

JEAN-PIERRE PELLISSIER: NOTES ON HIS MAP OF 1834

by

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The article refers to the map published in the JOURNAL DES MISSIONS; EVANGELIQUES (IXe-Année, 1ere livraison) with the legend: CARTE DU SUD-EST DE L'AFRIQUE POUR L'INTELLIGENCE DES TRAVAUX DES MISSIONNAIRES FRANCAIS. PARIS, 1834. It was drawn by Jean-Pierre Pellissier (1808 — 1867) of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society and reproduced by S. H. Pellissier: JEAN-PIERRE PELLISSIER VAN BETHULIE. Pretoria, 1957 (facing p. 113).

It was due to the influence of Dr. John Philip that the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society sent three missionaries to South Africa in 1829. Two of them became pioneers: Prosper Lemue, who, after many years of observation at his northernmost outpost Motiton, recorded his observations on fauna, flora and native life. Prosper Lemue was a quiet man with a scientific mind, but he had no scientific training. No anthropologist has as yet examined his articles in the light of modern science and present-day conditions, so that there is another case of a pioneer who has left a treasure of which we have not availed ourselves yet. The other was Samuel Rolland, a different type of pioneer: he was the man of action, a great personality, afterwards president of the Conference of French Missionaries in South Africa.

Upon the ancestry and life of the fourth missionary whom the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society (P.E.M.S.) sent to South Africa light has been shed very recently only.⁽¹⁾ Pellissier was born on 28th September, 1808, on the farm Le Mas between St. Arey and La Mure in the French Alps. When sixteen and a half years of age his conversion was initiated by an aunt who sent him later to M. Jacquet, head of the missionary institute of Glay. In July, 1827 Pellissier applied for admission as scholar to the *Maison des Missions* of the P.E.M.S. in Paris.⁽²⁾ His admission was supported by testimonials of Professor Blumhard and M. Jacquet.

A high standard of knowledge and a long period of training was demanded by the director of the *Maison des Missions*. In 1831 Pellissier came to South Africa after a swift and fortunate voyage.

The above-named French missionaries who had preceded Pellissier had been pursued by a pirate near St. Helena and Pellissier's colleagues who followed

(1) S. H. Pellissier: JEAN-PIERRE PELLISSIER VAN BETHULIE, J. L. van Schaik, Pretoria, 1956, 697 pages.

(2) The first mission house still exists in the Boulevard Montparnasse (then No. 41), Paris 14e.

him in 1832 also got ready for an encounter with pirates. Pellissier too mentioned a mysterious ship that had appeared on August 12th, 1831, at 23° S.L. and 37° W.L., and which sailed towards them and was believed to be a freebooter. This offers proof of how unsafe the Southern Atlantic was at that time.

The orders of the head committee of the P.E.M.S. were that Pellissier should take up mission work with the Wanketsi. The London Missionary Society expected the P.E.M.S. to penetrate into the unknown area N. and N.W. of the Kuruman. Pellissier consequently took ship to Algoa Bay, or, if this sounds too easy, was nearly drowned in Table Bay on December 1st, and again when disembarking in Algoa Bay at 10 p.m. on 11th December, 1831.

The stages of the Frenchman's trip from Graaff-Reinet via Philippolis and Boetsap to Kuruman are entered on his map. It took him only 22 days to travel from Bethelsdorp to Kuruman, one of the most fortunate and swiftest treks of the French missionaries. The only incidents were that he lost the track twice but struck it again by means of his compass, and that before his arrival at the Kuruman his oxen reared in fright at an animal of prey and overturned his ox-wagon.

On 22nd January, 1832, Pellissier arrived at the Kuruman where he met his predecessors P. Lemue and S. Rolland. These men still waited there for things to become safe again at Mosega which was disturbed by the presence of Moselekatse in the immediate neighbourhood.

Between 17th February and 7th or 8th March, 1832, the three Frenchmen trekked as the map indicates from Kuruman to Mosega. Their journals throw interesting sidelights on the nature and conditions of the country which they traversed. They reached Lattakou on a Sunday. It was the residence of the Tlapin chief Mahura, of whom we have a pretty accurate picture if we gather the evidence which the French missionaries have left us. His baulking and thwarting them at every turn, his duplicity and cruelty, his affrontery and unreliability make sorry reading. He was an oppressive heathen chief, whose misdeeds were not checked by the European rule of law and who did not allow Christian influences to change the depraved ways of life of his person or his tribe.

The next stages entered on Pellissier's map are Klein Chwaie and Groot Chwaie. Their geography had already been described by S. Rolland when he had come this way on Monday, 30th May, Tuesday, 31st May, and Wednesday, 1st June, 1831.

