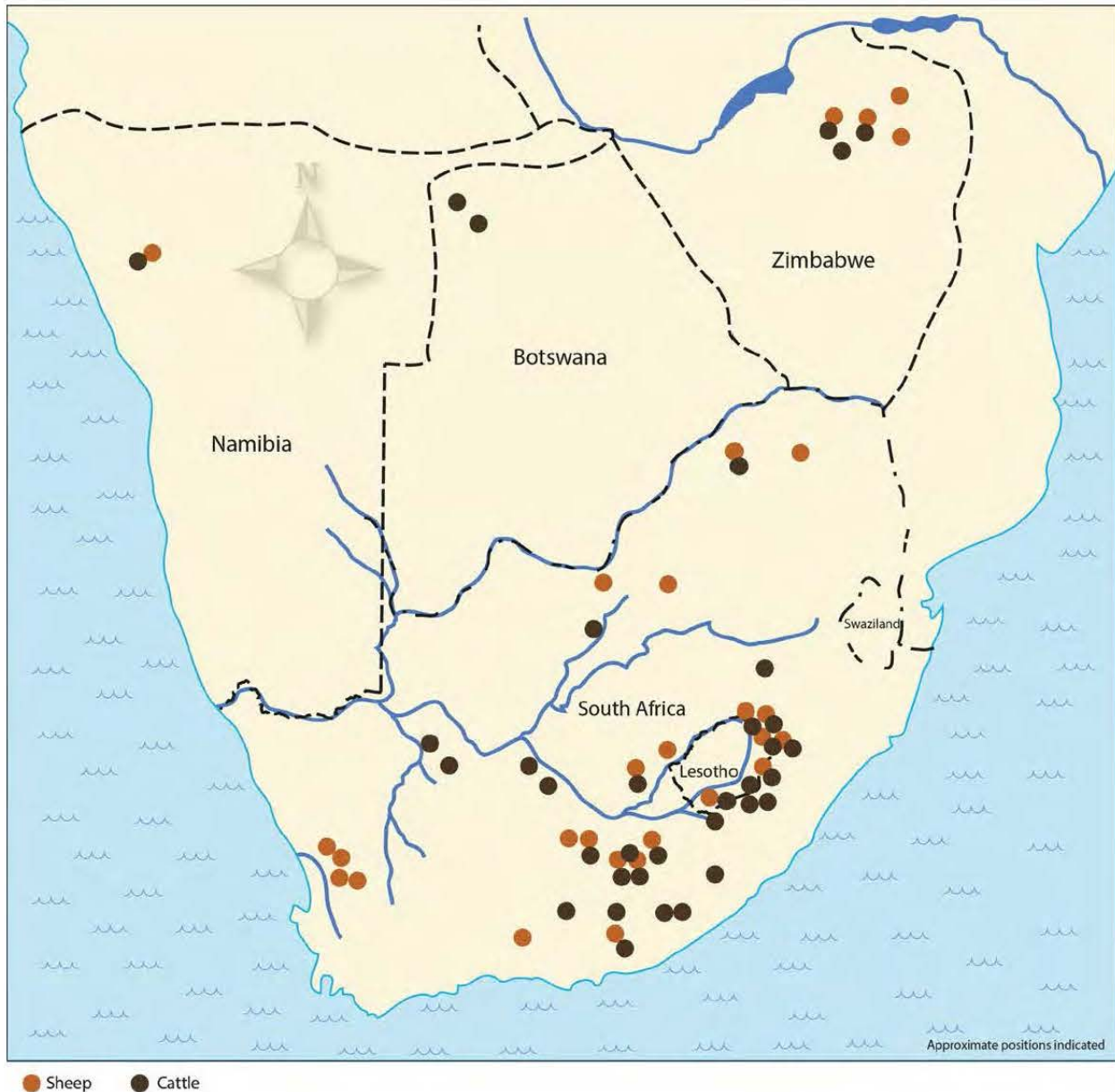


Shamans, who are wearing animal skins, in the process of transforming into these animals. After Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1999). *Images of Power*, Fig 76 b. Cape Town: Southern Book Publishers.

