

# EARLY YEARS AT THABA NCHU AND FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN THE ROLONG AND THE VOORTREKKERS

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*A painting by C.D. Bell of Rolong women at Thaba Nchu in 1834.*

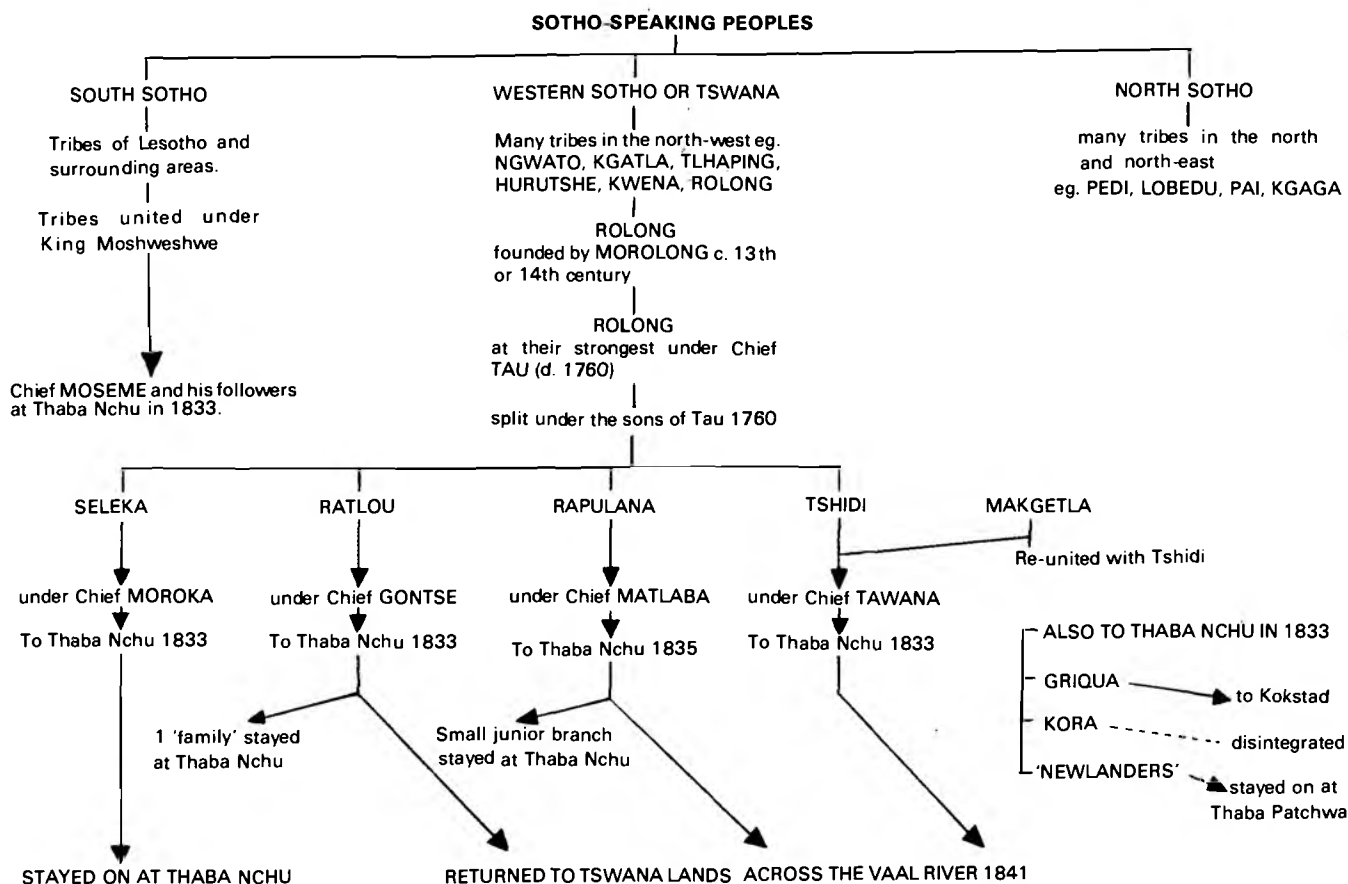


*A painting of Thaba Nchu painted in 1834 by C.D. Bell.*

Although, in about 1760, succession disputes had split the Rolong division of the Tswana under the sons of their great chief, Tau (d. 1760), the different Rolong still recognised their relationship with each other and sought asylum with each other in times of trouble. Thus, when the Seleka branch of the Rolong, under Chief Moroka, settled at Thaba Nchu in December 1833, they were accompanied by the fugitive Tshidi branch, under Chief Tawana, and the Ratlou branch, under Chief Gontse. Two years later the Rapulana branch, under chief Matlabane, joined them. Three 'Coloured' groups the Griqua of Barend Barends, the Kora of Jan Kaptein and the 'Newlanders' of Piet Baatjies, settled to the east of Thaba Nchu, sharing the services of the Rolong's Wesleyan Methodist missionaries. Also in the vicinity of Thaba Nchu lived a South Sotho group under chief Moseme, who considered himself a subject of King Moshweshwe of the newly formed Basotho Nation. Chief Moseme originally welcomed the Rolong, considering that settlers in the area would provide his people with security against the marauders of the *Difaqane*.



*A painting by C.D. Bell of Rolong men at Thaba Nchu in 1834.*



The Tshidi, Ratlou and Rapulana Rolong did not stay long at Thaba Nchu. Mzilikazi, the Matabele conqueror, was driven north by the Voortrekkers, removing the Matabele danger on the Highveld, and in 1841 Chiefs Tawana, Gontse and Matlaba started to lead their people back to their old lands north of the Vaal River. A single 'family' of the Ratlou and a small junior branch of the Rapulana stayed behind at Thaba Nchu with the Seleka Rolong. In later years the Griqua moved away to Kokstad, the Kora disintegrated and their remnants were absorbed by other groups, while the 'Newlanders' stayed on at Thaba Patchwa, just east of Thaba Nchu, where their descendants still live today.

In 1836 Andries Hendrik Potgieter's trek arrived at Thaba Nchu, and from then on Thaba Nchu became a natural stopover and meeting place for the Voortrekkers. Relations between the Voortrekkers and the Rolong were very friendly. The Voortrekkers bartered sorghum and mealies from the Rolong and made use of the services of the Wesleyan missionaries at Thaba Nchu. When Potgieter's trek was attacked by the Matabele at Vegkop and all their cattle

plundered, Moroka sent oxen to bring them back to Thaba Nchu, where they then stayed for a further six months to recuperate. The Rolong joined the punitive expedition organized by the Voortrekkers against Mzilikazi and later aided a second expedition against him. In return the Voortrekkers offered a safe passage and protection to the Rolong who wished to return to their old lands when the Matabele threat was removed. Piet Retief also warned off the Griqua who were posing a threat to the Rolong at Thaba Nchu. Piet Uys and Piet Retief made treaties of friendship with Moroka and Moroka agreed to return any straying Voortrekker cattle. Initially the Rolong also had very sound relationships with the Boer Republic at Winburg.



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