



always necessary to be adjusted after such operations', he said, was in fact to sort out the devastation caused by the indiscriminate seizing of property over such a wide area. There is little doubt that a significant number of rebels were in fact people in hiding. There were rumours of unnecessary violence and cattle-lifting. The Legislative Council got to hear of them and called for an inquiry, but Shepstone headed it off successfully. There were other ways to assess the expedition. People might not have been killed, but seven thousand cattle had been seized: sixteen hundred of these had been returned to their owners, six hundred had been given as rewards to participants and three thousand sold for government funds. Twelve hundred, many of them with lungsickness that had infected hitherto isolated herds, were distributed amongst the deserving destitute. Sidoyi's people lost at least 90 per cent of their stock. The chief himself was deposed from office and another appointed in his place – Zashuke kaMbeshwa Ngubane, Shepstone's *induna*, successor to Ngoza: 'I believe him to be the fittest Native in the Colony to be intrusted with such a duty.'

Governor John Scott's official report followed Shepstone's arguments closely – and shared the same mood of self-justification and success. Although without Pine's posturing and preening, it demonstrated the beneficial results of stern but just action towards a barbarous people and a potentially dangerous tribe. It is also totally unconvincing. This was not the punishment of an upstart chief whose behaviour, if unattended, threatened the security of the colony. The explanation lies in Shepstone's determination to bring to an end 'assertions of independence'<sup>9</sup> in a region still to be settled by whites. It also opened up new ground for one of Shepstone's most reliable appointed chiefs, Zashuke, and drove across the border one of the men who had acted truculently towards Fynn and Shepstone in 1851. The other, Mdushane, had been dealt with two years previously.

It is true that Shepstone did what he could to avoid direct casualties by inflicting economic rather than physical damage. This was Shepstone's way and his strength: to achieve his ends by careful strategy, using but controlling, where he could, both settler and native violence. Instead of the direct and provocative attack, he invested living spaces with large numbers of armed men, raided livestock, smothering resistance with the enormous threat posed to non-combatants and holding the whole area hostage until he achieved his end – to make Shepstone's power felt in a region in which a colonial presence was about to become a colonial authority.

#### **'Eating *imbuya*': Matshana kaMondise Sithole, 1858**

The next major attack on a Natal chiefdom was in the north-east and, initially, largely the responsibility of the local magistrate and John Wesley Shepstone, although Misjan's brother, Theophilus, had to clean up and then dispose of the mess. The Klip River district with its scattered Boer population, pressing border difficulties

and years of magisterial abuse by Captain Struben was a difficult area to manage and the situation did not improve under his successor, Dr Thomas Kelly.<sup>10</sup>

In December 1857, Ncanda arrived at Kelly's office in Ladysmith and reported that her husband, Sigatiya, had been accused of being a *thakathi* and causing the illness of a neighbour. A group of young men had seized the couple, tied Sigatiya's arms behind his back, pulled them over his head, dislocating his shoulders, and then beaten him. When the severity of his injuries were realised, his wife was released and she dragged her husband to a stream and cleaned his wounds. But his neck seemed to have been broken and, after a night in agony, he died the next day as she was trying to get him home.<sup>11</sup> Magistrate Kelly, known as Helehele or the 'wild cat', ordered Sigatiya's *inkosi*, Matshana kaMondise of the Sithole, to Ladysmith to explain.

Matshana made excuses. And he had his reasons. Three years before, he had been accused of killing an uncle and his sons. The Lieutenant Governor, 'taking into consideration the strong feelings of Her Majesty's native subjects on the subject of Witchcraft and the youth and ignorance of Matyana, forbore to put in exercise the stern requirements of the Law . . .' But this was no reason to forget that, under the laws of Natal, 'life requires life' and, in 1853, the Lieutenant Governor declared 'to the Native Chiefs, and people of this District, that any man who in future wilfully attempts to take the life of another will most assuredly forfeit his own'. They were reminded that recently in Durban, convicted murderers 'were hung by the neck before the eyes of the people and in the face of the sun – their guilt had been made manifest their punishments all might see'.<sup>12</sup> Shepstone favoured such phraseology.