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 therianthrope 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 therianthrope 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.

## CHANGES IN SAN ROCK ART AFTER CONTACT



Distribution of the main areas with rock paintings and engravings depicting cattle and sheep in southern Africa.

*After maps in Deacon, H. and Deacon, J. (1999).*

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.



Fat-tailed sheep.

Source: Woodhouse Collection, UP.



Fat-tailed sheep.

Source: the author.

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 southeastern 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.



Fingerdots, 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.



A cow/ox/bull painted in the earlier, shaded fineline style.

Source: the author.



A large herd of cattle painted in the fine-line style.

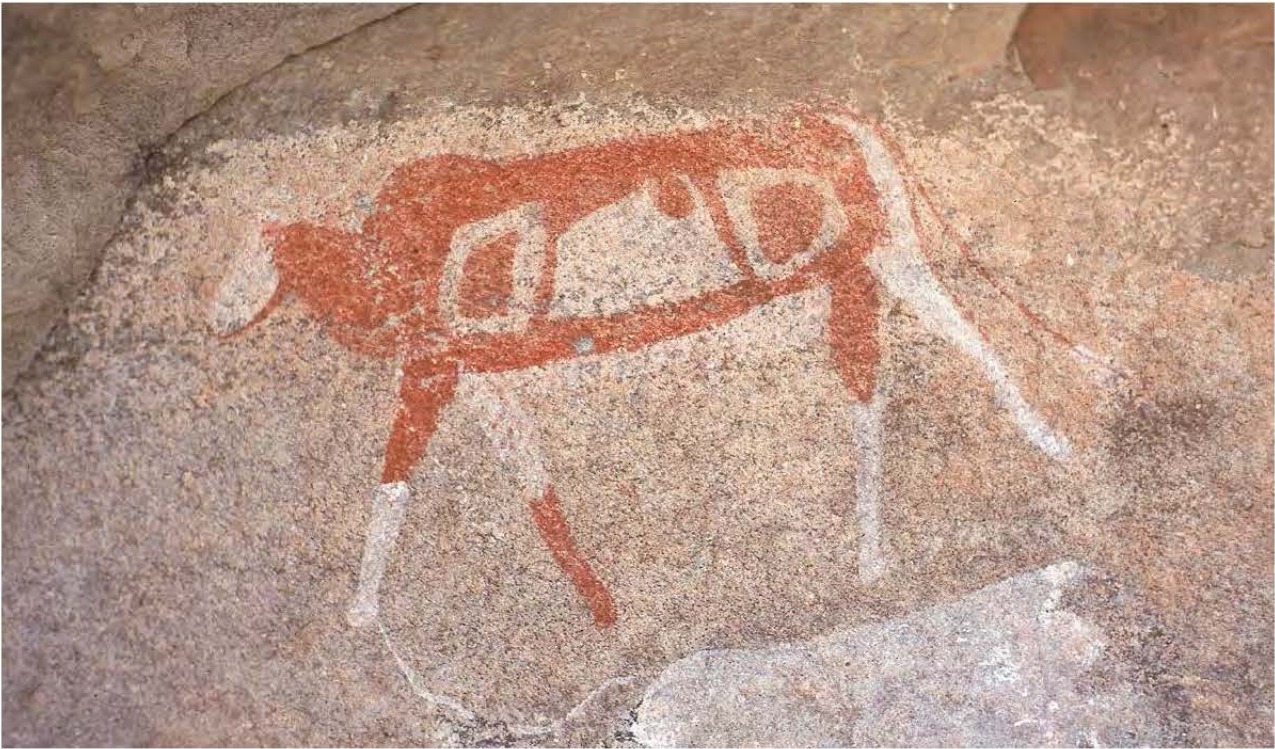
Source: the author.

