



SIR GARNET WOLSELEY CHEERING ON THE SWAZIES 1880

THE CAPTURE OF SEKUKUNI'S STRONGHOLD



Hard-fought frontiers

THE HISTORY of European settlement in the eastern Transvaal begins at the Cape. The Dutch colonised the Cape from the mid-1650s onwards, and ruled it for 150 years. They initially intended to establish a refreshment station for provisioning Dutch ships rounding the Cape, but the settlement soon grew into a permanent colony, and from 1657 onwards Dutch settlers were given land. By the end of the 18th century the colony had expanded into Namaqualand, the Karoo, and the southern and eastern Cape.

Members of the predominantly Dutch (and nascent Afrikaner) settler community started referring to themselves as Boers (farmers). By the end of the 18th century some semi-nomadic farmers, known as Trekboers, began to move into areas beyond the jurisdiction of the Dutch colonial authorities.

The British annexed the Cape in the early 19th century, and began to introduce changes – among them the abolition of slavery – that threatened the Boer way of life. As a result, some Boers decided to leave the Cape and trek into the interior. They did so not only to escape British control; they also wanted to find good land to settle on where they could farm and make a living. Some settled in the Orange Free State and some continued northwards, drawn to the eastern Transvaal by the existence of indigenous trade routes and a booming trade in ivory between Africans and Europeans at ports in the adjacent Portuguese coastal territory of Moçambique. They also hoped that the large local African population would provide them with the labour they had lost in the Cape when slavery was abolished.

The Boers who embarked on the Great Trek were known as Voortrekkers (pioneers); they left the Cape in small groups, stopping and settling at different places as they moved further and further into the interior. In 1845 the first group of trekkers, led by Andries Hendrik Potgieter, arrived in the eastern Transvaal, and founded Ohrigstad. They were soon joined by a second group, led by J J Burger. But Ohrigstad did not thrive. The two groups bickered among themselves; the trekkers were ravaged by malaria, and their herds by stock diseases. Potgieter and his followers moved north and founded the town of Schoemansdal. Most of those left behind moved south and founded the town

Facing page: 'The capture of Sekukuni's stronghold: Sir Garnet Wolseley cheering on the Swazies'. From *The Graphic*, 1880.



Wall of Trekker fort at
Ohrigstad, photographed
in 1915.



The wall today; it has
been fenced in and
placed under cover.

of Lydenburg, which became the new centre of the Boer community in the eastern Transvaal.

In 1852 the Boers north of the Vaal River established the Zuid Afrikaansche Republiek (ZAR), stretching from the Vaal River in the south to the Limpopo River in the north, and from the later British protectorate of Bechuanaland in the west to the Portuguese colony of Moçambique in the east. It included the whole of the eastern Transvaal.

In those early days the ZAR was weak and poor, and as an administrative, judicial and executive body it was inefficient. In this chapter we will see how the new arrivals in the region interacted with those who had come before, and how they tried to achieve their aims.

Claiming the land

The Boers wanted to gain control over the region they had just arrived in; they wanted to own the land, distribute it to more white settlers, and govern it. But first they needed to have a legitimate claim to the land. The Boers first claimed that their decisive defeat of the Ndebele under Mzilikazi in 1837, near present-day Pretoria, made them masters of the whole of the Transvaal. But this assumed that Mzilikazi had ruled over the whole of the Transvaal before the Boers defeated him. This was not the case; he only controlled a portion of the Transvaal, which did not include the eastern Transvaal. The boundaries of this area had not been fixed either, and had waxed and waned along with Mzilikazi's power. The Boers wanted another claim to the land that sounded more legitimate.

They tried to buy land from the Pedi king, Sekwati, but the document was 'lost'. The Pedi also doubted that their king would sell any land. According to the Pedi, Sekwati said to the Boers: 'Live in peace with my people, but I will not sell the land.' So the Boers turned to the Swazi king, Mswati. Mswati wanted to entrench his own authority and wanted Boer protection from the Zulu, so he was quite happy to co-operate with the Boers. He signed over vast tracts of land, including that belonging to the Pedi kingdom and other African chiefdoms. In 1879 Carl Jeppe, a ZAR official, observed that 'the Amaswazies did sell the land, but it is also evident that they had no right to do so'.

Despite the illegitimacy of some of the ZAR government's claims to land, it still managed to claim vast tracts. While the ZAR was still too weak to demand land from more powerful chiefdoms and kingdoms, there were pockets of land that did not fall under the control of any particular chief, and the Boers also took control of land belonging to smaller African chiefdoms and communities. While some of them might have been happy at first to have such powerful



‘rulers’, it soon became clear that once Africans had been subordinated they did not become members of a new, powerful government that would protect them. They were never considered citizens, and, under the ZAR’s constitution, had ‘no equality in church and state’.

Once the ZAR was established, its government began to give land to all whites who wanted to settle within its borders. Whites entering the ZAR were quickly made *burghers* (citizens), and given title deeds to two 3 000-morgen farms. This system rapidly led to a shortage of land – the ZAR didn’t have enough land to continue giving away such large farms to all newcomers – so from 1860 onwards *burghers* were only given one 3 000-morgen farm each. From 1866 the government stopped giving farms to newcomers, and from 1871 even the sons of *burghers* were not given any land.

For a period, though, the ZAR gave away huge tracts of land. Some of it had belonged to the African chiefdoms and communities it had subordinated. Already by the early 1850s Boers were laying claim to land on the margins and even in the core areas of these groups. A British official wrote in 1877 that when the ZAR

[t]ook possession of the land and found it occupied by natives [it] made no provision in land for their location but granted the land away in farms over the heads of the natives living on it.

But the Boers not only issued title deeds to the land of subordinated African groups; they also ventured into the territory of the independent African kingdoms, ‘inspected’ potential farms there, and issued title deeds to them. However, while this was an affront to those independent kingdoms, such title deeds initially had no force or effect.

Meanwhile, the ZAR was faced with another problem. Not all Boers who had farms were able to, or wanted to, keep them, because many were hunters rather than farmers, and land seemed so abundant. They also lacked the capital to develop their farms. This led to farms being sold at very low prices to traders and speculators from around the world. Eventually, much of the land in the ZAR ended up belonging to people living overseas. Ironically, giving land away so freely to Boers and other whites had led to the same situation that had made life in the Cape unbearable to the Boers – many Boer families lost access to land, and became tenants on farms owned by others.



Lager im Buschfelde.

A Boer laager in the Bushveld. Engraving by T Wangemann, director of the Berlin Mission, who travelled through the region several times in the 1860s and 1870s.

What life was like for the Boers

When the Boers first arrived, the eastern Transvaal was an inhospitable place. They had to traverse a difficult landscape on foot, by horse, or by wagon – there were no roads to follow, and no bridges to take people across rivers. Elephants, lions and buffalo roamed freely; malaria and other diseases killed people and livestock, and there was no escape from the harsh climate. It was a difficult place to live. We have seen what life was like for Africans living in the region before the Boers came. What was life like for the Boers?

As we have seen, all newcomers to the Transvaal until 1866, and all sons of burghers until 1871, were given land. But this did not mean that they all became farmers. It was very difficult to run a farm and make a profit. In the first place, a lot of capital was needed to establish a farm. Many Boers did not have this kind of money. But farming was not the only way to make a living in the eastern Transvaal.

When the Boers arrived, the region teemed with wildlife. Africans living there had hunted game for hundreds of years, and had exchanged products of the hunt for other goods in trade networks that ran from the far corners of the region to the Mocambican coast. So when the Boers arrived they often hunted in groups with Africans who knew the area better than they did. They also made use of some of the old trading networks that ran to the coast. And they had guns, which enabled them to kill large numbers of animals. They found a ready market for their goods; animal hides were popular throughout southern Africa, and there was a large market for horn and ivory in Europe. The meat was eaten locally. Game was slaughtered on a massive scale, and by the end of the century the *landdrosts* (chief magistrates of a district) were seriously considering ways to restrict hunting. This will be examined in detail in chapter 4.

Trading was another major economic activity in the eastern Transvaal. For a while there was a booming trade in ivory and other products of the hunt. This is what drew many Boers to the region in the first place, and it initially formed a strong basis for the ZAR economy. Boers in the eastern Transvaal also hoped to trade with the Portuguese in Moçambique, notably at Delagoa Bay (today's Maputo) rather than the British at ports further away such as Durban or Port Elizabeth. But the ivory trade began to suffer when the numbers of elephants – together with those of other animal species – rapidly diminished.

While there were large markets for ivory and other hunt products, the eastern Transvaal was not well situated for any other kind of trade. Farmers struggled to sell produce as there was no real market for them locally. It was also dangerous to take livestock, or even themselves, along the trade route to the Mocambican coast because it ran through belts of tsetse fly and malaria. So farmers had to sell their produce as far away as Pietermaritzburg and Grahamstown. At the same time, Boers had to rely on those faraway markets for goods that they could not produce locally. As a result, they did not get much for their produce, and they paid very high prices for those items they could not make themselves.

So while land and animals were plentiful, it was still difficult to make a living. Many Boers ended up in poverty and sold their farms to traders, often for very small sums of money. Some Boers sold their farms for other reasons. Many made a living from hunting, and it did not seem necessary to them to legally own farms. This was because holding legal ownership meant that one had to pay taxes and other legal costs. Many hunters sold their land to avoid the costs and inconveniences of being responsible for a farm, and became tenants instead. After all, if one eventually wanted a farm, land was easy to

Crossing the
Crocodile river.



Camping in the veld.



claim from the government. But as land ran short, and more and more farms were bought up by traders and land prospectors, land became expensive. Boers who had become tenants on other people's land found their landlessness more permanent than they would have wished.

