

Chapter 3

*Sekhukhune Comes To Power 1861*

Sekhukhune was the eldest son of Thorometsane, the first wife of king Sekwati. He was born during the reign of his grandfather king Thulare the father of Sekwati. When Thulare died in 1820 Sekhukhune was a young boy who was able to look after his father's sheep and goats. The point that he was shepherding sheep rather than cattle suggest that he was in his early adolescence. It is a point that before a boy can start with cattle herding, he must first learn from sheep and goats.

When the boys grow older having the knowledge of looking after goats and sheep, he is promoted to herd cattle. But before that, the boy must undergo the first stage of male initiation, called koma ya bodika. The second stage is called koma ya bogwera. However today it is the first stage which is given more preference to koma ya bogwera. Very few chiefs and indunas still practice initiation to the level of the last and final stage called koma ya bogwera. If a person has not undergone this koma ya bogwera he is called (Lekgaola) meaning your story is unfinished. The fact that Sekhukhune was still a shepherd, suggests that he was still a boy who was to undergo this school before he can be called a man who must start looking after cattle. But Sekhukhune was old enough, because after forty years he was able to explain how Thulare his grandfather died. "He remembered that, as the sky darkened, he overcame with fear, he drove his flock back to the Capital, only to discover that the paramount had died" (Delius 1983: 85)

When Sekhukhune went to the initiation school it was at the time of Phetedi. This was the first stage called bodika. Majalodi, Phetedi's son attended the same bodika as Sekhukhune. Majalodi became the senior of the kraal called Mphato.

The second stage of initiation took place in Tlokwa country after the defeat of the Bapedi power, the death of Phetedi and the flight of his father Sekwati. This happened at the time of Difaqane Mfeqane. Sekhukhune's late adolescence was thus shaped by Sekwati's raiding career in the Northern Transvaal. Majalodi, Phetedi's son remained in the Bapedi's heartland called Phiring where he helped organizing the remnants of the Maroteng. It was before the followers of Sekwati the father of Sekhukhune absorbed him. Sekwati returned to the Bapedi heartland and after his defeat to Marangrang and Khabe, Majalodi was incorporated into Sekwati's followers. Majalodi started competing Sekhukhune for leadership, of the regiment, which had been formed from their initiation group. It must be remembered that the leader of the initiation group from the children or sons of the chiefs usually is the one who is also becoming the chief in that community. It must also be remembered that the childhood of these two Princes had been spent in the security and prosperity of Thulare's capital in the Steelpoort river valley.

They (Sekhukhune and Majalodi) had in early adolescence witnessed the struggle of power amongst their fathers, the sons of Thulare killing one another and the invasion of the Bapedi power by the Mfeqane Difeqane in their early adulthood. The two Princes achieved prominence as military leaders. During Mfeqane they were already leading their group to war. They have also featured in the Bapedi war against the Bamletsene in 1847. In 1852 they planned and executed the sortie which defeated the attempts of the Boers to cut Phiring off from its water supply and that forced king Sekwati into submission.

By the early 1850's Majalodi and Sekhukhune had emerged as military leaders with considerable reputations and probably with considerable followers. As time goes on Sekhukhune succeeded in establishing a clear pre-eminence over Majalodi. However Sekhukhune had a serious problem to deal with at home. His relationship with his father became sour. This was because of the fact that he was accused of taking one of his father's wives. The conflict between the two great men reached a climax, and Sekhukhune was forced to seek temporary refuge with his aunt Lekgolane. Mampuru the half brother to Sekhukhune gained the whole favour from the great king Sekwati. These disputes, along with the desire to escape his father's close attentions, played a part in making Sekhukhune to move away from the new Maroteng capital at Thaba Mosega and establish his own village at Phiring.

