

Praenotandum

This article was published in:

Frieder Ludwig & Afe Adogame (eds.) in cooperation with Ulrich Berner and Christopher Bochinger 2004, *European Traditions in the Study of Religion in Africa*. Wiesbaden: Harassowitz Verlag, 404 pp., ISBN 3-447-05002-0 (hbk), pp. 75-96

The page numbers of the published article are indicated in the text between square brackets and in bold. However, the text below is no more fully identical with the one published. Not only have a few typos been corrected, but I have also rewritten parts of the section on Van der Kemp [pp. 80-89]. That caused me also to add new footnotes (31, 49, 67, 68), to expand a number of the original footnotes, and to add further references to literature.

Jan G. Platvoet

MERCHANTS, MISSIONARIES, & ACADEMICS
ON AFRICAN RELIGIONS, 1594-2000:
THE EARLIEST DUTCH CONTRIBUTIONS

This article is mainly a programmatic one. It surveys three kinds of Dutch contributions to the History of the Religions of Africa: mercantile, missionary, and academic. Each was made in a different period and context, under different cultural constraints, at the service of different interests, and, therefore, with different aims, and with the use of different strategies in the perception, description, analysis and evaluation of African religions. Each also witnessed its own context-bound dynamics in their perception, description, analysis and evaluation. Space and time allow that I deal in some depth only with the earliest publications in each of these three kinds of Dutch contributions to the study of the religions of Africa. Apart from these earliest publications, the three kinds are surveyed in very general terms only. At a later time, I hope to deal with them in greater detail and for the full length of the period during which they produced contributions to the history of the religions of Africa. The generalities presented in this article about these three kinds are, therefore, provisional only. They need to be substantiated by those later, fuller studies.

Dutch Mercantile Contributions
1594-1872

Earliest mercantile descriptions

Dutch mercantile publications on African societies and their religions appeared between 1594, when Van Linschoten (1563-1611) published his *Itinerario*, and 1872, when the Dutch ceded their last commercial strongholds on the Gold Coast to the British, thereby effectively withdrawing from 'the scramble for Africa' by the nations of Europe. In the last decade of the 16th century, Dutch merchants began to develop a substantial trade with the coasts of Sub-Saharan Africa, in particular with those of West Africa. In order to further their trade with these coastal societies, Dutch merchants, captains, crew and others involved in these ventures, became acute observers also of African societies, cultures and religions, and published many details about them. Especially in the early part of that period, many important contributions to our knowledge of the religions – indigenous, Muslim, and also Christian and 'Jewish' (Falasha) – of 17th, 18th and early 19th century sub-Saharan Africa were published in Dutch mercantile books and reports.

The earliest note on African religions in Dutch was published in 1594 by Jan Huygen van Linschoten in his famous travelogue about his travels between 1579, when he had departed from the busy seaport of Enkhuizen at the age of seventeen, and his return home in 1592. Having travelled, first to Valencia in Spain, and then to Lisbon in Portu-

gal, where he had been made secretary to the newly appointed bishop of Goa in 1583, he had travelled with him to India and served at Goa till 1589. After an eventful return journey, he had arrived back in Enkhuizen in 1592 with a wealth of notes, which he ordered at once into the two volume *Itinerario*, with assistance of his learned friend, Berent ten Broecke, the town physician of Enkhuizen, who himself had travelled widely.

On his journey out from Lisbon to Goa in 1583, Van Linschoten had stayed for a fortnight (5-20 August) on [76] the tiny isle of Moçambique, at that time the major stronghold of Portugal on the southern part of the coast of East Africa.¹ He described its people, and their religions, as follows:²

Apart from the forty or fifty Portuguese and Mestizoes [resident on the isle of Moçambique ... , one finds there] three or four hundred little thatched houses and huts which belong to the indigenous [people] of the country, all of them black [...] who are subject to the Portuguese. Of these, some keep the law of Machomet. Which law they had accepted before the Portuguese obtained [possession of] the island, through communication with the Moors and Mohammedans of the Red Sea, of whom there are very many in those countries, viz. the coast as far as the Red Sea. But from Moçambique upwards [*sic*] to the Cape *deboa Esperansa*, they have had no communication. There the blacks and indigenous of the country still live like beasts, without knowledge of God or his commandment. Some of the blacks of this island are also Christians, and others are heathens, [but] they all go practically naked.³

Behind Moçambique lies the country of Prester John, which is called the country of the Abexynians there.⁴

The *Itinerario* was a big success, even though it contained preciously little information on the coasts of Africa. To make up for that, its second edition it was enlarged in 1596 with a third volume, entitled *Beschrijvinghe van de gantsche Custe van Guinea, Manicongo, Angola, Monomotapa [...en van] West Indien int langhe*.⁵ The coasts of Africa were described in its first quarter. The other three quarters were devoted to an extensive description of the Atlantic coast of the Americas, from the territory occupied by the French in the southern parts of North America, all the way down to the street of Magelhaen. The title page mentioned only Van Linschoten as its author. The part on Africa, however, was actually contributed by his close friend and collaborator, Berent ten Broecke, better known as Bernardus Paludanus (1550-1633).⁶

Ten Broecke himself had travelled widely also, between 1577 and 1581— first to Lithuania, then to Italy, where he had studied medicine at Padua and had obtained his degree in 1580. In the meantime, he had also visited Palestine and Egypt. In addition, he had travelled in Italy itself, twice to Rome and Naples, and once to Malta and Sicily.⁷ He was an avid collector of *naturalia*: pieces of art and ethnographic curiosa from all over the world, and famous for his large collection of them.⁸ After his return home in 1581, he served as the town physician of Zwolle till 1586, when became physician of the then flourishing seaport of Enkhuizen where he stayed for the rest of his life.⁹

¹ Cf. Burger 1934: 269-277.

² All translations from the Dutch in this paper are by the author.

³ Van Linschoten 1955/1596: 22.

⁴ Van Linschoten 1955/1596: 25.

⁵ 'Extensive Description of the Whole Coast of Guinea, Manicongo, Angola, Monomotapa [... and of] the West Indies'. For the full text on the title page, cf. Burger & Hunger 1934: XXI.

⁶ Burger 1934: 282.

⁷ Cf. Hunger 1934: 249-254; cf. also the reference Paludanus made himself to his visit to Egypt (Van Linschoten 1934/1596: 3; also in De Marees 1912/1602: 265).

⁸ Cf. Hunger 1934: 259-264.

⁹ Cf. Hunger 1934: 254-258.

Paludanus never visited the coasts of Africa. His description of the coasts of *Manicongo, Angola and Monomopata*, was extracted from Filippo Pigafetta's *Relazione del Reame di Congo et delle circonvicine contrade*, published in Rome in 1591.¹⁰ The part on the Guinea coast was, however, most likely based on the personal experiences of Barent Ericksz. from Enkhuizen,¹¹ who was the first Dutch skipper to have traded on the Gold Coast in 1593-1594.¹² Erikz. donated several of the [77] curiosities he had gathered on that journey to the collection of Paludanus: nests of weaverbirds, headgear, dyewood, casting-knives, aprons woven from rushes, weapons, drums, horns made of elephant teeth, and dresses made from the beaten bark of trees.¹³

In respect of religion on the Guinea coast, Eriksz. informed Paludanus:

One may trade well with the people of Guinea, in particular with those who are not subject to the Portuguese, who abduct people and are therefore hated. The land is populous, but they [its inhabitants] are all estranged from God, and from good discipline, [they are] heathens and servants of idols. [The land is also] abundant in gold, elephant teeth or ivory, grains [Malagetta pepper], Ethiopian pepper, rice, barley, cotton, and many kinds of fruits, [...]. There are numerous kinds of animals and birds [...], and an abundance of fish. In brief, it lacks nothing except the discovery of Christ and his word so that some order and salvation may be brought to these poor people.¹⁴

Trading later for a few days with people living a little above Cape Lopez Gonçalim, he had made notes on 'the many curious manners of this people':

Firstly, in respect of their religion, they know nothing at all about God or his command. Some of them worship the sun and the moon, others certain trees, or the earth, because they enjoy food from it.¹⁵ They also take care to spit on the ground before a thunderstorm. [Even when] they stroll a bit on the street, they carry a big, broad, naked knife in their hands. Everyone, men as well as women, have their skin tattooed in numerous ways, very queer. [...] They will also not drink unless they have first poured some from the pot or pitcher.¹⁶

Sailing several miles up the wide estuary of the river in a sloop, some members of the crew of Ericksz. were given a huge welcome in a large village on the bank of Gabon several miles upstream. Its inhabitants had never yet seen white men, and were eager to trade with them. After mats had been laid out before the thatch-house of the chief, two chairs, a large one and a small one, were placed upon them. Then the chief came out to receive them.

