

## The name of the fourth river: A small puzzle presented by a fragment of Kora, for Johan Oosthuizen<sup>1</sup>

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Menán du Plessis

Department of General Linguistics, Stellenbosch University, South Africa  
E-mail: Menan.du.Plessis@gmail.com

### Abstract

This squib is a brief venture into the minor sub-branch of Linguistics known as Toponomastics, or the study of the meanings and sources of place names. The topic is suggested by a previously unpublished fragment in the Khoekhoe variety once spoken by the Korana Khoi of South Africa, in which four rivers (*haka !gariku*) were mentioned by Piet Links. While the names of three of the four are easily established, it is the identity and the original Khoekhoe name of the fourth river that is sought here. Various early records are consulted and compared for the purpose, and the original Khoekhoe names of three major rivers within the Vaal-Gariep system are proposed. In conclusion, the identity and name of the fourth river most likely to have been intended by Piet Links is arrived at.<sup>2</sup>

**Keywords:** Toponomastics, South African river names, Khoekhoe toponyms, use of older Khoisan records, South African indigenous knowledge

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<sup>1</sup> Although our paths first crossed briefly many years ago when we were both still associated with the University of Cape Town, I really only had the privilege of getting to know Johan Oosthuizen from 2013 onward. I have learned much from him over these past few years, some of it imparted in his beautiful Afrikaans, and some of it through gentle example. Among the things I have learned about the man himself is his rich range of interests, which extend far beyond Linguistics, formal or otherwise. He is a great bibliophile, and once confided to me his delight in having picked up a particular treasure at a bookstall, on the origins of South African place names. Many of these names come from Khoisan languages, of course, and as my small tribute to Johan, I have chosen to follow up on this with a small squib in the form of a genre piece located within the minor but fascinating branch of linguistics known as as Toponomastics. The South African tradition of such studies began with Rev. Charles Pettmann, who presented a few preliminary observations of an onomastic nature in an early work (1913), which he followed up with a study of South African place names (1931). The study of southern African toponyms came to maturity with the remarkable work of Gabriel Nienaber and P. E. Raper, who presented their detailed studies of more than 4,000 names in a set of three volumes (1977, 1980), now greatly sought after.

<sup>2</sup> I am most grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers for suggesting a less tentative approach: taking this advice on board has led to what I hope is a more tightly argued paper, without loss of caution where appropriate.

## 1. Background: The Khoi and their names for rivers and other sources of water

As a matter of sheer survival, the early nomadic pastoralists of the Cape, who came to be known as the Khoi (or Khoikhoi),<sup>3</sup> were intimately acquainted with every vital river, spring and waterhole throughout the semi-arid region they regularly traversed. As Gabriel Nienaber and P. E. Raper (1977, 1980) show in meticulous detail, they have left behind their toponyms for several thousand of such features across southern Africa. If the presence of a water *source* was the single most significant motif in the place names bestowed by the Khoi, the second was the description of terrain, where this could include *qualities* of the local water (Nienaber and Raper 1977 A\*: 58). The terms used to signify these features survive in numerous South African place names as approximations of the original Khoekhoe<sup>4</sup> names (usually without the clicks), or else in the form of loan translations. The examples given in Figure 1 are only a small selection of such words.

It is also clear that the Gariep (or Orange River) was a major point of orientation for the Khoi clans. William Burchell, for example, observed that the Korana:

... designate the Bushmen living south of the Gariep by the names of 'Kusa'kykwa or 'Kusakwa, which imply 'men beyond the river'. Those who inhabit the northern side of that river are called Nusakwa.

(Burchell 1824: 331)

In the original Khoekhoe variety, the two terms approximated by Burchell would probably have been !Nūsal'aikua "Far clans" and !Nusakua "Near people", with the masculine plural suffix – *kua* in both. This interpretation is based on the fact that Lucy Lloyd (1879) obtained a similar set of distinctions from Piet Links, including the term !Nusan for the "Near people" (and !Nannil'ain or "Shore clans" for people who lived along the banks of the river).

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<sup>3</sup> Neither of the terms Khoi or Sān refers to a language grouping. The term Khoisan, moreover, does not refer to a single language or even a language family, but is used by linguists as a convenient umbrella term for at least three different families of languages in southern Africa, namely the KHOE, TUU and JU families. The question of any relationships between the three groups continues to be keenly debated.

The languages that belong to the large KHOE family are divided into a number of sub-groups. While the languages within the *linguistically* defined Khoekhoe branch were mostly spoken in the past by communities of nomadic herders – identified by ethnonyms such as Khoi (also Khoikhoi or Khoekhoen), after a common Khoekhoe root meaning "person" – the numerous varieties within the Kalahari branch were and still are spoken by people often referred to as Sān. (Some of the older colonial names for the Khoi people are today considered profoundly offensive, and where these occur in the historical texts quoted here, the term Khoi has been substituted in their place.) Languages in the Khoekhoe branch of KHOE include dialects of Nama, Dama and Hailom still widely spoken in Namibia, as well as disappearing or extinct varieties of South Africa, such as Northern Cape Nama, Giri (Xiri or Xri), Kora (or !Ora) and Gona (or Xona). Languages within the Kalahari branch of the family are divided into the sub-groupings *Kxoe*, *Naro*, *!Gana*, *Shua* and *Tshwa*, each of which (with the exception of *Naro*) is constituted by several dialects (Vossen 1997).

