

*Sekhukhune Land in 1860*

Sekhukhune became King in 1861 after the death of his father Sekwati. Sekwati was the fourth son of the great King Thulare. Thulare was the great king who once conquered the whole region of the Transvaal. His area started from Steelpoort passing the Mapoch's, Maleoskop, far into the Waterberg and Zoutpansberg district up to Blouberg and the back of the Drakensberg mountains. The whole mass of the black tribes of the Transvaal was afraid to fight him and pleaded for peace and gave tribute for the great king. Chief Thulare was quoted saying. "The whole world I have conquered. There is only one single man, whom I cannot conquer, "Modimo" meaning God. (Winter 1912:96).

As the king grew older he saw, with great pain, the jealousy amongst his sons. He thought of the great things he did for his nation. He was filled with anger and he said. "This great Capital will one day become a wilderness. The Ostrich will come and lay its eggs under this Molope tree and the Rhinoceros will also rub itself".

Their Capital was called the Maroteng. The Maroteng authority consisted of a number of chiefdoms in the Eastern Transvaal, which recognized the authority and accepted the rule of the Maroteng paramount. The missionary estimated in the 1860's a population in Bapedi or Sekhukhune land between sixty and seventy thousand. The Transvaal officials also confirmed this number in 1870.

The state building among the Bapedi involved the chiefs, and amalgamation of a number of separated states. The population of the chiefdoms was divided into a number of different strata or (kgoro). The middle ranked as nobles or (bakgomana). The lowest ranked being (Mathusa) or the captives. These individuals were expected to perform a variety of hard work. But they automatically obtained a higher rank because they fell under the personal protection of the king. All foreigners incorporated into the chiefdom through negotiation were known as Bafaladi or "Batho feela" meaning the commoners.

King Sekwati who had survived the onslaughts from Mzilikazi and skirmishing with Potgieter's Boers, played an important role among the Bapedi. He maintained order among his people and destroyed cannibalism in his land. He was able to make friends with the Zulu's in Natal by giving them what they wanted most, i.e. ostrich feathers. He did this after repelling Mpande's attacks. He built peace and good relationship with the Boers and the colonial government and as such the Bapedi was among the first migrants to seek employment outside their kingdom.

The Bapedi under Sekwati were able to establish themselves as wife givers to all the subordinate chiefs. The king (Sekwati) would not confirm in office any chief who did not marry a wife in the royal house. This made the king to achieve by dynastic diplomacy the kind of influence which Shaka the king of Zulu's achieved by the distribution of his regiments, and which the Swazi's achieved by the ritual transmission of the king's medicated blood.

That made the Bapedi king to extend their boundary from the Limpopo River at the edge of Soutpansberg to the Vaal river. Davenport had this to say. "The Bapedi Empire cannot be described as a nation, or a state, or a single tribe, but as a federation built, by force and by marriage, that is by conquest and diplomacy". (Davenport 1987:50). Before the Bapedi were less successful in their wars with the white authorities in the Transvaal. At the time of Difaqane and the Great Trek, the Bapedi were always attacked by the Zulu's and Swazi's, not forgetting the heavy crushing the Bapedi suffered under the hands of Mzilikazi in 1826. All these made the king to sign an agreement with Hendrik Potgieter in 1845. The Bapedi king was to cede the land east of the Steelpoort under the Boers. The Boers extended their claim of land to the land west of Steelpoort. As a result there were some hostilities between the Boers and Bapedi's in 1847, the cattle from the Boers were stolen and the Bapedi started collecting firearms in the Cape and Natal.

The attacks launched by Potgieter a commander from Zoutpansberg and P.Nel a commander from Lydenburg in 1848 failed to force the Bapedi into submission. It was after twenty days that the war was stopped. The Boers managed to seize more than 5000

cattle and 6000 small stock and some children were also captured possibly to be used as labourers and to be made slaves.

Maroteng's power under Sekwati though dented, remained intact. The Boer army was not to challenge this power of the Bapedi again until in 1876. The land question was resolved in 1857 when the Lydenburg authority and the Bapedi authority signed a peace treaty. It was agreed that the Steelpoort river will be the boundary between the Lydenberg and the Maroteng authority.

