

XHOSA EXPANSION BEFORE 1800

by

J. B. Peires

This paper is a truncated form of a lengthy original draft entitled "The Formation of the Xhosa State", which may be made available for reference. The original paper was subjected to some very justified criticism from various sources; considerations of time have prevented me from incorporating them into the paper, and the present paper has been abbreviated rather than improved. Two entire sections have been omitted, the first of which will be summarized in the Foreword, and the second in the Afterword.

Foreword

It is well known that, whereas the Zulu had a strong, unified state, obedient under normal circumstances to the will of its ruler, political power among the Xhosa was distributed among a number of chiefs of varying rank who were apparently constantly competing with each other to the extent that it proved impossible for them ever to present a truly united front against the encroaching Colony.

How did this situation arise? What was the nature of the polity or polities which the Xhosa possessed? The prevailing view seems to be that first put forward by W. D. Hammond-Tooke in his influential article "Segmentation and Fission in Cape-Nguni Political Units". (1) Briefly, he believes that the Xhosa possessed structural arrangements which made fission of the political unit inevitable. The Chief's first-ranking wife was known as the Great Wife and she was the mother of the heir, the Great Son. His second-ranking wife, the Right-Hand Wife, was the mother of a son known as the Right-Hand Son. Each of the other wives was allocated to one or other of the Great and Right-Hand Houses, thus creating a division within the political unit after the reigning chief's death. Theoretically, each unit could split each generation, although, of course, this did not always occur. Consequently, Hammond-Tooke believes we cannot speak of a Xhosa state but only of a Xhosa cluster, consisting of genealogically associated chiefdoms.

I believe that Professor Hammond-Tooke is wrong, and "The Formation of the Xhosa State" contains a lengthy attempt to refute his "Segmentation and Fission" article (see my "The Rise of the 'Right-hand House' in the history and historiography of the Xhosa", History of Africa, Vol. II, 1975). Rather than repeating those arguments here, however, I shall simply proceed with my account of how the Xhosa royal lineage expanded in the years prior to 1800.

The "Segmentation and Fission" article does, however, raise two interesting historiographical points which I would like to mention here, not with reference to Hammond-Tooke but as examples of the problems facing the historian of the Xhosa today.

1. The consistent bias of the sources: the Western Xhosa, who are also known as the Rarabe, were the first to be incorporated into the Colony and therefore the first to receive a Western education and write things down. Lovedale, still perhaps the intellectual capital of kwaXhosa, is in Rarabe territory. All the important Xhosa writers who have written down Xhosa oral traditions (except for two Thembu, who are not involved) have been Rarabe. (2) The Eastern Xhosa, also known as the Gcaleka, the line of the Paramount Chief, were incorporated only after 1857 and have contributed little to the written record. J. H. Soga, whose compendious works, written in the late 1920s, are still our basic source on Xhosa history and customs, was the grandson and great-grandson of councillors to the Rarabe chiefs. Since the Rarabe are a Right-Hand House, the emphasis which Soga places on the independent position and rights of the Right-Hand House (as opposed to the Gcaleka, who are the Great House) cannot be regarded as conclusive.

Moreover, because of their geographical position, the mass of the documentary evidence for the early period, whether from military or missionary sources, deals with the Rarabe. In addition, the accounts of Xhosa political institutions given to Europeans were coloured by political necessity - chiefs who did not wish to be held responsible for the acts of their subordinates simply told the white men that they were not responsible.

2. Oral history has a tendency to telescope time and to represent legendary figures and eponyms as real people. The Xhosa are no exception, and in fact the very name "Xhosa", which is commonly believed to be the name of the first Xhosa chief, was simply the designation given to a certain Nguni group by Khoi or San with whom they came into contact. Consequently, one cannot take these early accounts too literally, although they are meaningful if correctly interpreted (see, for instance, the story of Tshawe which I discuss below). Now, there is a tradition concerning the origin of the Right-Hand House which dates its formation to the time of the chief Phalo. Since this runs contrary to certain arguments advanced by Soga and Hammond-Tooke, they deny the validity of this tradition and advance as a reason the fact that traditions assert that there were Right-Hand sons before the time of Phalo. This objection cannot be upheld because (a) the tradition may be inaccurate, since there is the possibility of an ulterior motive and (b) even if Right-Hand sons did exist before the time of Phalo, there is no evidence that they served the same functions.

The Xhosa are defined as the people living under the government of a member of the Xhosa royal lineage. It will be argued that the area and people under Xhosa control increased as members of the royal lineage dispersed. To understand this process, it is necessary to begin by examining the procedures by which a chief's son acquired territory and property.

Devolution of Power among the Xhosa

Since the rank by birth of each son depended on the rank of his mother, a suitable point of departure for the description of Xhosa political processes relating to the delegation and succession of power is that of chiefly marriage. A Xhosa chief directly descended from the royal lineage is bound in his choice of marriage partners only by the rule of exogamy. In practice, he normally married between five and twelve wives. (3) His first wife, married just after circumcision to break him in sexually, was usually the daughter of a commoner. The wives are ranked relative to each other

by birth.

