

## Chronology of the Klip River Affair of 1847<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** The aim of the present article is the reconstruction of the chronology of the Klip River Affair of 1847. Reading primary sources and literature for the Natal history in the 1840s I realized that the chronology of the Klip River Affair is incomplete and incorrect, and that this affects the analyses of this affair and the whole situation of Natal Colony at that time. Therefore the decision to reconstruct the chronology of this affair as much as possible and put it straight, in hope that it will be helpful for further studies of KwaZulu-Natal history during 1840s and 1850s.

**Keywords:** African studies; colonial studies; 19th century; South Africa; KwaZulu-Natal; Oorlam communities; Korana; ethnic composition and identity; cultural influences

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Late in May of 1847 British authorities of the Natal Colony received first, vague reports that a group of Boers living between the Klip (Mnambithi) and Thukela Rivers renounced the allegiance to the British Crown. They learned that those

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<sup>1</sup> This text is a part of wider project concerning Klip River Affair, and the history of Zululand-Natal during the 1830s and 1840s.

Boers reached an agreement with M'Pande, the king of the Zulus in which he ceded to them the territories between Thukela and Buffalo (Mzinyathi) Rivers and the Drakensberge Mountains (Statement of James Archbell, 10<sup>th</sup> July 1847; Behn 1932: 10). This was a beginning of an interesting episode in the Natal-Zululand and South African history, the so called Klip River Insurrection which lasted nearly until the end of 1847, when the British finally established their control over abovementioned territory, and most of the Boers emigrated from there.

The whole affair lasted several months and involved a limited number of Voortrekkers. Looking from just a chronological perspective and the sheer numbers of involved people, it was a marginal incident. Despite that it was an important episode in not only the British-Voortrekker relations in Natal (Cory 1930, V; Behn 1932; Van Zyl 1955), but also in the relations in the Zulu-Boer-British triangle during the second part of 1840s. It was an example of fluidity of those relations in which the alliances were not given for ever.

But in the case of this episode the first problem one comes across is the very chronology. Looking through those few works concerning the Klip River affair or a few others where this incident was described or just mentioned, one realizes that its chronology is, at best, very vague. Most of the dates, up to June or even July of 1847, are uncertain and debatable. It is difficult to find out when the whole affair started, or when the consecutive missions of the Boers to M'Pande took place.

Although there are quite an extensive collection of primary sources (archival or published) for an early history of the Natal Colony, there are also quite a few gaps. The British administration was eventually settled in Natal only in December 1845, but the first confirmed news of the situation in the Klip River area appeared in April-June 1847 (D. Moodie to J. Montague, 28<sup>th</sup> April 1847; P. Ferreira to D. Moodie, 21<sup>st</sup> May 1847; M. West to H. Pottinger, 4<sup>th</sup> June 1847). Only then did the British take more interest in the affairs of that region and started to record in detail the events connected to the whole situation. In effect we learn of the earlier events mostly from the ex-post sources, from the perspective of at least several months. It is then quite understandable that participants did not remember exactly when the particular events took place. What's more, witnesses were interested in making up testimonies to explain their actions and to prove the validity of their claims. Therefore reconstruction of the exact dates of the events taking place in the Klip River area before 1847 is rather difficult. But the first thing is to find out which events prior to 1847 were really connected with the Klip River affair and how far back one should go.

The statements and testimonies of the persons connected with this affair usually start as far back as spring 1843, when Andries Spies settled in the

Biggarsberge. In April he was supposedly attacked by a Zulu detachment sent by M'Pande (Minutes of an Inquiry, 26<sup>th</sup>–27<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1847). This testimony was supported by other statements (Jato alias J. Kok and Seyogella statement, 1<sup>st</sup> Oct. 1847, 42/980: 193-194). Therefore we may accept this as a fact. The question remains if this incident had anything to do with the developments in 1847?

Quite surely this testimony was given as a proof that the situation which led to the Klip River affair of 1847 had a long history. Andries Spies built a direct connection between the incident in April 1843 and the crisis of 1847. But it should be remembered, that the former incident took place during the interim period, after the formal submission of the Natalia Republic in July 1842 and before the final regulation of the relations between the republic and the British. Their control was then limited to just Port Natal (contemporary Durban). The representatives of the Volksraad of the Republic accepted Sir George T. Napier's proclamation of 12<sup>th</sup> May 1843 only in August 1843, nearly four months after the described incident. Therefore the incident of April 1843 had nothing to do, at least directly, with the Klip River affair of 1847. It was evidently an ex-post argumentation, and we may assume that in 1843 M'Pande wanted to use the unstable situation in Natal to strengthen his position in relation to both the Boers and British during the takeover of Natal.<sup>2</sup>

The Henry Cloete treaty with M'Pande (Bird 1888, II: 299-300) also was sometimes presented as a source of the Klip River crisis of 1847. Both M'Pande and the Klip River Boers pointed ex-post to this treaty as a source of the misunderstanding. Different interpretations of this treaty supposedly led to the crisis (Report of the Chief Yenge, 9<sup>th</sup> July 1847; W. Harding Report, 13<sup>th</sup> Oct. 1847; A. T. Spies to H.G.W. Smith, 11<sup>th</sup> March 1848; Cory 1930, V: 80-95; Behn 1932: 17-18). To some degree it was true, but was it a starting point of the events which led to the crisis? That much is in doubt.

