

INVENTING THE ROLE OF PREACHER IN EAST-CENTRAL BOTSWANA:
MORUTI SEAKGANO, c1865-1953

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One of the problems in the historiography of African religions is how to talk about the movement from "traditional" religion - itself a suspicious construct - to Christianity in Africa. This process has admitted two perspectives which, although often found hand in glove, would seem to be contrasting. First, there is the indivisibility of religious change from general cultural, and even social, political, and economic [1] change; and, second, the appearance of religion as something emotive and spiritual, cathartic, prescriptive, manipulative - in short, as an entity. [2]

It seems to me that for most historians, the notion of religion embodies such referents as institution, faith, doctrines, and rituals; and these referents inform their epistemology. "Religion" may then have a corollary in the cognitive vocabularies of some African Christians at some times. When and where it has, partly determine the depth of interpretations. Of course, behaviour that makes reference to God or ancestor spirits or Church may be described as religious and we may ask questions about "it". But, when discussing "religious change", do we mean the metamorphosis of a thing? For example, I would argue that first encounters with evangelists conveyed not just one message to BaTswana, but many. The process of learning about Christianity, and negotiating its social performance, was then a collective act of creation: co-opting the strange into old societal roles and frameworks, transforming or bursting them, and managing the results. In this context, "religion" as an analytic construct serves to reify, and box in, one aspect of an accumulation of contacts, adjustment and legitimization. This is what lends a static quality to otherwise useful debates on what "makes" a religion: Is African Christianity "determined by the structure of 'basic' cosmology" [3] already there, or was the content of missionary teaching truly informative? [4] Do "traditional" ideas persist? [5]

If we want another way to discuss religious change, we need to approach the shifting articulation between people's behaviour, their changing material circumstances, and their categories of meaning. [6] This is a quintessentially historical task: meanings are historically contextual. [7] It is therefore odd that Jean Comaroff's *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance*, a book largely about meaning, notably lacks history. We are given an elegant portrait of BaTswana appropriating Christianity as part of an expressive refusal to inhabit the alienation thrust upon them by *apartheid*. But brief sections on "events" and the missionary endeavour are plainly discontinuous with the main text, which is in two tableaux: a precolonial BaTswana ethnography, complete with cosmological maps; and an analysis of contemporary Zionist church structure and practice. [8] What, particularly, unfolded in between for the BaTswana of the Tshidi chiefdom?

This paper is a partial response (however ill-realized) to my criticisms. The Bagamma-Ngwato, like the Tshidi, are BaTswana, but their kingdom escaped the worst depredations of a white regime. They have, none the less, from the first evangelical encounters to the healing churches of today, reconstructed and internalized missionary Protestantism in a plastic manner. In this paper I focus on a minor but revealing event: a botched attempt to kill a preacher - a *moruti* - in 1915, in east-central Botswana. Through it I hope to show something about the evolution of the socio-religious role of preacher, as part of a continuous historical process.

I begin with a short biography of *Moruti* Seakgano. Then, in the context of a rough chronology, I review King Khama's politico-economic reorganization of his state, his related

conflict with his son, Sekgoma, and the latter's exile/secession. I next look at the position of Christians living with Sekgoma under their *moruti*, Seakgano, in the context of Khama's successful co-optation of Christianity; the disputes behind the failed plot, and finally, its unfolding. I conclude with Seakgano's personal contribution to the conflict.

Seakgano Ncaga was born some time in the 1860s, in Shoshong, then the capital of the BagammaNgwato. [9] His family was of BaTlhako stock, and his father or grandfather had probably emigrated from the Transvaal to settle in Shoshong. [10] The BaTlhako were one of many incorporated groups, or *bafaladi*, which amalgamated with the Ngwato kingdom. Seakgano grew up in the ward given to them by King Khama III. [11] The London Missionary Society (LMS) representative in Shoshong, the Rev J D Hepburn, introduced Seakgano to Christianity some time in the 1880s. In adopting the new faith, the young man followed the lead of the King, who ruled GammaNgwato from c1875 to 1923. King Khama, with a coterie of his peers, had converted a generation earlier before usurping his father, and so legitimized Christianity. Seakgano joined a core of active members of the Ngwato Church shortly after his marriage to Seitibatsho Tinkane. It is likely that he preached for the missionary Rev W C Willoughby, and eventually became one of the Church's deacons. [12]

In January, 1898, Seakgano left GammaNgwato with his family to study at the Paris Evangelical Society's *Ecole Biblique* at Morija, in present-day Lesotho, with the aid of a recommendation and a small grant from a missionary. [13] Before he had entered Morija, his father Ncaga had died, and King Khama had transferred the patrimonial cattle to Seakgano's uncle, to be kept in trust for him. By the time Seakgano finished his studies, he had yet to pry his herd away from this uncle, and he resented the King's intervention. He therefore sent his family straight from Morija to join Chief Sekgoma, Khama's son, who had seceded with a large following. [14]

In 1907, during Chief Sekgoma's long and difficult move north to the Nata River to Nekati, his unofficial preacher left him. Seakgano filled this vacancy and preached to the depopulated church at Nekati. In 1910 the LMS appointed Seakgano as Nekati's evangelist. To the people of Nekati, Seakgano was simply *moruti*, or minister and instructor in the Word of God. [15] But by late 1915 things had gone sour. Seakgano narrowly escaped a plot to take his life. He then fled to Serowe, King Khama's third and final capital, with his wife and family.

