

***Present State of the Cape of Good Hope: Or, A Particular Account of the Several Nations of the Hottentots: Their Religion, Government, Laws, Customs, Ceremonies, and Opinions; Their Art of War, Professions, Language, Genius, etc. Together with a Short Account of the Dutch Settlement at the Cape by Peter Kolb, London: W. Innys, 1731.***

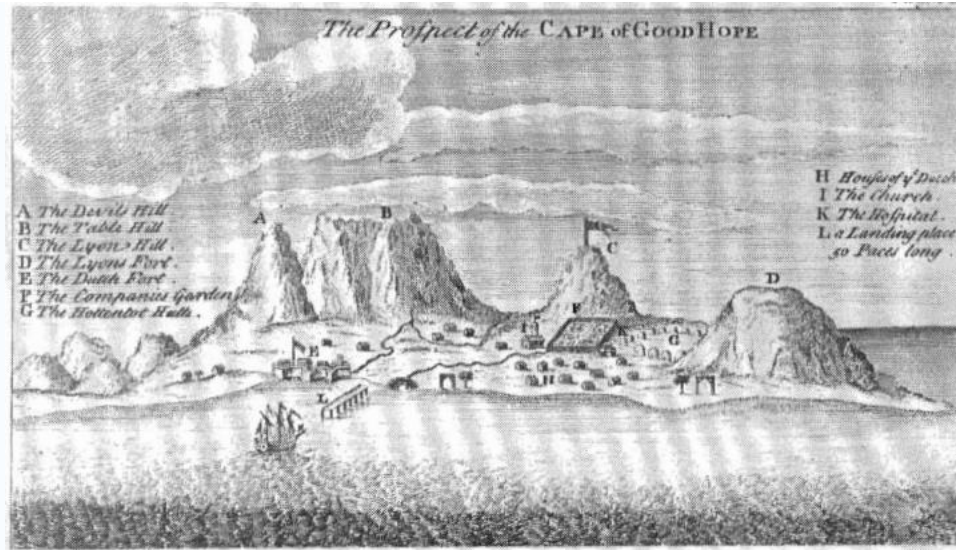


**Peter Kolb (v. 2 frontis)**

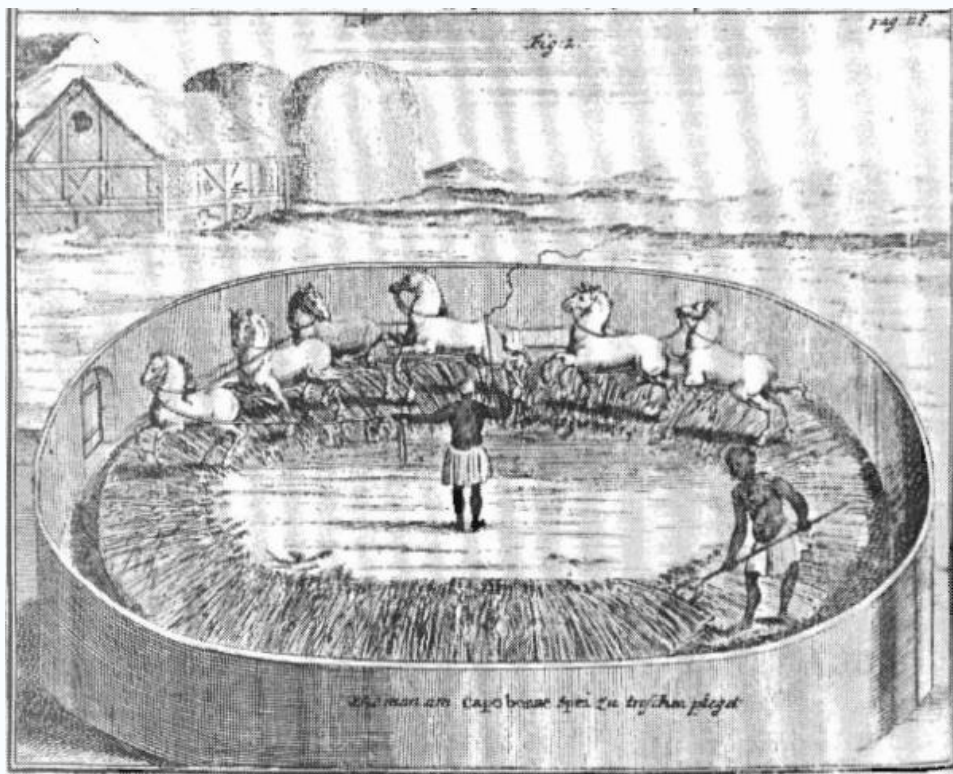
**Peter Kolb** (1675-1725), was born on 10 October 1675 in Dörflas (Germany). He studied at the Egidius Gymnasium at Nuremberg where its rector, J. Textor, obtained scholarships for him and introduced him to the astronomer G. C. Eimmart, to whom Kolb became assistant. He then attended Halle University where he studied Philosophy, Theology, Mathematics and Physics. He obtained his master's degree in 1703 with the thesis entitled *De natura cometarum* in which he explained comets as natural phenomena.

