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978-0-521-44067-7 - A South African Kingdom: The Pursuit of Security in Nineteenth-century Lesotho

Elizabeth A. Eldredge

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The BaSotho kingdom emerged and consolidated in the dramatic and dangerous environment of nineteenth-century South Africa. Elizabeth Eldredge provides a rich description of local agriculture, iron-working and craft industries, bringing out the resourceful responses of the BaSotho to the challenges of drought and famine, and explaining the dynamics of the competition for land. During the colonial period, regional economic integration increasingly influenced local production, land use and internal politics, and drew the BaSotho into the regional migrant labor system. Throughout these turbulent years, the overriding interest of the BaSotho was the pursuit of security. Dr Eldredge analyzes the epic struggle which bound together rich and poor, chiefs and commoners, and men and women in a largely successful effort to sustain this fragile and innovative society in the face of political threats and environmental challenges.

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A SOUTH AFRICAN KINGDOM

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**The pursuit of security in
nineteenth-century Lesotho**

ELIZABETH A. ELDREDGE

Michigan State University



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To David
and
to Michael and James

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In the end this work rests on the contribution of the old people of Lesotho, who allowed their knowledge to be recorded for posterity. I hope that their contribution to the writing of their history will help to forge a brighter future. *Kea leboha le ka moso.*

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Abbreviations

BR	Basutoland Records
BBNA	Blue Book on Native Affairs
CRA	Colonial Report – Annual (Great Britain)
JME	Journal des Missions Evangéliques
OMI	Oblats de Marie Immaculée
PEMS	Paris Evangelical Missionary Society/Société des Missions Evangéliques de Paris
SANAC	South African Native Affairs Commission

Note on orthography and terminology

I have chosen to use the official SeSotho orthography of Lesotho instead of the SeSotho orthography in use in South Africa, in accordance with the choice of modern BaSotho to retain their own orthography. The spellings of names and places reflect this choice.

In the SeSotho orthography of Lesotho, the letter *L* followed by *i* or *u* is pronounced as a *d*; when followed by other vowels it retains the ordinary English pronunciation of *L*. The vowels *o* and *u*, when followed by *a* or *e* and sometimes another *o*, serve as consonants sounded as *w*. Similarly, the vowel *e* when followed by *a* or *o* and sometimes another *e* serves as a consonant sounded as *y*. Clicks are represented by *g*, *c*, and *x*. An apostrophe before *m* or *n*, as in '*me* or '*na* indicates duplication of the consonant (*mme* or *mma*). The consonant *h* does not form a new sound when it follows *p* or *t* as in *ph* or *th*, but indicates the *p* or *t* are aspirated in pronunciation.

I have avoided the use of word stems as words; such use of stems in place of full words would not be acceptable in English usage, where full compliance with word transitions, such as from England to English or Britain to British, is standard. As in other Bantu languages, word changes in southern Bantu languages often occur before the stem, which can be confusing for readers accustomed only to European languages. To alleviate confusion I have adopted a system used by other scholars by which the stem is capitalized in the middle of the word. This should make changes from singular to plural, and differences between group names, easier to identify. For example:

Sotho:	word stem
SeSotho:	language and customs
MoSotho:	person
BaSotho:	people
LeSotho:	nation

Group names are particularly problematic in the ambiguity of their meaning. Thus the term BaSotho could refer to anyone speaking the SeSotho language, or it could refer to a member of the nation of Lesotho. I differentiate

