The hunt for the Damara lHaihāb in 1903: Contemporary oral testimony

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Abstract

This paper presents details pertaining to the assassination by hired Witbooi troopers of the Damara lHaihāb lGuruseb in 1903. lHaihāb, also known as Blauberg or Blouperd in German parlance, the son of a Damara chief, was notorious as audacious robber. German troops were unable to eliminate him because of his evasive tactics. For that reason troopers were hired from the Nama chief, Hendrik Witbooi. Their eventual success in eliminating lHaihāb was due solely to their knowledge of his shrewd tactics – a historical anecdote that has elevated lHaihāb to legendary status among Damara, yet entirely absent from German archival records.

The present paper correlates interviews with one of the hired troopers and his wife with archival evidence in the form of newspaper reports and the official military correspondence. The narratives of these more or less closely involved contemporary witnesses lend credibility to the popular anecdotal versions of lHaihāb’s end. Next to furnishing details of the episode the paper attempts to show how oral accounts, once corroborated in essence by archival documentation, can provide pivotal information to facilitate the understanding of causalities and human interaction in historical events.

When I started doing fieldwork as a language planner in the early seventies among the Nama and Damara, it was still possible to encounter individuals who had lived in the German colonial period. Whenever my late colleague Johannes Boois and I were fortunate enough to meet such people, we deferred our intended programme of linguistic investigation and recorded their personal testimony, in particular concerning events pertaining to the Nama-German war of 1904.

One case predating that war was especially fascinating, as it was the personal testimony of a man who had been involved in the pursuit and assassination of lHaihāb, alias Vaalperd (literal translation), Blauberg or Blaubart in 1903. lHaihāb lGuruseb was a Damara, notorious in the eyes of Germans as a murderous robber and gang leader, admired by Damara for his skill in outwitting his German pursuers over several years. In recent years efforts have been made by Damara to elevate his status to that of heroic Damara chief or ‘prince’ fighting against intruders in his territory.1

to fit the concept of the social bandit, the issue of social banditry will not be investigated here. Although the German newspapers consistently depict him as notorious robber ("Räuber"), he was also acknowledged as a chief.\(^2\) Haihāb and his followers raided mainly in the district of Ojitbingwe, from around Tsawisis and Übeb (Ubib) between the Khan River and the Ikhuos (Chuos) mountains to the Illūsab mountains (Husab), Salem and Tsaobis on the lower Swakop River.\(^3\) Here, ox wagon transports and stock posts were frequently raided, with African herders and employees being assaulted if not murdered. Over several years the German authorities failed to track him down and eventually had to hire the services of Nama troopers who could match the tactics of this shrewd man.


discussed in this paper, other than observing that the photograph purporting to depict Haihāb, is clearly marked as copyright of G. Behrens. Gert Behrens was a professional photographer who was born in 1942 and came to Namibia only some sixty years after the death of Haihāb (p.c., Caroline Behrens).

\(^2\) Windhoeker Anzeiger No, 7, 28 March 1900 (NAN K0017): "Der Verurtheilte gehörte zur Bande des Bergdaimara-Kapitāns Blauberg, die [...] bisher sich allen Verfolgungen zu entziehen wusste." [emphasis added, W.H.]

\(^3\) In the cropped section of the map by Paul Sprigade and Max Moisel place names and figures that are not relevant to this paper have been deleted in the area concerned, so as to enhance identification of pertinent place names.
The hunt for lHaihāb is best introduced in the words of the then governor Theodor Leutwein:

Finally a drastic example may be mentioned of the superiority of the native over the white soldier in guerrilla warfare. From about the year 1900, a small band of marauders under the leadership of a Kaffir [i.e. Damara, W.H.] named “Blauberg” had made the district of Otjimbingwe unsafe. White patrols — once even the entire second company under Captain Fromm — that had been sent out against them had been unable to take care of them. When the complaints about their stock rustling increased and even reached Berlin, in the year 1903 shortly before the Bondelzwarts uprising, I requested Captain Witbooi to put at our disposal twenty of his best men. These were dressed as German soldiers and were placed under the command of an officer, [...] Second Lieutenant Müller v. Berneck, who was capable of staying in the saddle for 24 hours, if need be. After six weeks, the entire band of marauders had been eliminated; it came to light that they had consisted of only about six rifles; — bleak prospects for the future of the protectorate if there is no success now in bringing the natives to peace. That the Witboois could not have achieved this feat without their capable leader [2nd Lieutenant Müller von Berneck, W.H.] is for certain; but equally certain is that the latter would not have been able to do so if he had had to rely solely on white soldiers.5

The dilemma highlighted by Leutwein, namely that the white soldiers could not match the tactics of the native soldiers, is paralleled in the attempt to unravel the historical events around lHaihāb’s death: The archival material of the German government without the oral testimony of a Witbooi trooper, just like the account by Leutwein, does not reveal the essential circumstances that led to the elimination of this man and his cohorts.

In what follows, the oral testimony, which was unimpeded as it was provided in the vernacular, will through extensive citation be given more prominence than is customary. This may differ from the conventional approach of historians who, more often than not, seek oral evidence only subsequent to their archival investigation. As the oral testimony repeated here amounts to quasi-authentic testimony (since it was retold in the presence of the former Witbooi trooper, a contemporary witness involved in the overall campaign, albeit not in the final episode), this paper should, on the one hand, serve to provide historical detail, and on the other, counter some popular claims concerning the assassination of lHaihāb that can no longer be considered authentic. For, as is reflected in the title of IlGaseb et al., the fame of lHaihāb is indeed becoming ‘legendary’ and so with the popular oral accounts that are prevalent tend to become ever more unreliable because biased.

The following account should moreover show how factual details concerning the campaign, such as dates, numbers of soldiers, locations, etc., are more reliably

4 For the sake of accurate rendition the ethnic references are directly translated as found in the sources, even if pejorative. Comments by the author within a quotation are enclosed in square brackets.

5 Theodor Leutwein, Elf Jahre Gouverneur in Deutsch-Südwestafrika, Berlin, Mittler, 1907: 536. All German and Khoekhoe texts were translated by the author. The tape recorded interviews with Otto and Fransina were transcribed by Johannes Boois. Translations of (Khoekhoe) oral testimony are rendered fairly literally, so as to convey the style. I am indebted to Cynthia Murray for her suggestions of improvements of the text.
recorded in the archival records, rather than in the oral accounts. However, the clue to what made it possible to finally outwit this shrewd man, ʿIhāhāb, whom German soldiers were unable to apprehend, is not even hinted at in the archival records, while on the other hand, this anecdotal detail of how ʿIhāhāb was tricked, leading to his death, is among Damara the best remembered incident around this almost legendary man. The oral testimony of closely involved individuals presented here thus should serve to lend overall credibility to the essence of the anecdotal accounts, yet curb some of the excesses that have developed in the reporting of details.

