EUROPE
On May 4th 1661, Jan van Riebeeck wrote a long letter to the directors of the VOC to assess the ten arduous years he had spent founding and asserting the VOC’s domination at the southern tip of Africa. Following the directors’ instructions, he had built a fort and created a garden, defended this highly strategic position for trading with the East Indies against enemy European nations and driven the inhabitants of the Cape Peninsula further inland after making the necessary commercial contacts for the colony to survive. In his letter, he listed all these achievements to sing his own praises and to support his application for a new post within the VOC. But amongst these many achievements, one prevails over the others. ‘Discovering the hidden things’ at the Cape is, in the governor’s very words, his biggest achievement and must be his successor’s main objective.

You can therefore see how far we, unto the last moment, have endeavoured to discover for the Company, with all possible diligence, the hidden things of this land and how we have already succeeded so far (...) and we hope, which God grant, that our successor may be so fortunate as to discover something for the Company.

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* Translated from the French by Christine Bull.