

KHAMA AND JAMESON: NEW LIGHT ON HOW THE RAID WAS LOST ¹

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Historical ifs are back in favour. A recent issue of *The Times Higher Educational Supplement* tells us that a new book called *Virtual Reality*, out later this year, will feature well-known historians speculating on how key historical events might have turned out, if only...²

In this paper I hope to show that if only Khama had not interfered, the Jameson Raid might have had a greater chance of success. Or, more precisely, that Khama pushed Chamberlain into stymieing the preparations for the Jameson Raid.

Who was Khama? Khama was the ruler of the Bangwato people, in what is now Botswana and what was then the Bechuanaland Protectorate. He was an extraordinary individual, a cool and canny statesman who was widely recognised as the most successful African potentate in surviving the Scramble for Southern Africa. A Christian temperance king who gave out only one commercial concession in his life. A concession which, however, was bought up to form one of the legal bases of Rhodesian British South Africa Company.

To understand how Khama may have killed the 1896 raid, we must go back to the first Jameson Raid of 1893, the cavalry dash from Mashonaland under Jameson that captured Bulawayo from Lobengula and his Amandebele. Rhodesian propaganda claimed single-handed victory for this first Jameson Raid. Ignoring the role of Imperial and Bangwato troops who approached Bulawayo from

This paper is a slightly expanded version of a talk given at the session on The Black Perspective at the symposium on "The Jameson Raid and beyond" at the Brenthurst Library in Johannesburg, 21 January 1997. It is based on my forthcoming book *King Khama, Emperor Joe, and the Great White Queen: Victorian Britain through African eyes*, to be published by the Chicago University Press, and possibly by University of Natal Press, later in 1997.

Times Higher Education Supplement, 27 December 1996, p. 20.

the south and engaged Lobengula's main army. In the words of High Commissioner Henry Loch, it was Khama who with great gallantry, fought in the only action with the Matabele in the open, and charged the Matabele at the head of his regiment, and successfully pressed them back.³

But instead of praise, Khama was pilloried by Rhodes. Rhodes chose to interpret as desertion Khama's prompt withdrawal after the capture of Bulawayo. He suppressed a Reuters interview giving Khama's viewpoint, and strode into the *Kgotla* or central courtyard of Phalapye, Khama's capital, denouncing Khama as a coward before his people. Word got round that Rhodes was enquiring how many men it would take to dispose of Khama and dispossess him of his country. Over the next eighteen months there were plenty of straws in the wind, in the form of hostile Rhodesian actions towards Khama, to suggest truth in this assertion.⁴

By January 1895 an anonymous article in the *South African Review* was predicting Khama will be discovered to be massing his forces, and made responsible for some act of his subjects, and the dogs of war will be loosed upon him.⁵

In November 1894 Rhodes and Jameson had gone to London to glory in their victory over Lobengula and to boost the shares of the BSA Company. They also secured a promise from the Rosebery government that the Bechuanaland Protectorate (what is now Botswana) would become part of Rhodesia in a matter of months, at the same time as the colony of British Bechuanaland (now the left-hand half of North West Province) became part of Cape Colony.

Rhodes and Jameson returned to Cape Town in February 1895. The very next day High Commissioner Loch announced his sudden retirement, and five days later cabled his masters in London:

South Africa (London), 28, 358, (9 November 1895), pp. 334-335. The standard Rhodesian version of the war was propagated by W. A. Willis & L. T. Collingridge, *The downfall of Lobengula: The cause, history and effect of the Matabeli War*, published soon afterwards by H. Rider Haggard's *African Review* in 1894; and has continued to inform the historical accounts of the war through Lancelot Dudley Stafford Glass, *The Matabele War*, (1968), based on the author's 1964 PhD at Natal University.

Neil Parsons, *King Khama, Emperor Joe and the Great White Queen*, chapter 2.

Q. N. Parsons, "Khama III, the Bamangwato and the British, 1895-1923", PhD, University of Edinburgh, (1973), chapter 4.

Chief Khama has ever been a faithful friend and ally and to hand over that Chief, his people and his territory, to be administered by a commercial company, dependent for their prosperity upon what they may get out of the country, would be a breach of faith such as I am sure the Government would not for a moment entertain.⁶

By April 1895 the *Pretoria News* was carrying reports of BSA Company preparations to equip a military expedition of up to 1200 mounted men with Maxims, rifles, uniforms, saddles and camping equipment. We now know why. But over the next nine months Rhodes-inspired misinformation was to identify Khama of the Bangwato, Lewanika of the Barotse (or Malozi), and Linchwe of the Bakgatla, as likely target.