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.



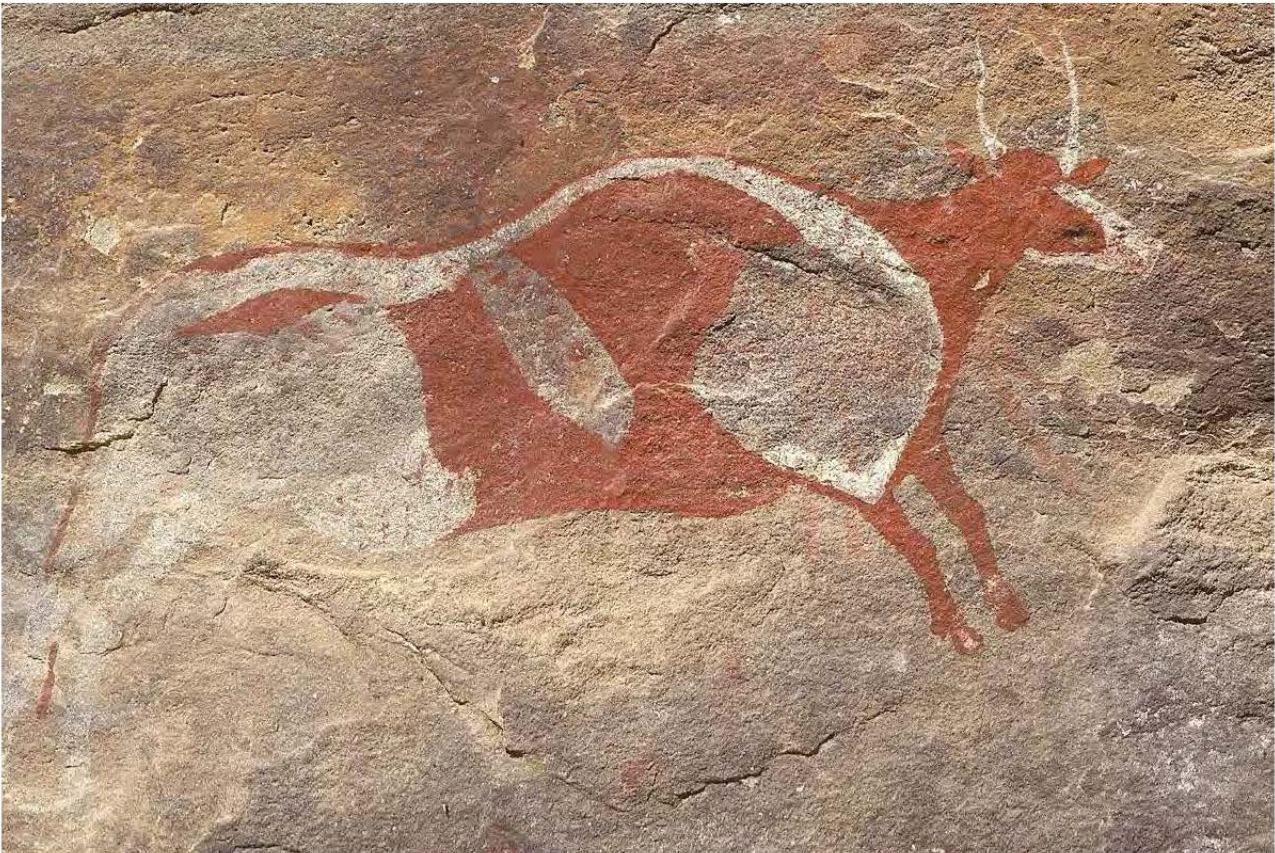
Eland painted in the later period - with bright orange pigment and in a “blocked” style.

Source: Woodhouse Collection, UP.



A finely-painted cow/ox/bull with patterned hide, in the blocked style.

