

CARL PETER THUNBERG
TRAVELS AT THE CAPE OF
GOOD HOPE
1772-1775

Based on the English edition
London 1793-1795

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CARL PETER THUNBERG (1743-1828)
at the age of 65.

The original oil painting, executed by Per Krafft the younger in 1808, is at the University of Uppsala whose courtesy in permitting its reproduction here is gratefully acknowledged. Thunberg is shown wearing the sash of a Commander of the Royal Order of Vasa. He became a Knight of this Order in 1785 and Commander in 1815. Dr W. Odelberg, formerly Chief Librarian to the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, believes that the date of the portrait (1808) is correct. This suggests that the painting was modified after 1815 by the addition of the Commander's sash.

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tarded their passage, for which reason it has received from the inhabitants the name of *wakt een beetje*, stop a bit.

The *Tulbaghia aliacea* (wild garlic or *wilde knoflook*) which grew both in the sands near the Cape and in other places in the country, was used in hectic fevers, either boiled in water or in some kind of soup.

At several farms near the Cape I had an opportunity of seeing wine made, and of receiving information with respect to the various sorts of wine, which are made here in great quantities. The pressing, which is done in March,⁹² is performed in general, for want of proper tools and contrivances, in a more simple manner here than it is in Europe. The slaves gather the grapes, and put them into a large vessel. For the pressing they make use of a vessel, the bottom and sides of which are bored full of holes; this vessel is set in the inside of a larger vessel upon a cross piece of wood laid at the bottom of the latter; this outside vessel has a spigot and faucet, through which the juice, as fast as it is pressed out, may run into a tub placed beneath. The grapes being laid in the inner vessel, heaped up to the brim, three or four slaves, after having previously washed their feet very clean in a tub of water standing at the side, get into the vessel that contains the fruit, and holding themselves fast by a rope fixed to the ceiling, trample upon the grapes,⁹³ and squeeze out the juice as long as they are able. In the meantime, the must that runs out is put into large high vessels to ferment. If the aperture is obstructed by grapes or stalks, so that the juice cannot easily run out, they push them away with a stick, to the end of which some bristles are fixed at right-angles. The trodden grapes, before they are farther pressed, are put, stalks and all, upon a coarse strainer (or the bottom of a bed) made of rattans, on which they rub the fruit with their hands, till the husks go through it, the stalks in the meantime remaining behind, which are now separated and thrown away, as they are supposed to make the wine austere and bitter. The husks are then put into the fermenting-vessel, which the next morning is in full fermentation, during which process the thick parts subside, and the must grows clear, when it is barrellled off, by putting a wicker basket into the bung-hole of the barrel, and filtering the wine through it. The grounds, which remain in the fermenting-vessel, are afterwards put into a square vessel, or vat, pierced full of holes at the sides and bottom, which vat is placed on a cross piece of wood in a larger vessel: with a spigot and faucet at the side. At the top there is a screw of wood or metal, by means of which the last drop of juice is pressed out from the husks. From the dregs and husks, that remain over from the last pressing,

92. Still the main month.

93. No longer practised except at festivals and shows.

brandy is distilled. No yeast is used for accelerating the fermentation.⁹⁴ The white and green grapes yield white wine, and the red, red wine. The muscadine grape, both red and white, produces the Constantia wine,⁹⁵ and the blood red grape, the wine called Pontac.⁹⁶ Names are bestowed accordingly as they resemble more or less the products of the European grapes, though the resemblance is not always perfect.

Several kinds of wine are sulphured,⁹⁷ especially the white ones, so that they should not continue to ferment and become sour in the vats into which they are tapped.⁹⁸ This sulphuring is done thus: strips of linen dipped in sulphur are fastened in pairs to an iron hook, the upper end of which is attached by an eye to a wooden cone. The sulphur is set alight and the hook is hung down into the vat, the opening of which is closed by the wooden cone, after it has been wrapped with a piece of linen. When the sulphur has burnt out the cone is removed and the opening closed up to allow the sulphur smoke to penetrate into the wooden walls. Into such sulphured vats and ankers the wine is then tapped, the sulphur preventing the wine from starting to ferment again.⁹⁹

A great number of dogs are frequently kept in the farms; they follow the cattle into the fields along with the slave, keep wild beasts away from the farm, sometimes protect the master from the outrages of his slaves, and are serviceable in hunting and on journeys.

