

# MEMORY OF THE WORLD REGISTER

## NOMINATION FORM

### The Hendrik Witbooi Papers



#### PART A -ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

##### 1. SUMMARY

###### SUMMARY

The National Archives of Namibia submits a set of letter copy books of the African traditional leader Hendrik Witbooi for inclusion in the Memory of the World Register.

Hendrik Witbooi (traditional name !Nanseb /Gabemab, born ca.1835; died 1905) is a key figure in Namibian history. He was born into a traditional leadership position among the /Khowesin, a Khoikhoi community in Namibia. Between 1884 and 1894, he resisted German advances at gaining colonial control over Namibia by attempting to forge a united front against the conclusion of "protection treaties"; was forced by military means to give in; rose against German rule during the war of anti-colonial resistance (1904-1908); and died in combat 1905.

Witbooi's fame is to a considerable extent due to the fact that he has left a written record in the form of letter copy books. This record has ever and again caught the attention of scholars, and therefore has been published in several versions. Witbooi's insights into the nature of colonialism, about the fundamental difference between conflict with African competitors and with European invaders, his attempts at formulating African legal concepts, and the visionary and poetic power of some of his texts are the qualities that set his letters apart and above the bulk of contemporary and earlier African texts of the same genre.

This set of manuscripts not only offers a unique first-hand view into the internal administration and external politics of a small African polity and its response to colonialism, but also demonstrates the awareness of an outstanding leader about issues of sovereignty. The texts include the probably first written formulation of the concept of Pan-Africanism: "This part of Africa is the realm of us Red chiefs. If danger threatens one of us which he feels he cannot meet on his own, then he can call on a brother or brothers among the Red chiefs, saying: Come, brothers, let us together oppose this danger which threatens to invade our Africa, for we are one in colour and custom, and this Africa is ours. For the fact that we various Red chiefs occupy our various realms and home grounds is but a lesser division of the one Africa" (Minutes dated 9.6.1892).

## **2. DETAILS OF THE NOMINATOR**

### **2.1. NAME (PERSON OR ORGANISATION)**

National Archives of Namibia

### **2.2 RELATIONSHIP TO THE DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE NOMINATED**

Owner

### **2.3 CONTACT PERSON**

Ellen Ndeshi Namhila and Werner Hillebrecht

Director: Library & Archives Service; Acting Chief Archivist

### **2.4 CONTACT DETAILS (INCLUDE ADDRESS, PHONE, FAX, EMAIL)**

Private Bag 13186  
Windhoek, Namibia  
Tel. +264-61-2933180  
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Email: enamhila@mec.gov.na

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Windhoek, Namibia  
Tel: +264-61-2935215  
Fax: +264-61-2935217  
whillebrecht@mec.gov.na

## **3. IDENTITY AND DESCRIPTION OF THE DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE**

### **3.1 NAME AND IDENTIFICATION DETAILS OF THE ITEMS BEING NOMINATED**

The Letter Journals of Hendrik Witbooi

### **3.2 DESCRIPTION**

The Letter Journals of Hendrik Witbooi are the official archives of an African leader in Namibia around the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. They consist of four (or possibly more) books, into which Witbooi, respectively his scribes, entered in-and outgoing diplomatic and administrative correspondence, treaties and proclamations.

Journal 1 (1884-1893) was captured by German colonial forces on 12 April 1893, when they attacked Witbooi's headquarters at Hoornkrans, together with some other papers which are apparently lost. It is held by the National Archives of Namibia since 1948.

It is a leather-bound volume of 366 numbered pages, measuring 32.5 x 21 cm, being an accounting book of pale blue-grey paper with blue lines and red columns. Pages 12-23, 101-103, 110-120, 128-291 are inscribed.

Journals 2 and 3 (1893-1901) were taken, together with some loose papers, by a German trader, August Wulff, from the abandoned house of a Witbooi official at Gibeon, when the Nama joined the war of anti-colonial resistance in October 1904. The entire set of papers was bought in 1934 by the "Überseemuseum" in Bremen, Germany. The Überseemuseum had them professionally restored at the Bremen State Archives, and restituted them to Namibia in 1996. They are now in the custody of the National Archives of Namibia.