In 1853 the Maroteng authority under Sekwati left Phiring and established a new settlement to the east of the Leolu Mountain. The king lived on the top of Mosego Hill or Thaba Mosego. The population of this authority of the Bapedi lived in the main centers called Villages ranging in size from fifty to over five thousand inhabitants. The villages were usually situated close to mountain slopes, valley sides and hills.

In conclusion we can say: The Maroteng under king Sekwati had emerged as the forces and the best kingdom. The kingdom was like a rectangle shape formed by the Olifants and the Steelpoort rivers, with the extension to the North provided by the domains of the Mphahlele and Makgakala chiefdoms. Beyond this area to the south of it lay an area in which Boer's, Swazi's and Amandebele's authorities and power overlapped properly in the 1860's. Having said this it does not cancel the fact that the Sekhukhune area once started from Limpopo to the Vaal River.

In 1861 Sekwati was succeeded by Sekhukhune his elder son. Some internal fighting with his half brother Mampuru broke out. Sekhukhune beat Mampuru in a silent coup d'état. But Mampuru who was favoured by his father to the throne fled to Swaziland where he became a real trouble to Sekhukhune. Sekhukhune's nightmare did not end there. Alexander Merensky the missionary from Berlin also fled to Botshabelo with Sekhukhune's subjects accompanied by his half brother Johannes Dinkwanyane and Sekhukhune's great wife Tlakale. Sekhukhune built his army by welcoming Zulu and

Swazi refugees to his kingdom. This move by Sekhukhune brought conflict between him and Mabhoko of the Ndebele in the South of Steelpoort river. Sekhukhune also stopped making payments to the

South African Republic that his father Sekwati made, not as a token of subject status, but as a gesture of goodwill.

In 1865 the Transvaal Boers reinforced by the Swazi's, attacked Sekhukhune.

The Boers found it difficult to penetrate his kraal. In 1877 Sekhukhune was forced to sign a peace treaty. He was forced to recognize the Transvaal as sovereignty and to pay a fine of about 2000 cattle. Sekhukhune approached Sir Theophilus Shepstone through Reverend Merensky, asking for help. The king denied that he signed papers that made him a subject of the Republic.

The king still regarded himself as an independent king who rules the whole Transvaal. When the British annexed the Transvaal in April 1877, his troubles were far from over. The British renewed the peace treaty, and Sekhukhune was forced to pay the 2000 cattles.

The king kept on claiming his land as "the whole of Lydenburg district as far as the Komati river to the west and to the other side of Pretoria was all his territory and that he would continue to make claims upon it". (Delius 1983:185)

By the beginning of 1878 king Sekhukhune began to appear bold. He started planning to drive out all the Whites living at the east of Lulu or Leolu Mountain out of the Transvaal. However this plan or idea reached the Lydenburg authority. The Lydenburg authority decided to wait and see. In March 1878 king Sekhukhune's soldiers moved against Whites' settlements, at Waterval, Ohrigstad and Krugersport. It was a fine exercise

organized by the Bapedi but he found the British like what Paul Kruger once said. "If one wants to kill a tortoise let him wait, it will stick its head out then you will be able to deal with it by cutting the head on the neck". The British only managed to stop the well-planned Bapedi's soldiers in November 1879. The Bapedi were then removed to two settlements Mathibe's Kop and Maleo's Kop, fifty miles from their Lulu stronghold's. Sekhukhune was taken to prison in Pretoria.

The British government appointed Mampuru, Sekhukhune's half brother and the old enemy of Sekhukhune over the kingdom. The once independent authority fell in the hands of Pretoria Government. In 1881 king Sekhukhune was released and taken back to his kingdom, only to be assassinated by Mampuru's man in 1882. The Pretoria government in November 1883 also killed Mampuru.

The once powerful Bapedi kingdom was destroyed forever. Lulu Mountain was used by the South African Republic as a home base for workers employed to build the Delagoa Bay railway. The Bapedi powers were broken. Kgolokoe became the regent for the next chief Sekhukhune II. The white government accepted the subordination. But in 1896 his kingdom was also split. All this led to a political split among the Bapedi leaders.