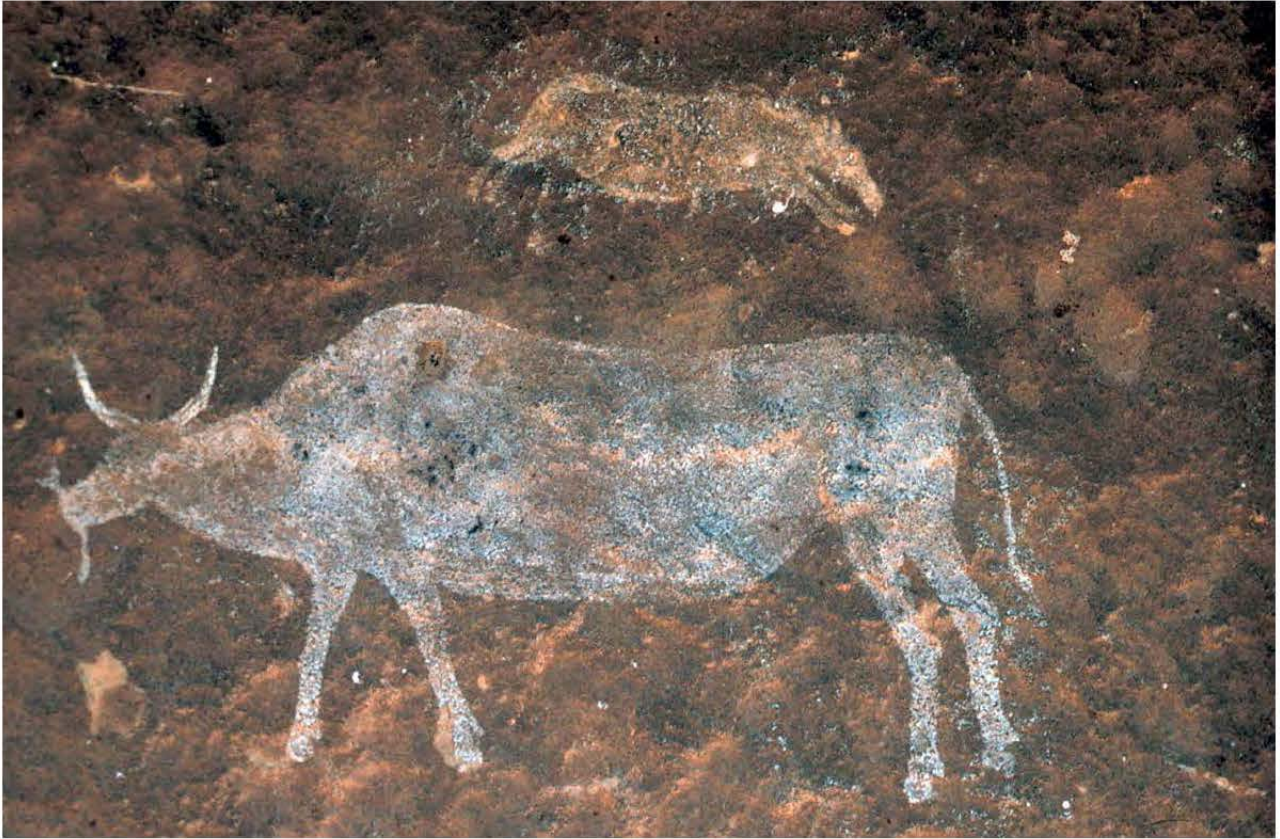
Source: National Museum, Free State.



A finely-painted cow/ox/bull in the blocked style.

Source: National Museum, Free State.





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.



Cattle and horses painted in the later "blocked" style.

Source: the author.

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.



A Sotho shield superimposed on a painting of a cow/ox/bull.

Source: Woodhouse Collection, UP.

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.

Source: Stow, G.W. and Bleek, D.F. (1930). *Rock Paintings in South Africa*. London: Methuen & Co. .



"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.