

# LANGUAGE AND HISTORY IN AFRICA

A VOLUME OF COLLECTED PAPERS PRESENTED  
TO THE LONDON SEMINAR ON LANGUAGE AND  
HISTORY IN AFRICA (HELD AT THE SCHOOL OF  
ORIENTAL AND AFRICAN STUDIES, 1967-69)

*Edited by*  
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AFRICANA PUBLISHING CORPORATION  
NEW YORK

1970

Published in the  
United States of America 1970 by  
AFRICANA PUBLISHING CORPORATION  
101 Fifth Avenue, New York  
N.Y. 10003

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Library of Congress catalog card no. 70-129004  
ISBN 0-8419-0054-X

907. 2096 DALB  
76/3933.

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY HEADLEY BROTHERS LTD  
109 KINGSWAY LONDON WC2 AND ASHFORD KENT

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# The Problem of the Nguni: An Examination of the Ethnic and Linguistic Situation in South Africa before the Mfecane<sup>1</sup>

SHULA MARKS AND ANTHONY ATMORE

THE term *Nguni* is now used to denote the peoples in the south-east coastlands of Southern Africa who speak similar languages and who share some aspects at least of a common culture. The Zulu are recognized to be Nguni when a term to include them and their neighbours in the Cape is required. The Swazi have been classified linguistically and culturally as Nguni but are even less frequently referred to as such than are the Zulu; being a relatively recent amalgam of Sotho and Nguni elements, they hold a somewhat anomalous position. The peoples of the Cape are recognized to be still politically, and to a slight extent linguistically, heterogeneous, and *Cape Nguni* is applied frequently to them as a generic term. Although in its strictest sense the term Nguni is a linguistic one, it is used far more widely. Murdock,<sup>2</sup> in classifying the 'Nguni', includes not only the Rhodesian Ndebele, who broke away from the Shakan kingdom of the early nineteenth century and who still speak an Nguni language, but also the Ngoni<sup>3</sup> groups of Malawi and Tanzania, who broke away at the same time but who no longer speak an Nguni language. The Transvaal Ndebele groups, too, of diverse origin and language, are similarly classified by him and others as Nguni. Although the present-day usage of Nguni has its inconsistencies, however, it is readily understandable. Likewise the term *Sotho*, which is now used to designate related languages (Tswana, Pedi and Sesotho) over a wide territorial area. This is an immense extension of its earlier meaning—the peoples, languages and country unified by Moshoeshe in the early nineteenth century.

Nevertheless, the latter day inclusive use of the term Nguni may do much to distort the past. Recently historians have used the term rather freely of the peoples in the Natal-Zululand area, in an attempt to avoid the anachronistic 'Zulu' for the pre-Shakan period. In fact, it may be masking as great or even greater an anachronism. As we shall see, it should probably be used to designate only a few of the large numbers of peoples to whom it is now applied. The problem is that it is by no means clear just which groups were truly Nguni, and the picture is both complex and confused.

The political and military convulsions set in motion by Dingiswayo and Shaka greatly blurred, if they did not obliterate, previous ethnic and linguistic divisions. The advent of the white man, in Natal especially, only served in many instances to make confusion worse confounded. The powerful nation states which grew up out of the maelstrom of the *Mfecane* were able to enforce a measure of linguistic and cultural uniformity on their subjects which makes it extremely difficult for the historian to trace the pre-*Mfecane* situation. Yet it is only by reference to the earlier linguistic and ethnic patterns that any inferences can be made as to the possible origins of the various peoples in Southern Africa.

Clearly, the starting point in such an exercise must be the correlation of the available oral traditions with the slender fragments of archaeological information we have for this area. In South Africa most of the traditional histories were collected by gifted amateurs, both white and black, towards the end of the last century and the beginning of this. The most obvious difficulty with these collections is that their authors rarely cited the sources of their oral information and seldom made it clear in their narrative when they were retailing genuine traditions, or when they were allowing free rein to their not inconsiderable imaginations. But, for all their faults and their obvious need for reinterpretation, works like Ellenberger, *History of the Basuto*,<sup>4</sup> and Bryant, *Olden Times in Zululand and Natal*,<sup>5</sup> are indispensable, as they record information which, in the environment of twentieth century South Africa, has since passed into oblivion.

