

## 1. Description

### 1.1 Name of society, language, and language family

- Xhosa, Xhosa, Niger-Congo

### 1.2 ISO #

- 639-3: xho (1)

### 1.3 Location

- South Africa including Lesotho and Swaziland 29° 00' S and 24° 00' E (1)

### 1.4 Brief history

- The Xhosa are one of the biggest and best known of all the Bantu tribes. They have the longest association with the white race because of the early European settlers who explored the Cape. In their history, they have never been conquered or made inferior to any other Bantu tribe. However, they have history of war. Because of their colorful dress, which is cotton or wool dyed a deep-brick red, these people are sometimes known as "Red Blankets." Today, they still practice rites, customs, and live by a code, which has been passed from father to son. The Xhosa culture is based on superstition and magic rules their lives (2p13.)

### 1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors

- Africans sought asylum with the missionaries for a variety of reasons. Some were refugees from war and some could no longer provide for their families. However, "The missionaries were passive and sometimes active participants in the struggle to undermine and destroy the authority of the chiefdoms" (3p353.) This made it difficult for people to join missionaries. The missionaries of the Anglican, Presbyterians, and Methodist churches brought education to the people of the Xhosa tribes. They were run by teachers and preachers and regulated by the government of British colonialism. Political alliances were being formed by the 1880's (3p353.)

### 1.6 Ecology

- The climate of South Africa is warm and temperate. It is in a subtropical location and is surrounded on three sides by water. The terrain is rugged and relatively dry. Grass and trees cover the landscape for the most part. Like many tribes, the Xhosa survive by farming. The most common fauna of this region is cattle. The Xhosa use cattle for many purposes including food and agriculture.

### 1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density

- The population of the South African countries is 7,817,300 (1.) The mean village size is based on how many clans there are. Many clans live together and are descendants from one family. There may be up to 25 clans in a village. Individual home size differs on the amount of children they have (3p194.) The Xhosa tend to have large families but numbers may differ depending on sterility factors (2p54.)

## 2. Economy

### 2.1 Main carbohydrate staples

- Mealies, pumpkins, corn, beans, and lentils are the main staples. "New varieties of grain and vegetables are gradually being introduced by European farmers and traders" (4p393.)

### 2.2 Main protein sources

- The main protein sources are cattle and beans (4p393.) The Xhosa also enjoy fattened milk and beer (4p399.)

### 2.3 Weapons

- Spears, some for throwing and some for stabbing, clubs, shields, and guns, which were introduced since 1750. There is an art of throwing the assegai, or spear, which has to be acquired by practice (4p77.)

#### 2.4 Food storage

- Baskets and barrels are methods of food storage (4p398.)

#### 2.5 Sexual division of production

- In the Xhosa tribe, “when a new hut is to be built, all men and women of the neighborhood help with the work.” In the building process, the women take care of smearing the walls with cow dung (2p27.) The men are the masters of their homes, take care of the livestock, and are usually the wealth of the family. The women carry everything on their heads and can balance many shapes. They are responsible for cooking and household chores (2p37.)

#### 2.6 Land tenure

- The Xhosa are under the Natives’ Land Act of 1913. It sought to consolidate the efforts made the settler colonies to prevent Africans from acquiring land. The African population had small tracts of land set aside from the white community (3p194.)

#### 2.7 Ceramics

- “Variations in the design and decoration of pottery are associated with the growing importance of cattle, and they begin to appear in Iron Age sites in Eastern basin by 900 A.D.” (3p30.)

#### 2.8 Specified sharing patterns

- Tobacco is a traditional present to give and is often shared. Gifts such as this are gratefully received (2p37.)

#### 2.9 Food taboos

- For girls it is taboo to eat kidneys, animal rectums, and birds. Boys are not to eat edible native herbs or tails of cattle (4p356-7.)

#### 2.10 Canoes/Watercraft

- No water transportation found.

### 3. Anthropometry

#### 3.1 Mean adult height

- Height for men and women has not been measured but in pictures they appear to be average height.

#### 3.2 Mean adult weight

- Average weight for men and women has not been stated.

### 4. Life History, Mating, Marriage

#### 4.1 Age at menarche f.

- Not found

#### 4.2 Age at first birth

- No specific age but women are expected to have children after marriage.