The horns of the rhinoceros were kept by some people both in town and country, not only as rarities, but also as useful in diseases, and for the purpose of detecting poison.¹⁰⁰ As to the former of these intentions, the fine shavings of the horns taken internally, were supposed to cure convulsions and spasms in children. With respect to the latter, it was generally

94. Ripe grapes carry on them many strains of yeast which upon fermentation may produce undesirable odours and flavours. To eliminate these nowadays the crushed grapes are inoculated with a selected wine yeast as a "starter" to dominate the fermentation.

95. Red Constantia was probably a blend of Pontac, Red Muscadel and Red Muscat de Frontignac (De Bosdari 1966, p. 78), while the white was probably a White Muscadel and Green Grape wine (Leipoldt, p. 21).

96. Named after one of the first vines planted at the Cape, which is one of the few that bears red-fleshed grapes. Most red grapes have white flesh, the pigment being in the skin. This is a red, full-bodied, aromatic and sweet wine.

97. All wines require sulphur dioxide as a preservative. White wines require a higher level of treatment because they are delicate and susceptible to oxidation and bacterial spoilage. This paragraph is omitted in the London editions.

98. This process also described in Mentzel 3, 1944, p. 184.

99. Sulphuring is now done by the addition of potassium metabisulphite or liquid sulphur dioxide.

100. This legendary property discussed by Kolb, vol. 1, p. 192 and by Smith, 1968, p. 104.

believed, that goblets made of these horns in a turner's lathe, would discover a poisonous draught that was put into them, by making the liquor ferment till it ran quite out of the goblet. Such horns as were taken from a young rhinoceros calf that had not yet copulated, were said to be the best, and the most to be depended upon. Of these, goblets are made, which are set in gold and silver, and made presents of to kings, people of distinction and particular friends, or else sold at a high price, sometimes at the rate of 50 rix-dollars a goblet. The horn is of a conical form, thick at the bottom, and blunt at the top, a foot long, frequently in old rhinoceroses, and is placed forward on their snout. Two or three inches from this, the African two-horned rhinoceros has another smaller and shorter horn. In colour, it most resembles the horn of a bullock. When I tried these horns, both wrought into goblets, and unwrought, both old and young horns, with several sorts of poisons, weak as well as strong, I observed not the least motion of effervescence; but when a solution of corrosive sublimate;¹⁰¹ *aqua phagaedenica*,¹⁰² or other similar substances, was poured into one of these horns, there arose only a few bubbles, produced by the air, which had been inclosed in the pores of the horn, and which was now disengaged from it.

Though few countries can boast of so much venison and game as this colony, still here, as in Europe, at a certain time of the year, hunting and shooting are prohibited. Thus from May to August, nobody is allowed to hunt or shoot, at least near the town.¹⁰³

The hospital I very seldom visited,¹⁰⁴ as I could not possibly derive any improvement from any thing I saw there. I observed, however, in this place, what I never saw any where else, viz. that the attendants on the sick were provided with ropes ends, with which they now and then corrected turbulent patients. *Mirum sane morborum remedium!*¹⁰⁵ Both in the hospital

101. Mercuric chloride, a strong acrid poison.

102. *Aqua Phagedaenica Nigra*, black mercurial lotion for syphilitic sores and to relieve pruritis (*Squire's Companion to the British Pharmacopoeia*, 19th edn, London 1916, p. 727).

103. Unenforcable regulations protecting game, particularly in the Peninsula and Cape Flats, were passed from time to time, e.g. Van der Stel 1680 (Jeffreys 1944, p. 161) and Tulbagh 1751 (Jeffreys 1948, p. 204). Van Plettenberg 1771 prohibited all hunting June to November (Naude, p. 81), but why he chose this half-year is obscure. The colonists' imperfect knowledge of this ineffective regulation is a possible source of Thunberg's information about "May to August".

104. Described in some detail as it was thirty years earlier by Mentzel 1, 1921, pp. 108-116. Its overcrowded and insanitary condition in 1768 commented upon in Stavorinus 1, p. 550. See also Burrows pp. 41-49; Laidler pp. 74-75.