It was one of the twenty hired Witbooi troopers that in 1974 narrated to us the events that enabled his cousin and others to dispatch ʿIhāhāb. Since some of ʿIhāhāb’s descendants are known to exist, I had to pledge never to reveal the narrator’s name. Hence photos of him and his wife also cannot be displayed here. For the purpose of this paper the veteran trooper will be referred to as Otto. The tape recording of the narrative by Otto himself was stolen in 1976 along with a number of other audio tapes, but fortunately only after that narrative had been transcribed. As this first-hand testimony by a contemporary witness was important to us, we visited Otto again in August 1979, and asked him to retell the events. He was, however, in no mood and disposition then to recount the story. So his wife, here called Fransina, recounted the story for us in the presence of her aging husband. Fransina claimed to have been born in the year of the rinderpest, thus in 1896 or 1897. Indeed, she narrated the events in much greater detail than her husband had done originally. The son of Otto’s cousin and fellow trooper, Paul (pseudonym), here named Amon, who accompanied us on this visit to Otto, remarked after the visit that he had never heard the story in such detail from his own late father. Otto, Amon and Fransina are Namadama; that is, Namaised Herero from the area north of Keetmanshoop.

In an attempt to find confirmation of these oral accounts, I first consulted the German newspapers of that time in the Sam Cohen Library in Swakopmund. Indeed, the first report appeared on 28 March 1900, in the Windhuker Anzeiger, where it was reported that one of ʿIhāhāb’s men by the name of ‘Kaussib’ had been arrested by chance and had been sentenced to death after having confessed to four of the nine murders that he was tried for. At the time of that news report ʿIhāhāb and his gang (“Bande”, see footnote 2) were said to have already been active for several years. Sporadic reports of

6 Indeed, in an attempt to answer certain questions about her ancestor, extracts of Fransina’s narrative were played in 2005 to a great-granddaughter of ʿIhāhāb, who is considered to be the most knowledgeable descendant alive. She remarked that that narrator (Fransina) knew more detail about her great-grandfather than she herself did. This loss of information after three generations is indicative of the degree of progressive decline in reliability of oral testimony.

7 Credit is due to Ursula Massmann of the Sam Cohen Library, Swakopmund, for having compiled an index for the Windhuker Anzeiger and the Deutsch-Südwestafrikanische Zeitung, albeit incomplete. This index greatly facilitated the finding of reports on ʿIhāhāb.

8 See also NLAS K0017.
raids and murders then appeared in the *Deutsch-Südwestafrikanische Zeitung* as from December 1901.\(^9\)

The most detailed and pertinent material regarding particulars, however, is to be found in the official correspondence of the district office of Otjimbingwe filed in the *Zentralbureau des kaiserlichen Gouvernements*, now housed in the National Archives of Namibia.\(^10\) In order to provide a summary account of the most important events regarding the apprehension of Ihaihâb this paper will furnish highlights from this official correspondence, and supplement or contrast it with the oral accounts, as the case may be.

The failure of various patrols — including Herero patrols with Damara guides — to apprehend Ihaihâb and his cohorts eventually led Governor Leutwein to suggest putting rewards on the heads of Ihaihâb and his men. On 9 September 1901, however, the district commander of Otjimbingwe (1\(^{st}\) Lieutenant Zemken?) reported back “most obediently” to him — in the rhetoric required from subalterns — that the announcement by the district chief of Omaruru of a price of 500 Mark for Ihaihâb and 100 Mark for each of his proven allies had had no effect. Leutwein in reply (17 September 1901) scribbled in the margin of the letter that only with the involvement of natives in some way could there be any chance of success, and that the dispatch of the second field company (stationed in Omaruru) would be the most useless strategy, even with African guides as suggested.\(^11\)

The embarrassment to the colonial government increased as Berlin started becoming impatient. On 18 February 1903, the *Deutsche Kolonial-Gesellschaft für Südwest-Afrika* in Berlin addressed a letter of complaint to the Kolonial-Abteilung of the Auswärtige Amt (Colonial Office) in Berlin with the request that the imperial government in Windhoek be called upon to terminate the robberies through appropriate action. The Kolonial-Gesellschaft reminded the Colonial Office that this matter had been discussed with their office already on 31 January 1902. This letter was forwarded to the government in

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\(^9\) NLAS K0033. Reports appeared on 4-12-01, 11-12-01, 13-2-02, 11-9-02, 3-4-03, 14-4-03, 1-9-03 and 13-10-03.

\(^10\) NAN ZBU 715, F.V.O. 2, vol. 1. I am indebted to Jakob Zollmann and Wolfram Hartmann for having drawn my attention to this source, and to Magdalene Rethemeyer for transcribing the often barely legible documents in Sütterlin-script.

\(^11\) The statement by Lenssen (1953/1999:120) that Victor Franke cleaned out Ihaihâb and his band is at variance with the facts. The considerable price of 500 Reichsmark for a common criminal (in the eyes of the Germans) was indicative of the extent of the embarrassment to the local German authorities. This amount was the equivalent of a second class boat fare from Hamburg to Swakopmund (cf. Raimund Freiherr von Gleichen, *Ratschläge für angehende Farmer in Deutsch-Südwestafrika*, Berlin, Reimer, 1914: 14). By comparison, General von Trotha offered 5 000 Reichsmark each for the political adversaries Samuel Maharero and Hendrik Witbooi, against whom a national war was waged. The relative value of a Reichsmark may further be inferred from the minimum price for a hectare of farmland: in the north, 1 Mark 20 Pfennig; in the districts of Rehoboth, Gibeon and Maltahöhe, 1 Mark, and in the southern districts 50 Pfennig (ibid.: 59).
Windhoek on 22 February 1902 by the Colonial Office together with an ordinance giving orders as requested. A further complaint was forwarded by the Colonial Office on 13 March of that year about repeated incidents of marauding in the mountains on either side of the Swakop River from Horebis to Nabas.

