitle [sic] his Majeste king supreme head and governor of that continent not yet inhabited by any Christian prince’.\textsuperscript{114} Even though the Khoi are referred to as ‘men’ in the contract that was

\textsuperscript{111} The name Watermans, as used by Van Mandelslo (1639), was also used by Van Riebeeck in his journal (\textit{Dagregister}) for the years 1652-1662 (Cited in Theal (1897, \textit{sub voce}). Throughout his office at the Cape, Van Riebeeck maintained that the Strandlopers were a particular type of ‘Hottentot’.

\textsuperscript{112} Wurffbain (1686, 22).

\textsuperscript{113} De Graaff (1640, 52).

\textsuperscript{114} The ceremony was deferred and the English formally annexed the Cape on 3 July 1620. Under naval law, a nation could take possession of a land by simply putting up a sign and a flag. In this case, a mount of stones
drawn up at the annexation, the fact that they were no Christians was enough justification for the English to take ownership of their lands. King James, however, had little interest in the Cape and never had it inhabited by his own men.115 And so the Dutch were the first to – albeit unwillingly – spent several consecutive months on Cape shores. The VOC’s Mauritius Eyland shipwrecked on 7 February 1644 in Table Bay, whilst on its outbound journey to the east, forcing the 350 crew to shuttle all cargo to the shore and abandon ship. Three years later, the VOC’s Haerlem ran aground on 26 March 1647, ‘sitting very fast on a sandy shore 1 1/2 miles from Table Bay’.116 The wreckings constituted the longest periods of uninterrupted European presence at the Cape before Jan van Riebeeck and reports on the Khoi from this period proved pivotal in the VOC’s decision to build a refreshment station at the Cape.

Both shipwrecked crews reported that building a fort was central to their survival. Officers from Mauritius Eyland drew up a series of resolutions for the time until a homebound crew would pass the Cape. No longer were the Khoi there for a quick barter; contact now had to be sustainable, perhaps even formalised so as to guarantee the crews’ safety. In the Resolutions, the officers explain that a fort was necessary ‘to be free of danger from the natives, who are not to be trusted’.117 Other letters, such as this one by an English caller, share the idea that ‘the men are first to raise a small fort to defend themselves’.118 The fort became the first building of a semi-permanent nature at the Cape: ‘a fort of casks, armed with one gun [...] and about 340 men’. The second fort, built by the Haerlem crew, was sturdier, ‘provided on all four corners with mountings or batteries, and on each of the

---

115 The English did not levy taxes or re-enforce their claim to the land. Pending an English decision on a refreshment station, Aldworth (1611) and Kerridge (1612) (both quoted from Raven-Hart (1967)) speak out in favour of the natives and against the negative light they were put in previously: ‘[The natives are] very affable & tractable onto us, and not of base and beastlike disposition, and voyde of all reason as commonly hath been reported of them’. And: the natives are ‘very courteous and tractable folk’. I cannot confirm whether such experiences stretched beyond the purpose of pleasing a benefactor.

116 Diary of Leendert Janssen, codex OD1648II (The Hague). In both cases, the rest of the fleet could not take in all men and supplies from the wrecks. The supplies were rowed ashore, and the crew were left behind at the Cape to safeguard them from capture by the Khoi and the European competition.

117 Letter from Upper-merchant Thomas van Cuijck to the Lords XVII, not dated (probably early April 1644). Hague Archives codex 1056. William Minors (OC1868), who called at the Cape on the homebound journey, claims in a letter (20 May 1644) from aboard Royal Mary that the purpose of the fort was to ‘preserve what is ashor vntill from Battauia they cann send shipping to fetch them [the sailors] away’.

