

https://dspace.org/

The Swaziland question and a road to the sea 1887-1895

Garson, N. G. (Noel George)

2015-01-27
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/16791

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

THE SWAZILAND QUESTION AND A ROAD TO THE SEA

1887 - 1895

by

Noel George Garson

Dissertation presented for the degree of Master of Arts

in the University of Witwatersrand

July 1955

Thesis

INTRODUCTION

The partition of Africa had a twofold aspect. On the spot it involved the occupation of territory peopled mainly by native tribes, usually through influence derived from treaties with the native chiefs, and exercised by subjects of the occupying Powers. For the rest relations between the Powers tended to determine the destination of the territory for which they were competing. "Backward territory" became a field on to which issues between the "advanced" Powers were projected. Hence the inevitable diplomatic slant of any account of territorial partition.

Swaziland, together with the territory to the east of it, lying between Portuguese East Africa and Zululand and reaching the sea in Tongaland, made up a large area of "unclaimed" territory in 1387. By 1895 Swaziland had become a "dependency administered by the South African Republic", Tongaland had been proclaimed a British protectorate and the intervening trans-Pongola territory had been annexed to Zululand. A small episode in the scramble for Africa had closed. This dissertation is primarily concerned with how and why the above disposition of these territories was arrived at.

The reaction of the native tribes themselves to European encroachment has been largely ignored. The part played by the tribes and their chiefs in determining the destination of their countries among the two occupying Powers - Britain and the South African Republic - was almost negligible. The force majeure of the encroaching Powers has set the problem of explaining their motives and policies. British and Republican interests in the territories must be placed in their context in the general relations between the governments.

The year 1887 is a convenient starting point. In Swaziland the problem then emerged of providing a regular administration for the few hundred Europeans who had entered the country and acquired interests there. This immediately became attached to the Republic's aspiration to annex Swaziland. Reluctant to sanction this, the British government could not shelve the problem of setting up a settled administration there. This gave the Swaziland question the character of urgency

which was maintained throughout its course, making some external intervention imperative if a relapse into anarchy was to be avoided.

In 1887 the High Commissioner's treaty with the Tonga queen forestalled the Republic in the last area of unannexed coastal territory available to it. Although the Boers failed to obtain a foothold in Tongaland, they consolidated themselves in the trans-Pongola region by concluding treaties with the petty chiefs, Zambaan and Umbegisa. In 1887 the Pretoria government adopted a definite policy of eastward expansion, in which Swaziland, the trans-Pongola territory and Tongaland were involved. Boer influence in Swaziland and with Zambaan and Umbegisa was consolidated throughout the period under discussion, while British influence prevailed in the non-Portuguese portion of Tongaland.

So much for the situation on the spot. The actual extension of European control in the native territories involved and the manner in which relations between the two Powers affected the process are the two themes involved. The second is obviously the more significant, yet various extra-local questions intrude into it, having little if any relation to the first. The forces governing the extension of their sway over territory hitherto occupied by neither of the two Powers were often independent of their relative strength in the territory in question. What follows is primarily an account of Anglo-Transvaal relations as they were projected on to what remained a neutral territorial field for most of the period under discussion.

The Republic's policy was straightforward. Thwarted in Bechuanaland and barred from St.Lucia Bay and Zululand, the Republic after 1887 could attempt to expand either beyond the Limpopo or eastward through Swaziland to the sea. By 1889 President Kruger had opted for Swaziland and the road to Kosi Bay. He tried to obtain the British government's consent (necessary under the London Convention) to his having Swaziland and a free hand to obtain a seaboard by offering to sacrifice the pretensions of his state to expand northwards. While he shrank from the consequences of simply occupying the territory he wanted - possibly because such a policy had failed in Bechuanaland - he tried to "negotiate from strength" by purchasing concessions and "influence" in Swaziland, and maintaining Boer agents with Zambaan and Umbegisa.

The imperial government had no wish to acquire the territories which were the object of Kruger's aspirations - at least not on the basis of British interests in the territories themselves. This has led Leyds to regard the opposition to the Republic's claim to Swaziland, and the annexation of the trans-Pongola region in April 1895 as capricious and perfidious - simply manifestations of an irrational desire on the part of British policy-makers to thwart the innocent ambitions of a tiny state. A bald statement of the aims of British policy will show that this explanation confuses cause with effect.

