

# The rise of a raiding state: Makaba II's Ngwaketse, c. 1780-1824

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*Makaba was a warrior Chief under whom the Bangwaketse became the strongest and most feared tribe in all Bechuanaland.*

(I Schapera)

*Makaba [was] the most formidable ruler among the Tswana kings of the pre-Difaqane period.*

(LD Ngcongco)

## ***Abstract***

Though long acknowledged for their military prowess under Makaba II (ruled c. 1780-1824), the emergence of the Ngwaketse among the southern Tswana in the pre-difaqane era has not been sufficiently accounted for, and its significance to regional developments has gone unrecognised and unexplained. Argued here is that the Ngwaketse embarked on territorial domination of southern Botswana during the reign of Moleta (ruled c. 1750 – c. 1780), when they subordinated previous inhabitants, introduced military training as part of initiation, and reached their apogee as a territorial entity prior to Makaba's reign. The area that the Ngwaketse colonised (Gangwaketse) in Moleta's time became during the reign of his son Makaba II a base for frequent stock raids among their neighbours and for building a formidable regional state. Their success was derived to an important degree from their use of the hilly terrain in northeastern Gangwaketse suited for stone-wall stock posts secure from their enemies. The Ngwaketse built their military might, in other words, by adapting to the landscape they colonised and shaping each of their settlements to varied local resources. Research is based on a correlation of oral histories, settlement locations, initiation and totemic lists, topographical and Google earth surveys, and field surveys and site mapping in parts of northeastern Gangwaketse and the Kanye area.

**Keywords:** Schapera; Ngcongco; Ngwaketse; Moleta; Makaba II; Legassick; Seoke; Pitsa; Kanye; *Mephato*; Landscape; Stonewall settlements; Stock raiding; Kwena; Kgwatlheng; Tlhaping; Rolong; Hurutshe; Kgatla Mmanaana; Kololo; Moffat.

## **Introduction**

Since Isaac Schapera published his “Short History of the Bangwaketse” seventy years ago, the reputation of the Ngwaketse as a combative force under Makaba II (ruled c. 1780-1824) has not been in dispute.<sup>1</sup> Based on oral traditions collected in the 1930s and in 1941, together with some early nineteenth-century travellers’ accounts, Schapera records a detailed sequence of raids carried out by Makaba’s people, along with successful defences of his kingdom, and several intermittent defeats. Leonard Ngcongco, who has added a few early publications and carried out interviews in 1972 and 1973, offers an account identical in most respects with that of Schapera’s. Both relate that, until his death in 1824 at the hands of Sebetwane’s Kololo, Makaba II was in perpetual conflict with the parental Kwena and initiated attacks far west against the Ngologa of Lehututu and to the south and east vs. the Mmanaana Kgatla, Moilwa’s Hurutshe, Ratlou Rolong, various Tlhaping groups, and the Lete. Some of these erstwhile foes became at times Ngwaketse allies, supplicants relocating to Ngwaketse territory, and welcome traders. Under Makaba, the Ngwaketse absorbed the Mmanaana Kgatla and elements of the Rolong, among others. A recent estimate of the territory controlled by Makaba, bordered by the Molopo in the South, Dinokana in the east, Lehututu in the west, and the Kweneng in the north, approximates 16,545 square kilometres.<sup>2</sup> (see Image 1) At most three residents out of five were Ngwaketse. Roughly two out of five of the wards established prior to 1810 had non-Kwena totems.<sup>3</sup>

Why and how Makaba II led the Ngwaketse to such heights Schapera does not explain. The issue is of considerable historical importance, not least because the ramifications of Makaba’s rise to power extended far beyond “Bechuanaland”, affecting as it did many people occupying the northern Cape and western Transvaal. As early as 1812 European travellers arriving in Dithakong, some 250 km south-southwest of Kanye, were fed stories about Makaba by the Tlhaping kgosi Mothibi, who counted his people as among

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1 I Schapera, “A short history of the Bangwaketse”, *African Studies*, I, 1942, pp. 1-26; Ngcongco argues persuasively that Schapera’s estimated date (1790) of Makaba’s succession is at least a decade later than was likely. LD Ngcongco, “Aspects of the history of the Bangwaketse to 1910” (Ph.D., Dalhousie University, 1977), p. 84.

2 F Morton, “Settlements, landscapes and identities among the Tswana of the Western Transvaal and Eastern Kalahari before 1820”, *South African Archaeological Bulletin*, 68 (1977), 2013, p. 21.