They are now bound in half-linen, with 84 and 103 leaves respectively, measuring 33 x 21 cm. These were also accounting books of pale blue-grey paper with blue lines and red columns, and originally bound in soft cover. All pages are inscribed.

Journals 2 and 3 differ from Journal 1 insofar as they had previously been used as financial accounting books. Only at a later stage, empty spaces which had not been filled with accounts were used to copy correspondence. The accounts are in themselves an interesting source of historical socio-economic information, supplying the names of traders, debtors within and outside the Witbooi community, traded commodities, and prices.

Due to the long use as frequently consulted account books, they had also been in a much more dilapidated state than Journal 1 before restoration.

They are kept at the National Archives of Namibia as Accession No.650.

Accession No.650 also contains a number of loose papers in various sizes, some of them being letters directed to Hendrik Witbooi, the others related to other members of the Witbooi community.

Journal 4 (????-1904) is only known by conjecture. It was apparently captured by German colonial forces on 5 December 1904, when they attacked Witbooi's headquarters at Rietmond during the German-Nama War of 1904-1908. Contemporary literature mentions only the capture of loose papers, not of a letter-copy book. Its existence can however be inferred from fragments which surfaced in Germany in the 1990s and are now in private hands at Munich, Germany. It can be assumed that this journal had been dismembered and the fragments shared among soldiers as war memorabilia. The current custodian of the fragments has supplied a photocopy to the Sam Cohen Library in Swakopmund, Namibia.

It is possible that there have been more such journals, which must however be assumed destroyed.

#### **4. JUSTIFICATION FOR INCLUSION/ASSESSMENT AGAINST CRITERIA**

##### **4.1 AUTHENTICITY**

The authenticity of Journals 1, 2 and 3 is established beyond doubt.

The original of Journal 4 (Munich fragment) has not been inspected by archival experts, but inspection of the photocopies supports the assumption that these fragments are authentic. They are pages from an account book similar to Journal 1, with stamped page numbers.

#### **4.2 WORLD SIGNIFICANCE, UNIQUENESS AND IRREPLACEABILITY**

The Journals are a rare original written source on the politics, diplomacy, and philosophy of an African leader facing the advent of European colonialism. Written in Cape Dutch, the lingua franca of diplomatic correspondence in 19<sup>th</sup> century Namibia, they not only document African attitudes towards the encroaching colonial powers, but also insights into the nature of colonialism and into the differences of African and European legal concepts.

While Journals 2, 3 and 4 remained hidden to scientific discourse until the 1990s, the importance of Journal 1 was soon recognized after its capture. Already contemporary authors began to cite from the journal, or from original letters which had also been copied into the journal. A first source edition of Journal 1 in the original language was published in 1929 by the Van Riebeeck Society in Cape Town, while a manuscript German translation circulated since the 1930s and formed the basis of published German (Berlin 1982) and English (Boston 1984) translations. A new English translation was published in Namibia 1989, and an expanded edition of the latter, including some contents of Journals 2 and 3, was published in Namibia 1995.

The impact of Hendrik Witbooi as a leader of anti-colonial resistance transcends the boundaries of Namibian national history, and is of continental African significance and even beyond. Anecdotal contemporary evidence suggests that he was seen as an inspiration to anti-colonial sentiments as far as Japan [E:\witbooi\witbooi\\_cd.htm - \\_ftn19](E:\witbooi\witbooi_cd.htm - _ftn19), while he was possibly the first African leader to claim a Pan-African approach, and the United Nations concept of the basic equality of all states.

It is also significant that the Journals do not just contain correspondence but are a conscious effort at record-keeping. They document an awareness of the importance of written records among Africans at a time when the African contribution to world culture was negated or belittled by colonial racism.

#### **4.3 CRITERIA OF (A) TIME (B) PLACE (C) PEOPLE (D) SUBJECT AND THEME (E) FORM AND STYLE**

##### **(a) Time**

The time span covered by the journals is one of crucial importance for Namibia: from the beginnings of colonial encroachment, to the total take-over of control by colonialism. The process reflected in the journals is exemplary not only for Namibia, but for almost the entire sub-Saharan Africa. As an indigenous document not only describing but also reflecting this process, it is unique.

##### **(b) Place**

No specific criteria of place apply.

