

## THE KHOISAN ARCHIVES : HISTORY AS A MUSICAL FIELD

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When Vasco de Gama and his crew landed in the Bay of São Bras (today known as Mossel Bay), not far from the Cape of Good Hope on December 2<sup>nd</sup> 1497, they were welcomed musically by a group of « Blacks », or to be more precise, by a flute orchestra. Vasco de Gama’s diarist, generally identified as a certain Alvaro Velho<sup>1</sup>, recounts the scene :

« On Saturday, almost two hundred Blacks arrived, tall and short, driving twelve heads of cattle, both bulls and cows and five sheep in the bargain. As soon as we saw them, we went ashore. They immediately started playing four or five flutes, some high-pitched, others low, so that they played together in harmonious concert in a manner you would hardly expect from Blacks. And they danced like Blacks. The captain told the trumpets to sound and we started dancing on the decks and when the captain returned he danced with us too. When the party was over, we landed at the same place as the last time and bought, for three bracelets, a black bull that we ate that very Sunday for dinner. It was nice and fat and as tasty as the ones you can eat in Portugal.

On Sunday they returned, as numerous as before, accompanied by their wives and little children. The women stood on the top of a hill near the sea. And they had brought along many bulls and cows. Having formed groups in two places along the beach, they started playing and dancing like they had on Saturday »<sup>2</sup>.

The Blacks mentioned by Vasco de Gama’s diarist may have been a *Gouriqua*, a group of Khoisan cattle-breeders<sup>3</sup> who, according to historian Richard Elphick, settled towards that time on the Eastern Coast of the Cape of Good Hope<sup>4</sup>. The reason they hardly seemed afraid, or even surprised, upon seeing the foreign sailors is that they « had heard from those in the Bay of Saint Helen, only sixty leagues away from here by sea and where we had stopped before, that we were harmless, and on the contrary, even generous »<sup>5</sup>. That piece of information gives one the impression that, far from being isolated, the group lived in good intelligence with their neighbours about one hundred kilometers away and who, according to the same Elphick, were also *Gouriqua*.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Fauvelle-Aymar (2002 : 31 sq.).

<sup>2</sup> Peres (1945 : 8-9).

<sup>3</sup> The term Khoisan is composed of two radicals : Khoi (« person » in the Khoe language) and San (« predator » in Khoe). It was coined in 1928 by Léonard Schultze and picked up in 1930 by Isaac Schapera to designate all the populations known as « Hottentots » (Khoi) and « Bushmen » (San) considered as a racial, cultural and linguistic entity. Today, scholars use the term particularly to distinguish the Khoisan-speaking populations from the Bantu-speakers in Southern Africa. For approximately ten years, these populations (and the NGOs that protect their legal rights) have made it autonomous, a sign of their common identity and of their native status.

<sup>4</sup> Berens, Boonzaier, Malherbe, Smith (1996 : 69), following Elphick (1977).

<sup>5</sup> Peres (1945 : 7).

Vasco de Gama's diarist is writing about the very first known material exchange of goods between Westerners and Khoisan. But for our purposes here, what is especially interesting about the event is that those two hundred Blacks, gathered together in what might be called an embassy, had come to welcome the newcomers to the sounds of a flute orchestra, as if to celebrate their arrival in pomp and circumstance, but also perhaps to give themselves the importance that befits an embassy. At once, making music and dancing take on a far greater significance than being simply entertainment and become political acts, more specifically diplomatic. Music and dance thus allowed greeting the foreign visitors with a magnificence that needed no words (neither spoke the other's language), a fact that was immediately understood by the commander-in-chief of the Portuguese ships, who asked his men to answer the Blacks in kind, *i.e.* musically, with a trumpet tune. Music and dancing thus truly filled the office of a political language, allowing a relationship to grow up between two groups of men totally unknown to each other. The day following that first contact, the flutes once again announced the Blacks' arrival, this time accompanied by their women and children, like a repeat performance of what had taken place the night before. After Vasco de Gama, many other explorers were to describe how so-called « Hottentot » groups greeted them to the sounds of a flute orchestra<sup>6</sup>, how sometimes even their departure or some other important event that took place during their visit was marked likewise.

Vasco de Gama's diarist was not content to mention the music played by the Blacks, he also describes it both literally and metaphorically. This was doubtless so because he noticed in it elements that were also common to Western music towards the end of the XV<sup>th</sup> century, first and foremost the flutes playing « in harmonious concert » and organized in ensembles of four or five instruments, a well-known formation in Western Europe at the time. Besides, since each was limited to an either « high » or « low » register, the flutes must certainly have alternated using the *hocket*, a technique developed by composers during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance<sup>7</sup>, and with which Vasco de Gama's diarist was no doubt familiar. But was it the flute orchestra's brilliant sound, its structured organization or its (relative) proximity to the Western music of the time that he liked, since he wrote that the musicians « played together in harmonious concert »<sup>8</sup> ?

From the very beginning of the Cape Colony created by the Dutch in the XVII<sup>th</sup> century, flutes, and some other instruments such as the *gom-gom*, the *goura* (musical arcs) and the *rommelpot* (a drum made of an earthen or wooden recipient stretched with an animal skin) were typical of the native populations. Diderot and d'Alembert thus dedicated a whole article to the *gom-gom* in their *Encyclopaedia*<sup>9</sup> :

« GOMGOM, (*Luth.*) The Hottentots also have a musical instrument they call *gongom*, & which is said they share with all the Negro nations on the West Coast of Africa. The *gongom* of the Hottentots is of two kinds. The small & the large.

The small *gongom* is an arc made of iron or olive wood, stretched by a string of gut or a sheep's nerve that has been sufficiently dried in the sun. At one end of the arc, the quill of a feather split lengthwise is attached on one side, & the string is placed in the slit. The musician holds the feather in his mouth when playing the instrument, & the different tones of the *gongom* come from the different modulations of his breath.

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. below, *The « Hottentot » flute orchestra : from emblematic to patrimonial*

<sup>7</sup> This inevitably reminds one of Guillaume de Machaut's *mass*. The technique is also used today by several populations on every continent (especially the Wayana and Wayampi of Guyana and Brazil, the mountain tribes in Vietnam or yet again the inhabitants of the Solomon Islands).

<sup>8</sup> Peres (1945 : 8).

<sup>9</sup> Diderot and d'Alembert (1777 : 244, vol. 20 suppl. III) following Peter Kolb (1741 for the French edition of the *Description du Cap de Bonne Espérance*). For a detailed analysis of these sources, see Fauvelle-Aymar (*op. cit.* : 291-293).

The large *gongom* only differs from the small in that the shell of a coconut, & whose top has been cut off, is made to pass onto the strings through two holes before the arc is strung taut. When touching the instrument the shell is pushed farther from or closer to the feather, according to the tone desired. [...].

I confess of course that I don't understand how the split feather, nor the coconut, can produce different tones ».

Their musical instruments are thus part and parcel of these populations' image, they no longer reveal only their cultural wealth or even their cleverness alone, but also reveal their strangeness and primitiveness. In two centuries, the Western view of the Khoisan populations and their music had radically changed : from *political* it became somehow *exotic*<sup>10</sup>.

We do not intend here to propose a history of Khoisan musical forms according to periods, styles or genders, as in a well-organized reconstitution of these populations' past, but rather to try and understand what is at stake in the music during « an ongoing historical process »<sup>11</sup>. Through the study of musical practice such as it appears in the Khoisan Archives, what is interesting is to consider music as a social experience, capable of revealing situations, the turning points or particular moments of a history. This exploration will end by opening the question of music as being a way of inscribing a society in Temporality, a way of broaching the history of Khoisan populations differently.

## MUSICAL SOURCES AND RESOURCES

To the extent that music is an immaterial production, the question of source is necessarily a delicate one. What musical traces do we have at our disposal ? How and in what terms have explorers, travellers and ethnologists described the music they had the chance of witnessing and hearing ? How far back in these populations' past does their music allow us to go ?