When, therefore, the one wife of a chief is descended from an old family of a chief, and the other is also the child of a similar, but less old family, then the sons of the former occupy a rank above that of the latter.... On this hereditary rank deriving from the mother, the law of the inheritance of the highest chief is founded. (4)

Thus ranking is, in a sense, automatic. The Great Wife is officially proclaimed and invested but it is not her investiture which makes her Great Wife; it is the fact of her noble birth. According to Soga, even if the status of a wife has already been proclaimed it can be revoked if the chief subsequently marries a wife of higher rank. Elsewhere, he relates a case where a sub-chief's investiture by the Paramount Sarili himself was set aside because a rival claimant's mother was of superior birth. (5) In practice, the Great Wife was usually a Thembu, the reason for this being that only a foreign royal lineage was equal in rank to that of the Xhosa. She was normally married late in life, and the decision to marry her was taken by the amaphakathi or councillors, acting as representatives of the people, each of whom contributed to the dowry. (6)

The principle of ranking wives in order of nobility of birth is important from two standpoints. It offers an acceptable alternative to the Great House - Right-Hand House dichotomy, and it affects the prestige of the chiefs' sons. For each chief's son inherited an equal power base, as I shall endeavour to show shortly, but each chief's son did not form his own party; instead, factions formed around two, three or even more brothers. The Xhosa, a people who place a high value on legitimacy (as do all the Southern Bantu) (7), naturally looked to the most highly born for leadership, but unusual circumstances, premature death of a chief, or personal ambition might throw up a number of claimants. Rivals would then draw other brothers to them through the not unusual channels of kinship ties, force of personality or hope of personal gain. After the initial clashes with the (Cape) Colony, foreign policy attitudes came to replace personal loyalty as the chief factor on which internal political alignment was based. In conclusion, we may say that political groupings resulted from the clustering of a number of chiefs' sons (not necessarily members of the royal lineage or of the same generation) around one of their number. Each of these chiefs' sons brought with him his personal following. We must now examine the way in which such personal followers were recruited.

As in many other African societies, circumcision was the rite of passage with which the Xhosa marked the transition from juvenile to adult. (8) For the Xhosa it was of crucial political importance. At the age of ten or twelve, male children were sent off to their parents' chief. They tended his cattle and were instructed in the basic arts of war. When a number of them had reached maturity, they were assembled at the Great Place to undergo circumcision. Usually, an attempt was made to include a son of the chief with each group of these abakweta, and it is reported that "a large number ... are circumcised at the same time with a young chief of rank". (9) One reliable figure for a minor son of a Gqunukhwebe chief reports that he had nearly forty companions. (10)

Here we find two political bonds being consolidated. A man affirms his allegiance to a particular chief by sending him his son for education and circumcision. The son is taught to be loyal to the chief whose cattle he has tended and who officiates at the closing circumcision ceremony. At this ceremony each of the new adults is made to swear an oath of loyalty to the chief, an oath which is reiterated by their parents and by the chief's retinue. The second loyalty, inculcated at the same time as the first, is that of the novice to the chief's son with whom he has been circumcised. The importance of the role played by his age-mates in the young

chief's future life has been noticed (11) but, to my mind, insufficiently stressed.

The newly circumcised young son of the chief is now set up as a real chief. In the process of circumcision he gains wealth, following and territory.

Shaw describes circumcision as one of the two important occasions on which a chief may expect a large accretion of wealth. He refers to

the offerings made by the people at the time when he was circumcised and introduced into manhood and the status of a chief. These are of considerable amount in the aggregate, and, besides the offerings of the people of the tribe, include others from friendly chiefs or other branches of the family connected with other tribes. (12)

This is clear enough. In addition, there is room here for the inference that the circumcision gift provided an opportunity for other chiefs who thought it worth their while to establish friendly relations with the new chief.

With regard to the new chief's following, John Campbell, an inspector of missions, wrote in 1815:

When the eldest son of a Caffre chief is circumcised, he becomes chief of all the youth of the same age and under, and his father retains his authority over all others: thus power is divided between the father and his eldest son. (13)

Campbell is wrong, of course. No chief could govern all the children and none of the parents. But he does pinpoint the significance of circumcision in terms of devolution of power. The chief's son is now more than that; he is a chief in his own right, with dependants of his own. These dependants are the age-mates with whom he undergoes the months long circumcision period:

The youths ... circumcised at the same time with a young chief of rank become his retinue. The prospective 'prime minister' is the first operated upon; the second is the chief himself; the third becomes the councillor second in order. (14)

The council of the young chief is made up largely of his age-mates. They give him advice, and serve as the bureaucracy which sees that his orders are carried out. He might add the most notable members of his father's council and probably co-opts representatives from unrepresented areas of his potential territory, but in essence his council is drawn from his age-mates.