The problem is that since October 1843 up to the beginning of 1846 we do not have any suggestions that there were any conflicts between M'Pande and the British authorities concerning the borders or that the Klip River Boers showed any inclination to emancipate. In fact all we know is that there were some Boers settled there (H. Cloete to J. Montague, 25<sup>th</sup> July 1843; H. Cloete to J. Montague, 14<sup>th</sup> March 1844). There is very little information about the situation in this region, and nothing, up to the beginning of 1846, indicates that M'Pande or the local Boers contested the boundary line set by the Cloete treaty.

George Cory and M.M. Behn suggested that already in 1845 M'Pande warned the Klip River Boers of his plans to settle in this area (Cory 1930, V: 80; Behn 1932: 9). The

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<sup>2</sup> In fact it was rather connected with the decision of M'Pande, during the fall of 1842, to expel all whites, including missionaries, from the territories to the north of Thukela River (Grout 1864: 211-212; Kennedy 1976: 53).

primary sources present a different story. According to the statement of Andries Spies, he heard that "Panda intended himself to move over on this side of Buffalo River with his cattle" only after the arrival of the Lieutenant-Governor Martin West (A.T. Spies Statement, 27<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1847, 42/980: 191). Furthermore William Harding in his report of October 1847 stated:

This brings me to an important part of the case, and then if the statement of Mr. Spies himself to be believed, Panda after the treaty with Mr. Cloete – after the proclamation of August 1845, and after the arrival of the Lieutenant-Governor at Natal in December 1845, threatened to move across Umsinyatu, and to reside within it. (W. Harding Report, 13<sup>th</sup> Oct. 1847)

So if we are to believe those accounts, we may assume that M'Pande planned to settle his subjects west of Mzinyathi (Buffalo) River <sup>3</sup> after the arrival of the Lt.-Governor who came to the Natal Colony (Durban) only on 4<sup>th</sup> December and to Pietermaritzburg on 12<sup>th</sup> December 1845 (M. West to P. Maitland, 8<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1845; M. West to P. Maitland, 15<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1845; van Zyl 1955: 125; Brookes, Webb 1987: 53). Therefore we may be certain that both G. Cory and M.M. Behn were mistaken in their statements.

Such communiqué could not be sent earlier than in the beginning of 1846. The question remains when exactly during 1846 M'Pande could inform the Boers of his intention to take over the Klip River area? It is impossible to point to the exact date, but one may try to narrow down the time span.

M'Pande was well aware that his claims to the territory between the Thukela (Tugela) and Mzinyathi Rivers would irritate the British. And he had no reason to do that. It is true that M'Pande objected to the number of white hunters entering Zululand and pressed for the return of Mawa's cattle (Kennedy 1976: 56). But it seems it was a kind of diplomatic game, a test of British intentions towards him, especially when we remember that at the same time king of the Zulus applied to the British authorities in Natal for the acceptance and aid in his planned war against Mswati (M'Panda's Message, 7<sup>th</sup> Feb. 1846, 42/980: 44-45; M'Panda to M. West, 11<sup>th</sup> Feb. 1846). Despite the initial negative reaction of the British, M'Pande was persistent. He was sending successive messages asking Lt.-Governor West for support in his war plans against the AmaSwazi. He even was ready to renounce some of his claims concerning refugees and cattle taken by them from Zululand in exchange for the support (M'Panda to M. West, 6<sup>th</sup> April 1846; Bonner 1983: 53-56). When we see his persistency, it is difficult to accept that at the same time he wanted to irritate the British. As late as August 1846 he

<sup>3</sup> I do not discuss here if he had such plans at all. Beside the statements by Boers and British officials we do not have any proof of such plans. The Klip River area was rather marginal for the Zulu state, therefore we may be quite sure M'Pande did not plan to move his capital kraal there. But he could plan to take more direct control of this territory.

played the role of unjustly treated by the British (M'Panda Message to M. West, 6<sup>th</sup> Aug. 1846).

The summer of 1846 was the earliest possible time he could undertake a more aggressive policy. Seeing the British unwillingness to cooperate in stopping the emigration from Zululand or to return the stolen cattle, and to support him against the AmaSwazi (D. Moodie to M'Panda, 11<sup>th</sup> Feb. 1846; M. West to P. Maitland, 24<sup>th</sup> Feb. 1846, 42/980: 42-43; M. West to M'Panda, 6<sup>th</sup> Aug. 1846, *Le Cordeur* 1960: 103-104), he could decide that he needed to take over the Klip River area to create a buffer zone, which would enable him to limit the emigration from Zululand. Evidently since June or July 1846 the British officials were observing the Zulu actions with more and more apprehension (D. Moodie to J. Montagu, 20<sup>th</sup> July 1846; D. Moodie to H. Hudson, 20<sup>th</sup> July 1846). What's more we know that during those months he was contacted by Johannes H. de Lange and possibly also other Boers (Dabankulu Statement, 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1847, 42/980: 145), and we might see the first examples of cooperation between at least some of Klip River Boers and the Zulus.

