SONQUA

Southern San History and Art
After Contact

An Illustrated Synthesis

A handmade book
First published 2014

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Any profits that may accrue as a result of the sale of this book will be given to organizations working to improve the living conditions of surviving San groups.


A painting of armed San men about to set off on an expedition. Later eighteenth century. By Samuel Daniell

Source: Library of Parliament.

Emaciated San. Early 20th century.

Source: State Archives, Windhoek.
The cabins of the Cherokee that they passed among seemed solemn in their abandonment, cramped by the watercourse and the overhanging brow of the cloudy mountain. Some of its people might yet be living, and Ada wondered how often they remembered this place, now still as held breath. Whatever word they had called it would soon be numbered among the names of things which have not been passed down to us and are exiled from our memories. She doubted that its people, even in the last days, had looked ahead and imagined loss so total and so soon. They had not foreseen a near time when theirs would be another world filled with other people whose mouths would speak other words, whose sleep would be eased or troubled with other dreams, whose prayers would be offered up to other gods.

Charles Frazier. “Cold Mountain”. 
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Glossary of some terms related to ethnicity that are used in the text

**Bantu-speakers:** Strictly, a linguistic term referring to people, including the Nguni and Sotho, who spoke one of the Bantu languages - all of which are related to each other. These languages originated amongst groups in West Africa, some of whom subsequently migrated southwards into areas occupied by the San.

**Basters (also Bastaards/Bastards):** These were nomadic stock farmers and hunters, people of mixed Khoe, San, European and slave origin who spoke Dutch and were westernised to some degree. They originated in the Cape in Little Namaqualand. Many became known by the name of the family to which their leader belonged. The best known of these groups was the Afrikaner family. There was often little to distinguish them from the Khoe and Griquas. The Griquas, for example, were known initially as Basters before changing their name in 1813.
**Bergenaars:** An offshoot of the Griquas of Klaarwater/Griquatown. They rebelled against the Griquas in 1821, leaving this group and occupying the present-day Fauresmith district. Together with Korana and other adherents, including those Korana who were under the leadership of the freebooter Jan Bloem, they conducted raids on various groups over a very wide area.

*Dawid Hendricks, a Bergenaar chief. By Charles Davidson Bell.*
*Source: Museum Africa.*

**Boers/trekboers:** Dutch farmers, many of whom lived a semi-nomadic life subsisting as stock farmers and hunters.

*A trekboer’s outspan in Transgariep. By Charles Davidson Bell.*
*Source: Museum Africa.*
Griquas: Nomadic stock farmers and hunters, mainly followers of the Kok family. Adam Kok I was an emancipated slave of mixed descent who had acquired grazing rights in the Piketberg area in the mid-eighteenth century. Over the years a number of Chaguriqua/Grigiqua Khoe (a clan within the Cochoqua group), as well as Basters, escaped slaves and Company deserters attached themselves to Kok - forming the nucleus of the particular group of Basters and others that later came to be termed the Griquas. The main group, who produced a number of splinter groups in later times, moved from the Piketberg to the Kamiesberg in Namaqualand, then to the middle reaches of the Gariep, then to Klaarwater/Griquatown north of the Gariep in 1805, then to Philippolis in 1826, and finally to Nomansland/East Griqualand in the early 1860s. Many were the offspring of Khoe and Europeans, and almost all spoke Dutch as well as their Khoe language, Xiri. They were partly westernised, particularly the men, most of whom, unlike the women, adopted European dress.
Khoekhoen (shortened throughout to Khoe) - also commonly, and pejoratively, referred to as Hottentots by the European Colonists: San hunter-gatherers who, probably more than 2,000 years ago, acquired livestock and became pastoralists, thereby changing their way of life and culture and developing a new ethnic identity. Some Khoe lost their livestock and lived by hunting and gathering for longer or shorter periods.
A Khoe man with his sheepskin kaross. By Francois Le Vaillant.
Source: Library of Parliament.

A Khoe woman with her sheepskin kaross. By Francois Le Vaillant.
Source: Library of Parliament.
**Khoe-San:** A collective term for San and Khoekhoe groups.

**Korana:** Originally a Khoe group, the Korana had lived in the Cape in the seventeenth century and then migrated northwards to the Gariep in small groups over time. From about the beginning of the nineteenth century they changed from being a group with a relatively distinct culture, traditionally
headed by hereditary chiefs, to more loosely organized multi-ethnic raider bands under the leadership of prominent, freebooter personalities who were not necessarily of Khoi descent.

A Korana kraal on the banks of the Gariep. By Samuel Daniell.

Source: Library of Parliament.

A Korana man.


**Nguni:** Agropastoralists who shared a common ancestral language, one of the Bantu language group, as well as other cultural features that set them apart from the Sotho-Tswana. It is largely with relations between the San and the southern/Cape Nguni, rather than the northern/Natal Nguni (who include the Zulu groups), that this book is concerned. The southern/Cape Nguni were usually referred to by the Colonists as “Kaffirs”, “Caffres” etc. - a pejorative term of Arab origin meaning “infidels”. 
They include the Xhosa, Mpondo and Mpondomise clans, and, after the Mfecane/Difaqane had caused Northern Nguni groups to flee from KwaZulu-Natal to the Cape, they came to include the Bhaca, as well as the Mfengu (fragments of other northern Nguni groups such as the Bhele, Hlubi, Zizi and Nhlangwini).
Oorlams: A broad term of Malay origin, often loosely used, which referred to Khoe-San who lived in the Colony and were familiar with European customs.
San: A corruption of Khoe terms for people without cattle. Here it refers to aboriginal southern Africa hunter-gatherers, almost certainly the descendants of the earliest *Homo sapiens* inhabitants of southern Africa. They were also referred to as Sonqua or Soqua, Batwa, Baroa, and Bosjesmans or Bushmen by the Khoe, the Nguni, Sotho, and the European Colonists, respectively.
San women. By Charles Davidson Bell.
Source: Bell Heritage Trust, UCT.

A San man. By Edward Orme.
Source: Library of Parliament.
A young San man. By Edward Orme.
Source: Library of Parliament.

A young San woman.
Southern San: Broadly-speaking, and as the term is used here, these are the aboriginal, primarily hunter-gatherer, inhabitants of Lesotho and South Africa - although the focus in this book is on those groups who occupied the regions within this broad area that were situated south of the Vaal River and the section of the Gariep below its confluence with the Vaal.

Sotho: Agropastoralists who, like the Nguni, shared a common ancestral language, one of the Bantu language group, as well as certain other cultural features that set them apart from the Nguni. The group originated when one of the Sotho clans moved from the north onto the southern Highveld in about 1650. They include the Fokeng (who may have had an Nguni origin), Koea, Taung, Kubung, Tlokoa and Kgatla clans. At the time of the Difaqane (see below) they were forged into the Sotho nation by Moshoeshoe.

A Sotho man on the way to his fields.
A “Boquain” (Koena/Sotho) chief in war dress.

A Sotho warrior.
**Tlhaping:** A Tswana group, who intermarried extensively with the Korana, and who occupied an area in central Transgariep between the Langeberg and Hardcastle. At the beginning of the nineteenth century their largest town was said to have a population of 16,000 with a circumference as large as Cape Town.

Colonists: Europeans who occupied the territories of the southern San, and were later associated with the Cape Colony. The C is written in upper case to distinguish them from other groups, such as the Khoi, Nguni and Sotho, who also colonised the territories of the southern San.

Dagga: *Cannabis sativa*

Difaqane/Mfecane: Sesotho/Nguni terms referring to the period of widespread social disruption and conflict in southern Africa, lasting from about 1816 to 1835, initiated by the expansion of a number of chiefdoms in present-day KwaZulu-Natal, including the expansion of the Zulu under Shaka.

drostdy: magistrate's court

Gariep: Khoi-San name for the Orange River

landdrost: magistrate

Land van Waveren: the Tulbagh valley

loan-farm: an area of about 6,000 acres, measured out from a central point, and reserved for the exclusive use of a farmer

Maloti: Pronounced “Maluti/Malooti”. A Sesotho word meaning “mountains” - those of the highlands of (eastern) Lesotho and parts of the Free State.

Nu Gariep: “Black River” – the upper reaches of the Gariep, above its confluence with the Vaal River

Senqu: San (and then Sesotho) name for the Gariep/Orange River

Transgariep (also termed Transoranjia/Transorangia and, in one account, Hottentotia): Regions north of the Gariep River. It is with the San occupying the middle Transgariep, (the area north of the Gariep and west of its confluence with the Vaal) and the eastern Transgariep (the area north of the Gariep and east of its confluence with the Vaal - roughly the southern Free State) that this book is primarily concerned.

raad: council

veldkorporaal/veldwachtmeester: official drawn from the ranks of the Dutch farmers whose task was to uphold the authority of the landdrost and organize or lead commandos.
On the edge of a river valley in the mountains of the south-western Cape there is a farmhouse that is typical of the kind encountered in the area - a solid, utilitarian building fronted by pretty shrubs and a large, sheltering tree. I have passed this house on many occasions and each time I have felt affected by the place in some way. Not by the house itself, which is neither particularly beautiful nor well-set in the landscape, but rather by the directness of its connection with another, earlier place of shelter - a cave set high on the mountain across the valley and directly visible from the farmhouse.

Any informed person arriving at this point along the road into the mountains is required to think about the link between these two places. The cave, home to the first people of these mountains, its walls the setting for a number of particularly beautiful panels of rock paintings, through which the deepest religious beliefs of these people were expressed. And the house, sacred in its own way, home to successive generations of farmers who had worked the soil of the valley, pasturing their herds and flocks in the surrounding mountains. The two seem connected by an almost tangible line of power. Yet it is difficult to say whether this is an energy of the kind expressed in the rock art by the thin, wandering line that connects people and animals in some profound and mystical way, or whether it is related to the force that drives the bullet to its mark.

It was partly a desire to answer questions such as this one that lay behind my decision, made about 20 years ago, to write an account of the history of contact between the southern San and other groups. Archaeologists and historians have powers to visit and bring news from the land of the dead, and if there are any dead in southern Africa who need speaking for it is the San people. In view of the fact that there existed a wealth of dispersed archaeological and historical information on the history and art of southern San groups, it seemed to me that it would be worth synthesising this material in one volume which would provide a broad account of a virtually extinct people's history and art - from first contact with immigrant pastoralist and agriculturist groups, at least 1,600 years ago, until the demise of the painting tradition, around the end of the nineteenth century – or possibly a few decades later.

This book is intended to act as an introduction to later southern San history and art for the informed layperson, for students, and for those people whose specialised research interests are related to the theme of this book, but who would like a reasonably accessible overview of the subject. It serves as an introduction to the archaeological and historical themes it covers, although, partly as a result of a bias in my own research interests and partly because of the uneven depth in researches into San archaeology, history and art, some themes and periods are covered more fully than others. The rock engravings, for example, which tend to occur further north than the rock paintings, are not discussed. On the other hand, relationships that developed between south-eastern San and Southern Nguni and Sotho communities, the focus of my own research, as well as the particularly well-researched history of contact between the Cape San and the European settlers, are presented and discussed in some depth.

After the arrival of literate European groups, far more information concerning the southern San became available, in written form, and this is reflected in the greater attention given here to this period than to earlier times, Although San groups, and descendants of these people, continued to exist and interact with other groups throughout the twentieth century, I have chosen to end this account of interaction with the last rock paintings known to have been produced in Lesotho – in about 1930, by people of part-San, part-Phuthi descent.
I have tried, as far as possible, to make this book more widely accessible by including anecdotal and interesting historical material, but have also included sufficient detail for this book to act as a useful source of archaeological and historical information for anyone studying its subject. As I remark in the note on my sources, however, I have drawn on a wide range of material, some of it very detailed, and one of the intended functions of the book is to point the reader who wants to explore a particular area of interest in more depth to the specialised texts listed at the end of this book.
Introduction

They were a fragment of an ancient world, their virtue unknown, their ... puny malice their only introduction.

Margaret Spilhaus

Dr Lichtenstein asks “What had a people like the Bushmen to lose - they who are everywhere at home, who know not the value of any land?”. To which I would reply, “He loses the means of subsistence: and what more can the richest monarch lose?”.

Reverend Robert Moffat

The arrival of Khoekhoe pastoralists and Nguni, Sotho and European farmers in the lands occupied by southern San hunter-gatherers had a profound effect on the way of life of the San, South Africa and Lesotho’s first inhabitants. This book relates how these new groups impacted on southern San society and art. The major theme of this book is the history of the dispossession of an aboriginal people of their native lands by more powerful groups, and their long and bitter struggle as they first resisted and then attempted to come to terms with this loss. However, this is also an account of the changes brought about in the ancient tradition of rock painting by the coming together of different peoples within the same landscape, as well as the potential for economic and cultural exchange presented by this process. In some cases, the establishment of trading and ritual relationships as well as friendships and marriage ties between southern San groups and their new neighbours contributed to the development and enrichment of the societies and cultures of these groups as well as the formation of new groups of mixed descent and cultures. Both the processes of conflict and separation between the southern San and other groups as well as the forces that drew them together will be described in the following chapters.

Yet who were the southern San, whose history and art forms the subject matter of this book and who are now almost all extinct? This may appear to be a simple question, but defining exactly which groups comprise the southern San is not always an easy matter. Broadly speaking, however, they are considered to be the aboriginal people of South Africa and Lesotho. In this book I have focused largely, but not exclusively, on the San of the western Cape, south of the Sak River, and those south-eastern San groups who occupied the Eastern Cape, Free State, KwaZulu-Natal and Lesotho. I have dealt only peripherally with the archaeology and history of the San north of the Vaal River and those of the far Northern Cape.
Although regional groups, such as the /Xam San, had names for themselves, as far as we know the southern San did not have any word by which they referred to themselves collectively. The names which are used to refer to all these groups today, San (derived from earlier names such as Soqua and Sonqua), Bushmen, Batwa and Baroa were given to them by the Khoekhoe (hereafter “Khoe”), Dutch, Nguni, and Sotho respectively.

Prior to contact with immigrant groups from the north, determining who did or did not belong to the southern San group would have been a relatively easy task. Before about 2000 years ago South Africa and Lesotho were occupied exclusively by hunter-gatherers, who were almost certainly the ancestors of the San encountered in later years by European settlers. Genetic studies have revealed that some of the present-day San descendants living in the northern Cape have a more ancient human lineage than any other group on earth. While there would have been some cultural and other differences between the aboriginal groups before contact, they would all have been composed of people who were typical hunter-gatherers and whose culture and way of life clearly set them apart from herders and farmers.
After symbiotic contact, including intermarriage, had occurred between the hunter-gatherers and immigrant herders and farmers the situation changed. Although many San groups continued to retain a way of life similar to that which they had possessed in ancient times for much of the post-contact period, hundreds of years of interaction between the southern San and other peoples, and the consequent formation of groups of mixed descent and ethnic identity, made it increasingly difficult, in some cases, to distinguish between San and non-San groups. The blurring of ethnic distinctions as a result of intermarriage and other forms of interaction between the southern San and others acted to create a more complex mix of ethnic groupings than had been the case before contact.

Thus when the Dutch began to explore the areas further to the north of the Cape Peninsula, after the establishment of the first European settlement at the Cape in 1652, it was sometimes difficult for them to distinguish between San hunter-gatherers and Khoe herders. As one archaeologist has remarked, we need the talents of a Sherlock Holmes to make sense of the confusing mix of names applied by the Colonists to the people they found occupying these areas. Terms such as Soaquas, Obiquas, Bosjesmans-Hottentots, Hottentots-Bosjesmans, Bushman-Boors and others were all used to refer to the “Bushman” group.

This confusion sometimes stemmed from misunderstandings and a lack of communication between the European Colonists and the people they encountered, but part of the problem lay in the initial inability of the Dutch to realise that the ethnic identity of some of the groups was in fact a creolized one. Not only was it often difficult to categorise these groups neatly in terms of a particular ethnic identity and associated way of life, it was also inappropriate to do so in many cases since they possessed characteristics of both herder and hunter-gatherer societies.

As we shall see in the next chapter, there were a number of ways in which this overlap of ethnic groups occurred. One was for individual members of herder groups, or even an entire group, to join up and merge with hunter-gatherer groups, or for hunter-gatherer individuals and groups to be incorporated into herder groups. The result was the formation of groups of mixed ethnic identity and racial composition. Another was for entire groups of a certain identity and culture to change their way of life and adopt that associated with other groups. Thus some Khoe pastoralists, such as the Strandlopers encountered by Van Riebeeck at Table Bay, lost their cattle and became foragers, living off shellfish and other seafoods along the shore. Other impoverished Khoe took to the mountains and subsisted by cattle raiding and hunting and gathering. Some aboriginal hunter-gatherer groups, moreover, acquired and learned to breed livestock. In all these cases it was difficult to make the distinction between hunter-gatherer and herder, and sometimes the distinction between the groups was effectively lost altogether.

That there was little to distinguish impoverished herders who had become hunter-gatherers and raiders from aboriginal people who were practising the same lifestyle is indicated by the fact that the Khoe gave them the same name, Sonqua, or variants of this word. This term probably meant “to gather”. It did not refer to an ethnic group, but rather to a general class of people who subsisted by hunting/fishing and gathering, or cattle-raiding. Most of the people referred to as Sonqua by the Khoe were probably aboriginal San, but by no means all were. It was a pejorative term that was applied to any person of low status in regard to wealth or lineage, whether these were aboriginal hunter-gatherers, people without cattle within Khoe society, or Khoe groups who had lost their cattle and were subsisting by hunting and gathering and/or cattle theft. While cultural differences almost
certainly existed between many aboriginal hunter-gatherers and those impoverished Khoe who had become San, the similarities between the groups were recognised by the Khoe who made little or no distinction between them in their terminology.

The picture that emerges, then, is of the Dutch encountering a range of groups in the years after their arrival at the Cape. At opposite ends of this social spectrum were solid cores of archetypal hunter-gatherer and herder societies who were clearly very different and easily distinguished from each other in their appearances, lifestyles and cultures. Between these two poles there were San who lived in a manner similar to Khoe groups and Khoe who lived largely or exclusively by hunting and gathering, as well as creolised groups of mixed ethnic identity composed of San, Khoe and even slaves and criminals who had escaped from the Colony.

The people whose later history and art forms the theme of this book, therefore, comprised a variety of groups, all of whom had in common the characteristic that they were termed Bushmen or variants of this name by those who recorded their history. Many of these groups were profoundly affected by the advent of herders and farmers and their societies were greatly changed as a result, while others remained relatively isolated from the immigrant groups. Almost none, however, escaped the destruction wrought by the arrival of Europeans mounted on horses and equipped with firearms, and all, in the end, were absorbed into the powerful new societies that had laid claim to their native lands.
CHAPTER 1

EARLY CONTACT BETWEEN SOUTHERN SAN AND KHOE AND BANTU-SPEAKING GROUPS

The Sonquas are a people dwelling in massive mountainous country. They number several thousands, and are very small in size, both men and women. They have no cattle, but live by shooting rock rabbits with the bow and arrow, which they use with remarkable skill ... They also go out hunting big game, especially wild horses and mules ... The meat of the rock rabbits constitutes a pleasant food for the Sonquas who live principally on it and on certain roots growing in the ground ... Their little cloaks are sewn together from the skins of wild oxen which live on the rocks.

Olfert Dapper

This account by Dapper of people inhabiting the western Cape mountains is one of the earliest descriptions we have of San hunter-gatherers after the arrival of Van Riebeeck at the Cape in 1652. Its references to “wild horses and mules” (zebras or quaggas) show that many elements of the environment were alien to the Dutch and were interpreted in terms of the European world they knew. Yet European explorers, travellers and settlers were not the first people to encounter the original inhabitants of southern Africa. Long before their arrival, iron-using agropastoralists whose identity is uncertain had moved down the south-east coast into KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape, establishing themselves there by about 450 AD. Khoe pastoralists, too, had moved southwards into Namibia and the Cape by 800 AD, and possibly much earlier. The ancestors of the present day Nguni people probably arrived in KwaZulu-Natal in about 1000 AD, while the Sotho groups arrived later in southern San territories, crossing the Vaal River from the north and occupying the southern Highveld, roughly the present Free State, in about 1600 AD.

When Europeans first arrived at the Cape, therefore, the southern San had been sharing the South African landscape with other groups for more than 1000 years. All the immigrant groups introduced the indigenous hunter-gatherers to new animals, new ways of utilising the environment and new cultures centred on the keeping of livestock. Where did these people come from and what do we know of the relationships they formed with the southern San?

The arrival of Khoe in Namibia and the Cape

It appears that the Khoe originated as a pastoralist group at least 2000 years ago when southern African hunter-gatherer groups acquired sheep and pottery from pastoralists or mixed farmers who had moved into northern Botswana. The San who became Khoe pastoralists in this manner were probably the Naron and G/wi people. This is suggested by the fact that there are certain cultural similarities between the extinct Cape Khoe and Naron and G/wi hunter-gatherers still living in Botswana. Not only are their languages closely related but they also share other cultural features, such as a similar kinship system, which sets them apart from most San groups. Some time after acquiring livestock these proto-Khoe pastoralists dispersed southwards with their flocks into the Cape, but there is debate both as to what routes these people took and when this migration occurred.
One route followed by the early pastoralists may have involved the main stream of Khoe dispersing southwards from northern Botswana and dividing when they reached the Gariep River. It is suggested that one section then moved westwards along the banks of the Gariep until they reached the coast, where they again split - one group, the ancestors of the Great Namaqua, moving north into modern Namibia, while those who were to form the Little Namaqua moved south into Namaqualand. Another section, it is proposed, the ancestors of the Cape Khoe, instead of moving westwards along the Gariep to the coast, moved southwards, probably up the Seekoei River valley in the Karoo and then over the Sneeuwberg into the valleys of the Sundays or Fish rivers. After reaching the south-east coast, they would have expanded westwards along the coast, perhaps as a result of pressure from Bantu-speakers, until they reached the south-western Cape. Here they would have increased rapidly to form the cluster of Cape Khoe groups, the most northerly of which later encountered the southern Namaqua groups near the Olifants River.

Probable Khoe migration routes, according to Elphick.

*After a map in Elphick (1977).*
While there is some evidence to support the above scenario, the absence of any sheep bones dated to a period earlier than 1400 at archaeological sites in the Seekoei River valley is difficult to explain in terms of this hypothesis. If early pastoralists migrated through this valley we would expect to find sheep remains dating to the time of this migration at herder sites in the region.

An alternative route that has been proposed has better support. This involves a movement by early Khoe westwards from the original dispersal area in northern Botswana to the Atlantic coast, and then southwards to the Cape Peninsula. From there, groups probably moved along the east coast towards the Fish River, where their advance would have been halted by the presence of Nguni and Sotho farmers. This is the route that a number of archaeologists believe was taken by early Khoe. However, linguistic evidence has been used to suggest yet another scenario.
As far as the timing of the arrival of early pastoralists in the Cape is concerned, we know that sheep bones and pottery dated to between 2000 and 1800 BP (Before Present) have been found in this region. According to one model of pastoralist migration from Botswana into the Western Cape, pottery and sheep were first introduced into Namibia and the Cape when herders migrated into these areas approximately 2000 years ago. An alternative, more favoured, model suggests that pottery and sheep were introduced independently by diffusion from one hunter-gatherer group to another, thus pre-dating the arrival of pastoralists themselves. The diffusionists argue that the migration of Khoe pastoralist groups into Namibia and South Africa probably only occurred about 800 years after hunter-gatherers in Namibia and South Africa had acquired pottery and livestock from pastoralist groups further to the north.

The issues surrounding the arrival of herder communities in Namibia and the Cape are only likely to be resolved fully once we have more archaeological data, including additional dated material, from a wider range of sites containing pottery, sheep and cattle. As new herder sites are located and investigated, and as more early pottery and sheep bones become available for analysis, we will be in a better position to assess which of the different models put forward for the arrival of the Khoe most closely approximates the real situation.
Early interaction between the Khoe and southern San

Whatever the date of their earliest contacts with the southern San, and whatever the route they may have followed into territories occupied by these people, we can expect that early pastoralists in Namibia and the Cape entered into a variety of relationships with the aboriginal hunter-gatherers they encountered. Analysis of herder and hunter-gatherer sites as well as historical accounts of relations between San and Khoe can help us to model the kinds of relationships which these groups are likely to have formed after first contact. We nevertheless need to bear in mind that settlement by European people brought about many changes in San and Khoe society, and relations which existed in Colonial times between Khoe and San groups, particularly in the later Colonial period, would not necessarily have existed before contact with Europeans.

One response by the San to the arrival of the Khoe would have been to resist the occupation by the pastoralists of their hunting and gathering grounds - specifically the lower lying coastal plains that were more suitable for pastoralism than the inland mountains. Some San would have perceived the arrival of the Khoe as a direct threat to their ancient way of life and fought to maintain their hunting and gathering existence in the face of competing claims to these areas from pastoralists. Those that did not succeed in this would have been forced to move off into the more inaccessible and, for the Khoe pastoralists, less desirable mountainous areas - where the grazing was less suitable for livestock than that on the lower plains. In the mountains they may have joined up with other San groups with whom they had marital and other ties, or they may have been forced to compete with other San groups for resources in these areas. The relatively small quantities of pottery and sheep bone present at most mountain sites in the south-western Cape suggests that the majority of San who occupied the mountains remained in contact with, but relatively independent of, Khoe. Historical accounts also indicate that many mountain Sonquas, such as the Ubiquas, who inhabited the mountains east of the Berg River, subsisted to a large extent on cattle stolen from Khoe groups occupying the lower-lying areas. This suggests that relations between some Khoe and the San groups inhabiting the mountains were poor.

Other San groups, like hunter-gatherers living on the coastal plain at Witklip, near the pastoralist site of Kasteelberg north of Saldanha Bay, appear to have continued to practise a way of life largely unaltered by the close proximity of pastoralists at the latter site. With time, however, they may have become clients of the herders, providing services for them such as tending their sheep and cattle in return for payment in kind of these animals. Khoe in the Colonial period, for example, used San to look after their livestock, and these hunter-gatherers probably received milk and the occasional cow or sheep in return for this service. Similar arrangements are common in Botswana today, where San have attached themselves as clients to Tswana and Herero families. In some cases, livestock acquired from Khoe in this way by San may have been simply slaughtered for food. Alternatively, domestic animals could have been accumulated to form a sufficiently large herd or flock for the owner to be assimilated into pastoralist society.

Other services besides herding are also likely to have been rendered by the San to neighbouring Khoe people. This is suggested by historical accounts which indicate that San acted as soldiers, messengers, hunters and spies for Khoe groups to whom they had attached themselves. San are recorded as having fought together with Khoe against the herders’ enemies, and Landdrost Starrenburgh reported at the beginning of the eighteenth century that San would tell their Khoe patrons where to find elephants.
to hunt. He remarked that some Khoe had “fallen into the most extreme poverty, and are compelled to resort to elephant-hunting … (and) as soon as one is perceived by their Sonquas who daily roam over the plains to catch dassies, jackals and other animals they come out with all their young men.”

Similarly, San were used by the Khoe to warn them of the approach of hostile groups whom they had sighted while on hunting and gathering expeditions or while looking after the livestock of the Khoe at outlying cattle posts. Thus Simon Van der Stel remarked in 1685 that Sonquas near the confluence of the Olifants and Doorn rivers “are like the poor (or troops) in Europe, of whom each tribe of the Hottentots has its own, used by them to give warning should they hear of (the approach of) any strange tribe”. As a reward for these services they were given meat or other gifts during peacetime, and in times of war they were given a share of the spoils. Although not pastoralists themselves, client San groups such as these were considered part of the larger Khoe grouping to which they were attached.

It is likely, too, that trade would have been an important aspect of the relationships established between San and early Khoe groups. San, and other hunter-gatherers in the sub-continent, are known to have traded a wide range of foods and goods with neighbouring pastoralists and agriculturists. In return, the San would have received milk, the occasional sheep or cow, and, when the Khoe gained access to European trade goods, tobacco and beads. Where there was enough demand from the Khoe for “bush goods”, it is possible that some hunter-gatherers specialised in trading with pastoralists and became “professional primitives”; so that hunting and gathering for subsistence became secondary to hunting and gathering for exchange. In other words, they may not have traded in order to remain hunter-gatherers, but rather remained hunter-gatherers in order to trade. This is a strategy that has been adopted by a number of hunter-gatherer groups in other areas of Africa and the world who live in forested or mountainous areas adjacent to agriculturists or pastoralists.

Still other San groups probably entered into close relationships with pastoralist groups which were based on intermarriage. Reports by both early and later European settlers and travellers in the Cape indicate that Khoe and San were not always easily distinguishable to these observers, suggesting that a considerable degree of mixing had occurred between Khoe and San. This would have acted to blur the distinction between pastoralist and hunter-gatherer during the long period in which they occupied the same landscape. Like those Khoe who were absorbed by Nguni and Sotho farmers so that, through intermarriage and the adoption of the culture of the farmers, the distinction between the pastoralists and agropastoralists was almost completely lost, some San in close contact with Khoe would have been completely absorbed into their society. As has been mentioned, a number of the terms used by the European settlers to describe the indigenous people, such as Bosjesmans-Hottentot, Hottentots-Bosjesman, and Bushman Boor, may indicate this mixing of peoples and cultures, as well as confusion on the part of Europeans when attempting to identify the various groups with whom they came into contact.

Finally, some San would have acquired livestock and become herders themselves. This is how the Khoe originally came into being and there is no reason to suppose it only happened once and only in Botswana. Some San groups in the present Free State and other areas close to the Maloti-Drakensberg possessed large herds of cattle and sheep in Colonial times. San were even reported, on one occasion at least, to have ridden cattle “into battle”. New pastoralist groups may therefore have formed when San groups acquired cattle and sheep from Khoe. Van Riebeeck reported, for example, that the Little Chariguriqua, a Khoe group who lived between Saldanha Bay and mid-way between Robben and
Dassen Islands, were originally subject to Oedasoa, chief of the Cochoqua Khoe, and “were accustomed to be his stock-keepers, but appropriated his cattle to their own use”. The Little Chariguriqua may well have been San clients of Oedasoa. Some San who acquired cattle in this way and became pastoralists may have been distinguished in certain respects from “true” Khoe groups, as was the case with the Little Chariguriqua. Others may have adopted the culture and lifestyle of other Khoe groups so completely that no distinction was made between them and the Khoe in general.
The picture that emerges, then, is of the Dutch encountering a range of groups in the years after their arrival at the Cape. At opposite ends of this social spectrum there were solid cores of archetypal hunter-gatherer and herder societies who were clearly very different and easily distinguished from each other. Long histories of conflict developing out of the occupation of the territories of the hunter-gatherers by the Khoe and subsequent raids by hunter-gatherers on their cattle, sometimes served to separate these groups and maintain cultural and other distinctions between them. The real, but not insurmountable, difficulties associated with changing a lifestyle based on hunting and gathering to one based on herding with its emphasis on accumulation of livestock rather than immediate consumption probably also served to maintain the distinction between these groups. Between these two poles there were San who lived in a manner similar to Khoe groups and Khoe who lived largely or exclusively by hunting and gathering, as well as groups of mixed ethnic identity composed of San, Khoe and even slaves and criminals who had escaped from the Colony.

**Early interaction between Bantu-speaking agriculturists and the south-easter San**

In the fourth century AD, about 300 years after sheep had been introduced to hunter-gatherers on the west coast, Bantu-speaking agriculturists from East Africa, with Urewe tradition pottery, moved into the present Limpopo Province in South Africa. Evidence for this comes from the site of Silver Leaves in this area (about 50 kilometres south of present-day Tzaneen). They brought with them characteristic elements of the Early Iron Age way of life - crop cultivation, livestock herding, iron production, settled village life, and a particular ceramic tradition. The Urewe at Silver Leaves developed into the Mzonjani tradition, and by 450 AD people with this style of pottery had reached the coastal belt of KwaZulu-Natal and were settled 100 kilometres south of present-day Durban.

This was succeeded by the Kalundu tradition, specifically a form known as the Msuluzi style. It indicated the arrival of a new group of people, also Bantu-speakers, originating in West Africa. These farmers gradually expanded southwards and towards the interior. By about 800 AD, Bantu-speaking agriculturists had spread to the edge of the summer rainfall regions of the Eastern Cape and into
much of KwaZulu-Natal below the 1000 metre contour line. Areas above this line were less suitable for farming than the lower areas. Although these were Bantu-speakers they were almost certainly not Nguni-speakers (the Nguni languages are just one group of languages within the larger Bantu family of languages). The arrival of the ancestors of present-day Nguni-speakers in KwaZulu-Natal, indicated by the presence of a very different pottery tradition, the Blackburn tradition, only occurred much later, in about 1030 AD.

While there would almost certainly have been instances of conflict between these first millennium farmers and the south-eastern San hunter-gatherers into whose territories they moved, it is likely that while pioneer farmer groups were small in number and relatively unacquainted with the environments they had occupied it would have been in their interest to remain on good terms with the aboriginal inhabitants, who would have been in a position to assist them in a variety of ways. This is suggested by analysis of Early Iron Age sites, which indicate that, in some cases, close relationships were established between the immigrant farmers and the hunter-gatherers they encountered.

While pioneer Early Iron Age agriculturists were few in number they are likely to have had a minimal impact on the ability of the San to continue their ancient hunting and gathering lifestyle, and early farming communities may, in many cases, have been viewed by the original inhabitants as a resource to be tapped for exotic goods, such as iron, ceramics and cultivated foods. Some archaeologists have suggested that south-eastern hunter-gatherers based themselves in more densely forested refuge areas adjacent to early farming settlements, where they could both hunt and gather and trade forest products with farmers in exchange for material goods and foods not produced by hunter-gatherers. The farmers, too, would have benefited from these relationships, by gaining access to goods and services provided by the hunter-gatherers.

It is also likely that early agriculturists would have relied to an extent on the San’s intimate knowledge of the areas they occupied and, like the Khoe, employed them as guides, hunters, soldiers, and to look after their animals. Hunter-gatherers and farmers in many other areas of Africa and the world, for example, depend on each other for goods and services that they lack themselves. The development of relationships that were to the mutual benefit of both the indigenous hunter-gatherers and the incoming farmers may thus well have characterised the first encounters between these groups in many cases.

The sustained period of overlap between some Later Stone Age and Early Iron Age sites in KwaZulu-Natal supports this model of interaction. Archaeological evidence from Msuluzi Confluence, a seventh century Iron Age site on the upper Thukela River, as well as from other early agriculturist sites, suggests that harmonious interaction occurred between hunter-gatherers and farmers in this area. Later Stone Age artefacts associated with the San, such as ostrich eggshell beads, bone arrow-points and link-shafts and stone tools, are found on the site together with pottery and iron, and analysis of the assemblages suggests that trade may have occurred with hunter-gatherers in the area. The farmers appear to have been provided with ostrich eggshell beads by hunter-gatherers. Ostrich eggshell beads and the necklaces and other decorative items made from them were valued not only by the San but also by Early Iron Age farmers. The hunter-gatherers, in turn, were given iron, possibly produced in excess by farmers especially for this trade.
Excavations at other sites in the Thukela Basin suggest a similar pattern of co-operative co-existence between hunter-gatherers and early farmers in this area. Although not conclusive, the available evidence suggests that the central Thukela Basin was only occupied by hunter-gatherers after the arrival of farmers, and it is quite possible that it was the presence of the farmers which drew them there in the first place. Hunter-gatherers and farmers appear to have lived alongside one another in this area for a considerable period of time.
There is indirect evidence that some of the hunter-gatherers at these sites used iron tools and, as at Msuluzi Confluence, some farmer sites contain items generally associated with hunter-gatherers, such as worked bone, ostrich eggshell beads and stone tools. Moreover, one of the excavated hunter-gatherer sites contained decorated pottery associated with farming communities. This overlap can be explained as indicating that farmers and hunter-gatherers were manufacturing items traditionally associated with each others' cultures, or that the foreign items indicate sequential occupation by hunter-gatherers and farmers of the same sites, but the most plausible explanation is that the two groups were trading with one another. If so, we can expect these relationships to have resulted in the development of other ties, perhaps including intermarriage. While it is impossible to tell from the archaeological evidence whether or not this actually occurred, studies of hunter-gatherer and farmer societies involved in trade in historical times indicate that this would probably have been the case.

In the Eastern Cape, excavations at Edgehill and Welgeluk shelters near the Fish River present a slightly different picture. The initial impact of the first immigrant groups, herders, indicated by the presence of pottery in the later deposits of these shelters, appears to have been slight, but the arrival of agriculturists may have resulted in disruption of the hunter-gatherer-fishers' access to key resources. After contact with farmers, smaller game animals and less desirable riverine foods, such as crab and turtle, were increasingly exploited - probably because these animals were not an important source of food for the immigrant herders and farmers.

Pressure placed on the subsistence base of the indigenous inhabitants seems to have caused the break-up of the social organisation of some communities, and many of these people appear to have attached themselves to the settlements of the agriculturists - although it is also likely that some did so voluntarily, attracted by the new resources which these communities had to offer. Whatever the case, the net result of the occupation of the areas surrounding the Edgehill and Welgeluk shelters by farmers was almost certainly acculturation and incorporation of significant numbers of hunter-gatherer-fishers into surrounding farmer communities.

It is important to realise, however, that the impact of food producers at these and other sites in the area was not uniform. Some of the hunter-gatherer-fishers continued to co-exist with herders and farmers for a long time after the arrival of the latter groups. Others appear to have retreated to refuge areas such as the Winterberg further to the north, where a hunter-gatherer life was more viable and from where they could establish relationships with food producers that allowed them a greater degree of independence.

These excavations have allowed us to gain a better understanding of the forms of interaction that may have occurred between Early Iron Age farmers and San hunter-gatherers. Relationships that developed between southern Nguni and Sotho farmers and south-eastern San groups in later years will be discussed in another chapter, drawing upon Nguni and Sotho oral traditions, as well as written accounts by survivors of shipwrecks, travellers, government officials and missionaries. It is the history of the arrival and settlement in southern Africa of a powerful new group of people, the European Colonists, and the impact they were to have on the Cape San, to which we will now turn.
CHAPTER 2

EUROPEAN SETTLEMENT AND EXPANSION INTO SAN TERRITORIES BEFORE 1800

_They shoot at us in the mist. We make cloud, our blood is smoking …_

Diä!kwain, a /Xam San man.

_I must now believe that these savages have not been rendered happier by their communication with Europeans._

William Burchell

**The arrival of the Europeans**

The earliest known encounter between Europeans and South African hunter-gatherers, almost certainly aboriginal San people, occurred at St Helena Bay on the south-western Cape coast. It was off this bay that Vasco da Gama anchored on the 7th of November 1497 and rested up for eight days, hoping to make contact with people who could provide him with fresh supplies of meat and water, and, he hoped, more valuable goods such as ivory and gold. This is his description of the people he met and some of the events associated with the visit:

“On Wednesday we cast anchor in said bay and here we remained for eight days … In the land the men are swarthy. They eat only sea-wolves (seals) and whales and the flesh of gazelles and the roots of plants. They wear sheaths on their members. Their arms are staffs of wild olive trees tipped with fire-hardened horns. They have many dogs like those of Portugal …

_A San man with his dog. Detail. By Samuel Daniell._

Source: Library of Parliament.
On the next day … we went ashore with the Commander and captured one of these men. He was small of body … and was going about gathering honey on the moor … We took him to the Commander's ship, who placed him with himself at his table, and he ate of everything we ate. The next day the Commander clothed him very well and ordered him to be put ashore. On Sunday … we went ashore … and bartered for shells that they wore in their ears, which looked as if they had been silvered over; and for fox-tails, which they fastened to sticks, and with which they fan their faces.”

This encounter began with an abduction, but it was followed by expressions of goodwill on both sides, and the San hosted one of the Portuguese at their camp, providing him with a meal of roasted seal meat and wild plant foods. The visit nevertheless ended in conflict when the San, alarmed by this man's shouting to the people aboard the ships anchored off the shore, attacked him and the crew of the boat sent to fetch him. A skirmish ensued, initiating the long process of bitter conflict between the original inhabitants of southern Africa and European settlers.

There are no accounts which indicate that Van Riebeeck found San hunter-gatherer groups in the region around Table Bay when the Dutch East India Company established a settlement at the Cape in 1652, more than 150 years after Da Gama's visit to St Helena Bay, but he did find Khoe with cattle and sheep. The Dutch also encountered people without cattle or sheep who lived largely by foraging and scavenging of dead whales and seals along the shoreline. They called themselves the Goringhaicona, but were called Strandlopers (Beachwalkers) by the Dutch. In all, they numbered about 50 people and were under the leadership of Autshumato, known to the Europeans in later times as Harry.
A painting, from the imagination, of the Dutch under Van Riebeeck arriving at the Cape, and their meeting with the Khoe who were pasturing their animals there. By Charles Davidson Bell.
Source: National Library of South Africa.

A painting, from the imagination, of Van Riebeeck meeting a group of “Strandloopers”. By Charles Davidson Bell.
Source: Collection of Desmond Woolf.
The Goringhaicona were an impoverished offshoot of the Peninsular Khoe, or Goringhaiqua, whose language they spoke and with whom they had close lineage ties, but they included in their number robber Sonquas, as well as cattleless Khoe from other groups and a variety of people who, for one reason or another, had fallen on misfortune. They adopted the role of intermediaries in the cattle trade between other Khoe groups at the Cape and the European settlers, and in this way Autshumato was soon able to build up a herd of more than 200 head of cattle and an even greater number of sheep.

The Khoe, like other pastoralists, were accustomed to move from place to place with their herds as pasture for their cattle deteriorated or improved with the different seasons of the year. If pasture was plentiful in a particular area at a certain time of the year, various groups would share the resource by occupying the grazing lands for part of the year. According to Autshumato, there were three groups of people who occupied Table Bay at the time of Van Riebeeck’s arrival. One of these groups was the one he headed, the Goringhaicona. Aside from the name Strandlopers, which was given to them by the Dutch, they were also known as the Watermans or Watermen. Another group, the Saldanhamen, had many cattle and sheep which they brought to the bay every year. A third group, the Vissermans or Fishermen, timed their arrival each year to coincide with the departure of the Saldanhamen. The Fishermen owned cattle but no sheep and subsisted mainly by fishing from the rocks in Table Bay and other areas that they visited on their round.

Walter Schouten, who arrived from Batavia on the Rysende Son in 1665, left a description of the inhabitants of the Cape of Good Hope, probably Strandlopers or Watermen, which reveals the mixture of fascination and disgust with which the first European settlers viewed the Khoe and their impoverished offshoots. His account is particularly interesting as it indicates how similar to hunter-gatherer San communities cattleless Khoe groups must have been in their appearance and way of life:

“(It was wonderful) to see the wild nature of the people of the Cabo de Bon Esperance, who because of their beastliness bear no resemblance to mankind. They are truly the most miserable folk that I have seen on the earth. Because of their wildness and clucking speech (which seems to come forth with a stuttering from deep in their throats) they are commonly called Hottentots. … They continually bring all sorts of beasts, principally oxen, cows and sheep, which they know how to get from their neighbours in the Sardaigne-Bay … for sale to our people in the Table Bay, who get them by barter for a little copper, tin, beads, tobacco and other trifles.

For the most part they live (on dead fish that had been washed ashore and the entrails of cattle slaughtered by the Dutch), and from some sorts of roots that grow wild and which they eat raw. … At night they creep together in whole troops, men, women and children, in places where horrible caves, valleys and pits are to be found … without shelter or any covering but the hills, the rocks and the wild growths, since I have seen no houses or huts among them. Some, however, indeed spread out a few beast-skins on sticks, thus to be protected from the cold, hail, snow, rain and winter squalls …”
Dutch Colonists bartering with Khoe for sheep.

