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# A PICTORIAL COMPANION TO THE SOUTH AFRICAN JOURNEY OF FRANÇOIS LE VAILLANT (1753–1824)

BY

L.C. ROOKMAAKER

Yale University's Beinecke rare book and manuscript library contains a possibly unique volume catalogued as *Atlas Supplémentaire des Voyages de F. Le Vaillant*. 32 figures . . . [n.p., n.d.] 33 col. pl. 30 cm (Ripley & Scribner 1961:170). François Le Vaillant (1753–1824) from France is chiefly remembered both for his journey to South Africa in 1780–1784 and for his ornithological interest resulting in several illustrated bird books. The combination of these activities secured him a place among the foremost pioneers of African ornithology.

While staying in the southern part of Africa from 14 April 1781 until 14 July 1784, he made two extensive expeditions to different parts of the Cape Colony. On his return to France, Le Vaillant prepared an account of his travels which became an immediate and lasting success. The *Voyage* described his first expedition to the eastern Cape Province. It was first published by Leroy, Paris, in 1790 in two volumes, illustrated by twelve engravings. This was followed by a large number of other French editions as well as translations into the major European languages, all enumerated by Ogilvie (1962). The *Second Voyage* was the story of his second expedition towards the Orange River. This came in 1795 published by H.J. Jansen, Paris, in three volumes with twenty-two engravings. This book too went through many later editions and translations. One of these reprints of both journeys was announced as "new and corrected". It was published by Desray in Paris: the *Voyage* in 1798 (two volumes), the *Second Voyage* in 1803 (three volumes). The corrections and additions to the text appear to be very minor. In the volumes of 1798, however, there were added eight engravings which had not appeared earlier.

Having completed his travel accounts, Le Vaillant turned his attention to the birds collected on the journey. This in fact was his first and lifelong love. The purpose of his research was not just to document the birds seen while in South Africa, but to present a complete survey of all African species. It resulted in his magnum opus entitled *Histoire Naturelle des Oiseaux d'Afrique* published in fifty-one instalments (six volumes) between 1796 and 1812. It illustrated three hundred birds in colour and included notes on their appearance, distribution and habits. This is one of the finest examples of the kind of illustrated natural history books which

were popular in the twenty years following the revolution in France. It is still very much a collector's item, although its scientific reception has been ambiguous. At first, the *Oiseaux d'Afrique* was received favourably. The criticism grew, however, with the increasing study of African birds. Some ornithologists in the second half of the 19th century began to emphasize Le Vaillant's errors or even "deliberate falsehoods". Although this attitude does not do justice to Le Vaillant's pioneer efforts, it can be understood because the book is full of bibliographical and scientific pitfalls. The judgement of the plates has been kinder and they are generally praised for their originality and fine production. While a project like the *Oiseaux d'Afrique* would have been a remarkable accomplishment, Le Vaillant in the meantime wrote and published three other bird books. Together those contained 392 plates of various kinds of birds.

The *Atlas Supplémentaire* discussed here is not a publication but a special compilation. This is best shown by describing its contents.

The title on the first page is handwritten:

Atlas supplémentaire  
des voyages  
De F: Levaillant  
32 figures  
No. 3  
Exemplaire soigné par l'auteur  
F Le Vaillant

This title explains three things. First, it is written in the same handwriting as the text found in the rest of the volume. Very few letters or manuscripts by Le Vaillant are known to exist. Bokhorst (1973:102) pictured part of an autograph with his signature of 1796. That is sufficiently similar to the signature on this page to assume that the notes in this volume were written by Le Vaillant personally. Secondly, the title claims that this is copy "No. 3" implying that there would be at least two other, presumably identical volumes.

Those are not known to exist. It cannot be ascertained why Le Vaillant prepared these collections of engravings with explanatory text. I assume that he meant to give them to his friends or important contacts, but whether this in fact happened is not clear. The present book does not contain any clue about a possible recipient. The text, short in all cases, in one instance is obviously unfinished in the middle of a word. One wonders if Le Vaillant would knowingly make such an imperfect presenta-

tion. The third piece of information found on the title page is that the volume should contain thirty-two figures. This is not actually the case. There are thirty-two explanatory notes, but one of those is followed by two, not one plate. Thus, there are in fact thirty-three plates, all coloured engravings.