So June 1846 was probably the earliest possible date of M'Pande's decision to assert his control over the Klip River area. But it is safer to assume that it happened after the Lt.-Governor and D. Moodie's final answers concerning cooperation against the AmaSwazi reached M'Pande's kraal. Those answers were dated on 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Aug. 1846 (M. West to M'Panda, 6<sup>th</sup> Aug. 1846, *Le Cordeur* 1960: 103-104; D. Moodie to M'Pande, 7<sup>th</sup> Aug. 1846), and we know that it was at least a nine days' journey from Pietermaritzburg to M'Pande's capital kraal (Statement of Gebula, Gambushe, Umtshelwa, Pengo and Mazabukwana, messengers from Panda, 8<sup>th</sup> June 1847; Report of the Chief Yenge, 9<sup>th</sup> July 1847). Therefore M'Pande probably did not receive those answers earlier than on Aug. 16<sup>th</sup>. Therefore the end of August 1846 was the earliest feasible moment for the Zulu king to decide to press the issue of his southern and south-western frontiers. This speculation is supported by the fact that during the autumn of 1846 the British administration observed a rapid deterioration of the relations with the Zulus. During October 1846 M'Pande raided the AmaSwazi and other groups to the north and north-west such as Langalibalele's AmaHlubi (P. Maitland to Grey, 7<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1846, 42/980: 99-100; M. West to P. Maitland 11<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1846; Kennedy 1976: 58; Wright and Manson 1983: 33). In the December 1846 and March 1847 there were some warnings that Zulus were preparing to attack territories south of Tugela. Those reports could be exaggerated, as they were sent by African chiefs willing to antagonise the British toward the Zulus (Passell's Report, 9<sup>th</sup> March 1847, 42/980: 136-137), but still they show how much the Zulu-British relations were strained. In such a situation it was more possible for the Zulus to intervene beyond the Mzinyathi River.

We may narrow this time span even further. The primary sources suggest that the first mission of Andries Spies and his companions to M'Pande took place in February 1847 (D. Moodie to J. Monatgu, 28<sup>th</sup> April 1847; A.H. Potgieter to M'Panda, 16<sup>th</sup> Jan. 1847, 42/980: 143-144 <sup>4</sup>). Taking into account the statements that the first Klip River Boers mission went to M'Pande after the news of the Zulu plans reached them (Statement of James Archbell, 10<sup>th</sup> July 1847), this news must surely have reached them at the very beginning of February at the latest, probably sometime earlier. Furthermore W. Harding mentioned that "on four different occasions previous to January 1847 it became necessary for the Boers in the night time to move their families into central spot for mutual safety, in consequence of the rumoured inroads into the country by Panda's army" (W. Harding Report, 13<sup>th</sup> Oct. 1847), we may therefore assume that the rumours of M'Pande's plans to settle his subjects or rather to assert his control over the Klip River area reached the Boers before January 1847, probably in December 1846.

As it was already mentioned, the Boer delegation which included: A.T. Spies, Lodewyk de Jager, Gert and Isaac Niekerk and Stuurman, the native interpreter, visited M'Pande for the first time in February 1847 (A.T. Spies Statement, 27<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1847, 42/980: 191; Stuurman Statement, 27<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1847, 42/980: 192). They did not sign any formal treaty then, they just reached a verbal understanding that M'Pande will tolerate Boer settlement between the Mzinyathi and Thukela Rivers, but they could not agree on the exact borderline. When the Boers wanted the whole area between those rivers, M'Pande proposed Biggarsberge as borderline (W. Harding Report, 13<sup>th</sup> Oct. 1847). M'Pande finally promised to send his indunas to check the situation and finally settle the question of the boundary (A.T. Spies Statement, 27<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1847, 42/980: 191-192; Behn 1932: 31).

Again we do not have the exact date of their arrival. According to the sources they did not arrive at an appointed time, but as Johannes de Lange stated, "Seven of Panda's captains came to my place in the absence of Mr. Spies, and stated that they came by order of Panda to fix the boundary line as promised to the first commission" (A.T. Spies Statement, 27<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1847 and the J.H. de Lange Statement, 27<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1847, 42/980: 192). But we do not have any exact date. We know for sure that at that time Spies was in Pietermaritzburg. On 21 April he sent the letter of A.H. Potgieter to the editor of the newspaper *Patriot* to be published there (A.T. Spies to the Editor of the *Patriot*, 21<sup>st</sup> April 1847; Jansen 1938: 116; van Zyl 1955: 155). But when did he arrive there and when did he leave the Klip River area?

<sup>4</sup> The Zulu king could not get it earlier than at the very end of January. The notice suggests that Spies arrived to M'Pande's after the Zulu king got Potgieter's letter (A.T. Spies to the Editor of the *Patriot*, 21<sup>st</sup> April 1847).

Knowing that on April 21<sup>st</sup> he sent the letter to the editor of the *Patriot*, we may assume that this day was the last day when he could reach Pietermaritzburg. But it is safer to assume that he arrived at least a day earlier, so probably on or before April 20<sup>th</sup>. The distance from his farm to the capital of Natal was c. 144 miles or 24 hours of uninterrupted horse travel (The W. Harding Report, 13<sup>th</sup> Oct. 1847). It means that at best it would be a five days' journey, but probably he needed seven or eight days.<sup>5</sup> If he travelled by an ox-wagon, it would take even longer, as "The strength of the draught oxen here is easily exhausted" (Lichtenstein 1812, I: 14-15; van der Merwe 1995: 156-157). What is more, nothing shows that he was in a hurry, therefore his trip took probably ten days, so he left his farm no later than on April 10<sup>th</sup>. But we may be quite sure that it was several days earlier.