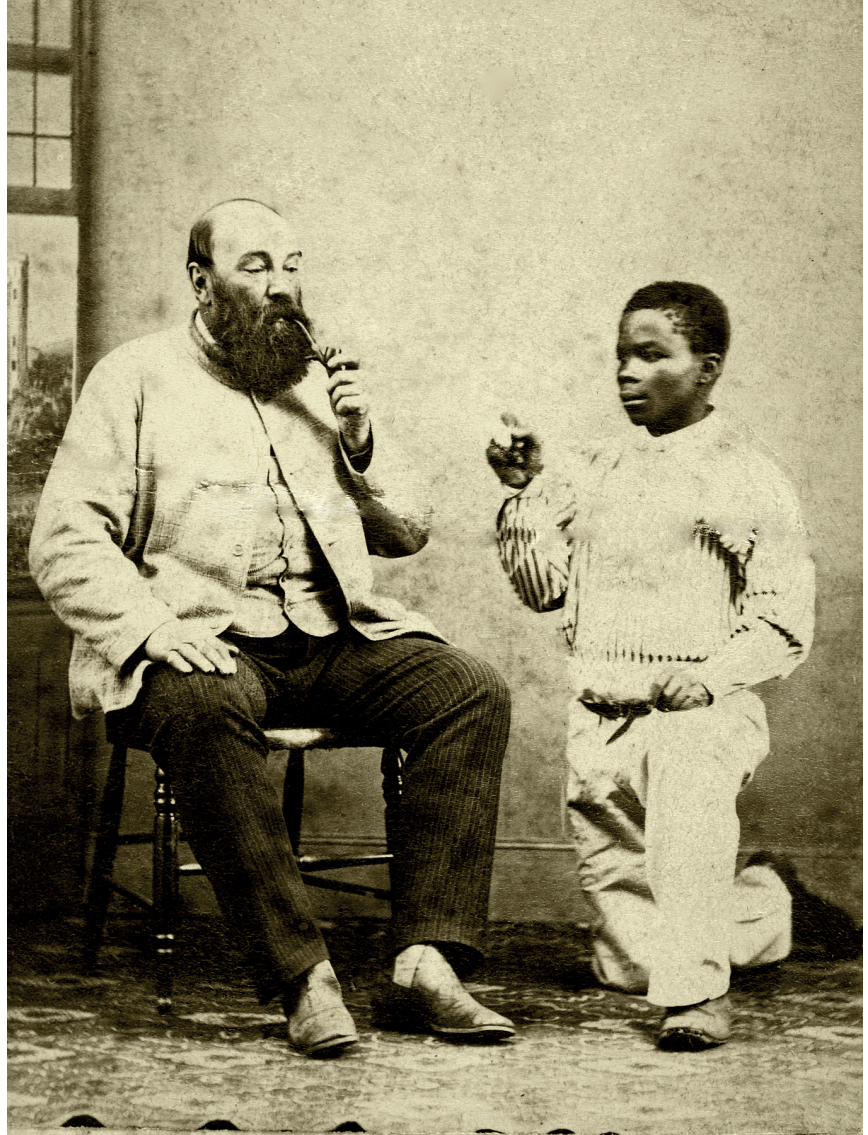
Boers who had more money and could keep their farms running had another problem to deal with. They had come from the Cape where they had become dependent on servile labour on the farms. Whites were reluctant to do menial labour. When Boers came to the eastern Transvaal they expected to continue with this system. But in the early decades of Boer settlement in the ZAR Boers were almost always short of labour. While African communities used family labour, Boer communities were strongly averse to white women and children working on the land. One way to recruit labour was by demanding it from African communities as a form of tribute, but many of those communities were still powerful enough to refuse such demands. Sometimes Africans would provide labour willingly in exchange for guns and cattle, and sometimes Boers were able to obtain labour from subordinate African communities. In those cases it was most often their own women and children who would be sent to work on the Boers' farms. But still there was a shortage. Since Boers could not control adult labour successfully, they turned to child labour.

Inboekeling

Boers in the eastern Transvaal and elsewhere took African children – removed from their communities against their will – into their households, mainly to provide them with cheap labour. These young people were called *inboekeling* ('booked in people', or indentured labourers) because when they were brought into a Boer community their names would be entered in a contract book kept by the local magistrate. Some apologists said these children were orphans whose parents had been killed in raids and war, and the Boers were rescuing them from bleak futures. But evidence points to less altruistic motives and practices.

When the practice first started, children were captured by Boer commandos in raids on their villages. But, over time, a trade in children developed. In the 1860s the Swazi were determined to cement a relationship with the Boers, creating an alliance that would benefit them. The Boers were also happy to have support from a major African kingdom. In order to cement their alliance, the Swazi began to supply Boers with children from neighbouring African communities.

There are no surviving detailed accounts of how Boers and Swazi captured children in the eastern Transvaal, but one from Natal provides a good example.



A servant, thought to be an *inboekeling*, lights his master's pipe.

In this instance Zulu children were hiding in a cave with their mother, Mpindo, after fleeing their village. They had been subjects of the Zulu king Dingane, who had just been defeated by the Boers. They had been without food for three days. The diary of the German missionary Albert Nachtigal contains the following account:

Then the followers of Mpande [allied to the Boers] arrived. They sat below the fugitives among the bushes, slaughtered an ox and started to roast the flesh, giving the impression that they had come to assist the refugees. Two of Mpindo's children, Mozane and Nzunza, were so attracted by the sight and smell of food that they left their hiding place to join them. The warriors were very kind to them and more and more went out to join them. Finally, when no more children emerged, the warriors enticed the children further and further away from their hiding places. Then, suddenly, a group of Boers on horseback appeared nearby and although the children wanted to flee it

was now too late. They were captured and taken to the Boer laager where, quaking with fear, they awaited execution. To their great relief they were not killed but were given food.

Once the children were captured, they were taken by individual farmers or sold. In the 1850s and 1860s about 1 000 children were traded each year. One of the major centres of this trade was the Zoutpansberg, in the far northern Transvaal, and from there children were sold as far south as the Orange Free State. After being caught, children would be hidden in baskets, carpets, and wooden boxes, and loaded onto wagons that would take them to places far from their homes. There they would learn their new roles. The children who were captured by Boers and the followers of Mpande

[s]oon realized that each had a Boer as a master, and these gave them new names. Mozane who was then eight years old was from thenceforth called Valentyn. His brother Nzunza was called Kibit and his sister Lutika was called Kaatjie. Valentyn and Kaatjie belonged to a Boer called Gerrit Schoeman. Eventually they became used to their new masters and their new life and were no longer as distressed as they had been when they were seized. Valentyn was given over to play with and attend to the young Hermanus Steyn whose father had been murdered by Dingaan. The young white Hermanus and the young black Valentyn soon got to know one another and were always together. They caught mice and roasted and ate the birds and locusts which they captured. They raided hives and removed the honey. The one learned from the other, bad as well as good.

The children would be taught skills their new masters needed. Boys became herders, hunters, and drivers. Some learned masonry, carpentry, thatching, plastering, gun and wagon repair, ox training and driving, and leather and metal work. Girls cooked; made butter, soap and tallow; sewed; and, as they got older, raised their own and their masters' children. Some *inboekeling*e learned to play musical instruments, which they would play at Boer weddings and celebrations. In Ohrigstad, where Valentyn lived, there were many *inboekeling*e. They would get together at night, once their masters were asleep. They sang and danced, and young men and women had a chance to meet and fall in love.

But *inboekeling*e were not free. Technically, they would be freed after reaching adulthood, but this did not always happen. They had to work very



Albert Nachtigal.



An early photograph
of Lydenburg.

hard and were vulnerable to abuse, both physical and sexual. *Inboekeling*e were essentially slaves. Some decided to run away, but this was very risky.

The trade in children declined after the 1860s. African communities began to resist the Swazi and Boer raiders, and so the supply of children was reduced. The Swazi disengaged from the trade, and when the British and others criticised the ZAR for continuing with slavery, the Boers became too embarrassed to continue.

Migrant labour

From the 1860s onwards, a Boer in the eastern Transvaal surveying his farm, desperate for labour and wondering how to get it, might be greeted with a sight that would get his blood boiling: that of a large group of young African men walking past, laden with provisions, on their way to Port Elizabeth, Uitenhage, or Kimberley. This was the beginning of the migrant labour system. At Port Elizabeth and Uitenhage they would work as labourers, often on sheep farms, as there was a booming trade in wool at this time. After the late 1860s, once diamonds had been discovered in Kimberley, young African men would go to work on the mines. It frustrated the Boers in the rural areas to watch so many men go off to work somewhere else. As more and more men walked to Kimberley to work on the mines the Boers tried to find ways to get them to stay at home and work on their farms. Among these were laws to curb migrancy. But this did not work. The Boers also launched raids on groups of migrants,

and tried to force them to work on their farms – but the migrants often fought back.

When migrants worked in Port Elizabeth, Uitenhage or Kimberley, they would earn cash wages. Sometimes they would use the money to buy cattle for bridewealth. More often, though, they bought firearms and ammunition. The firearms bought in other parts of the country were cheaper and better than those that could be bought in the eastern Transvaal. This was how the Pedi, Swazi, Ndzundza, and other powerful African kingdoms and chiefdoms managed to obtain firearms. It is also one of the reasons why the Boers were so anxious about the migrant labour system.

Chief Boleu and the guns

The acquisition of guns became a means of defiance for African chiefdoms and a bone of contention for the Boers. Boleu, the chief of the Kopa, who lived close to modern Groblersdal, was one of many chiefs who chose to build strength against the Boers. He had seen many defeats and weathered many storms in the 1830s and 1840s, and was determined to free the Kopa from Boer domination. He started accumulating guns and horses, but the Boers began to take notice. In 1848 some Boers in the district accused the Kopa of stealing three horses from them and using them to hunt buffalo. They also accused the Kopa of buying 28 guns from an English trader. ‘Boleu’, they said, ‘no longer regards himself as a kaffir but as a Boer.’ They decided to teach Boleu a lesson, and put him in his place. They formed a commando and set off for his settlement. When they got there they raided the community and seized 24 firearms and 56 head of cattle. Then they found Boleu and, in front of his subjects, gave him a flogging. After this humiliation Boleu had little choice but to bow down before the Boers. But this would not be for long.