Some of the Sān communities of western Botswana, eastern Namibia and southern Angola speak entirely different languages, belonging to either the TUU family (so-named by Tom Güldemann 2004, previously !Ui-Taa (Westphal 1971) or Southern Bushman (Bleek 1927), or the JU family (Bleek's Northern Bushman). The names !Ui-Taa and JU were coined by Ernst Westphal (1971), who based them on the typical word for "person" in each group. On the same principle, Westphal initially referred to languages of the Kalahari branch of KHOE as Tshu-Khwe (Bleek's Central Bushman).

<sup>4</sup> The term Khoekhoe is used here in a generic sense, to signify any of the varieties belonging to the Khoekhoe branch of the KHOE family.

Another indicator of the prominent place of the Gariiep in the conceptual landscape of the Khoi comes from an old Korana tradition collected by the missionary Carl Wuras:

In ancient times the whole nation of [the Khoi] lived close together along the banks of the Vaal and Orange Rivers. Their chief settlement called ‘Chei am aub’ [!Hai am läub “Settlement on the Vaal”] was not far from the junction of the Vaal and Orange Rivers. But in consequence of a great quarrel which arose amongst them, they divided. One part of their nation went in the direction of Cape Town and settled there; another part went down the Orange River, and the Korana, the greatest and richest tribe, remained.

(Maingard 1932: 112-113)

Kora words for types of water sources, typically the second term in a compound.	
Kora	Gloss
<i>ammi</i> ,    <i>gammi</i> ,    <i>gamma</i>	water
! <i>arib</i> , ! <i>garib</i>	river
!' <i>ab</i>	stream, rivulet, spruit
! <i>xubis</i>	vlei, pan
<i>kx'aus</i>	spring, well
<i>müb</i>	source, eye
<i>kx'amma</i> , <i>kx'ams</i>	mouth
<i>onna</i>	bend, knee, hoek
‡ <i>kx'urub</i>	artery
<i>xanub</i>	drift, fordable stretch, poort
Kora descriptive terms, typically used before a noun.	
Kora	Gloss
/' <i>üb</i>	salt
‡ <i>kx'oxa</i>	salty
‡ <i>xon</i>	sweet
<i>xuru</i>	sour
<i>kx'ao</i> ~ <i>kx'au</i>	bitter
<i>xati</i>	white
<i>kx'aba</i>	red
‡ <i>nū</i>	black
<i>hai</i>	yellow, pale,
! <i>kx'am</i>	green
!' <i>oa</i>	brown
‡ <i>xai</i>	shine
/' <i>uib/s</i>	stone
<i>xaeb</i>	sand
‡ <i>oas/b</i>	clay, mud
!' <i>am!ā</i>	deep
<i>gama</i>	crooked

**Figure 1:** A small selection of Kora terms (Meinhof 1930: 78-119) that could be used to refer to water sources and qualities of water, and which were frequently incorporated into place names. Note that in the Kora language, !*garib* was usually reserved for a great river, and even

specifically the Gariiep or Orange River, whereas *!’ab* referred merely to a stream or rivulet. In Nama, however, *!āb* is used for a river in general. In the Eastern Cape, some of the old river names appear to have incorporated *!gammi* or *!gamma* “water”. (The ending of a noun with *a* in the citation form was a characteristic feature of Kora and eastern varieties of South African Khoekhoe.)

Lastly, the Khoi clearly had a systematic knowledge of the interconnections between rivers that contributed to particular systems. The Nama language, for example, has more than one term for a confluence, including *!gamme* and *dāu†gā!nāgu*, both meaning “flow into one another”.<sup>5</sup> Two adjacent or converging rivers were sometimes given the same name, but distinguished as greater and lesser by means of words such as *kai* “great” and Kora *!ā*, Nama *†khari* “little”. Other words used to mark such relational distinctions included colour terms, as in the case of the White Guruchab and Black Guruchab near Keetmanshoop in Namibia.

## 2. A puzzle

Given the extensive Khoi knowledge of southern African river systems, the small Kora text quoted below is puzzling. The fragment (1) is a brief remark that was made by Piet Links to Lucy Lloyd (1879), evidently as a kind of codicil to his story about the Cave of Origin.<sup>6</sup>

- (1) *Haka !gariku kie !nā kx’ab !nā hã,*  
*i !nāb !hũb kie kie !ou*<sup>7</sup>  
*!nammi i !goe !garibi kie hã.*<sup>8</sup>

<i>haka</i>	<i>!gari-ku</i>	<i>kie</i>	<i>!nā</i>	<i>kx’a-b</i>	<i>!nā</i>	<i>hã</i>
four	river-3mp	TOP	that	cave-3ms	in	stay (=COP)
<i>i</i>	<i>!nā-b</i>	<i>!hũ-b</i>	<i>kie</i>	<i>kie</i>	<i>!ou</i>	
CONN	that-3ms	master-3ms	TOP	REM.PST	go [show?]	
<i>!nam-mi</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>!goe</i>	<i>!gari-bi</i>	<i>kie</i>	<i>hã</i>	
riverbank-3ms	CONN	lie	river-3ms	REM.PST	stay (=COP)	

“It was four rivers that were in that cave,  
but it was the Englishman who showed

<sup>5</sup> In the Namibian orthography, the circumflex is used to indicate nasalisation of a vowel. All Nama examples in this text are given in the official orthography for the Namibian Khoekhoe dialects (also known collectively as Khoekhoegowab). In these conventions, the glottalised clicks are written without any additional letter after the click symbol, while clicks represented with a following letter *g* are in fact plain (that is, voiceless unaspirated). The letters *kh* after a click symbol indicate velar frication, and are equivalent to the *x* used for Kora.