In 1917, the Church at Serowe posted Seakgano to the Shoshong station. Seakgano served as *moruti* there for six years, growing in stature and gaining a reputation for possessing various theurgic powers. *Moruti* Seakgano moved back to Serowe in 1923, and, with the exception of a two-year post in Johannesburg, preached there for the rest of his life. He died in 1953, an old and respected man. [16]

Chief Sekgoma and King Khama

In the late 1890s, King Khama faced the task of reorganizing his father's administration. The system in place had essentially developed from the domestic social order, with the power and wealth of the king expressed in his supreme rights over cattle. The incorporation of economically and culturally diverse groups of people signalled the need for administrative change; ownership of cattle often shifted to those men within *bafaladi* (subordinate groups) who controlled use-rights, some of whom considered royal appropriations to be theft. [17] It was, after all, royal control over his cattle that provoked Seakgano himself to join Chief Sekgoma's state. Meanwhile, the overcrowded agro-urban capital led to a policy of what Parsons has termed "decentralization". [18] Khama acted to inhibit the effects of his dispersal of populations by co-opting regional leaders and, later, sending out governors; using preachers (*baruti*) as distant brokers of Ngwato ideology; and modulating the inevitable commoditization of cattle.

It was Khama's reform of the laws of cattle-holding which, alongside the decentralization policy itself, threatened Sekgoma's inheritance and so hardened their dispute. During the rainy season in 1898, Sekgoma attempted to confiscate his aristocratic friends' cattle from a commoner division:

When [Sekgoma] came [to Phalapswe] ... it was a Saturday, and on the following day, Sunday, he sent his people to the houses of those who were sided with his father, telling them ... that cattle and people will arise and go to plough. 'Even if my father disagrees I will just plough ... [Y]ou should just go and take the cattle so that we can go plough.' [19]

This action - a double insult to his Sabbatarian father, who controlled the ploughing season - would have increased his following by kidnapping their cattle. It provoked King Khama, with his Resident Commissioner, to begin to legislate the end to the system of aristocratic ownership of the kingdom's cattle. [20]

Khama's redistributive strategy had its drawbacks. Sekgoma already commanded a great deal of support, especially among his peers and in "his" commoner division. But, beyond these groups, a fair proportion of Christians also followed him away. [21] Wealthy BaNgwato men tended to favour the old cattle laws, and their families were often Christian. When Sekgoma finally left for Mogonono, among his two thousand or so followers were three of seven Church deacons and 59 of 480 Church members. [22]

Chief Sekgoma's Christian Followers and Ngwato Christianity

The Christians who left soon suffered a broadside issued from the Phalapwe church members against Sekgoma, accusing him of sneaking around like a witch at night and of ignoring his father, Khama, who

with the Teacher of the Word of God is leading us in faith. ... Khama raised [his son] by the Word of God but when the congregation of God helped Sekgoma and we pointed out the law of God, he refused it ... Ezekiel 20.12 and the law of Christ in Matthew 15.4, what do they say to us? We have disowned ... this one [Sekgoma] who commits the acts of the heathen. [23]

The implication was that those Christians accompanying him were doing so out of selfish and unChristian motives. In the event, within a few short years many of them became convinced they had erred. Sekgoma seemed arbitrary, committed adultery by practising the levirate with his wife's sister, and then discarded both for a woman of the lowest status. [24] In 1904 his state began haemorrhaging, and among those in the fore were again well-born Christians. Sekgoma then attempted to repossess people's cattle, resulting in a final hearing and his exile to Nekati, on the Nata River to the north. This commenced a period of tribulations for him. Locusts ate his people's crops in Lephephe, and on his way up to scout a site along the Nata, Sekgoma nearly perished of malaria. Although *Moruti* Seakgano signed a 1907 petition to King Khama asking protection for those wishing to remain in Lephephe, he did not petition to be readmitted to Serowe with scores of other household heads, and in fact went north with the now small congregation. [25]

However, because of Seakgano's earlier training at Morija, some of Sekgoma's people doubted Seakgano's legitimacy as a *moruti*:

[He returned so that the ministership] be conferred upon him by the BammaNgwato. [However] when we went to Nekati ... he

was already a *moruti* but LMS followers did not accept him yet because it was not us, it was not the LMS, they did not believe that a person who came from Lesotho should come to teach in GammaNgwato. [26]

In fact, there had been few other choices open to him; the (LMS) Moffat Institution at Kuruman had just shut down, and the plans for Tiger Kloof Missionary College were in their infancy. But, by doubting the legitimacy of a Christian who lacked the *thuto* (learning) of the LMS, the Nekati Church pointed up the anomaly of its own position.

While it had moved beyond the scope of the LMS, and repudiated contact with it [27], the very meaning of Christianity was yet hardly separable from that which the LMS provided and Khama stamped with his imprimatur. In his weakened position, Chief Sekgoma could therefore claim independence from Khama's Church, while the congregation would express its qualms. But, better still, Sekgoma wanted the prestige of a true state, with the complexities of a school and church, equal to his father's. So it was upon gaining some stability in Nekati in 1910 that he welcomed back the LMS to ask for a white minister. In hindsight, his gambit misfired.

