

CHAPTER 6

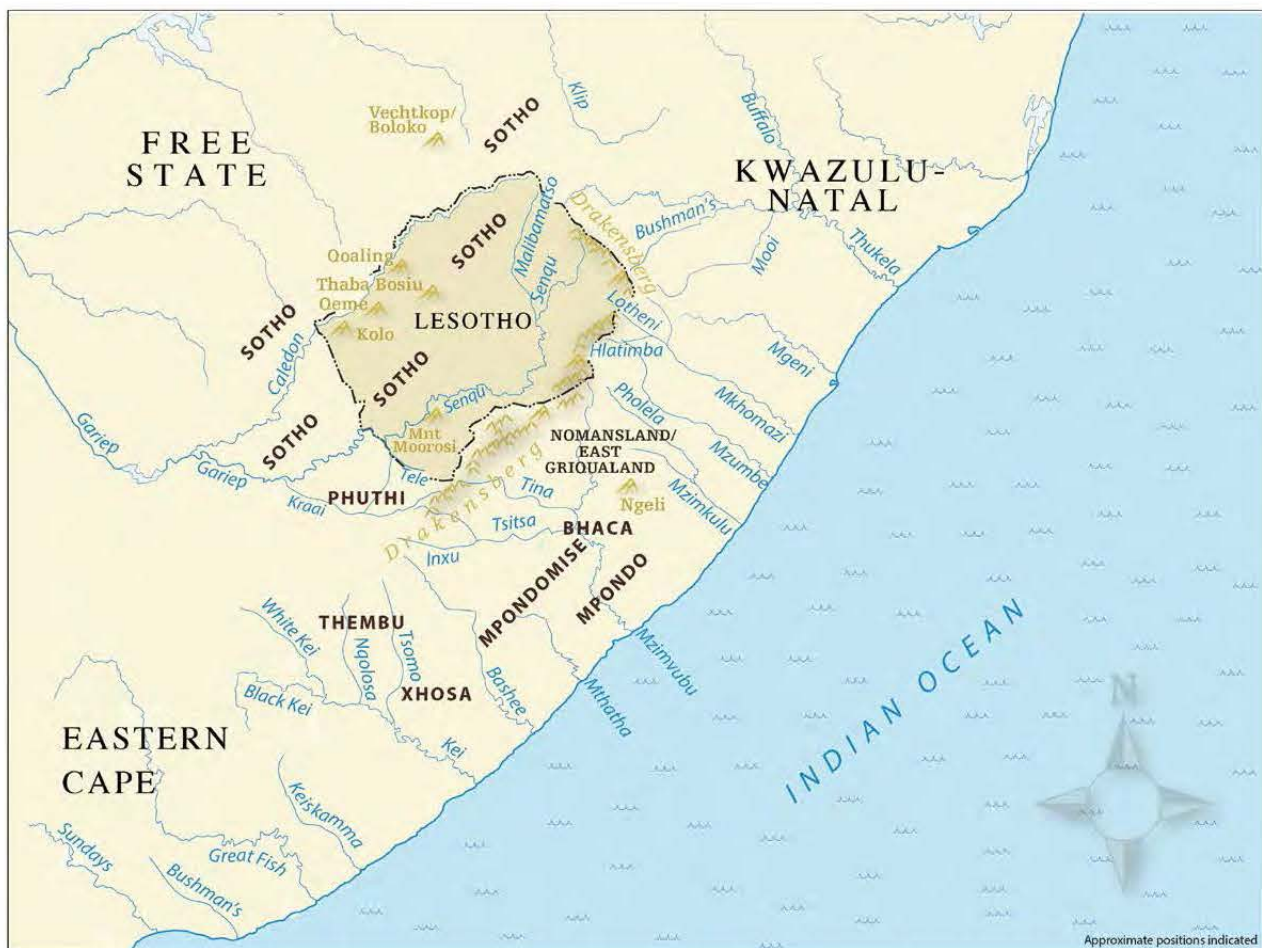
LATER INTERACTION BETWEEN NGUNI AND SOTHO GROUPS AND THE SOUTH-EASTERN SAN

*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



The approximate location of some Southern Nguni and Southern Sotho groups c. 1850.