<sup>6</sup> The story will appear in the collection of heritage texts included in *Kora: A Lost Khoisan Language of the Early Cape and the Gariiep* (Du Plessis forthcoming).

<sup>7</sup> Lloyd pencilled in *!kũ* (“go”) as a possible alternative for *!ou*.

<sup>8</sup> Lloyd translates the last line as “point out this was a river”, but it is not clear what verb she had in mind. Engelbrecht recorded *!gau* with the meaning “show, point out”, and this could have been the verb given by Lloyd as *!ou* in the second line, while *!goe* in the last line is more likely to have been the postural verb “lie”. Although Kora was partially recorded by several older writers, including the missionary Carl Wuras, Lloyd was the first linguist to offer a record of Kora, and it is understandable that her pioneering work would have reflected many uncertainties. She nevertheless laid a firm foundation for the work of later scholars.

it was a river lying along a bank.”

The sentence is a little difficult to parse. However, if we accept the interpretation handed down by Lloyd, which must have been given to her by Links himself, the general sense is that, although there were originally believed to be four rivers in the Cave of Origin, it was the “white man” (or Englishman)<sup>9</sup> who demonstrated that they converged into one course.<sup>10</sup> In the context of this piece, the rivers alluded to would have been tributaries to the Great River (the Gariiep or Grootte Rivier). The major rivers that contribute to the Vaal-Gariiep system are shown in Figure 2.

There is a subterranean stream of bitterness that runs through some of the Kora narratives dictated to Lloyd by Links, and in the case of the fragment above, we should be wary about taking at face value the flattering attribution of superior knowledge to the coloniser. In reality, given the extensive body of indigenous knowledge alluded to in the introduction, it is unlikely that the original inhabitants would have been unaware of the geographical facts in question. We know, for one thing, that the Korana and other Khoi clans of early South Africa distinguished a Yellow (or Pale) River and a Black River, as the names !Hai!garib and †Nū!garib respectively indicate. The first name is preserved in the Afrikaans translation still used today for the Vaal River; and while the second river is nowadays often still referred to as the Orange, it is alternatively known to many as the Gariiep, while it may also be referred to by the Sotho name Senqu, especially in its upper reaches. One of the major tributaries to the Vaal is the Harts (or Heart) River, named after a Korana community who lived on its banks and took their name of Heart (Kora †aob) from one of their chiefs.<sup>11</sup> Piet Links himself came from the town formerly known as Mamusa (now Schweizer-Reneke), which is situated on the banks of the Harts.

Given their regional prominence, it is reasonable to assume that three of the four rivers Piet Links had in mind would have been the !Hai, the †Nū, and the †Aob. What remains unclear, though, is the identity – and more specifically, the original name – of the fourth river implied by his reference to *haka !gariku* (where *haka* is the Khoekhoe word for “four”, and *!gariku* is the plural form of the masculine singular noun *!garib* “river”). The remainder of this squib constitutes a small expedition to try and discover the identity and name of this last river.

### 3. Candidates for the “fourth river” alluded to by Piet Links

It is fair to set out with the assumption, on both historical and geographical grounds, that the best candidates for the fourth river of Piet Links are the Vet, the Modder and the Riet.