Instead of granting the Chief a missionary who drew his status straight from overseas, the Revs Reed and Jennings merely boosted Seakgano's prestige by recognizing him as the paid LMS representative to Nekati. Chief Sekgoma's closest followers, the Mogashwa (so called after Sekgoma's home ward in Phalapswe), then began to differentiate themselves from the Christians, who seemed tainted with disloyalty to Sekgoma. As Seakgoma's daughter put it, in Nekati "the BaNgwato all loved Father; the Mogashwa were Sekgoma's people". [28] To understand why this was so - and why Seakgano was placed in peril - we need to look at the evolving religious component of state ideology in GammaNgwato.

To begin, King Khama exerted a direct influence over Church affairs, both in Serowe and across his territory, and fought several battles to keep his influence: against dissenters inside the Church, against missionaries, and against the LMS itself. [29] This was not so uncommon, as many BaTswana kings evinced a desire to control "matters purely ecclesiastical" [30], had kin among their deacons, and so on. Khama, however, was distinguished by his overall success. By 1914 the LMS *Chronicle* blithely commented: "In a very true sense Khama is head of the Church as well as head of the State." In addition, his wife, Semane, was then senior deaconess and the leading preacher on forays outside Serowe. By 1906, moreover, the Ngwato Church contributed heavily to its own outstation salaries and its own evangelical campaigns. [31] Non-Christians felt just as strongly that Khama, once he held it, should maintain his pre-eminence in the Church. [32]

This connection between religion and political power was manifested in several ways. *Baruti* (African preachers) in the Ngwato kingdom became Khama's unofficial agents, though sometimes grudgingly. King Khama influenced appointments, and received reports from them about political, judicial, and ethnic problems. [33] It is hardly surprising that Khama forbade, first, the Rev Willoughby and then the Rev Jennings from importing *baruti* from outside GammaNgwato, fearing they would prove disloyal. [34] In 1914 Willoughby wrote to Khama, and warned that the BaKhurutse chief, Rauwe, was, by flirting with Anglicanism, "undermin[ing] your *power as Chief*", and suggested that a certain *moruti* "go up at once and settle among the people" to counteract this. [35] The King so responded

Moreover, Khama relied on *baruti* to provide his citizens with a non-ethnic, largely female, tea-and-bun-eating elite: regional congregations. This elite served to integrate his state. A *moruti* wrote from Selolwane in 1916, where the first visit from a missionary had transpired only six years before, to complain that an internal BaKalanga leader had been

scattering people ... he is not gathering them in, but instead, taking off the roof of the house [church] since he is scattering

the chiefdoms. [Previously] there were many nations present because they were gathered by the church. [36]

Similarly, in 1912 the *moruti* in Lerala complained to Khama that Afrikaner farmers from the Tuli Block, in collusion with the local Chiefs, forbade their workers to acquire *thuto* (education) at Church; this was subversive, as it attacked the intended centralizing role of the local church. The *moruti* saw this, and asked for help: "I put myself in the hands of the King and the Church." [37] Indeed, regional Chiefs sometimes resented the power of local Churches, or tried to co-opt their pulpits. [38] Lower-level headmen knew that deacons and *baruti* had taken some of their power, since, although accumulation was as yet subject to their influence, the Church loosened the ties between accumulation and social advance. They reacted, as Khama knew, by themselves joining the Church, and perhaps dissuading others. In Shoshong, the Rev Lloyd was moved to ask rhetorically, "Can it be, that Headmen - for their own reasons - keep the people away [from Church]?" [39]

As these hints of conflicts indicate, commoners did enter congregations. None the less, Church elitism was reinforced by the very process of gaining Church membership. Most of Nekati's 500 or so residents were not anti-Christian, but there were fewer than 50 full church-members, mostly women. With some exceptions, attendants were either members or enrolled catechumens; and Seakgano, like most *baruti*, closely guarded the integrity of the three-year period of instruction in reading and Bible study. Naturally, studying and Church activism required time and effort. Members often came from families with enough cattle to justify the retention of servants to replace their school-age children at the cattle post [40], and enough subordinate female labour to allow a wife and mother time for immersion in church affairs. At the end of the instruction period, the *moruti* or a deacon posed a set of questions and asked for personal statements from the candidates on their reasons for wanting to be Christian. Only the formality of confirmation required a passing missionary. The whole process lent itself to personal and community biases, and certainly came to a standstill in Nekati. [41] As elsewhere, then, the number of full members was small: this was due, in the end, to the *modus vivendi* between the mission's Protestant focus on individual salvation and Khama's support for hierarchy.

Only full members referred to themselves as Christians, were permitted to preach, went on prayer vigils for the sick, or received the sacrament of Communion, often viewed as a miracle. In GammaNgwato, these rules began with the Rev Willoughby, who served Khama from 1889 to 1903. He wished to make "a clear distinction between the members of the Church and those who are outside". [42] This meant that Seakgano denied Chief Sekgoma Communion. Since he held services in the Nekati *kgotla*, or public court, perhaps withdrawing to the adjacent Church rondavel for Communion, we must imagine this exclusivist ritual in the Chief's own judicial forum! Moreover, services up-ended the hierarchy of status and gender over which Chief Sekgoma usually presided. Women, whom some have termed southern Africa's under-class [43], normally dared not venture into the *kgotla*, a male forum. Yet, on Sunday morning they filled it up and actually stood and enjoined men not to "sin". That Chief Sekgoma accepted this speaks for the wide legitimacy accorded to local churches.