Though many rock paintings in South Africa<sup>12</sup> very probably represent scenes of singing and dancing<sup>13</sup>, considering them as a source is a problem, not so much because of their age but rather because the question of continuity between those who painted the walls and present-day Khoisan populations is subject to much debate<sup>14</sup>. The sources we examined include accounts by explorers<sup>15</sup>, travellers, administrators (governors, soldiers, etc.) and missionaries, the writings of historians, anthropologists, linguists and musicologists, newspaper articles from the local press, but also illustrations (sketches, watercolours, oil paintings, etc.), photographs, musical instruments, recordings and films. Among the writings, rare are those dedicated to Khoisan music ; with the notable exception of the work of ethnomusicologist Percival Kirby in the 1920s and 1930s, there is no comparative study, nor even a monograph, dealing with that music. The description of the instruments, songs and dances must be sought out in all sorts of books and articles written by non specialists, dispersed in many different archives, libraries and South-African museums. As far as the old recordings are concerned – on cylinders, phonograms, 78 RPMs – though some have been written up recently<sup>16</sup>, most are dormant at the bottom of an archive<sup>17</sup>, rarely worked on and

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<sup>10</sup> For a history of the Western vision of Khoisan populations, see Fauvelle-Aymar (2002).

<sup>11</sup> Revel (1996 : 13).

<sup>12</sup> Mainly to be found in South-Africa in the Drakensberg and Cedaberg mountains, as well as in Namibia, in the Brandberg. Cf. esp. Lewis-Williams (1981) ; Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1989) ; Pager (1989, 1993, 1998, 2000) ; Parkington (2002) ; Vinnicombe (1976).

<sup>13</sup> There are no musical instruments, except for a few arcs and one pluri-arc copied by Stow (1930 : plate 72).

<sup>14</sup> See especially Jolly's article (1996) in *Current Anthropology* and the many reactions it elicited.

<sup>15</sup> The oldest is certainly Vasco de Gama's in 1497.

<sup>16</sup> Traill (1997) ; Pöch (2003).

even sometimes totally forgotten<sup>18</sup> ! What remains is the iconography, better known because it is shown in museums and listed in reference books<sup>19</sup> or published in richly illustrated albums<sup>20</sup>, as well as in documentaries, where they are more widely available<sup>21</sup>.

As to the exact nature of the data, there is a disparity between what concerns the musical instruments, which are material objects easy to identify and describe, and the music itself, especially the vocal music, for which testimony is more anecdotal, and above all depreciative<sup>22</sup>. In fact, it was only with the first musical transcriptions done by William J. Burchell at the very start of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century<sup>23</sup>, and even better with the first sound recordings done by Rudolf Pöch in 1908, that it became possible to have an idea of the sounds and musical language produced (scales, rhythms, forms, polyphonic techniques, vocal styles, etc.).

In the course of two missions (2003 and 2004<sup>24</sup>), I undertook an empirical inventory of the sources of Khoisan music, working on three collections of archives. Kirby's and Bleek & Lloyd's are stored at the Cape (Cape Town University, National Library, Museum of South-Africa) ; the Hoernle Archive is in Johannesburg (Witwatersrand University).

Percival Kirby (1887-1970) was a pioneer both in ethnomusicology, a discipline born at the very end of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century, and in fieldwork, at a time when both were hardly obligatory when analyzing so-called « exotic » music. He was also one of the rare scholars to show an interest in the Khoisan music of South-Africa<sup>25</sup>, on which he published *ca.* ten articles<sup>26</sup> and especially a basic book that represents the only comparative study on South-

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<sup>17</sup> At the *South-Africa Museum* in the Cape and the *Department of Historical Papers* of Witwatersrand University.

<sup>18</sup> I for instance literally unearthed forty-four 78 RPM records deposited by the linguist Anthony Traill at the *Department of Historical Papers* of Witwatersrand University and forgotten on the shelves. Nobody knew what was on those records and what they were worth, certainly a considerable sum, because, except for recordings by Rudolf Pöch and Dorothea Bleek, they are the only known examples of Khoisan music – polyphonic singing, pieces for musical arcs and flute ensembles – that go back to the first third of the XX<sup>th</sup> century. A copy was made on a CD in October 2004 at the South-African radio (SABC), making it possible to identify and analyze those musical excerpts.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Kennedy (1966).

<sup>20</sup> For example Le Vaillant (1973).

<sup>21</sup> Particularly John Marshall's films, most of which were done in the 1950-1960's (for an inventory, see Olivier and Valentin 2005).

<sup>22</sup> Thus, the singing is compared to « cattle mooing » (Waterhouse 1932 : 128-129) or « screaming » (Godée-Molsbergen 1932 : 196, vol. 4). François Le Vaillant is an exception since, towards the end of the XVIII<sup>th</sup> century, he wonders at the beauty and art of Hottentot music: « [the dancer] himself invents a sort of English step whose merit and beauty consist in executing it with as much alacrity as precision, without moving from the place to which his foot is transported » (1790 : 72, vol. 2).

<sup>23</sup> Burchell (1824 vol. 2 : 48, 50). At the end of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century, Charles Weisbecker was the first to bring out a small book entirely dedicated to Bushman songs. They were sung by |Han=kasso, one of the main informers of Lucy Lloyd (who collected the words of those songs). Complete transcriptions were published in 1936 by Percival Kirby in his article « A Study of Bushman Music ».

<sup>24</sup> This work is part of the programme «Khoisan Archives. Sources for the history of peoples without history» (*Archives khoisan. Sources pour l'histoire de peuples sans histoire*) directed by historian François-Xavier Fauvelle-Aymar (CNRS, IEA) and archeologist Karim Sadr (Witwatersrand University, Johannesburg), and financed by the French Institute of South-Africa (Institut Français d'Afrique du Sud, IFAS) in Johannesburg. I wish to thank the *Manuscripts and Archives Department* of the University of the Cape and its director Lesley Hart, the Archives of Witwatersrand University in Johannesburg, and its director Marius Coetzee, who gave me permission to publish photographs belonging to the Bleek & Lloyd and Hoernle Collections. I am also grateful to the *Department of Historical Papers* of Witwatersrand University, and especially to Librarians Carol Archibald and Kate Abbott, for the CD copy of 78 RPM records of Khoisan music.

<sup>25</sup> But also to the music of Bantu-speaking populations (esp. Zulu, Venda, Xhosa, Tswana and Ovambo) of Southern Africa.

<sup>26</sup> Kirby (1931a, 1931b, 1932a, 1932b, 1933, 1935a, 1935b, 1936a, 1936b, 1956, 1961, 1973).

African instrumental music : *The Musical Instruments of the Native Races of South Africa*<sup>27</sup>. As professor at Witwatersrand University, he trained the first generation of South-African ethnomusicologists, of whom the best-known is certainly John Blacking<sup>28</sup>. In this sense, Kirby can be considered the founding father of South-African ethnomusicology.

The Kirby Collection is composed partly of writings (bibliographic notes, manuscripts for articles and lectures, correspondence), photographs and musical recordings deposited at the *Manuscripts and Archives Department* of the Capetown University (CTU), and partly of a unique set of musical instruments deposited at the *College of Music* in the same University. The written archives are organized in *boxes*, two of which are labelled *Tribal Music and Musical Instruments*<sup>29</sup>. Aside from the manuscripts of various articles concerning the *tribal musics* of South-Africa and a great number of excerpts from ancient books (mainly written by explorers) in which the musics are mentioned, those two boxes contain unpublished documents : musical transcriptions of |Auni<sup>30</sup> Bushman chants as well as songs and pieces written for « Hottentot »<sup>31</sup> flutes ; field notes from Kirby's mission during the *Witwatersrand Kalahari Bushmen Expedition* in June and July 1936 ; and recordings done during that fieldtrip<sup>32</sup>. As to the instrument collection, it includes several hundred specimens, the best part of which comes from South-Africa. Over one hundred instruments are of Khoisan origin<sup>33</sup>, some were bequeathed by Dorothea Bleek, Winifred Hoernle, Carl Berger and Clement Doke<sup>34</sup>.