Bryant<sup>6</sup> and Soga<sup>7</sup> appear to be the first South Africans (either amateur—as they were—or professional) to make extensive use in English of the term Nguni. Previous writers had styled the Cape and Natal Africans (those living outside Zululand proper) simply, if inelegantly, Kaffirs. Bryant's works are themselves an interesting indication of how the use of the term Nguni developed in his thinking and experience. He arrived in Natal from England in 1883 and published his *Zulu-English Dictionary* in 1905. In the historical introduction to this dictionary, there is no mention of the word, although he is already concerned with the identification of the various layers of population in the Natal-Zululand area in pre-Shakan times. In the dictionary proper, he defines Nguni as 'the name by which the Tongas<sup>8</sup> call a Zulu-Kaffir, hence occasionally accepted by these latter themselves'. He adds that the word is also the *isitakazo* (praise name) of the Emanzimeleni tribe. By the time he came to prepare his next published works, Bryant was making wide use of the term. These were a series of articles published between 1911 and 1913 in *Izindaba Zabata*, a periodical of the Mariannhill Mission, and collected (in part) and reprinted by Struik in 1964 as *A History of the Zulu and Neighbouring Tribes*. In these articles he was beginning to use Nguni as a descriptive term in his researches into Zulu origins

in such combinations as 'Pure' Nguni, Sutu-Nguni and Tonga-Nguni. The terminology and analysis is developed still further in *Olden Times*. In his last published work, *The Zulu People*, which was completed in 1935 (though not published until 1949) some of the excessive detail about the earlier history of the numerous tribes which encumber *Olden Times* is jettisoned, but in tracing possible origins and relationships elsewhere in Africa, his imagination soars to quite fantastic heights. Before examining his more pertinent theories of origin and migration, however, it is necessary to look briefly at other definitions of Nguni.

Dohne's *Zulu Kafir Dictionary*<sup>9</sup> contains no mention of Nguni; it does, however, make some interesting references to *amaLala* and other names used later by Bryant. In Kropf's *Kaffir-English Dictionary*,<sup>10</sup> *ubu-Nguni* is said to mean 'a neighbouring country, which possesses foreign commodities', but is used only in the locative *ebu nguni*, 'in the west, westward'. Interestingly enough, Bishop Colenso, in the first edition of his *Zulu English Dictionary*,<sup>11</sup> suggested that Nguni was 'another name for AmaXhosa'; but in the fourth edition in 1905, which had been revised by his daughter Harriette, Nguni had become 'another name for the amaXhosa, Qwabe and Zulu, and other kindred tribes'—a significant widening of the original definition. In this connection it is also relevant to note the rather curious and perhaps contradictory definition of the word given by Samuelson in his *King Cetshwayo Zulu Dictionary*:<sup>12</sup> 'a gentile, a foreigner; an ancient, a person belonging to an ancient stock'.

Neither Stow nor Molema<sup>13</sup> mention the word Nguni, although Stow<sup>14</sup> considers the term *Bakone(i)* as synonymous with *Bakwena* and quotes Moffat and his fellow missionary, Roger Price, as his sources; it has, he says, 'been considered by some as a term of reproach, and of Kaffer origin' and he quotes Arbousset<sup>15</sup> to the effect that 'the name *Bakoni* was applied without distinction by the Kaffers to all the coloured people they had known'.

Doke and Vilakazi add some interesting information in their *Zulu-English Dictionary*.<sup>16</sup> By 1948, of course, they were using Nguni in the accepted sense. They repeat Bryant's 1905 definition of Nguni as a Thonga name for the Zulu-Xhosa group (and the praise name of the Nzimela people) but add that *ebuNguni* (loc.) is the name the Zulu use for Zululand 'as they consider themselves to be the ancient stock of the group' and quote *Woza siya ebuNguni lapho abantu befa beluphele* (Come let us go back to Zululand where people die old), which they state comes from a Shangaan-Thonga song.

The only writer to rival Bryant in presenting a detailed account of the pre-Shakan situation in south-east Africa is Soga;<sup>17</sup> unfortunately, however, many of the details he gives flatly contradict Bryant. Soga, himself of mixed Xhosa-Scottish descent, considers that the term Nguni originated as a proper name (M)Nguni, the

putative father of Xhosa. Only two great tribes, he says, 'are the people of Mnguni, the Ama-Xhosa and the Abe-Nguni of Nyasaland . . . by the other tribes of Natal, this tribe (the Xhosa) even to this day is more frequently spoken of as Abe-Nguni than as Ama-Xhosa', although among themselves Ama-Xhosa is more generally used.<sup>18</sup> Soga explicitly maintained that Kropf's translation of Nguni as 'in the west' was incorrect.

Soga therefore agrees with Bryant in suggesting that the Xhosa are Nguni, or, as Bryant would term it, 'pure' Nguni. About the Thembu he is not sure, and suggests a Lala or a Sotho origin, although Bryant considers the Thembu to be 'pure' Nguni. According to both Bryant and Soga, the Mpondo and Mpondomise are Mbo in origin, and both appear to follow Theal in suggesting a relationship between the Ama-Zimba and the Aba-Mbo.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, Soga and Bryant are diametrically opposed to the origin of the Zulu themselves; here Soga commits what must be heresy to the confirmed Zuluphile by suggesting a Lala or even a Thonga origin. Bryant, as we shall see, actually relates the Lala to the Thonga, but Soga makes the significant point<sup>20</sup> that this term was applied to skilled workers in iron ore, and links the name with 'a large break away section of the Makalanga'; he also suggests that the Lala were the first people in the Natal area.