The British government's reaction to Kruger's "friendly offer" was to demand a higher price than he offered for sanctioning the fulfilment of his ambitions, while accepting and enforcing his undertaking to stay out of the north. Despite its tendency to vacillate, and the lack of clarity in its ends, imperial policy approached some consistency from 1890 onward. Kruger could have Swaziland and a road to the sea if he agreed to enter a South African commercial union as a prelude to a British-sponsored closer political union. This was the essence of the reaction of the imperial factor to Kruger's offer, and the same basic aim - a South African federation under British predominance - was present in the other issues between the governments.[1] Had Kruger been prepared to make concessions in this matter, he would have obtained Swaziland on better terms than he actually did, and "access to the sea" as well.

But the imperial government was asking too much. Kruger valued the independence of his state too highly to risk sinking it in a closer union which would admit British supremacy. The lure of Swaziland and a sight of the sea failed to win him over to the sort of "general settlement" British policy-makers were trying to conclude with him. The Republic refused to accept access to Kosi Bay on the terms offered in the Convention of 1890, and in 1893 shrank from concluding an agreement offering a corridor to the bay in return for the Transvaal's accession to the commercial union. Reliance on the Delagoa Bay connection and doubt about the potentialities of Kosi Bay as a harbour were partly responsible for this. But while Kruger was not prepared to accede to the demands of the imperial government, he did not give up his territorial ambitions. The Republic

---

(1) For example, the political status of the Uitlanders.

tried to consolidate its influence in Swaziland and the trans-Pongola region, while keeping the negotiations open in the hope of obtaining what it wanted on better terms.

The Republic was not prepared to risk war or the use of force to obtain its own way in Swaziland and in securing its own seaboard. The imperial government, using its influence in this question as a bargaining-counter in its negotiations with the Republic on other issues, was even less prepared to fight over it. The question remained a diplomatic one, with the imperial government frequently resorting to the threat to intervene in Swaziland under article II of the London Convention. This threat and the power to disallow the Republic's claim gave the imperial government the whiphand in the negotiations. But the consolidation of the Republic's influence in Swaziland practically necessitated a recognition of its claim there. Fear that the same thing would happen in the trans-Pongola region led to the abandonment of the attempt to lever concessions from Kruger in these negotiations, so that the episode was ended by the closing of the road to the sea.

The fact that the imperial government and a Boer Republic were the two Powers concerned in occupying Swaziland and the territory further east made this rather a special case in the scramble for Africa, revealing tendencies peculiar to South Africa. The trek Boer in Swaziland represented the moving frontier of the pastoral farmer - probably the most continuous thread in South African history. The concession-hunters were products of the lure of mineral wealth in the Transvaal - again an important theme, in this case of the second half of the nineteenth century. Swaziland was also a miniature Transvaal, reflecting the conflict between British and Boer elements in the European population. As part of the field of the Republic's efforts to expand to the sea, Swaziland illustrated a further aspect of Boer relations with the imperial government, in which a complex of other issues was entangled. Finally, the tendency of the governments in their dealings with each other to ignore the Swazi, while extending their control over the native country, typifies the minor rôle of "native policy" in what was essentially an era of inter-state power-politics in South Africa.

The negotiations concerned with the Swaziland question and the road to the sea were protracted and involved. Apart from the official telegraphic and

written correspondence between the Pretoria government and the High Commissioner in Cape Town, there were five meetings between Loch and Kruger between 1890 and 1894, all concerned with this issue and others which were attached to it. In addition the Republic's Consul-General in London, Montague White, had interviews with Ripon while the latter was Secretary of State for the Colonies, and also with the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Buxton, and permanent officials at the Colonial Office. He provided an important channel of direct communication between the Colonial Office and the Pretoria government. The British Agent at Pretoria was a further channel through which the High Commissioner could communicate with the Republic. In the negotiation of the Convention of 1890, Hofmeyr's mediation as Loch's special agent was of considerable importance, not only for that agreement, but for the negotiations subsequent to it.