The issue of hiring Africans to assist in the hunt for IHaib lingered on until 1903. The suggestion had been publicly made in the Deutsch-Südwestafrikanische Zeitung already in December 1901. The district-judge of Swakopmund, Dr D. Hanemann, for one, submitted requests for the hiring of Witbooi fighters. On 13 February 1902 the Deutsch-Südwestafrikanische Zeitung reported that a reader had repeated the suggestion that the services of Africans like Witboois should be obtained to track down the robbers. Such services had been successful before, such as when the murderers of two settlers, Claasen and Duerr, had been apprehended in 1899.

On 18 May 1903 Governor Leutwein sent a letter with detailed instructions to the district office in Gibeon to finalise an agreement with Captain !Nanseb Hendrik Witbooi to supply twelve able horsemen that could be used as policemen, preferably trained soldiers under the command of Samuel Isaaks or another capable sub-chief (Unterkapitän). These men were to establish a base in Otjimbingwe and to search for IHaib and his bands under the command of a German officer with three cavalrymen. The Witboois were to receive free rations, as well as a wage of 20 Marks per month for the troopers, 40 Marks for the foreman and, according to a contract with Witbooi dated 10 December 1902, 20 Marks per month jointly for the use of their own horses and saddles. A commission was to determine a value for each horse so that compensation could be paid in full in the case of loss. A price of 500 Marks was put on the head of “Blauberg” and a reward of 50 Marks was offered for each of his men brought in dead or alive. The men were to be issued with police uniforms and contractual agreements of employment were to be completed.

2nd Lieutenant Hans Müller von Berneck was commissioned to head the special unit, consisting of four members of the Schutztruppe (Sergeant Spierke, and Lance Corporals Lupke, Zimmermann and Michalek), an African policeman of the field force and the twelve Witboois. Most of the Witboois troopers remain anonymous entities as their names do not feature in the official correspondence, other than that of the leader Daniel Pitter (also known as Pieters) and those that needed special mentioning (see below). The assignment was explicit: elimination of the band of the robber Blauberg, alias Vaalperd.

On 22 June 1903 the district officer [Bezirksamtmann], First Lieutenant Henning von Burgsdorff of Gibeon reported as follows:

12 Letter to the imperial government, Windhoek, dated 4 April 1903.
13 Leutwein [Elf Jahre] ignored some detail in his book as quoted above, where he speaks of twenty of Witbooi’s best men being requested, to be dressed as soldiers.
The Witbooi-commando requested for Otjimbingwe leaves for Windhoek on this day under the leadership of Daniel Pitter, the most able sub-chief in the veld.\textsuperscript{14} It appeared advisable after consultation with Chief Hendrik Witbooi not to take trained native soldiers for the present purpose but old Witbooi 'men of oorlog' instead. The trained soldiers are all younger elements which, as Witbooi puts it, are like German soldiers: By this he means that they duly attack the enemy, but are unsuitable to trace cattle rustlers in their hideouts. Furthermore they are entirely unfamiliar with the terrain between the Swakop and Kuisb [sic!] Rivers and around Otjimbingwe; they were still children when Witbooi moved against Jan Jonker and the Herero of Otjimbingwe. Some of the old Witboois are well acquainted with this terrain and, above all, personally know a great number of the Bergdam that live in the mountains and were associated with Jan Jonker. The request of Chief Witbooi – and I most diligently support same – amounts to the following, that sub-chief Daniel Pitter be allowed as free a rein as possible in his expeditions; only if these men operate as non-regular cavalry can success be expected from them. I would therefore present it as desirable that the commanding officer generally remain at Otjimbingwe and allow Daniel Pitter a free hand in the work outside.

As will become evident below, the views of the commanding officer, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Lieutenant Müller von Berneck, did not conform with this recommendation by von Burgsdorff. In his lengthy letter to Governor Leutwein von Burgsdorff further explained that as the Witboois were not fully trained, he had not issued them with a complete uniform but allowed them to wear their white hats, with the national cockade on the turned-up right rim. He added that Witbooi thought that he, Witbooi, should send not twelve but twenty men, in order to attain the required goal:

> In particular the Witboois request that a certain Bergdama with the name of Samuel, son-in-law of Jan Afrikander, who is said to be in Windhoek and in the service of the Truppe, should be added to the Witbooi-commando, as this man is said to have superb knowledge of the terrain and people of the area in which Blauberg is suspected to be. Furthermore, the Witboois do not wish to consult the Hereros of Otjimbingwe; they wish rather to rely solely on the statements of the Damara that live scattered in the mountains, some of whom they know.

When interviewed in 1974 Otto, the former trooper, presented a somewhat laconic first-hand account of the initial events:

> Otto: Haila’s people still exist. Until today they are murderous people.\textsuperscript{15} – The Dama called Haila was in the Khan River. The Khan [Khanni] is a river at Usakos. This man lived there withdrawn and hostile. And he killed people. And

\textsuperscript{14} “Onderkaptein” Deputy Captain Daniel Pitter (in German documents) or Pieters, also known as Daniel Magistraat because of his office, was in 1904 again sent by Hendrik Witbooi as commander of auxiliary troops to assist the Germans, this time against the Ovaherero uprising. When Witbooi too declared war, however, Pitter and his unit were taken prisoner and deported to Togo and later Cameroon. Pitter died there, probably of malaria (cf. National Archives of Namibia, Dictionary of Namibian Biography, Database of the Namibian National Archives). Regrettably Pitter’s Nama name could no longer be established beyond doubt. Johannes Boois transcribed the recording of Fransina as Khâi\textsuperscript{naotamab}. Elsewhere the name sounds like Khâi\textsuperscript{naotamab}. Enquiries in Gibeon, even with the descendants of Pitter (who now call themselves Pieters) were to no avail. This is just another instance of cultural attrition, where the European name has obliterated the traditional Nama name.

\textsuperscript{15} This contention explains why I had to guarantee the narrator’s anonymity.
as he was too dangerous for Black and White, the White [von Burgsdorff] asked !Nanseb [Hendrik Witbooi] for a Dama that could outwit him. So !Nanseb selected some of his warriors for him. And in that selection were we two cousins16 chosen, the father [Paul] of him who is sitting here [Amon] and I. And we arrived in that war and killed Dama, and also that Dama lHaihāb. And returned down here [to Namaland].

JB17: How was lHaihāb killed? How did lHaihāb die? Tell us how you outwitted him.