3 I Schapera, *The ethnic composition of Tswana tribes* (London, London School of Economics, 1952), pp. 39-45; F Morton, “Settlements, landscapes and identities...”, p. 24. The Ngwaketse totem is Kwena (crocodile). Other totems include Tlou (elephant), Tshwene(baboon), Kgano, Phuti, Phiri, and Kgori.

the Ngwaketse's many victims.<sup>4</sup> Ngwaketse expansion and rise to power is the more curious because the Ngwaketse were the relatively recent, early-to-mid-eighteenth-century offspring of the Kwena, a small group that had moved into an area already occupied by the Kgwatlheng and bordered on the south and east by such long-established Tswana groups as the Hurutshe and Rolong.<sup>5</sup> In a relatively short time, the Ngwaketse became stronger than their southern neighbours, extended their power westward, and preserved control of their northern territory from the often hostile parent Kwena. Among all the southern Tswana groups, only the Ngwaketse were able to extend their territory at the expense of their neighbours and raid them thereafter on a regular basis without yielding ground. After the Ngwaketse were established in Gangwaketse (Ngwaketse territory), the Hurutshe, Rolong, and Tlhaping went into decline. What therefore needs to be answered is: why and how were the Ngwaketse able to increase their strength while other, older groups on the southern and eastern borders of Gangwaketse were weakening and subdividing?

Since Schapera's outline of the Ngwaketse's rise, two explanations of their prowess have been offered. Martin Legassick claims, without supporting evidence, that the Ngwaketse came to prominence by taking control of the clients supplying the regional Kalahari-sourced trade in game products, at the expense of the Rolong.<sup>6</sup> Certainly, the Ngwaketse gained control of southern Botswana, extended their influence west into the Kalahari, and derived benefits from the game products it generated. But they hardly edged out the Rolong from southern Botswana. Traditions make no mention of

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4 WM Burchell, *Travels in the interior of Southern Africa, II* (London, Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1824), pp. 455, 476, 482, 489, 496, 497, 504, 537.

5 Ngcongco places the separation a century earlier than does Schapera, by correlating traditions among neighbouring Tswana groups, but either estimate remains approximate. LD Ngcongco, "Aspects of the history of the Bangwaketse...", pp. 56-57; PTR Mgadla, *The history of the town and area of Lobatse from pre-colonial times to 1965* (BA Thesis, Department of History, University College of Botswana, 1978), pp. 1-3.

6 MC Legassick, *The politics of a South African frontier: The Griqua, the Sotho-Tswana, and the missionaries, 1780-1840* (Basel, Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2010), pp. 31, 33. This is the unaltered publication of Legassick's Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1969. In the wake of Legassick's seminal work on the northern Cape, many historians of this region, and of those further north that encompassed Tswana groups, have regarded regional trade and trade routes as principal sources, if not primary markers, of political power. All the while, they have left largely unexplored other, particularly local, factors that can help explain the accumulation of wealth and the mobilisation of might.

other than the Kgwatlheng occupying the area north of the Molopo before the Ngwaketse arrived.<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, Ngcongco situates the rise of the Ngwaketse, especially under Makaba II, amidst tensions and conflict in the region occurring at end of the eighteenth century. In contrast to Legassick's *Politics*, which he does not cite, Ngcongco regards Makaba's emergence as part of the "beginning of the *volkerwanderung*" that led to the *mfecane/difaqane*. "[I]n such an environment of restlessness and uncertainty it was the soldier kings or rulers that tended to succeed."<sup>8</sup> Ngcongco's view of events generally anticipates the arguments of Parsons and Manson, who claim that a growing pre-*mfecane* conflict among the southern and eastern Tswana began in the mid-to-late eighteenth century.<sup>9</sup> And by identifying Makaba as the "most formidable" ruler among the Tswana, Ngcongco inadvertently provides a corrective to Parsons and Manson's assertion that the spark of conflict was the Fokeng's rejection of Hurutshe supremacy.<sup>10</sup> Yet, Ngcongco does not help us answer why Makaba became a successful "soldier king" when other southern Tswana rulers did not, leaving us rather to infer that it must have been the force of Makaba's personality. The little we know about Makaba II reveals him to be a shrewd and dynamic fellow, probably ruthless, and perhaps even magnanimous. Nevertheless, the many men who carried out so many raids at his instruction could not have been entirely forced into duty and must have returned to a reward beyond Makaba's smile or other sign of approval. Their long-term expectations would help explain why they were prepared to risk their lives in a way that made Makaba's military rule successful and sustainable. And it is also difficult to regard Ngcongco's statement, that Makaba was part of the "beginning of the *volkerwanderung*," as other than an over-dramatisation. Makaba II's many attacks on his neighbours, and his regional reputation, clearly demonstrated his long reach of military might, but none of his actions appear in any way to have extended Ngwaketse territory. Apart from his subjugation of the small

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7 Ngcongco claims that Kgwatlheng had been in "much earlier occupation" of the area, but offers no supporting evidence. "Aspects of the history of the Bangwaketse...", p. 78. He agrees that the Kgwatlheng were displaced from Dithejwane by the Kwena before relocating south into present southeast Botswana, which he dates, along with the Kwena-Ngwaketse split, to the late sixteenth century. LD Ngcongco, "Aspects of the history of the Bangwaketse...", pp. 56-57.