118 I have been unable to track down any further accounts by the Mauritius Eyland crew. Cf. Nienaber (1963, 27).
same a gun, the breastworks being about 8 or 9 feet high’. Reports describe the Khoi as ‘enemy’, who are ‘not to be trusted’. There is also still the ‘fear of the savages who might readily play some hostile trick on the Dutch as was their custom’. In the eyes of the VOC Commissioners, the fort was deemed ‘sufficiently secure against enemy attacks by the natives of this land’. Rather than drawing the Dutch closer to the Khoi, the construction of the forts seems to have formalised the opposition between the crew and the ‘enemy savages’. In 1649, with all crew rescued from Table Bay, the VOC took stock and reflected on the risk that having no permanent refreshment stations on African shores entailed for its trading routes with the East. Answering to a VOC request, two survivors from the Haerlem, Leendert Jansen and Matthijs Proot, compiled a Remonstrantie (Remonstrance). Its full title clearly reflects the VOC’s purpose in ordering it:

Remonstrantie, in which is briefly set forth and explained, the service, advantage, and profit, which will accrue to the United Chartered East India Company, from making a Fort and Garden, at the Cabo de Boa Esperance.

In the outline of a permanent settlement at the Cape, the natives took a central place. Yet, contrary to popular opinion, Jansen and Proot also cast a critical glance at the Dutch and developed an early argument in defence of the Khoi. While the Remonstrantie started off with a recuperation of the common consensus – ‘Others will say that the natives are brutish and cannibals, from whom nothing good is to be expected; and that we shall have to be on our guard continually’ – these opinions were soon discarded as not based on fact: ‘this is only a sailors’ yarn [‘een Jan Hagels praetjen’] as shall be more closely shown

119 Wurffbain (1686, 24).
120 The fort was also given a name, underlining its (semi-)permanent nature: Fort Sandenburgh. It was home to 62 people from the Haerlem, armed with 30 muskets. Report of the Commissioners, OD1648II (Hague Archives). As the shipwrecked crews awaited rescue, they regularly obtained meat and fish from outward-bound ships (Witte Duijve, BDR8/4/1648, sailing with Princesse Royale, DBR15/4/1648). The Witte Duijve carried orders from the Lords XVII to offloaded provisions and supplies. A letter from Van Riebeeck to Batavia dated 25 May 1652, locates Fort Sandenburgh about 3 miles up the west coast from where he was building his fort.
121 It was informed largely by the Journael (Journal), kept by the same Leendert Jansen. First entry 25 March 1647. The Remonstrantie and the Journael are the only two accounts from this time at the Cape. Raven-Hart (1963, 207) speculates that N. Proot is a misreading of M. Proot in the manuscripts and that he may very well be Matthijs, first intended commander at the Cape. Copies of private letters from Mauritius Eiland and resolutions of its impromptu council have also been preserved; Raven-Hart (1963, 157ff.) provides a bibliography.
122 Translated by Moodie (1838-1841, sub voce 26 July 1649), as are all further quotations from the Remonstrantie in this paragraph. A fort and garden would supply ships and be beneficial in maintaining regular traffic to and from the East. Mooring fees could be levied on ships from friendly parties.
and denied’. In what follows, Jansen and Proot discuss the familiar ethnographic categories but rather than drawing a conclusion about the natives’ non-civility, they point the finger at the Dutch:

It is not to be denied that they are without laws or government like many Indians, and it is indeed true, that also some sailors and soldiers have been killed by them; but the reason for this is always left unspoken by our folk, to excuse themselves for having been the cause of it, since we firmly believe that the peasants of this country [Holland], if their cattle were to be shot down and taken off without payment, would not show themselves a whit better than these natives, had they not to fear the law.

To a degree, Jansen and Proot align the Remonstrantie with the contemporary framework of ethnographical analysis; they compare the Khoi with New World natives and mention the customary categories of law and government. Yet, importantly, they stress that the killing of mariners by the Khoi is not a consequence of the observed lack of civility on the latter’s part. Without denying that the natives are uncivil, Jansen and Proot build a case for them by providing an analogy with what Dutch people in the same situation could be expected to do.

The five-month sojourn after the wrecking gave Jansen and Proot ample exposure to the Khoi. Armed with these experiences, they develop an argument that reverses the common opinion:

[T]he natives, after we had been there about five months, came daily to the fort (which we had thrown up to our defence) with all friendliness to barter. [...] [crew] of the aforesaid ship Haerlem [...] who [the natives] could readily have killed when in their hands, had they been inclined to cannibalism (as is asserted by some), so that without any doubt the killing of our folk is rather in revenge for the taking of their cattle, than for eating them. Thus the fault is not on the side of the natives, but lies in the uncivilised and ungrateful conduct of our folk.