#### 3.1 The Vet (“Fat River”)

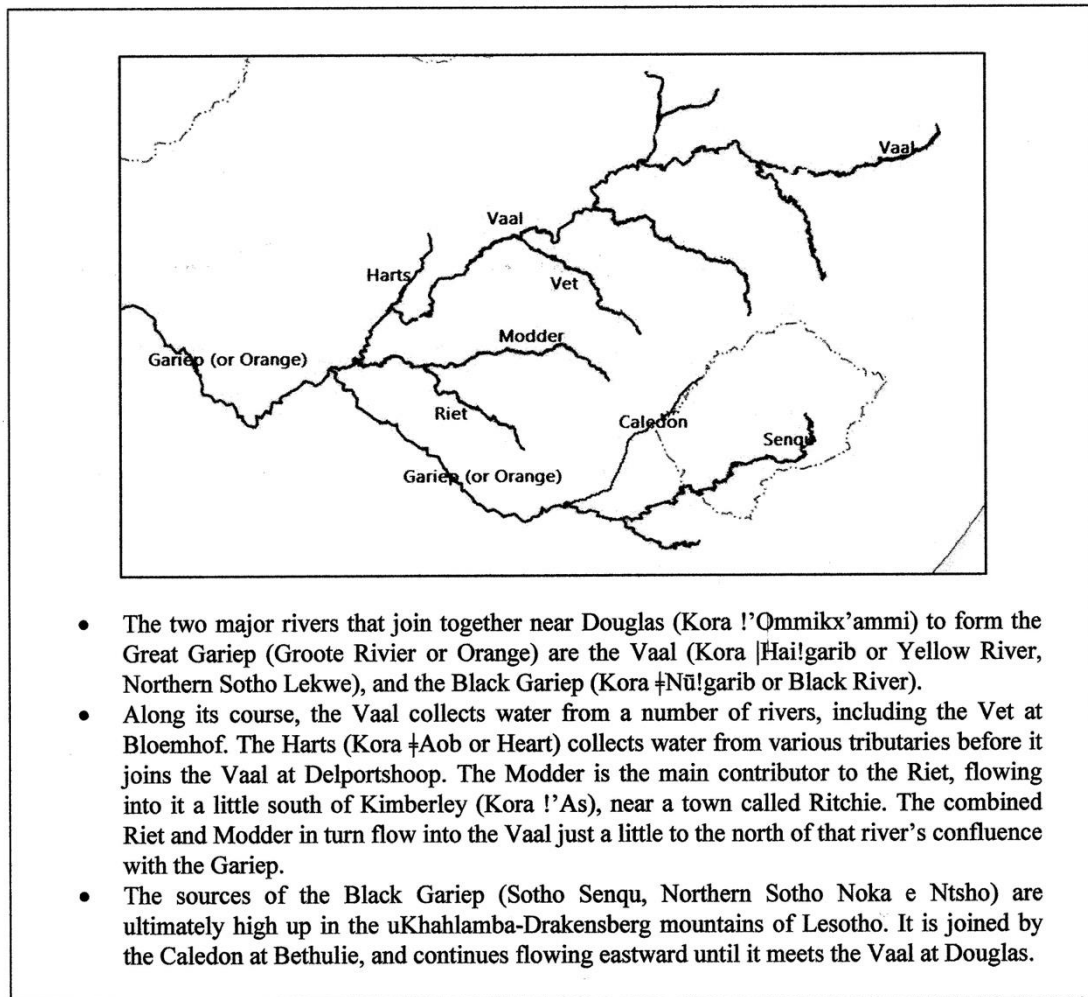
The river known today as the Vet was certainly significant to the Korana people. The surviving members of the Links clan interviewed by Louis Maingard in the 1920s and 1930s lived at

<sup>9</sup> Although *!hūb* typically means “master” or “white man”, there are cases in the Links narratives where the word is contrasted with Burib “Boer, Afrikaner”, so that it then appears to refer specifically to an “Englishman”.

<sup>10</sup> In fact, it was the Dutch-born Robert Gordon who was the first European to trace the full course of this river, and who in 1777 re-named it the Orange in honour of the Dutch royal house.

<sup>11</sup> It is this community that was intended by the name Taubqua in one of Robert Gordon’s maps (Forbes 1965: Map 15).

Bloemhof, which is situated at the confluence of this river with the Vaal.<sup>12</sup> (The Links clan (ǀ'Aremǎǎl'ǎis) is the one to which Piet Links himself belonged.)



**Figure 2:** The Vaal-Gariep river system of South Africa

The most probable source of the name Vet is the Khoekhoe word *ǀnuib* “fat”. Certainly, the use of this word – albeit with the feminine singular suffix *-s* – was recorded by Theophilus Hahn in the context of one or more Namibian river names (Nienaber and Raper 1977 A\*\*: 934). Though it might seem an unusual choice as a descriptor, it is likely that the epithet was used particularly of a river that abounded in fish. This is suggested by lines from the Nama “Praise of the Sea” collected by Kuno Budack (1977), where the closing imprecation addressed to the ocean, is:

<sup>12</sup> A major dam was built at the site in the 1960s.

- (2) *Dâu re* ‖*nuitse*,  
*Dâu re* ‖*ganxa tsa* ‖*gamtse*

dâu re ‖nui-tse  
flow PTCL fat-2ms

dâu re ′ gan-xa tsa ‖gam-tse  
flow PTCL meat-full.of 2ms water-2ms

“Flow, O fat,  
Flow, you water rich in meat.”

There is a South African river with a name recorded at an early date as Nuy (Forbes 1965: 51-52). This might well be seen as an attempt to suggest ‖*nui*b, particularly since the salient prenasalisation of the click would have been noticed by an attentive observer. This name has been plausibly interpreted, however, as a reflection of the Khoekhoe word †*hũib* “Cape willow” (Nienaber and Raper 1977 A\*\*.: 942). Another South African river name that might have been a match for ‖*nui*b “fat” or ‖*nui*xa “rich in fat” is Dwyka – except that the meaning of latter was recorded in 1776 as “salty” (Forbes 1965: 50), so that the name in this case is more likely to have been based on Khoekhoe |*ũb* “salt” (with diphthongisation of the vowel). In order to illustrate the difficulties and even the perils that may arise during excursions of this kind, it might be noted in addition that South African rivers are not uncommonly named Klip (or “Stone”), where the original Khoekhoe name would have been based on yet another word of a broadly similar shape, namely |*uib* “stone”.

Despite the lack of direct historical evidence, it is reasonable to suggest, all the same, that the original name of the Vet would have been ‖*Nui*b or ‖*Nui*xa.

