

Answer to missionaries' query & objections owing to unhygienic conditions & killings.

S.K.23/6/24/407

Sekukuniland 19th April 1926.  
P.O. Secocoenis. Tvl.

Secretary for Native Affairs.  
P.O. Box 384.  
Pretoria.

Circumcision Schools.

With reference to Identical Minute N.A.20/366 of the 9th instant the following are the particulars in regard to Sekukuniland :-

(1) Circumcision Schools are prevalent throughout the whole District. They are held when the crops are good or even fair, but not in years of drought or calamity such as when the cattle were shot for East Coast Fever, or at such a time as the Influenza of 1918. Last year there were schools everywhere; most of the boys' schools finished last August and the girls' schools (which go out on the same day that the boys finish) have in several cases only been completed this April.

There is no diminution in the general prevalence of the schools.

(2) It is said that in very ancient days the circumcising was done with a sharp flint stone. Later this gave place to a piece of sharpened iron.

Nowadays the operation is done with a knife which the headman keeps specially for that purpose and it is never used for anything else.

The youths are operated upon alongside a running river or mountain stream. Each one is done separately out of the sight of the others and the operators' hands and the knife have to be cleaned in the stream after each individual operation. I only know of one instance in which the above practice is not carried out in Sekukuniland, owing to lack of water at that centre: there the operator cleans his knife after each operation by passing it through a grass broom containing certain medicines but I do not know the medicines.

Generally speaking the methods are not unhygienic and the operation is as clean as untutored natives can make it, though a modern doctor would doubtless advocate sterilizing the knife every time to make sure and avoid all danger, especially in the case of a possible syphilitic.

I have made a study of these Schools and have questioned many natives who have told me openly and freely about them. They say they cannot recollect any boy dying of blood poisoning or bleeding to death, though I daresay out of several thousand operations there must be some such instances.

Nowadays after the operation a youth is not made to go out hunting so long as his wound is not healed,

(3) The practice of taking life for breaking a tribal taboo



taboo exists mainly in the memory of old natives and in the imagination of some Evangelists and others who are opposed to the Schools.

In the old days when the "mediti" or watchers were fewer and the schools larger and harder a youngster might attempt to commit the worst possible offence, that of running away from the school, in which case he used certainly to be killed. Nowadays the mediti are more numerous, the schools are more spread out among the headmen and therefore smaller and in any case fear of the consequences prevents the taking of life. A truant nowadays is certainly recaptured and brought back to the school, but he is thereafter kept separate from the others. I personally know of a boy named Edgar Ngake who ran away from Chief Pasha Nkoane's school and was recaptured, he is very much alive today.

Formerly a youth might be killed if he went out by the entrance to the sleeping place instead of by the exit. Nowadays the mediti take better precautions to prevent this "crime" and in any case the youth would not be killed.

In the old days they would kill a girl who spied on the school but old Sekukuni stopped this practice long ago. Such a girl is now taken to the Chief who makes her parents pay a heavy fine privately.

Killing may be said to have ceased in the Sekukuniland schools years before 1899, as these natives were afraid of it coming to the ears of the Republican Government who kept a close watch on the Bapedi of Sekukuni.

Some weak or sick natives die during the school period and their deaths are kept a secret till the end of the school. Perhaps this practice may raise some suspicion in the eyes of friends who had known the youth ~~was~~ before he entered the school.

Every headman in Sekukuniland, certainly since I came here (18 years ago) comes to office and asks permission to open a school. I have met schools hunting and have turned out many schools to come hunting with me. They do not look upon me as a stranger to avoid. At the close of a school those near Schooneoord come in a body naked and smeared with fat and paint to the office to be assessed for tax.

The Bakoni in this District used to make their Bodikane and Boguera phases continuous while the Bapedi used to separate the phases by a year or even two years. Nowadays owing to the difficulty of collecting the school again (as after its dispersal its members may have been kept at work on contract in Johannesburg or elsewhere) the Bapedi are adopting the old Bakoni custom of joining the two phases consecutively, making it thus longer and therefore perhaps a harder strain than was the case a few years ago.

In old times the Bodikane used to be six months, now it is about three and the Boguera is two months.

The circumcision school is still cherished as the most sacred event in the life of a man, and in these days of loosened tribal morale it is the one period of discipline they undergo and respect.

*D. J. Hunt*

SUB-NATIVE COMMISSIONER,  
SEKUKUNILAND.



S.M.A.

## Circumcision Schools

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I have made a study of these schools & have questioned many natives who have told me openly & freely about them. They say they cannot recollect any boy dying of blood poisoning or bleeding to death, though I daresay out of several thousand operations there must be some such instances.

Nowadays after the operation a youth is not made to go out hunting so long as his wound is not healed.

(3) The practice of taking life for breaking a tribal taboo exists mainly in the memory of old natives & in the imagination of some evangelists & others who are opposed to the schools.

In the old days when the "mediti" or watchers were fewer & the schools larger & harder a youngster might attempt to commit the worst possible offence, that of running away from the school, in which case he used certainly to be killed. Nowadays the mediti are more numerous, the schools are more spread out among the headmen & therefore smaller & in any case fear of the consequences prevents the taking of life. A truant nowadays is certainly recaptured & brought back to the school but he is thereafter kept separate from the others.

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D. H.



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