The practice of drawing one's council from one's age-mates is an additional source of division and friction within Xhosa society. The council of the deceased chief remained in existence as an independent unit, shorn of its decision-making power but presumably retaining the personal power created at the local level in the course of its term of office. (15)

Thus, whereas the first effect of circumcision was to make the novice loyal to the present chief, the second effect was to implant in him an antithetical and superior loyalty to his own age-set, and to its head, the chief's son. The relationship between chief's son and age-mates is, to my mind, crucial for the understanding of certain important differences between the Xhosa and the Zulu polities, and will therefore

be somewhat further explored. The inherent superiority of a member of the royal lineage to ordinary men is a central fact of Xhosa political ideology. Ngqika once said of the landdrost of Graaf-Reinet (the most important Colonial official with whom he dealt on a regular basis): "He is a chief made, I am a chief born." (16) Yet one cannot discount the democratizing effect of three months in a circumcision lodge, so well described by Victor Turner:

Complete equality usually characterises the relationship of neophyte to neophyte where the rites are collective.... The liminal group is a community or comity of comrades and not a structure of hierarchically arrayed positions. This comradeship transcends distinctions of rank, age, kinship position.... Much of the behaviour recorded by ethnographers in seclusion situations falls under the principle: 'Each for all, and all for each.' Among the Ndembu of Zambia, for example, all food brought for novices in circumcision seclusion by their mothers is shared out equally among them. No special favours are bestowed on the sons of chiefs and headmen [Note: this applies to Xhosa too (17)] All are supposed to be linked by special ties which persist after the rites are over, even into old age.... This comradeship [possesses] familiarity, ease and, I would add, mutual outspokenness. (18)

In the light of this, it is significant that Dingiswayo, who laid the foundations of what later became the Zulu state, abolished circumcision. Whatever his reasons, and they may have been military, the result can only have been to strengthen internal discipline. (19) Whereas the loyalty of the newly circumcised adult males (amakrwala) (certainly the most enthusiastic and numerous component of any southern African fighting force) was given primarily to the chief's son, their age-mate, their Zulu equivalents were subordinated directly to the supreme chief. Whereas a Xhosa chief's scope of action was bounded by the criticism and occasional forcible sanction (20) of peers who had come to know his weaknesses and predilections, the regiments which replaced the circumcision lodge as the initiation school for Zulu youth gave rise to no spirit of criticism and individual judgement, but only to what Turner would call the "complete obedience which characterizes the relationship of neophyte to elder". (21) Moreover, whereas the Xhosa was enabled to release sexual and other tensions during the liminal period (22), the Zulu could release his only in blood. Writers who have stressed the introduction of the age-set as a key factor in Zulu military success are only half right: the age-set exists among all Nguni - the Zulu innovation was to use it as an instrument for the creation of a military despotism, both internally and externally. Perhaps it would not be over-moralistic to say that the Zulu system produced the better warrior and the Xhosa system produced the better citizen.

Finally, not too long after the circumcision ceremony, the young chief receives the last thing necessary for full chiefship: his own territory.

All sons of the kings are born captains; one of them always succeeds to the government, the rest are only chiefs of small kraals, which they generally form themselves with the young men and their wives who have been their attendants, in some spot selected according to their own fancy. (23)

This passage furnishes information on several important points. It confirms the hypothesis that all chiefs' sons become chiefs. It indicates that they have authority over a specific territory, and it suggests that the new chief and his followers take up residence in a new area. This passage is consonant with the following in Alberti:

All sons of a chief are heirs to the honour befitting their rank. The youths who were circumcized together

with one of the sons of the chief, belong to his future horde, and are intended, when he marries and quits the paternal home, to constitute the main body of the tribe. (24)

Thus the moment of separation occurs within a reasonably short time from the end of circumcision, that is when the young chief and his leading age-mates have married. Such marriage need not be long delayed. As a result of the wealth he has received, the young chief is able to pay the dowry for his first wife, and loan cattle to his age-mates for the same purpose. (All the age-mates have themselves received gifts, including cattle, at the end of the closing circumcision ceremony.) (25) Here, too, the quality of one's birth plays a crucial role in determining one's future possibilities: a highly born son would receive greater tribute on completing circumcision than a lesser son, and engage more attention from neighbouring chiefs. The more cattle one has, the more age-mates one can "buy".

Once the chief is established, there are several ways by which he can enlarge his following. He might admit groups of refugees from drought, San raids, or political oppression, according to the process of ukungena described by Soga:

When received their clan system is not interfered with, and they are allowed to retain their unity under their own chiefs, provided that they have become tributary in the usual way, that is by slaughtering cattle for their hosts as a sign of submission. (26)

Councillorship was often granted to the chief of such a tributary group, which thus became incorporated into the national mainstream. (27)

Now that some insight into the processes of delegation and transfer of authority among the early nineteenth century Xhosa has been acquired, we may turn to the historical evidence. It should be noted that an assumption has been made here - namely, that the processes of the early Xhosa were similar to those which have been described. This is not an extraordinary assumption, but it is an assumption and should be regarded as such. It is justifiable only in so far as it fits all the known facts.