Now, in 1858, the blustering rhetoric was having its effect. Matshana said he would hand over the perpetrators, but he would not come to Ladysmith himself. The death had occurred despite his instructions and he believed that the magistrate's police had their own reasons for misrepresenting his role in the killings.<sup>13</sup> Magistrate Kelly, new to the post, wanting to impress and already persuaded that Matshana was responsible for the killing, trotted out the conventional formula: the chief's refusal to report was an act of public contempt for his authority and this could lead to 'universal insubordination among the natives'. The local settler 'Frontier Guards', which he had just founded, were very willing to give their support to any attempt to deal with this 'contumaciousness' and he was 'anxiously awaiting' instructions.<sup>14</sup>

In response, Kelly got a letter in which Shepstone exhibited all his wary skills, shifting responsibility for any untoward future consequences down to the magistrate and up to the Lieutenant Governor. The magistrate's assumption of the chief's guilt was based on evidence provided by police and messengers who might well have exaggerated it, Shepstone warned. A direct armed advance on a chief was an unwise tactic. It was likely that Matshana would retreat into a secure place and gather his people around him, making an ordered arrest difficult. It would have been better

for the magistrate to have gone first to Matshana to investigate the matter personally and done everything to avoid using force to apprehend the chief. So, while the Lieutenant Governor

is prepared to support your authority by the employment of an armed force, if needful . . . I am to point out to you that every caution should be observed, and every possible means should be taken to avoid placing the Government in a position to compel a resort to such extreme measures.<sup>15</sup>

Kelly made a desultory attempt to meet Matshana peacefully and, predictably, it failed. The chief, he said, had surrounded himself with armed men and was preparing ‘to set at defiance the majesty of the law’ and ‘resist to the last extremity’.<sup>16</sup> Kelly asked for authority to act and suggested that the Thembu under Nodada be mobilised along the Mzinyathi River and Thukela, while Shepstone’s brother, John, organise a supporting African force. On 10 January, the Lieutenant Governor and the Secretary for Native Affairs decided they had no choice but to support direct action against Matshana. Fifty volunteers from Pietermaritzburg, the Carbineers, would travel with Scott to Ladysmith to participate in the action.<sup>17</sup> Theophilus Shepstone remained behind in Pietermaritzburg.

On 13 January, the settler volunteers were ready to march. They might well have given the venture a certain colonial authenticity – but the active, coercive force lay with the Africans deployed. Misjan and the five hundred Hlubi and Ngwe he had mobilised were already causing concern as they moved through Weenen on their way to Matshana’s territory. The area was invested with armed men, its livestock was seized and held until its people agreed to co-operate. To succeed, these tactics needed skill – an understanding of the local conditions and the histories and personalities of the people, their chiefs, their alliances and their rivalries. Skills that both Kelly and John Shepstone lacked.<sup>18</sup>

Accounts of just what happened are scarce. The attack was premised on the assumption that Matshana and his people were planning, if not already in, rebellion – although there is no evidence that they had done more than gather around their chief when he was threatened and got out of the way as soon as they could when their land was invaded by Misjan’s armed force. The official history of the Carbineers records a lot of playing at soldiers and finding Matshana’s location empty of people to be attacked, but full of cattle to be looted. But a scrappy report by John Shepstone has survived:

I collected a native force consisting of the tribes of Langalibalele and Putili numbering about 500 men . . . [and on the 16th crossed the Thukela] and commenced operations the next morning by seizing all cattle, horses sheep & goats belonging to Matyana’s tribe. On the 18th & 19th I proceeded down the Sundays River still taking small lots of cattle, sheep and goats.<sup>19</sup>

On 19 January, he met up with the volunteer force and it was decided to adopt a tactic previously used against Sidoyi on the Mkhomazi – part of the force would sweep up the Mzinyathi River and the other downstream. During that day, they seized eight hundred head of cattle and five hundred small stock. The African force was then ordered to search out the more inaccessible areas where stock was hidden and got hold of some four hundred head, described as Matshana's own animals. There was some resistance – a force of Ndabankulu's Mabaso was attacked and some of Matshana's men were killed trying to keep possession of their stock, but 'the Native force has succeeded in taking during this expedition 4 000 head of cattle 3 horses, and about 2 000 sheep and goats'.

Matshana crossed the Mzinyathi into the Zulu kingdom. Now safe from colonial attack but still directly involved in the lives of his people, many of whom stayed in Natal, he waited for the next move by the colonial authorities. But it was difficult for the officials to know just what to do. Another raid would not only be hard to organise, but pointless. With the cattle removed from Matshana's location, the major incentive was no longer there. Also, the terrain towards the Thukela and Mzinyathi was formidable, providing places ideally suited for defensive tactics. Both sides wanted a solution. The Sithole people needed to reap their crops and re-occupy their homesteads – as they put it, they longed for *imbuya*, the wild spinach that grew in their homesteads and was prized as a leaf vegetable. Theophilus Shepstone travelled to the area saying that he was as eager as the Sithole to find a solution. He told them that they could reap their crops but, if they were to keep possession of their land, Matshana must report to the magistrate. Shepstone sent a message to Matshana telling him he 'lamented what had taken place, saying that he had been away at Durban, but had hastened back'<sup>20</sup> for he was 'much grieved for this prosperous tribe (*umuzi*) of mine which has been ruined'.<sup>21</sup> The problem confronting them was like a heavy stone that could only be moved if they found a way to co-operate: '“Where is Matshana himself?”' he asked.