Thaba Ntsho

In the 19th century the fortunes of different chiefdoms in the eastern Transvaal waxed and waned. The Kopa were one such chiefdom that sometimes found themselves at the mercy of others, and sometimes were strong enough to resist subordination. In the 1830s and 1840s the Kopa recognised the authority of the Pedi king, which meant they became subjects of the Pedi kingdom. When the Boers arrived, the Kopa had to recognise their authority too, and became subordinates. But as the years passed the Kopa gradually built up their strength. One of the ways in which they did so was by buying firearms. They also built one of the most impressive fortified capitals yet seen in the eastern Transvaal. Called Thaba Ntsho (‘Black Mountain’), it was built on a



‘Berg Maleos’, or Thaba
Ntsho, fortified capital
of the Kopa chiefdom,
near latter-day
Groblersdal. Engraving
by T Wangemann.

conical hill near modern Groblersdal. Protecting the summit were impenetrable thickets of thorn trees and imposing stone bulwarks. The main settlement was built halfway up the hill, and housed about 3 000 people. They lived in huts, surrounded by reed fences. The huts were grouped in clusters, and each cluster had a cattle kraal. Five-metre high prickly pear hedges separated the kraals from the avenues. Close to the summit was the royal kraal, where Chief Boleu lived with 18 wives and many children.

Erholweni

In the mid-19th century the Ndzundza, under Chief Mabhogo, also had to recognise the authority of the Pedi and the Boers. But in the 1860s the Ndzundza gathered strength, and their capital also became legendary. Erholweni (‘Place of Fortified Caves’) was situated near modern Roossenekal. T Wangemann, the director of the Berlin mission, wrote that it consisted of a

... mountain of rock [which] protruded from a long mountain ridge. It could not as a result be besieged from all sides. The mountain consists of bare rock overhangs and has at only one point about half way up a clump of large trees which are tended with care. Castor trees, prickly pears and creepers make this forest impenetrable. Mapog's own home is here, and close by is a large cave, big enough to absorb all his cattle in the event of an enemy attack. All around are the kaffirs' huts, but you can see nothing of them from below because each is shielded by stone fortifications. Running water on the mountain protects the inhabitants from thirst in the event of a siege.

The Ndzundza also built strong stone walls with loopholes, and had guns to fire through them. As noted earlier, migrants had for many years been bringing firearms with them on their return home. The Ndzundza did not just accumulate guns brought home by their own migrants; they raided returning Pedi migrants as well. They also bought guns from local traders, even though Africans were prohibited from buying firearms in the eastern Transvaal. The region was a lawless frontier, and some Boers and other whites tried to make money in any way they could.

Buying and raiding guns was one of the things that made the Ndzundza gain strength by the 1860s. Another factor that gave them greater strength was their growing population. Many small African chiefdoms could not stand up to the might of the Boers and the stronger African chiefdoms. When they were attacked, those Africans would flee and become refugees. They would then try to find somewhere safe to live. Many came to the Ndzundza and asked to become subjects of the chief. They now had a place to live, and in return gave their allegiance to the chief. This meant they would have to fight for him. Soon there were 10 000 people under Chief Mabhogo. At the beginning of the 1860s the time to fight was fast approaching; the Ndzundza and their defences would soon be put to the test.

War with the Ndzundza

By the 1860s the Boers were becoming increasingly worried about the degree to which the Kopa and Ndzundza were resisting their control. The only way to deal with this, they believed, was to subjugate them by force of arms. In the early 1860s the Boers asked the Swazi to help them attack the Ndzundza at Erholweni. The Swazi declined. In 1863 the Boers approached the Pedi, and asked them for help in the attack. The Pedi agreed. Boer and Pedi regiments launched an attack on Erholweni. The Pedi surged forward, met



The mountain fortress of Erholweni, capital of the Ndzundza kingdom.

fierce resistance, and suffered many casualties. But the Boers hung back and watched the fighting from a distance. The Pedi soon realised that the Boers were letting them do all the work, and decided to abandon the campaign. The campaign was unsuccessful, and the Ndzundza were left undefeated.

In 1864 the Boers again asked the Swazi for military assistance, and this time the Swazi agreed. This time they attacked the Kopa first. On 10 May 1864 Swazi regiments stormed the Kopa stronghold at Thaba Ntsho. About 900 Kopa men met the attack and fought for their lives, but were eventually defeated. Some 853 of the 900 died in battle, and Thaba Ntsho was left defenceless. The Swazi advanced further up the hill and began to deal with women and children. Swazi warriors captured about 2 500 women and children, and killed many others. Bodies were left in piles two metres high. Missionaries wrote:

Approximately half of [Boleu's] entire people lay dead or dying on the mountain that only a few days earlier had echoed with the sound of heathen

dancing and singing. The other half had mostly been captured and was in the possession of the enemy. The survivors did what they could to nurse those that could still be helped. Sons carried their exhausted parents on their backs away from the burning town and girls – some of them mortally wounded – dragged themselves down the mountain.

Boleu and many of his children died in the fighting. One of his surviving sons, Ramapodu, sued for peace. He was recognised as chief by the Boers, whose authority the Kopa now had to recognise.

After this victory the Swazi and Boers planned an attack on Erholweni. But the Ndzundza once again fought fiercely, shooting at their assailants from behind the stone walls. The Swazi would not continue this battle, and returned home with the spoils of the last battle with the Kopa. The children they had captured were sold to the Boers and became *inboekeling*e, and the women were incorporated into Swazi society as wives and concubines.

Tribute

Some of the Boers who had fought against the Ndzundza were unable to retreat like the Swazi. They were farmers, and lived on land very close to the Ndzundza chiefdom. Here they faced hardship and insecurity. Ndzundza regiments harassed them, taking cattle and other prizes, and the situation worsened after the unsuccessful attack on the Ndzundza capital. In anticipation of these raids the Boers formed *laagers* – defensive formations created by placing ox wagons end to end in a circle. They camped behind the wagons, and used the gaps between them as loopholes. But going into laager all the time disrupted their lives and their farming operations. At the same time their cattle were dying of lung sickness. Their fellow Boers would not help them any more, and neither would the Swazi or Pedi. Some of the farmers trekked away, not willing to live under the shadow of the Ndzundza chiefdom. Those who were left approached Chief Mabhogo to try to negotiate some kind of settlement, and ensure their safety. They found that

Mapog is for peace if the people [Boers] are prepared to pay Mapog one beast for each house because it is his land... He said that he had said earlier that it was his land... and he would fight to the death for it.

The *landdrost* of Lydenburg opposed this demand. So did the executive council of the ZAR. But the farmers who lived on the land Mabhogo would die for decided to agree, and handed over 30 head of cattle. They hoped that this



Stone fortifications
at Erholweni.

payment, and others that followed, would be enough to buy the land. But Mabhogo took the payments as tribute, and still regarded the land as his own.

Expanding borders into Swaziland

So far we have seen that the Swazi often allied themselves with the Boers, recognising their strength and wanting to entrench their own position in the region, particularly in light of the threat they faced from the powerful Zulu kingdom. But these sorts of alliances were very fickle. Boers and African chiefdoms alike were gripped by the necessity to hold on to land, expand their borders, and assert their dominance in their changing world. So while they sometimes fought on the same side, the Boers and the Swazi did not always agree, or trust each other. The Boers looked with hungry eyes at the land across the Swaziland border, and the Swazi looked back with suspicion. What complicated things further for Swaziland were rivalries and disputes within the kingdom itself. King Mswati was a strong king, and had a lot of support, but he had many brothers, and thus many rivals for the throne. One of his brothers, Somcuba, had such designs of his own. He began to make his own alliances with the Boers; in 1846 he ceded land to the Boers during his role as chief Swazi negotiator. When Mswati began to feel suspicious about his brother, Somcuba escaped to Ohrigstad, the home of his new Boer allies. As a Boer protégé he was a real threat to Mswati, and the latter sent forces to capture or kill him. The first attempt, in 1853, failed, partly because Somcuba was so well protected by the Boers. Mswati realised that he needed the Boers on his

side in this matter. For withdrawing their protection of Somcuba, they would receive another grant of land from Swaziland. This tactic worked. Somcuba was killed in 1854 or 1855, and the Boers received their land.

But 'land grants' did not necessarily mean the same thing to the Swazi and the Boers. The Boers thought they now owned the land (even though they took a long time to pay for it), and the Swazi thought they were simply allowing the Boers to use the land in return for payments of cattle. Regardless of who owned the land, for a long time the Swazi continued to be the primary 'users' of the land, and Mswati still fought wars across it. But when the British annexed the Transvaal in 1877 they regarded the 'land grant' of 1855 as proof of Boer ownership of that tract of land.

The Swazi were prepared to cede land or the use of land to the Boers because they were worried about being attacked by the Zulu. When King Mswati died in 1865 the heir was too young to rule, so the country was ruled by a council of regency. Then, in 1874, the heir died. This ushered in a period of turmoil which both the Boers and the Zulus tried to exploit. The Zulu monarch, Cetshwayo, harboured a refugee Swazi prince, Mbelini, whom he hoped to install as a client Swazi king. But the Boers beat him to it.