Because of this legitimacy, and Khama's stature within Christianity throughout his country, church activism militated against separatism amongst distant populations. Khama, just weeks before his death, wrote to his nominal subordinate, the BakaNswazwi chief, and praised him for paying the salaries of his people's teachers:

I say, let us work hand in hand, mightily for God. You know your fathers hastened to be BaNgwato. My [word] is, you know if you are a MoNgwato; and when you do the work of God, you know yourself as a MoNgwato then. [44]

Chief Sekgoma resisted this ideological hegemony. From the outset, his *moruti*'s position was not enviable.

The Attempt on Seakgano's Life

Seakgano departed from Nekati some time between May and December 1915. [45] *Moruti* Kaleakgosi was prepared to return to Nekati (he had been its lay preacher until 1908) by the end of 1914; a friend of Sekgoma's, he was delayed only by the summer rains. [46] By the time the terrain dried in the winter of 1915, then, the moment was ripe for Seakgano's demotion or departure. As it was, a controversy over the distribution of hymn-books catalysed it.

This happened because of Sekgoma's child named Oratile. It began by their fighting over these ten books of hymns with the children of the congregation ... The Chief's child purchased the prettily decorated hymnbook; but it was bought first by the congregation, that book! She wished it to be seen in her keeping, with her only, the daughter of the Chief. Yet it was bought by the congregation just like hymnbooks usually are sold ... Now when she had just bought it, the child of the Chief did not agree that it be bought by each person, one by one, and things were thus stirred up. [47]

Oratile and her crowd then assaulted Seakgano's son, Segadimo, and a friend. All involved were adults in their early twenties [48], so the episode must have been serious. Oratile was herself a married woman. Her "uncles" in the Mogashwa faction now decided to do away with Seakgano. Tension escalated, and the members of the congregation were prevented from attending Communion. [49]

Despite appearances, the fight over hymn-books was not trivial. Hymns were the most manifest, and most audible, signature of Christians throughout Botswana, and "the most universally employed method of evangelization". Lloyd found hymn-books in villages never visited by a missionary. [50] Moreover, the power over the distribution of both the potential and the reward for literacy was at stake. Along with the Bible and some few books, hymns were a rare source for printed Setswana in 1915, and it naturally devolved on to Seakgano to ensure that his congregation had access to them. Oratile and her husband, Simon Ratshosa [51], came in later years to represent the section of aristocratic, educated progressives who rejected the hegemony of both the LMS and its emissaries. But in 1915 she was at least a church-goer. By taking the hymn-books, she tried to control a tool of social advance without deferring to the *moruti* in his oversight of the dreary steps of confession, catechism and confirmation into the congregation. Yet this mode of defiance, in effect, recognized his legitimacy, and the tension within this contradiction was explosive.

But if Sekgano could not command the resources of the Church, then he was a hollow *moruti*. The overlap between religion and education (and its status), symbolized by the hymn-books, lay embedded in the very language and thought of the BagammaNgwato. The two ideas are one for very old people in Serowe. *Thuto* is glossed by Brown's Dictionary as "a teaching or doctrine", yet it is a synonym for "education", as in "to take *thuto*", "orthodoxy", and even "civilization". [52] At the same time, it may merely mean "sermon". *Nilo ya thuto*, "house of *thuto*", means *kereke*, a church. Old people use this same expression to mean church or school, interchangeably; for this is the place where both preaching and the teaching of literacy, both denoted by *go ruta*, originally transpired.

Elderly Christians in Serowe, when asked about the meaning of their faith, tend to mention the "Word of God", *Lehoko la Modimo*. This is perhaps the oldest, and the only simple, way to distinguish "religion" from *thuto* in Setswana. But there are overlaps. The Word was (and

is) seen to be concretely contained in the Bible, and emotionally reflected in hymns, both of which the literate may read first-hand. The *moruti*, one who does *go ruta*, taught people the ability to read the Word [53] and to trust in it, at the same time. Its content is, of course, the doctrine of Christ and His teachings. However, the "Word of God" is more often treated as a cue or prompt to the universe of not merely Christian teaching but life: a password suggesting literacy, belonging, piety, and lawfulness. [54] When people understood the Word, they acted according to the syntax of the Law of God, *Molao wa Modimo*. The Law dictated Christian marriage, burial, schooling - and abstention from beer-drinking, initiation, witchcraft, and other "heathen" practices.

Behaving as a "true Christian" thus meant, to many, obeying Khama's laws [55]; and aspects of the Law of God were, in fact, the secular law of the land. Even outside Khama's state in Nekati, the Law flowed organically from the activity of *go ruta*: the teaching of the Word and the word. In Nekati, too, the linkage between *thuto*, the Word, and Khama's Law, like a hidden spring-board, propelled Seakgano into conflict.

Some time after the fight over the hymn-books, on a Saturday night, Seakgano woke to hear someone shouting outside his door. It was Ramorotong, a distant half-brother to Khama and junior full-brother to Rraditladi, a royal ex-councillor. Ramorotong had come straight from a conspiratorial meeting to Seakgano's house. He was frightened, and so disguised his purpose by calling out a biblical name.

'Jakop! Jakop!' Then my grandfather wanted to go out but grandmother refused [because she was afraid]; 'Jakop!' So [finally] he went outside. He was told to remain in the yard and was told that he was going to be killed the next day and that he should take his children to a safe place. We fear to say these things because they are old Setswana secrets. [56]

Seakgano left his children at home, despite the warning, and went off to preach to his congregation on Sunday morning, in the face of obvious danger. A brave [57] and fiercely committed man, Seakgano could rely only on his supporters and his God to protect him.