Personal and prolonged close-up experience with the Khoi gave Jansen and Proot the authority to challenge some of the un-Christian behaviour ascribed to the Khoi. More than that, they relate descriptors of non-civility normally associated with the Khoi to the European visitors and put the blame for deteriorated relations between them and the natives with the Dutch. It should also be noted that – in marked contrast with earlier accounts – the Remonstrantie exclusively refer to the Khoi with neutral terms like
‘inhabitants [of this land]’. In addition, Jansen and Proot use more precise geographical distin- guishers, like ‘the beach roamers among the inhabitants’.

For all the cultural relativism of Jansen and Proot, Jan van Riebeeck seems to have been more of a practical man. Having read the Remonstrantie, he accepted the position of commander of the fleet that was to set up a halfway post at the Cape but expresses his concerns about the Khoi in a letter to the Directors of the VOC Chamber of Amsterdam:

Although Mr. Leendert Janz does not appear to entertain much apprehension of any interruption from the natives, provided they are well treated, I say, notwithstanding, that they are by no means to be trusted, but are a savage set, living without conscience, and therefore the fort should be rendered tolerably defensible, for I have frequently heard, from diverse persons equally deserving of credit (who have also been there) that our people have been beaten to death by them, without having given the slightest cause: we should, therefore, act cautiously with them, and not put too much trust in them.

Van Riebeeck clearly believed that first-hand observation produces trustworthy knowledge. Interestingly, however, he stresses that such trust is based on numbers (‘I have frequently heard, from diverse persons […] who have also been there’): one man’s experiences are not enough to convince him that the Khoi are trustworthy and not uncivil. To remedy their uncivility, Van Riebeeck requested that the Lords XVII send Christian teachers to the Cape.

The conclusion of the directors of the VOC is well known. In December 1651, Jan van Riebeeck sailed from Texel with the ships Drommedaris, Reijger, and Goede Hoop. The VOC’s lengthy instructions carefully outlines the actions he was to undertake upon arrival at the Cape. His concerns seem to have been heard:

a general rendezvous be formed near the shore [...] in order to provide that the passing and re-passing East India ships, to and from Batavia respectively, may, without accident, touch at the said Cape or Bay, and also upon arriving there, may find the means of procuring herbs, flesh, water, and other needful requirements, [...] You shall [...] in the first place go on shore with a portion of your people, taking with you as many material as you require, in order hastily to erect for your defence,

---

124 ‘[S]rantloopers vande Inhabitanten’.
125 Theal (1896, sub voce October 1651).
126 See my earlier remark on positive primitivism in note 71.
against attacks of the inhabitants – being a rude [rouwe] people - a fitting wooden Lodge, as well for the people to lodge therein, as for storing all the implements you take with you.127

The Directors conceded that the Khoi are a ‘rouwe’ people. They did not give reasons for their judgment but the choice of the term ‘rouwe’ confirmed that a negation of their civility was at play. At the same time, the Directors conceded that a refreshment station could not succeed without a good understanding with the natives. Consequently, they suggested that Van Riebeeck slyly attach the natives to him:

You will also make inspection near the Fort for the land best suited for depasturing and breeding cattle, for which purpose a good correspondence and intelligence with the natives will be very necessary. [You must] reconcile them in time to your customs, and attach them to you, which must be effected with discretion, above all, taking care that you do not injure them in person, or in the cattle which they keep or bring to you, by which they may be rendered averse from our people, as has appeared in various instances.