### 3.2 The Modder (“Mud River”) and the Riet (“Reed River”)

These two rivers are mentioned often enough by their Dutch names in the early Cape records, and yet there is considerable confusion concerning their original names. One of the main reasons for this is that, prior to the 1840s, neither the four basic clicks of the Khoekhoe languages<sup>13</sup> nor the diverse features that may contrastively elaborate them<sup>14</sup> were accurately distinguished, while there were no established conventions for representing them. The following preliminary note highlights the difficulties (some of them already foreshadowed above) that can arise as a result.

<sup>13</sup> The four basic Khoekhoe clicks are: dental (ǀ), lateral (ǁ), (post)alveolar (ǃ) and palato-alveolar (ǂ).

<sup>14</sup> Nama has a voiceless unaspirated (plain) series for each click, plus four possible elaborations (or accompaniments). Kora had two further series in addition to the five it shared with Nama, so that each of its four clicks could be characterised as: plain, glottalised, delayed aspirated, fricated, prenasalised, voiced (that is, with audible release of the uvular closure), or with affricated ejective release of the uvular closure. The prenasalisation of a click is strongly audible, and early observers usually captured its presence. The two accompaniment types referred to as glottalisation and delayed aspiration are associated with a latent prenasalisation that becomes audible when the click is preceded by a vowel. The salient nature of the delayed ejection or aspiration accounts for those cases where it is the only feature that seems to have been heard and recorded by early observers. In other cases, the pre-nasalisation was evidently the main feature heard.

### 3.2.1 Difficulties presented by older records of Khoekhoe names

Some of the earliest attempts to record indigenous place names occur in the journal of the Ensign Isaq Schryver, who in 1689 led an official expedition to the east, to visit the Inquahase Khoi. His entries include notes such as those set out in (3) below, from the transcription by E. C. Godeé-Molsbergen (1922: 98-123):

- (3) *de plaats werd van de [Khoi] Kaukou, dat is een Steekdoornsrivier genaamt*  
 “the place is called Kaukou by the [Khoi], that is Steekdoorns river”

*een loopende rivier bij de [Khoi] Kamnasij genaamt*<sup>15</sup>  
 “a running river called Kamnasy by the [Khoi]”

*Dese plaats werd bij de [Khoi] Humtata genaamt*  
 “This place is called Humtata by the [Khoi]”

*een rivier, van de [Khoi] Tuhata, dat is Oliphants rivier genaamt*  
 “a river called Tuhata by the [Khoi], that is, Oliphants River”

*de plaats van de [Khoi] Naukoti, of Roodsand geheeten*  
 “a place named *Naukoti* by the [Khoi], or Roodsand”<sup>16</sup>

As the examples show, no attempt was made to represent the clicks that must have occurred at the beginning of several of these names – as in the case of Tuhata, which was no doubt based on the Khoekhoe *!xoab* “elephant”.

From this point onward, and continuing throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century and well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, various brief wordlists were compiled, and many more original place names were entered on to charts and noted in journals (Forbes 1965). By the early 1800s, some earnest attempts at a systematic representation of the clicks began to appear, for example, in the work of Henry Lichtenstein, who adopted the notation of the missionary, Johannes Theodorus Van der Kemp (Lichtenstein 1815, vol. 2, Appendix I, fn.), and William Burchell (1822: 251-255). Others, however, continued to use only vague conventions, typically involving the letters *t* or *k* in combination with an apostrophe, to indicate little more than the presence of some undetermined click. The examples in Figure 3, from William Somerville (Bradlow and Bradlow 1979: 90-93), show how inaccurate such notations could be, even where the writer’s use of different combinations of letters and apostrophes might be supposed by the reader to reflect a meaningful range of contrasts.

Despite these inevitable shortcomings, it is in many cases still possible to deduce what the sketchy representations in older records were attempting to convey, particularly when they date from the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This is for two reasons.

Firstly, although the guides hired by travellers of this period usually still spoke their own native Khoekhoe variety (Cape Khoekhoe, Kora or Giri), they were by this time almost universally

<sup>15</sup> The Kamnasij was the river known today as the Kamanassie, for which Sparrman obtained the translation “Washing Water River” (presumably from a word resembling Kora *!kx’ā* “wash”).

<sup>16</sup> It is difficult to recognise any Khoekhoe roots meaning either “sand” or “red” in Schryver’s *Naukoti*.



also fluent in Dutch, and freely supplied translations of their own names for rivers and other geographical features. William Burchell, for example, writing in 1811, explained (1822: 186) why “places in the following part of our route, not frequented by the colonists, should bear Dutch names.” It was “only necessary to repeat,” he said, “that the usual language of the Klaarwater [Khoi] is Dutch, and that these names are frequently the mere translation of the aboriginal names, which latter they never make use of when conversing in the Dutch language.” There is no guarantee, however, that the meanings of very old place names offered by the local Khoi were necessarily correct, and the potential for spurious folk etymologising should not be discounted. A case in point involves the river name Tsomo, which was reported (Forbes 1965: 53) to mean “sore eye”, no doubt on the basis of words resembling Kora *thũ* “ache, be sore” and *mũb* “eye”.