They were still around, those who came to whisper to him. Father's people were many, at first ... They walked in line and some of them left. According to [Seakgano], he left, returning from church, and went out to where they were about to grab him. They had been ordered to grab him but they did not yet do it. ... If they had taken him, the congregation would have fallen before their Lord. Instead, he was not captured by anybody. It was too much [for them], and he passed right through the midst of them and continued. [58]

That the plot had its collaborators within the congregation as well is recorded by family tradition with the economy of a vignette. When Seakgano had finished his sermon, an old churchwoman stood up and said: "What, wasn't anyone supposed to kill him?" [59]

Meanwhile, Chief Sekgoma decided on an opportune visit to Francistown so as to absent himself during the fracas:

and the war remained behind and was fought, he not being present to fight with the members of the congregation who had purchased the songs. It is apparent that he knew something about the war. [60]

Out of respect for the Khama family - Sekgoma, after all, fathered President Seretse Khama - neither of my two main informants for this story would explicitly implicate Sekgoma. Yet it

was made clear to me that he supported his daughter and the plot. Sekgoma, indeed, took a drastic step in insulting an important section of Nekati by sanctioning his *moruti*'s murder. What was it about Seakgano himself that, in the prevailing politico-religious trend in Khama's Kingdom, prepared Sekgoma to take it?

Seakgano was a *moruti* who preached, and never concealed anything about the work of God. He taught about everything. He preached ... about things that are proper, and he always read people this and that. What was prohibited [e.g. beer] that you should not do, [you] the congregation! He worked in *thuto* and was orthodox. [H]e would say: you should not say, you are Christian people and you shall do this and this and etc; rather, you are the nation and will do thusly ... Father went to his grave with his teachings never deviating from a single theme, if you do not oppose evil things then they will return to you later. He told something if it was in the Bible; he had to tell the words of the Bible, about responsibilities. [61]

[H]e said only that a person who did not believe was going to Hell. It was just that, he spoke the Words of God very strongly, wishing to battle the thought of unbelief. It was the *thuto*, and did not mean that folks came in to church for the fear of Hell. ... Christians should cease thinking about material things in life and life on earth, and get themselves involved in fighting against evil to become true Christians. He was a mature man who understood how it went with people who did not believe, how they always make incisions on their bodies and use charms in their houses, so he convinced them to leave off those things. [62]

Seakgano was a severe man who devoted himself to the Word. Other informants confirmed this. In the context of the Khamaian emphasis on proper and moral behaviour in harmony with the Law of God, it was a dangerous trait. Seakgano, in effect, directed the Christian community's disapproval of the Chief toward making him respect his father's laws, the Sabbath [63], Christian taboos - in short, to become more "Ngwato". As Seakgano's great grandson put it, "In those days sermons were often misunderstood as political". [64]

One of Khama's most famous dicta, sporadically enforced, was his prohibition of the brewing and drinking of *bojalwa*, the indigenous beer. These were heavily socialized gender and labour-related activities that, when discouraged, set off ripples of social change. Chief Sekgoma, like Khama, prohibited hard liquor, and according to the OC Police in Nekati, disallowed beer-brewing. Yet Khama, who on the occasion of his 50th anniversary as a Christian revived his total ban on beer, thought otherwise, and accused his son of drinking and of other violations of "the law". In 1911 Khama scolded his people in the *kgotla*, arguing that

if we continue in the service of God we shall be a nation still. But instead of that, unfortunately ... there are so many people who refuse to receive the Word of God ... [and] the one thing that which destroys our work ... is Drink. [65]

As part of this crusade, he wrote a letter to the Rev Tom Brown in August of the same year, accusing his son of "destroying my people" and "hampering my people from knowing God".

My people [with Chief Sekgoma] will drink beer as much as they want; as I am writing this letter my people have just been initiated, since now they are aware that I do not have power [over them] and that the [Protectorate] government disturbs no one. ... My request is

that you ... pass my letter to the son of the King. I would be pleased if [you would] go and be there when he sees it so that if he does not understand something, you can explain. [66]

Using the issue of beer, Khama was, in effect, asking the Rev Brown to assist in re-establishing his authority in Nekati beyond what the administration would enforce. Abstinence from beer, like other coded public behaviours, marked one's loyalty to Christ, but also to Khama.

While Brown may not have delivered the letter (he received it in Cape Town), it illustrates the uncomfortable closeness between the stuff of Seakgano's sermons and Khama's own agenda in the years right before the plot in 1915. One can readily see how Chief Sekgoma would have viewed one of Seakgano's favourite choices of texts for his Sunday injunctions: the two Books of Kings. [67] Seakgano, with his booming voice [68], commenting on the theme of David's heirs' moral corruption and their contempt for the Law of God, must have seemed the Elijah to Sekgoma's Ahab.

