

The Belgian Contribution to the 30th Meridian Arc in Africa

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SUMMARY

The Academie des Sciences in Paris promoted the scientific expeditions to go and to measure the arc of a meridian near the Pole – Lapland (1736-7), the Equator – Peru (1735-45) and in the southern part of Africa, in the Cape Colony

This latter arc was measured by Nicolas de la Caille when he was there on an expedition to chart 10000 stars as seen in the southern hemisphere. It was remeasured and extended by Maclear (1837-47). Towards the end of the 19th century David Gill instigated the measurement the southern part of what was to become the Arc of the 30th Meridian.

The aim of F.G.W. Struve and D. Gill to liaison the northern part of Europe with the southern part of Africa, was realised over a century later.

The Belgian contribution in the eastern part of Central Africa (in former Belgian Congo), 1908-09 was between 1°11' N and 1°11' S. The Belgians Wangermee and Dehalu were mainly involved with astronomical and some geodetic observations. Between 1930-35 Maury and Verlinden carried out the reconnaissance between 1° S and 4°30' S.

RESUME

Avant toute chose, il y a lieu de remettre la mesure des Arcs de Méridien dans leur contexte historique de la recherche de la figure de la terre. Depuis les philosophes grecs et après l'application de l'intersection par Gemma Frisius de Louvain, dès 1533 la cartographie scientifique fut appliquée. Après la méridienne de Picard les grandes expéditions en Equateur et en Laponie, l'Académie des Sciences voulait une mesure du méridien dans la partie australe, ce qui fut réalisé par l'Abbé de la Caille, ce fut le départ de ce qui devait devenir bien plus tard la mesure du 30^e degré du méridien à travers l'Afrique.

La collaboration Anglo-Belge en début du 20^e siècle est développée en fin d'article.