The Bleek & Lloyd Collection is deposited at the *Manuscripts and Archives Department* of UCT and classified in the Unesco World Memory Register<sup>35</sup>. It includes a large number of written documents and photographs collected by Wilhelm Bleek (1827-1875) and his sister-in-law Lucy Lloyd (1834-1914) in the 1870-1890s, then by his daughter Dorothea Bleek (1873-1948) between 1910 and 1930. Bleek and Lloyd subsequently started up the ethnological and linguistic Bushman Studies, in particular on the |Xam of South-Africa,

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<sup>27</sup> Kirby (1934).

<sup>28</sup> Author notably of *Venda Children's Songs* (1967) and *How Musical is Man* (1973).

<sup>29</sup> The other boxes contain Kirby's correspondence, articles and works, negatives and a copy of the photographs published in *The Musical Instruments of the Native Races of South Africa*, as well as articles by other musicologists bearing on other sorts of music (traditional and classical).

<sup>30</sup> The |Auni are a small group of Bushmen who were settled in South-Africa, in and around the Kalahari Gemsbok Park (today Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park), when Kirby surveyed them in 1936.

<sup>31</sup> These pieces are either Korana, Kirby having stayed with them in 1932, or Nama, Kirby having recorded Nama flutists in Windhoek in 1936 (Kirby 1967 : 244).

<sup>32</sup> Box 71/1078. These are twelve recordings of |auni chants engraved by a Pro-technic Ediphone ; one of the recordings is due to the South-African linguist Louis Maingard with whom Kirby did this fieldwork.

<sup>33</sup> Instruments called khoi : rhombe *burubush* (KK 53), arc with an independent external resonator *kha:s* (KK 107), conical flute made of bone *||areng !as* (K12), arc with independent resonator *kha:s* (KK 107), musical arc *!gabus* (KK 127). Korana instruments : flute *≠adi* (K 110), ensemble of 6 flutes *≠adi* (K111a-f), arc *gora* (K 128), cylindrical drum *|khais* (K 160). Nama instruments : ensemble of 14 flutes *≠ati* (K 108), ensemble of 17 flutes *≠ati* (K 106), ensemble of 17 flutes (K 109), musical arc *!gabus/outa* (KK 109). San instruments : three rhombes *!goin!goin* (KK 50, 52, 59), arc with external resonator (K 211), conical flute *|garras* (K 220A), 2 whistles in the shape of conical flutes *|garras* ou *|garris* (K 10A-B), flute (K 5a-b), globulous flute *||nazi khosike* (K 80), three arcs (KK 7, 8, 9), 2 harps *|ka|kanasi* (KK 5, 6), arc with mouth resonator (KK 122), rubbing arc *nxonxoro* (K 226a-b), lute *ramkie* (K 189A), cithara *!gawukhais* (KK 183), arc with external resonator (KK 130). Khomani Bushmen instruments : 2 wooden clappers *marapo* (KK 85), cocoon rattles *|keriten* (KK 83a-b). Red Dune Bushman instruments : three rhombes *!goin!goin* (KK 48, 51, 55), two ensembles of 4 flutes *≠a* (K 112, 113), two sets of 6 flutes *≠a* (K 114, 115), cocoon rattles *|keriten* (KK 74a-b), 2 sticks for tuning the flutes *≠ou* (K 116a-b), 2 rhombes *fur fur* (KK 57, 58).

<sup>34</sup> Hansen (1999 : 24).

<sup>35</sup> See the Web-site at <http://www.unesco.org/webworld/mdm/1997/fr/southafrica/southafrica/bleek.html>.

collecting vocabulary, myths and tales, but also much data on daily life. Moreover, we are indebted to them for the first comparative research on those populations<sup>36</sup>.

The Collection includes the field diaries kept by Wilhelm Bleek<sup>37</sup> and Lucy Lloyd<sup>38</sup>, that come to over 10 000 hand-written pages, only one small part of which has been published<sup>39</sup>. As to Dorothea Bleek's journals<sup>40</sup>, they have never been published and have not, to this day, even been analyzed at all. W. Bleek and L. Lloyd also took down the words of many |xam songs, describing the musical instruments and the way the music was performed. Lucy Lloyd also transcribed some |xam music, complete with a description of the instruments, the songs and dances and a transcription of the words<sup>41</sup>. Two boxes belonging to the Collection also contain 35 cylinders of music recorded by Dorothea Bleek in 1911 in Kyky (South-Africa)<sup>42</sup>, and over 300 photographs which are now entirely digital<sup>43</sup>. The exceptional quality of the documents collected by D. Bleek is due to the fact that, for the first time, we dispose of data on written as well as visual and aural supports of the same Khoisan group, all of which both complete and shed light on one another.

Finally, Winifred Hoernle (1885-1960) is one of the few scholars to have carried out a solid investigation in the field, among South-African and Namibian Khoi. As an ethnologist trained in part at Cambridge and who had worked with Alfred R. Radcliffe-Brown<sup>44</sup>, she was a pioneer of South-African anthropology at a time when scientific exchanges with Great-Britain were frequent. Deposited at the Archives of the University of Witwatersrand, the Collection that bears her name (AU8 HOE) is mainly composed of field journals (1912, 1913, 1922) and pictures of the Khoi of South-Africa and Namibia (Nama and Damara)<sup>45</sup>. These documents contain a considerable amount of information about populations of whose past very little is known. The photographs of Nama flutes are unique and all the more valuable as this music, now on its way to becoming extinct, has never been studied. On some photographs a phonograph appears, the only remaining trace today of the recordings on cylinders done by Hoernle, which unfortunately disappeared in the great fire that destroyed the University of Witwatersrand in 1931<sup>46</sup>.

At this point in our research, a considerable amount of written, iconographic and audiovisual material concerning the different varieties of Khoisan music has been brought together from the main South-African archives and libraries. Ranging over five centuries, the documentation suggests a great diversity of music, according to the period, the population (or even certain groups within the same population) and their surroundings. Rather than giving a sketchy view of an academic compilation, I have chosen two situations that the photographs

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<sup>36</sup> W. Bleek's *A Comparative Grammar of South African languages* (1869) and D. Bleek's *Comparative Vocabularies of Bushman Languages* (1929) immediately come to mind.

<sup>37</sup> A1.4. in the Repertory (about 20 hand-written notebooks).

<sup>38</sup> A2.1. and A2.2. (approximately 130 hand-written notebooks).

<sup>39</sup> Several articles were published in the journal *Bantu Studies* (1931-1936) and one part of the collected material went into the book *Specimens of Bushman Folklore* (1911). Several studies have been devoted to the work of Bleek and Lloyd, among which Deacon and Downson (1996) and Lewis-Williams (2000).

<sup>40</sup> A3.1.-23 (23 hand-written notebooks).

<sup>41</sup> E4.4.1.-E4.4.22.

<sup>42</sup> The recordings have been entrusted to the *Museum of South Africa* at the Cape, while the list of recordings, together with the translation of the words of the songs and comments on the music by Dorothea Bleek are at CTU under reference number E5.1.17-21. A programme for digitizing these recordings is being carried out in collaboration with the British Library Sound Archive.

<sup>43</sup> References J2.1. et J4.2-4 in the repertory. Fifty photos can be viewed on the UCT Archives Website: [www.uctlib.uct.ac.za](http://www.uctlib.uct.ac.za).

<sup>44</sup> Radcliffe-Brown taught at the University of Johannesburg then at the University of the Cape from 1920 to 1926, before emigrating from South Africa to Australia

<sup>45</sup> But also of the Bantu-speaking populations in Namibia (Ovambo) and South-Africa (Zulu, Venda) among whom Hoernle carried out her investigations.

<sup>46</sup> Hoernle (1985 : xvi).

revealed and that I will use as concrete and fixed supports of practices which by definition are immaterial and evanescent, in such a way as to be able to question the music as a producer of history.

The first situation is a male initiation dance performed at the beginning of the 1920s by the Auen and the Naron<sup>47</sup> of the Ghanzi region, on the border between what used to be Bechuanaland (today Botswana) and the African South-West (Namibia). Dorothea Bleek, who lived in the region for several months saw them, wrote about them in her field journals and took pictures<sup>48</sup>. We must try to understand how this dance and that ritual are the product not of some ancestral culture but of a very particular circumstance, in this case the fact that small Khoisan groups (called Auen, Naron and Nama) and Bantu-speaking groups (Tswana), shared the same territory and entertained relations of intermarriage or domination, from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century on.