In 15 days the three Frenchmen covered 60 *lieues* (a *lieue* = 2.75 miles) without meeting a soul. This reveals another interesting fact viz. that the re-population of South Africa is due to the establishment of European rule. We can take the word of any French missionary or, for that matter Pellissier's observation, who had mentioned that on his journey from Algoa Bay inland he would trek for five days before he would meet up with a native. With



J. P. Pellissier's map of 1834.

the establishment of European rule came modern medicine and such outbreaks as the three small-pox epidemics that had depopulated South Africa before the Great Trek meant no longer the end of untold Africans. Small-pox in fact ravaged the country again in 1831, otherwise S. Rolland would have preceded Pellissier to Mosega: Moselekatse had sent a deputation of 12 Hurutsi and a Hurutsi chief on 5th December, 1831, already, saying that no one connected with the mission of Kuruman should fear him but that Moffat should come to visit him again. S. Rolland wanted to set out after this but was delayed on account of the fact that his men were down with small-pox or had not sufficiently recovered yet.

A second scourge were the wars of extermination that convulsed the interior. The French missionaries were aware that the reason why they found no living soul for 15 days was that the Mantatees had crossed these parts on their notorious devastating migration. No less terrible was the extermination of native tribes which the French missionaries had to report very shortly after the time of which we speak now. Moselekatse wiped out whole Bechuana tribes and also opposed himself to Christian penetration. Seen in the perspective of what the French missionaries put on record as historical facts, the benefits to the Africans of European rule were of the greatest humanitarian value imaginable.

The next station on Pellissier's map is the Sitlagoli River. Here S. Rolland had had an interview with chief Gontsi on Friday, June 3rd, 1831, when Gontsi had asked for missionaries. On Friday, 28th October, 1831, S. Rolland had again come to the Sitlagoli River where two lions had tried to cut him off from his ox-wagon. He had been saved only by the speed of his horse, a gift from Ds. Andrew Murray of Graaff-Reinet, the great friend of all French missionaries.

We notice that Pellissier did not explore the route in question but that Rolland had been over it before him in order to "purchase" the ground for the projected French mission station. The *Journal of Evangelical Missions* had at that time said of Rolland that he had "penetrated further than any modern traveller (sic) seeing that he had arrived at Mosega, capital of the Hurutsi, situated about 76 lieues North East of Lattakou (Takoon), last village entered on the most recent maps of South Africa".⁽³⁾

The next spot entered on the map is Kunana (26° 22' S.L., 25° 19' E.L.). It was also called the place of Tauani. The Barolong chief Tauani had 10 wives at that time and Prosper Lemue described him in the following terms: "After having traversed the town we saw the most imposing train of men that one can imagine advance in our direction. At the head of it appeared Tauani, their chief, who came to receive us as we climbed from our wagons. The features of this man seemed striking to us. The prominence of his lower lip, his deep-sunk eyes, his disdainful smile and his countenance composed

(3) *JOURNAL DES MISSIONS EVANGELIQUES*, volume 7 (1832), p. 5.

with art gave him the air of a great man used to meditating the profoundest schemes. This is also about the character attributed to him by the Bechuanas: he passes amongst them as a man of ruses. It is even said that he is capable of the worst crimes in cases where his interests are involved. It was not assuring to know ourselves in the power of such a man."

Pellissier did not mark the following two stops namely Maritzani River and the spring Lothlakane (26° 2' S.L.; 25° 40' E.L.). Rolland had been held up by snow in the first-named place on Monday and Tuesday 6th and 7th June, 1831. Of the second place he had said that a great forest of *acacia girasae* grew there. The Molopo is entered again. If we can believe Rolland it had water at that time all the year round.

Pellissier did not mention which English maps he used as an aid, but Rolland said of the next stage (Mamori Fontein) which he had reached on Friday, 10th June, 1831: "We made 6½ *lieues* and arrived at *Mamoric Fontein* or according to the map of *Mr. Campbell* Philip's Fountain. This source is situated at the bottom of a very beautiful valley, dotted with big trees of various kinds. The ground there is black and sandy and the hill surrounding it is covered with thick loose stones. The road by which one gets there is very bad".⁽⁴⁾ We look in vain for Mamori on Pellissier's map.

The goal of the journey was Mosega where the three companions arrived in the beginning of March, 1832, to build their mission station with Mokhatla, the Hurutsi chief. Today Mosega is called Sendelingspos and a memorial plaque reminds us of the abortive attempt of our three Frenchmen to establish a mission station there, as well as of the subsequent drama which took place at this very spot.

How roughly the topography of Mosega was ascertained is revealed by what Rolland wrote: "It appears to me according to the observations which I could make with the compass that Mosega is situated about 76 *lieues* E.N.E. of Kuruman. I hope to give you a more exact idea of its situation once we have received the necessary instruments for this purpose".⁽⁵⁾

It reveals their complete ignorance of how matters stood if the three Frenchmen hoped to start work with the Hurutsi, and scarcely had three weeks elapsed when Moselekatse demanded by an embassy of seven men that one of them should come to see him as the paramount chief. Twice as many men followed the first embassy, Moselekatse soon demanding the appearance of two missionaries before him.