Aftermath

Father then escaped to Khama. ... Khama told him, quit Nekati and come over to me. ... We stayed, Mother and us, and we then were brought in by Khama in his wagons. ... [Seakgano] went by foot and entered Francistown. He did not tell a soul that he was fleeing, they just talked in secret in the house with the people who would come and conspire with him, and he said, 'Let's go.' We children did not then know where he was going, whether he was going to teach, going to BoKalanga, while in fact he was going to Serowe ... As it was, when he arrived in Francistown, he passed straight through and fled to Khama. [69]

Evidently, there had been talk of Seakgano going to teach in Bokalanga, either for a brief period or permanently once the Rev Kaleakgosi arrived. Yet he returned to Serowe, the seat of his religion, overcoming his earlier disagreement with the King over the disposal of his father's estate. As for his replacement, the Rev Kaleakgosi also lost favour in Sekgoma's eyes, prompting the Rev Lewis to write that "he needs our constant prayers". Sekgoma then tried to weaken the tie between book learning and Christianity by enforcing the attendance of every child, Christian or not, in the outdoor school, but was thwarted when the teacher was dismissed for seducing schoolgirls. [70]

Seakgano continued his career in Shoshong, from about 1917 to 1923. The circumstances of his conflict with a priestess of a long-standing local prayer and healing cult fall outside the scope of this paper. But in it Seakgano again tested the limits of his power as *moruti*, and this time, crossing the juncture of thaumaturgy and Christianity, he emerged the victor. By 1930 Seakgano had been accepted as an important and respected person; upon his return from a two-year post in Johannesburg, the Serowe congregation feted him and built him a new home. In 1943, the tax register for Serowe listed him as the headman of Seletamotse ward (his father had not been), representing twenty-six tax-paying men and their families. He died in 1953, a very old man.

Conclusion

Khama offered men like Seakgano room to grow into respected figures in their communities. Religious independency was rare under him. [71] While *baruti* had some resentment toward the LMS for its lethargy in formally ordaining them, their increasing stature at least did not move in opposition to the main forces of religious and political control in the Kingdom. On

the contrary, the growth of their role came to rely on Khama's reappropriation of spiritual power in his country - and it was a reappropriation of his father's spiritual and ritual supremacy before him. For Chief Sekgoma and his daughter Oratile, Seakgano's Church therefore embodied the contradiction of being a desirable and legitimate thing-in-itself and being alien and ideologically attached to Khama's rule. In the end, Sekgoma could not permit his *moruti* to share in even some regnal elements, because he recognized his father's voice within them. This became doubly threatening when Seakgano, not content to serve Sekgoma quietly, turned with his congregation and rebuked him. We can understand the force of this rebuke only in terms of the larger set of meanings associated with *thuto* and the Word.

In 1915, the role of the Ngwato *moruti* was very much in a process of becoming, of defining its perimeters. It overlapped with the notion of "rulership" (*bogosi*) in a static sense, as to who could demand what of whom; but, in addition, part of the power within the position of *moruti* derived from Khama's permutation of *bogosi* on the nation's highest level. The nature of the overlap was therefore embedded in a process of change, and was altered even in the event of Seakgano's stridency, his enemies' plot, and his own choice to flee to Serowe. Moreover, the growth of the position of *moruti* was one of a set of developments linking Christianity with the later Spirit or Healing Churches. These Churches, led by charismatic "prophets", emerged in the 1950s when the Serowe Church had lost its salience and legal sanction in the Ngwato "District". They appeared especially on the Kingdom's ethnic and territorial fringes, where *baruti* had been relatively independent and yet most important to the now superannuated notion of state unity. This paper might suggest that historical research can chart the specific lineage of these religious movements, both in Botswana and the rest of southern Africa.

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Notes

- 1 E.g. Wyatt MacGaffey, *Religion and Society in Central Africa* (Chicago, 1986); Monica and Godfrey Wilson, *The Analysis of Social Change* (Cambridge, 1945); Karen Fields, *Revival and Rebellion in Central Africa* (Princeton, 1986), and David Lan, *Guns and Rain* (Berkeley, 1985); Wm Van Binsbergen, *Religious Change in Zambia: exploratory studies* (London, 1981).
- 2 E.g. Terence Ranger's challenge to the field in "Religious Movements and Politics in Sub-Saharan Africa", *African Studies Review* 29, 1986, pp 1-71; Jean Comaroff, "Healing and Cultural Transition: the Tswana of southern Africa", *Social Science and Medicine* 15B, 1981, pp 367-78; J D Y Peel, "The Pastor and the *Babalawo*: the interaction of Religions in 19th c Yorubaland" (forthcoming article. I am grateful to Professor Peel for allowing me to see a copy.); I M Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion* (Harmondsworth, 1971).
- 3 R Horton, "On the Rationality of Conversion", *Africa* XLV (3, 4), 1975, p 220.
- 4 R Gray, "Christianity and Social Change in Africa", *African Affairs* 77 (306), 1978, pp 98-99.

