



## Projects to transcribe archival documents: 2001-2020

### 1. Introduction

The Tracing History Trust (THT) was established in 2008 with the main objective of continuing the work started during two major transcription projects executed in the Cape Archives<sup>1</sup> from 2001 until 2008, namely TANAP and TEPC. These were financed by the Dutch Ministry of Cultural Affairs. In both instances the work was executed by a team of highly skilled professionals, each member excelling in their field(s) of expertise.

As the Trust functions as a non-profit and public benefit organisation, it is totally dependent on external funding to render a professional service of high quality. The Trust's services are provided to funded projects under formally approved, reported and audited contracts. The major funder to date has been the Kingdom of the Netherlands through its long-standing and ongoing Mutual Heritage and Dutch Culture programmes in South Africa. Financial support for transcription projects related to specific academic research programmes in various fields of study, is also highly appreciated. Sometimes minor but often significant financial support has been gratefully received from local and international interest groups.

The hard copy records, facilitated through the Tracing History Trust, have been shared with a wide range of academic and interest groups. The Trust is however dependent on external providers to host online and public dissemination of the products of the projects, such as national archives, academic and research institutions. The WCARS is presented with copies of Trust products for online or reading room computer access.

### 2. TANAP and TEPC projects

During the TANAP<sup>2</sup> Transcription Project (2001-2003) the *Resolutions of the Council of Policy of the Cape of Good Hope* were transcribed, edited and made available in the public domain. During the TEPC<sup>3</sup> Transcription Project (2004-2008) VOC-period *Cape Estate Papers and Auction Rolls* (1673-1834) were transcribed and edited, together with some related documents in the Cape Archives.

The contents of the Resolutions and the Estate Papers were converted into XML format and published on the website of the Nationaal Archief Nederland (NAN) for local and international use. They were accompanied by introductions, contextual information and indexes. (See <http://www.tanap.net> and click on activities, documents, Resolutions/Inventories).

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<sup>1</sup> Western Cape Archives and Records Service

<sup>2</sup> TANAP: Towards A New Age in Partnership

<sup>3</sup> TEPC: Transcription of Estate Papers of the Cape of Good Hope

## **2. Cape VOC Dagregisters/Journals Project**

The ‘dagregisters’ (journals) of the Dutch East India Company in the Cape Colony are unequalled in early modern history for their rigorous documentation of daily life over the course of nearly 150 years (1652 to 1795). Each register details a wide range of human activity (trade activity, politics, diet, diplomacy etc.) and environmental observation (e.g. daily weather phenomena).

The following institutions financially support the Trust:

- Local funders include the Van Ewijck Foundation (Cape Town), Cordis Trust (Pretoria), the Genealogical Society of South Africa, the Department of Geography (University of the Witwatersrand), the Department of Economics (University of Stellenbosch) and SADiLaR (Centre for Digital Language Resources, Department of Science & Innovation).
- Foreign funders include the Newton Fund (Britain), Zuidafrika-Huis (Amsterdam), the Nederlandse Taalunie and the Nationaal Archief Nederland (both in The Hague) and the Dutch Ministry of Cultural Affairs in collaboration with the Netherlands Embassy (Pretoria).

Work on the VOC Journals between 2015 and 2020 was executed in the following manner:

- Phase I, funded by the Dutch Embassy in Pretoria and the Department of Geography, University of the Witwatersrand (Prof. Stefan Grab). The contents of eleven journals missing from the Cape Archives were photographed in the Nationaal Archief The Hague and transcribed. The remaining journals were extracted from the VC series vested in the Cape Archives, partly financed by SADiLaR. By the end of 2018 there were already 82 journals transcribed, of which 71 were from the VC series.
- Phase 2, funded by the Nationaal Archief Nederland (NAN) and the Nederlandse Taalunie. The remaining 55 Cape Journals of the VC series will be completed by December 2020. The final VC phase is assisted by the Transkribus transcription programme, a ground-breaking automatic transcription method developed by the DEA Group at the University of Innsbruck. The ‘H2020 Project READ’ is being funded by the European Union. The NAN assists them in building a Dutch transcription memory. The Nederlandse Taalunie prepared a tri-partite agreement between themselves, the NAN and THT in 2019, whereby the Trust is responsible for certain professional services.

## **3. Significance for local and international cultural cooperation and research**

These transcription projects feed into major national and international collaborations which will only grow in scope. Both the UNESCO ‘Memory of the World’ designation and the ongoing work of the Nationaal Archief’s TANAP project have made available the letters and resolutions of the VOC in the Cape. The Dagregisters, which are of equal or greater significance, until now have remained unavailable to the same global audiences.

Through collaboration between Wits and Cardiff universities, some world-leading research into historical themes is being conducted. In the course of time other role-players joined the Tracing History Trust in its quest for making as much as possible Cape archival material available for public use: the University of California, Irvine Campus; the Nederlandse

Taalunie; the Orde van den Prince (Flemish/Dutch cultural group); the Universities of Gent, Leiden and Amsterdam; the Maritime Museum, University of Western Australia; and the Arsip Nasional, Republik Indonesia and its local Consulate in Cape Town.

Local institutions include the Universities of Stellenbosch, North-West, Bloemfontein and Cape Town, SAVN (Suid-Afrikaanse Vereniging vir Neerlandistiek), as well as various interest groups, the Historium Trust (Afrikaanse Taalmuseum, Paarl), the Genealogical Society of South Africa, the Huguenot Society of South Africa, SASNEV (Suid-Afrikaanse Sentrum vir Nederland en Vlaandere), and the Erfenisstigting (Pretoria).

Last, but by no means least, are hundreds of individuals, both local and from overseas, with various fields of interest, including under- and post-graduate students, lecturers, researchers, scholars and genealogists.

*Antonia Malan & Helena Liebenberg, THT Trustees*

*September 2020*