His body had been made white all over with [powdered] chalk, or [some] other whitening, and also his face, and a little pouch with [this] whitening was carried after him. On his head, he carried a cap [made from] a skin full of feathers, and he carried a chain made from small bones [wrapped] more than one hundred times around his neck, arms and legs. When he had sat down in his chair, an elderly woman came to him and offered him some of this

¹⁰ L'Honoré Naber, note, in De Marees 1912/1602: 272.

¹¹ Or the nearby Medenblik (L'Honoré Naber 1912a: LV, note 4; De Marees 1912/1602:).

¹² Cf. Hunger 1934: 265-266; L'Honoré Naber 1912a: LV-LVII. In *Historie der vermaerde zee- en koopstadt Enkhuizen* (1666), Erikz. is said to have completed the journey in nine months, and to have returned in March 1594 with 'one "part" of gold, eight or nine *lasten*, 'loads' [of 14 metric tons each], of grain [Malagetta pepper], and between seven and eight hundred pounds of ivory' (L'Honoré Naber 1912a: LVI), and to have travelled eleven more times to the Guinea Coast after 1594 (L'Honoré Naber 1912a: LVII).

¹³ L'Honoré Naber 1912a: LV-LVII; Van Linschoten 1934/1596: 3; also De Marees 1912/1602: 265, 267, 268, 269, 271, 272.

¹⁴ Van Linschoten 1934/1596: 3; also De Marees 1912/1602: 265-266.

¹⁵ He also noted that they regarded defecation on the earth as a great evil; they had dug deep holes into the earth to serve as latrines (Van Linschoten 1934/1596: 6-7; De Marees 1912/1602: 268).

¹⁶ Linschoten 1934/1596: 5.

whitening. After doing as if he had washed his hands with it, he threw the remainder into his face, and acted as if he raised high both his hands. His wife was also given some of the whitening. After this, the lady began to sing and dance in front of the house, with all [the] other women following suit and doing likewise. Then the Lord spoke a few words, and beckoned the Black man, who had brought us from the previous place, and told him that we were welcome, meanwhile [softly] beating his hands together¹⁷ with the words *Fuio, Fuio*, as [is] customary. After a few more topics, he invited us to bring iron, saying there were enough [elephant] teeth. This we did: [we] barter[ed iron] against a number of teeth.¹⁸

On their journey further south, a canoe with 18 persons, carrying a small drum, which they played with a hollowed-out stick, came to their ship from an island named Caracombó:

[78] Coming alongside the ship, four or five [of them] came on board, one of which had been made completely white in his face, [and] on his breast and arms. This one carried a small green branch in his hand, with a little bell, and also a braided thing of the size of a sparrow, or a bit bigger. He also had whitening in his hands, which he sprinkled on the ship. Ringing the bell, he went all over the ship. And when they, or we, said something, then he rang it properly, as if he gave some consecration or benediction. Then he sat down, his speech trembling like [that of] a person possessed, or having a trembling fever. And a big pot of palm wine was handed to him, from which they toasted to the others for more than half an hour. Then they went back into their little boat and sailed back ashore. They also pointed it [viz. the shore] out to us, [and invited us] to come and trade, which we did.¹⁹

¹⁷ The Dutch text has: 'die handen tsamen kloppende'. It referred to the ritual gesture of softly beating one's curved palms together a few times in order to meekly draw attention to oneself or to one's words, or of gently inviting, or permitting, someone to perform an action. The gesture produced soft, dull sounds, as opposed to the loud ones produced by *klappen*, 'clapping'. It signified, says Paludanus, *nae die maniere deslands, alle vrede des vrientschap*, 'after the manner of th[at] country, all [the] peace of [and] friendship' (Van Linschoten 1934/1596: 8, 10, 11; De Marees 1912/1602: 267, 269, 270).

¹⁸ Van Linschoten 1934/1596: 11; also De Marees 1912/1602: 270-271.

¹⁹ Van Linschoten 1934/1596: 11-12. Three more passages, about the 'king', death, and circumcision, are of interest. The first relates how the crew of Erickz. was introduced to the court of the *Mani Gobam*, 'king of Gabon', on one of the islands in the estuary of the river Gabon: 'They were taken into a hut [...] where a few carpets [made from] the bark of trees had been spread out on the ground, on which they sat down. When they failed to pay attention to anything else, they were tapped on their shoulders and pointed upwards with the words *Mani Gobam*. Not being aware or knowing what [why?] that was, they looked upwards to where a black person sat, elevated upon a few stairs, virtually immobile, like an Idol, covered with many small chains of bones and rings, terrible to see. A few black women were lying at his feet with elephant tails for chasing flies away from him and fanning air towards him. Having understood from all this that he must be a Lord of the island, they fell on one knee at once, [and] paid reverence after the manner of the country by beating their [curved] hands [softly] till the Mani or Lord gave a counter-sign and [himself] beat his hands. Then they rose. And they were honoured with these delightful small mats made of bark, as royal presents, like the ones [...] you may see with me' (Linschoten 1934/1596: 9; De Marees 1912/1602: 269).

The second passage relates how the people on the isle of Caracombó coped with death: 'Taking our iron towards the palace of the Chief [...], we saw, on passing through the village, among other things a small hut, roughly three foot high, covered on top with a roof, and rather open on its sides, below which stood a small gallows, from which hung a small bent horn, with some kind of stuff in it, which they did not allow us to examine. And below the gallows was a little stick, on which the skull of a small child stood, having in one eye a small bone very similar to the one which haddocks have in their heads – at ours they are used for making horse reins and dog collars. At the foot of the little stick, various fish and animal bones lay, and [also] the snout of a *Pristis*, which our people call a swordfish, without teeth, which the captain brought back for me. When they [the crew] asked what all this signified, they [the villagers] said that someone had died. Passing through another village, they saw a lot of people, more than twenty, sitting before the door of a hut, some of **who** seemed to belong to the authorities. In the hut was a singing of all kinds of voices, small and big, which was a wonder to hear. When [the crew] asked what it meant, they said someone had died' (Van Linschoten 1934/1596: 12-13; De Marees 1912/1602: 272).

Analysis

When we reflect on these six – or nine – passages on elements of African indigenous religions in Van Linschoten's *Voyage* of 1594 and 1596 – the earliest in Dutch publications –, we may notice, firstly, that African Muslims and Prester John are merely and correctly noted. Secondly, that the descriptions of the religions of these African indigenous societies are marked by a deep-seated ambiguity. They were served, on the one hand, with a general Christian condemnation. Africans were believed to have no knowledge of the Christian God of the Bible, nor of his commandments. Therefore, they were held to be 'estranged from him', to lack proper social order and discipline, to live 'like beasts', and to be in need of 'salvation'. On the other hand, many details of the indigenous religions were correctly noted and without distaste, and some with approval and even admiration, e.g. when the crew of Barent Eriksz. was welcomed by a traditional priest who went into a trance.

This ambiguity reflects two cultural constraints on their perceptions. The first was that of merchants eager for profitable business. As merchants, they were quite tolerant and perceptive of any religion, as long as the 'market' was not disturbed, *i.e.*, as long as conditions for profitable business prevailed. The other was that of Western Christians. The general Christian view of other religions as idolatry endowed them with an effective instrument of depreciation, denigration and [79] condemnation, which they applied as soon as they were displeased by unwelcome accidents, such as theft, or were shocked by some of the different ways in which African societies were organised in matters of, e.g., sexual relations, or political power, or religious behaviour. Together, the two constraints provided them with the mechanism of a 'perceptual swing', which enabled them to shift at a moment's notice, and often quite unexpectedly, between appreciation and depreciation in their descriptions. So, they often swung between neutral, detailed and appreciative, albeit unsystematic, reporting on African societies, their institutions, cultures and religions, and their condemnation.

