



# TIME TRAVEL

## SAN-KHOI TIME TRAVELS

for the region in the Cederberg and Olifantsrivierberg mountains, either side of the Olifants River, October 1410, before the arrival of the Europeans.  
(The Time Travels could be anything between 200-1487 AD)



## Background, relations between hunter-gatherers and pastoralists in the region

In the mountains either side of the river live /Xam speaking groups of hunter gatherers who move regularly between small shelters and caves, occasionally building small windbreaks of bushes in the open. They often move in family or two family groups during the winter when food is scarce and widely dispersed. Some on the western side of the river move toward the coast where they have relatives, although this means a risky trek across the sandy coastal plains where people with sheep and cattle are sometimes encountered.

These /Xam subsist by hunting occasional large game, snaring small steenbok, ambushing dassies that have strayed too far from their rocky homes, fishing in the river pools, collecting tortoises that they chance on and, most importantly, by gathering underground bulbs, corms and tubers. Work is shared but men do the large game hunting and women the bulk of the plant gathering.

These /Xam have mostly good but cautious relations with the sheep owners to the north and west, although they are very wary of any groups of pastoralist that they don't know well.

These pastoralists call themselves Grigiriqua, or Namaqua or Cochoqua and refer to the /Xam in derogatory terms as Sonqua which means bushpeople or even as Obiqua which means robbers. These strained relations reflect very different attitudes between the hunters and the pastoralists when it comes to the many sheep and the few cattle owned and grazed in the region. For the /Xam a stray sheep or cow means a good meal for many people, whereas for the Grigiriqua it is an insurance against bad times. Of course it could be eaten and will be one day when other meat is rare, but sheep and cows are needed to pay for wives and to gather together to show a man's wealth and power.

Hunters like the /Xam often travel a few miles away from their normal territory and steal a sheep or two from pastoralists who they don't normally interact with. This probably is the origin of their reputation as robbers. They sometimes camp with friendly pastoralists they know well, however, although they build their windbreaks near the edge of the kraals, keeping more or less to themselves. They visit with gifts of elephant ivory or ostrich eggshell beads that they can trade for a sheep or perhaps a broken pot. It sometimes happens that one of the pastoralist men offers to marry

one of the young /Xam girls and this result in the handing over of a cow or a few sheep. After these marriages there are relatives of hunters among the pastoralists, which help to build good relations. Hunter men never get to marry pastoralist girls, though, as their fathers always want them to marry other pastoralists to earn sheep and cattle to add to the father's wealth.

Relations around the Olifants River are, therefore, quite complicated and occasionally break out into disputes over stolen animals, the correct payment for a young girl, the appropriate exchange rate for a necklace of 100 beads or from outright raiding between pastoralist groups. Some of the leaders of larger groups, those usually with the most cattle, are called upon to arbitrate on these occasions, but not everyone accepts their decision. One recurrent argument is about who owes what to whom. The /Xam own very little of value to pastoralists and believe that the correct 'payment' for a wife is for the husband to go and work for his new in-laws, hunting and bringing in meat for them. Pastoralists have a more direct system whereby the husbands' family hands over an agreed number of sheep or cows for the wife, although there are always arguments when a marriage doesn't last. The actual marriage ceremony, however, is always great fun with lots of eating, drinking, singing and dancing.

Some years back, one group of pastoralists, the Grigiriqua, lost almost all of their sheep and cattle to raiding Cochoqua, who denied the charges and refused to give any animals back. This resulted in unusually close relations between the Grigiriqua and the /Xam as the pastoralists had to rely more on gathered foods for a while. They eventually managed to loan some sheep and cattle from the Namaqua to the north and within a decade or so had increased their herds and flocks back to the original sizes. They knew that the veld in the sandveld was not nearly as good for sheep and cattle herding as the plains to the south and north where Cochoqua and Namaqua lived.

The /Xam were always tempted to steal a good number of animals and move off substantially to the Karoo in the east where they were sure the pastoralists could not follow. On the rare occasion that a group tried this, the animals died of hunger or were quickly eaten by the /Xam who then had to return and take their chances with the angry Grigiriqua or Namaqua.



## Scenario, Grootkloof (Algeria), a /Xam site is visited by Grigiriqua people. Theme of the Time Travel: Living with differences

Local /Xam groups have gathered together around a series of deep pools in the heart of the Cederberg, as always at this time of year. There should be enough water here for the unusually large number of people, about 38 this year, and the women will have to work very hard to keep a good supply of roots and corms. It's quite early in the corm season, but there are lots of dassies in the rocks and steenbok in the river plains. These meetings are always enjoyed because people get very tired of moving around in small groups and look forward to meeting family and kin for a few weeks. There are always a few arguments but mostly it is a chance to party, to dance and sing, to tell stories and keep up with the news.

Many are coming from the Karoo to the east and are not used to these mountainous slopes and cliffs. This year a group of Grigiriqua from the west are expected because one of the young men has fallen for a /Xam girl and wants to marry her. Her family is not sure whether she should and the girl is very unwilling to go off to a place where she hardly knows anyone. The /Xam older men and women are hoping they will finish a large frieze of eland they have been painting in a local cave for the last two visits. It is an important part of their teaching of younger people about the importance of the eland herds to the /Xam of these mountains. The /Xam are 'people of the eland'.

### Roles

Some of the learners are /Xam, some are visiting Grigiriquas.

The adults are also divided into these two groups of people.

Wedding couple.

### Key questions/issues to discuss

Living with differences.

There are two ways of living –

Grigiriquas own property and accumulate their fortune; a society with leaders, where wealth and power is shown.

/Xam are living on what nature gives and have very little property, a more equal society, totally dependent on nature, friends and sharing of goods.

Can we live together in peace in spite of differences in language and ways of living? How do we overcome our suspicions? Is there even an advantage in compromising?

What is the next step for my group of people for better relations with the others? Is the wedding a good idea?

### Activities

Wedding preparations

Build a windbreak for the visitors

Make paint, make paintbrush, paint an eland frieze

(/Xam), handprint (Grigiriquas)

Try bow and arrows (/Xam), assegai (Grigiriquas)

Tracking (/Xam)

Make medicine

Prepare food

Make necklaces

Listening to stories

Trading of goods

Dancing

Make stone tools? (/Xam)

### Timeplan

09.00 Welcome of learners, read the landscape, repetition of scenario

Dress up, presentation of characters

09:40 Initiation, Grigiriquas arrive at the /Xam site,

suspensions, trading

listening to a story.

10.00 Activities and discussions begin

12.00 Food, common discussion, trading

Agreement on a wedding

Dance

13.00 Ending ceremony, evaluation

13.30/14.00 Learners leave

