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"Suppose a black man tells a story": the dialogues of John Mackenzie the missionary and Sekgoma Kgari the king and rainmaker

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This is a study of two tremendous voices in conflict. One, that of John Mackenzie, was the voice of missionary Christianity and western culture; the other, that of King Sekgoma II of the Bangwato, the voice of African traditional belief and civilization. Mackenzie, while residing in the Bangwato capital in the 1860s, became involved in a struggle between the traditionalist Sekgoma and his Christian son Khama. Although Mackenzie and Sekgoma profoundly disagreed with each other, they were able to engage each others' intellects in a series of subtle encounters. These encounters are of particular interest since Mackenzie was an unusually acute observer, while Sekgoma was an expert practitioner of the traditional religion, widely famed as a rainmaker, a highly intelligent and subtle exponent of his traditions.

Introduction

John Mackenzie (1835-99), who took up his duties as a missionary for the London Missionary Society in Bechuanaland in 1859, is perhaps best known for his part in what has been termed 'missionary imperialism' in the 1870s and 1880s.[1] It was before this period, however, that he published his classic *Ten Years North of the Orange River*,[2] a compellingly-written memoir with affinities to Livingstone's *Missionary Travels*. To a large extent the book stands alone, as a more complete statement of Mackenzie's observations than is to be found in his papers.

Mackenzie was an acute observer of Tswana life, and one who preferred to look for coherence in the unfamiliar things he saw, rather than simply dismiss them as primitive illogic. It is especially notable that whereas some missionaries' accounts present long lists of unexplained 'superstitions', (for example a whole chapter in Josiah Tyler's *Forty Years Among the Zulus*[3]) Mackenzie atempted to explain customs as part of an internally coherent system. He was convinced that such a system was delusional, but neither it nor its manifestations were 'absurd' (as Tyler described Zulu practices[4]). In cases where Mackenzie could not see a logical explanation, he tended to leave the matter as one he had simply not succeeding in penetrating.

The view that African practices with supernatural implication constituted 'superstition' was connected to attitudes to differing beliefs within European society. European culture had long included both an élite and a popular version. At earlier times members of the élite had moved in both worlds, but by the nineteenth century the popular forms had come to seem relatively alien to them.[5]. The popular version included a large number of beliefs which the élite classified as 'superstition', beliefs which did not fit into either the orthodox Christian or the new scientific world-views. These included, for example, a complex of beliefs concerned with behaviour or events which produced good or bad luck. Such beliefs were classified as 'superstition' partly because they were unofficial and non-élite, but more especially because they did not seem to be part of a coherent system—because there seemed to be no answer to the question '*why* is it unlucky?' Folklorists were attracted to the theory that such 'superstitions' were the remnants of extinct belief-systems (such as medieval popular piety or even the ancient

European paganism). Tyler, however, did not attempt any such analysis of Zulu 'superstitions', which he portrayed as simply irrational and apparently random. Mackenzie did sometimes speculate about earlier forms of belief,[6] and certainly regarded many fears and prohibitions as 'superstitious' in the sense that they were delusional and that the Gospel offered escape from them. He also, however, pointed out the parallels with the Levitical code,[7] which although abolished by the New Testament could not be dismissed disrespectfully. It may be significant that Mackenzie, coming from a poor background, understood both the popular and élite in his own culture, although he now belonged clearly to the latter.

Ten Years North of the Orange River, published in 1871, was written while Mackenzie was on furlough in Britain. It recounts his experiences from his arrival in Africa, but reaches a climax with the period spent in Shoshong, the capital of the Ngwato. Sekgoma I (died 1883), the *kgosi* or king, had welcomed missionaries but had not reckoned on his son and heir, Khama, converting to Christianity. A power struggle developed between Khama and Sekgoma, reflecting partly the ideological conflict, but also reflecting the fact that, as recent history had shown, Khama could not necessarily rely on the legitimate succession: a challenge while he was in a strong position might be a better bet. Ultimately Khama's Church party took power, after a tense and somewhat confusing contest which had not ended at the time of the book.

Sekgoma's reign was an eventful one. His father Kgari's reign had ended in disaster with his death in battle in 1828. The Ngwato were in disarray, and according to Mackenzie 'the tribe may be said at this time to have been nearly destroyed.'[8] Following the death of the successor Khama II, the heir was Macheng, the legal son of Kgari, but biologically the son of the regent Sedimo, who according to the levirate custom 'entered the house' of Khama II's mother Bobjwale after Kgari's death.[9] However Sekgoma, the son of Kgari by a junior wife, seized power in 1835. He was to reign three times.[10] His early years were devoted to restoring the power of the Ngwato state and establishing independence from the Ndebele. Mackenzie gave Sekgoma principal credit for this restoration, commenting that 'The energy and wisdom of Khari seemed to animate the conduct of Sekhome'.[11] During his reign he presided over a major increase in his *morafe*'s size and power. Contemporary European accounts often mention his dubious reputation for cunning, but present a picture of an intelligent and resourceful leader.[12]

