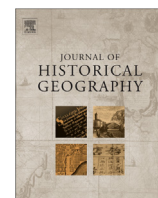


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Feature: The art of travel and exploration

‘To do the Cape’: Samuel Daniell’s representation of African peoples during the first British occupation of the Cape



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Abstract

Samuel Daniell's *African Scenery and Animals* of 1804–5 is justly celebrated in the literature of art history as one of the most beautiful accounts of African life of any time, but has been rather neglected by other historians. This paper considers how this major project is likely to have taken shape, situating it in the context of the first British occupation of the Cape in order to reveal the ideological dimensions of his representation of African peoples. The paper argues that Daniell's visit to the Cape from 1799 to 1803 is likely to have been inspired by his relatives', William and Thomas Daniell's work in India, notably their *Oriental Scenery* of 1795–8, and that his view of Southern Africa developed as he travelled through the sub-continent in the company of British officials. At a time before Britain had any formal colonial ambitions at the Cape, its officials developed distinct images of the three main population groups occupying the territory – the Dutch colonists (the 'Boors'), the Xhosa (so-called 'Kaffers') beyond the borders, and the Khoisan (so-called 'Hottentots' and 'Bushmen') whose fortunes contrasted strongly whether they lived inside the colony, in conditions of slavery on Boer farms, or outside the colony in a state of freedom. Daniell gave visual form to these images, notably through the classical language of art, and so expressed the turmoil on the frontier as a contest between the Enlightenment terms of liberty and oppression. © 2012 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Samuel Daniell; Cape Colony; First British Occupation; Boers; Xhosa; Khoisan

Samuel Daniell (1775–1811) is remembered today chiefly for the thirty aquatints of *African Scenery and Animals* with their extraordinarily benign view of the animal and human population of Southern Africa at the turn of the nineteenth century. The book that has been described by R.V. Tooley as ‘the finest colour plate book in English on African Life and Scenery’ was the product of Samuel's stay in the sub-continent between 1799 and 1803 during the First British Occupation of the Cape, and it was published in London in two parts in 1804 and 1805.¹ In discussing this work, scholars tend either to ignore this historical context or to associate it exclusively with the Bechuanaland Expedition of 1801–2 and so overlook both Daniell's other recorded excursions in the colony and, more significantly, any possible reflection in his work of British policies at the Cape. Moreover, these studies tend to ignore also whatever plans for a publication of prints he might have brought with him to

the Cape that would place Daniell in the context of other British explorer-artists, including his own uncle and brother whose work in India obviously provided a model for his own project.² In order to reconstruct the evolution of *African Scenery and Animals*, it is necessary to review what little is known of Daniell's life in England and to establish, as far as it is possible, his movements in Southern Africa in the specific conditions of Britain's first, short-lived annexation of the Cape. Only this history can explain the development of Daniell's extraordinary view of African life.

The British captured the Cape from the moribund *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (the VOC) in September 1795 in the wake of Napoleon's conquest of the Netherlands in order to prevent this strategic outpost from falling into French hands and so threaten their trade routes with India.³ After eight years, in 1803, Britain ceded control of the Cape to the Batavian Republic in the Peace of

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¹ R.V. Tooley, *English Books with Coloured Plates, 1790–1860*, London, 1954.

² ‘The journey was the source of the fine collection of drawings made and utilized on his return to England’: T. Sutton, *The Daniells, Artists and Travellers*, London, 1954, 102. See also B. Taylor, *Samuel Daniell: Drawings and Prints*, London, 1973, 1; A. Gordon-Brown, *Pictorial Africana*, Cape Town, 1975, 142; F. Bradlow, Introduction. in: S. Daniell, *African Scenery and Animals*, Facsimile Reprint, Cape Town, 1976. Even the most recent account by Katherine Prior, who tracks Samuel's several expeditions through the colony and situates his visit in the context of British society at the Cape, has limited interest in the political context of the First British Occupation: K. Prior (Ed.), *An Illustrated Journey Round the World by Thomas, William and Samuel Daniell*, London, 2007, 198–250.

