

OUTENIQUALAND – “What’s in a Name?”



“The Old Man Lying on Honey ... The Man Lying on Old Honey ... or ... ?

Centuries have passed before a generally accepted spelling of Outeniqualand came into use; there is no consensus on the meaning of “Outeniqualand” and there is no proof whether Outeniqualand was named after a Khoi clan or if it is the name of the region from Mossel Bay to Knysna.

A number of scholars have scoured the archives for references of the name from van Riebeeck’s entry of *Houtunqua/s* in his diary in 1660 to a number of references up to 1803. The German travellers, Thunberg in 1772 and Lichtenstein in 1803, referred to *Hauteniqua* and *Hautniqua*. Helena Liebenberg listed the following variations in spelling found in her critical research in the archives in 2011: *Hout Inqua Land, Houten Iqua Land, Houte Niqua Land, ’t Oudeniquas Land; ’t Houteniquasland, Houteniqua Land, Oudniquas Land, Oud Niquas Bosch, ’T Outeniqua Bosch, ’t Oude Niqua Land*.

Dutch, German, French, English colonists or travellers hearing the Khoi word, would have written variations in phonetic spellings - which leaves everyone scratching their heads today to determine the meaning. Was *Hout*, meaning wood, forests or bush, corrupted to *Oud*? Was *Inqua, Iqua, Niqua* the name of a once resident Khoi clan or the Khoi word for a man or people with honey? The problem lies in the fact that there is no documentary proof of any clan of that name found living in the area, apart from the inference in the name that there may have been a clan before the arrival of the colonists. Dan Sleigh and Helena Liebenberg, among other academic scholars, are in agreement that until evidence is found, Outeniqualand is a region.

Nienaber and Raper compiled a Khoi / Afrikaans dictionary, *Toponymica Hottentotica* in 1977, but reached no conclusion as to the meaning of “*Outenikwa*”. They found a reference by Cloppenberg who gave either “the Khoi carried the honey out of the bushes” or the translation that has come into common use: “*zakkerdraggers*” (carriers of bags of honey). Le Vaillant wrote that the name signified a man laden with honey in his 1782 journal of his travels. Pauw Steyl has a suggestion that the name, “*tHouteniquasland*”, - the Dutch word *houten*, may refer to the “*houtbosse*” of the area and *Niqua*, Khoi word for “honey” to mean: “Die Land (van) hout en heuning” (The Land of Wood and Honey). An old Georgian recalled hearing of “A man full of honey”.

More recently, Dr Kutela has translated the Khoi words: *au* – old; *anti* – honey; *qua* – people, to make Outeniqualand as the “land of the people of old honey”. But there are other contemporary Khoi who think the word originally meant “the [old] man **lying** on honey”.

The silhouette of the mountains above George, viewed from Blanco and the Airport, is very clearly that of a man lying down, seen in the image above, and would certainly be lying on the bush and the many caves where hives with abundant honey would be found. This giant old mountain man would surely have been noted by all the early inhabitants where such a feature in the landscape would be a landmark with an obvious name – “The Old Man lying on Honey Land”.

Men bearing honey; the old Niqua clan in a land of honey; the land of wood and honey; the land of old honey; the old man lying on honey and other descriptive alternatives, illustrate the conundrum in finding an answer to the question: What’s in a name – a mixture of romantic legend, hearsay, or traces of historical insights?

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