Xhosa Expansion and Incorporation of Neighbouring Groups

None of the authorities who stress the fissiparous tendencies of Xhosa polities have proceeded to the necessary consequence, logically speaking, of such a position - namely that since the various sub-chiefdoms are breakaway fragments, there must once have been a single, unified Xhosa state to which they all belonged. This is hardly surprising since such a deduction is contradicted by the historical evidence, both written and oral. Documents relating to shipwrecks make it quite clear that in the sixteenth century in the territory now occupied by the Xhosa "there are no other kings, but all is in the possession of chiefs called Ancozes, who are the heads and governors of three, four and five villages", and that "the people never go far from their villages and thus they know and hear nothing except what concerns their immediate neighbours". (28) The picture, then, is indubitably one of small-scale political units up until the end of the sixteenth century. It is nearly one hundred years before the next significant account of the Xhosa appears, and in this a rather different picture is drawn. Instead of a large number of insignificant small chiefdoms, the coast from the Mzimkulu (approximately) to the Buffalo was occupied by six distinct peoples: the Mbo (Bomvu?), Mpondomisse, Mpondo, Thembu, "Riligwa" (a Khoi group?), and Xhosa. (29) A possible explanation of this transformation will be suggested below; the important point to be noticed now is that the initial

organizational unit of the Cape Nguni was the small chiefdom rather than the large state and that these chiefdoms later coalesced. Oral traditions written down in 1914 by Samuel Mqhayi give a complementary picture of a situation where numerous warring chiefdoms were succeeded by a strong ruler:

During the period which preceded Ngconde, the practice was that the fellow possessing the greatest power, it was he who became the great chief; but now [the time of Ngconde) the law was established on this subject. (30)

The argument which is adopted here is that Xhosa history is best viewed not as a series of schisms destroying a previously unified people, but as the on-going expansion of the Xhosa polity brought about by the dispersion of the Xhosa royal lineage and its conquest of new lands and independent groups of Khoi, San and Nguni. The increase with each generation of the total number of segments, each under the leadership of a young chief of the royal lineage, did not mean internal subdivision of territory, population and authority, but an extension of all three. Although it may be true that where the territory and population of a polity are constant and unchanging a multiplicity of heirs means a subdivision of the whole, we shall see that there was no such constancy among the Xhosa, whose boundaries were continuously advancing in all directions. This was a natural consequence of the process whereby recently circumcized and married age-groups occupied new territory. Where the young chief chose an area already containing other settlements, one may assume that he fitted into the established political framework. Where he chose an area new to the Xhosa, he brought it into the Xhosa sphere of influence. In some cases, such as that of Langa and Mdange, large accretions of territory seem to have been colonized with the agreement of the Paramount. In other cases, such as that of the Ntinde, colonization was a by-product of the flight of a defeated traitor, but this did not mean that the Ntinde chiefs lacked an honoured place in the councils of the Xhosa chiefs in later years. (31) That the reward of adding a colony (isithanga) (32) to the polity was considerable freedom of action within it should not obscure the fact that the polity as a whole benefited by having its territory extended. In fact, as Aidan Southall has recognized, in polities where the means of communication are limited, the power of the Paramount must of necessity diminish with distance from his Great Place. (33) (One may, of course, set up a machinery of terror to prevent this, as Tshaka did, but the result would be a more conclusive form of fission [viz. Mzilikazi, Shoshangane, Matiwane, Zwangendaba] destroying even the outward semblance of common authority.) (34)

The dispersion of princely groups brought not only an increase in territory but an increase in population as well. The stereotype of a chief detaching his followers from the old state in order to form a new one on empty territory is without foundation. As far as the elder chief was concerned, the occupation of new territory by his son was presumably a desirable norm, since it either added to his territory or stabilized an uncertain section of it. Moreover, the territory into which the Xhosa royal lineage was moving was not empty. While it is abundantly clear that large numbers of Khoi were incorporated into the Xhosa state, it may not be so apparent that many independent Nguni groups, the original occupants of the land which later came under Xhosa control, were also incorporated. This is because the indigenous Nguni groups have obscured their separate origins by claiming genealogical relationships with one or other of the more or less mythical ancestors of the Xhosa royal lineage, the Tshawe. This may be clearly seen by analysing the story of Tshawe, which is the charter myth of the Tshawe dynasty. Tshawe was allegedly a minor son of the (mythical) chief Nkosiya^{mtu} ("Lord of Man").

After a time, probably desiring to distinguish himself, and considering himself sufficiently strong, he collected all his people and set out ostensibly to visit his father, Nkosiya^{mtu}, though he probably knew his father was dead. As he proceeded, numbers of broken men from other tribes

joined him and he reached his father's place to find the heir, Cira, in power. For a time he settled down.... On a certain day a general hunt was proclaimed ... Tshawe was successful in killing a blue-buck antelope, and, following the usual custom, the principal chief, Cira, required that a certain portion should be reserved for him. This Tshawe refused ... [Cira and Jwara (the 'Right-Hand Son' of the tradition) were defeated by Tshawe with the help of the Rudulu clan of the Mpondomise.] It is Tshawe's house ... which has ever since ruled among the Xhosa. (35)

Soga accepted the story at face value, but the historical substance of the myth would seem to be that Tshawe, chief of a wandering band of "broken men", was given land in which to settle by Cira, a powerful chief. When he felt himself strong enough, Tshawe overthrew Cira and Jwara, presumably a neighbouring chieftain who rallied to the support of the status quo, and replaced Cira with his own dynasty, thereby founding the Xhosa state. From this vantage point, Tshawe and his successors were well placed to absorb smaller independent Nguni units: given a choice between challenging the Xhosa or accepting the easy terms of ukungena described above, with its promise of local autonomy, resistance would seem the less attractive alternative.