8 LD Ngcongco, "Aspects of the history of the Bangwaketse...", pp. 85-86.

9 N Parsons, "Prelude to *Difaqane* in the interior of Southern Africa, c.1600-c.1822", C Hamilton (ed.) *Mfecane aftermath: Reconstructive debates in Southern African history* (Johannesburg, University of Witwatersrand Press, 1996), pp. 322-349; A Manson, "Conflict in the western Highveld/Southern Kalahari, c. 1750-1820", C Hamilton (ed.), *Mfecane aftermath*, pp. 351-361.

10 A Manson, "Conflict in the western Highveld/Southern Kalahari...", C Hamilton (ed.), *Mfecane aftermath*, pp. 351-361.

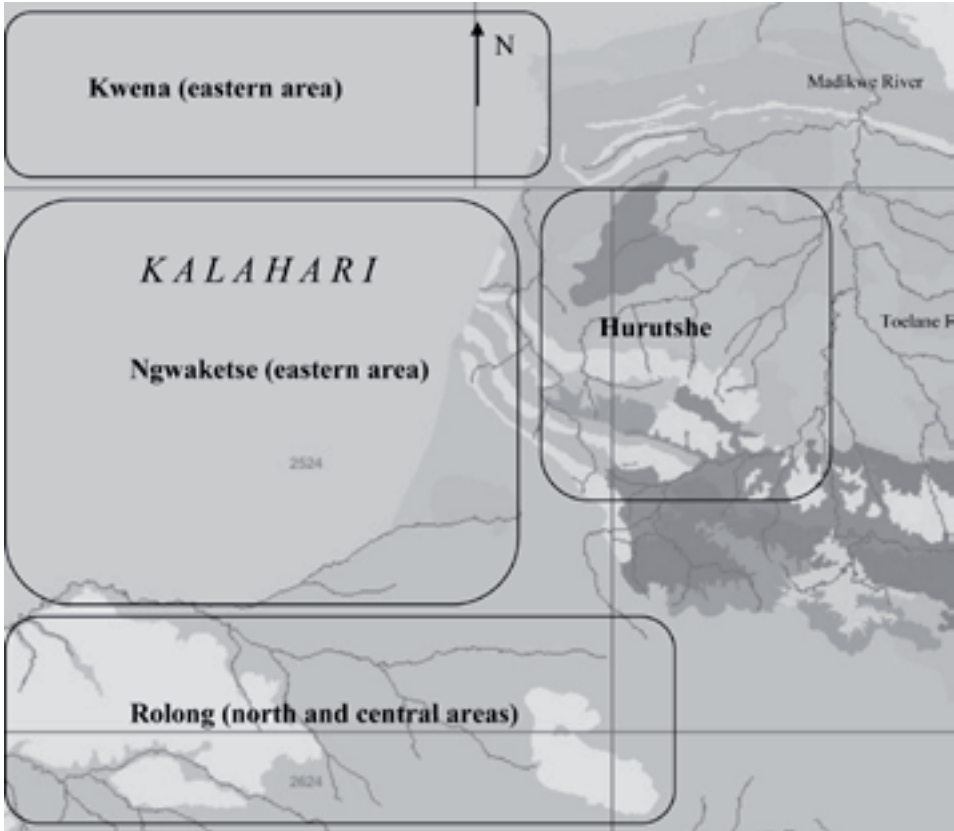
Kgatla Mmanaana group, he sent his men on forays, not conquests. As we shall see below, Ngwaketse expansion occurred during the reign of Moleta (c.1750-c.1780), prior to Makaba II's ascent. From time to time, Makaba relocated his capital within the borders established by Moleta, but such moves hardly qualify him or his people as part of a "wandering".

What follows is an attempt to offer in three parts a new answer to the "Makaba question". First, the sequence of events after the arrival of the Ngwaketse in southern Botswana are examined to connect Makaba's rule with those that preceded it, particularly the reign of Moleta. Second, Schapera's heretofore unpublished and unedited "regiment" list is used to argue that under Moleta the Ngwaketse established a military system that Makaba inherited and used to sustain a raiding culture. Third, recent surveys of hill sites offer clues in understanding how the Ngwaketse used their landscape to safeguard their ill-gotten herds and increase their general wellbeing. Briefly, this paper explores the possibility that prior to Makaba II's reign, the Ngwaketse established themselves in a territory well suited for defending their settlements against their enemies and for sequestering large quantities of stolen stock, primarily cattle, in stone-wall cattle posts. When the Ngwaketse reached their apogee as arch-raiders during the reign of Makaba II, they had succeeded where other Tswana groups, also known for raiding, had failed: by securing most of their purloined cattle from recapture. If revived, throngs of southern Tswana of this era would queue to testify that it is one thing to steal cattle quite another to keep them in one's possession.<sup>11</sup> An organised raid took only a few days, perhaps a week or so, to carry out, whereas protecting what has been rustled (or raised) was a round-the-clock obligation of permanent duration. The landscape controlled by the Ngwaketse gave them a great advantage for secreting and husbanding livestock. Its many hilltops, slopes and hollows in the eastern part of their domain offered secluded grazing close to surface water, with abundant stone to construct kraal walls as needed. Under Moleta, the Ngwaketse secured this territory; under Makaba, they defended it. During their reigns, stretching over 70-odd years, the Ngwaketse sustained themselves with large and increasing herds, grew in population, attracted immigrants, and enjoyed relative security.