According to Mackenzie, Sekgoma was far from uninterested in Christianity. He rejected it decisively, as Mackenzie decisively rejected Sekgoma's 'heathenism', but in neither case did this imply indifference. Unlike, for example, Mzilikazi[13] of the Ndebele, who thought it sufficient to say 'We Matebele like many wives'—pointing out the most obviously unpopular implication of conversion[14]—Sekgoma apparently found interest in the subject, or at any rate was willing to discuss it seriously during a series of private meetings with the missionary.[15] Mackenzie's portrayal of Sekgoma is of course a literary construction which at least partly served his own purposes: Sekgoma was presented as the counterweight to Khama, not merely an unconverted chief but a formidable opponent who tests the missionary and the young Christian heir. Mackenzie described him as 'this man with a sinister face,[16] who was the greatest sorcerer in Bechuana-land, who was hated by many and mistrusted by all his neighbours', yet who 'had a keen appreciation of the character and object of the gospel of Jesus Christ.'[17] Sekgoma the sinister old sorcerer provides the foil to Khama the upright young convert.

Nevertheless, the portrait is not fantasy, but a particular interpretation of some real elements. While every *kgosi* was regarded to some extent as the chief *ngaka*,[18] Sekgoma was a genuine expert: 'trained by the finest dingaka in Southern Africa and... a skilled practitioner of bongaka.'[19] In his conflicts with Khama, Sekgoma made prominent public use of charms, and emphasized their importance in his resistance to the new powers of the missionary.[20] (In contrast, Macheng, 'being no doctor himself', had to employ a

foreign doctor when he wished to use magic against his opponents.[21]) In particular, Sekgoma was famed as a rain-maker of great power,[22] and, as John and Jean Comaroff have shown, the dispute between the missionary and the rain-maker was a central scene in the script of the missionary drama.[23] The rain-maker was the opponent *par excellence* of the missionary. Moreover, in referring to sorcery Mackenzie was not conflating the categories of doctor and witch, as did some Christian observers, but distinguished the *ngaka* and the *moloi*.[24] Mackenzie clearly stated that Sekgoma was both,[25] and he recounted an incident in which Sekgoma allegedly attempted to use witchcraft against Sechele's crops.[26]

Despite his role as the adversary of Khama, Sekgoma, in Mackenzie's narrative, cannot be seen as simply a villain. Later versions of Khama's life would increasingly pit 'Khama the Good against Sekgoma (later Raditladi, Rhodes, etc.) the Bad'.[27] But in *Ten Years North of the Orange River*, the picture, though partisan, is more subtle. Sekgoma appears almost as a tragic figure. As Mackenzie recorded in his letters, Sekgoma had invited missionaries without realizing the possible consequences:

> When I sought missionaries for you [Khama], I had no idea that their teaching would torment me thus; I thought that you would just be taught to read and write—your habits remaining unchanged. But learn this... whether you are a Christian or not, I am your father & am determined to exact obedience to my wishes. Either you or I must be master; and who ever heard of a father governed by his own son? What could I say to Kari and the rest of my ancestors if I succumbed to my own child?[28]

Now, however, it was too late. Mackenzie does not present the development of Sekgoma's hostility as caprice, but captures poignantly the pain felt by Sekgoma, who shed tears when he found that his eldest sons, under Christian influence, would not accompany him to the *bogwera* (male initiation) camp. 'Proud is the Bechuana father who is surrounded by a number of sons on these occasions. There is an honour connected with this which no distinction of rank can supply.'[29] Although Sekgoma had already become concerned, this was the crucial moment at which the conflict with Khama became overt and bitter.[30]

Missionary mistrust of Sekgoma went back as far as Livingstone. Livingstone's first impressions had been favourable: 'He has a bad name, but we have always experienced kindness at his hands. He has in his intercourse with strangers been more sinned against than sinning. Those who have behaved well to him, as Mr O. [Oswell] &c., have no complaint to make.'[31] However, subsequent experience, especially Sekgoma's attempts to obstruct his exploration plans,[32] led to a more negative view: 'Sekomi's ideas of honesty are the lowest I have met with in any Bechuana chief'.[33]

The Prices were similarly sympathetic at first: although he was 'heathenish' and 'savage', and had a 'terrible character [reputation] everywhere', Elizabeth Price nevertheless saw him in 1862 as 'a wise politician and *just & upright* in his government (comparatively)... Sekhomi we can honor'.[34] Personal relations were apparently fairly friendly in this early period. Sekgoma treated Elizabeth Price with teasing humour, and gave the two missionaries nicknames: Mackenzie was 'Mohibidu' and Price 'Tau e tona'.[35] In 1863, despite the conflict with Khama, Elizabeth Price was sure that Khama remained Sekgoma's 'well-beloved son.'[36] But this was indeed the reason Sekgoma became so bitter, and as the conflict with Khama intensified, Sekgoma seemed (to her) increasingly unstable. '[P]oor old Sekhomi—*we* all think... that he is goaded on by utter misery and remorse to his many foolish and wicked acts.'[37] Elizabeth Price found him a frightening figure: 'you know my old terror of Sekhomi and how it worked upon my imagination...'[38] J. D. Hepburn described Sekgoma as a 'wily, determined old heathen chief... proud and resolute.'[39]

It is worth reiterating that when Mackenzie published his book, the struggle for the Ngwato kingdom was unfinished. Thus, the story of Sekgoma and Khama began to be written before it was complete. Even while events were playing themselves out in Shoshong, Sekgoma and Khama had become characters in the written discourse of the British missionary press, and even the wider public. This was a story to be continued.