Because previous accounts of these negotiations appear to be incomplete as well as biased, I have dealt with their course as fully as possible, adopting where necessary a narrative rather than an analytical approach.

For the sake of convenience, quotations from documents in Dutch and Afrikaans have been translated into English. The correspondence between the governments which has been cited (e.g.Leyds to Loch, ... date) is official (i.e., in the present example, State Secretary to High Commissioner) except where it is stated to be private. For the most part the spelling of the Bantu names has been retained in the form current at the time (e.g.Umbandine has been favoured over the modern version, Mbandzeni).

It had been my intention to include a map, but as I have nothing to add to the information in the maps furnished by Leyds in The Transvaal Surrounded, I have omitted to do so. These maps are useful for comparative purposes, as they cover all the frontiers of the Republic. The map of Swaziland, the New Republic and Zululand is, of course, the one particularly relevant to the present topic.

In the preparation of this dissertation I have owed most to my supervisor Professor Marais. In addition to his advice and the benefit I have enjoyed of his knowledge of his period, he is to be thanked for his patience in awaiting its submission.

For access to the Miller Papers and the Shepstone Papers, as well as other items of her impressive collection of Africana, I am grateful to Dr.Killie Campbell

of Durban. I must also thank Sir John Murray and Professor A.Headlam-Morley, St.Hugh's College, Oxford, for their helpful replies to my enquiries. [1]

The librarians of the University of the Witwatersrand rendered able assistance in enabling me to find much material that was not readily accessible. They were also helpful in other ways.

The staff of the Archives Reading Room, Pretoria, must be thanked for helping me to find my way around the maze of material making up the Republic's archives.

Finally, for completing the typing of the thesis under rather trying circumstances, I wish to thank the University Typing Office, Cambridge.

June 1955.

Sidney Sussex College,
Cambridge.

---

(1) See Bibliographical Note on The Years Before the Raid (Quarterly Review, Vol.191, No.381).

C O N T E N T S.

Chap.		Page.
I	Swaziland to 1887.	1
II.	The Swaziland Question, the Trans-Pongola Territories and Tongaland 1887 - 1889.	30
III.	Kruger's offer of May 1889 and the Negotiation of the First Swaziland Convention (August 1890).	72
IV.	The Second Swaziland Convention (1893).	104
V.	The situation in Swaziland and the Convention of 1894.	131
VI.	The Annexation of 1895 and the Tongaland Protectorate.	171
VII.	The Policies of the Governments.	210
BIBLIOGRAPHY		241

CHAPTER ONE

Swaziland to 1887

(1) The Transvaal Boers and Swaziland 1846-1875

In the Conventions of Pretoria (1881) and London (1884), the governments of Great Britain and the Transvaal recognised the independence of the Swazi within the boundaries of Swaziland, which were defined in the earlier document.[1] This independent status of the Swazi remained one of the bases of the negotiations between the two European governments on Swaziland until 1894. In the Convention of that year the Republic received rights of protection, jurisdiction and administration over Swaziland, despite the failure of the Swazi to consent to this arrangement by issuing an Organic Proclamation in terms of the earlier Convention of 1893.[2] The principle of Swazi independence as recognised between the two governments was an enduring factor in their negotiations and it is desirable to account for its embodiment in the Conventions of 1881 and 1884. A related question, which will be considered first, is how far the designation of the Swazi as independent was justified by their status in their relations with the European governments up to 1881. While the latter question has no bearing on the validity of the recognition of Swazi independence in that year, it throws light on the origin of the Swaziland question as one between Great Britain and the South African Republic, and also on certain aspects of the policies of these governments towards Swaziland. Part of what follows may also be regarded as an implicit assessment of the "historical claims" of these governments to the Swazi and Swaziland which were put forward in 1869 and the years following.[3]

---

(1) Leyds, The Transvaal Surrounded, pp.6-7. Article I of the Convention of Pretoria defined the boundaries and article 24 defined the independent status of the Swazi. Articles 1 and 12 of the Convention of London repeated these articles.

(2) See Chapter Six below.