All in all, however, it seems to me that the basic attitude of Dutch merchants was that of a tolerant pragmatism in matters of religion, customs and culture. This was certainly practised by these two earliest authors on African religions, Van Linschoten and Paludanus, in their personal lives. Van Linschoten faithfully served the bishop of Goa as his devout Catholic secretary for five years. There is nothing to suggest, however, that he had any problems in integrating into the 'reformed' Calvinist religious milieu he found established in Enkhuizen on his return home in 1592.²⁰ That was true also in the case of Paludanus. He was made a papal *protonotarius* by the Pope on his visit to Rome in May 1580, but, after his return home in late 1581, he concluded the first of his three marriages before a reformed minister in 1583.²¹

This tolerant pragmatism in matters of religion seems to have usually neutralised Christian dogmatic intolerance and Western cultural superiority. 19th century colonial terms like 'tribes' are absent. It was fully recognised and accepted by early Dutch authors that most African coastal societies had kings, courts, nobles, priests, governments, markets, villages, towns and even cities. It was also noted when some societies lacked these. Also absent were generalised views, prevailing in the 19th century and legitimated by 'scientific investigations', about the inherent inferiority of Africans, as 'savages', cannibals, and dim-witted children, who need the stern hand of a white master. So were the Christian biases about the Negroes as children of Cham, with no religion but super-

Lastly: 'One may wonder [why it is] that on the one hand all children are circumcised, yet they [the people] have no law or rule, or knowledge of God' (Van Linschoten 1596/1934: 13; De Marees 1912/1602: 272).

²⁰ Cf. Burger 1934: 273, 276.

²¹ Cf. Hunger 1934: 252-254.

stitution, which were used as strategies of comparative religion for dispossessing them of their lands, and incorporating them into European settler and territorial colonies.²²

Survey of the programme

In later studies, I will further explore the use of this perceptual swing mechanism between mercantile tolerance and Christian intolerance, and explore whether or not the latter was neutralised by the former, in the following descriptions of African coastal societies and their religions:

- = P[ieter] de M[arees] 1912⁴, *Beschryvinghe ende historisch verhael van het Gout koninckrijk van Gunea* (Amsterdam: Cornelis Claesz., 1602¹).²³ De Marees stayed on the Gold Coast from 3 January to 29 November 1601, and also visited Benin, Rio de Gabon and Cape Lopes Gonsalves on his journey home, arriving back in Amsterdam on 21 March 1602.²⁴
- = K. Ratelband (red.), *Reizen naar West-Afrika van Pieter van den Broecke, 1605-1614*²⁵
- = *Naukeurige beschryvinge der Afrikaensche Gewesten* (1676²)²⁶ by Dr. Olfert Dapper, historian and geographer at Amsterdam. Dapper drew on all earlier Dutch and numerous other sources for his extensive descriptions of the coastal societies of Africa
- [80]= *Nauwkeurige beschrijving van de Guïnese Goud- Tand- en Slavekust*, (1704)²⁷ by Willem Bosman (1672-17??), who lived at the Gold Coast as a factor, or merchant, in the service of the *West Indische Compagnie* (WIC) for 14 years, from 1688 to 1702, at the time when Osei Tutu and Okomfo Anokye were laying the foundations of *Asanteman*, the Asante nation and empire.

In addition to these, I plan to look at other Dutch sources from the 18th and 19th century to see if they contain descriptions of religions on the Gold Coast. And also to look at a four volume collection of *Reizen in Zuid Afrika in de Hollandse tijd*, esp. volume 2, dealing with travels to the north between 1686 and 1806,²⁸ and volume 4, on journeys into *Kafferland* (Xhosa territory) between 1776 and 1805.²⁹ The latter accidentally serve as a quite relevant background, contrast, and bridge to the next part of my article, to wit the history of Dutch missionary descriptions of African religions. For that history began with the description of Xhosa religion at the turn of the 18th century by the controversial Dutch medical doctor and LMS-missionary, J.Th. van der Kemp (1747-1811).

*Dutch Missionary Contributions,
1800-2000*

Van der Kemp was the first Dutch missionary to stay for a year and a half in an indigenous African society. He lived in Xhosa land from mid-1799 to early 1801, tried to master the Xhosa language, and reported extensively on whatever he saw and witnessed, including Xhosa religion. He had been sent there by the newly founded London Missionary Society (LMS), which published his diaries, letters, and other reports in its *Transactions* as part of its policy of rallying support for the promotion of ‘the propagation of the gospel in pagan countries’. It did so, not only in English, but also in Dutch and Ger-

²² Cf. Chidester 1996.

²³ For the second and third editions in 1617 and 1650, and the translations into German, Latin, French and English, cf. L’Honoré Naber 1912a: xix-xxii; 1912b.

²⁴ De Marees 1912: 1-3, 242, 251-253.

²⁵ Ratelband 1950.

²⁶ Dapper 1676.

²⁷ Bosman 1704.

²⁸ Godée van Molsbergen 1916.

²⁹ Godée van Molsbergen 1932.

man.³⁰ I will first briefly survey Van der Kemp's turbulent life, then present some of his views on Xhosa religion, and analyse them. Lastly, I will outline what other research needs to be done to establish the part of Dutch Christian missionaries in the History of the Religions of Africa.

Van der Kemp (1747-1811)

Van der Kemp's life took a dramatic turn on Monday 27 June 1791, when he had already turned 45. On that beautiful summer day, he took his wife Styntje and his daughter Antje for a sailing trip on the river Meuse, where they were caught in sudden thunderstorm. Their boat capsized, Van der Kemp was barely saved, his wife and daughter drowned.

Johannes Theodorus van der Kemp had been born into a respected family of orthodox Calvinist³¹ ministers in Rotterdam in 1747 but until 1791 had conducted his life in an erratic way in terms of his education and career before that dramatic event, and in a scandalous way in respect of public morals. During his study of medicine and philosophy at Leiden University from 1763 to 1766, he had scandalised many by his several public liaisons with low class women, and by his temper. And when his elderly brother was appointed professor of Church History in the Leiden Faculty of Theology in 1766, he had discontinued his studies at the university to become an officer in the Regiment of the Dragoon Guards. In that position, he had continued his free sexual life till 1780, when he had again resigned from that post in a temper. He then had finally got married, but to the dismay of his father to a low class woman, Styntje Frank. [81]With her and his daughter Antje, born from an earlier liaison, he had travelled to Edinburgh where he had resumed his study of medicine, specialising in obstetrics, and also his study of philosophy.

Privately, he had also developed unorthodox views about religion. In 1781, he had made them public in a treatise on his 'Parmenidean' cosmology,³² in which he had argued that the distance between the Creator and his creation is cognitively and conceptually unbridgeable and that God is unknowable. In 1782, he had obtained his medical degree and had served, from 1782 to 1790, as physician at the orphanage of Middelburg, developing also an interest in chemistry. In 1787, he had nearly been killed in the political clashes between the Orangist and Patriot parties. He had also further developed his deist, unorthodox views of God, viewing Christ as an exemplary human being but not as divine. He had also held that 'Christian doctrine has been proved, through repeated investigation, to be a web of absurdities, contradictions and blasphemies'. In 1790, he had retired to Zwijndrecht, where disaster struck in 1791.³³

After the burial of his wife and daughter, he had a vision of Christ, experienced his divine power and love, accepted his divinity and omnipresence, and underwent a profound conversion to a highly emotional, individualistic, undogmatic, supra-confessional pietism. He spent the remaining twenty years of his life in as eccentric a way as he had done so far. In 1795, he got in touch with the Directors of the newly founded, interdenominational London Missionary Society (LMS), and offered himself for service to 'Caffraria', Xhosa country due east of the Cape Colony, which the British had taken from the Dutch in that very year.³⁴ He was accepted, ordained a minister of the Scottish Presbyterian Church in 1797, founded the *Nederlandsch Zendeling-Genootschap* (NZG) to

³⁰ Cf. [LMS] 1801, 1802, 1803.

³¹ Not 'Lutheran', as Hodgson (1984: 4) writes. Van der Kemp's father was a minister at Rotterdam of the *Gereformeerde Kerk*, the 'Reformed Church', which was the Calvinist public church of the *Republiek der Verenigde Nederlanden*, the Republic of the United Lowlands, as The Netherlands were officially termed from 1587 till 1795.

³² Van der Kemp 1781.

³³ Cf. Enklaar 1988: 1-29.