“It is lamentable”, Schouten piously concluded, “that among mankind such folk … are to be found, who, although descended from our father Adam, yet show so little of humanity that truly they more resemble the unreasoning beasts than reasonable man … . Miserable folk, how lamentable is your pitiable condition! And Oh Christians, how blessed is ours!”

Although Autshumato frequently complained to Van Riebeeck of thefts by “Souqua” (San), the people encountered at Table Bay by the Dutch who did not have livestock all appear to have been Khoe pastoralists or impoverished Khoe who had resorted to hunting, fishing and gathering in order to survive, and it was only north of Table Bay that the Dutch encountered people whose appearance and way of life was that of typical San hunter-gatherers. Possibly the first San to be encountered by the Dutch were people, described in an entry in Van Riebeeck’s journal for the 26th of November 1652, who had no cattle or sheep and who hunted antelope with bows and arrows. Van Riebeeck had travelled by ship to Saldanha Bay shortly after his arrival at the Cape when he met these people walking along a beach. He was disappointed to learn that they could offer only ostrich eggshells and tortoises “and similar trash” for barter, and they told him that if he wanted cattle he should obtain them from the Saldanhar Khoe. Although the members of this group were probably aboriginal hunter-gatherers, the Dutch called them Strandlopers, assuming that, because they had no cattle, they must form part of the same group to which Autshumato and his people belonged.

References to hunter-gatherers become more frequent in the Company record after Van Riebeeck’s encounter with these people. Expeditions to the north met small people without cattle who subsisted by gathering and by hunting with bows and arrows and who lived in the mountains. Some were said to rob the Khoe of their cattle, but others attached themselves to the herders, for whom they acted as soldiers and spies. The Khoe called them Sonquas, Soaquas, Souquas, and variants of these names.

Jan Danckaert, a Company servant, also encountered typical hunter-gatherers on his exploratory journey north of Table Bay between November 1660 and January 1661, and it is clear from his description that they were different in a number of respects from Khoe pastoralists. Van Riebeeck’s diarist reported that Danckaert and his party “had come across a poverty-stricken band of tiny
people, who had helped them to cross the first range and had been very friendly to them, giving them some honey and dried fish. He went on to remark that “these small people, who have already been encountered somewhat nearer here by previous exploring parties, live in a state of poverty in shabby, low huts made of branches … They are well provided with bows and arrows, and they are adept at using these for shooting all kinds of game for food. Honey also forms part of their diet. They dress like the Hottentots, but they use very poor skins of wild animals. … They are rather modest, but in their speech they also cluck like turkey-cocks, the more so as one goes further into the interior”.

When members of Danckaert’s expedition were laid up exhausted after battling their way through thick undergrowth on their journey they were taken care of by Souquas, who fed them royally on antelope and rhinoceros meat. This was not the first account which reveals the spirit of generosity and goodwill shown by the San to the early Dutch settlers. In November 1660, for example, a party of Sonquas had arrived at the Company fort on the shores of Table Bay with a present of the heads of quaggas or zebras - “young horses” which are “most beautifully striped” with “long ears like asses”. According to one account, the entire skin of the animal was stuffed and hung up on display in the fort. The potential for peaceful relations and harmonious co-existence between the San and the Dutch was therefore present from the time of first contact, but, as history was to show, it remained largely unrealised.

The first free burghers and their expansion into San territories

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Cape mountains and rivers

Official exploratory expeditions such as Danckaert’s had a minimal impact on the Khoe-San communities they encountered and, in general, did not disrupt them to any extent. When the Company allowed the first freeburghers, Company servants, to settle along the Liesbeeck River in 1657, however, it initiated the long process of expansion by Dutch farmers into Khoe-San territories. Almost immediately, in 1659, war broke out between the Khoe and the Dutch, and the San were soon also to be affected by this new wave of immigrants. During the next 30 years the Company allowed farmers to settle at increasing distances from Table Bay as its need for agricultural produce increased. By 1687 new settlements had been established at the Tijgerberg, Paarl and Stellenbosch, and in 1688 two hundred Huguenots arrived and were settled in the Drakenstein Valley.

These farmers and the roaming frontier farmers, or trekboers, who were to encroach in increasing numbers upon San territories, were hardy pioneers who had to deal with great physical hardships far from any of the conveniences offered by the metropole. Few became rich, and many lived a life not that different from the Khoe pastoralists whose lands they usurped. The very real trials to which they were subjected bred in them a spirit of independence and a determination to overcome the obstacles that placed themselves in the way of any person attempting to establish a life for himself in unfamiliar and often wild terrain. Given an opportunity to establish farms in the territories of the Khoe-San, however, these qualities often translated into an almost complete disregard for Company rule and the rights of the indigenous inhabitants, who stood in the way of their acquiring this land.
It was no surprise, therefore, that the Colonists experienced considerable resistance from the Khoe and San they encountered during the course of their expansion. Conflict between the Dutch and Khoe-San persisted for much of the eighteenth century and can be divided roughly into three phases: the periods between 1700 and 1739, 1740 and 1769, and 1770 and 1795. Each of these phases was characterised by the movement of Colonists into new territories occupied by the San, the outbreak of hostilities between the farmers and the indigenous inhabitants, and the subsequent subjugation of the San either by force or, in the case of the last phase, through the establishment of conditions suitable for pacifying and “civilising” them, followed by their incorporation into the rural work force.

The period 1700-1740: expansion into the Sandveld and to the edge of the Bokkeveld mountains

By the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Dutch had firmly established themselves in the southernmost regions of what was to become the Cape Colony, and, as the Colonists increased in number, they looked to expand into other areas occupied by the Khoe-San. The region to the east was initially blocked by the extensive lands owned by the Company close to the Hottentots Holland Mountains, with the result that the main thrust of expansion of the Dutch farmers was to the north.

In 1700, a significant natural boundary, the Berg River, was crossed when Dutch freemen moved into the Land van Waveren, or Tulbagh Valley. The Van Waveren farmers were almost immediately raided by Khoe-San from the surrounding Ubiqua Mountains, a continuation of the Drakenstein range. These people, identified as Ubiqua, seem to have been a mixed group of Grigriquas/Guriquas and Namaqua Khoe with quite a number of San adherents – a multi-ethnic group typical of many of the Khoe-San groups of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They were referred to as “Bushmen or highwaymen”, probably because they subsisted largely by cattle-raiding rather than pastoralism.

In the same year, the Governor of the Cape, Willem Adriaan van der Stel, opened the cattle trade with the Khoe, which previously had been the monopoly of the Company, to the Colonists. This resulted in considerable friction between the Khoe and Dutch since some burghers attempted to force Khoe who were reluctant to participate in this trade to part with their cattle. By 1702 attacks on the Khoe by Dutch cattle traders had become so severe that van der Stel had to close the trade, only re-opening it again in 1704. Landdrost Starrenburgh, journeying to the Olifants River in 1705, reported that maverick freemen had wrought havoc amongst the Khoe. One of these burghers, “Dronke Gerrit” (Drunken Gerrit), had attacked a Khoe kraal a few years previously, setting fire to the herders’ huts and stealing their cattle. Depredations by the Dutch Colonists of this kind, Starrenburgh remarked, had disrupted Khoe society to such an extent that “from men who sustained themselves quietly by cattle-
breeding, living in peace and contentment, divided under their chiefs in their kraals, they have nearly all become Bushmen, hunters and brigands, dispersed everywhere between and in the mountains”.

The San were treated even worse than the Khoe by the freeburghers, and no attempt was made to come to any sort of accommodation with them with respect to sharing the lands into which they had moved. This was partly due to the difficulties of negotiating with an elusive enemy who usually did not have identifiable leaders, but it was also due in large measure to the fact that, in general, the San were viewed as little different from the wild animals which roamed the land they occupied. With some exceptions, the incoming farmers treated them as they would any wild creature which stood in the way of their progress - as an obstacle to be removed as quickly as possible and by any means available. This was the common, and persistent, view of the San held by the European Colonists. “He is in every sense of the word, a wild man”, the Reverend Henry Tindall was to write more than 150 years later. “He has nor religion, no laws, no government, no recognised authority, no patrimony, no fixed abode. The power of speech, the physical conformation and constitution of man, and a soul (debased, it is true, and completely bound down and clogged by his animal nature) are all that he has in common with the more favoured and enlightened portions of the human family.”

It is perhaps no surprise, considering the manner in which the Colonists conducted themselves, that the San came to rank the European farmers just as low on the scale of human qualities. Thus the naturalist, traveller and first Director of the South African Museum, Andrew Smith was to report:

“(The Bushman) has a graduated scale and readily enumerates opposite what degree each tribe will stand; and invariably maintaining that those who rank lowest in the scale of courage are the most entitled to be robbed, not, he asserts, because the danger is least, but because they partake in the smallest degree of the attributes of men and consequently less deserve to possess what he argues has been given to all men in common. The Bushmen speak of the Colonial farmers as dangerous simply on account of their possessing fire-arms, while they represent them as entirely unfit to compete in other respects with persons of their own class.”

Predictably, the Khoe-San stepped up their resistance to this onslaught by the Dutch and by 1704 repeated raids on the Colonists had forced the Company to establish a series of military posts stretching as far north as the Tulbagh Valley in order to protect the farmers. Although the Company felt it necessary to bolster its defences with these posts, the period from the early eighteenth century until 1715 was relatively peaceful. However, there were two significant developments in the years shortly preceding this date that impacted on the Khoe-San.

One was the introduction of the loan-farm, or leningplaats, system in 1714. If a farmer had no (European) neighbours, he could, legally, use as much land as he wished. But where the boundary of a leningplaats needed to be determined relative to a neighbour’s land, this was done by walking a horse for half an hour in all directions from the homestead. Thus, for a small rental each year, farmers were now allowed to claim about 6,000 acres for their own use. The springs at which the game grazed and drank became the centres of these farms, with inevitable disruptive results for the San who occupied these areas. The obvious material deprivation associated with the occupation of waterholes was accompanied by an equally destructive spiritual loss, since, as one writer has remarked, the water pit was a site “rich in theatre”, one occupied by rain animals and other spirits, where the past intersected with the future, the living with the dead and the natural world with the supernatural.

The other development was the outbreak of smallpox amongst the Khoe in 1713. This decimated
their population and was to prove an important factor in breaking the power of the Khoe chiefdoms. The extent of the destruction wrought by this plague can be judged by the following account provided by a visitor to the Cape: “The Hottentots … died in their hundreds”, he wrote. “They lay everywhere on the roads … Cursing at the Dutchmen, who they said had bewitched them, they fled inland with their kraals, huts, and cattle in hopes there to be freed from the malign disease.”

While the effects of smallpox on the Khoe were to be seen everywhere and were extensively reported, there are no reports of San suffering from the disease. It is nevertheless likely that many died unseen by the Dutch, and that in some areas they were very badly affected. Certainly, the San did not entirely escape the impact of diseases introduced by Europeans in later times. A description provided to the wife of an officer in the Colonial forces by a farmer who visited San dying of measles in the nineteenth century could well describe the plight of San hidden in caves from the Colonists as smallpox swept the country:

“A wretched sight presented itself: the measles had broken out in the community, and the dead, the dying, the sick, the old and the young, men, women and children, were all heaped together within the caves and nooks of the steep krantzes. (The farmer) dragged them from their covert, but they would listen to no suggestion calculated, if acted on, to remedy or lighten the disease, and all he could do was to rescue some of the children from the pest-house in the wilderness.”

In 1715 the Dutch freemen were once again subjected to attacks by Khoe-San when the Ubiqua raided the farms of Europeans in the Tulbagh Valley. A commando was raised, which, although it was not the first to be organised in response to Khoe-San raids, differed from previous commandos in that it was authorised by the Company but did not contain a complement of Company soldiers. Peace was negotiated between the Khoe-San and Colonists in 1716, and raids decreased considerably between this date and 1739, although there were occasional outbreaks of conflict. San raided in the Riviersonderend area in 1719, and a military post was established there in 1726 to assist Khoe against San depredations. Two years later a group of about 300 “Bosjesman-Hottentoten”, probably Namaquas and Chariguriquas, stole cattle from behind the Piketberg. A commando was hurriedly formed, the raiders pursued and a number of them shot.

By 1725, the first farms had been allocated to farmers in the Olifants River Valley and, despite Khoe-San resistance, it took only another seven years for it to be settled along its entire length. The harshness of the environment to the north of the Olifants and Doorn rivers, and the difficulties involved in traversing the Cedarberg and Bokkeveld mountains, constituted a significant barrier to northward expansion. The fact that the region to the north of the areas settled by about 1730 was heavily populated by Khoe-San, acted as a further deterrent to trekboers who wanted to move into the area. All these factors combined to persuade the farmers to move south-eastwards into the more hospitable valleys of the Warm and Koue Bokkeveld.

It is clear that San raiders were angered by the incursion of the trekboers into their ancestral lands, and their raids on the Colonists’ farms were soon to be motivated as much by political resistance to the Dutch as by material want. Thus in 1731 a small band of raiders, “the sons of Giebenaar”, told the commando pursuing them: “We Bushmen have more people, we shall give the Dutch no rest.” Similar sentiments were expressed by “bosjemans” to a commando in Little Namaqualand in 1738. Asked by the commando’s Khoe emissary why they stole the cattle of the Dutch, they defiantly replied: “To chase them out of their country, since they were living in their country; and that this was only a
beginning, but that they would do the same to all the people living thereabouts, and if that did not help they would burn all the corn presently standing in the fields, once it was ripe; that then the Dutch would be compelled to leave their country”.

Major fighting flared up in 1739 when the Bushman War, a general uprising by the Namaquas and San against the Dutch in the Sandveld, Piketberg and Bokkeveld, broke out. The uprising had its immediate roots in an illegal cattle bartering expedition to Namaqualand, in the course of which a Namaqua kraal was attacked by Dutch freemen and the occupants robbed of their cattle. A notable feature of this war was the prominent role played by renegade servants in the uprising. Many servants were familiar with commando tactics, and some possessed firearms which they had been taught to use by their Dutch masters and which they used to good effect. This must have served to increase the intensity and bitterness of the conflict.

Faced with this uprising of Khoe-San in response to the theft of their cattle, the Landdrost of Stellenbosch appointed the first veldkorporaals (field corporals) in outlying areas, granting them authority to conscript farmers to serve in commandos. Instead of first notifying the Company’s authorities when a raid occurred, farmers were now permitted to initiate commandos and attack Khoe-San where they felt it necessary - a report simply had to be delivered after the event. Similarly, a farmer could pursue Khoe-San raiders at will, but had to notify the veldkorporaal afterwards. Burgher service in the commandos now became compulsory for all Europeans in the outlying districts.

Although, as in almost all the conflicts between them and the settlers, the San had the advantage of living in small, highly mobile groups in rugged terrain that they knew intimately, by September 1739 they had been cleared from most of the Bokkeveld and Sandveld and the Doorn and Olifants river valleys. Resistance effectively ended in this year when Swartbooi, one of the leaders of this uprising, was killed on the Langevlei near Meerhof’s Kasteel and most of his followers, including women and children, massacred and their bodies mutilated. Swartbooi’s son, Titus, escaped on this occasion but was ambushed and mortally wounded some months later.
The Bushman War of 1739 had been an unequal struggle between Khoe-San and Dutch in which the casualties of the former had far exceeded those of the farmers. During one commando expedition alone, for instance, more than 100 Khoe-San were killed, many more wounded and a small number taken prisoner, whereas in the entire war only two Europeans or Khoe auxiliaries were killed by poisoned arrows and four by musket fire. By the end of the war, the resistance of the Khoe-San communities on the north-west frontier had been crushed. All suitable grazing land south of Namaqualand and west of the Bokkeveld was now occupied by the European settlers.

A deputation of San who wished to make peace went to Stellenbosch and received copper-headed canes from the Company. Their acceptance of these staffs of office (or sometimes a brass medal, worn around the neck, with the words “Vrede” (“Peace”) inscribed on it), symbolised, if only for the Company, their official appointment as leaders of their people, and at the same time their willingness to submit to the Dutch authorities and the laws that they proclaimed. It was 15 years before any further organised attempts at resistance were repeated.
The period 1740-1770: expansion into the Onder Bokkeveld and the Hantam, Roggeveld and Nieuweveld Mountains

The consequences of this defeat for Khoe-San occupying the areas to the north were profound, as the way had now been opened for the trekboers to expand northwards and eastwards beyond the control of the Company into new territories. The frontier farmers began to disperse into a much larger area than that which they had previously occupied, establishing themselves along the edge of a major environmental divide - the relatively well-watered plateaus and mountains running from the Kamiesberg in the north southwards to the Onder Bokkeveld plateau, the Hantam, the Roggeveld and ending in the Nieuweveld Mountains in the south-east.

Although the areas to the north and east of this interior escarpment were arid, and the grazing usually very poor in consequence, it was nevertheless important to the trekboers that they had access to them, since they needed to escape the cold winters in the mountains and take advantage of the good grazing on the plains after summer rains. Consequently, loan-farms were registered there. Every year their houses in the mountains would be closed up and they would remove to the plains taking their livestock and carrying their furniture and anything else that was movable.

It was customary for the farmers to erect a small house on their loan-farms in the lower-lying parts of the country. The house was usually placed in the middle of the sheep kraal as this meant that every corner of the kraal could be easily reached by the inhabitants if they were raided by the San and enabled them to protect their livestock against attacks by wild animals. William Burchell, botanist, artist, and a meticulous observer, travelled through these areas in the early years of the nineteenth century. He described a typical trekboer's dwelling as “a small, oblong, low hut built of rough bits of rock; rudely thatched with reed and sedge; having no window excepting one small opening covered with white linen, instead of glass; and the doorway but half closed with a clumsy panel of reeds.” The houses of the frontier farmers were often not much more luxurious than these crude dwellings, and most of them lived a hard life with few conveniences.

Trekboer houses in the Roggeveld Karoo, c.1810.

A Boer’s thatched house. By Charles Davidson Bell.
Source: Library of Parliament.

A trekboer’s family encamped. By Samuel Daniell.
Source: Library of Parliament.
By the 1750s the trekboers were ensconced on the Karoo plains of the Onder Bokkeveld and in the Hantam and Roggeveld mountains. The fact that they spread themselves relatively thinly within this newly-occupied area may explain why, for the most part, they and the Khoe-San were able to share its resources and co-exist relatively peacefully. The Khoe-San were still very vulnerable to maltreatment by the Dutch, however, and in some cases they were forcibly removed from the springs at which they were based. As a result, tensions between the Khoe-San and the Colonists began to build up again.

They erupted in 1754 when “Bosjesmans-Hottentotten” began assembling in the Voorste (Little) and Agterste (Lower) Roggeveld. The raiders fortified themselves in huts built of stone and mounted a series of raids on the farms of the Dutch in the Olifants River, Bokkeveld, Roggeveld and Doorn River areas. Some farmers were forced to abandon their homes, but a commando was raised and a number of Khoe-San kraals located and forced to submit to the Colonists. The leader of the San in the area was traced and, together with three other Khoe-San leaders, was persuaded to accept the Company's copper-headed staffs of office, as well as gifts of sheep from the Roggeveld farmers. For more than a decade there was relative peace in the Roggeveld and Onder Bokkeveld and several small kraals of “tame Hottentots” lived interspersed amongst the trekboers of this area.

An isolated incident was the cause of widespread conflict breaking out yet again in 1770 as Khoe-San and trekboers competed for the diminishing environmental resources of the interior escarpment. It appears that the spark which initiated this conflict was a dispute between a San leader and the European servant, or knecht, of a Roggeveld farmer. During the course of this dispute the knecht was killed and the San leader's kraal was in turn attacked by a commando. Khoe-San, including those who had previously lived amongst the Dutch, now rose up and attacked farmers from the Hantam to the Sneeuwberg.

A number of commandos were sent out against the Khoe-San during the course of the following two years as the conflict continued. Further impetus was given to the hostilities by a rumour which spread through the Roggeveld in 1772 that a commando from the Bokkeveld planned to come and kill all the Roggeveld Khoe and Bastards/Basters. Panic-stricken, Khoe servants deserted and joined up with Khoe-San in the mountains. The rebellion was quashed in the same year, however, and Khoe-San captives taken to Cape Town. According to the Swedish botanist, Thunberg, who was living in Cape Town at the time, they did not deny their crimes, “but asserted that they acted so in their own defence, the Europeans making every year fresh encroachments upon their lands and possessions, and forcing them continually further up into the country, whence they were driven back again by the other Hottentots, or else killed”. Most of the captives received sentences ranging from flogging to long terms of imprisonment and death, while some were released and allowed to return to their places of origin.

The period 1770 to 1795: occupation of the Seekoei River Valley, Sneeuwberg, Camdeboo and adjacent areas

By 1770 a frontier had been established along the edges of the interior escarpment - roughly along the line of the Roggeveld, Nieuweveld and Sneeuwberg ranges. The population of the Boers was increasing rapidly and a number of early travellers commented on the large size of their families. New land was therefore constantly being sought out on which the sons of farmers could establish their own places. The variation in their prosperity and fortunes was reflected in the form of their houses, which varied from large, comfortable manor houses to relatively small and modest buildings.
At the same time that farmers had been moving northwards into Khoe-San-occupied areas, other Colonists had been migrating eastwards between the Swartberg and the Indian Ocean. They reached the Groot Brak River near Mossel Bay by about 1730, and by 1765 they had reached the Gamtoos River. By 1768 they had moved into the area between the Sundays and Bushman's rivers and had turned inland and begun to occupy the plains of the Camdeboo at the base of the Sneeuwberg, where they began registering loan-farms. Here they were joined by farmers from the Bokkeveld, Roggeveld and Hantam, who, faced with the aridity of Khoe-San-occupied areas to the north, had spread eastwards along the escarpment to the Nieuweveld, Camdeboo, Sneeuwberg and Bruintjeshoogte. By 1770 these trekboers had reached the Sneeuwberg mountains and the Camdeboo plains.
A wagon traversing a kloof.

A wagon traversing a pass.
The intense cold of the Sneeuwberg during winter meant that its inhabitants, like those of the Roggeveld mountains, were forced to abandon their homes during the colder months and move to the lower-lying plains at its base. Aside from this inconvenience, however, the mountains offered a number of advantages to the incoming settlers. It was reasonably well-watered, it was almost completely free of horse sickness and it contained many fertile valleys suitable for grazing and limited cultivation. Colonel Robert Jacob Gordon, Commander of the Cape Garrison, was greatly impressed with the potential of the area for farming when he visited it about ten years after it had begun to be settled, and he remarked that the sheep of the farmers who had occupied the mountains grew “fatter than cattle” in this region. It is not surprising, therefore, that many loan-farms were soon registered and established in this region. The first farms in these areas were registered in 1768, and in the early 1770s a number of farms were registered in the areas abutting the Seekoei River, which drained from the Sneeuwberg in a north-easterly direction into the Gariep. By the end of 1774, more than 250 farms had already been granted to frontier farmers in what was to become, in 1786, the District of Graaff-Reinet.

Many of the factors which favoured settlement in the Sneeuwberg by the Dutch farmers also made the area attractive for the authochthonous Swy èi San and the animals which they followed on their seasonal round. Numerous Swy èi, known to the settlers as “Snese” or “Chinese” Bosjesmans because of their small, “slit” eyes and their light-yellow skin, occupied these mountains, and conflict between them and the frontier farmers was inevitable once the mountain valleys and the springs on the plains had been claimed by the Colonists. The farm of one of the immigrant trekboers was attacked in 1770 and the San soon intensified their attacks. Within three years, farmers in the Camdeboo, Sneeuwberg and Seekoei River valley found themselves in a state of siege, and by 1773 the situation had deteriorated to such an extent that they were forced to appeal to the Company for help.
These appeals resulted in the Company's supporting the formation of a Great Commando, or "Groot Kommando", in 1774 under the overall leadership of Godlieb Rudolph Opperman. The Company instructed the Colonists to try and make peace with the leaders of the San. Orders were also issued that no blood should be spilt without its being absolutely necessary and, if at all possible, women and defenceless males should be spared. However, the authorities went on to instruct the Colonists that, if it proved impossible to subdue the San without using force, they were “to attack the robbers from all sides in their dens and lurking places and to reduce them either to a permanent state of peace and quiet, or otherwise, in case of necessity, entirely to destroy them”.

It is clear from these instructions that, while preferring peace to a long and costly war, the Dutch authorities had provided a mandate for genocide, should the situation demand it - policy that was to become official in 1777 when the Council of Policy gave their blessing to the extermination of San whenever and wherever they were encountered. Despite their urging restraint on the part of the commando members, moreover, the authorities were aware that similar orders had been issued in the past to no effect as the Company was completely unable to enforce them. The Landdrost of Stellenbosch, who had been responsible for exercising authority on the eastern frontier until the establishment of the district of Graaff-Reinet, was hundreds of miles away, and the frontier farmers showed little respect for his local representatives. The rules laid down by the Company for the treatment of San by the members of the Great Commando were therefore unlikely to be adhered to.

Having obtained the official sanction and support of the Company, the Boers began assembling for what they hoped would be a final and decisive onslaught on the San. The Great Commando was split into three groups. The first section set out from the Bokkeveld. They searched the Middle and Klein Roggeveld and travelled as far east as the Koup and the Nieuweveld Mountains. The second section left from the Roggeveld for an area north and north-east of the Sak River. A third group attacked San kraals in the Sneeuwberg, Seekoei River valley, Camdeboo, Nieuweveld and Koup.

In all, more than 500 San were killed and well over 200 captured, while only one member of the commandos lost his life and none was taken captive. These figures illustrate the extent to which the odds were stacked against the indigenous inhabitants in any clash with a well-organised commando armed with muskets. Despite these casualties, however, Khoe-San resistance to the incursion of the trekboers continued unabated and undiminished in its intensity, and for the next 20 years a bitter war was fought between San and farmers in the Hantam, Roggeveld, Nieuweveld, Sneeuwberg and Camdeboo.

A variety of strategies were adopted by the Cape San to reduce the advantage which the well-armed and mounted settlers had in this struggle - although curiously, unlike the later San raiders of the Maloti-Drakensberg, raids in the eighteenth century were almost always conducted on foot, rather than on horses stolen from the farmers. They usually made their incursions during the rainy season - the time when the horses of the farmers in the lower-lying areas were often afflicted by horse sickness, making pursuit on horseback difficult. At this time, too, the wet caused the muskets of the Boers to misfire. The period when the moon was in its last quarter was also a favourable time for raids as it allowed them to complete their raids in darkness, but make their escape with the stolen livestock with the assistance of the morning moon's light.

When attacking the Boers’ Khoe herders in the veld or mountains, their modus operandi was to hide themselves behind bushes or rocks as close as possible to cattle and sheep being herded. Overcome by the heat of his fire and drowsy from the effects of the dagga (Cannabis sativa) he had smoked, the
herder more often than not would fall asleep, allowing the San to creep up and kill him. Anger at the Khoe’s collaboration with the Dutch on commandos, including commandos that resulted in the capture and enslavement of San women and children, sometimes provoked them into doing this in a particularly cruel fashion, similar to that in which cattle were slaughtered. In these cases, the herder’s abdomen would be slit open, the main artery severed and the unfortunate victim left to die. His gun would be taken and the livestock he was tending driven, night and day if necessary, into the mountains. Spies would be placed on the surrounding heights to see whether they were being pursued by the Dutch farmers.

Armed “Bushman Hottentots” prepared for an expedition. Detail. By Samuel Daniell.
Source: Library of Parliament.
During their flight they would consume some of the animals and those that they were unable either to eat or to take with them were killed with their assegaais or shot with poisoned arrows. According to one account, perhaps apocryphal, they sometimes carried lion skins with them on these raids, as the scent of these frightened the cattle and made it easier to drive them at speed over difficult terrain. Once they reached a place in the mountains where they felt reasonably secure, they encamped with their booty and constructed kraals of bushes and huts covered with mats. They would remain in these temporary camps until their supply of food ran out, when they would prepare for another raid on the Colonists.
San raiders prepare to roll a boulder down onto their pursuers. Note the cattle being driven up the steep incline and the man about to spear one of the animals - probably one that could not keep up with the others. By Charles Davidson Bell.

Source: Museum Africa.

Although casualties were much lower amongst the farmers and their Khoe-San auxiliaries than among the San of the mountains, death by poisoned arrow was greatly feared by the enemies of the San. The southern San groups made their poison from a variety of ingredients, including the grubs of certain beetles, snake venom, and parts of poisonous plants and trees - such as the castor bean, the leaves of the *Euphorbia virosa* tree, and the bulbous root of one of the amaryllis species, known to the Dutch as “gifbol” (poison bulb). These poisons, sometimes used in combination, were highly potent, and if an arrow penetrated deeply they could kill a person within a very short period of time. According to some sources, the poison they used when hunting game differed, in potency or kind, from that which they used in warfare. A number of San groups were said to have antidotes to the poison, which, if they existed, must have been more effective than the combination of gunpowder and urine reportedly used by some Khoekhoe.

The arrows of the San, tipped with points made of stone and bone, or, in later times, iron or even glass, were usually carried in a quiver made of a hollowed-out stem of a branch or the stem of a form of aloe (the kokerboom, or quiver tree), which was fitted with a skin base and cover. In times of war, some San groups inserted their arrows into a fillet placed around the head, where they could be easily reached. In this way they were able to shoot about five or six arrows a minute with a reasonable degree of accuracy to a distance of 60 to 80 paces (although the trekboers’ muzzle-loading muskets could easily kill at more than twice this range). They were shot individually at specific targets, or in a shower aimed in the general direction of the enemy.
There are a number of accounts of the terrible fate of people struck by San poisoned arrows. Burchell, who journeyed over the Sneeuwberg in 1811, was told by his Khoe servants of a man who was pierced by so many arrows of the Sneeuwberg San that when his body was found he “looked more like a porcupine than a man.” Ten years earlier, missionary Johannes Van der Kemp witnessed the deaths of two Khoe herders struck by poisoned arrows while looking after horses in the mountains, and his account of this incident demonstrates the rapidity with which death could ensue once a person had been struck by a poison arrow:
“The Hottentot Ngei came running down the mountain; he was wounded in several parts of his body by the Boschemen with poisoned arrows; he vomited, was vertiginous, and, whilst he spoke, fell down and expired at my feet. Another was also wounded, and dropped down dead before he could reach us; their wounds were only superficial, though death ensued within a quarter of an hour”.

Even when the victim survived he was liable to endure great suffering since wounds from poisoned arrows generally healed very slowly. George Thompson who travelled in South Africa in the early 1820s, reported that a farmer he encountered still suffered great pain from a poisoned arrow wound inflicted 30 years earlier.

Not only were the San feared for their proficiency with the bow and arrow, but they also gained a reputation for great stoicism and bravery in the face of overwhelming odds. They often fought to the last man when cornered, and Thunberg reported that “a Boshiesman who is mortally wounded by a ball is never found crying or lamenting in any shape whatsoever”. About 25 years later, John Barrow, private secretary to the Governor of the Cape, Earl Macartney, also remarked on the bravery of the San in combat. “It frequently happens”, he wrote at the end of the eighteenth century, “that a party will … (throw) themselves in the midst of the Colonists in order to create confusion, and to give their countrymen, concealed amongst the rocks or in the long grass, at the expense of their own lives, an opportunity of exercising more effectually their mortal weapons upon their enemies, and at the same time to facilitate the escape of their wives and children”.

Adriaan van Jaarsveld reported in 1775 that San of the Seekoei River area, captured by a party under his command and ordered to lead them to two others who had escaped capture, refused to do so, despite knowing that they would be shot for refusing to co-operate with their captors:

“I strongly impressed on them … that if they misled us … they should certainly be put to death; but that if they pointed out the hiding place of the fugitives, they should thereby save their lives … I then let them depart, but they had only gone about an hour, when (they) fell on the ground; our spies desired them to rise, but they lay as if dead, without making answer; they then tried to make them
rise by means of some blows, but they still made as if they were dead; and seeing no means of getting these deceivers to leave the spot, and that they might not be any further betrayed by them, they were therefore killed on the spot by our spies …”

Acts of heroism such as these, together with the fact, already mentioned, that San were considered in some senses vermin or sub-human by many of the farmers, who shot them on sight, meant that San casualties were extremely high and the war on them was marked by atrocities on the part of the Dutch Colonists, in the course of which thousands of men, women and children were cruelly put to death.

Little point would be served in providing detailed descriptions of the many atrocities, which are well attested to in the historical record, but the following account by William Somerville, a Scottish doctor and traveller, provides some idea of the sufferings experienced by the San at this time. Travelling through the Eastern Cape near the Winterberg-AmaThola range in the last years of the eighteenth century, Somerville visited the site of a massacre perpetrated by a Boer commando on San men, women and children several years earlier. This is his description of the scene:

“When on the bank of a river at the bottom of a rugged precipice exhibiting at a little distance the resemblance of a ruinous castle shaded and obscured in the front with spreading trees a most romantic spot attracted our attention. We left the road to visit it, and a nearer view added to the gloomy ideas which its first aspect had created; the ground was strued (sic) with morsels of human bones in such number that there remained not a doubt of the place having at some period not very remote been the abode of some unfortunate horde … One of our fellow travellers … told us that about twelve years ago a commando of Boors led by Klaas Smit, who is still alive, and a man noted for his piety amongst the farmers … had gone in pursuit of some roving bosjesmen who had stolen cattle from the inhabitants. Their spies sent out before the party had discovered by the smoke of the fires at which they cooked their victuals that a kraal resided at that spot … Upon this intelligence which the Hottentots had gained … they beset them so perfectly that every retreat was cut off, and began to fire upon them with swanshot and slugs before dawn of day - in this way men, women and children were murdered. The fire was kept up as long as a living creature appeared.”

It is a reflection of how little worth was attached by the frontier farmers to the life of a San person at the time that even Colonists of high standing in their communities, like the individual mentioned in Somerville's account, were guilty of acts of this kind. George Thompson was later to remark of one such person, a veldkommandant who admitted to him that he had been on many commandos that had been involved in the killing of San and the capture of their children:

“It struck me as a strange and melancholy trait of human nature, that this Veld-Commandant, in many other points a meritorious, benevolent and clear-sighted man, seemed to be perfectly unconscious that any part of his own proceedings, or those of his countrymen, in their wars with the Bushmen, could awaken my abhorrence. The massacre of many hundreds of these miserable creatures, and the carrying away of their children into servitude, seemed to be considered by him and his companions as things perfectly lawful, just, and necessary … .”

As a contemporary account by Anders Sparrman, a visitor to the frontier regions, makes clear, however, the brutal manner in which the San were treated by the commandos was not approved of by all the Dutch Colonists. “I am far from accusing all the Colonists of having a hand in these and other cruelties, which are too frequently committed (against the San) in this quarter of the globe”, Sparrman wrote. “While some of them plumed themselves upon them, there were many who, on the contrary, held them in abomination, and feared lest the vengeance of heaven should, for all these
crimes, fall upon their land and their prosperity”. It is also clear that the systematic slaughter of Khoe-San by the Boers was never encouraged or approved by the Company. Government officials at the Cape continually exhorted the farmers to try to negotiate and make peace with the San. If this was not possible, they ordered, those San who actively resisted the establishment of farms in their territories were to be captured and treated humanely. As has been mentioned, however, the Company was in no position to control and discipline the distant frontier farmers, and, despite wishing to prevent confrontation between the San and burghers nominally under their control, they were prepared to sanction the use of extreme measures by the farmers if it appeared that these would succeed where other strategies had failed.

That they did not succeed is indicated by the fact that the suffering of their people at the hands of the commandos served only to harden the San in their resolve to resist the Dutch. “I have to inform you that the fury of the Bushmen on the Sneeuwberg gets worse and worse every day”, wrote an anxious Veldwachtmeester D.S. Van der Merwe to the Landdrost in June 1776. The situation was clearly getting out of hand for the Colonists, and when Colonel Gordon visited the Sneeuwberg in 1777 it was to see whether peace could be negotiated with the San there. Although he was unsuccessful in this and was not able to make contact with the San, he reported a speech by a San chief which demonstrates the determination of these people to defend their land against the Dutch:

“These so called Bushmen or Chinese have a famous chief called Koerekei, or bullet-escaper. Veldwachtmeester Van der Merwen told me that, after an action which he commanded, this Koerekei, standing on a cliff out of range, shouted out to him: “What are you doing in my land? You who have taken all the places where the eland and other game live. Why did you not stay where the sun goes down, where you first came from?” He went on to say that he would kill the herdsmen of the Dutch and chase them all away. As he went off he further said that it would be seen who would win.

Hunting eland.

It appears that Koerekei’s confidence in the San’s ability to chase the Dutch from the land was not misplaced. One of the most prominent Boer leaders, Adriaan Van Jaarsveld, had already tucked his tail between his legs and fled the Sneeuwberg, and within a few years of Gordon’s visit the area from the Hex River to the Swartberg as well as much of the Roggeveld, Koup, Sneeuwberg, Seekoei River valley and Camdeboo was under Khoe-San control. Many Colonists were now forced to abandon their farms.

Gordon was followed by the Governor of the Cape, Van Plettenberg, who visited the eastern frontier in 1778 and erected a beacon in the Seekoei River valley, near present-day Colesberg, defining the most northerly point of the Colony. On his return to Cape Town, Van Plettenberg recommended the establishment of a drostdy in Graaff-Reinet, and in 1786 the new district of Graaff-Reinet was proclaimed and a drostdy built. It was hoped that, with the establishment of the new drostdy, it would be easier for the Company to monitor and control the Colonists on the north-eastern frontier.

Despite the presence of the government’s representatives at Graaff-Reinet and closer governmental supervision of the area, however, the rate of attrition amongst the San communities in the district remained very high. H.C.D. Maynier, appointed Landdrost of Graaff-Reinet in 1792, testified that he had “found that regularly every year large commandos, consisting of 200 and 300 armed Boors, had been sent against the Bosjesmen, and learnt by their reports that generally many hundreds of Bosjesmen were killed by them, … and that the greatest part of the killed comprised helpless women and innocent children”. He was “acquainted with the most horrible atrocities committed on these occasions”. 
Between 1786 and 1795 at least 2,500 San were killed and more than 650 taken prisoner on the north-eastern frontier alone. During the same period the San killed 276 people, mostly Khoe-San herders looking after the Boers’ cattle and sheep. These are the official figures and they are almost certainly too low if one considers that illegal commandos were not reported and one farmer alone boasted to Colonel Richard Collins, who toured the Colony in 1808 and 1809, that in his younger days parties under his command had shot or captured about 3,200 San over a period of six years. No wonder then, as Barrow remarked, “the burden of their song was vengeance against the Dutch”.

The Sneeuwberg San nevertheless continued to cling to their mountain strongholds, and it became clear that it was the spirit of the Dutch farmers rather than that of the Khoe-San which was breaking. Dismayed at the scale of the resistance that they were facing, the morale of the farmers plummeted. Khoe servants and San now joined forces and assembled in large numbers to oppose the Boers, causing many farms in the Tarka, Sneeuwberg and Bruintjeshoogte areas to be abandoned.

To combat the intensified threat from Khoe and San raiders, veldwachtmeesters, who led the commandos, were forced to call out farmers for duty much more frequently. Conditions on commando were arduous, however, and the members’ farms and families were vulnerable to attack while they were away. Those who could afford to do so sent surrogates - usually their Baster or Khoe servants. The discipline of the farmers, who were loathe to serve on the commandos, began to deteriorate - a problem that was on the increase but which the veldwachtmeesters had faced for some time. D.S. Van der Merwe had complained in 1780, for example, that when he tried to form a commando he got “more excuses than men”. And a few years earlier, in 1777, some farmers were already openly ridiculing those in charge of recruiting men and provisions for the commandos, as the following report by the same Van der Merwe makes clear:

“I … ordered the wagon of C. de Clerk on the commando, to convey the provisions, but he sent me the wagon without a tilt (canvas covering); I then sent him a letter to send the tilt, as he was ordered to send his wagon with all its appurtenances; on which he sent me a letter running as follows: “Monsieur D.S. Van der Merwe. You write me to send my wagon tilt tomorrow, which it is impossible that I can do, as it is the bolster of my bed. I am not unwilling, if I had enough bedclothes, to give the tilt, but I am deficient in these. I remain, therefore, after compliments, your friend, Cornelius de Clerk.” Turning over the paper, Van der Merwe found the following words written: “The tilt of which I write you is the bolster for my head, and my wife is my mattrass (sic); so if you claim the tilt by force, order the mattrass with it, as cook”.

Conditions for farmers further to the west in the Roggeveld, Nieuweveld and Koup were as bad as in the Sneeuwberg. Khoe-San bands continued to roam these mountains, attacking farmhouses and stealing livestock and, as in the areas closer to Graaff-Reinet, commandos were encountering much larger bands than had been the case in the earlier period of the conflict. San and other groups were joining up to oppose the European Colonists, and traditionally acephalous San societies now found it necessary to rely on strong leadership in the face of the threats they faced from the Europeans. The fact that the later bands were often reinforced by Khoe servants armed with firearms meant that they were sometimes able to take on and repulse the Colonists when they were attacked. A Khoe-San group that entered the area at the southern base of the Nieuweberg in 1791, for example, was said to be about 1,000 strong, and a commando that attacked a Khoe-San kraal in the Kareeberg in 1790 was forced to retreat as a result of fierce resistance - the Khoe-San were armed with guns as well as bows and arrows and had been reinforced by other kraals in the area. Similarly, a large Khoe-San group located by a commando in 1792 were well-enough armed and organised to successfully resist the
commando’s attack on them. In contrast, it has been estimated that, by the end of the eighteenth century, the population of trekboers in the Cape did not exceed 1,000.

As the eighteenth century drew to a close, therefore, the Colonists of the north-western and north-eastern frontier came to realise that a military solution to the conflict was unlikely to be achieved. It was thus at this time that serious efforts were made by the British, who had occupied the Cape in 1795, as well as some farmers and newly-arrived missionaries, to pacify and settle the San. The hope was that the “disassembling” of San society and culture, and the threat it posed to settler society, could be achieved by peaceful means, rather than by the physical extermination of the people themselves. These efforts met with varying degrees of success and will be discussed in the following chapter.
**TIMELINE**

1497  
Vasco da Gama encounters San hunter-gatherers at Saldanha Bay

1652  
The Dutch East India Company establishes a station at the Cape

1657  
The first free burghers are allocated land on the Liesbeeck River

1700  
Farmers cross the Berg River and establish farms in the Land van Waveren (Tulbagh area)

The cattle trade with the Khoi, previously monopolized by the Company, is opened to the Colonists

1704  
A number of military posts established by this time to counter Khoi-San raids

1713  
First outbreak of smallpox amongst the Khoi, and possibly also the San

1714  
The introduction of the loan farm system

1716  
Peace negotiated between the Colonists and the Khoi-San – raids infrequent between this date and 1739

1725  
Farmers settle in the Olifants River Valley

1730  
Further expansion by farmers south-eastwards into the Warm and Koue Bokkeveld

1739  
Bushman War – Namaquas and San in the Sandveld, Piketberg and Bokkeveld rise up against the Dutch

First veldkorporaals appointed

Khoi-San defeated

1740  
Farmers begin to expand into Khoi-San territories to the north and east of the Olifants River valley

1754  
Khoi-San of the Roggeveld assemble and raid farms in the Olifants River, Bokkeveld, Roggeveld and Doorn river areas

Peace negotiated

1768  
First farms registered in the Sneeuwberg
1770
First San raids on the Sneeuwberg farms

Farms registered in the Seekoei River valley

1772
Khoe-San of the Roggeveld rebel

Rebellion put down and captives taken to Cape Town to be tried and sentenced

1773
Dutch in the Sneeuwberg abandon their farms in the face of San attacks

1774
More than 250 farms registered in the Graaff-Reinet region by this time

The Great Commando assembled and widespread attacks on Khoe-San are launched

1777
Colonel Gordon visits the Sneeuwberg to assess the situation there

1778
Governor Van Plettenberg visits the Sneeuwberg area and erects a beacon in the Seekoei River area, near modern Colesberg, marking the northern-most point of the Colony

1786
The District of Graaff-Reinet proclaimed

1786-1795
Fierce resistance from Khoe-San in the Sneeuwberg and adjoining areas – many raids mounted on the farms of the Colonists

1795
Efforts made by the British, who had occupied the Cape, to bring about peace with the Khoe-San
I spoke to him of God and his soul and eternity, but he seemed quite indifferent about these subjects, making no reply and asking for a tinder-box.