Otto: In going from here we fetched a Dama from Karibib18 that knew lHaihāb and would also shoot him. That Dama was killed up there during the search by lHaihāb’s brother. So one day they, with that boy we had from Windhoek and Amon’s father and two Whites went out from our base. [...] [Continued below].

His wife, Fransina, in 1979 provided some names and anecdotal detail in her vivid and occasionally slightly embellished narrative of the same event. Her re-enactment of the German petition portrays the embarrassment of the Germans as perceived by the indigenous population. With regard to the facts she revealed that lHaihāb was supported in his murderous escapades by an elder brother ±Aitabeb (alias Gaoeb)19 – a fact that is not reflected in the German documents:

Fransina: [...] and while the two [lHaihāb and ±Aitabeb] killed, a request was put to !Nanseb [Hendrik Witbooi]. “Oh, Chief, give us shrewd ones from the Nama. This death that we are dying [...] the cargo that leaves does not arrive. How many transports that we have sent did not arrive!” […] and so it went. “And as in that way people have died of hunger, give us someone that finds for us the people that kill off all, that waylay at the road, these people that are in the mountains!” So there was spoken and [they] were given !Khâ!naotamab [Daniel Pitter, see footnote 14]. And with !Khâ!naotamab they were given men, selected men.

JB: Who was !Khâ!naotamab?

Fransina: !Khâ!naotamab – is !Khâ!naotamab.

Fransina’s retort exposes the relatively young interviewer’s perceived ignorance of national heroes. Her nephew Amon, being himself from a subsequent generation, was more accommodating:

16 Sons of sisters, hence ḥâ!kha, who as parallel cousins are tantamount to brothers in the Khoekhoe kinship system. Contrary to von Burgsdorff’s letter not all selected men could have been "older", judging by the age of Otto, when he narrated his experiences to us 71 years later. Paul appears to have been older indeed, for he died already on 12 September 1957.

17 Johannes Boois, who was conducting the interviews in Khoekhoegowab.

18 Presumably he means the Nama Swartbooi from Swakopmund. See below.

19 According to Fanie Dixon (1982 at Ubeb near Usakos; Sprigade-Moisel: Ubib) Gaoeb was captured near Tsawisis by a Ms Kennedy while in a trance from smoking (dagga?), handed to the Germans and hanged some time before the death of Haihāb. Walter Brockerhof also mentioned that Gaoeb was captured because of "tobacco", but otherwise the truth of this statement has not been verified. It is likely, though, that the report in the Windhuker Anzeiger on 28 March 1900 about the chance arrest of "Kaussib" (cf. above) actually refers to Gaoeb. This speculation, however, conflicts with Fransina’s statement (below) that the Nama scout Swartbooi was killed by ±Aitabeb. According to Gerhard Gurirab (public lecture, 2 November 2007) Haihāb’s grandfather was killed by a member of the Dixon family.
Amon: !Khâñoaotamab is a Witbooi, a senior office bearer of Chief Hendrik Witbooi who waged war against the Germans. He was the commander of that war, !Khâñoaotamab.

Fransina: He was the commander of the war. – And men were given to him. Men were selected. Dama there were three, Baster there were three, Nama there were three. Each man with a leader. And the Germans again were three selected men. And the men went to Windhoek, passed Windhoek, passed Okahandja and established themselves at a place called Aukhâs [Spr.-M.: Aukas].

JB: Aukhâs?

Fransina: Yes, at a place called Aukhâs the men arrived and stayed. And while they stayed there they took one man, two, from Karibib to guide them. One is a Nama [Swartbooi from Swakopmund], one is a Dama [Samuel from Windhoek], a young Dama. And the men went, having taken the two men to guide them in that country they were not familiar with. And as they were guided and arrived at the place called Aukhâs, they split up and caught two male little Dama and a little female Dama. And those people were treated well. They were given handouts by the German so that they would not get suspicious. So those people lived comfortably, being treated kindly. They were taken to guide them on the way.

Aukas was an outspan on the Khan River some 16km south-west of Usakos. On 12 August Müller von Berneck reported from this base in a letter to the Imperial Command in Windhoek that near a waterhole called Tsawisis in the Chuos mountains a patrol under the command of Lance Corporal Michalek had caught two men and a woman who belonged to the gang. Interrogations of these captives — and Fransina’s account (see below) suggests why they were communicative — revealed that lHâiâb and his gang were probably lying low in the Khan mountains. Hereros had also reported that members of the gang had shot at three Wambos: 21

I discussed the matter with the sub-chief. I told him that I intended to ride down the Khan with one White and four Natives, to look for tracks and to have all watering places shown to me. He wanted to go to Keetemanaoms [Sprigade-Moise: Ketmannsnam; Khoekhoe: Keʼtʼama-ams (?)] with the remainder of his people (twelve men) to pick up tracks there. – I departed with my patrol on the evening of the 12th, down the Khan River. On the afternoon of the 13th we found old tracks in the Khan River and followed them, and in the evening we arrived at a left tributary at a place that had been occupied by Kaffirs and abandoned only a few days before. I stayed in the vicinity for the night. At 4 o’clock in the morning I set out to be at the next waterhole by sunrise. This is a waterhole on a right tributary of the Khan/Tsaridib [Spr.-M: Charadeb?] and [? illegible]. Waterhole sufficient for only a few people. A distance from the waterhole I left the horses behind, guarded. At sunrise we reached the waterhole. Suddenly Kaffirs quite taken aback jumped out of the rocks. They immediately took to flight; they did not stop when challenged. As the terrain was exceedingly difficult and as one of them could disappear behind the boulders at any time I ordered my men to fire on the fleeing. The murderer and robber

20 Here her particulars are at variance with the archival records that twenty Witboois were sent to assist five Germans.

21 Letter of 17 August. The fact that lHâiâb attacked these Wambos may be viewed as further evidence of his social banditry, namely that he attacked intruders into the territory.
Kaikub and an elderly woman, a cattle-rustler, were shot and killed. Furthermore the wife of Kaikub and a boy. Three boys and a little girl were caught. It transpired through the statements of the captives that Blauberg and his wife live in solitude and that the others of the gang themselves do not always know where he is. Furthermore, two fellows with women are said to be in the northeastern vicinity of Keetemanoams. Presumably it was they who shot at the Owambos. – I fear that the same men have slain the Hottentot Swartbooi, who was supplied to me by Swakopmund as a guide and who some time ago led a Witbooi patrol, and have taken his gun. Same [Swartbooi] had left the patrol at a waterhole and had said that he wanted to look around behind the mountain; he would come back. When he had not returned by nightfall, the patrol looked for his tracks, but lost them in that terrain. As same [Swartbooi] has not returned until today it is possible that he was beaten to death by the two Vaalperd men.