(3) Leyds, op.cit., pp.5ff. for the Republic's "historical claims" to Swaziland. Cf. de Winton's report, C 6201 pp.8,20 and C.O. 438 (Graham's memorandum), p.19 for the British government's claim to "consideration" from the Swazi, owing to Sir T.Shepstone's influence with Cetewayo which forestalled a Zulu raid. Cf. Section 2 of this Chapter. On de Winton's mission and report see Chapters II (2) and III passim. On Graham's memorandum see Bibliographical Note.

Before various east coast tribes became consolidated into the Swazi nation in the eighteenth century, they had come into sporadic contact with individual hunters and traders from Portuguese East Africa. This contact dated from the sixteenth century at least, but it was not until the 1840's that the Swazi established continuous contact with Europeans as members of organised communities.[4] Missionaries were in touch with the Swazi by 1838, but they made few converts and owing to the unsympathetic attitude of the Swazi ruling house their influence on Swazi relations with other Europeans was almost negligible.[5] In the late 1840's the Swazi king Mswazi, who ruled until 1866, sent messengers to Natal requesting protection from the raids of the Zulu under Panda. Theophilus Shepstone, then serving the government of Natal as a "diplomatic agent" with the native tribes, agreed to use his influence over Panda and the raids ceased for a time.[6] Their relations with the Zulu were a lasting factor affecting the Swazi attitude to European governments. From this point, however, the most significant development in Swazi relations with Europeans lay in their dealings with the Boers who had trekked into Transvaal.

The Swazi were one of the few powerful Bantu tribes whose relations with Europeans did not lead them into war. This was partly owing to a powerful tradition against fighting the white man, which began with Sobuza I at the turn of the eighteenth century and was subscribed to by his warrior successor Mswazi.[7] The tradition was almost mystical in its origin, but its survival had much to do with an intelligent respect for the white man's superior military strength and probably more with a desire to enlist his aid or at least protection against the neighbouring Zulu to the south.[8] As they never

---

(4) F.C.Symington, Swaziland tot 1890, pp.37, 41; H.Kuper, An African Aristocracy, p.19; Hailey, Native Administration in the British African Territories, Part V (cited Hailey (2)), p.360.

(5) On the Swazi missions see Symington, op.cit., pp.39, 64; T.van Rooyen, Verhoudinge tussen die Boere, Engelse en Naturelle in die Geskiedenis van die Oos-Transvaal tot 1882 in Archives Year Book for South African History, Vol.I (1951), pp.115, 133-4; Kuper, An African Aristocracy, p.109; Hailey (2), op.cit. p.408; Kuper, article in African Studies V (1946), pp.177-188, on The Swazi Reaction to Missionaries.

(6) de S.Honey, History of Swazi land (unpublished), p.33; Uys, In the Era of Shepstone, p.xi.

(7) Ibid., pp.34-5; Kuper, op.cit., p.19; Symington, op.cit., pp.38, 116.

(8) Hailey, (2) op.cit., p.360.

fought the European, the Swazi were never conquered by him. The encroachment of European control in their territory was a gradual process. The Boers at first exerted no great pressure and showed no special desire to occupy Swazi territory which lay rather on the outskirts of the main European advance routes. In the Swazi contact with the Boers the main development was in the direction of greater precision in the definition of relations and boundaries.

What conclusions can be drawn from the relations between the Boers and the Swazi from 1846, when the Swazi made their first recorded exchange of land for cattle from the Boers, to 1875 when the Republic concluded a formal treaty with the Swazi which defined their status ?[9] Despite the fact that the Swazi cession of land in 1855, for example, appeared to cede to the Boers territory comprising the whole of modern Swaziland and part of what is today the Eastern Transvaal, the Boers did not make immediate or extensive inroads into Swazi territory proper, either for purposes of settlement or to graze their stock.[10]

The idea of establishing a boundary between themselves and the Swazi was accepted by the Boers in the 1860's and from 1865 Boer boundary commissions were regularly appointed. How much of the frontier was actually demarcated and the extent to which it was observed in practice are points difficult to establish. From the earliest demarcations, Swazi continued to be found on the Transvaal side of the boundary, despite the agreement of the Swazi kings to the boundary arrangements. This was due to the failure or inability of the latter to "clear" territory ceded to the Boers. The tendency for the boundaries of Swaziland to contract after the visit of each Commission reflected the steady superimposition of European over tribal authority.[11] At the same time the acceptance of the principle of a boundary between themselves and