According to another information about M'Pande indunas' mission (Dabankulu Statement, 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1847, 42/980: 145), the Zulu envoys came there in the beginning of April 1847.<sup>6</sup> When exactly we do not know. But we may be quite sure about his estimate, as the visit of the indunas was connected with an incident in which Ndabankulu was forced to give away some of his cattle. Therefore we may assume he remembered it rather well. What's more, there are two accounts of this affair, one by Ndabankulu, the other one by J.H. de Lange (J.H. de Lange Statement, 27<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1847, 42/980: 192). According to those accounts the sequence of events looked like that: first came the Zulu chiefs, after that J.H. de Lange gathered the Boers on his farm. This took at least a day and probably more, two or even three days. Then for three days both sides negotiated the terms of the treaty. Only after that they sent messengers to Ndabankulu. So if his statement that the incident happened at the very beginning of April (probably during the first seven or ten days of that month) is correct, then we may assume that the Zulu indunas arrived at the very beginning of April at the latest, no later than April 5<sup>th</sup>. We may also estimate how long they stayed there. The negotiations took five to six days, then the incident with Nadabankulu lasted for two days, and the Zulus left before they got all the cattle from Ndabankulu (Dabankulu Statement, 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1847, 42/980: 145; J.H. de Lange Statement, 27<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1847, 42/980: 192). So we may assume that the Zulu indunas stayed in the Klip River area for seven or eight days.

As we know Andries Spies was then away. He supposedly left for Pietermaritzburg some time before their arrival, therefore probably at the very end of March 1847 or during the first two or three days of April. So taking this into account and also a probability that he could have lost some time fording Thukela

<sup>5</sup> Roger Pocock argues that according to his own experience the most effective horse pace on the long run was 21 miles a day. (Pocock 1917: 202-203).

<sup>6</sup> He made his statement to John Shepstone on June 2<sup>nd</sup> and declared that the incident had happened nearly two months earlier. (Dabankulu Statement, 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1847, 42/980: 145).

and other rivers on his way, A.T. Spies probably reached Pietermaritzburg sometime between April 10<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>.

During the negotiations, which took place at the beginning of April 1847, the Zulu envoys accepted, in the name of M'Pande, the Mzinyathi River as the boundary of the Klip River settlement (J.H. de Lange Statement, 27<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1847, 42/980: 145; Stuurman Statement, 27<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1847, 42/980: 193; Behn 1932: 9-10). The dating of those negotiations is important in the light of Donald Moodie's message of 28 April to John Montague. There is no mention there of any such understanding between the Klip River Boers and the Zulus. Moodie was evidently apprehensive about the actions undertaken by the Andries-Ohirgstadt Boers, and interested in M'Pande claims to the Klip River region, but nowhere in this letter there was any suggestion of the Klip River Boers' disloyalty (D. Moodie to J. Montague, 28<sup>th</sup> April 1847). We know that he spoke about it with A.T. Spies when he was in Pietermaritzburg, but he "did not appear to attach any importance to the circumstance" (D. Moodie to J. Montague, 28<sup>th</sup> April 1847). Quite probably Spies was not aware of the de Lange understanding with the Zulu indunas, as it was reached when he was already in Pietermaritzburg or on his way there, but at the same time it also shows that he was misleading the British representatives, as we know that he already was in communication with M'Pande at least since February 1847. Still this was yet unknown to the British. As late as 18<sup>th</sup> May 1847 D. Moodie inquired A.T. Spies about the M'Pande claims to the Klip River area and asked for advice on who should be nominated as the Field Cornet there (D. Moodie to A.T. Spies, 18<sup>th</sup> May 1847). This shows that the British administration was still not aware of the situation in the Klip River area. One does not ask such a question of somebody deemed disloyal. Therefore we may assume that nothing more than rumours about M'Pande's claims was known to the British at that moment. And they still considered the Klip River Boers as loyal, if somewhat misguided, subjects.

In the meantime the second and final delegation of the Klip River Boers (A.T. Spies, J.H. de Lange and Pieter Lafras Uys) went to M'Pande to sign a treaty. But when exactly did this mission take place? Pieter L. Uys stated that: "I rode with Spies and De Lange to Panda, I think at the end of April or beginning of May last" (P.L. Uys Statement, 27<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1847). So was it still April or rather May 1847?

Probably during his stay in Pietermaritzburg A.T. Spies got information from de Lange about the outcome of the negotiations. But we cannot be sure when exactly he learned that. We know for sure that on 21<sup>st</sup> April 1847 he was still in Pietermaritzburg, but on May 7<sup>th</sup> he already presented himself to Marthinus J. Potgieter, claiming the 'Rhenoster Fontein' farm in the region as a representative of M'Pande in this territory (P. Ferreira to D. Moodie, 21<sup>st</sup> May 1847). Even if he

departed on April 21<sup>st</sup>, he could not have arrived at his farm earlier than on April 26<sup>th</sup>, and probably he arrived there a day or two later. On the other hand, he could not have departed much later, otherwise he could not present himself on May 7<sup>th</sup> as M'Pande representative. So he probably left Pietermaritzburg no later than April 23<sup>rd</sup>. So he was back at home somewhere between April 26<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>. He was rather in a hurry to complete the final treaty with M'Pande. But again, if he departed for Zululand immediately, he rather did not reach M'Pande's kraal earlier than on April 30<sup>th</sup>, again with one or two days' margin. Therefore we may be quite sure that the treaty, which was ante dated to 7<sup>th</sup> January, was in fact signed at the very beginning of May 1847. Taking into account the incident with M.J. Potgieter mentioned above, we may be quite sure that the signing took place sometime between 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> May 1847.