The suggestion made in a previous paragraph that, once the Xhosa polity was founded, it was able to absorb previously independent Nguni groups is not based merely on speculation. Some groups retain traditions which attempt to attach them to a mythical Xhosa chief and thus betray their alien origin. The Kwemnta and the Qwambi, for instance, also claim to be descended from some of Nkosiyamntu. The Nqabe, who live in Thembu territory as guardians of Tshawe's grave and have never paid tribute to a Thembu chief, claim to be a minor house of Sikhomo's. Other formerly independent groups who are still identifiable include those who make up the Ndluntsha. This is a consortium of "clans", including the Cira, Bamba and Nkabane, who allied together in an unsuccessful attempt to regain lost influence. War between the Xhosa and the Ndluntsha is reported by Kropf, though he borrows the details from accounts of later wars between the Rarabe and the Goaleka. (36) Probably there were many more groups, the record of whose independent existence has since been lost. (37) This can easily be accounted for by the passage of time, the prestige involved in associating one's own ancestors with the ancestral myths of the dominant lineage, the probable absence of professional praise-singers at the courts of minor chiefs, and the custom of kinship groups (on which the initial independent chiefdoms were presumably based) to divide once they became too unwieldy for the purposes of exogamy.

In addition to independent groups of Bantu origin, Khoi chiefdoms were incorporated. Soga names the Nkarawane, Tatu, Dukwini, Cwama, and Gora. (38)

Three stages may be discerned in Xhosa-Khoi relations. In the first, the Xhosa simply exert informal influence over Khoi affairs; in the second, they participate directly in them; in the third, they incorporate them.

Once the Xhosa were in direct control of the Khoi group, they reduced them to a semi-servitude, a state which seems to have been obligatory in the transition from free non-Xhosa to fully-fledged Xhosa, for the Thembu suffered in much the same way during the periods of Xhosa ascendancy (39), as did the Mfengu later. The relationship at this point is well described by Haupt:

Near [the Xhosa] and with them mix the Gonaqua Hottentots[;] these the Kaffers use as servants and in war time, they also serve them as soldiers; their clothes and lifestyles are precisely alike and they intermarry without differentiation. (40)

Eventually, however, the conquered were adopted as Xhosa. To the Xhosa "clans" of Khoi extraction named by Soga and quoted above, the Dama may be added as an example. These were incorporated into the Ntinde, and any traces of their separate identity disappear after 1775. (41)

The Xhosa polity absorbed its neighbours in various ways, including overt force or indirect pressure, such as raids and harassment. The Thembu told Winkelman that the Xhosa "ravaged their dwelling-places, robbed them of their cattle, dragged them with them, and forced them to do heavy duty in their kraals". (42) A Khoi chief warned Beutler that the Xhosa "sought every possible way to jump out upon foreign peoples". (43) Given this state of affairs, it would not be surprising if non-Xhosa peoples preferred the Xhosa as overlords rather than neighbours.

As a result of the relatively easy terms of incorporation (ukungena, described above), the formerly independent chief apparently lost little through his inclusion in the Xhosa polity. His local political base remained intact, and the super-structure which was added weighed but lightly on his shoulders - a purely symbolic tribute, the expense of an occasional royal visit, the levy of troops for the national defence (and in a war it was better to be with the Xhosa than against them). Moreover, his political scope was broadened by his inclusion in his superior's council. The office of councillor was hereditary, that is to say on the death of an important councillor his successor would be chosen by the local group (44), and though the king had the power of refusing to confirm the choice, one may doubt that he did so casually, especially since it is known that he "only very rarely" deposed a councillor (45), as Lichtenstein reported, and since "the subjects are generally so blindly attached to their chiefs, that they will follow them against the king". (46) As a member of the council, he could protect his own interests and promote his own policies for the larger unit, because decisions were normally made by consensus. Only rarely did the chief force his opinions on his councillors, although theoretically his will was absolute. (47)

A newly incorporated Xhosa chief could also deploy his political influence as an "insider" on the battlefield. His superior chief was not in personal command of a particularly large body of soldiers and, in time of war, he depended on the geographically scattered councillors to send in their units. (48) As a result, military power remained concentrated in local hands. This became important when two major chiefs were rivals for the same potential followers. A major chief's power rested not only on his own strength but on the strength and loyalty of his supporters. Ndlambe's praises say that "[His] sanctuary is with the people of Dabadaba" (49), but there were many others whose loyalty was far less reliable and calculated to maximize their own political advantage. As a result of Ngqika's policy of slowly curtailing local privileges, his former supporters seized on a case of statutory incest to desert to Ndlambe. Once this new accession of strength had enabled Ndlambe to defeat his rival, however, the chiefs returned to their former allegiance, no doubt because a situation of balanced rivalry provided the minor chiefs with greater leverage than did competition for the favour of a single major chief. (50)

