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I Masiangoako.

Knowledge and conceptions of the Isama  
about natural phenomena.

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The creation of the sun, moon and stars is unknown to us, we just look upon them as heavenly bodies. There is nobody who knows about their creation. The sun is even worse than the other bodies because we do not find any name given to it or that anyone ever took any notice of it. The creation of the moon too is unknown, we only know this about the moon, that our fathers say that a long time ago, a certain man cut thorn bushes on a Sunday. The god of his fathers then put him on the moon with a thorn bush that had fallen on top of him. Even to-day he is still carrying that thorn bush on the moon, we teach our children too that on the moon, there is a man carrying a thorn bush, he cut a thorn bush on a Sunday and then the god of his fathers caused him to carry that thorn bush. What we know further about the moon, is that our grandfathers have told us that if a person should look at the moon at night, that person will wet his bed. Every child then has been taught by its mother that if it looks at the moon, it will wet its bed. Every child therefore, takes great care not to look at the moon.

No one dares to look at it, we are all afraid. You just give it a glance not looking at it for a long time. No one has ever tried to find out whether this is true or not. The eclipse of the moon is neither watched nor wondered at. We assume that if there is an eclipse of the moon or the sun the one or the other is dead because this happens when no clouds or smoke cover either of them. We do not count the days of the month, we just notice when it is new moon. When it comes out late in the night we say that the moon has gone into darkness, that is to say, it is towards the end of the month. There is no prohibition upon any kind of work which one undertakes to perform. But what is well known with regard to the moon, which is bad is this that when it is new moon, and it lies on one side, it carries sickness, the people will be attacked by sickness, although it does not start when the moon is in that position, the sickness will come about as it goes into darkness.

We are quite aware of that, and as far as we know, that does happen, and people do get sick.

1. When it lies in this position, that is as shown on sketch on page II, it pours out a lot of sicknesses, people will suffer from colds, influenza, headaches and other sicknesses.

2. When it is in this position, as shown on sketch II, it is pregnant of disease, it is not pouring it out, it is taking it upwards and not downwards, people do not suffer a lot from influenza because the sickness is held upwards.

Stars. Stars are well known and we take a particular note of them. We have also given them names and we know that they go with the times of the year. At a certain time of the year you may see one there or at the other end. You will then know what time of the year it is.

These are the well-known stars:-

Selemela - Jupiter  
 Dikolobe - Comet(?)  
 Molaladi - The Milky Way  
 Naka - Morning star

KIOBLASIO (Mars) is a well-known star; in summer it sets after sunset, and as the summer season goes on, it rises in the night until the summer time comes again.

Selemela (Jupiter) is a star which appears to be one, but if you look at it, it looks as if there are many. We observe the nights by it. We say when it is here, it is dawn, and when it is there it is still night time.

Dikolobe (Comet?) is a group of stars and we observe the times of the year by them. That is to say, when they reach a certain spot it is this season of the year, when they rise in the night time, it is winter, and when they rise early in the night time, summer has set in.

Naka (Morning star) is a star which comes out in winter, at the time when the wind blasts the crops. That is to say, according to our observation, it is seen in winter. But we know nothing

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nothing about the creation of the stars. We see them, and we have given them names, not knowing how they came to be. We came to existence to find them with names which our fathers gave them. They were watching them and they knew how they indicated the seasons of the year. In our times too we called them by the names with which we found our fathers calling them we did not invent different names for them.

Lightning and Thunder: We know nothing about the creation of lightning and thunder, but the witch-doctors tell us that lightning (tladi) is a bird, and (legadima) is the sound of its wings as it flies in the clouds. The witchdoctors are trying hard to capture this bird, it is known only to them, and as for our part, we do not know it. The witchdoctors make their own lightning too, and they call it (tladi-mothoana). This artificial lightning is more severe than the lightning we get when it rains. (Tladi-mothoana) is a person, he flies by medicines which he knows, he goes into a creased ox hide, so that when he flies in the air the sound is like that of thunder when it rains. The clouds of the artificial lightning form just a streak, and when you see them you will wonder what kind of clouds they are. Their thunder too is like the cracking sound of a whip. You will find them moving fast. Those who know will tell you straightaway that it is "tladi-mothoana".

