

Tradition and innovation in Dutch ethnographic prints of Africans c. 1590–1670

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Abstract

In the early modern period Europeans were fascinated by the dark colour of African skin. Although this does not show in sixteenth-century prints where skin colour was not usually indicated, this would change in the first decade of the seventeenth century in the wall maps of Willem Jansz. Blaeu. Drawing on developments in printing techniques, changes in artistic fashion, contemporary ideas about scientific illustrations, developments in map making, and the business of book publishing, this article traces the origin of the convention to depict blacks without reference to their skin colour and examines the reasons for its success and demise. It also charts and explains the new model and addresses the different pace in which this convention changed in travel books and wall maps.

Keywords: scientific images, Africans, printmaking, maps, book illustration, Blaeu, Meurs

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Introduction

At the dawn of the Golden Age, the Dutch oversea expansion created a market for wall maps and illustrated travel books that described the geography, flora, fauna and people of far and exotic lands. These books and maps appealed to the community of natural philosophers and to the wider audience alike, allowing them ‘to examine the strange things and acquire knowledge of exotic lands, people, states and trade without risking his life, as if he had visited them personally.’¹

Yet such images do not always reflect the visible world as accurately as the authors or publishers suggest. A case in point is the depiction of Africans, in particular the colour of their skin. The subject is occasionally mentioned in two excellent studies on Africans in early modern prints by Jean Michel Massing and Elizabeth Sutton, but they do not systematically describe or explain the development, from absence to presence, of colour indications in these prints.² Although readers would be aware of the Africans’ dark skin colour, the earliest images of them did not confirm that knowledge and for a long time Africans were depicted only with outlines and some shading (fig. 1). The audience did not seem to mind this incongruence between reality and the images, and knew they were expected to simply imagine something that was explained in the text but not depicted. However, in the first decades of the seventeenth century things changed when printmakers started to indicate the black complexion (fig. 2). This new development originated in maps. Shortly after it also occurred in artistic prints, while book illustrations lagged behind.³

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1 J. Hartgerts (ed.), *Oost- en West-Indische Voyagie door de Strate van Magallanes naer de Moluques*, Amsterdam 1648, fol. A1v.

2 J.M. Massing, *The image of the Black in Western art*, vol. III: *From the ‘Age of Discovery’ to the age of Abolition*, part 2: *Europe and the world beyond*, Cambridge (MA) 2011, p. 13–115; E. Sutton, *Early modern Dutch prints of Africa*, Aldershot 2012.

3 The developments in artistic and ethnographic prints occur independently. For artistic prints, see E. Kolfin, ‘When Africans became black. Dürer, Rubens and the changing image of Africans’, in: *Print Quarterly* xxxiv (2017), forthcoming.



Fig. 1 Anonymous, Africans on the coast of Guinea, etching, 14.5×22.5 cm, in P. de Marees, *Beschryvinge ende historische verhael van't goudt koninckrijck van Guinea*, Amsterdam 1602, between p. 14 and 15, Leiden University Library, Special Collections.

Drawing on developments in printing techniques, changes in artistic fashion, ideas about scientific illustrations, developments in mapmaking and the business of book publishing, this paper traces the origin of the convention to depict blacks without reference to their skin colour and examines the reasons for its success and demise. It also maps and explains the new model and addresses the different pace in which this convention changed in travel books and wall maps.

Anatomy or colour?

Given the pronounced fascination for the colour of the African skin in the late sixteenth century, it is surprising to see that printmakers were apparently free to omit any pictorial reference to the black complexion.⁴ The scholarly aspirations of these publi-

⁴ Numerous examples of this fascination in Massing, *Image of the Black* and Sutton, *Early modern Dutch prints*. See also R. Parker Brienen, 'Embodying race and pleasure. Dirk Valkenburg's *Slave dance*', in: A.S. Lehmann and H. Roodenburg (eds.), *Body and embodiment in Netherlandish art, Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek 58* (2007/2008), p. 242–264; S. Iyengar, *Shades of difference. Mythologies of skin color in early modern England*, Philadelphia 2004; K. Lowe, 'The stereotyping of black Africans in Renaissance Europe', in: T.F.



Fig. 2 Hessel Gerritsz, Africans from Mozambique, etching, detail from Wall map of Africa, republished by Hendrick Hondius in 1624 from Willem Jansz. Blaeu's original from 1608, Weimar, Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek.

cations, demanding precise references to nature as it was observed, make this even more unexpected. The reason for this lies in a pictorial convention that had resulted from the limits of printing technique nearly 100 years earlier.

Around 1500, the preferred printing technique was the woodcut. Being a relief technique, it was easy to combine with text printing and it allowed for a high print run, but there was also a disadvantage. Images were printed from the upstanding lines that were carved out of a woodblock.⁵ These ridges had to be able to withstand much

Earle and K. Lowe (eds.), *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe*, Cambridge 2005, p. 20–21; and A. T. Vaughn and V. M. Vaughn, 'Before Othello. Elizabethan representations of Sub-Saharan Africans', *William and Mary Quarterly* LIV.1 (1997), p. 21–29.