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11 [Kgomo] *Ka nna nayo ka tlhoka boroko, ka e thoka ka tlhoka boroko* ("both the possession and lack of cattle create major problems", Setswana proverb), DT Cole and LM Moncho-Warren, *Macmillan Setswana and English illustrated dictionary* (Northlands, Macmillan Boleswa Publishers, 2011), p. 257.

Image 1: Kalahari and Western Transvaal



Source: F Morton, "Settlements, landscapes and identities among the Tswana of the Western Transvaal and Eastern Kalahari before 1820," *South African Archaeological Bulletin*, 68, 2013, p. 197.

### Occupying Southern Botswana

While Schapera and Ngcongco are at variance in their timing of the moments of Ngwaketse occupation, they agree on the sequence of rulers (*dikgosi*, sing. *kgosi*), their settlement sites, and the events occurring in tandem. All such events transpired sometime in the eighteenth (possibly late seventeenth) and early nineteenth centuries, but Ngcongco's dispute with Schapera's approximate dates underscores the difficulty in being precise. For our purposes, agreeing on the sequence of events and settlement sites is regarded as more important than asserting that they occurred at a precise moment. Among the many Tswana traditions recorded in Botswana and South Africa, the names

and sequence of rulers are commonly recalled together with their respective settlement sites, or capitals, a correlation that has proved to be a useful tool in reconstructing their history in the context of physical landscape.<sup>12</sup> In the following discussion, therefore, the sequence of reigning Ngwaketse dikgosi is used to discern patterns of events and their geographic occurrence.

Image 2: Ngwaketse rulers, settlements and events

<b>Kgosi</b>	<b>Settlement</b>	<b>Event(s)</b>
Seepapitso	Magagarapa	First settlement after separation
	Kgale	
	Manyana (Ntsotswane)	Seepapitso dies
Khutwane	Potsane	
	Sengoma	
Makaba I	Seoke	Find Kgwatlheng in area
Mongala	Seoke	Conquer Kgwatlheng, subordinate them
Moleta	Seoke	Crush, disperse Kgwatlheng, attach captives to royal wives as <i>malata</i>
	Pitsa	Repulse large Korana/Tlhaping/San invading force at Phata ya Barwa
		Attack Hurutshe Gopana near Powe (Dinokana), install Tirwe
	Makolontwane (ne of Moshaneng) aka "Melita"	Back and forth attacks on/from Kwena
	Mhakane (aka Mabule, near Molopo)	Son Makaba leads expedition v. Ngologa at Lehututu, returns with cattle
	Setlhabatsane (w of Moshaneng)	Moleta dies
Makaba II	Selthabatsane	Attacks Kwena (retaliation)
	Sebatleng	Attacked by Kwena
	Kanye hill	Repulses attack by Jan Bloem and allies
		Raids cattle from Kgatla Mmanaana at Maanwane and incorporates Kgatla
		Cattle raids v. Tlhaping, Kwena, Hurutshe et al
		With Rolong assistance, repels combined attack of Tlhaping, Hurutshe, Kwena, Lete, Kgafela Kgatla raised by his disgruntled uncle Moabi
	Pitsaneng	
	Makakanana (near Mafikeng)	Attacks Tlhaping passing through Gangwaketse; Foments raids on Tlhaping, Korana et al
	Dinokana (briefly)	
	Tlhorong (near Ranaka)	
	Kanye	Raids Hurutshe, Lete
		Kwena attack, take some cattle

Source: I Schapera, "A short history of the Bangwaketse", *African Studies*, I, 1942; LD Ngcongco, "History of the Bangwaketse..."

12 F Morton, "Creating maps as historical evidence: reconsidering settlement patterns and group relations in the Rustenburg-Pilanesberg area before 1810", *New Contree*, 56 (2008), pp. 1-22; S Hall, M Anderson, J Boeyens and F Coetzee, "Towards an outline of the oral geography, historical identity and political economy of the late precolonial Tswana in the Rustenburg region," N Swanepoel, A Esterhuysen and P Bonner (eds), *Five hundred years rediscovered: Southern Africa precedents and prospects* (Johannesburg, Wits University Press, 2008), pp. 55-85.