It now became clear to the three French that a mission with the Hurutsi or the Wanketsi was out of the question unless Moselekatse had agreed to this. Pellissier was selected to visit the Matabele chief. His experiences during his

(4) Ibid. p. 19.

(5) Ibid p. 26.

journey and at the main kraal have gone down in history. In the 8th volume of the *Journal des Missions Evangeliques* (pp. 5-19) Pellissier gave a day-to-day account of his journey. What with the shuttle service of embassies bringing ever so many orders every day, it took Pellissier 13 days to reach Moselekatse's capital.

As regards this part of South Africa, Pellissier's information is of documentary value, but we are bewildered by his computations. He wrote that he was separated from his colleagues by 45 *lieues* and that Moselekatse's country lay between 21° and 22° S.L. and 29° and 31° E.L. from the meridian of Paris, which is fantastic. On his map the mistake is somewhat toned down, his journey and Moselekatse's villages extending only between 25° and 26° E.L. from Paris, which is still one degree too far to the East.

The student of these and the other parts of Pellissier's map must take into account that his degrees of longitude differ from ours by the degree of East Longitude of the observatoire (Paris 14e) which is two degrees twenty minutes and fourteen seconds.

The coastline shown over ten degrees of longitude and nine of latitude is more accurately mapped since Pellissier could draw on the observations and reckonings of Dutch and English hydrographers.

What the French knew about South Africa may be gathered from the following facts: N. de Fer put the Cape of Good Hope at the end of the 17th century at 34° S.L. and 38° E.L. from Ferro.⁽⁶⁾

The Count of Maurepas (1739) marked the Cape of Good Hope as a spot the position of which had been determined by astronomical observations. Ten years later Sir Robert de Vaugondy indicated the proportions of the sub-continent fairly well. Geographers like Delisle and naval engineers like Bellin and Bonne had also mapped the coast accurately though their entries of rivers, mountains, etc. in the interior are distortions at best, fabrications at worst. The same is true still of one part of Pellissier's map viz. of the part North of 26° S.L. and east of 26° E.L. from Paris where he copied three of the river courses marked on some of the above-mentioned maps as flowing into the Delagoa Bay. These mapmakers had been in complete ignorance of the Limpopo system which is not shown by Pellissier either.

Apart from the Cape coastal settlements, those in the Eastern Province are accurately mapped. In respect of the area of Colesberg, Philippolis and

(6) On 25th April 1634 a French royal decree enforced as first meridian the one passing through the Western end of the most westerly of the Canary Islands, viz. the Island of Ferro. Delisle later proposed to accept the meridian of Paris exactly 20° East of Ferro. Greenwich is accordingly 17° 39' 46" east of Ferro. The round figure of 38° E.L. given by the royal geographer N. de Fer equals therefore 30° 20' 14" E.L. from Greenwich.

Bethulie ⁽⁷⁾ Pellissier was not on equally sure ground. All three places are entered to a greater or lesser degree too far North and East.

All place-names North of 29° S.L. are entered too far to the East as well. Griquatown, on Pellissier's map on the 22° E.L., may serve as a convenient example, its longitude being 23° 15' East of Greenwich. — Its latitude should be 28° 50' which reveals a slight error — curiously enough the opposite of what happened to Kuruman (27° 29' S.L.) which is shown too far South. Boetsap is erroneously placed.

Kuruman may have served as basis for the computation of degrees of latitude of its northern neighbours like Motiton and Takoon, where the same slight deviation is seen, a deviation not continued (this is very peculiar) still further to the North so that the latitudes of Kunana and Mosega are surprisingly accurate.

South of the Vaal River everything was *terra incognita*.

A new feature is the topography of Basutoland. Pellissier obtained information about this area from his brethren, Thomas Arbousset and Eugène Casalis.

This group of P.E.M.S. members had left Europe in 1832 and turned towards Basutoland. On 15th June, 1833, they were at Thaba N'chu and on 28th of the same month they stood before Moshesh. On July 9th, 1833, Morija was founded. The round-about route by which they were taken to Thaba Bosiu *via* the village of Rampese and Kugnanane is also entered on Pellissier's map and so are the frontiers of Basutoland, as indicated at that time by Arbousset and Casalis. The lithographers, Messrs. Engelmann of Paris, entered the name "Basuto" far to the East. Pellissier's map is thus the first to show the places and route mentioned. It fulfilled thereby the avowed purpose to serve "for the intelligence (information) of the work of the French missionaries" showing (as indicated in the inset) the travels of the missionaries by a dotted line.

