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The White 🐘 Horse Press
Sheep, Scab Mites, and Society:  
The Process and Politics of Veterinary Knowledge in Lesotho, Southern Africa, c. 1900–1933

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ABSTRACT

This paper reconstructs a sheep-dipping campaign in Lesotho, southern Africa to explore the historical dynamics between local social and political circumstances, ecological change and veterinary knowledge. African livestock owners and the British colonial government accelerated a biological transition from local breeds to non-native merino sheep in the early 1900s to produce wool. Wool-bearing sheep ushered in *Psoroptes ovis*, a parasitic mite that caused the skin condition called scab. Examining colonial Lesotho’s anti-scab campaign from 1903 to 1933, its politics, ideas and procedures, improves our understanding of the past and present interplay between transnational science, farmers, governments and the non-human world. This case study of sheep-dipping and the wool industry that it bolstered shows, too, how people from across the social spectrum interacted within new regulatory communities under a colonial state. These communities, fraught with social cleavages of race and class, and geared towards capitalist production, coalesced during the anti-scab campaigns and formed the political, technical and ideological foundation on which subsequent development schemes were built. Chiefs, stockowners, herders, labourers and European veterinarians too participated in various ways in this process of producing and circulating knowledge, and transforming livestock practices and policies.

KEYWORDS

Lesotho, sheep, dipping, scab, veterinary knowledge, colonial history

1. I use *Basutoland* and *Lesotho* interchangeably. *Basotho* are the people from Lesotho, *Mosotho* is singular. *Sesotho* is the language and culture of the Basotho.
INTRODUCTION

Hoaba, a Mosotho man in his twenties, began work on a February morning in 1918. As the dipper at Ramatseliso’s Gate, a small border village in the Qacha’s Nek district of Lesotho, Hoaba dipped sheep that herders brought to the station each day. To prepare the eight-foot wide dip-tank, he filled it with water piped from a spring and stirred in Cooper’s Dip, a powder of sulphur and arsenic concocted to kill *Psoroptes ovis*, the mites that caused the skin condition known in the Sesotho language as *lekhoekhoe*, sheep scab. When animals arrived, Hoaba drafted them into an enclosure before dropping them into the tank several at once. The sheep stewed in the toxic brew for two minutes, submerged up to their throats. He then dunked their heads using a pole before they scampered up a ramp to the dripping yard and on to the drying pen. Finally, the dipper forced them upslope to graze before they trekked home. Hoaba worked this station under the auspices of Mr Hill, a European trader in the district who owned the store. Hoaba was illiterate, but he knew his job from repeating it in the varied conditions of Lesotho’s highlands: cold dry winters and hot summers with frequent thunder storms.²

But this day was different. At noon two herders arrived with 260 sheep belonging to Chaka, a local stockowner who also worked for the British colonial government as an interpreter. Hoaba pointed to the dark clouds approaching as he told the herders, Kabelo and Azariele, that the sheep must not get wet after dipping. They shrugged and urged Hoaba to get on with the task, after which they drove the flock several miles to their grazing post. The next morning they found 31 dead sheep. Deaths among dipped sheep in 1918 averaged one per cent, making this case extraordinary.³

What had gone wrong and who was to blame? Chaka and his shepherds performed postmortems and found enflamed tissues. He wrote to the British district commissioner in Qacha’s Nek to demand compensation, explaining the story as his herdboys had told it. He blamed the dipper for mixing too much powder into the tank. But the real onus was on Hoaba’s boss, the store manager Wilfred, who oversaw operations for his employer, Mr Hill. The commissioner sent a European sheep inspector to investigate. When the inspector arrived, the boys had already butchered the carcasses and feasted with others, but he did record testimonies from the herders, and from Hoaba, Chaka and Wilfred. The store manager told a different story. Wilfred claimed that the herders hurried the sheep back to the post under the hot sun after dipping, ignoring the warning that when dipped sheep overheated, their pores opened, exposing their organs to toxins. Rain posed a similar threat. In his own testimony, Hoaba said that it

2. J. Smith to Assistant Commissioner (AC), 5 Mar. 1918; J. Willis to Principal Veterinary Surgeon (PVS), 7 May 1918; Chaka to AC, 25 Feb. 1918; Statement by Hoaba, 26 Feb. 1918, Lesotho National Archives (Hereafter LNA), S3/1/6/3.

must have rained on the animals as they trekked home. The herders, for their part, insisted that it did not rain. Chaka received compensation, as was standard under law when the dipper was at fault, but it remained uncertain which combination of human error, weather and toxicity killed the sheep.4

This interaction, as seen through a collection of testimony, provides a glimpse of how a transnational veterinary model for destroying a parasite that threatened commercial wool production unfolded in a local context. The case of Lesotho, a small nation entirely surrounded by South Africa (see Map 1), is used here to open Africanist historiographical conversations to wider audiences. Unlike most colonial interventions in livestock and agriculture, anti-scab measures in Lesotho were largely successful. A survey in 1908 showed that roughly half of Lesotho’s sheep were afflicted with scab. In 1932, as the campaign ended, officials claimed that flocks were ‘practically scab free’. As Grace Carswell has pointed out in her study of soil conservation in colonial Uganda, the reasons for relative success in these anomalous cases need to be better understood.5 Qacha’s Nek district makes an appropriate focus because it hosted Lesotho’s largest sheep population, recorded the highest dipping returns and had substantial cross-border stock movements. These local textures influenced how policy was formed and implemented. By placing the micro-dynamics of this story – the politics, actors, ideas and setting – in a broader context, this article responds to questions that are applicable to global studies in environmental, agricultural, veterinary and political history. In their evaluation of Africanist environmental scholarship, William Beinart, Karen Brown and Daniel Gilfoyle, have asked whether the field has become ‘trapped in a critique of science and whether it obscures interesting and important questions about scientific and technical ideas that have provided the building blocks for understanding environment and disease in Africa’.6

Examining colonial Basutoland’s anti-scab campaign improves our understanding of the past and present interplay between scientific and technical ideas, farmers, governments and the non-human world. Key aspects of this interplay to be explored are: the nature of experts’ experiences in specific places;

4. Ibid.
the value of grasping scientific explanations for ecological phenomena, rather than seeing science only as an instrument of coercive policy; and, finally, the ways experts incorporated local knowledge and labour. This article builds on recent scholarship on eco-cultural networks in the British Empire by narrating how various actors within the colonial political economy perceived human-environment relationships, and the ways these people contributed to producing knowledge, policy and action to control *Psoroptes*. On the environmental and political history of Lesotho, this article makes new claims that resonate in other colonial pasts. Environmental scholarship has not appreciated the period between 1900 and 1933 sufficiently, nor the extent to which Africans and European experts debated, designed and often collaborated on agricultural and veterinary projects. A distinguished canon has prioritised soil conservation schemes, which although begun in the early 1900s, intensified after 1935. Following World War Two, during the so-called second colonial occupation, and after independence too, these schemes were paired with mechanisation and integrated development programmes that often ended in failure. Examining the history of sheep dipping and the wool industry that it bolstered, I argue, shows how people from across the social spectrum interacted within what Arun Agrawal calls ‘regulatory communities’. These new communities, fraught with colonial social cleavages of race and class, and geared towards capitalist production, coalesced during the anti-scab campaigns and formed the political, technical and ideological foundation on which subsequent schemes were built. Chiefs, stockowners, herders, labourers and European veterinarians too participated in various ways in this process of transforming livestock practices and policies while building a specific environmental infrastructure across a mountain landscape.

