

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.

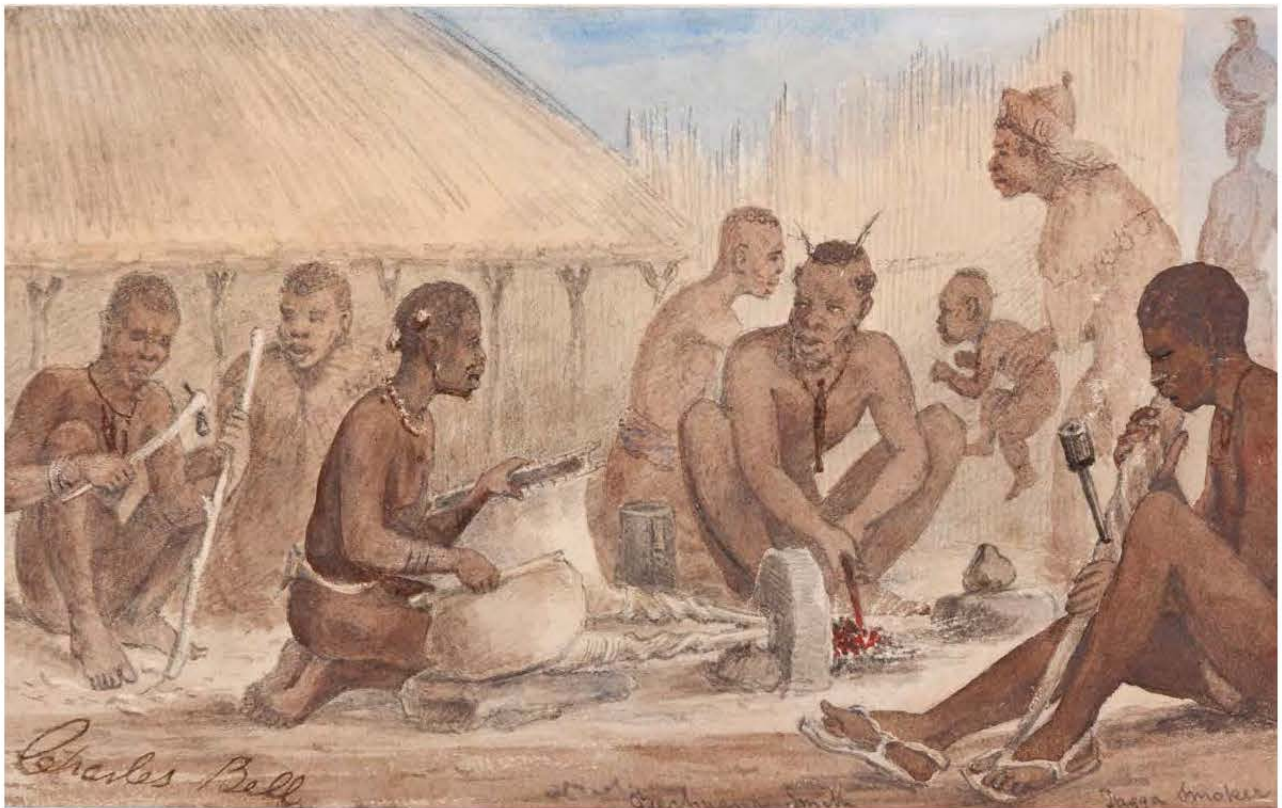


A sketch of the dagga plant and a Khoe man smoking its leaves.