Sekhukhune used his absence from the Capital to extend his influence amongst the subordinate chiefdoms and to build up his own followers, directly or indirectly by taking refuge groups under his patronage. The one good example is that of chief Msuthu who had formed himself by combining the Bapedi and the Amaswazi under him. When Msuthu was attacked, he took refuge under Sekhukhune. A good relationship developed between Sekhukhune and Msuthu. When Sekhukhune came to power, this group of Msuthu was used as the bodyguards during wars. The group was also called to assist in internal conflicts when the loyalty of some members of the regiments may have been in doubt.

While Sekhukhune being a Prince was pursuing his ambitions away from the capital, his half brother Mampuru emerged as a contender for the succession of king Sekwati. Mampuru's mother was Kgomomokatane of the Magakala chiefdom. It is a

common practice among the Bapedi, that the heir must come from a wife who also came from royal family. Kgomomokatane the mother of Prince Mampuru was designated as the chief wife of chief Malekutu. She was not, however, formally installed in this capacity and Malekutu died without a designated heir.

When Sekwati became a king he married Kgomomokatane as his wife, whilst Sekhukhune was hiding himself from the face of his father. The king publicly declared his support for Mampuru by handing him his royal war emblem (Sefoka) Thulare. The clear evidence of his preference for his younger son is given by the fact that Mampuru's name is found among the signatories to the 1857 treaty with the Lydenburg Republic. All this shows that king Sekwati wished to make his intended heir known to the Lydenburg Republic.

Although Prince Mampuru enjoyed his father's favour, he remained lamentably unprepared to secure and enforce his claims after the death of the king. The point is that, Sekhukhune, excluded from the Capital and royal favour, had developed an independent basis of support within the Bapedi power, and that made it easy for him to be the king. On the other hand his succession became difficult for Prince Mampuru to contest and to challenge his brother who seemed to be enjoying the approval of a reasonable support. Not only did Prince Mampuru fail to challenge Sekhukhune's claims, but he also helped Sekhukhune to ensure that the rivals' claims were crushed. Prince Mampuru's followers were also made up of the men who had passed through initiation with him at Phiring and who had been constituted into the Manala regiment. The fact is that this group were more juniors to the group that followed Sekhukhune, and by law, they must respect their seniors, simply because, Sekhukhune's group is the

one who taught them to be men at the initiation school. King Sekhukhune on the other hand was afraid of the ZAR. His main problem was that the ZAR would neither encourage nor condone a Zulu or Amaswazi attack. It was the ZAR's aim to influence these two kingdoms, which the Bapedi kingdom both feared. Although the threat of the Zulu attack diminished in the early 1860's because of king Sekwati's policy of friendship with this powerful kingdom, the attack by the Amaswazi was still far from *over*. The big problem was the smooth relationship between the Lydenburg authority and the Amaswazi.

Sekhukhune had a good friendship with Msuthu who kept on attacking Boers in the Lydenburg district and who was the enemy of the Amaswazi kingdom. Having that in mind, king Sekhukhune after he climbed to power made it possible for the Lydenburg authority to recognize him as the legitimate successor of Sekwati and that peaceful relationship was maintained between him and the Lydenburg authority. This was a wise move because the king was also faced with the domestic problem from the neighboring chiefdom. The chiefs who once paid homage to his father Sekwati were now seeking their independence by not recognizing him as a legitimate king of the Bapedi kingdom.

The king's major problem was to deal with this rivals and subordinates. Faced with pressing problems within their own domain, the Lydenburg council was fast in replying to the king's initial letter. The Lydenburg authority assured him of their full support for the Bapedi kingdom and their desire for peace and good neighboring. However they put down some conditions. That is:

- Stolen cattle should be returned.
- The king's subjects who took employment on Boer farms do not desert.

- The king must stop the raids made by Msuthu on the Lydenburg subjects or Boers.