Somerville's Kora (1801)	Meinhof's Kora (1930)	Gloss
<i>kamma</i>	<i>ammi</i> (~    <i>gamma</i> )	water
<i>T'gow-'quaip</i>	<i>kx'aokhoeb</i>	man
<i>T'gaup</i>	ʒ <i>ao̱b</i>	heart
<i>T'gamām</i>	<i>xamab</i>	hartebeest
<i>T'Gowp</i>	<i>kx'aus</i>	spring, fountain
<i>T'Gei</i>	<i>ai</i> (~    <i>gai</i> )	strong
<i>'Gnabāāp</i>	! <i>nabas</i>	rhinoceros
<i>T'seip</i>	!' <i>aeb</i>	fire
<i>T'soomme</i>	<i>hommi</i> (~    <i>hummi</i> )	cloud
<i>Ts'gow</i>	' <i>ō</i>	die
<i>'Ts'goom</i>	' <i>om</i> (~   ' <i>um</i> )	sleep
<i>'Ts'oom</i>	ʒ' <i>ũ</i>	eat
<i>T'Kāāp</i>	!' <i>ab</i>	river
<i>'Tkōāp</i>	ʒ' <i>xoab</i>	elephant
<i>T'kamerōpy</i>	<i>amorob</i> (~    <i>amirob(i)</i> )	star

**Figure 3.** A selection from William Somerville's Kora wordlist (Bradlow and Bradlow 1979: 90-93), compared with the much later representations of the same words by Carl Meinhof (1930: 78-119). This list includes examples of all four clicks and all seven click accompaniments of Kora.

Secondly, older representations of original Khoi names can sometimes be correlated with names that were more accurately recorded at a later date. Even so, given that a generic indication of a click (for example, as *t'* or *k'*) may have stood as the place-holder for any one of four clicks, with up to seven potential accompaniments – giving a total of 28 possibilities – a degree of tentativeness is seldom out of order when it comes to the use of older records.

### 3.2.2 William Somerville's record of river names

William Somerville, mentioned above, was one of the travellers who explored South Africa during the key period when the original names were still widely in use, while at the same time most of the Khoi who lived closest to the Cape were already proficient in Dutch. Like many before him, Somerville made conscientious attempts to record the original names of the rivers encountered by members of his party. In 1801, for example, he wrote as follows:

We left the banks of the Gareep, ascending by a rugged pass to the North over several heights which were covered with quantities of loose stones. [...] About 80 or 100 miles higher up or to the NE is the complex of two rivers, a day higher a third joins, and about the same distance a fourth. They all bear the name Gareep. The Southernmost is said to flow from Storm Berg behind Snew Berg and Renoster Berg, and is that which Mr Barrow visited – called the T’G’noo Gareep or Black Gareep. The second greatly inferior in magnitude is the T’s’maam Gareep or White Gareep. These two run westerly – the former a little south. The 3<sup>rd</sup> or T’sKābā Gareep or Red Gareep is equal in volume of water to the Black Gareep. The 4<sup>th</sup> T’Kaup Gareep or Heart Gareep runs NE, is similar to the 2<sup>nd</sup> – never small enough to dry up – but sometimes its water ceases to run and is only found in deep pools.

(Bradlow and Bradlow 1979: 87-88)

The names of the four rivers given by Somerville are collated in Figure 4.

River name [modern]	Somerville (1801)	Kora [probable original]
Gariep	Gareep	!Garib (below confluence with Vaal)
Gariep/Orange/Senqu	T’G’noo Gareep	‡Nū!garib (Black River, above confluence with Vaal)
Vaal	Gareep	Hai!garib (Pale or Yellow River)
Riet [?]	T’s’maam Gareep	[?] (“White River”), Somerville’s second river
Modder [?]	T’sKābā Gareep	[?] (“Red River”), Somerville’s third river.
Harts	T’Kaup Gareep	‡Aob!garib (Heart River), Somerville’s fourth river.

**Figure 4:** Compilation of the names of rivers mentioned by William Somerville (Bradlow and Bradlow 1979: 87-88)

### 3.2.3 Somerville’s T’sKābā Gareep or “Red River”: the Modder?

In the name of Somerville’s third river, T’sKābā seems immediately and unproblematically recognisable as the Kora word for “red”, *!kx’aba*. This is easy enough to link to the name Modder (“Mud”), given that the term “red” could well have included a connotation of “clay” or “red ochre”. The picture is somewhat complicated, however, by the circumstance that various other early travellers recorded the original name of the Modder as the Gmaap or Maap. William Burchell, for example, wrote in 1811 that:

The name Gariep, is applied only to that part of the river below the confluence; while the branch that begins at that place where we were now stationed, is called the T’ky-gariep or Ky-gariep by the natives, and the Vaal Rivier by the Klaarwater [Khoi]; which in English may be rendered by Yellow River. While the Nu-gariep is, in the same manner, called Zwart Rivier, and Black River: and the stream which we intended next to visit, the Gmaap or Maap, translated by Modder Rivier and Muddy River.

(Burchell 1822: 391)

The difficulty here – assuming that they refer to the same river – is to reconcile the two representations T’sKābā and Gmaap.