Fransina’s account is more informative about the death of Swartbooi:

And they [the patrol] took the Dama girl and one man, the Red Man [i.e. Nama] taken from Karibib and went down. She was a girl, an unmarried girl. And she said: “Well, this is not good country to be in as late as it is. Let us go back!” And he [Swartbooi] got up saying “Yes, indeed”, and said “Oh, but sit for a bit while I go down to the water to see whether I can’t find new tracks.” All the time they had been seen and surreptitiously followed in the dense bush. And as he went down he was caught, his rifle snatched away, his arms ripped off and he was beaten to death with them, without the noise of rifles.

JB: Who? That Nama?

Fransina: This was done to the Nama, the one that was taken from Karibib to do tracking. By that Aitabeb [lHaiha’s brother] was he killed.

JB: By that brother of lHaiha’s.

Fransina: Yes. And he was killed. – And the woman said, “Oh, if you are missing in this country this late then you have died”, got up and ran to that place where the men were. And she arrived to report. It was already late. The sun had set. It was dark, dusk. Hence it was pointless for them to search then. So that Dama man kept watch throughout the night, guarded all night until sunrise. And in the morning [they] looked for the way the man had gone; [they] descended, descended, descended in different directions. As the patrol was lying in a position some came upon the man slammed down and said: “Was he ravaged here?” [They] perceived that. The arms lay there; the head sat over there. And [they] did just that and from that place onwards were on the lookout for those Dama.

This dramatic description of the slaying is at variance with Müller von Berneck’s report in his letter that Swartbooi had not been found yet. The slaying was later confirmed, however, by Governor Leutwein in a report to the Colonial Office dated 19/12/1903.

Fransina continued:

[They] went on, began patrolling from that place, from Aukhās. Nothing found. Then they did find the tracks that [initially] had not been found. And the tracks were on the way on which they were approaching. The shoes had been put on back to front, and the tracks they seemed to be following were actually approaching them. They only realised this after some time. […] And there (where a river meets the Khan) the biggish Dama that had been caught together with the woman was taken. And two Whites – it is a long story, let me tell it only briefly.
JB: Don't speak briefly Mama, tell it in full.
Fransina: I don't know it in full. How shall I? Is it I who went on that trip? – And at that confluence with the Khan they found a drinking place, a waterhole. People drink there. They went with the two Dama men.

At this stage Fransina asked her ailing and sulking husband Otto for the name of the place where the next episode happened, but he would not reply.

And they entered the Khan, and went deeper and deeper and found the Dama people. [...] And those two ‘Eingeborn’ [German: Eingeborene = natives] Tsailsaimauba and Paul were sent for food by the two Whites.

JB: They were exhausted.
Fransina: They were exhausted. … Then it was Aitabeb who was found there. And he went down to that pothole to fetch water carrying a pot on a rifle over his shoulder, that same rifle he had taken from the man [the guide Swartbooi] he had killed. And it was bad to walk on foot in that terrain, let alone ride there at the Khan. When he came down to fetch water the two [German] men appeared not to be there; they were lying low, crawling down all the time. They had run down. They made their way down. While they moved down Aitabeb went down to fetch water with that pot slung from the rifle. And there were a lot of Dama who had come down to fetch water as for a long time they had not eaten oryx venison. Then one White said, “Let us not shoot [yet], so that they completely come down into this bad place!” So the other White said, “Let us shoot!” He was shitting himself [with fear]. And he [the first] said, “Hey, they are the Dama that are not to live. So let them go down completely into the waterhole. The waterhole is bad and is difficult to get out of, so let us shoot [them] in the waterhole.” Then the rifle [of Aitabeb] was left outside. And [the soldier] shot. From pure fear and shivers he shot at the Dama and missed “iṣipara!” “Ai!” [they] yelled and all pots [were] flung down right there and [they] ran up the hill. They found no-one and returned to Aukhās to report to that White whatever had happened and whatever had been done: How the two ‘Eingeborn’ had been sent down to get food; that on that day they had set out without breakfast; and that then the one White shot and the Dama turned back, it was told. The one White reported [thus] to the other White. And that one was assigned Old Paul. And Old Paul was assigned [to him] and this Dama who was handed back. And the moon was reappearing. And as they moved on, and on, and on, and on. And they climbed the buttress-range that accompanies the river. [...] And they proceeded to Aukhās or what it was called [...] no, Usakos.

When Fransina asked her husband for the name of the place, Otto reiterated faintly what he had told us five years before: that I Haihāb was found in the last inaccessible mountains before the Khan flows into the Swakop River.24

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22 According to Paul’s testimony (below) it was the man referred to as Samuel earlier. This need not be a contradiction, however, as Samuel could have been the baptismal name while Tsailsaimauba could have been the Khoekhoe name.

23 It is notable that both, Aitabeb and his brother I Haihāb are reported to have approached the waterhole with a pot slung over their rifle. Possibly this motif-like image of unsuspectingness was extended to Aitabeb by Fransina who had not been a direct witness of the events.

24 According to the report of 19 December 1903 to the Colonial Office in Berlin, the Chuos Mountains.
Otto’s authentic albeit briefer version of the above incidents as told in 1974 is as follows:

In our journey from here [Namaland] we fetched a Dama from Karibib that knew \( \text{I} \)Haihâb and would also shoot him. That Dama was killed up there during the search by \( \text{I} \)Haihâb’s brother. So one day they, being that boy we had from Windhoek [Samuel], Amon’s father [Paul] and two Whites went out from our base. And they found those Dama that had killed the Dama from Karibib. These had drunk at a river that meets the Khan, which has water at Kharis. But they were not there. They had only come to drink water. And they found the tracks and ambushed them on the very day that they came for water. But those Whites became hungry and at noon had sent [Paul and Samuel] for food to the place in the river where they had unsaddled. While the two men were gone to the river, the Dama arrived. And as the Dama arrived the two [Germans] were lying in an ambush in the rocks on this side of the river. While the Dama approached, one [German] said “Let us shoot!” Then the other said: “Let us not shoot, so that they come and pass here and go into the water. If they pass here they have no way of retreat.” The other one was afraid and said “I will shoot”, and shot before they had come down to the hazardous place. And as the Dama had been nothing but alerted, they fled back. So the two Whites reproached each other and reported each other to the commander. And when the lieutenant learnt of the matter, the White who had acted so, this man’s father [Paul], that one we had got from Windhoek [Samuel] and also the Dama they had caught from them [\( \text{I} \)Haihâb’s band], he who had shown us the fountain, were chased away. Without horses were those men made to walk on their feet for ten days, carrying their food. For those ten days they had to sweep down alongside the Khan as it lay, and where there are the last rugged mountains before the river meets the one that goes to the sea, they caught up with that Dama [\( \text{I} \)Haihâb].