105. "Certainly a wonderful cure for diseases."

and on board of their ships, the Company had, for the greater part, ignorant and unskilful surgeons: and, in general, when a skilful surgeon was found among them, he was a foreigner. When emetics or such kind of remedies were prescribed, they were sometimes written down on the headboard of the bed: and of other medicines, a dose was commonly administered immediately, which were carried ready made up in a box after the surgeon, when he visited the patients. What most contributes in this place to the recovery of the sick, is the excellent refreshments of fresh meat and vegetables, that are to be had here. The principal surgeon makes his report to the Governor every day of the number and state of the patients.

At Zeekoe Valley the Company has a farm, where straw (*Restio tectorum*) is cut and prepared for the purpose of thatching,¹⁰⁶ as follows: A bundle or sheaf, after it is cut with a sickle is held by the top, and all the shorter stalks that are loose in it, are shaken off from it. The remaining long ones are then spread out in rows to dry, and afterwards tied up in bundles. With this the houses are commonly thatched both in town and country; and sometimes whole huts are built with it. A roof made of it lasts 20 or 30 years, and would last much longer if the south-east wind did not blow a great deal of dirt between the thatch, in consequence of which it rots the sooner.

At Muysenburg (or Mouse Mountain)¹⁰⁷ the wax-shrubs (*Myrica quercifolia* and *cordifolia*)¹⁰⁸ grew in abundance along the shore. The berries of them are quite round, full of knobs, soft, and of the size of a pea. The berries themselves are quite black, but covered with a farina of a whitish-grey colour.¹⁰⁹ They are gathered in their ripe state in the month of March, and boiled in water till all the white powder is melted off, and floats on the surface of the water like fat; this, when skimmed off and cooled, grows hard, almost like wax, and is of a greenish-grey or ash colour. The farmers

106. Lies 17 km SSE of the castle. Three lakelets of this name near Cape Town are shown in Valentyn 1, 1971, inset in map at p. 34 and discussed p. 147, n. 112. A *buiten-post* for reed cutting is mentioned in Mentzel 1, 1921, p. 160.

107. Now Muizenberg but originally Muysenburg, the fort (*burg*) of W. W. Muys established when he was an officer in the Cape garrison. His name means mouse in English. Both here and below p. 148 no translation of Muysenburg is given in the Swedish original. See Botha 1926, p. 83. Sparrman 1, 1975, p. 75, n. 173. Burman, J., *Cabo*, vol. 3, Feb. 1979, pp. 21-25.

108. Names unchanged. Both are species of waxberry, the former favouring mountain habitats and the latter occurring mainly in sand dunes near the sea.

109. A powder or pollen-like substance.

These people, who were well made, and of a sprightly and undaunted appearance, adorned themselves with brushes made of the tails of animals,³⁶⁸ which they wore in their hair, on their ankles, and round their waist. Some had thongs cut out of hides, and others strings of glass-beads, bound several times round their bodies. But upon no part of their dress did they set a greater value than upon small and bright metal plates of copper or brass, either round, oblong, or square. These they scowered with great care, and hung them with a string, either in their hair, on their foreheads, on their breasts, at the back of their neck, or before their posteriors; and sometimes, if they had many of them, all round their heads. My English fellow traveller had brought with him one of those medallions struck in copper, and gilt,³⁶⁹ that had been sent with the two English ships, which were at this time sailing towards the South Pole, to be distributed amongst the different nations in that quarter of the globe. This medal was given to one of the Caffres who was very familiar with us, and who was so well pleased with it, that he accompanied us on the whole of our journey and back again, with his medal hanging down glittering just before the middle of his forehead.

Some of these people had hanging before their breasts a conical skin bag made of the undressed skin of an animal, which was fastened about the neck by four leathern thongs, and served them for a tobacco pouch. Some of them wore about their necks a necklace made of small shells, called serpents skulls (*Cypraea moneta*)³⁷⁰ strung upon a string, and to this hung a tortoise-shell,³⁷¹ for keeping the bukku ointment in. Most of them were armed with as many javelins as they could well hold in one hand.

The huts were covered over with mats made of rushes, which, with their milk-baskets, were so close that no water could penetrate them.

