

KAREL SCHOEMAN (ed.)

The British presence in the Transorange 1845-1854

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Just like its predecessors, the thirteenth volume in the *Vrijstatia* series source publications that deals with the early history of the Orange Free State, meets all the requirements that one expects from this

type of historical work: comprehensive and elucidative annotations (in this case there are no fewer than 362 footnotes), a map and nine other apt illustrations, two appendices (the one in which an annotated list is given of all the main settlements which existed in the present Orange Free State and Lesotho and the immediate vicinity during the period 1845-54, is particularly handy), and then there are the suggestions for further reading (p. 141), as well as a comprehensive index (pp. 143-147).

The texts that have been included in this anthology are of special significance, and the publication is all the more worthwhile because Karel Schoeman has succeeded in compiling, editing and annotating it in such a way that it is not only an important reference work for students of history (especially cultural, social, military and constitutional history), but is also a highly readable work which should generate interest amongst at least a portion of the general reading public.

Karel Schoeman quite rightly points out that the impression is frequently given that the Orange Free State as a modern political entity was created and shaped exclusively by Dutch-speaking Boers and Afrikaners. That was by no means the case, because from the 1820's English-speaking, French and German missionaries settled in the area between the Orange and Vaal rivers and exerted considerable direct and indirect influence on local affairs, while in due course the British government's involvement in the Transorange also grew. Even after the Bloemfontein Convention of 23 February 1854, the new independent "Boer" republic was to a large extent shaped just as much by its English-speaking, Dutch and German inhabitants as by members of the Boer population.

As has been the case with the other publications in the *Vrijstatia* series, *The British presence in the Transorange 1845-1854* makes available to the general reader a lot of archival and other material that is not readily accessible and is, moreover, widely scattered in several archive depots and in its original form is written in different languages. In this anthology the process by which the inhabitants of the Transorange were welded into the political entity known as the Orange River Sovereignty, is sketched. The different texts have been skilfully woven together, with introductory and other comments by the compiler in the text, and with additional comment and information in the annotations. (Perhaps it would have been better if the sources of quotations which are now tucked away at the back of the book, had been given at the beginning or at the end of the different quotations.)

The anthology begins with the skirmish at Swartkoppies (May 1845), which witnessed for the first time the deployment of British troops north of the Orange River, and a visit by a Cape governor (Sir Peregrine Maitland), to the area (pp. 11-20). The establishment of British authority (1846-48) is the next theme that is scrutinized (pp. 21-44), e.g. Sir Harry Smith's over-hasty and ill-considered proclamation of sovereignty that was violently resented by the pro-republican Boers of the Highveld, and led to the military confrontation at Boomplaats (August 1848).

Chapter 2 (pp. 45-64) is devoted to the mission stations in the Transorange, e.g. those of the London Missionary Society (LMS), and the indigenous population, e.g. die Korana, Griquas and Basotho. As is the case in so many contemporary documents, there are several references to the remarkable King Moshweshwe of the Basotho. J.J. Freeman of the LMS, who visited several mission stations in 1849-50, said of Moshweshwe: "He is endowed with a mind naturally fond of improvement. He seems to have felt that his tribe was in a state of barbarous ignorance even before the contrast presented by civilised nations had apprised him of the fact ...He has also by his example and interference imparted to his tribe a character of humanity and gentleness of manners very remarkable" (p. 51).

In chapter 4 texts are included that show how the Orange River Sovereignty took shape (pp. 65-81), and in the next chapter the wars of the Sovereignty period (1848-53) are discussed (pp. 82-103), e.g. the large-scale and protracted war between the Basotho (supported by the Bataung of Moletsane) and the Batlokwa of Sekonyela (supported by the Taaibosch Korana).

The anthology ends with the signing of the Bloemfontein Convention (23 February 1854) and the consequent abandonment of British sovereignty (pp. 104-126). A large part of the English-speaking population - having little confidence in the viability of the new republic - left with the British troops and officials. Of those who stayed behind, a considerable section continued to be hostile to the new authorities, but gradually a common loyalty began to develop among the white inhabitants of the state. For the remainder of its brief history, English speakers played a notable role in the affairs of the so-called "Model Republic", and they were to serve it loyally to the end. Among the most prominent examples are Andrew Murray Jr., W.W. Collins, Colin Fraser Jr., J.G. Fraser and John Brebner.

This is the third and last of the *Vrijstatia* volumes which have been published with a subsidy kindly provided by SASOL Limited. All of us interested in history owe this firm a lot of gratitude, and one can but hope that they, or other interested parties, will in future be willing to sponsor the publication of worthy historical manuscripts.

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