Like Soga, Bryant sees the migration of peoples into South Eastern Africa in three streams, all of which, however, he classes as Nguni because 'this was the name by which . . . these people generically distinguished themselves from the other two types [Sotho and Thonga] around them'.<sup>21</sup> This in itself marks a certain departure from his 1905 definition. He brings his wandering Nguni, 'the very first of the Bantu arrivals', 'from the north' into the Transvaal via the headwaters of the Limpopo:

- (i) Here one group remained, to give rise to the 'local ba-Koni (Zulu, abaNguni) clans, the baHurutse, baKwena, ba-ma-Ngwato, baNgwaketsi and others', but not before a different Bantu element had fused with them. This new group, Bryant thinks, are 'Venda-Karanga', who mixed with the older baKoni to produce the Sotho, or, as he calls them, the 'Sutu-Ngunis'.<sup>22</sup>
- (ii) Before the complete fusion of Koni/Venda-Karanga had been accomplished, a section of the baKoni whose language had been influenced to a certain extent, especially phonetically, by the Venda-Karanga, migrated eastwards. Bryant says these people were known to their 'kindred' as Tekela-Nguni (from the Zulu *uku-tekela*, to pronounce certain consonants in a peculiar fashion). Near the east coast, probably north of Delagoa Bay, these Tekela-Ngunis divided into (a) Mbo/Embo or Dlamini or

Swazi Ngunis, who moved southwards, towards Zululand and Natal, and (b) another group, which mixed linguistically with the Thonga (Gwamba) who were also moving southwards along the east coast. These mixed Thonga-Nguni also pushed southwards, bypassing the Mbo to become 'the head of the Bantu procession', through Zululand and into Natal. There were at least three different groups amongst the Thonga-Nguni, each with its dialect and customs: the Mtetwa, the Lala and the Debe. In this way, Bryant has his Thonga-Nguni and Mbo people coming into Zululand from the north (*eNyakato*), which he says in *Zulu People*<sup>23</sup> to be their traditional direction of migration.

- (iii) Finally, Bryant posits a further group of the original Transvaal baKoni (Nguni who left the other groups before the advent of the Venda-Karanga) settling in the south eastern Transvaal. These were the 'pure' Nguni, whom he divided into two—the Ntungwa, from whom the Zulu were descended, and the Xhosa-Thembu. The Thembu reached the coast south of Durban, and then moved into what became the Cape; the Xhosa kept inland, close under the Drakensberg, and went into Griqualand East before reaching the coast to the south of the Thembu. Although at the time of separation the 'pure' Nguni spoke a single language, in time Zulu and Xhosa developed 'along different lines . . . until separated by a quite considerable extent of dialectal differences in speech'. By having his 'pure' Nguni come into the coastal area from the south-east Transvaal, Bryant explains the Ntungwa/Zulu traditions about an origin 'in the west', which, he maintains, the Xhosa have retained as an archaism. As we have seen, this is denied by Soga.<sup>24</sup>

Much of Bryant's argument depends on the identification of the term *Nguni* with the Sotho *Koni* and variants, and linguistically this is certainly feasible. There are groups of Koni people scattered widely through the Transvaal, and, to a lesser extent, Botswana and Lesotho. Many of these are now designated Transvaal Ndebele, but this would appear to be a European invented term. According to Ziervogel,<sup>25</sup> while one of these groups, the so-called Southern Ndebele, undoubtedly came from Natal originally, the Northern Ndebele (i.e. the Gegana, Mugombhane and Lidwaba groups) are said to have come from across the Limpopo to the north. One of his Lidwaba informants maintained that originally they were of 'Kalanga' speech, although this was later completely changed through contact with the Swazi.<sup>26</sup> Ziervogel classifies Northern Ndebele as part of the *tekela* sub-group of Nguni, together with Swazi, Bhaca, Phuti and Lala, and points out that while it is close to Swazi, as well as having been considerably influenced by Sotho,



the Northern Ndebele 'also have some linguistic peculiarities of their own which have to be attributed to their origin in the north'.<sup>27</sup> It is significant that one section of the Lidwaba have a chiefly genealogy of well over twenty names.<sup>28</sup> The Northern Nguni therefore appear to lend some substance to part of Bryant's hypothesis, although clearly this cannot, and should not, be stretched too far. Van Warmelo<sup>29</sup> has described some of the tiny Koni groups scattered amongst the Pedi and Lovedu of the north eastern Transvaal. According to tradition, these were *in situ* when the Pedi first reached this area. On the other hand, the Phuti and other people in Lesotho whom Bryant designates Koni<sup>30</sup> are not so termed by Ellenberger;<sup>31</sup> indeed, the word Koni never appears in his work. They are, however, recognized to be from the Natal side of the Drakensberg, and to be the first Bantu inhabitants of present-day Lesotho.