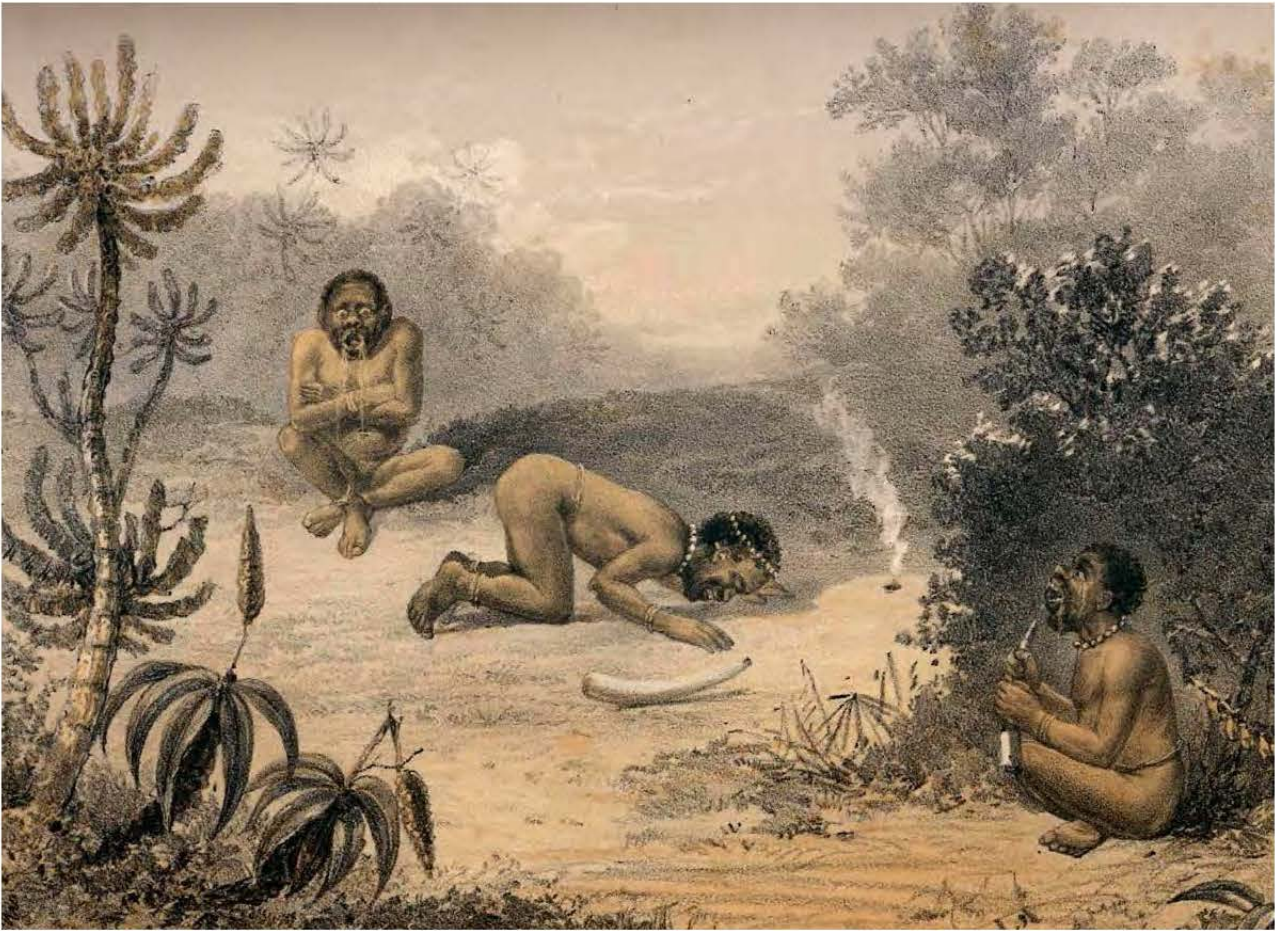
Source: Kolb, P. (1731). *The Present State of the Cape of Good Hope*. London.



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.



Dagga smokers.

Source: Lucas, T.I. (1861). *Pen and Pencil Reminiscences of a Campaign in South Africa*. London: Day.

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.



Zulu women making beer. By George French Angas.

Source: Library of Parliament.

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 Hintsá, 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, Hintsá’s people, and San were living adjacent to, or together with, other Xhosa groups at this time.



Hintsa.

Source: Alexander, J.E. (1837). *Narrative of a Voyage of Observation ...* London: Colburn.

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 “Tambu’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 “Tambu’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.



A Thembu man. By Francois Le Vaillant.  
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 Kgatla clans – although recent research suggests that the Fokeng had an Nguni origin.



Sotho warriors in about 1834. By Charles Davidson Bell.

Source: Cape Archives.

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.

