

**Tlhaping:** A Tswana group, who intermarried extensively with the Korana, and who occupied an area in central Transgariep between the Langeberg and Hardcastle. At the beginning of the nineteenth century their largest town was said to have a population of 16,000 with a circumference as large as Cape Town.



A Bachapin (Tlhaping) man. Source (original): Burchell, W.J. (1822/24). *Travels in the Interior of South Africa*. 2 vols.  
London: Printed by Longman et al.

## Glossary of some other terms used in the text

**Colonists:** Europeans who occupied the territories of the southern San, and were later associated with the Cape Colony. The C is written in upper case to distinguish them from other groups, such as the Khoe, Nguni and Sotho, who also colonised the territories of the southern San.

**Dagga:** *Cannabis sativa*

**Difaqane/Mfecane:** Sesotho/Nguni terms referring to the period of widespread social disruption and conflict in southern Africa, lasting from about 1816 to 1835, initiated by the expansion of a number of chiefdoms in present-day KwaZulu-Natal, including the expansion of the Zulu under Shaka.

**drostdy:** magistrate's court

**Gariep:** Khoe-San name for the Orange River

**landdrost:** magistrate

**Land van Waveren:** the Tulbagh valley

**loan-farm:** an area of about 6,000 acres, measured out from a central point, and reserved for the exclusive use of a farmer

**Maloti:** Pronounced "Maluti/Malooti". A Sesotho word meaning "mountains" - those of the highlands of (eastern) Lesotho and parts of the Free State.

**Nu Gariep:** "Black River" – the upper reaches of the Gariep, above its confluence with the Vaal River

**Senqu:** San (and then Sesotho) name for the Gariep/Orange River

**Transgariep** (also termed Transoranjia/Transorangia and, in one account, Hottentotia): Regions north of the Gariep River. It is with the San occupying the middle Transgariep, (the area north of the Gariep and west of its confluence with the Vaal) and the eastern Transgariep (the area north of the Gariep and east of its confluence with the Vaal - roughly the southern Free State) that this book is primarily concerned.

**raad:** council

**veldkorporaal/veldwachtmeester:** official drawn from the ranks of the Dutch farmers whose task was to uphold the authority of the landdrost and organize or lead commandos.

## PREFACE

On the edge of a river valley in the mountains of the south-western Cape there is a farmhouse that is typical of the kind encountered in the area - a solid, utilitarian building fronted by pretty shrubs and a large, sheltering tree. I have passed this house on many occasions and each time I have felt affected by the place in some way. Not by the house itself, which is neither particularly beautiful nor well-set in the landscape, but rather by the directness of its connection with another, earlier place of shelter - a cave set high on the mountain across the valley and directly visible from the farmhouse.

Any informed person arriving at this point along the road into the mountains is required to think about the link between these two places. The cave, home to the first people of these mountains, its walls the setting for a number of particularly beautiful panels of rock paintings, through which the deepest religious beliefs of these people were expressed. And the house, sacred in its own way, home to successive generations of farmers who had worked the soil of the valley, pasturing their herds and flocks in the surrounding mountains. The two seem connected by an almost tangible line of power. Yet it is difficult to say whether this is an energy of the kind expressed in the rock art by the thin, wandering line that connects people and animals in some profound and mystical way, or whether it is related to the force that drives the bullet to its mark.

It was partly a desire to answer questions such as this one that lay behind my decision, made about 20 years ago, to write an account of the history of contact between the southern San and other groups. Archaeologists and historians have powers to visit and bring news from the land of the dead, and if there are any dead in southern Africa who need speaking for it is the San people. In view of the fact that there existed a wealth of dispersed archaeological and historical information on the history and art of southern San groups, it seemed to me that it would be worth synthesising this material in one volume which would provide a broad account of a virtually extinct people's history and art - from first contact with immigrant pastoralist and agriculturist groups, at least 1,600 years ago, until the demise of the painting tradition, around the end of the nineteenth century - or possibly a few decades later.