Knowledge that the final treaty between the Klip River Boers and M'Pande was signed at the beginning of May, explains why the British authorities learned about the Boer secession only late in May and took the first actions in June 1847. Then one realizes how quickly the British decided to react and therefore, how important for them this matter was.

We know that the first news reached the British officials c. May 26<sup>th</sup>, as the P. Ferreira letter, in which he describes the incident between M.J. Potgieter and A.T. Spies, was dated May 21<sup>st</sup>, but it needed at least five days to reach its destination. There might be some earlier rumours concerning the co-operation of the Klip River Boers and the Zulus, but nothing conclusive. Those were for the first time confirmed on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1847 (P. Ferreira to D. Moodie, 21<sup>st</sup> May 1847; J. Melville to A.T. Spies, 18<sup>th</sup> May 1847, 42/980: 146; Dabankulu Statement, 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1847, 42/980: 145). In fact only on 8<sup>th</sup> June 1847 did the British authorities in Pietermaritzburg finally get the confirmation that "Panda proposed occupying the territory between Buffalo and Tugela Rivers" (Statements of Zatshuke and Nonzwenzwe, 4<sup>th</sup> June 1847; M. West to H. Pottinger, 28<sup>th</sup> June 1847).

Therefore only in the beginning of June 1847 the British administration could take some action in reaction to the situation in the Klip River area. Lt.-Governor M. West informed Sir Henry Pottinger as soon as on June 4<sup>th</sup> that he decided to undertake some action to show the determination of the British authorities in Natal, although he was not yet ready to use military force (M. West to H. Pottinger, 4<sup>th</sup> June 1847; van Zyl 1955: 157).<sup>7</sup>

During the meeting of the Natal Executive Council on June 10<sup>th</sup> the question of relations with M'Pande and the situation over the Thukela River was the main

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<sup>7</sup> He knew that the British forces in Natal were too small to undertake an effective offensive against the Zulus, let alone the Zulus and Boers combined (E.F. Boys Opinion on the Military Situation in Natal, 16<sup>th</sup> July 1847).

topic of the discussions. The first reaction of the British authorities in Natal was rather cautious. They preferred to collect more data about the situation and only then to act accordingly. This was visible in the Martin West messages to M'Pande which were rather cautious and testing the attitude of the Zulu king. The Lt.-Governor casually and cautiously enquired about the nature of his communications with the Klip River Boers (M. West to M'Panda, 10<sup>th</sup> June 1847, *Le Cordeur* 1960: 121; Message to Panda by Yenge, 10<sup>th</sup> June 1847, *Le Cordeur* 1960: 121-122).

On 21<sup>st</sup> June 1847 D. Moodie received an letter from A.T. Spies, in which he declined to circulate the Lt.-Governor's proclamation (A.T. Spies to D. Moodie, 15<sup>th</sup> June 1847, 42/980: 156). This was the final proof that A.T Spies and at least some of the Klip River Boers rejected British sovereignty. Therefore M. West decided to sent to the Klip River James Archbell "to circulate the proclamations, and to report upon the feelings of the inhabitants of that quarter" (M. West to H. Pottinger, 28<sup>th</sup> June 1847).

How soon had he despatched him? Narration of M. West's letter to H. Pottinger suggests that Archbell departed between June 21<sup>st</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> (M. West to H. Pottinger, 28<sup>th</sup> June 1847). Taking into account that he arrived in the Klip River area on June 28<sup>th</sup> (Statement of James Archbell, 15<sup>th</sup> July 1847) and that he needed at least five days for travel, he probably departed on June 22<sup>nd</sup> or at the latest June 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Until July 1847 authorities of the Natal Colony had no exact information concerning the situation in the Klip River area. Only in the beginning of July did arrive more detailed reports concerning the situation beyond the Thukela River. First on July 9<sup>th</sup> the Lt.-Governor got the Theophilus Shepstone transcription of chief Genge (Yenge) report from his mission to M'Pande (Report of the Chief Genge (Yenge), 9<sup>th</sup> July 1847; van Zyl 1955: 158). Six days later he also received the journal of James Archbell's trip to the Klip River area (Statement of James W. Archbell, 15<sup>th</sup> July 1847).