In the Africanist historiography on dipping, especially with regard to cattle and the tick-borne East Coast Fever (ECF), the emphasis has been on

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rural resistance. A close look at the processes and policies of sheep dipping reveal distinct differences from the more reviled cattle dipping campaigns. Nonetheless, understanding the colonial motivations behind dipping, especially with regard to South African ambitions to incorporate Lesotho, is a key lens. The work of one Basotho political organisation, Lekhotla la Bafo (Council of Commoners, LLB) illustrates resistance to dipping on political grounds. But this same stance also shows how politics, on all sides, distorted local perspectives of veterinary science. By the time the Basutoland government made dipping compulsory in 1923, which is when LLB began to protest, the policies and practices of dipping had been developing for fifteen years and Basotho attitudes towards it varied. Who owned what type of animals and how many, and who performed what tasks at dipping stations mattered in the micro-dynamics of government, animals, insects, people and pastures. Grasping how these dynamics shaped, and were shaped by, the politics of environmental interventions during this process speaks to how Basotho understood and
participated, or did not participate, in environmental and development programmes in later colonial and postcolonial contexts.10

**SHEEP, HISTORY, AND ECOLOGY IN LESOTHO**

Scab was first reported in Lesotho in 1903, but sheep have a deeper history that demonstrates Basotho knowledge of place, animals and veterinary health prior to the dipping campaigns. Sheep production in Basutoland expanded throughout the 1800s alongside a transition from local breeds to non-native merino sheep. Observing around 1840, Thomas Arbousset, one of the first missionaries from the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society (PEMS), noted that Basotho owned fat-tail, Nguni and merino sheep. The people who settled the eastern mountains (see Map 2) around 1880, then, arrived there with mixed flocks. Although the greater Qacha’s Nek area came under the Basutoland colonial administration in 1888, people from diverse origins settled there in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, especially speakers of Sotho, Phuthi, Xhosa and Zulu languages.11

Livestock breeds and practices reflected this human diversity. Figures from an 1875 census indicate that 83 per cent of Basutoland’s flock of 290,000


Sheep were ‘woolled’. It was unclear how many were African or mixed breeds versus pure merino with wool fleeces. Nguni sheep, for example, grew some wool and some hair. As for goats, there were 160,000 recorded in the census, mostly local breeds rather than imported angoras. The biological composition of the flock was changing fast. Arriving in 1833, Protestant missionaries brought some merino sheep into Lesotho. More than missionaries, it was likely the fluid movements of people between Basutoland and the Orange Free State (OFS) and, especially, the Cape Colony, where merinos numbered five million by 1855, that hastened interbreeding in the 1800s. The Sotho-speaking...
Batšueneng chieftainship, as an example of African migrations, fled political turbulence in the 1820s to the Cape Colony where they worked for pay in sheep and goats of various breeds. With their stock, they returned to Basutoland decades later.\textsuperscript{12}

The biological transition was important for both wool and scab. Basutoland’s sheep population expanded in the 1890s, especially after 1897 when rinderpest (cattle plague) had devastated cattle. As ample Africanist scholarship shows, cattle had been the primary economic and cultural resource for Basotho. While rinderpest killed some small stock (sheep and goats) too, the plague opened new space for sheep, and stockowners looked to wool markets for profit. Although difficult to quantify the shift from fat-tail to merino sheep, local breeds held clear advantages over merinos. The less hearty merinos were more susceptible to intestinal parasites and sensitive to mountain conditions of high altitude and cold, dry winters. Not least, fat-tail sheep grew hair as opposed to the thick merino wool where scab mites could thrive.\textsuperscript{13}

Highland Basotho used diverse sheep breeds for multiple purposes. In addition to providing food and clothing, sheep featured in practices that were evolving from numerous Sotho and Nguni-speaking groups settling the mountains. These practices shifted over time, but a sample illustrates the meanings and uses prior to, and overlapping with, commercial wool production. When the Mosotho minister Jobo Moteane visited Sehonghong in Qacha’s Nek in 1887, local chiefs slaughtered sheep to welcome him. When a bride arrived at the village of her betrothed, the groom’s father would slaughter a sheep to symbolise her welcome into the family. During the ceremony, the bride and groom sprinkled sheep’s gall for cleansing. Although a black ox was essential for funerary feasts, people also slaughtered sheep, for example, to welcome the deceased home if he had died while away. Families also killed sheep to honour newborns. To treat certain illnesses, Basotho healers, known as lingaka, used


\textsuperscript{13} There was also a shift from older goat breeds to angoras to produce mohair. Goats developed scab from a different mite, Symbiotes caprae. In Sesotho, the word lekalapense refers to all blends of non-merino sheep breeds: Afrikaner, Persian, Zulu, etc. I will use fat-tail in this general way. Faralane is the word for merinos, while linku are sheep, generally. Mokhafisi Kena, interview, 10 Dec. 2014, Auplaas. All interviews were conducted by the author in Lesotho with written consent from interviewees. All permissions, recordings and transcripts are held by the author. See James Ferguson, ‘The Bovine Mystique: Power, Property, and Livestock in Rural Lesotho’, Man 20 (1985): 647–74; G. Henderson, A Survey of Our Sheep and Wool Industry (Morija: Morija Printing, 1936); Results of a Census, 1875, p. 529; Financial and Economic, pp. 190–94.
sheep liver to make medicines. To fend off evil spirits, healers often ordered the sacrifice of a black sheep. In economic terms, Basotho bartered sheep for grain, blankets and tools. Migrant workers to farms outside of Lesotho often preferred sheep as payment. Under Sesotho law, a man accused of injuring another would pay a specified number of sheep for damages. In this way, Basotho understood sheep as smaller units of exchange or savings compared with the larger, more valued cattle. Owning large herds of cattle had long indicated political and social status for Basotho men, but as merinos became more standard, so too did owning wool-bearing sheep. Whether people preferred fat-tails to merino, or vice versa, depended on how a stockowner used the sheep and on how many they owned. People with fewer sheep often preferred fat-tails, which required less care and yielded more meat and fat. As one man recalled, ‘people knew that a handful of merinos yielded small wool, so they liked fat-tails’. Many Basotho men produced large flocks prior to merinos for both social and economic purposes, but the possibilities for cash earnings from merino wool affected changes in the ecology of sheep, parasites, pastures and people.

Basotho herding practices highlight key features of the social order within which the dipping campaigns took place. Stockowners like Chaka employed their sons, nephews or sons of debtors as balisana (herdboys). It is important to note that, apart from pigs and fowls, women had little control over livestock. Yet when husbands were away working in South Africa, as was common throughout the 1900s, women managed households, including livestock. Women’s voices are silent in the primary sources on dipping, which speaks to how they were excluded from official networks. Still, further research could yield new insights on matters of gender, sheep and veterinary knowledge. Hired boys like Kabelo and Azariele maintained flocks at mountain posts, earning food and some stock at year’s end. Balisana knew much about weather, animals, grasses, wild foods and medicinal plants, but most knew little about government veterinary policy and procedure.