³⁴ Godée van Molsbergen 1932: 327-328; Enklaar 1988: 75.

promote the LMS ideals in The Netherlands in that same year, and arrived in Cape Town on 31st March 1799.³⁵ There he founded the *Zuid-Afrikaanse Genootschap ter Bevordering van de Uitbreiding van Christus' Koninkrijk, verblijvende te Kaap de Goede Hoop*, 'South African Society for Promoting the Expansion of the Kingdom of Christ, resident at the Cape of Good Hope', or South African Missionary Society (SAMS), on 22nd April 1799.³⁶

The region was torn with wars between the Boer and the British; Cape Town and rebellious outlying districts; whites and Africans on the diffuse borders of the colony: Xhosa, Khoekhoe, and San; and also between some of the African peoples. It was further thrown into confusion by internal Xhosa rebellions, and bands of marauders, white, coloured and black.³⁷ Even so, Van der Kemp managed to enter the realm of the young Xhosa king, Ngqika, in early August 1799. A friendly relationship developed between Ngqika and Van der Kemp, who became famous as *Jank'hanna* ('the bald one'?) among the Xhosa.³⁸ He obtained permission to stay there, which he did for a year and a half, till the end of 1800. By then, the political situation had worsened that much that he was forced to flee, against the will of Ngqika, with his motley crowd of dependants. After a long, circuitous and dangerous trek, he arrived back at Graaff Reinet, within the borders of the Cape Colony, in mid-May 1801.

On his return, the Boer and British were shocked to see that Van der Kemp had completely 'gone native' in his attire, demeanour and unreserved identification with the Khoi, Xhosa, coloured and other displaced 'rabble', which had gathered around him as catechumens and other [82] dependants. The peak of his 'disgrace' was reached, in the eyes of Colonists, in 1806, when Van der Kemp, at 59 years of age, bought a 14-year old Malagasy Muslim slave girl, Sara Janse.³⁹ Although she was not a Christian, he married her, and had four children with her in the remaining five years of his life.

Not only his crossing of racial borders, however, got him into an ever-increasing acrimonious hostility with his fellow Calvinists, the Boers. It was intensified also by the accusations – often unfounded or exaggerated – of maltreatment of Khoi, San and other slaves by their Boer masters, which Van der Kemp and his LMS-fellow missionary Read lodged officially with the magistrates in the following years. And also by his public denigration of the 'nominal' Christianity of the Boers by referring to their 'stony hearts', and by depicting them as 'enemies of real Christianity', or as an ill-natured, perverse generation of inhuman wretches, rogues and murders, and similar vituperations.⁴⁰

Van der Kemp on Xhosa religion

What views did this eccentric, ascetic, hot-tempered LMS champion of the down-trodden entertain of Xhosa religion? My quotes are taken from Van der Kemp's *Natuurlijke historie van het land der Kaffers* ('The Natural History of Caffraria', 1802/1803), the first section of which deals with their religion;⁴¹ his diaries between April 1799 and

³⁵ Enklaar 1988: 28-74.

³⁶ Enklaar 1988: 79-80

³⁷ Godée van Molsbergen 1932: 325-331; Enklaar 1988: 75-78, 86-91; *passim*; Hodgson 1984: 5-7; Stow 1964/1905: *passim*, esp. 316sq.

³⁸ On this, and three other names, Van der Kemp was given by the Xhosa, cf. Van der Kemp 1802: 131; 1803a: 44; Enklaar 1988: 94-95). Hodgson (1984: 8), however, gives *Jankanna*, or *Tinkhanna*, or *Nyengana* as his Xhosa name and renders its meaning as 'the one who appeared sneakingly, as if by accident'. Van der Kemp not only never wore a hat, but also went barefoot during his stay in Xhosa land, and did without shoes ever after, though Lichtenstein saw him wear leather Hottentot sandals in October 1803. (Enklaar 1988: 98, 139, 140, 201, 204; Hodgson 1984: 10).

³⁹ Cf. also Chidester 1992: 45.

⁴⁰ Enklaar 1988: 100-208, esp. 112-118, 136, 147-157, 177-184, 206-207.

⁴¹ Van der Kemp 1802-1803: 357-389; 1-25.

June 1800; and some of the letters he wrote to the LMS board and/or supporters in the Cape Colony between 1799 and 1801.⁴² In addition, I use four secondary sources.⁴³

Let me first present some of his views in his own words:⁴⁴

If by *religion* we understand reverence for God, or the external action by which that reverence is expressed, I could never perceive that, speaking nationally, they had any religion, or any idea of the existence of a God. I speak of the Nation in general, for there are many individuals who do have some idea of the existence of the Supreme Being, which they have adopted from neighbouring peoples. A conclusive proof of what I say in respect of the national atheism of the Caffres is that they have no word in their own language by which to signify the Godhead. The individuals I was referring to a moment ago, call Him *Thiko*, which is a corruption of *Thuike*, the name for God in the language of the *Hottentots*, which means literally *one who causes pain*.⁴⁵

On 25 September 1799, five days after his arrival and first meeting with Ngqika, the young Xhosa king, Van der Kemp noted in his diary:

Then [Ngqika] taught me his language; and taking notice that I never wore a hat, he asked me, if God had ordered me to do so, or if it were by my own choice? I observed that he expressed the Deity by his Hottentot name, Tuikwa, to supply, in this respect, the defect of his native language.⁴⁶

[83] [The next day] Hoby [Ngqika's sister, and other women] came to present us with milk. They cried and danced like senseless people at the very moment I was about to begin my religious service. [...] I raised my eyes towards God, read [a passage from the Bible], [and] we knelt down in prayer, in their presence; and they stood still, without speaking a word.⁴⁷

This morning [7 February, 1800], while we were praying, the King came into my tent. But he spoke no word till we had finished our religious service. [...] When we had had our evening meal and everybody had eaten enough already, [Ngqika] took an[other] dish of milk. I waited with saying grace till he also had finished his meal. As soon as he had eaten the last spoonful, he lay down on his back besides me, and, wrapping himself into his tiger [*sic*] skin,

⁴² Also in [LMS] 1801, 1802, 1803.

⁴³ Enklaar 1988: 92-106; Chidester 1996: 75-76, 84-87, 184, 243-245; Godée van Molsbergen 1932: 309-314; Hodgson 1983: 42, 49, 76, 92-93.

⁴⁴ His *Natuurlijke Historij van het Land der Kaffers*, as well as his diaries and most of his letters, were originally written by Van der Kemp in English, and sent to LMS-headquarters in London through the South African Missionary Society. LMS published it as 'An Account of the Religion, Customs, Population, Government, Language, History, and Natural Productions of Caffraria' in *Transactions of the [London] Missionary Society*, 1 (1801): 432-468. Van Werkhoven, a member of the *Nederlandsch Zendeling-Genootschap* (NZG), the Dutch offshoot and sister society of the LMS, founded by Van der Kemp in 1797, translated the LMS Transactions into Dutch; cf. [LMS] 1801, 1802, 1803. So far, I have only been able to consult these Dutch translations, and mostly [re-]translated the pertinent passages into (my) English again, except when I found the original English texts quoted in Enklaar 1988, or Chidester 1996. I hope to be able to consult the original English texts myself in due time.

⁴⁵ Van der Kemp 1802-1803: 360-361; 1803a: 37: 'The Caffree language has no word to express the Deity by [*sic*]. *Thiko* is borrowed from the Hottentots, who call God by the name of *Thuikee*, signifying "one who induces pain"'. Cf. also Enklaar 1988: 96, 105; Chidester 1996: 75; Hodgson 1984: 17-20). Van der Kemp was accompanied by two Khoi who acted as his interpreters: the elephant hunter, Bruntjie, and Valentine Hartenberg. His other interpreter was Coenraad de Buijs, a Boer who had fled the Colony and had attached himself to Ngqika together with other rebel frontiersmen and army deserters. Van der Kemp clearly relied in particular on his Khoi companions for his interpretation of the religious notions the Xhosa had borrowed from the Khoekhoe and San (Hodgson 1983: 42, 93; 1984: 6, 7, 12, 14, 18). Hodgson emphasises that 'the language barrier was critical in affecting not only how Vanderkemp was heard by the Xhosa but also what he understood, or failed to understand, of their religious beliefs' (Hodgson 1984: 17, 26, 33).

⁴⁶ Van der Kemp 1802: 133-134.

⁴⁷ Van der Kemp 1802: 134.

he made ready to go to sleep. I began to say grace. Noticing that, he rose at once and took a posture of religious reverence till we had finished praying. Then he lay down again.⁴⁸

In the first two quotes, Van der Kemp used a Western-Christian definition of 'religion' to assert that the Xhosa, as a nation, had no religion on two grounds. Their language lacked a word for, and their minds the concept of, 'God'; and he had never seen them pay collective acts of worship and reverence to God, acts by which in his view religion as a public institution was constituted. The Xhosa were, therefore, a nation of atheists. But he immediately qualified this general statement by adding that some Xhosa, e.g. the King and his sister, did have religion, for they had learned the notion of God from the Khoi, and had adopted their word for God, *Tuikwa*, because their own language lacked the word and the concept.

