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A
GEOGRAPHICAL AND TOPOGRAPHICAL
DESCRIPTION
OF THE
CAPE OF GOOD HOPE

BY
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TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN
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PART ONE.



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in so short a time, and in fact the whole idea is quite preposterous. Yet, for reasons already given, it is still more impossible for an elephant to lift its head and its tusks upwards. Hence the further statement that the elephant kept the huntsman in this position for a considerable time and exhibited him triumphantly to his companions is perfectly ludicrous. These would, in so tragic an affair, not remain inactive for long.

I must quote another incorrect statement made by the Abbé de la Caillé. On p. 108 he narrates as follows: "On the 6th of December I saw at Herr Dessin's a rhinoceros' horn measuring 26 inches from its point to its root. In addition, the root measured from eight to nine inches. The horn of a rhinoceros is of exactly the same quality as the horn of an ox. It is composed of whitish fibres that are easily divisible into splinters or shreds."

I have seen many such horns, and, although I do not deny that the substance of a rhinoceros' horn and that of an ox are of identical quality, yet the rhino' horn is more compact and consequently heavier. The general colour is brown but, vertically, greenish shades prevail. The outer surface of the soft, curved tip is black, but internally it is of a somewhat dark grey-black, with whitish stripes as if marble-grained. It has no other root than the bridge of the nose, upon which the horn rests, and is directly set in its skin. All those who saw the young calf, some eight years old, that was exhibited in Berlin, Breslau and many other places in 1746-7, will testify to the truth of my description. I cannot comprehend the Abbé's meaning in giving the measurement of the root as 8 to 9 inches; perhaps he refers to the several irregular rings. The horn of a rhinoceros is solid and differs from that of an ox, which is hollow and fixed upon a bony or woodlike kernel. The rhino' horn is generally sawn off very close to the bridge of the nose. Its greatest base measurement would be 8 to 9 inches in diameter and it would seldom exceed 20 inches in length up to the soft curved spike. This latter narrows somewhat sharply from the thick stem, and measures, at its extreme edge, which is curved and slopes towards the forehead, about two digits in width and a trifle less in thickness. It is much firmer at the lower end, where it meets the thick stem, than at the tip. This spike measures about four inches from where it meets the stem to its tip. When this animal becomes enraged or greatly excited he plants the tip of his horn with all his might into the ground and tears up the earth as with a plough-share, while at the same time he uproots all obstacles that lie in his path. This characteristic makes it possible to follow up the spoor of the rhinoceros.

When I was at the Cape there was a certain expert turner in the employ of the Company who was called "Baaspumpenmaeker" because he was also engaged in water leading. This man constructed a big cup or chalice out of a rhinoceros horn which measured seven inches in diameter at the mouth. Between the cup and its pedestal he screwed three balls. In the upper and smallest of these he skilfully placed a set of nine-pins, intertwined with two ivory balls; in the middle and largest one a draughtsboard was inset, made of ivory and ebony, with 24 draughtsmen of the same materials; while below in the smaller ball he was still engaged upon the task of modelling three cannons mounted on their gunwales. The statement that the rhinoceros' horn secures immunity from poison, or that it will cause wine to ferment is quite fabulous. These things have been tested several times and disproved.

Lest it should seem that I have thrown doubts upon M. de la Caille's description of the horn shown to him by Herr Dessin without grounds, I will be more explicit and state that the latter was quite capable and even inclined to impose upon a French visitor. I have known him since my youth. In 1720 he was my contemporary and school friend in the Joachim Gymnasium at Berlin under an old Jesuit professor named Wencke, who kept, besides the gymnasium, a private boarding school. He was then wearing the livery of Her Royal Highness the Margravine Albrecht, that is, he was being educated under the patronage of this princess. But after her demise it seems that he did not get a situation at court, for he left soon after, while still quite young, for Africa, where on my arrival he held the post of assistant or clerk to the Council of Justice.* During my stay at the Cape he became Director of the Orphan Chamber, or Orphan-Master as it is styled there. By a happy inspiration he asked for a thorough investigation and examination of the treasury before he assumed office. His wish was granted; a commission was appointed for the purpose, which revealed a deficit of 140,000 Cape florins, or 46,666 $\frac{2}{3}$ spec. thaler. The money had been stolen and spent by the deceased supervisor. This is clear proof that in Africa there is no such system of audit as exists in Prussia. The inheritance of the late orphan-master had been adiated by his widow, since he left no children. It was now attached, inventoried and sold by auction. His well-built house was bought by Captain Rhenius, who took the opportunity of retiring from office to private life. The expensive furniture and all the contents

* Joachim Nicolaas van Dessin died in 1761, leaving his collection of books to the Dutch Reformed Church together with a sum of money for its development in trust for the people of South Africa. It is now incorporated in the South African Public Library.