Thus the Xhosa royal lineage satisfied non-royal chiefs by giving them a stake in the polity. At the same time, it bound them irrevocably to itself. The new chief helped to shape the decisions of the major chief's council, but this made him subject to these decisions and responsible for carrying them out. He helped select the victor among the heirs, but in so doing he acknowledged the supremacy of the royal lineage. The contributions paid to the major chiefs were merely symbolic, but symbols have power too, and greatly enhanced the prestige, religious and political, of the royal lineage. Meanwhile, the minor chiefs' people were beginning to feel part of the larger unit. Its youth went off to join in the Isizwe ngezizwe (nations by nations) dancing. Its abakweta visited other abakweta in the liminal period. The adults could attend ox-races in the territory of their enemies. Parents sent their

children to be circumcized with a son of the royal lineage rather than with the son of a local chief. And whereas the place of the local chief on his superior chief's council remained secure while it was locally unchallenged, when there were two or more contenders the superior chief's favour was presumably crucial, and, no doubt, he was often able to name one of his own lineage to the place of the squabbling contenders. Finally, the point was reached where the privileges of the minor chiefs themselves were suspended. Ngqika went too far too fast when he attempted to arrogate the rights of inheritance of deceased rich subjects to himself, but he did succeed in suspending the right of other chiefs to order capital punishment. (51)

Afterword

The Xhosa are not the only people whose royal lineage dispersed over a wide area. The dispersion of the Yoruba and the Alur royal lineages, for example, led to a multiplicity of states. Did the dispersion of the Xhosa royal lineage do the same?

Hammond-Tooke asserts that they did. Basing himself on Nadel's criterion of territorial authority, he asserts that "there was no political theory which acknowledged the sovereignty of the paramount over the territories of his junior chiefs". (52) It should be pointed out, however, that if this criterion is to be considered crucial, very few polities currently considered as kingdoms would qualify. In Vansina's typology of Central, South and East Africa, he finds "delegation of power" to be a common characteristic:

The delegation of authority is generally a total delegation and comprises legislative, administrative, judicial, military, and even religious authority.... In their provinces [subordinate chiefs] will give justice, raise tribute, issue laws, sometimes even wage war and be considered generally as 'owners' of their subjects, their labour, their goods and their land all through the one act of delegation. (53)

Under such a definition, Hammond-Tooke's objection falls away. It should be noted that the Nupe (among whom Nadel did his fieldwork) were a full prebendal state and not very typical of states anywhere.

But in history - and this is where history diverges from classical anthropology - all definitions are operational, and there is little point in arguing over whether the Xhosa were or were not a state. The crucial question would appear to be whether or not the word chosen illuminates or obscures the reality. It would appear to me that the work which Hammond-Tooke uses to describe the Xhosa and the other Cape Nguni - cluster - is misleading. Certainly, it has never been used to describe other African polities which seem to me to resemble the Xhosa in many ways, and it might give the impression that the Cape Nguni are different. On the other hand, one has to consider the social and ritual importance of the Xhosa paramount, which Hammond-Tooke himself grants. (54) We have to consider that the Paramount had the final say in legal disputes. We have to consider the Paramount's symbolic stature as the head of the Xhosa "nation". (55) In the only case I know of, in which a Rarabe chief is installed, the Paramount officiated. (56) As far as I know, Hammond Tooke's point about tribute not being paid is not historically verifiable. What he refers to as intra-cluster wars, I would see as succession disputes (and I would use as my examples the Ngqika-Ndlambe and Ngqika-Hintsa wars). When he speaks of the failure of "cluster" chiefdoms to unite in the defence of one another, I assume he is speaking of their failure to unite in the face of the danger from the Colony. For a long time, however, the Colony posed less of a threat to individual Xhosa chiefs than did certain of their rivals, and they thought they could use the Colony as a tool in their internal disputes.

This is not to say that the internal structure of the Xhosa polity can be treated as a constant. For example, the power of the Paramount was challenged by the Rarabe, a challenge which culminated in Ngqika (Rarabe) 's defeating the Paramount Hintsa around 1800, and working out a genealogy which showed himself as the true Paramount. (57) But, on the whole, I believe we have to recognize a degree of unity which Hammond-Tooke does not recognize.

-----oOo-----

Notes

The notes have probably suffered most from condensation. References which are given in full only once may be insufficiently clear. A list of the most important is given below:

- H. H. Dugmore "Papers" in J. Maclean (ed), A Compendium of Kafir Laws and Customs (Cape Town, 1866)
- H. Lichtenstein, Travels in South Africa, Vol I (London, 1812; reprinted Cape Town 1928).
- W. Shaw Journal, ed. W. D. Hammond-Tooke (Cape Town, 1972).
- J. H. Soga, The Ama-Xhosa (London and Lovedale, n.d. [1932?]).
- " " The South-Eastern Bantu (Johannesburg, 1930).
- V. Turner, The Forest of Symbols (Ithaca, NY, 1967).