---

(9) For the early agreements and details between the Boers and the Swazi during this period see Symington, op.cit., pp.41ff.; van Rooyen, op.cit. pp.5, 13-9, 188; Huyse, Die Naturelle Politiek von die Suid-Afrikaanse Republiek, pp.85-92; J.A.Monton, Genl. Piet Joubert in die Transvaalse Geskiedenis, pp.45, 370; Walker, History of South Africa, pp.272, 285-6, 357-8; Kuper, op.cit., p.20; Honey, op.cit., p.49; Hailey, (2), op. cit., p.360.

(10) By Swazi territory proper is meant territory occupied by tribes actually incorporated into the Swazi system, and not territory inhabited by tribes whom the Swazi claimed as subjects but did not control.

(11) On the boundaries of Swaziland see Symington, op.cit., pp.46-8, 51, 52; Kuper, The Uniform of Colour, p.5; Kuper, The Swazi, p.1.
Today many Bantu of the Eastern Transvaal are tribally speaking Swazi and participate in Swazi tribal ceremonies, although they fall under the administration of the Union Government.

the Swazi implied a recognition by the Boers of a measure of Swazi independence.

In 1888 and 1889 when the Republic's claims to Swaziland were argued by the State Secretary, its geographical contiguity to the territory was among them.[12] With the exception of its eastern boundary which was recognised to lie along the Lebombo mountains, Swaziland was surrounded entirely by Republican territory. The significant development had been along the southern border of Swaziland where the Republic had acquired a strip of territory along the Pongola River extending to the Lebombo range. This meant that Zululand and therefore Natal were cut off from Swazi territory. Britain's sole approach to Swaziland lay to the north of Zululand through the unhealthy, low-lying and unannexed region bordering the eastern slopes of the Lebombo south of Portuguese East Africa.[13]

The corridor of territory between the southern boundary of Swaziland and the Pongola River had been included in the Swazi session of 1855. It was abandoned by the Swazi, but was not beaconed off and later the Zulu occupied it.[14] In the 1860's Mswazi made grants of land to individual Boers in the vicinity of the strip, his idea being to separate himself from the Zulu by an intervening Boer settlement.[15] The New Scotland settlement which was established between 1866 and 1868 carried the history of the strip a step further. The scheme was the result of an agreement between President Pretorius and A.McCorkindale in 1864 and involved the settlement of Scottish farmers in the Eastern Transvaal from Lake Chrissie to the Swazi border.[16] The Pongola River strip was included in the scheme, for one of its aims was to connect the Republic to Delagoa Bay along the Maputa River from its confluence with the Pongola. This part of the scheme was never carried out and not all the farms were settled.

---

(12) C 6200, pp.56, 110ff., 227.
(13) See Chapter II (3) below on this point.
(14) van Rooyen, op.cit., pp.75-6; Walker , op.cit., p.236.
(15) Symington, op.cit., p.45; Kuper, African Aristocracy, p.19.
(16) D.W.Krüger, Die Wegna die See, Archives Year Book for South African History. (1938) Vol.I, pp.170, 174-8.

But as New Scotland was included in the later boundary delimitations, the Republic's possession of the corridor was assured. New Scotland is also significant as marking the earliest connection of the Republic's attempts to reach the sea to its policy toward Swaziland.