Reverend John Campbell, on his attempts to convert the San leader, Kiewiet.

Am I not a Bushyman, had found grace?

San convert, addressing a congregation at Bethelsdorp.

San depredations continued well into the second half of the nineteenth century in some areas. As has been mentioned, the reason for these continued hostilities lay partly with the difficulties involved in negotiating with the San. While peace might be made with local bands, the various San bands seldom formed a larger political unit with whom binding agreements could be made. Although many groups, particularly in the later years of the eighteenth century, appear to have had leaders, they lacked the stronger forms of leadership common to more hierarchically-structured groups. Barrow, for example,
reported towards the end of the eighteenth century that the members of a large San camp near present-day Colesberg had stated that “every one was master of his own family, and acted entirely without control, being at liberty to remain with, or quit, any society he might incidentally have joined, according as it might suit his convenience”. This meant that agreements entered into with one San group were seldom adhered to by others, a continual source of frustration for the frontier farmers - although the agreements they “negotiated” were usually overwhelmingly in the favour of the latter.

Another obstacle to peace was that the ethos of sharing, which ran very deep within traditional San society, meant that, in the early stages of contact at least, livestock donated to San by the farmers, in return for an undertaking by the San to end their raids, were sometimes consumed by bands from other areas with whom they were expected to share resources. In other cases they were raided for their cattle by more powerful groups. Without livestock to slaughter and with game increasingly scarce as the springs were taken over by the trekboers, the San were driven by hunger to resume their raids on the Colonists’ farms. Henry Lichtenstein, a German physician and naturalist who accompanied Governor J.W. Janssens of the Batavian administration on a tour of parts of the Colony in 1803, described how, on being asked why he was so addicted to stealing, one of the leaders of the San in the Roggeveld-Kareebberg area who had been taken prisoner by the Colonists “pointed to his body, which hung together in folds, and taking a piece in his hand, drew it out as far as it could be drawn, to shew how much it would hold if it was full”.

In the Graaff-Reinet area, Janssens found the conditions of the Khoe-San in the service of the Boers to be appalling. “Many Hottentots presented themselves with bitter complaints, not about thrashings or nakedness - such things seem no longer worth complaining about - but about the withholding of children or cattle, and even about the murder of relatives …” he reported. “The cruelties practised
against the Hottentots surpass not only everything that is said about them in Cape Town, but even everything that can be imagined … Complaints about the withholding of children, cattle, wages and other such matters are so numerous that a volume would be needed to record them.”

Despite these obstacles and the bitterness of the many abused Khoe-San who were in the service of the Boers, limited attempts to bring about a lasting peace with the San were initiated by the government towards the end of the eighteenth century. In 1792 Maynier had received instructions from the Company to take steps to ensure that the San in the Graaff-Reinet district were protected from maltreatment by the Boers. In an attempt to improve relations with the San, he employed one of the “better-inclined” Boers to go with a party into the areas occupied by the San and distribute presents of beads and sheep for slaughter amongst them. There is a hint in Maynier’s description of this man that there were divisions within the ranks of the frontier farmers as to how the San should be treated. Some, as has been remarked, were clearly more sympathetic to the plight of the San than others.

Maynier’s emissary to the San was instructed to “use his best endeavours to dispose them to leave off the commitment of depredations, to give them the assurance that then all hostilities on the part of the Colonists would also cease”. These measures had some success in halting San raids, and farmers in the region between the Tarka and Nieuweveld mountains hunted game for the San, who visited their farms to receive food and other presents. From about the end of the eighteenth century, a number of San groups of the north-western and north-eastern frontier districts began to attach themselves to the Colonists' farms.

Somerville reported in 1799, for example, that a J.P. van der Walt, who had a farm in the Tarka, treated the approximately 70 San who lived on his farm very well, receiving, in return, faithful and reliable service from them. And when Colonel Richard Collins toured the frontier districts in the early years of the nineteenth century, he reported that many San in the north-west appeared to be on reasonably good terms with the farmers in this region. Some independent San visited farms on a regular basis to receive gifts of sheep and tobacco, while others were employed by the farmers and were said to be faithful servants. Most of the San who continued to raid the farms of the Dutch settlers lived beyond the borders of the Colony, and it seems that those raiders who lived within the Colony avoided attacking the farms of Europeans with whom they had established good relationships.

**Floris Visser and Macartney’s Proclamation**

The first concerted and systematic efforts to make peace with, and “civilise”, the San had been initiated in 1798 by Floris Visser, veldwachtmeester of the Middle Roggeveld, some years before Collins’s visit to the frontier. In this year Visser travelled from the Roggeveld to discuss a series of measures with the Landdrost of Stellenbosch which he believed would solve the “Bushman problem”. He suggested the appointment of leaders amongst the San who had credibility both amongst their own people and amongst the farmers, and he also proposed that areas should be set aside which could be permanently occupied by the San. Both these measures had been adopted previously, but Visser further proposed giving the San the means to support themselves as pastoralists - to change their mode of subsistence from one based on hunting and gathering to one based on herding. He suggested that the San should be provided with cattle and sheep by farmers in the area until they were able to establish themselves as pastoralists on a permanent basis. These proposals greatly impressed the Governor, Lord Macartney, who issued a proclamation in 1798 setting out government policy concerning the way San were to be treated and ways in which the problem of their relations with the frontier farmers was to be addressed. British rule was, then, and in the years to come, to result in significantly lower (even if still unacceptable) rates of attrition against the San than had been the case under the Dutch.
Macartney ordered that sufficient land was to be given to San beyond the Sak River for them to sustain themselves by pastoralism and that the inhabitants of the Roggeveld should be encouraged to make contributions of livestock to San in the areas they occupied. The San of the north-western frontier districts, between the Colonial boundary and the Gariep River, were to be placed under the protection and authority of the English government and no veldwachtmeester was to mount any expedition or commit any violent act against them except in self-defence. The capture of children for use as servants was specifically forbidden. San captains (leaders) were to be appointed and given metal-headed canes as symbols of their office, and some of these leaders were to be encouraged to come to Cape Town to “wait upon the governor to receive marks of kindness and approbation from him” and receive gifts for their wives and children. Finally, Macartney declared, because “reclaiming these Bosjesmen from their present savage and deplorable state is not only of the greatest importance to the Colony, but highly interesting to humanity”, those who assisted in this ideal would receive the special favour of the government, while those who obstructed it would be punished.

Visser, accompanied by a number of farmers, began to implement this scheme almost immediately. He visited San captains/leaders in the region of the Roggeveld, explained the intentions of the government and distributed livestock to a number of San groups. By early 1799, several San leaders and their followers had made peace with, and accepted cattle, sheep or goats from, the Colonists. Although San depredations continued on some parts of the northern frontier, the scheme had considerable success and was adopted in other areas. It also led directly to the establishment of the first Christian mission to the San, north of the Sak River.

**Kicherer and the LMS missions to the San, 1799 - 1806**

When Visser returned to the Roggeveld to enter into negotiations with the San early in 1799, he began by holding a peace ceremony. This was accompanied by prayer and singing of hymns by the farmers, and the San present were said to have asked for people to be sent to them who could teach them the Christian religion. Whether or not such an appeal was actually made by the San, plans were soon put in place to bring missionaries to the area to minister to them. These plans were brought to
fruition by the coincidental arrival in Cape Town of four missionaries of the London Missionary Society (LMS) in March of 1799.

Two of these missionaries, Johannes van der Kemp and his assistant, John Edmond, intended to minister to the Xhosa on the eastern frontier, while the other two, Johannes Kicherer and William Edwards, considered establishing a mission in Namaqualand. In April, encouraged by Visser and in accordance with Macartney’s wishes, three San leaders from the Sak River area arrived in Cape Town to request that “proper persons might come and reside among them, who would afford them those valuable instructions which would enable them to become as rich and happy as their neighbours”. Kicherer and Edwards saw this as a sign from providence and immediately changed their plans and arranged to travel to the Sak River - beyond the Roggeveld, which formed the northern frontier of the Colony at that time. They were encouraged and supported in this by the government at the Cape who wished to incorporate them into their larger scheme of pacifying and settling the San.

Within a short time the missionaries had bought provisions and equipment and had set out for the frontier. They were joined on the last leg of their journey by many farmers, who had come to be ministered to by Kicherer. Swollen with these extra numbers, the party arrived at Visser’s farm, where they stayed for about three weeks while Kicherer preached to the farmers of the area. At the end of this period they journeyed for a day north of the Sak River into Bushmanland, accompanied by a train of Colonists, wagons carrying provisions, and herds of livestock. In August 1799 a site for the new mission, which they called Blyde Vooruitzicht, was selected. Kicherer and his helpers immediately began work on the construction of reed houses and a vegetable garden was laid out.

A few days later the farmers who had travelled up with Kicherer and Edwards left them. The missionaries were immediately faced with the daunting task of establishing the mission and of
persuading the “wild” San of the area to settle there. “We are now beyond the limits of the Colony, literally in a heathen land, where men roam around at large, uncontrolled by human or divine laws, doing that which is right in their own eyes” the Reverend T.L. Hodgson was to write when travelling through San-occupied territory in 1822, and something of the loneliness and the sense of alienation experienced by this missionary two decades later must have been shared by Kicherer and Edwards as they contemplated the task ahead of them in Bushmanland. They nevertheless set to work and a party of about 30 San were enticed to the station by handouts of tobacco, “the irresistable herb” as Kicherer described it. Further gifts of tobacco, meat and other presents brought others to the mission.

Having succeeded in their first aim, that of attracting San to the station, the missionaries now faced a host of problems, chief among which was that of communicating with their newly-established congregation. The latter obstacle was removed with the arrival of the wife of one of the Khoe men who accompanied the party. This woman, Gertrude Fortuin, who could speak both Dutch and a San language, acted as interpreter for the missionaries, but the problem remained of conveying the concepts underlying Christianity to the San. This proved particularly difficult and there were times when Kicherer despaired of ever being able to communicate the message of the Bible to his flock. San who professed to have been converted were not always sincere in this, since, as Kicherer remarked, “some of them seem to pray with no other design than to obtain a piece of tobacco”.

Kicherer also found it impossible to identify different individuals at the station, but he solved this problem in a novel, if bizarre, fashion. The names of the San were written in chalk on their backs, and whenever they approached Kicherer they were required to turn their backs and shoulders in his direction so that they could be identified. Yet another obstacle was that the San disliked the taste of cultivated vegetables. Kicherer had hoped that the San would acquire a taste for the vegetables they had begun to grow and that this would induce them to settle at the mission, believing, with another LMS missionary, the Reverend John Campbell, that the San’s “tasting the sweets of industry may produce the spirit of it”.

At the beginning of 1800, Kicherer visited Cape Town with nine San from the mission in order to get support for the mission from the authorities there. The extent to which the emotions of Kicherer and his San companions differed as they approached Cape Town is evident from Kicherer’s account of this visit: “I anticipated with delight, the pleasing scenes before me, but they were struck with dread and dismay. Some of the first objects which presented themselves to their affrighted view were several men hung in chains for atrocious crimes, and many of the Bushmen were conscious of having deserved the same punishment. Their terror was soon increased by beholding in a few days the public execution of another malefactor.”

The San were taken to the Calvinist Church in Cape Town where Kicherer had been asked to preach. “(They) were greatly struck with the large number of well dressed people, whom, in their simplicity, they compared to a nest of ants; and the sound of the organ was at first mistaken by them for the noise of a swarming bee-hive”, Kicherer reported. Exhibited before several of the chief magistrates, the “Boschemen, clad in their filthy karosses (or sheep-skins) sitting in a drawingroom on silk covered chairs, or parading before large pier-glasses were the objects of much goodnatured mirth, as well as sincere compassion”.

When the party returned to the mission from Cape Town in March, they found it faced threats from two San groups - a large kraal of San further to the north and another located nearby under the leadership of a man called Vigilant. Although Vigilant was arrested after threatening the lives of the missionaries and their congregation, he soon escaped, forcing Kicherer to move the mission further south to the Sak River itself. Here they were closer to those farmers who were prepared to offer protection against those who were hostile to its aims.
The Sak River mission – after a sketch by Kicherer.


The Sak River mission as it was in 1805 when it was visited by Henry Lichtenstein.

However, while many farmers in the area supported the Sak River mission and visited it to take Holy Communion, others actively opposed it. The latter faction feared that the mission would attract the attention of people of influence who might act on behalf of the San against farmers who had been guilty of maltreating them. Resentment against the mission amongst some farmers increased further in 1800 when the government issued an order forbidding the Colonists from entering Bushmanland. Only San were now permitted to hunt there, although Floris Visser was allowed to enter the area to hunt on their behalf. This order prevented the farmers from making the seasonal treks into the area that had become an integral part of their pastoral cycle. Some Roggeveld farmers were unhappy that Visser had been granted sole rights to the area and were suspicious of the close relationship he had established with the San, a considerable number of whom stayed on his farm.

Faced with opposition both from certain San groups and from some of the European farmers, and feeling that he was making little headway in converting the San who based themselves at the Sak River mission, Kicherer increasingly shifted his attention to evangelising the Khoe and the Basters. In March 1801, an assistant, William Anderson, at Kicherer’s request, trekked northwards to the Gariep. Kicherer was attracted by the possibility of winning converts amongst the Khoe, Korana and other groups of mixed descent who inhabited that region, and he and the other missionaries arrived some months later, in July. A church was built at Rietfontein, about 60 kilometres north of modern Prieska, but after some months Kicherer departed, leaving Anderson and another assistant, Cornelius Kramer, in charge of the newly-established station. After an arduous journey he arrived back at the Sak River, and the mission was restarted.

William Anderson (left) and Cornelius Kramer (right).
Source: Museum Africa.
By early 1803 there were about 600 people at the settlement. Most of these were of mixed descent and there appear to have been very few San left at the mission. Although Kicherer had turned down an attractive offer to take up the vacant post of minister at Roodezand (Tulbagh) when he was visiting Cape Town, on the grounds that he was needed by the Sak River Mission, he had difficulty in settling in one place and at this point he decided to visit England to exhibit Khoe converts from the station and raise money to support the mission. Christian Botma, a Colonist, was left in charge at the mission, and, according to Lichtenstein, who visited the mission, he “not only undertook the whole trouble of instructing what pupils remained, abandoning his own affairs for the purpose, but also made great sacrifices of money to support the thing”. However, the loss of Kicherer’s leadership qualities appears to have resulted in the station’s losing many of its adherents so that by July 1804 less than 100 people remained.

Kicherer returned to the mission in October 1805 after being received by the king and large numbers of other dignitaries in England, but a drought with which the Sak River area had been afflicted for almost six years made it increasingly difficult to feed the people at the mission. The game which the farmers shot for the San in order to maintain the peace moved off into other areas and the “wild” San, deprived of their natural source of food, cast their eyes increasingly towards the missionaries’ livestock. A number of raids were made by San on the cattle and sheep belonging to the station, and in July of 1806 the missionaries and their congregation were presented with the alarming sight of one of their horses galloping past the entrance to the church in which they were seated, its body pierced with numerous poisoned arrows. By this time, too, many of the farmers had become fearful of the effects that a good education might have on the San. Under pressure from them, a decree banning the teaching of writing at the missions was issued in 1805, with Kicherer noting that the farmers feared that “the heathen will become too wise by instruction”. His appeals to the authorities to lift this ban fell on deaf ears. All these factors, combined with Kicherer’s decision to leave the Sak River mission yet again, this time to minister at Graaff-Reinet, caused the station to be abandoned in August of 1806.
The missions at Toornberg (Colesberg), 1814 – 1817, and Hephzibah (Petrusville), 1816-1817

Approximately two years after the closure of the Sak River mission, Colonel Richard Collins was commissioned by the Governor of the Cape, the Second Earl of Caledon, to undertake a tour of inspection of the frontier districts. In his report, Collins recommended that the government encourage and support the establishment of missions to the San as a way of dealing with the conflict between the Colonists and the San. It was only in 1814, however, after the first visit to South Africa by the Reverend John Campbell, that the LMS decided to try once again to establish another San mission. Campbell, a minister of a Congregational Church in London, travelled extensively in South Africa on two visits, in 1813 and 1820, with, the historian J.S. Marais remarks, “an umbrella to protect him from the sun in one hand, a Bible in the other, and, according to the missionary Robert Moffat, a bottle of brandy in his pocket”.

Campbell’s visit, in 1813, resulted in renewed efforts to evangelise the San, and a number of mission stations were established by the LMS close to the Gariep. The first mission was founded on the site of present-day Colesberg in September 1814 by Erasmus Smit and Jan Goeyman, a former member of the Sak River mission. It was situated between the Colonial boundary and the Gariep, an area heavily populated by San. The mission was named Blyde Vooruitzicht Fontein after the one at Sak River, but became known as Toornberg or Toverberg. In 1816 it was renamed Grace Hill (Genadeberg) by missionary James Read, who gave it this name on account of the great progress he felt had been made in evangelizing and “civilising” the San at this place. According to a report made to the LMS Directors in 1815, the motive in deciding to found this and other stations in the region was to “deprive the Bushmen of that savage ferocity by which they have been hitherto distinguished, and reconcile them to the white men, against whom they had a peculiar enmity; while it will greatly facilitate the journeys of Missionaries and others, who hitherto have been obliged, for safety, to travel in large companies”. Although the missionaries showed themselves over the years to be steadfast protectors of the San when they were threatened by other groups, the sometimes pragmatic, even political, aspects of “civilising” the San, unrelated to the saving of their souls, are evident in this statement.
More than 500 San are reported to have gathered at the mission initially, but their fears that the missionaries intended to turn them over to the Boers severely hampered Smit's efforts. Some months after the mission had been established, all the San, together with their leader, approached Smit and protested against his presence there. They told him that they had had enough of his teaching and demanded that he leave the mission. The primary reason for this confrontation was Smit's attempts to change their beliefs and customs - clearly something which the nature of his calling made it difficult to avoid. Smit's challenging of key San beliefs concerning the afterlife and his insistence that they died only once and were judged after death, for example, induced uneasiness and a strong sense of dissatisfaction amongst his congregation.

His relationship with the San at Toornberg having deteriorated to the point where he felt he could no longer continue to minister to them, Smit abandoned the station in March 1815 and moved to Graaff-Reinet. Here he met up with James Read and William Corner, a member of the LMS from British Guiana, and, with their encouragement, it was decided to try again. Corner joined forces with Smit and Goeyman and in June they returned to the mission. Plots were measured off, vineyards laid out, fields ploughed and planted and a church was built. Smits' wife, only 15 years of age, began to teach the San girls to knit and sew. San from both sides of the Gariep were attracted to the mission and a number of them were baptised, including the San leader Uithaalder. To induce the San to remain at the station they were regularly supplied with corn, tobacco and dagga. They were also occasionally given gifts of sheep “for which”, Corner remarked,” they were glad as if they were received into paradise”.

There were essentially two categories of San attached to the missions - those who stayed there more or less permanently and those that made occasional visits for longer or shorter periods of time. The
tendency was for a core of San groups to live at the station, adapting their way of life to that determined by the missionaries, while at the same time a varying number of camps of visitors situated themselves on the edge of the station. Those San who were permanently attached to the mission were called “onze Boschjesmans” or “vaste Boschjesmans” (“our Bushmen” or “settled Bushmen”) while those who only visited the mission occasionally and maintained an independent existence were termed “wilde Boschjesmans” or “vreemde Boschjesmans” (“wild Bushmen” or “unfamiliar Bushmen”). Even the settled San, however, continued to hunt and gather from time to time. They made trips into the veld to forage, sometimes for as long as two months, but some returned to the station to attend Sunday services.

Good progress was made in getting the mission on its feet, but tensions had developed between Smit and his assistants, and by the beginning of 1816 both Corner and Goeyman had left the station. This presented a problem for Smit as Corner had developed a good relationship with the Toornberg San and his presence was greatly missed by them. By September 1816 there were only 12 San families living in the mission itself, although about 300 San camped on its outskirts.

Another role was found for Corner and Goeyman when James Read, their superior, travelled to the LMS missions in the north and met Corner in Graaff-Reinet. He arranged for Corner, Goeyman and an assistant to travel to Renosterfontein, or “Tkannee” as it was called by the San, near present-day Petrusville. It was there that they established the Hephzibah mission in September 1816. It was established in order to minister to and settle the approximately 300 San occupying the surrounding area. According to the Reverend John Philip, head of the LMS in South Africa, it and Toornberg together attracted almost 1,700 San at one time.
The closure of Toornberg and Hephzibah

Although the missionaries at Toornberg and Hephzibah were starting to attract quite large numbers of San by 1817, their efforts were destined to be thwarted by the Governor of the Cape, Lord Charles Somerset, who was sympathetic to those Boers who wanted the missions to be closed down. While some farmers had given their full support to the missions at Toornberg and Hephzibah, and a number attended worship on the sabbath at Toornberg with their families, others complained to the Governor of the dangers of assembling San so near the frontier.

There were a variety of motives underlying the appeals by some of the Boers to Somerset to close the missions. Probably the most important was their fear that the way in which the San had been maltreated by them would be reported to the Colonial authorities. Smit had clashed with Boers in the area over the dubious manner in which San children were taken into service on the farms, as well as over their attempts to seize San children who had fled from the surrounding farms to the mission. San took refuge at the mission from Boers who were persecuting them and this upset the farmers, who, in some cases, resorted to kidnapping the refugees. Thus Maria Maritz, Smit’s sister-in-law, testified:

“The Bushmen when they found they had the means of subsistence wished to recover their children, some of whom they had made over to the farmers when in a famished state, and some of the children themselves, hearing that the establishment was formed, wished to join it. This drew on the Institution the hostility of the Boors, who used to come with their wagons and carry off all the Bushmen with their women and children, and their representatives at length induced the Landdrost to break up the establishment”.

Somerset ordered the closure of the mission at Hephzibah in March 1817 and a year later Smit, too, was ordered to leave Toornberg. According to Philip, the closure of the missions now resulted in the country being cleared of San “as if they had been wild beasts”. The San chief, Uithaalder, for example, told Philip: “Some moons after Mr Smit’s removal, the boors came and took possession of our springs, chased us from the lands of Toornberg, and made us go and keep their sheep. Whitboy, one of my Bushmen, and his wife, were both shot by the boors while taking shelter among the rocks, and their children carried into perpetual servitude”. The spring at Toornberg was taken over by one of these Boers, van der Walt, who declared that “the Bushmen should have no springs in this country, and they should have no pools but the rainwater pools out of which to drink”. After being flogged by van der Walt with a sjambok when three of his sheep went missing, Uithaalder was driven away from the area. He was forced to move from farm to farm, until he went “to live among the mountains, and to subsist upon roots and locusts”.

The sad state of the missions after their abandonment was described by Anne Hamilton, wife of one of the missionaries’ assistants at Lattakoo, a Tlhaping settlement north-east of Kuruman:

“We rode by the places that had once been stations, but now left desolate. At (one) a Boor had passed on his way to the salt pan and driven away most of the Bushemens (sic); at poor Hephzibah we found a few who sang and prayed notwithstanding they have no missionary. (They) say they are determined to pray till the Lord again send his Word among them. It made my heart bleed to see this place: two years ago as I passed them there were about 300 Bushermens living there … the land was covered with flocks and gardens, now not the smallest vestage(sic) of house or garden remaining; all is destroyed by a Boor.”
By 1823 most of the San who had been attached to Hephzibah were reported to be working for farmers in the area.

The missions Ramah and Konnah, 1816 - 1823

About two years prior to the closure of Toornberg and Hephzibah, another two San missions had been established by the LMS. In 1816, Andries Pretorius and Piet Sabba, a Nama convert, had begun teaching at Ramah, three kilometres north of the Gariep, in the vicinity of present-day Hopetown. At about the same time, the Khoe converts, Kruisman and David, were placed at Konnah, just south of the Gariep.

Campbell visited both stations in August 1820. He found Kruisman and about 30 San still at Konnah, which was situated a few miles from a Korana (Khoe) kraal situated on the banks of the Gariep. From Campbell's description, it seems that Kruisman and David had achieved considerable success at the station. "(W)e went to Konnah, which lies about two and a half miles to the westward of the river, and is now entirely occupied by Bushmen", he wrote. "We saw a considerable piece of ground, which their Hottentot teachers had taught them to cultivate and to irrigate from a neighbouring spring. The ground had been so productive, particularly of tobacco, water-melons, onions etc. as sufficiently to reward them for all their labours." Europeans could not have been a common sight, for Campbell remarked that "all the Bushmen children in the place fled at our approach to the leader's hut, and as many as could concealed themselves behind two women; the others crouched in silence at the back of the hut".

At Ramah, about 30 Griquas/Basters and 40 to 50 San, with many occasional visitors, had placed themselves under Piet Sabba. By the time of Campbell's visit, five houses had been built there as well as an unusually decorated church capable of accommodating 100 people. Campbell described it as very neat with whitewashed walls and "red and black large round spots regularly daubed over it, which gives it the appearance of stained paper". A number of San and Griqua huts had been erected behind the houses.

However, the attempts of the missionaries to convert the Ramah San and their leader, Kiewiet, met with little success, and Campbell's scolding the old San leader for not attending church meetings had no effect. He advised the San to build more substantial houses, but this suggestion was also disregarded, Campbell remarking that "they appeared as perfectly indifferent to such counsel as if a native from China were advising a healthy inhabitant of London to clothe himself with the thickest fur during the months of summer".

Kiewiet and his followers left Ramah in 1822 when it was taken over by Basters, whom Sabba had permitted to stay in the area, and Sabba himself soon left the station. When the traveller George Thompson passed through the area in 1823 he found the station completely deserted and all the buildings in ruins. By this time Konnah, too, had been abandoned.
The mission at Philippolis, 1822 - 1828

A new mission was established north of the Gariep at Philippolis under Jan Goeyman, later succeeded, in August 1825, by James Clark. (Goeyman had spent a night in the church with another man's wife, and the Church deacons were unwilling to accept his explanation that the night had been spent solely in prayer). The mission attracted about 60 San, but they were troubled by the Bergenaars, who raided the mission for cattle, as well as the Griquas who occupied the springs in the area. Further problems arose when Boers began to move into the region, harassing the San at the station. By 1825 there were between 700 and 800 Boers in the Philippolis area, and in the same year Philip reported:

“On my arrival at the Bushman station at Philippolis I found that the Boers who had recently settled in the new district so lately added to the Colony had found their way across the river, and were beginning to annoy those who had the conducting of the mission and to oppress the Bushmen, under the pretext of searching for stolen cattle and runaway Bushmen and children, who, they alleged, had been contracted to them and promised them by their parents. The missionaries were set at defiance, the statements of the Bushmen were disregarded by the Boers; there was no authority in the country to decide such questions, and the Bushmen were unable to defend themselves.”

Attacks also came from Sotho-Tswana, who attacked Boesmanfontein, an outstation of the mission, in May 1826. They drove off sheep and cattle donated to the San living there, believing that these animals had been stolen from them by the Bergenaars, a rebel offshoot of the Griquas, and razed the mission buildings to the ground. About 30 people were burnt to death or assegaaied as they fled from their dwellings.

Prior to this event, Philip had decided to allow Adam Kok II and his Griquas, rather than the San, to occupy the land on which the main mission at Philippolis stood - in return for an undertaking that Kok and his followers would protect the San in the Transgariep area. At this time Kok and his followers, alienated from the main Griqua settlement at Griquatown under Andries Waterboer, were wandered from place to place within the Modder River valley. After the attack on Boesmanfontein an alarmed James Clark sent an urgent message to Kok to settle at Philippolis and prevent further depredations. This he and his followers did, and Philippolis was eventually to become the capital of a wide area under the control or influence of the Griqua people - although some San lingered on at the mission for some time after this, and the settlement also attracted a considerable number of desperado Bergenaar and Korana groups. Philip hoped that the Griquas at Philippolis, under the guidance of the missionary Peter Wright, would prevent further Boer incursions from south of the Gariep, and, at the same time, act as a barrier against Mzilikazi's Ndebele in the north. Unlike the San, the Griquas were seen as a force capable of resisting the incursions of the Boers into the area as well as the threat of incursions by Mzilikazi's Ndebele, who had moved from KwaZulu-Natal and were wreaking havoc over a wide area.
Adam Kok II. By Charles Davidson Bell.
Source: Cape Archives

Philippolis in 1834. By Charles Davidson Bell.
Source: Museum Africa.
Mzilikazi.

An Ndebele warrior.
Bushman Station/ Bethulie, 1828 - 1833

Work amongst the San soon became unviable at Philippolis, however, largely as a result of tensions between the San and the Griquas, and James Clark left in 1828 to establish a new mission at Bushman Station, near the confluence of the Gariep and the Caledon. Most of the San at Philippolis had left by this time. In the same year, about 150 San attended a service at the new mission station. By 1830, about 50 San with livestock had settled more or less permanently there, and by 1833 it had about 100 permanent inhabitants, with others living a more independent existence nearby.

There were many difficulties involved in the establishment of the Institution and Clark’s task was not an easy one. Theft was rife and the San at the mission were reluctant to attend his sermons, demanding to be paid for listening to the preaching of the missionaries. To make matters worse, San at the station, as well as other San groups in Transgariep, once again came under pressure from Boers who had started to cross the Gariep from the south in large numbers in 1827.

As at the Sak River mission, some of the immigrant farmers were sympathetic to the aims of the missionaries and donated livestock to San living at the mission, but, in general, they had a massive and
negative impact on the area. Much of Transgariep was occupied by San communities, and the raiding and hunting expeditions of these new arrivals had a profound effect on the people living there. In the face of these incursions and their effects, starving San sought refuge from the Boers at the mission, and some of them used it as a base from which to raid the livestock of the farmers. Clark reported, however, that some of the farmers in the neighbourhood had greatly provoked the San, causing them to plunder their livestock, and the traveller George Thompson reported the San’s view of these thefts: “The Bushmen say in reply to the question why they steal the Boers’ cattle: The Boers come and destroy and carry away our game. We merely do the same; we rob them of their game - cattle”.

By June 1833, Philip had decided, for strategic reasons, that the LMS should concentrate its attentions on its Griqua missions. At this time, the Paris Evangelical Mission Society was looking to establish a mission to the Sotho-Tswana, and Philip offered Bushman Station to the French missionaries. When Clark protested this decision he was ordered to leave the mission, which was soon deserted by most of the San. The French missionary, Jean Pierre Pellissier, took over the mission and it was subsequently settled by Tlhaping (Sotho-Tswana mixed with other groups) refugees and renamed Verhui. Later it became known as Bethulie. Although a few San lingered on at the station, this marked the end of the LMS’s efforts to evangelise the Gariep San.
Bushman School, Glen Grey, 1839 - c.1850.

The last LMS mission to the San was that which was formed for the benefit of San and other groups under the San leader, Madolo, also known as Madoor or Madura. It was established by James Read, who was based at Philipton Mission in the Kat River Settlement, Eastern Cape. In 1838 Read had been told by one of the members of his congregation, who was of San descent, that he had relatives to the north who were still living a wild existence. The missionary saw this as a divine call to minister to the San and an exploratory party was sent out from Philipton to locate these people. They found them under the leadership of Madolo at Glen Grey, north of the Black Kei River - in the vicinity of the present-day town of Lady Frere. Madolo had previously been chief of the San who occupied the country around the Klipplaats and Upper Black Kei Rivers, but had retired with his people to the Glen Grey area in about 1835.

The San chief returned the missionaries’ visit in May 1839 and it was agreed that a LMS outstation would be instituted amongst his people with the help of two members of the Philipton congregation. Read travelled north to supervise the establishment of the station in September 1839 and a large piece of land was soon under cultivation. The new mission, which was situated on the White Kei/ Cacadu River and was named Bushman School, soon attracted San as well as people from other groups, and by early 1842 there were 15 San families staying there. A few years later, the number of people who based themselves at the mission, now re-named New Bethelsdorp, had increased to about 300 families, many of whom were Khoe, Nguni and Sotho farmers, or people of mixed descent. Some San at Bushman School were baptised, and although Madolo himself was never converted he often attended services at the small chapel which had been erected there.

In April 1846 the War of the Axe broke out between the British and the Xhosa, and Madolo and 200 of his San, Khoe, Mfengu and Thembu followers were recruited as levies by the British, whom they assisted in defeating the Xhosa. The mission never really recovered from the prolonged absence of so
many of its inhabitants during the war. When Madolo, described by Thomas Baines, the artist and explorer, as a “diminutive old man, with meagre visage, prominent cheek bones and bare head by no means covered with little peppercorns”, was visited and sketched by the famous traveller and artist at the School in 1848 the station consisted of only 12 inferior reed houses, one of which served as both chapel and school.

Madolo (in peaked cap) and followers sketched by Thomas Baines.
Source: Museum Africa.
Madolo's San, under James Read, engage with Xhosa warriors.

Source: Bell Heritage Trust, UCT.
After the war, Madolo, Read and his son petitioned the Colonial government for their territory to be made over formally to the San. An area was marked out for occupation by Madolo and Flux, another San chief, but other groups began to move into the area, causing Flux to attack an immigrant Thembu chief, Ndhela. As the most important San leader in the area, Madolo was held responsible with Flux for this attack and he was attacked by Ndhela. He and Flux were forced to flee to caves along the banks of the White Kei in about 1850 when the Colonial government sent a force to the area to arrest the perpetrators of the violence. Most of Madolo’s followers went with him, and, deprived of his leadership, the remainder of the community at Bushman School appear to have dispersed - although a few San, as well as other groups, were still living at the mission in 1850.

George William Stow, the pioneering nineteenth century geologist, historian and rock art copyist, later visited the cave inhabited by Madolo on the White Kei, in the course of his researches into San history and rock paintings, and found its walls covered with a beautiful painted panel of about 100 springboks. When he asked what had happened to the old San chief, he was told that Madolo had fallen back on the fastnesses of the Maloti-Drakensberg in 1856 when he was about 80 years of age, “since which time he has been lost sight of, and his ultimate fate is buried in oblivion”.

George William Stow.
Rock paintings of springboks in Madolo’s cave on the White Kei. Copied by Stow.


Rock paintings in Madolo’s cave on the Black Kei. Copied by Stow.

TIMELINE

1798
Floris Visser suggests measures to bring about peace between the San and the farmers on the north-western frontier

Governor Macartney issues a proclamation setting out government policy concerning the ways in which the San are to be treated and in which the problems with the frontier farmers are to be addressed

1799
Arrival of LMS missionaries in the Cape

Blyde Vooruizicht mission established by Kicherer and Edwards north of the Sak River

1800
Kicherer and a group of San from the mission visit Cape Town

Kicherer moves the mission south to the Sak River itself

1801
Kicherer abandons the Sak River mission and establishes a mission at Rietfontein to the Khoe and mixed communities on the Gariep, north of the Sak River

1802
Kicherer leaves the mission at Rietfontein and re-establishes the San mission at the Sak River

1803
Kicherer, Scholtz and several “Hottentots” visit London and are received by the king

1805
Kicherer returns to the Sak River mission

1806
The Sak river mission is abandoned and Kicherer goes to minister at Graaff-Reinet

1814
Toornberg mission established by Smit and Goeyman on the site of Colesberg

1815
Toornberg temporarily abandoned by Smit and Goeyman

They return to the mission with Corner, recruited in Graaff-Reinet
1816
Corner and Goeyman leave the mission after conflict with Smit.

Hephzibah (Renosterfontein/Tkanee) mission established under Corner and Goeyman, near present-day Petrusville

Ramah mission established under Sabba and Pretorius, near present-day Hopetown

Konnah mission established under Kruisman and David, just south of the Gariep

1817
Somerset orders the closure of Hephzibah

1818
Smit ordered to leave Toornberg

1822
Ramah taken over by Bastards/Basters

Philippolis mission established under Goeyman

1823
Konnah abandoned

1826
Philippolis handed over to the Griquas by Philip

1828
Bushman Station established by James Clark on the site of modern Bethulie

1833
Bushman Station handed over to the French missionary Jean Pierre Pellissier, who ministered to the Tlhaping

1839
Bushman School mission established on the White Kei by James Read, ministering to Madolo's people

1846
Madolo and his followers fight in the War of the Axe with the British against the Xhosa

1850
Madolo leaves Bushman School, taking most of his followers with him
CHAPTER 4

SAN LABOUR AND THE TRADE IN SAN CHILDREN

_Bushmen appear to think that there is no justice for them in this world … they are now so in despair that most have resolved to cease complaining._

Andrew Smith, after encountering San journeying to trace their kidnapped children.

_The only game … which receives such treatment is the family of wild fowl, and then the sportsmen would scorn to steal the eggs._

Joseph Orpen, on the killing of San and the enslavement of their children.

**Captive and “free” San labour**

During the course of the eighteenth century many San were captured during commando expeditions, and most of these war captives ended up as labourers on the farms of the Dutch Colonists. The earliest recorded capture of Khoe-San women and children by Europeans and their distribution to farmers as captive labour occurred in 1731 when a woman and three children captured by a commando in the Western Cape were given to farmers as servants. This practice increased greatly during the period of intense conflict between the San and Boers after 1774. Between that year and 1795 there were probably more than 1,000 Khoe-San war captives in the Graaff-Reinet district, and during the last decade of the eighteenth century they probably outnumbered the official slave population of Graaff-Reinet by two to one.

It is difficult to be sure exactly how many Khoe-San were taken captive by commandos, but the numbers of Khoe-San captives listed in official reports of the time are almost certainly too low as veldwachtmeesters sometimes omitted to mention the taking of captives in the reports they submitted after commandos had been mounted. As a result, the landdrosts’ lists of San prisoners were generally very inaccurate. For example, more than 100 San are known to have been captured by commandos in the eastern frontier districts between 1787 and 1788, but the landdrost listed only 13 captives for this period.

The capture of San by the members of commandos was not simply an unavoidable consequence of these expeditions. Few of the farmers could afford to buy slaves or pay for free labour. Thus, while the primary aim of most commandos was usually the breaking up of San raider groups, in many cases an important objective in mounting an expedition against the San was the taking of prisoners to meet the labour needs of commando members. John Barrow, who was sent to the eastern frontier in 1797 by Macartney to investigate the causes of the unrest there, put it bluntly when he stated that “the boors are chiefly induced to undertake (commandos) with the view of securing for their service the women and children”.

That some commandos were mounted specifically to obtain captive labour is corroborated by other observers, including Anders Sparrman. Sparrman recounts how, travelling through the Zuurveld of the Eastern Cape, he was approached by San who came to beg tobacco and complain of the manner in which they had been treated by the Boers. They told him that a Boer commando had taken all the young San children in their area from their parents, leaving them to look after themselves and their cattle alone in their old age. It is clear that commando members often derived significant benefits from these expeditions in the form of free captive labour and that their intention when deciding to
mount commandos was not always limited to putting an end to San raids. Barrow’s assertion that the primary aim of all the commandos was to procure San captives is probably extreme, however, since there were many reports of the shooting of San who could, rather, have been taken captive and employed as servants – although this can hardly be said to be a mitigating factor.

In general, San men were not taken prisoner by the commandos. This was partly due to the fact that many of them refused to hand themselves over to the Boers and were shot while fighting to the last. Some were not given the opportunity to surrender, however, since adult males were considered largely unsuitable for service on farms. It was feared that they would try to escape and even perhaps attack their masters. Furthermore, it was difficult to secure adult male captives and keep them prisoner for the time that the commando was in the field. San women and children, however, were a valuable source of labour, and their capture came to play an increasingly important part in commando activities. During the eighteenth century, female San captives had sometimes been given to Khoi auxiliaries as wives or concubines, but more often they were distributed with their children to the European commando members, who kept them as servants on their farms. A number were even employed as nurses for the Boers’ children, some of whom, as a result, became fluent in a San language. Young children, however, were considered the most valuable captives as they could be conditioned to life as a farm labourer from an early age, and we find the farmer Dirk Koetse sending the following note to a commando leader: “I have asked my Hottentot to catch a little one for me and I beg that if he gets one he may be allowed to keep it”.

The official status of San captured by commandos was neither that of “free Hottentots” nor that of slaves. Rather, it was similar to that of the “ingeboekte Bastard-Hottentots” or “inboekelingen”, the offspring of slaves and Khoi, whose names and details, since 1775, were registered, and who were
then indentured to their masters until the ages of 18 or 25. After 1790 they could be apprenticed for 25 years from the time of their capture. In practice, San were often kept as unpaid labourers for their entire lives, and, although by law they could not be sold or inherited like slaves, it was not uncommon for the farmers to claim that San captives, as well as any children born to them while they were in their service, were their property. Thus in 1794 we find W. Prinsloo of the Graaff-Reinet area making a present of a young “Bastard Hottentot” to one G. Jordaan - prompting the Secretary of the District to chastise him with the remark that “this kind of thing conflicts not only with the laws, but with humanity”. It was to prevent actions of this kind that, in 1792, the Council of Policy had decided to pay a sum of money for every man, woman or child captured by Colonists who were serving on official commandos. Although well-intentioned, this edict nevertheless sometimes served to encourage trekboers to hunt down and capture San for profit.

During the course of the nineteenth century things improved for some San communities, while for others the situation became worse. In the former case, in some areas a peace of sorts had been negotiated between some San and the farmers and accommodation reached between them, even if this arrangement was unfavourable in many respects for the San. The establishment of peace in many areas on the frontier was partly due to the efforts of Stockenstrom and his son, Andries Junior, also a Landdrost of Graaff-Reinet. They put in place a policy for the treatment of San between 1804 and 1828 which went some way to ensuring that they were treated more humanely than in the past. Boer commandos were made subject to strict regulations that were designed to ensure that these expeditions were not marked by the wholesale slaughter of San men, women and children as in the past. Greater attention was also given to the manner in which captured and apprenticed San were treated. These efforts to establish peace with the San after the wars with the Boers in the last quarter of the eighteenth century initiated the large-scale movement of independent San into the ambit of European society, as servants.

Initially the San living adjacent to areas claimed by the Colonists based themselves in the mountains, but made periodic visits to farms to receive presents of livestock and game shot for them by the

Andries Stockenstrom Junior.
farmers. It was not long before hunger and presents of food by the farmers caused them to base their kraals permanently in the neighbourhood of the farms. Here they were supported by the farmers in return for the rendering of services. From time to time, in some cases, they would leave the farms to resume their previous way of life in the veld, but their dependence on tobacco and dagga, which was sometimes cultivated by the farmers specifically in order to attract and retain San labour, as well as the establishment of relationships with the mixed Khoe-San labour force on the farms and their absorption into this class through intermarriage, bound them increasingly firmly to the farms and the servant families who lived on them. Stockenstrom, for example, reported that “on every farm between the Great Sneeuwberg chain and the Orange River, we found a Bushman family, or kraal, easily maintained by the enormous flocks of sheep and game, and very useful to the farmer”. And when he travelled from the Winterberg to the Seekoei River valley in 1821 he encountered no San living independently from the Boers except for one kraal. Between about 1800 and 1830 much of the labour force on the north-eastern frontier farms was reported to consist of San, who provided a variety of services to the farmers and attached themselves to the farms to varying extents - ranging from full time service to occasional visits and provision of services on their hunting and gathering round.