'Let him come back; men can carry, by helping one another, a heavy stone; and as to these gardens, which you have been watching, you will not eat of them, if you do not carry that stone; and, if Matshana were here, he would hear good news of his property, which is not dispersed and sold, but is kept waiting for him.'<sup>22</sup>

Matshana was encouraged and crossed back into Natal. But he was also cautious and remained in hiding while negotiations were opened, not with Somtsewu – his job apparently done, he had gone back to Pietermaritzburg – but with his brother, Misjan. Tentative negotiations began. Matshana remained suspicious and refused to attend without a bodyguard. Misjan insisted that he wanted to resolve their differences – but he could not treat with armed men. But there was also a significant number of Sithole who urged their *inkosi* to meet with Misjan and reach an agreement

that would allow them to return to their homes and eat *imbuya*. Matshana felt the responsibility, his youth and his isolation intensely: ‘‘You do this to me because I have no father (to protect me)’’<sup>23</sup> but, in the end, he yielded to the pressure and helped to persuade his men to leave their arms a few hundred yards from where the meeting with Misjan was planned.

It took place at three in the afternoon in front of the *iziThuli* homestead in which Misjan and his party of some thirty men, half of them mounted, were staying. They were the conventional sort of escort with which John Shepstone worked. Old favourites, men he could trust, indunas and police who, for their loyalty, could expect loot and favours from the brother of Somtsewu. They kept out of the way as best they could. Everything had to be done to create the atmosphere of a peaceful meeting. Misjan’s wife and her children remained with him to create that impression.

But it was a cover. Kelly had provided the warrant for Matshana’s arrest for murder. In front of the homestead, Misjan, flanked by his indunas, was seated on a chair facing Matshana and his men. But ten armed mounted men had been placed out of a sight behind a ridge. On a signal, it was their job to get between Matshana’s men and their weapons. Hidden in the homestead behind Misjan was the rest of his force, their weapons ready. John Shepstone had two pistols in his pockets and hidden under a leopard skin at his feet was a double-barrelled gun. When he asked for a drink of water, two of his ‘most trustworthy indunas’ were to seize hold of the chief.<sup>24</sup>

The meeting was tense from the start. As they were getting into place, Matshana’s young men began to declaim their *isiga* – their regimental signature song – ‘*Wominza! Wominza! Wotshona lapa!*’ (You’ll go down, you’ll sink here!) Misjan objected to this, but Matshana told him it was just the boys’ usual custom and of no special significance. The party was forced into a compact group by blows from Misjan’s police and squatted in rows behind their *inkosi*. The questioning of the three men charged with the original killing began. Matshana, uneasy, remained kneeling, shifting from knee to knee. He was protected from the direct rays of the sun by a small travelling shield and did not take his eyes off John Shepstone – even when the sound of the horses galloping off towards the weapons reached the ears of the crowd.<sup>25</sup> They began to stir. Some got up to try to see where the horses were. Matshana had not taken his eyes off Shepstone when the men flanking him made the move to grab hold of the chief and Shepstone fired.

Matshana sprang up, turned and jumped over the rows of men behind him, treading as he did so on the leg of the man on his right, Deke, who had dropped ‘wriggling on the ground’ with a bullet through his thigh, entering just above the knee. John Shepstone, now standing and tracking Matshana as he pushed his way through the confusion, fired another shot and hit the wrong man. The Sithole scrambled to their feet in confusion. Matshana’s *induna*, Sondlovu, tried to get them to rally, divert attention from the chief, and get between him and Shepstone’s

men, previously hidden but now charging out of the homestead. ‘*Banamanga! basibulala!*’<sup>26</sup> (the liars! They are killing us!) they shouted before Sondlovu was stabbed and fell mortally wounded. Matshana’s men turned and made for the place where they had left their weapons – and were met by Misjan’s mounted men. Running, with Shepstone’s force after them, the Sithole picked up sticks and stones to defend themselves. Misjan fired again, this time over their heads, trying to stop just the sort of fracas that his brother always tried to avoid. In the melee, a man pulled an assegai out of his own arm and struck it into Misjan’s side. His bullet pouch saved him from severe injury, but thirty to forty men on the other side were run down and killed as they tried to escape.