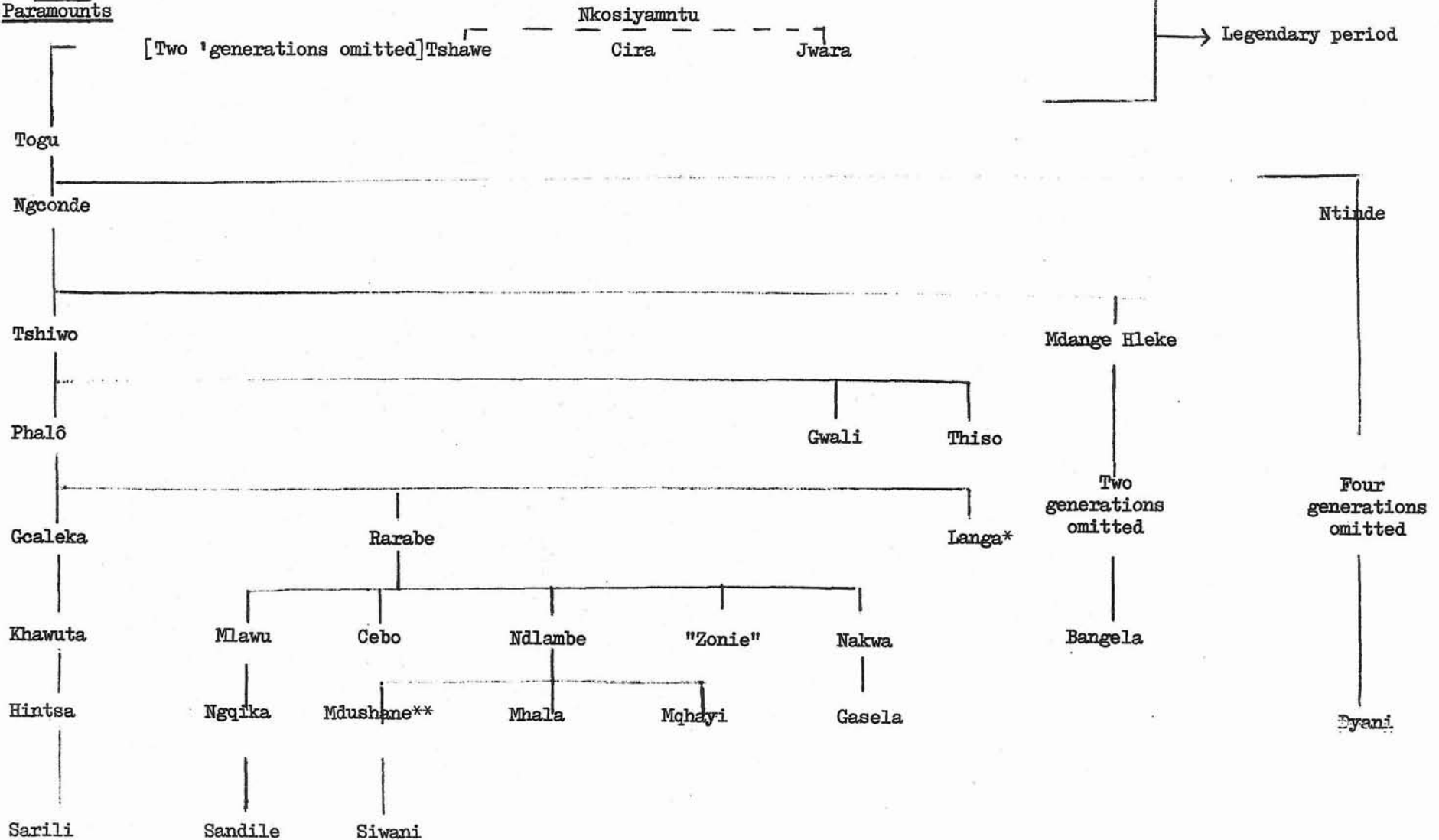
- (1) Africa XXXV (1965)
- (2) See the biographies by R. A. Kirsch in D. P. Kunene and R. A. Kirsch, The Beginnings of South African Vernacular Literature (University of California at Los Angeles, 1967).
- (3) Both Lichtenstein, Travels I, 322, and J. Brownlee, "Account of the Amakosae" in G. Thompson, Travels and Adventures in Southern Africa (London, 1828; facsimile reprint Cape Town 1962), 451, say that the chiefs normally take five wives, but they probably mean lesser chiefs. Ngqika had over twelve, a number regarded as excessive (J. Brownlee, 451), Sarili had nine (Soga, Ama-Xhosa, 104-7), and Ndlambe had six at the age of about 55, almost thirty years before he died (J. Barrow, Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa, 2nd ed. [London, 1806], 150-1).
- (4) Alberti, Account of the Xhosa, 84. See also Lichtenstein, Travels I, 354, and Great Britain, Houses of Parliament, Select Committee on Aborigines, Report (London, 1836), 603.
- (5) Soga, Ama-Xhosa, 37, 53, 290.
- (6) Ibid., 48; "Justus" (R. M. Beverley), The Wrongs of the Caffre Nation (London, 1837), 51-2; W. D. Hammond-Tooke, The Tribes of Willowvale District (Ethnological Publications, No 36, Department of Native Affairs, Pretoria, 1956-7), 54; Moodie, The Record, V, 46.
- (7) A case of a usurper giving up the throne on discovering that the true heir was still alive is found in A. Kropf, Das Volk der Xosa-Kaffern (Berlin, 1889), 5. For the Southern Bantu, see M. Gluckman, Order and Rebellion in Tribal Africa (London, 1962), 24.