#### 4.3 Completed family size

- “The Xhosa have large families and they regard fertility as a blessing.” The women of the Xhosa bear their children without any fuss. It is common to have midwives. (2p54)

#### 4.4 Inter-birth- interval

- “Nature has generously endowed Xhosa women and they are able to feed their babies up to an advanced age.” However, “so long as a mother is suckling a child, another baby must not be conceived” (2p61.)

#### 4.5 Age first marriage (m and f)

- Males and females are betrothed at a young age. Either the parents of a girl take the first step towards seeking a husband or a young man takes the first move and seeks a wife (4p227.)

#### 4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce

- Divorce in the Xhosa tribe is not common and law does not provide punishment for the husband (4p283.)

#### 4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously

- “Xhosa law allows a Xhosa man to have as many wives as he likes as long as he can afford the lobolo (dowry) for them. [...] In some Xhosa families multiple wives is a tradition and the heir always has more than one (2p53.)

#### 4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry

- Most fathers ask a marriage payment of anything from seven to fourteen head of cattle for their daughters. The payment of the “lobolo” (dowry) is paid with installments and the groom is allowed to take his bride and pay the rest as he earns it (2p42.)

#### 4.9 Inheritance patterns

- “The law of inheritance follows a specific pattern among the Xhosa and a man has only a limited say as to what must happen to his own possessions when he dies. Women and girls do not inherit.” If the man has no sons, then his brother or nearest relative takes preference over his own wife and daughters (2p53.)

#### 4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict

- In most clans, the husband is not allowed to see his wife or baby for the first four days. He doesn’t have much contact with either the wife or the baby until the wife is out of confinement and has little to nothing to do with bringing up the baby. When the children are older they are expected to help support the family. They must obey their parents and honor tribal customs and traditions (2p57-61.)

#### 4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals

- None found

#### 4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy)

- Usually, the tribes marry into the same family clans. If necessary they find suitable partners outside of the community but with adult guidance.

#### 4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible?

- No evidence of partible paternity.

#### 4.14 What is the belief of the mother’s role in procreation exactly?

- Beliefs on procreation not found.

#### 4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process

- Information on conception not found.

#### 4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape

- In cases of rape it was treated as a civil case, where guilt was proven and the offender was fined such number of cattle as were considered appropriate (4p62.)

#### 4.17 Preferential category for spouse

- In most cases the parents choose the future husband or wife but sometimes sweethearts can get away with marrying each other (2p74.)

- 4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?
- Females do not have sexual freedoms. They may have sweethearts but sex before marriage is strictly forbidden. Having a sweetheart when a girl is young and she must have the consent of her mother. The female's future husband is up to her parents and she does not have the opportunity to marry more than one man (2p74.)
- 4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring
- Tobacco is a traditional gift to give in the Xhosa tribe. They give it to employees and it is greatly received (2p37.)
- 4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?
- In the situation of death of a mother the children would be taken care of by different females in the family.
- 4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females
- None found
- 4.22 Evidence for couvades
- None found
- 4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers
- None found
- 4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?
- Children in the Xhosa tribe are always expected to respect their parents.
- 4.24 Joking relationships?
- None found
- 4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations
- The pattern of descent in the Xhosa tribe comes from the father's side of the family. Some property, however, cannot be distinguished as to who receives it (2p53.)
- 4.26 Incest avoidance rules
- "A the case of incest is treated as a civil law case, by the imposition of a fine. Incest, however, apart from law is regarded with horror by the Xosas, on the account of its violating the marriage custom affecting the degrees of consanguinity (4p62.)
- 4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?
- Before the wedding an animal is slaughtered. Afterwards, the bride is accompanied by her bridesmaids, chaperon, and master of ceremonies for a walk from their hut. It is at a very slow pace to the wedding site. The wedding takes place around midday. During the ceremony, the bride is always unveiled (4p232.)
- 4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name?
- A child is "named at any time within, perhaps, the first year and this is done quite unceremoniously and without any function. The Xhosa have no vocabulary of common names and a child might be called anything that sounds appealing to the person naming it" (2p59.)
- 4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community?
- Marriage is usually preferred to be within the community. In special cases one may marry outside of the community if they have permission.
- 4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)?
- Marriages are arranged most of the time by the parents. The preferred spouse is someone from inside the community for both males and females. Marriage is "not an affair of the heart and is not traditionally the culmination of courtship (2p42.)
- 4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who

- None found

### Warfare/Homicide

4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare

- No specific percentage given

4.15 Outgroup vs Ingroup cause of violent death

- Most fighting is done outside of the tribe.