In 1875 Gert Rudolph, the *landdrost* of Utrecht – a town near the Swazi border – led an expedition into Swaziland to install Mbandzeni, whom most Swazis regarded as the rightful heir, as the new Swazi king. Rudolph also wanted to sign a treaty with the Swazi. According to this treaty, the Swazi would become subjects of the ZAR, but the land they lived on would still belong to them. The Swazi accepted this treaty; it seemed like a better option than the prospect of a Zulu invasion. But the latter proved less of a threat than had been imagined. Both the colonial government of Natal and many of Cetshwayo's subjects strongly opposed a Zulu attack on the Swazi, and so Cetshwayo eventually decided against it. Once the threat of invasion was gone, the Swazi regretted having made such huge concessions to the ZAR. In a move to reject the dominance of the ZAR, a Swazi emissary was sent to Pietermaritzburg the next year to take a message to the British colony of Natal. The emissary thanked the government for sending Rudolph to Swaziland. Rudolph, the emissary said, had confirmed Swaziland's long-standing tributary relationship with Britain. But while the Swazi preferred the British to the Boers in 1875, they still lost out in 1877 when the British annexed the Transvaal and confirmed, using the piece of paper signed in 1855, that a portion of Swaziland in fact now belonged to the Transvaal government.



The Zulu monarch
Cetshwayo.

Christianity and the Pedi

While Boers and African chiefdoms struggled to increase or at least maintain their territory and power, another shaping force was at work in the eastern Transvaal, and in fact the whole of South Africa. This was Christianity, one of the great players in South African history. Missionary and African Christian endeavours intensified in the 19th century, and were to have a profound impact on communities throughout the country. Missionaries came to southern Africa from all sorts of missionary societies and Christian denominations in Europe and America. Their aim was to convert the 'heathen' Africans to Christianity, thus saving their souls and spreading the word of God. Converting to Christianity in those days was not the same as it is today. It was very difficult to be baptised as a Christian. Not only did Africans have to prove their devotion to God, they also had to become 'civilised' in other ways. In order to become properly Christian, Africans had to stop participating in traditional rituals and practices. This could lead to all sorts of problems, as we shall soon see.

The station of the Berlin Missionary Society in Lydenburg, founded by Albert Nachtigal in 1866.



In June 1861 two missionaries from the Berlin Missionary Society settled in the heart of the Pedi kingdom at Khalatlolu ('Place of the Elephant'), near modern Schoonoord. There is a widely held assumption that Christianity only arrived in African societies with the arrival of missionaries. But many Pedi were already Christians. The missionaries attached themselves to a group of Christians who were already spreading God's word among their people. They, like many others across the country, had heard of Christianity from returning migrants, or had been exposed to it themselves on their own travels. The missionaries, Heinrich Grützner and Alexander Merensky, and the early converts, especially Jacob Mantladi and Martinus Sewushane, worked together to continue to spread Christianity in the Pedi kingdom.

Very soon after the missionaries arrived, strange things started happening in the Pedi kingdom, which some Pedi said was the work of God. A missionary was told that

At Kabu's the people no longer hoe on a Sunday. It was told that an old witchdoctor had said that he couldn't care less about Sunday and had gone out to look for honey: he found the honey but then fell off a cliff and returned home bleeding. He was reported to have said that this happened because it was a Sunday. Sunday would probably kill him soon!

The missionaries told a tale of another man who scorned Sunday observance. One Sunday he took his axe into the forest to cut wood. As he was chopping, the head of the axe flew off its handle and struck him in the mouth. He came home bleeding heavily from a very bad wound. This, the missionaries implied, was what happened to blasphemers.

Some Pedi said the Christian converts had God on their side; others said they practised witchcraft. Some of the converts had been accused of practising witchcraft before they became Christian, and so people were already suspicious of them. When the converts refused to take part in traditional rituals meant to keep the community safe, people began to get angry. In 1864 illness and disease spread through the Pedi capital, and some people blamed the converts. Meanwhile, the king needed to safeguard his people, and discouraged further conversion. Christians were threatened and persecuted; some had their property taken away, and some were attacked. But they did not renounce their faith.

The missionaries decided to leave the Pedi kingdom, and Pedi Christians followed them. Among the devout Christians was a man who would come to play an important role in the lives of the converts. He was the brother

Heinrich Grützner and Alexander Merensky.



Botšhabelo in the 1860s
or 1870s. Engraving by
T Wangemann.



'Wagon building at
Botšhabelo'. Engraving
by T Wangemann.



Wagenbauerei in Botšhabelo.

of Sekhukhune, the Pedi king, and his baptismal name was Johannes Dinkwanyane.

Botšhabelo

When Alexander Merensky left the Pedi kingdom with Dinkwanyane and a group of Christian converts, they looked for another place to build a mission station. They eventually settled in a valley north of today's Middelburg on the eastern highveld, surrounded by rolling hills. The settlement was built at the foot of a hill. Fields sloped gently towards a river on the valley floor. It was a beautiful and fertile setting. They called it Botšhabelo (Place of Refuge). The first people to settle there were 115 Pedi men, women and children who had fled the Pedi kingdom. They were soon joined by 120 Kopa, led by Ramapodu. Here they built a church, houses, workshops, a mill, a school, and, on the other side of the river, a large 'native village'. Many of the buildings were built of stone, with thatch or tin roofs. In the 1870s, when the stone church had become too small to accommodate the growing population, the community built another. It was modelled on churches in Berlin, but built with local materials. The walls were built of red clay bricks, formed and baked at Botšhabelo. The roof was thatched, and the floor was smeared with cow dung. It was built by the converts themselves.

The community also built a fort, named Fort Wilhelm, on the top of the hill behind the settlement. E E Sandeman, a traveller, wrote that it had

walls fifteen foot high and two feet thick pierced with loop-holes and built of iron stone ... there are flank defences and a turret over the entrance which give a clear view of the surrounding countryside.

Within ten years of Botšhabelo's establishment there were 1 600 people living there. It was an important centre in the eastern Transvaal, and featured prominently on maps of the region. It was a thriving site of agricultural production, and a centre for wagon building and repair. For a while it had the largest school in the Transvaal, and the first Sotho Bible was written there. It was a place of fertile fields and fertile minds.

People at Botšhabelo worked hard, and lived according to strict rules. When people arrived on the mission station to live there they were, according to Merensky,

made clearly to understand the laws of the community, that idleness will not be allowed and will be visited by expulsion; that theft will be punished

The first church
at Botšhabelo.



An early photograph
of Botšhabelo.





Botšhabelo today.



The second church at Botšhabelo, built by converts in the early 1870s.

Fort Wilhelm, later known as Fort Merensky – Merensky's answer to the fortified strongholds of neighbouring African kingdoms.



by lashes and expulsion; drunkenness, the first offence a flogging and the next a still more severe flogging and expulsion into the bargain.

Converts had to hand over one tenth of their crop to the missionaries. They also had to recognise the authority of the ZAR. This meant they had to pay taxes, and were sometimes expected to provide tribute and labour to Boer farmers. They had to dress according to certain rules, and live according to certain rules as well. They were not allowed to practice circumcision, polygyny, bride wealth, rainmaking, divination, and sacrificing to the ancestors.

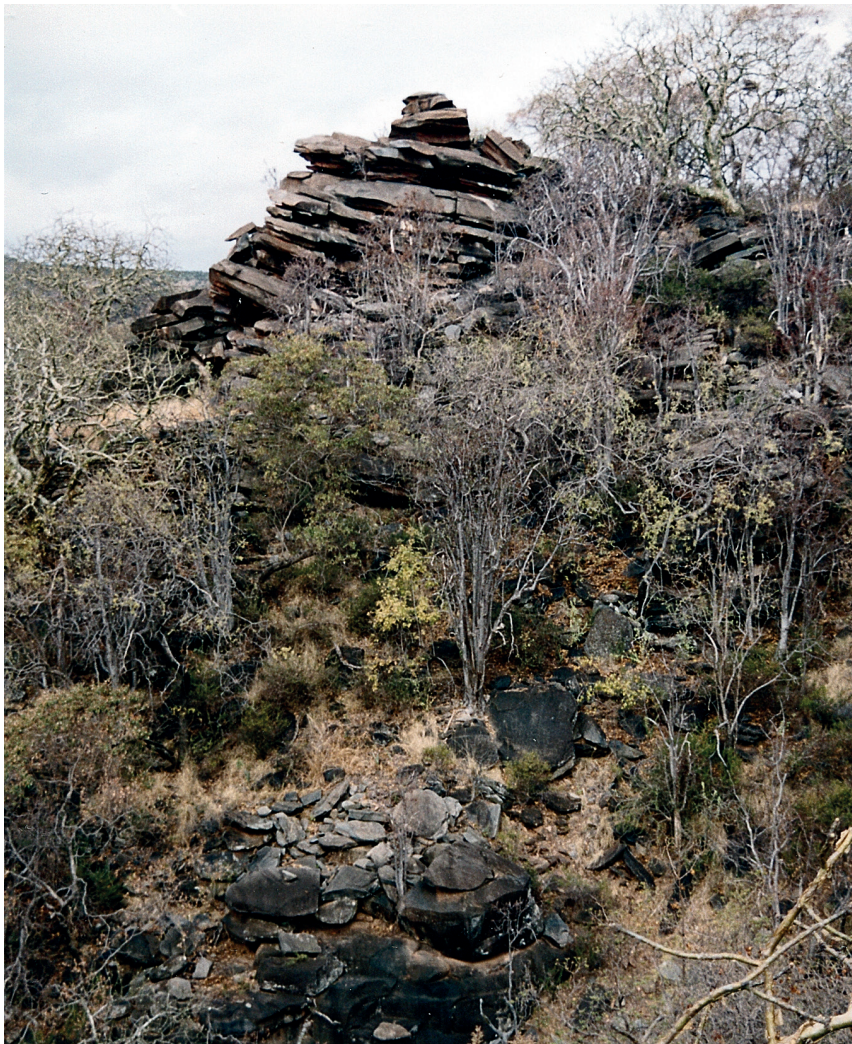
As a result, Dinkwanyane and others developed a number of grievances which they brought up with the missionaries. They were tired of Boer demands for labour and tax, and also wanted to own land. Dinkwanyane asked: 'Have we no land ... have we not continuously worked for Merensky and so served him? Where is it written down that a congregation must live on the land of their spiritual leader?' They were tired of the overriding authority of Merensky. They wanted to engage in some traditional practices and customs, such as the payment of bride wealth. Dinkwanyane also insisted that women should cut their hair according to Pedi custom, and not let it grow, like Europeans did.