⁵ A. Griffiths, *Prints and printmaking. An introduction to the history and techniques*, London 1996, p. 13–22.

pressure, which limited the possibilities of hatching. This made it difficult to create the high degree of variation in grey tones required for subtle modeling of the nude. Therefore, nudes in woodcut were usually left white, with only some schematic shading and additional lines to indicate anatomy. Although this system worked for whites, the black complexion could not be expressed. Figures would either be black with very little definition of anatomy or they would show the anatomy without an indication of the skin colour. The earliest prints of nude Africans indeed demonstrate the printmaker's dilemma that follows from this impediment: should he focus on anatomy or skin colour?

In 1508 the Augsburg artist Hans Burgkmair (1473–1531) created a 230 cm long frieze that showed people of Africa and India, based on the notes and possibly some drawings that his fellow townsman merchant Balthasar Springer (died between 1509 and 1511) brought back from a trading mission to African and India.⁶ Burgkmair employed heavy hatching to indicate the dark skin, for example in the natives from Algoa Bay in South Africa. As a result the musculature of these figures lost all definition and detail (fig. 3). In a spin off from the same year, Burgkmair tried another approach. Sacrificing the skin colour, he reduced the amount of hatching and concentrated on the anatomy (fig. 1). Of course Burgkmair realized his print could be coloured by hand and maybe even intended this, but only one coloured copy has survived of the sheets that constitute the frieze, and none of the single print.⁷ Clearly Burgkmair relied on the fact that his audience would either already know or have read that Africans were black, a fact that was not only mentioned in early travelogues but also in classical texts and in the bible.⁸ Besides, most people would have seen paintings of the *Adoration of the Magi* with an African Magus.⁹

Anatomy in travel books: establishing a convention

Burgkmair's approach of sacrificing colour for anatomy had been repeated by most other printmakers and became so well established that by the time engraving ushered in scientific printmaking, it remained the dominant convention.¹⁰ Copper plate

6 On Burgkmair's print and its background, see Massing, *Image of the Black*, p. 13–17; S. Dackerman (ed.), *Prints and the pursuit of knowledge in early modern Europe*, Cambridge (MA), New Haven and London 2011, p. 326–331; S. Leitch, 'Burgkmair's peoples of Africa and India (1508) and the origins of ethnography in print', in: *The Art Bulletin* 91.2 (2009), p. 134–159; M.P. McDonald, 'Burgkmair's woodcut frieze of the natives of Africa and India', in: *Print Quarterly* 20.3 (2003), p. 227–244; and J.M. Massing, 'Hans Burgkmair's depiction of native Africans', in: *RES. Anthropology and Aesthetics* 27 (1995), p. 39–51.

7 See Dackerman, *Prints and the pursuit of knowledge*, p. 326 for the coloured copy.

8 Massing, *Image of the Black* gives many examples.

9 On the popularity of paintings of the *Adoration of the Magi* in the Netherlands in the sixteenth century, see D. Ewing, 'Magi and merchants. The force behind the Antwerp Mannerists' Adoration pictures', in: *Jaarboek van het Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen*, 2006, p. 274–99.

10 The few exceptions of woodcuts showing dark Africans are all from costume books, see Massing, *Image of the Black*, p. 23, 34, 50 and 53.



Fig. 3 Hans Burgkmair, In Allago, 1508, woodcut and letterpress, 28.5×21.5, detail from Hans Burgkmair, Peoples of Guinea and Algoa, 28.5×42.5 cm, Neurenberg, Schloss Neunhof, Freiherrlich von Welserschen Familien Stiftung.



Fig. 4 Hans Burgkmair, In Allago, 1508, woodcut, 22.9×15.4 cm, London, The British Museum.

engraving is an intaglio technique that enabled a more nuanced modelling by varying the thickness and density of the incised lines.¹¹ But the dense pattern of hatching needed for a dark surface would still result in a loss of definition of anatomy.

The first travel book with engravings of Africans was *Relatione del reame di Congo delle circonvicine contrade* (*A report of the kingdom of Congo and of the surrounding countries*) from the Italian humanist Filippo Pigafetta (1533–1604) based on notes from the Portuguese tradesman Duarte Lopez (dates unknown) who had been in Congo from 1578 to 1584. It was published in Rome in 1591. Pigafetta mentioned that Africans were black. He even argued that, as far as the Congolese nations were concerned, this was the only feature that distinguished them from the Portuguese, who were his (or better: Lopez') point of reference:

Their hayre is blacke & curled, and some also red. The stature of the men is of an indifferent bignes; and excepting their blacknes are very like to the Portingalles [italics EK]. The apples of their eies are of diverse colours; blacke and of the colour of the sea. Their lips are not thick as the Nubians and other Negroes are; and so likewise their countenances are some fat, some leane, and some betweene both, as in our countreyes there are [italics EK], and not as the Negroes of Nubia and Guinea, which are very deformed.¹²

The book has 8 prints, engraved and probably designed by the Roman printmaker Natale di Bonifazio (1537–1592), who almost certainly worked from the text rather than from drawings.¹³ True to the description of Pigafetta and Lopez the posture of his figures did not differ from Europeans (fig. 5). However, the prints do deviate from the text where skin colour is concerned. Obviously Bonifazio followed the pictorial convention to depict Africans with outlines only that goes back to Burgkmaier, though was practiced outside of ethnographic prints as well. It also dominated the earliest prints of the *Adoration of the Magi* and prints with Africans by Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528), Lucas van Leyden (1494–1533) and Hendrick Goltzius (1558–1617) and their likes.¹⁴