The range of mountains which, during our whole journey, we had hitherto had to the left, now came to a termination;³⁷² and, to the right of us,

368. Tails mounted on long sticks were Hottentot ornaments illustrated in Forbes 1965, plates 43, 46 and Paterson 1980, plates 5, 33.

369. Obverse the head of King George III, reverse the ships *Resolution* and *Discovery*. Masson had come in the former to the Cape with Capt. James Cook on his second voyage of exploration. (Beaglehole, J. C., ed. *Journals Capt. J. Cook*, 1969, vol. 1, p. 16).

370. These are not money cowries *Cypraea moneta* but *Cypraea annulus* brought by the Dutch from India for barter and thus spread inland (Rudner 1957, p. 26).

371. Illustrated here in plate V.

372. The Van Stadensberge.

was seen the sea. A larger range of mountains, however, proceeded farther into the country to the left.³⁷³

The country hereabouts was full of wild beasts of every kind, and therefore very dangerous to travel through. We were more particularly anxious concerning our draught animals, which might easily be scared away by the lions, and lost to us for ever.

We were likewise too few in number, and not sufficiently armed, to protect ourselves against the inhabitants, whose language our Hottentots now no longer perfectly understood. We therefore came to a resolution to intice from this village another troop of Hottentots to go along with us, which we accordingly did, by promising them a reward of tobacco and other trifles that they were fond of, as also to kill for them a quantity of buffaloes sufficient for their support. This promise procured us a great many more than we wanted, and our troop consisted now of above an hundred men.

The 13th. The country in which we now were, was called Krakakamma,³⁷⁴ and abounded with grass and wood, as well as wild beasts of every kind, which were here still secure in some measure from the attacks of the colonists; these were chiefly buffaloes, elephants, two-horned rhinoceroses, striped horses and asses, (zebra, quagga) and several kinds of buck, particularly large herds of hartebeests, (*Capra dorcas*).

We travelled first to Krakakamma valley,³⁷⁵ and afterwards from hence farther downwards to the sea shore, where there was a great quantity of bushy growth, as well as wood of a larger growth, filled with numerous herds of buffaloes, that grazed in the adjacent plains.

In the afternoon, when the heat of the day abated, we went out with a few of our Hottentots a hunting, in hopes of killing something wherewith to satisfy the craving stomachs of our numerous retinue. After we had got a little way into the wood, we spied an extremely large herd of wild buffaloes, (*Bos caffer*),³⁷⁶ which being in the act of grazing, held down their heads, and did not observe us till we came within three hundred paces of them. At this instant the whole herd, which appeared to consist of about five or six hundred large beasts, lifted up their heads, and viewed us with

373. The Suurberge 75 km N. of Port Elizabeth.

374. Defined in 1776 by Swellengrebel as the entire promontory between the Van Stadens and Zwartkops rivers (Molsbergen 1932, p. 26). Discussed in Sparrman 2, 1977, pp. 57, 236-238. Nienaber & Raper, 1977, p. 785.

375. Kraggakamma Vlei on the old farm Kraggakamma 6 km south of Greenbushes, still with the same shape as when mapped by C. D. Wentzel in 1752 (Koeman 1952, plate 1. Forbes 1965, p. 12).

376. *Syncerus caffer*.

bread. They make a fire by rubbing two pieces of hard wood quickly against each other.

The Caffres are the only people that apply themselves in the least to agriculture.¹⁵ They cultivate caffre-corn (*Holcus*) beans, hemp, &c. The rest do not till the earth at all, except some few who now and then sow a handful of hemp.

Their huts are built with sticks of wood which are fixed in the ground and bent in arches, so as to make the hut round at top, and about four feet high.¹⁶ These are afterwards covered with mats made of rushes, and on one side an opening about two feet high is left at bottom, which serves the double purpose of a door and chimney, the fire-place being just inside the opening. Such huts as these, built in a circle of a greater or smaller extent according to circumstances, form a village, within which the livestock, at least the sheep, are kept in the night, and secured from beasts of prey. As long as the grass lasts on the spot they live there without removing; but as soon as it fails, or any one dies, the whole village removes to another place: so that the Hottentots, like the Laplanders and Arabians, are nomades, or wandering shepherds. A few of them live together in one of these huts, and lie coiled up, dispersed around the internal walls of it.