While low in status in one respect, Basotho also saw shepherds as ‘very important people for the country’, in large part for their work in sustaining livestock health. Stockowners trusted balisana to look after their wealth by keeping the animals fed, watered, healthy and shorn. These were not easy tasks in 1900s Qacha’s Nek. Until the 1940s, when the government built a network of shearing sheds, herders sheared sheep at their grazing posts, which consisted of stone huts and kraals perched among crags and peaks to conserve pasture. Mountain posts were for summer grazing when weather was warmer and water and grass plentiful. On the other end of this seasonal transhumance pattern, livestock and herders survived in and around villages, generally at lower elevations. Whereas fat-tail sheep required minimal care, merinos had to be shorn consistently because their wool grew continuously, and could overheat or suffocate them. Balisana then packed burlap wool bales and transported them by donkey or horseback to trading stations. For herders, the transition to wool-bearing sheep meant more work.

In addition to moving livestock between pastures, Basotho caretakers deployed an array of veterinary medicines. Most treatments combined various plants to induce vomiting or diarrhoea to purge impurities that had been ingested while grazing, whether from noxious plants or decaying animal matter. For example, people diagnosed gall sickness in cattle (nyoko) through dry nose, lassitude and loss of appetite. Caretakers – whether herders, healers or owners – treated nyoko using processed herbs and roots as purgatives, such as hloenya (Dicoma anomala) and lebate (Cymbopogon validus). But external maladies were different. Before dipping facilities became accessible Basotho treated scabby sheep by hand with a mixture of carbolic powder and water, or smeared fat and grease over the sores. Alternatively, caretakers used tobacco-based extracts to scrub the sheep. These topical applications represented pluralist veterinary knowledge that, when applied, soothed itching and killed some mites. As an environmental control, Basotho herders sanitised kraals by burning the manure and thatch. But the biological characteristics of Psoroptes necessitated a thorough, full-body treatment.

The Basutoland government first reported scab in 1903, believing it had probably crossed the border into Lesotho during the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902). This is puzzling given the prevalence of scab in the OFS and Cape

SHEEP, SCAB MITES, AND SOCIETY

Colonies in previous decades, and the constant cross-border movements of livestock and people. Perhaps scab was less prevalent because of cooler, wetter mountain conditions; or because of less penning of sheep, at least prior to 1900, that both prevented its spread and obscured cases. Scab mites are invisible to the naked eye and reproduce quickly, colonising a sheep’s body and migrating between sheep when in close quarters. Using mandibles, they prick the skin and lay eggs that topical remedies and scrubbing cannot destroy. Psoroptes can survive without a host on stone walls or posts for two weeks. Living at the roots of sheep’s wool, the mites cause extreme itching for which animals rub vigorously against rocks, posts and each other. Eventually, wool peels off in patches. Scab destroyed the wool, but could also kill sheep if left untreated. Winter in the Maloti (Drakensberg Mountains), when scab was most prevalent, meant frigid temperatures, scarce water and dormant forage – a potentially deadly constellation. Sheep grew full fleeces during winter and huddled together for warmth, which made healthy breeding for Psoroptes.21

Although topical remedies and transhumance could not destroy Psoroptes, Basotho were continuously compiling knowledge. With respect to government-sponsored veterinary medicine, inoculation campaigns during the rinderpest had saved many cattle and so were widely embraced in much of southern Africa. Whereas some Basotho associated rinderpest with malevolent forces, particularly witchcraft deployed on behalf of government, I have found no evidence to suggest that people understood the pathology of scab in this way. At least early on, people seem to have understood lekhoekhoe as an environmental problem. In large part, it was. If caretakers could provide sheep with clean kraals, verdant pasture and plentiful water then they would stay healthy. This point supports findings from recent scholarship on African knowledge of cattle and tick-borne diseases in South Africa.22

Viewed through a wider historical lens, sheep scab had wreaked havoc since biblical times in Europe and the Middle East, where herders used various fats to dress animals. In Britain, the English first introduced legislation in 1798 to mitigate scab by controlling stock movements, something African caretakers already did through seasonal grazing practices. Australian sheep farmers in the 1800s, much like Basotho, soothed animals with tobacco extracts and animal fats until Cooper’s Dip and dipping facilities became available in the 1860s, which helped Australians nearly eliminate scab by 1870. But despite a wealth of veterinary knowledge, Australian sheep farmers did not understand scab when they first encountered it any more than did their counterparts in

the Cape Colony and OFS and, later, Basutoland. Positively diagnosing scab remains a challenge today – a fact that testifies to the importance of specialised knowledge then and now. In all cases the expertise and resources of the state, in tense interaction with local knowledge, played a central role in both framing and addressing the scab problem.23

THE POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF WOOL AND DIPPING

The Tsoelike store in Qacha’s Nek includes a grain mill, storage barns and a dipping station. In conjunction with documentary evidence, historic sites like Tsoelike provide a sense of the places where socially disparate humans interacted with new knowledge, animals, and insects. Near the shop, on a slope above a creek, two dip tanks sit side by side with the ruins of the dip supervisor’s (dipper’s) quarters just a few paces away (Figure 1). Dipping stations like Tsoelike dot the landscape of Lesotho today, though most have not dipped animals for scab in many years. Some serve as meeting places where government veterinary workers vaccinate livestock. Others operate as baths during shearing time, while some have melded back into the grassland. The stories behind these sites show how humans remade a landscape and transformed the very ideas for regulating its use by pursuing a particular capitalist project in a specific historical context.

In 1905 the British high commissioner in Cape Town governed Lesotho through a resident commissioner (RC) in the capital Maseru. The RC presided over a parallel administration in which the hierarchy of Basotho chiefs, headed by the paramount chief (PC), conducted the daily business of courts, tax collecting and enforcing veterinary regulations. Since the rinderpest, the British had expanded their veterinary authority through a modest veterinary department, consisting of a principal officer, or surgeon, and a small staff of European stock inspectors. The resident commissioner also utilised district commissioners, a government secretary and a mostly Basotho police force of 290 men, which had expanded during rinderpest to maintain cattle-free corridors on Lesotho’s borders. Although begun in the 1880s, veterinary policing combined with European expertise to form a central part of the new regulatory community during the dipping campaigns.24


In the structural sense, Basotho chiefs worked within this community as instruments of colonial power to rationalise Lesotho’s human and non-human resources. But it is also important to understand how they worked as individual policy makers and regulators. Chiefs had influenced colonial veterinary policy in the 1890s and their influence grew when the resident commissioner formed the Basutoland National Council (BNC) in 1903 to advise on matters of law, education and agriculture. In this advisory body the paramount chief, as the highest Mosotho member of the council, nominated 94 members, mostly chiefs. Paramount Chief Lerotholi (d. 1905), who was the grandson of King Moshoeshoe (d. 1870), the patriarch of Lesotho, had wanted the BNC to legislate. Instead, the RC retained authority to dismiss motions. But the RC took BNC opinions seriously, recognising that agrarian measures like dipping needed support from chiefs. In addition to chiefs, and often in opposition to them, the Basutoland Progressive Association (BPA) was an important group. A cadre of educated Protestant Basotho formed the BPA in 1907 with the aim of advancing ‘important matters relating to the prosperity and progress of all