The practice found its way to the numerous prints in the travel books that were published in great numbers between 1595 and 1605. Many of these were produced by Cornelis Claesz (1551–1609) in Amsterdam, such as the first Dutch translation of Lopez and Pigafetta's account of Congo, *De beschryvinghe vant groot ende vermaert coninckijck van Congo ende de aenpalende oft ommegheleghen landen* (1596), Jan Huygen van Linschoten's *Itinerario, Voyage ofte Schipvaert naer Oost ofte Portugaels Indien* (1596), Willem Lodewycksz' *D'Eerste Boeck. Historie van Indien* (1598) and Pieter de Marees' *Beschryvinge*

11 On the technique of engraving, see Griffiths, *Prints and printmaking* (n. 5), p. 38–56.

12 D. Lopez and F. Pigafetta, *Reporte of the kingdome of Congo, a region of Africa: And of the countries that border rounde about the same*, transl. A. Hartwell, London 1597, p. 14. A modern edition is *A report of the Kingdom of Congo and of the surrounding countries, drawn out of the writings and discourses of the Portuguese Duarte Lopez by Filippo Pigafetta*, ed. M. Hutchinson, London 1970.

13 Massing, *Image of the Black*, p. 89–92.

14 For this tradition, see Kolfin, *When Africans became Black* (n. 3).



Fig. 5 Natale di Bonifazio, Three Congolese warriors, engraving, 19.5×29 cm, in F. Pigafetta and D. Lopez, *Relatione del reame di Congo et delle circonvicine contrade*, Rome 1591, plate 4, Antwerp University Library, Special Collections.

ende historische verhael van't goudt koninckrijck van Guinea (1602).¹⁵ In 1590 the publishing firm of Theodore de Bry (1528–1598) and sons began to issue travel books in Frankfurt. Eventually their series would comprise of 30 lavishly illustrated volumes, the last of which was published in 1630.¹⁶ Volumes on Africa appeared between 1597 and 1603, often based on the books published by Claesz.¹⁷

The prints in these books follow Burgkmair and Bonifazio's preference of anatomy over colour. Some printmakers would briefly look for alternatives. The de Bry's copied their figures from Jan Huygen van Linschoten's *Initerario* (1597), though added a stipple technique to make them darker (fig. 6). They gave it up after employing it in two more prints of their own invention, probably due to its being too labour intensive. But de

¹⁵ On Claesz, see G. Schilder, *Cornelis Claesz (c. 1551–1609). Stimulator and driving force of Dutch cartography*, Alphen aan den Rijn 2003, and B. van Selm, *Een menigthe treffelijke boecken. Nederlandse boekhandelscatalogi in het begin van de zeventiende eeuw*, Amsterdam 1987, p. 174–333.

¹⁶ See S. Burghartz (ed.), *Inszenerierte Welten. Die west- und ostindische Reisen der Verleger de Bry, 1590–1630. Staging New Worlds. de Bry's illustrated Travel Reports, 1590–1630*, Basel 2004, and M. van Groesen, *The representations of the overseas world in the De Bry collection of voyages (1590–1634)*, Leiden 2008.

¹⁷ Massing, *Image of the Black*, p. 93–95, and E. van den Boogaart, 'De Bry's Africa', in: S. Burghartz, *Inszenerierte Welten*, p. 95–149.