In the two other quotes Van der Kemp presented instances of the manifest religious sensitivity and propensity, which the King, his sister and some other Xhosa – as well as Khoi – displayed, e.g., by acting reverently whenever they happened to be present at the Christian services conducted by Van der Kemp.⁴⁹ His stay among the Xhosa clearly convinced him that they were, at least potentially, and to some degree actually, 'religious people'. This is also born out by a passage in a letter he wrote in February 1801, after he had been forced to flee from Xhosa land and abandon his mission for the time being. He wrote that he would not 'abandon the hope that some of this people, particularly the King himself, will still, in due time, be brought to the knowledge, by which alone men are saved, that of Christ'.⁵⁰

He had arrived at this conclusion despite that other trait he found dominant among the Xhosa, to wit that they were 'extremely superstitious [but] without religion'. 'Magic was very common among them', 'even though the King forbade its practice, but [he] indulged into it himself'.⁵¹ So, he perceived many instances of their 'vain credulity', the most famous one of which was their fear of the anchor of a shipwreck:

There lies, near the mouth of the [river] Keiskamma, an old anchor, belonging to a ship, which was lost on the coast. Chachabee [Rharhabe, died 1782], who governed this country (as far as I can find out) about the year 1780, ordered a piece of the anchor to be cut off; the Caffree, who was employed in this work, died soon after. The accident was enough for this people to take into their heads that the anchor had the power of punishing everyone who should treat it with disrespect, and [that it] also [had] some dominion over the sea. In order to reconcile it, it has been honoured with a peculiar name, and when a Caffree passes it by, he salutes it.⁵²

One may note the striking similarities between the ways in which this anchor and Van der Kemp were regarded and approached by the Xhosa. Both were foreign intruders, entering Xhosa land without having been invited, and so, in principle unwelcome, especially in these troubled times. But both were also perceived points of contact with invisible worlds and/or as endowed [84] with mystical powers for good and/or evil, and, therefore, not killed,⁵³ but honoured and greeted with a Xhosa name. Thereby they were incorporated into the Xhosa social worlds, empirical and meta-empirical, as new, rather

⁴⁸ Van der Kemp 1803a: 30-31.

⁴⁹ 'From the start of his mission Vanderkemp established a daily routine of family worship in his tent, his times being in the early morning and after supper. [...] The services were held entirely in the Dutch language which a few of the Khoi could understand but which were a complete mystery to the Xhosa on-lookers' (Hodgson 1984: 14).

⁵⁰ Van der Kemp 1803c: 74; cf. also Hodgson 1984: 23.

⁵¹ Van der Kemp 1802-1803: 361.

⁵² Van der Kemp 1801: 432-433; 1802-1803: 362-363; Chidester 1996: 76, 74-84, 243-244.

⁵³ As were some – but not all – shipwrecked sailors; cf. Van der Kemp 1802-1803: 19-20; Enklaar 1988: 103; Chidester 1996: 79, 82-83.

weird mediators between those two ‘worlds’, but which might perhaps serve as a measure of control over the numerous evils, natural and political, which befell the Xhosa at that time.⁵⁴ One Xhosa wondered whether Thiko, God, might have given Van der Kemp the power of raising the dead.⁵⁵ So, when their own mediators failed to heal the sick or to procure rain during a period of severe drought, the king, and other Xhosa ‘captains’, ‘naturally’ approached Van der Kemp and requested that he pray to God for their cure or for rain.⁵⁶

Van der Kemp, on his part, derisively termed the Xhosa diviners, healers, rain-makers, etc., *tooveraars*, ‘magicians’, and regarded the faith of the Xhosa in them, as the ‘vain, whimsical credulity’ of ‘wild people’ in ‘boring fairy tales’, and as ‘superstition’ and ‘unbelief’.⁵⁷ When he acceded to requests for prayer, he duly insisted that it was God, and not he, who cured the sick after he had prayed for them, or sent rain after he had implored it.⁵⁸ Yet, he gave in to their requests regularly, and gratefully reaped reputation and glory from the ‘success’ of his prayers.

One event, in particular, he celebrated in a letter of 28 December 1800 as a major feat by which he felt God had ‘revealed [the power of] his holy arm to the Pagans in such a fitting manner’ that ‘it became known throughout the land’.⁵⁹ As the drought had been severe for several months, people, beasts and plants had been dying for lack of food. People had often besought him to give them rain, and their requests were becoming ‘a nuisance’. In late October 1800, Van der Kemp was overtaken, whilst travelling, by an embassy from the King which presented him with two cows and their calves and requested ‘in a more solemn manner’ that he give them rain, as the Xhosa ‘magicians’ had been unable to procure it. Van der Kemp responded as usual that he could not give rain, as it depended on God’s pleasure, but that he could pray for it, and would do so. He refused the gift of the cows and their calves, and went for a walk in ‘the desert’. There it dawned on him that God would certainly grant rain, if he asked for it in Christ’s name; and he felt ‘a longing that God be glorified’. So he returned to the Xhosa embassy and announced in Xhosa: ‘Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is Lord of Heaven (*Inkoessi zal izoulou*). I will speak to Him, and He will give rain; I cannot.’ After he had arrived that night at the place where the King was waiting for him, he prayed publicly for rain. It came so abundantly next morning that the King’s kraal was flooded. The King was so terrified by the thunder, that he sent for Van der Kemp in order that he pray to God never to let the King witness such frightening thunder again.⁶⁰

So, on the one hand, Van der Kemp was in a triumphant mood. He felt that ‘God was doing battle with [Ngqika] in order to make him see that He is GOD’, and that the King would, at some time, be ‘saved’.⁶¹ On the other hand, Van der Kemp was sceptical about the – missionary – effect of this event, for the Xhosa, he wrote, remained ‘as superstitious about the power of their magicians as ever’.⁶² How correct he was to entertain these doubts was proved by what happened that very day, 28.12.1800. The King was ill, and requested that Van der Kemp pray to God for him, but at the same time had a woman executed whom his diviners had identified as the [85] cause of his illness.⁶³ The Xhosa practices, which Van der Kemp divided into the theologically incompatible

⁵⁴ Cf. Also Chidester 1996: 82.

⁵⁵ Van der Kemp 1803a: 37; Enklaar 1988: 99; Hodgson 1984: 23.

⁵⁶ Van der Kemp 1802: 171; 1803a: 31-32, 45, 47; 1803b: 70; Hodgson 1984: 23-26; Enklaar 1988: 99, 100, 101; Chidester 1996: 83.

⁵⁷ Van der Kemp 1802-1803: 361, 362, 364, 20, 23; 1803b: 70..

⁵⁸ Van der Kemp 1802: 171; 1802-1803: 20, 23; Enklaar 1988: 99.

⁵⁹ Van der Kemp 1803b: 68, 70.

⁶⁰ Van der Kemp 1803b: 68-70; Hodgson 1984: 24-25; Enklaar 1988: 102.

⁶¹ Van der Kemp 1803b: 74.

⁶² Van der Kemp 1803b: 70.

⁶³ Van der Kemp 1803b: 70.

categories of 'superstition', 'national atheism', 'individual borrowed religion', and pre-udes to conversion to the Christian religion, were for the Xhosa completely compatible, as Van der Kemp correctly assessed.⁶⁴ But he held also, that credulity and unbelief went hand in hand in Xhosa land as well as in Europe,⁶⁵ implying that Africans were capable of (proper) 'religion' and of becoming converts to the 'true religion', (his) Christianity, as much as were Europeans.