The language, which frequently is almost the only thing that distinguishes the indolent Hottentots from the brute creation, is poor, unlike any other in the world, is pronounced with a clack of the tongue, and is never written.¹⁷

With respect to household furniture, they have little or none. The same dress that covers a part of their body by day, serves them also for bedding at night. Their victuals are boiled in leathern sacks and water, with stones made red hot, but sometimes in earthen pots. Milk is kept in leathern sacks, bladders of animals, and baskets made of platted rushes, perfectly water-tight. These, a tobacco-pouch of skin, a tobacco-pipe of stone or wood, and their weapons, constitute the whole catalogue of their effects. Their defensive weapons against their enemies and wild beasts consist of

throwing-sticks (*kirris*),¹⁸ javelins (*assagay*) and bows with poisoned arrows.

To the use of intoxicating substances they are much addicted. From a decoction of certain indigenous roots and honey, they prepare an inebriating kind of mead. They are very fond of arrack and brandy, and take delight in smoking tobacco, either pure, or mixed with hemp, and, when they cannot procure these, wild dakka (*Phlomis*)¹⁹ or the dung of the two-horned rhinoceros, or of elephants. The inhabitants of the southern part of Africa contract marriage early, and with little ceremony. When the suitor has made his intentions known, and obtained the girl's and her parents' consent, a day is fixed for the wedding, which is solemnized by the so-called priest belonging to the village, who besprinkles the bride and bridegroom with his natural water.²⁰ After that an ox or sheep is killed, according to the circumstances of the parties, and the company entertained; the men and women sitting in separate circles, according to their custom, and always squat on their heels, as they have neither chairs nor sofas. One circumstance however attending their wedding is highly laudable, which is, that though at other times they are much given to drunkenness, they never drink on this occasion; neither do they dance and play upon musical instruments.

To their new-born children they give a name, which is generally that of some wild or domestic animal.²¹

A youth is not suffered to marry till he is made a man, which is at the age of eighteen; when the village so-called master of the ceremonies besprinkles him with his natural water, and separates him from that time forward from his mother and other women.

Formerly the Hottentots, according to KOLBE, used castration.²² This operation was generally performed at the age of eight, the left testicle being

15. None of the independent Hottentots ever cultivated the soil (Schapera 1930 p. 235) while the Bushmen were hunters and gatherers.

16. This paragraph refers to the Hottentots as shown by his mention of them towards its end.

17. It is not clear whether he was aware that the languages of the Hottentots and of the Bushmen are different though brief mention of this had been made by Sparrman 1, 1975 p. 219 & 2, 1977 p. 266. The relationships between these two language groups and between them and some other tongues are discussed by Westphal 1971. *Stand. Encyc. S.A.*, 1972, 2, p. 612 & 5, p. 603. *Encyc. Brit.*, 1976, Macropaedia 1, p. 228 (Ack'd to Prof. E. O. J. Westphal).

18. Kirri, Kerrie, Knobkerrie or throwing-stick, a short straight club knobbed at one end was used by both Bushmen and Hottentots (Schapera 1930 pp. 132, 301).

19. *Leonotis leonurus* (Lamiaceae).

20. A frequently repeated assertion, but R. J. Gordon's investigations led him to cast doubts upon it (*Gordon-Dagboek*, 4, VC 595, "Letter to Griffier Fagel", p. 125). This alleged rite illustrated by a plate in Kolb 2, p. 17 and discussed in Schapera 1930 p. 249. Not mentioned in Schapera 1933, pp. 61, 147, 201-203. See also Raven-Hart 1971, index p. 511 & Rudner 1982, p. 86.

21. No support for this assertion is to be found in Schapera 1930, pp. 115, 226 n, 267.

22. Excision mentioned by several early writers e.g. Kolb 1, pp. 506, 512. Ten Rhyne in Schapera 1933, p. 142. Valentyn 2, 1973 p. 63. Wikar in Mossop 1935 p. 81. Sparrman 1, 1975 p. 183. Raven-Hart 1967, index p. 213 & 1971 index p. 524. Doubts cast on these statements by Schapera 1930 p. 71. Gordon says monorchism found only in some Namaquas and Finiquas (*Gordon-Dagboek*, 4, VC 595, pp. 81, 125).