Image 2 reveals a pattern of events that leads to four general conclusions. First, the Ngwaketse embarked on establishing themselves as the preëminent rulers of southern Botswana during the reign of Mongala, their fourth kgosi after the breakaway, though only tentatively. Mongala's people subordinated the Kgwatlheng, but it was not until Moleta's reign that Ngwaketse power over them became absolute. Second, territorial expansion commenced after the succession of Moleta c. mid-eighteenth century. The initial phase of Moleta's reign, after the expulsion and enslavement of the Kgwatlheng, was marked by the relocation from Seoke (Ntakwetoga), which is exposed to attack, to the more hilly and reclusive Pitsa (Pitsaneng). Though remembered as a defensive site by Schapera's informants, we have on record no recollection that Pitsa was ever attacked. What seems likely is that the general turmoil percolating south of the Ngwaketse, was anticipated as a threat to themselves. The first major battle engaged by Moleta, after shifting to Pitsa, was fought at Phata ya Barwa to the south of Pitsa and on Ngwaketse terms to the utter destruction of a combined attacking force.<sup>13</sup> Third, by the end of Moleta's reign (c.1780), Ngwaketse control of their territory had reached pretty much its full limit. Moleta's major thrusts were toward the southeast where the Ngwaketse interfered in the affairs of the Hurutshe Moilwa, to the south by establishing a capital on the border of the Tshidi Rolong at Mhakane (Mabule), and extending their authority over (or at least power to intimidate) the Ngologa Kgalagadi whom prince Makaba II's forces attacked at Lehututu to the west-northwest of Mhakane.<sup>14</sup> Under Makaba II, the Ngwaketse raided and later absorbed the Kgatla Mmanaana of Maanwane (Mabotsa), a few kilometres east of Pitsa, but they did not control Kgatla territory.<sup>15</sup> And fourth, Makaba's reign marks an increase in raiding, directed particularly at the Rolong, Hurutshe and Tlhaping, with most raids launched from Kanye. Schapera and Ngcongco agree that almost all were for cattle. Apart from reference to these raids as having taken place, no account of any of them appears in the record; given Ngwaketse notoriety in the region, however, there is little reason to

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13 Ngcongco argues that the combined force under Korana leadership was a punitive expedition ordered by Kunapsoop (Taaibosch the elder) against all the southern Tswana, not necessarily the Ngwaketse. LD Ngcongco, "Aspects of the history of the Bangwaketse...", pp. 1-82.

14 The Ngologa included a Kgwatlheng remnant that had fled after Moleta assumed *bogosi* and crushed the Kgwatlheng.

15 The Kgatla Mmanaana of Maanwane, erstwhile Ngwaketse allies, were targeted by Makaba II's forces, who seized all the Kgatla's cattle. Kontle, the Kgatla kgosi, then appealed to Makaba to be given cattle. Makaba allocated them a ward (Gamogopswana) adjacent to Kanye and gave them loan cattle (*mafisa*). They remained subject to Makaba until his death in 1824, after which most returned to Maanwane as followers of Mosielele. BM Tselelele, "Bakgatla-ba-ga-Mmanaana" (4-year BA in Humanities degree-thesis for history majors, Department of History, University College of Botswana, 1978), pp. 11-14, 55n36.

doubt that they occurred. Makaba was feared as a menace, not as a conquerer.

In brief, then, under Moleta the Ngwaketse established themselves in a territory that his and Makaba II's forces controlled for 70 to 80 years. With the exception of the Kwena, against whom the Ngwaketse engaged often in back-and-forth cattle raiding – winning some, losing some –, the Ngwaketse remained impenetrable from all other directions; until 1824 they defeated every enemy entering their territory, and when they chose to raid their neighbours, they rarely suffered failure.<sup>16</sup> Moleta's Ngwaketse created an entity of conquest and territorial control. Under Makaba II they refashioned themselves into a raiding state, with Kanye as a base from which its military sallied forth in cattle rustling campaigns and returned with stock to augment their national herd.

### The Ngwaketse military

Recently it has been argued by this author that the western Tswana groups (Ngwaketse, Kwena, etc) introduced *mephato* (sing. *mophato*, militia units or cohorts, commonly but inaccurately referred to as “regiments”) around c.1800, nearly a half century after the Kgatla Kgafela and Tlokwa of Makabe in the Pilaneseberg created *mephato* jointly as part of a military alliance to cope with the Fokeng.<sup>17</sup> Important sources supporting this argument were the lists of *mephato* that appear in the 1938 edition of Isaac Schapera's *Handbook of Tswana Law and Custom*.<sup>18</sup> It is now clear, however, that Schapera's published lists for the Ngwaketse, Kwena and Ngwato have been abbreviated, because copies of his original notes on deposit at the Botswana National Archives show Ngwaketse *mephato* stretching back to the c. mid-eighteenth century, equal in depth to those of the Kgatla Kgafela and Tlokwa.<sup>19</sup> Apart from forcing a revision of Morton's hypothesis, for now what is striking is that Schapera's

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16 A Ngwaketse defeat is recalled by the Lete, who claim that, while under kgosi Mokgoywe at Lotlhakane, they defeated a combined Ngwaketse-Kgatla Mmanaana attacking force when Makaba II was based at Dinokana. Some years later, under Mokgoywe's successor Pooe, the Lete were decimated by a combined force that included Makaba's units and that of his Kgatla vassals under Mosielele, and other allies. V Ellenberger, “History of the Ba-Ga-Malete of Ramoutsa (Bechuanaland Protectorate)”, *Transactions of the Royal Society of South Africa*, 25 (4), 1937, pp. 36, 42.