Therefore the next two Executive Council meetings took place within four days, i.e. on July 12<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> (The Executive Council Meeting 12, 12<sup>th</sup> July 1847, *Le Cordeur* 1960: 8; the Executive Council Meeting 13, 16<sup>th</sup> July 1847, *Le Cordeur* 1960: 8-9). The second meeting was devoted to Council the members' conclusions and proposals after reading the reports mentioned above. The tenor of the Genge (Yenge) statement suggested that the only real problem the British were facing were the Klip River Boers. According to this report M'Pande recognised the Mzinyathi River as the border of his kingdom and supposedly declared that he did not support the Boer claims (Report of the Chief Genge (Yenge), 9<sup>th</sup> July 1847). The Archbell statement strengthened this impression by providing an account of

Boer animosity towards the British authorities. But M. West declared his doubts about the credibility of the Archbell account (Statement of James W. Archbell, 15<sup>th</sup> July 1847; M. West to H. Pottinger, 19<sup>th</sup> July 1847, *Le Cordeur* 1960: 161). He decided to see the situation in the Klip River area for himself and to get the information about the Zulu intentions from a more reliable source. Therefore he decided to send Captain H.D. Kylie of the 45<sup>th</sup> Regiment and John Shepstone, the government interpreter, to M'Pande (M. West to M'Pande, 16<sup>th</sup> July 1847; M. West to H. Pottinger, 19<sup>th</sup> July 1847, *Le Cordeur* 1960: 161-162; van Zyl 1955: 159-160). His resolve was strengthened by the fact that at the end of July he received a message from M'Pande who acknowledged that the Mzinyathi River was the border between Zululand and Natal (M'Pande to M. West, 16<sup>th</sup> July 1847).

On August 3<sup>rd</sup> Martin West himself headed off with his entourage to the Thukela River. On August 8<sup>th</sup> he reached Weenen, two days later he crossed the Thukela River, but he did not stay there long, as by August 14<sup>th</sup> he already was back in Pietermaritzburg (van Zyl 1955: 160; Behn 1932: 25). It means that he spent over the river just a day, not more. This trip was a complete failure. He did not meet with the Klip River Boers. They clearly were much more interested in Captain Kylie's mission to M'Pande, as they knew that the King of the Zulus' attitude will be crucial for the outcome of the whole affair.

Captain H. D. Kylie departed on July 27<sup>th</sup> and on August 9<sup>th</sup> he arrived at M'Pande's capital kraal. On August 11<sup>th</sup> he delivered the Lt.-Governor's message to M'Pande and a day later he had an official public hearing and witnessed a debate between M'Pande's councillors. Eventually on 13<sup>th</sup> August 1847 he was given M'Pande's answer to the Lt.-Governor (H.D. Kyle to D. Moodie, 15<sup>th</sup> Aug. 1847, *Le Cordeur* 1960: 133). In his message M'Pande acknowledged that he already had ceded the Klip River area to the British and that Boers asked him for this country, but he stressed the fact that he refused their offer (Reply of the chief Panda to the message from Lieutenant-Governor of Natal, 13<sup>th</sup> Aug. 1847, *Le Cordeur* 1960: 132; van Zyl 1955: 161). This message, sent to Pietermaritzburg on 15<sup>th</sup> Aug. 1847, convinced the British authorities that M'Pande was not ready to risk a conflict with them. Therefore Lt.-Governor M. West decided to act more decisively.

On 23 August 1847 John Bird crossed the Thukela River. The decision to send him was undertaken in July, but the mission started in fact on 17 August (J. Bird to D. Moodie, 28<sup>th</sup> Aug. 1847, *Le Cordeur* 1960: 159; Bird 1971: 16; van Zyl 1955: 161, note 63). Its goal was formally to inspect the farms in the Klip River area, but in reality it was to test the intentions of the local Boers. They tried to play him, stating that they could not agree to the inspection nor accept British sovereignty until the matter was not resolved by the British with M'Pande (J. Bird to D. Moodie,

28<sup>th</sup> Aug. 1847, *Le Cordeur* 1960: 159-161). We cannot be sure if they knew of the outcome of Captain H.D. Kyle's mission to M'Pande. In fact, Martin West himself accepted that the Boers could have had no knowledge of the content of M'Pande's answer to Captain Kyle (M. West to H. Pottinger, 4<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1847, *Le Cordeur* 1960: 163). Still, J. Bird was sure that their intention was to frustrate his mission and that they did not want to recognize the British authority (Bird 1971: 16).

Although M. West had doubts about sincerity of M'Pande's statements, he was sure that the Zulu king would not risk an open conflict with the British over the Klip River area (M. West to H. Pottinger, 30<sup>th</sup> Aug. 1847). Therefore on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sept. 1847 he issued an official proclamation in which he reminded the inhabitants of the Klip River area that it was a part of the Natal district of the Cape Colony, and declared that all claims to the land in this area needed to be renewed "by a personal application at the Colonial Office at this place" (The Proclamation by Martin West, Lieutenant-Governor of the district of Natal, 3<sup>rd</sup> Sept. 1847, BPP, 1847-1848: 182-183). In this way he made clear that the United Kingdom had no intention of forfeiting this territory or accepting the existence of any independent Boer republic there.

Just a day earlier M. West met up with Johannes J. Uys, who insisted that the British authorities should send his representative to inquiry into the situation in the Klip River area. As M. West himself admitted, he agreed against his better judgement, pressed by the majority of the executive council members (M. West to H. Pottinger, 4<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1847; M. West to H. Pottinger, 9<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1847; Shamase 1999: 136-137). On 10 September Walter Harding, the Crown Prosecutor of Natal, was requested to proceed to the Klip River area. He left Pietermaritzburg on September 14<sup>th</sup> and reached his destination (Andries T. Spies' farm) on Sept. 20<sup>th</sup>. As Andries T. Spies was absent, W. Harding had to wait until Sept. 24<sup>th</sup>, when Spies returned, and after that they agreed that proceedings would start on Sept. 27<sup>th</sup> (W. Harding Report, 13<sup>th</sup> Oct. 1847).