Ellenberger<sup>32</sup> recounts an interesting tradition to the effect that a group of Fokeng (considered by Bryant to be Koni) intermarried with Bush women; the resultant Fokeng/Bush people were forced out of the country south of the Vaal, passed through Natal, and eventually arrived in Thembuland 'where they joined the Tembus, and became so completely absorbed by them as to lose their identity, and even their language'.<sup>33</sup> Ellenberger (in 1912) thought this 'disruption' of the Fokeng from the High Veld had taken place some 250 years previously. As we shall see, it has considerable relevance to the archaeological picture presented below.

This, and other evidence, is confused and conflicting. Some 'Koni' appear to have come from the coastal lands up on to the High Veld, whilst others travelled in the reverse direction. The chronological deductions of the recorders of these traditions vary enormously. Nevertheless, certain points do emerge from this mass of conflicting narrative. One is that the latter-day terms Nguni and Sotho are flags of convenience to describe the post-*Mfecane* situation and that their wide-ranging use is due to white intervention or invention, not least on the part of Bryant. In pre-*Mfecane* times they were either group names of local or at least limited application, or terms referring somewhat vaguely to foreign groups in general. What is not at all clear is exactly which groups owned these names, and other such as Mbo and Lala, and whether there were groups who may not have in fact fitted into any of the three categories—Lala,<sup>34</sup> Mbo or Nguni. Another conclusion to be drawn from the recovered traditional evidence is that the present day Zulu/Nguni and Sotho uniformity overlays a number of layers of languages and peoples. These layers are most apparent in the coastlands, but are also discernible on the High Veld. Is there any other evidence which makes the task of identifying these layers any easier?

Verifiable facts about the pre-*Mfecane* South African past are

peculiarly few. Archaeology could give us our biggest lead. Unfortunately, the amount of excavation done on the south-east coast is meagre in the extreme, although the late J. F. Schofield's analysis of Natal coastal pottery is a useful beginning.<sup>35</sup> Schofield divided Natal pottery into four groups, which he labelled NC<sub>1</sub>, NC<sub>2</sub>, NC<sub>3</sub> and NC<sub>4</sub>. Of these, only the first three are relevant, the fourth being modern Zulu pottery. NC<sub>1</sub> pottery, found with Late Stone Age or Khoikhoi (Hottentot) associations in the Cathkin Park area, is—according to Schofield—'undoubtedly Ronga ware from Portuguese East Africa'.<sup>36</sup>

NC<sub>2</sub> ware is particularly interesting. Found mainly around Durban and Durban Bluff, it has—according to Roger Summers—'so many features in common with Buispoort ware (ST<sub>2</sub>) that [Schofield] . . . postulated intercourse between stone hut dwellers and those living at the foot of the escarpment'. Summers continues:

There are however other features in NC<sub>2</sub> pottery which suggest an admixture from elsewhere . . . : the geographical probability is that 'elsewhere' was Mocambique, but at present we know nothing about its later prehistory.<sup>37</sup>

The trail of NC<sub>2</sub> pottery according to Schofield also continues into the Eastern Cape, where it is found amongst both the Mpondo and the Thembu people. Both Schofield and James Walton,<sup>38</sup> using the traditions recounted by Ellenberger, are inclined to associate NC<sub>2</sub> with the Fokeng—a Sotho group, whom, as we have seen, Bryant classifies as Koni. NC<sub>2</sub> pottery includes a large number of clay pipe bowls. Again in Schofield's view, which is in part echoed by Roger Summers,<sup>39</sup> it was made by people 'who used iron, but did not smelt it'. As no really large scale excavation has been done in this area, too much reliance cannot however be placed on this statement.

NC<sub>3</sub> pottery makers, on the other hand, clearly worked iron extensively. Their pottery is found mainly in the Tugela Valley and to the north of the river, although some sherds have been found at Weenen and Otto's Bluff near Pietermaritzburg as well as at Durban. On the basis of traditional evidence and the extensive iron slag, Schofield is content to identify the NC<sub>3</sub> potters as Lala.<sup>40</sup> Although oral tradition suggests that the Lala preceded the Mbo on the south-east coast, in the absence of carbon dating there is nothing in the archaeological record to support or refute this contention. Where NC<sub>2</sub> pottery precedes NC<sub>3</sub>, as at Durban Bluff, tradition tells of a relatively short and late migration of 'Lala' from the Tugela Valley. It is thus conceivable that for a long period Lala and Mbo settlements were contemporaneous, but in different parts of the country.