On May 2nd the new British High Commissioner at the Cape, Hercules Robinson, announced imminent Cape legislation to absorb British Bechuanaland south of the Molopo. By June it was made clear that the Bechuanaland Protectorate north of the Molopo would become part of Rhodesia at the same time. But the Rosebery government in London fell on June 23rd, and a new Salisbury government with Joseph Chamberlain as Colonial Minister took its place. Chamberlain was a long-term admirer and supporter of Khama's, who had protested against the removal of Loch.

Khama was kept well informed by the Cape telegraph and the Cape newspapers received at Phalapye.

On his very first day in office, a petition was addressed to Chamberlain by Khama and 135 other Bangwato, protesting at BSA Company take-over of their country. The petition was systematically delayed for a month on its way to London by Sidney Shippard, a British official in Rhodes' pocket and believed to be Rhodes' nominee for the first Administrator of the Rhodesian Transvaal.⁷

Public Record Office (hereafter PRO), London: CO 417/138 (& CO 879/484, p. 174), Loch to Ripon, 27 February 1895; Anthony Sillery, *The Bechuanaland Protectorate*, (1952), p. 67; Anthony Sillery, *Founding a Protectorate: History of Bechuanaland 1885-1895*, (1965), p. 76, misquoted in Jack Halpern *South Africa's hostages: Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland*, (1965), p. 90.

PRO: CO 417/142, enclosure in British South Africa Company to Imperial Secretary, 9 August 1895; Neil Parson's entry on Sir Sidney Shippard in *New Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford), forthcoming.

Given the lack of response to the Bangwato petition, Khama organised two fellow Chiefs, Sebele of the Bakwena and Bathoen of the Bangwaketse, to sail with him to protest to Chamberlain in person.

By the end of July Khama was ready to go, but he was delayed by Hercules Robinson who ordered him to await the arrival of Dr. Jameson, the Administrator of BSA Company territories. Jameson arrived from Bulawayo early on the morning of Saturday August 3rd. He began by relaying Rhodes' apology for the 'unkindly' words said in the Phalapye Kgotla in 1893. 'Mr Rhodes often lost his temper, so would Khama try to put it all out of his mind, and think no more of it'.

Jameson tried to twist Khama into publicly retracting all objections to the Chartered Company. He later claimed that his interpreter, a local white trader, misled him into thinking he had won Khama round. But Khama kept diplomatically silent through a number of interviews on the Saturday and Sunday, and insisted on leaving for the south.⁸

Khama was 'itching to off'. So were Rhodes and Jameson. Rhodes wrote to Alfred Beit at this time: "we must have the right of administration [over the Bechuanaland Protectorate], to collect our forces at Gaberones", because "Johannesburg is ready". But he was worried about Khama and his possible affect on Chamberlain: "Is it not awful that the whole future of the British Empire out here may turn on a wretched Kaffer".⁹

After further attempts at Cape Town to turn them back, by High Commissioner Robinson and a flu-ridden Rhodes in person, Khama and his two brother Chiefs arrived in the West of England on September 6th. The *Western Morning News* asked Khama if he was

London Missionary Society Archives (hereafter LMS), School of Oriental & African Studies, London: Rev. W. C. Willoughby Papers, T. B. Shaw (Palapye) to Willoughby, 4 August 1895; PRO: CO 417/142, High Commissioner to Colonial Office, 7 August 1895 enclosing telegrams. See also British Parliamentary Papers, C: 7962 (vol. LIX of 1896).

Elizabeth Longford, *Jameson's Raid; the prelude to the Boer War*, second edition, (1982), p. 12.

satisfied with Rhodes' and Robinson's verbal assurances, and Khama replied: "No; the words would be worth nothing if they are not placed on record, to speak for themselves when these men will not be alive or in office, so that we may turn to them."

He played down being scolded by Rhodes in 1893: "Mr. Rhodes has asked me to forgive him for words which he said when he was misinformed, and I cannot go back on what I have already forgotten."¹⁰ Khama declined to discuss his political mission in public before he had seen Chamberlain, and was much aggravated by Rhodes' continual claims carried in *The Times* newspaper that he had given way to Jameson back home at Phalapye.

The Chiefs made their grievance against Chartered Company rule plain to Chamberlain:

we think they will take our land and sell it to others; they will fill our country with liquor shops... they are people without gratitude... [and] because we hear the words of the Makalaka [Mashona] and the Matabele who live under the Company, and we see that these people do not like their rulers.¹¹

Chamberlain heard them out, and then went off on six weeks' vacation to the Mediterranean, promising to settle matters when he returned.

The Chiefs used the intervening time well, touring major towns and cities in the Midlands and North of England, southern Scotland, and south Wales, speaking at first in chapels and then at municipal and commercial receptions in their honour. They protested at the prospect of being handed over to a profit-making company as if they were oxen, dogs, or mere "things".