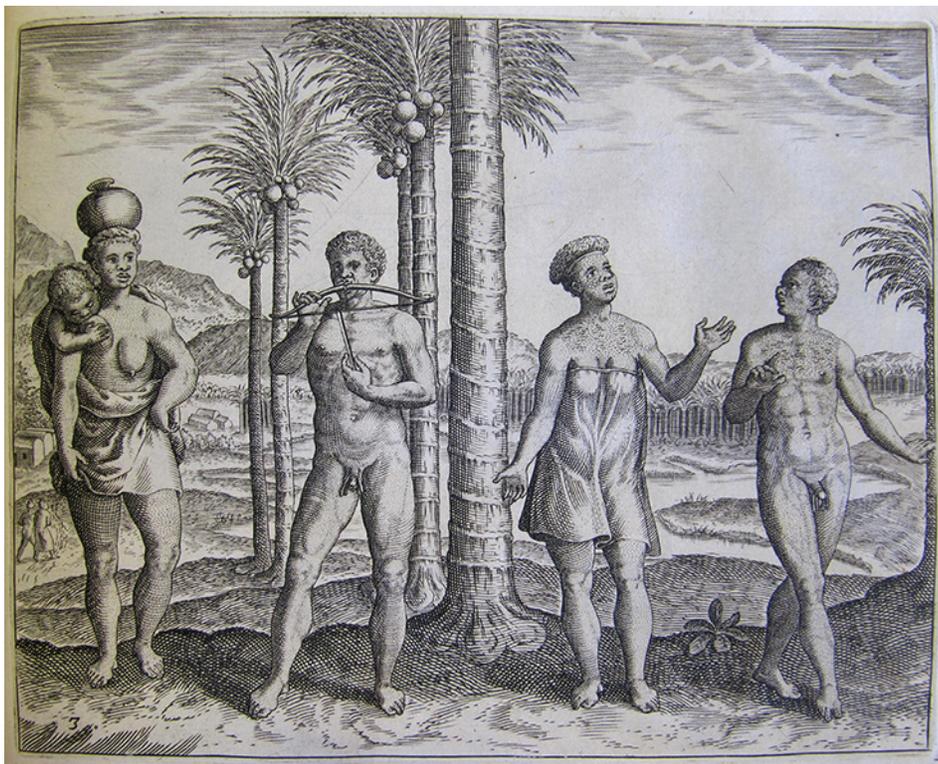


Fig. 6 Anonymous after Johannes van Duuetecom, Africans from Mozambique, etching, 13.8×17.5 cm, in J.Th. de Bry and J.I. de Bry, *Pars Indiæ Orientalis, in qua Iohan. Hvgonis Lintscotani Nauigatio in Orientem*, Frankfurt 1599, plate III, Leiden University Library, Special Collections.

Bry's experiment does suggest that around 1600 printmakers began looking for ways to bring the images in accordance with texts and with reality.¹⁸

Three factors explain why ethnographic prints around 1600 showed 'white' Africans.

First, there was the dominance of a tradition that rooted in the technical limitations of the woodcut and that remained in place in engraving. Second, the engravers of travel books were trained in the mannerist style that had become the preferred format for nudes since the 1580's (figs. 1, 5, 6). For these artists, a virtuoso and often exaggerated display of anatomy and the muscular system was more important than the suggestion of colour. When confronted with the choice between colour and anatomy, they were naturally inclined to the latter. The third reason is the specific character and aim of

¹⁸ The prints appear in the *East Indian Travels*, vol. 2 (1598), plates 1, 3 and 4; see the figures in Van den Boogaart, 'De Bry's Africa', p. 111-113.

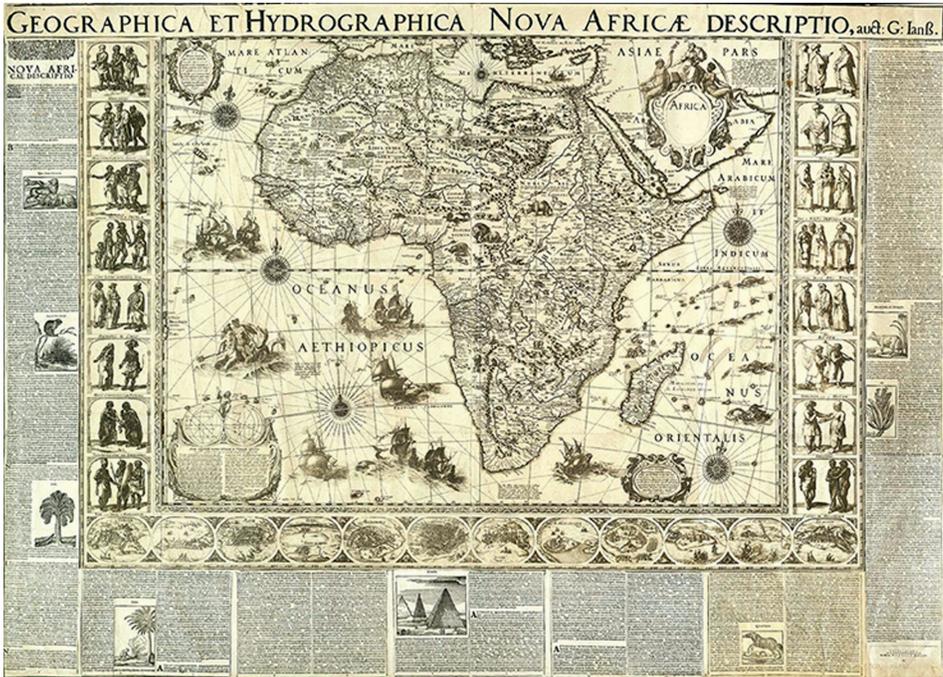


Fig. 7 Josua van den Ende and Hessel Gerritsz., Wall map of Africa, engraving, etching and letterpress, 128×176 cm, republished by Hendrick Hondius in 1624 from Willem Jansz. Blaeu's original from 1608, Weimar, Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek.

scientific images of Africans. Sixteenth century ethnographic texts and prints aimed to communicate that Africans were both exotic, and human, a view which, in the light of classical and medieval myths about dark Africa, was not yet self-evident.¹⁹ To have explanatory and argumentative power in a (semi-)scholarly text, images had to have a scientific quality, which meant they had to be generic.²⁰ In the context of the argument about the humanity of Africans, this meant the figures had to conform to the standard Western ideal of the human body, including classical proportions and the suggestion of a white complexion.

¹⁹ See for the expression of (degrees of) humanity of Africans in early modern text and image Leitch, *Burgkmair's peoples of Africa* (n. 6); Van den Boogaart, 'De Bry's Africa'; Iyengar, *Shades of difference* (n. 4); D. Bindman, *Ape to Apollo. Aesthetics and the idea of race in the 18th century*, London 2000; Vaughn and Vaughn, *Before Othello* (n. 4).