17 F Morton, “Mephato: The rise of the Tswana militia in the pre-colonial period”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 38 (2), 2012, pp. 385-397.

18 I Schapera, *Handbook of Tswana law and custom...*, appendix II.

19 Botswana National Archives and Records Services (BNA), Schapera Papers (SP), PP. 1/5/12, Regimental lists. Why the full lists were not published, much less why the second edition shortened the lists that had appeared in the first, is unclear, but as appendices perhaps the publishers afforded them limited space, n.d.

original “regimental list” for the Ngwaketse indicates that nine *mephato* were created during Moleta’s *bogosi*. In his reign estimated at 30 years, therefore, Moleta would have created a *mophato* every three or four years, a rate much more frequent than normal among Tswana groups. In contrast, during Makaba II’s reign, which lasted more than 40 years, only five *mephato* were brought into existence. Conclusions can only be provisional, but in comparing Moleta and Makaba’s reigns, one seems fairly safe: extending control over their new, widening territory meant that Moleta required a steady supply of young Ngwaketse militia recruits. And by the time Makaba assumed authority, several seasoned *mephato*, including his own unit (*maTshologa*), were available for operating a raiding culture.

Image 3: Ngwaketse Mephato (Militia cohorts)

Name	Leader	Kgosi
maDingwana (“little gods”)	Moleta Mongala	Mongala
maSwama (“fan lilies”)	?	Moleta
maTshwarakgomo (aka Tshwere) (“cattle rustlers”)	?	Moleta
maLetlathebe (aka maUtlathebe) (“bring the shields”?)	?	Moleta
maNkwe (“leopards”)	?	Moleta
maThibaphata (aka maGwasa) (“defenders of the pass”)	?	Moleta
maTshologa (“those who come in numbers”, “expedition”, “invading force”)	Makaba II	Moleta
maNoga (“snakes”)	Ikaneng Moleta	Moleta
maTimakgabo (“extinguishers of the vervet monkey”—totem of the Bakgatla бага Mmanaana?)	?	Moleta
maGaga (“caves”)	Pheko Moleta	Moleta
maThubapula (“yellow”)	Mosimo Moleta	Makaba II
maGalatlindi (?)	Moloko Moleta	Makaba II
maTshelaphala (?)	Tshosa Makaba	Makaba II
maLau (“lions”)	Sebego Makaba	Makaba II
maAbakgomo (“cattle dividers”?)	?	Makaba II
maAkantwa (“those who go with war”)	Mathiba Makaba	Sebego (regent)

Source: BNA, SP 1/5/12; I Schapera, *Praise poems of Tswana chiefs* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 162n2.

There is little question that Ngwaketse units were accustomed to move over long distances and strike with deadly force. Their cattle raids on the Tlhaping to the south would have required travelling from Kanye at least 200 kms each way, and Makaba's already mentioned cattle raid on the Ngologa at Lehututu, launched from Mhakane, totalled close to 700 kms, round trip. Such raids required swift approaches to increase the element of surprise. A clear example of the devastation that armed Ngwaketse were capable of inflicting at a distance occurred two years after Makaba had been killed. The setting is as follows: In 1824 Makaba died in the defence of Kanye under attack by an invading Kololo force. In the lead-up to this attack, the Kololo under Sebetwane had moved out of the Orange Free State and entered the northern Cape and the Transvaal in turn, plundering as they went, and then moved west into Bechuanaland where they devastated a large area from their base on Dithubaruba hill in Kwena territory.<sup>20</sup> In 1824 they invaded Ngwaketse territory, killed Makaba, scattered the people, and made off with large herds of their cattle. Soon, the Ngwaketse regrouped under regent Sebegu, and in 1826 he led a force of 4,000 men (made up of what appear to have been five *mephato*). After assembling in short order on Sebegu's summons, they marched 65 kilometres in under three days carrying only spears and shields, hunted en route for meat and carried water in game stomachs, launched a dawn surprise attack at Dithubaruba, annihilated the Kololo, and returned with many cattle.<sup>21</sup>

Image 4: Ngwaketse spearhead and detail



Source: WM Burchell, *Travels in the interior of Southern Africa, II* (London, Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1824), p. 596.

20 EW Smith, "Sebetwane and the Makololo", *African Studies*, 15 (2), 1956, pp. 49-74.

21 MH Lister (ed), *Journals of Andrew Geddes Bain, trader, explorer, soldier, road engineer and geologist* (Cape Town, The Van Riebeeck Society, 1949), pp. 59-71.