Sekgoma's first encounter with a missionary was when Livingstone visited the Ngwato in 1842. Livingstone recorded an interesting conversation:

> On one occasion Sekomi, having sat by me in the hut for some time in deep thought, at length addressing me by a pompous title said, 'I wish you would change my heart. Give me medicine to change it, for it is proud, proud and angry, angry always.' I lifted up the Testament & was about to tell him of the only way in which the heart can be changed, but he interrupted me by saying, 'Nay, I wish to have it changed by medicine, to drink it [and] have it changed at once, for it is always very proud and very uneasy, and continually angry with some one.' He then rose and went away. This seemed to me the more remarkable as we had then not then spoken to either him or his people on the necessity of a change of heart.[40]

Evidently Sekgoma perceived the missionary as a type of doctor. This was of course quite reasonable. As a religious specialist, with an apparent interest in rain-making, the missionary fitted the category of *ngaka* better than any alternative concept available. Livingstone was furthermore offering actual medical treatment,[41] and in this context at least he treated *dingaka* as colleagues to some extent.[42] This first impression was to be reinforced by further familiarity with missionaries.[43]

What is interesting, however, is Sekgoma's insight that Livingstone's 'medicine' was peculiarly concerned with inner nature and its modification. This is especially impressive in view of the obvious communication gap between Livingstone and Tswana when he tried to communicate Christian ideas. Sekgoma's interest in whether the heart could, or should, be changed, resurfaced in his discussions with Mackenzie many years later.

Sekgoma was apparently also impressed by a traveller who had tried to explain Christianity to him.

> He had often heard preaching since, but Sekhome's mind continued to be most impressed with the view of our religion he had first heard as a novelty from his early instructor... Sekhome never failed to mention that he was not a missionary. There would seem to be the same feeling among the Bechuanas as amongst Englishmen, that preaching is to be expected from a minister, as it is his proper work. Hence the store set on the kindly explanation or good counsel tendered by a passing layman.[44]

Mackenzie had not, at the time of writing *Ten Years North of the Orange River*, discovered the name of this traveller, but he is identified in Roger Price's biography as the hunter R. Gordon Cumming.[45]

Mackenzie, like Livingstone, respected the logical powers of the Tswana. In fact, his tendency in *Ten Years North of the Orange River* was to downplay differences in patterns of thought, in order to stress his subjects' intelligence and their common humanity with Europeans. Frequently, he attempted to counter possible negative impressions in his British readers by comparing Tswana thought or behaviour to British examples. Thus:

> Just as there are thousands of professing Christians in England who could give no better reason for their religious beliefs than that it was the belief of their fathers, so Bechunanas look upon their customs with reverence for the same reason—it was the religion of their ancestors.[46]

Mackenzie's portrayal of Sekgoma is consistent with this attitude: whereas Tyler had found that 'Great simplicity was required in our teaching'[47] Mackenzie presents his adversary as engaging him in subtle argument. Mackenzie could respect such opposition, as he respected Tswana culture—which is not to say that he *accepted* it. The encounter between Mackenzie and Sekgoma was an adversarial one, in which each profoundly disagreed with the other and rejected the other's basic concepts. Nevertheless, it was an encounter in which each engaged with the other's intellect.

Livingstone had come to see that Tswana rain-making could be fitted into a metaphysical logic just as coherent as, and indeed not entirely dissimilar to, that of Christian prayer,[48] and had the courage to portray his interlocutors as matching his arguments with 'remarkably acute' reasoning.[49] Mackenzie's account shows something slightly different. In his dialogue, Sekgoma attempts not so much to counter the missionary's arguments as to show that what is proposed is not merely a different set of beliefs but a different way of thought or being.

As presented by Mackenzie, the most prevalent objection to the 'Word of God', both from Sekgoma and others, was the break with tradition. 'How should I answer to Khari[50] if changed the customs of the town?' asked Sekgoma.[51] Mackenzie's reply is interesting.