In 1919 Basutoland exported ten million pounds of wool with 25 per cent of it originating in Qacha’s Nek. Basotho farmers had profited, if erratically, by selling grain in the Cape, Transvaal and OFS since the 1870s. For instance, wheat exports topped 100,000 bags annually ten times between 1903 and 1930, though went as low as 5,000 bags in 1906. For highland residents, as well as Basotho who kept their livestock there, wool and mohair offered the most lucrative opportunity outside, or in addition to, migrant work on South African mines and farms. To support production, the government introduced stud merino and angora rams in 1905, 1910 and 1912. Traders and wealthier stockowners purchased these rams at discount rates, or paid for their services, which few Basotho could afford.\footnote{Wool exports for 1919 were up from 1.1 million lbs. in 1895. On wool and wheat, see Financial and Economic Position, p. 190; CAR 1905–06, p. 6; CAR 1910–1911, p. 6; CAR 1912–13, p. 8.}

The distribution of livestock in the mountains, the primary means for storing wealth, was highly unequal in 1920. According to one traveller in 1921, ‘a poor man might have 20–30 sheep, an average man 300–500, and a wealthy man as many as 3000’.\footnote{R.U. Sayce, ‘An Ethno-Geographical Essay on Basutoland’, \textit{Geographical Teacher} 12 (1924): 276–78.} This scale made Chaka, whose sheep died near Ramatseliso’s in 1918, an average stockowner. But livestock was not Chaka’s only capital. His employment as an interpreter enhanced his socio-economic status and probably helped in streamlining his claim for compensation. Other well-off people had accumulated livestock by exporting agricultural goods, earning wages in South Africa or working for government. Some men were among the first families to settle a given village and thus owned rights to fertile fields, which were scarce in the mountains by 1910. People at the low end, and those with few or no animals, were widows, elderly men or families who were among the latest settlers in a village. This last group often had marginal, if any fields, or few animals with which to produce food or wool.\footnote{Chaka to AC, 25 Feb. 1918, LNA, S3/1/6/3; L. Wacher to PVS, 16 Dec. 1914, LNA, S3/1/6/5; Mokhafisi Kena, interview, 10 Dec. 2014, Auplaas; Ashton, \textit{The Basuto}, p. 173; Eldredge, \textit{South African Kingdom}, pp. 191–94.}

General traders linked the montane grasslands, sheep and herders of Lesotho to ports such as Durban and East London where wool was shipped to Europe. Although there were few roads beyond Qacha’s Nek town, several mountain passes served as official border posts. Herders like Kabelo and Azariele hauled wool from their posts to the traders. In the early 1900s a handful of European
traders bought most Basotho wool. R.E. Hill owned six stores in Qacha’s Nek including the one at Ramatseliso’s Gate. The most prominent trader in the district at the time, Hill came from Matatiele, a South African town to the south. Hill and other white traders formed a distinct social group and, to some extent, remained outsiders in a place with no white settlers. But the ways Basotho interacted commercially and personally with this group varied. Some traders spoke Sesotho well, developed friendships with local chiefs and stockowners and married Basotho.

Colonial social contours of race and class shaped relationships between buyer and seller, and employer and employee in inconsistent ways. The few Basotho with trading licenses, like Caleb Sebatane of Qacha’s Nek, faced formidable challenges related to geography, credit, supplies and law. Sebatane operated his shop from 1918 to 1930 in a remote valley, relying heavily on European traders in Qacha’s Nek town, and especially in Matatiele, for selling agricultural goods and purchasing inventory. These were the same traders who, while Sebatane applied for his license, complained that there were already too many traders in the district and doubted that a ‘Native’ would succeed. In addition to high transport costs and little cooperation from other traders, Sebatane accrued large debts by allowing local people to buy goods on credit. Furthermore, the provisions of his license prevented him from selling the license to another trader, black or white, and made sure that, when he failed, the shop would cease to operate. Sebatane and other Basotho traders and hawkers also lacked the strong political voice that white traders exercised through the Basutoland Chamber of Commerce, which had close links to the resident commissioner. But political and economic influence under colonialism could buck racial lines too. In the opening narrative, the Mosotho stockowner Chaka won compensation for his dead sheep, based largely on the claims of his shepherds, which contradicted the testimonies of a European trader and his Mosotho employee.

Chaka and other Basotho sheep farmers produced wool for domestic and South African buyers, but profits always hinged on the interplay of market prices, ecology and government policy. After 1912 the government had suspended its stud programme amid concerns by British officials, and by members of the BNC, that the grasslands could not sustain additional small stock without hastening soil erosion. This period coincided with three drought years in 1914, 1919 and 1922. Not coincidentally, these years saw the greatest increase in sheep scab. The South African Drought Commission, investigating in the wake of the 1919 drought, found that European and African extensive grazing

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30. Caleb Sebatane to AC, Qacha’s Nek 10 Jan. 1918; R. Tomlinson to AC, 8 June 1928; Paramount Chief (Hereafter PC) to AC, 27 May 1931, LNA, S3/26/10/1.
practices and overstocking had accentuated the drought’s economic impact and quickened soil erosion. The Drought Commission’s report, which included evidence from Basutoland’s head veterinary and agricultural officers about severe erosion there, called for regulating livestock movements and less kraaling. In addition to concerns about cross-border livestock and pest traffic, by 1919 officials in Basutoland and the Union of South Africa (formed 1910) recognised that erosion in Lesotho, where the headwaters of the vital Orange River system formed, could affect the river’s flow into the Union. Basutoland officials considered these reports and recommendations closely.

Yet the Drought Commission’s findings hardly slowed Lesotho’s wool boosters who insisted that improving breeds by emasculating non-merino rams, not curtailing transhumance, was the most pressing need. Stud rams were again introduced, with mixed success. In 1928 the Basutoland government provided £500 to supply traders with merino rams on credit. At the end of the year the programme had used only £329 because traders found that, although people wanted the ram services, they had no means to pay. Furthermore, many rams that were sent to mountain traders died quickly because they were poorly acclimated to the higher altitudes and weather conditions. In addition to this ecological error, the initiative catered to those who already had cash to pay for stud services. Inequality of stock ownership seemed to be widening as production increased. National wool revenues grew to a 1920s peak of £716,000 on 11.6 million pounds of fleece in 1924. Although the tonnage grew to near thirteen million pounds in 1929, the price of wool fell in the latter part of the 1920s before crashing in late 1929.

Textile manufacturers in the UK praised southern African wool quality, but the British never believed that Basutoland could earn high profits for colonial coffers, as was the case, for example, with cocoa in the Gold Coast. They did hope, though, that a wool export duty levied in 1923, along with a customs duty, wheat sales and the hut-tax on married men, could finance small development projects. To support these projects, colonial administrators, BPA members and most chiefs asserted the importance of a robust wool industry. With these revenues they hoped to strengthen local governance, erect schools and medical facilities and construct roads and bridle paths. For them, attaining these objectives in the 1900s meant producing scab-free merino sheep.

