

*REV. A. MERENSKY AND THE BAPEDI PEOPLE OF  
SEKHUKHUNE*

*By*

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CONTENTS	PAGE NO
SUMMARY	
CHAPTER 1.....	1
Reverend Alexander Merensky : 1837 - 1918	1- 8
Merensky's contribution can therefore be classified as follows	8
1. As a missionary	8
2. Merensky as an author	9
3. Merensky as a medical doctor	10
4. His contributions	10
Merensky's contribution in education	
11-12	
CHAPTER 2.....	13
Sekhukhuneland in 1860	13 - 17
CHAPTER 3.....	18
Sekhukhune comes to power 1861	18 - 29
A genealogy of the Maroteng Royal	29
Sons of Sekwati	29
CHAPTER 4.....	30
African culture	30
1. Laws concerning families	30
2. Spirituality	31
Kinds of African beliefs	31
Social life	32 - 33
Worship	33 - 35
CHAPTER 5.....	36
Culture versus Christianity	36 - 42
Today we realise:	42
Today we recognise and deplore that:	42
We confess:	42 - 48
1. Polygamy	48
2. Drinking beer	48
3. Wine as the blood of Jesus	48 - 50
4. Witchcraft	50 - 51
5. Circumcision initiation school	51
6. Singing and dancing	51 - 52

7. Worship (Modimo) as God	52
8. Lobola/paying dowry to the bride	53
9. Renaming Christians by foreign names	54
The following points stand opposing each other or conflict of ideas	55
Their importance	56
Learning and teaching method	56
Philosophy about it	56
Benefits	57
Segregation	57
The lesson	57 - 58
Teaching responsibilities and loyalty	58
Building the future	59
CHAPTER 6.....	60
Christians are persecuted	60 - 61
Jan Mafadi	61
Jacob Mantladi	61- 62
Martinus Sebushane	62 - 63
Reverend Heinrich Grutzner	63 - 65
The following are resolutions from the gathering:	66 - 68
CHAPTER 7.....	69
Crossing the Steelpoort River	69 - 75
CHAPTER 8.....	76
Botshabelo, place of refuge	76
S.P.P. Mminele reported that:	76
<b>This is all what they found</b>	77- 80
Rules and Regulations for settlement	80
More land needed	81
Buildings at Botshabelo	81 - 83
The building of the fort	83 - 86
Problems encountered	86 - 88
The land question	88 - 89
Early education offered at Botshabelo	89
The kinds of schools were	90
1. The congregation school	90
Time table and subjects taught	91
2. The confirmation	91 - 92
3. The Children school	92
Educators	92
Time table and subjects taught	92 - 93
4. The trade school	93
5. Botshabelo seminary 1880	93 - 94
The impact of wars and laws	94 - 96

Where are we? 97  
 Good things from Botshabelo 97 - 98  
 Botshabelo 1865 - 1965 99- 101  
     1. Mgwenya Teacher's Training College (1975) 101  
     2. Ndebele Teacher's Training College (1980) 101  
     3. Rehlahlilwe Training College (1971) 101 -102  
 Bad things from Botshabelo 102 - 105  
 Botshabelo to Motetema 105 - 109  
 How they entered their new home in poverty,  
 sadness and anger 109 - 110  
 We confess: 110  
 Life in Motetema 111 - 113

CHAPTER 10..... 114

CONCLUSION..... 114

- 1. Wars and stability 114
- 2. Culture and tradition 114
- 3. Colonialism 115
- 4. Impatience 115

Consequences 115 -116

- 1. Seeds falling on good soil 116
- 2. Seeds falling on thorny soil 116

BIBLIOGRAPHY..... 117 - 118

PERIODICALS/JOURNALS..... 119

APPENDICES..... i--xii



When King Sekwati met the missionaries in 1860, it was one of the best moments of his life. He could not predict that at a certain point in time, his nation would be torn apart because of their religion and Christianity. The turning point can be classified under the following headings:

Wars and stability,  
Culture and tradition,  
Colonialism, and  
Impatience

Sekhukhune became heir after the death of Sekwati his father. Mampuru his half brother opposed him to his Kingship. Even the nations that were once loyal and depending on the great King Sekwati, challenged Sekhukhune for their independence. The Christians on the other hand with their new religion added more to the confusion of the new King. The internal problems weakened the once powerful and united Kingdom of the Bapedi.

The Bapedi people had their own system of beliefs. Their beliefs had been handed down to them from their fore-fathers by word of mouth from generation to generation. The sudden change brought forward by Christians, was new and unaccepted to them. They hated their own names, which are easy for them to pronounce. Christian names like Johannes, Andries, Merensky or Christians are new to them. To them there is only one King, and that is Sekhukhune. To them there is no other God than their gods, who are their ancestors. And if these Christians' God is going to take the place of Sekhukhune, then King Sekhukhune will fight for recognition and his place.