Analysis

Van der Kemp clearly transferred the polemical 'paganopapist' theory of religion, developed in Protestant Europe in the 17th century for battling Roman Catholic 'popery',⁶⁶ to Xhosa religion in his representation of that religion's condition around 1800. The notion of 'religion' he used was peculiar to Western-Christian monotheism too, and exclusive. It restricted 'religion' to *godsdiens*, 'the service of God'. Only subjection to, and the public Protestant-Christian worship of, and reverence for God were constitutive of religion.⁶⁷ The two theories allowed him to conclude that the Xhosa, as a nation, had no religion, and were extremely superstitious. On both counts he was ethnocentric and very much a middle-of-the-road Dutch Calvinist.⁶⁸

However, the first section of his *Natuurlijke historie van het land der Kaffers* is devoted to 'religion'. There, the term seems to be used clearly in a wider, more neutral and more inclusive meaning, to wit that of the modern Western secular notions of 'a religion' and 'religions'.⁶⁹ This inclusive, non-theological meaning served comparative and classificatory purposes of an implicit kind. It classified particular groups of cultural phenomena in Europe and other societies as 'religion', 'a religion', and 'religions', which differed greatly from, yet were also perceived to resemble in some respects, the 'true religion', (one's own Calvinist/Pietist kind of) Western-Christian religion. This inclusive notion emerged in part from the 16th and 17th century wars of religion and the need for accommodating Christianity's ever increasing diversity in Europe politically and intellectually, and from the encounters with other 'religions' through the world-wide expansion of European commerce since 1500. That inclusive notion covered not only the Abrahamite version of monotheistic *godsdiens*, 'servitude to [the one and only Creator-] God', but also the Xhosa beliefs and practices in respect of, e.g., healing and drought, which Van der Kemp placed under 'superstition'. From the interplay of these two notions of 'religion' in his diaries, letters and *Natuurlijke Historij*, it transpires that the Xhosa had '(a) religion', even in Van der Kemp's view, despite his assertion that they had no (proper public) religion.

In addition, he admitted that some Xhosa, like Ngqika, had adopted the notion of God from neighbouring peoples, and thereby implied that individual Xhosa entertained the core element of theistic religion. More importantly, he reported that they had real religious sensitivities and were basically religious.⁷⁰ In his eyes, they were potentially as much, and perhaps more, fit to be converted to 'true religion', after the model and ideal

⁶⁴ Van der Kemp 1802-1803: 361.

⁶⁵ Van der Kemp 1802-1803: 364; Hodgson 1984: 22.

⁶⁶ Cf. Harrison 1990: 143-146; Chidester 1996: 84-86, 235.

⁶⁷ Cf. Hodgson (1984: 21): '[Vanderkemp] had no understanding whatsoever of their ancestor ritual and felt aggrieved when "they howled and danced like crazy people" when he wished to worship with his flock'.

⁶⁸ Hodgson (1983: 93) cites two other reasons why Van der Kemp's interpretation is 'hardly conducive to a penetrating insight into Xhosa religion': his reliance on a Khoi interpreter, and the antagonism of Ngqika and his followers. My analysis below will show that both reasons are in need of further qualifications.

⁶⁹ On the semantic history of the Western notions of 'religion' and the emergence of its modern classificatory and comparative functions, cf. Platvoet 1999c: 481-486, *passim*, and the other essays collected in Platvoet & Molendijk 1999.

⁷⁰ Cf. als Hodgson 1984: 23.

of Van der Kemp's own emotional, pietist Christianity, than his fellow believers, the Boer Calvinists of South Africa.

Thirdly, although he seems to have regarded the Xhosa as ignorant pagans, he did not attribute that, or their 'superstition', to Satan. He saw Satan at work everywhere, but more especially among Christians. Satan had been at work in the first half of his own life, when he had [86] constantly given in to his carnal lusts, to his pride and temper, and had developed deist views. But Satan was especially the cause behind all his present tribulations, as he was of the troubles his catechumens experienced in coming to an ardent surrender to Jesus Christ as Saviour and God and to the deep, emotional experience of a complete conversion. But most especially, he regarded the opposition of the Boers and everyone else to his missionary work among the 'heathen tribes' of Africa as his battle with Satan. Enklaar writes:

[Van der Kemp] lashed out at the lack of fervour [of the Boers] in the execution of Christ's call to mission. He considered their behaviour criminal and prophesied that on the Day of Judgement the blood of those tribes, who remained unconverted due to their neglect, would establish a clear testimony of their guilt. God would not answer their prayers in future and would destroy their whole church, as it had now become a synagogue of Satan.⁷¹

So, unlike that other famous LMS missionary, Robert Moffat, Van der Kemp did not develop what Chidester aptly terms, a 'Satanic Comparative Religion',⁷² by means of which both the absence of religion in some societies and all 'idolatrous' religions were attributed to Satan. Van der Kemp located Satan's work in his own heart, in that of his converts, and in that of his fellow Boer Calvinists, especially when he had to battle them. Van der Kemp found Satan wherever he had to do battle, which was much more with his 'unrepentant' fellow Christians than with the pagans he was eager to convert.⁷³

Lastly, Chidester's analysis of the subtle but effective political violence exercised by white frontier Comparative Religion in South Africa throughout the period 1652-1900 is admirable. Whites denied that African societies had 'religion', as long as the 'frontier was open' between the Colony and the African societies around it, the Colony being at war with them for the purpose of conquering them. White authors on African societies discovered that they had '(a) religion' only after they had been brought under its dominion and the frontier had been closed. Chidester adduces numerous examples of this shift from denial to affirmation as an instrument of European territorial expansion and the subjection of African societies to white hegemony. Van der Kemp's denial that the Xhosa had religion and his assertion that they were extremely superstitious at the time of an open frontier *serve*, says Chidester, as a paradigmatic instance of this politically inspired practice of denying 'religion' to African societies, and so as one of his proofs of his theory.⁷⁴

Pace Chidester, I would suggest, however, that Van der Kemp's assertion during an open frontier period, that the Xhosa as a nation had no religion but only superstition, seems to me not to support Chidester's theory, for two reasons. One is Van der Kemp's simultaneous use of two different notions of 'religion' in respect of Xhosa beliefs and practices: the theological, exclusive one, and the secular, inclusive one. By the use of this double perspective, he complemented his theological position. He did explicitly deny that they had 'proper' religion, but was aware that that denial was a restrictive theological stipulation. From the evidence he adduced in his descriptions of Xhosa beliefs, attitudes and practices, it transpired that the Xhosa also had (a) religion in the modern

⁷¹ Enklaar 1988: 114.

⁷² Cf. Chidester 1996: 184-192.

⁷³ E.g. Van der Kemp 1803d: 117-124, 135-141; cf. also Hodgson (1984: 22), quoting Van der Kemp as saying that 'credulity and unbelief go hand in hand, as well in Caffraria as in Europe'.

⁷⁴ Chidester 1996: 75-76, 84, 87, 233, 243-244.

meaning of the term. And the other reason is Van der Kemp's political *parti pris*: he identified completely with the Xhosa, the Khoi, the San and the downtrodden slaves of the Colony. He was definitively not on the Boer-British side of the frontier.

Survey of the programme of further research

Dutch missionary contributions to the History of the Religions of Africa were produced between 1800 and now. More research on them is in order before I can make confident statements. It [87] seems safe, however, to state that the contributions to the History of Religions of Africa by Dutch missionaries were rare before the middle of the 20th century, and few between 1950 and now, for two reasons. One is that The Netherlands was not a colonial power in Africa after 1872. Dutch missionaries, therefore, became involved in missionary work in Africa only through their international connections with British, French, Belgian and Portuguese counterparts. The other reason is the meagre intellectual training of the greater part of the Dutch missionaries who did come to Africa before the 1950s. As a result, only a very few of them did actually contribute to the description of the religions of Africa between 1800 and 1950.

Dutch Protestant missionaries opted to work virtually only in the Dutch colonies: the Dutch 'East Indies', now Indonesia, and the Dutch 'West Indies', now Surinam and the Dutch Antilles. They hardly came to Africa before the late 1950s,⁷⁵ when Indonesia closed its doors on them, except for a very few. The most remarkable of them is the medical doctor, J.Th. van der Kemp, author of the earliest Dutch missionary contribution to the History of Religions of Africa.⁷⁶

Dutch Roman Catholic missionaries did get involved in missionary work in Africa in greater numbers, but only after the 1920s. But they failed to contribute to the study of the religions of Africa until the 1950s, mainly because of their very modest intellectual training in seminaries in a thoroughly Western, scholastic, neo-Thomist dogmatic and pastoral theology only. None was trained in (academic) theology at universities, or in allied disciplines – History of Religions, Social and Cultural Anthropology, etc. – till the mid-1950s. As a result, their views of African societies, cultures and religions were of a 'traditional' – Euro-centric and orthodox Christian – kind, which did not allow them to adopt the distanced, neutral, empathetic, comparative view of societies, cultures and religions, which is an intellectual requisite for engaging in ethnographic description.