The British authorities hoped that this hearing would convince at least most of the Klip River Boers to stay there. The inquiry took five days: 27 September and from the 1 to 4 October 1847. The final report was prepared on 13<sup>th</sup> Oct. 1847 (W. Harding Report, 13<sup>th</sup> Oct. 1847; Behn 1932: 29-33). Between Oct. 15<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> there were three consecutive meetings of the Natal Executive Council (on 15, 18 and 20), which debated this report and further actions the British authorities should undertake (The Executive Council Meeting no. 16, 15<sup>th</sup> Oct. 1847, Executive Council Meeting no. 17, 18<sup>th</sup> Oct. 1847, Executive Council Meeting no. 18, 20<sup>th</sup> Oct. 1847, *Le Cordeur* 1960: 11-16). But eventually Martin West decided to disregard W. Harding's report and against the advice of other members of the Executive Council decided to act more decisively.

During the last of the above mentioned meetings he decided to appoint a magistrate to the Klip River district and to give him support of a military detachment. He also issued on 25<sup>th</sup> Oct. 1847 a proclamation that all the Boers should take an oath of allegiance before the magistrate within a fortnight after his arrival. The next day he nominated Jacobus N. Boshof as Resident Magistrate of the Klip River Division and gave him detailed instructions concerning his mission there (Proclamation by Martin West, Lieutenant-Governor of the district of Natal, 25<sup>th</sup> Oct. 1847; Instructions for J.N. Boshof, 26<sup>th</sup> Oct. 1847; Executive Council Meeting no. 18, 20<sup>th</sup> Oct. 1847, *Le Cordeur* 1960: 14-15).

Boshof arrived to the Klip River area on 16<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1847. He was delayed in his journey for several days by high water on the Mooi and Thukela Rivers (J. Boshof to D. Moodie, 16<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1847; Behn 1932: 40). Considering that normally such travel would take five to eight days and that he used the term "several," I would argue that he travelled for two weeks, no more than sixteen days, therefore I would agree with M.M. Behn that he left Pietermaritzburg at the very beginning of November (Behn 1932: 40), probably no later than 2<sup>nd</sup> Nov. 1847.

Immediately after his arrival he distributed circulars acquainting the Boers in this area with the objective of his visit and summoned them to the Abraham Spies farm to take an oath of allegiance before him, and indicated that 29 November 1847 would be the last day to take this oath (J. Boshof to D. Moodie, 16<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1847; van Zyl 1955: 165). And this date might be seen as the final date of the whole incident, as the most of the Boers decided by then to emigrate from the Klip River area. On 20 November, Boshof wrote to D. Moodie that "They [the Boers] seem so perfectly resolved to leave the district" (J. Boshof to D. Moodie, 20<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1847). Even the arrival, on the evening of 22 November, of Marthinus Scheepers and Solomon Maritz, who wanted to convince the Klip River Boers to accept British sovereignty, was of no avail (J. Boshof to D. Moodie, 24<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1847).<sup>8</sup>

Still, there was a short period of uncertainty, which should be seen as a part of the whole affair. As long as the local Boers had the slightest hope of the Zulu support, they could believe they had a chance to oppose the British. Therefore they sent Gert van Niekerk to M'Pande to inform him of their intention to leave Natal, because they were given an impossible choice: to take the oath of allegiance to the British or to emigrate. In this situation they decided that emigration was the only possible choice (J. Boshof to D. Moodie, 24<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1847; Shamase 1999: 140). We do not have exact information when G. van Niekerk went to M'Pande, and if he went at all. But he surely could not have left before J. Boshof's arrival on 16 November. Boshof mentions this in his letter to D. Moodie of Nov. 24<sup>th</sup> and he also reports the J.J. Uys message from Nov. 23<sup>rd</sup>, in which Uys told Boshof

<sup>8</sup> According to this document just seven families decided to stay behind.

that van Niekerk just returned from M'Pande's kraal (J. Boshof to D. Moodie, 24<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1847; J.J. Uys Statement, 23<sup>rd</sup> Nov, 1847, *Le Cordeur* 1960: 201-202). From the description we learn that Niekerk returned on 22 November in the evening, with two horses exhausted by the long journey (J.J. Uys Statement, 23<sup>rd</sup> Nov, 1847 *Le Cordeur* 1960: 201-202). Taking into account the urgency and that he had a spare horse, we may assume that he could make this journey in two days, but he surely was not received at once, so he needed at least five days for the two-way trip and the audience with the Zulu king. Therefore he departed on Nov. 17<sup>th</sup> at the latest, but, more probably, providing for urgency, he did so in the afternoon of Nov. 16<sup>th</sup>.

M'Pande's answer gave the Klip River Boers some hope of his support, as Niekerk suggested that the Zulus had mobilised large impi for an expedition to the Klip River area. Boshof had doubts if the Niekerk mission really took place. But even so, other sources suggest that M'Pande was contemplating an attack on the Klip River area (J. Boshof to D. Moodie, 24<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1847; Umbokwama to Th. Shepstone, 1<sup>st</sup> Dec. 1847). Despite the doubts he had about those revelations, Boshof decided on 26 November to withdraw and he also requested military assistance from the Lt.-Governor. At first he went to the Ndabankulu kraal and later to the Bushman's River, which he reached on 3<sup>rd</sup> Dec. 1847 (Cory 1930, V: 91-92; Shamase 1999: 140). Next day A.T. Spies issued a proclamation, warning the Klip River Boers of the possible attack of the Zulus. It is quite probable, as J. Boshof suspected, that the real goal was not to fight the British, but to convince as many Boers as possible to emigrate (A.T. Spies to the Emigrants and Countrymen over Tugela, 4<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1847; J. Boshof to D. Moodie, 3<sup>rd</sup> Dec. 1847, *Le Cordeur* 1960: 203).