The source of Gmaap has been sought by a number of authors (Nienaber and Raper 1977 A\*: 419-420) in the Khoekhoe word for “mud, clay”, †*goab*. Certainly, Burchell’s letter combination *Gm* can be interpreted as an attempt to indicate a click combined with a sound resembling a voiced velar (or post-velar) stop, which is to say, a click that might be described as voiced. The version written with the letters *Gm* moreover suggests the presence of an initial nasal. It is noteworthy in this regard that one of the last Kora speakers produced an isolated token of a click that featured not only voicing (which is to say, an audible release of the second (post-velar) closure), but also prenasalisation (Du Plessis forthcoming) It is puzzling, nevertheless, that Burchell so specifically implied the presence of a *bilabial* nasal. (This point will be returned to below.) Lastly, the final consonant in Burchell’s Gmaap can be interpreted readily enough as the Khoekhoe masculine singular suffix *-b*, which is typically devoiced by speakers.

The matter might seem to be decided: and yet, the unsatisfactory matching of the rhymes /aap/ and /ɔap/ is an undeniably problematic aspect of the proposed source for Gmaap in †*goab*. Nienaber and Raper (1977 A\*: 420) cite an alternative proposal by Van Vreeden, who, noting the common enlistment of colour terms for the purpose of naming rivers, suggested that the original form of Gmaap or Maap was perhaps †*Gama!āb* or Brown River. The elision of the click in the second part of the name would be consistent with a tendency noted by Burchell (1824: 253-255) in the case of compound words; and while *!’ab* was more commonly used in Kora for “stream”, its use with the meaning “river” was nevertheless recorded by Somerville, as seen in the extracts from his wordlist quoted earlier (Figure 3). On the other hand, the colour term †*ama* “brown”, while it occurs in Nama, was never recorded in Kora.

Kora had a word of its own for “brown”, namely *!oa*. Meinhof (1928/1929) additionally recorded the use of this root as a borrowed term (for one of the coat colours of horses) in the N!uu-like !Ui language, †*Ungkwe*, where it notably occurred with pre-initial nasalisation, as *n!oa*. If it was alternatively this root rather than †*gama* that was intended by Gmaap (perhaps *n!oa!ab* > *n!waab*), this would have the advantage of helping to account for Burchell’s indication of an initial nasal. The same problem arises as before, however, in connection with the rhyme.

If, however, Burchell’s Gmaap and Somerville’s T’sKābā were attempts to represent the *same* river name, then it is an alternative possibility that Gmaap did not include the masculine singular suffix *-b* at all, but rather reflected the loss of an unstressed final vowel. What is more, if the source for both T’sKābā and Gmaap(a) was *!kx’aba* “red” (as in red ochre, clay or mud) then the cases for †*goab* “mud, clay”, *n!oa* “brown” and †*ama* “brown” as potential sources for Gmaap fall away.

It remains perplexing, though, that Burchell so clearly indicated the presence of a voiced velar (or post-velar) stop, as well as a bilabial nasal in Gmaap. The fact that the *G* is omitted in one version (Maap) raises the possibility that it was intended to suggest a click rather than an ordinary egressive segment. The tendency for a click to be dropped is consistent with the little that is known (Meinhof 1930: 145-152; Beach 1938: 326; Lloyd 1879) about the Khoekhoe variety (Giri, Xiri or Xri)<sup>17</sup> formerly spoken by the Griqua people. In view of this, it is

<sup>17</sup> Giri was clearly much closer to Nama than to Kora in respect of its phonetics, morphology, lexicon and syntax. It did not have the eastern Kora click accompaniment of the affricated uvular ejective, but may have preserved a series of voiced clicks. At the same time, it was characterised by the occasional elision of a click, and a frequent raising and fronting of vowels and diphthongs.

significant that Burchell identified the Klaarwater Khoi as the sources of some of his information, since more than half of the people who made up this community<sup>18</sup> were originally from clans of the West Coast, which included the Grigriqua.

The Giri varieties also did not have the eastern Kora click accompaniment of the affricated uvular ejective, so that Griqua speakers would have had *l'aba* rather than *l̥kx'aba* for “red”. The glottalised click, as it happens, is associated with a latent prenasalisation, which Burchell would have heard when the word was used in certain phonetic environments. It is also noteworthy that one of the last Kora speakers occasionally began with a bilabial closure as she was preparing to make the hold for a dental click (Du Plessis forthcoming). A similar phenomenon, if it was detected by Burchell, might explain his use of the letter *m*.

For the sake of completeness, it is necessary to mention one last historical record, this time of an old Sotho name for the Modder. Writing about the period during the 1820s when Moshoeshoe became established at Thaba Bosiu, Ellenberger (1912: 150) described the attempt of the Marabe to join the king in his mountain fortress, and mentioned that, on being temporarily thwarted, their leader “accordingly had to go to Qhaba (Modder River)”. The Sotho language has only a few click words, all of them featuring only the (post)alveolar click (!), in either the plain form, or else aspirated or prenasalised. Just as Nqu in the name Senqu for the upper reaches of the Gariiep seems to be a Sotho approximation of *†nū* “black”,<sup>19</sup> so Qhaba may have been the Sotho realisation of *l̥kx'aba* “red”.

The connection with the Sotho name leads us back via a circuitous route to Burchell’s indication of a bilabial nasal at the beginning of the name Gmaap, since it is difficult to ignore the fact that the names of rivers in Sotho-Tswana and Nguni languages commonly feature the Class Three prefix, as *mo-* or *mu-* respectively. While we do not know the meaning of the Sotho name Qhaba, it is equally difficult to ignore the fact that the Xhosa word *-qaba* means “paint, smear with clay, ochre” (where the clay might be white or red). What all of this might mean is in the end by no means clear, but it should encourage us, at least, to be open to the possibility of rather complex early scenarios of exchanges and reciprocal influences.