Rainbow: The Milky way is something that we know very well, we know that it drives the rain away. If it commences to rain and the milky way then appears, the rain will immediately disappear, we do not know the reason for this. We know nothing about its creation, we only see it appearing. Our fathers have told us nothing about it, we have not made a thorough investigation as to how it came about and where it came from.

Rain: We have no idea of how the rain was created. Other witchdoctors know how to cause rain to fall, but they do not explain to us as to where it comes from. Other doctors which which make rain take great care to see whether there are cured medicines in the land. The reason is that there are some people

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to go about the country. There are people who do not take things into consideration. The creation of the earth, the mountains, the lakes and the sea is unknown. These were in existence and were just as they are when the people saw them. These are the well-known mountains in our neighbourhood: The Bohole mountains, Rakatane, Katuroga, Ngoloe, Segolaleetse, Moreteletse. The only spring we know is that of Kolobeng. There is nothing important that we can say about these mountains. Moreteletse is where the Bakgatla were killed by the Boers after they had stolen the latter's cattle. When the Bakgatla fled from the Boers, they took refuge in the Moreteletse mountains. Some were captured before they reached them and others were captured in the mountains.

Fire: We don't know who discovered fire, but we learn that our fathers kindled fire by rubbing two sticks together. We also kindled fire by rubbing two sticks together. They say that

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a man made a hole in a piece of wood by knocking wooden pegs into it, and as he continued to knock harder, he noticed smoke rising and eventually, he saw the flame. It was then that he noticed that if a person rubbed a piece of wood against another one, fire was kindled. From that time the people began to kindle fire by rubbing two sticks together. This went on until I also got old enough to have my full senses. Europeans also came to inquire about this from us.

But before, there was a fire which was kindled by flint stone; this I do not know. They got hold of a stone and hit it with another one. They caused the spark and was turned over and over till it flamed. When it was kindled, they saw to it that it never went out again, by continually adding firewood. If it went out at the 'lapa', they went to get it at the 'kgotla', not during the day but in the morning and in the evening. People are not allowed to take fire and go round the village with it. By doing so, they would be destroying the medicines which protect the village. Firewood is taken care of, there is wood which is never used as firewood for people to warm themselves. That is why people should be careful, otherwise the children will warm themselves at the fire made from such wood, thus rendering useless the medicines of their fathers. Wood with which fire is not made for people to warm themselves are these: Moretologa, Mositatlout, Mmilo, Mokoerekoere.

The reason why people do not warm themselves at the fire made by wood of the 'Moretologa' and 'Mmilo' trees is that our fathers told us that if a person warmed himself at the fire made by the wood of these trees, his cows would calve males only and there would be no female calf. That is the reason for our fear.

Mositatlou: They say that many people have the elephant as their totem. That is why people do not make fire to warm themselves with it.

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Mokoerekoere: There is no reason to prevent people from making fire to warm themselves with it. We found nobody making fire with it and so we also got afraid.

When people warm themselves at the fire, the men sit on one side at their fire, they sit with the boys. The women sit with the girls at their fire in the 'lapa', they do not sit together with the men at the fire. The men's fire is at the 'kgotla'. There were no veld fires because the people did not go about the country carrying fire with them, the fire remained only at home. Fire was not made anywhere and everywhere a person wished. The fire of the initiation school is for men only who have undergone the rite of circumcision and they warm themselves at the initiation school. These are the fires:

The fire at the 'kgotla' for men (Kgoro)

The fire at the 'lapa' for women.

The various groups of men sat round the fire at their own 'kgoro', but at the chief's 'kgotla' the old men sat round the fire, men who fetched meat nearby. Some were appointed by the chief himself at the 'kgotla' to keep the fire burning. Others went to the 'kgotla' of their own accord to pass time there and to listen to the news. The wood for making fire at the 'kgotla' is collected by the age-groups (mephato). When the firewood has been used up, the chief calls out an age group and instructs the men to go and collect wood for the old men. Women cook beer and bring it to these old men so that they may not be impatient and leave the kgotla without anyone looking after it. The chief passes his time at the 'kgotla' too with the old men, but he sleeps in his house. The old men sleep at the 'kgotla', they have restrained themselves from sleeping at their homes.

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