In May 1875 Acting President P.J. Joubert proclaimed the annexation of a further strip of territory, this time to the south of the Pongola.[17] The Zulu chief Cetewayo had threatened to raid the Swazi and with the latter being brought into more closely defined relations with the Republic, Joubert's intention was probably to strengthen the buffer and impress Cetewayo.[18] When the British Royal Commission demarcated the Transvaal-Swazi boundary in 1879-80 the Pongola corridor was included in the Transvaal and the separation of the Swazi from Zululand by intervening Boer territory was completed.[19] With the penetration of the Boers into Zululand in the 1880's, which led to the establishment of the New Republic, its incorporation in the Transvaal in 1888 meant the end of the strip and the creation of a wide sweep of Republican territory intervening between Swaziland and Zululand and Natal.[20]

Apart from making Swaziland almost an enclave of the Republic, the Boers secured from the Portuguese government an implicit recognition that the Swazi were Transvaal subjects. In 1868 President Pretorius proclaimed an extension of the Transvaal boundary eastward to Delagoa Bay and thereby evoked the protests of the Portuguese and British governments. Forced to abandon his idea of securing Delagoa Bay, Pretorius concluded a treaty with Portugal in 1869. It included the delimitation of frontiers and the Lebombo mountains were recognised as the boundary between the Republic and Portuguese East Africa, with the Swazi therefore included within the Transvaal.[21]

Despite the uncertain character of Boer-Swazi relations there is some justification for speaking of the exercise by the Boers of a "sort of

---

(17) van Rooyen, op.cit., pp.73-4, 75-6.
(18) Mouton, op.cit., p.45. [illegible]
(19) For comments on this, see Sir Hercules Robinson's article on The Swaziland Question in the Fortnightly Review (Feb.1 1890), Vol.XLVII, pp.284/5; Quarterly Review, Vol.191, No.381, p.232. (See Bibliographical Note on this article.)
(20) Bryce, Impressions of South Africa, p.209; Hertslet, Map of Africa by Treaty, pp.238, 240-1.
(21) Krüger, op.cit., pp.188, 190. The Portuguese territory does not extend so far south as to be contiguous with Swaziland alond the whole of its eastern boundary.

protectorate" over the Swazi from at least the 1860's.[22] The Republic exercised a certain surveillance over the relations of the Swazi with other tribes, and also expected and utilised Swazi assistance against tribes with whom the Boers themselves had come into conflict. In return they offered protection for the Swazi from Zulu and late Bapedi raids.[23] In 1866 and 1874/5 when disputes over the succession to the kingship led to anarchy and fighting among the Swazi the Boers intervened in Swaziland itself.[24] On both occasions they merely confirmed settlements which the Swazi had arrived at independently, but the second intervention led to the signing of the treaty representing the high-water mark of Boer influence over the Swazi before the intrusion of British policy.

In the early 1870's the Swazi became involved in the Republic's policy of acquiring a road to Delagoa Bay, this being carried out / after 1872 by President Burgers. In April of that year a Volksraad Commission visited Swaziland on what may have been a misunderstanding or merely the pretext of a request by Ludonga, Mswazi's successor, to become a subject of the Republic owing to his fear of Cetewayo; for the Commission, aiming at securing a road through Swaziland to Delagoa Bay, failed to persuade the Swazi to accept the status of subjects of the Republic. An "agreement of friendship" was concluded and the Swazi declared their willingness to permit the free passage of goods through their country.[25]

In May 1875, fourteen months after the death of Ludonga had ushered in a period of anarchy in Swaziland, the Executive Council of the Republic authorised the despatch of an expedition. Its purpose was to define the Republic's relations with the Swazi more closely and to decide whether they were to be accepted

---

(22) Cf. Mouton, op.cit., pp.45, 370.
(23) Symington, op.cit., pp.52-3; van Rooyen, op.cit., p.79.
(24) Symington, op.cit., pp.49-50, 55-7. In 1866 there was also a threat of a Zulu intervention.
(25) Krüger, op.cit., p.197. van Rooyen, op.cit., p.79 mentions the appointment of the Commission, but not its outcome.

Author Garson N G (Noel George)
Name of thesis The Swaziland Question And A Road To The Sea 1887-1895. 1955

PUBLISHER:
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg
©2013

LEGAL NOTICES:

Copyright Notice: All materials on the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg Library website are protected by South African copyright law and may not be distributed, transmitted, displayed, or otherwise published in any format, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

Disclaimer and Terms of Use: Provided that you maintain all copyright and other notices contained therein, you may download material (one machine readable copy and one print copy per page) for your personal and/or educational non-commercial use only.

The University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, is not responsible for any errors or omissions and excludes any and all liability for any errors in or omissions from the information on the Library website.