The primary role of male San servants was to herd the farmers’ livestock, whereas the women worked as domestic servants. The men also acted as messengers, as trackers, and as translators and mediators in the dealings the farmers had with the “wild” San. Some San servants were given livestock as wages and were allowed to build up their own herds and graze them on their masters’ farms. Many, however, desperate simply to survive after their territories had been occupied and they were unable to continue roaming and hunting in these areas, were prepared to work on the farms in return for no more than shelter, food and blankets - sometimes supplemented by the gathering of veldkos. This, added to the fact that they were usually reliable and faithful servants, made them a favoured source of labour for the frontier farmers.

Between 1809 and 1819 a number of laws relating to the status and treatment of “Hottentots” were passed by the British government at the Cape, which had an effect on the San labour force. Prominent amongst these was the Hottentot Code of 1809. San who were living permanently in the Colony were automatically subsumed within this ethnic category, and these laws therefore impacted on them. They followed the prohibition on the importation of slaves into the Colony by Britain in 1807, and while ostensibly designed to ameliorate the conditions of service of the Khoe-San, they effectively limited their movement within the Colony, through a pass system, and forced them to attach themselves to farms and provide labour to the Colonists.

Those San who lived outside the Colonial borders were not subject to the “Hottentot” laws, and so should have had greater freedom of movement. However, their children, once of a certain age, fell under the laws of apprenticeship established in 1775 and had to be registered with, and apprenticed to, a farmer. Bound to their children, the parents were therefore also automatically bound to the farms on which their children were registered. Naturally this made it extremely difficult for the parents to leave the service of a farmer who maltreated them - something that occurred very commonly. In 1817 a government proclamation regulated the treatment of Khoe-San child “apprentices”, but it was largely ignored and had little real effect on their working conditions. It was only with the passing of Ordinance 50 in 1828, which gave the Khoe-San equality with Europeans under the law, that a measure of real protection and freedom was given to San and Khoe serving farmers within the Colony. In 1834 an Imperial Act was passed which gave the thousands of slaves at the Cape their freedom, although even then some were forced to serve their masters for another four years.
In general, the measures taken to make peace with the San held some benefits for the former hunter-gatherers, who, although now reduced to the status of servants or clients, were nevertheless provided with regular contributions of food, and sometimes livestock, in return for services rendered to the farmers. Many were encouraged to build up their own herds. However, it was also clear that the change in policy with respect to the San formed part of a wider strategy adopted by the farmers to subdue and pacify their former enemies. The effect of the peace measures was to disempower the San and facilitate the establishment of new farms and the re-occupation of farms previously abandoned by the trekboers in the face of attacks by San raiders. Encouraged by the cessation of hostilities, for example, farmers began to move back into the Seekoei River valley, and in the early years of the nineteenth century there was a rush for land in this area as new farms were established and old ones re-occupied.

The development of the trade in captive San children

Contemporary accounts and surveys make it clear that many San serving the Colonists in the northeastern frontier districts were children. A survey taken in 1823 and 1824, for example, revealed that the Colonists in the Graaff-Reinet district had more than 1,000 San children working for them - or, as it was described, “apprenticed” to them, or “under their protection”. The practice of capturing San children while on commando for employment as farm servants developed in later years into a large-scale trade in captive children, primarily by the Boers, but also by other groups, including the Griquas, Bergenaars, Basters, Korana and Tlhaping. Renegade freebooters such as Jan Bloem, Pieter Pienaar, Coenraad de Buys, and the Afrikaner family also participated in the trade.

This practice grew out of the increased demand for labour, caused by the establishment of new farms and the growth in the farmer population during the early nineteenth century. Captive Khoi-San labour had always provided a cheap alternative to the purchasing of slaves, but the cost of slaves increased dramatically after the abolition of the slave trade in 1808, and many farmers who could not afford slaves became heavily dependent on captive labour, and captive women and children in particular. Although the focus here is on the capture of San children, children from a number of other groups were captured in war or in raids and were sold on to Boers in the Colony and beyond its borders. Besides conducting raids for their own labour, the Boers, a reliable source of guns and ammunition, provided a ready market for children captured in war by Nguni, Sotho and Tswana groups, which would usually have kept these children as their own servants, or ransomed them back to their relatives in the communities from which they originated.

The acquisition of free or cheap San labour was an inducement to Boers to settle in the areas where this labour was available, and many a farmer was able to establish himself and prosper with the aid of his San workforce. When John Philip met up with a party of Colonists on their way to “Bushman country”, in the north of the Colony, and asked them how they expected to succeed, “they stated that the boors in that country were acquiring stock, and with the help of Bushmen, and Bushmen children, whom they would be able to get for nothing, they hoped to do as well as the others had done”.

When, as often occurred, the Boers found they could obtain neither inexpensive nor voluntary labour they looked to obtain Khoi-San servants by capturing them themselves, or by buying them from others. As early as the 1790s, renegade freebooters such as Jan Bloem, a German deserter who had fled the Colony to the badlands of the Gariep after murdering his wife, raided Khoi-San of the Northern Cape and sold their children to European farmers. In 1817 Stockenstrom drew the attention of the authorities in the Cape to this trade after he noticed two small San girls in Graaff-Reinet in the company of a merchant from Cape Town. The merchant would give him no details about these young
children other than that he had got them at a San kraal and that he had been told that they were orphans. Stockenstrom subsequently wrote to the Colonial Secretary advocating much stricter controls of “this (as it is called) ancient custom” of placing San children in the care of the Dutch farmers, but although legislation was passed in 1817 and 1822 protecting the rights of San children living on farms and banning their purchase and trade this was largely ignored. In about 1824, for example, Stockenstrom found that almost 200 San children had been “placed under the protection” of the inhabitants of the Graaff-Reinet District, while 55 had been “apprenticed”. In the sub-drostdy of Cradock, more than 400 San children above the age of 16 years, and almost 450 under this age, were living with European Colonists without contract or indenture. San children were reported to be very useful to the Graaff-Reinet farmers and were usually employed as leaders of the teams of oxen.

The claim that they were simply rescuing orphans as well as the claim that San had voluntarily given up or sold children whom they could not support were common justifications given by the Boers for their trading in or owning San children. In many cases, however, the children had been forcibly removed from their parents’ care and had not been surrendered voluntarily. In other cases the children had no parents because they had been killed by their European “guardians”. Those San who gave up their children as servants to the Boers had usually been reduced to extreme poverty by the Dutch Colonists. They gave them up under duress, and then only on the understanding that they would receive their children back when they were again in a position to support them.

Once in the service of the Boers, the children were treated, to all extents and purposes, as slaves. The proprietary attitude of farmers towards captive San children was particularly clearly expressed by farmers in the Winburg district, who were ordered by a court to release San who had worked all their lives on their farm without receiving wages. “Ons het de ou’ es dood gemaak en de kleintjes groot gemaak” they protested to the magistrate, “en nou is dit mos onse goed” (“We killed the parents and raised the young ones, and now they are our property”).

Some San children tried to escape, but this was usually very difficult, particularly from the isolated farms of the frontier farmers. If they did manage to leave the farm and successfully elude their masters, they often faced a long journey through inhospitable country before reaching their homes. Campbell, for example, described how two San children who had run away from the farm where they were to be trained as servants were found “half-starved in the wilderness, fast locked in each other’s arms”; and the French missionaries, Arbousset and Daumas reported seeing two San children about seven or eight years of age who had escaped from their Boer masters in KwaZulu-Natal, and had journeyed all the way back to their parents in the Free State, surviving off roots and sleeping in the bush.

Burchell, too, recounts how one of his Khoe servants, Juli, and this man’s sister had been captured by a Boer, who refused to allow their mother to remain on the farm as she was of less value to him as a servant than her children. Burchell writes:

“He therefore procured Juli and his sister to be registered in the field-cornet’s books, as legally bound to him for twenty-five years; which was in fact to make them his actual slaves for that time. The mother clung to her children … but the farmer repeatedly drove her off; and at last, with a resolution to deter her from coming there again, he one evening flogged her so unmercifully that she died the next morning! This, and the harsh treatment which he himself received, were sufficient to drive Juli to despair; and he, in consequence, took the first favourable opportunity to escape.”
The situation worsened for San communities targeted by slave raiders when European and multi-ethnic Griqua and other raider groups moved, from about the turn of the eighteenth century, into the central Transgariep. Here they were, to an even greater extent than before, beyond the influence of the Colonial government. With regard to the European farmers, the San in Transgariep, as well as Sotho, now found themselves regularly attacked by Boers seeking cheap labour for their farms. According to the French missionaries, Arbousset and Daumas, by the mid-1830s San from Philippolis to the Maloti-Drakensberg had “lost a great part of their children” to these raiders. In some cases, not content with simply abducting the children, they tortured their parents by dragging them behind a horse, tied to its tail. Depredations of this sort by the Boers had become so common, Arbousset and Daumas remarked, that “the cry of alarm and signal for flight amongst the Bushmen is … ‘Tuntsi, a saa a nge a kunte’ (‘There is the white man; he is coming to take away our children’). Tuntsi, the San word for a European person in this region, derived from the sound made by the report of a gun.

The forced removal of children from their parents caused great bitterness amongst the San of Transgariep, some of whom journeyed to the Colony to try and find their children on the Boers’ farms. Farmers who were responsible for these acts were sometimes singled out for special attention. When visiting a kraal between the Gariep and the Sneeuwberg in 1835, Andrew Smith was told that a party of San had recently passed through the area looking for one of the farmers who had stolen their children. Smith wrote: “The Bushmen and even the Hottentots keep telling their children of the injuries they have experienced at the hands of the farmers, and that they must never cease following such and such a one till they spill his blood on the ground …”

However, some of those trading in San children got their fingers burnt. Joseph Orpen, magistrate, surveyor, and now best-known for his recording of nineteenth century Maloti San mythology, rites and rock art, was told of a farmer, Daniel Pietersen, who, with a number of his companions, “had been in the habit of murdering Bushmen and driving a large trade in the children, often selling a child for a cask of brandy to the smouses (itinerant traders) from the Cape Colony. … (I)t was told as an amusing story how he had one Bush boy, whom he had caught young and who was very bright and
handy, and that when a brandy smous would come along, Pietersen would offer him other Bushman children, but the smous would press for the nice one and give him a good price for him and go on his journey. But after a day or two the Bush boy would run back to Daniel Pietersen and served to humbug another brandy smous another time.”

While the Boers were at the centre of the trade, other groups also took San children into slavery. Paravicini di Capelli, a captain in the Batavian military forces at the Cape, relates how a Khoe man, whom he encountered around the turn of the 18th century in Graaff-Reinet, came to complain to the officers that a young San boy, whom he claimed to have bartered from the mother for a handkerchief, had been stolen from him by another resident of this town.

The Tlhaping, too, became involved in the trade in young San “prisoners of war”. Andries Stockenstrom gives a graphic account of the return of Tlhaping warriors to “New Lattakoo” (Kuruman) in 1818 after an attack on a San kraal:

“I could not help lamenting to find here, as much as amongst the Griquas, a horrible animosity towards the Bosjesman, rendered still more frightful by an ancient prejudice which considers the murder of a Bosjesman, woman, or child, meritorious under any circumstances, and entitles the murderer to speak at the piatza, or national assemblies. One of their Commandos returned while I was there, after having annihilated a whole kraal. The honours paid to these blood-thirsty warriors indicated the spirit of the nation. They were saluted with the surrounding shouts of hundreds of women … (The leader of the warriors gave) a full and apparently exaggerated account of the exploits and hardships the Commando had executed and suffered, interrupted only by the occasional shouts of the women, who seemed most vociferous at the description of the fears and shrieks of the women and children among the victims, and carried to the greatest height of enthusiasm when the death of a Bosjesman by the hand of Matabee’s son and apparent successor, and the narrow escape of the prince himself, was related.”
According to Burchell, San children captured by the Thaping were kept as servants, although they were sometimes ransomed back to their parents. One of these children, in a state of semi-starvation, was offered to Burchell in return for a sheep.

James Backhouse reported that maltreated captive San servants of Basters had put themselves under the protection of Moshoehoe. Griquas and Korana, too, armed with firearms said to have been provided by the Boers, raided San, Sotho and Tswana kraals, kidnapping their children and selling them on to the frontier farmers. Thus, in 1830, Andries Stockenstrom reported: “I had discovered that a kraal of Bushmen living among the migratory Boers … were attacked by a commando of Griquas of (Adam) Kok's party, who killed fifteen, left two for dead badly wounded and carried off the only survivors (three children), after offering them for sale to the Farmers”.

And the traveller and hunter, Gordon Cumming, provided this description of a Griqua hunting party in the 1840s:

“(We came across) a party of ruffianly Griquas who were proceeding with a dilapidated-looking wagon, which had no sail, to hunt hartebeests and blue wildebeests in the vicinity of a small spring to the north-east where game was reported to be abundant. They were accompanied by several wild-looking, naked Bushman attendants, whom they had captured when young and domesticated.”

The Griqua legislative council at Philippolis was later to condemn the enslavement of San. However, an indication of the extent to which the Griquas were feared by the San as child kidnappers is made clear by Andrew Smith's reporting that San who attacked the horse-wagon of a Griqua man, killing or injuring all the horses, stated that they did so because “the Boers, Griquas and Korana, through possessing horses, were better enabled to carry off the children of the Bushmen, who were determined not to leave a horse alive”.

Like the Griquas, the Korana sometimes mounted expeditions specifically to kill San and capture their children. As has been mentioned, the freebooter, Jan Bloem, who had several Korana wives and many Korana adherents, as well as his son of the same name, participated in the trade in captive San children. Some of the children were given to their followers, and most of these were incorporated into Korana society.

Slave raiding by Boers continued in the Free State with the approval of the Republican government until well into the 1850s, and it was also practised in KwaZulu-Natal in the second half of the nineteenth century. While surveying farms in KwaZulu-Natal in 1855, Joseph Orpen discovered that San children had been enslaved by Boers in that area as well as in the Boer republic of Utrecht, formed when Mpande provided land to European farmers north of the sources of the Pongola and Mkhonto Rivers. Orpen found evidence of intensive traffic in children of mixed Zulu-San descent from the latter area, in which the Zulus were complicit. So many children of San descent had been abducted, he learned, that there were hardly any left in their kraals.

Orpen attempted to rescue two San children from the family of Christian Odendaal, son of the member of the Volksraad for the area in which he was working, and this led to a dramatic chase of the Odendaals' wagon. He provides a graphic account of his subsequent confrontation with these people in which Mrs Odendaal played a “pivotal” role:
“I said ‘How dare you take the children from my custody?’ Suddenly the three full-grown men of the party rushed at me and seized hold of my gun, while Mrs Odendaal got hold of me round the neck from behind and held on with her weight (some two hundred pounds). That was my salvation. I simply held my arms straight down still, with my hands wide apart, gripping the stock and barrel. They cursed and tugged and misdirected their efforts and exhausted themselves … Anchored by the heavy woman, I was immovable … “

Orpen eventually managed to escape from the Odendaals’ clutches, and when they then tried to flee he cut the reins of their wagon and leapt onto his horse. ‘Stooping down, I caught the little boy by the arm and swung him behind me astride the horse. The little girl trotted between me and the after-rider, and the mite behind me turned and cried “Mooi!” (“Beautiful!”), waving his hand. And so we rode away, leaving the Odendaals to mend their reins and go home thoroughly baffled.”
TIMELINE

1731
First recorded capture of Khoe-San women and children and their distribution to farmers as captive labour

1775
Legislation passed requiring servants (including San) to be registered and indentured until the ages of 18 or 25

1790
Legislation passed allowing captured Khoe-San to be apprenticed to Colonists for 25 years from the time of capture

1792
Council of Policy pay a sum of money for each person captured by official commandos

1804
Stockenstrom draws up the first in a series of regulations concerned with the amelioration of the treatment of San captives

1808
Abolition of the slave trade

1809
The Hottentot Code is passed

1817
A proclamation is issued regulating the treatment of Khoe-San child “apprentices”

1825
Boers start to move across the Colony’s border into Transgariep, and, like other groups in the area, take San children into slavery as labourers, and trade in San children.

1828
Ordinance 50 passed
CHAPTER 5

THE TRANSGARIEP AND THE MALOTI-DRAKENSBERG

In stealing cattle, Mercury himself could not have been more expert, or cunning, than the Bushmen.

William Burchell

When Lichtenstein passed through the Bokkeveld and Roggeveld in the early years of the nineteenth century he found that many San had moved from the Lower Bokkeveld to the Roggeveld from where they continued to attack the farms of the Colonists. “Nothing was to be heard but complaints of the Bosjesmans”, remarked Lichtenstein. A similar situation prevailed at the Bruintjeshoogte. San bands inhabited the more remote and mountainous areas of the north-eastern frontier districts and many of the raids made by these people seem to have been politically inspired as Lichtenstein remarked that San frequently raided, not to plunder, but “through mere wantonness” - which suggests that a political motive underlay their actions. Certainly, many of the Khoe-San who raided these farmers were known to be ex-servants, and it is clear from the records that, in a great many cases, the cruel treatment of Khoe-San servants by their masters led to the former’s deserting the farms and enlisting with the Khoe-San “guerilla/raider” bands who occupied the surrounding mountains.

Farmers in the Tarka, Stormberg, Koup and Nieuweveld, too, were troubled by San raiders for many years after the first concerted attempts were made to pacify the San. The high hills surrounding the Tarka continued to shelter San robber bands and the whole of this area lay deserted during the early years of the nineteenth century. George Thompson reported that San were still troubling farmers in the Cradock area in 1823 and more than 100 San had been shot by commandos in this district in the previous year. Many San bands also found refuge in the Stormberg, and raids were mounted from these mountains up until at least 1824. And in the Beaufort District in 1829 more than 40 farms were abandoned in the face of a threatened “invasion” by a band of San about 400 strong. Commandos were mounted against all these raider San groups of the earlier years of the nineteenth century, but there was now a shift towards capturing, rather than exterminating, these people. In these later commandos, many more San were taken prisoner than were killed.

Although pockets of resistance thus continued on the north-eastern frontier, by the 1830s the San within the Colony were, nevertheless, essentially a defeated people. Most, as we have seen, had been subjugated and incorporated into the rural labour force. While the so-called “Bushman problem” was therefore largely, although certainly not completely, under control within the Colony by the 1820s, the situation north of the upper reaches of the Gariep and in KwaZulu-Natal was very different. Here new frontiers were being opened up, and the arrival of immigrant groups, including European traders and farmers, was to be followed by extensive San raids on the livestock of these people.
Previously occupied only by San and Sotho-Tswana, the middle Transgariep (the area north of the Gariep and west of its confluence with the Vaal) and the eastern Transgariep (the area north of the Gariep and east of its confluence with the Vaal - roughly the southern section of the present Free State) began to be occupied by other groups as the nineteenth century progressed. Although for quite a number of years before 1800 occasional hunters armed with guns had apparently made forays from the Cape into the southern portions of this region, areas populated almost exclusively by the San, it was only with more permanent settlement of the area that serious conflict developed between its San inhabitants and the newly arrived immigrant groups.

Shortly after the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Griquas (a multi-ethnic group founded by the manumitted slave Adam Kok I primarily from members of the Charugriqua/Grigriqua Khoe, but also many members of fringe groups who wished to be free of the influence of the Cape authorities, and known generally as Basters, or Bastaards) moved into the the more easterly areas of the middle Transgariep. This was a response to the establishment in 1805 of an LMS mission at Klaarwater, later re-named Griquatown, under the LMS missionary William Anderson and his assistant Cornelius Kramer. It is unclear how many Griquas (who only assumed this name in 1813 at John Campbell’s suggestion) settled there, but they may have numbered as many as 500. They were under the leadership of Cornelius Kok, son of Adam Kok I, as well as a Baster chief, Barend Barends. Cornelius’s son, Adam Kok II, sometimes acted for his father. Later, in 1820, a catechist of San descent, Andries Waterboer, was elected chief of the Griquas at Klaarwater, by then known as Griquatown.
A view of Klaarwater, c.1810.  

The matjieshuis of Adam Kok II at Klaarwater in 1811.  

Griquatown in 1813.  
The spring at Klaarwater was taken from the San band who were based there, and this was followed shortly thereafter by the appropriation of a long chain of springs running for about 50 miles south-west and north-east of the settlement. The Griquas, who were peripatetic stock farmers and hunters, used all these springs, camping close to them while on their grazing and hunting rounds, but Klaarwater, with its mission, became the capital of the infant Griqua “state” - with two main outposts, at Campbell and Hardcastle. Tensions developed between Kok and Andries Waterboer, and the former moved with his followers to Campbell, and subsequently, in 1826, to the LMS mission at Philippolis, while Griquatown continued to be occupied by Waterboer and his followers.

In the years following the establishment of the Klaarwater/Griquatown mission other multi-ethnic groups, not always easily distinguished from the Griquas, or from each other, also entered the area, grazing their livestock at the springs. By the early 1820s there may have been between 2,000 and 3,000 people of mixed descent who were occupying the middle and eastern Transgriep and who belonged to groups such as the Korana (with their many adherents, including Tlhaping), the Basters, and the Griquas (or dissident offshoots of this group, like the Hartenaars and Bergenaars). They lived by a combination of stock-keeping, agriculture, hunting, trading and raiding, and were to form a range of relationships with the San during the nineteenth century, ranging from extermination to patron-client relationships and intermarriage.

A Korana horseman.

All these immigrant groups were equipped with horses and guns, and many lived as raider-pastoralists, preying on weaker, less well-armed groups, particularly the San. The Hartenaars, for example, who had moved from Griquatown to the Harts River in 1814, raided the San for cattle and children at this time. The situation worsened for the San when Boers from the Colony began to cross over into the eastern Transgariep. Expanding in population and suffering from the drought in the Colony and the shortage of grazing south of the Gariep, from about 1820 they began to make occasional expeditions across the Gariep, roaming for longer or shorter periods in central and eastern Transgariep, before returning to their farms south of the river. These expeditions were initially conducted against the orders of the Colonial government, but in 1825 they gained the official sanction of Stockenstrom.
Reluctantly, recognizing that “the spirit of expatriation” which ruled amongst the Boers was unlikely to lessen, Stockenstrom gave permission for European farmers from the Colony to move northwards and cross the Gariep to the better-watered areas in this region. This was granted under strict (albeit unenforceable) conditions, including a commitment by the farmers to return to the Colony once the drought eased. Stockenstrom was particularly concerned about the effect that the movement of the Boers, and the other frontiersmen, such as the Griquas, would have on the San living in Transgariep. Hundreds of Boers now moved to the Transgariep. Initially they built temporary houses, and most returned regularly to their farms south of the Gariep, but by at least the mid-1830s many had settled permanently or semi-permanently along the Caledon, Riet and Modder Rivers. In 1834 there were about 1,500 Boers in the Transgariep. The closure of the San missions and the attacks on San communities of the Great and Upper Riet Rivers and the Modder River by the Boers and Griquas in particular, put severe pressure on the San in the region.
A trekboer's camp in Transgariep. By Charles Davidson Bell.
Source: Museum Africa.

The interior of a trekboer's tent in Transgariep. By Charles Davidson Bell.
Source: Museum Africa.
The Boers, like the Griquas and other stock farmer groups in the area, grazed and watered their cattle at the springs, forcing the San into more arid zones, as well as into areas further to the north within the present Free State, where they sometimes came into conflict with the Sotho-Tswana who occupied these areas. The farmers’ cattle had a detrimental effect on the wild plant foods in the area, trampling the veld and destroying the “uintjies” (bulbous plants) on which the San subsisted. Overgrazing also caused the destruction of plants on which the game grazed. It is possible, too, that, as occurred in some other areas such as the Seekoei River valley, plants used by the San to make their arrow poison were destroyed, so that the San were no longer able to hunt larger game. Certainly, hunting was carried out by the immigrant groups on a scale hitherto impossible as a result of the extensive use of guns and horses, resulting in a rapid decrease in the amount of game. Both the Boers and the Griquas were avid hunters, and subsisted to a large extent on game. Unlike the San, they were able with their guns to kill far more animals than they were able to eat at one time, and there are many accounts of the wholesale slaughter of eland and other antelope by the farmers. Game that was not shot out moved to other, less-intensively occupied, areas, forced there by the settlers’ appropriation of the water holes at which they drank, or scared off by the reports of the hunters’ guns. Although the San were sometimes allowed to share in the spoils of these hunts, ultimately the long-term effects of these hunting expeditions were to prove disastrous for their hunting and gathering way of life.
Hunting out the game with guns and horses.

Source: Bell Heritage Trust, UCT.
Hartebeests being hunted.

A Khoi hunter. By "W.J.".
Source: Library of Parliament.
A Khoe hunter. By Charles Davidson Bell.
Source: Museum Africa.
After allowing the Boers into the Transgariep on a temporary basis, Stockenstrom, to his credit, did his best to shield the area's original inhabitants from the effects of this action. He conceived a comprehensive, long-term, but ultimately unsuccessful, scheme for solving the problem of the occupation of the San's land by other groups. Realising that it would be impossible to reclaim the land in the Colony that had been seized from the San by the Boers, he aimed to keep the Boers out of the Transgariep, once the drought had broken, and make the area a haven for the San. He marked out areas in the Transgariep, specifically the Philippolis area, where the San from both sides of the Colonial border could be settled. Here, under the supervision and protection of the missionaries, he believed, they could learn to become self-supporting cattle-herders, with cattle being provided by the Boers in the Colony as a form of insurance against San raids on their own cattle. He recognized that he needed the co-operation of the Griquas in protecting the San, and in 1827 he extracted a promise from Adam Kok that he would ensure that the San in Transgariep were not maltreated, either by his own people or by other groups. Somewhat naively, therefore, and supported by John Philip, Stockenstrom rested his hopes for this scheme's success on the ability of the missionaries and the Griquas to protect the San, and the willingness of the European farmers to provide the San living at or near mission stations with livestock.
This was not to be. While some Griquas had formed good relationships with San, others, as has been mentioned, were at least as rapacious as the Boers in their dealings with them - claiming somewhat disingenuously, in some cases, that they knew little better, having been instructed in these ways by the Boers. Campbell, who visited Griquatown in 1820, had already noted the treacherous and cruel manner in which the Griquas treated San who had been driven by hunger to raid their cattle:

“One party shot one of the Bushmen while he was in conversation with one of their number. Another party chased some of the Bushmen with their wives and children into a cave, which they were afraid to enter or was difficult of access. They sent down a tame Bushman who was with them to invite his countrymen in the cave to come out, for they wanted to make peace with them. On this the credulous Bushmen left their strong-hold and they all sat down together to eat, after which they butchered the men, women and one child, in a savage manner.” (They were killed by having their heads beaten to pieces on stones and the surviving children were distributed as servants among the commando members.)

In this case, the actions taken against the San were strongly disapproved of by the Griqua Council, and some of the perpetrators of the massacre were expelled from the church at Griquatown. And in one case at least, the Griquas appear to have received “divine punishment” for their cruelty towards the San. Campbell reported:

“Some Griquas hunted in the morning a lion, which they killed after its having bitten Jantje Kok (mortally). It is remarkable that the lion when attacking Jantje passed two men, just as if he sought him (in particular) … About three years ago the same man met a Bushman in the fields who drove a cow which he had stolen. Jantje having retaken the cow without meeting any resistance from the Bushman, shot him.”

Jantje, it seems, was unaware that some San shamans transformed into lions while in trance.

Stockenstrom also reported on Griqua massacres of San groups, comparing their behaviour unfavourably with that of the Boers. (While he was instrumental in having legislation for the protection of San servants drawn up by the Colonial government, Stockenstrom, at times, acted as an apologist for the Boers, and attempted to justify their occupation of San territories in Transagariep, as well as the taking of San women and children into service on their farms and the subsequent harsh treatment of these people). In 1830 Stockenstrom travelled in the Transgariep collecting evidence on the reported massacre of two kraals of San people by Griquas, who said they had been aided and abetted in this by the Boers and Korana. He found clear evidence of the massacre, and of the Korana’s involvement, but little or no evidence that the Boers had been involved on this occasion.

However, it is also clear, as we have seen, that many of the Boers were on very poor terms with the San. They resented the fact that maltreated San servants, including San who had been forced off their land by the farmers, took refuge at the missions, sometimes raiding their cattle in revenge for the expropriation of their land and the manner in which they had been treated. As has been mentioned, they harassed the San at the missions, and, like the Griquas, often treated them exceptionally cruelly. Despite assurances from Stockenstrom that steps would be taken to prevent the San from raiding their cattle, therefore, the Boers were not prepared to provide gifts of livestock to the San at, or near, the missions.

Faced with intense competition by other groups for their land, some San now went to work on farms in the Transgariep as well as in the Colony. Others attached themselves in small groups to the Griquas,
Basters, Bergenaars or Boers as their servants/clients, or as fellow brigands. Some looked after their herds, receiving “milking rights” or a share of the offspring in return for this service. When Campbell visited the Griqua community at Danielskuil in 1820, he was welcomed there by both San and Griquas. And the Griquas who accompanied Eugène Casalis, a member of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society, when he travelled in the Caledon River valley in 1833 were reported by Casalis to be accompanied by “quite a small army of half-naked Bushmen, who were to look after the draught oxen, saddle the horses, and follow their masters in hunting, carrying the heavy guns.”

A Khoe hunter with his San “handlanger”/servant. By Thomas Baines.

Source: Iziko Museums.
Many San, too, had continued to live in the general area of the mission at Klaarwater/Griquatown after it was taken from them by the Griquas and the missionaries. Some occasionally attended services there, and when Campbell visited in 1820 he reported that the missionary there customarily addressed the San who lived at the mission at the evening services. In the same year, the Kok family at the settlement of Campbell had 165 San followers - a large number when one considers that only about 350 of the Koks’ following were identified as Griquas at that time. It is of interest, moreover, that Andries Waterboer, who became “captain” of the Griquas at Griquatown in 1820, was of direct San descent and at times acted against groups who persecuted the San – although this did not prevent his conducting a ferocious campaign against those San groups who were bold, or desperate, enough to raid his own people’s livestock. According to Andrew Smith, San thieves, or at least those who survived capture alive, were put in irons by Waterboer and forced to work in the village.

Some of the San at Campbell received agricultural produce from the Griquas, probably in return for the men’s herding their livestock and the women’s guarding the fields. Campbell, for example, mentioned that one of the Griquas, who had many San living near him, supported these families with daily rations of “corn”. Other San began to acquire and breed cattle, and some even planted crops. With time, quite a number of San was incorporated into the Griquas and intermarried with them.

Other San groups, deprived of their traditional means of subsistence, joined up with Sotho-Tswana groups and conducted raids on the livestock of the Boers in the Colony, or attached themselves to multi-ethnic immigrant groups other than the Griquas. Unlike the European farmers, and like the Griquas, these mixed frontier groups were open to recruiting new members from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. A number of San, therefore, were incorporated into the Bergenaars, Basters, and, in particular, the Korana.
The Korana had come into contact with the San many years before encountering them in the eastern Transgariep. In some areas the two groups were so intermingled that they were referred to as “Korana Bushmen”. One section of the Katse Korana, for example, had merged with the San at an early date, learning their language and intermarrying with them. Travelling in the Transgariep in 1810 and 1811, Burchell noticed the close association between the Korana and the San - as well as other groups. “On one side the Kora stations are intermingled with those of the Bushmen”, he remarked, “on another with the Bamuchars, in the middle with the settlements of Mixed or Klaarwater Hottentots, and everywhere with the kraals of the Bushmen”.
Korana preparing to move camp. By Samuel Daniell.
Source: Library of Parliament.

A Korana kraal in Transgariep, on the banks of the Modder River. By Charles Davidson Bell.
Source: Museum Africa.
By 1830 Stockenstrom and the Colonial government had given up all hope of being able to establish a “reserve” occupied only by the San, as well as any hope of being able to exert control over the actions of the immigrant groups in Transgariep towards the San. Gradually the issue of exclusive San territories and San rights in Transgariep was forgotten as other political developments in the area engaged Stockenstrom and the Colonial government’s attention. So much so that in 1836 Stockenstrom felt compelled to declare to the British Parliament’s Select Committee on Aborigines that “with (regard to) those people (the San) I should not object to (their amalgamating with other groups), for they must gradually disappear, and die out, as it were; in their present state they cannot remain”.

The Maloti-Drakensberg and adjacent areas

The first Europeans to settle in KwaZulu-Natal were English traders, who established themselves in 1824 at Port Natal, present-day Durban. Guns, cloth and other items were traded with local chiefdoms for a variety of goods, and ivory in particular. Indirect contact with San hunter-gatherers was established with San via elephant hunters such as Dumisa, an Nhlungwini chief and hunter who lived in close association with the San, but for the next 13 years the small number of traders, hunters, and missionaries in KwaZulu-Natal appears to have had little or no direct contact with San hunter-gatherers. With the arrival of the Voortrekkers in 1837, however, the impact of relatively large-scale European settlement began to be felt by the San. By 1840 the trekkers had begun to establish permanent farms, largely around Pietermaritzburg and Port Natal. Their reputation amongst the San of the Cape Colony appears to have preceded them, and they were immediately subjected to raids by San occupying the Maloti-Drakensberg and surrounding areas.
The pattern of the raids

The pattern of San raids in KwaZulu-Natal remained virtually unchanged for 30 years and was similar in a number of respects to those conducted on the Boers in the Cape. Small groups struck at farms over a wide area. Autumn was a favourite season for the raids as the cattle of the farmers were in good condition at that time. This was advantageous to the San, not only because the animals were better eating, but also because they could be driven more quickly than if they were in a poor condition. Raids often occurred on moonlit nights, when it was easier to drive stolen animals, but were sometimes conducted during daylight if it was very misty.

Once they had been stolen, cattle and horses were driven at great speed into inaccessible areas of the Maloti-Drakensberg by the San, who were often mounted. The raiders were expert at driving cattle over rugged ground and some were said to smear fresh dung on the path ahead of the leading animal at the worst places to deceive it into thinking that it had been preceded by other cattle. Those animals that could not keep up and that the San were forced to abandon were generally hamstrung or stabbed to death, so that the pursuing farmers were often confronted with the distressing sight of their dead or dying livestock lying alongside the paths taken by the raiders. If there was time, the raiders carried away slabs of meat on their horses from animals slaughtered in this manner. Sometimes the San rolled stones down on their pursuers, but they practically never attempted to engage them directly, preferring the hit-and-run tactics of guerilla warfare. Only in the last years of the raids, when they were reinforced by armed Sotho, did they take on the parties mounted by the Europeans against them.

The KwaZulu-Natal raiders were divided primarily into two groups: those raiding farmers on the northern tributaries of the Thukela, who retreated over the escarpment into northern Lesotho and the Free State; and those who struck at farms on the southern Thukela, the Mgeni and the Mkhomazi, who moved off to the upper reaches of the Mkhomazi, Mzimkhulu and Mzimvubu, as well as to the eastern and southern regions of Lesotho. Most San bands raiding in KwaZulu-Natal came from Nomansland (East Griqualand) and south-eastern Lesotho.

Between 1840 and 1870 there were more than 70 recorded raids, the highest number being seven in 1845. In the late 1840s, farms near Bushman’s River in the Estcourt area, and, occasionally, farms in the region of the upper Thukela were raided. Between 1855 and 1860 the San raided largely in the upper Mgeni area. In the final period of the raids, between 1856 and 1872, the San struck most frequently in the immediate vicinity of the Maloti-Drakensberg, from the Thukela to the Mzimkhulu.

Although the conflict between European farmers and San in this newly-occupied region was similar in some respects to that which had occurred in the Cape, there were also several differences. Probably the most significant of these was that the raiders operating from the Maloti-Drakensberg were far more elusive than those in the mountains further south. Between 1840 and 1872, the main period of San raids on the farms of Europeans, there were only five recorded instances of San being surprised and killed, wounded or captured by punitive expeditions, although it is likely that some successful expeditions went unreported.
There were several reasons for the success of the San in eluding the commandos organised by the European farmers in response to their raids. One factor which increased the difficulty of capturing the raiders was that the thefts of cattle appear to have been conducted by a relatively small number of San bands who were expert, even “professional”, raiders. It has been suggested that there were not more than a few hundred San living in the Maloti-Drakensberg during the 30 or so years in which the raids were conducted. Many of the European authorities and farmers persisted in the mistaken belief, moreover, that somewhere in the mountains lay the “headquarters” of the raiders, a large settlement that, once located and destroyed, would end the raids. In fact, the San were constantly on the move and no such base appears to have existed.

Other reasons for the San raiders’ successes were that they always had the advantage of surprise, with the result that they had a head-start on their pursuers, and that the terrain into which they had to be followed was extremely rugged. Unlike the European farmers, the San were familiar with this terrain and the deep twisting valleys of the Little Berg, or “Bushman's Terrace”, which runs parallel to, but some distance from, the main mountain chain, slowed up those pursuing the San and their stolen livestock. Once the foothills of the Drakensberg had been negotiated, pursuing parties were confronted with the massive barrier of the mountains themselves, which rose almost vertically to more than 10,000 feet in places. Beyond this lay the Maloti, the rugged mountains of present-day Lesotho, cut with countless deep valleys and extremely difficult to negotiate at any speed if one was not familiar with the area. These mountains were easily large enough for San raiders acquainted with the area to hide themselves and their stolen cattle away from all but the most determined pursuers.

After reaching the mountains, the San generally moved well away from the area in which they had raided, taking their stolen animals with them. Often they went to areas south-west of KwaZulu-Natal where they were sheltered by Nguni and Sotho farmers, who kraaled their stolen cattle for them. Stolen cattle and horses were exchanged for other goods with these farmers, but sometimes they served as payment in return for shelter within their territories.

The first major San depredations occurred in the Weenen and Mkhomazi districts in 1840. These raids resulted in a large commando being mustered by the Boers, who attacked the Bhaca under Ngcaphayi. They had received information from the Mpondo chief, Faku, that Ngcaphayi was in league with San cattle thieves who lived in caves near his kraals at the sources of the Mzimvubu River. One hundred and fifty Bhaca were killed by the commando and 3,000 cattle confiscated, but no San were found. Later, the Nhlangwini chief, Fodo, was tied to a wagon wheel and flogged by the Boers, who reasoned that the San must have passed through his territory and that he had had a hand in the raids.

Similar raids continued to be mounted by the San during the following years. By the mid-1840s they had penetrated almost as far as Pietermaritzburg and their raids had intensified to the point where farms on the Mooi, Bushman's and Thukela Rivers had to be abandoned. Faced with this onslaught, the Boers demanded aid from the British, who had taken over authority in KwaZulu-Natal in December 1845 when the Boer Republic of Natalia submitted to their rule. Their leaders, Andries Pretorius in particular, complained bitterly of San depredations. Pretorius was angered that the San chief, Mdwebo, who roamed an area of the Maloti-Drakensberg and its foothills, had been invited to visit Martin West, the Lieutenant-Governor of Natal, and that two members of Mdwebo’s band who had been sent to Pietermaritzburg to meet West were given presents by the Colonial authorities. Despite these appeals by the farmers for help, however, the British government was unwilling to commit troops or funds to aid them in their struggle against the San, and Pretorius left Natal in disgust the following year, accompanied by some of his followers.
Strategies adopted by the British government to combat the raiders

Over the course of the period that San raided in KwaZulu-Natal, a number of strategies were adopted by the Colonial authorities to try and put a stop to the raids. These included the building of military posts in areas most frequently subjected to San depredations, the formation of a Native Police Force and the settlement of Nguni and Sotho chiefs and their followers in barrier locations sited on routes favoured by the San when raiding into KwaZulu-Natal.

The first systematic attempts to combat the San raiding from the Maloti-Drakensberg involved the establishment of a series of military posts in areas that were subjected to frequent San raids. Van Vuuren's Post was established south-west of Pietermaritzburg in 1846; another post was placed on the Bushman's River in 1848; and Fort Nottingham, the last of the posts to be put in place, was established north-west of Pietermaritzburg at Spion Kop in 1856. Although the garrison at Van Vuuren's Post was reasonably successful in deterring the San from raiding in this area, the focus of their attacks simply shifted to the Bushman's River. The presence of the later posts, one in this newly-targeted area and the one at Spion Kop, proved to be of little help in discouraging San depredations.

In 1848 the Natal Native Police Force, trained along British lines and commanded by European officers, was formed specifically to combat the San. They were used as a mobile force that could be stationed in trouble areas and were available at short notice to pursue the San and their stolen stock, either independently or in concert with commandos mounted by the European farmers. The force showed themselves to be an effective one which operated well under very difficult conditions, but the costs of maintaining the unit were high and the authorities were reluctant to commit themselves to funding an operation that might prove a drain on the limited funds available for administering the Colony. In an attempt to recoup these costs, they levied a hut tax on the resident population in 1849, but continued problems of funding, combined with fears amongst the European population that the members of the unit might desert to enemy, led to the unit's being disbanded in 1851.

The establishment of barrier locations also proved to be an effective means of deterring San raiders. This scheme was first mooted in 1846, and when the chiefs Langalibalele and Phuthini fled from Mpande into the Klip River district in 1848 with many of their followers, the Governor of Natal, Theophilus Shepstone, instructed them to move to areas at the base of the Maloti-Drakensberg. The chiefs refused to obey this directive, but the following year the governor visited the Klip River area and, with the help of the Natal Native Police and a loyal chief, pressured the resident chiefs into settling in the areas allocated to them. They immediately began to move with their people and cattle to locations at the sources of the Bushman's, Mooi and Mkhomazi rivers, and some of Langalibale's people were paid to build their kraals in key positions near the principal passes and drifts across rivers used by San.

Together with that of chief Zikhali, who had his kraal near the sources of the Thukela, these locations, stretching from the Thukela in the north to the Bushman's River in the south, formed a “barrier of tribes” to San raiders using the passes leading into the Maloti-Drakensberg to attack farms in Natal. In April 1859 another location was established when a section of Lugaju's people were moved from near Swartkop in the Pietermaritzburg district to a site now known as Mpendle Location on the banks of the Mkhomazi River. Even the Nhlangwini chief and elephant hunter, Dumisa, who had once had close relations with some San groups, later moved to an area near present-day Underberg with his followers to act against San in this area. With time, and as the San raids continued, kraals were established by these chiefs further and further up the Lotheni, Hlatimba and Mkhomazi Valleys towards the base of the Maloti-Drakensberg. The human barricade against the San entering KwaZulu-
Natal was finally completed in 1865 when chief Thukelela settled between the Ngwangwana and Mzimkhulu rivers.

One of the main advantages that the barrier locations offered to the European Colonists was that a force of Nguni or Sotho farmers could be mustered almost immediately in the area where raids had occurred, and were able to pursue the San into the mountains without the delay involved in organising a commando of farmers from a number of different areas. As a result, there was a sharp decline in San raids in the areas where these locations were sited. The disadvantages for the people settled in these locations who formed this human shield against the San were, nevertheless, considerable. They were subjected to raids almost immediately after the locations had been established, and on at least one occasion the raiders made it clear to them that they were an obstacle to their raids and that they would continue to suffer attacks until they moved. Moreover, although the locations acted to deter a number of the bands who raided into KwaZulu-Natal, when raids did occur near the locations, or when raiders were spotted moving through the areas where the locations were sited, the inhabitants were seldom able to catch up with and engage the San.