It is not clear to which Dama Otto refers that as having been killed. Presumably he meant the Nama Swartbooi from Swakopmund (see Fransina’s account above). There is no record that Müller von Berneck reported the disciplinary matter to his superiors. From the oral evidence it transpires, however, that this incident and the subsequent punishment meted out to the two Germans of being sent on patrol on foot was an important causal link in the finding of \( \text{I} \)Haihâb’s hideout.


Blauberg was shot on 30 September 1903 in the area between the Khan River and the Chuos mountains. The report promised by Müller von Berneck is not contained in the archival documents. The matter was apparently played down, once handled. Only on 19 December was the Colonial Office in Berlin formally informed by telegram and letter about the most essential facts. The letter concludes with the explanation that little importance had been ascribed to the matter, but that the Governor had changed his opinion in view of recent newspaper reports in Germany and hence had ordered that the Colonial Office be formally notified. The report explicitly attributes the final success in capturing Blauberg to the agility and circumspection of Lance Corporal Luppke. Ironically this seems to be the man who, according to the oral testimony (above), was sent on foot patrol for having blundered during the ambush. The details of the circumstances
surrounding the shooting are not reported — being indeed irrelevant for an official report — and the actual marksmen are not accredited, as the sentence is rendered in the passive so as to omit the agent: “Blauberg was shot […] while fleeing, his wife captured and surrendered to the jail in Karibib, a muzzle-loader with bullets, percussion caps and powder confiscated” [emphasis added, W.H.]. The report to Berlin further states that apart from lHaihâb four men were shot while fleeing, and four men, one woman and some children were captured. It does not mention the two women and the boy who had been shot earlier according to Müller von Berneck’s report to Windhoek (cf. above, 17 August).

The only quasi authentic sources about the final episodes, the actual defeat of lHaihâb, are thus the oral narratives of the erstwhile trooper Otto and his wife Fransina. These gain in importance as the fundamental problem around eliminating lHaihâb and his gang pivoted on the ability – or initial lack of ability – to outmanoeuvre this extremely shrewd man.

Otto completed his brief account of lHaihâb’s death as follows:

[...], and where there are the last rugged mountains before the river [Khan] meets the one that goes to the sea [Swakop], they caught up with that Dama [lHaihâb]. He had separated from the other Dama and stayed just with his wife. And so they went on, being here and there. Saying “Why was this hideout abandoned only recently?” they arrived and tried to lay an ambush at the water obstacle. And as she came down to fetch water she was promptly captured. And although she was unruly she calmed down as she saw their man [the young captive, alive and well]. “This one stays with our people, for sure, yet was not killed”, she said and composed herself. Thereafter his, Amon’s father [Paul], said, “Come, let us go out here to the homestead of you two, for he is said to be very formidable. And when we are close you go ahead to confine the dog, for I want to talk with your man.” And when the woman arrived she locked up the dog; and when he arrived he stabbed the dog to death with a spykergeweer [bayonet?]. On that day the man had looked for a pot they had forgotten at that place where the two old ones had been. And out came also the other two men, that White [Luppke? Cf. report to Berlin.] and the other one who was a soldier [Samuel]. And they arrived at the hide-out. And they laid an ambush for him at a little rocky outcrop near that hide-out. All was fine. And there from far they in the ambush saw him approaching. And he came close to the side where my cousin [Paul] was lying.

Anyone who might encounter him and allow him to live would die by his hands. So it used to be with him. He was so tough that, should you meet him and let him live you would in no way meet again. Such a formidable man was lHaihâb.

And when he lHaihâb] was close [Paul] thought “If I now shoot and miss, then I will surely die. What must I do?” So [he] thought, yet shot when he lHaihâb] was near. [He] shot him in the stomach. And [lHaihâb] had a rifle, and [he] was carrying that pot slung on the rifle’s barrel over his shoulder. And [he] discarded those goods and fled. And the other man who should have been crouching low to shoot him, got up and gave chase. And as he [lHaihâb] was caught up with he picked up a stone, and the other one also picked up a stone

25: Spykergeweer (needle gun) must be a misnomer for a bayonet, as it was used for stabbing and obviously without making a noise.
and they stood facing each other. And that one gaped for air and was dying; and this one stood, actually was letting him die. Then there was that other man close to the hideout [Samuel?] . He shouted “Stand aside for me!” and shot. And that (other) one threw him to the ground violently. In that way IHaihâb died. 

Just as a number of Damâ that we five including the lieutenant had encountered were all shot when they did not want to stand still when challenged, so we closed in on IHaihâb and killed him up there, and returned down here while the Nama war was about to start.

Some crucial background information (conveyed to us during interviews with other informants, but being almost legendary knowledge amongst Damara generally) is required to understand the significance of Paul’s order that the dog must be confined. IHaihâb was said to have had two dogs, called Êamirob (Star) and Êkhâb (Moon). He was reputed to have been so circumspect that on returning to his hideout, he would send Êamirob, the more intelligent dog, ahead before he approached. If no strangers were around, the dog would settle down; if something was amiss, it would return to its master. According to Fransina’s account it was Paul’s knowledge of this practice that eventually allowed them to ambush IHaihâb successfully. Hence Paul killed the dog even though it was tethered, so that it could not possibly bark. It is not mentioned where the second dog was. IHaihâb was thus taken by surprise, entirely unawares, walking with a pot suspended from his muzzle loader. The eventual success in the hunt for IHaihâb hinges on this manoeuvre of killing the dog, which features only in the oral accounts, not in the archival evidence.

Whether Paul had indeed had prior knowledge of IHaihâb’s almost legendary dog is not known. According to the accounts of other informants, especially Tobias Cloete (1982 at Ituseb at the lower Kuiseb River), the captured woman betrayed IHaihâb by revealing his habit to the troopers. Passive cooperation, if not outright betrayal, is plausible if the claim offered by both Cloete and Fanie Dixon is true that this woman had been taken captive by IHaihâb after he had killed her parents. 