³ On the First British Occupation of the Cape see M. Boucher and N. Penn (Eds), *Britain at the Cape, 1795–1803*, Johannesburg, 1992, and, for the role of John Barrow, N. Penn, Mapping the Cape: John Barrow and the first British occupation of the colony, 1795–1803, *Pretexts* 4 (1993) 20–43; C. Lloyd, *Mr. Barrow of the Admiralty: A Life of Sir John Barrow*, London, 1970.

Amiens (in which Britain gained Ceylon, where Daniell was to proceed in 1805) but reconquered the colony on a permanent basis in 1806. Officially, Britain harboured no long-term ambitions for the Cape during its first occupation, but the administrative and financial reforms that replaced the ineffectual VOC government certainly stood it in good stead later on. British policy for the duration appears to have been to introduce and maintain law and order in a new rational system based on a comprehensive statistical report on the colony and the first definitive mapping of its borders, both of which projects were carried out by one of England's leading officials, John Barrow (1764–1848). Samuel Daniell's connection with British rule at the Cape is apparent in his initial appointment in 1799 to the staff of the Governor, Sir George Yonge; his service as Undersecretary to Barrow himself in 1800; and his employment as Secretary to Dr. William Somerville (1771–1860), both on the expedition to Graaff-Reinet in 1800–1, and on the Bechuanaland Expedition in 1801–2. With these connections it is hardly surprising that while Daniell's project was self-motivated, his work should strongly reflect British attitudes to local concerns.

Daniell's project was conceived in terms of the newly-emerging model of the independent 'traveller-artist' who invested in his own expedition in order to benefit directly from work produced on it.⁴ The illustrations of *African Scenery and Animals* show that Daniell travelled widely through the sub-continent, but the grouping of the plates makes clear that this is not simply an attempt to narrate these journeys in two volumes. More information about the region is provided in the substantial letterpress that Daniell compiled in some degree of collaboration with John Barrow, although, again, no actual narrative is attempted. Of his other work related to South Africa, Daniell provided plates for two of Barrow's publications in 1806, the year that Britain reconquered the Cape, namely the second edition of *An Account of Travels into the Interior of South Africa in the Years 1797 and 1798*, and the second edition of *Voyage to Cochinchina*, which contained the first published account of the Bechuanaland Expedition: unsurprisingly, these works clearly reflect some of Barrow's ideas. In 1820 – that is, nine years after Samuel's untimely death, but at a time of renewed interest in the Cape on account of the well-publicised programme of introducing British settlers – his brother William published *Sketches Representing the Native Tribes, Animals and Scenery of South Africa from Drawings Made by the Late Mr. Samuel Daniell*. The Preface states that for the 'greater number of illustrative notices ... the Editor has to express his obligations to Dr Somerville and Mr Barrow'. And in 1832, William published a very few copies of *Twenty Varied Subjects of the Tribe of Antelopes*, also from Samuel's drawings. As for the numerous drawings that are preserved in public and private collections in South Africa, England and elsewhere, while many of them express the same benign vision as the aquatints, there are few with inscriptions that could contribute materially to the historical record.

Apart from the letterpress of *African Scenery and Animals*, Daniell himself left no written account of his time at the Cape. But a man of his talents and personality obviously attracted attention from the small English population at the Cape and he appears occasionally in