“The king in a letter dictated to Merensky and Nachtigal in late October agreed to these conditions which were in substance a reiteration of the 1857 agreement between Lydenburg and king Sekwati”. (Delius 1983:95)

The one thing that they forgot to look into was the land and boundary question, simply because it seems as if the two authorities recognized the existence of the other. The question of where does my land begin and where does your land end was overlooked. He partially observed these terms and sent gifts in order to display his desire to maintain friendly relationships. However Msuthu remained his loyal bodyguard. The letter, which the king sent to the Lydenburg authority, concludes in these words:

“Sekhukhune anticipates that the government will not send AmaSwazi or Zulu’s to fight with him. And if one of those tribes attempts to pass through the land inhabited by the Boers to attack his land then if the Boers request it he will send his regiments to fight with the Boers against them”. (Delsius 983:96)

The agreement was maintained by both the Lydenburg authority and the Bapedi kingdom of Maroteng for the time being. It was maintained because the Bapedi were called by the Boers to assist when they were at war with the Ndebele of the Ndzundza and the Amaswazis were not allowed to pass through the land occupied by the Lydenburg authority to attack the kingdom of Maroteng. For the time being agreement was real because Msuthu stopped attacking them. We can conclude by saying both parties needed each other for different reasons and aims.

Although the king managed to establish himself to the Lydenburg authority, at

home he was faced with domestic problems. Prince Mampuru who seemed to be working for peace with his half brother became a thorny issue to the king. The king was prepared to share his patrimony in cattle with him, and delegated his royal duties to him. By so doing the king was however trying to get his full support from his half brother and to avoid either civil war or external intervention. His action was influenced by the memories of the disputes, which took place in the Bapedi kingdom at the time of Thulare's death. The conflict and killings of one another amongst Thulare's children over kingship left the Bapedi kingdom weak and opened for attack by intruders. The king believes that these conflicts are cursed and they cause the disruption of the social order laid down by the fathers or ancestors. The king also believes that if the kingship is not treated well, it brings the misfortune to the whole society and the gods in turn brings suffering and punishment to the whole nation, by bringing in the wars with the neighboring tribes.

Despite their initial co-operation and the king's attempts at reconciliation, the relationship between the two brothers remained sour. The prince was unwilling to put aside his feelings and accept the friendly hand that comes from the king for the sake of peace. The Prince began to rally his own support. And at the center was Tlakale who had been given to the Prince by king Sekwati to cohabit with her. The subordinate Chief Moreane gave Tlakale to King Sekwati in tribute. The Prince had a child with her. It must be remembered that although the king was willing to share his power with the Prince, the King was not in a position of allowing any challenge to his control over royal wives. So Tlakale was taken back from Mampuru to the king himself. When the Prince realized the stand taken by the king, he had no other option, but to flee because

he cannot cut ties with Tlakale and the baby. On June 16, 1862 news reached the missionaries that Mampuru had fled from the Capital for unspecified reasons and Sekhukhune had called on Msuthu to prevent his brother from joining Mabhogo, but warning them not to kill his brothers. However the Prince opted to settle at Makgakala to Lekgalane, Sekwati's sister who had previously protected Sekhukhune from the hands of his father.

The other problem threatening the position of Sekhukhune is the internal and the external matter of his rivalry for succession: the possibility that the death of Sekwati would encourage subordinate Chiefdoms to restrict, contest or reject the authority of Maroteng. The King's problem started when the chief of Boleu or Kopa stopped to deliver the appropriate tribute in cattle to the Maroteng kingdom. The Bakopa were now seeking their independence and they didn't recognize Sekhukhune as a King. As if this was not enough, the Ndundza Ndebele also demonstrated their decency to the Maroteng kingdom by ordering the return of Mabhogo's daughter who was given to King Sekwati as a tribute and their willingness for peace between the Maroteng kingdom and the Ndebele tribe.

The group, which appeared most threatening from Sekhukhune's perspective in the early 1860, was the Tau Chiefdom of Masemola, which was ruled by chief Mabowe. This group or tribe once entered into an alliance with King Sekwati on his return from the North. The agreement had never lasted. But that doesn't mean that Chief Mabowe had influenced Mabhogo and Boleu to withdraw their support and recognition of the Maroteng kingdom. Prince Mampuru took the advantage of this sour relation between Sekhukhune and Mabowe by seeking refuge under Mabowe. The



King avoided the direct challenge to the power of Mabowe by giving his support to the Nakaphala against his brother who had the support of the BagaMasemola. The BagaMasemola also had the support of two small tribes Tisana and Mphanama. The group assembled at Phiring to attack Sekhukhune at Maroteng.