At some stage, not necessarily a later one, there must have been the entry of yet another group of people—the Nguni. Unfortunately,

for our purposes, none of the 'pure' Nguni groups have their own pottery tradition. According to Schofield, the Xhosa have adopted Khoikhoi pottery, whilst the Thembu and Mpondo have taken over the traditions of the Fokeng NC<sub>2</sub> potters. Amongst the Zulu, the women have adopted the wood-carving techniques of the men to decorate their pots.<sup>41</sup> All this suggests that the Nguni were pastoralists; it also makes their track particularly difficult to follow.

So far, the only other evidence of an archaeological nature we have is that of chiefs' grave sites and some Cambay beads and Chinese porcelain around Port St. John. According to Monica Wilson,<sup>42</sup> the burial sites of the Xhosa, Thembu and Pandomise ruling families were located in the Transkei for a considerable number of generations—ten at least in the case of the Thembu. Gervase Mathew has found some evidence—Ming china and red beads—around Port St. John, which suggests to him a pre-Portuguese, Swahili-Arab trading-site.<sup>43</sup> But systematic archaeological work, either here or elsewhere along the south-east coast is conspicuous by its absence, so that no firm conclusions can as yet be drawn from his finds.

Indeed, the Greefswald sequence<sup>44</sup> in the Northern Transvaal, the one really big Iron Age archaeological discovery in South Africa, tends to be used, as a result of the present poverty of evidence elsewhere, to interpret not only the High Veld but the whole South African situation. The earlier valley site, Bambandyanolo or K<sub>2</sub>, is that of an Iron Age Community of cultivators and pastoralists. A burial site here has been dated to the mid-eleventh century and this ties up with other eleventh century sites in the central and southern Transvaal, although more recent work in the Eastern Transvaal (Phalaborwa) and Swaziland has turned up significantly earlier Iron Age dates. One of the features of the K<sub>2</sub> site is that the surviving skeletal material appears to be non-negroid and has been described as Khoisan (Bush/Hottentot). Physical anthropology is a notoriously difficult and contentious field, but it may be, as the traditional evidence also suggests, that the first Bantu-speakers in this area were tiny groups who infiltrated the Khoisan—and ultimately imposed their language and culture on some of their non-negroid neighbours. In view of the later genius displayed by the Khoikhoi at the Cape for assimilating other people's cultural apparatus, the possibility that the K<sub>2</sub> site was that of Khoikhoi influenced by Iron Age neighbours cannot be ruled out of court: linguistic, racial and cultural traits are independent variables.<sup>45</sup>

If the people of the High Veld in the first centuries of the present millennium were mixed Khoisan-Bantu pastoralists and cultivators—this dictated by the nature of their environment—what of the south-eastern coastlands? This fertile region was probably more suited to agriculture than to cattle-keeping, the more so in the

early days of human settlement, when the valleys at least were heavily wooded,<sup>46</sup> although it should be remembered that the uplands of Natal and Zululand are now also excellent cattle country. Along the coast, it is conceivable that the earlier inhabitants were mainly agriculturalists who, in the course of several centuries of patient effort, cleared the forests and thick woodlands.

Even during the Portuguese period it is clear that much of the coast was still heavily wooded, although it is equally clear that the inhabitants from the Transkei northwards were both pastoralists and cultivators. From the records of survivors of Portuguese and Dutch ships wrecked along the coast in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it appears that the Cape Nguni then occupied similar positions to those they held in the early nineteenth century.<sup>47</sup> Thus the northernmost people mentioned by the Dutch survivors of the *Stavenisse* in 1686 were 'Temboes and Emboes' (?Mbo), who lived behind the Natal south coast. These, or similar people, are still distinguished by the Mpondo—the next group to the south—as Abambo.<sup>48</sup> At Durban Bluff, sailors noted the smoking habits of the Africans, which again ties in with the archaeological evidence.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, in the Delagoa Bay area and its immediate hinterland, the Thonga tribal configuration remains remarkably unchanged.<sup>50</sup>

The Natal-Zululand coastal regions, however, present no such orderly pattern. Bryant,<sup>51</sup> apparently basing his views entirely on Theal,<sup>52</sup> suggests that although all the people in this area would today be classified as *Nguni*, their exact tribal configuration has changed considerably. As yet, however, no really thorough examination of the relevant Portuguese material, whether published or unpublished, has taken place for this section of the coast.