The second situation is a dance for Nama flutes that Winifred Hoernle photographed and recorded during one of her three field trips in South-Africa and South-West Africa in 1912, 1913 or 1922-1923 (the dates are uncertain<sup>49</sup>). These flutes strongly resemble those heard by Vasco de Gama in 1497, as if the musical tradition had remained the same for five centuries. But contrary to that preconceived notion, the music did not remain the same, but was part of the modernity of the « Hottentot » populations, while acting as the *chronicles* of a group and its relationship to others.

## THE BIOGRAPHY OF AN INITIATION RITUAL

In her field-notes, Dorothea Bleek gives no less than four descriptions of a male initiation ritual – *tshóma*<sup>50</sup> – and the dance accompanying it |*gi*<sup>51</sup>, while giving only succinct descriptions of the musical instruments (musical arcs, cithara and drum) and barely mentioning the medicinal ritual, as if it had already been sufficiently documented<sup>52</sup>. Her comments are illustrated by several as yet unpublished photographs, the first ones ever of this ritual<sup>53</sup>.

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<sup>47</sup> Known today in anthropological literature by the names ≠Au||eisi and Nharo (or Naro). The terms Naron and Auen designate two so-called Bushman groups as well as their languages.

<sup>48</sup> Bleek & Lloyd Collection, notebooks A.3.13, A.3.15-18 and photos J2.1.

<sup>49</sup> The sound recordings are what disappeared in the fire at Witwatersrand University. As to the photos, they are neither explained or dated. However, if one takes Hoernle's declarations seriously (quoted by Kirby (1933), these snapshots may have been taken in 1923 among the Nama of the so-called « Zwartboy » group, who were at the time settled in the Franzfontein reserve north of Walvis Bay (South-West Africa). To visualize the expeditions described in Hoernle's field notes, see Carstens, Klinghardt and West (1987 : v).

<sup>50</sup> According to D. Bleek (1929 : 232), *tshóma* is a term of the Naron language that breaks down into *tshó* (« medicine, magic, spirit ») and – *ma* (« give »). This etymology is confirmed by the ethnologists who thereafter investigated the ritual (Barnard 1992 ; England 1995 ; Heinz 1994 ; Lee 1979 ; Marshall 1999 ; Wilmsen 1989). For questions of homogeneity, and even though more recent spellings exist (*cf.* especially Barnard 1985 ; Dickens 1994), I will use Bleek's spelling when discussing that ritual and the populations performing it.

<sup>51</sup> Version 1 : notebook A6.16, p. 298 ; version 2 : notebook A3.16, p. 331 ; version 3 Naron-English: notebook A3.17, pp. 416-417 ; version 4 : notebook A3.17, pp. 463-464.

<sup>52</sup> Bleek & Lloyd Collection, notebook A3.13, pp. 71 et 73. In reality, since the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the explorers, missionaries, administrators and ethnologists who have written it up are legion. Their descriptions, very congruent, contributed to turning the medicinal dance into a unifying and timeless element of Bushman culture. But not only is the form of the dance (number and position of the dancers, choreography, steps, accompanying songs) not the same among all the Bushman groups and does it vary with time (*cf.* Guenther 1975, 1999 for the Nharo), but some groups do not even dance during their medicinal rituals (that is the case, today, of the Kxoe settled in the Caprivistruok in Namibia).

<sup>53</sup> Bleek & Lloyd Collection, photos 175, 178, 182, 186, 189.



*Men's dance |gi at Sandfontein. Naron and Auen*  
(Photo Dorothea Bleek 1921 ; © Bleek & Lloyd Collection)

Photograph n° 1 shows young men dancing in a circle following one another in a clearing in the bush. Their bodies are straight, some hold their arms bent close to the torso, others are holding them at shoulder height. Their feet slide over the ground in tiny steps. They are circling round as people do throughout the world and which thus holds no special significance in this case either. Only the caption accompanying the photograph allows us to grasp its meaning.

Confirmed by Dorothea Bleek, that caption indicates that during the 1920s, the |gi dance was performed both by the Naron and the Auen. That seemingly bland statement nevertheless refers to an important, and previous, episode of their history. Thanks to Siegfried Passarge, a German geographer and physician who stayed in the region and carried out research between 1896 and 1898<sup>54</sup>, we know that during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a group of Auen from the North-West part of Kalahari went to the Ghanzi region where the Naron were then living and rapidly took control of it both economically and politically<sup>55</sup>. Their linguistic differences – Naron and Auen speakers can not understand each other's language – do not get in the way of economic and matrimonial or cultural exchanges : their joint participation in the masculine initiation ritual, reported on by D. Bleek, proves it.

The ritual is mentioned quite late in the literature on Bushmen. Once again it is Passarge who writes about it for the first time through the tale told by ||Kocheb, his Naron servant, who compares that masculine initiation rite to « the Bantu ritual, that the Boers call “Kaffir School” »<sup>56</sup>. By Bantu, one must certainly here understand it to refer to the Tawana, a Tswana group who, in the second part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, took advantage of a situation unfavourable for the Bushmen (rarefaction of the cynegetic resources) to undertake a veritable territorial conquest in the Ghanzi area<sup>57</sup>. Auen and Naron, whose social structure was then falling apart,

<sup>54</sup> Siegfried Passarge (1866-1958) pioneered ethnographic fieldwork on the Bushmen. His work was published in German at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and translated into English by Edwin Wilmsen in 1997.

<sup>55</sup> According to Lebzelter (1934 : 68), the very term Naro comes from the Auen word *naru* meaning « subordinated » or « submissive ».

<sup>56</sup> Wilmsen (1997 : 189).

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Guenther (2002 : 132-133).



succumbed to the newcomers, accepting both their political and economic domination<sup>58</sup>. Thus, there are many Auen and Naron men who work for the Tswana as herdsmen, in a subordinate position locally known as *mafisa*<sup>59</sup>.

We may well wonder if the male initiation rite observed by Dorothea Bleek about twenty years later did not correspond to the arrival of the Tswana in the territory occupied by the two Bushman groups. Thanks to anthropologist Isaac Shapera's two investigations in the 1920s, we dispose of a detailed description of the Tswana male initiation *bogwêra*<sup>60</sup>. That ritual, Shapera explains, is a precondition for the formation of age groups that were institutionalized in the form of « regiments », whose responsibility it was to do collective chores for the benefit of the tribal chiefs and to defend the territory<sup>61</sup>. During *bogwêra*, several boys of the same age are left completely alone for about three months in a camp placed at a certain distance from their village and where, far from women and the non-initiated, they are circumcised before undergoing a panoply of physical ordeals but also learning the secret formulae, songs and dances that give them access to the religious values, rules and beliefs of Tswana society.

With the exception of circumcision which is not part of the Bushman ritual, the way *tshóma* is organized is very similar to Tswana *bogwêra* : young men of the same age group come together in a bush camp, out of sight of women and young boys, where they have to go through a certain number of trials (hunger and thirst, cold and heat, pain, fear and fatigue) and learn a specific repertory of songs and dances. But though the two sets of rituals are comparable, most of the characteristics mentioned can also be found in other male initiation rites, in Africa and even elsewhere. Thus, this does not really reinforce the hypothesis that Tswana *bogwêra* was borrowed, even if one may suppose that the Auen and the Naron, economically and politically dominated by the Tswana, borrowed a ritual that had shown what it was worth, and with which they were familiar because of having been submitted, along with the « regiments » of the initiated, to collective chores<sup>62</sup>.

But other arguments can also be made for it, especially the collective nature of *tshóma*, whereas all the other Auen and Naron rituals are individual<sup>63</sup>. Besides, *tshóma* is connected to the yearly calendar<sup>64</sup>, whereas the date of the other rituals is unpredictable, determined by an unforeseen event that concerns one individual in particular<sup>65</sup>.