After qualifying, Kolb entered the service of Freiherr B F von Krosigk, privy councillor at the Prussian court, who was also interested in astronomy. His chief duty was to tutor Von Krosigk's two sons, but he was also required to travel with Von Krosigk and be sent on missions by him.

In 1705 Von Krosigk sent Kolb to the Cape of Good Hope with a letter of introduction from Nicolaas Witsen, mayor of Amsterdam. His task was to make meteorological and astronomical observations. Governor Willem Adriaan van der Stel received him when he arrived on the ship *Unie* in June and accommodated him in the Company's garden. The relationship between Kolb and Van der Stel however deteriorated because of Kolb's inability to complete the astronomical work successfully and because he sided with the colonists in their differences with the Governor.

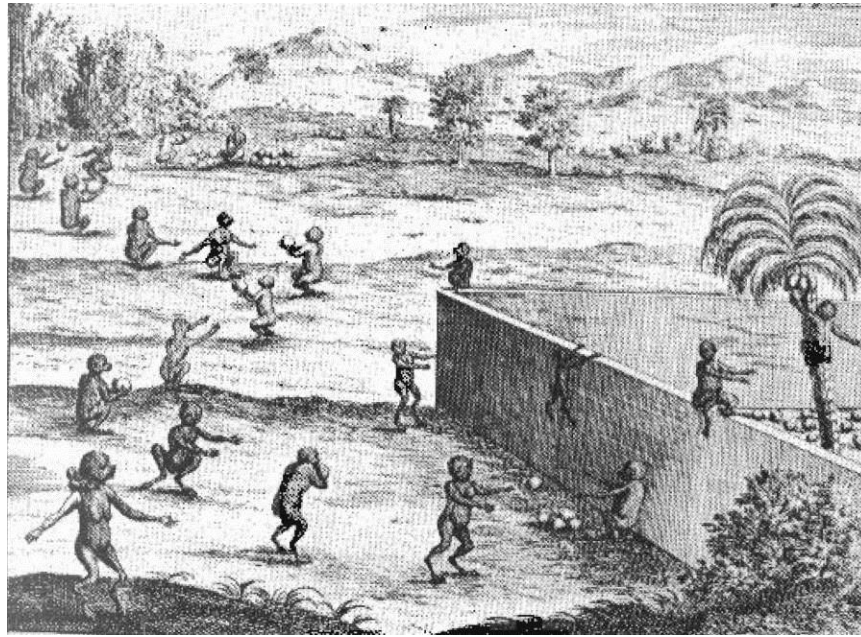


**The Prospect of the Cape of Good Hope (v. 2 p. 12)**



**“The Manner of Threshing of Corn at the Cape” (v. 2 p. 68)**

In addition to his attempts to make astronomical observations, Kolb spent his time studying the climate, geology, flora and fauna of the Cape. He took an especial interest in the Khoikhoi. Von Krosigk died in 1707 with the result that Kolb's source of income ceased. He however reconciled with the Governor who succeeded Van der Stel, Louis van Assenburg, and in 1711 entered the service of the VOC as secretary at Stellenbosch.