This book is intended to act as an introduction to later southern San history and art for the informed layperson, for students, and for those people whose specialised research interests are related to the theme of this book, but who would like a reasonably accessible overview of the subject. It serves as an introduction to the archaeological and historical themes it covers, although, partly as a result of a bias in my own research interests and partly because of the uneven depth in researches into San archaeology, history and art, some themes and periods are covered more fully than others. The rock engravings, for example, which tend to occur further north than the rock paintings, are not discussed. On the other hand, relationships that developed between south-eastern San and Southern Nguni and Sotho communities, the focus of my own research, as well as the particularly well-researched history of contact between the Cape San and the European settlers, are presented and discussed in some depth.

After the arrival of literate European groups, far more information concerning the southern San became available, in written form, and this is reflected in the greater attention given here to this period than to earlier times. Although San groups, and descendants of these people, continued to exist and interact with other groups throughout the twentieth century, I have chosen to end this account of interaction with the last rock paintings known to have been produced in Lesotho - in about 1930, by people of part-San, part-Phuthi descent.

I have tried, as far as possible, to make this book more widely accessible by including anecdotal and interesting historical material, but have also included sufficient detail for this book to act as a useful source of archaeological and historical information for anyone studying its subject. As I remark in the note on my sources, however, I have drawn on a wide range of material, some of it very detailed, and one of the intended functions of the book is to point the reader who wants to explore a particular area of interest in more depth to the specialised texts listed at the end of this book.

## Introduction

*They were a fragment of an ancient world, their virtue unknown, their ... puny malice their only introduction.*

Margaret Spilhaus

*Dr Lichtenstein asks "What had a people like the Bushmen to lose - they who are everywhere at home, who know not the value of any land?". To which I would reply, "He loses the means of subsistence: and what more can the richest monarch lose?"*

Reverend Robert Moffat

The arrival of Khoekhoe pastoralists and Nguni, Sotho and European farmers in the lands occupied by southern San hunter-gatherers had a profound effect on the way of life of the San, South Africa and Lesotho's first inhabitants. This book relates how these new groups impacted on southern San society and art. The major theme of this book is the history of the dispossession of an aboriginal people of their native lands by more powerful groups, and their long and bitter struggle as they first resisted and then attempted to come to terms with this loss. However, this is also an account of the changes brought about in the ancient tradition of rock painting by the coming together of different peoples within the same landscape, as well as the potential for economic and cultural exchange presented by this process. In some cases, the establishment of trading and ritual relationships as well as friendships and marriage ties between southern San groups and their new neighbours contributed to the development and enrichment of the societies and cultures of these groups as well as the formation of new groups of mixed descent and cultures. Both the processes of conflict and separation between the southern San and other groups as well as the forces that drew them together will be described in the following chapters.

Yet who were the southern San, whose history and art forms the subject matter of this book and who are now almost all extinct? This may appear to be a simple question, but defining exactly which groups comprise the southern San is not always an easy matter. Broadly speaking, however, they are considered to be the aboriginal people of South Africa and Lesotho. In this book I have focused largely, but not exclusively, on the San of the western Cape, south of the Sak River, and those south-eastern San groups who occupied the Eastern Cape, Free State, KwaZulu-Natal and Lesotho. I have dealt only peripherally with the archaeology and history of the San north of the Vaal River and those of the far Northern Cape.



**Distribution of /Xam and some other San language groups in the nineteenth century.**

*After a map by Anthony Traill in Skotnes (1996).*

Although regional groups, such as the /Xam San, had names for themselves, as far as we know the southern San did not have any word by which they referred to themselves collectively. The names which are used to refer to all these groups today, San (derived from earlier names such as Soaqua and Sonqua), Bushmen, Batwa and Baroa were given to them by the Khoekhoe (hereafter “Khoehoe”), Dutch, Nguni, and Sotho respectively.

Prior to contact with immigrant groups from the north, determining who did or did not belong to the southern San group would have been a relatively easy task. Before about 2000 years ago South Africa and Lesotho were occupied exclusively by hunter-gatherers, who were almost certainly the ancestors of the San encountered in later years by European settlers. Genetic studies have revealed that some of the present-day San descendants living in the northern Cape have a more ancient human lineage than any other group on earth. While there would have been some cultural and other differences between the aboriginal groups before contact, they would all have been composed of people who were typical hunter-gatherers and whose culture and way of life clearly set them apart from herders and farmers.