Their lack of success in this respect was sometimes attributable to unorthodox methods used by the San to frighten off their pursuers. On one occasion, for example, Lugaju’s warriors set off in hot pursuit of the San after 150 cattle had been stolen from their kraals on the Mngeni. Closing in on the raiders, they were brought to an abrupt halt when their path was blocked by a baboon head impaled on a stick! This had the intended effect, demoralising Lugaju’s men to such an extent that it was decided that further pursuit would be useless under the circumstances.

The Speirs expedition

There were few San raids in KwaZulu-Natal during the early and mid-1850s, although farmers in the upper Mngeni area suffered losses to the San during 1856. By 1858 it was almost exclusively a small number of European and Nguni farmers living in this area who were targeted by the cattle thieves, and after 1859 these raids became very sporadic. It was following one of the later raids that Robert Speirs, a farmer and member of a party mustered to track down San who had raided the farm of his uncle, James Speirs, lost his way in the fastnesses of the Maloti-Drakensberg. The dramatic events associated with this expedition, including the capture and eventual fate of a young San raider, are worth relating in some detail as they provide an idea of the difficulties experienced by the members of expeditions attempting to track down San raiders in the heart of the mountains.

San raiders had struck at James Speirs’ farm on the Mngeni in early 1862 making off into the mountains and driving the stolen cattle and horses before them in the usual fashion. A party of more than 40 people, including Robert Speirs, was mustered and followed the thieves over a pass at the head of the Lotheni River and into the wilds of the Lesotho highlands. After a long chase in the Maloti-Drakensberg lasting more than a week, Robert Speirs and the rest of the party tracking the raiders spotted a San boy on horseback and immediately set off in hot pursuit. While chasing the young San horseman through a bog, Speirs succeeded in wounding the youth and, after a struggle, managed to take him captive. One of the Natal Carbineers, Thomas Hodgson, was accidentally shot by a member of the party during the chase and his thigh bone shattered. The group was not equipped to extract the bullet and all that could be done for him until they returned home was to make him as comfortable as possible.

That evening, the party’s scouts located the hide-out of the band to which their prisoner belonged in a deep ravine at the base of the mountains. The rest of the party was alerted, but it proved impossible to locate the path leading down to this shelter in the dark. The young San prisoner was fetched and,
at first light, wounded and with a leather thong tied around his neck, he was forced to guide the party down the mountain. All their efforts were in vain, however, as the occupants of the shelter, two children and four women, including the young San prisoner’s mother, saw them coming and made their escape into the rocks on the far side of the ravine.

Four of the party, including Speirs, were now detailed to remain with Hodgson while the others left for home. Speirs accompanied them for part of the journey as he wanted to shoot something for Hodgson and the others to eat that night, but he was seized with cramp in one of his legs and had to spend the night in a cave sheltering from a thunderstorm. Early the next morning he set off for the camp on the escarpment and arrived in driving rain - only to find the place deserted. He discovered Hodgson’s body under a heap of stones, but there was no trace of his three companions, his horse or any of his equipment.

Dismayed, Speirs left at once to try and catch up with the remainder of his party, but he lost his bearings. Forced to save his limited powder supply, and unable to make a fire in the damp, he had to eat a bird that he had shot raw. When his powder eventually ran out he was forced to live off ants, wild blossoms and grasshoppers – a diet he declared in his famished state to be “surprisingly good”. It was twelve days before he stumbled exhausted into a kraal of Dumisa’s people.

While he was undergoing this ordeal his party had returned and the San youth was taken to Grey’s Hospital. Although Speirs later wanted to retain possession of the San boy, he was placed in the charge of one of the members of the expedition, William Proudfoot, Captain of the Karkloof Carbineers. Proudfoot was made his guardian for three years on condition that the boy was released after this period and that every effort possible was made to “civilise” him. The boy was given the job of cook’s assistant but was said to be completely untrainable and not equal to this task. His skills as tracker were well-developed, however, and he was taken into the Maloti-Drakensberg on at least one occasion to help locate San raiders.

The young San captive died not many years later of consumption, having taken to drink and “other evil ways” towards the end of his life. In a strange sequel to his death, his bones were secretly disinterred one night, with the permission of William Proudfoot on whose farm he was buried. They were sent to the Edinburgh Medical School in 1881, where they remain today labelled “Skeleton of a Bushman from Umzimkulu”.

**The last San raids on the farms of Europeans in KwaZulu-Natal**

The last recorded raid on the farm of a European in KwaZulu-Natal occurred in the Fort Nottingham area in July 1869. Two parties were organised to follow the raiders and it is a measure of the success of the San raids that this was the first officially organised force from KwaZulu-Natal to surprise, shoot and capture San raiders in their mountain strongholds. One of the parties, that which was under Captain Albert Allison, was led on an exhausting chase through the mountains, but eventually caught up with the raiders. Scouts reported seeing horses grazing beyond a deep ravine and heard voices and singing in the narrow gorge below. The gorge was sealed off and they attacked the San at dawn. Some of the San possessed firearms and the women fought with bows and arrows alongside the men. Sixteen San were killed and six children and two women taken prisoner during a skirmish which lasted for about half an hour.

By the late 1860s almost all the parties raiding farms and kraals in KwaZulu-Natal consisted of mixed groups of San and Sotho, but after 1870 there were very few reports of San raids into KwaZulu-Natal. In August 1872 Sakhayedwa’s people on the upper Pholela River were attacked by San raiders.
Seventeen horses were taken during a snow storm and the inhabitants of the area followed the trail deep into the mountains to the upper Gariep. Here they surprised a band of San, killing a number of them. This was the last recorded San raid in KwaZulu-Natal, and after this date neither European nor Nguni and Sotho farmers in this region were again subjected to depredations by the San and their allies based in the Maloti-Drakensberg.
TIMELINE

c. 1800
Groups of hunters from the Cape, mounted and armed with guns, make occasional expeditions into Transgariep

1805
Griquas settle at the newly-established LMS mission at Klaarwater (Griquatown)

1824
The first traders establish themselves at Port Natal

1825-6
Stockenstrom gives permission for Boers to trek across the Gariep into San territories, on a temporary basis

1826
Griquas under Adam Kok move to Philippolis

1826-7
Stockenstrom attempts to reserve areas within Transgariep for the San

1836
Stockenstrom abandons all hope of protecting the San in Transgariep

Great Trek

1840
First major depredations on European farms in Natal

1845
British annexe Natal from the Boers – Republic of Natalia submits to their rule

1846
First military post established, at Van Vuuren's Post, to combat San raiders

1848
Natal Native Police Force formed to combat San raiders

First of a series of barrier locations established at the base of the Drakensberg – under Langalibalele and Phuthini

1869
Last recorded San raid on a European farm in Natal

1872
Last recorded San raid in Natal
You cleared out the Bushmen and Hottentots
Like you destroyed monkeys and apes.

Praises of the Xhosa chief, Rharhabe

The Bushmen dance and drink beer with Cetwa’s people

Statement of Chaka, 1849

Some of the relationships established between south-eastern San raiders and Nguni and Sotho groups after the arrival of European farmers in KwaZulu-Natal were touched on in the previous chapter. However, the south-eastern San had come into contact with Iron Age groups long before the nineteenth century. As we have seen, small numbers of farmers had established themselves on the KwaZulu-Natal coast by at least 450 AD. Shortly after the turn of the second millennium, other
groups of farmers, very likely the ancestors of the present-day Nguni, moved into KwaZulu-Natal. And by about 1500 AD the Fokeng, a Sotho group today but possibly of Nguni origin, had moved from beyond the Vaal River into the territories of the south-eastern San and had settled on the southern Highveld - roughly the present Free State. They based themselves at Ntsuanatsatsi, where they were later joined by the Koen, a Sotho clan originating from further to the north. Later these groups spread out from Ntsuanatsatsi, reaching the Caledon River valley in the later 1600s, shortly after it had been settled by three groups of Zizi (Nguni) origin from the Thukela area - the Phetla, followed successively by the Polane and Phuthi. It is the history of the relationships formed between the south-eastern San and these and other immigrant Nguni and Sotho farming communities, from about the middle of the sixteenth century until the last quarter of the nineteenth century, that forms the focus of this chapter.

c.1550 to c. 1822

Relatively little is known of the relationships which developed between the later northern Nguni groups, who were to come to form the Zulu nation, and the San. The relations which the southern, or Cape, Nguni established with indigenous hunter-gatherers from the sixteenth century are, however, better documented. The main southern Nguni groups include the Xhosa, Mpondomise, Mpondo and Thembu. After 1822, these groups were augmented by a number of refugee groups from KwaZulu-Natal, such as the Mfengu (a generic name for refugee groups who comprised fragments of northern Nguni groups such as the Bhele, Hlubi, Zizi and Nhlangwini) and the Bhaca, all of whom moved into the territories of the southern Nguni in the Eastern Cape.

Survivors of early shipwrecks on the east coast provided some information about the people who had settled in this area and their relations with the indigenous hunter-gatherers. Journals of Portuguese shipwreck survivors dating from 1552 and 1554 describe iron-using, cattle-owning farmers occupying a sparsely-populated coast, with many villages inland. There are some early reports of people living by hunting and gathering along the south-east coast, but we cannot be sure that these were San, since Nguni farmers, like the Khoe, were sometimes forced to rely solely on hunting and gathering for subsistence.
When the Dutch ship, the *Stavenisse*, was wrecked in 1686 about 70 miles south of present-day Durban, however, survivors lived with the Xhosa of this area for nearly three years and reported that people called the “Makanaena”, who possessed bows and arrows, were bitter enemies of the farmers, whose cattle they stole. The Xhosa warned the Stavenisse survivors of possible attacks by people armed with bows and arrows and it appears that these were a group called the *Batua*, who later killed 12 of the survivors when they attempted the journey overland to the Cape. Although the term *Batwa* was a general Nguni term for people who lived by hunting and gathering, including Nguni groups such as the Nhlangwini who had adopted this way of life, it is probable that the people referred to in this case were San. The fact that the Xhosa felt it necessary to warn the Stavenisse survivors that they might be attacked by the *Batua* suggests, moreover, that relations between some San groups and the Xhosa of this area were poor.

A number of Nguni and San groups fought each other during the eighteenth century as pressure on the natural resources of areas jointly occupied by hunter-gatherers and immigrant farmers increased. One of the causes of such increased pressure would have been the rise in the number of cattle in the hunter-gatherers’ territories as these people moved into San territories, and specifically the effect that their animals had on wild plant foods. Like the European and other pastoralist groups, the Nguni and Sotho farmers with their livestock brought not only new, cultivated, foods but also new environments. The introduction of cattle by the Nguni into the hunter-gatherers’ territories often resulted in the rapid deterioration of the veld and the destruction of bulbous plants on which the San subsisted. Particularly threatening to the hunter-gatherers would have been the expropriation of water holes by farmers in order to provide watering points for their cattle, and the consequent movement of game into other areas. The game that remained would have had to be shared with the newcomers.
A Zulu hunting dance. By George French Angas.
Source: Library of Parliament.

European and Nguni hunters driving in an eland.
Hunting antelope.

Sotho hunting rhinoceroses. By Charles Davidson Bell.
Source: Bell Heritage Trust, UCT.
Some Nguni chiefs were known to have particularly poor relations with the San. The eighteenth century Xhosa chief, Rharhabe, a son of Phalo, waged a prolonged and bitter war against San who inhabited the areas that he and his followers had colonised. This conflict is said to have arisen after the San stole and ate Rharhabe's favourite ox. While Rharhabe usually was satisfied with taking the cattle of those he defeated in battle, sparing the people he had taken captive, he is said to have invariably killed his San captives, including young children.

On one occasion, while Rharhabe was encamped on the banks of the Great Kei, San stole his cattle. They were tracked to the rocky cliffs at the confluence of the Nqolosa and the Kei, where a solitary path led upwards to the San's hideout. Night was falling, but at first light Rharhabe and his warriors attacked, taking the San by surprise, killing them all, including the small children. They burnt the quivers of the San and headed back home, but are said to have encountered a terrible storm, which so frightened them that when they had returned they immediately summoned the “war doctor” to cleanse and strengthen them. Rharhabe's attacks on the San are still celebrated in Xhosa praises today.

Other Xhosa groups were also known to be on poor terms with the San. Lichtenstein, Barrow and Ludwig Alberi, all of whom travelled to the eastern frontier districts in the second half of the eighteenth century or the first years of the nineteenth century, reported that a state of intense hostility existed between some Nguni groups and the San. Barrow stated that the “Kaffres”, like the “Dutch peasantry” (Boers), had declared “perpetual war” against the San. Alberi, an officer in the services of the Batavian Republic, remarked that San raided the cattle of these groups and in turn were attacked by the Xhosa, who were said to show little mercy to the San they managed to capture - an observation supported by Governor Hendrik Swellengrebel, who was told that “Bosjesmans-Hottentots” were invariably killed if captured by the “Caffers”. Large San groups on the Gariep, too, clashed on a number of occasions with Xhosa groups in the early years of the nineteenth century. This enmity is well-illustrated in Lichtenstein’s account of the encounter in Cape Town between a “Caffre ambassador” 

A sketch, from the imagination, of pursued San raiders shooting stolen cattle with poisoned arrows.
and a San youth in the employ of Governor Janssens. As soon as the former sighted the San boy, he made a rush at him and attempted to spear him with his assegai. The boy managed to evade his attacker and eventually found shelter in the kitchen of the Governor's house.

In the face of San raids on their cattle, Xhosa, Khoe and Europeans occasionally forged, or attempted to forge, alliances to combat their common enemy. Thus, in about 1779, the Xhosa chief Gqunukwebe offered to assist the European Colonists in their struggles with the San. The Xhosa are also known, on occasion, to have allied themselves with the Khoe against the San and looked after cattle for the Khoe to prevent their being stolen by the San.

The Xhosa chief Nzwani, or Danster as he became known, a junior son of the Right Hand House of Rharhabe, frequently clashed with the San. Impoverished as a result of his struggles for land and resources and internal fission among the Ndange group of the Xhosa royal house, he roamed over a wide area of the Northern Cape intermittently between c. 1800 and c. 1835, subsisting by ivory trading, hunting and freebooting. Although a Xhosa chief, Danster's position was not typical of those chiefs who headed more settled communities, and his clashes with San groups and individuals appear to have reflected opportunistic strategies which allowed him to pursue a peripatetic and predatory way of life. This is indicated by the fact that he sometimes formed alliances with San groups and individuals if he believed that they would be an aid to him in the many conflicts in which he was involved. Shifting alliances were a feature of the frontier zone, and even Rharhabe allied himself with the San against his brother Gcaleka when he found it expedient to do so.

A sketch, from the imagination, of San cornered in a cave by Nguni warriors.

These instances of enmity between certain Nguni groups and the San can be supplemented by those of other observers. LMS missionary Johannes van der Kemp, whose exploratory party had themselves been attacked by San and one of their number wounded by two arrows, reported in an account of his travels published in 1803 that the San were the terror of the “Caffrees”. He stated that when four men went to look for deserters from their party, a “Caffree” and two “Hottentots”, they found them “murdered in a shocking manner by the Boschemen, who assembled in a vast number, whistling and shouting at them until they made their retreat”. Van der Kemp was told by the “Caffrees” that one of the chiefs, whose kraal was on the banks of the Bashee River, had boiled several San captives alive.

Not all Nguni groups were engaged in bitter struggles with the south-eastern San before 1822, however, and many of these groups developed close ties with hunter-gatherer communities. Unlike the Dutch Colonists, who, in general, actively defended their society against the influence of members of other ethnic groups, excluding them on moral grounds from their communities, Nguni (and San) societies were open to the incorporation of members of other groups. Mechanisms existed for the integration of strangers into their societies, the natural course being for these people to marry into the group. This is evident in the genetic makeup of many San and Bantu-speakers.

The genetic constitution of present-day Nguni and Sotho people provides evidence of close contact between these people and the Khoe-San. Studies of southern African peoples have allowed geneticists to trace the degree of inter-relatedness of present-day Khoe-San people and Bantu-speakers, and all the Bantu-speaking peoples of southern Africa show some influence of the Khoe-San in their genes as a result of mixing and intermarriage between the groups. Many San groups also have genetic traits associated with Bantu-speaking groups, and craniometric studies indicate that this probably occurred from an early period - well before 1000 AD. This came about as a result of miscegenation between the groups, including intermarriage, an aspect of San-Nguni/Sotho relationships that will be detailed and discussed in greater depth below.

Much interaction also occurred in the cultural sphere. The influence of Khoe-San culture on the cultures of Nguni in southern Africa, for example, is most readily apparent today in the presence of clicks in some of the Nguni languages. The Nguni adopted three main clicks from the Khoe-San, and the number of Xhosa words showing some Khoe-San influence has been estimated to be as high as 40 percent. These include a considerable number of Xhosa place names and names of other geographical features. The names of some of the earliest chiefs listed in Xhosa genealogies contain clicks, moreover, indicating that Khoe-San linguistic influence was already felt during the time of these chiefs, and in all likelihood before this. These clicks, and the Khoe-San linguistic influence in general, differentiate some of the Nguni languages from the Bantu languages spoken by people further to the north. Both the San and the Khoe are likely to have had a linguistic influence on the southern Bantu-speakers, though it is likely that the Khoe had the greater influence. It is known, for example, that there was intense interaction and mixing between certain southern Nguni and Khoe groups, such as the Gonaqua, Gqunukhwebe and Ntinde - more intensive than that which occurred between the Nguni and the San. Nevertheless, elements of the San languages, specifically, were undoubtedly adopted by Bantu-speakers.
Other relationships, such as those based on trade, were also formed - as occurs frequently between hunter-gatherers and farmers in other parts of Africa and the world. Relationships based on trade in ivory, for example, were established between San and Nguni people at an early date. They constituted part of larger southern African trading networks whose participants included the Sotho, Khoe and Europeans. When the Company’s surgeon, Pieter van Meerhoff, encountered “Soaquas” at the Olifants River in the Western Cape in 1661, for example, they promised to bring him honey and ivory, which they were said to have in abundance. According to van Meerhoff, these people exchanged the ivory for other goods with a group called the “Cabonas” or “Chabonas”. This was a Cape Khoe term for Bantu-speakers, and, it seems, referred more specifically to the Xhosa or mixed Xhosa-Khoe groups (such as the Gonaqua, Gqunukhwebe and Ntinde). The “Cabonas/Chabonas”, in turn, traded the ivory to the Portuguese.
It is not certain whether the Portuguese referred to were trading from the east coast, but it is known that a regular trade in ivory between the Portuguese and local populations had been established in northern KwaZulu-Natal and the bay of Lourenco Marques, in present-day Mozambique, by about 1550. Large quantities of ivory obtained in KwaZulu-Natal, and even in the Eastern Cape, from Nguni groups were sent to Delagoa Bay, where the tusks were traded to Europeans, primarily the Portuguese and English. By shortly after the middle of the seventeenth century, therefore, and quite possibly earlier, San appear to have been involved in ivory trade networks linking Portuguese and English traders on the east coast to the interior and as far as the Olifants River in the west. And the Khoe, too, are known to have traded in ivory at an early date. They were bartering small quantities of ivory from at least 1624, and by the 1670s were hunting elephants for their ivory with guns. The San may well have been involved in this trade, probably over a very wide area.

Trade in ivory intensified as the number of permanent European settlers and traders increased, and the moving of the frontier of European settlement eastwards during the course of the eighteenth century opened this trade to extensive commercial markets. Demand for ivory by European traders set a much higher value on this commodity and provided new opportunities for Nguni groups and San to participate in these exchanges. English and Dutch traders and hunters preceded the arrival of European farmers in the south-eastern areas by many years. Trading and hunting expeditions were organised from the Cape Colony into the territories of the southern Nguni, and the primary aim of these people was to obtain ivory. Elephant hunters had penetrated beyond Thembuland by 1736, and by the 1770s there was a regular trade in ivory in the Ciskei region. As demand for ivory grew, hunters operating in the interior supplied the trade with tusks.
Elephant meat being smoked. By François Le Vaillant.
Source: Library of Parliament.

Cooking an elephant’s foot.
It is likely that at least some San groups were providing ivory for this trade through Nguni middlemen, and they may also have acted as guides for European hunters. Certainly, the Xhosa were active participants in the ivory trade. In particular, smaller Xhosa groups, squeezed between encroachment by larger clans to the east and European settlers in the west, became heavily involved in the ivory trade towards the end of the eighteenth century. It has been pointed out that, in order to survive both politically and economically, these groups were forced to expand that sector of their economy which gave them access to the commodity exchange market of the Cape Colony by hunting and trading across the frontier - ivory being the principal item of exchange. The fact that San were exchanging ivory with the Xhosa more than 100 years before this time strongly suggests that they may have acted as primary producers in some of this trade, supplying the Xhosa with ivory which was subsequently bartered in the Colony. And trade in ivory between the San and other groups, including the Nguni, is known to have continued until well into the nineteenth century. Certainly by the beginning of the nineteenth century it is known that some San were making regular trips to “Caffreland” to exchange elephant tusks for cattle. According to missionary Van der Kemp, the Xhosa at about this time would give a cow in return for five ivory rings.

It is also possible that, in some cases, Nguni and Sotho chiefs obtained ivory and skins for the commercial trade from the San by strict enforcement of customary rules of tribute, which required their subjects to surrender the skins and, in the case of elephants, tusks of large game to the chiefs. In later times, some chiefs, such as the Mpondomise chief Mandela, and the Sotho chief Moshoeshoe, received tribute of skins, as well as ivory, from San in their territories. As trade in skins and ivory increased, and as the opening of European markets led to an increase in value of these goods, Nguni customs respecting the aboriginal status of the San and their prior claim to game may have been discontinued in favour of the relations of the market place. With increased pressure being placed by European traders on chiefs to supply ivory for the trade, San living within the territories of these chiefs may also have been required to supply them with ivory for trade, over and above the customary requirements of tribute. If this occurred, it would probably have resulted in the development of a class of hunter-gatherers who hunted and gathered for trade as much as for subsistence.

Items provided to the San by the Nguni and Sotho, in exchange for ivory, as well as skins, feathers, ostrich eggshell beads, honey, wax and other “bush products", included sorghum, maize, milk, cattle and iron. However two of the most important trade items were tobacco and dagga. With regard to the latter, some Sotho groups supplied the San with this narcotic to placate them, or in exchange for hunter-gatherer commodities. The early Koena (Sotho) chief, Kali, acquired his land from a San man in exchange for dagga, and, according to Sotho tradition, the Sotho gave presents of dagga to the San in early times to placate them. The late eighteenth century Phuthi chief, Mokuoane, traded karosses for cattle with other groups, and the dassie (rock rabbit) skins for these karosses were obtained from the San. In return they were given tobacco and dagga, which were cultivated specifically for this trade. A number of later oral traditions of the Sotho refer to the hunger of the San for these substances.

Dagga was probably originally introduced into southern Africa by Arab traders. They acquired it in India and traded it to Bantu-speakers on the east coast of Africa, from where it passed into trading networks extending into the interior. Smoking of “bangi” long preceded the arrival of Europeans in southern Africa, but tobacco, which is of New World origin, appears to have been introduced later, since “Soaquas” encountered in 1660 by Jan Danckaert were unfamiliar with the practice of tobacco smoking. There are a number of accounts of dagga’s being smoked or chewed shortly after Van Riebeeck’s arrival at the Cape, although some of these reports may refer to substances other than Cannabis sativa, or to Cannabis sativa mixed with other narcotic herbs and roots.
Numerous accounts by early European observers, too, attest to the San’s great fondness for, and addiction to, dagga and tobacco. They appear to have been the most common form of currency utilised by Europeans, Khoe and the Nguni and Sotho to obtain goods and services from the San. The demand for tobacco from San at some of the LMS missions has already been mentioned, and Burchell recorded that one of his guides traded less than two ounces of tobacco for a beautiful leopard-skin kaross worn by a member of a San band encountered by his party. Andrew Smith reported that starving San whom he encountered were prepared to exchange the last of their food for tobacco. And Lichtenstein describes how, after giving a San man a wad of tobacco to smoke, this person stuffed the herb into a reed and smoked it without exhaling and with such vigour that he fell to the ground unconscious. We can speculate that, in some cases, the San also smoked dagga to attain a trance state - a practice reported to exist amongst some twentieth century Kalahari San groups.

Dagga is known to have been cultivated by some European farmers and by the LMS missionaries specifically for the purposes of trade with the San, or as gifts for them. After staying the night at a Boer’s house while travelling through the Zeekoei River valley in 1823, George Thompson noted:

“We found a large quantity of the herb called dacha, a species of hemp, hung up on the rafters. The leaves of this plant are eagerly sought after by slaves and hottentots to smoke, either mixed with tobacco or alone. It possesses much more powerfully stimulating qualities than tobacco, and speedily intoxicates those who smoke it profusely, sometimes rendering them for a time quite mad. It is therefore the more extraordinary that the whites, who seldom use the dacha themselves, should cultivate it for their servants. But it is, I believe, an inducement to retain the wild Bushmen in their service, whom they made captives at an early age in their commandoes - most of these people being extremely addicted to the smoking of dacha.”

Whether the San’s addiction to dagga and tobacco was actually encouraged is a moot point, but Thompson’s account suggests that this may have been the case, with respect to the European farmers at least. Certainly, the prospect of acquiring these substances would have been a powerful inducement to hunter-gatherers addicted to them to provide much-needed labour for farmers - something which they often appear to have been unwilling to do. In this sense it is possible that the trade in tobacco and dagga may have played a major role in inducing those San who had elected to retain a degree of independence from farming communities to provide services to these communities.
Tswana dagga smokers. By Charles Davidson Bell.
Source: Library of Parliament.

Blacksmiths, depicted together with a man smoking dagga out of an antelope horn pipe. By Charles Davidson Bell.
Source: Library of Parliament.
Another important commodity which Sotho and Nguni farmers had to offer the San was cultivated foods. Isotopic studies of the diet of skeletons in KwaZulu-Natal that have been excavated by archaeologists suggest that the diet of San coastal hunter-gatherers changed after the arrival of farmers in about 450 AD to one that included grain crops and domesticated stock - with typically hunter-gatherer marine foods decreasing in importance as the population density of farmers along the coast increased. It seems likely that the San were becoming more dependent with time on the foods of the immigrant farmers.

That this occurred is suggested by later historical and oral data. Some San traded for “corn” with the Mpondo in the early nineteenth century, and some Sotho provided San with sorghum, particularly unripe sorghum, which the San are said to have preferred. While domestic carbohydrate may not have been an essential dietary requirement of the south-eastern San, they could well have developed a strong liking for it, as well as for other farmer foods such as milk and beer – particularly the latter! We know that some San were in the habit of visiting the kraals of Nguni farmers in order to get milk. And there are a number of accounts of San and Bantu-speakers coming together at the farmers’ kraals for beer drinks. This is likely to have resulted in the production of a surplus of bush products which could be exchanged for domestic foods and drink, as well as dagga and tobacco, with Nguni and Sotho farmers. This may have initiated the development of hunter-gatherer economic systems geared specifically towards trade. Iron, too, seems to have been in demand by some San and may have been produced in excess by Nguni groups for trade with them.
The establishment of trading relationships, the precursor to the establishment of other ties between groups, would, in general, have fostered good relations between the southern Nguni/Sotho and the San, particularly the individuals/trading partners involved in these transactions. So would intermarriage between the members of these groups. The Mpondomise, for example, had particularly close relations with the San and intermarried with them from an early date. The isiqhulo, or “clan nickname”, given to the Mpondomise is bantwana bomthwakazi - “the children of San women”. This name probably derives from the fact that one of the early Mpondomise chiefs, Ncwini, whose birth date is not known but who is estimated to have died some time between 1495 and 1555, had a San wife. According to an Mpondomise tradition, presumably apocryphal but still related today, Ncwini is said to have rested under a tree while on a hunting expedition. Looking up, he saw what he mistook for a wild animal in the branches of this tree and took it back with him to his homestead. The “animal” turned out to be a San woman and Ncwini had a son by her, Cira. He became a famous Mpondomise chief, succeeding his father above an older Mpondomise half-brother. Since it is customary amongst the Nguni for the first son of the chief and his “great wife”, rather than simply the oldest son of the chief, to succeed his father, it seems that Ncwini chose the San woman as his “great wife”.

There is other evidence suggesting that some eighteenth and nineteenth century Nguni groups established close relations with the San. The Thatu, a Xhosa clan, is partly San in origin, and the charismatic Xhosa military leader and diviner Nxele Makana/Makhanda had two San wives (see Giliomee and Mbenga (2007:102) for a portrait of this man). The Xhosa chief, Langa, was said to have allied himself with the San against the European Colonists in 1792. Other Xhosa chiefs, too, such as Hintsa, and his successor, Kreli, were reported to have treated San living within their territories well. By the 1820s there were a considerable number of San living amongst the Gcaleka, Hintsa’s people, and San were living adjacent to, or together with, other Xhosa groups at this time.
Some Thembu, or “Tambookies” as they were usually referred to in the historical records, are also known to have established close relations with the San. It appears that pioneering Thembu groups intermarried with San they encountered when moving into an area near the Tsomo River in the Eastern Cape, and a section of the Thembu amalgamated with the San of this area. A San group called the “Tamb’u’ki“, also referred to as “Chinese or Snese Hottentots”, were reported to be occupying an area close to the Tsomo in the 1770s. These may have been a mixed San-Thembu group. (It has been suggested that the term “Tamb’u’kis”, or “Tambookies”, referred to groups of this kind, while Thembu referred to the original immigrant Nguni group). They kept cattle on a permanent basis, very likely as a result of their mixing with the Thembu. Early relationships of this kind, based on intermarriage, are known to have continued into later times. Mixed San-Thembu groups, for example, were encountered living together on the Tsomo River in the earlier years of the nineteenth century.
A Thembu woman. By Francois Le Vaillant.  
Source: Library of Parliament.

Source: Library of Parliament.
It is interesting, moreover, that early Thembu were particularly respectful of the San’s right to resources within the territories they had occupied. They were said to allow San accompanying their hunting parties to choose the most desirable portions of any large game killed, and San were even given precedence over any Thembu chiefs present at these kills in recognition of their having been the original occupants of the land.

With regard to early relations between the Sotho and the San (or Baroa, the name given to them by the Sotho), one can detect many patterns in common with those established between the San and the Nguni groups. Interaction between the Sotho and the south-eastern San occurred after agriculturists who had occupied the central and more southerly regions of the present Limpopo Province began to migrate southwards into territories of the San. As has been mentioned, they settled on the southern highveld at a relatively late date. These groups became known as the southern Sotho, and they included the Fokeng, Koena, Taung, Kubung, Tlokoa and Kqatla clans – although recent research suggests that the Fokeng had an Nguni origin.

The earliest clear evidence for the presence of Iron Age farmers on the southern Highveld dates from about 1650. The first clan to occupy the southern Highveld was the Fokeng, who migrated southwards from the present southern Limpopo Province after a split in the clan and spread out over a wide area in the present Free State. They appear to have settled between present-day Frankfort and Vrede at
Ntsuanatsatsi, the traditional place of origin of the founding southern Sotho group. They were followed by other Sotho clans, but the first farmers to occupy the Caledon River valley were three Zizi (Nguni) groups from the Thukela Basin. One of these groups, the Phetla, or “pioneers”, migrated into the valley, and they were later joined by the Polane and the Phuthi. By the end of the seventeenth century most of these groups had reached the southernmost limits of their distribution and a relatively stable frontier situation had been established.

The oral traditions of these groups have helped us to gain a better understanding of the types of relationships which were established between the immigrant farming communities and San communities they encountered. We can expect a wide range of relationships to have occurred between these groups, and it is clear that these would, in many cases, have changed through time - from good to bad and vice versa. Thus an old San man told Andrew Smith that Sotho-Tswana who moved into the area occupied by his group in the Free State, apparently in about 1750 or earlier, began their relationship on good terms, but with time it deteriorated.

“According to his account … before the time of his birth, parties of (Sotho-Tswana) had been established in the country where he was born; and had for some time after their arrival in it lived in tolerable friendship with the Bushmen. (These people), however, not continuing satisfied with the proportion of country of which the Bushmen were disposed to allow them possession, began to seize additional parts, particularly those where the strongest springs existed. Such proceeding soon irritated the Bushmen and caused them not only to war against, but to plunder the intruders of their cattle, which occasioned the retirement of (these people) to their old country …”

There must have been many similar instances of early conflict between San, armed with their bows and poisoned arrows, and Sotho and Tswana groups, armed with assegais, knobkieries and battle-axes, as the farmers moved into, and occupied, San territories, hunting the game on which the San depended as well as appropriating their water holes.

However, while conflict certainly occurred between a number of pioneer Sotho groups and the San, the traditions of most of the clans that migrated southwards and who were later to form the main southern Sotho groups state that they had close relations with the San. Those of the Phuthi and Phetla, for example, suggest that their relations with the San they encountered, as they moved from the Thukela Valley into present-day Lesotho crossing the Caledon River a few miles below its source, were amicable. Mbulane, one of the first Phuthi chiefs to migrate southwards from the Thukela, was guided by the San on long expeditions into the mountains to view the land when he first arrived in the area with his followers before settling at Koro Koro. And Mokuoane, father of the well-known nineteenth century Phuthi chief, Moorosi, had a San wife.

Other immigrant Sotho farmers are said to have intermarried with the San. In the later eighteenth century a Phetla chief, Matelile, married a San woman who was living in a cave at a place which came to be known as Ntlo-Kholo. Matelile is said to have asked his wife to come and live with him in his village, which was situated below the cave. She preferred staying in the cave, however, despite the fact that some of her fellow San had already gone to live with the Phetla in huts. Matelile was wise enough to see the disadvantages of disagreeing with his wife at such an early stage of their relationship and, according to one version of a Sotho tradition, he bowed to her will and built his hut inside the cave itself. The cave consequently became known as Ntlo-Kholo, or “the great hut”, since it was now occupied by the Phetla chief’s great wife.
The Sotho village below Ntlo-Kholo today.
Source: the author.

A traditional healer's hut built in the shelter of Ntlo-Kholo.
Source: the author.
The traditions of the Hoja (“Ghoya”), a collective name for the Taung and Kubung clans who merged in the nineteenth century, state that some San retained their independence after this group moved into their territories from north of the Vaal, while others are said to have mixed and intermarried with the farmers. At this point, some San began to settle and acquire livestock. Both the Taung and Kubung are said to have intermarried with the San and accompanied them on hunts in early times, and in some cases the San were employed to look after the farmers’ livestock.

The Kubung occupied parts of the north-western Free State initially, and their oral traditions suggest that they too had close relations with the San - so close that the Taung and Kubung were said to refer to themselves as “the brothers of the Baroa”. The two groups’ languages were said to have mixed and hybridised - in a similar manner to that in which the Gonaqua’s Khoe language hybridised with isiXhosa after intensive interaction and intermarriage between this group and the Xhosa. The Taung must have respected the fighting abilities of the San, moreover, as they enlisted their help in their conflicts with other groups. San archers, for example, provided support to one of the Taung chiefs, Ramokhele, when he fought the Koena chief, Monyane. The latter chief died after being struck by a poisoned arrow during a skirmish with the combined forces of the Taung and San. Ramokhele’s people, the Baramokhele, were known to be on particularly good terms with the San, intermarrying with them and accompanying them on hunts.

It is a measure of the trust that the Taung placed in their San allies that they sent one of their future chiefs in infancy to be reared by San at an outlying cattle post in about 1790. The siblings of this child had died at birth and it was thought that evil spirits were associated with their deaths. By sending the child away to the distant cattle-post it was believed that these spirits would be evaded, and the San there were consequently asked to raise the boy. They took good care of him, giving him a girdle of ostrich eggshell beads which they had made. As a result he became known as Moletsane, the Sesotho name for this kind of girdle, rather than Makhothi, his Sesotho name. Moletsane eventually returned to the Taung and succeeded his father as chief. He later brought a number of Taung groups under his control, as well as several independent San groups, under Qonsop and Deqoi, who were assimilated into the Taung. This process of assimilation was facilitated by Moletsane’s tolerant attitude towards the different customs of the groups he incorporated into the Taung.
Fokeng traditions, too, suggest that initial relations between this Sotho group and the San were harmonious, and the early Fokeng chief, Komane, lived on friendly terms with San who were occupying a cave near Futhane, where this chief had settled. Other Fokeng groups, as has been mentioned, settled at Ntsuanatsatsi, where they intermarried both with Koena and with the San. At this time the chief of the Fokeng married a San chief’s daughter. Marriage between Fokeng and San was not disapproved of, but the fact that the Fokeng chief took a San woman as his first wife was not acceptable to some of his people and a faction within the Fokeng, as well as the Koena living with them, refused to serve under the son of this San woman when the Fokeng chief died. The clan consequently split, and the main section under the chief of mixed San-Fokeng ancestry migrated eastwards over the Maloti-Drakensberg. This section of the Fokeng went to live amongst the Thembu in the Eastern Cape, where they adopted the Thembu culture and language and became known by the Xhosa equivalent of their name, the Amavundle. They eventually settled in southern Lesotho in the Mjanyane Valley, territory controlled by Moorosi.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, then, south-eastern San were living interspersed amongst Sotho chiefdoms and had established a variety of relationships with these groups, ranging from intermarriage and assimilation to almost complete independence from farmer societies. Many of these relationships, as well as relationships between the San and southern Nguni groups, were to be affected by the wave of refugees who moved into the territories of the Sotho and southern Nguni during the period of widespread social disruption known to the Sotho as the Difaqane and to the Nguni as the Mfecane – “the forced migration”.

The Difaqane and its effects on relations between south-eastern San and southern Nguni and Sotho communities

By the early 1820s the Zulu king, Shaka, had welded together a great number of independent Nguni chiefdoms to form the Zulu nation. This process occurred over a relatively short period, from about 1816 to 1824, by which time most of an area stretching from the Thukela to the Mzimkhulu rivers and from the Maloti-Drakensberg to the sea had been destabilised as the Zulu under Shaka, and other groups such as the Ndwande under Zwide, conquered and then incorporated chiefdoms in this area. While their causes are still not fully understood, a major, and catastrophic, consequence of these struggles was the ripple effect they had on Nguni and Sotho groups of other areas, who were faced with an influx of desperate, and often predatory, refugee groups.

Source: Library of Parliament.
Zulu warriors. By George French Angas.
Source: Library of Parliament.
Thus the Bhaca and the Mfengu moved away from KwaZulu-Natal into areas occupied by southern Nguni groups in the north-eastern Cape. In the north, three bands of refugees from Shaka – the Hlubi, the Ngwane and the Ndebele under Mzilikazi - moved over the Maloti-Drakensberg onto the Highveld, where they immediately came into conflict with Sotho groups causing widespread disruption after 1822. Displaced Sotho, in turn, were forced to raid surrounding groups in order to survive. The Tlokoa under MaNthatisi, were foremost amongst these predatory groups. For a number of years there was great social disruption over a wide area as these groups fought each other for limited resources, and some groups even resorted to cannibalism in order to avoid starvation. This period of conflict lasted until about 1835 in some areas.
Two sketches of Sotho cannibals.

Ndebele warriors on the rampage. By Charles Davidson Bell.
Source: Museum Africa.
Mzilakazi reviewing his warriors.
Source: Museum Africa.

How were the San affected by these struggles? The mobility of the hunter-gatherers, their intimate knowledge of the remoter areas in the mountains and the fact that many of them possessed no crops and few if any cattle which could be stolen would have been to their advantage during the Difaqane. However, the increased pressure placed on resources as a result of competition from starving refugees who took to the bush and resorted to hunting and gathering to survive at this time would certainly have had an impact on many San groups.

One means for San to survive the disruptions was to hunt elephants and barter their tusks to European ivory traders or local chiefs - as they had probably been doing for a great many years. This was feasible in remote areas such as Nomansland (East Griqualand) where elephants were still plentiful and which were relatively unaffected by the Difaqane. The establishment of Fort Willshire as an official trading post on the Keiskamma River in 1824 provided a stimulus to trade between the Xhosa and the Colony, and if the Xhosa were obtaining some of their ivory from the San, as was almost certainly the case, the ivory trade between these two groups is likely to have increased at this time. This seems to be borne out by the observations of the trader Andrew Geddes Bain. In 1829 a large group of elephant hunters, who regularly traded ivory for cattle and comprised about 30 mixed families of San and Bantu-speakers, was located by Bain in hills near the Mzimvubu. For each elephant tusk they supplied to their Nguni trading partners they received a cow and some beads. By the time Bain left he had traded all his cattle for 2500 pounds of ivory. A similar group of elephant hunters in the same area were reported to barter ivory to the Mpondoland chief, Faku, in exchange for “corn” and tobacco. It appears that mixed San-Nguni groups such as these hunted both for trade and for subsistence.
Hunters shelter from the rain in the carcass of an elephant. By Charles Davidson Bell.

Source: Library of Parliament.

An elephant hunted.

Source: Library of Parliament.
The ruins of Fort Willshire in later times. By Charles Davidson Bell.
Source: Bell Heritage Trust, UCT

Ivory for sale on Market Square, Grahamstown 1850. By Thomas Baines.
Source: Albany Museum.
A number of Nguni people adopted a similar way of life to these hunter-traders at the time of the Difaqane. Dumisa, an Nhlangwini chief who lived with San for a time (the same person who, with the encouragement of the British authorities, later moved with his people to a barrier location and became a bitter enemy of the San raiding from the Maloti-Drakensberg), learned the art of hunting elephants with poisoned arrows or assegais from San. They were said to be in league with this chief and would leave the tusks for him when they killed elephants. He and his followers lived by hunting elephants, eating the flesh of these animals and trading the ivory to the Boers and to Nguni and Sotho groups.

Some farmers were assisted by the San in other ways. Sotho groups enlisted the help of San during their skirmishes with other groups during the Difaqane. The weaponry and fighting abilities of the San were greatly respected by the southern Nguni and Sotho (and other groups), and, despite their lack of military organization, the San could often more than hold their own in armed conflict with Bantu-speakers. Some Nguni and Sotho groups, in fact, armed themselves with bows and poisoned arrows in preference to the weapons that they customarily used.

San also provided shelter and protection to some refugee Nguni and Sotho groups at this time - a reversal of the usual roles, where Nguni and Sotho chiefs “owned” or protected San groups living in their territories. At times of great political upheaval and associated ecological crisis, such as that which characterised the Difaqane, hunter-gatherers are generally in a better position to survive these crises than farming communities. During a period when practically no southern Nguni or Sotho community was safe from attack by other groups it would therefore have been important to foster good relations with the San. Farming communities that had forged alliances with hunter-gatherers would have been able to depend on them for help in the form of provision of shelter and food as well as military assistance when times were bad. This was the case with the Phuthi and Phetla who were sheltered by the San when Mokuoane and his son, Moorosi, moved southwards with their followers to escape the invasions. We have a good record, in this case, of the unsettled life experienced by many groups at this time, as well as the sorts of relationships they formed with the San in order to survive.

According to Joseph Orpen, who took oral histories from Phuthi and other groups, towards the onset of the Difaqane the Phuthi and Phetla crossed the Senqu (the San, then Sesotho, name for the Gariep) from the north and held a pitso (a general meeting of the clan) at which it was decided that they would split into two groups. One group, including Mokuoane and Moorosi, went to live with the Mpondomise under Myeki, who had a San wife. The other party went to stay with San living in the Herschel District who were occupying caves along the Tele and Blikana rivers, near the southern boundary of present-day Lesotho. The Phuthi and Phetla lived by hunting and gathering at this time, as they had lost their cattle to raider groups.