Dutch Christian missionaries, RC and Protestant, began to make significant contributions to the descriptions of African religion after the late 1950s, because three major shifts occurred in the political and religious scene, and in their training. The colonial period drew to a close. With it, the modern era of Christian missions ended, at least in terms of the missionary efforts of the mainline Christian churches and missionary societies of Europe. And remarkable changes occurred in Dutch theology and theological training. Liberal theology became the hallmark of virtually every institution of Dutch academic theology, including the *simplex ordo* ones of the 'confessional' universities – the Roman Catholic University at Nijmegen, and the Free University at Amsterdam.⁷⁷ That, and the greatly improved training in the new disciplines of Missiology, Theology

⁷⁵ For a survey of Dutch Protestant missionary work in Africa after 1954, cf. Enklaar 1968: 207-231.

⁷⁶ So far I have traced only one other Dutch Protestant medical missionary, Dr. Eugène van Cooten. He served with the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in its Yoruba Mission in 1850 and 1851 as its Medical Officer at Badagri in what is now the South-Western part of Nigeria. He reported extensively to the CMS-headquarters on his observations on Yoruba religion during his travels into Egbaland in second half of 1850 (cf. Cox 2001: 344; McKenzie 1997: 40, 122-123, 127, 149, 179-180, 212, 213, 217, 221, 222, 236, 273, 291-292, 317, 415-416, 499, 514-515, 561; also 12-15, 562). He accompanied the Consul of the British Government, John Beecroft, on his visit to Abeokuta in January 1851 (Ajayi 1969: 68; Biobaku 1957: 42).

⁷⁷ On the history of Dutch *godsdienstwetenschap* ('Science of Religions') in *duplex ordo* and *simplex ordo* Faculties (and institutes) of (academic) Theology, cf. Platvoet 1998a, 1998c, 2002.

of Religions, Missionary Anthropology, Linguistics, History of Religions, and Philosophy of Religion in the setting of universities, enabled a few Dutch missionaries to make significant contributions to the History of the Religions of Africa in the aftermath of the Dutch missionary epoch.

At the Free University, the pioneer of the liberal approach was the biblical scholar and missiologist J. Blauw. He failed to obtain a chair in its Faculty Theology and served as Professor of Non-Western Sociology of Religions, esp. the 'archaic' ones, in its Faculty of Social Sciences [88] from 1962 to 1975, when he became Professor of Social Philosophy.⁷⁸ Others were Wilhelm Dupré, professor of Philosophy of Religion at Nijmegen University, who published an 'ethnophilosophical' analysis of the religion of the Bambuti Pygmies in Congo/Zaire on the basis of Schebesta's descriptions;⁷⁹ and Bijlefeld and Haafkens, who served on the Islam in Africa Project of the International Missionary Council.⁸⁰ In that context, Bijlefeld published an article on Christian-Muslim relations in the North of Nigeria,⁸¹ and Haafkens on the Fulani Muslim community of Maoua in Cameroun and its religious songs.⁸²

Other contributions at the Free University were by the missiologist and anthropologist Martinus Daneel,⁸³ Blauw's successor Mathieu Schoffeleers,⁸⁴ and the anthropologist, and successor to Schoffeleers, André Droogers.⁸⁵ These, however, were very much one of a kind with the 'academic' contributions to be discussed below.

One of the reasons why missionaries, missionary anthropologists and scholars of African religions in Dutch faculties of theology contributed studies of African religions in recent decades was the emergence of a new paradigm, methodological agnosticism, in Dutch Science of Religions in the early 1970s.⁸⁶ Most authors, who have published on African religions after 1980 in Dutch faculties of theology, followed that paradigm. It required them to bracket out permanently their private or confessional religious views. These, therefore, became non-operational, as did the institutional location of their research. As a result, the particular Christian theology of a missionary or scholar of African religions in a faculty of theology was either no longer traceable, or the 'scientific' description and analysis of a particular African religion was clearly kept distinct from the theological interpretation of the data presented. Examples of the former are my own work on Akan, and recently on San Ju/'hoan, religions,⁸⁷ and on 'preliterate' African religions generally,⁸⁸ and Gerrie ter Haar's on Archbishop Milingo,⁸⁹ as is e.g. Krijn van der Jagt's analysis of Turkana religion.⁹⁰ The description of Sukuma Roman Catholicism by Frans Wijsen is an example of the latter.⁹¹

Because of the dearth of Dutch missionary contributions before 1950, and their shading into the category of 'academic' contributions after the 1950s, it might be argued

⁷⁸ Cf. Blauw 1950, 1962a, 1962b, 1968, 1978; on Blauw' travel into Africa in 1961, cf. Enklaar 1968: 225.

⁷⁹ Dupré 1975: 151-190.

⁸⁰ Cf. Enklaar 1968: 210-212.

⁸¹ Bijlefeld 1966; cf. also Bijlefeld 1959.

⁸² Haafkens 1983 (1979).

⁸³ Daneel 1970a, 1970b, 1971/1974/1988.

⁸⁴ The contributions of the RC priest and anthropologist Schoffeleers are too many to be listed here; I merely refer to two collections of studies which he edited (Schoffeleers 1978; Van Binsbergen & Schoffeleers 1985) and his magnum opus (Schoffeleers 1992).

⁸⁵ E.g. Droogers 1974, 1980.

⁸⁶ Cf. Platvoet, 1998c.

⁸⁷ Cf. Platvoet 1973, 1979, 1982a, 1982b, 1983, 1984, 1985a, 1985b, 1991, 1995, 1998b, 1999a, 1999b, 2000a, 2000b.

⁸⁸ Cf. Platvoet 1989, 1992, 1993, 1996.

⁸⁹ Ter Haar 1992.

⁹⁰ Van der Jagt 1983, 1989.

⁹¹ Wijsen 1993.

that this section should have been dropped altogether, as it is a virtually empty box. But that would have been inadvisable for two reasons. One is that I would not be able to discuss Van der Kemp's views on the religion of the Xhosa. Nor could I have highlighted that he was an exception to all three reasons quoted above for the absence of ethnographic contributions by Dutch missionaries before 1950 – their confinement to Dutch colonies, their poor academic training, and their lack of a distanced, neutral, observant, and empathetic mind.⁹² Dropping that section would also mean that [89] I could not investigate whatever other contributions Dutch missionaries had produced to the study of African religions before 1950. The other reason for not dropping this section is that it will provide an interesting perspective on Dutch political, social and religious history as the context constraining the mode and quality of the perception, description and analysis of the religions of Africa by Dutch missionaries. And thereby, it will contribute a chapter to the history of the methodology of the study of religions, in Africa and elsewhere, as it developed in Dutch (faculties of) theology in the past two centuries.

*Academic contributions,
1933-2000*

My third, most recent and largest group of contributions to the History of the Religions of Africa is the academic ones, mainly by Dutch anthropologists. With one exception, that of J.S. Hofstra, to be discussed below, they were all produced after 1954, when Indonesia refused research permits to Dutch anthropologists. I will again describe briefly the earliest Dutch academic investigation into African indigenous religions, that of Sjoerd Hofstra (1898-1983), and then indicate very summarily what further research is needed on this section.

Hofstra (1898-1983)

Hofstra studied Social Geography and Ethnology with Steinmetz at Amsterdam University in the 1920s, and did further studies in Hamburg, and in Berlin with Vierkandt in Sociology and with Dieter Westermann in African Languages. Then he moved to London, where studied with Malinowski and became research fellow at the newly founded African Institute. He obtained his Ph.D. at Amsterdam University in 1933,⁹³ and stayed in Sierra Leone from 1934 to 1936 for research on Mende society.⁹⁴ He was appointed Director of the *Museum voor Land- en Volkenkunde* (Ethnological Museum) at Rotterdam in 1937, and became the first (extraordinary) professor in *Afrikaanse Volkenkunde* (Ethnology of Africa) at Leiden University in 1947. He continued to serve in this post till 1958, even though he had become ordinary professor of Sociology in Amsterdam in 1951, and, in addition, the first director of the Institute of Social Studies (ISS) in The Hague in 1953. He retired in 1968.⁹⁵

It is apparent from his thesis and article on the Mende, that Hofstra was typically a scholar of the Steinmetz school of 'sociography' at Amsterdam University. It insisted that social-scientific investigations should be conducted on well-defined research problems by means of detailed, empirical studies in a limited region in order that empirically well founded conclusions might be drawn from it, which could be tested in similar re-studies elsewhere. The primary goal of its critical comparative ethnology was to debunk

⁹² Being a polemical person, Van der Kemp certainly was not a distanced and neutral observer. However, he was quite a keen observer of the Xhosa and their religion, and he had much greater sympathy and empathy for them than his Protestant fellow believers in South Africa, as I have shown above.