After maps in Wright (1971) and Vinnicombe (1976).

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 Koena, 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.



A "Kaffer" village. By Samuel Daniell.

Source: Library of Parliament.

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 *Batuas*, 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 Nhlanguwini 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 *Batuas* 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.



Zulus in their kraal with their cattle and sheep. By George French Angas.

Source: Library of Parliament.



A Zulu hunting dance. By George French Angas.
Source: Library of Parliament.



European and Nguni hunters driving in an eland.
Source (original): Cornwallis Harris (1852). *The Wild Sports of Southern Africa*. London: H.G. Bohn.



Hunting antelope.

Source: Wood, J.G. (1868). *The Natural History of Man*. London: Routledge.



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.



A sketch, from the imagination, of pursued San raiders shooting stolen cattle with poisoned arrows.

Source: Wood, J.G. (1868). *The Natural History of Man*. London: Routledge.

Other Xhosa groups were also known to be on poor terms with the San. Lichtenstein, Barrow and Ludwig Alberti, 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. Alberti, 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"

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.

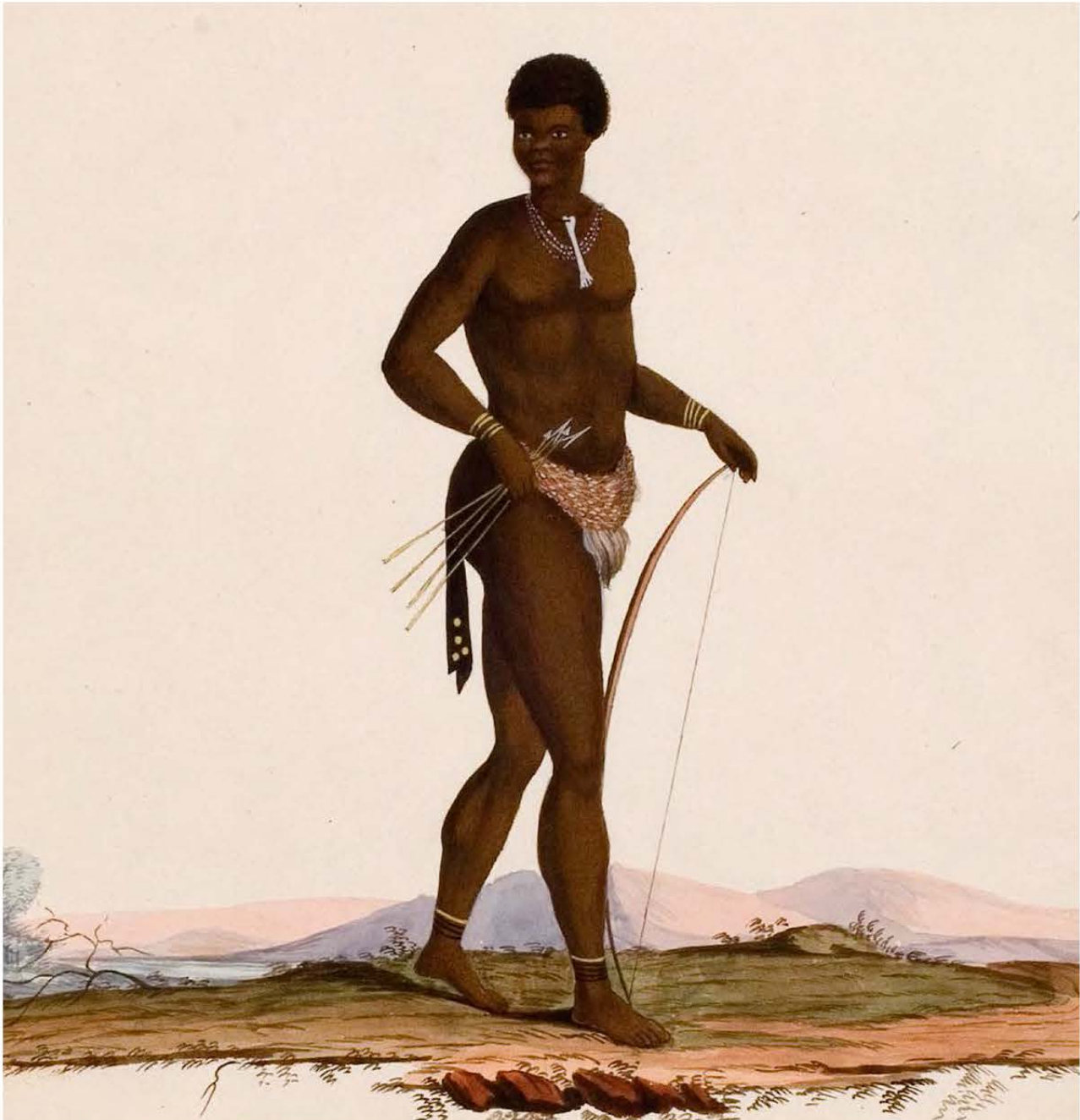
Source: Wood, J.G. (1868). *The Natural History of Man*. London: Routledge.