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Orthography

between SeSotho-speaking peoples, who might or might not belong to the nation called Lesotho built by Moshoeshoe from 1824; and the BaSotho, by whom I mean those people who gave their allegiance to Moshoeshoe and Lesotho, and their descendants, among whom are included people speaking numerous languages and dialects. Similarly I distinguish between IsiZulu-speaking peoples, some of whom became BaSotho, and the AmaZulu people of the nation built by Shaka. The distinction is more ambiguous for the IsiXhosa-speaking peoples and the SeTswana-speaking peoples. Again, various IsiXhosa and SeTswana-speakers became BaSotho by virtue of their incorporation into Lesotho under Moshoeshoe, but the terms AmaXhosa and BaTswana cannot be used to designate people belonging to a single specific polity in the region. I therefore try to designate the specific polity or political context where appropriate. Because there were numerous polities which were composed primarily of SeTswana-speaking peoples, they are sometimes distinguished by separate group name (for example, BaThaping, BaRolong), and sometimes designated collectively as BaTswana when the specific sociopolitical distinctions are not relevant. It should be noted that chiefdoms and kingdoms throughout the region, whether dominated by AmaXhosa, AmaZulu, BaSotho, or BaTswana, included peoples of various origins speaking various language. Processes of amalgamation and acculturation accompanied ongoing political changes among all southern African peoples in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The descriptive term I use to designate Lesotho changes, varying from chiefdom to kingdom to nation to colony according to the historical context. The BaSotho have referred to Lesotho from its origins as their *sechaba*, which translates as nation, and this seems generally the most appropriate term for the polity established by Moshoeshoe. On the other hand, when Moshoeshoe's chiefdom incorporated other chiefdoms after 1824 Moshoeshoe became the *morena o moholo*, or paramount chief, distinct from subordinate chiefs within Lesotho, and the polity can appropriately be termed a kingdom. During the colonial era the kingdom persisted in the status of the colony of Basutoland, so the term kingdom has the advantage of remaining appropriate for the entire history of Lesotho. I apply the term nation in most contexts, however, because it draws attention to the dynamic role played by the BaSotho in shaping their political and economic destiny in a changing political context, independently of any one chief or king. By using the term nation I suggest an underlying allegiance and loyalty to the polity which survived Moshoeshoe and his heirs in the paramouncy, as well as the colonial era, to shape the modern nation of Lesotho. At the same time the term nation implies dynamics which have allowed the incorporation of people of diverse origins, and therefore also suggests the potential for broader regional incorporation based on wider regional ties and loyalties.

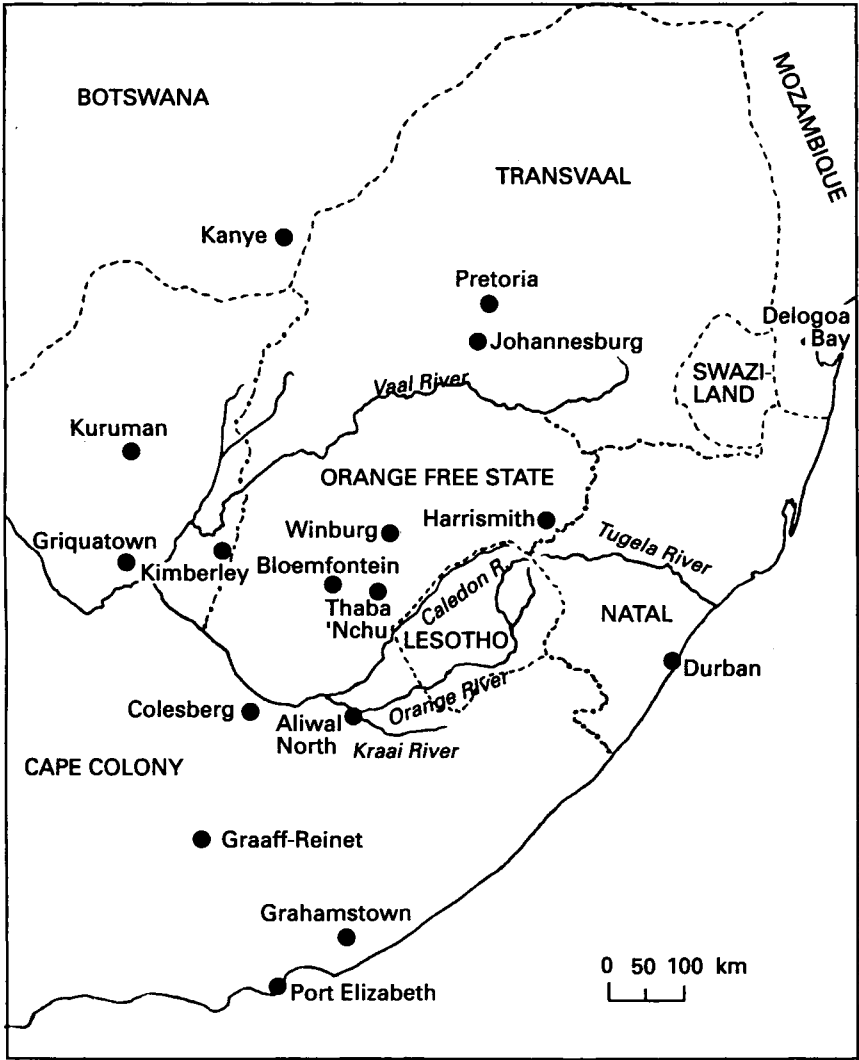


Fig. 1 Southern Africa