Fransina’s version has been dramatised through the use of direct speech, but relates the same basic events. She adds a further incident about the subsequent escape of prisoners, an incident not reported in the archival material, other than perhaps the final statement on the matter in the Deutsch-Südwestafrikanische Zeitung (13/10/1903) that only two members of the gang were still left and were being searched for.

Fransina: Yes, and as they [the patrol which was sent out on foot after the botched ambush, including Old Paul] went on, went on; they found a hideout, found a water place. “Here they drink. So let us lie in wait for them”, said the men – said that other [captive] Dama they had been given. And while they lay in wait a woman came down to fetch water.

JB: IHaihâb’s.
Fransina: IHaihâb’s.

JB: Were the two dogs with her?
Fransina: No, she had restrained the dog to lie down, at the hideout. The man had gone with only one dog and the other one was at the hideout. – And the woman faked insanity when she saw their Dama woman. Then they knew that he
llHaihāb] was her husband. And she [the captive?] said: “Don’t behave like that. Don’t think anything since I am here with these men.”

So Old Paul, he, that Dama and she went to the hide-out. “Now is it true that your dog is vicious, that he will come to bite a person if he gets that person’s scent?”

“Yes, it is true.” “Now see to it that you go ahead to the house to lock up the dog”, said he, that other man [Paul]. And when he arrived he broke the dog’s neck with a blow. The woman said, “The man is looking for his pot. He is looking for the pot where we left it behind at a place near the Khan.” [...]

So one of the two, that Dama — he is one who had long ago been a servant to a German, that one who had been taken from Karibib [Samuel], a well-drilled youngster [...].

So there appeared that child of a Dama woman, llHaihāb; appeared far over there on the buttress of the river. And the two lay in different places on that buttress. And Old Paul lay on this side where he might approach. And that other Dama [Samuel] lay on the other side. The two did not know yet on which side he would appear. He could come on the side of Old Paul, while he could also be on the side of the other Dama; that llHaihāb. And he approached there, came closer, and was just watched, and in the bend was shot as he was facing away.

So he was shot, in the intestines. He ran to attack, was briefly overcome by faintness, stood up and picked up a stone to throw at him. Apparently he did not remember that gun of his. — As was always said, a person who allowed llHaihāb to live will not live himself. That person must be hanged, it was said.

This one too got a bouncing heart, he who had shot. And the other man of those Whites [Samuel] hit the man away with a hat, gaped for air, and [llHaihāb] fell with a bullet. Fell with the second bullet. And a wrist was cut off and the men returned, taking along the woman, and the wrist to present down below. [...]

In a letter to the military command in Windhoek dated 23 November 1903, Müller von Berneck requested that the rewards should be paid out as promised. In addition to llHaihāb, thirteen members of the gang had been shot or captured. These included three men and a juvenile, the only one who knew the water place where llHaihāb was captured.

Fransina proceeded to narrate how some of these remaining camp-followers were captured:

And when they [who had ambushed llHaihāb] patrolled again all the Dama of the troop came. Those who were left under guard [at the base camp]. Those who were left under guard had their separate patrol. And they had found a lot of Dama, a settlement at a pot-hole. And apparently there was a single hillock ahead of the pothole. It looked big, with mountains on either side. And on that evening they had come to the dance. And they danced, danced and stood around and ate meat. So they were stalked, fettered and made to smoke the last tobacco.

JB: By whom were they fettered?

Fransina: The German. Apparently it was said: “You will not smoke again after this smoke”. And they lay, lay, lay there and at the beautiful time when the morning came, when the tips of the cattle horns showed, and one started seeing the others, they were chased up. So some old Dama woman that had

26. It is not clear how the captured Dama woman gets into this episode, as she had not been reported to have been sent along on this foot patrol.

27. There prevails a claim today that llHaihāb’s head was removed and taken by the Germans. This claim was also made by Fanie Dixon (junior, born 1902). His testimony has proved to be of varying reliability, however, as he belonged to a subsequent generation.
long been there was not satisfied, one among those Dama. She was fairly close
to those men. And when the shoes of the men that were lying scattered made
noises and the lieutenant was stalking about among the sentries, he was
touched and was told: “Your continuous walking is heard by the woman lying
here.” So that White stopped strutting about.

“Oh, what kind of hubbub is it, while I am becoming aware of something
ominous?” she said as she was lying. While she was so noisy they fled. They ran
as fast as they could. And “Stand you still! Don’t you run! Don’t you run!” it was
said while they ran ever faster; they were lHaihâb’s Dama. And they clambered
up that buttress. If they climbed up they only needed to do that descent into the
valleys. They climbed that steep buttress. And they were searched for by the
‘Kaister’s [emperor’s] lot’. They were the emperor’s dispatch. And the Dama
were searched for from there. And all the Dama fled down. Not a single one
stayed behind. Only one, no, two little Dama remained. Of those two one had
lost all fingers, only these two toes were left. And one had a fractured
backbone. After all that they only found those two little Dama. After those little
Dama had been made to lie down they were made to sit behind two other
Dama on horseback.

That is the story of lHaihâb. And from that place the men returned to Aukhâs,
and then they returned from Aukhâs. On the day that it was written on the rocks
they returned from Aukhâs. And they handed over those Dama to Karibib [to
the magistrate’s court]. And they returned to Khâxatsûs [Gibeon]. And those
who were returned took leave of each other on that same day with rations and
were thanked. The one who had shot [first, i.e. Paul] was repeatedly picked up
and put back on his feet, picked up and put back on his feet. Thus were those
two thanked. The other one who had shot after the first one [Samuel] was also
thanked and they all celebrated drinking. ‘Roms Ains’ was opened and
finished.28

In a discussion afterwards the last words of lHaihâb were cited: “Okha, omtsel! Di’re! Di
tama[se] go ko’ra+nnao!” – “How then, uncle! Ask! You all shoot without asking, don’t
you!”

The conjecture that he may have felt entitled to an opportunity to justify his way of life is
supported by his one other communication with representatives of the establishment
that is on record. On 3 April 1903 the Deutsch-Südwestafrikanische Zeitung had
reported that a Baster Michel, a government drover who had been sent out to hunt
down lHaihâb with the Hottentot Swartbooi (see above) and two other natives (a Nama
and a Dama, Christof and Jakob), was shot in the leg by lHaihâb while camping for the
night near the Spitzkopje. lHaihâb is reported to have shouted while running away that
he too was only a human being and that they should leave him alone.29

These admittedly scanty quotes of lHaihâb’s words raise the question of whether he was
not simply a common bandit with a following, but that his attacks should be seen rather

28 It is not clear what ‘roms ains’ is supposed to be. As, according to her, it was drunk (not eaten), it might
have been rum. On the other hand it might be a malapropism in the form of a mispronunciation of Afrikaans
‘roomys’ (ice-cream), which is unlikely to have been available in those years.