> How are you to know that Khari would not have changed the customs himself, if the Word of God had come in his time?... You can never be like Khari, for he never refused the Word of God, whereas you do refuse it at present... You must therefore live your own life, in the circumstances in which God has placed you; and not seek to live the life of an ancestor to whom these circumstances were unknown.[52]

Mackenzie also argued that Sekgoma had already altered some customs by adopting horses and guns.[53]

In arguing that 'You can never be like Khari', Mackenzie was not merely making a debating point about Sekgoma's logical choices; he was challenging the possibility of continuity with the Tswana past. Sekgoma claimed the right (and the responsibility) of deciding whether or not to remain in continuity with the world of his ancestors. Mackenzie asserted that the Europeans had already severed that continuity, and removed such a choice. The arrival of horses and guns, and arrival of the Word of God, created a new world, and Sekgoma was already in it. Mackenzie's time was linear and directional. The past—and Khari—were dead. Whereas Sekgoma saw his life as part of a continuity with the ancestors, Mackenzie told him that he must live his *own*, individual, life.

In the key dialogue between Sekgoma and Mackenzie,[54] Sekgoma says that the Word of God may be good for white men, but they have different hearts.[55]

> It is all very good for you white men to follow the Word of God,' Sekhome more than once said. 'God made you with straight hearts like this,'—holding out his finger straight; 'but it is a very different thing with us black people. God made us with a crooked heart like this,'—holding out his bent finger. 'Now, suppose a black man tells a story, he goes round and round so,'—drawing a number of circles on the ground; 'but when you open your mouth your tale proceeds like a straight line, so'—drawing a vigorous stroke through all the circles he had previously made.[56]

In taking the heart as the symbol of inner nature, Sekgoma combined the metaphors of SeTswana proverbial discourse and Christian preaching. (There was a certain serendipity in the coincidence of western and Tswana metaphorical references to the heart.) He also made a slightly puzzling reference to the hearts of black people as 'bad and black'.[57] This probably alludes to Mackenzie's preaching on sin, whether (as Mackenzie assumed) a misinterpretion, or an ironic appropriation, perhaps implying that if the hearts of the

Africans were not as Mackenzie wished, this was not something he could change. However it may also refer to that mistrust of his own emotions Sekgoma had once expressed to Livingstone.

The point of Sekgoma's argument, or part of the point, was that the differences between himself and Mackenzie ran deep. The difference between them, Sekgoma implied, was not merely a set of beliefs but a way of believing, a framework of reality. Mackenzie categorized the issues in dispute as 'religion', but this category did not necessarily correspond to Sekgoma's conceptualization. Mackenzie responds to this with the argument that such cultural nature is not innate, using the example (a real case) of a white boy brought up as a Motswana. Hence such difference is not 'from... birth' as Sekgoma had said.[58] This does not, however, entirely answer Sekgoma's point.

Perhaps most interesting of all is Sekgoma's use of the metaphor of the straight line and the circle. In material culture these two had early been noted as distinctive features of European and Southern African technique. Livingstone had noted, about his own house-building experience,

> The people cannot assist you much; for, though most willing to labor for wages, the Bakwains have a curious inability to make or put things square: like all Bechuanas, their dwellings are made round. In the case of three large houses, erected by myself at different times, every brick and stick had to be put square by my own right hand.[59]

The point was therefore no doubt familiar to both of them as an example of differing mental habits. Sekgoma first applies this metaphor first to inner nature, and then uses it to suggest that European and Motswana are telling stories differently—engaged, we might say, in different discourses. Superficially the image might refer to the Europeans' more impatient style of speech, but it goes deeper. The missionary's straight line cuts across the Tswana circles.

Although there is no reason to doubt that Mackenzie is reporting an actual comment of Sekgoma, his choice of this argument for such a central place in his showpiece dialogue reflects its resonance for him as well. The image of the straight line and the circle not only recalls material culture but is also resonant with an image in European religious and philosophical thought: that of the Hebrew-derived linear time of salvation-history, as opposed to the circular historical view attributed to Eastern religions (and to some extent to classical antiquity). Like the straight house and the round house, these were images which were not only familiar to Mackenzie but which carried an unambiguous implicit preference: the straight line in each case represented Christianity, civilization, and the technology of the modern west. The images Sekgoma put to Mackenzie were not without force for the missionary, but to the extent that Mackenzie could accept them, he they became also images of what in the 'heathen' world-view needed to change. Indeed hearts might be crooked, but if so the crooked would be made straight, and the rough places plain.

The dialogue ends when Mackenzie 'suddenly' asks Sekgoma 'Sekhome, why shouldn't you "enter the Word of God"?'[60]

> 'Monare [sir],' said the chief, rising to leave, 'you don't know what you say. The Word of God is far from me. When I think of 'entering the Word of God,' I can compare it to nothing except going out to the plain and meeting single-handed all the forces of the Matebele! That is what it would be for me now to "enter the Word of God." '[61]

Again, the image is complex and resonant, and it is too simple merely to take it as indicating that conversion was a frightening prospect. In the situation pictured (the image of battle being a paradigmatic one for a nineteenth-century *kgosi*), Sekgoma would be trying to perform his duties as *kgosi*, yet without support; cut off from his people and all

the things that made his role possible—a situation which recalls that of Sechele after his unpopular conversion. Another implication is that of Christianity as an invading army. Would Sekgoma be taken prisoner, as Macheng had in fact been taken by the Ndebele?