Merensky would not accommodate change, and would not address the grievances of Dinkwanyane and his followers. So Dinkwanyane decided to leave.

Mafolofolo

One day, late in 1873, Dinkwanyane and 335 followers loaded their possessions onto two wagons and left Botšhabelo. They would find another place to stay, where they could live as Christians *and* follow some traditional African customs.

At this time in the Transvaal Africans were not allowed to buy land. But they often ended up owning land. The way this happened was that Africans would give money to missionaries who would buy land on their behalf. Dinkwanyane asked the Berlin Missionary Society to buy land for him in this way. But the Society refused, so Dinkwanyane and his followers rented land near Lydenburg. Very soon the local magistrate arrived, and demanded that Dinkwanyane and his followers provide him with workers, and pay taxes. They refused, so the magistrate confiscated three of their guns. Dinkwanyane and his followers were outraged. They would not live under conditions such as these, and decided to move on.



The forbidding slopes of Mafolofolo, stronghold of Johannes Dinkwanyane and his followers.



Stone fortifications
at Mafofolofo.

Again, they went in search of a place to live. They moved north and stopped at a steep gorge in the middle of the bushveld, close to the confluence of the Waterval and Spekboom Rivers, near Lydenburg. The slopes of the river valley were steep but fertile, and surrounded by rock formations. Caves and crevices were hidden in the walls of the gorge. They decided to settle here, and called the place Mafofolofo ('Place of Gladness').

Dinkwanyane was their chief. He allowed his followers to pay bride wealth when marriages took place. Apart from that the community still abided by some of the rules they had lived by at Botšhabelo. Missionaries noted that

The word of God and Christian discipline and morals ruled [the community]. Open sins like drunkenness and debauchery were punished, nobody took a second wife, and the people did not become involved in witchcraft or initiation ceremonies. A service was held every Sunday, Johannes often preached himself ... hours for prayer were set aside and there were

Christian meetings. A teacher tended to the children, school was held each day and the children were assembled for a special service on Sundays. Dying children or catechists were baptised but otherwise the authority of the church [BMS] was not violated, nobody performed Holy Communion.

They built terraces on the steep slopes of the valley, which they irrigated and cultivated. They kept cattle and hunted game. They chopped down trees on neighbouring farms. High stone walls were built around the caves and crevices to form strong defences, and fortified outposts ringed the main settlement. People from different chiefdoms, mission stations and Boer farms came to live at Mafofolo, where they found freedom. The residents of Mafofolo refused to recognise the ZAR, and regarded the land as their own.

Confrontation

In October 1875 the residents of Mafofolo received another visit from the Lydenburg magistrate. The magistrate said he had come to count them so that they could pay taxes. He asked to see Dinkwanyane. Forty armed men barred his path. They told the magistrate the land belonged to them, and they would not pay taxes. A few days later the magistrate received this message from Dinkwanyane:

I will address you Boers; you men who know God; do you think there is a God who will punish lying theft and deceit? I ask you now for the truth because I also speak my whole truth. I say the land belongs to us ... Your cleverness has turned to theft ... ; those who have bought the land, let them take their money back. Let these words be read before all the people so that they can hear the same. I am Johannes the younger son of Sekwati.

Sekwati had been the Pedi king. In the minds of local whites, and the ZAR government, Dinkwanyane was linked to Sekhukhuneland and the strength of that kingdom. His words had a strong effect on the local white population. Local farmers were frightened. The diggers in the area were frustrated by the difficulty of getting labour, and greedy for the gold and diamonds rumoured to lie in Sekhukhuneland. They began to plot among themselves, making schemes to penetrate the Pedi kingdom. Meanwhile, some missionaries from the Berlin Missionary Society (BMS), notably Albert Nachtigal from Lydenburg, wanted Mafofolo to fail as it threatened the authority of the BMS. Nachtigal, a self-proclaimed expert on the Pedi, began to fuel the growing discontent over the Pedi's strength by insisting that Dinkwanyane was planning an attack on



President T F Burgers.

the local white community. T F Burgers, the new president of the ZAR, was not enthusiastic about the idea of war – he wanted to use the ZAR's limited funds to build a railway to Delagoa Bay, to improve trade and the Republic's economy. But there were too many voices clamouring for war, and so, on 16 May 1876, Burgers reluctantly declared war on the Pedi.

Assault on the Pedi kingdom, 1876

In July 1876 the largest army ever assembled by the ZAR marched to war against the Pedi. It consisted of 2 000 *burghers*, 600 Transvaal Africans, and a small non-combatant force from Botšhabelo. They were also joined by 2 400 Swazi warriors. Their plan was to attack the outlying Pedi chiefdoms before moving on to attack the Pedi capital. One of the outlying chiefdoms to be attacked and subdued was Mafolofolo.

On 13 July 1876 the army advanced towards Mafolofolo. Two Swazi regiments took up position about half an hour's march to the west of the settlement. The Boer commando set up their artillery on a hill east of the Spekboom River, and began to bombard Mafolofolo with a four-pound cannon. Meanwhile, the Swazi advanced until they were in sight of Mafolofolo, and waited for the Boers to arrive so that the assault could begin. But the Boers stayed on top of the hill with their artillery. They were eyeing the 300 metre high cliff, covered with thick bush and trees, that stood between them and Mafolofolo's perimeter defences. The Swazi eventually realised they were waiting for the Boers in vain, and decided to attack Mafolofolo on their own. They split up into three sections and stormed Mafolofolo from different directions. The men defending the perimeter fired one salvo at the fast advancing Swazi warriors. Before they could fire a second salvo the Swazi were upon them. About 100 Swazi scaled the 2,5 metre high wall with ease and jumped down into the midst of Mafolofolo's defenders. They then advanced on the village. Missionary Bauling, from Lydenburg, recorded what happened next:

A few minutes later the whole village looked like a disturbed ants nest and within ten minutes the entire Swazi army was in the village. The dreadful carnage had begun. The Boers gave the Swazi three resounding hurrahs and from the other side rang the terrible war cry of the Swazi, who roared like lions while at their murderous work. Without great resistance they captured the houses of the outlying village, setting three of them on fire. With the exception of four women and children, they killed or mortally wounded all the people they found in these houses. They took with them the above-mentioned women and children, all the cattle and other



remaining belongings. They stormed the central fortification twice but could not capture it and after three-quarters of an hour of strenuous attack they retreated. During this time the Boers sat on their horses, some restfully smoking their pipes watching the spectacle; others praising the bravery of the Swazi and celebrating the fact that they did not have to risk their own lives. Others revealed their hate for the Kaffirs in gloating and malicious talk about Dinkwanyane's tribe and the folly of the mission and missionaries.

Johannes
Dinkwanyane's
grave.

While the main settlement had been spared during the attack, Mafolofolo's leader, Johannes Dinkwanyane, had joined the fight. He was wounded in his arms and chest, and died seven hours later.

The Swazi wanted to pitch camp overnight so that they could launch a fresh assault in the morning. The Boers wanted to retreat; they were alarmed by the fact that the whole settlement had not been subdued. They also feared that the main Pedi army might arrive. So they retreated to a distant laager where they would be safer. The Swazi were furious. Some of their men had died in the attack while the Boers had sat on their horses, and now the Boers were leaving them to face danger on their own once again. The commanders wondered about their next move. If the Boers let them fight alone at Mafolofolo, they would let them fight alone at the Pedi capital. The commanders remembered the last time they had attacked the Pedi capital in 1869. They had been badly defeated. They decided that the fight wasn't worth the risk. They took the women, children and cattle they had captured at Mafolofolo and abandoned the campaign.



Lord Carnarvon.

The Boers were left on their own. With fear and trepidation they entered the heartland of the Pedi kingdom. Meanwhile, Pedi regiments moved through the countryside destroying Boer property and seizing Boer stock. They stayed under cover of trees and bushes to avoid the guns of the advancing cavalry. The Boers advanced to the Pedi capital and on 1 August 1876 launched their attack. The Pedi resisted. Boer commandos refused to go any further towards the capital out of fear of the Pedi defence. When President Burgers urged them to continue the attack, they sent him a petition:

We are all entirely unwilling to storm Secoecoeni's Mountain for the reason that we see no chance of safeguarding our lives or conquering the kaffer. But we propose a plan to destroy the crops of the kaffer in the coming year so as to starve him out and promise obedience in protecting the borders with patrol.

The Boers built two forts inside Pedi territory, manned by mercenaries, who torched crops, seized cattle, and raided smaller settlements. The Pedi remained undefeated. But the scorched earth policy, and drought, weakened them.

Despite this, the fact that the Boers had been defeated added fuel to a fire being kindled carefully by the British. The British administered the colonies of Natal and the Cape, and by this time had begun to think that it might be a good idea to place the Boer republics under the same colonial umbrella. They welcomed any Boer setback as a reason to annex the Transvaal.

The Zulu, the British, and the Transvaal

By the late 1870s the British Secretary of State for the Colonies, Lord Carnarvon, had hatched a grand scheme to annex the Boer republics and consolidate all the British territories in South Africa into a British dominion. This, he believed, would enable border disputes to be more easily settled, and spur the growth of the South African economy. Having a strong colonial empire would also strengthen Britain vis-à-vis other European powers, such as Germany, Russia, and the United States. In 1877 Carnarvon appointed Theophilus Shepstone, previously Secretary for Native Affairs in Natal, as Special Commissioner to 'investigate conditions in the Transvaal'. In reality Shepstone's job was to find a reason to annex the Transvaal.