The Boers in the Transvaal wanted to annex the whole of Transvaal. The Missionaries were the only white people working in peace amongst the Bapedi people. They were also the only people who were able to talk to the Transvaal or Lydenburg government up to the highest level. Merensky was able to bring closer the two governments. The real

aim of the Missionaries was easily shifted, indirectly or directly the Missionaries used forked tongues: Jesus who want people to love Him and obey his commandments and the Transvaal government who wanted people to respect their laws.

Because of the given facts, time was against them. Sekhukhune was impatient, he wanted to unite his nation. He could not tolerate those who wanted to destabilize the country for their own benefits. He would rather use anything necessary before him to remove them. On the other hand was the Transvaal government that could not wait any longer. They could easily lose the Transvaal under the British Empire. Sekhukhune's leadership will not last much longer. It is matter of time before the whole Transvaal is annexed. But Christians in Sekhukhuneland as converts will be forced to cross the flooding river of Steelpoort to Botshabelo near Middelburg.

The impact of this misunderstanding between Christians and the Bapedi divided the people of Sekhukhune's ideology. The Christians from Sekhukhune came closer to the whites and even fought on the side of the Transvaal government. Sekhukhune and the Bapedi people who are loyal to him were called the heathens. To be a Christian will mean to be leaving all that you have inherited from your forefathers and be educated by all that comes with the Missionaries. Your father or brother is your enemy if he doesn't want to change his way of life.

This was the seed that the missionaries were planting. But their seed eventually fell on good soil and thorny soil.

Chapter I

Reverend Alexander Merensky- 1837-1918

Alexander Merensky, the great pioneer of the Berlin missionary, the geographer, the ethnologist and the author, was born some forty miles west of Breslau (now Wroclaw, in south west Poland) on the 8<sup>th</sup> June 1837. He died on the 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1918. Merensky was the son of Albert Merensky, a senior forestry official, and Pauline von Kessel. His mother, Pauline died at his birth and his father, Albert, died when he was seven years old.

Following his father's death, Alexander Merensky was accepted by the Schindler orphanage because his stepmother was unable to support the large family. At the Schindler orphanage he was troubled by the spiritual uncertainties of youth. Although his intention was to become a military officer, he experienced a spiritual awakening, particularly at the time of his brother's death who drowned in his presence. The influence he received from Rev. Knak changed him completely. At seventeen Merensky decided to become a missionary. The love for Jesus started burning in him and he was quoted as saying: " I felt deep in my heart the call to become a missionary" (Mminele 1983: 31.)

In 1845 Merensky went to the Berliner Missionshaus and for three years he was trained at the Institute of the Berlin Mission Society where he also studied medicine and nursing at the local hospital. He must have had an extra love for his work, because he dedicated himself to God and the South African people for today his name is amongst the great names of South African heroes.



In December of 1855 Merensky left Amsterdam for Cape Town. Heinrich Grutner, who also made a name for himself among the 19th century missionaries in South Africa, accompanied him. On his arrival Merensky wasted no time getting started with his work. He visited mission stations and studied the work he had to undertake. Eventually he was ordered to move from Natal to Swaziland and to establish a mission there.

It must be remembered that the Berlin Missionary Society was not the first missionary group to arrive in South Africa. The Dutch, being the first settlers of European descent in South Africa, are generally regarded as the first missionaries, who established the first church in 1652. The first Berlin Missionary Society arrived in South Africa from Germany on 17 April 1834. The missionary, August Geibel, was the leader. The following missionaries, August Ferdinand Lange, Gustav Adolph Kraut, Rheinhold Theidor Gregorowsky and Johannes Schmidt, accompanied him.

They were instructed by the Berlin Missionary Society to proceed to the land of the Batswana tribes, in the region of the 20<sup>th</sup> parallel latitude south of the Equator, somewhere in the area of Kuruman. It was pointed out to them that there was vast lands and large numbers of Batswanas who had been neglected by the missionaries in the region, who were crying out for the knowledge of God and of His love. However the Berlin Missionary Society established their first Berlin Mission station in Africa on the 24<sup>th</sup> of September 1834 among the Korannas under Piet Witvoet at Bethany in the Orange Free State.

By the time of Merensky's arrival in 1858, the Berlin Missionary Society had already founded the following eight mission stations in South Africa. These included Bethany, two in the Cape (Amalienstein, Ladysmith), three in Xhosaland (Bethany,

.....Pniel) and two in Natal (Emmaus, Christiansburg). At each of these mission stations, mission schools were established. However the main aim of the Berlin Missionary Society was the same as that of all missionary societies working in South Africa, namely "Evangelization".

The Berlin Mission was inspired by the words found in Matthew 28:19. "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and of the Holy Spirit". These were the words written at the main entrance door of all mission houses.

Merensky and Grutzner, who had just arrived in South Africa, were stationed at Emmaus. Then they were ordered to move from Natal to Swaziland and to establish a mission station there. They set off from Emmaus to Lydenburg where they were given permission to work amongst the AmaSwazi. Their attempt to evangelise the Amaswazi failed because of conditions laid down by King- Sobhuza I. The king wanted them to bring him gun powder and lead.