The same day Capt. F. Campbell arrived at the Bushman River with 29 soldiers (J. Boshof to D. Moodie, 4<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1847, *Le Cordeur* 1960: 203; van Zyl 1955: 169; Stander 1964: 300). This moment should be seen as the final episode of the affair. The situation during the next few weeks was hectic and volatile, but it is evident that by that time the leaders of the Klip River Boers decided that the only option left was emigration (J. Boshof to D. Moodie, 4<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1847, *Le Cordeur* 1960: 203; J. Boshof to D. Moodie, 8<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1847, *Le Cordeur* 1960: 205; A.T. Spies to J. Kock, J.H. Lombard, Desember 1847, Pretorius and Kruger 1937: 294). Of course the chosen date is symbolic. There is no single point one may select as the ending date of the affair, in fact any date since the arrival of J. Boshof to the Klip River area could be chosen, but the coming of the British troops, however small in number, was a decisive sign that the British authorities were ready to force the issue. Some of the later actions were important for the relations between the Zulus, Boers and British, but in fact they had nothing to do with the so-called Klip River Republic. The very appearance of Andries W.J. Pretorius on the scene

was a clear sign of the new phase of Anglo-Boer relations in the South African interior during the Great Trek.<sup>9</sup>

Summarising, it may be argued that the final chronology of the main events connected with the Klip River affair looked probably like this:

**7 Feb. 1846** – M’Pande asks the British for the support in his war with the AmaSwazi;

**June 1846** – Johannes H. De Lange contacted M’Pande and acts as his agent regarding the return of the Zulu cattle;

**7 Aug. 1846** – the British authorities in Natal finally decline to support the Zulus against the AmaSwazi;

**October 1846** – M’Pande attacks the AmaSwazi and raid AmaHlubi;

**c. Dec. 1846** – M’Pande decides to assert control over the Klip River area;

**Feb. 1847** – the first Klip River Boers’ mission to M’Pande;

**Beginning of April 1847** – the Zulu delegation came to the Klip River area to delimit the borders. They negotiate with Johannes H. De Lange for seven or eight days;

**10-15 April 1847** – Andries T. Spies arrives in Pietermaritzburg;

**21-23 April 1847** – Andries T. Spies leaves Pietermaritzburg;

**c. 30 April 1847** – the second Boer delegation arrives in M’Pande kraal;

**1-4 May 1847** – the Zulu-Boer treaty concerning the status and borders of the Klip River area, antedated to 7 January 1847;

**7 May 1847** – Andries T. Spies acts as a representative of M’Pande in the region for the first time;

**c. 26 May 1847** – the British authorities receive first news about the Zulu-Boer Treaty;

**21 June 1847** – Andries T. Spies letter and a final confirmation of Klip River Boers secession;

**22 or 23 June-6 July 1847** – James Archbell’s mission to the Klip River area;

**27 July-15 Aug. 1847** – Captain H.D. Kyle’s mission to M’Pande;

**3-14 Aug. 1847** – Lt.-Governor Martin West’s expedition to the Thukela river;

**17-28 Aug. 1847** – John Bird’s mission to the Klip River area;

**3 Sept. 1847** – Martin West’s Proclamation concerning the Klip River area;

**14 Sept.-8 Oct. 1847** – the mission of Walter Harding and the inquiry into the allegations against the leaders of the Klip River Republic;

**25 Oct. 1847** – the final proclamation concerning the Klip River by Martin West;

**2-26 Nov. 1847** – the mission of Jacobus N. Boshof to the Klip River area;

<sup>9</sup> Until 4<sup>th</sup> December 1847 he played no part in the whole affair. He emerges in the correspondence concerning the Klip River affair only in late December 1847 (J. Boshof to D. Moodie, 20<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1847, Le Cordeur 1960: 206).

**16-22 Nov. 1847** – the supposed Gert van Niekerk mission to M’Pande;  
**4 Dec. 1847** – the British military detachment arrives at the Klip River;  
**Dec. 1847** – Most of the Klip River Boers decide to emigrate. End of the crisis.

The reconstruction of the chronology of this incident shows the real dynamism of situation in the Zululand-Natal area since 1846 to 1848. It shows how complex the situation was in this area at that time, in which three parties, British, Boers and Zulus, played complicated game for control over this territory. And in fact this region will still play significant role in later time, during Zulu War of 1879, Transvaal war of 1880-1881, and finally during the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902, as a strategically important part of the Natal Colony, which controlled the roads both into Zululand and over the Drakensberge into Transvaal.

I hope this article could help correct certain notions about Martin West, or wider British administration in the Natal, supposedly passive policy during the first months of 1847. Finally it simply puts the chronology of this episode straight, although at the same time it shows further gaps in the chronology which require clarification. This hopefully may lead to new studies and analyses of the situation in the Zululand and Natal during the later 1840s.

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