²⁰ L. Daston, 'Observation', in: Dackerman, *Prints and the pursuit of knowledge* (n. 6), p. 126–128; S. Dackerman, 'Prints as Instruments', in: Dackerman, *Prints and the pursuit of knowledge*, p. 26–29; S. Kusakawa, 'The uses of pictures in the formation of learned knowledge. The cases of Leonhard Fuchs and Andreas Vesalius', in: S. Kusakawa and I. Maclean (eds.), *Transmitting knowledge. Words, images and instruments in early modern Europe*, Oxford 2006, p. 76–83.

Colour in maps: changing a convention

Although there had been incidental prints that showed dark skinned Africans, the majority did not. That made the dark Africans who adorn the left and right of Johan Blaeu's map of African from 1608 an exception to the rule and it will have been perceived as a novelty (fig. 7).²¹ The borders of Blaeu's map were designed and etched by his employee Hessel Gerritsz. (1580/1581–1632), who used simple lines and some cross hatching to give the figures their black countenance.²² He hardly attempted to create tonal variety or detail in the musculature. Clearly, his main goal was simply to indicate the blackness of the skin.

Gerritsz. adapted the figures from illustrations in travel books like Lopez' and Pigafetta's *Account of the kingdom of Congo*, Linschoten's *Itinerario*, Lodewijksz' *History of India*, De Bry's *India Orientalis*, and Pieter de Marees' *Description and account of the Gold kingdom of Guinea*, all published between 1591 and 1602.²³ The people of Mozambique are free variants on the figures in Johannes van Doetecum's (1558–1605) print that De Bry had tried to darken through stippling (cf. fig. 6). Gerritsz.' change from white to black was not the only adaptation. To enhance their legibility he isolated the figures from the landscape and set them against an uninformative white background. In travel books engravers followed the conventions of costume books: figures stood next to each other without any communication that could distract from the demonstrative function of the images. Gerritsz. changed this too by animating his figures: they discuss, negotiate, trade or travel. Through new combinations of figures, changes in position, eye contact, and gestures, Gerritsz. suggested a sophisticated degree of communication that was absent in his original example. Possibly this was an attempt to express the humanity of black Africans that initially had been communicated through the absence of colour indication.

That this change from lack of indication of skin colour to an obvious visualization first occurred in printed wall maps was no coincidence. Printed wall maps were a novelty that was mainly developed in Amsterdam. The large and expensive maps were compiled of various sheets that were glued together, pasted on canvas, varnished and attached to sticks. Many were hand coloured. The price of these luxury items was high. A mounted and coloured set of the four continents (also a new format around 1600) of circa 100×120 cm each, could amount to 16 guilders.²⁴ Apart from the cartographic

²¹ G. Schilder, *Ten wall maps by Blaeu and Visscher*, Alphen aan den Rijn 1996, p.83–86. There is one slightly earlier example: Jodocus Hondius' map of Africa from 1598; see. R.L. Betz, *The mapping of Africa. A cartobibliography of printed maps of the African continent to 1700*, 't Goy-Houten 2007, p. 185–186, no. 41.

²² On the technique of etching that was quicker and allowed for a more fluent drawing style than engraving, see Griffiths, *Prints and printmaking* (n. 5), p. 56–71.

²³ Schilder, *Ten wall maps*, p. 149–151, identifies them and demonstrates that Blaeu used Braun's and Hogenberg's *Civitates Orbis Terrarum* from 1572–1574 for the town views. For Hondius' use of these figures in 1619, see Massing, *Image of the Black* (n. 2), p. 80–82.

²⁴ Schilder, *Ten wall maps*, p. 38–39.

image the maps usually also showed historical figures, personifications, ethnographic types, and topographical views. Many had text in Latin or Dutch, either on the map itself or printed as a separate booklet.

Between 1604 and 1608, probably inspired by allegorical borders of tapestry, the innovative publisher Willem Jansz. Blaeu (1599–1673) was the first to organize the figurative images around the border of the map itself.²⁵ This created space to increase the number of images: additions like the four elements, the four seasons, the seven classical gods, the seven miracles of the world and rulers, town views and ethnographic pairs turned the maps into veritable humanist compendia on the world and the cosmos. The aim was to make them more attractive, both visually and intellectually, as Blaeu explained on a world map from 1605:

To provide ornamentation and delight I have also depicted in the border, in addition to the two hemispheres with their constellations the eight mightiest princes who in our time rule the world, as well as the principal eight cities and multiform costumes of different peoples so that many inquisitive viewers may be pleased.²⁶

The text also provides a clue as to the audience Blaeu had in mind: *inquisitive* viewers for whom printed images were a source of knowledge. Blaeu indeed reached his audience. In 1638 Constantijn Huygens (1596–1687), the learned secretary of Frederik Hendrik (1584–1647), and father of the later scholars Constantijn jr. (1628–1697) and Christiaan Huygens (1629–1695), used globes, spheres and maps to teach his children geography and astronomy:

They daily looked at the terrestrial globe with enthusiasm, zest and speculation, trying to establish the sunrises and sunsets at different times of the year. Then followed a general division of the world, and later a more specified one, which they more or less understood, remembered and knew how to tell me about, while very well reciting both the old names and the new ones. To encourage them even more, I had the four parts of the world by Willem Blaeuw mounted in my entrance hall, where they often played, in order to provide them with a fixed image of the world and its division.²⁷