⁹³ Hofstra 1933.

⁹⁴ Hofstra 1937.

⁹⁵ Cf. Laeyendecker 1984: 1-2; Noordegraaf 2000.

grand theories about large, ill-defined subjects, such as Lévy-Bruhl's theory of primitive mentality.

Hofstra joined his mentor Steinmetz and his colleague Fahrenfort in their battle against that very influential theory in his PhD thesis as well as in his article. In the former, he used the data colonial and missionary ethnography had gathered by 1932 on nine African societies⁹⁶ – including two early publications by Evans-Pritchard – to show that they were not, as Lévy-Bruhl proposed, the collectivist communities in which 'the individual dissolves into the group and virtually does not play any role'.⁹⁷ On the contrary, they were replete with 'phenomena of differentiation', individuality and personality, which were normal, and not accidental, to these societies, and offered institutionalised opportunities for competition to its members in several [90] social domains. In the political realm, chieftainship elections, and restraints on kingly autocracy, fostered political competition and opposition.⁹⁸ In the social realm, marriage offered many opportunities for differentiation,⁹⁹ as did customs in respect of burial, taboos, civility and names.¹⁰⁰ Religion, sorcery, and medicine in particular offered ample institutionalised opportunities for differentiation and competition,¹⁰¹ and so did storytelling, singing songs and quoting proverbs.¹⁰²

All these institutionalised opportunities for differentiation could not be squared with the 'collectivism' and uniformity of African indigenous societies implied in Lévy-Bruhl's theory of 'primitive mentality'.¹⁰³ In his conclusion, Hofstra therefore rejected the numerous dichotomies (individual-group, individualism-collectivism, freedom-lack of freedom, differentiation-homogeneity) used in the dichotomous comparison of 'modern' and 'primitive' societies. He insisted that preliterate African societies were in their own way as complex and differentiated as were modern societies. He repeated this exercise in part in his article on the Mende by emphasising the scope that Mende political institutions and the chief's personality offered for differentiation.¹⁰⁴

Hofstra's approach to African indigenous religions

In his analysis of the scope for differentiation which 'religion, sorcery and medicine' offered in the nine African societies on which he had ethnographic data, Hofstra deplored that descriptions of African indigenous religions had till then been marred by 'geneticist' pre-occupations. They had primarily been studied as 'primitive' religions, for the purpose of establishing the origin of religion by means of them, and in them, and not to regard them as religions, that ought to be studied for and in themselves. It had also caused scholars to stress general belief notions and uniformity of belief at the expense of the diversity and discrepancies in matters of belief among the individual believers. Hofstra asserted against these unifying representations that 'psychological differentia-

⁹⁶ The Thonga, Ba-Ila, Ba-Venda, Bafioti, Dschagga, Ashanti, Ewe, Kpelle and Lango (Hofstra 1933: 40).

⁹⁷ Hofstra 1933: 1.

⁹⁸ Hofstra 1933: 46-60.

⁹⁹ Hofstra 1933: 60-80.

¹⁰⁰ Hofstra 1933: 80-94.

¹⁰¹ Hofstra 1933: 95-177.

¹⁰² Hofstra 1933: 178-206.

¹⁰³ 'Unser Ziel wird es sein, an einigen Phänomenen aufzuzeigen, auf welche Weise die Gemeinschaft differenzierend auf die Individuen einwirkt und welche Möglichkeiten der Differenzierung die letzteren haben oder suchen. [...] Die Ergebnissen werden dan erweisen ob die kollektivistische Theorie, die in zugespitzter Form eine Homogenität der Gruppenglieder bedeuten würde, Recht hat oder nicht' (Hofstra 1933: 38).

¹⁰⁴ Hofstra 1937.

tion was also found among primitives'.¹⁰⁵ In addition, African indigenous religions were viewed as sets of cognitive doctrines at the expense of religious feelings.¹⁰⁶

In the section on 'sorcery', he asserted that inaccurate concepts had been used in its description and analysis, and deplored that it had hardly been studied from the functionalist perspective. However, Hofstra himself continued to use the obnoxious colonialist terminology of 'sorcerer', 'magician', *Zauberartz*, *Zaubermeister*, 'witch-doctor', etc., even when some ethnographies were offering him also more neutral terms, like 'medicine-man', diviner, 'doctor', and 'priest'.¹⁰⁷

Hofstra was also an ecological activist who was inspired by Schleiermacher, Schopenhauer and Scheler. He held that a thoughtful human would gather an awareness of the infinite from silent meditation on nature, and that that would turn a humble man into a partner of the [91] universe.¹⁰⁸ Even so, he was not a romanticist in his perception of African indigenous religions as is apparent from his rejection of the term *Naturreligion*, 'nature religion', which was strongly established in German discourse on preliterate religions.

[True,] primitive man experiences mountains and rivers, trees and animals as animated or inhabited by mysterious powers [...]. Even so, it is not correct to speak here about *Naturreligion*, as is often done. For it is not nature, as an external phenomenon, which is worshipped, but the powers, however vague, which are connected with it in some or other personified form. In addition, the belief in supernatural beings and the fact that an important part of the cult is directed at them, creates in itself already a greater distance to nature than those are aware of who speak in vague terms about the unity between nature and [primitive] man.¹⁰⁹

Analysis

Hofstra's approach to African indigenous religions was a functionalist one: he studied religion as a social institution that offered opportunities for many different kinds of action, religious and other, to members of a society. His aim was to disprove by it Lévy-Bruhl's thesis of primitive mentality. His comparative research into nine African indigenous religions was, therefore, not for the sake of the description and analysis of these religions themselves, but to disprove the theory of Lévy-Bruhl. However, except for continuing some obnoxious colonial terminology, he seems to have taken quite neutral position towards them. This seems to be confirmed by a remark of Laeyendecker, who knew him well. Hofstra, repeatedly discussed problems of religion [in modern Dutch society] with him, but never gave even as much a hint as to how he himself, existentially, related to religion.¹¹⁰ His 1945 essay, however, shows convincingly that he was 'religiously musical'. But in scholarly approach to religions, he seems to have separated his own religion completely from his analysis of them, and therefore to have practised 'methodological agnosticism' *avant la lettre*.

Survey of the programme

De-colonisation forced Dutch anthropologists, 'non-Western' sociologists, political scientists, human geographers, economists, linguists and a few other kinds of scholars to look for research opportunities elsewhere after 1954. Many of them turned to de-colonising Africa and sought permission from the newly independent African states to do research there. By 1980, the Dutch 'Africanists' were that many that they founded an academic society of their own, the *Werkgemeenschap Afrika* (Dutch Association for Afri-

¹⁰⁵ Hofstra 1933: 95-96.

¹⁰⁶ Hofstra 1933: 96.

¹⁰⁷ Hofstra 1933: 103-109, 119sq.

¹⁰⁸ Hofstra 1945: 43-44.

¹⁰⁹ Hofstra 1945: 23. The term *Naturvölker* recurs regularly in his Ph.D thesis (e.g. Hofstra 1933: 1, 6, 9

¹¹⁰ Laeyendecker 1984: 6.

can Studies). By 1992, it had almost 200 members.¹¹¹ Anthropologists are by far the largest group among them. Many of them have published important contributions on African religions, which I will survey at a later time by means of an inventory of modern Dutch academic contributions to the study of the religions of Africa. It will have to list them by their authors and the chronology of their publications, as well as systematically, after their contributions to the various kinds of religions of modern Africa: indigenous, Christian, Muslim, as the three main categories, but also several other.¹¹² Many names come to mind: Köbben, Trouwborst, Prins, Knappert, Schoffeleers, Van Beek, Wolf Bleek/Sjaak van der Geest, Geschiere, van Binsbergen, Buytenhuijs, Droogers, Meyer, Mommersteeg, Abbink, Pels, Van den Breemer, Van Dijk, de Wolf. More names will certainly have to be added to this list after further bibliographical research.

[92]

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¹¹¹ Cf. Kloos 1992: 49.

¹¹² Cf. Platvoet 1996 for the thirteen kinds of religions that have so far established some significant presence in Africa.

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