The Boer defeat by the Pedi in 1876 was a perfect example Shepstone could use to show that the ZAR needed British help. Britain, he told the ZAR government, could help it with its financial troubles, and bring its dangerous African neighbours under control. But while the Pedi and Boers were on hostile

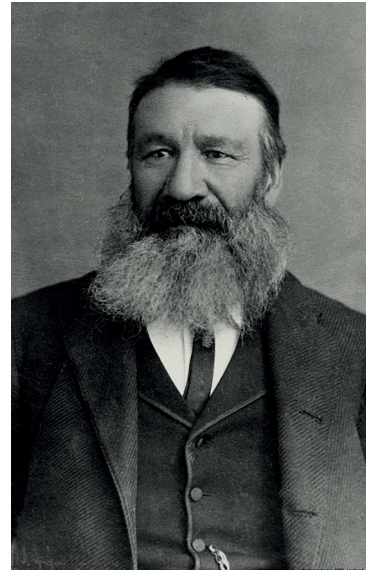
terms, the Pedi had been weakened, and were less of a threat to the Boers than Shepstone at first made out.

Meanwhile, events on the south-eastern border of the ZAR began to worry the Boers more than their troubles with the Pedi. The trouble began in 1861, but we need to go back to 1848 to understand the contestable nature of the border between the ZAR and Zululand.

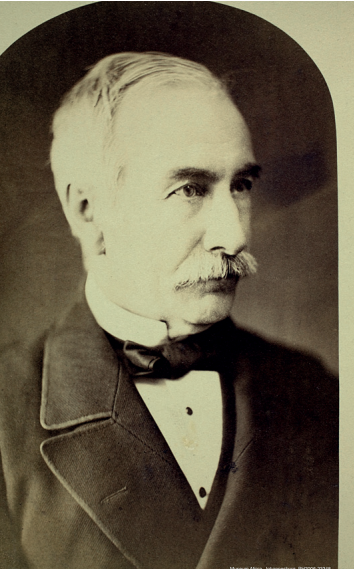
In 1848 a portion of land near the northern end of Zululand was left unoccupied as the Zulu, Hlube and Ngwe chiefdoms fled the area. They had fought with the Zulu king, Mpande, and had to leave the area for fear of attack. Meanwhile, a group of Boers living in Natal wanted to escape British rule, and so moved north, to the area the Hlube and Nqwe had just abandoned. More and more Boer families settled there, and in 1854 the community received formal permission from Mpande to live in the area in exchange for 100 head of cattle. In 1859 this area – which included the town and district of Utrecht – became part of the ZAR. Mpande probably did not expect this land to become part of the ZAR, but when it happened, he acquiesced.

Mpande died only in 1872, but in the latter part of his reign there was a struggle for the right to succeed to the throne. The contenders were Cetshwayo, the popular choice, and Mthonga, Mpande's favourite. In 1861 Mthonga fled to the Utrecht district. Cetshwayo followed with an armed force, but did not cross into the district. Instead, he negotiated with the Boers, threatening to seize Mthonga by force, but promising not to harm him if the Boers handed him over. The Boers then handed Mthonga over, and he was not harmed. But the Boers later claimed that Cetshwayo had promised to cede land to them in return for their handing over Mthonga – a claim that Cetshwayo denied. This was the origin of a land dispute that produced sporadic conflict for almost two decades.

In 1875 the ZAR extended its border further into Zululand without any pretence of agreement with the Zulu. A little while after the ZAR had made this claim on land, Acting President Piet Joubert told Cetshwayo that he must inform his subjects of the new boundary line, and prohibit them from moving across it into the ZAR. Cetshwayo refused. His subjects had been moving into the area claimed by the ZAR since the 1850s, and by this stage between 15 000 and 30 000 Zulu were living north of the line drawn by the ZAR. In 1876 the ZAR attempted to impose a tax on the Zulu people living in the disputed territory. But Cetshwayo ordered his subjects to refuse to pay the tax, and sent an army to the area to strengthen their will. Many Boers fled the area, and in their absence their cattle were seized, houses looted, and some burned down. When the Boers tried to return, Zulu warriors would not let them. By 1877 many Boers were living in laagers, or had left the area for good.



Sir Theophilus
Shepstone; General
Piet Joubert.



Sir Bartle Frere.

In early 1877 border incidents resulted in both Boers and Zulu fearing invasion by each other. Shepstone seized the opportunity to declare that the Transvaal had reached a 'pinnacle of peril' which made it imperative to bring it under British rule, which he did on 12 April 1877.

The Boers were not happy, but they accepted the annexation for the time being. The British said they would protect the Transvaal's borders, and so the Boers watched with curious and critical eyes while Shepstone set out to do just that. But Shepstone found himself in a very uncomfortable position. As Secretary for Native Affairs in Natal, it had always been his job, and in his interests, to protect the borders of Zululand and ensure that the Boers from the ZAR did not encroach on it too much. But now he was responsible for protecting the borders of the Transvaal. Importantly, he needed to keep the Boers happy, so that they would not rise up against the British and attempt to revive the Boer republics. While Shepstone put the Pedi problem on hold, he turned his attention to the disputed boundaries of the south-eastern Transvaal and Zululand.

When, in September 1877, Shepstone travelled to the frontier between the ZAR and Zululand, he found the area peaceful and calm. Both sides waited for him to decide on which claim he would support. Would the Boers get the land they had been 'granted' when they had supposedly handed over Cetshwayo's rival to him in 1861? Would they get the land south of the Pongola River that the ZAR had claimed in 1875? Or would the Zulus claim back all of this land, except for land in the Utrecht district, which Mpande had allowed to merge with the ZAR in 1854? A Zulu delegation met Shepstone to discuss this question. The Zulu wanted land extending far north of the Pongola River, even further into the eastern Transvaal than the area of land under dispute. This included the land that had been granted to the Boers by the Swazi king Mswati – and which the king had had no right to grant as the land did not belong to him. Shepstone found this claim unacceptable, and made a different suggestion which the Zulu delegation said was unacceptable to them. The issue was taken to Cetshwayo, and the debate continued.

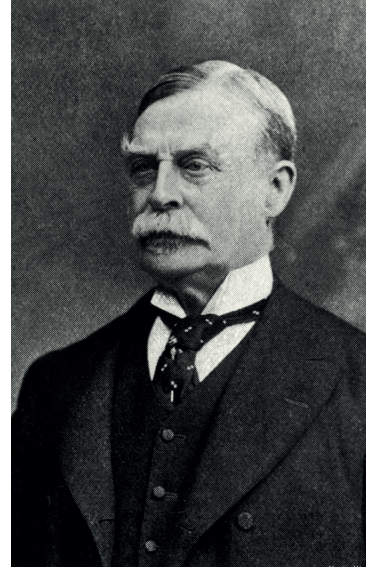
Meanwhile, without getting Cetshwayo's authorisation, representatives of the Zulu told the Boer farmers still living in the disputed territory to leave the land. Cetshwayo ordered an army to begin building an *ikhanda* military kraal near the junction of the Pongola and Ntombe rivers, but this was delayed while he and Shepstone tried, one more time, to reach a settlement. But by then Shepstone had made up his mind to support the Boers in all their claims, and Cetshwayo responded by continuing to build the *ikhanda*. He advised that all Boers leave the area, lest an 'accident' occur in these tense times. While

Cetshwayo had not actually declared war, Shepstone took this as an ultimatum, and asked for troops to be sent from other parts of South Africa to the area as rapidly as possible to prepare for war. He also told the Boers in the district to send their families to safety and prepare themselves for enlistment into the army being mustered to fight the Zulu. At this signal of war, about 2 000 wagons blocked the roads out of the district towards the Vaal. It wasn't only Boer women and children who fled to the Vaal – the men joined them, leaving the British to defend the borders. After all, the British had annexed the Transvaal because, as they said, the Boers could not protect their borders themselves.

Shepstone appealed to Sir Henry Bulwer, Lieutenant-Governor of Natal, for help. Bulwer responded by asking Cetshwayo if he would agree to arbitration – that is, passing the matter on to neutral observers to sort out. Cetshwayo agreed. Sir Bartle Frere, Governor of the Cape and British High Commissioner in South Africa, also agreed, not because he thought arbitration would work, but because it would give him time to secure more troops from Britain for the war with the Zulu which he considered inevitable. Shepstone also wanted war because it would bring the Zulu under control, and because it would silence the loud criticism he was having to endure from Boers and British alike at his failures in the Transvaal.

But unfortunately for Shepstone the commission appointed by Bulwer to investigate the land claims and advise on a solution did not help him at all. The commission agreed more with Zulu claims than Boer claims. It decided that the Transvaal claim of 1861 was dubious and so the Zulus should keep that land, but that the 1854 cession was more valid and had been accepted for so long that it could continue to remain a part of the ZAR. The Zulu claim to land north of the Pongola River was not considered, since both the British and the Boers believed that Zulu territory could not stretch that far. But the commission suggested that this land should be considered as well, as it appeared to it that the claim could be valid.

This was bad news to Shepstone and Frere. They could not declare war on the basis of these findings. It seemed the Zulu had a very strong claim to at least some of the disputed territory, and the commission suggested even more investigation, clearly supporting the Zulu. In December 1878 Cetshwayo was informed of the commission's findings, and the 1861 border in dispute was awarded to him; he had seemingly won. But a 'message' accompanied this good news. It stated, among other things, that Cetshwayo had to disband the Zulu army and abolish Zulu marriage laws. If he did not do this, the British would declare war. Cetshwayo did not reply in the short time allowed. As a result, the Anglo-Zulu War began in January 1879.



Sir Henry Bulwer.