However, more than the previous arguments, it is the zone in which the ritual has developed that consolidates the borrowing hypothesis. Indeed, only those groups who towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were in direct or indirect contact with the Tswana practiced *tshóma*. The groups concerned were Ju|'hoan<sup>66</sup>, !Xuu<sup>67</sup>, !O!Xuu<sup>68</sup> and

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<sup>58</sup> According to Shapera (1994 [1938] : 120-121), the populations conquered by the Tswana became their « serfs », forced to pay them an annual « tribute » in the form of cattle, grain, animal skins, ivory, ostrich feathers, and so on, in exchange for protection and justice.

<sup>59</sup> For an analysis of these relations, see especially Shapera (1994 [1938] : 246-248) ; Lee (1979 : 406-408) ; Wilmsen (1989 : 138).

<sup>60</sup> *Bogwêra* : relation of sociability and mutual assistance between boys of the same age group. The term designates both the male initiation ritual and the boys of the same age group who are submitted to it.

<sup>61</sup> Schapera (1994 [1938] : 104-117).

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid* : 108.

<sup>63</sup> The medicinal ritual, though carried out collectively by the members of a community, is intended for a given individual who is ill and who they set out to cure. As to the male and female initiation rites, they are respectively carried out each time that a young man has killed his first large antelope and that a young girl has her first menstruations. For a description of these rites, see Bleek (1929 : 23-24 et 28-29).

<sup>64</sup> Bleek does not specify what backed up the Auen and the Naron in their decision to initiate that individual, but England (1995 : 241) and Marshall (1999 : 208) explain that, in the 1950-1960s, the Ju|'hoan from Nyae Nyae (South-West Africa) wait for the constellation of the Pleiad to appear towards the middle of the month of June (the coldest time of the year), to assemble the boys of the same age group.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. footnote 66.

<sup>66</sup> England (1995) ; Lee (1979) ; Marshall (1976, 1999) ; Schapera (1930) ; Wilmsen (1989, 1997).

<sup>67</sup> Schapera (1930).

!Xóǒ<sup>69</sup>, all settled in the North-West of Kalahari, as Dorothea Bleek very aptly noted as early as 1928<sup>70</sup>. Those groups were interconnected in networks of relationships that each kept up with one or several of the others and in which the Naron appear to have occupied the pivotal position. This is confirmed by the use of the Naron word *tshóma* by all of the groups performing the ritual, whatever their language. It is also confirmed by the tales told by the Ju|'hoan, among whom Lorna Marshall<sup>71</sup>, Nicholas England<sup>72</sup> and I carried out investigations between the 1950s and today. They all mention the foreign origin of *tshóma*, coming from the South, even if the characters and situations described in the tales differ considerably from one version to the next. Thus, according to some, *tshóma* was introduced by a Ju|'hoan man married to a Naron woman<sup>73</sup>, others say it was a Naron man married to a Ju|'hoan woman, or yet again they tell of an entire Ju|'hoan community that came to visit a Naron group in order to exchange goods and seal matrimonial alliances.

Though *tshóma* does seem to stem from the Tswana *bogwêra*, the Auen and Naron nevertheless altered its meaning so it should fit into their religious conceptions and practices. Just as it allows boys to go from childhood to adulthood, *bogwêra* permits setting up the age groups that are the basis of the Tswana economic and political system, an aim quite foreign to the ritual of the Bushmen, whose society does not include such generational principles. It would seem, on the other hand, that the Bushmen transformed the ritual into an initiation to the trance during which, as the nocturnal sessions of songs and dances unfold, the boys receive supernatural powers and experience the trance individually, a hypothesis upheld by the very meaning of the term *tshóma* that harks back to notions of « medicine », « magic » and « supernatural power »<sup>74</sup>. But the Bushmen are not content with tacking their religious beliefs onto the new ritual. They transform them by adding two new supernatural characters, who Bleek calls « sorcerers », and who manifest their horrific presence during the dance<sup>75</sup>. However, those characters were not created *ex nihilo* by the Bushmen nor taken from Tswana mythology. They very likely come from the Nama who, in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, spent several months each year in the region of Sandfontein for their hunting expeditions<sup>76</sup>, periods that were favourable for economic<sup>77</sup> and matrimonial relations<sup>78</sup> but also for cultural exchanges with the Bushmen.

Beyond this historical reconstitution of the ritual, however, what are we to make of the songs and dances that accompany and rhythm its performance ? Dorothea Bleek describes them as follows :

« Every night they dance. All gather in a circle, clap their hands and sing a weird, solemn tune with the refrain of “honk a honk”. Then they stamp round in a circle waving their

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<sup>68</sup> Bleek (1929).

<sup>69</sup> Heinz (1994).

<sup>70</sup> Bleek (1928 : 2)7.

<sup>71</sup> Marshall (*ibid* : 203-220).

<sup>72</sup> England (*ibid* : 232-240).

<sup>73</sup> England (*ibid* : 233) noted the name of this couple : it was ≠Koma !Kwa married to |Gasa, who were both deceased in the 1950s.

<sup>74</sup> According to the words of D. Bleek. For the Ju|'hoan, see Marshall (1999 : 206-207).

<sup>75</sup> « There was a man, the man came and called. “hrhrhrhr” he said. The woman and the man came up to the people, and called the women, she came. The man and woman sorcerers. Man a lion was a big head, big body big neck, like a lion he was. Woman like a lioness was » (Collection Bleek & Lloyd, notebook A3.18, p. 416-417).

<sup>76</sup> Bleek *op. cit.* : 25-26.

<sup>77</sup> According to Bleek (*ibid*), the Nama employed the Bushmen as servants.

<sup>78</sup> In her book on the Naron, Bleek thus published a photograph of J. Drury entitled : « Naron huts. The woman in the middle is the daughter of a Nama chief and a Naron woman ».

arms to another phase of the melody (no words are used) ; then they stand still and sing the first part again and so on »<sup>79</sup>.

Bleek seems astonished at the « weird, solemn tune », as if she was discovering that music for the first time. In fact, her description does not fit any of the Bushman songs known up to that date. This one was a slow and majestic melody, while the tempo of the other songs (for curing or entertainment) is rapid. As to the « honk a honk » refrain, it reminds us of rhythmic shouting rather than strictly speaking of a melody. The structure of the piece in two phases, of which only the second is for dancing, also seems original<sup>80</sup>.

Unfortunately, Dorothea Bleek did not record any of the songs and dances she witnessed during *tshóma*. But approximately ten years earlier, in 1908, Rudolf Pöch, an Ukranian ethnologist then working with the *Phonogrammarchiv* in Vienna and the one in Berlin<sup>81</sup>, stayed for several months in the Ghanzi region, recording and filming Naron music<sup>82</sup>. Most of the photos, films and field notes (including comments on the music) have been lost, but we are fortunate to still have bits of sound which were recently digitized and are now available on CDs<sup>83</sup>. Consequently, we dispose of the very first, and one of the very rare “sound images” of *tshóma*<sup>84</sup>. More precisely, they are two excerpts recorded on the 22nd of August 1908 at Kamel Pan<sup>85</sup> to the North-East of Ghanzi : the first is played by three men<sup>86</sup>, the second by ten<sup>87</sup>. Here is what Pöch writes about the first excerpt (track 11 of CD2) :

« This chant was sung by three men. !Narexa, the youngest of them, stood in the middle, and began singing; on his right stood the old [...] Kubi, on his left Ka||tna. Kubi kept singing for the longest time, the deep singing, getting more quietly when fading away, is due to him. This male singing differs from that practised at the bustard (« Pau ») dance »<sup>88</sup>.

Pöch succinctly describes the modalities of musical performance, *i.e.* the order in which each singer enters, the time their part lasts and the quality of their voices (« deep singing », « getting more quietly when fading away »), details that remind us of the way Dorothea Bleek commented on the same songs. It seems to me that his last sentence, about the difference between this song and the one accompanying the *Pau* (a dance for entertainment), reiterates the astonishment expressed by Bleek when listening to that music. The *tshóma* songs and dances executed by the Naron and the Auen thus have a style of their own, recognizable among all the rest of their music.