A large-scale map of Casalis' and Arbousset's journey is the source of Pellissier's treatment of Basutoland. Both maps were published in the *Journal of Evangelical Missions*. Pellissier's map is bound with the first instalment of volume 9 (1834) facing page 33. Casalis' map follows immediately, facing page 64.⁽⁸⁾ In view of the fact that this map is being dealt with separately we can dispense with a detailed study of this part of Pellissier's general map.

The head committee of the P.E.M.S. had promised to the interested Protestant public in France ⁽⁹⁾ that it would publish a good map of South Africa as soon as information was forthcoming from the missionaries "en route at present for that country".

(7) On Pellissier's map his station Bethulie is still called Caledon, a name that was changed afterwards by request of the L.M.S.

(8) In a few of the rare copies of the *Journal*, Casalis' map may be found facing page 388.

(9) *Journal* vol. 8 (1833), p. 17.

Pellissier said that the map had been revised by Melvill, (A. M. Melvill), the companion of Kolbe on their exploration of the upper Caledon. The Vaal River is named *R. Jaune ou Gelber*. Since its first impression in 1834 the map has been reprinted repeatedly.

Three scales are indicated in the inset; the most important of the three gives the *lieues communes de France* of 25 to a degree. Whenever the French missionaries indicated distances in the volumes of the Journal of Evangelical Missions these are given in the *lieues communes*; it may accordingly be just as well to deal with this linear measure of length.

It is clear that the meaning of "25 lieues to one degree" is of a degree of latitude measured on a meridian.⁽¹⁰⁾ The polar diameter of the earth was computed rather accurately already in the first half of the last century so that we can ascertain the measurement of Pellissier. Mathematically speaking we have on the upper margin of Pellissier's map the 22° S.L. where a degree is 68.802 miles, a *lieue commune* therefore 2.752 miles. The southern margin of the map coincides with 35° S.L., where a degree is 68.935 miles, a *lieue commune* therefore 2.757 miles of our length.⁽¹¹⁾ The differences are considerable — theoretically speaking — but seeing that the map under discussion is on a very small scale they do not make any difference.

The distances noted in the reports of the French missionaries are also worked out by such primitive means as measuring the time and taking a guess at the speed — mostly of the ox-wagon or the horse — and the use of the compass for long distances, that a difference existing in the third place behind the decimal point is also rather immaterial in this connection.

The same reckoning applies *mutatis mutandis* to the second scale of naval *lieues* of 20 to a degree and to the last scale of 60 to a degree.

If the question is put in how far Pellissier's map is a contribution to cartography then we must answer that it is, in two respects. The first being the pinpointing with incredible accuracy of places N.N.E. of Kuruman. This may, however, have been based on the computations of S. Rolland or have been taken over without alteration from him. The subsequent measurements in Moselekatse's country (when Pellissier was on his own) are unreliable. When travelling North of the Magaliesberg, Pellissier did not even report that strong watercourses flowed in a northerly direction. We must gather from this that he did not realise that he was on the other side of a watershed.

(10) Degrees of longitude vary between Poles and Equator from nil to 69.171 English miles.

(11) The variation is due to the fact that the earth has an oblate spheroid shape. Around the 50th degree of latitude (latitude of Paris) a *lieue commune* would be 2.766 English statute miles. Expressed in the decimal system the figures in statute kilometers also vary, being e.g. 4.444 . . . km. or 4.452263 km. o.a. (Figures for values of degrees from: "The Earth and Man" by D. H. Davis, Macmillan, New York, 1950, page 613).

The second merit of the map is the mapping of places on the route of his colleagues Casalis and Arbousset in the Free State and Western Basutoland. In this respect, too, we have no original contribution by Pellissier. It would be unfair to blame on the missionary the lack of progress made by 1834 in mapping our mountain ranges and rivers, for all pioneer work in an unknown country must need start with ascertaining the topography of fixed places. The geography of the country comes second; the tracing of a winding river-course is a different matter which can only be undertaken after the general lay-out is roughly known.

None of the numerous maps made subsequently by the French missionaries has yet been studied as to its contribution to the cartography of South Africa. Some of these even seem to be lost. We notice a similar neglect in other fields; historians and ethnologists have not yet set to work on the heritage left by the members of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society.

OP 5 Januarie 1958 is Heinrich Christoph Penzhorn (gebore 12 Maart 1872) op Rustenburg oorlede. Hy was Adjudant van generaal Cronjé gedurende die Engelse Oorlog en is saam met generaal Cronjé gevang en na St. Helena gestuur in ballingskap. Oom Christoph Penzhorn het ook nog deelgeneem aan die Malaboch-oorlog in 1894. Later jare was hy lank prokureur op Zeerust en Rustenburg.