

Jean Pierre Purry's proposal to colonize the Land of Nuyts.

As a servant of the Dutch East India Company in Batavia in 1717, Jean Pierre Purry had proposed the settlement of Nuyts Land, the present South and South West Australia. He considered Leeuwin and Edels Lands to be islands, and included them among the islands of Nuyts Land. Purry's ideas were published in Amsterdam in 1718 and in London in 1744 (John Peter Purry, *A Method for Determining the Best Climate of the Earth*). In this work, Purry wrote:

Who knows what there is in *New Holland*, and whether that Country does not, perhaps, contain richer Mines of Gold and Silver than, perhaps, *Chili*, *Peru*, or *Mexico*? And what should hinder, but that all that Coast, called the LAND OF NIGHTS, containing five or six [hundred] Leagues in Extent, and all of it contained within the fifth Climate, may be equal to *Barbary*, *Chili*, and all the best Countries both of the Old and New Continents? (page 32).

Purry's ideas were also discussed by Adam Anderson in *An Historical and Chronological Deduction of the Origin of Commerce from the earliest accounts to the present Time* (London, 1764, Vol.1, p.xlvii). Anderson related that Purry, whom he had met, had "laid it down as a *postulatum*, 'That there is a certain Latitude on our Globe, so happily tempered between the Extremes of Heat and Cold, as to be more peculiarly adapted than any other for all the said rich productions: and he seems, with Judgment, to have fixed on the Latitude of 33 Degrees, (whether *South* or *North*)....as the identical one for that peculiar Character'". The Land of Nuyts, "on the Southern hitherto unplanted Continent called *New-Holland*", lay near this favoured latitude: "A Latitude, most fit for *Vines*, and other *excellent Fruits and Plants*; whereby the Company would be enabled to supply their *East-India* Settlements with Wines, Fruits, Oils, and Corn".

Emanuel Bowen's *Complete System of Geography*, published in London in 1747, referred to the "*Land of Peter Nuyts*, said to have been discovered the 16th of *January* 1627". It extended from the islands of St. Peter and St. Francis in the East, westwards to the "*Landt Van te Leeuwin*, or *The Lioness's Land*. This Coast lies between the 31st and 33d Degrees of South Latitude, and seems to extend above four hundred Leagues from East to West, from the 110th to beyond the 130th Degree of Longitude East from *London*" and was "the Country seated, according to Colonel *Purry*, in the best Climate in the World" (Volume 1, p.782). On his *Complete Map of the Southern Continent*, Bowen said: "If *Peru* overflows with Silver, if all the Mountains of *Chili* are filled with Gold, and this precious Metal & Stones much more precious are ye product of *Brazil* this Continent enjoys the benefit of the same position and therefore whoever perfectly discovers & settles it will become infallibly possessed of Territories as Rich, as fruitful, & as capable of Improvement, as any that have been hitherto found out, either in the East Indies, or the West".

Purry claimed that the native inhabitants of the country would benefit from colonization by Europeans. He wrote: "there is Reason to believe, the Establishing a good colony of *Europeans* would be so far from being any Detriment to the

Inhabitants of the *Land of Nights*, and from driving them out of their Possessions, that on the contrary it would procure them all Sorts of Advantages, as well from a civilised Life, as from the Arts and Sciences it would bring among them, provided this was done with Mildness, and we looked upon them as poor Creatures, who tho' stupid and ignorant don't cease as well as we to be Members of human Society."

References:

Jean Pierre Purry, *Aanmerkingen betreffende de Kust der Kaffers en het landt van Pieter Nuyts : ten opzichte van de nuttigheit die de Oostindische Compagnie van dezelve voor haaren Koophandel zoude kunnen trekken* (*Mémoire sur le Pais des Caffres, et La Terre de Nuyts. Par raport à l'utilité que la Compagnie des Indes Orientales en pourroit rétirer pour son Commerce.*

John Peter Purry, *A Method for Determining the Best Climate of the Earth*, London, 1744.

Lands of true and certain bounty : the geographical theories and colonization strategies of Jean Pierre Purry / edited and annotated with introductions to the texts by Arlin C. Migliazzo ; translations from the French by Pierrette C. Christianne-Lovrien and 'BioDun J. Ogundayo. Selinsgrove [PA] : Susquehanna University Press ; London ; Cranbury, NJ : Associated University Presses, c2002.

"Proposed Dutch Colony in Nuyt's Land", translated by Alexander Buchanan, *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia: South Australian Branch*, vol.xix, 1917-1918, pp.102-8; cited in C.C. Macknight, "Neither useful nor profitable: early eighteenth century ideas about Australia and its inhabitants", presented at the National Library of Australia, 22 September 1993.

Robert J. King

April 2008

Originally published by the [Australia On The Map Committee](#)