- 5 E.g. Bengt Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* (London, 1961).
- 6 As many authors, including Sundkler, Peel, and others not cited, have certainly done.
- 7 My statements here are perhaps informed by Wittgenstein's essential thesis that meaning is use; as elaborated in *Philosophical Investigations*, and especially *On Certainty* and *Zettel*.
- 8 Another fascinating book which lends itself to the same criticism is James Fernandez, *Bwiti: an ethnography of the religious imagination in Africa* (Princeton, 1982). Jean Comaroff is now working on what is to be an explicitly historical analysis of Tshidi BaRolong religious change.
- 9 BagaMmaNgwato, or very often BammaNgwato, means the inhabitants of Khama's kingdom. BaNgwato refers either to members of the extended royal family or to BaTswana whose families have lived under the royal house for "a very long time".
- 10 2nd interview with Ms Gabotepele Ntsosa, cattle post outside Serowe, 1 June 1989; Isaac Schapera, *The Ethnic Composition of Tswana Tribes* (London, 1952), pp 78, 114. Leonard Ngcongco informs me (13 June 1989) that the name BaThako probably comes from the Ndebele clan-name MaHlangu.
- 11 The best work on Khama III remains Q N Parsons, "Khama III, the Bamangwato, and the British, with Special Reference to 1895-1923", PhD Edinburgh, 1973.
- 12 United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA) Papers, Serowe, Baptismal Reg No 1; W C Willoughby, "Review of Five Years' Work in Khama's Country", p 23, from Selly Oak, xeroxes at Khama III Museum. Since people were discouraged from active Church membership before marriage, and since Seakgano appears frequently as a witness on early church registers, he was probably a deacon and evangelist for Willoughby's campaigns after his marriage.
- 13 PEMS, *Ecole Biblique* records at Morija. Courtesy of Chris Whann and the Rev Bruch in Lesotho.
- 14 1st Interview with Gabotepele Ntsosa, Serowe, 27 February 1989, p 1; UCCSA BR 1.
- 15 Interview with Mr L G Baruti, Serowe, 8 November 1988; CWM/LMS Southern African Incoming, Box 72/File 8, Jennings to Thompson, Durban, 20 October 1910.
- 16 Interview with Ms Otaajang Kedikilwe, Sefhope, 20 May 1989; Schapera, *op. cit.*, pp 78, 221; Interview, Ms Hilda Moswate, Serowe, 15 June 1989.
- 17 This was certainly true among conquered bafaladi: see Motswedi Dimpe, "Batswaping-Bangwato Relations: the politics of subordination and exploitation, 1895-1949", unpag., University of Botswana, 1986.
- 18 Parsons, "Khama III", pp 220-21.
- 19 Khama III Memorial Museum, Khama III Papers, Box D/File 27, "Phalapye Khama's Town", 14 November 1898, probably by Asst to Res Mag, Serowe.
- 20 K III, B/10/Exhibit 3; and B/10/bound volume "Lephephe", redacted statement by Khama, 13 June 1907 and 14 June 1907. By 1907 Khama claimed he had long since given all such cattle to their holders.

- 21 K III D/27 (SeTswana): "When the magistrate arrived, Sekgoma and Kgama arrived with their age-regiments and Khama told his regiment to keep to themselves and ignore the other regiments." This implies substantial support for Sekgoma. Also, Botswana National Archives, Asst Comm (AC), 5/26, Correspondence concerning Sekgoma Khama: R M Daniel to (Asst RC) B May, Francistown, 21 December 19/10, and Mahalapye, 22 May 19 11.
- 22 Parsons, *op. cit.*, pp 225, 377.
- 23 K III B/1, "Palapye Khama's Town. To ask help from the congregation of the BammaNgwato", c1900, my trans. Ez 20.12: Keep the Sabbath; Matt 15.4: Obey your parents.
- 24 K III B/10 "Lophephe", Exhibit 2 (16 February 1907). I am grateful to Neil Parsons for stressing this to me.
- 25 K III B/10 "Lophephe", Exhibit 1 (28 April 1907) and 2 (16 May 1907); Arnold W Hodson, *Trekking the Great Thirst* (Bulawayo, 1987), p 193.
- 26 Interview with Otaajang Kedikilwe.
- 27 LMS SA 69/4, Reed to Thompson, Dombodema, 26 November 1908.
- 28 LMS SA 72/8, Jennings to Thompson, Durban, 20 October 1910; Interview with Otaajang Kedikilwe, p 4.
- 29 This forms a topic in itself. For conflicts with the Rev Hepburn and Lloyd, as well as with BoRaditladi, see Parsons, *op. cit.*
- 30 LMS SA 49/1/A BDC Report, Taungs, 3/5/92.
- 31 LMS *Chronicle*, June 1914, p 121; Parsons, *op. cit.*, p 377; LMS SA Annual Reports, School Report for Serowe, 1914 (Ella Sharp). Interviews with Helen Sebina, Serowe, 28 February 1989, Ms Dichetiso Balang, Serowe, 3 November 1988, and others, on Semane; LMS SA 67/3, Jennings to Thompson, Serowe, 2 February 1906.
- 32 Or more strongly: LMS SA, Jennings to Hawkins, Serowe, 19 January 1912.
- 33 After formal evangelical training began, the missionary normally requested (i.e. in Serowe, with Khama's connivance) certain students for his district. As for direct reports, three from Seakgano in Shoshong to Khama are: K III Papers, H/59 "Khama 20th C Undated", on the collapse of the churchbuilding; H/59 20/5/22, asking for help in a divorce case; H/59 15/7/22, describing an ethnically divisive sorcery case.
- 34 LMS SA 67/4, Jennings to Thompson, Serowe, 3 May 1906.
- 35 My italics. KIII G/50, Doc 36, Willoughby to Khama, Tiger Kloof, 7 July 1914; also, for example, *Moruti* Mosisi's assumption that Khama personally appointed *baruti*, H/59/"1921", encl. in Sekgoma II to Khama, Nekati, 16 July 1921.
- 36 LMS SA 78/2, Reed to Hawkins, Selolwane, 27/5/16; Quote, K III H/59, Solomon Kebothilwe to Khama, Selolwane, 23 October 1922. Trans. assisted by G Selato.
- 37 K III Papers, H/59 "Loose papers", Samuel Maremane to Khama, Lerala, 29 August 1912. My trans.