All things considered, nevertheless, the point has been reached where it can be claimed with reasonable confidence that the original name of the Modder would have been *l̥kx'aba* among the Korana people, and *l'Abā* among the Griqua.

### 3.2.4 Somerville’s T’s’maam Gareep or “White Gareep”: the Riet?

Finally, on this last leg of the quest to determine the identity and name of Piet Link’s fourth river, it is left to contemplate the name given by Somerville as the T’s’maam Gareep or “White Gareep”. This name is altogether an enigma, since the word for “white” in Kora was *xati*, while in Nama it is *!uri*. At the same time, it is not even entirely clear whether the meaning “white” was supplied as a direct translation or as an alternative name. There are nevertheless a few other historical sources we can turn to for comparison, especially since the river systems of the Eastern Cape were equally well-known to some of the Khoi clans. The names White Kei and

<sup>18</sup> The town of Kaarwater, originally named *!Arilamma*, was inhabited by people from different backgrounds, some of whom were referred to as Basters. At the urging of the missionary, John Campbell, the citizens changed this offensive name to the historically sourced Griqua, and the name of their town to Griquastad.

<sup>19</sup> The Northern Sotho name of the river, *Noka e Ntsho*, literally means “Black River”.

Black Kei, for example, which are used to this day for two of the major tributaries to the Great Kei, are believed to have been given by the eastern Khoi.

Anders Sparrman reported hearing in 1776 from travelers who had ventured much further east than his own party that:

The more considerable rivers which run through the country [...] are said to be only the following: t’Kamsi-t’Kay, t’Nu-t’kay, Little Zomo, Great Zomo. [...] From t’Kau-t’kay, or the great fish river, to t’Kamsi-t’kay, or white river, they reckon seven days journey.

(Sparrman 1785, vol 2: 146)

Since the first component of the name reported by Sparrman as t’Nu-t’kay<sup>20</sup> is transparently †nū “black”, while the first part of t’Kau-t’kay is clearly †’aub “fish”, it is reasonable to conclude that t’Kamsi would have been an equally fair approximation of an original word meaning “white”. Promisingly enough, Sparrman’s T’kam- bears a resemblance to Somerville’s T’s’maam, which was used in a similar context, apparently with a similar meaning. The only impediment to declaring the equivalence of these two words – and a shared meaning “white” – is that there are no obvious affines for them in other Khoekhoe languages. (The Nama term †gam†gamsa ‘clear (like water); bright’ (Haacke and Eiseb 2002: 247) may be the best candidate, though it is only a distant possibility.)

It seems that a different route is required, and in particular, the possibility should now be considered that the name given by Somerville was rather the source of the Dutch name Riet (“reed”). Words for “reed” in Kora included †hāb and †’āb, where the click accompaniments in both cases, namely delayed aspiration and glottalisation respectively, are associated with a latent prenasalisation that becomes clearly audible when the click is preceded by a vowel. This might explain Somerville’s indication of a nasalisation in his representation, T’s’maam. What is more, it was a regular pattern in some dialects of Kora for a nasalised vowel to be followed by an epenthetic nasal segment, and for the masculine singular suffix -b to assimilate to this nasal in turn (Du Plessis forthcoming). This means that †hāb “reed” would have been reflected in these dialects as †hām.

It is now suggested that an archaic word resembling Somerville’s T’s’maam and Sparrman’s T’kam – and originally meaning “white” – was re-interpreted as a local dialectal word for “reed”, and that the name of the Riet was in all likelihood †Hām.

#### 4. Conclusion

At the conclusion of this small and winding expedition, what has been arrived at is a set of the most likely original Khoekhoe names for three of the major rivers that contribute to the Vaap-Gariep system. These are †Nuixa for the Vet, †Kx’aba for the Modder, and †Hām for the Riet.

<sup>20</sup> Sparrman’s record clearly indicates the presence of a click in the original name, which makes it unlikely that Kei was simply the Khoekhoe word *kai* “great”. That the word must have begun with a click is also suggested by the record of the Ensign Beutler (Crampton, Peires and Vernon 2013), who in 1752 gave the name of the river variously as IJ, Y and Key. Nienaber and Raper (1977 A\*: 677-679) conclude that the most plausible origin is the one obtained by Beutler directly from his guides, who said that the name meant “sand” (Kora †xaeb).

While all three rivers were undoubtedly significant in the lives of the indigenous communities, the fact that Sotho-speakers borrowed the name for the Modder in particular (as Qhaba), while, on the other hand, the original names for the Vet and the Riet are only just traceable, suggests that the |Kx'aba was the pre-eminent river of the region. Given that this is the general region Piet Links came from, it is overwhelmingly likely that the fourth of the *haka !gariku* or “four rivers” he had in mind would have been the Modder, or |Kx'aba.

### Abbreviations

2ms	Second person masculine singular
3mp	Third person masculine plural
3ms	Third person masculine singular
CONN	Discourse connective
COP	Copula
REM.PST	Remote past tense
PTCL	Particle used for politeness with the Imperative
TOP	Topic

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