

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 Nqabayoy 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. Nqabayoy's band, who lived on the Tina River, were related to that of Mdwebo, and hence to Mandela. It seems that Nqabayoy'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 Nqabayō'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 Nqabayō'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. Nqabayoy, unlike other men in the band, had two wives and he controlled the preparation and dispensing of the poison for their arrows.

In 1857 Nqabayoy fell out with the Thembu chief, Mgudhluwa, by which time Silayi had returned to the Thembu. Three members of Nqabayoy's band stole horses from this chief, who surrounded and attacked the San at Gubenxa. All the San men, other than those (including Nqabayoy) 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 Mgudhluwa's knowledge. The survivors of the band took refuge in the territory of Mditshwa, 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.



**Molapo.**

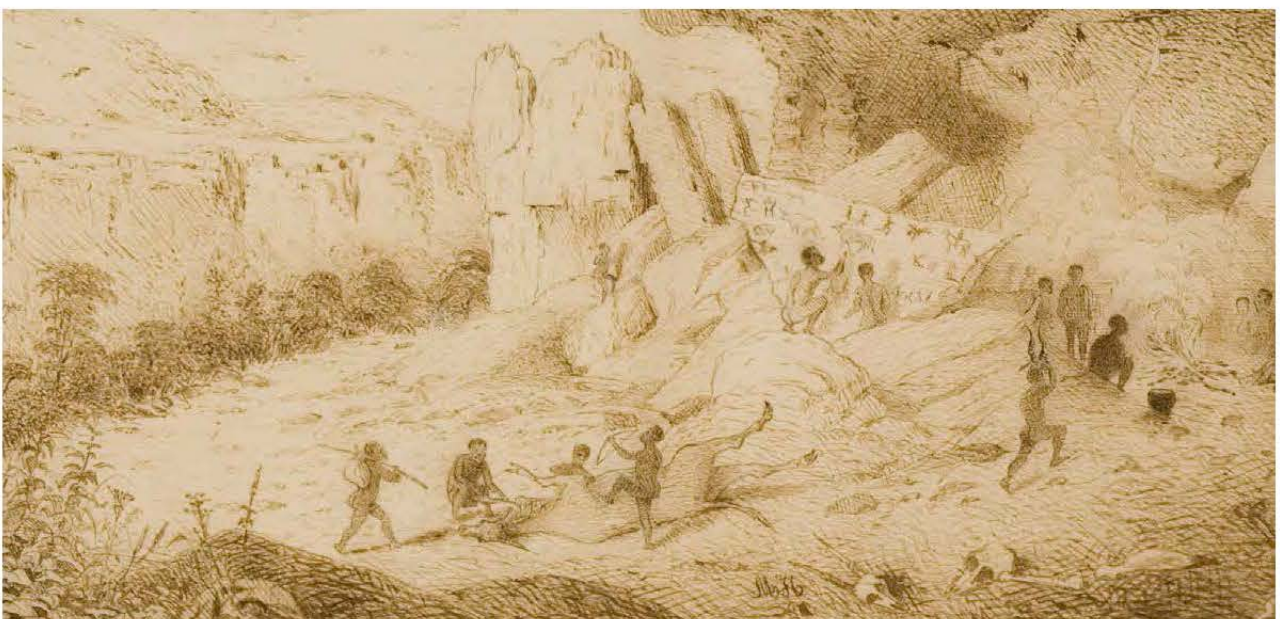
Source: Gill, S. (1993). *A Short History of Lesotho*. Morija, Lesotho: Morija Museum and Archives



Jonathan.

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

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.



A sketch, from the imagination, of San artists at work. By Mark Hutchinson.

Source: Library of Parliament.





Sehonghong Cave.

Source: Peter Mitchell.

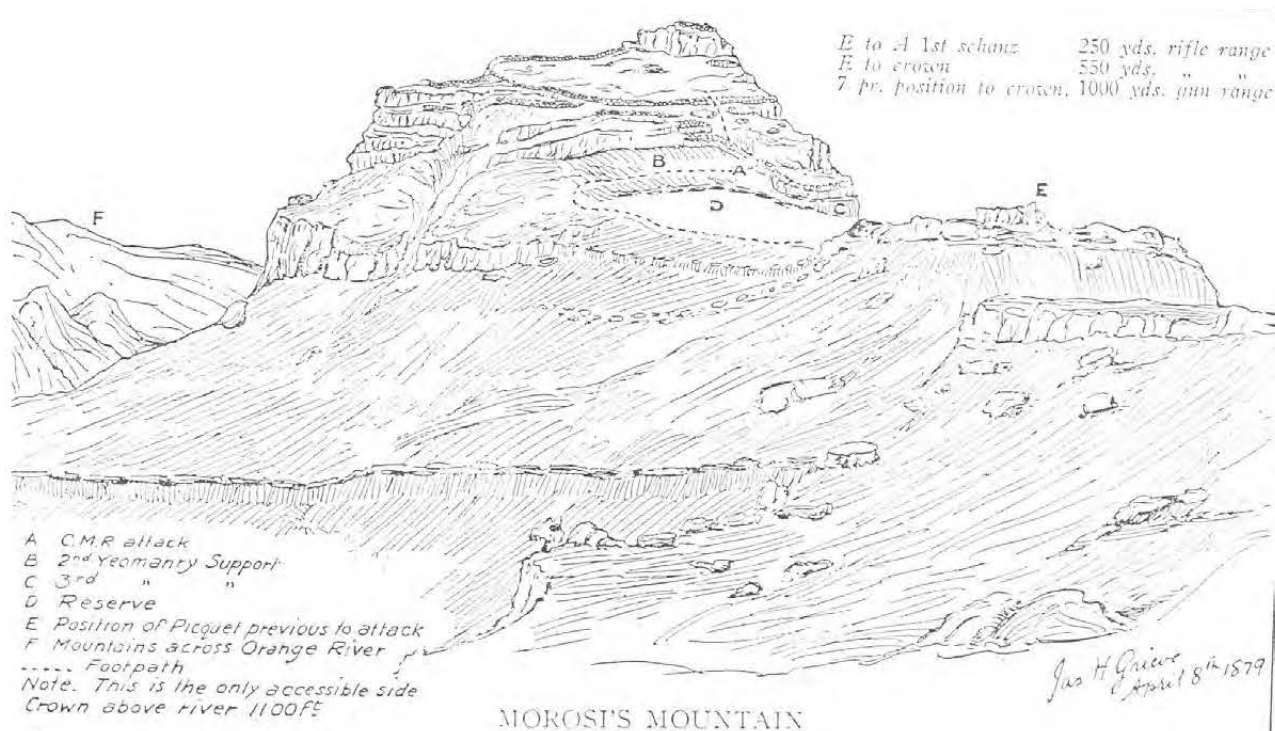
The defeat and death of Soai enabled the Sotho to expand into the Lesotho highlands without fear of further attacks by San. Some San now sought refuge in East Griqualand, as well as areas as far afield as Kimberley and Harrismith. Others were taken in by their allies and kin, Moorosi's Phuthi, but the 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, Mabile, 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.

Source: Tylden, G. (1950). *The Rise of the Basuto*. Cape Town: Juta.



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

Mpondomise 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