The war was called “ War of Thirst” (ntwa ya lenyora): it was a stalemate, the alliance at the top of Phiring and the Bapedi below. The shortage of water from the mountain became the most serious problem of the defenders on top. Mabowe was forced to sign for a peace. The Masemola, Tisana and Mphanama handed over three young ladies to symbolize and express their desire for peace and their recognition of the authority of the Bapedi Kingdom.

Although few chiefdoms were in a position to mount an effective challenge to the overall authority of the Maroteng, the combined army and the incorporation of population, the acquisition of fire-arms and the development of fortified strongholds ensured that the paramount in turn could not lightly or easily impose its authority by military. The decency strategy, which the Bapedi army had developed and used in order to survive the Amaswazi, the Zulu and the Boer attack, was used. This strategy also helped the Bapedi against the Ndebeles.

The Bapedi army of Maroteng had learned that the only best method of that period was that defence became more effective than attack. In 1862 the Maroteng King ordered an attack on the Phaala chiefdom that has just ignored the authority of the Maroteng King. The king was demonstrating his existence and his paramount to the rival chiefs. After Mampuru had fled, the King tasted his paramount by calling all chiefs under him to assemble at Maroteng royal kraal. This assembly had a double

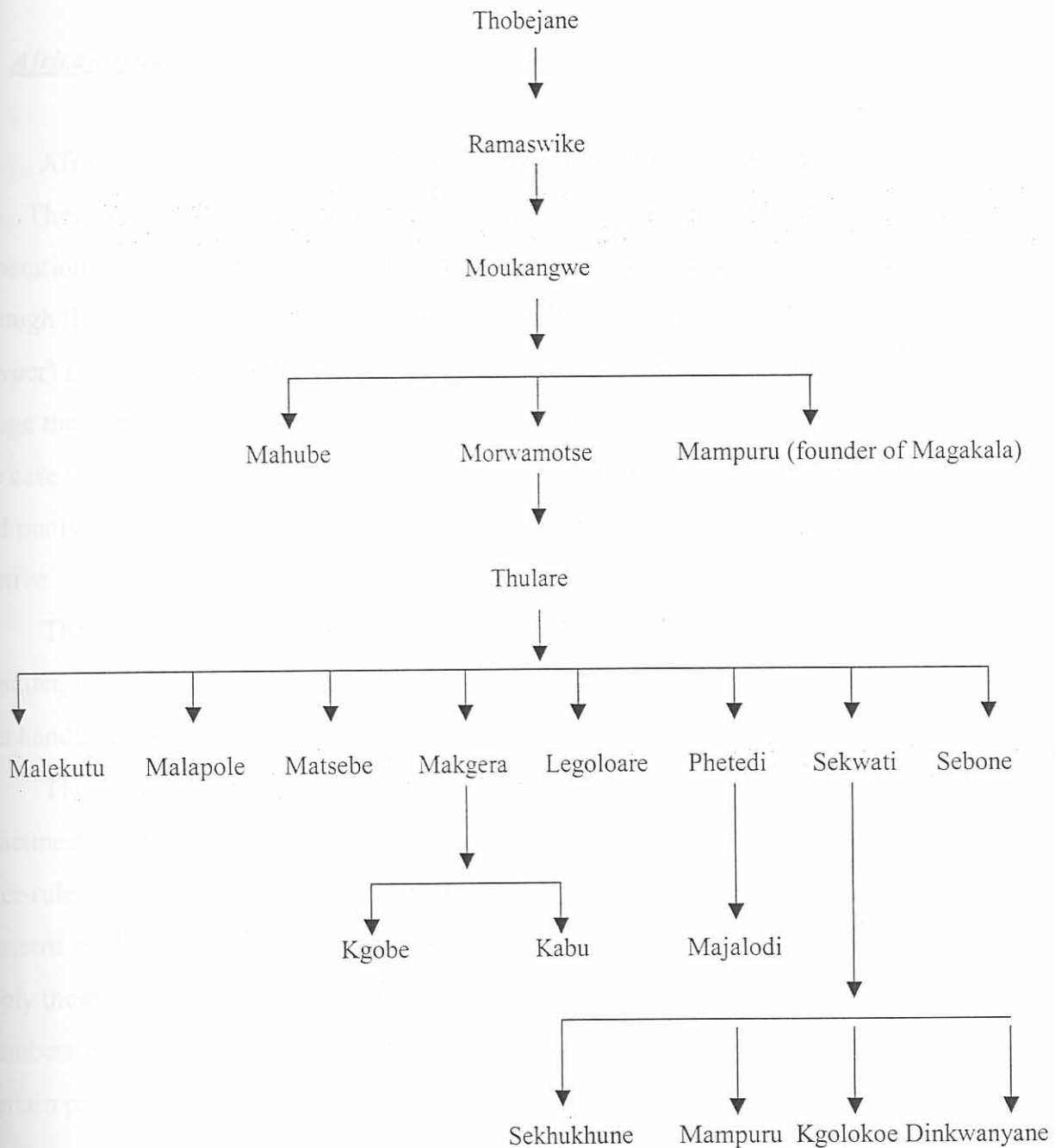
edged aim, should the exercise fail, it was to indicate the support the king had against his estranged half brother Mampuru who was moving around in campaign against the king. However mobilization could also serve to isolate those defensive chiefs, wavering in their support and expose them to the risk that their actions would provoke the king into launching the chiefdoms that had assembled against them in reprisal.