At this stage of the argument, it is necessary to try to fit these fragments of evidence into some kind of coherent framework. If we follow the traditions recorded by Bryant and Soga as well as the archaeological and other evidence, the picture seems to us something like this:

1. *Lala*: Iron Age cultivators, whom Bryant associates both with the Thonga and the Karanga, Soga solely with the Karanga. In support of the Thonga origin for the *Lala*, an entry in *The Natal Diaries of Dr. W. H. T. Bleek* seems relevant:

I interrogated several Matonga . . . I discovered that their language is the same as that in Peter's vocabulary of Lourenco Marques and seems to extend in the direction of Delagoa Bay. It is the language the Zulus call u Kutugeza, which the Mancolosi and other Malala tribes speak . . .<sup>53</sup>

On the other hand, Schofield has suggested the affinities of some of the ancient ware of Natal-Zululand with Karanga pottery in Rhodesia. While this is tenuous, Bryant does link the *Lala* with the

Gwambe Thonga and possibly this is the clue: according to C. E. Fuller, the Gwambe resemble the Shona in many aspects of their language, proverbs, riddles, folk tales and omens.<sup>54</sup> Alternatively, it could be that the Lala were in fact the second and not the first layer of Bantu-speaking inhabitants, the first being represented by the NC<sub>1</sub> 'Ronga type' pot.<sup>55</sup> If, as we suggested, the very earliest Bantu-speaking inhabitants were mainly agriculturalists, they would have had a culture similar to the various groups comprising the Thonga, and would have come from the same direction—north down the coast from the Lower Zambesi area. Baumann and Westermann,<sup>56</sup> writing in the early forties, considered indeed that from an ethnographic point of view the modern Nguni culture represented a fusion between an earlier agricultural way of life and a later pastoral way of life. It may therefore be that the term Lala is in fact disguising two (Karanga and Thonga), and perhaps more, distinct groups. This would also account for Bryant's three 'Tonga-Nguni' types.

2. *Mbo*: Mixed Khoisan-Sotho pastoralists and cultivators, who made the NC<sub>2</sub> pots and settled alongside, rather than mingled with, the earlier settlers. They came into Natal from the High Veld, avoiding the tsetse country to the north, and their route is fairly clear if they can be identified with the Fokeng. One must, however, be careful not to be led into thinking that *all* the Mbo are the result of the single recorded Fokeng migration. This would appear on the face of it to be most unlikely.

3. *'Pure' Nguni*: Probably pastoralists, who also appear to have entered from the High Veld. So far, the only possible clue to their presence there, apart from the Koni and perhaps the Northern Ndebele, relates to the Greefswald sequence and is of dubious value. There the Mapungubwe hill site itself was occupied later than the K<sub>2</sub> valley, in the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century, by people having a very considerably superior Iron Age culture to those in the valley. The skeletal remains are still predominantly Khoisan, but there are some negroid features. The evidence seems to suggest a new ethnic element and probably new linguistic elements also. Gardner, who excavated Mapungubwe, suggests a triple Nguni, Sotho and Venda peopling of the hill, but his grounds for suggesting the presence of the Nguni are never made explicit.<sup>57</sup>

In the absence of other evidence as to their origins and the tenuous nature of the existing material, in the case of the 'pure' Nguni the clues linguists may be able to provide could prove particularly valuable. Clearly, analysis of the various Nguni dialects of the south-east coast would be extremely useful, especially if the dialectal differences could be related to non-Nguni languages. An historical dimension could be added to this by the use of dictionaries and

vocabularies which go back well into the nineteenth century. South African place names (many of the pre-European names for towns, villages and farms have been recorded) could well provide clues to the pattern of tribal migrations. Not only do we need to know far more about the relationship between Bantu and pre-Bantu languages, but also between present day Nguni, Sotho, Delagoa Bay Thonga, Venda and Shona.

Given financial support and encouragement, archaeologists could do much more to unravel these and related problems; further study of the Portuguese sources is also clearly essential. It seems to us, however, that linguists have a major role to play if progress is to be made in their solution.