### **(c) People**

The social and cultural context reflects the conflict between African and European legal systems, in particular between different concepts of land ownership in the process of colonisation of a settler colony. In response to this conflict, it sets out manifestations of messianistic adaptations of Christian religion, the self-conscious claim of state sovereignty and equality against the European invaders, and possibly the earliest manifestation of Pan-Africanism.

### **(d) Subject and theme**

See above under (c)

### **(e) Form and style**

While most of the correspondence is quite matter-of-factly and businesslike, in its programmatic parts it often reaches a poetic and visionary quality which draws both on biblical language (from the Dutch Bible translation) and on African folklore. In linguistic terms, it is an important example of the Southern African adaptation of the Dutch language, not only as a lingua franca communication vehicle across widely divergent language groups, but also as an expressive and colourful language in its own right which was only later unilaterally usurped and codified as “Afrikaans” by the descendants of Dutch settlers in South Africa.

## **4.4 RARITY, INTEGRITY, THREAT AND MANAGEMENT**

### **Rarity:**

These are the only examples of letter-copy books of African leaders so far described in the literature.

### **Integrity:**

Journal 1 is fully intact. Journals 2 and 3 are missing some pages and sections of pages. Journal 4 had been dismembered, and the larger part is missing. Restoring the integrity of this journal through finding the missing parts could be a most welcome effect of the publicity surrounding a “Memory of the World” status.

### **Threat:**

Journals 1-3 are not under any imminent threat.

The Munich fragment of Journal 4, being in the hands of a private collector, is probably adequately cared for at the moment, but details have to be established. Its long-term custody has to be secured.

The missing parts of Journal 4, if they have survived at all, are most likely under imminent threat through ignorance of their identity and importance by the current owners.

### **Management:**

The National Archives of Namibia has developed a management plan for all Hendrik Witbooi documents in its possession. **See Annexure 1.**

## **5. LEGAL INFORMATION**

### **5.1. OWNER OF THE DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE (NAME AND CONTACT DETAILS)**

Journal 1, 2 and 3: Owner and custodian:

National Archives of Namibia

P/Bag 13250, Windhoek, Namibia

**Tel. +264-61-2935211**

Fax +264-61-2935217

Journal 4 (Munich fragment): Owner and custodian:

**Dr Klaus Goebel, Sonnenstr. 20, D-80331 München**

### **Journal 4 (other fragments):**

Owners/custodians of possible further fragments not known. Possibly in family custody of the descendants of unidentified German colonial soldiers.

### **5.2 CUSTODIAN OF THE DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE (NAME AND CONTACT DETAILS, IF DIFFERENT TO OWNER)**

**Same as owners**

### **5.3 LEGAL STATUS:**

#### **(a) Category of ownership:**

Journals 1, 2 and 3: Public ownership

Journal 4 (Munich fragment): Private ownership

Journal 4 (other fragments): Not known

#### **(b) Accessibility**

Journals 1, 2 and 3: Accessible to the public (under adequate security and preservation restrictions)

Journal 4 (Munich fragment): Accessibility currently not established

Journal 4 (other fragments): None

**(c) Copyright status**

Journals 1, 2 and 3: Public domain

Journal 4 (Munich fragment): Currently not established

**(d) Responsible administration**

Journals 1, 2 and 3: Kept in a climatized building, and within a fireproof safe vault for security. The building is fire-protected by a sprinkler system. Viewing of the original is only permitted if reasonable scientific interest can be motivated, otherwise users are referred to an existing photocopy and the published versions.

Journal 4 (Munich fragment): Currently no details established

**(e) Other factors**

None

**6. MANAGEMENT PLAN**

**6.1 IS THERE A MANAGEMENT PLAN IN EXISTENCE FOR THIS DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE?**

Yes. See Annexure 1.

**7. CONSULTATION**

**7.1 DETAILS OF CONSULTATION**

(a)(b) The owner and custodian of Journals 1, 2 and 3 is the nominator.

The owner and custodian of Journal 4 (Munich fragment) has not yet been consulted.

(c) A national committee is not yet in existence.

The regional committee has not yet been consulted.

**PART B -SUBSIDIARY INFORMATION**

**8. ASSESSMENT OF RISK**

**8.1** Journals 1, 2 and 3: There is no particular threat to these journals. The storage conditions are suitable; they are kept by a long-established state institution in a politically stable nation.