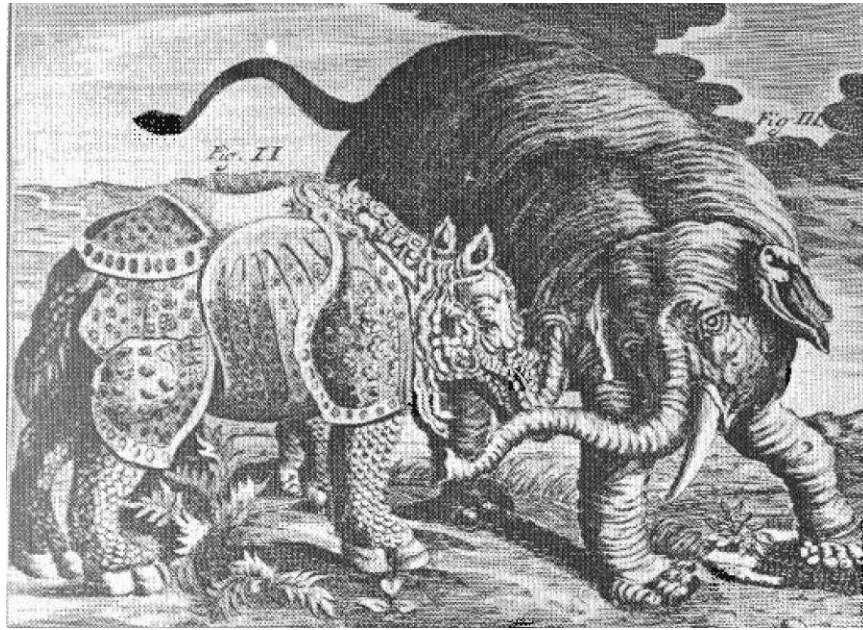


**“Baboons robbing of an Orchard” (v. 2 “Tab VI Fig. 1 P.121”)**

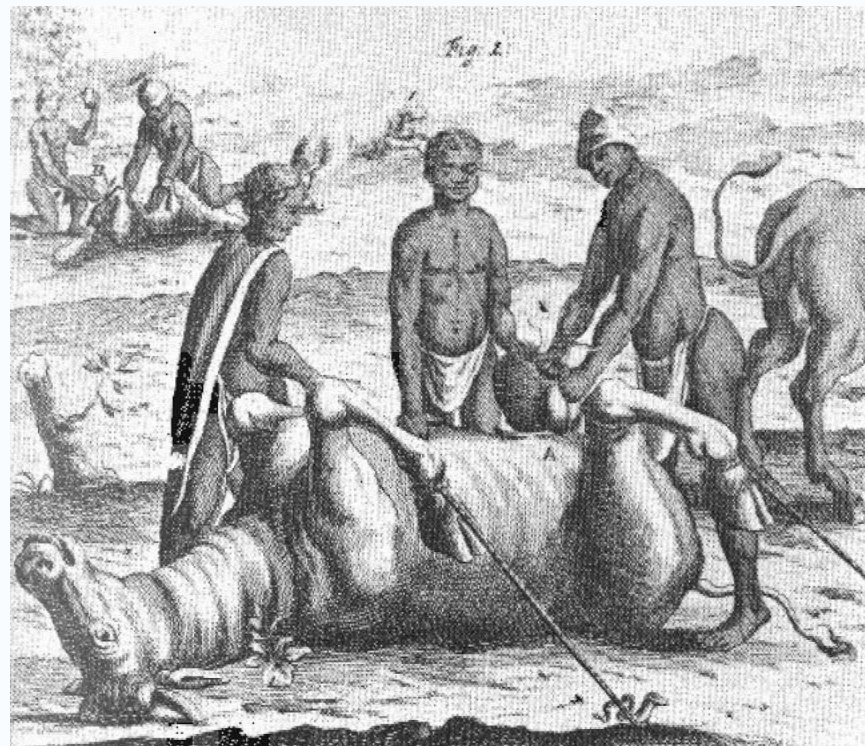
He continued in this position until 1713 when his failing eyesight prevented him from working. He sailed to Amsterdam where his eyes were treated by Dr. C. Göckel, court physician at Rastatt. His eyesight was restored and he wrote two books *De ecnephia vento Capitis Bona(e) Spei*, on the Cape Southeaster, published in 1715, and *De aquia Capitis Bonae Spei*, on the waters at the Cape, published in 1716. He also published a theological work in 1714 entitled *Theosophia, dat is proefstuk der natuurlijke erkenenis Gods*. In 1718 he became rector of the Latin school at Neustadt an der Aisch.