## NOTES

1. Unless quoting from earlier authorities, we have tried to use the current orthography for African words. For this and many other linguistic points we should like to thank Mr. David Rycroft of the School of Oriental and African Studies for his generous help. We should also like to thank Dr. Brian Fagan of the University of California, Santa Barbara, for helping us over some of the hurdles which lie in the path of the unwary historian tackling the writings of archaeologists. The paper has also benefited from the criticisms of members of the Conference on the History of African Peoples in Southern Africa before 1900, Zambia, July, 1968. None of the above, however, are responsible for the content of this paper.  
The term *Mfecane*, used here to cover the wars and resulting migrations of the Shakan and post-Shakan period, is discussed in the postscript note below.
2. G. P. MURDOCK, *Africa, Its Peoples and their Culture History*, New York, Toronto and London, 1959.
3. It should be noted that the term *Ngoni* may derive from the *isitakazelo* of the Nzimeleni clan who joined Nxaba and Zwangendaba on their migrations. For the Nzimeleni, see A. T. BRYANT, *Olden Times in Zululand and Natal*, London, 1929 (repr. Struik, 1965), 276-81.
4. D. F. ELLENBERGER, *History of the Basuto*, London, 1912.
5. Op. cit. (note 3 above).
6. In addition to *Olden Times in Zululand and Natal*, BRYANT also wrote of traditional history in his *Zulu-English Dictionary*, Natal, 1905; *The Zulu People as They Were Before the White Man Came*, Pietermaritzburg, 1949; and *A History of the Zulu and Neighbouring Tribes*, Cape Town, 1964.
7. J. H. SOGA, *The South-Eastern Bantu*, Johannesburg, 1930; *The AmaXhosa, Life and Customs*, Lovedale, 1931.
8. I.e. the Delagoa Bay Thonga, as distinct from the Thonga/Tonga groups in Rhodesia and north of the Zambesi.
9. J. L. DOHNE, *Zulu Kafir Dictionary*, Cape Town, 1857.
10. A. KROPP, *Kafir-English Dictionary*, Lovedale, 1899.
11. J. W. COLENSO, *Zulu English Dictionary*, (1st ed.) Pietermaritzburg, 1861.
12. R. C. SAMUELSON, *King Cetshwayo Zulu Dictionary*, Pietermaritzburg, 1923.
13. G. STOW, *The Native Races of South Africa*, London, 1905 (repr. Struik, 1964); S. M. MOLEMA, *The Bantu Past and Present*, Edinburgh, 1920 (repr. Struik, 1964).
14. *Native Races*, c. xxv.
15. T. ARBOUSSET and F. DAUMAS, *Relation d'un Voyage d'Exploration*, Paris, 1842, 530. In a note on p. 269, the authors state: 'Les Bechuanas leur donnent [i.e. aux Zulus], le plus generalement, le nom de Bakoni.'
16. C. M. DOKE and B. W. VILAKAZI, *Zulu-English Dictionary*, Johannesburg, 1948.
17. *South-Eastern Bantu*, 83; 87.
18. Here Soga cites M. M. FUZE, *Abantu Abamnyama*, Pietermaritzburg, 1922. Magema Fuze was also among Bryant's and Bishop Colenso's chief informants.

19. The Vambe, Zimba, and Mumbo of the Portuguese accounts. See G. M. THEAL, *Records of South-Eastern Africa*, VII, Cape Town, 1898, which includes Dos Santos' account of these people further up the East coast. Apart from the similarity in name between the Mumbo and the Abambo, there is little evidence to link the two groups. As Monica Wilson has pointed out (M. WILSON, 'Early History of the Transkei and Ciskei', *African Studies*, 18, 1959), it is highly unlikely that there was a mass migration into South Africa as late as the late sixteenth century, in view of the complete absence of a record of this in oral tradition and the generally settled condition of life along the South East coast at the time of the Portuguese accounts.
20. *The South-Eastern Bantu*, 395.
21. *Olden Times*, 5-10; 232-3.
22. *Zulu People*, 6.
23. *Zulu People*, 11.
24. See p. 123 above.
25. D. ZIERVOGEL, *A Grammar of Northern Transvaal Ndebele*, Pretoria, 1959, 5.
26. *Ibid.*, 180-3. Ndebele Text with English translation.
27. *Ibid.*, 5, 13.
28. *Ibid.*, facing p. 6.
29. N. J. VAN WARMELO, *Bakoni ba Maake*, Native Affairs Department, Ethnological Publications 12, Pretoria, 1944; and *Bakoni ba Mametsa*, N.A.D., Ethnological Publications 15, Pretoria, 1944.
30. *Olden Times*, 356.
31. *History of the Basuto*, 25.
32. *Ibid.*, 19-20.
33. It may be on this tradition that Soga based his suggestion of a Sotho origin for the Thembu.
34. We have used the term *Lala* somewhat loosely for all the groups Bryant has termed 'Tonga-Nguni'.
35. J. F. SCHOFIELD, *Primitive Pottery*, Cape Town, 1948; 'Natal Coastal Pottery from the Durban District, a Preliminary Survey', Parts I and II, *South African Journal of Science*, 1935, 508-27, and 1936, 993-1009; 'A Description of Pottery from the Umgazana and Zig-zag Caves on the Pondoland Coast', *Transactions of the Royal Society of South Africa*, 1937-38, 25, 327-32. Citations below are to *Primitive Pottery* which in the main accurately reflects Schofield's earlier articles.
36. *Primitive Pottery*, 151; Dr. Fagan argues in favour of a Khoikhoi origin for NC, pottery (personal communication).
37. R. SUMMERS, 'Iron Age industries of South Africa with notes on their chronology, terminology and economic status', p. 698, in W. W. BISHOP and J. D. CLARK, *Background to Evolution in Africa*, Chicago, 1967, 687-700.
38. James WALTON, 'Bafokeng Settlement in South Africa', *African Studies*, 1956, 37-40.
39. *Primitive Pottery*, 155. SUMMERS, op. cit.: 'Mining is likely to have been incidental to farming and specialisation is not indicated by the simple mining techniques employed'.
40. *Primitive Pottery*, 150.
41. *Ibid.*, 157.
42. Monica WILSON, 'Early History of the Transkei and Ciskei', *African Studies*, 18, 1959.
43. Communication to the African History Seminar, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, December 1966.
44. L. FOUCHE (ed.), *Mapungubwe: ancient Bantu civilisation on the Limpopo. Reports on excavations at Mapungubwe . . . from 1933 to 1935*, Cambridge, 1937; G. A. GARDNER (P. J. COERTZE, ed.), *Mapungubwe, Vol. 11: Report on excavations at Mapungubwe and Bambandyanalo . . . from 1935 to 1940*, Pretoria, 1963; B. FAGAN, 'The Greefswald Sequence', *Journal of African History*, V, 1964, 3.
45. The Bantu and the arrival of iron-working have generally been associated, but this hypothesis may well have to be reconsidered, both in the light of the findings at the Greefswald sequence and of recent discussions on the origin and expansion of the Bantu.
46. J. P. N. ACOCKS, 'Veld Types of South Africa', *Botanical Survey of South Africa*, Memoir No. 28, Pretoria, 1953.