Those Phuthi and Phetla who stayed with the San were “owned” and supported by them. The area was not settled by farmers at that time and there was plenty of game available, with the result that the San were able to provide the Phuthi and Phetla with food. Tiring of living under the San, however, they secretly ran away, taking the one horse that the San possessed. After stealing cattle from a European farmer in the Colony they appear to have taken these to a cave near Lady Grey where they were staying, but they were discovered here by the San with whom they had previously stayed. The San drove off their cattle and returned to their caves, probably those along the Tele and Blikana. Some Phuthi accompanied the San and stayed with them in their caves.

In the interim, the group under Mokuoane had started to retrace their steps northwards. They appear to have gone to stay with the San at the Tele and Blikana, meeting up with their Phuthi kin who had
followed the San back to these caves. The two Phuthi groups united and lived together at the cave near Lady Grey, living partly by hunting and gathering and partly by conducting cattle raids on Nguni and Sotho farmers in the Cape Colony. Despite these good relations, however, the two groups clashed when the San claimed cattle which the Phuthi had stolen from Europeans in the Cape Colony. The Phuthi subsequently moved off to an area near Moshesh’s Drift on the Kraai River. Here they stayed in caves and were reported to have again subsisted on game hunted for them by San, before occupying an area at the head of the Tele.

At some time during these wanderings, Mokuoane formalised his relationship with the San by marrying the sister of the San chief Quu and had a son by her. It is quite possible, moreover, that intermarriage between Phuthi chiefs and the San had occurred before this time. Mokuoane’s son, Moorosi, was reported to be descended from the San on his mother’s side, and it was said that an “ancestor” of Moorosi’s had a San wife, suggesting that intermarriage between the San and Phuthi may have occurred over a considerable period of time.

Many other Sotho communities disrupted by the Difaqane struggles were forced, like the Phuthi, to subsist by hunting and gathering. The Fokeng lived on game in the Rouxville area in about 1822, and at these times the farmers appear to have been aided by San communities. The Koena of Monaheng, too, were greatly helped by the San during the time of the Difaqane. A very old Koena woman, who was born early in the nineteenth century, testified that “(t)he pressure of famine was so great among her own people, owing to the constant raiding which made it not worth while sowing where no one knew who would reap, that even the children had to be fed on game as soon as they were weaned, and they were glad to learn from the despised Bushmen in the neighbourhood of Mekoatleng how to snare the plentiful game by digging pits with a light covering of branches”. And some Sotho, probably those who had resorted to hunting and gathering, obtained supplies of “corn” by trading skins with Sotho living in less disrupted areas, who were still able to sow and harvest crops.
San hunters and women celebrate catching a rhinoceros in a game pit.
Source: Bell Heritage Trust, UCT.

Antelope trapped in game pits. By Charles Davidson Bell.
Source: Museum Africa.
A number of San groups appear to have been caught up in the fighting, supporting those Sotho groups to which they were allied. Thus San fought with Setlho’s Phetla against the Tlokoa at this time, and the Phuthi were reported to have used poisoned arrows in their struggles with the Ngwane - perhaps the arrows of their San allies. We know that San were formed into “regiments” during “Sotho inter-tribal wars”, probably those that occurred during the Difaqane. The Koena chief, Makhetha, is said to have divided his warriors into four corps, one of which consisted of San archers.

The Koena also established relations with the San at the time of the Difaqane. When Moshoeshoe was forced to flee from Butha-Buthe to Thaba Bosiu in 1824, he found San living on Qeme and Qoaling mountains. Among the San groups at Qeme when Moshoeshoe arrived in the area was a group under Quu. The Phuthi united with Quu’s San, and it appears that the former were living near Qeme at the time, trading with their San neighbours to whom they were related by marriage.
Moshoeshoe as he would have appeared in 1833 - a reconstruction drawn in 1859.


Moshoeshoe. By George Duff.

Source: Museum Africa.;
Moshoeshoe in 1845. By Francois Maeder.
Source (original): Journal des Missions Évangéliques (1846).

Moshoeshoe in 1860.
Source: Cape Archives.
Moshoeshoe attempted to befriend the Qeme San, giving them cattle including cows in calf. Instead of settling down and breeding these cattle, however, the San slipped away one night taking the cattle with them. They retreated to the mountains where they killed the cattle and ate them, after which they became freebooters, plundering the cattle of the Sotho, particularly those of Moshoeshoe’s son, Molapo. They eventually joined up with the last great San leader of the Maloti, Soai - whose fate is discussed later. Despite these clashes with the San, Moshoeshoe is nevertheless known to have had at least two San wives, while some San groups acknowledged Moshoeshoe’s “ownership” of them, bringing him tribute of lion and leopard skins.

San under Moshoeshoe. Note the typical Sotho warrior’s breastplate worn by one of these men. By Charles Davidson Bell.

Source: Museum Africa.
Interaction between San and southern Sotho and Nguni groups after the Difaqane

Under stress stemming from the arrival of these new groups, including the Difaqane raiders, many refugee San and Sotho who wished to retain their independence now fled to remoter areas in the south-eastern mountains, particularly the Maloti and Nomansland (East Griqualand), which continued to support large herds of game until well into the latter half of the nineteenth century. The movement northwards in 1836 of the Boers who had joined the Great Trek added impetus to these processes, and brought the San, in alliance with the Sotho, into conflict with these newcomers.

The arrival of Europeans in areas occupied by San and Sotho, while usually resulting in conflict and hardship for these groups, also presented new opportunities for co-operation between Sotho and San in opposition to a common enemy. Thus Posholi, a brother of Moshoeshoe, conducted raids with the San on the cattle of the Boers in the 1830s, as well as in later times. And many San forced to move from the Transgariep seem to have placed themselves under the protection of Moorosi - who nevertheless also clashed with other San groups, those who were not allied with him and who raided his cattle. That the Phuthi were involved in raids on the Boer’s stock in co-operation with San by this time is suggested by the tradition that Moorosi presented Moshoeshoe with his first horse in about 1829, stolen by one of the San under his protection. San are also reported to have helped Moorosi and his father Mokuoane on another occasion, in about 1835, when Moorosi was visiting Moshoeshoe at Thaba Bosiu. While Moorosi was away, a Boer commando captured cattle belonging to Mokuoane at Bolepeletsa, east of the Tele River, and took the old man prisoner. On the way to deliver him to prison they camped overnight at Buffelsvlei, near present-day Aliwal North, tying the old man to a wagon wheel. However, he was freed during the night by a San man, probably one of his San adherents, and managed to escape.

Other Sotho groups formed alliances with, or protected, the San about this time. When James Backhouse visited Moshoeshoe in 1839 he remarked on the presence of some San among the Sotho clans. And a San group visited by the French missionaries Arbousset and Daumas in the Maloti a few years earlier were found living in rough shelters close to the kraal of a Sotho chief. The chief had gained their trust, and the missionaries remarked that the Sotho sheltered these San in their huts during bad weather. It is possible that this San community had fled the upheavals resulting from the occupation of the Transgariep by the Griquas, Boers and other groups, and had placed themselves under the protection of the Sotho chief. They told the missionaries that the reason they did not build huts, keep cattle or cultivate crops was partly because they needed to be on the move following the game, but also because they needed to be mobile in order to escape attacks on them by Boers, who treated them very badly.

While Moorosi (whose Nguni clan later became part of the Sotho nation), Moshoeshoe, and some of the other Sotho chiefs had thus established good relations with certain San groups in the 1840s, relations with others were poor. In 1840 the San stole horses belonging to Moshoeshoe near Qoqolosing while he was involved in negotiations with the Boer leader, Pretorius. And when Moshoeshoe accompanied Arbousset on a journey from Thaba Bosiu to the sources of the Malibamatso River in 1840, it was partly to acquaint himself with the more remote areas of his domain where San raiders were believed to be based. San had stolen horses from the Tlokoa chief, Masopo, the previous winter, and had taken them to the Maloti where they slaughtered them. No San were encountered on the journey, but San bands inhabited the mountains, and Moshoeshoe remarked to Arbousset that the Sotho were prevented from establishing permanent settlements in the Maloti by the frequent raids conducted by these groups on their cattle.
San of the Maloti. By Charles Davidson Bell.
Source: Museum Africa.

A tracing of a rock painting panel depicting a San raid on the cattle of a Sotho group.
The French missionary, Francois Maeder, also remarked that San troubled some Sotho frequently, and Moshoeshoe, acting on complaints by his subjects about San depredations between Thaba Morena and Maphutseng, sent a party to mount an attack on the raiders. Four prisoners were taken and delivered to Moshoeshoe's son, Letsie. At Moshoeshoe's request, Maeder subsequently interviewed one of the San prisoners (both spoke Dutch) concerning his reasons for raiding the Sotho. This may have been a man named “Kingking” (Qingqing?), whom Maeder sketched at the time. As the interview progressed, it became clear to Maeder, to his despair, that these San had no conception of private property with regard to animals - or even of the Christian concept of sin. The captives unashamedly told Maeder that, if released, they would continue to steal, for otherwise, they stated, they would die of hunger. They were subsequently taken to Thaba Bosiu, where Moshoeshoe sentenced them to work for him for the duration of their lifetimes. Three of them later escaped, but one remained with the Sotho.

Later developments in the Transgariep, however, were to have the effect, at least initially, of improving San-Sotho relations as these groups combined again to oppose the Boers, who fought two wars in close succession with the Sotho. When the Orange River Sovereignty, established in 1848, was handed over to the Boers by the Colonial government in 1854, boundaries between the newly-established Orange Free State Republic and the Sotho were left undefined, and this was one of the factors which led to armed conflict between the Republic and the Sotho. Senekal's War was waged during 1858 and hostilities broke out again in the Seqiti War of 1865, which continued until 1868. In some cases the San were enlisted, to good effect, by the Sotho in their battles with the European farmers during the course of these wars.

Further to the west, near the town of Boshof, the San chief, Khausob (also known to the Europeans as Skeelkobus), embittered as a result of his having received no payment for land he had sold to European farmers, took advantage of the outbreak of Senekal’s War and the diversion of the Republic’s forces to the east, where they were engaging with the forces of the Sotho. In 1858, he and his followers, a mixed group of San, Khoe, Korana, and Griquas, launched a series of raids on the farms of Europeans. He was aided, in particular, by two Korana clans - the Scorpions, under Ryk Klaas and Kort Hendriks, and the Seekoeie.
A commando was mustered under Landdrost James Howell, and Khausob’s kraal was encircled. After a fierce fight, lasting about three hours, Khausob, his brother Klaas, and about 130 of their followers were killed. Subsequently, more than 40 male prisoners who were being escorted to Bloemfontein were intercepted by a party of Boers, who summarily executed the men. Although a hearing into this atrocity was ordered to take place, pressure placed by the Boers at Boshof on the government meant that this never occurred.

A commission sent by the Free State government to arrange peace at the end of Senekal’s War in 1858 asked Moshoeshoe to act against San in his territory, and to order his chiefs, and Moletsane in particular, to do the same. After San had again raided farms in the Free State, a deputation pressured Moshoeshoe, Mopeli and Moletsane to prevent San within their territories, as well as San who were occupying areas formerly under their control, from stealing cattle from the farms of the Boers. Some Sotho chiefs were known to be co-operating with San in these raids. One of these was Posholi, who at about this time was based on the mountain Boloko (Vecht Kop), and, subsequently, nearby on Sefika mountain. A group of “wild Bushmen” and runaway farm servants also lived on Boloko, and Posholi was said to have placed them on the mountain, supplied them with horses, and claimed the lion’s share of their booty after their raids on the cattle of the Boers.

Somewhat unwillingly, a Sotho deputation agreed to allow the European farmers to follow the spoor of cattle stolen by the San into the territories of the Sotho chiefs. And, fearing reprisals by the Boers, some Sotho chiefs acted against San living within their territory whom they had formerly protected. By 1860 joint commandos were being organised by Sotho and Boers against the San. In the same year, Moshoeshoe agreed to act against the San and ensure that his chiefs did the same. Boer commandos were sent to track down Posholi’s San. An initial attempt to dislodge them failed, but they were eventually killed, captured and dispersed after being shelled in their caves. Posholi himself attacked and killed a number of San at Litsoeneng in 1862, and several other skirmishes occurred between the Sotho and San at this time. Whether these skirmishes resulted from pressure placed by the Boers on the Sotho is not certain, but the San were now clearly seen as a liability by some Sotho chiefs.
Deprived of support from many of the Sotho chiefs who had previously protected them, San raids on farms in the Free State had largely ceased by 1865. San under the protection of Moletsane were forced to leave Mekoatleng after being attacked by the Boers. The mountain at Mekoatleng had provided a natural fortress for a number of powerful San bands for many generations. They occupied caves in the area until the Seqiti War in 1865, when they were attacked by a commando under Commandants Fick and Dreyer, who used rifles, grenades and cannon against them in a fierce battle to dislodge them from their caves. The Mekoatleng San subsequently moved to Qeme mountain and thereafter to Kolo mountain further to the south.

![Mekoatleng in the early 1840s.](image)


Sotho and San were thus forced to retreat towards the mountains of the eastern Free State and Lesotho, as well as into Nomansland, as the Boers took over their territories, and some San went with them. Moorosi, who had two San wives, moved up the Senqu, accompanied by his Phuthi and San adherents and kin. By 1869, and probably earlier, San had settled amongst the Phuthi in huts, tending their own cattle and sheep and growing crops. They also assisted the Phuthi when they raided farms in the Colony for cattle and horses, and between 1868 and 1870 most of the raids in KwaZulu-Natal were conducted by combined parties of San and Phuthi.

Raids on the farms of Europeans such as these, involving mixed groups of San and Bantu-speakers, had been occurring for more than 30 years in the Maloti-Drakensberg and adjacent areas - after the arrival of large numbers of Boers in KwaZulu-Natal in 1837. Mixed groups of San and Bantu-speakers continued to raid the stock of European farmers in KwaZulu-Natal throughout the 1840s. By 1850 these raids had intensified to the point where the Colonial authorities, now strongly suspecting collaboration between the Nguni and Sotho farmers and San, commissioned an enquiry to investigate the thefts. At the same time they placed pressure on the Mpondo chief, Faku, as well as on Bhaca and Mpondomise chiefs, to act against the San based in their territories, but these demands were initially resisted by the chiefs for a number of reasons: they benefited too greatly from their relationships with San cattle raiders, they...
were often in no position to trace and apprehend the San in rugged, broken country; and some of the chiefs and their people had married San women and established blood ties with San bands.

The Commission of Enquiry revealed many interesting details of the relationships existing between San bands and Nguni and Sotho farmers in Nomansland in 1850. At least four San bands were known to have occupied Nomansland and adjacent areas at that time. One band, under Mdwebo, roamed an area between the Ngeli Mountains and the Mzimvubu. They were living at this time at the Mzimvubu, in the territory of the Bhaca. Mdwebo's band appears to have fluctuated in size from 15 men, plus women and children, to about 120 men, women and children. They were often joined by another band under an old San chief, Qangi. A third, small, band headed by Nqabayo lived in an area bordering the Tina, a tributary of the Mzimvubu. A fourth, and much larger, band, the Thola, were under the leadership of Biligwana. This heavily creolised group consisted of about 200 San, Khoe and runaway servants. They appear to have subsisted largely on stolen cattle and were armed with guns. They also hunted game on the plains near the headwaters of the Mzimvubu, however, and were active on both sides of the Maloti-Drakensberg. A fifth band, the Mbaklu, had occupied the upper reaches of the Mzimvubu as well, but their location was not known in 1850.

All these bands at one time or another had recruited from the Bhaca or Mpondomise, and all appear to have been involved in the trading of stolen cattle to these groups in 1850 and for some years before this date. The Mpondomise chief, Mandela, as well as the Bhaca chiefs, Mchithwa and his brother, Bhekezulu, in particular, collaborated with San bands who stole cattle and horses from European farms. In return for these animals or parts of these animals, such as ox tails (used by the Bhaca for ornamental dress), the San received dogs, maize and tobacco. On the occasions when trading took place there was generally much feasting and fraternising between the groups. Sometimes the farmers kraaled stolen cattle for the San, and on other occasions a form of cattle-laundering took place, with the chiefs exchanging cattle recently stolen by the San for cattle which they already possessed, presumably in order to make it more difficult for European farmers to trace their animals.

The Bhaca, perhaps because they were relatively recent immigrants to the area, appear not to have intermarried with the San. Their alliances with the San were probably formed purely on the basis of collaboration in the trade in stolen cattle, and perhaps other goods. The alliances between the San and the Mpondomise, on the other hand, were based to a large extent on intermarriage, and, as has been mentioned above, ties of this kind had existed between these groups as early as the sixteenth century. The San chief Mdwebo was related to Mandela by marriage and “belonged” to the Mpondomise during Mandela's great grandfather's time. Nqabayo's band, who lived on the Tina River, were related to that of Mdwebo, and hence to Mandela. It seems that Nqabayo's people provided tribute of leopard skins, elephant tusks and other goods to Mandela - and Mdwebo, as a vassal of Mandela, may well have been required to pay similar tribute.

It does not appear that the Thola traded cattle or intermarried with the Bhaca or Mpondomise, although they may well have done so with Sotho groups nearer to the base of the Maloti-Drakensberg where they were located. They certainly raided cattle extensively, but some of these appear to have been slaughtered and eaten, rather than bred. Many cattle bones were found at one of their kraals, enough to provide them with material for building these enclosures. The kraal was constructed of “stakes driven into the ground, wattled by strips of hide from the slaughtered cattle, and with the interstices well filled with skulls and horns”. However, these people were also keeping large herds of cattle on a permanent basis, as were other San bands undergoing the process of transformation from a hunter-gatherer to a pastoralist, or agropastoralist, way of life.
Neither Mdwebo’s nor Nqabayo’s band, on the other hand, seem to have settled, and they appear to have moved constantly from one place to another, following the game. They subsisted largely by hunting, but probably supplemented their subsistence base, to a greater or lesser extent, by raiding the Europeans’ farms for horses and cattle. In their nomadic lifestyle, as well as their physical appearance, dress and their construction of “impromptu” huts, Mdwebo’s band resembled typical San hunter-gatherers. They could nevertheless speak a Bantu language and the band included several members of the Mpondomise under Mandela, to whom Mdwebo said he was related. Thus, while in some senses representing a typical San hunter-gatherer community, Mdwebo’s band was nevertheless closely linked to the Mpondomise, some of whom had joined up with him. Like many of the later San groups, they were multi-ethnic in composition and creolised to a large extent. It is likely that some of the mixed groups that existed at this time had formed new ethnic identities that combined features of the cultures of the several ethnic groups of which they were constituted. In fact, it was the norm by this time for San bands to be composed of people from different ethnic groups, even if San-speakers were in the majority in most cases.

By 1850, as was to occur later in the Free State, pressure placed on chiefs collaborating with the San in thefts of European farmers’ cattle caused rifts to develop between many of these chiefs and the San, as well as between those who felt the San should be attacked in order to appease the European authorities and those unwilling to act against the San under their protection. The seizure in 1850 of 1000 cattle from the Mpondo chief, Faku, by the Crown Prosecutor, Walter Harding, in retaliation for his failure to prevent San stock raids, forced this chief to act against the San, and he is rumoured to have fallen upon and killed a large number of them after being fined so heavily. Both the Bhaca chief Bhekezulu, who had kraaled stolen cattle for the San, and his brother, Mchithwa, also acted against the San. Bhekezulu ordered the San to build their own kraals, and Mchithwa was struck by two poisoned arrows and killed while pursuing a San band that had stolen his cattle. Between 1852 and 1855 San raids on farms in KwaZulu-Natal decreased greatly, probably due to the deterioration in relationships between Nguni chiefs and the San raider bands following the pressure placed by the Colonial authorities on chiefs allied to the San. By 1855, however, these relationships seem to have been re-established, and joint cattle raids had resumed.

Before this time, a number of Thembu groups living on the White Kei, including Jumba, father of the Thembu chief, Mgudhluwa, were on comparatively friendly terms with San “families and clans” living in that area - according to a statement made by Silayi, a subject of Jumba’s, to Sir Walter Stanford. Silayi was well qualified to inform Stanford about the San and their relationships with farming communities, having lived with Nqabayo’s band for about three years in the 1850s. This band, according to Silayi, was at that time roaming an area at the base of the Maloti-Drakensberg close to the Xuka River (the largest tributary of the Mbashee) and the Qanquru (Mooi) River, a tributary of the Tsitsa. The band comprised more than 40 men, most of whom were armed with bows and arrows, although they also possessed assegais and flintlocks. Silayi was accepted into the band on the basis of his friendship with his companion, Ngqika, who was “half a Bushman”. Ngqika, Silayi and a Khoe companion “received bows and arrows and became members of the tribe”.

Silayi reported that the San were on friendly terms with neighbouring Bantu-speakers. They visited their kraals to ask for milk, although, unbeknown to the farmers, they sometimes stole livestock from them on these occasions. They also received tinder-boxes from the farmers, whose language they appear to have been able to speak, and San “rain doctors” were employed by the farmers in the dry season. Perhaps as a result of their contact with the more hierarchically-organised black farming communities, institutions of leadership were more developed than may have been the case in some
earlier San communities. Nqabayo, unlike other men in the band, had two wives and he controlled the preparation and dispensing of the poison for their arrows.

In 1857 Nqabayo fell out with the Thembu chief, M indulgeluwa, by which time Silayi had returned to the Thembu. Three members of Nqabayo’s band stole horses from this chief, who surrounded and attacked the San at Gubenxa. All the San men, other than those (including Nqabayo) who were away hunting, were killed in the attack. The women and children captives were killed by the younger warriors while being taken back to the Thembu, although this was apparently done without M indulgeluwa’s knowledge. The survivors of the band took refuge in the territory of Mditchwa, chief of the western section of the Mpondomise. Some of the San later returned to the mountains, and the last Silayi heard of them they were at the sources of the Mzimvubu.

In the 1850s and 1860s the upper regions of the Mzimvubu, part of Nomansland which was still quite well populated with game and appears to have been a haven for a number of San bands, were settled by various refugee groups. These included Khoe from the Cape Colony, who formed alliances with the San and Nguni and Sotho farmers. The expansion of the Sotho under Moshoeshoe caused many San to leave the Maloti-Drakensberg and move into Nomansland, and they were followed by Sotho themselves in 1858 and 1865 after the devastating wars with the Orange Free State Republic, causing the San to retreat into even more remote areas. The arrival of these groups, as well as the Griquas under Adam Kok, who moved into the area between 1859 and 1862, resulted in great competition for land and resources. This disrupted the area to such an extent that a government Commission of 1872 found the whole of Nomansland to be in a state of chaos.

The end of an era

With the settlement of the Lesotho lowlands by the Sotho after the Boer conquest of areas to the west of the Caledon River, the San raiders operating from the Maloti appear to have taken advantage of the presence of these Sotho communities and began to raid them rather than the European farmers in KwaZulu-Natal. This is suggested by the marked decrease in numbers of San raids on farms in KwaZulu-Natal during the 1860s and the increased intensity of raids by San on the livestock of the Sotho. Chief Molapo and his sons, Jonathan and Joel, were troubled constantly by San raids led by the Maloti San leader, Soai.

Jonathan and Joel organised a number of expeditions against Soai and his followers, who were based at Sehonghong Cave deep in the mountains, but they were unable to capture or kill the San leader. On at least one occasion, Soai sought refuge from the Sotho with the Phuthi, as he had particularly close ties with their chief, Moorosi. He frequently visited Moorosi’s place, where he apparently had a Phuthi wife or lover, and there was much intermarriage between his and Moorosi’s people. Moorosi, in turn, visited Soai at Sehonghong Cave in the Maloti, where he was reported to have seen San artists painting on the walls of this cave. According to a Sotho woman who accompanied Moorosi, three painters with white goatee beards were at work when they visited, each painting in his own section of the cave. Hers is one of the very few known first-hand accounts of the San artists at work.
On his return from one of these expeditions to locate Soai’s group in 1871, Jonathan passed Joel at the head of a party which was also searching for Soai. Joel continued his expedition into the mountains, where his men encountered three San, one of whom they pursued up the Senqu to an area near Sehonghong Cave. Here they lost sight of him, but after a long search one of the men spotted a shoulder coated with red ochre protruding above the surface of a deep pool. It was the San fugitive who, breathing through a thin reed, had hidden himself beneath the water. A shot was aimed at him and he began to struggle, but, after more shots were fired, his body, adorned with ivory bracelets and a beautifully-worked belt of beads, was dragged from the pool. It was only when this belt was shown to San captured by Jonathan on an earlier expedition, and identified by them as belonging to Soai, that the Sotho could be sure that the last major Maloti San leader had finally been killed.

The defeat and death of Soai enabled the Sotho to expand into the Lesotho highlands without fear of further attacks by San. Some San now sought refuge in East Griqualand, as well as areas as far afield as Kimberley and Harrismith. Others were taken in by their allies and kin, Moorosi’s Phuthi, but the old Phuthi chief was soon to be defeated and killed, depriving the San of their most powerful ally.

One of Moorosi’s sons, Doda, had often raided the cattle of European farmers during the 1870s, and had also incited the Phuthi not to pay their hut taxes to the British. He was eventually imprisoned for these offences by the Colonial authorities, but Moorosi’s men broke open the jail and released him. This resulted in an expedition being mounted against Moorosi in 1879. According to one tradition, San armed with bows and arrows are said to have fought alongside the Phuthi, helping them inflict losses on Colonial troops and their auxiliaries near Pokane on the Senqu.

After a series of skirmishes with the advancing troops, the Phuthi withdrew to an almost impregnable hill at the junction of the Quthing and Senqu rivers in Lesotho. This hill, which became known as Mount Moorosi, was well fortified by the Phuthi with stone walls, or schanzes, and Moorosi and his followers were besieged there for eight months. Conditions on top of the mountain were very bad, and it was only through the help of villagers who replenished the food supplies of the Phuthi on the mountain under cover of darkness, and the efforts of warriors who crept off the mountain unobserved to get provisions from caves in the area, that they were able to hold out. The role of the San in supporting the Phuthi at this time, and their importance in Phuthi society in general, is probably indicated by the fact that the password for Phuthi who wanted access to the mountain during the siege, according to one of the men who defended the mountain fortress, was “Moroa”, meaning “Bushman”. It is very likely that Moorosi, assisted by Raisa (one of his principal chiefs, a war doctor and rainmaker, and, like Moorosi, a great friend of the San) drew on the support of his San allies during the siege.
It is a measure of the intensity of the siege and the fighting that three Victoria Crosses were later awarded to members of the Colonial forces who besieged him there. Although Mount Moorosi was defended with great courage and skill, it was stormed and fell on the night of the 19th/20th of November 1879 after days of sustained mortar fire over and behind the schanzes. Most of the defenders were killed, including Moorosi, whose corpse was dishonored and then paraded around the camp, before being dismembered. His head was cut off, exposed on a pole, and sent to King Williams Town. After protests from the French missionary, Mabille, the matter was raised in the Cape Parliament and the head was returned and buried with Moorosi’s body, thus ending an era, not only for the Phuthi but also for the south-eastern San.

A sketch of Mount Moorosi in 1879, showing the location of the British forces on the day it was stormed and fell.


Mount Moorosi today. The mountain falls steeply down to the Senqu/Gariep on the other side. On the left hand side of the photograph a cypress tree can just be seen, marking the graves of some of the Colonial troops.

Source: the author.
TIMELINE

c. 1500
Mpondonisie chief, Ncwini, marries a San woman, their son succeeding him as chief

c. 1650
The first Sotho clans cross the Vaal River and occupy the southern highveld

c. 1660
San are recorded trading ivory with the Xhosas

1686
Survivors of the Stavenisse, wrecked on the east coast, encounter Xhosas who are enemies of the San

c. 1790
The Taung chief Moletsane sent to a cattle post as an infant to be raised by the San

c. 1820
Onset of the Difaqane

c. 1822
Destitute Fokeng assisted by the San

1824
Moshoeshoe moves to Thaba Bosiu and attempts to befriend San on Qeme mountain

1825
Boers begin to move into Transgariep, impacting on San-Sotho relations

c. 1830
San form alliances with Sotho against the Boers

1848
Orange River Sovereignty proclaimed a British territory by Sir Harry Smith

1850
Commission of enquiry set up by British to investigate San raids in the Maloti-Drakensberg, as well as the co-operative relationships established between the raiders and the Sotho and Nguni of that area

1852-1855
San raids in the Drakensberg decrease greatly

1854
Orange Free State Republic proclaimed when the British withdrew from the Orange River Sovereignty

1858
Senekal's war waged between the Sotho and the Boers

Khausob attacks farms of Boers in the Republic
1860
Joint Boer-Sotho commandos mounted against the San in the Republic

1865
Seqititi War between the Sotho and the Boers - causes conflict between San and Sotho refugees fleeing to Nomansland

San at Mekoatleng attacked, in a major battle, by Commandants Fick and Dreyer with rifles, grenades and cannon

1868-1870
San and Phuthi conduct joint raids on farms of Europeans in the Drakensberg

1871
The San chief, Soai, is killed at Sehonghong by Sotho warriors

1879
Moorosi is defeated and killed at Mount Moorosi
The prominence given to the eland (in the rock art) seems to correspond with the place it occupied in the Bushman imagination. It was to them what the ox is to the pastoral Bantu - not only their principal food-provider, but in some sense also a sacred animal.

Alice Werner

The migration of Khoe, Nguni, Sotho and Europeans into southern Africa brought about marked changes in the environments, social organization, cultures, and, in turn, the artistic traditions of many of the San communities who occupied the areas into which they moved. In this chapter, some of the ways in which the overt content and underlying symbolism of San rock paintings changed as a result of both harmonious and conflictual contact between the San and immigrant herders and agro-pastoralists will be discussed. Before we do this, however, it will be useful to look briefly at the main features of those paintings that are not obviously related to the contact period.

“TRADITIONAL” SAN ROCK PAINTINGS

The rock art tradition in southern Africa is an extremely old one. Paint mixtures containing ochre and other substances found in perlemoen (abalone) shells at Blombos on the south-eastern Cape coast, which have been dated to about 100,000 B.P, may just possibly indicate the existence of some form of rock art tradition, other than body painting, at this time. Certainly, one form of the art tradition, the engraving of abstract patterns, is represented at a very early period. A date of at least 99,000 B.P. has recently been claimed for some of the engraved ostrich eggshell excavated at Diepkloof shelter in the western Cape, and engraved ochre excavated from Blombos has been dated to about 78,000 B.P.
A grindstone used for processing ochre and a perlemoen shell containing ochre and other substances. They were found together at the site of Blombos.

Source: Chris Henshilwood.

Engraved ostrich eggshell from Diepkloof Shelter.

Source: Pierre-Jean Texier.
The earliest dated San paintings, however, the tradition with which we are concerned in this chapter, are those found on portable stones from the Apollo 11 shelter in southern Namibia. These have been dated by association with the deposit in which they were found to about 28,000 years BP. From at least this time, therefore, hunter-gatherers, in all probability the ancestors of the San, were painting on the rocks of southern Africa, and this custom continued to be practised by San into the later years of the nineteenth century in the south-eastern mountains, and, in a few cases, even into the twentieth century.

A slab from the Apollo 11 shelter with a painting of an indeterminate animal. Its hindlegs, which are more human than animal in form, may have been painted at a later date than the rest of the body.

Source: National Museum of Namibia.

A re-creation of a scene from the past in Main Caves, Giant’s Castle, Drakensberg.

Source: the author.
There are both similarities in the style and subject matter of San paintings as well as local and regional differences. Paintings of animals and humans predominate in all regions, but they display varying degrees of complexity in terms of technique and symbolic content. Some paintings were done using only one colour while others are composed of two or more paint colours. Still others are composed of several colours, sometimes finely shaded into one another. Red and brown are the most durable, and perhaps for that reason, the most common paint colours, but yellow, white, black and orange were also used, as well as blue and grey, which are much rarer in the art.

Pigments were obtained by various means. Ground iron oxides, some of which appear to have been heated to produce different shades, were used for red and brown paint. Yellow was obtained from
limonite, white from silica, china clay and gypsum, black from charcoal or manganese, and orange from a mixture of red and yellow pigments. Water, blood, sap, animal fat, and perhaps eggwhite, appear to have been used as binders. Although we cannot be absolutely sure what the San used for brushes, as none has ever been found, there is good ethnographic evidence that they used thin reeds with trimmed feathers or the tail and mane hairs of the wildebeest or horse attached to the end of these reeds. Pieces of grass or twigs may also have been used.

The subject matter varies greatly in content and complexity and includes depictions of animals, people in isolation or part of processional and dance scenes and in a variety of postures, and strange hallucination-derived or mythical creatures.

Men with bows and arrows.
Source: the author.

A rhebuck.
Source: the author.
Running figures, men in procession, and eland.

Source: the author.

Elephants.

Source: the author.
Women's bags.

Source: the author.
A rhinoceros and antelope, one of which carries a quiver, bow and possibly also arrows.

Source: the author.

A cheetah.

Source: Lucas Smits.
Lions.
Source: the author.

A mythical/hallucination-derived bird with extended talons.
Source: the author.
Despite this variation, patterns can be discerned which provide clues to the meaning of the art for the San. Certain animals are singled out for special attention in terms of the frequency with which they were painted or the way they were painted. This suggests that these animals had special significance for the painters. The eland, for example, is the most commonly painted animal in several regions, including the Maloti-Drakensberg and the Western Cape. In general, it was treated more elaborately than other animals by the artists in terms of colour, shading and perspective and, even allowing for its great bulk, its size relative to other animals is often exaggerated in the art. In contrast, many other animals, such as the wildebeest and hartebeest, which were present in large numbers in the Maloti-Drakensberg and were hunted and eaten by the south-eastern San, are much less commonly painted. Some animals commonly eaten by the San, such as dassies and tortoises, as well as plant foods which formed an important part of their diet, are almost entirely absent from the art.

We can draw at least two conclusions from these facts. Firstly, the art does not simply represent a checklist of the animals present and eaten in the various areas occupied by the San. There were other criteria than their diet involved when they decided what to paint. Secondly, the eland had special significance for the San and was an extremely important symbol for them. That this was the case is indicated not only by the obvious prominence of the eland in the art but also by ethnographic studies, which show that the symbolism of the eland permeated almost every aspect of the religious life of many San groups. It was, for example, the first animal created by the mythological San trickster deity, /Kaggen or Cagn, who is said to have loved the eland more than any other of his creations.
A large bull eland.

A very large painting of an eland - about two metres in length.
Source: the author.
A large panel of eland paintings.
Source: the author.

Finely-painted eland, and other subjects.
Source: the author.
An eland.
Source: the author.

A recumbent eland.
Source: the author.
According to the now widely accepted “trance hypothesis”, the visionary experiences and religious symbolism associated with the trance dance, the most important San rite, are also frequently depicted in the art. During this dance, which all San groups appear to have performed, a trance state is induced through rhythmic circular dancing and the clapping of women who usually stand or sit on one side of the dance circle. In the early stages of trance, dancers may see geometric patterns, which sometimes transform into the people, creatures and objects that are seen in the fullblown state of trance.
Merging of human and crenellated entoptic forms seen in the first stages of trance.
Source: the author.

Elephants painted in association with crenellated entoptic forms.
Source: the author.
There are a number of characteristic postures and features associated with this dance and the various stages of trance. The dancers may hold their arms backwards and parallel to their bodies; they may bend forward with their torsos parallel to the ground; blood may come from their noses; and, in the final stages, they may lose consciousness and collapse.
When in trance, modern Kalahari San experience an altered state of consciousness during which they sometimes have the experience of leaving their bodies and travelling to the realm of the dead - sometimes on magical ropes known as "threads of light". It is believed that the trance state is equivalent to death, and that shamans actually die while in trance. In the realm of the dead they often do battle with evil spirits who are believed to be responsible for bringing misfortune and illness to the group or to individuals within it. Bizarre, often grotesque, spindly white figures in the art, termed the Eldritch images, may represent evil spirits of the dead.

San shamans, one of whom is in a “arms-back” trance position, ascend and descend a “thread of light” that connects the world of the living with the realm of the dead.

Source: Woodhouse Collection, UP.
Eldritch images.
Source: Woodhouse Collection, UP.
Eldritch figures holding their hands to their noses, a posture indicative of nasal bleeding/trance.

Source: the author.

The trance state is believed to imbue those who experience it with a supernatural power, or *n/um*, that enables them to cure people. This potency is sometimes represented by thin lines or dots. They may also travel in trance to other San camps to communicate with people living there, and the shamans of some San groups were believed to travel to places occupied by a mythical rain animal, which, once captured, was led to areas where rain was required.

A line of magical force held by one person encircles a group of women.

Source: the author.
Parallel lines of magical force connect the people in this scene. Zoom in to see the lines coming from the bow of one of the people in the cave, and the person at top left who appears to be reeling in the lines.

Source: the author.

An eland, with dots, probably representing supernatural potency, painted on its breast and forelegs.

Source: Woodhouse Collection, UP.
Eldritch images and dots, probably representing supernatural potency.

Source: the author.

A shaman "taming" a water bull/rain animal.

Source: the author.
Capture of a rain animal.
Source: the author.

One of the figures in the previous scene.
Source: the author.
The hallucinatory experiences associated with the trance state are very powerful and San trancers, like trancers in other cultures, liken it not only to a state of death, but also to the feeling of being underwater. Various physical sensations, such as the feeling of potency “boiling” and rising up the spine to explode in the head, and sometimes a sense of attenuation of the limbs and body, are experienced by present-day San trancers. Sensations of flight also occur and the trancer may feel himself transformed into a bird, or an animal, so that to all intents and purposes he or she becomes that creature. All these body postures and experiences associated with trance, as well as more complex metaphors such as the association made between the eland bleeding from the nose at death and the shaman bleeding from the nose in the “death” of trance, are depicted in the art.

Men depicted underwater, with fish around them, and with elongated bodies - features of trance experience.

Source: the author.

Hartebeests, possibly transformed shamans, with very elongated legs.

Source: the author.
A man, probably a shaman, depicted in a ritual relationship with an eland that is at the point of death and is bleeding from the nose.

Source: the author.

While altered states, specifically those associated with trance, are by far the most important feature of the art’s symbolism, other aspects of San culture and society are also represented, and some researchers have focused on subjects in San art that are unrelated, or only indirectly related, to trance experiences. For example, a rite which appears to be depicted and symbolised in the art, and with which the eland is directly connected, is that of male initiation.

According to a San creation myth, men first became hunters after killing the eland, the most-loved and first-created being of /Kaggen. Killing an eland was an integral part of the initiation rites of many San groups, and it was through this act that San youths became men who could contribute in a meaningful way to the survival of the group. San initiation rites marked the transition from boy to adult hunter and appear to have provided ritual sanction for the destruction of the creator’s favourite animal.

Some paintings of male figures cloaked in eland skins, including those that form processional scenes, may symbolise initiation rites, concepts associated with initiation rites, and the related symbolism of eland in particular. The solidarity of initiated San men may be expressed in this painting (see below) through their being covered by one kaross, so that they appear to share a single torso. It appears as if they are linked by a single eland kaross. Like the eland, the shape is very large and it is very similar to that of conventionalised depictions of eland torsos in the art. In both cases, the kaross-clad figures and the eland, legs and head emerge from an undifferentiated mass or torso.
Two groups of people, each covered by a single kaross.
Source: the author.

The meaning of the kaross, it has been argued, may thus be the “wearing of the eland” - a form of transformation into an eland. Viewed in conjunction with beliefs concerning the creation and killing of the first eland, as well as the San custom of hunting an eland during the puberty ritual, the painting can thus be interpreted as symbolising a range of concepts associated with initiated men. These include group solidarity, the identification of the men with the eland (the animal through which they become men and husbands/sexual beings) and hunting (with its links to sexual penetration as well as to highly desirable fat, not only of the hunted eland but also of sexually active women). A good argument can also be made for the existence of female initiation rites in the art. Scenes of women in procession, as well as the wide-spread motif of a spread-legged figure, almost always female in form, which appears in the art have been interpreted in these terms.
Women painted sitting in a circle with bags, hung up on pegs, on the cave wall.

Source: the author.

A spread-legged female figure, with antelope ears and holding a bow, who is probably associated with female initiation rites.

Source: the author.
The ideas discussed above introduce notions of gender and sexuality into the meaning and function of the art, without denying the importance of the “trance hypothesis”. Still other aspects of the art have been studied by rock art researchers. Some have looked at the relationship between paintings and the landscape and sites in which they are placed, and the style, colour and form of paintings have also been studied for clues which can throw light on their significance for the San who created them.

Finally, an interesting feature of the art is the category of therianthropes or “were-animals”. By far the most common form of therianthrope depicted in San rock paintings is the antelope therianthrope, a being with the body of a man and the head, and sometimes the hooves and limbs, of an antelope. Other animals are depicted in therianthropic form, but are much less common. All these beings, it is generally accepted, are shamans transformed into animals while in trance, or symbols of the relationship between the shaman and a particular animal - often the animal with which he, possibly she, is considered to be magically associated. Shamans of the game, for example, were believed to have the ability to control particular animals and draw on their potency.

There are a number of features that link paintings of therianthropes to shamans in trance. They may bleed from the nose, they may be in an arms-back position, lines of potency may be seen entering or leaving their bodies, parts of their bodies may be attenuated, or other bizarre, unrealistic features may be associated with them.

An antelope-human transformation scene

Source: the author.
A shaman in a ritual relationship with a stumbling, dying eland. Both the eland and the shaman have crossed legs and erect hairs on their bodies, and the shaman also has an antelope head and hooves.

Source: the author.

An antelope therianthrope holding a line representing supernatural potency.

Source: Woodhouse Collection, UP.
A finely-painted antelope therianthrope.

Source: the author.
An antelope therianthrope with blood streaming from its nose.

Source: the author.
Baboon therianthropes.
Source: KwaZulu-Natal Museum.

A shaman grows feathers and transforms into an antelope-headed bird.
Source: the author.
It is likely that, in the great majority of cases, transformation into an animal was achieved without the use of animal masks. However, we know that at least some of these therianthropic beings represent masked shamans, who are almost certainly in a trance state. The idea that animal masks are represented in some paintings is supported both by the ethnography and by certain paintings themselves. We know, for example, that some San wore full animal masks, as well as the more common skin caps with “ears”, and in the last century San north of the Okavango were observed dancing clothed in the skins of a large number of different kinds of animals, including the skins of antelope and the skin of an elephant’s head, complete with trunk. Some of the figures depicted with animal heads in the art are shown wearing masks made of the entire skin of an antelope’s head. As in many other societies that are known to wear or have worn full animal masks, the mask is likely to have symbolised the special relationship between a particular animal, whose spirit is believed to enter into the mask, and the wearer who is in communication with the animal spirit and draws on its power in order to enter trance.
A copy by George Stow of a San painting of people wearing masks and transforming into animals in trance.


A man, covered with the skin of an eland, transforms into this animal while in trance. The colour of one of the legs of the man has changed to that of the eland's legs.

Source: Woodhouse Collection, UP.
Shamans, who are wearing animal skins, in the process of transforming into these animals. After Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1999). *Images of Power*, Fig 76 b. Cape Town: Southern Book Publishers.