Much has been written about the Anglo-Zulu War, and the battles fought. But this is a book on the history of Mpumalanga, and one might wonder why we are looking at the Anglo-Zulu War at all. As we have already seen, the causes of the Anglo-Zulu War are firmly rooted in events in the ZAR, especially Shepstone's need to address Boer concerns after Britain had annexed the Transvaal. The course of the Anglo-Zulu War is also linked to Mpumalanga, and one of the major British defeats occurred inside its present-day borders. This was the Battle of Ntombe River.

The Battle of Ntombe River

In October 1878 British soldiers entered the small missionary town of Lüneburg. The town was under threat from the dangerous Swazi exile Mbelini, who had become a subject of the Swazi king. Despite this he still vied for the Swazi throne and, in 1876, had attacked a homestead near Wakkerstroom, leading to the deaths of 30 people. To protect the town, and to have a base from which to attack the Zulu, the British set up fortifications. In February 1879 more troops arrived, and they needed a lot of supplies. On 7 March about 100 soldiers were sent from Lüneburg to escort a convoy of 18 wagons from the north, which were bringing in supplies and ammunition for the large force now protecting Lüneburg.

By 9 March the wagons had reached the Ntombe River, which they needed to cross in order to make their way to Lüneburg. But this was March, the season of heavy rains, and the rivers were swollen from a recent deluge. The convoy was forced to stop. They built a camp and drew the wagons into a laager. But the laager was poorly planned and the whole camp was inadequately protected. They had also been spotted. While British soldiers camped near the river, Zulu warriors were busy gathering, eager to attack this soft target. Before dawn on 12 March, under the cover of a thick mist, a Zulu force led by Mbelini advanced towards the slumbering British soldiers. They fired a volley close to the camp and, while the British soldiers fumbled with their rifles in panic, the Zulu warriors charged with their spears. The British soldiers who weren't killed fled the site in terror, pursued by the victorious Zulus. After chasing the British soldiers for about five kilometres, the Zulu retreated to the camp, and captured 250 head of cattle and the ammunition destined for Lüneburg. By the end of the day 61 British soldiers, 30 Zulus, and 18 civilians had been killed.

Facing page: Zulu warriors attacking an escort of the 80th Regiment of the British army at Ntombe River. From the *Illustrated London News*, 1879.



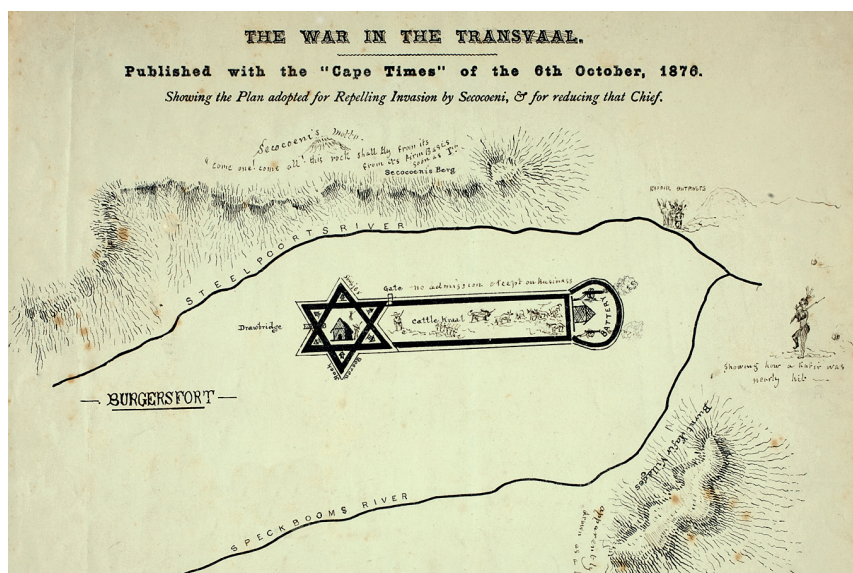
British officials with
Swazi warriors.

War against the Pedi, 1879

After the British had annexed the Transvaal they turned once more to the Pedi; they wanted the Pedi to accept their rule. Sir Garnet Wolseley, Governor of Natal and now the Transvaal, demanded that they pay a heavy fine, and pay taxes as well. King Sekhukhune thought about this and held a large meeting to discuss the issue. An angry speaker said:

We discovered that the English were no better than the Boers ... [we] will never be subject to the British who compel their subjects to build forts and work for them. The English are liars. Rather than be in the position of a subject tribe [we] will fight. [We] won't pay taxes before we have had a good fight for it.

The Pedi did get a good fight for it. Wolseley decided to attack the Pedi kingdom. But first, he needed a large force to storm their stronghold in the



Sekhukhune's capital, Dsjate, in the Leolu Mountains, showing the stronghold of Ntswaneng in the middle of the valley. From the *Graphic Illustrated Weekly Newspaper*, 1880.

'The war in the Transvaal', *Cape Times*, 6 October 1876.

‘The capture of
Sekukuni’s stronghold
– storming the Fighting
Koppie, Nov 28, 1879’.
From *The Graphic*, 1880.

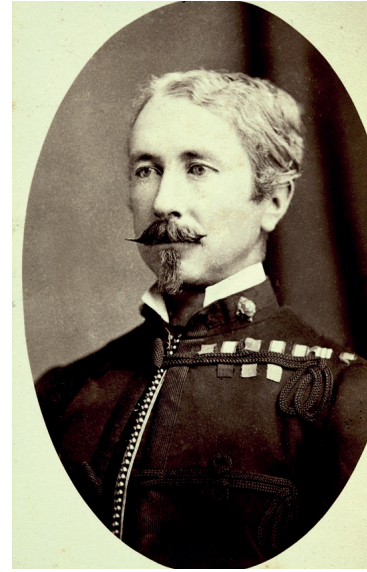


mountains – Dsjate, in the heart of the Leolu Mountains. The Pedi capital was legendary, and even the bravest men were fearful of approaching it. Wolseley assembled a huge army, consisting of 3 500 white troops, 8 000 Swazi warriors, and 3 000 Transvaal African auxiliaries, many of whom were Ndzundza Ndebele.

In order to defeat the Pedi, they would have to breach the Pedi capital, which was formidable. It was built in a fertile flat-bottomed valley in a fold of the Leolu Mountains. About 3 000 huts were nestled against the mountainside, and fields were cultivated along the valley floor. The capital was defended by line after line of stone walling, and forts built at regular intervals. One side of the town lay open, but was defended by lines of rifle pits. But the most formidable stronghold was Ntswaneng – a hill in the heart of the valley. It was 46 metres high and honeycombed with caves which were protected by stone walls and boulders. This would be the last line of defence for the Pedi.

The attack on the Pedi capital took place on 28 November. Wolseley and his troops were part of the main column that would attack the town from the valley. They marched towards the town under cover of darkness, and at 4 am the British artillery began firing. An attack was launched, but the defenders fired on them. They retreated. The British launched a second attack. Again, they were kept at bay by the Pedi guns. In the meantime the Swazi army crept up the back of the mountain. When they appeared at the top of the mountain the British troops below cheered. The Pedi were caught by surprise. The Swazi swept down the mountain with their assegais and spears, and a bloody battle ensued. By 9.30 am the settlement was in flames, and about 1 000 Pedi, 600 Swazi and 13 whites lay dead on the slopes of the valley. But the surviving Pedi managed to flee to Ntswaneng, where they hid in caves. They refused to surrender. Their attackers then laid charges of explosives at the cave entrances. They hoped to scare the Pedi into surrendering. The Pedi cut the fuses of some of them, and the explosions that did occur did not make them surrender. Night fell and it began to rain heavily. The Pedi emerged from the caves under cover of darkness and rain. They fought their way out and escaped.

For the next ten days the Swazi attacked surrounding villages, capturing women, children, and livestock. Meanwhile, some forces began a search for Sekhukhune. They searched deep into the Leolu mountains and eventually, on 2 December 1879, found him in a cave. He was taken to Pretoria and imprisoned. His rival and British ally, Mampuru, was allowed to settle in the Pedi heartland. But this did not last long. In 1881 there was a change in circumstances.

