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# THABA NCHU'S BORDER PROBLEMS —

## Relationships between the Rolong and the white governments of the area

Sandra Bishop

The important chiefs:

Moroka — Chief of the Seleka Rolong at Thaba Nchu.

Moshweshwe — Chief of the Sotho and the most powerful chief in the area

Sekonyela — Chief of the Tlokwa, the other large Sotho group in the area and long-standing enemy of Moshweshwe

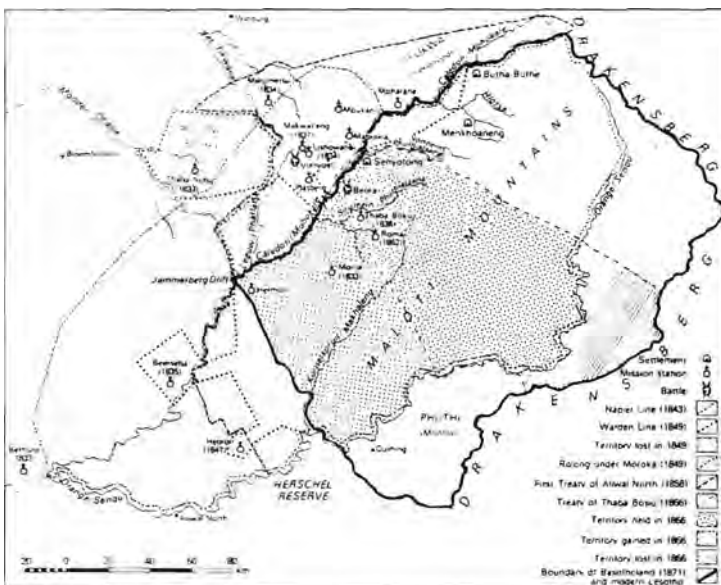
Moletsane — Chief of the Taung and ally of Moshweshwe

Following on his friendship towards the Voortrekkers, Moroka had a very sound relationship with the Boer republic at Winburg. Soon, however, under the influence of his English missionaries, he became pro-British. Allied to the British cause, he found himself harried on all sides. Time and again vacillating British policy let him down. The British were also inclined to support Moshweshwe rather than their so-called 'ally', Moroka, whose autonomy Moshweshwe refused to accept.

In 1843 the Napier Treaty set the boundaries of

Moshweshwe's territory, cutting through territory claimed by the Rolong, Griqua and Kora.

The Treaty also recognised the independence of Sekonyela on territory claimed by Moshweshwe. It warned the Boers against further encroachment on 'native' territories and claimed any Boers in those territories as British subjects. No one was satisfied with the treaty. Moshweshwe felt that Thaba Nchu and the territory of the Kora, as well as Sekonyela's territory, should have been included within his boundaries. while Moroka, the Griqua and the



Map showing Thaba Nchu's position in relation to the territories of Moshweshwe and Sekonyela and the shifting boundaries of nineteenth century Lesotho.

(from: J.S. Bergh 1984. Tribes and Kingdoms)



Rolong warriors receiving strengthening medicine from a medicine man before going to battle. Depicted by C.D. Bell in the 1830's.

(from: A. Smith 1975. Andrew Smith's Journal of his expedition)

Kora all claimed that Moshweshwe had been given part of their lands. There was also continuous trouble among all the parties concerned over cattle rustling, grazing rights and squatters.

In 1848, with the declaration of the Orange River Sovereignty, Sir Harry Smith marked off the boundaries of Thaba Nchu and officially recognised Moroka's autonomy, but Moshweshwe refused to accept it. In 1849, when the Warden Line deprived Moshweshwe of a large tract of arable land, a contest for land-occupation ensued, with Moshweshwe's people squatting on land claimed by Moroka and a wave of cattle rustling on both sides.



*Moshweshwe I in 1854*

In 1850 the Rolong, British, Boer and Kora combined forces to punish Moshweshwe's ally, chief Moletsane of the Taung who had plundered the Wesleyan missionary station at Mpukani. In retaliation Moletsane raided thousands of Rolong cattle and horses. Although major H.D. Warden, the British Resident of the Orange River Sovereignty, succeeded in retrieving some of the stolen animals, Moroka was not satisfied. In 1851 after the defeat of Warden's forces and the Rolong at Viervoet by Moshweshwe and Moletsane, the Rolong left Thaba Nchu and moved closer to Bloemfontein for safety, while the warriors of Moshweshwe and Moletsane plundered Thaba Nchu. Later in the year Moroka returned to Thaba Nchu, but the Rolong had lost most of their stock and were virtually destitute. Many left Thaba Nchu permanently and sought work on white-owned farms.

When the Orange Free State came into being in 1854, Moroka maintained good relationships

with the new government. Meanwhile Moshweshwe was occupied in driving Sekonyela, the Kora and the Griqua from their strongholds. He gained control of most of the Caledon River area, excluding Thaba Nchu. In 1858, in a letter, Moroka condemned Moshweshwe's actions and offered the Free State support against Moshweshwe. During the subsequent Basuto Wars the Rolong served the Free State as spies and helped with patrols to catch stock thieves. In 1866, after the Second Basuto War, Moroka and the Free State signed a treaty concerning mutual help in war, the sale of weapons to Thaba Nchu and the extradition of criminals. By the end of the third Basuto War in 1868 Moshweshwe had lost the whole border area. His territory was confined to Lesotho's present boundaries and became a British Protectorate. The border area became known as the Conquered Territory and is still claimed by Lesotho today. Moroka remained an autonomous chief and an ally of the Orange Free State, until his death in 1880.



*Sotho warriors as painted by C.D. Bell in the 1830's.*

*(from A. Smith 1975, Andrew Smith's Journal of his expedition)*

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