Kolb is best remembered for his book *Caput Bonae Spei Hodiernum, das ist vollständige Beschreibung des Afrikanischen Vorgebürges der Guten Hoffnung ...*, which was published in Nuremburg in 1719. It is divided into three parts: the first describes the three natural kingdoms at the Cape, the second the customs of the Cape Khoikhoi, or Hottentots as they were called at that time, and the third is on the government and way of life of the Whites at the Cape. It was translated into Dutch in 1727, French in 1742 and appeared in English in 1731 as *Present State of the Cape of Good Hope: Or, A Particular Account of the Several Nations of the Hottentots: Their Religion, Government, Laws, Customs, Ceremonies, and Opinions; Their Art of War, Professions, Language, Genius, etc. Together with a Short Account of the Dutch Settlement at the Cape*. This translation is shorter than the original and is not accurate.





**“The Elephant and Rhinoceros” (v.2 p.124)**



**“The Hottentots Method of Gelding their Bulls and Rams” (v. 1 “Tab. V, fig. 1. p. 170”)**

The original German edition contains 846 folio pages and many copper plate illustrations. It is a useful work in that Kolb describes the Khoikhoi language, religion, lifestyle and customs before they were influenced to any significant extent by Europeans. However his writings do have to be treated with caution and verified. Some of his theories are rather strange such as his belief that

the Khoikhoi were descended from the Jews and that their customs resembled those of the cave-dwellers of the Nile Valley. He occasionally exaggerates and has in places used accounts of the Khoikhoi from other authors such as Olfert Dapper and Guy Tachard. He has been criticised by François le Vaillant who considered him a stay-at-home and dismissed his book as full of fantasies, Abbé N. L. de la Caille (the astronomer who made the astronomical and meteorological observations that Kolb could not) who questioned his sources and Anders Sparrman who criticized his proclivity for the unusual. On the positive side, his accounts of the Khoikhoi are largely sympathetic, though he does tend to make moral judgements, in one instance describing them as lazy, drunken and vengeful. In addition, many of the customs mentioned by Kolb, and originally thought to be false, have been proven correct.



**“The Kraals and Hutts [sic] of the Hottentots” (v. 1, “Tab. VII, fig. 1, p.219”)**

The book also provides a useful and detailed account of the clash between the colonists and Governor van der Stel. Though strongly biased in favour of the colonists, the account contains details not found anywhere else. Again his version of events needs to be verified.

Below is a description of early Cape Town from the 1731 English edition:

*"Several beautiful country seats, vineyards and gardens are to be seen on almost every side of the Table-Hill. The Company has here two very spacious, rich and beautiful Gardens. In one of them stands, erected at the Company's Expense, a noble Pleasure-House for the Governor, and near it a beautiful Grove of Oaks, called the Round-Bush from which this Garden (Rondebosch) takes its Name, being called the Round-Bush garden. The other Garden which is at some distance from this is called Newland because but lately planted. Both these gardens are finely watered by the Springs on the Table-Hill and the Company draws from them a very considerable Revenue." (v. 1 pp. 4-5)*





“The Hottentot Smith etc.” (v. 1, Tab. IX, fig. 1 p. 237)



“*Bangua Indorum* by the Hottentots cal'd Dacha” “*Cannabis minor* & *Lignofior*, *Bangua dicta*.” (v. 1, “Tab. IV. p. 163”)

Kolb never married. His sister kept house for him when he returned to what is now Germany. He died in Neustadt an der Aisch of a lung complaint on New Year's Eve 1725.

Special Collections has a copy of the 1731 English edition. It is in two volumes and as stated above is not considered an accurate translation of the original German. The Harold Strange Library of African Studies possesses the original German edition as well as all translations. this library is situated at the Johannesburg Public Library, Beyers Naudé Square. Copies of all the illustrations can be found in R F Kennedy's *Catalogue of Prints in the Africana Museum and in books in the Strange Collection of Africana in the Johannesburg Public Library up to 1870*, a copy of which can also be found at Special Collections, UJ.