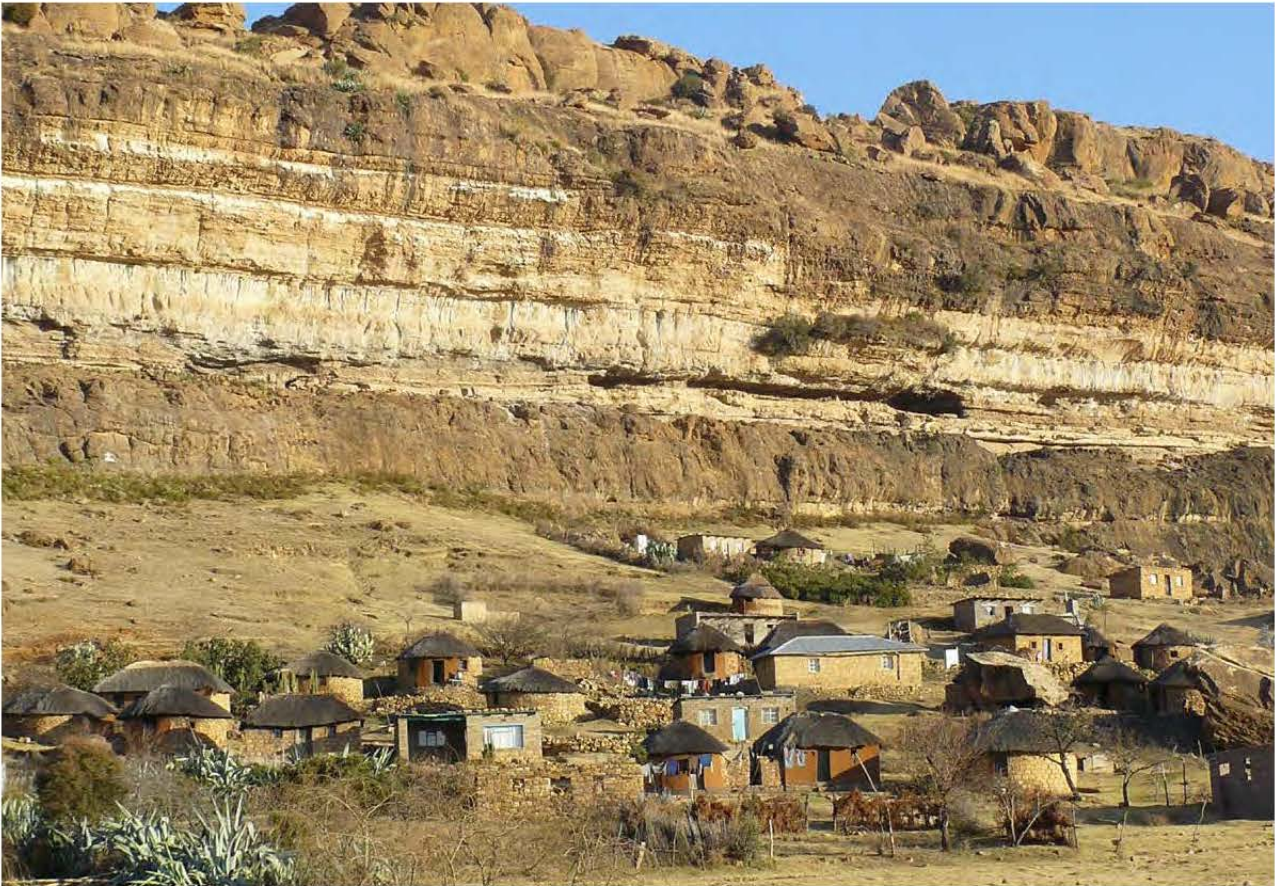
“According to his account ... before the time of his birth, parties of (Sotho-Tswana) had been established in the country where he was born; and had for some time after their arrival in it lived in tolerable friendship with the Bushmen. (These people), however, not continuing satisfied with the proportion 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.