Alternative interpretations of the therianthropes, ones not incompatible with the idea that they represent shamans transformed into animals in trance, is that they represent mythological or spirit beings from a primal time when animals were people, or that they depict the spirits of the dead. The idea that the therianthropic figures in the art represented the First People was put forward as early as the nineteenth century by George Stow, and some later rock art researchers have also suggested that these figures represent people of the Early Race, who inhabited a mythical, unstructured, primal realm where the distinction between animals and people did not yet exist. Since San shamans, who are known to have assumed therianthropic form, were believed actually to die when they went into trance, it is likely that they felt that they became spirits of the dead, visiting the realm of the dead in their spirit form. The therianthropes therefore probably express the inter-relatedness of the realm of the trancing, occasionally masked, shaman fused with animals of power, the realm of shamans “tranceformed” into spirits of the dead, and the realm of the mythical, liminal, primal time beings who could slip between the animal and human worlds.
The most obvious indicators of the influence of Khoe, Nguni, Sotho and European farming communities on San art are the paintings of sheep, cattle and horses, and paintings of Nguni, Sotho and European farmers with their characteristic weaponry and other equipment. Handprints and many of the finger dots, found mainly in the Western Cape, almost certainly also belong to the contact period.

**Paintings of sheep, handprints and dots**

Although it is possible that sheep reached San people by diffusion before the arrival of the Khoe themselves, or that they were seen by San travelling far from their home ranges who painted them on their return, it is likely that many of the rock paintings of sheep with their distinctive fat tails and floppy ears indicate the presence of pastoralists or agropastoralist in the areas where the sheep paintings occur. These paintings are found over most of southern Africa, but are restricted to broadly defined areas.
In the western Cape, the area where sheep paintings have been most intensively studied, they are generally painted in monochrome red, but some are yellow, white or black. They are never painted in isolation but always within panels containing a range of motifs including wild animals, and they are found almost exclusively in the mountains, away from the lower-lying plains where the Khoe pastured their livestock. This suggests that they were probably painted by San rather than Khoe.

Another motif in the art which appears to be associated with the arrival of pastoralists is the handprint. Unlike the handprints found in the caves of Europe which often take the form of a negative image, created by placing one's hand on the rock face and blowing paint over it to form an
outline of the hand, the handprints found in southern Africa are all positive images. They were formed by putting paint on the hand and then placing the hand on the rock face or, in the “decorated” form, scraping the paint off the hand and pressing it on the surface of the rock to leave a distinctive U-shaped, nested pattern.

Handprints are found mainly in the western Cape, but there are also examples much further to the north in the Waterberg and Soutpansberg. There are very few depicted in the imagery of the south-eastern mountains. In the western Cape, it seems that the older tradition of San art was supplanted at some time after the arrival of pastoralists by one characterised by images of handprints since, where panels occur which contain both superpositioning (overpainting) and handprints, the handprints are always placed on top of paintings, never below them. Red and black finger dots, too, appear to form part of this later tradition as they are similar in technique to the handprints.

Handprints and rhinoceros.

Source: the author.
Finger dots, probably made by Khoe.  
Source: the author.
It is not clear why this tradition developed in later years or whether it was the Khoe or the San who executed these paintings. The fact that handprint imagery is almost exclusively restricted to the south-western Cape, an area where the Khoe herded their animals, is circumstantial evidence for their having been done by pastoralists, as is the fact that they clearly represent a later tradition in the art. It is also quite possible, however, that the emergence of handprints in the art represents, in some cases at least, a response by the San to the emergence of pastoralism.

Nor do we know what the handprints and finger dots signified to those who made them, although there is some evidence which suggests that they are linked to initiation rites held in the shelters where they occur. Most of the handprints are about the average size of twentieth century San sub-adults’ hands. Since it was at this time, just before adulthood, that most initiation ceremonies occur, the handprints may be associated with these rites.

**Paintings of cattle**

About 75 percent or more of all cattle paintings in southern Africa are distributed in a relatively restricted area, in the Maloti-Drakensberg and Lesotho, but including parts of KwaZulu-Natal, the north-eastern Cape and the southern Free State. Cattle paintings exist at relatively few sites outside this area. In addition, there are many more paintings of cattle in the southern than in the northern Maloti-Drakensberg, despite the fact that cattle were present as far north as the Thukela Basin by at least 550 AD. Cattle paintings are quite often associated with conflict scenes, and in the southern Maloti-Drakensberg they are also frequently associated with paintings of horses.
Paintings of cattle in the Maloti-Drakensberg and Free State are typically painted in black, white or bright orange pigments characteristic of the more recent art, although vermilion was also quite commonly used, and, occasionally, grey. The colours used in painting them very seldom shade into one another, unlike the more finely painted eland. Rather, they usually have a blocked, graphic appearance. The paints used are also generally different from those used in the “traditional” art. They do not bind as well with the rock surface and hence do not penetrate the rock as deeply. Many of the later paintings of eland and other animals share these characteristics with paintings of cattle.
A finely-painted cow/ox/bull with patterned hide, in the blocked style.
A cow/ox/bull painted in the later “blocked” style with a thin white paint.
Source: Woodhouse Collection, UP.

Cattle and horses painted in the later “blocked” style. Note the therianthrope below.
Source: Woodhouse Collection, UP.
In the Free State, cattle paintings seem to have been part of a separate tradition. Unshaded paintings of cattle, and paintings of sheep and Sotho shields, in this region are always painted on top of shaded paintings of non-contact elements, where they occur in the same panel and where superpositioning occurs. Where they are not superimposed on shaded paintings they appear as separate panels. Blocked paintings of cattle and shields can therefore be systematically distinguished from the shaded paintings and appear to have succeeded this tradition.
Surprisingly, there are no known paintings of cattle in the Western Cape, an area occupied by both the San and the pastoral Khoe, who possessed both cattle and sheep. Since cattle are known to have been present in this area by at least 800 AD, and possibly earlier, we would expect the San to have painted them, as they did in other areas occupied by cattle-breeders. It is possible that their absence from the Western Cape art is related to the relatively late appearance of cattle in this area and the demise of the fineline painting tradition. There is some evidence, for example, which suggests that the main tradition of painting in the south-western Cape ended before 1000 AD. If this is correct, it would mean that there was a relatively small period of overlap between the first herders with cattle and the last painters of the more sophisticated fineline tradition. Cattle may therefore not have appeared early enough in the south-western Cape for San painters of this tradition to have depicted them in their art.

Another possible explanation for the absence of cattle paintings in the south and their presence in the areas further to the west may lie with differences in the nature of interaction that occurred between San and herders of the Western Cape, on the one hand, and Nguni and Sotho farmers and the south-eastern San on the other. It may be significant, for example, that cattle paintings are present in the Maloti-Drakensberg, an area occupied by Nguni and Sotho farmers, but not in the Western Cape, which was occupied by the Khoe. The possible implications of this patterning will be discussed later when we look at the effects of symbiotic interaction between Nguni and Sotho farmers and San on the rock art.
Paintings of horses

San were using horses by at least 1809 in the Eastern Cape, although they were only introduced into the Maloti-Drakensberg in large numbers in the 1830s. San made good use of them for hunting and raiding expeditions and there are several reports of their expertise as riders. Horses stolen from European farms were clearly greatly valued as they were very seldom traded to Nguni and Sotho farmers. Generally they were kept to be ridden, and there is at least one account of raiders having built stalls for their horses in a shelter they occupied in the Maloti-Drakensberg. Horses were also sometimes eaten, however, as horse flesh was considered a great delicacy by the San.

Paintings of horses are not found in the Western Cape, except for a few late, very crude finger paintings. Most paintings of horses are found in the Maloti-Drakensberg and East Griqualand. Horse, and cattle, paintings in the Maloti-Drakensberg are almost all in the southern section of this range of mountains, mostly on the upper reaches of the Mkhomazi, Mzimkhulu, Mzimvubu and Gariep, where nineteenth century San raiders are known to have been based. They are often painted in considerable detail, with bridle, saddle and other items of harness.

Mounted men hunting eland.
Source: Woodhouse Collection, UP.
Horses and riders.
Source: Woodhouse Collection, UP.

Mounted men with knee tassels, characteristic of Nguni dress, drive horses.
Source: KwaZulu-Natal Museum.
Paintings of Nguni and Sotho farmers and their associated weaponry and equipment

Nguni and Sotho farmers are most easily identified in the art by their characteristic weaponry such as shields, knobkerries and assegais - although assegais, in particular, were also commonly used by the San, and cannot on their own be used to identify Bantu-speakers in the art. When they are painted together with paintings of San people, as in scenes of conflict between the groups, Nguni and Sotho farmers are generally depicted as taller than the San.

A scene depicting a clash between burly Nguni warriors and diminutive San bowmen. Copy by George Stow.

“Punch”, a San man living in the Weenen area, c. 1920, stands next to a Zulu man.

Source: Collection of M.C. Burkitt.
Sotho warriors with their characteristic hourglass-shaped shields and headdresses of inflated gall bladders.

Source: the author.

A clash between Sotho warriors, with shields and assegais, and San, with bows and arrows.

Source: the author.
Nguni or Sotho warriors with assegais
Source: Woodhouse Collection, UP.
Warriors, probably Sotho, with assegais of an exaggeratedly large size.

Crudely-painted Sotho shields.
Source: National Museum, Bloemfontein.
Sotho shields, possibly painted by Sotho rather than San.
Source: Lucas Smits.

Identifying Nguni and Sotho farmers in the art outside a context characterised by conflict is often difficult, particularly when they are not associated, and can be compared, with the more slightly built San. Nevertheless, in the light of the long history of symbiotic contact between some San groups and Bantu-speakers we can expect the San to have painted not only their enemies amongst the farmer communities but also their trading partners, relatives, friends and age-mates within these societies - with whom they interacted socially and ritually. In some cases we can identify Nguni or Sotho people in the art by their characteristic dress - such as knee tassels or inflated gall bladders attached to the top of the head. And paintings that appear to relate to ritual interaction between Nguni and Sotho farmers and San will be discussed when we consider the ways in which the symbolic content of the art changed as a result of both conflictual and harmonious contact between the San and these farming communities.
An Nguni or Sotho man, with knobkierie and knobbed headdress (either an inflated gall bladder or a topknot) and with dots, probably representing supernatural potency, painted below him.

Source: Woodhouse Collection, UP.
Another Nguni or Sotho man from the same panel.

Source: Woodhouse Collection, UP.
Paintings of Europeans and their associated weaponry and equipment

Paintings of this genre, which are relatively rare, include male figures with wide-brimmed hats and heeled shoes, mounted and unmounted men with their hands on their hips and often with guns, women in long crinoline dresses, wagons, and, in the Western Cape, at least one painting of a galleon. The Colonial era paintings in the western Cape are generally crudely painted, almost always with the finger, and are quite easily distinguishable in their technique from the fineline paintings of the older tradition.

A man shoots and kills an antelope. Note the smoke emitted upwards from the pan of the gun, the white line issuing from the end of the gun's barrel, depicting either smoke or the line of the bullet, and the dead antelope with its legs in the air and its head facing downwards.

Source: Lucas Smits.

A dismounted soldier shoots his rifle. Note the reins looped over his arms, with the horse trained to remain stationary.

Source: Woodhouse Collection, UP.
An ox wagon depicted with its rider holding a whip and another man on foot behind it shooting game.
Source: Woodhouse Collection, UP.

Men with wide-brimmed hats accompany an ox wagon and cattle. Copy by Patricia Vinnicombe.
Source: KwaZulu-Natal Museum
INTERPRETING THE CONTACT ART

The San of the western Cape

Some researchers who have studied the art of the western Cape San have suggested that the arrival of Khoe pastoralists had a strongly negative impact on the societies of many San groups, which in turn translated into changes in the content and tempo of the fineline tradition in this area. According to this hypothesis, the threat posed by Khoe herders to the way of life and culture of the San caused an increase in the performance of rites such as the trance dance that expressed core values of San culture and identity. This was a way both of coping with the stress caused by the incursion of the Khoe into their native lands as well as of ensuring the continuation of their threatened culture. These researchers point to the high incidence of complex, symbolically rich trance scenes at the painted sites that were located in the mountains, where San would have taken refuge from their Khoe foes. It also appears that the fineline tradition associated with traditional hunter-gatherer societies persisted longer in these mountainous refuge areas than they did in the areas occupied by the Khoe.

With a few exceptions, the fineline tradition of painting appears to have ended well before the arrival of European settlers in the western Cape. However a tradition of crude finger painting developed at a late date and probably over a brief period of time. Most of the very few sites where these paintings occur are in a relatively restricted area - the Koue Bokkeveld. The paintings are mainly of geometric forms, wagons, horses or mules, and men and women with Colonial dress and accoutrements - wide-brimmed hats, trousers, boots, guns, pipes, crinoline dresses and kappies (hats worn by Boer women). Finger dots and handprints, although different to the main elements in this tradition, nevertheless appear to be directly associated with some of the paintings. Analysis of patterns of superpositioning reveal that the Colonial paintings always postdate the fineline paintings and the handprints, and the style of the women's dresses and the kinds of wagons painted suggest that some of the art was created later than 1850, probably as late as the 1870s.
The art here seems to have been done by Khoe-San who had been incorporated into the rural proletariat, and the element of caricature in many of the paintings of men and women, who do not appear to have been members of the artists’ communities, suggests that some of it may have served a satirical purpose. It is very unlikely that the crudely painted paintings produced by the nineteenth
century western Cape rock artists would have been connected in any way to the earlier more richly-symbolic fineline paintings – although there are elements in this tradition that hint at symbolic intent, and perhaps even trance experience.

**The south-eastern San**

Some paintings belonging to the period after the arrival of other groups in the south-eastern areas appear simply to record the presence of these people and events associated with contact between them and the San. It is also quite possible, however, that some apparently narrative contact paintings also had a deeper, symbolic dimension to them. The introduction of domestic stock and foreign goods and weaponry is likely to have had a considerable impact on the San, who could well have believed that these animals and objects, and their owners, were imbued with supernatural power of some kind. How else could one explain the power that the Nguni, Sotho and European farmers were able to exercise over their domestic animals, which they controlled at will, as well as the mysterious ability of the Europeans to kill people and wild animals from afar simply by pointing at them with wood and metal sticks? Supernatural powers such as these were possessed only by shamans who were able to control the movements of game, and it is likely that the first immigrant farmers were attributed with similar powers.

*Therianthropic Nguni warriors, with characteristic ear-rings.*

*Source: Woodhouse Collection, UP.*
A therianthropic Sotho warrior engaged in battle.

A cow/ox/bull, a man in Colonial dress armed with a gun, and dots, probably representing supernatural potency.

Source: Woodhouse Collection, UP.

Sotho warriors driving cattle.

Source: Woodhouse Collection, UP.
The reaction of San people to European wagons, for example, indicates the mixture of incomprehension and fear that they evoked. The nineteenth century trader, James Chapman, recorded the amazement with which San of present-day Botswana greeted his train of five wagons, one large and four small. They believed them to be strange animals, a female with her four calves. Some San thought wagons were ships that had come out of the sea. Still others imagined they were predatory beasts.

European galleons, too, were incorporated into the creolised religious beliefs of later San groups exposed to a degree of Christian influence. When missionary Schmelen, who worked amongst Namaqualand San groups in the early years of the nineteenth century, asked San what they believed happened to them after death, they replied: “The dead go over the water to where the Devil is. You shall see all our people who have died over there in the ships”.

We can expect, therefore, that, in many cases, when the San painted Colonial imagery, such as wagons, galleons, cattle, and men with horses and guns, these paintings had a greater significance for them than merely the recording of their presence or specific events associated with these foreign people and the strange animals and objects that they brought with them. We cannot be sure exactly what their significance was, but it is likely that they were considered symbols of power in some sense. By painting them this potency was harnessed and expressed in the art, in a similar way to that in which some paintings of eland symbolised, in part, a particular power with which these animals were believed to be imbued and which could be drawn upon by San shamans.
A European man in trousers and a woman in a crinoline dress associated with a hallucinatory form.

Source: Museum Africa.
A (very rare) geometric form, apparently representing a European woman in a crinoline dress with her hands on her hips. This probably symbolises the transformation of entoptic geometric forms, seen by the shaman painter in the first stages of trance, with his vision of a European woman in Colonial dress.

Source: Woodhouse Collection, UP.
Two figures, probably associated with trance experience, in front of what appear to be wagon wheels.
Source: Woodhouse Collection, UP.

A panel, and a tracing of this panel, showing horses and Colonial figures in European dress with lions - animals with the power to harm and into which evil sorcerers transform.
Inverted (dying/trance) horse.
Source: Woodhouse Collection, UP.

Inverted (dying/trance) eland painted above a "normal" eland.
Source: the author.
Cattle and horses, in particular, appear to have become important symbols for the later south-eastern San, and are sometimes associated with trance imagery in their art. Although some paintings of cattle and horses probably simply represent animals stolen in stock raids by the San who recorded these events in their paintings, it has been suggested that where symbolic weight was given to these animals in the art it derived from the increased prestige and wealth of San shamans after contact with Nguni, Sotho and European farmers. The discussion that follows refers to the south-eastern San and their art.

With the development of San stock raids on farmers, San shamans are likely to have been called upon to use their powers to assist the raiders, in a similar manner, for example, to that in which warriors in Nguni and Sotho society were provided with medicines by their traditional doctors before raids or battles in order to prevent their being killed by their enemies. And it was probably the shamans who were responsible for enacting the rainmaking rituals that some San were asked to perform for some Bantu-speakers, and for which they were often paid in cattle. In both cases, through their magical assistance in cattle raids and their performance of rainmaking rituals for Nguni farmers, they were directly or indirectly able to capture or acquire domestic animals through the use of their reputed supernatural powers. They may well, therefore, have come to be seen as “controllers” of cattle and horses in a similar manner to that in which certain shamans were believed to be able to control game magically.
A tracing of a painting of what may be a San raid for cattle and sheep, with rainmaking elements. The fish and the serpent, one end of which touches the nose of a sheep and the other that of the hippopotamus, indicate that trance experience, probably relating to the capture of a rain animal as well as a stock raid, is being depicted here.


An apparently naturalistic scene of men, cattle and horses, but with the inclusion of two therianthropic (hallucinatory/shaman?) figures at bottom-left. Copy by Patricia Vinnicombe.

Source: KwaZulu-Natal Museum.
Conflict over cattle. Note the non-realistic therianthropic figure with enormous horns. Copy by Patricia Vinnicombe.

Source: KwaZulu-Natal Museum.
Another consequence of the stock raids carried out by the south-eastern San would have been that a surplus would have been generated in the form of cattle and horses. The important role played by shamans suggests that they would have controlled this surplus. In other words, the relations of production, the social mechanisms which determine who gets what share of the fruits of the band’s labour, would have changed from one that was egalitarian and based on equal sharing of resources, including game controlled by shamans, to one where a certain class of people took a greater share than others.

This suggestion is supported by the observation made by Robert Gordon, who travelled extensively in the Colony in the 1770s, that the “magicians” of the Sneeuwberg San had as much authority amongst them as their chiefs. Indirect evidence also comes from Botswana, where modern-day Nharo San shamans are well paid for their services by the Tswana and are far wealthier than other San. This wealth is not fully redistributed, as occurred in earlier times. It is likely, therefore, that the status and wealth of south-eastern San shamans approached that of the Khoe “sorceror” encountered by Sparrman in the eighteenth century who, Sparrman remarked, “besides being universally respected (by his fellow clansmen), was in possession of a greater stock of cattle than anyone among them”.

If one accepts that this process occurred, we can see the changing role of the San shaman and the development of an embryonic class system reflected in the art. The increased ritual and economic power of the shaman may be expressed, for example, in panels where one person figures prominently, painted larger than the others and often elaborately attired and decorated. In addition, cattle and horses may have been appropriated as a new and powerful source of imagery and incorporated into their art and rituals by shamans as a way of demonstrating their control over access to exotic goods. In terms of this theory, trance elements in certain paintings of cattle can be interpreted as depicting the supernatural activities of game shamans directed towards the raiding of cattle.
A prominent figure, probably a shaman, who is wearing cattle horns on his head.

Source Lucas Smits.
While paintings of cattle and horses may thus have expressed changing social relations within San bands, in some cases they also appear to have substituted for eland as symbols of spiritual power in the art. For some San groups, eland, horses and cattle became closely related, perhaps equivalent, symbols in San thought. This equivalence, particularly between cattle and eland, is expressed in a number of ways in the art. One way to symbolise it was to paint cattle in an explicitly trance context that corresponded closely to the way in which “trance eland” were painted. A painting from the Sebapala River valley in Lesotho, of cattle which are depicted in a bizarre “flying” posture and are bleeding from the nose, may well symbolise religious concepts associated with paintings of dying eland, charged with supernatural potency, which also emit a fluid from their noses. The latter feature links both the Sebapala cattle and eland to the experiences of San shamans, who, as has already been mentioned, experience nasal haemorrhaging in the “death” of trance. Paintings of creatures that combine physical features of humans and cattle also link the latter firmly to the trance experiences of shamans.
A creature with the physical features of both antelope and cattle.

A kaross-clad cow/ox/bull therianthrope.
Source: the author.
A cow/bull/ox therianthrope.
Source: Woodhouse Collection, UP.

A patterned cow/bull/ox therianthrope bleeding from the nose.
Source: Lucas Smits.
“Flying” cattle, some of which are bleeding from the nose.
Source: the author.

One of these “flying” cattle, with blood coming from its nose.
Source: the author.
And the equivalence for some San people of eland and horses is demonstrated through the combining of the physical features of these animals in paintings. Paintings of “horse-eland” at the cave of Melikane in Lesotho are a good example of this phenomenon. The heads and forequarters of these animals are those of eland while their hindquarters are those of horses. They provide graphic evidence for the equivalence of eland and horses in the conceptual system of the San who painted them – an objective correlative to the mix of old and new religious beliefs held by many of the later artists.

“Horse-eland”. The front portion of their bodies are in the form of an eland, while the rear sections are in the form of a horse. Eland and horses, both animals of power, have thus been conflated by contact period San into one being. Copy by Patricia Vinnicombe.

Source: KwaZulu-Natal Museum.

We can see, then, that some animals associated with other groups, such as cattle and horses, were appropriated by San groups and substituted in their art for traditional symbols such as eland. In the examples discussed above, the traditional San frame of ideological reference was retained. New animals were used to symbolise old ideas. In other cases, however, it appears that newly introduced domesticated animals were used to symbolise new religious ideas drawn from other cultures, specifically the cultures of Nguni and Sotho farmers with whom San groups established close relations and with whom they intermarried. Since some south-eastern San groups maintained close relations with Nguni and Sotho farmers over long periods of time, it is reasonable to expect the cultures of these San groups to have been influenced by those of the farmers with whom they interacted.

This influence would not have been uni-directional, and Nguni and Sotho people would certainly also have been influenced by San cultures. There is evidence, for example, that points to San influence on the rites of Nguni diviners, the name for whom, igqira, is derived either from a San or a Khoe language. Aspects of the mediumistic divination dances of Nguni traditional healers may well, also, have been adopted by these people as a result of their being exposed to the trance rites of San
shamans - although a number of features of their rites, such as the use of fly whisks and ankle dance rattles, have been too easily attributed by some researchers to San influence. Fly whisks and dance rattles are common among some northern Bantu-speakers who appear to have had little or no contact with San groups.

That the south-eastern San would have adopted some of the rites and beliefs of neighbouring farmers with whom they had close ties is suggested by anthropological studies which show that a number of other San groups were strongly influenced by the customs and beliefs of neighbouring farmers. Studies of interaction between hunter-gatherers and farmers in areas other than those occupied by the southern San also indicate that, where these groups live in close association with each other, the hunter-gatherers tend to adopt the customs and beliefs of the politically dominant farmers much more frequently than vice versa. It is quite common, for example, for hunter-gatherer youths to attend the initiation schools of affiliated farmers, where they are versed in the tribal lore and customs of the farmers, and there are reports of San youths attending the initiation schools of Sotho and Swazi groups. Circumcision, which was common among some San groups, was also adopted from Bantu-speakers, although San, like hunter-gatherers in some other areas in Africa, were almost certainly employed by some Bantu-speakers as circumcisers in their initiation rites.

San divining tablets. The practice of using these tablets for divination was adopted from Bantu-speakers.

Source: Museum Africa.
A San man divining with dice.

Source: Museum Africa.
If, as seems very likely, some south-eastern San groups underwent a similar process of acculturation as they were drawn into the ambit of the Nguni and Sotho farmer societies that encapsulated them, we can expect beliefs and rites associated with Sotho and Nguni cultures to be expressed in south-eastern San art. These concepts may sometimes have been combined with traditionally San religious beliefs to form new, syncretic forms of belief - something that commonly occurs when people with different religions interact closely with one another. Certain San paintings, or features of paintings, can be interpreted as depicting Sotho or Nguni rites and beliefs which were adopted in whole or part by the San, and perhaps syncretised with existing rites and beliefs. Some of these are illustrated and discussed below.

A painting from “Upper Mangolong” cave in Lesotho (probably Pitsaneng shelter, about one kilometre from Soaï’s cave, Sehonghong) which was described and illustrated in an article in 1874 by Joseph Orpen, may depict a Phuthi initiation rite in which San could also have participated. This painting was copied by Joseph Orpen in 1873 during an expedition into the Lesotho mountains. His copy was initially commented on by a San guide who accompanied the party and later by nineteenth century /Xam San informants staying with the linguist Wilhelm Bleek at his house in Mowbray, Cape Town.

A tracing of Orpen’s copy of the painting from “Upper Mangolong” which was commented upon by his San informant, Qing. Long thought to be San, the figures depicted in the painting are now recognized from their dress and weaponry as being Nguni, Sotho or members of a creolised Nguni/Sotho/San group.

Source: After Lewis-Williams (1981). Believing and Seeing (Fig. 9D). London: Academic Press.
The first page of the original manuscript of Joseph Orpen's celebrated 1874 article detailing the religious beliefs and rites of the San of the Maloti - entitled "A glimpse into the mythology of the Maluti Bushmen".  

Source: National Library of South Africa.
Orpen’s San guide, Qing, was living at the time with Ncatya, a son of Moorosi, and he could speak Sephuthi, the Phuthi language. He appears to have been a member of the San group led by Soai, who, as has been shown, established very close relations with Moorosi’s Phuthi. Qing and his fellow San could well, therefore, have been influenced by Phuthi customs, and some of the comments made by Qing on the Upper Mangolong painting appear to fit well with certain Phuthi beliefs related to initiation rites.

Aside from these comments, support for this interpretation of the painting’s meaning comes from the body decoration, dress and weaponry of the tailed figures. The “knobs” on the heads of four of them are almost certainly inflated gall bladders. Wearing of this form of headgear was much more characteristic of Nguni and Sotho custom than of the San. The spots painted on the body of one of the figures are the same as the white spots painted on the bodies of *abakwetha*, male Nguni initiates. The long tails worn by the figures are possibly the long woven grass tails worn by the companions of some Sotho initiates at the initiation lodge. Three of the figures, moreover, hold knobkieries, the weapon traditionally associated with Nguni and Sotho youths at initiation and associated to a much greater extent with Nguni and Sotho people than with San.
An Nguni man, or a man of mixed/creolised Nguni and San cultures, with an inflated gall bladder on his head and with characteristic knee tassels and knobkerrie, bleeds from the nose in trance.

Source: KwaZulu-Natal Museum.

It may be relevant, moreover, that a nineteenth century /Xam San informant from the Northern Cape who was shown a copy of the painting by Wilhelm Bleek shortly after Qing commented on it, stated that the people in this painting were Bantu-speakers. We cannot be completely sure of the reliability of comments made by San so far removed from the social context of the art in the south-eastern mountains, but some archaeologists have argued that the comments made by Bleek’s informants are useful, even critical, for an understanding of the paintings copied by Orpen.

Other San paintings, aside from the one at Upper Mangolong, which probably symbolised concepts associated with the cultures of Nguni and Sotho farmers include many of those depicting cattle. While some paintings of cattle are likely to have substituted for paintings of eland and symbolised older San beliefs, it is very likely that others symbolised religious concepts associated with Nguni and Sotho cultures. Cattle have great symbolic significance in the societies of Bantu-speakers, including those of the Nguni and Sotho people. They represent the ancestors and stand at the centre of many rites directed to these beings.
San had become acquainted with cattle through their contact with all of the immigrant groups, and indeed the Khoe came into being about 2000 years ago when some San groups acquired and started to breed sheep, and possibly cattle - probably as a result of their coming into contact with agropastoralist Bantu-speakers. The establishment of patron-client relations between the San and other groups, whereby the San were paid in cattle for herding and other services, allowed some San to build up their own herds of cattle. Shortly after the settlement of the Cape by the Dutch, for example, a number of groups of “Sonquas” were reported by Ensign Schrijver to be keeping sheep and cattle.
As has been mentioned previously, we know that significant numbers of south-eastern San also kept cattle (in some cases, very large herds), and many south-eastern San lived in close association, or together, with Nguni or Sotho farmers. It is highly likely, therefore, that aspects of the symbolism associated with cattle in Nguni and Sotho society, specifically those connected to the ancestors and animal sacrifice, were adopted by some San people and expressed in their art. In the same way that a painting of an eland symbolised a multitude of religious concepts associated with that animal in San thought, some paintings of cattle executed by San influenced by contact with Nguni and Sotho farmers would have represented religious concepts associated with cattle by those Nguni and Sotho groups with whom the San had developed close relations. It seems probable that, initially, early in the contact period, San painters attributed the ancient symbolism of eland to cattle, but, with time, as San acculturation took its course, paintings of cattle by San, and Nguni and Sotho individuals who had joined up with them, increasingly took on the religious symbolism with which these animals are imbued in Nguni and Sotho society, syncretised in some cases with existing San religious beliefs.

We know, for example, that San who were employed to make rain for their Mpondomise patrons (discussed below) were often paid in cattle for their services, and probably sacrificed these cattle during rainmaking ceremonies for the Mpondomise. In this way, the concept of animal sacrifice, a core feature of Nguni and Sotho cultures, but almost completely absent from “traditional” San cultures, was probably adopted by some of the south-eastern San painters and expressed in their art, including paintings of rainmaking rites involving cattle.

A copy of a painting of a cow/ox/bull depicted with therianthropic beings, as well as fish and a serpent - creatures associated with water and the Rain. It is likely that this ox represents a rain animal, perhaps one sacrificed by San in a rainmaking rite that combined elements of the rites of San and Bantu-speakers.

Similarly, paintings of fantastic serpents and rain animals are extremely rare in the western Cape (where the Nguni and Sotho did not settle), but are relatively common in areas occupied by the south-eastern San, where many San interacted intensively with the Nguni and Sotho. Mythical serpents have great religious significance for Bantu-speakers. Snakes had been present in the Maloti-Drakensberg for the entire time the San occupied these mountains and they would almost certainly have had symbolic significance for the San before contact. However, it is likely that the symbolic importance of these creatures increased, and their religious meaning changed, as San were increasingly exposed to the strong religious beliefs of Bantu-speakers regarding serpents - causing them to be depicted much more frequently in the art of some of the south-eastern San groups. It has been suggested that serpents, as well as rain animals which were bound up with rainmaking rites conducted by the San for some Bantu-speakers, acted as a natural conduit for communication between the San shaman artists and Bantu-speakers. These elements of the traditional San rock art repertoire probably came to be emphasised in the later art as a means of expressing the close relationships that came to be established between some San and Bantu-speaking groups.
A serpent in association with Sotho warriors.
Source: Woodhouse Collection, UP.

Some examples of serpents in the art.
Source: the author.
A therianthropic shaman, shown emerging from the rock face, in a ritual relationship with a serpent. The feathered lines of supernatural potency entering or emerging from both of their heads emphasize the relationship that exists between them.

Source: the author.

A rain animal captured by Nguni men, or men of mixed/creolised Nguni-San cultures. Two of the men are bleeding from the nose while in trance.

Source: KwaZulu-Natal Museum.
Another way for the San to have expressed these relationships was to adopt the dress of their Bantu-speaking neighbours. Thus some south-eastern San groups have been shown to have adopted the ritual dress of their Nguni and Sotho neighbours, adherents and fellow villagers. An item of ritual dress that is redolent with symbolism amongst the Nguni and Sotho groups, as well as amongst Bantu-speakers throughout much of Africa, is a bandolier made of skin, cloth or beads. It represents the power and presence of the ancestors, and is worn both by traditional healers as well as by adolescents during their initiation ceremonies. The context in which it is worn suggests that it is associated with the state of liminality that characterises these two “ritualised” groups. The traditional healer mediates on behalf of society between the world of the spirits and the living, straddling these worlds, and the initiand occupies a liminal space between the world of the child and the world of the fully-socialised adult. In both cases, strong spiritual powers are associated with this inbetween state. The existence in the Maloti-Drakensberg of San paintings of shamans wearing bandoliers, as well as the presence of bandoliers in a wide range of Bantu-speaker societies far removed from possible San influence, strongly suggests that south-eastern San healers adopted this form of ritual dress, together with aspects of ancestral symbolism with which it was imbued, from those Bantu-speakers who migrated from the north into the territories of the south-eastern San.
Map showing the distribution of bandoliers in areas occupied by Bantu-speakers together with examples of bandoliers worn as ritual dress.

1) San rock painting of a clapping woman with bandolier. Lesotho. 2) San rock painting of a therianthrope with bandolier. Eastern Cape. 3) San rock painting of a fantastic figure with bandolier. Eastern Cape. 4) Male Zulu initiand with goatskin and bead bandoliers. 5) Female Tswana initiand with bandolier of grass or reeds. 6) Rwandan dancer with bandolier. 7) Bandoliered wooden “spirit spouse” figure, representing a Baule trance diviner, from the Ivory Coast. 8) Female spirit medium from Togo with bandolier. 9) Female Okiek Dorobo (hunter-gatherer) initiand in Kipsigis (pastoralist) initiation dress, including bandolier. Kenya. 10) Female Bassari initiand from southern Senegal with bandolier. 11) Female Ngebende initiand from the northern Congo with bandolier.

Analysis of rock paintings in this manner, in terms of the ideological influence of other societies on San people, can help us to understand both the way in which the art changed through time, as well as to throw light on regional diversity in the art. The many similarities in San paintings in different regions reflect certain shared values and religious ideologies of the artists who made these paintings. Regional differences, on the other hand, are likely to stem, in part, from the differing relationships established between various San groups and other societies, and the varying influence these societies had on San religious beliefs and rites.

**Recent research on the contact period rock art**

In the last few years there have been several studies that have focused on the development of regional traditions in the contact period rock art of the south-eastern mountains and adjacent areas. These studies have produced analyses of late San groups, enmeshed in multi-cultural/ethnic matrices, who expressed their changing identities and the radical social changes that they were experiencing through the medium of their paintings. All these studies have built on the realisation (achieved through previous in-depth, historical analyses of interaction between southern Nguni and Sotho groups) that the extent of symbiotic interaction between, and overlap of, the societies of the south-eastern San and the southern Nguni and Sotho was much greater than had previously been thought to be the case. This insight has important implications for studies of contact period rock art. It has led a number of San rock art researchers in recent years to shift their thinking from a theoretical paradigm which almost exclusively emphasizes uniformity and continuity in the art to a paradigm which views the contact period art and its underlying symbolism as a complex and dynamic mosaic of beliefs, shaped and changed by contact with a variety of different cultures - and by the contact experience itself. It has also provided a historical dimension to San rock art and its religious symbolism, which was largely absent from the earlier paradigm.

It is now recognised that the social fragmentation of later San groups whose hunter-gatherer way of life was becoming increasingly unviable, combined with intensive symbiotic interaction between the San and Nguni, Sotho and other groups, produced a range of ethnically-mixed, sometimes creolised bands - each painting within one or other of the later traditions that reflected and expressed its particular historical circumstances and ethnic composition. In this way new identities, and short-lived associated art traditions, came into being which reflected the history of fracture and creolisation experienced by these groups.

It seems that these newly-formed and uniquely-constituted multi-ethnic groups may have coalesced around new symbols of identity and power, “totem animals” of a kind, such as the baboon and the horse. The Thola, a particularly diverse and ethnically-fluid group of nineteenth century raiders, who roamed parts of the Maloti-Drakensberg, may have created a new identity and culture centred on their shared religious and magical beliefs concerning baboons and horses - on whose powers they drew when accessing the spirit world through the trance dance. One of the factors that helped to create the new identity of the Thola, it has been suggested, was that San, Khoe, Nguni and Sotho, the main ethnic groups from which these mixed “bands” were drawn, all had certain beliefs in common as a result of some of their members having established close ties with members of other ethnic groups well before the arrival of European farmers.
A typical mounted raider, perhaps a member of one of the late creolised bands such as the Thola.

Source: the author.

Another painting of a typical late raider-rider, perhaps from one of the ethnically-composite late groups that had forged new, syncretic, ethnic identities. Copy by Patricia Vinnicombe.

Source: KwaZulu-Natal Museum.
The objective correlative of the process of ethnic mixing and creolisation that characterized mid- to
later nineteenth century south-eastern San group who were living in “Nomansland”, a region that
formed part of the north-eastern Cape, can perhaps be found in the way that they portrayed their
body forms in the art. According to this theory, the so-called “death of the post-cranial body”, facial
features became much more prominent in the art of a late, heavily-creolised group under the San
leader, Nqabayo. This occurred, it has been proposed, for two main reasons. Firstly, it is through the
face rather than the body that ethnic differences are recognized. Secondly, with progressive
acculturation, these later groups’ healing practices changed to accord more closely with those of their
Bantu-speaker members and neighbours. The decline in the importance of traditional San curing
practices, which are focused on the sucking of illness directly out of the body, and the increased belief
in, and practising of, Bantu-speakers’ healing rites, which place much more emphasis in the causation
of illness on agents external to the body (the ancestors), resulted, it has been suggested, in what has
been termed “the decline in the postcranial body” in the art of this group. Figures portrayed in the
later art that are depicted with racially-mixed facial features, over-sized heads and small bodies, or
even heads painted without the body (Significantly Differentiated Figures – aka SDFs) may express
this shift in identity and cosmology. They may, at the same time, also represent “portraits” of pre-
eminent shamans who, in the later period, “owned” specific sites where they conducted rainmaking
rites for Bantu-speakers.
Some paintings of SDFs.

Source: the author.
An SDF bleeding from the nose, an indicator of trance.
Source: the author.

An SDF (top left) painted together with a variety of Eldritch images.
Source: Woodhouse Collection, UP.
It has also been suggested by a number of researchers that a range of “sub-traditions” or “sub-categories” can be detected in the art of some of the later groups occupying the south-eastern mountains and adjacent areas, each acting as identity markers for the respective groups. None of these paintings are done in a fine-line style.

One such category in the art, termed Type 2, consists of crudely-painted images done in a thin, powdery paint and depicting, to a large extent, contact period subject matter, such as horses and cattle. They are typically either monochrome or unshaded bichrome. When found at sites that also have fine-line paintings, they are always painted in areas apart from the fine-line paintings.

Another category of contact period paintings, Type 3, consists of finger-painted images predominantly done with a coarse pinkish red, or white, paint. The overwhelming majority of the paintings in this tradition are of humans, often shown in Colonial dress and often holding weapons (but not guns). Unlike the Type 2 tradition, these painting are often superimposed on fine-line paintings, but, like Type 2 paintings, they were probably done by later nineteenth century groups that included people who were not of San descent.

Recently, yet another late, non-fine-line tradition has been identified. It is similar to, yet also different from, the Type 2 and Type 3 art. One difference is that it is found at a lower altitude than the Type 2 and 3 traditions, on the Macler-Tsolo inland plateau in East Griqualand, and it is usually painted over and amongst fine-line images. It is varied in subject matter, pigment colour and pigment texture, but is typified by paintings of horses with riders.

Local conditions unique to the authoring groups played a definitive role in the formation of these rock art traditions. However, the general social context of manufacture of these traditions was similar, and the similarities in the style and content of these non-fine line traditions are also strong. This suggests that the three traditions are related, though in some cases in contestation with each other. They probably constitute a cluster of traditions born out of the often turbulent conditions that characterized the later nineteenth century in the more remote areas of the Maloti-Drakensberg and, in different ways, acted to construct and reinforce the identity of late, creolised San and non-San groups that roamed the mountains at that time.

In conclusion, it is clear that the impact of immigrant herding and farming communities on San cultures and artistic traditions differed in a number of ways. In some cases, the impact of these communities was disastrous for the San, and those that survived battles with the advancing farmers may have attempted to shut out an alien and destructive world that threatened their ancient way of life. The art of these San communities probably increased in tempo and complexity and may have been a medium through which traditional values and beliefs were maintained and reinforced in the face of external threats to their culture and their very existence - perhaps culminating in a final, apocalyptic phase in the paintings they created. A class of imagery represented by grotesque and strange figures may form the core of this hypothesised phase in the art, and these images may depict the nightmare trance visions of San shamans faced with the genocide of their people.
In other cases, and in contrast, trading relationships, marriage ties and friendships were formed between San and Nguni and Sotho farmers over hundreds of years. The context of the art produced by painters from these San societies would have been very different from those who were seeking to escape the destructive aspects of contact. The art born of these conditions very likely expresses the overlap of the cultures and societies that were interacting with each other - and, in particular, the overlap and syncretisation of their religious beliefs and rites.

Whatever the precise effects of these new cultures may have been on San society and art, the fact that a significant number of the paintings in the south-eastern mountains would have been executed within a social context affected in some way by contact suggests that its effects are likely to have been important in the development of the later San artistic tradition. These effects still need further exploration and hypotheses concerning the cultural influence of Nguni and Sotho farmers on San art are likely to be refined in the coming years as greater attention is given to this area of southern African rock art research.
CHAPTER 8

THE FINAL YEARS

Coming at length to the copies of some dances, old 'Kouke immediately exclaimed, “That is a grand dance ... I know it! I know it! I know the song!”

An old San couple, on being shown a portfolio of copies of rock paintings by George Stow, in about 1878.

Although San raids in KwaZulu-Natal ceased after 1872, some San continued to live a relatively independent existence in the remoter areas of the Maloti-Drakensberg. The last San of the Leqoa and Tsoelike rivers in the Lesotho mountains were said to have been killed in 1886, and some isolated south-eastern San individuals were sighted in the last decades of the nineteenth century. One of these sightings occurred in 1878 when Edith Kelly and her husband were honeymooning in the Drakensberg and were astonished to come across a small San band. “Strange, weird-looking creatures they were, hardly bigger than a child of ten”, Kelly wrote, “We saw them in their natural state, which, it seemed to me, was little removed from that of wild animals”.

19th century San farm workers in the Free State.
There is indirect evidence, moreover, that a few San individuals continued to live by hunting and gathering in the Maloti-Drakensberg in the earlier years of the twentieth century. In 1926 a farmer, Johannes Lombard, came across a large cave decorated with many paintings while he was tending his sheep in the Mhlwazini Valley, within the present-day Cathkin Park. Exploring the inside of this cave, now known as Eland Cave, he discovered a ledge of rock which sloped gradually upwards to a point about six metres above floor-level. Here he found grass bedding and, next to it, a hunting kit consisting of a bow, quiver, arrows, a spatula, a curved metal blade and a small leather pouch. The whole outfit was wrapped in baboon skin and covered with a resinous substance. According to another farmer who saw the bedding kit in situ, everything was very well preserved, and the bows and arrows gave the impression of having been handled not long before. It is quite possible, therefore, that a lone San hunter continued to live in the area long after his fellow San had departed.
The sighting of San by Edith Kelly and her husband and the find of the hunting kit in Eland Cave provide rare and tantalising glimpses of the last San individuals occupying the fastnesses of the Maloti-Drakensberg. By the beginning of the twentieth century, however, almost all those residual San communities and individuals living within the territory of European farmers as well as the southern Nguni and southern Sotho appear to have been completely absorbed into the urban and rural proletariat, or into the societies of Nguni and Sotho farmers and other groups, such as the Griquas. This appears to have been a relatively gradual process which accelerated with the progressive unviability of particular regions for hunting, gathering and raiding. A variety of strategies were adopted in the face of the incursions of Nguni, Sotho and European farmers into their territories, and the adaptations which San were forced, or chose, to make in the face of ever-increasing pressures or opportunities resulting from their encapsulation by farmers would have formed a complex mosaic of different, and probably interchangeable, ways of life.