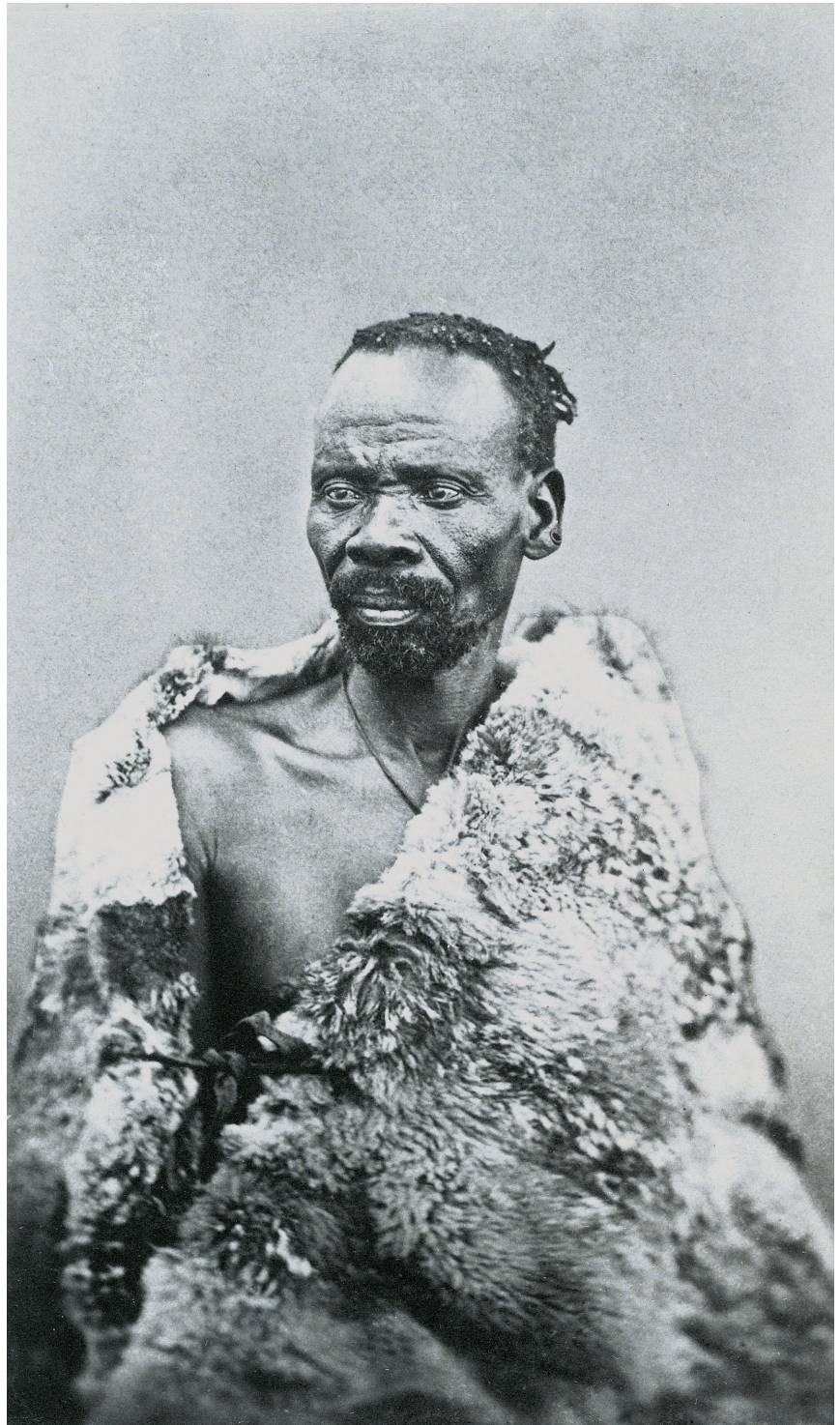


Sir Garnet Wolseley.

Overleaf: British troops lead a wagon carrying Sekhukhuni and seven of his wives into Market Square in Pretoria, 1879. Sketch from the J G Gubbins Collection.







Sekhukhune,
photographed in
captivity in 1879.

The first Anglo-Boer War and the battle of Majuba

The British administration in the Transvaal was highly unpopular, and once the threat from the Zulu and Pedi kingdoms was removed it did not take long before the Transvaal Boers began to think about rebellion. When the new administrator of the Transvaal, Sir Owen Lanyon, insisted that Boers in the Transvaal pay their taxes (something they were reluctant to do at the best of times), and attempted to make an example of one farmer, Piet Bezuidenhout, in Potchefstroom, he found himself with a mutiny on his hands. A rally was held at Paardekraal where 5 000 Boers, including Paul Kruger, Piet Joubert and Marthinus Wessel Pretorius, proclaimed the reborn South African Republic. On 16 December, when this proclamation was made, the first shots of the first Anglo-Boer War were fired in Potchefstroom.

Lanyon asked Sir George Pomeroy Colley, Governor of Natal and South-East Africa, to reconquer the Transvaal. By late February Colley had suffered two defeats, and was about to suffer another that would prove to be the final battle of the war. Colley wanted to occupy Majuba ('Hill of Doves') in the south east Transvaal which, he felt, would put him in an excellent strategic position to attack a Boer force encamped below the hill.

On the night of 26 February 1881, some 27 officers and 568 men, made up of different companies from a variety of regiments, began to march up Majuba. Some companies took up positions along the ridge and, after some confusion over the location of the true summit of the hill, a group of soldiers took the summit. Their position was not ideal, as the soldiers were stretched

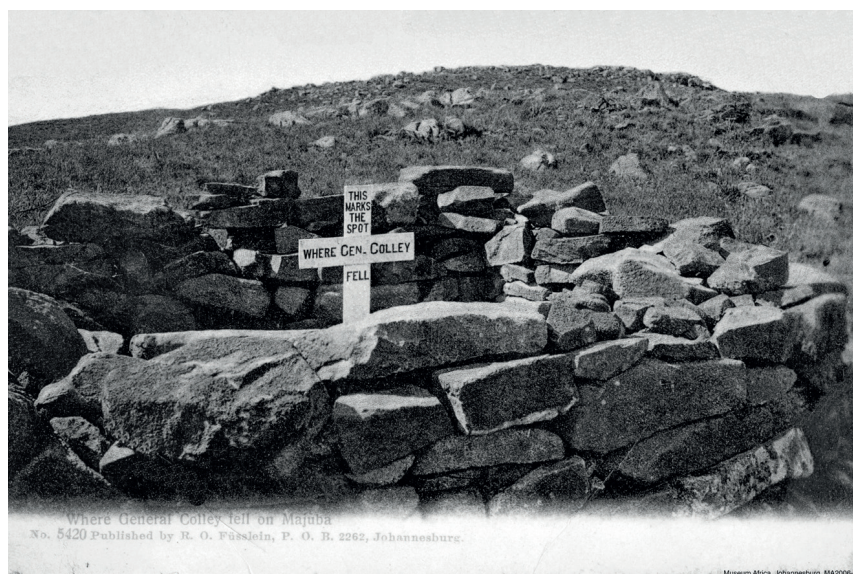


A Boer laager with Majuba in the background.

A diagram, not to scale,
of the Battle of Majuba.



Sir George Colley, and
his grave at Majuba.



thin in some places, and did not dig adequate trenches or set up defences. At first morning light the British troops shook their fists and yelled at the Boers camped below. The Boers panicked, and some got ready to leave their positions. But when it became apparent to the Boers that the British were not going to attack immediately, their panic subsided. General Joubert's wife, Hendrina, spurred her husband into action to take the summit. As Joubert and 150 volunteers began to climb the hill, the British ate breakfast, and some fell asleep. The Boer attack came as a shock, and the ill-prepared British forces suffered heavy losses. Colley himself was killed. When it became clear that they were losing, the British retreated. The Boers reclaimed Majuba and, shortly thereafter, reclaimed their independence from Britain.

The ZAR is independent once again

We can return now to the story of the Pedi. After wanting for so long to get rid of Sekhukhune, the Boers now decided to release him from prison in Pretoria, and allow him to return to the Pedi heartland. But by now Mampuru was trying to consolidate his power in Sekhukhuneland, and wanted Sekhukhune out of the way. He orchestrated Sekhukhune's murder in 1882, but while he did succeed in getting rid of his rival, he gained the ire of the Boers and Sekhukhune's supporters. To avoid the repercussions of the murder, Mampuru fled to the Ndzundza Ndebele, the last major independent African chiefdom left in the eastern Transvaal after the defeat of the Pedi.

War on the Ndzundza Ndebele, 1882

In 1882, after the Boers had returned to power in the eastern Transvaal, they wanted to assert their authority over the Ndebele. For a start, they demanded that the Ndzundza chief, Nyabela Mahlangu, hand over Mampuru to them. Apart from ordering Sekhukhune's murder, Mampuru had been an ally of the British and was therefore unpopular. The Boers wanted reprisals. But when they made their demand that Mampuru be handed over to them, Mahlangu refused. The ZAR then declared war on the Ndzundza Ndebele.

In late 1882 some 2 000 Boers and a large number of African allies set out to attack the strongholds of the Ndzundza Ndebele. There were many, all of them strongly fortified with stone walls. The Boers bombarded them with heavy artillery, siege guns, and mortars, but could not penetrate them. They then used dynamite to try to blow them up. Some of the smaller strongholds were destroyed, and some people were killed, but the Boers were no closer to victory. They laid siege to Erholweni and other major strongholds. They captured cattle and destroyed crops, and then sat and waited. The Ndzundza



A mock tombstone in memory of the British flag.

Overleaf: Boer forces with ox wagons during the 'Mapoch War'.







KAFFIR CHIEF, MAPOCH.

Handwritten caption in German: "Handwritten caption: Kaffir Chief in Mapoch. (The caption is written in a cursive script.)"

Handwritten note on the right margin: "The caption is written in a cursive script."

began to starve, but refused to surrender. People ate cattle hides, grass, tree bark, lizards, and insects to stave off hunger and death. After eight months of war they could take no more; in July 1883 Chief Mahlangu and 10 000 Ndzundza surrendered.

Chief Mahlangu and Mampuru were taken to Pretoria, tried, and sentenced to death. The British protested on behalf of Mahlangu, and his sentence was changed to life imprisonment. On 22 November 1883 Mampuru was hanged, on the second attempt. Meanwhile, the 10 000 Ndzundza who had surrendered faced total subordination. They were divided into small family groups, and each group was given to a Boer soldier. The Boer would now be the family's new master, and its members were put under a contract to work for him for five years. But when the Ndzundza had been divided up into 'family' groups it had all been rather haphazard and random, and so in reality many families were split up. Sometimes men would be allowed to search for their wives and children, but more often families remained separated. Some Ndzundza managed to escape from the farms, and some managed to make it to the safety of remaining African chiefdoms. But some who escaped were caught and punished, and the majority stayed on the farms they had been sent to. The once mighty Ndzundza were scattered, from Potchefstroom to Standerton, firmly under the control of the white rulers.

Conclusion

The defeat of the Ndzundza marked the end of the frontier wars in the region. All the major African chiefdoms had been subjugated, and the Boers had enforced their authority. Their control ensured that a new system and pattern of land ownership was entrenched, although it remained profoundly illegitimate in the eyes of the black majority. The Boer ideal of a racially ordered society also received a considerable boost although it too continued to be remote from many aspects of social reality. But, while the Boers won the last war, these outcomes were far from secure until British military power was deployed in the region on a massive scale, and the independence of the Zulu and Pedi kingdoms was destroyed. Equally important for the future was the fact that once the British had crushed African resistance, they acted decisively to support the dominance of white settlers in the Transvaal.