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34. CAR 1904–05, pp. 6–8; CAR 1914–15, p. 4; CAR 1926, p. 5.
EXPERTISE AND POLITICS IN ELIMINATING SCAB

Basutoland’s anti-scab campaign grew from transnational roots. In 1874, the Cape Colony passed a scab act modelled on the Australian approach of chemical dipping and controlled stock movements. The 1874 act was not compulsory, but black and white sheep owners resented its provisions to curtail seasonal grazing movements. To show active *Psoroptes* to farmers as a way to justify dipping, the Cape’s principal veterinary surgeon, Duncan Hutcheon, a graduate of the Royal Veterinary College in Edinburgh, took his microscope to the field. Farmers observed demonstrations sceptically but, for many, seeing meant believing. A government sponsored Scab Commission (1892–94) compiled two years of research to help pass the 1894 Cape Scab Act that made dipping sheep compulsory. As was the case with Australian stockowners, dipping remained unpopular. This was especially true among Afrikaner sheep farmers who were suspicious of state-sponsored anti-scab measures and of underlying British political motives. By 1900, however, the scheme had used a network of dipping stations, dip supervisors and inspectors to largely eliminate scab in the Cape. Sheep farmers, traders and veterinarians in the Cape hoped to keep it that way.35

Basutoland’s first veterinary officer, Otto Henning, began anti-scab work with this transnational concern in mind during his tenure from 1901 to 1907. A German veterinarian, Henning had immigrated to the Cape Colony in 1892. He gained local field experience first, with anti-scab programmes in the Cape and subsequently during the rinderpest when he worked as the state veterinary surgeon of the OFS. Rinderpest had devastated herds and heightened political tensions, but it also strengthened the region’s connections to international veterinary networks and spread new knowledge of animal disease and treatments. Henning came from these networks and his appointment in Basutoland was part of a broader professionalisation of veterinary medicine in the colonies where new officials had trained at European institutions in emerging biomedical approaches to animal health.36

Henning surveyed Lesotho’s flock in 1905. He found some scab in his survey, but claimed that sheep and goats were in ‘very good condition and no complaints have reached me from store keepers or native stock owners’. Henning noted that ‘Basutos [sic] do not generally house up their small stock within the walls of a kraal, but allow them to stray during the night amongst the rocks and bushes in the immediate vicinity of their village.’ Recognising the integrity of this local knowledge, he stressed that this practice ‘was prohibitive to the spreading of a disease like scab’ and ‘is much to be recommended’.37 Keeping animals fed and watered, and clear of warm environments where ticks, mites and flies lurked, was done by grazing animals extensively, whether inside or away from villages, and at various altitudes. But as political boundaries hardened and the population increased in the 1900s, transhumance became more localised in Lesotho and in South African reserves, exposing stock to more and, sometimes, new threats.38

Yet Henning failed to understand, or ignored, the fact that stock theft was increasing and that segregationist political boundaries constrained grazing space. In this context, caretakers began penning animals at night to protect from thieves. Henning focused instead on the biological and technical aspects of the problem, as shown in his 1906 educational booklet on scab. Translated into Sesotho and distributed amongst literate Basotho, it explained the life cycle of scab, how sheep contracted it, how to detect it and how to treat it chemically. To be sure, Henning disseminated new veterinary knowledge through his surveys, writings and speaking with Basotho chiefs, but he also neglected important social, ecological and political factors for understanding the problem.39

Scholars have shown that veterinary policies in the Cape Colony prioritised dipping cattle to eliminate the tick-born East Coast Fever in the early 1900s. Nonetheless, other livestock diseases and parasites, and theft too, were important concerns for sheep farmers, governments and traders on both sides of the border. In Qacha’s Nek and Quthing districts most sheep and wool crossed into South Africa through remote mountain passes. In 1907, Basutoland’s mounted police patrolled this border to prevent cattle infected with ECF from entering the territory. Scab was a new addition to Lesotho’s police agenda. On the Cape side, white farmers and the agricultural department feared that, if present patterns of cross-border sheep movements continued without adequate regulations, Cape flocks would become scabby again. The chief inspector of sheep,

37. Henning to GS, 26 June 1905, LNA, S3/1/6/1.
speaking about the southern and western borders of Lesotho, claimed that ‘the Basutoland flocks are a source of great danger to our flocks’.  

Officials in the Cape Colony and Lesotho did look beyond dipping, at least for a time. They acknowledged the complex interplay of animals, people, borders and Psoroptes by preserving some patterns of cross border migrations. Many families in Quthing and Qacha’s Nek had originally emigrated from Herschel, Mount Fletcher and Matatiele districts in the Cape after 1880, a fluid process that continued through the twentieth century. Coming from Xhosa and Zulu-speaking groups, families maintained transnational socio-ecological links, which involved moving livestock between lower, more crowded areas in the Cape and Lesotho’s mountains. These patterns served the dietary and health needs of the animals while sustaining resources within families that, as new arrivals, had often received little in the way of arable fields when settling in Basutoland.

To protect this historical link, chiefs in Mt Fletcher and Herschel had petitioned against a 1906 proclamation from the Cape Colony that prohibited all sheep and goats from entering the Cape from Basutoland unless they were dipped at the point of entry. In support of this petition, John Merriman, the Cape’s Prime Minister in 1908, pressured the Basutoland government to create a dipping and inspection system so that the 1906 proclamation could be relaxed. Of course, Merriman had hoped to facilitate commercial activity, but he added that the older regulation harmed ‘people with deep social relations and grazing needs that both transcended the border’. The Cape agricultural department passed Proclamation No. 187 in May 1908 which eased restrictions on small stock movements, yet required dipping for all sheep moving in and out of Lesotho. Continuing cross-border relations, however, would become more difficult after the Land Act of 1913, which aimed to enclose Africans and their livestock in so-called native reserves.

Calls for more chemical dipping came from other sources too. Basutoland’s Paramount Chief Letsie II (1905–1913), speaking to the Basutoland National Council in 1908, argued to expand the dipping infrastructure to make it widely accessible. There were a handful of stations then, operated by European traders and clustered around administrative border posts. Few stockowners