Matshana swapped his distinctive *umutsha* for a less recognisable one and kept running, not stopping until he had scrambled up the sides of the Ilenge mountain, or Job’s Kop after his grandfather, Jobe. At the top, he stopped, caught his breath, and then, furious, turned to shout down to his men scrambling up the slopes below him: ‘So here’s that fine *imbuya* spinach you wanted from your fields.’ ‘There’s your fine *imbuya* which you said you would eat in your old kraals!’<sup>27</sup>

#### Spin, cover-up and damage control

Years later, a man told the story how, fortuitously, he been at Somtsewu’s house in Pietermaritzburg when the news of the attack and his brother’s injury reached him.

[He] heard with his own ears Mr. Shepstone blaming and severely scolding, being sorry for Matyana and his people, and blaming Mr. John’s act in enticing Matyana in this way and preventing their coming with their weapons . . . I hoped that Mr. John had left off by this time doing such things as these, whereas Mr. John does evil practices of such a character!<sup>28</sup>

Perhaps. But it was Theophilus who had enticed Matshana back to Natal and any anger he showed would have been directed at the fact that it was he who now had to clear up after his brother’s botched attempt at an arrest. But it was a task for which he had special skills. On 19 March, Scott issued a proclamation that stated that Chief Matshana was deposed from the chieftainship of the Sithole and declared an outlaw. Official recognition of his tribe was withdrawn and their right to the land they occupied was terminated.<sup>29</sup>

The formal report was sent to London in May. Scott’s covering letter was a long and detailed account of how Matshana had refused to act on the magistrate’s order and defied his authority.<sup>30</sup> That the case he had to answer involved witchcraft gave it a particular significance because failure to act could lead to a resurgence of witchcraft killings. Scott referred to Shepstone’s enclosed report for the details of just what had happened – in fact, there was very little in Shepstone’s report on the raid and nothing of the attempt to serve a warrant of arrest by concealing, then

using, weapons at a peaceful meeting. Instead, he reversed the account – it was Matshana and his men who had hidden weapons and, at a given word, were to seize John Shepstone. Their plan, however, had failed but made it necessary for Misjan to attempt to assert the law against a force that outnumbered his by ten to one. Unfortunately, it had not been successful and some thirty lives had been lost – the result of John Shepstone being stabbed, an act that so outraged his men that for a moment he lost control of them.

It is another of Shepstone's reports in which a large amount of information gives an impression of a scrupulously informed writer, but in fact obscures alternative interpretations by means of a persuasive vagueness.<sup>31</sup> By leaving out specific dates, the rhythm of the events is lost. The few isolated attempts made by the Sithole to defend their property during the initial attack are described as 'passive but dogged resistance'. The attempts by the Shepstone brothers to persuade the Sithole to give up their chief and return to their homes are mentioned but, without dates or details, they give the impression of a long process of failed attempts to negotiate a peace. Finally, the warrant for arrest of the perpetrator was issued, but never served because Matshana had decided to destroy the man responsible for implementing it.

When the reports arrived in London, none of the officials had any suspicion that anything untoward had happened: indeed quite the opposite: this was another example of the skill of the native administrator in Natal – necessary firmness had been applied with a 'prudence & moderation' of which the Secretary of State entirely approved.<sup>32</sup>

But no moderation and very little prudence had been shown in these events and, if the Colonial Office was not allowed to know this and settler Natal was unable to perceive it, Natal's Africans were very aware of it. The Shepstones had lied in order to entice Matshana into a murderous trap. But the chief had outwitted them and, still *inkosi* of the Sithole, Matshana was now in the Zulu kingdom on the other side of the Mzinyathi, a living demonstration of the failure of the house of Sonzica. And Shepstone needed to counter this. Those Sithole who acceded to his plans were allowed to re-occupy their land – at a price, labour on the Boer farms and the roads being pushed through the Klip River district. Apart from a few homesteads on the Thukela left for border guards and special favourites, the Sithole location was to be left unoccupied. For Theophilus Shepstone had his ideas on its future – and was waiting for the right time to put them into operation. Within a few years, it was Ngoza kaLudada of the Qamu, Shepstone's chief *induna*, and numbers of his people who were living there.