At the other edge of the sword, the army gathered on that day and the missionaries estimated their numbers to be some ten thousand men. Beside the Bakopa and the Ndzundza Ndebele who had not showed up, none of the chiefdoms, which had recognized Maroteng rule during Sekwati's reign, withheld their regiments. The most interesting was the arrival of eight hundred men from Magakala chiefdom, which had since showed their support for Prince Mampuru's claims. This big assembly or (Pitso) revealed the extent to which Sekhukhune's power and Kingship was recognized and its effectiveness. The Prince and supporters were exposed. At the end it became clear that the king still had more support and is enjoying the loyal part of it.

By the early 1860's in the Northern part of the Lydenburg district, a multiplicity of Nguni, Tsonga and eastern Sotho groups lived under a loose land, land which doesn't belong to the Boers or Bapedi: some of them had come to seek employment in the Lydenburg area. At the Southwest of the Bapedi heartland of Maroteng were the Bakopa under chief Boleu and the Ndzundza Ndebele under Mabhogo. The two chiefdoms had once recognized King Sekwati's kingship. The growing strength of the Ndzundza under Nyabela, Mabhogo's son had encouraged Boleu of the Bakopa to defeat the authority from Maroteng.

The one last problem that also threatened the King's authority is the domestic

problem caused by the missionaries. The king as a traditional man, couldn't differentiate between Missionaries and whites in Lydenburg, faith in God and obedience to His law and respect given to him as king and obedience to the laws laid down by the ancestors. For now Sekhukhune might have won the war against his brother Mampuru but not the battle against Him. The leadership struggle had not yet begun. The missionaries on the other hand are on the track of establishing themselves with the converts for final say in the leadership and the running of the Bapedi heartland. The king had no other option for the missionaries, either they recognize him as a King and obey him or they had to die.



*Sons of King Sekwati*

- (i) Mampuru men assassinated Sekhukhune.
- (ii) Mampuru was hanged by Z.A.R. government
- (iii) Johannes Dinkwanyane was killed in a war (Mafolofolo)
- (iv) Kgolokoe was the regent (1883)