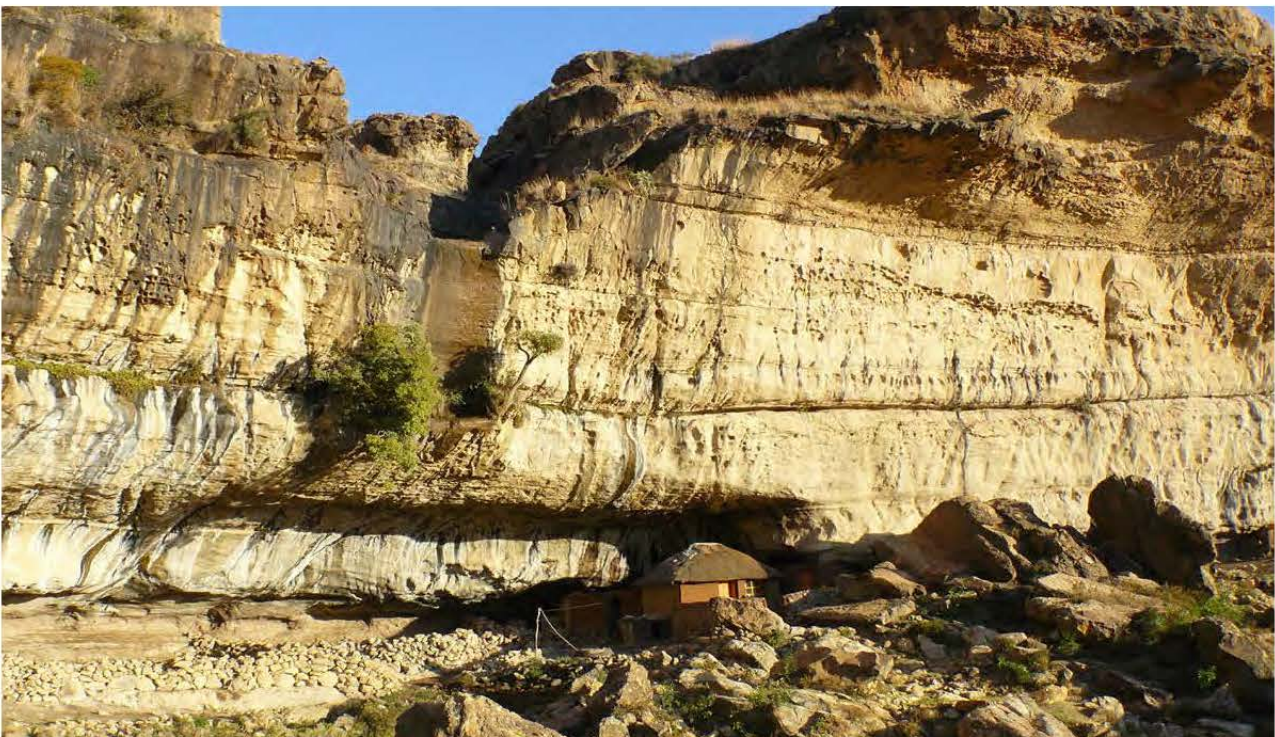
Other immigrant Sotho farmers are said to have intermarried with the San. In the later eighteenth century a Phetla chief, Matelile, married a San woman who was living in a cave at a place which came to be known as Ntlo-Kholo. Matelile is said to have asked his wife to come and live with him in his village, 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-Khoho today.

Source: the author.



A traditional healer's hut built in the shelter of Ntlo-Khoho.

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.



Moletsane.

Source: Gill, S. (1993). *A Short History of Lesotho*. Morija, Lesotho: Morija Museum and Archives.

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 Zwibe, 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.