At this point, one may wonder where those songs and dances came from : were they created *ex nihilo* for the new ritual or were they borrowed from the Tswana? Given the absence of recordings of Tswana music and of investigations on the subject among the Auen and the Naron, it is difficult to answer. However, examining what transpired later among the !Xóǀ and the Ju|'hoan, to whom the Auen and the Naron had transmitted the ritual, one can suggest a few hypotheses.

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<sup>79</sup> Bleek (*op. cit.* : 23-24).

<sup>80</sup> For a description of Naron medicinal dances, we refer the reader to the Bleek & Lloyd collection, notebook A.3.13 belonging to Dorothea Bleek.

<sup>81</sup> Two pioneering institutions in the new science of ethnomusicology.

<sup>82</sup> Of course, we do not know if the communities where Pöch stayed were the same as those with which Bleek was to work a few years later, but their geographic and cultural proximity makes us think that the same may be true for their music too.

<sup>83</sup> Pöch (2003).

<sup>84</sup> The only other known recordings of *tshóma*, but carried out among the Ju|'hoan of Namibia, are Marshall's (1956) and my own (1997).

<sup>85</sup> *Kxau* (« bitter water ») in Naron.

<sup>86</sup> Pöch (2003 : 39) gives their names and ages, making the recording come even more alive. They are !Narexa, Kubi and Ka||tna respectively 40, 50 and 60 years old.

<sup>87</sup> Kubi, Dsedum, Ka||tna, ≠Nubi, |Kxara, Tsawu, !Narexa, Tshai, |Kxara and|Tiko, aged between 20 and 60.

<sup>88</sup> Pöch : *ibid.*

England reports that in 1961, the !Xóǎ who had settled in Ukwa (Bechuanaland) included at least one Tswana chant in their musical repertory for male initiations<sup>89</sup>. As to the Ju|'hoan, he describes a dance session recorded in 1953 in the village of |Gautsa (South-West Africa), during which tunes specific to *tshóma* alternated with chants taken from their medicinal rituals<sup>90</sup>. England says nothing about the style of the Tswana song performed by the !Xóǎ, perhaps because it is identical to the other chants associated with that ritual. On the other hand, he analyzes in detail the performance of Ju|'hoan songs, the main characteristics of which correspond to those described by Bleek and Pöch fifty or so years earlier. In the face of such data, one may suppose that the processes of elaboration at work in the rest of the ritual – borrowing (and transforming) foreign elements and associating them with already existing Bushman elements – were also operative in these songs and dances.

The making of *tshóma* thus appears like a grand, ritualistic « tinkering » (*bricolage*), testifying to the local processes at work in the invention of modernity. For the Auen and Naron, borrowing a ritual that had guaranteed the strength of the Tswana is also a good way of acquiring some too and with little cost to themselves, a way of making one's place in the sun, be it ever so modest, in the dominant Tswana universe. Through that ritual we can see a society emerge, a society in full renaissance and creativity that integrates, transforms and recycles, both for itself and for its relations with others ; a society, in short, that is actively participating in the history of Southern Africa.

Thanks to the *tshóma* rite, it has become possible to pinpoint and analyze the entire biographical unfolding of a ritual, from its creation to its disappearance (though not from memory), a process generally denied to these people who one usually imagines as reproducing the identical cultural practices they have always had since the beginning of time. Born very probably toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, *tshóma* became obsolete as of the 1960s, at least according to Lorna Marshall, Nicholas England and Richard Lee, who investigated the ritual at the time, though without being actually present<sup>91</sup>.

Before I go on, I would like to stress an aspect of my research directly induced by the analysis of the *tshóma* ritual, or rather of the songs accompanying it, and it so happens, that aspect is the question of the validity of the sources. Let me explain. We saw previously that the Naron and Auen borrowed the male initiation rite from the Tswana. We lack information about how the repertory of songs and dances was constituted but not about their very particular style which was described by Passarge and Bleek at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Naron and Auen then transmitted the ritual to the Ju|'hoan, whose *tshóma* musical repertory is composed partly of songs performed during medicinal rites and partly of songs specific to the initiation ritual but whose beginnings remain obscure. That Ju|'hoan repertory is therefore composed of diverse foreign elements but which possess a certain unity in the same musical style, identical to the Naron's and the Auen's. Finally, the !Xóǎ, who took the ritual from the Naron and the Auen, perform at least one Tswana song during their *tshóma*, whose musical style is doubtless similar to those of other Bushman groups. The case of the !Xóǎ makes it possible to hypothesize that Tswana songs passed into the Bushman initiation ritual. But what really reinforces that hypothesis is the unity of style of the songs as well as of the dances among the Bushman groups who practice *tshóma*, and only among them (which does not preclude ulterior processes of variation or transformation of that style). The songs and dances thus represent a historical source allowing us to validate a certain number of

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<sup>89</sup> England (1995 : 238).

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid* : (255-257).

<sup>91</sup> Cf. England (1995 : 231-232) ; Marshall (1999 : 204) ; Lee (1979 : 365). The latter noted the (approximate) dates when the Ju|'hoan ritual was performed throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century : in the area of |Xai|xai-|Gam-#Tollgana, *tshóma* was performed in 1910, 1917, 1922, 1930, 1940, 1944 and 1950 ; in the valley of !Kangwa, it was performed in 1920, 1921, 1928, 1934, 1942, 1943 and 1960.

hypotheses concerning the Tswana origins of the male initiation ritual and its transmission to some Bushman groups from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century onward.

Today, the ritual itself has totally disappeared among Naron, Auen and !Xoǀ but it survives in a few Jul'hoan enclaves in Namibia thanks to the performance of its songs and dances which continues<sup>92</sup>. The music is thus the only remaining trace of that initiation ritual and its history. From time to time, the young men of a village sing and dance the *tshóma* repertory while the women look on or dance round them as their mothers and grandmothers had done when the initiated returned to the village at the end of the period of seclusion in the bush. True, it is no longer a matter of enduring physical ordeals during the session of song and dance but in doing so the young men continue to assert their masculine identity in front of the young women. Might that be a simplified, acculturated version or the decaying, contemporary expression of the *tshóma* ritual ?

Lastly, one may wonder why the ordeals endured in the bush camp disappeared. The Jul'hoan of the « *Conservatory* » region of Nyae Nyae (Namibia) with whom I worked in the 1990s particularly stressed the hardships, the suffering even, that those ordeals entail and that the young men today refuse to submit to. But beyond those practical reasons, the economic and political situation changed rapidly in the 1960s, bringing with it a reconfiguration of the social networks and types of inter-group relations. In 1966, Bechuanaland became independent Botswana, with a central authority at Gaborone and administrative services in the county towns of the region. Many Bushmen became sedentary, some were employed by the various State departments, the others live on government subsidies. At the same time, most of the land occupied by the Bushmen was divided up into lots bought by farmers (mostly Whites), who employ them as unskilled labour. Consequently, the communities have broken up, with no possibility of being reunited. In the District of Gobabis in Namibia, where most of the Auen and Naron live, the situation is similar<sup>93</sup>. On the contrary, in Bushmanland and Hereroland, the South-African government set up administrative structures, sedentarized the Jul'hoan in small localities created to that effect, while at the same time encouraging them to give up their hunting and gathering economy to cultivate the land and raise cattle<sup>94</sup>. South-African civil servants came to settle in those regions and merchants followed suit, importing most of their goods from South-Africa. The new map of domination and economic relations that was drawn has had consequences on the Bushmen's social life : *tshóma* brutally disappeared, replaced by the medicinal ritual as a way of acquiring the strength allowing them to solve or calm all sorts of pains and conflicts<sup>95</sup>.

## THE ORCHESTRA OF « HOTTENTOT » FLUTES: FROM EMBLEMATIC TO PATRIMONIAL

Contrary to *tshóma*, recently born and already vanished, we have proof that, among the « Hottentots », the flute orchestra has existed for five centuries, to the point that it has become the emblem of their culture. Numerous explorers who had stayed in a « Hottentot *kraal* » described such a dance accompanied by the same instruments<sup>96</sup>. Interest in the flute orchestra remained lively at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century among the first ethnographers working on these

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<sup>92</sup> I observed these songs and dances in the « *Conservatory* » region of Nyae Nyae (Namibia) several times between 1993 and 2001, while several sessions were organized and recorded at my behest.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. Suzman (2000).

