

# RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN CHIEF MOROKA OF THABA NCHU AND OTHER CHIEFS IN THE AREA

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Almost from the start of the Rolong settlement at Thaba Nchu in 1833, chief Moroka of the Rolong had to contend with border problems and with the fact that other parties who became involved in the land and power struggle in the area did not recognise him as the autonomous chief he claimed to be.



*Chief Moroka of the Seleka Rolong.*

Moshweshwe's kingdom, which was still very young, was constructed out of scattered and broken tribes, mainly Sotho, which he had taken under his protection. Moshweshwe was the most influential chief in the vicinity of the Caledon River, while Sekonyela was the other powerful Sotho chief in the area.



*Chief Moshweshwe of the Sotho, sketched in 1833.*

Initially Moroka's relationship with Moshweshwe was very good, so much so that Moshweshwe came to Moroka's aid when the Rolong were attacked by the Kora (Koranna) in 1836. However, cattle-raiding was a traditional pastime of young Sotho-Tswana men and constant cattle-raiding between the Sotho of Moshweshwe and the Rolong at Thaba Nchu began very early in their relationship. Already in 1835 Moshweshwe complained that the sons of Tawana, the Tshidi Rolong chief, were a band of cattle thieves.

However, the seeds of the serious trouble between Moshweshwe and Moroka, which would eventually embroil all the black, "coloured" and white communities in the area, were already sown at the very first contact between Moshweshwe and the Rolong. When

the Rolong delegation were looking for land to settle in 1833, Moseme, chief of the small Sotho community at Thaba Nchu and a vassal of Moshweshwe, arranged for them to meet Moshweshwe and Sekonyela. The land deal took place with the Wesleyan Methodist missionaries acting on behalf of the Rolong and 'paying' Moshweshwe eight head of cattle, thirty-four sheep and five goats for the territory of Thaba Nchu. Later, in 1834, Moshweshwe signed a document officially ceding the territory to the missionaries.



*Chief Sekonyela of the Tlokwa, painted by Charles Bell.*

Moshweshwe considered the 'payment' of stock to have been a 'present' to settle the agreement. The missionaries, however, considered that the land had been sold to them, while Moroka maintained that he was an independent chief and had never paid tribute to Moshweshwe.

Sekonyela and Moshweshwe, as the two most powerful chiefs in the area, were rivals of long standing, so it was natural that Moroka, in his struggle with Moshweshwe, should win the support of Sekonyela. In 1837 chief Moletsane of



*Chief Moletsane of the Taung, as sketched in old age.*

Moshweshwe apparently did not realise the implications of what he had signed. Among the tribes of southern Africa there was no such thing as landownership or the buying or selling of land. A chief held the land in trust for his people and only supervised its use. Moshweshwe apparently considered that he had only given the Rolong and their missionaries the right to settle in territory under his paramountcy, as was the custom among the Sotho-Tswana tribes, and that the territory thus remained under his jurisdiction with Moroka becoming his vassal.

the Taung, who had been an enemy of Moroka in the earlier years north of the Vaal river, settled with his people at Mekwateng and allied himself with Moshweshwe against Moroka and Sekonyela. The rivalry of the chiefs was further intensified by the animosity between the French missionaries serving Moshweshwe and Moletsane and the English missionaries serving Moroka and Sekonyela. The Griqua, Boers and British were also soon to add to the turmoil in the territory, as will be discussed in the next Museum News.



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