- (8) Alberti, Account of the Xhosa, 38-42; J. Brownlee, "Account", 449; W. Shaw, The Story of my Mission in South-Eastern Africa (London, 1860), 455-60.
- (9) Dugmore "Papers", 155.
- (10) The Gqunukhwebe were an independent group subject to the Xhosa Paramount, but ruled by a commoner lineage. Their relative numerical strength results from the absorption of a large number of Khoi. See Soga, South-eastern Bantu X, 116-9. For the quoted figure, see Journal of William Shaw, 100.
- (11) Oxford History, 119, 125.
- (12) Shaw, Story of my Mission, 442.
- (13) John Campbell, Travels in South Africa (2nd ed, London, 1815), 365.
- (14) Dugmore "Papers", 155.
- (15) Soga, Ama-Xhosa, 29-30.
- (16) Campbell, Travels, 371. Campbell's emphasis.
- (17) All novices are supplied with milk from the same cows. Alberti, Account of the Xhosa, 39.
- (18) Turner, Forest, 100-1.
- (19) Omer-Cooper, Zulu Aftermath, 27; Oxford History, 341.
- (20) See below.
- (21) Turner, Forest, 100.
- (22) For the concept of the liminal period, see Turner, op. cit., Chapter IV; J. Brownlee, "Account", 449; Shaw, Story of My Mission, 456-7; Dugmore "Papers", 155.
- (23) Lichtenstein, Travels, I 354.
- (24) Alberti, Account of the Xhosa, 84.
- (25) Warner in Maclean, Compendium, 96.
- (26) Soga, Ama-Xhosa, 18.
- (27) Soga, South-eastern Bantu, 94.
- (28) Oxford History, 79-81.
- (29) This is from the account of the survivors of the wreck of the Stavenisse in 1686. Moodie, The Record, I, 426-8.
- (30) Mqhayi, Ityala Lamawele, 107-8.
- (31) Soga, South-eastern Bantu, 122 (Mdange), 125-6 (Langa), 113 (Ntinde). For the respect in which Dyani, Ntinde's direct descendant, was held, see Aborigine Committee Report, 603.
- (32) For the use of the word isithanga in this sense, see Mqhayi, Ityala Lamawele, 105.
- (33) A. Southall, Alur Society (Cambridge, 1953), 248.
- (34) See relevant chapters in Omer-Cooper, Zulu Aftermath.
- (35) Soga, South-eastern Bantu, 104-6.
- (36) Soga, South-eastern Bantu, 282-6 (Kwemta, Qwambi, Nqabe), 114-6 (Ndluntsha); Kropf, Xosa-Kaffern, 32, 35.
- (37) Cf M. Wilson, Oxford History I, 117: "In any local area, one clan, that of the local leader, predominated."
- (38) Soga, Ama-Xhosa, 20.
- (39) F. von Winkelmann, "Reisaantekeningen" (1788-9) in E. C. Godée-Molsbergen, Reizen in Zuid Afrika in de Hollandse Tijd, Vol IV (s'-Gravenhage, 1932), 92-3.

- (40) Haupt "Journaal", 310-11.
- (41) Theal, History, II, 122.
- (42) See note 39 above.
- (43) Haupt "Journaal", 288.
- (44) Soga, Ama-Xhosa, 29; J. Brownlee, "Account", 446; Lichtenstein, Travels, I, 352.
- (45) Alberti, Account of the Xhosa, 82.
- (46) Lichtenstein, Travels, I, 352.
- (47) Soga, Ama-Xhosa, 28-9.
- (48) Alberti, Account of the Xhosa, 81.
- (49) Quoted in W. Kuse, "The Traditional Praise Poetry of the Xhosa: Iziduko and Izibongo" (MA dissertation, Wisconsin, 1973), 42.
- (50) Moodie, The Record, V, 15-16.
- (51) Lichtenstein, Travels, I, 352.
- (52) Hammond-Tooke, "Segmentation and Fission", 156.
- (53) J. Vansina, "A Comparison of African Kingdoms", Africa XXXII (1962), 324-6.
- (54) Hammond-Tooke, "Segmentation and Fission", 156.
- (55) See, for example, the reaction of Phato, chief of the Gqunukhwebe, on hearing the news of Hintsa's capture. H. H. Dugmore, Reminiscences of an Albany Settler (Grahamstown, 1958), 80.
- (56) Owing to the fact that none of the original sources are available to me at this moment, I am unable to supply the exact reference. However, I believe it is in Soga, Ama-Xhosa, in the discussion on "ubuhlalu".
- (57) J. T. Van der Kemp "Journal", Transactions of the London Missionary Society (London, 1804), 464-6.

GENEALOGICAL TABLE OF KHOSA CHIEFS
MENTIONED IN THE TEXT

Xhosa
Paramounts



14

* Langa is the son of Phalo, and became Chief of the house of Thiso.

** Mdushane is the son of Ndlambe, and became Chief of the house of Cebo.