The four parts of the world Huygens refers to must be an edition of Blaeu's set from 1608 or 1611, with ethnographic figures in the left and right border.²⁸

²⁵ On Blaeu, see D. van Netten, *Koopman in kennis. De uitgever Willem Jansz Blaeu (1571–1638) in de geleerde wereld van zijn tijd*, Zutphen 2014. On figurative borders, see G. Schilder, *Wall-maps of the world by Blaeu, 1619 and 1645/46*, Alphen aan den Rijn 1990, p. 115–149. Sutton, *Early modern Dutch prints of Africa* (n. 2), p. 161–196 discusses Blaeu's ethnographic figures in the context of a shift from allegorical to empirical imagery and points to the relation between degrees of civility and proximity to Europe. Leitch, *Burghmairs peoples of Africa* (n. 6), p. 144 gives an exceptional example of a world map in the *Neurenberg Chronicle* from 1493.

²⁶ Blaeu, quoted in Schilder, *Ten wall maps*, p. 135. The map is only known in an edition by Blaeu and Hondius from 1624.

²⁷ Schilder, *Ten wall maps*, p. 102.

²⁸ The only known copies of the set from 1608 with decorative borders are the second edition from 1612. The difference between state I and II is the presence of the name of the engraver of the map, Jozua van den Ende (Schilder, *Ten wall maps*, p. 83–84). The maps were very popular. Blaeu issued the

State of the art

Three circumstances explain Blaeu's desire to show the African skin colour to his viewers. On the most general level, the genre of the wall map with ethnographic borders was new and novelty forces artists or publishers to rethink old conventions. But this does not explain the direction of the innovation. Adding hatching to the figures meant extra work that Blaeu was prepared to commission, so there must have been a sudden urgency for dark Africans.

Scientific images of natural history were expected to describe the essential features of whatever was depicted.²⁹ This made it relevant to distinguish clearly between different species, which became more urgent when they were represented close together. Blaeu was the first who collected the different nations of the world on four maps where they would be seen together, most likely in a single room.³⁰ In this context of collecting, collating and comparing that was characteristic of the world of natural history, the most essential or authentic characteristics had to be visualized as clear as possible.³¹ For Africans this had always been the dark colour of their skin, so in order to create scientifically valuable images Blaeu had no choice but to clearly bring out this feature.³²

But the muscled mannerist figures that dominated the scientific images since the 1570s did not lend themselves for detailed modeling in black (compare figs. 1 and 2, or 2 and 6). Here Blaeu and Gerritsz. were helped by or saw the opportunities of circumstances beyond their control. Between 1600 and 1610 the ideal figure type that conventionally represented the generic human body was redefined. Instrumental in this was the Amsterdam history painter Pieter Lastman (1583–1633). His figures represent a new type: shorter and broader, with angular contours, suggesting slower

entire series twice (1608 and 1612), after which the plates were bought and published by Henricus Hondius (1624). Finally they ended up with Claes Jansz Visscher, who issued them twice (Schilder, *ibidem*, p. 76–77). Copies were made and published in Venice (probably Stefano Scolari, 1646), Bologna (Pietro Todeschi, 1673) and Rome (Giovanni Battista de Rossi, 1666, 1686 and Godefridus de Scaichi). In Paris they were published by Alexis-Hubert Jaillot (Schilder, *ibidem*, p. 77 and 189–202).

²⁹ B. Ogilvie, *The science of describing. Natural history in Renaissance Europe*, Chicago, London 2006, p. 5–7; see also Kusakawa, *The uses of pictures* (n. 20) and Daston, 'Observation' (n. 20).

³⁰ World maps with ethnographic figures slightly preceded maps of the four continents. The earliest was Blaeu's own map from 1606–1607 apparently with uncoloured figures (R. Shirley, *The mapping of the world. Early printed world maps, 1472–1700*, London 1984, p. 275–276, no. 258). Hondius published a world map with figurative borders in 1608 in which the Africans were dark (Shirley, *ibidem*, p. 279–280).

³¹ Ogilvy, *The science of describing* and Kusakawa, *The uses of pictures*.

³² With the exception of the Malabars from the south-western coast of India, the people from India, Sri Lanka and the Indonesian archipelago remained without indication of their skin colour until the 1660s and 1670s, even though they could be as dark as Africans, as was sometimes noted in travel books. See for example J. Huygen van Linschoten, *Itinerario, Voyage ofte Schipvaert, van Jan Huygen van Linschoten naer Oost ofte Portugaels Indien*, Amsterdam 1596, p. 66 with an English translation in: J. Huighen van Linschoten, *His Discourse of Voyages into ye Easte & Weste Indies*, London 1598, p. 77.

and heavier movement.³³ The definition of musculature received less attention than in mannerist figures. This made it much easier to add black hatching. Hessel Gerritsz. was among the first who picked up this new figure type in print (fig. 2). Proportions, anatomy, and musculature of Gerritsz.' Africans are more akin to those of Lastman's figures than to those in Gerritsz.' actual source – the mannerist figures in African travel books from 1590–1605.