47. M. WILSON, 'Early History of the Transkei and Ciskei', op. cit.
48. Ibid., 175. Both Bryant and Soga, as we have seen, classify the Mpondo themselves as Mbo, and relate them closely to the Dhlamini rulers of Swaziland.
49. SCHOFIELD, *Primitive Pottery*, 158.
50. C. E. FULLER, 'Ethnohistory in the Study of Culture Change in South East Africa', in W. R. BASCOM and M. J. HERSKOWITZ (eds.), *Continuity and Change in African Cultures*, Chicago, 1959.
51. *Olden Times*, *passim*.
52. G. M. THEAL, *Records of South-Eastern Africa*, 8 Vols., London, 1898-1903.
53. O. H. SPOHR (ed.), *The Natal Diaries of Dr. W. H. I. Bleek*, Cape Town, 1965, 77.
54. 'Ethnohistory in the Study of Culture Change', op. cit., 126-7.
55. SCHOFIELD, *Primitive Pottery*, 151. This perhaps also ties in with the recently reported carbon date of 410 A.D.  $\pm$  60 for an Iron Age site in Swaziland (*Journal of African History*, VIII, 1967, 3).
56. H. BAUMANN and D. WESTERMANN, (French edition) *Les Peuples et les Civilisations de l'Afrique*, Paris, 1948, 124-5.
57. G. A. GARDNER, *Mapungubwe*. See also the doubts expressed by Brian FAGAN, 'The Greetswald Sequence', op. cit.

#### POSTSCRIPT NOTE ON THE TERM 'MFECANE'

The origin of this term seems almost as obscure as that of 'Nguni' itself. BRYANT (*Olden Times*, p. 276) speaks of a clan *abakwaMfekane* (or *Mfekaye*), alias *emaNcwangeni*, but connects it rather with Zwangendaba and his people who moved northwards from Zululand, than with any of the refugee groups in South Africa. The word does not appear in the early Zulu or Xhosa dictionaries, but was used of, or by, the Natal-Zululand offshoots in the Eastern Cape: *amaMfengu* or *Fingo*. This seems to be the Sotho usage, i.e. it referred to refugee groups. Thus Nehemiah Moshweshwe wrote to J. M. Orpen about certain chiefs who had been ruined *ke Faqane*, i.e. 'by the Faqane' (ELLENBERGER papers, Lesotho, item no. 70A, letter 15 April 1905). The great Sotho historian A. SEKESÉ similarly used the word in an article in the newspaper *Leselinyana*, in 1892. It was spelt *fangane*, but this was probably an orthographical mistake for *faqane*. Another Sotho writer, E. MOTSAMAI, in the opening words of his *Mehla ea Malimo* (1912) wrote of *mehla ea khale, mehla ea lifaqane, mehla ea malimo*—'the times of old, the times of the *lifaqane*, the times of the cannibals'. Here the term is beginning to take on a more general meaning, i.e. Time of Troubles. The *q* in Sotho orthography represents a palato-alveolar click.

It is possible that the word was of Sotho origin, and passed from them to the 'Nguni'. Mr. D. Rycroft considers that the correct spelling in Zulu is *Mfekane* (no click), but Mrs. R. Jones-Phillipson informs us that in Xhosa there is a click (*c*). It is also possible that the term came into general usage in South African historiography through the writings of Europeans such as Orpen, Ellenberger and Macgregor.

I am grateful to Mr. Peter Sanders of Wadham College, Oxford, for supplying me with most of the Sotho information. (Anthony Atmore)