## **Stowing the spoils**

Over the roughly seventy-five years that Moleta and Makaba oversaw the rise of the Ngwaketse raiding state, large numbers of cattle and other stock were rustled and kept. Ngwaketse lost cattle to Kwena raiders toward the end of Moleta's reign and the beginning of Makaba's, but their raids in return restored the balance, and the boundary separating them remained intact. As for their neighbours to the south and east, several tried but none succeeded in wresting stock back from the Ngwaketse who raided them. Purlined herds, numbering in the thousands, supported a growing population. Kanye (Kwakwe hill), which John Moffat visited in 1824 near the end of Makaba's reign, had grown into an extended settlement populated in the thousands:<sup>22 23 24</sup>

As the wagons were obliged to take a circuitous road over the hill to the town, we saddled our horses to cross by the nearest way; on reaching the summit of the hill, at the foot of which lay the metropolis of the Bauangketsi, turning our eyes northward, we were greatly surprised on beholding the number of towns which lay scattered in the valleys.

... [on the next day] I visited the town, which is very large, but was not able to judge of the number of inhabitants: the town itself covered a vast extent, so that the population must have been great compared with that of the towns of South Africa generally....The front cattle-fold, or place where public meetings are held, is a circle, of 170 feet diameter...Behind lay the proper cattle-fold, capable of holding many thousand oxen: there were also large sheep-folds.

While walking to a neighbouring height, I was able to count fourteen considerable villages; the farthest distant about one mile and half; and I was informed that there were more towns, which I could not see.

Sustaining this large capital meant bringing stock into town for milk and slaughter. A large concentrated population did not mean, however, that the national herd was grazed nearby. For one thing, as Moffat observed, though the "soil in general is very rich...the [surface] water is rather scarce".<sup>25</sup> For another, Kanye faced an open plateau extending south, the direction from which all invasion attempts, apart from the Kwena (and eventually the Kololo), were expected. Stock grazed south of Kanye would have been at considerable risk. Atop Kanye's hills, defensive stone walls surrounded Moleta

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22 J Moffat, *Missionary labours and scenes in Southern Africa* (London, John Snow, 1842), p. 394.

23 J Moffat, *Missionary labours and scenes in Southern Africa...*, pp. 398, 399.

24 J Moffat, *Missionary labours and scenes in Southern Africa...*, p. 400.

25 J Moffat, *Missionary labours and scenes in Southern Africa...*, pp. 401-402.

and Makaba courts, and they proved effective in repulsing attackers, at least until the Kololo arrived. It is possible that the enormous kraal Moffat observed at Makaba's court served in times of danger as a temporary refuge for large herds grazing beyond the valley settlements and run in for safekeeping. It is also likely, though it yet cannot be determined for certain, that most of the national herd was kept at distant cattle posts.

As a people nourishing themselves with rustled and husbanded stock in a region beset by cattle raiding, the Ngwaketse took utmost care in placing their cattle in safe havens. Over the years of Moleta's expansion, the Ngwaketse had become well acquainted with the northern and eastern portions of their newly acquired landscape of Gangwaketse (Ngwaketse territory), where they had built a succession of capitals. Images 2 and 5 illustrate that, with the exception of brief occupation near the Molopo River, their capitals were positioned on hilltops or slopes in an extensive hilly landscape. Between 2012 and 2014 a pilot survey was conducted over parts of Gangwaketse and the area north up to Ramotswa, during which five Ngwaketse capitals were encountered.<sup>26</sup> Among these, Moleta's second capital of Pitsa was surveyed and digitally mapped (Image 6). It clearly indicates that Pitsa expanded over time acquiring numerous small, medium and large stock enclosures. A stonewall site several kilometres to the north of Pitsa at Kikana hilltop is not mentioned by the Ngwaketse, but a brief survey there suggests it, too, may have served as a stock post.

Image 6: Pitsa Central



Source: Google Earth; digitisation by Thabo Kgosietsile.

<sup>26</sup> "Retrieving the historical landscape: Mapping LIA sites in watersheds of the Madikwe and Ngotwane Rivers", supported by a grant from the Office of Research and Development, University of Botswana. Principal investigator: Fred Morton: Co-investigators Sarah Mothulatshipi and Stefania Merlo. Thanks also for technical and field assistance provided by Lokwalo Thabeng, Thabo Kgosietsile, Lorato Segokgo, Malebogo Mvimi, Oscar Hange, Gofaone Banogi, Tsholofela Selepeng, Jackie Hluke and Otumiseng Kebonye.