Journal 4 (Munich fragment): The fragment is in private hands and might get lost to public knowledge if the owner or his inheritors decide to sell it to unknown private hands.

Journal 4, other fragments: If these fragments still exist at all, they are under high risk of being destroyed by their present owners or their inheritors, who might not know about their identity and significance.

## **9. ASSESSMENT OF PRESERVATION**

**9.1** Journal 1: The material is in reasonable preservation condition, with no text loss. The original binding is dilapidated, the book block broken and some pages loose, possibly through previous photocopying. The paper is of good quality with no imminent danger of disintegration.

Journals 2 and 3: The material is in reasonable preservation condition. Several pages or parts of pages are missing. This seems to be related to the original level of use as an accounting book, and does not affect the later entered copies of correspondence. The re-binding has been done professionally at the Bremen State Archives, and included replacing missing paper with suitable material. It is currently not known whether the paper was de-acidified before re-binding.

The loose papers with Journals 2 and 3 have been placed in acid-free folder. The entire set has been microfilmed.

Journal 4 (Munich fragment): Not known

## **PART C - LODGEMENT**

This nomination is lodged by:

Ellen Namhila

11 June 2004

Director: Namibia Library and Archives Service



## **Annexures:**

1. Management plan

2. Images

3. Publication: The Hendrik Witbooi Papers (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Windhoek 1995)

## Annexure 1

### The Witbooi Documents

#### Accessions A.2 and A.650 and scattered individual letters

### Management Plan

#### 1. Principle

The Witbooi Documents are a national treasure which should be treated with utmost care, but also popularised for public education. Access to adequate facsimile copies should be enabled and encouraged.

A number of Witbooi autographs are scattered in several accessions and in German administrative files. These are acutely endangered by collectors – two letters were reported missing in 1982. All Witbooi autographs should be removed to the safe for added security.

#### 2. Storage

Action	Remarks	Implementation
The originals of A.2 and A.650 are to be stored in the Safe	Safe key with Head of Archives	Done
Other Witbooi documents are to be identified and listed		Done
Other Witbooi documents are to be extracted from current location and stored in the Safe	See list for details	In progress

#### 3. User access

Action	Remarks	Implementation
Instruct staff to issue original Witboois documents to readers only with special permission by Head of Archives, and use only under direct supervision	Permission only granted if scientific interest is proven, and cannot be served with access to existing copies	Done
Prepare suitable user copies of all documents	Ultimately, all documents should be accessible in electronic format	Photocopy of A.2 available. Microfilm copy of A.650 available. Electronic scans of other documents partly done.

#### 4. Copying

Action	Remarks	Implementation
Instruct staff that under no circumstances photocopying of the originals is allowed	Users to be supplied with copies from existing copies	Done

#### 5. Preservation

Action	Remarks	Implementation
Prepare high resolution colour scan of all documents:		
a) of all bound documents with overhead scanner	Overhead scanner not yet available	-
b) of all loose documents with flatbed scanner		In progress

#### 6. Conservation

Action	Remarks	Implementation
Determine acidity of paper	No expertise locally. Solicit foreign assistance	-
Deacidification of paper where necessary	No expertise locally. Solicit foreign assistance	-
Restore binding of Journal 1	No expertise locally. Solicit foreign assistance	-
Store all loose documents in folders of acid-free paper	Current no paper supply. Urgent order!	Partly done

## 7. Facsimile

Action	Remarks	Implementation
Prepare facsimiles (colour print from the scans) for exhibition to the public	Only feasible after preparation of scans	-
One copy for National Archives		-
One copy for the direct descendents of Witbooi (Gibeon community – local museum)	Community has repeatedly expressed interest. Local museum in planning stage	-

## 8. Transcription and translation

Action	Remarks	Implementation
Prepare a complete accurate transcription of the Witbooi texts in NAN		In progress
Issue a printed source edition of original texts		-
Secure and transcribe copies of Witbooi texts held by other institutions	List available	In progress
Translate all texts into English	Published translation of the majority of texts available	Translation of further texts in progress

## 9. Web accessibility

Action	Remarks	Implementation
Develop a website with (a) images of the originals, (b) transcription, (c) English translation, (d) commentary	National Archives website currently not operational	-

## 10. Popularisation

Action	Remarks	Implementation
Design and print popular booklet on Hendrik Witbooi with extensive citations, illustrations and facsimile excerpts of the documents		-

[E:\witbooi\witbooi\\_cd.htm - \\_ftnref1](#) He is one of the nine “national heroes” honoured with a symbolic gravesite in Namibia’s “Heroes Acre” in Windhoek. The actual gravesite near Vaalgras is unmarked at an unidentified location.