<sup>94</sup> Marshall and Ritchie (*ibid* : 4-5).

<sup>95</sup> On this subject, see the admirable volume published by Katz, Biesele and Saint Denis (1997).

<sup>96</sup> See particularly the descriptions by Simon van der Stel when among those he called « Hottentots » in 1685 (Waterhouse 1932 : 133-134), by Robert Gordon among the Namaquas and the Little Nama in 1779 (Raper and Boucher 1988 : 253 and 287, vol. 2), by Sir James Edward Alexander among the Nama (1838 : 233-234), and also the article by Percival Kirby (1933) who inventoried most of what had been done on the flutes.

populations, such as Theophilus Hahn<sup>97</sup> and Leonard Schultze<sup>98</sup>. But Winifred Hoernle was the very first to record and photograph the flutes during her three long field trips among the Nama of South-Africa and of the African South-West between 1912 and 1923<sup>99</sup>. She also brought back several samples that she left Percival Kirby for his musical instrument collection. He in turn did the musical transcriptions of the sound recordings brought back by Hoernle, a part of which is as yet unpublished and stored in the Kirby Collection<sup>100</sup>. He also published his field data in 1933 in a long and little known article entitled *The Reed-Flute Ensembles of South Africa: A Study in South African Native Music*. Kirby himself studied the Korana flute orchestras during a mission in Bloemhof (South-Africa) in 1932, and reported on them in an article published the same year. He also investigated the Tswana and Venda flutes that he had a chance to hear in 1931 and 1932<sup>101</sup>, and this allowed him to consider the instruments from a comparative point of view<sup>102</sup>.

Paradoxically, though the flutes have been much written up, sound recordings are practically non-existent. Those done by Hoernle officially burned in the fire at Witwatersrand University. As to Kirby's recordings, there's no sign of them. However, among the thirty odd Vinyl 78 RPM records I discovered in 2004 at the *Department of Historical Papers* of Witwatersrand University, three include pieces for flutes and voice which might well be copies of recordings by Hoernle or Kirby<sup>103</sup>. Finally, photographic documents are even rarer than sound recordings. To my knowledge, the only pictures taken live are Hoernle's<sup>104</sup>.



*Flute Orchestra and Nama dance*  
(Photo Winifred Hoernle ; © Hoernle Collection)

Photo n° 2 shows women dancing, singing and clapping their hands surrounding a small group of men playing flutes, their bodies leaning slightly forward. The scene corresponds to those previously described, as well as to the iconographic documents of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>

<sup>97</sup> Hahn (1881).

<sup>98</sup> Schultze (1907).

<sup>99</sup> Hoernle Collection (AU8 HOE), photographs in the box labelled *Papers/Photographs* and field notes in the box labelled *Papers, correspondence, personal details, diaries of expedition*.

<sup>100</sup> Kirby Collection, box n° 1 of the part labelled *Tribal music and musical instruments*.

<sup>101</sup> Kirby (1933 : 354-368 and 373-376).

<sup>102</sup> Kirby (1933 : 373-374) thus manages to show that the Tswana flutes come from the Korana, with whom they were in contact during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. Kirby (1968 : 244).

<sup>104</sup> With the exception of mine, taken in 1999 in Sesfontein (Namibia). Kirby photographed one single Korana musician (called Matiti) tuning and blowing into a flute but not playing it (Kirby 1933 : plate XXII, fig. 2 et 3).

centuries<sup>105</sup>. With the help of the two following photographs, we can take a closer look at who these musicians are and what the flutes they played are like.



*Nama flutists*

(Photo Winifred Hoernle ; © Hoernle Collection)

In the foreground of photograph n° 3, three men are each playing a flute. According to Hoernle, they are part of a group of six at least<sup>106</sup>. The two flutes which are entirely visible are of different lengths, as are the others, and have no holes : each plays a single note. The melody is thus produced by adding the notes played on each flute, following the staggered composition technique called *hocket*. There again, the information one can glean from the photos concord with previous descriptions<sup>107</sup>. Thus, the first impression is one of a permanent form, with the men playing the flutes and the women singing and dancing round them. However, aside from the *hocket* technique mentioned since Vasco de Gama's time, we know nothing about the music – or rather musics – the numerous « Hottentot » populations played before. What were the scales, the rhythms, the melodies, the processes used for composing and performing ? There is no documentation at all on this topic permitting us to infer any sort of permanent trait in this music since the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Nevertheless, photo n° 4 affords a few elements to answer the question about the transformations this music underwent during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>105</sup> Cf. especially Paterson's watercolour painted between 1777 and 1779 (Forbes et Rourke 1980 : 102) and those Robert Gordon did in 1779 and 1780 (Raper and Boucher 1988 : 275 and 289).

<sup>106</sup> According to Hoernle, the set of flutes is called *ati*, while each of the instruments has a particular name that refers to its pitch :

- *ai.as* : « high and strident » ; the flute that begins playing the melody and, like a tuning fork, allows the others to adjust their pitch.
- *a. !kas* : « carillon » ; a flute pitched slightly lower than the first.
- *gomas* : « follower ».
- *!kuis* : « low » ; big, low-pitched flute.
- *!a.rop* : « very low ».
- *ai.a* : « sister » of the *ai.as*, but one octave higher (Kirby 1933 : 345 according to Hoernle).

<sup>107</sup> See especially the descriptions by Simon van der Stel (Waterhouse 1932 : 133-134), Robert Gordon (Raper and Boucher 1988 : 253, vol. 1 et 287, vol. 2), Sir James Edward Alexander (1838 : 233-234), Theophilus Hahn (1881 : 27-29) and Leonard Schultze (1907 : 375-381). For a complete, critical inventory of the descriptions of flute orchestras from the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, see the article by Kirby (1933).



*Nama Reed Pipes*

(Photo Winifred Hoernle ; © Hoernle Collection)

On this picture, two men are each playing a reed pipe. The instruments are made of several small pipes (shorter than the single reed flutes) attached to each other. Hoernle noted their name : *!naniti* designates the six little flutes that render a trill effect ; *!nona≠ati* is the name given the three other little flutes that complete the trills. But those flutes are not to be found on the iconographic representations of the 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries. What is more, they only appear in the literature at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with Leonard Schultze (1907), who at the same time noted the practice of the accordion and the harmonica by the Nama in South-West Africa. As to Hoernle, she jotted down the Nama's comments ; as far as they are concerned, the little flutes were a recent acquisition, an imitation of the *concertina* they were used to playing (a relative of the accordion). And Kirby explained that, in its portable form, the *concertina* was manufactured in Vienna by Damian in 1829, which allows us to date the moment when Nama reed pipes appeared as being more recent than that<sup>108</sup>. These flutes not only modify the structure of the instrumental ensemble (number and morphology of the flutes), they also change the music itself, as Kirby showed by studying Hoernle's sound recordings. He explains that the six main flutes (and their equivalents a few octaves higher and/or lower) produce the four-tone scale<sup>109</sup> (D-E-A-B), on which the pieces are based. But the small reed pipes are tuned differently, following the diatonic scale (D-E-F-G-A-B-C)<sup>110</sup>. The very foundations of the melody and the harmony are thus transformed, by adding three extra notes (F-G-C). As Kirby notes<sup>111</sup>, the flute pieces henceforth depend on the tonic and dominant chords, a harmonic combination typical of the folk music which was then played on the accordion<sup>112</sup>. With that new scale, the Nama thus adapted their flutes to the new musical model, and in that way they fit in with the taste of the times.

Among the 78 RPM black disks deposited at the *Department of Historical Papers* of Witwatersrand University, three contain excerpts from pieces for flute and voice. Listening to them, it seems clear that one of the excerpts could correspond to the transcription done by Kirby from Hoernle's recording and reproduced in his 1933 article<sup>113</sup>. The sound effect is surprising : one gets the impression that two independent tone systems have been superimposed, as if different musical strata had been piled up. On one side, single-reed flutes playing on a four-tone scale, on the other the reed pipes and voices filling in the melody on a

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<sup>108</sup> Kirby (1933 : 346-347).