Although Mackenzie does not draw attention to it, the word 'now' in Sekgoma's closing sentence is significant. It was one thing for Khama to become a Christian before becoming king, but it would be quite another for Sekgoma, a king whose rule was already established under the old order.[62] Mackenzie had told him that 'I admitted that I wished the people to leave him as priest, but declared that I desired his people to be subject to him as commander of the army of the tribe. I wished all to be Christians, yet all to remain Bamangwato.'[63] It might prove possible for Khama to construct his authority on such a basis,[64] but for Sekgoma the proposal was to begin by abandoning the supports he already relied on. Mackenzie was aware of the gravity of trying to draw distinctions in the 'minute ceremonial permeating life, merging religious and civil',[65] and must have realized that in asking BaNgwato to obey Sekgoma as commander but not as priest he was in fact undermining the king's autyhority. Similarly, Sekgoma already had a number of wives.[66] Khama had converted at the ideal point, after having been initiated[67] and before marrying.

Mackenzie concluded the dialogue with a somewhat unusual rhetorical passage, emphasizing the tragic aspect of Sekgoma's refusal:

> Poor Sekhome! Such was his own estimate of his position, surrounded by the thralls of priestcraft and polygamy, but, above all, misled by his own darkened and wayward heart![68]

The conflict between the parties of Sekgoma and Khama took several years to resolve, and alternated between a war of nerves and periods of open hostility, in which, however, actual violence was usually kept within limits. After a period of open conflict in 1865-6, Sekgoma recalled Macheng, the man he had himself displaced in 1859. Macheng however was more favourable than Sekgoma expected to the Christians, and Sekgoma went into exile. In 1872 Khama ousted Macheng, but after an unsuccessful first year in which he tried to move too quickly in his Christian-inspired reforms, he was in turn replaced by Sekgoma. In 1875 Khama finally overthrew Sekgoma for the last time.[69]

At the time of Mackenzie's book (1871), Macheng had taken over from Sekgoma and the Christians seemed to have won a qualified victory. Mackenzie's portrayal of Sekgoma during the political intrigues is generally unflattering, though not entirely negative. When things go against him, Sekgoma, 'judging his sons by himself' immediately assumes that they will kill him. In Mackenzie's view, this was at least understandable in view of alleged past Tswana practice.[70] Mackenzie noted that Sekgoma had firmly vetoed proposals to attack the missionaries, who had come as guests, and recalled his sparing of Boers in the Tswana-Boer War of 1852-3.[71]

Mackenzie concluded that the story was defective as a piece of Christian edification.

> To a writer of fiction it would be easy to construct a more telling story than that of this 'house divided against itself.'... In such a [more ideal] story we should be careful to keep the Christians separate from the heathen. But having to narrate facts and not to compose fiction, I have had to describe a struggle in which not more than half a dozen lost their lives, and these neither Christians nor leading persecutors. And I have had to relate that one of the chief difficulties and trials of the 'people of the Word of God' was that they were surrounded by some personal friends who were no friends of the new religion.[72]

Mackenzie thus acknowledged the conflict as a generational dispute, into which the new religion had introduced a new and potent factor, but which could not be seen simply as one of persecuted Christians. He admitted that Khama's party had been associated with

non-Christian opponents of Sekgoma, some of whom were not necessarily attractive figures.[73] In this Mackenzie was anticipating what was later to become a peculiar concern of the missions in Bechuanaland: the lack of a sufficiently clear division between Christian and non-Christian. Unlike in some parts of Southern Africa where a separate Christian settlement could emerge, in Tswana polities Christianity tended to remain one element in a mixed society. The absence of a clearly distinct Christian people made all the more necessary the cult of the Christian king, Khama the Great. It also explains the importance, in Mackenzie's narrative of the arrival of the 'Word of God', of Khama's adversary the sinister sorcerer. Khama, Mackenzie and Sekgoma constitute an early example of Botswana's personalized politics.

They do not, however, inhabit a narrative determined only by Mackenzie's objectives. Mackenzie's account shows an encounter in which each party was able to present sophisticated perceptions of the other. To Mackenzie's story of the straight line, Sekgoma opposed his own story of the circles, ably representing his own world-view in a subtle discourse which still demands our attention.

Notes & References

The Mackenzie Papers referred to are in the Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

1 A. J. Dachs, 'Missionary Imperialism—the case of Bechuanaland', *Journal of African History*, XIII (1972), 647-58. Cf. Brian Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag: Protestant Missions and British Imperialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Leicester, 1990) 116-21, John Comaroff & Jean Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, vol. I, (Chicago, 1991) 341n.15.)

2 John Mackenzie, *Ten Years North of the Orange River: A Story of Everyday Life and Work among the South African Tribes from 1859–1869* (London, 2nd ed., 1971; first published 1871).