## Notes

1. See above, pp. 87–8.
2. A.T. Bryant, *Olden Times in Zululand and Natal* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1929), p. 367.
3. As usual, we are far too dependent on Shepstone's account of this, although some of the original statements do exist in this case in PAR: SNA 1/3/6 in a series of statements on pp. 311–50, taken from 28–31 March 1857 by the Richmond Magistrate, Arthur Hawkins. See also PAR: SNA 1/1/7 for various letters and drafts that culminate in the long official accounts in TNA: CO 179/45, 7495, Scott to Labouchere, 8 June 1857 and enclosures.
4. Bryant's account on pp. 351–3 of *Olden Times* confirms in interesting ways aspects of the accounts in the official sources.
5. PAR: SNA 1/3/6. Statement by messenger from Sidoyi to Hawkins, 31 March 1857.
6. TNA: CO 179/45. 7495, Scott to Labouchere, 8 June 1857.
7. PAR: SNA 1/1/7. Benjamin Moodie to Shepstone, 4 June 1857.
8. Shepstone's report is dated 27 May 1857 and enclosed in TNA: CO 179/45, 7495, Scott to Labouchere, 8 June 1857.
9. A phrase used in Scott's report.
10. PAR: SNA 1/1/5. Shepstone to Lieutenant Governor, 1 December 1854 (draft).
11. Details of the preparatory examination in April can be found in the PAR: SNA 1/1/8, 'Papers in the case of the Murder of Sikadiya 12 July 1858', but by this time this was done, the whole matter had been compromised by previous events – and the accused were released for lack of evidence!
12. I wrote a short piece on this execution for the *Witness True Story* Competition, which was published on 3 October 2008 as 'Little John's Escape'.
13. It is impossible here to examine, disentangle and assess the role of Kelly's messengers and police in this case, but it was one that Matshana believed worked against him from the beginning. Theophilus Shepstone suspected there was truth in this.
14. PAR: LDS 3/1/1/4. Kelly to Shepstone, 31 December 1857. With this letter, Kelly enclosed a private letter to Shepstone – which probably gave some indication into why Kelly was so determined to confront Matshana at just this moment.
15. TNA: CO 179/48. 6407, Shepstone to Kelly, 2 January 1858. This letter from the SNA to Kelly, the Resident Magistrate in Klip River, was written on 2 January 1858 (it is also in the outgoing letter book PAR: SNA 1/8/6) and was the only contemporary document enclosed with the eventual reports to London in TNA: CO 179/48. 6407, Scott to Labouchere, 20 April 1858.
16. PAR: LDS 3/1/1/4. Kelly to Shepstone, 7 January 1858.
17. PAR: SNA 1/8/6. Allen (for SNA) to Kelly, 10 January 1858.
18. PAR: SNA 1/8/6. Allen to Kelly, 10 January 1858.
19. PAR: SNA 1/1/8. J.W. Shepstone to Philip Allen, Commander of Volunteer Force, 25 January 1858.
20. PAR: Colenso collection. C 1280/5 [Harriette Colenso's copy]. 'The History of the Matshana Enquiry with a report of the evidence as taken down by the Bishop of Natal and the Rev. Canon Tonnesen'. Evidence of Homoi, p. 113.
21. Various drafts were run off by Magma at the Bishopstowe press. This quotation is from John Sanderson's copy of 'The History of Matyana'. PAR: Colenso collection. C 1280/4, Statement of Njuba and Mlamula, pp. 23–4.
22. PAR: Colenso collection. C 1280/5. 'History of the Matshana Enquiry'. Evidence of Homoi, p. 113.
23. PAR: Colenso collection. C 1280/4. 'History of Matyana'. Statement of Njuba and Mlamula, p. 27.
24. D.C.F. Moodie, 'The Affair of Matyana' in *The History of the Battles and Adventures of the British, the Boers, and the Zulus, etc., in Southern Africa* (Cape Town: Murray and St Leger, 1888). Internal evidence shows the author to be D.C.F. Moodie himself, at the time clerk in the Klip River magistracy and a witness to these events.
25. PAR: Colenso collection. C 1280/5. 'History of the Matshana Enquiry'. Evidence of Nomatshinatshina, p. 141.
26. *Ibid.*, Evidence of Njuba, p. 71.
27. *Ibid.*, Combined statement of Mabona and Noju, p. 118.
28. PAR: Colenso collection. C 1280/4. 'History of Matyana', 'Story of Hlalelwa', p. 34.
29. TNA: CO 179/48. 6407, Scott to Labouchere, 20 April 1858, enc. 2, Proclamation, 19 March 1858.