Notably, the Directors strike quite a different tone than the English during their brief annexation of the Cape in 1621. There is no talk of confiscating lands, which the English moreover justified on the basis of a civil versus uncivil dichotomy. Striking a golden mean between the Remonstrantie’s tone and Van Riebeeck’s doubts, the Directors aimed at ‘befriending’ the Khoi in order to gain favours from them. The Dutch thought a sustainable relationship with the Khoi an essential part of a developing a commercially viable refreshment station in support of its overseas trade. However, the Khoi were not regarded as a cultural equal – the idea was to teach them to become more amenable and civilised by having them follow European customs and become attached to the Dutch administration.128

The mission letter to Van Riebeeck includes the first institutional policy for appeasing the Khoi. The Directors’ ambitions were commercial, not ethnographic per se. Yet, Van Riebeeck, in his letter, describes the Khoi as ‘a savage set, living without conscience’ and he advances a Christian framework to argue his case, thereby invoking the familiar discourse about them. The arrival of the Dutch at the Cape remained a unilateral decision: the Khoi did not have any say in it. Jansen and Proot presented a rare and brief wind of change and

127 It is interesting that the Directors do not adopt the terminology familiar from earlier sources to describe the Khoi, but use ‘rouwe’ instead. The historical dictionary in WNT (http://gth.inl.nl) gives ‘Go beyond the limits, atrocious, disgraceful’. (‘De perken te buiten gaand, gruwelijk, gedgekaagd.’)
128 Sleigh (2004, Introduction) emphasises that Van Riebeeck extensively used tobacco and alcohol as gifts, indicating that the Khoi were not befriended but made addicted.
although the basis for establishing a relationship may have been changing, authority continued to reside with the thought frames of knowledge above the equator.

**Conclusion**

So, what do the sources that predate Van Riebeeck’s arrival at the Cape tell us about changes in the European framework for appreciation of the Khoi? For one, they reveal that a recent verdict such as that of Renaissance historian Kate Lowe that ‘to the majority of the Europeans, the defining feature was African skin colour, and nothing else [...] mattered, and consequently nothing else was recorded’, is simply not true, ignoring as it does bookshelves full of earnest ethnographic record.129 What European reports about the Cape Khoi do show is that discourse about them was always in flux – already before 1652.

In the earliest Portuguese eyewitness accounts about the Khoi from the 15th century, as a legacy from ancient and medieval times, ‘black’ did not carry derogatory connotations. Readily observable characteristics such as skin colour, hair and language were appreciated in a comparative framework. Scuffles between the Khoi and the Europeans, however, tainted the image of the Khoi, and ‘black’ became indicative of a people’s nature. With the number of eyewitness accounts growing in the 16th and 17th centuries, also from English and Dutch writers, information about the Khoi would be organised more systematically, along increasingly fixed criteria. These included, notably, language, law and religion, and behaviour. The Khoi were described as a negation of European habits, living in a primitive, natural state. Christian worldviews facilitated a graded categorisation of the Khoi as ‘uncivilised savages’, ranked between European (Christian) man and beasts. Bestial metaphors sparked from this framework. With more accurate observation dawned the awareness that not all African people were one. In the decade before Jan van Riebeeck’s landing at the Cape, marooned Dutch crew described the Khoi as enemy. Van Riebeeck, in contrast, would try and ‘civilise’ the Khoi by introducing them to Christian customs.

Overall, this chapter has made clear that the European outward gaze and horizon of expectations about Africa was invested in a Christian worldview and drawing on ancient authorities in geography and history. In that regard, the Portuguese and Van Riebeeck form hinges in a process of framing that started long before them and which continues into the present. As the South African historian Paul Maylam argues:

---

129 Lowe and Earle (2005, 6).
On the one hand it is erroneous to suggest that a ready-made racism, or an embryonic racial order, was brought to the Cape by the Dutch in the seventeenth century. There was no systematic body of racial thought. [...] On the other hand, it would be equally misleading to separate the history of South Africa’s racial order from the rise of capitalism, Protestantism and imperialism in early modern Europe.\(^{130}\)

All the same, if there was a defining feature of pre-Van Riebeeck accounts about the Khoi – and African people in general – it was the observed lack of Christian features. Significantly, the ethnographer Hodgen reminds us that there is no unequivocal answer to the question of why certain frameworks surfaced over others:

Hierarchical ideas were used freely but works will be searched in vain for coherent statements of the reasons for their use, or for any uniformity of opinion as to their relation to the status of savage man.\(^{131}\)

As accounts and encounters multiplied, the frailty of any one standard of judgment became uncomfortably clear, and many a 17\(^{th}\) century mind was shocked into an admission of cultural relativism. In 1612, Peter Martyr writes:

The Aethiopian thinketh the blacke colour to be fairer then the white: and the white man thinketh otherwise. Hee that is polled thinketh himselfe more amiable than hee who weareth long hayre, and the bearded man supposeth hee s more comely than hee that wanteth a beard. As appetite therefore moveth, not as reason perswadeth, men run into these vanities, and every province is ruled by its own sense [...].\(^{132}\)

Then as now, judgment depends on perspective; it is all too easy to judge ‘the’ standard of one’s own time and place supreme. Montaigne ponders over cultural relativism:

\(^{130}\) Maylam (2001, 23). Maylam provides a concise overview of what he calls ‘the emerging racial order’ before Van Riebeeck. The topic is marked by starkly opposing views. Guelke (1989, 40) argues that the Dutch brought their prejudices with them to the Cape: ‘White supremacy is not an essentially South African product, but has its origins in a pre-existing Dutch colonial vision, which was premised on European dominance and a sense of racial superiority. [This] was made manifest in colonial settings in institutional racism and slavery’. Frederickson (1997, 19), in contrast, argues that the Dutch colonial project was not imbued with a deep-seated racism, and not set on conquest and colonisation, but stubbornly commercial: ‘the Dutch showed little racial prejudice’. Elphick and Giliomee (1989, 525) see the attitudes of the Dutch as shaped by their own cultural norms, perceptions of black communities, and ‘forms of contact’. Comparing the Dutch attitudes in Africa with developments in the New World, Van den Boogart (1982, 40) puts cultural differences rather than skin colour at the basis of an emergent Dutch racism. In his view, Africans were generally perceived by the Dutch to be living in a state of ‘savagery’ but the Dutch ‘also discovered that Africans were not entirely savage’ and considered them superior to Amarindians in political organisation, agriculture and craftsmanship.

\(^{131}\) Hodgen (1964, 415).

\(^{132}\) Pietro Martire d’Anghiera (1612). Writing only a decade after the return of Columbus, Martyr (1455-1526) was one of the first to put realism against ancient wisdom and the embellishment of medieval fantasy. Cf. Hodgen (1964, 30-1).
What goodness is that, which but yesterday I saw in credite and esteeme, and tomorrow, to have lost all reputation [...], is made a crime? What truth is that, which these Mountaines bound, and is a lie in the world beyond them? How comes it to pass [...] that people separated only by a river or a mountain are dissimilar?¹³³

Nonetheless, travel books that reiterated the prevailing perceptions of the inhabitants of African shores had a readership that far outnumbered that of Montaigne and Peter Martyr.¹³⁴ At the same time, it should be observed that a major shift took place between the early Portuguese navigators, whose horizon of expectations about the African people was determined by the bounds of the ancient and biblical library, and Van Riebeeck’s judgment that reliable information may also come from empirical observations, preferably in large numbers. It was only a matter of time before Europeans began to realise that the Christian explanation of the history of the world was unable to account for the growing number of empirically acquired observations that contradicted it.

In the next chapter, I focus on a Dutchman, Johannes Willem van Grevenbroek, who argues that the reiteration of stock-motives over the centuries had come to disadvantage the Khoi, whilst designating the Europeans hypocrite Christians. I will show how, in his attempt to ‘civilise’ the Khoi, Grevenbroek strategically returned to Christian and ancient sources.

¹³³ Quoted from Hodgen (1964, 222). Montaigne is thinking about the mountains separating the Italians and the French.

¹³⁴ Print numbers of travel books prove just how popular travel narratives were and how vital in the transmission of knowledge of foreign peoples across Europe. See Stagl (1980; 1983). Both Montaigne and Peter Martyr were not read widely until centuries after their death.