3 Josiah Tyler, *Forty Years Among the Zulus* (Boston, 1891), chapter 12 (pp. 104-16). Tyler was a New England Congregationalist who arrived in Natal in 1849.

4 Tyler, *Forty Years*, 104. Another missionary of Bechuanaland, W. C. Willoughby later described African thought as "pre-logical", arguing that its rules of logic were defective by western standards. (W. C. Willoughby, *The Soul of the Bantu* (Westport, Connecticut, 1970, first published 1928) 424-7.)

5 This élite-popular split within European thought is of great significance in questions of European attitudes to African culture. For example, western doctors' negative attitudes to traditional practitioners must be seen in the context of their often equally vociferous condemnation of popular medical traditions and unofficial practitioners within Europe.

6 E.g. Mackenzie, *Ten Years*, 394-5. Livingstone suggested that African traditional religious beliefs were 'fragments of the wreck of a primtive faith floating down the stream of time' but offered few details (David & Charles Livingstone, *Narrative of an Expedition to the Zambesi and its Tributaries; and of the Discovery of Lakes Shirwa and Nyassa, 1858–1864* (New York, 1971; reprint of London, 1865 ed.) 58.

7 Mackenzie, *Ten Years*, 393. These parallels were, indeed, also noted by Tyler (Tyler, *Forty Years*, 182-3) but in a separate context, dissociated from the 'absurd' superstitions.

8 Mackenzie, *Ten Years*, 359. During this tumultuous period, some Tswana *merafe* which suffered similar defeats never managed to recover their unified existence. (I. Schapera & John L. Comaroff, *The Tswana*, rev. ed. (London, 1991) 9.)

9 I. Schapera (ed.), *Praise-Poems of Tswana Chiefs* (Cape Town, 1965), 191. Bobjwale (MmaKhama), though senior to Sekgoma's mother Dibeelane, was the second wife; Mmapolao, the great wife, was childless (Anthony Sillery, *John Mackenzie of Bechuanaland 1835–1899* (Cape Town, 1971) 32.)

10 Sekgoma I 1835-58; Macheng 1858-9; Sekgoma I 1859-66; Macheng 1866-72; Khama III 1872-73; Sekgoma I 1873-5; Khama III 1875-1923.

11 Mackenzie, *Ten Years*, 359.

12 The hunter Gordon Cumming described him as a fast talker, with 'an abrupt and rather dictatorial manner' (R. Gordon Cumming, *A Hunter's Life in South Africa*, (Bulawayo, 1980, 2 vols, reprint of 1850 ed.), vol. I 323-4) and recounted a conversation in which Sekgoma tried to gain some picture of his visitor's background and (especially) the strength of his visitor's government (*Ibid.* vol. II, 36-7).

13 Mackenzie uses the contemporary Tswana form 'Moselekatse'.

14 Mackenzie, *Ten Years*, 337.

15 This is not to say, of course, that he wished to discuss Christianity as much as the missionaries did. Elizabeth Price wrote that he was usually more interested in discussing guns and ammunition. (Edwin W. Smith, *Great Lion of Bechuanaland: The Life and Times of Roger Price, Missionary* (London, 1959) 140.)

16 Cumming described his appearance thus: 'His distinguishing feature is a wall-eye, [i.e. a discoloured eye, or a squint] which imparts to his countenance a roguish character which does not belie the cunning and deceitful character of the man.' (Cumming, *A Hunter's Life*, vol. I, 323. Other descriptions also noted that he had only one good eye. See also Mrs Mackenzie to Mrs Thompson, Jun. 1866, Mackenzie Papers (A782), LMS 34/1/A.

17 Mackenzie, *Ten Years*, 407.

18 T. Tlou, 'The Nature of Batswana States: Towards a Theory of Batswana Traditional Government—the Batawana Case', *Botswana Notes and Records*, VI (1974) 68.

19 J. Ramsay, B. Morton & T. Mgadla, *Building a Nation: A History of Botswana from 1800 to 1910* (Gaborone, 1996) 138.

20 Mackenzie to Tidman, 19 March 1866, Mackenzie Papers (A75), item A.84, & Mackenzie to Tidman, 3 July 1866, *ibid.* item A.88.

21 Mackenzie to J. Mullens, 2 Sep. 1872, Mackenzie Papers (A782), LMS 37/1/A.

22 Sekgoma's rain-making prowess features prominently in a praise poem: *Keseriri-tau sabôMmakgama,/ sakolwane jôôMmakgokong; / gaseke sebeolwa, seasekolwa, / gatwe gorêwa gobô ele morôka, / gorêwa ka ele morôka wapula...* (He is the lion-maned one of Ma-Kgama, / the sturdy youth of MaKgokong; / his hair is never shorn, but merely trimmed, / because he is said to be a rain-maker, / he's said to be a maker of rain...) Schapera (ed.), *Praise-Poems*, 193.

