

**SERPA PINTO
AMONGST BOER AND BRIT:
HIS TRAVELS THROUGH THE
TRANSVAAL AND NATAL, 1879**

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FOREWORD

A great number of publications have been written about the British Annexation of the Transvaal in 1877 and the Boers' protest movement against it – which led to the First War for Independence, or the First Anglo-Boer War of 1880-1881, and the regaining of their independence. The social circumstances and cultural life in Pretoria during the annexation period have also been recorded in books about the Transvaal capital. When the sources of all these publications are studied, it is noteworthy that one significant source – Serpa Pinto's *How I crossed Africa* – is conspicuous by its absence.

The Portuguese explorer, Serpa Pinto, travelled through the Transvaal in 1879 and tarried awhile in Pretoria, during which time he wrote in great detail in his travel journal about political, social and cultural matters. Later, he spent quite some time in Pietermaritzburg and Durban while waiting for a ship that could return him to Europe. There it was that he met some of the main characters who had participated in the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879. His travelogue was published in both Portuguese and English in London in 1881, so the argument about inaccessibility cannot be used as an excuse for this exceptional source not being consulted before.

The purpose of this study is to make the journal of Serpa Pinto available to South African researchers. The highlighting of specific commentary regarding the character and lifestyle of the Boers, the appearance of and social life in Pretoria during the time of the British annexation and the role of the missionaries in the Transvaal recorded in his journal, will, in all probability, have cultural historians in particular realise that this is a source not to be ignored.

Being Portuguese, Serpa Pinto saw the Boers in a different light to that of contemporary British travellers and visitors from the Netherlands, who recorded their impressions during visits to the Transvaal. The English were often critical and disparaging in their pronouncements about the Boers, while the Dutch were probably all too conscious of their kinship to the Boers. Serpa Pinto, by contrast, seems to have been an objective observer, having great appreciation for the character, lifestyle and customs of the Boer people he came into contact with in rural areas; while in Pretoria, Pietermaritzburg and Durban he moved in English social circles, enjoying associating in their rules of social etiquette, soon becoming friends with them. On those grounds alone, this travel journal is worthwhile.

Whenever a book is published, there is always a team of collaborators. In the case of Serpa Pinto's story, it is no different, and I would like to thank them all:

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