The rest of the volume consists of those thirty-two manuscript notes with the corresponding engravings facing them. These explanations are very brief, written in French, and nowhere reveal any new, or even particularly interesting, information. The pages or the plates are not numbered in the original. I have for the present purpose given them consecutive numbers according to the plates, i.e. nos. 1–33. These thirty-three plates can be divided into four categories to gain insight into their dates and origin

- (i) Eight engravings which were published in the corrected Desray edition of the *Voyage* (1798). [*Catalogue of prints in the Africana Museum* ... L65–L72]. All those added to those volumes are present and they can be listed here in the order as they appear in this volume.

1. “Le manchot aigretté” showing *Eudypates chrysocome* from Le Vaillant 1798, I:41.
3. “Camp à Duywen Hock riviere” from Le Vaillant (1798, I:131).
4. “Le Touraco” showing *Tauraco corythaix* from Le Vaillant (1798, I:159).
10. “Camp à l’entrée du Poort. Grande chasse d’Eléphants” from Le Vaillant (1798, I:224).
11. “Camp à Jager-Kraal dans le pays d’Auteniquois” from Le Vaillant (1798, I:236).
16. “Camp sur les bords de la grande riviere de Poissons” from Le Vaillant (1798, I:319).
20. “Le Porte Lambeau” showing *Creatophora cinerea* from Le Vaillant (1798, II:243).
21. “Camp à une Horde de Caffres détruits” from Le Vaillant (1798, II:303).

- (ii) Fifteen engravings, of which identical copies are found in Le Vaillant’s *Historie Naturelle des Oiseaux d’Afrique* (Ois. Afr.). [The entry in the *Catalogue of prints in the Africana Museum* ... is given in square brackets]. The book exists both in folio and quarto editions, but according to the size of this volume in Yale University, the latter must have been used. The highest plate number in this group is number 50, published in 1800.

2. "Le Chasse-fiente" from *Ois. Afr.* pl.10 (*Gyps coprotheres*). [L121].
5. "Le Bateleur" from *Ois. Afr.* pl.7 (*Terathopius ecaudatus*). [L118].
6. "Le Bateleur jeunevâge" from *Ois. Afr.* pl.8 (same species). [L19].
7. "Le Blanchard" from *Ois. Afr.* pl.3 (*Stephanoaetes coronatus*). [L114].
8. "Le Vocifer" from *Ois. Afr.* pl.4 (*Haliaeetus vocifer*). [L115].
9. "Le Faucon chanteur" from *Ois. Afr.* pl.27 (*Melierax canorus*). [L138].
18. "Le Caffre" from *Ois. Afr.* pl.6 (*Aquila verreauxi*). [L117].
19. "Le Huppard" from *Ois. Afr.* pl.1 (*Lophaelaetus occipitalis*). [L113].
23. "Le Mangeur de Serpents" from *Ois. Afr.* pl.25 (*Sagittarius serpentarius*). [L136].
24. "Le Griffard" from *Ois. Afr.* pl.1 (*Polemaetus bellicosus*). [L112].
25. "L'Oricou" from *Ois. Afr.* pl.9 (*Torgos tracheliotos*). [L120].
26. "Le Corbivan" from *Ois. Afr.* pl.50 (*Corvus albicollis*). [L161].
27. "L'Ourigourap" from *Ois. Afr.* pl.14 (*Neophron percnopterus*). [L125].
31. "L'engoulevent a queue fourchue" from *Ois Afr.* pl.47 (unidentified). [L158].
32. (same name, head and leg) from *Ois. Afr.* pl.48 [L159].

(iii) Five engravings, resembling those present in the *Oiseaux d'Afrique* but differing in various ways. All are without caption or other imprints on the plate.

12. The note on the facing page calls this bird "Couroucou d'Afrique Mâle tué sur les bords du Gamtoos". This figure of *Apaloderma narina* resembles *Ois. Afr.* pl.228 "Le Couroucou Narina mâle" published 1807 [L339] but it is in reverse, with a different branch.
13. The note on the facing page calls it "Couroucou d'Afrique femelle". This plate is similar to *Ois. Afr.* pl.229 "Le Couroucou Narina femelle" (published 1807) [L340] but in reverse and with different branch.
14. The note on the facing page names this bird "Etourneau d'Afrique nommé par les hottentots *nabirôp* et par les Colons Europeens Groene Spreeuw" and gives a locality and a reference to the *Ois. Afr.* pl.89 (published 1801) [L200]. These plates of *Lamprolaima nitens* are similar, not reversed, but the branches differ.
17. In the note on the facing page, the bird is called "Coucou vert doré" while it gives a locality and a reference to the *Voyage*. A similar plate is found in *Ois. Afr.* pl.210 "Le Coucou Didric mâle" (1806) [L321], not reversed, with different branch. It shows *Chrysococcyx caprius*.