23 Comaroff & Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, vol. I, 206-13

24 Mackenzie, *Ten Years*, 388.

25 *Ibid.*, 389.

26 *Ibid.*, 389-90, 405-6.

27 Q. N. Parsons, 'The 'Image' of Khama the Great—1868-1970', *Botswana Notes and Records*, III (1971), 42

28 Mackenzie to Arthur Tidman, 19 March 1866, Mackenzie Papers (A75), item A.84.

29 Mackenzie, *Ten Years*, 411-12.

30 Simon Ratshosa, 'My Book on Bechuanaland Protectorate', unpublished MS, 94–5, Botswana National Archives, Gaborone, Mss. 3.

31 *Livingstone's Private Journals 1851-1853*, ed. I Schapera, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1960) 4. (4 [May] 1851.)

32 *Ibid.*, 305; David Livingstone, *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa* (New York, 1971; first published 1858), 51-2, 67.

33 Livingstone, *Missionary Travels*, 164.

34 *Journals of Elizabeth Lees Price*, ed. Una Long, (London, 1956) 99 (5 Dec. 1862). The respect which could be given to Sekgoma was in distinction to the Prices' attitude to Sechele, who at that time they despised for what they saw as his ambivalent Christianity.

35 Smith *Great Lion*, 140. 'Tau (e) tona', 'The Great Lion', a title sometimes used for major rulers, was a humourous reference to Price's splendid beard. Sekgoma himself was called 'lion-maned' on account of his hair, which as a rain-maker he kept uncut. (Schapera (ed.), *Praise-poems*, 192.) 'Mohibidu' meaning 'The Red One', referred to Mackenzie's tendency to turn red in the sun. The name had previously been given to Cumming, and Europeans in general were known as 'reds'. (Willoughby, *The Soul of the Bantu*, 100n.; Paul Stuart Landau, *The Realm of the Word: Language, Gender and Christianity in a Southern African Kingdom* (Portsmouth, New Hampshire, 1995) 13.) Landau suggests that in Mackenzie's case it may have had some symbolic significance: 'red connoted ambivalent power and change in a *ngaka*'s practice.'

(*Ibid.*) Red was so prominent a colour in traditional ritual that in South Africa the Christian and traditionalist parties were sometimes known as "School" and "Red".

36 *Journals of Elizabeth Lees Price*, 160 (20 Dec. 1863).

37 *Ibid.*, 162 (18 Dec. 1865).

38 *Ibid.* After all these 'sinister' impressions, it is slightly odd to find that, when writing reminiscences later, one of her main complaints against him was that he used to hang around at meal-times in the hope of a cup of coffee. (*Ibid.* 77.)

39 *Twenty Years in Khama's Country, and Pioneering among the Batauana of Lake Ngami, told in the Letters of the Rev. J. D. Hepburn*, ed. C. H. Lyall (London, 3rd ed., 1970; first published 1895) 19.

40 Livingstone to J.J.Freeman, 3 July 1842, in *Livingstone's Missionary Correspondence 1841-1856*, ed. I Schapera, (London, 1961) 20.

41 In 1851 Sekgoma himself accepted medical treatment from Livingstone. (*Livingstone's Private Journals*, 4.)

42 'With the regular practitioners I always remained on the best terms, by refraining from appearing to doubt their skill in the presence of their patients. Any explanation in private was thankfully received by them, and wrong treatment changed...' (Livingstone, *Missionary Travels*, 144). 'The regular practitioners... are a really useful class, and know something of their profession, and the nature and power of certain medicines...' (Livingstone, *Narrative of an Expedition to the Zambesi*, 51.)

43 Mackenzie was later to find himself regarded in the same way; sometimes his books were interpreted as equivalents of divining-dice (*Ten Years.* 381, 336). See also Caroline Dennis, 'The Role of Dingaka tsa Setswana from the 19th Century to the Present', *Botswana Notes and Records*, X (1978) 53-66, especially 57-9, T. Tlou, 'Khama III—Great Reformer and Innovator', *ibid.*, II (1970), 99, and Landau *The Realm of the Word*, 11-14, 114-16. Comaroff & Comaroff *Of Reveleation and Revolution*, 212 suggests that missionaries were especially likely to be perceived as rival rainmakers; a perception which would incidentally have fitted their remote and slightly puzzling origins (cf. Cumming *A Hunter's Life*, vol. II, 69).

44 Mackenzie, *Ten Years*, 407.

45 Smith, *Great Lion*, 143. Smith does not give his source and there are some inconsistencies: although Mackenzie seems to imply that the unidentified traveller had been the first to speak to Sekgoma of Christianity, Cumming's first visit to Sekgoma came *after* Livingstone's first visit (Cumming, vol. I, 21 & 324.) There is no mention of religious discussion in Cumming's own account of his meeting with Sekgoma in *A Hunter's Life*.