[E:\witbooi\witbooi\\_cd.htm - \\_ftnref2](#) See image on the cover

[E:\witbooi\witbooi\\_cd.htm - \\_ftnref3](#) Die dagboek van Hendrik Witbooi, Kaptein van die Witbooi-Hottentotte, 1884-1905 : bewerk na die oorspronklike dokumente in die Regeringsargief, Windhoek. Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society, 1929.

[E:\witbooi\witbooi\\_cd.htm - \\_ftnref4](#) Das Tagebuch des Hottentottenkapitäns Hendrik Witbooi in Deutsch-Südwestafrika aus den Jahren 1884-1894. Undated typescript. The original is kept by the Bundesarchiv, Koblenz, Germany.

[E:\witbooi\witbooi\\_cd.htm - \\_ftnref5](#) Das Tagebuch Hendrik Witboois, Fuehrers der Witbooi-Hottentotten von 1884-1905. Undated typescript. The original is kept by the Sam Cohen Library, Swakopmund, Namibia.

[E:\witbooi\witbooi\\_cd.htm - \\_ftnref6](#) Afrika den Afrikanern! Aufzeichnungen eines Nama-Häuptlings aus der Zeit der deutschen Eroberung Südwestafrikas 1884-1894. Berlin: Dietz, 1982. See image

[E:\witbooi\witbooi\\_cd.htm - \\_ftnref7](#) Freedom for Namibia. Lagos: Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization, 1982.

[E:\witbooi\witbooi\\_cd.htm - \\_ftnref8](#) Nama/Namibia: diary and letters of Nama chief Hendrik Witbooi, 1884-1894. Boston: Boston University, African Studies Center, 1984.

[E:\witbooi\witbooi\\_cd.htm - \\_ftnref9](#) The Hendrik Witbooi Papers. Windhoek: National Archives of Namibia, 1989.

[E:\witbooi\witbooi\\_cd.htm - \\_ftnref10](#) The Hendrik Witbooi Papers. Second revised edition. Windhoek: National Archives of Namibia, 1995. See Annexure 3

[E:\witbooi\witbooi\\_cd.htm - \\_ftnref11](#) National Archives of Namibia, Accession No.3

[E:\witbooi\witbooi\\_cd.htm - \\_ftnref12](#) dated 27 June 1892; The Hendrik Witbooi Papers, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., letter no.70

[E:\witbooi\witbooi\\_cd.htm - \\_ftnref13](#) The Hendrik Witbooi Papers, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., letter no.34

[E:\witbooi\witbooi\\_cd.htm - \\_ftnref14](#) The Hendrik Witbooi Papers, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., letter no.68

[E:\witbooi\witbooi\\_cd.htm - \\_ftnref15](#) The Hendrik Witbooi Papers, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., letter no.195

[E:\witbooi\witbooi\\_cd.htm - \\_ftnref16](#) The Hendrik Witbooi Papers, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., letter no.197

[E:\witbooi\witbooi\\_cd.htm - \\_ftnref17](#) Rossouw, N.J.: Die taal van Hndrik Witbooi as proewe van Hottentot-Hollands. Stellenbosch, 1939; Van der Zwan, D.: Die taalgebruik in die

dagboek van Hendrik Witbooi. Pretoria, 1986; Stals, E.L.P.: So het Afrikaans na Namibie gekom. Windhoek: Gamsberg, 2001

[E:\witbooi\witbooi\\_cd.htm - \\_ftnref18](#)cf. Dedering, T.: Hendrik Witbooi, the prophet.In: Kleio, vol.25 (1993), pp.54-78

[E:\witbooi\witbooi\\_cd.htm - \\_ftnref19](#)see Bayer, M.: Mit dem Hauptquartier in Südwestafrika. Berlin: Mittler, 1908, p.270. Here it is related how the German military intercepted a letter from Japan which urged Witbooi to carry on the fight. (Japan at the time was waging war against Russia)