40. For instance, Bundy, ‘We Don’t Want Your Rain’; Chief, Div. of Sheep to GS, 20 June 1914, LNA, S3/1/6/5; Police Report, 25 Mar. 1912, LNA, S7/1/6/20; Chief Inspector of Sheep to Sec. of Agriculture, 2 Feb. 1909; GS to Sec. of Agriculture, 12 June 1911, LSK, SAB, Vol. 69, S419.
41. Mt. Fletcher Magistrate to Inspector of Sheep, 10 Dec. 1907, LSK, SAB, Vol.69, S419; Sec. of Agriculture to Inspector of Sheep, 28 Oct. 1907, LSK, SAB, Vol.69, S419; Mokhafisi Kena, interview, 10 Dec. 2014.
42. John Merriman to Dep. of Agriculture, 28 Feb. 1908, LSK, SAB, Vol. 69, S419.
patronised the first dips for several reasons. Most stockowners did not have the three-pence per head to pay the traders, as was the case in Quthing, where the assistant commissioner suggested that government take control of the dips to foster trust from stock owners. Most Basotho knew little about scab, or the purpose and process of dipping. Not least, the stations were too far from most flocks. Building dips proved difficult, even near administrative centres. The first dipping station in Qacha’s Nek, for instance, opened in 1908 after a year of construction: a prolonged process hampered by poor funding and scarce materials. Other stations lacked adequate water. Nonetheless, Letsie urged his subordinate chiefs ‘to take interest not just because of pressure from South Africa, but also to increase your wealth’. He reasoned that ‘if quality of wool improves so your wealth will grow’, which appealed to the sentiment among chiefs, large stockowners and a small group of farmers that the regional capitalist economy offered opportunities to prosper beyond migrant labour in South African farms and mines. Letsie believed, too, that certain veterinary expertise – expertise that differed from that of Basotho caretakers – was essential to create the infrastructure necessary for facilitating these opportunities.44

Basutoland got its committed expert when Frank Verney took the helm as principal veterinary surgeon in 1909, a post that he held until he retired in 1935. Verney was English-born and, like Henning, he had trained at the Royal Veterinary College before working in southern Africa during the rinderpest. Following his service in the Anglo-Boer War, Verney researched and wrote about livestock diseases in cattle and horses. He took a particular interest in the lifecycle of ticks. By the time he arrived in Basutoland he was well established in southern Africa’s veterinary circles. Verney’s professional experience endowed him with legitimacy in Lesotho’s government networks, with both Basotho and Europeans, but he now confronted new challenges that went beyond his veterinary practice. Controlling scab proved a slow process. Remembered as a strict leader, Verney demanded discipline from all subordinates, black and white, and was prepared to work incrementally to overcome ecological, technical and political challenges.45

Local ecology mattered. Dipping stations required reliable water supplies, especially during winter when sheep became weak because grass had gone dormant or had been eaten down during summer. Animals that were penned up near villages, or at mountain posts, huddled together for warmth. Poor condition, close quarters and dryness provided *Psoroptes* with an ideal environment.


During Verney’s first decade on the job, at least three drought years hampered dipping operations: 1912–1913, 1914–1915 and 1919–1920. Other than major rivers and drainages, mountain streams dried up in winter and in dry years. The Maloti offered many perennial springs, but local people used these springs for drinking and washing. Coopers Dip, or other recommended concoctions of sulphur and arsenic, contaminated water, raising health concerns for humans and animals.

Building sturdy dips was difficult, especially in the mountains where they were needed most. The meagre budget drawn from the dipping fees paid by stockowners, combined with the challenge of moving materials across mountain terrain, necessitated local supplies whenever possible. For technical guidance, the Basutoland veterinary department drew on a model produced at the Potchefstroom School of Agriculture in South Africa (Figure 2). The work of an agricultural engineer, the model included instructions for construction.

Figure 2. Model dipping tank. Potchefstroom School of Agriculture, South Africa. Source: Enslin and Cleghorne, *Sheep Dipping Tanks* (Pretoria, 1917).

and operation. Ideally, contractors would use cement, wire, wooden posts and locally quarried stone along with a patented ‘Coopers Sheep Dip Bath’, to be set into a foundation. Builders might need alternatives, depending on local circumstances. In the highest pastures, for instance, there was none of the workable sandstone that was common at lower elevations, but only the much harder basalt – a reality that meant extra cement had to be hauled to construction sites.\footnote{L. Wacher to PVS, 16 Dec. 1914; Basutoland Government: Erection of Sheep Dips: General Specifications, No Date, LNA, S3/1/6/5; B.G. Enslin and W.S.H. Cleghorne, Sheep Dipping Tanks: An Improved Design for a Circular Tank (Pretoria: Government Printers, 1917).}

In 1918 there were forty dipping stations, most of which operated under the supervision of white traders. A few were government owned. Each of the eight official border crossings into South Africa had dips. This operating system highlighted social and political fissures in colonial Basutoland. For the first half of his tenure Verney was doubtful, not only of local veterinary knowledge, but about Africans being able to learn and perform the tasks of dipping, much less those of inspection. Chiefs and sheep farmers resented this division of labour based along racial, rather than professional, lines. Furthermore, Paramount Chief Griffith Lerotholi (1913–1939) remained suspicious of the focus on keeping clean border areas, which he viewed as part of an ongoing imperial effort to incorporate Basutoland into the Union. For this reason, Griffith and his subordinate chiefs offered little support for partial dipping programmes in the 1910s. But, according to one agricultural officer, poverty, in terms of cash, was the real reason for low dipping returns. The officer explained that stockowners often pleaded with European traders to accept a sheep in return for dipping. Despite these challenges, and in addition to frequent drought, the value of Basutoland’s wool export continued to grow, as did the number of sheep dipped, if modestly.\footnote{CAR 1916–1917, p. 7; Wacher to PVS, 16 Dec. 1914, LNA, S3/1/6/5; CAR 1922–1923, pp. 7, 11; In 1908, 4.6 million lbs of wool brought £83,000 in export revenue. In 1920, 10 million lbs earned £419,000; See Financial and Economic, p. 190.}

But scab persisted. By 1923 support for proposed compulsory legislation had grown, perhaps in part because chiefs and stockowners now understood the link between scab and falling wool profits. Chief Griffith suggested that if the government was committed to prosperity in Basutoland rather than to imperial incorporation, why not offer dipping services across the territory.\footnote{Extracts from BNC discussion, Aug. 1923, LNA, S3/1/6.}

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were prohibitive. Recognising these obstacles, the high commissioner still urged the resident commissioner to push for compulsory measures.\textsuperscript{50}

In August 1923 the Basutoland National Council discussed the details of compulsory dipping, which helped create policies that eventually succeeded in eliminating scab. Verney explained the plans, answered questions and incorporated some concerns of Basotho into what became the Prevention of Scab Act, or, High Commissioner’s Notice No. 18 of 1923. A proclamation earlier that year had made dipping of sheep in government reserves (administrative capitals) compulsory. The idea was to extend these laws to include all small stock in Basutoland. Anticipating a key problem, councillors protested that it was impossible to expect owners of animals that grazed the high pastures to travel to dips. Others lamented the recently implemented wool export duty. Verney, believing that finance had always been the biggest barrier to a thorough anti-scab campaign, explained that the new export duty would fund dipping in lieu of the per head fee, which was ceased. The new revenue would also fund a construction programme that aimed to close the distances between flocks and dipping facilities by building tanks at seven-mile intervals. Stockowners, or their shepherds, would be responsible for dipping sheep twice within a two-week period. To be sure, this measure, along with the six-month shearing schedules, required a new type of discipline. But when compared to the frequent dipping required of cattle for ECF, which sparked rural protest in South Africa, the Basutoland Scab Act was less intrusive, a fact that made success possible.\textsuperscript{51}