Stonewalling is common latitudinally from Kanye to Pretoria on hills and slopes, and is associated with such Transvaal groups as the Hurutshe, Mogopa Kwena and Tlokwa.<sup>27</sup> But in Botswana, complex stonewall sites appear to be found almost entirely in areas colonised by the Ngwaketse and are concentrated in the northern and eastern portion of their territory. The Ngwaketse may have entered this area without a stone-wall culture and adopted stone-walling after their encounter with the Kgwatlheng. According to Okihiro's Kwena informants, the Kwena immigrants moving into the Molepolole area (and before the Ngwaketse and Ngwato hived off from the Kwena) found the Kgwatlheng there having built stone houses and walls as well as mined *sebito* (specularite) and iron.<sup>28</sup> After the Kwena displaced them, the Kgwatlheng moved into southern Botswana, where the recent Ngwaketse breakaway group found them. When the Ngwaketse settled at Seoke (northeast of Lobatse on Woodlands Farm, now part of Lobatse Estates), they claim initially to have lived alongside the Kgwatlheng. It is possible, too, that during Moleta's time the Ngwaketse were tutored by their Kgatla Mmanaana allies, who assisted in building the stone walls at Pitsa.<sup>29</sup>

Image 7: Seoke (Main settlement)



Source: Google Earth; digitisation by Thabo Kgosietsile.

27 RJ Mason, "Transvaal and Natal Iron Age settlements revealed by aerial photography and excavation", *African Studies*, 27, 1968, pp. 167-180; JCA Boeyens, "The intersection of archaeology, oral tradition and history in the South African interior," *New Contree*, 64, 212, 2012, pp. 1-30.

28 GY Okihiro, *A social history of the Bakwena and peoples of the Kalahari of Southern Africa, 19th century* (Lewiston, Edwin Mellen Press, 2000), p. 116.

29 BM Tselaele, "Bakgatla-ba-ga-Mmanaana...", pp. 11-12.

## Conclusion

Although the pattern of Ngwaketse ascendancy as a raiding state seems clear, assessing the landscape of their *modus operandi* will require more research. The early Ngwaketse sites of Seoke and Pitsa have been surveyed and mapped, and a test pit has been excavated at a Seoke midden, the analytical results of which are pending. Brief visits have been made to Makolontwane, Setlhabatsang and Tlhorong, where stone walling was present.<sup>30</sup> Motsenekatse, which contains extensive stone walling, was used as a cattle post in the mid-19th century and may have been a carryover from an earlier period.<sup>31</sup> A stone wall site in northeastern Gangwaketse not mentioned in Ngwaketse oral histories – Kikana – was encountered by chance during foot surveys.

At this stage, three conclusions appear likely:

First, cattle posts can vary greatly in layout and location, depending on landscape and political settings. It is often claimed that historically Tswana divided their principal economic activities into town, lands, and cattle posts. This widely-adopted prototype was generated during the colonial period and is often applied back in time on the assumption that it was a fixed, long-standing arrangement. Though perhaps true for groups controlling large territories after the Bechuanaland Protectorate was established and when raiding became uncommon, it was very unlikely in the late eighteenth century north of the Orange River, when the Tlhaping, Rolong, Hurutshe and others became increasingly unsettled by raiding forces emanating from the south.<sup>32</sup> Only the Ngwaketse were fortunate enough to colonise a territory and shrewd enough to mobilise their men in ways that made Gangwaketse a barrier to these threats. The Ngwaketse case demonstrates that the regional landscape in which they established themselves and succeeded as stock raiders was, beyond their territory to the south in particular, unsuited for protecting stock concentrations from human predators.

Second, stonewalling is a plastic concept. The sequence of settlements that served as Ngwaketse capitals were built in fairly rapid succession, and the sites observed to date are situated in a varied range of soil, elevation, stone

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30 P Lane, Personal communication; own observation, 29 July 2014.

31 LB Segokgo, "Project preliminary results: Motsenekatse" (Archaeology unit undergraduate research paper, Department of History, University of Botswana, 2012).

32 MC Legassick, *The politics of a South African frontier...*, pp. 36f; K Shillington, *Luka Jantjie: Resistance hero of the South African frontier* (London, Aldridge Press, 2011), pp. 1-5; N Penn, *The forgotten frontier: Colonist and Khoisan on the Cape's northern frontier in the 18th century* (Athens, Ohio University Press, 2005).

and other physical features. Two early Ngwaketse sites not far from one another and occupied in succession – Seoke and Pitsa – are in fact studies in contrast. The main sprawling complex of Seoke (Image 7) was built on an easily accessible, low-lying sandstone ridge, whereas Pitsa (Image 6) is a dense formation of kraals and some lapa nestled in a quartzite hilltop with difficult access. What they share is abundant onsite stone for construction, suggesting that the central site was constructed first and gradually expanded.

Lastly, settlements were adapted to the broader human and physical landscape. All subsequent Ngwaketse settlements observed to date do not replicate prior settlements in layout and size, suggesting that shifting political and social circumstances probably favoured relocation, whereas the available resources for settlements in the newly colonised landscape was a major, if not determining, factor in how these settlements were constructed and utilised.