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.



Gonaqua man (note the bow and arrows). By Francois Le Vaillant.

Source: Library of Parliament.

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.



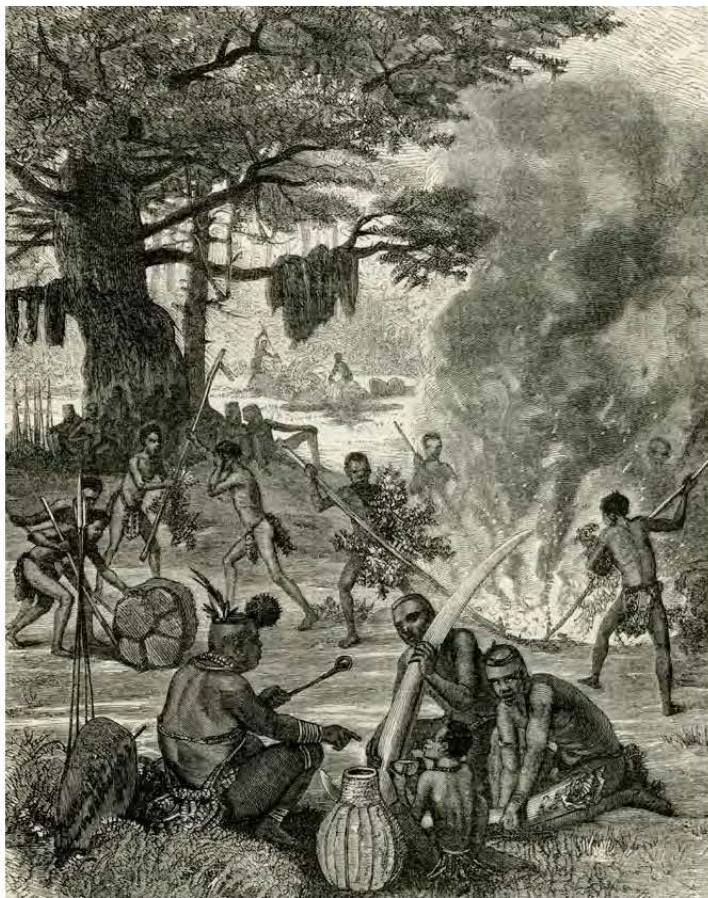
An elephant caught in a game pit.

Source: Library of Parliament.



Elephant meat being smoked. By Francois Le Vaillant.

Source: Library of Parliament.



Cooking an elephant's foot.

Source: Wood, J.G. (1868). *The Natural History of Man*. London: Routledge.

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 "Soaquis" 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.