In 1608 Blaeu's map of Africa was the state of the art. The medium of etching was still very young in Amsterdam. The idea of a set of the four continents to which the map belonged was new, the cartographic image was up to date; the format with decorative borders was also new, and the figures followed the latest artistic style, with a new accuracy that had hardly before been seen in print.³⁴

Travel books lagging behind

Blaeu's *Four parts of the world* from 1608 was followed in 1611 by another set, and by series from rivals such as Pieter van den Keere (1614) and Jodocus Hondius (1619).³⁵ Abroad John Speed in London (1626), Nicolas Picart in Paris (1644) and Stefano Mozzi in Venice copied it, turning Blaeu's innovation into an international standard.³⁶ Virtually all publishers of maps followed the new format with dark Africans. The same change occurred in fine art prints. In 1621 Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640) and his exceptionally talented engraver Lucas Vorsterman (1595–1674) finally found new ways for a lifelike depiction of Africans that were immediately copied by almost all subsequent printmakers.³⁷

It took some decades before this new standard reached the prints in travel books, mainly because the old plates kept on being republished. Gradually variants and copies that appeared in new editions and in new titles since the 1650s began to show black figures. But the established convention proved durable. For example, a new edition of Pieter de Marees' *Beschryvinge van de goudt-kust Guinea* (*Description and account of the Gold kingdom of Guinea*), published by Joost Hartgers (worked 1637–1655) in 1650, showed a newly invented title page print with dark Africans, but the plates inside were

³³ Examples in T. Seifert, *Pieter Lastman. Studien zu Leben und Werk*, Petersberg 2011. The same figure type was employed by the Amsterdam etcher Simon Frisius, see N. Orenstein, *The new Hollstein Dutch & Flemish etchings, engravings and woodcuts, 1450–1700. Simon Frisius, Oudekerk aan de IJssel* 2008.

³⁴ See on Blaeu as an innovator Van Netten, *Koopman in kennis* (n. 25) and M. Donkersloot-De Vrij, *Drie generaties Blaeu. Amsterdamse cartografie en boekdrukkunst in de zeventiende eeuw*, Amsterdam, Zutphen 1992.

³⁵ Betz, *The mapping of Africa* (n. 21), p. 220–222, no. 55 (Van den Keere), p. 229–232, no. 58 (Jodocus Hondius). Blaeu himself published a variant in 1617 (*ibidem*, p. 225–228, no. 57).

³⁶ Betz, *The mapping of Africa*, p. 241–243, no. 62 (Speed), p. 267–269, no. 73 (Nicolas Picart) and p. 274–275, no. 76 (Stefano Mozzi).

³⁷ Kolfin, *When Africans became Black* (n. 3).



Fig. 8 Anonymous, A captain and two soldiers in Guinea, etching, 8.4×12 cm, in P. de Marees, *Beschryvinge van de goudt-kust Guinea, als mede een voyagie naer de selve*, Amsterdam 1650, p. 55, Leiden University Library, Special Collections.

copies of the original prints, retaining the original white appearance of the figures (fig. 8). However, in the same year Hartgers also published a new edition of Lopez' and Pigafetta's *Beschryvinge van't Koninkrijk Congo* (*Report of the kingdom of Congo*). Four of the five prints are variants on the original ones, though with the complexion changed from white to black (fig. 9).

This intermediate stage ended with the publication of Olfert Dapper's *Naukeurige beschrijvinge der Afrikaensche gewesten* (*Accurate description of African regions*) by Jacob van Meurs (1619/1620–1679) in 1668 (fig. 10).³⁸ Many of the more than eighty illustrations were adapted from the old travel books, but all black Africans are made dark through dense hatching.³⁹ The anonymous engraver or designer never copied the original example faithfully but transformed figures freely. For example, when copying an Angolan warrior, most probably from De Bry's title page to their version of Pigafetta and Lopez'

³⁸ See on Dapper's book and sources Massing, *Image of the Black* (n. 2), p. 107–111 and especially E. de Groot, *The world of a seventeenth century collector. The Atlas Blaeu-Van der Hem*, 't Goy-Houten 2006, p. 259–267.

³⁹ For example O. Dapper, *Naukeurige Beschrijvinge der Afrikaensche gewesten van Egypten, Barbaryen, Libyen, Biledulgerid, Negroslant, Guinea, Ethiopiën, Abyssinie*, Amsterdam 1668, p. 524, 537, 539, 573, 574, 577, 580, 586 or B. Picart, *Naukeurige beschryving der uitwendige godtsdienst-plichten, kerk-zeden en gewoontens van alle volkeren der waereldt*, 6 vols., Amsterdam, Den Haag, Rotterdam 1727, vol. 4, plates 159 and 162.



Fig. 9 Anonymous, Congolese warriors, engraving, 8.4×12.2 cm, in F Pigafetta and D. Lopez, *Beschryvinge van't Koninkrijk Congo, met't aenpalende Landt Angola*, Amsterdam 1650, p. 55, Leiden University Library, Special Collections.