4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing

- One cause of in-group killing is because of adultery by a woman. It is said that if a man found his wife and another man in compromising situation of this kind the old Xhosa law would give him the right to kill both of them on the spot (2p61.)

4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations)

- None found

4.18 Cannibalism?

- None found

### 5. Socio-Political Organization and Interaction

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size

- There may be up to 25 clans in a village but population size isn't specified. Individual home size differs on the amount of children (3p194.)

5.2 Mobility pattern (seasonality)

- For the most part, the Xhosa tribe stays in the same place. They have large villages so they don't move around.

5.3 Political systems

- The CNVC (Cape Native Voters' Convention) became one of the key regional bodies in the Cape voting Community in May 1934. It sought to preserve rights and attracted some of the most active African politicians in the province (3p252-3.)

5.4 Post-marital residence

- After a marriage in the Xhosa tribe the wife lives with the husband. The tradition of carrying off the bride-to-be is customary. The female is usually sent out on an errand and then grabbed and taken to his home (2p45.)

5.5 Territoriality

- The natives own land under the Natives' Land Act of 1913. It sets aside land apart from the white community (3p194.)

5.6 Social interaction divisions

- None found

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships

- A Xhosa girl is allowed to have a sweetheart if it approved by her mother first. This does not usually lead into marriage and is expected to play no part when the boy becomes a young man and has to find a wife (2p74.)

5.8 Village and house organization

- None found

5.9 Specialized village structures

- "The family's home is a round mud hut with a pole in the middle supporting a dome-shaped or a conical grass roof. A fire burns in a hollow in the mud plastered floor and, when the weather is too bad to cook outside, a three-legged cast-iron pot stands over it with the next meal slowly cooking inside (2p27.)

#### 5.10 Sleeping arrangements

- “No matter how big the family is, unless there is more than one wife, everyone sleeps in the same hut and this includes any visitors who might be calling. This is not because of poverty or any expenses that would be involved in building more huts [...] but purely because of the customs and usage on the farms...” (2p30.)

#### 5.11 Social organization, clans, lineages

- The social organization of the Xhosa tribe is based around the men. The clans always originate from men.

#### 5.12 Trade

- African peasants were dependent on local white traders to store and sell their produce. Traders would remain the principal intermediary between the producer and the market for generations to come, because they controlled the extension of credit and prices of good that were bought and sold (3p100.)

#### 5.13 Indications of social hierarchy

- For the most part there isn't a social hierarchy except for the dominance of men.

### 6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion

#### 6.1 Specializations (shamans and medicine)

- “The Xhosa sorcerer is a man or woman who uses ‘medicines’ made from herbs and mysterious ingredients, to bring harm to property and people and even death to his enemies” (2p106.) The herbalist is a person in Xhosa magic who provides medicines for all purposes (2p106.)

#### 6.2 Stimulants

- The only listed stimulant use is tobacco. Men and women smoke it regularly in the Xhosa community.

#### 6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal)

- The birth rituals of the Xhosa include the first rite, which is performed soon after birth, is passing the baby through smoke. It means he/she must never betray their friends or give them away. The rituals of puberty are different for males and females. The males are secluded from society for about a month and the females are secluded after the killing of a beast (2p54-56.)

#### 6.4 Other rituals

- There is a ritual for women that when they menstruate they routinely wipe cow dung on their necks. This has to do with a superstition with blood and the cows that surround them (4p300.)

#### 6.5 Myths (Creation)

- None found

#### 6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games)

- The Xhosa believe in the ‘People of the Sea,’ who are happy people with a sense of humor that play tricks and games on them (2p99.)