Under the leadership of Paramount Chief Griffith, Basotho councillors debated the structure of the new regulatory community; namely, who would operate the dips and how the laws would be enforced. Chief Joseph Molapo asked if the dippers would be Basotho or Europeans, to which Verney said he had ‘the greatest difficulty in the world at finding Basuto who could do it’.\textsuperscript{52} So, he would appoint Europeans who could then train Africans for the job. Another chief from Qacha’s Nek expressed thanks that government people and not traders would now oversee dipping. For inspections to serve to enforce the laws, Verney said that European inspectors would travel to rural villages where flocks would be brought. ‘It would be absolutely necessary’, he said, to ‘have the cooperation of the chief or headman’ in gathering all animals. To this, councillors asked who would be responsible for flocks whose owners lived in the lowland areas and had no connection to local chiefs. Verney answered only that all sheep must be dipped and inspected. By the close of the

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{50} Imperial Sec. to Gov. General, 31 Oct. 1916, GG, SAB, Vol. 1854, 54/504; See also, Robert Germond, ‘The Quest: the Population Problem in Basutoland, Vol. II’, Unpublished Manuscript, p. XLIV, No Date, LNA.
  \item \textsuperscript{51} High Commission’s Proclamation No. 18 on Prevention of Scab, Aug. 1923, LNA, S3/1/6/11; CAR 1922–23, pp. 3 – 12; Extracts from BNC discussion, Aug. 1923, LNA, S3/1/6; Bundy, ‘We Don’t Want Your Rain’, 194–96.
  \item \textsuperscript{52} Extracts from BNC discussion, Aug. 1923, LNA, S3/1/6.
\end{itemize}
proceedings, the BNC supported the extension of the campaign under compulsory legislation.\footnote{Ibid.}

Basotho participated in creating and operating the regulatory community that, after 1923, enabled substantial success in eliminating scab via a dynamic process. Between 1923 and 1932 the government constructed 160 dipping stations to meet the seven-mile requirement, including many that were far from administrative capitals, missions, or border posts. To find suitable sites, the government asked local residents to identify reliable springs and the places where people drew water in order to mark locations for dips downstream from collection points. The veterinary department, working with private contractors, coordinated local labour to quarry sandstone, paying them small wages. Stonemasons, some of whom had trained at the industrial school in the capital Maseru, applied their skills to constructing tanks, drying yards, and supervisors’ quarters. In 1929, crews used 1100 donkeys, horses, and oxen to haul materials for twenty-seven new tanks, including 11 in Mokhotlong, the new district recently cleaved from Qacha’s Nek. Selecting sites, importing materials, and erecting dips brought together technical expertise learned from the South African experience with scab, local knowledge of place, and Basotho labour and building skills. With improved access to dipping services, the veterinary department dunked three million sheep in 1929, up from 350,000 in 1922.\footnote{Verney to PC Griffith Leretholi, 10 April 1931, LNA, S3/1/6/15; CAR 1922–23, p. 12; CAR 1929, pp. 20 – 2.}

But despite rapid expansion, the regulatory regime responsible for the anti-scab campaign was hardly a well-oiled machine. Basotho participation as technicians and monitors was still curbed by race and class barriers. As Wesley Mwatwara and Sandra Swart have pointed out in their recent study of veterinary knowledge in Southern Rhodesia, colonial programmes proceeded in a context where ‘political power determined which version of veterinary knowledge dominated’. This was true enough of Lesotho’s anti-scab campaigns. But because of the geographic coverage and eventual success in eliminating sheep scab, at least temporarily, these campaigns did change how people understood the pathology of scab and the state’s role in controlling it. In their study of veterinary knowledge in South Africa, Beinart and Brown have pointed out that African farmers were aware that scab was caused by bugs because they observed animals scratching or rubbing vigorously. Moreover, scab was a condition, as opposed to a disease like ECF. Scab was easier to understand from an epidemiological perspective compared to tick-borne ECF, which involved a protozoan being passed from tick to animal. This is reasonably accurate for
Basotho understandings of scab and the role of chemical dipping, especially when topical remedies and kraal burning had failed to destroy *Psoroptes.*

Still, the tensions within the actual dipping procedures and the ambiguities of the evolving regulatory framework speak to the micro-politics of knowledge and to a shifting relationship between people and the colonial state. Stockowners feared that the prescribed twice-dipping over two weeks would kill their sheep. As Chaka’s case in 1918 shows, sometimes it did. Although his loss of 31 was exceptional, fatalities were standard. Even after compulsory legislation was passed in 1923, owners could only claim compensation for deaths exceeding two animals per hundred-head. This fact highlighted the problems with the treatment as well as the need for specific expertise in a dangerous procedure that brought diverse agents together: sheep, mites, stockowners, shepherds, dippers, store managers, veterinarians and, not least, weather and water. News of a few dead animals among the dipped sometimes morphed into rumours that dipping intentionally killed sheep. This news circulated in Sesotho newspapers and at community meetings, while claims for compensation were common.

Whether or not people heeded government veterinary regulations often depended on one’s relationship to cultural brokers. That is, the characteristics of the people who translated the concepts, policies and procedures of dipping affected the level of trust between regulators and regulated. In addition to the dippers and inspectors in the veterinary department, chiefs were important brokers between government and commoners. As the charismatic younger brother of the late Paramount Chief Letsie II (d. 1913), the district chief of Qacha’s Nek, Makhaola Leretholi, exercised strong influence in the BNC. Subordinate chiefs and commoners respected Makhaola as a great chief who provided his people with residential sites, arable fields and other resources. Makhaola showed that eliminating scab should be part of his duties by supporting the Scab Act of 1923. He argued that stockowners in remote areas wanted to dip their sheep, and would do so if they could gain reasonable access to a tank, free of charge. He also stressed that the government should operate the tanks, not European traders. To colonial officials, Makhaola was an agriculturally progressive and popular chief, and they paid him well for his role in the BNC and regulatory work in Qacha’s Nek. After 1923, dipping returns were high in Qacha’s Nek, due in part to Makhaola enforcing the law and convincing people of the efficacy of dipping. But even in a district where colonial claims to veterinary and political legitimacy were filtered through a popular chief, disputes over jurisdiction, especially in remote areas, reflected personal tensions amongst chiefs and resulted in gaps in dipping coverage. Ironically, it was in


Qacha’s Nek that nine of eleven minor scab outbreaks were reported in 1933, the last year of the campaign.  

Lesotho’s chiefs were a varied bunch in terms of their relationships with the paramount chief and their views on government policies. In the northern districts of Leribe and Butha-Buthe, the most influential chiefs hailed from the lineages of Molapo and Masupha, who were King Moshoeshoe’s second and third sons respectively and, thus, not heirs to the paramountcy. Friction between Molapo, Masupha and their eldest brother Letsie mounted through disputes over political succession and land jurisdiction since before Moshoeshoe died in 1870. Stemming from this tension, the descendants of Molapo and Masupha often resisted paramount-approved measures such as dipping. Following the passage of the Scab Act in 1923, several chiefs in these districts objected to tanks at sites that they believed to be too far from their own flocks, or simply refused to dip their sheep and ordered their people to do likewise. Both examples of chieftainship, based on different relations with the ruling lineage, speak to how colonial micro-politics shaped outcomes of veterinary interventions.