After symbiotic contact, including intermarriage, had occurred between the hunter-gatherers and immigrant herders and farmers the situation changed. Although many San groups continued to retain a way of life similar to that which they had possessed in ancient times for much of the post-contact period, hundreds of years of interaction between the southern San and other peoples, and the consequent formation of groups of mixed descent and ethnic identity, made it increasingly difficult, in some cases, to distinguish between San and non-San groups. The blurring of ethnic distinctions as a result of intermarriage and other forms of interaction between the southern San and others acted to create a more complex mix of ethnic groupings than had been the case before contact.

Thus when the Dutch began to explore the areas further to the north of the Cape Peninsula, after the establishment of the first European settlement at the Cape in 1652, it was sometimes difficult for them to distinguish between San hunter-gatherers and Khoe herders. As one archaeologist has remarked, we need the talents of a Sherlock Holmes to make sense of the confusing mix of names applied by the Colonists to the people they found occupying these areas. Terms such as Soaquas, Obiquas, Bosjesmans-Hottentots, Hottentots-Bosjesmans, Bushman-Boors and others were all used to refer to the “Bushman” group.

This confusion sometimes stemmed from misunderstandings and a lack of communication between the European Colonists and the people they encountered, but part of the problem lay in the initial inability of the Dutch to realise that the ethnic identity of some of the groups was in fact a creolized one. Not only was it often difficult to categorise these groups neatly in terms of a particular ethnic identity and associated way of life, it was also inappropriate to do so in many cases since they possessed characteristics of both herder and hunter-gatherer societies.

As we shall see in the next chapter, there were a number of ways in which this overlap of ethnic groups occurred. One was for individual members of herder groups, or even an entire group, to join up and merge with hunter-gatherer groups, or for hunter-gatherer individuals and groups to be incorporated into herder groups. The result was the formation of groups of mixed ethnic identity and racial composition. Another was for entire groups of a certain identity and culture to change their way of life and adopt that associated with other groups. Thus some Khoe pastoralists, such as the Strandlopers encountered by Van Riebeeck at Table Bay, lost their cattle and became foragers, living off shellfish and other seafoods along the shore. Other impoverished Khoe took to the mountains and subsisted by cattle raiding and hunting and gathering. Some aboriginal hunter-gatherer groups, moreover, acquired and learned to breed livestock. In all these cases it was difficult to make the distinction between hunter-gatherer and herder, and sometimes the distinction between the groups was effectively lost altogether.

That there was little to distinguish impoverished herders who had become hunter-gatherers and raiders from aboriginal people who were practising the same lifestyle is indicated by the fact that the Khoe gave them the same name, Sonqua, or variants of this word. This term probably meant “to gather”. It did not refer to an ethnic group, but rather to a general class of people who subsisted by hunting/fishing and gathering, or cattle-raiding. Most of the people referred to as Sonqua by the Khoe were probably aboriginal San, but by no means all were. It was a pejorative term that was applied to any person of low status in regard to wealth or lineage, whether these were aboriginal hunter-gatherers, people without cattle within Khoe society, or Khoe groups who had lost their cattle and were subsisting by hunting and gathering and/or cattle theft. While cultural differences almost

certainly existed between many aboriginal hunter-gatherers and those impoverished Khoe who had become San, the similarities between the groups were recognised by the Khoe who made little or no distinction between them in their terminology.

The picture that emerges, then, is of the Dutch encountering a range of groups in the years after their arrival at the Cape. At opposite ends of this social spectrum were solid cores of archetypal hunter-gatherer and herder societies who were clearly very different and easily distinguished from each other in their appearances, lifestyles and cultures. Between these two poles there were San who lived in a manner similar to Khoe groups and Khoe who lived largely or exclusively by hunting and gathering, as well as creolised groups of mixed ethnic identity composed of San, Khoe and even slaves and criminals who had escaped from the Colony.

The people whose later history and art forms the theme of this book, therefore, comprised a variety of groups, all of whom had in common the characteristic that they were termed Bushmen or variants of this name by those who recorded their history. Many of these groups were profoundly affected by the advent of herders and farmers and their societies were greatly changed as a result, while others remained relatively isolated from the immigrant groups. Almost none, however, escaped the destruction wrought by the arrival of Europeans mounted on horses and equipped with firearms, and all, in the end, were absorbed into the powerful new societies that had laid claim to their native lands.