Khama said in a Leicester chapel "We were progressing very much under the Imperial Government, but now you are teaching us the word of war". At a town council official breakfast in Birmingham — Chamberlain's constituency — he spoke in the name of the oppressed black people of the Chartered Company territories, adding: "whether I am speaking correctly, or the Company have spo-

Western Morning News, 7 September 1895; *Daily Chronicle*, 7 & 9 September 1895; *Leicester (Daily) Post*, 10 September 1895; *Nottingham Express*, 11 September 1895. *African Critic*, 14 September 1895; *England and the Union*, 14 September 1895.

ken correctly, when they told you of their doings, you cannot judge. We live near, and we know.”¹²

The journalist W. T. Stead, until this point a great admirer of Rhodes, observed: “Khama is the one man in the whole of Africa whose case commands the sympathy of a large section of the British public: his claim is moderate, founded in justice and right.” England must therefore warn Rhodes off.¹³

A significant element of British public opinion now saw Khama as “over here trying to avoid being seized and sucked dry by the Rhodesian crew”. Press scepticism was fed by Oliver Schreiner’s well publicized break with Rhodes. A Jamaican visitor in London, fresh from residence in Kimberley, was quoted as calling Rhodes “the prime mover in all oppression” and Jameson as “one of the Negro’s worst enemies.”¹⁴

Wary of the strength of British public support for Khama *et al*, by early October 1895 it became obvious to Rhodes that the Chiefs could delay and immeasurably complicate his plans for the Bechuanaland Protectorate. The BSA Company should therefore content itself with getting, for the time being, a “railway strip” along the Transvaal border from Tuli in Rhodesia to Mafeking in the Cape, to be the “jumping-off ground” for the Raid. But even here Khama *et al* were “utterly obdurate” that they would not concede their respective parts of the so-called “railway strip” (the later Lobatse, Gaborone, and Tuli Blocks) directly to the Company, but only to the British government.¹⁵ This meant more delay for the Jameson Plan.

By the time Chamberlain dictated a “settlement” of the matter between the Chiefs and Company on November 6th, Rhodes was

Leicester (Daily) Post, 26 September 1895; *The Times*, 25 September 1895; *Birmingham Post*, 28 September 1895; *Birmingham Gazette*, 28 September 1895; *The Globe*, 28 September 1895; *African Review*, 28 September 1895; *South Africa*, 5 October 1895; *British Weekly*, 10 October 1895.

W. T. Stead, “Character sketch: Khama, chief of the Bamangwato”, *Review of Reviews*, 12, (1 October 1895), pp. 302-317.

Cape Argus Home Edition, 19 October 1895; *South Africa*, 28, (19 October 1895), pp. 123, 145-146; *Penny Illustrated Paper*, 28 September 1895; *Sunday Times*, 6 October 1895. The phrase originated with H. A. Bryden in *Saturday Review*, according to the *African Review* edited by H. Rider Haggard, vol XI, (July-December 1895), pp. 867-1067. It led to fisticuffs between Bryden and Haggard and their supporters on London’s Anglo-African Writers’ Club bar.

Parsons, *King Khama*, chapter 12.

apoplectic with rage at the way his plans were going astray. On November 7th Chamberlain got the message through to Rhodes to "delay fireworks for a fortnight".¹⁶

Two of Rhodes' cables from Cape Town vented his frustrations on Khama, Sebele, and Bathoen. Thus on November 12th: "It is humiliating to be utterly beaten by these niggers." And on November 13th: "I do object to being beaten by three canting natives especially on the score of temperance, when two of them, Sebele [and] Bathoen, are known to be utter drunkards."¹⁷ (Actually only Sebele drank.)

The point taken up by Jameson when he met Khama returning home on horseback after leaving the train at Mafeking, half-way between Mafeking and Pitsane on December 21st, 1895 - just a week short of the Jameson Raid.

Jameson was extremely angry at Khama for having made such a big issue of the liquor question in drumming up British opposition to the Chartered Company because he, like Rhodes, felt that the Company did its bit in restricting the sale of hard liquor to Africans. An account of the bandy between Jameson and Khama comes to us through the memoirs of one of Khama's secretaries:

JAMESON: I must tell you point blank you had no reason to visit England...

KHAMA: Dr Jameson you have got a smooth tongue; I have known you for many years. If you say I should have relied on your guardianship and peaceful intentions, can you tell me why these [Maxim] guns are in front of you? What is their object?... Your ambition is but one to kill.

JAMESON: Oh, no, no, Khama, you must not say that. I am proceeding to Mafeking on some important business... and am only going down with these guns to have them repaired.