In addition to chiefs, the perspectives and actions of Lekhotla la Bafo illuminate another political dimension of dipping. Josiel Lefela and his brother Maphutseng formed LLB in 1919. Their objectives were to become more independent from British governance, to restore the traditional chieftainship and to promote schemes designed to protect Basotho political, economic and cultural institutions from colonial subjugation. LLB’s members criticised the British and Basotho chiefs who enforced government policies. But from his seat in the BNC, which he had held since 1916, Josiel Lefela supported most veterinary and agricultural programmes. It was only when the resident commissioner, with broad support from the BNC, passed the Scab Act in 1923 that LLB protested. For Lekhotla la Bafo, the Scab Act compounded economic stress for poorer stockowners by levying the wool tax, requiring additional labour to bring animals to the dips and threatening the health of their animals with toxic treatments.

The Lefela brothers believed that compulsory dipping unnecessarily meddled in rural lives and environments. For some, especially those owning few


animals, LLB was right on. Speaking to followers in 1928, Josiel Lefela explained that, ‘of great affliction to the people is the poisonous dip, which kills the sheep and goats of the nation by the thousands’.60 These words echoed, among other contexts, an earlier period of Afrikaner resistance to the Cape Scab Act of 1894. Lefela drew on legitimate hazards, represented by a backlog of compensation claims for deceased livestock. But he clouded scientific realities, in part, by exploiting people’s uncertainties about scab as a biological phenomenon, its potential treatments and the role of human error in dipping casualties. Taking it further, Maphutseng Lefela claimed that South African imperialists sought to ‘exterminate, through the agency of poisonous dip, the flocks of the nation’.61 In fact, during the years of the compulsory campaign, Lesotho’s national flock expanded from 2.7 million sheep and goats in 1921 to 3.8 million in 1931. LLB strove for self-determination by extending older currents of protest against incorporation into the Union, but they also obscured useful knowledge about the pathology of and treatments for scab.62

The problem of how and why some sheep died after dipping, whether the sacrifice was worth it and for whom, remained open questions throughout the campaign. LLB leaders and stockowners like Chaka were not alone in their concerns. In Mohale’s Hoek district, Frank Verney investigated a case where a British inspector named Gardiner had dipped 460 sheep. Under Gardiner’s supervision, a Mosotho man dipped the same flock again eight days later. Ninety animals died from arsenical poisoning. In what was apparently Verney’s style, he lambasted Gardiner for mixing the dip at full strength each time to treat a visibly weak and scabby flock that was struggling through a cold, dry winter. As the scheme progressed it became clearer to officials, chiefs and especially stockowners like Chaka, that dipping required not a European or Mosotho dipper, but a competent one. Whereas Lekhotla la Bafo and some chiefs used the anti-scab campaigns and its imperfect systems to express politics, Verney, to his frustration, failed to grasp this politics and saw dipping as a technical solution with which trained human labour could solve an economic problem. The perspectives of Verney and LLB showed important dimensions for understanding a complex veterinary problem, yet missed a more holistic picture.63

In his 1933 report, Verney declared that scab was nearly eradicated in Lesotho, save a few isolated outbreaks. The campaign left a legacy with physical, social and ideological dimensions. Basutoland now had 219 dipping stations. But the personnel that built and operated the dips, and the new institutions that they formed, had a more lasting imprint on the political and

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60. LLB Address, 26 Dec. 1928, LNA, S3/22/2/3, cited in Edgar, Prophets, p. 88.
environmental history of Lesotho. The ten-year compulsory campaign ‘was carried out by nine Europeans and three hundred trained natives’, a statistic that indicated significant Africanisation of the veterinary ranks. Verney admitted that his leadership style of ‘extreme discipline’ with his staff often got him ‘disliked in the process’. But he claimed that he had ‘loyalty and cooperation from district commissioners, police officers, chiefs and headmen and herdboys’. Ideologically, the knowledge that scab resulted from a microscopic insect that was embedded in local ecology, and could be destroyed through certain chemicals and procedures, seems to have become widely adopted.

1933, however, was not a year for celebration in Lesotho. Wool prices had fallen from ten pence per pound in 1928 to two pence in 1932, raising alarm among wool growers and harming the overall economy. But the key event was the 1933 drought when ‘rivers never known to be dry had dried up’, and ‘the mighty Orange [River] was standing in pools’. Harvests were negligible. Many people starved. A national flock that had grown from 2.4 million in 1911 to near four million in 1931, shrank 47 per cent over the next two years, resulting from sales, slaughter and starvation. In the midst of this ecological and economic disaster, the focus of agricultural and veterinary departments at local, regional and global levels shifted towards overgrazing, vegetation change and soil erosion. It is likely, too, that government support for sheep and wool, and the energetic response by larger stockowners, contributed to these ecological changes. For Basotho veterinary workers, many left the sheep dips and inspection tables to serve as soil conservation foremen, agricultural demonstrators or labourers in an expanding Department of Agriculture, which included a veterinary and livestock division. With the anti-scab campaign in the rear view, with all of its trials and tribulations, the Department of Agriculture and the Basotho who made this institution function on the ground moved into a new phase of interventions.

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64. CAR 1933, p. 12; CAR 1934, p. 13.

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CONCLUSION

In 1932, officials declared that Basutoland was ‘practically clear of scab.’ Although there would be outbreaks in later years, this contrasted to 1908 when half the national flock was infected and officials doubted if dipping could succeed. Although contemporary African and European observers hailed the campaign as a success, citing it as proof that veterinary science could triumph over the fiscal, geographic and cultural obstacles which planners believed were formidable in Basutoland. Viewed one way, this process rationalised Lesotho politically and economically, making it more legible by ingraining capitalist discipline in its people, institutions and landscape with export production of wool as the goal. As evidence of this trend towards state controlled modernisation, the 219 dip tank areas were carefully mapped and subsequently used for enumerating livestock, collecting taxes and gathering census data on rural lives and ecologies.

This is an important perspective, but it veils important micro-dynamics that tell us about the changing relationships between politics, science and environmental and health problems. This narrative has highlighted how socially disparate actors – from Hoaba the dipper and Chaka the stockowner to Chief Makhaoela and Frank Verney the veterinarian – worked for, and sometimes against, bringing a service closer to people and their suffering animals. This analysis affirms, as Beinart, Brown and Gilfoyle have suggested, that by looking beyond the coercive nature of colonial policies we gain new insights on how people have engaged with veterinary science and environmental problems as historical processes. Careers of experts, particularly those who spent extended periods in one place like Frank Verney, must be considered when examining local people’s experiences with transnational ideas. Although Lesotho’s anti-scab campaign succeeded in some ways, this is not a flat story of the triumph of science and technology over nature; nor is it a validation of colonial regimes and modernist development schemes. It is an exploration of tense political and social relationships during an effort to apply acquired knowledge to address a problem that was new in a specific place. Putting the specific place at the centre of an ecology of humans, non-humans and ideas illuminates the ways people engage with professional networks today within governments or other agencies, be they aimed at veterinary or agricultural challenges, or those of human health.

69. CAR 1932, p. 11; AC, Maseru to GS, 11 April 1908, LNA, S3/1/6/1.
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