33. The manuscript note identifies this bird (*Cisticola textrix*) as "Le pincpinc espèce de figuier d'Afrique", comments on the nest and includes a reference to the *Ois. Afr.* pl.131 [L242]. That plate, published between 1801 and 1804 of "Le Pincpinc Mâle et son Nid" is identical, not reversed.
- (iv) The last category has five engravings which cannot be found in any of Le Vaillant's publications. Hence they are the most interesting part of this volume. All are coloured engravings. Most of them have counterparts among the collection of 165 drawings or water-colours attributed to Le Vaillant, which are preserved in the Library of Parliament, Cape Town (Quinton & Robinson 1973).
15. Plate of a Hottentot man. The manuscript note describes it as "Capitaine de hottentots, ou chef de Horde, dans toute la colonie dependante du gouvernement du Cap" with a reference to the *Voyage*. The figure is surrounded by a cadre, outside which in the right lower corner the engraver signed "C. Mugot". I have been unable to trace this name, and he was not among the artists responsible for engravings in any of Le Vaillant's travel or bird books. The same figure, not reversed, is known as a water-colour in the Library of Parliament, Cape Town (no. 34).
22. Plate of a naked Hottentot woman who is standing with the left leg lifted on a stone. The manuscript text explains it as "Vieille hottentote à tablier dont le prolongement des grandes levres étoit excessif". It is probably similar to water-colour no. 50 in the Library of Parliament, this is not illustrated by Quinton & Robinson (1973).
28. Plate of a Hottentot man smoking a pipe. The manuscript note calls him a "Caminouquois". It is similar to water-colour no. 52 in the Library of Parliament, Cape Town, not reversed, but the position of the man is a little different and the background is not the same.
29. Plate of a Hottentot woman with child signed by "C. Mugot" in the lower right corner outside the cadre. The next calls it a "femme caminouquoise". It resembles water-colour no. 53 in the Library of Parliament, Cape Town, but differs in the position of the woman and the background.
30. Plate signed by "C. Mugot" showing a scene which the text explains as "Camp à la cotine du garde manger, dans le Pays des Caminouquois. Endroit où je tuai la première giraffe". It shows a man, probably Le Vaillant, on the left looking towards a camp, in front of which a giraffe is standing. A similar engraving is found as the frontispiece of the *Voyage* in several versions in the various editions.

The present plate differs from those known in several respects, like the lowered arms of the man, the presence of only one dog, and one raised front leg of the giraffe. The arrangement is quite unlike this scene in water-colour no. 1 in the Library of Parliament, Cape Town.

These plates give us a clue about the date of the collection. Among the plates taken from the *Oiseaux d'Afrique*, the identical copies are numbered between 1 and 50 (dated 1800). Two plates differ from the published ones, but Le Vaillant could cite their numbers, i.e. 89 and 131. That last plate was published somewhere between 1801 and 1804, probably ca. 1803. Of some later plates, Le Vaillant did not mention their number, meaning that probably they had not yet been published or planned. It is likely, therefore, that this *Atlas supplémentaire* was prepared after 1800 and before 1803.

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available to researchers at the Bank's archives. A detailed index to the reports is provided, essential in a publication of this nature. Anyone who has ever struggled to find information on an individual mine will welcome the large number of mines listed in this index. There are also many references to individual businesses. Towns receive detailed index entries, particularly useful for establishing conditions in a town at a particular date. Some valuable descriptions of Johannesburg in its early days are provided in these reports. For numismatists there is much on coin and note circulation, while costume historians can follow the fortunes of the wool and ostrich feather industries.

J.W.

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Dr. P.H. Butterfield, now resident in England, is studying the literacy of British soldiers during the 19th Century as evidenced by their letters and their journals. He edited the journal of Major William Cox on the Eastern Frontier of the old Cape Colony, 1826–1834 which appeared as No.7 of the series issued by the Historical Society of Port Elizabeth. His most recent publication is *War and peace in South Africa, 1879–1881* (Melville: Scripta Africana, 1987).

Dr. Frank Bradlow, the author of several books and numerous articles is an expert on the work of Thomas Baines and Thomas Bowler. He is associated with various cultural bodies such as the Van Riebeeck Society, the Friends of the South African Library and the South African Jewish Board of Deputies.

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Karel Schoeman was born in the Orange Free State and has studied its history in depth. He has published works on its architecture, history, reminiscences, etc. and on President Steyn. He is editor of the *Vrystatia* series.

W. Wilfried Schumacher of Gadstrup, Denmark has written several articles of Africana interest as diverse as the fur trade and linguistics.