KHAMA: No, doctor, don't take me for [a fool and] blind [man]. I can see this is an expedition which will bring you nothing but shame and disgrace. When I went over to England, I was afraid of

South Africa, 28, 358, (November 1895), pp. 288-299; Peter T. Marsh, *Joseph Chamberlain: Entrepreneur in politics*, (1994), pp. 366, 378-379.

W. T. Stead, "The Scandal of the South African Committee" London: *Review of Reviews* Office, (1899), cablegrams 14, 18, & 26.

these big guns. [But now I am not.]¹⁸

Just outside the Rhodesian "railway strip", the three Bechuana Chiefs were met by a large crowd of mounted and armed horsemen - drawn not only from the Bangwaketse and the Bakwena but also from the Bakgatla, Balete, and Batlokwa. In other words the Batswana of southern Botswana had assembled a counter-commando against the threat of invasion by Jameson's army.¹⁹ (Just like the neighbouring Boers of Marico and Rustenburg were doing.)

The Jameson raiders started out from Pitsane and Mafeking on the night of December 29th - 30th. If only they been 1200 men starting out two months earlier, rather than 500 hanging around in camp through a champagne Christmas, who knows what might have happened? The intervention of Khama *et al* seems to have made all the difference in delaying, complicating, and ultimately confounding the well-laid plans of Rhodes and Jameson.

But let the final word on Khama and Jameson be from the last *Cape Argus* editorial written before news of the Jameson Raid broke: Among the absurdest of the rumours relating to the Transvaal crisis is that which alleges that for some time the Chartered Company's forces have been quietly massing on the Transvaal frontier, ostensibly because of possible trouble with Khama, [but] really for use at Johannesburg.²⁰

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This paper has focussed on the clash of individuals - Khama and Jameson, with Rhodes always lurking in the background in South Africa and Chamberlain the main player in Britain. The figures of Rhodes and Chamberlain have long been seen by historians as representing significant interests, British colonial and British imperial, in the interplay of forces that led up to the South African War.

¹⁸ Memoirs of Ratshosa according to his son Simon - Botswana National Archives, Gaborone: S.598/1 typescript & MSS 3 manuscript Simon Ratshosa 'My Book on Bechuanaland Protectorate Native Customs, etc.' (c.1930); also quoted in Julian Mockford Khama, *King of the Bamangwato*, (1931), pp.182-183.

¹⁹ LMS: South Africa In-Letters W.C. Willoughby to LMS, 30 March 1896 enclosing circular letter of 3 March 1896 and quoting Mahoko a Becwana (Kuruman).

²⁰ *Cape Argus*, 31 December 1895.

Khama can also now be seen as the representative of significant “native” African interests, which have been ignored by historians.²¹

The success of Khama *et al.* was only partial, as only their three ‘reserves’ were denied to Rhodes in 1895, but it was crucial in that it paved the way for the whole Protectorate to be denied in 1896. The key to this success lay in their direct appeal in person to Chamberlain in London, by-passing the colonial officials ‘on the spot’ in South Africa who were in the Rhodesian camp.

Chamberlain was clearly, from our account, complicit in arrangements for the Jameson Plan. But he can hardly be said to have assisted the plot with great enthusiasm. Personally he was no great admirer of Rhodes, with whom he differed greatly over the question of “Home Rule”, and he was evidently not overjoyed at being brought into the plot so late in its gestation. Chamberlain had domestic issues as much at heart as colonial ones. He saw some concession to Khama *et al.* as a way of conciliating the provincial electorate (the “Non-conformist conscience”) which he had alienated by his opportunistic abandonment of radicalism and liberalism.

When it came to the crunch, after the failure of the Jameson Raid, the British public memory of the recent visit of Khama *et al.* gave Chamberlain the perfect symbolic punishment for Rhodes - the denial of the whole Bechuanaland Protectorate to the British South Africa Company. Thereby side-stepping the really significant punishment of cancelling the company’s royal charter.

If the Bechuanaland Protectorate had become part of Rhodesia, as planned, in 1896, no doubt the three “reserves” of Khama, Sebele, and Bathoen would have together as a “protectorate” become the equivalent of Barotseland within Northern Rhodesia. Southern Rhodesia would have enveloped them, stretching to the German South West African border. No doubt that would have resulted in very strong pressures for Rhodesia, rather than South

Honourable exception being made of my two colleagues on the same panel at the Brenthurst Library - Tlou Makhura who talked on the relationship of the 1894 Transvaal-Gananwa (Mmalebogo) War to the Jameson Raid, and Christopher Saunders who talked on the impact of the Raid on J. T. Jabavu and other Africans in the Cape Colony.

Africa, to have been given the South West African mandate after the German defeat in the First World War. If Botswana and Namibia, with their diamonds and copper and access to the sea, had been part of the Rhodesian federation in the 1950's, the history of Southern Africa might have looked very different indeed today...