<sup>109</sup> A tetratonic scale is made of four different tones within one octave.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid* : 347.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>112</sup> Up to present-day popular music (pop, rock, popular, world, etc.).

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid* : 348. Kirby did other flute transcriptions that are kept in his archives and have remained unpublished. Not having been able to xerox them, it was impossible for me to compare them with the sound recordings.



diatonic scale<sup>114</sup>, without the coexistence of the two sound universes seeming to bother anyone.

Up to now, Hoernle's photographs have been analyzed for their capacity to *freeze* a situation, as a unique moment in an on-going history. But by calling upon the documents found in the archives and more particularly travellers' narratives, we are able to examine what these photos now allow us to *reveal*.

Describing his voyage on the Orange River in 1778-1779, Hendrik Jacob Wikar<sup>115</sup> mentions that a Korana chant was composed in his honour, based on an existing flute piece called *Rhinoceros*. Since this was the first known visit of a white man among the Korana, the event was exceptional indeed, and the song composed for the occasion proves it. By composing that song and those words to recount a recent event, it is as if the Korana had translated a news item into music. Thus built into narratives, songs and flute pieces acquire meaning, becoming the *chronicles* of a group and its relations to others. By narrating through their music real events that happened to real people, the Korana were manifesting a true « historian's intent »<sup>116</sup>.

Since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, many written documents have mentioned the invention of flute pieces and songs to commemorate an important event that occurred in one of the « Hottentot » groups<sup>117</sup>. But doubtless the words of Major Von François are what best illustrate the historical role of music<sup>118</sup>. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, he was in the Namibian capital watching a dance accompanied by a flute orchestra miming an important event in Nama modern history : the assassination of Jan Jonker by Hendrik Witbooi, on August 10<sup>th</sup> 1889<sup>119</sup>. Reporting Von François' words, Isaac Schapera describes the dance in great detail :

« The men group themselves in two parties, one with white hatbands, the other with red. The latter, representing Jonker's people, dance first, as if believing themselves safe, and the women dance round them. Then to the same melody and time the Witboois dance up out of the darkness towards the camp of the Jonkers. Suddenly they are noticed by the latter, the women spring aside and begin, standing still and clapping their hands, to take up the melody, while the men, forming into line range themselves against the Witboois and in a crouching posture continue blowing on their reed pipes. The Witboois also form into line, and send forward a messenger, who advances and then return, always blowing on his pipe and hopping up and down. Next down of the red-hatted man, representing Jan Jonker, dances up to the Witboois, and, still blooming on his pipe, shakes several of them by the hand. Meanwhile a Witbooi in the same manner circles round the group of women, representing the cattle, and after inspecting them return to his party. Now the murder of Jan Jonker is enacted, so to his men dancing up to his aid are massacre, and finally the Witboois dance away with the plundered cattle and women. The whole dance, with its wealth of action and skilful performance, is a most interesting illustration of the imitative talent of the Hottentots and their fertile imagination »<sup>120</sup>.

There again, the music is used as a means of recalling and staging an important event of Nama history. Acting and dancing out this piece for flutes signifies both identifying with and transmitting history. But for how much longer ? In 1933, less than half a century later, Kirby

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<sup>114</sup> These recordings also reveal the practice of *yodeling* (having one's voice break from a chest-voice to a head-voice) by Hottentot singers, a vocal technique that until now was thought to be specific to Bushman populations.

<sup>115</sup> Mossop (1935).

<sup>116</sup> Ricœur (*ibid* : 170).

<sup>117</sup> For example le Vaillant (1790 : 72) ; Hahn (1881 : 28).

<sup>118</sup> Von François (1896 : 229-230).

<sup>119</sup> Jan Jonker and Hendrik Witbooi were two rival Nama chiefs who, depending on circumstances, either fought or joined the Herero and the Germans during the second half of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>120</sup> Schapera (1930 : 404-405).

deplored the fact that the « Hottentot » flute orchestras were nearly obsolete. When he did his survey among the Korana of Bloemhof (South-Africa) in 1932, he did not record any, but was satisfied to have a few specimens of flutes made for himself which he then studied exclusively from the point of view of organology. He did finally manage to hear and record a Nama flute orchestra during a short stay in Windhoek in 1936<sup>121</sup>. Unfortunately, he did not write anything about it.

At the end of the 1990s, as I myself was reviewing those instruments<sup>122</sup>, only a few Nama musicians from Sesfontein (Namibia) still played them, mainly when asked to by tourists<sup>123</sup>. For other occasions, like the accordion and the harmonica, the flutes have been replaced by the guitar (electric), synthesizer and battery, instruments considered more « modern ». On them, the musicians play Reggae and American pop music they hear on the radio, much more often than any « traditional » tunes. For a long time the emblem of the « Hottentot » populations, witnesses and vehicles of their history, the flutes are henceforth only inert objects, timeless, and aimed at a public of foreigners on the lookout for « primitive » cultures and peoples.

## MASTER-SINGERS AND MAKERS OF HISTORY

This on-going study is meant as a reflection on music considered as a *historical source* capable of destabilizing the researcher sufficiently so he or she can apprehend the past of Khoisan populations and, generally speaking, of all the societies which for such a long time were left in the wings of history. The 1970-1980 decade was the time when oral traditions were reified (at the expense of the music) as historical sources, in which the « Griot » became the figurehead<sup>124</sup>, but today an ethno-musicological approach is of a totally different nature. It means dealing with music both from the point of view of its specific characteristics (organology, musical practices and sound), and from the point of view of the situation. What we have undertaken here needs first and foremost the musicological competence and tools allowing one to decipher and question the musical facts. Thus, it is after having identified a particular vocal style in use at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century among the Auen and Naron of Ghanzi during a *tshóma* initiation ritual that I could begin working on it. Among the Nama of Franzfontein, I was intrigued first of all by the presence of the little reed pipes in an orchestra of single-reed flutes and also by the superimposition of two musical scales, one tetratonic, the other diatonic. But far from limiting itself to a purely aesthetic analysis, the present study aims at contextualizing the music (but can music exist out of context ?), at understanding it as a historically situated social production, participating in the past of the Khoisan populations, and even more so in their conception of the past. In this sense, our ethno-musicological approach is equally anthropological and historical.

Though work on visual archives (drawings, paintings, engravings, photographs, films) as historical sources has developed over the past few years<sup>125</sup>, there have been very few attempts

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<sup>121</sup> Kirby (1967 : 244).

<sup>122</sup> This research is part of the Franco-Namibian programme « Living Musics and Dances of Namibia : Exploration, Publication, Education », jointly financed by the service of Cultural Cooperation and Action of the French Embassy in Namibia and the University of Namibia, under the guidance of Minette Mans (Professor of Ethnomusicology at the University of Namibia), Hervé Rivière (CNRS) and myself. Results of these studies are forthcoming.

<sup>123</sup> The flute ensemble of Sesfontein includes five instruments tuned according to the same tetratonic scale as the one noted by Kirby in 1933. The two little reed pipes are no longer there ; the musicians only remember them as traces of bygone days. As to the women, they continue to chant in a diatonic scale, out of sync with the flutes.

<sup>124</sup> Cf. especially Camara (1992), Cisse and Kamissoko (1991), Dumestre (1979), S.C.O.A. (1981).

<sup>125</sup> For Southern Africa, see Skotnes (1996), Hartmann, Silvester, Hayes (1998) and Szalay (2002).

on the other hand to theorize the restitution of sound archives and more specifically, musical ones. Ethnomusicology has long been orientated towards a synchronic approach or, at its beginnings, towards the question of the origins of music, and has suffered from a comparison with musicology, a domain that Western classical music has firmly anchored in history. Yet, when Vasco de Gama landed not far from the Cape of Good Hope on December 2<sup>nd</sup> 1497, was it not music that sealed his encounter with the Blacks ? Does not the fact of taking music into account when making sense of that event shed a new light on things, since it allows one to perceive differently the way each presents himself and recognizes the other ? By taking music into account as the expression of an historical narrative, what we are trying to do here is *have people hear*, whereas they have been used to seeing.