#### 6.7 Sex differences in RCR

- None found

#### 6.8 Missionary effect

- The Xhosa were converted to Christianity by European settlers. In was a time of British Colonialism (3p353.)

#### 6.9 RCR revival

- None found

#### 6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs

- The Xhosa practice ancestor worship and pay homage to the spirits of their departed by the sacrifice of animals to them (2p125.)

#### 6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?

- None found

#### 6.12 Is there teknonymy?

- None found

#### 6.13 Briefly describe religion

- Xhosa religion has a basis in magic. They believe in which doctors and evil magic but also believe in medicine and good magic. Source two states that “the mysteries of their spiritual world find expression in their reasoning and, just as magic is used by witches to create evil, so stronger magic is used to remedy the ill.” They are a superstitious group of people. The Xhosa, however, do have a history with Christianity. This new religion was brought to South Africa by British missionaries.

### 7. Adornment

#### 7.1 Body paint

- Women paint their faces without a particular reason except for a cooling property. They also cover their bodies with red ocher paint (2p17.)

#### 7.2 Piercings

- Most of the older women of the Xhosa tribe have their ears pierced.

#### 7.3 Haircut

- “It is impossible to tell just how long a Xhosa man or Woman’s hair would grow to if it was given the chance, because they never let it grow longer than about an inch before they shave it off, down to the skull. They believe that human hair is one of the most dangerous ‘medicines’ there is for a witch to get a hold of because he can use it for magic mixtures to cast all kinds of spells over its owner” (2p33.)

#### 7.4 Scarification

- None found

#### 7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.)

- Women wear jewelry on a regular basis. They may have their ears pierced and wear many bracelets.

#### 7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment

- Men and women wear beads for special occasions. A woman’s beads are broad and flat with many colors. She may wear some wrist and arm pieces and a few strings around her ankles (2p33.)

#### 7.7 Sex differences in adornment

- “Among the Xhosa, the pieces worn by each age group of both sexes differ quite clearly and, strangely enough, the girls do not as a rule wear anything like the quantity, or quality of pieces of beads that their boy friends do (2p33.)

#### 7.8 Missionary effect

- None found except for a reference that in earlier days “...clothing was of te scantiest” (4p410.)

#### 7.9 Cultural revival in adornment

- None found

### 8. Kinship Systems

### 8.1 Sibling classification system

- Siblings in the Xhosa tribe are, for the most part, treated equally. The older ones will of course marry sooner.

### 8.2 Sororate, levirate

- None found

### 8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin

- None found

## 9. Other Interesting Cultural Features

### 9.1 National Suicide

- According to source two, “the power which magic and mystery holds over them is perhaps never better illustrated than in the incident of their ‘national suicide’ or- as it is called in their own language- ‘Nongquase’ [...] In 1856 the Xhosa were spoiling for a war with the white settlers on the Cape’s frontiers and, to add fuel to their simmering restlessness, their cattle started dying of lung-sickness, for which they blamed the witchcraft of the English who were at this time governing the Cape Colony.” This event is referred to as a ‘national suicide’ because of the death of the cattle (2p13-14.)

### 9.2 Alcohol Consumption

- “The tribal beer which the Xhosa make, and which the white people call ‘Kaffir beer’, is made fro maize or kaffir corn. The dry grain is soaked in water for twenty-four hours the spread out, sandwiched between two wet hessian grain bags until it sprouts.” It is milled into meal and the women grind it down. Even after it is drained it is still thick and heavy. The sociable way to drink beer is to sit around in a circle on the grass and pass a canful from person to person (2p38-40.)

### 9.3 Sacrifice of the White Goat

- “At some stage, in nearly all facts of Xhosa life, the sacrifice of a white goat is called for and a baby within the first days of it life has one slaughtered for it to make it grow up strong and healthy” (2p58.)

## Numbered References

1. Ethnologue.com
2. Elliot, Aubrey (1970) “The Magic World of the Xhosa.” ABC Press Ltd. Cape Town.
3. Switzer, Lee (1993) “Power and Resistance in an African Society.” University of Wisconsin Press. Wisconsin, Madison.
4. Soga Henderson, John (1931) “Ama-Xosa: Life and Customs.” Lovedale Press, South Africa.