contemporary journals and correspondence. By their nature these remarks cannot give a complete account of the man and it is necessary to supplement their evidence by reference elsewhere. Thus, to understand Daniell's original ambitions in Southern Africa, one should probably read the comment by Lady Anne Barnard, the artist-wife of the Colonial Secretary at the Cape, in December 1799 shortly after Daniell's arrival, that the new Governor, Sir George Yonge, had brought him with him 'to do the Cape', in the context of the artist's career up to that time. For while Samuel's brother William stated in the Preface to the posthumous *Sketches Representing the Native Tribes, Animals*, etc., that he had gone to the Cape to extend his research into 'objects of Natural History', Samuel in fact began his travels as a landscape painter: the *Madras Courier* of 26 March 1800, noting his arrival at the Cape, described him as a 'Landscape Painter'; and it is in this genre that he submitted paintings to the Society of Artists in 1791 and the Royal Academy in 1792 and 1793.⁵ Although a contemporary noted intriguingly that Daniell had 'been lost for two or three years' before leaving for Cape Town at the end of the decade, he most likely was involved in some way in the production of the first two parts of William and Thomas Daniell's monumental *Oriental Scenery* between 1795 and 1798.⁶ Samuel's brother (1769–1837) and uncle (1749–1840) had been in India between 1786 and 1794, early examples of 'traveller-artists' working independently of any official expedition, and it is certain both that their experience inspired his own decision to travel, and that their views of India provided the original model for his project at the Cape. Incidentally, on their return from India in 1794, these relatives travelled with John Barrow, who was to play such an important part during Samuel's time in South Africa.⁷

Daniell's first scenes in the Cape, such as the 'View of Lion's Head' and 'A Boor's House' compare readily with the style of *Oriental Scenery* that blended topographical precision with Claudian composition and sensibility.⁸ And other landscapes which were not, in the event, included in his publication, such as his water-colour of the house *Buitenzorg* that John Barrow acquired early in 1800, and the 'magnificent water-colour of Cape Town from the sea' that is mentioned by Thomas Sutton, would seem to conform to this model.⁹ Moreover, Daniell's 'expedition up the country', from which Lady Anne noted his return in February 1800, was most likely the occasion that Daniell made drawings in this vein of the 'Silver Mountain, Drakenstein' (near Stellenbosch) that William later engraved as Plate 13 in the *Sketches* and 'The Waterfall at Great Drakenstein', that Thomas engraved for James Holman's *Voyage Around the World* in 1834.¹⁰ On the evidence of these and similar scenes, it is possible to argue that Daniell's initial plan was 'to do the Cape' in a series of landscapes without venturing beyond the acknowledged picturesque scenery of the Cape Town region. Samuel's initial project, therefore, differed from his relatives' view of India in that the Cape had no architectural record of an advanced civilisation, but was similar to it because the appreciation of landscape scenery in both places was infused by a romantic sensibility that emphasised picturesque and sublime incidents in nature within a context of precise topographical description.

⁴ C. Greppi, 'On the spot': traveling artists and the iconographic inventory of the world, 1769–1859, in: F. Driver, L. Martins (Eds), *Tropical Visions in an Age of Empire*, Chicago, 2005, 23–42.

⁵ Sutton, *The Daniells, Artists and Travellers* (note 2), 100; Prior, *An Illustrated Journey Round the World by Thomas, William and Samuel Daniell* (note 2), 198.

⁶ Prior, *An Illustrated Journey Round the World by Thomas, William and Samuel Daniell* (note 2), 198; M. Archer, *Early Views of India, The Picturesque Journeys of Thomas and William Daniell, 1786–1794*, London, 1980.

⁷ Prior, *An Illustrated Journey Round the World by Thomas, William and Samuel Daniell* (note 2), 200.

⁸ Greppi, 'On the spot' (note 4), 29–31.

⁹ See respectively, R.F. Kennedy, *Catalogue of Pictures in the Africana Museum*, Johannesburg, 1967, D153; Sutton, *The Daniells, Artists and Travellers* (note 2), 111. This may have been the same as the 'View of the Cape of Good Hope and a South Whaler' in *Naval Chronicle* 12 (1805) 380.

¹⁰ A. Barnard, in: M. Lenta, B. Le Cordeur (Eds), *The Cape Diaries of Lady Anne Barnard, 1799–1800*, Vol. II, Cape Town, 1999, 54; R.F. Kennedy, *A Catalogue of Prints in the Africana Museum*, Johannesburg, 1975, D104.

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