Relatione del reame di Congo, Meurs' engraver relied on the original image for the appearance of the warrior, but also followed the text (fig. 11). Bonifazio and De Bry gave the man a headdress of ostrich feathers. Meurs' engraver added those of a peacock, following the words of Dapper, who in turn relied on De Bry's text. Also, the engraver seems to have mistaken the metal chains across the man's chest for cloth or rope. However, this may rather be a case of poor engraving, as Dapper's text, which we just saw the engraver read, explicitly mentions iron chains with shackles as thick as one's little finger. Finally he positioned the warriors peacefully on the bank of a river and combined them with what appear to be Congolese nobles on the left, from one or more unknown sources. Strangely, the text only discusses war, and does not mention other figures than soldiers. Obviously the relation between text and image could be very loose indeed, and engravers or designers were not compelled to follow their original sources faithfully.

For Meurs as a publisher iconographic and contextual accuracy were not important, nor was anatomical detail; cheap production and high print runs were. The plates must have been printed thousands of times for Dutch, French, and German editions.⁴⁰ They were cut in Meurs' workshop in a uniform and crude engraving style of deep and wide

⁴⁰ M.M. Kleerkooper en W.P. van Stockum, *De boekhandel te Amsterdam voornamelijk in de 17de eeuw. Biografische en geschiedkundige aantekeningen*, 2 vols., Den Haag 1914–1916, vol. 1., p. 423 and E. Kolfin, 'Amsterdam,



Fig. 10 *Workshop of Jacob Meurs, Congolese nobles and warriors on the bank of a river, engraving, 12.5×16.5 cm, in O. Dapper, Nauwkeurige beschrijvinge der Afrikaensche Gewesten, Amsterdam 1668, p. 577, Leiden University Library, Special Collections.*

lines in a simple pattern. All figures have the same round face with short curly hair, large wide opened eyes, upturned nose, round cheeks and thick lips. Most figures are busy and the early descriptive style with a horizontal composition and figures parallel to the picture plane often gave way to a more exciting narrating style and diagonal compositions. Anatomical detail and scholarly precision that were employed around 1600 to create generic, scientific images have gone lost completely. They were replaced by dramatic and horrific images of brutal killings and cannibalism that were more engaging, doubtlessly to boost sales.

Conclusion

The early modern history of the depiction of Africans ends with an ironic paradox. It had taken more than 150 years to depict Africans with their natural skin colour.

Fig. 11 *Theodore de Bry*, Congolese warrior, etching, detail from the title-page to *Regnum Congo hoc est vera description regni Africani (India Orientalis pars 1)*, Frankfurt 1598, *Amsterdam University Library, Special Collections*.



When this finally became the standard, the scientific value of the images was heavily doubted. This was because scholars were now aware that many prints were not made after empirical observation, but were copied with mistakes from other prints, just as had happened in Meurs' publication.⁴¹

In a short address to the Royal Society the natural philosopher Robert Hooke (1635–1703) put it like this:

we find that many Relations of foreign Countries do give us Pictures of Towns, Prospects, People, Actions, Plants, Animals, and the like; and those beget in us Ideas of Things, as they are represented. But, if we enquire after the true Authors of those Representations, for the Generality of them, we shall find them to be nothing else but some Picture-drawer, or Engraver, here at Home, who knows no more the Truth of the Things to be represented, than any other Person, that can read the Story, could fancy of himself, without that Help. [...] Instead of giving us a true idea; [illustrations in travel books] misguide our Imagination, and lead us into Error, by obtruding upon us the Imaginations of a Person, possibly more ignorant than our selves.⁴²

Hooke specifically referred to travel books published by Theodore de Bry (1528–1598) and sons, Thomas Herbert (1606–1682) and John Ogilby (1604–1676), whose books were translations of the publications of Jacob Meurs. Still, for Hooke drawn and printed images were particularly useful in the production and transmission of knowledge. They gave a better idea of reality than words:

No description, by Words, can give us so full a Representation of the true Form of the Thing describ'd, as a Draught, or Delineation of the same upon Paper. Nor can we so perfectly conceive, or imagine, the true Colours, by Words, as by seeing the very Colour it self imitated and compared with the Life, or the real Thing.⁴³

Hooke shows a great awareness about the nature of scientific images, their function in knowledge production and the role of the makers in their creation. However, for him only images based on direct empirical observation had any scientific value, not images based on texts, other images, or the imagination. The best way to avoid what he called 'Mr. engraver's fancy' was a portable camera obscura.⁴⁴ But the world would have to wait another 150 years for the first photos of Africans.⁴⁵

41 See Massing, *Image of the Black*, p. 23–25 who points to the paradox that images were taken for real while they actually were looted from other sources. At the end of the seventeenth century scholars stopped taking these images for real.

42 R. Hooke, 'An instrument of Use to take the Draught or Picture of any Thing. Communicated by Dr Hook to the Royal Society, Dec. 19, 1694', in: W. Derham (ed.), *Philosophical Experiments and Observations of the late Eminent Dr Robert Hooke [...] and other Eminent Virtuoso's in his time*, London 1726, p. 294. I would like to thank Matthew Hunter for drawing my attention to Hooke's text.

43 Hooke, 'An Instrument of Use', p. 293.

44 Ibidem, p. 294.

45 On early photography of Africans, see N. Monti, *Africa then. Photographs 1840–1913*, New York 1987.