Some San attached themselves to farms, swelling the rural labour force, while others began to drift into the towns, where they were incorporated into the mixed “non-European” communities that lived in, and on the edge of, these settlements. Those who attached themselves to Colesberg, which lay at the heart of the area occupied by the Seekoei River San, provide a good example of the fate of later San communities. Most of the San who drifted into this town squatted on the commonage, falling prey to the vices of alcoholism and theft commonly associated with an impoverished proletariat living on the fringes of European society. Periodic droughts in the Seekoei River valley were responsible for swelling their numbers as farms were abandoned and labourers moved to Colesberg in search of employment.
A drunk Khoe-San man. By “W.J.”
Source: Library of Parliament.

Drunk Khoe-San. By Charles Davidson Bell.
Source: Bell Heritage Trust, UCT.
Others continued to live in the interstices of European farmer society, basing themselves in the kopjes and mountains of the unleased Crown Lands and the more remote and inaccessible regions of farms, from where they subsisted partly by gathering and partly by raiding the livestock of the farmers as well as cattle and sheep put out by the Colesberg inhabitants to graze on the commonage. As the Colonial noose tightened, an independent existence became increasingly difficult for these remnant San groups and individuals. The erection of fences, and the shrinking of the more arid Crown Lands, which were sold off to farmers after borehole technology was introduced, were further problems that had to be faced. Confronted with these difficulties, some independent San in the Seekoei River valley were unable to subsist off the veld and starved to death. All these factors forced “free” San to look for work on farms or in the towns in order to survive. Perhaps the last of the independent San of the Seekoei River was a “wizened little Bushman”, Booi Lynx, who was traced to a secluded part of the farm Rietfontein in August 1894. Arrested for stock theft, he was discovered near a cleft in the rocks in which he had hidden the carcasses of a number of sheep he had stolen.
San farm workers from the Lake Chrissie area.
Source: Museum Africa.

In the arid Northern Cape, an area still known today as Bushmanland and which included the region in which the LMS established the Blyde Vooruitzicht mission, some /Xam San continued to lead a semi-independent existence until about the end of the nineteenth century – although massacres of San by the farmers of this area had occurred periodically throughout the first 60 years of the nineteenth century. Louis Anthing, Resident Magistrate and Civil Commissioner to Namaqualand, was sent to investigate reports of atrocities against the Bushmanland San in 1862. He found that the Boers and Bastards/Basters had been the main culprits, but Korana from the Gariep and from Schietfontein, in the eastern foothills of the Kareeberg, had also played a part.

Anthing found that parties of Boers were in the habit of going out to hunt and shoot any San they could find “for the fun of the thing”, as one Roggeveld farmer put it. A servant of one of the farmers who was interviewed by the Commissioner described a commando attack on a San kraal:

“They surrounded the place during the night, spying the Bushmen’s fires. At daybreak the firing commenced and it lasted until the sun was up a little way. The commando loaded and fired, and reloaded many times before they had finished. A great many people were killed that day. The men were absent. Only a few little children escaped, and they were distributed amongst the people composing the commando. The women threw up their arms, crying for mercy, but no mercy was shown them. Great sin was perpetrated that day.”

As a result of these actions many San were forced off the land, and Anthing estimated that by the time he arrived in Bushmanland there were no more than 500 independent San remaining there. Most combined hunting and gathering with occasional employment on the farms of Europeans, stealing the occasional sheep to supplement their meagre diet. Frequent droughts and denial of access to
natural resources by the Colonists meant that many lived a precarious existence, often, like those in other areas, on the brink of starvation. The death throes of the northern Cape San's resistance to the stock farmers who had usurped their lands occurred during the Korana wars of the late 1860s and 1870s. /Xam San joined up with Korana on the Gariep to fight the Colonists - unsuccessfully. Many San were killed and others were taken captive and distributed as labourers to farmers in the arid northern Cape district.

In 1870 /Xam San convicted of sheep theft and a variety of other offences were sent, together with Korana who were taken prisoner of war after rebelling against the Colonial government, to the Breakwater Prison in Cape Town. While the treatment handed out to these people by the Colonial authorities was very harsh, their imprisonment had a beneficial, if unintended, consequence - the compilation of a comprehensive record of the language and culture of the /Xam San. This came about as the result of the efforts of the German linguist Wilhelm Bleek and his sister-in-law, Lucy Lloyd, who were living in the village of Mowbray in Cape Town at the time when the /Xam San were imprisoned at the Breakwater. Bleek received permission for some of the San to stay on his premises in Mowbray, where he and Lloyd built up an extensive record of their way of life, language, folklore, and religious beliefs and rites. These, together with information about the religious beliefs and rites of the Maloti San given to Joseph Orpen by Qing in 1873, as well as ethnographic material from more recent San communities, have proved to be the most valuable sources we have for decoding the religious symbolism of much of the rock art of the San.
Dorothea Bleek.
Source: Special Collections, UCT

Charlton House in Mowbray, where Bleek and his family, and the /Xam San informants, lived.
Source: Special Collections, UCT.
Xam San convicts at the Breakwater Prison in Cape Town.
Source: Special Collections, UCT.

Han≠kasso, also known as Klein Jantje, one of Bleek and Lloyd's San informants.
Source: Special Collections, UCT.
//Kabbo, also known as Jantje Toren, another of Bleek and Lloyd’s San informants.
Source: Special Collections, UCT.

San children in front of a hut they constructed in the garden of the Bleeks’ house.
Source: Iziko Museums.
A painting from Ezeljagtspoort that was commented upon by /Han=kasso.

Source: the author.

One of the pages in Lucy Lloyd’s notebooks in which she recorded the comments of /Han=kasso on the Ezeljagtspoort panel.

Source: Special Collections, UCT.
Wilhelm Bleek died in 1875, but Lucy Lloyd continued with their work until 1884, when her poor health and Bleek’s widow’s wish to educate her daughters in Germany persuaded her to leave South Africa. The household now dispersed, some of the San informants making the long journey back to the farms on which they had formerly lived in the Northern Cape. Many years later Bleek’s daughter, Dorothea, returned to South Africa and made a visit to the northern parts of the Cape Colony. To her distress, she found that, although a few old people remembered some of the customs mentioned in the texts recorded by her father and Lucy Lloyd, “the folklore was dead, killed by a life of service among strangers and the breaking up of families”.

San from the Langeberg, with a Mr Lankman. Photographed by Dorothea Bleek in about 1910. 
Source: Special Collections, UCT.
“Punch”, a very old San man living in the Weenen District in KwaZulu-Natal. The photograph was probably taken in the 1920s.

Source: Special Collections, UCT,
“Punch” with two unidentified people. Taken at the same time as the previous photograph.

Source: Special Collections, UCT.
The assimilation of San into Nguni and Sotho communities

San encapsulated by Nguni and Sotho communities, in a similar manner to the /Xam, Sneeuwberg San, and other San who attached themselves to the farms and towns of Europeans, took a variety of paths in their movement towards assimilation by these communities. Some initially established themselves as farmers under their own chiefs. The San chief, Yele, for example, as has been mentioned, had settled at the mouth of the Mzumbe River on the south coast of KwaZulu-Natal by 1840. His band of ten men, including “Bushman Kaffirs”, had all married Nguni women, and possessed cattle and were cultivating crops by this time.

Other San bands continued to live more or less permanently by hunting and gathering in secluded areas, while kin who had intermarried with Bantu-speakers lived in villages. With time, those who had continued to live by hunting and gathering were assimilated into the farming or herding communities in which their kin were living. San who were completely absorbed into Nguni and Sotho communities were sometimes accepted into these groups on the basis of the specialist skills they could provide, such as leather-working and tanning. A number were even employed as jockeys by Sotho chiefs, riding their mounts for them in local horse races.

Some residual San groups in the process of being assimilated into the society of Nguni and Sotho farmers appear to have adopted agropastoralism on an ad hoc basis, spending the cold winter months at the homesteads or villages of Nguni and Sotho farmers, but reverting to a nomadic, hunting and gathering existence during summer. Thus a small San band continued to roam the Great Kei valley until at least 1874. They were on friendly terms with the people of Mapasa, the principal chief in that area, and spent a good deal of their time with these people in winter. In summer they moved off and resumed their hunter-gatherer way of life. One of the last haunts of relatively independent San groups was in the Prentjiesiesberg, near the present-day towns of Maclear and Ugie.

Still other San communities established relatively permanent settlements on the outskirts of Nguni and Sotho villages, probably attaching themselves to these communities as clients and undertaking certain tasks such as herding for them in return for milk and a share of their crops. These settlements were established in forested areas or river valleys near to villages, where it would have been possible for the San to hunt and gather to a limited extent, but where they would also have been able to maintain regular contact with their farmer neighbours.

The last San rainmakers

Those San that maintained a limited degree of independence from their farmer neighbours until the end of the nineteenth century appear to have split into small groups of related individuals who maintained close links with particular chiefdoms and had intermarried with Nguni and Sotho farmers. The San living amongst the Mpondomise were considered by the latter to be great rainmakers. The farmers patronised San rainmaking families, and it was the role of a specific sub-clan within the Mpondomise, the Cesana, to negotiate for rain with the San on behalf of the Mpondomise. The Mpondomise’s patronage of the San continued well into the nineteenth century.

According to Mpondomise tradition there were three main San or San-Mpondomise groups of related individuals living under the protection of Mditshwa, chief of the western section of the Mpondomise in the later nineteenth century. These families were employed as rainmakers by the farmers to whom they were affiliated, and would wander from kraal to kraal after rain collecting tribute which the chief ordered the people to pay. In times of drought, San rainmakers were sent...
for by Mditshwa, who presented them with goats, or even a bullock, as tribute. The payment which
they received for this “symbolic labour”, possibly supplemented by a limited amount of hunting
and gathering, enabled these groups to subsist on the margins of farmer society.

If rain fell, San rainmaker families such as these were well rewarded, but, as with other rainmakers in
Nguni society, if it did not they incurred the displeasure of the chief and his people and were severely
chastised or punished for their inability to open the heavens - the rainmaker's “celestial tap”. Joseph
Orpen, for example, was told by Mditshwa of an occasion when this chief invited more than 20 of his
San subjects to his kraal to make rain. After giving a signal to his warriors, the San were slain in a
heap before him because, according to Mditshwa, it was they who “had made the heavens hard as
brass”. On another occasion he sent an emissary to the homestead of San rainmakers living within his
territory to chide them for their failure to relieve a drought. In what must have appeared an unusual
spectacle to the San gathered below him, this man, anointed with melted butter, approached their
huts from above, berating them for being wizards and for withholding the rain.

There are a number of other accounts of San rainmaker families living within the territory of the
Mpondomise in the later years of the nineteenth century, and Major D. B. Hook, Chief Magistrate of
Tsolo from 1884 to 1886, left a vivid description of his encounter with one of these families:

“There is much beauty in the hills on the Buffalo River”, he wrote, “with bush and cliffs, high mountains
and ravines where the only known bushmen in Kaffirland dwelt in the ‘krantz’, living in their earlier
primitive condition, practising as rainmakers to the tribes, revered and wooed as prophets. In a
sauntering mood I met them on the height, and caused amazement by the beard I wore - mistaken
for a Boer. They were a scrap of pigmy life, pure and simple rock men by their flinty form and manner
- jabber, laugh and capers.”

Some time after his appointment as Chief Magistrate of East Griqualand in 1885, Walter (later Sir
Walter) Stanford met a San family of rainmakers living amongst the Mpondomise. He first met them
on the Umnga River, a tributary of the Inxu, probably in 1888, and then “many years later” they
“came out of their rocks” to meet him in the Tsitsa River valley. Mditshwa employed them as
rainmakers, and they had been under the protection of the Mpondomise for a good many years
before Stanford’s first encounter with them at the Umnga. In 1905, on the instructions of Stanford,
who by then was Chief Magistrate of the Transkeian territories, all the San in the Umnga area,
including Mamxabela, were brought together at Jengca store in the Tsolo District. There were about
30 men, women and children present. It seems probable that this was the second occasion of their
meeting, “many years later”, to which Stanford refers.

One of the members of the “family”, Mamxabela, described as “a likeable talkative little being” by
Stanford, was typically San in looks and still had some recollection of a San language, unlike some of
the other members of the band, who appeared to be of Mpondomise or mixed descent. Mamxabela’s
husband, who had died a few years earlier, had been a painter. It must have been a moving, certainly
an historical, scene as the last San who inhabited the area, some of them probably still living like their
ancestors in caves, gathered together in front of the small store - called in from the wilds by a distant
Colonial government. They eventually disappeared from the area and were last reported to be living
on farms in the Ugie area.
Mamxabela.
Source: Special Collections, UCT.
The last San painters

It is difficult to say exactly who the last south-eastern San artists were and where the last paintings were executed. In the eastern and north-eastern Cape and adjacent areas, however, the fineline tradition continued into the second half of the nineteenth century, and most probably into the following century as well. According to Stow, a San painter was shot as late as about 1866 in the Witteberg Native Reserve in the Herschel District while raiding for horses in the area. He was said to have had ten small horn pots hanging from his belt, each of which contained paint of a different colour from the rest. Stow also reports that an old San painter, 'Gcu-wa, the brother of the San chief Mada’kane who roamed an area along the Black Kei, was still alive in 1869.

Although these were among the last surviving painters, it appears that the painting tradition continued until an even later date in the north-eastern Cape. From written and oral historical sources it seems more than likely that Mamxabela's son, Lindiso, and possibly Mamxabela herself, lived under the patronage of the Mpondomise in Ncengane Cave, a richly painted shelter next to the Inxu River in the Tsolo District, Eastern Cape, until at least the late nineteenth century. It is in this cave that some of the last paintings in the millennia old tradition of rock painting by San people were created.

Much of what we know about the people living in Ncengane Cave derives from information provided by an elderly Mpondomise woman, Manqindi Dyantyi, the daughter of Lindiso, and granddaughter of Mamxabela and her artist husband. This woman was located and interviewed in 1984 at her Mpondomise homestead close to the Inxu River, and in Ncengane Cave on this river. Her sister had acted as a rainmaker for the Mpondomise of the area for many years, but died before she could be interviewed. Although not as knowledgeable about San customs and their painting tradition as her sister was said to be, Manqindi provided a considerable amount of information about her father, Lindiso, who, she stated, was both a rainmaker and painter.
Manqindi.

Source: the author.
Manqindi commenting on published reproductions of rock paintings. Her interpreter, Nozuko Mfono, sits next to her.

Source: the author.
It seems that Manqindi’s father lived in Ncengane Cave until the last decade of the nineteenth century. Thereafter he went to Umtata and married an Nguni woman. He returned to the area a few years later and settled in an Mpondomise homestead not far from the Inxu River, becoming a fully-fledged member of Mpondomise society. He nevertheless appears to have maintained links with people who were still living in Ncengane Cave, and he occasionally returned to the cave to paint there - probably until about 1920. Manqindi and her sister sometimes accompanied their father to the cave as young children, but they were not allowed to watch him paint. When they were much older, Lindiso took them to the cave and used the paintings in the cave to introduce them to the Tsolo San’s culture and way of life.

The paintings at Ncengane Cave range from finely painted polychromes, scenes that clearly belong to the corpus of “traditional” San art (such as people reaching out to a recumbent eland, a line of figures with bows and arrows, and clapping, seated women), to crude finger paintings, as well as paintings incorporating contact motifs (such as cattle and horses, a goat, an ox wagon, and an SDF). It is not certain which of these paintings were done by Lindiso, but, according to Manqindi, blood from an eland that had been magically captured and led back to Ncengane Cave to be ritually slaughtered was mixed with various other substances and added to the paint used by San artists at this cave. Another dimension was thereby added to the paintings for, in this way, the paintings were imbued with a particular potency associated with the sacrificed eland. This power, Manqindi said, could be drawn upon by placing one’s hand on the paintings or by facing the paintings when dancing in the cave.
Manqindi close to the cave on the Inxu River.
Source: the author.

Ncengane Cave, screened by trees and bushes, on the Inxu River.
Source: the author.
Some examples of the paintings: A horse, goat and a dog(?); A man hunting an antelope with a knobkerrie and assegai; A herder and an ox.

Source: the author.

Eldritch figures painted in Ncengane Cave.

Source: the author.
Manqindi places her hands on the paintings to draw power from them. Note that the end of the middle finger of her left hand is missing.

Amputation of the end of one of the fingers was a San custom, which was adopted by some Nguni and Sotho people.

Source: the author.

Manqindi dancing in front of, and interacting with, the paintings.

Source: the author.

There are questions regarding the authenticity of some of the information Manqindi provided, but if Lindiso did paint in Ncengane Cave, as Manqindi claimed, it is likely that the motivation underlying the paintings he made, as well as the symbolism that may have been associated with these paintings, would have been influenced to a significant extent by the culture of the Mpondomise amongst whom he was living. The paintings probably acted both as symbolic bridge with his past as well as a means of integrating the tradition of his San forefathers with the worldview of the farmers into whose society he had been accepted.
Two Phuthi artists

A final glimpse into the art of the south-eastern San was provided in the early 1930s to Marion Walsham How, wife of the British District Commissioner in Basutoland, now Lesotho. How was living at Moyeni in the Quthing District in 1932 when she was visited by a Phuthi artist named Masitise, who offered to do some paintings for her on the sandstone wall of the verandah of the British Residency building. Some of the Phuthi people were said to have been taught how to paint by the San and Masitise appears to have been considerably skilled as an artist as he was probably responsible for some well-painted antelope and Colonial horsemen in a small rock shelter close to the Residency.

How was interested to see what Masitise would produce and left him to his work while she attended to other matters. When she returned, she found that he had transformed a section of the front wall of the verandah. It was now decorated with many paintings, including a scene with a strange mythical or hallucinatory animal, two figures with very extended arms, and a serpent - something which strongly suggests that he had direct knowledge of the trance-inspired art of the San. He also painted a scene representing a battle between the San chiefs, Soai and Mphaki. Soai was depicted on horseback, wearing a uniform and holding a white flag. Masitise explained to How that the uniform and flag had been obtained by Soai from a party of British soldiers. According to the Phuthi artist, Soai had encountered the party in East Griqualand and one of the soldiers had begun waving a stick to which a white flag was attached, but Soai's band, unaware of the symbolism underlying this gesture, killed the soldiers. Soai took the uniform and the flag, which he considered to be the insignia of their leader, and on his return to Basutoland rode into battle against Mphaki wearing the unfortunate soldier's uniform and carrying his flag of surrender. The painting of Soai and Mphaki, and the other paintings done by Masitise, can still be seen on the walls of the Residency building.
The Residency at Upper Moyeni where Masitise painted for How. The paintings are on the sandstone walls of the building, on the right hand side, under the verandah.

Source: Janette Deacon.

Some examples of the paintings done by Masitise.

Source: the author.
A strange hallucination-induced or mythical beast, two figures with very extended arms, and a serpent.
Source: the author.

Soai on horseback with a white flag.
Source: the author.
This was not the first occasion on which How had witnessed a Phuthi artist painting. Two years prior to Masitise's arrival at the Residency in 1932, How was based with her husband at Qacha's Nek in the mountains on the border of Lesotho and South Africa. While she was living there she heard of a Phuthi man, named Mapote, who had painted with the San. She sent a message to him asking him to come and visit her, and, although he was an old man by this time, he made the long trip over the mountains to visit her at the Residency. Mapote, was the son of the Phuthi chief, Moorosi, and had escaped being captured or killed when Mount Moorosi was stormed by the British in 1879. Moorosi's close connections with the San and the fact that he had two San wives meant that Mapote had been permitted to paint with his San half-brothers and other San in a cave during his youth.

The old man agreed to do a painting for How and said he would paint an eland, as the Bushmen of that part of the country were “of the eland”. He made a brush of bird feathers stuck into the ends of tiny reeds and the pigments he used consisted of a variety of substances including qhang qhang, a red ochre used by the Sotho to ward off lightning. Mapote said that the qhang qhang had to be heated by a woman out of doors at full moon until it was red hot before it could be used as an ingredient of the paint.

When he was ready to paint the eland, Mapote asked for fresh eland blood to mix into the paint. Since this was not available, the blood of a freshly-killed ox was brought from the local butcher and used in its place. Over the next two days Mapote did a number of paintings on two smallish stones and a large rock in the garden of the Residency. He painted two eland, a hartebeest, a lion, two San men with bows and arrows, and a Phuthi man dancing and singing his lithoko (praise songs).

After choosing a present of new boots from the trading store, Mapote prepared to leave for home. “And so”, writes How, “we said goodbye with all the graceful words with which the Sotho language is endowed for such occasions. … Mapote’s slight old figure disappeared over the horizon, carrying his assegai in one hand and his beautiful new boots at the end of a stick slung over his shoulder …”. He, and his fellow Phuthi artist, Masitise, are the last people with direct links to the San artistic tradition known to have painted.
TIMELINE

1866
San painter, with ten horn paint pots hanging from his belt, shot in the Wittebergen Native Reserve

1870
Convict San from the Breakwater Prison in Cape Town go to live at the house of Wilhelm Bleek and his sister-in-law, Lucy Lloyd

1875
Wilhelm Bleek dies

1878
Last sighting of a San band in the Drakensberg

c. 1888
Sir Walter Stanford meets San rainmakers, including Mamxabela, the widow of a San painter, at the Umnga River, Transkei

1905
Last San in the Umnga River area, including Mamxabela, gather at Jengca Store and are met by Stanford

1926
San hunting kit and fresh bedding found in Eland Cave, Drakensberg

1930
Mapote interviewed by, and paints for, Marion Walsham How at Qacha's Nek, Lesotho

1932
Masitise paints on the walls of the British Residency at Quthing, Lesotho

1984
Manqindi, daughter of the San painter, Lindiso, and granddaughter of Mamxabela and her painter husband, interviewed at her homestead and at the shelter on the Inxu River where her father was born and painted
I said, “Where is Cagn?” He answered, “We don’t know, but the elands do. Have you not hunted and heard his cry, when the elands start and run to his call? Where he is, elands are in droves like cattle”.

Joseph Orpen. Interview with the nineteenth century Maloti San informant, Qing

Mapote’s remark that the San of the Maloti were “of the eland” is both a poetic and a factual expression of the strength of the south-eastern San’s relationship with this animal. For the San, the symbolism of the eland was woven into all aspects of their life and expressed in their rituals, their myths and their beautiful and complex paintings. The first eland was born of a San woman, and men became eland in trance. The creator being, Cagn, was intimately associated with the eland, as Joseph Orpen’s San guide, Qing, made clear in his eloquent expression of the greater religious significance of the eland for the San, cited above. And the San, like the eland, depended on the land that had been their inheritance for thousands of years. The bitter struggle waged between the San and immigrant groups had been about land, and all that the land signified for the San, including the game that roamed it.

It was often claimed that the San had no ties to the land, never settling in one place but continually following the game, and this reasoning was invoked to justify the occupation of San territories by the frontier farmers and herders. Yet this difference in attitude to the land by the two groups should not deceive us into thinking that the San placed little or no concept of property or rights to land. As one historian of the struggle between the Native Americans and European settlers has put it: “It is not that one had property and the other had none; rather it was that they loved property differently”.

It is difficult, therefore, to exaggerate the significance for the San of the capture of their lands and the eland that roamed them, for there were spiritual as well as material dimensions to the loss. The land,
the water rising at its springs and all the creatures, including man, that drew on these resources were imbued with spiritual powers and bound together in a seamless whole in San thought. All depended on each other and to destroy one was to sow the seeds for the disintegration of the whole system. As the historian Susan Newton-King has remarked:

“Every krans, every spring, every pool of water carried reminders of a cosmic order whose foundations had been laid long before the coming of the Europeans. The veeboeren had blundered into this world, ignorant of its principles, unaware of its secrets, recklessly careless of its prohibitions. They had desecrated its landscape and destroyed its most precious treasures, killing eland like cattle, piling the carcasses high on their wagons, without regard to the meaning of their actions.”

By occupying the springs where the eland drank and by hunting out the great herds of animals that teemed upon the plains and roamed the mountains the immigrant groups, but particularly the Tuntsi, mounted on horses and “armed with thunder and lightning”, destroyed not only a significant part of the San’s means of subsistence but also the very foundations of their cosmological order.
Yet there was another side to this story, despite its predominantly tragic theme. The eighteenth century Swedish traveller, Anders Sparrman, commented that, even among the frontier farmers who were responsible for so much of the material and psychic damage inflicted on the southern San, there were some who strongly disapproved of these acts of violence. This reminds us that not all the frontiersmen conspired in this process. Positive and creative forces were also released through this meeting of different peoples and cultures. These included the development in the Nguni and Sotho contact situation, in some cases, of new relationships based on intermarriage, friendship and trade that were beneficial to all the groups concerned, as well as the appearance of new themes and symbols in their art. I believe it appropriate, therefore, that this account of the relationships which developed between the southern San and the immigrant herders and farmer societies they encountered should end with an account of friendship between San and Sotho, people of the eland and of cattle respectively.

According to this tradition, the young herders of Chief Makhoakhoa's clan amused themselves while looking after their animals in the mountains by fashioning figurines of cattle from clay. When they brought in their flocks that evening, they left these clay sculptures where they had been grazing their animals, intending to collect them the following day. Unbeknown to them, however, they had been observed making these figures by the San, and when they returned to retrieve their toys they found them where they had left them, but also, placed amongst them, a number of beautifully fashioned figurines - not of cattle, but of eland.

In the words of the anthropologist Monica Wilson: “Conflict in societies persists, but the lines of cleavage are not constant: sooner or later, he who once was a stranger becomes a brother”.

THE SOURCES

Syntheses of archaeological and historical material are, by definition, based on the work of many people who have contributed to the subject. This summary of the current state of our knowledge of the later history and art of some of the southern San groups contains information drawn from a wide range of sources. These include the accounts of early travellers in southern Africa, published articles and books, and unpublished theses and documents.

A list of the primary sources consulted in writing this book has been provided in the select bibliography, but, in view of the fact that no references are included in the text itself, the main sources and the contribution of particular scholars to specific issues and fields of research related to the history and art of the San after contact are briefly discussed here. The reader should consult these sources for fuller details and analysis of particular aspects of San history and art dealt with in the text.

Introduction

The introduction to the later history and art of the southern San leads us immediately to an important debate in Khoe-San studies. This debate, which came to be known as “the revisionist debate”, centres on issues of ethnicity and the degree to which the distinction between aboriginal hunter-gatherer societies on the one hand, and herder and agriculturist societies on the other, became blurred due to symbiotic contact between these groups. It is also concerned with the degree to which people in southern Africa have oscillated between the hunter-gatherer and pastoralist/agro-pastoralist modes of production.

The suggestion that the San were originally Khoe who subsequently lost their cattle and became hunter-gatherers was first put forward as early as 1828 by Reverend John Philip (1828) but was rejected by other writers of the period. Marks (1972) re-opened the debate, pointing out that, although most of the people referred to in the historical record as “Soaqua” or “Bushmen” and “Hottentots” may have been the descendants of aboriginal hunter-gatherers and the first immigrant herders respectively, movement between the hunter-gatherer and pastoralist modes of production by individuals and groups means that one cannot be sure that this was always the case. These ideas were developed by Elphick (1977) and Schrire (1980), and prompted other archaeologists and historians, such as Parkington (1984), Wilson (1986), Wright (1996) and myself (Jolly 1996a), to re-examine the terms used by early European settlers and travellers to describe the indigenous peoples they encountered. Wilmsen (1989) takes the controversial view that the (Kalahari) San of historical and present times did/do not constitute a cultural group distinct from the pastoralist societies of the region, practising a way of life passed down from their aboriginal ancestors. Rather, he argues, they represent a poverty-stricken class of “lapsed” pastro-foragers, people who had, through misfortune of one kind or another, lost their livestock and been placed on the fringes of pastoralist society. All these sources are drawn upon in the general discussion of terminology in the introductory chapter.

Chapter One

This chapter begins with an outline of the theories concerning the origin of the Khoe and the possible routes they followed when migrating southwards into the territories of the southern San. Elphick’s (1977) hypothesis that the Cape Khoe moved down from the north through the interior of the country, rather than down the west coast as was previously considered to be the case, is outlined and
discussed. Barnard (1992) has put forward an argument for particular Khoe southward expansion routes that is based on linguistic evidence. The question of whether sheep and pottery first reached the Cape with the arrival of Khoe themselves or by means of diffusion, whereby hunter-gatherers acquired domestic animals and pottery skills from pastoralists, passing them southwards to other aboriginal communities, is also considered. Smith (1986 and other publications), Boonzaaier et al (1996) Kinahan (1995) and Sadr (1998, 2003) all discuss this issue.

The relationships which may have been established between San hunter-gatherers and early Khoe communities are also discussed in this chapter. Parkington et al (1986) and Smith (1986,1990) suggest that San and Khoe groups maintained their own cultures and a considerable degree of independence from each other after contact. They argue that San and Khoe were generally in conflict with each other, but in some cases mutual tolerance and the establishment of ties based on the provision of services by client San to their Khoe patrons characterised the relationships they established with each other. Marks (1972), Elphick (1977), Schrire (1980) and Wilmesen (1989), in contrast, see greater integration and overlap between the hunter-gatherer and pastoralist groups, as well as considerable movement of individuals and groups between the hunter-gatherer and pastoralist ways of life.

The chapter concludes with a discussion of relations between pioneer first millennium agriculturist communities and the hunter-gatherers whose territories they entered. Whitelaw and Moon (1996) and Whitelaw (2008) provide information on the movements and ways of life of these early agriculturist groups. Archaeological excavations and analyses by Maggs (1980) and Mazel (1989), as well as a study of the patterning of early radiocarbon dates by Parkington and Hall (1987), have all helped to throw light on interaction between early agriculturists and south-eastern San hunter-gatherers in KwaZulu-Natal. Hall (1990) has excavated the sites of Edgehill and Welgeluk in the Fish River basin and has used information from these and other sites to model patterns of interaction between hunter-gatherer-fishers and herders and agriculturists in this area. Ribot et al (2010) discuss the biological and dietary changes that occurred amongst coastal San in KwaZulu-Natal after the arrival of agriculturists in about 450 AD.

**Chapter Two**

The arrival of the first Europeans at the Cape and the process of expansion by these people during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries into territories occupied by the San is dealt with in this chapter. Here I have drawn on a wide range of sources, including the accounts of early travellers.

Raven-Hart's (1967,1971) synthesis of accounts by European callers at the Cape provided information on early relationships between Europeans and the Khoe-San before and after the arrival of Van Riebeeck. I also drew on Moodie's (1960) compilation of documents from the official records related to the condition and treatment of the “native tribes” of South Africa from about the time of Van Riebeeck's arrival until the early years of the nineteenth century. Elphick's (1977) study of Khoe-European relations was a particularly useful source of information on early interaction between these groups.

Detailed studies of European expansion and settlement in Khoe-San territories, primarily during the eighteenth century have been made by Newton-King (1984 (with Bredenkamp, H), 1986, 1992, 1999) and Penn (1986, 1987, 1989, 1995, 1996, 2005). These authors have drawn mainly on archival material, but also on published books and articles, and between them they throw much light on the relations that existed between the Khoe-San and the Dutch during the eighteenth century. Their studies have been important sources of information to me when writing this chapter.
For information on the skirmishes and wars between the San and European farmers I also drew on Theal (1888) and Stow (1905) as well as Van der Merwe (1937, 1938), Macrone (1937), Marais (1962), Spilhaus (1966), Smith (1976), Katzen (1982) and Neville (1996), who all describe this conflict in greater or lesser detail. Van der Merwe's work, the first study of trekboer expansion into Khoe-San territories to be based on detailed research of archival documents, contains much information on the expansion of the trekboers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. A feature of his writing on Khoe-San-trekboer relations, however, is his tendency to act as apologist for the farmers' expansion into Khoe-San territories and their subsequent treatment of the indigenous inhabitants. Marks (1972) provides a synthesis of material, including published archival documents, relating to the struggle between the Khoe-San and the Dutch in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Szalay (1983, 1995) provides information on contact between the Khoe-San and the European Colonists. Sampson (1994 and other publications) focuses on the archaeological traces of the contact situation in the Seekoei River valley. Gall's (2001) overview provides a useful synthesis of material relating to contact between many of the southern San groups and the European settlers, and Smith et al (2000) give a good overview of contact between the San and other groups, including Europeans. More recently, Adhikari (2010) has brought out an overview of contact between the Cape San and the European Colonists. He argues, persuasively, that the actions of the latter constituted a form of genocide.

Chapter Three

This chapter focuses on attempts to settle and pacify the San, particularly the efforts of Christian missionaries to evangelise the San and the establishment of missions to the San by the LMS. Here I have drawn to a large extent on Schoeman's (1993 a,b, 1994, 2003) work on the LMS's missions to the San, but also on a number of early travellers' narratives, as well as Kicherer's (1804) account of the mission he established at the Sak River. Szalay (1995), too, provides much information on the San missions. I also drew on Neville's (1996) work on the San of the Seekoei River Valley, and Penn (1995, 2005) and Schoeman (1996) for information concerning the Sak River mission. Wilson (1975) has written on the mission at Ramah. Details of the last mission to the San at Kat River are taken from Saunders' (1977) article on the San leader, Madolo, amongst whose people this mission was established. More recently, McDonald (2007) has made a study of the LMS missions to the San.

Chapter Four

The capture of San adults and children for use on the farms of the European Colonists forms the focus of this chapter. Newton-King (1992, 1999), Penn (1995, 2005), and especially Szalay (1995) were consulted for details of San captured by commandos during the eighteenth century. Eldredge (1994) was a source of information on raiding for San labour in Transgariep during the nineteenth century. Supplementary information on the use of San captives as labourers on the farms of Boers was taken from Burchell (1953/1822-4), Philip (1828), Kirby (1939, 1940), Lye (1975), Orpen (1964) and other writers.

Chapter Five

The occupation of San territories within the Transgariep by a number of groups, including Boers, Korana, Griquas, Bergenaars and Basters, in the nineteenth century is detailed and discussed in Stockenstrom (1887), Van der Merwe (1937), Van Aswegen (1968), Legassick (1970, 1989), Ross (1976), Schoeman (1993a, 1993b, 1994, 1997, 2002, 2003, 2005a, 2005b), Johnson (2012) and Halford (n.d.). Details of the Maloti-Drakensberg San and their conflict with immigrant European farmers were obtained primarily from Wright (1971) and Vinnicombe (1976). These are the chief
sources for the history of the south-eastern San during the nineteenth century, and between them they contain most of the information available on this period of the south-eastern San's history. I have consequently drawn heavily on their work in this chapter, although they record this history in much greater detail than it was possible to do here. Information was also obtained from other authors, such as Ergates (1905), Stow (1905) and a range of other researchers as well as many non-academic authors.

Chapter Six


Chapter Seven

This chapter begins with a brief discussion of the earliest evidence for the production of paint and art in southern Africa, and indeed the world. Henshilwood et al (2011) present evidence for an ochre processing kit found in an abalone/perlemoen shell dated to about 100,000 BP, and Henshilwood et al (2009) discuss engraved ochre from Blombos dated to c. 78,000 BP. Texier et al (2010, 2013) discuss engraved ostrich eggshell found at Diepkloof shelter dating to between at least 100,000 BP and about 50,000 BP. Rudner (1982) is the main source for information on the physical properties of the paints. The subject matter of the south-eastern paintings and their interpretation is dealt with in detail by Pager (1975a), Vinnicombe (1976), Lewis-Williams (1981, 1982 etc.) and Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1988, 1999), as well as other publications, by these and other authors. Werner (1908) was the first to point to the prominence given to the eland in San art and to suggest that this prominence derived from the fact that the eland was in some sense a sacred animal for the San. The importance of patterning in the subject matter of the art, and, in particular, the importance of the eland in the religious ideology of the San was subsequently emphasised by Pager, Vinnicombe and Lewis-Williams. Analyses of the Maloti-Drakensberg paintings by these rock art researchers led them to the conclusion that most of the art had an important religious or symbolic dimension for the San. Vinnicombe pointed to the relationship between certain features of the art and rites performed by San shamans or “sorcerors”. All these ideas were developed by Lewis-Williams, who was able to show that the trance dance, and the experiences and religious symbolism associated with this dance, are depicted in many, probably the great majority, of San paintings.

Other writers have examined different aspects of the art. Skotnes (1994), who approaches the art from the perspective of the art historian and practising artist, stresses the importance of style, colour, form and the positional context of the paintings. Deacon (1988) has discussed the relationship between places of spiritual or mythological significance and engravings executed near or at these places by the /Xam San of the Northern Cape. In a similar vein, Ouzman (1995) has argued that San people perceived certain places to be imbued with a particular power that made them appropriate sites for engraving and ritual activity. I have analysed and discussed the symbolism attached to paintings of therianthropes in some detail (Jolly 2002), as have Hollmann (2003) and Parkington (2003).

Some researchers have interpreted the paintings in terms of San rites and religious ideas, but rites
and ideas which are not necessarily related to trance. Parkington et al (1996) and Parkington and Manhire (1997), for example, suggest that initiation rites may be symbolised in the art, and Stow (1905), Bleek (Stow and Bleek 1930), Woodhouse (1968, 1979), Pager (1975b), Vinnicombe (1976) and Solomon (1994, 1998) have all explored the possibility that mythological beings and people of the Early Race may be depicted or symbolised in rock paintings. Notions of gender and sexuality in the art have been explored by Solomon (1992, 1994), Parkington and Manhire (1997) and Parkington (2003).

The changes brought about in San art as a result of contact with Khoe herders and Nguni, Sotho and European farmers have been discussed and analysed by a number of researchers. Parkington et al (1986) and Yates et al (1994) have discussed the impact of the arrival of Khoe herders on the society and art of the San of the western Cape. The main sources for the discussion of paintings of handprints and finger dots, which occur almost exclusively in the south-western Cape, are van Rijssen (1994), Yates et al (1994) and Manhire (1998), who, besides offering their own interpretations, discuss the work done by other researchers on these paintings. Vinnicombe (1976), Mazel (1982), Manhire et al (1986), Campbell (1987), Hall (1994) and Loubser and Laurens (1994) all discuss and analyse paintings of cattle, sheep and horses.

While no systematic recording or survey has yet been made of paintings which depict Nguni and Sotho farmers, the history of interaction between Nguni and Sotho farmers and south-eastern San communities has been researched in depth by myself (Jolly 1994, 1996b), and the distribution patterns of paintings of cattle, sheep and Sotho shields have been analysed by Loubser and Laurens (1994). Paintings of Europeans and their associated weaponry and equipment in the south-western Cape are discussed by Yates, Manhire and Parkington (1993).

In discussing the interpretation of the contact art I drew on the work of a number of rock art researchers, including my own work. Campbell (1987) has interpreted paintings of cattle and horses in terms of the trance experiences of south-eastern San shamans and in terms of the changes in the powers and roles of these shamans brought about by the arrival of European and Nguni and Sotho farmers. He, Hall (1994), Loubser and Laurens (1994) and Ouzman (2003) have suggested ways in which cattle were incorporated into existing San religious ideologies and symbolic systems, including the art. More recently, I have presented data to show that some San groups kept cattle on a permanent basis and have argued that the symbolism of cattle in Nguni and Sotho societies is expressed, in whole or part, in some of the San paintings of cattle (Jolly 2007).

I have also drawn attention to the possible connection between San paintings of serpents and the development of symbiotic relationships between the San and Nguni and Sotho groups (Jolly 1996c, 1998), as has Woodhouse (1992). Ouzman (2003) has suggested that paintings of water serpents and rain animals would have had particular resonance in Nguni and Sotho cultures, and were, for this reason, emphasized in the art of some contact period San groups. He and Loubser also posit the existence of an apocalyptic phase in the art of the south-eastern San (Ouzman and Loubser 2000). Dowson (1994) has suggested that the increased ritual and economic powers of San shamans may be represented in the art by paintings of prominent, elaborately-attired and -decorated figures. Hammond-Tooke (1998, 2002) has suggested ways in which the rites of Nguni diviners may have been influenced by those of the San. Thackeray (1888, 1990) has remarked on similarities in some ritual practices of San and Nguni farmers, and Botha and Thackeray (1987) have suggested that a comparative study of ethnographic and linguistic data from both San- and Bantu-speaking people may have a bearing on concepts expressed in San rock art.
Schofield (1949), Walton (1956), Woodhouse (1992), Prins (1990, 1994) and myself (Jolly 1994, 1996c, 1998, 2005, 2006, 2007) have all, in greater or lesser depth, explored ways in which religious concepts associated with Nguni and/or Sotho cultures, adopted and/or adapted by the San, could have been expressed in some later rock paintings. Dowson (1994, 1995), too, has pointed to the need to employ the ethnography of Bantu-speakers as well as San people when interpreting the contact art. Blundell (2004) has made a detailed study of the history of a small nineteenth century San band who roamed Nomansland under Nqabayo. He has tracked changes in their art and cosmology as they became increasingly creolised. Mallen (2008) identified Type 3 paintings, a new tradition of art practised by later, creolised, short-lived San groups. Henry (2010) identified another short-lived tradition in the art in the Maclear-Tsolo area, which she links to other late traditions in the south-eastern mountains identified by Blundell and Mallen. Challis (2008, 2012) has investigated the formation of new identity forged by the Thola - a late, multi-ethnic San group of the south-eastern mountains, who, he argues, adopted the horse and baboon as their “totem animals”. Smith (2010) has critically surveyed and assessed research done on the contact period art in the south-eastern mountains.

Chapter Eight

In this chapter, which deals with the last years of the independent San and their incorporation into other groups, I have drawn on a variety of sources. Edith Kelly’s account of her encounter with San in 1878 is cited by Rogers (1937) and the discovery of the San hunting kit in Eland Cave is described by Vinnicombe (1971). Stow (1905), Dornan (1909), Ellenberger (1953), How (1962), Wright (1971) and Vinnicombe (1976) all provide details of late reports of San individuals and communities in the south-eastern mountains. Szalay (1995) provides much information on the incorporation of San into the labour force on European farms and their subsequent acculturation. For accounts of the later history of the /Xam San I drew on Anthing (1863) Marais (1962), Findlay (1977) and Strauss (1979), with some details from Deacon (1986). Deacon (1996a,b), Bank (2006) and Skotnes (2007) were the sources for the section dealing with Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd’s /Xam San informants. Neville (1996) discusses the movement of Seekoei River Valley San onto farms and into the town of Colesberg. I have discussed the incorporation of residual San into Nguni and Sotho communities during the nineteenth century and the history of some of the last San rainmaker families who lived amongst the Mpondomise under Mditswa (Jolly 1986, 1992, 1994). For accounts of late San communities living in the Tsolo area I have drawn in part on unpublished fieldnotes, copies of which were given to me by the late David Hammond-Tooke. Mditswa’s massacre of San rainmakers living within his territory is described in JNO (1876) and Stanford’s meeting with one of these families is described in Macquarrie (1962). Yates et al (1993, 1994) and Hall and Mazel (2005) have studied the late finger paintings in the western Cape. Accounts of the last painters living at Ngcengane Cave in the Transkei are given by myself (Jolly 1986, 1999), myself and Prins (Jolly and Prins 1994), Lewis-Williams (1986) and Prins (1990, 1994). Finally, accounts of the “commissioning” of two Phuthi artists to paint at the British Residencies at Qacha’s Nek and Quthing in Lesotho are provided by How (1962).
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