46 Mackenzie, *Ten Years*, 397.

47 Tyler, *Forty Years*, 64. Tyler was ready to note that in legal debate the Zulus 'often show remarkable skill' (195). What marks off his attitude from Mackenzie's is that in the field of *religious* argument Tyler found no more than 'occasional gleams of native shrewdness' (and cited a trivializing example) (64) whereas Mackenzie presented his opponent as capable of serious debate.

48 This analysis is based on Comaroff & Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, vol. I, 210.

49 Livingstone, *Missionary Travels*, 27.

50 Kgari, *kgosi* of the Ngwato *c.* 1817-28, and father of Sekgoma, was described by Mackenzie as 'the chief whose name is most cherished among the Bamangwato. Brave in the field, wise in the council, kind to his vassals, Khari was all that Bechuanas desire their chief to be.' (Mackenzie, *Ten Years*, 358). See also Schapera (ed.), *Praise-Poems*, 190. Interestingly, modern historians have seen Kgari as an innovator, introducing for example the *kgamelo* system. See Thomas Tlou & Alec Campbell, *History of Botswana* (Gaborone, 1984) 117. Edwin N. Wilmsen, *Land Filled with Flies: A Political Economy of the Kalahari* (Chicago, 1989) 99 presents Kgari as a key figure in the development of the structures of the nineteenth century Tswana state.

51 Mackenzie, *Ten Years*, 397.

52 *Ibid.*

53 Sekgoma was keenly aware of the value of these: in 1863, after a battle with the Ndebele, he had advised the Tawana *kgosi* Letsholathebe 'to buy guns and horses, and not to let a gun leave your town if you have a tusk to buy it with.' He said that 'his guns and horses saved him, the few cavalry alone won the battle.' (James Chapman, *Travels in the Interior of South Africa*

1849-1863: Hunting and Trading Journeys from Natal to Walvis Bay & Visits to Lake Ngami & Victoria Falls, ed. Edward C. Tabler, (Cape Town, 1971) Part 2, 167, 4 May 1863.)

54 It is ambiguous to what extent this dialogue is intended to be read as a single conversation or as a composite.

55 Sekgoma was not, of course, the first to use this image. Livingstone reports the Kololo as arguing 'They needed the Book of God. But the hearts of black men are not the same as those of the whites. They had real sorcerers among them.' (Livingstone, *Narrative of an Expedition to the Zambesi*, 300.) Sekgoma, however, developed the image in a much more subtle form.

56 Mackenzie, *Ten Years*, 407-8.

57 *Ibid.*, 408.

58 *Ibid.*.

59 Livingstone, *Missionary Travels*, 46.

60 Mackenzie, *Ten Years*, 409.

61 *Ibid.*.

62 See Landau, *The Realm of the Word*, 20 & 29.

63 Mackenzie, *Ten Years*, 378.

64 In fact, as Paul Landau demonstrates in *The Realm of the Word*, Khama's rule did not dispense with the king's religious authority,but rather redefined it in terms of the new religion.

65 Notes by Mackenzie, n.d., Mackenzie Papers (A75), item C.65.

66 No fewer than sixteen, according to Schapera & Comaroff, *The Tswana*, rev. ed., 33.

67 In *c.* 1850; Landau, *The Realm of the Word*, 20n.63. I. Schapera *A Handbook of Tswana Law and Custom* (Münster-Hamburg, 1994) 312 gives the date as 1852. To convert before being initiated raised a serious dilemma: the missionaries made rejection of initiation a test of Christian affiliation (despite Livingstone's view that this was a mistake), while public opinion was contemptuous of an uninitiated adult. Khama conversion thus came within a crucial window of opportunity.

68 Mackenzie, *Ten Years*, 409.

69 Ramsay, Morton & Mgadla, *Building a Nation*, xii-xiii, 138-9. In these takeovers, Sechele played a significant role, at different times in support of each of the three claimants.

70 Mackenzie, *Ten Years*, 419.

71 *Ibid.*, 437. Sechele had asked Sekgoma to kill Boers in his territory, but when the occasion arose Sekgoma decided not to do so. In a wry and touching comment, Sekgoma told the Boer trader Jan Viljoen, 'Jannie, I love you and it is because I love you that I let you go... I know that when you get home you will come and shoot me, but that is nothing. Go, sleep well this night and as the day breaks mount your steed.' (Chapman, *Travels*, Part I, 76, 28 Sep. 1852.) Sekgoma also decided to spare other Boers to whom he had no such ties, probably out of a combination of motives including the desire to demonstrate independence of Sechele, his estimation of the dangerous consequences of killing Europeans (see Cummings, *A Hunter's Life*, vol. II, 36) and Chapman and Viljoen's pleas. In fact Viljoen, rather than return to shoot him, successfully promoted a peace settlement. (Ramsay, Morton & Mgadla, *Building a Nation*, 96-6.)

72 Mackenzie, *Ten Years*, 450.

73 *Ibid.*, 433. As this illustrates, the accusation (e.g. Sillery *John Mackenzie* 33) that Mackenzie's account was completely biassed in favour of Khama is over-simplified.