29 The wounded Michel and Swartbooi reached Swakopmund only after about a month on 25 March. The
gangrenous leg had to be amputated. Michel died nevertheless. Considerable official correspondence exists
concerning the compensation to be paid to Michel’s wife.
as a case of social banditry by resisting invasion. Investigation into his personal background has yielded only scanty information. According to unconfirmed information lHaihāb’s father, Abraham lGurus eb, had been a chief (gao-aob) in the vicinity of the Gamsberg (+Gans) further south, but for some unknown reason had had to leave that area for the area near lÄ-gommes (Okombahe) where his son later established himself with a following of marauders. If lHaihāb thus assumed (inherited) chief status for himself it is plausible that he was waging a kind of feud against any intruders, be they white or black; cf. the attack on the three Aawambo, people who were alien to that area at that time. lHaihāb was a member of the lGuruse family. This family name has survived up to the present time among his descendants.

The fact that lHaihāb must have enjoyed widespread admiration among the local (Damara) population is reflected in the still prevalent assertion that the Germans eventually built a monument in honour of lHaihāb in Swakopmund, depicting lHaihāb with his two dogs — a highly unlikely occurrence. No-one who made this claim could identify the monument or its position, even though at least one claimed to have seen it personally. It is possible that the marine monument, unveiled in July 1908 and displaying a wounded soldier guarded by a fellow soldier on a rock may have given rise to this legendary elevation of lHaihāb as a hero.

The main importance of the oral testimonies lies in the depiction of this anecdotal background, for the entire saga around lHaihāb pivoted on outwitting him at his own game.

The final success can be ascribed to the collaboration of the German soldiers with the selected indigenous troops. The colonial government had realised that they would not be able to capture the marauders on their own. On the other hand, the commanding officer of the task force, 2nd Lieutenant Müller von Berneck, who according to Leutwein “was capable of staying in the saddle for 24 hours, if needs be”, certainly did not follow von Burgsdorff’s advice to remain in Otjimbingwe and give Daniel Pitter a free hand. While acknowledging the Witboois’ practical skills, Müller von Berneck was rather critical of their general inclinations: “The Witboois are not interested in a quick settlement of the matter. When they are on their own they go hunting, light fires at night against all orders, etc.” (letter to the imperial command dated 12 August 1903).

In another report submitted to the imperial military command on 17 August 1903 he writes:

On the way back I met the sub-chief with his patrol in the Khan River. He had ridden from Keetemanoams [Ket’ma+ho+na-ams] to the Khan River and had followed our tracks. I can hardly expect that he will capture Kaffirs with this senseless riding. The entire patrol [was] in a bunch of twelve horses instead of searching the terrain in skirmish patrols. Such a big patrol must draw attention. [...] Hunting, riding and fire in the evening. — Getting up at night they do not seem to know. I had problems to get my men to look for the horses before sunrise in the very early morning. [...] The proof that the Witboois have until now not achieved anything without the command of a White has been furnished.
The prisoners taken up to now have been captured by patrols that were led by Whites.

In the interests of his Witbooi fighters, however, Müller von Berneck “most obediently” recommended to the authorities in Windhoek that the request made by Hendrik Witbooi that the agreed monthly wages should only be paid out to them after their return to Gibeon should not be heeded. Apart from considering the troopers’ need for immediate cash because of the deprivations endured, he suspected that Kaptein Witbooi personally intended to cash in on the remuneration at their expense. Witbooi’s decision to send twenty fighters instead of the requested twelve should probably also be seen in this light.

Scrutiny of detail in the accounts reveals the typical strengths and weaknesses of orally transmitted history: While the anecdotal and personal detail may provide valuable insight for the understanding of a situation, numerical detail in particular soon becomes unreliable. One instance was the enumeration of the members selected as offered by Fransina (cf. above: the commander with three Dama, three Baster, three Nama and three Germans). After the narrative by Fransina, Amon, the son of Paul, explained to us that the agreement was that the man who shoots Hailâb would receive £ 20.00 (sterling in a German colony!). Since two men actually were responsible for the shooting, they each received £ 10.00. As stated before, however, the actual agreement was 500 Reichsmark for Hailâb and 50 Reichsmark for any of his men, dead or alive. According to official correspondence, the agreed remuneration was meticulously paid out, although the names of the men who shared the reward for shooting Hailâb do not appear in the records. Payment was approved of 500M for Hailâb and 200M for four men captured or shot. The heirs of a Witbooi policeman, Gert Chlap, who must have died under circumstances not reported, received his quarter share for the capture of these men. Apart from the agreed compensation for wear and tear, the Witbooi troopers also received compensation, according to the predetermined assessment values of 350M and 300M, for the mares of one Wilhelm Isaak and one Damsib that had died of pneumonia and parasites respectively, as well as 25M each for two stillborn foals of one Jonas Joseph and one Paul Löwe (not to be confused with “Old Paul”). Payment to the German soldiers Spierke and Zimmermann was refused, however, as they had been carrying out their duties.

In principle, the oral evidence provided by the main informants should be categorised into two types, even though it was supplied each time in interviews with the same three family members. The account of the former trooper Otto is to be treated as a quasi-authentic account by a closely involved contemporary witness, even though he was not personally present at the final shooting and albeit perhaps slightly blurred by possible memory lapses over the years, while the account of his wife Fransina and comments by Paul’s son Amon are to be treated as accounts of oral history based on transmission – though optimally reliable, because of being immediate and because Fransina related the well-known events in the presence of her husband Otto, occasionally consulting him on detail.
These most rewarding interviews show that accounts of oral history should never be
discounted off-hand, but should be verified by independent evidence as far as possible.
Indeed, until recently oral testimonies have, in the African context, often been the sole
source for establishing the essential counterbalance to Eurocentric historiography. At
the very least they provide clues that can be followed up. If such testimonies are then
supported by documentary or independent evidence, they are more than just
corroborated; they can then be treated as pivotal sources to facilitate the understanding
of causalities and human interaction.

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