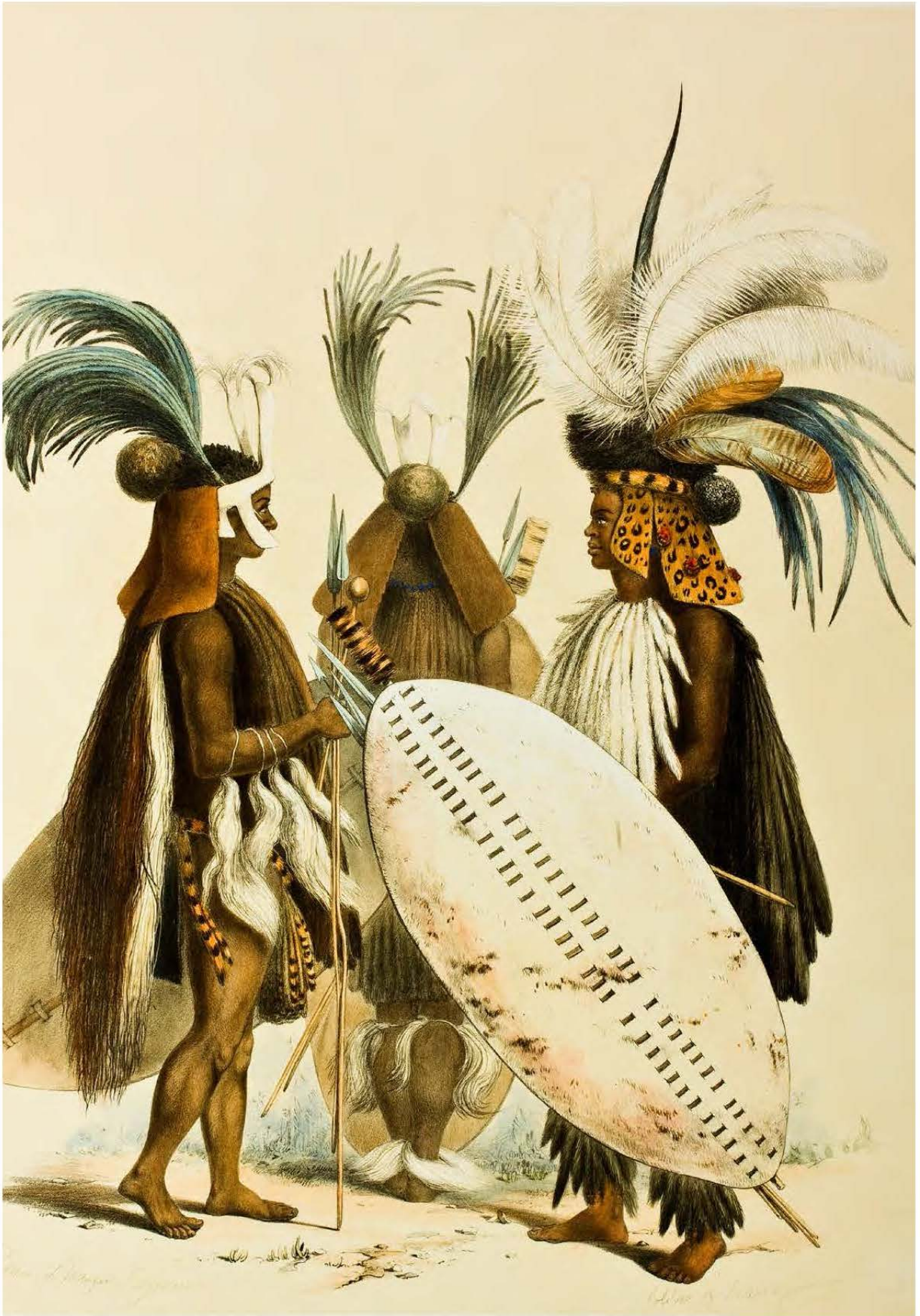
A statue of Shaka, based on a contemporary sketch.

Photo source: Unknown.



A Zulu warrior – Utimuni, a nephew of Shaka. By George French Angas.

Source: Library of Parliament.



Zulu warriors. By George French Angas.

Source: Library of Parliament.



A Tlokoa warrior under MaNthatisi. By "W.J."

