

*When Rustling became an Art: Pilane's Kgatla and the Transvaal  
Frontier 1820 –1902*

**(David Philip publishers, South Africa, 2009)**

**Fred Morton**

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Having read some of Fred Morton's contributions<sup>1</sup>, one felt it was only a matter of time before an interesting, well organised publication in the form of this book hits the shelves.

This nine-chapter book covers mostly the same themes that have been Fred Morton's passion about the history of the BaKgatla throughout. It is interesting to note how the BaKgatla people led by a father, son and grandson could have been involved in such diverse social, economic, political and military aspects of society. This book covers BaKgatla involvement in the areas of slave trading, missionary encounters, battles and wars, illegal gun trading, cattle raiding to issues of law enforcement and tax collecting. Morton must be commended for considering the history of the BaKgatla in its totality.

The division of the book is even more logical. Chapter one focuses on the shrewd personal character of the father Pilane and his business connections including the manner and methods with which he maintained good personal and group relations with both Whites and Africans. This chapter also reflects on how Pilane successfully pursued commercial interests under the wing of the *maBuru* while adopting a totally different attitude towards missionaries

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<sup>1</sup> F Morton, 1997. *Cattleholders, evangelists and socio-econopmic transformation among the BaKgatla of Rustenburg District, 1863-1898*, paper presented at the 16th biennial conference of the South African Historical Society, University of Pretoria on the theme: Land, violence and social problems in the history of southern Africa; JS Bergh and F Morton, 2003. "To make them serve..." *The 1871 Transvaal Commission on African Labour, Pretoria*; EA Eldredge and F Morton, 1994. *Slavery in South Africa: Captive Labor on the Dutch Frontier*, Pietermaritzburg.

whom he considered to be divisive of his people. It was probably this attitude and his closeness and support of whites that elevated Pilane into a political force within the region to an extent that he became authoritarian.<sup>2</sup>

The second chapter focuses on the persons of Kgamanyane, Pilane's son and successor and Paul Kruger. The chapter deals with aspects of how these two personalities developed and eventually assumed leadership over their respective peoples. The chapter also pays attention to the eventual reciprocal alliance between Kgamanyane and Kruger that even saw the former residing on the latter's property Saulspoort 38 (Chapter three). In chapter four, Morton reflects on the eventual emigration of Kgamanyane and his people from Saulspoort 38 into Bechuanaland border following the souring of relations as a result of clashes of interests between the two former allies detailed in the previous chapter.

Chapter five deals with aspects of war, first between the BaKgatla of Linchwe (who came to power in August 1875 following his father Kgamanyane's death in May) and the BaKwena of Sechele. Most importantly this chapter progresses into a discussion about the growing British presence in the Transvaal culminating in the British Annexation of the Transvaal in 1877. These after the Boers of the Transvaal had been displaced without resistance. However, that position was soon reversed when in August 1881 the British Annexation was overthrown.

In chapter six, the author focuses on the consolidation of the ZAR government which also meant that for BaKgatla to continue to breath and develop successfully they needed friendly relations with Kruger and his government. The next chapter therefore, observes the BaKgatla life under the British Bechuanaland Protectorate. Morton also notes how the BaKgatla noted the differences between the two white groups with the Boers called *maBuru* and the British called *maKgoa*.

Chapter eight pays attention to the westernisation of the BaKgatla through amongst other forms Christianisation. This would also serve to put them in good stead for purposes of engaging in business with other Bechuanaland leaders, most of who had already converted to the new religion. Another advantage would have been the fact that with the support of the Protectorate,

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<sup>2</sup> F Morton, 2009. *When Rustling became an Art: Pilane's Kgatla and the Transvaal Frontier 1820-1902*, Claremont, p. 8.

Christian dikgosi were able to rein in headstrong missionaries and their disobedient converts.<sup>3</sup>

In the last chapter, initially the reluctance of Linchwe to commit himself and his people to fighting on either side of the 1899-1902 war between the Boers and the British is being dealt with, before he finally decided to fight on the side of the British. The chapter ends with a consideration of the cost of the war for the BaKgatla involvement and reflects on BaKgatla losses both in terms of human loss and cattle stock. Most importantly, noted the author, the BaKgatla fell short of attaining one important objective despite being on the victorious side, i.e. reclaiming their ancestral land in the Transvaal.<sup>4</sup>

Morton is to be congratulated on producing this book employing an almost comprehensive list of sources: archival sources, published government sources, newspapers, interviews, unpublished materials and theses and published sources. Both the glossary of the Kgatla terms and that of the nineteenth-century Dutch terms makes it much more easy for readers who are not steeped in the two languages. The genealogies and the list of BaKgatla male regiments on pages 289 and 288 also make it readily accessible for any one interested in the history of the BaKgatla.

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3 F Morton, 2009. *When Rustling became an Art: Pilane's Kgatla and the Transvaal Frontier, 1820-1902*, Claremont, p. 209.

4 F Morton, 2009. *When Rustling became an Art: Pilane's Kgatla and the Transvaal Frontier, 1820-1902*, Claremont, pp. 288-289.