- 38 Interview with the Rev Gasethata Segaise, Serowe, 20 December 1988; LMS 85/2, Mins of Annual Conf of Mmangwato Churches, Serowe, 3/5-7-5/23; UCCSA Papers, Deacon's Minutes, 1946-1952, 6 February 1946 (Mookane).
- 39 LMS SA, Lloyd to Thompson, Shoshong, 14 April 1909.
- 40 E.g. Interview with Mrs Baletheo Moloi, Serowe, 17 November 1988.
- 41 Various informants, including Otaajang Kedikilwe.
- 42 W C Willoughby, "Review of Five Years' Work in Khama's Country".
- 43 Jeff Guy, "Analysing Precapitalist Societies in Southern Africa", *Journal of Southern African Studies* 13 (2), 1986.
- 44 K III E/36/49, Khama to Ngwana oa Kgosi Mfahafshe, 12 February 1923.
- 45 BNA S26/4, OC Police, Nekati, to RC, Nekati, 23 May 1915, in "Confidential Reports on Sekgoma Khama". LMS SA Annual Reports, Serowe: 1914, 1916, 1917; School Report, 1915; LMS SA 72/2, Lewis to Hawkins, Serowe, 21 January 1915; 77/5, Reed to Hawkins, Serowe, 18 November 1915; 78/2, Reed to LMS, Maun, 27 May 1916. K III E/33/43, Khama to Sekgoma II, Serowe, 2 June 1916.
- 46 Kaleakgosi's closeness with the royal family is recorded in the patronym. Interview, Mr L G Baruti, Serowe, 8 November 1988, p 2; and LMS SA 71/2, Lloyd to Thompson, Shoshong, 14 April 1908. K III D/31/57, Khama to Baruti Kaleakgosi, Serowe, 1 June 1913; LMS SADC, Tiger Kloof, 29 November 1914.
- 47 Interview with Otaajang Kedikilwe, p 4.
- 48 UCCSA BR I; and 2nd Interview with Ms Gabotepele Ntsosa.
- 49 2nd Interview with Gabotepele Ntsosa; Interview with Otaajang Kedikilwe, p 4. Oratile married Simon Ratshosa "just before Christmas" in 1913, not in 1910 as has been written elsewhere. LMS SA Annual Reports, Shoshong, 1913.
- 50 Gabriel Setiloane, *The Image of God Among the Sotho-Tswana* (Rotterdam, 1976), p 156. Many informants told me that they first attended church because of this or that hymn: cf Interview with the Rev Segaise, Serowe, 20 December 1988, who as a small boy sang hymns on the cattle post without understanding them. LMS SA 71/3, Lloyd to Thompson, Shoshong, 19 July 1909.
- 51 Simon was considered an anti-LMS agitator in 1915, and the important Ratshosa family had made a strategic alliance with Sekgoma. In 1913 Simon was still on good terms with Khama, although beholden to Sekgoma (KMM, Sekgoma II Papers, A/2, Simon Ratshosa to Sekgoma Khama, Serowe, 15 May 1913). But, Simon Ratshosa does not figure in anyone's account of Nekati.
- 52 Cf Parsons, "Khama III", p 237.
- 53 Nekati did receive a schoolteacher in 1914 from the LMS, who performed a semi-secular function.
- 54 This struck me as akin to Wm Hunt's description - *The Puritan Moment* (Cambridge, 1983), p 118 - of the Puritans' understanding of the Word as both the structure of God's will and the narrative of its unfolding: a synchronic and diachronic unity.

- 55 Interview with the Rev O Mokobi, Mahalapye; with Ms Oathokwa Samuel, Radisele; and others.
- 56 1st Interview with Ms Gabotepele Ntsosa, Serowe, 27 February 1989, pp 2, 3.
- 57 Interview with Mrs Botsanyang Ramatsela, Serowe, 10 November 1988.
- 58 Interview with Otaajang Kedikilwe.
- 59 1st Interview with Ms Gabotepele Ntsosa. This phrase was taken down by hand and may not be verbatim, but is also given similarly by Otaajang Kedikilwe, p 7.
- 60 Interview with Otaajang Kedikilwe, p 4.
- 61 Interview with Otaajang Kedikilwe, p 5.
- 62 1st Interview with Gabotepele Ntsosa.
- 63 At the time, as Sekgoma well knew, his father enforced the Sabbath as a rest day by dispatching an age-regiment to seek out violators and coerce them into Church. Interview with the Rev Johane Lenyebe, Shoshong, 19 April 1989.
- 64 1st Interview with Gabotepele Ntsosa, p 1.
- 65 Parsons, *op. cit.*, p 290; quote, p 282, taken from the LMS *Chronicle* 76 (No 900).
- 66 K III E/36, Doc 83, Khama to Brown, Serowe, 22 August 1911.
- 67 1 and 2 Kings in the Setswana bible is called 1 and 2 *Dikgosi*, the plural of same word applied to both Khama and Sekgoma.
- 68 1st Interview with Gabotepele Ntsosa.
- 69 Interview with Otaajang Kedikilwe, p 6.
- 70 LMS SA Interim Report of Ngami and Nekati, 1918 (H Lewis). This was a common problem, as several letters indicate.
- 71 Cf Richard Gray's comments in "Religion and Political Parties - the case of Uganda", Occ Paper No 2, Centre for African Studies, University of Copenhagen.