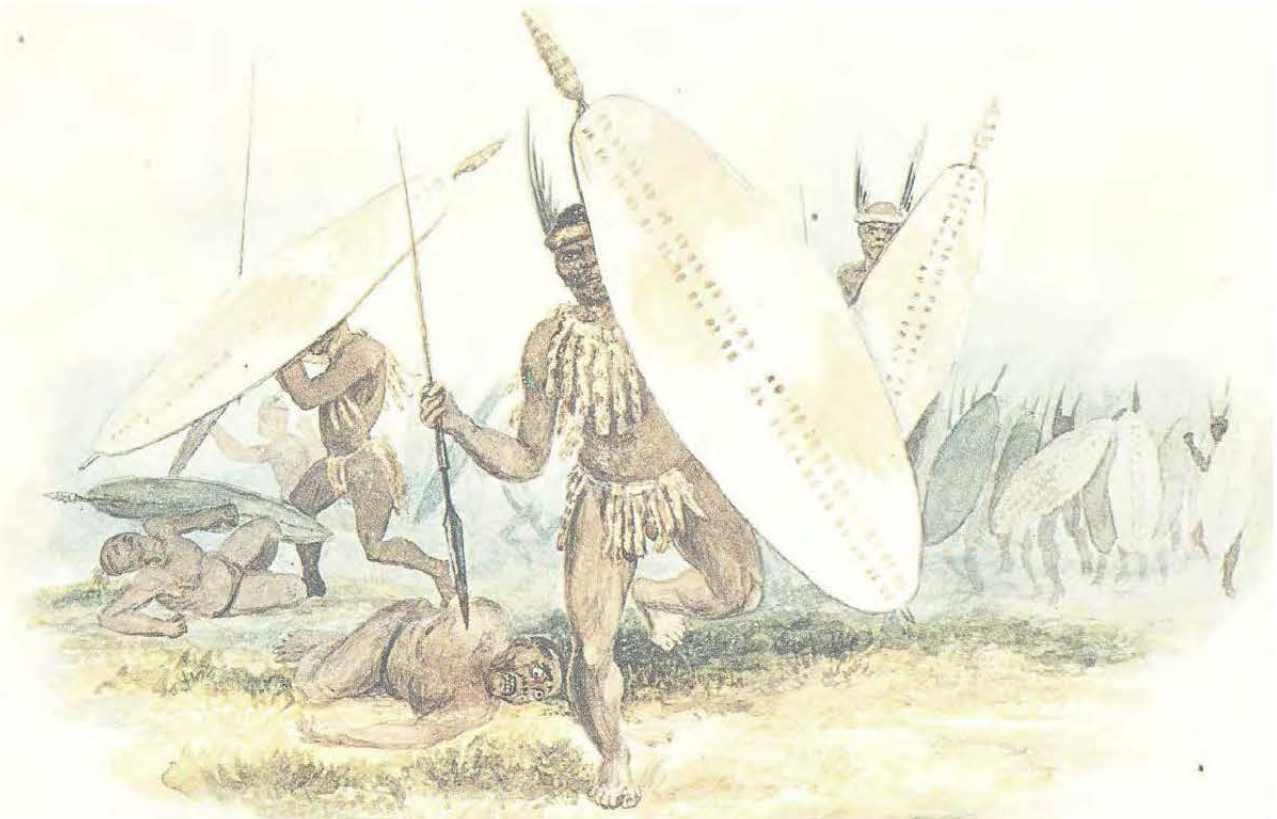
Source: Library of Parliament.

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.



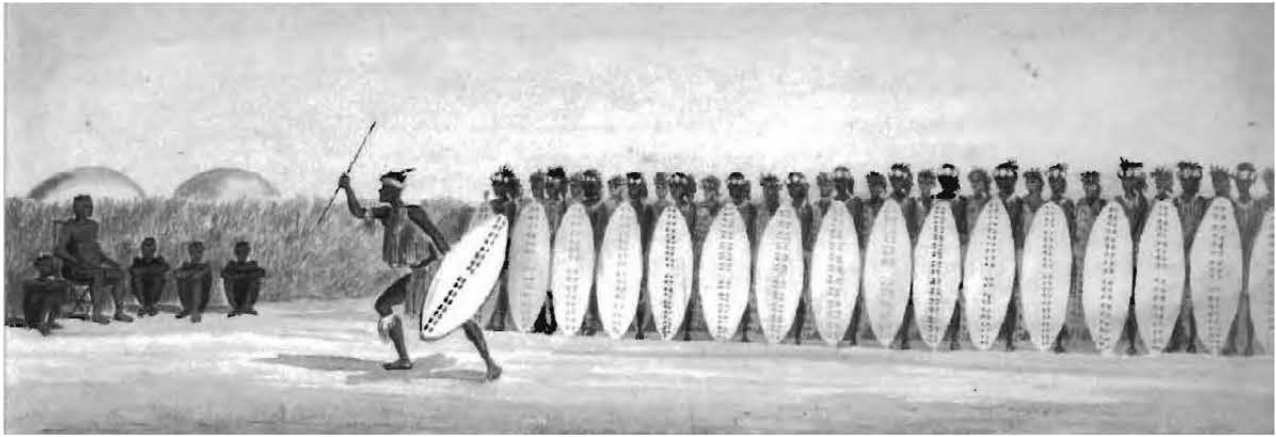
Two sketches of Sotho cannibals.

Source (original): Arbusset, T. and Daumas, F. (1842), *Relation d'un Voyage d'Exploration au Nord-Est de la Colonie du Cap de Bonne-Espérance*. Paris: Bertrand.



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 Mpondo 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 Nhlanguwini 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 Gariiep) 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.



Moorosi.

Source: Gill, S. (1993). *A Short History of Lesotho*. Morija, Lesotho: Morija Museum and Archives.

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.