After being given permission by the South African Republic, they approached Sekwati, the paramount chief of the Bapedi. Sekwati, who had been longing for the missionaries for sometimes, was overjoyed. He wasted no time in giving them permission to work among his people. The chief made it clear to Merensky that he had no intention of becoming a Christian at his age, but he had opened his heart and hands for the missionaries to work among his subjects.

In 1860 they established the first station among the Bapedi and named it "Gerlachshoop" in honour of General von Gerlach, one of the Society directors who had just died.

It must be remembered that it was not only Sekwati who was chief in this area. There were other chiefs, who were heading smaller tribes, like Boleu of the Bakopa near the

present Groblersdal and Mabhoko of the Ndebele. Sekwati was their Paramount Chief. The second station was established in 1861 and was named "Kgalatlou". The Paramount Chief died in 1861. His son, Sekhukhune, succeeded him.

Under the new Paramount Chief Sekhukhune, the following stations were established. The "Phatametsane" also called "Garbelstadt" were established in 1863 near the present Phokwane village among the Matlala people of Chief Maserumule. The last one was the "Ga-Ratau" in 1864, near the present H-C Boshoff Hospital in Maandagshoek.

Merensky, as a doctor, fought the malaria that had engulfed the land of Sekhukhune with considerable success. Nevertheless the Paramount Chief ignored his contribution. The mission station, "Gerlachshoop" was destroyed during the Swazi uprising in 1864. The Christians were so badly persecuted that, at the end of 1864, they fled seeking missionary protection at "Botshabelo" (a place of refuge), a farm near Middelburg. "Botshabelo" under Merensky became the center of all the Berlin Missionary Society missions in the Transvaal.

"Botshabelo" became the institution for training ministers, and teachers for black students. Merensky also built the church at "Botshabelo", the oldest church in the Transvaal. He also erected the stone fortress, Fort Wilhelm, which was restored in 1962 and declared a national monument.

Shortly after Merensky had become superintendent of the mission, he acted as mediator in the peace negotiations between the Boers and Sekhukhune following the abortive Transvaal Campaign against the Bapedi chief in 1876. These negotiations gave birth to the peace treaty signed in 1877. The terms of this peace treaty being that Sekhukhune would become a subject of the Transvaal Republic. The Boers regarded Merensky's mediation and his new relations with Sekhukhune and Theophilus Shepstone



unfavourably. The Boers never trusted Sekhukhune and the British Shepstone government. Merensky's mediation was an embarrassment to them. The Shepstone annexed the Transvaal Republic on the 12 April 1877.

Although Merensky welcomed the British annexation as he was convinced that it will bring peace and order, he was also blamed by the Shepstone government because he had denied them the opportunity to utilize Sekhukhune's hostile relations with the Boer government as an urgent justification for the British annexation. On the other hand he was also blamed by the Boer Government for using Sekhukhune as a lever against President T.F Burgers. Indeed, the Boer government regarded him as a traitor. Nevertheless when the first Anglo-Boer war broke out, Merensky was asked to support the Boers as a doctor on the Natal border. Merensky was also present at Laingsnek and Skuinshoogte (Ingogo). From his field hospital he watched the Majuba fighting through his binoculars in February 1881. Therefore he was able to leave behind a striking account of the battle in his memoirs. After the war it was clear to Merensky that through his pro-British attitude since 1877, he had lost the support from his colleagues as well as the Boers.

The other problem Merensky encountered was the treatment of the Christian converts in Botshabelo. The government of the Transvaal was too weak to bring peace in the country. Although the government kept on promising Merensky and the Botshabelo residents protection, this protection was never enjoyed. This caused friction between him and the converts, as he tried to convince the Transvaal Republic to return the children of Chief Rammupudu's subjects who were kept as slaves by the neighbouring Boers. The Boers, did

not want any compensation. Merensky and the Boers in particular, started to lose all hope and trust in the white government and with Merensky himself.

The paying of taxes by blacks, particularly those who were staying in Botshabelo, were challenged by the Christians. But "Merensky tried to appease the government and admonished his flock not to disobey the law of the Boer government, his subjects started to view him as a friend of the Boers" (Mminele 1982:50).

Another contributing point was the refusal of the Transvaal Government to raise the status of the Chiefs at Botshabelo. On the 1<sup>st</sup> May 1874 Grutzner requested the Landdrost of Middelburg to pay the chiefs at Botshabelo at least ten percent of the taxes collected. This request was made in light of the fact that the Botshabelo residents were regular with their payment of taxes. The chiefs ought to be viewed as salaried officials of the state and occupying a sort of "Veldkornet" post. "This request was turned down" (Mminele 1982:51)

The black residents of Botshabelo were also dissatisfied at being forced to serve as police and prison workers in Middelburg. Their complaint was based on the fact that most of the prisoners were their own people, the Bapedi. Eventually the government had to replace them by hiring the Zulus from Natal.

The other concern of the Botshabelo people was that they were used to serve on the side of the state in the wars against Sekhukhune or their fellow Blacks without individual compensation. Their compensation went directly to the Berlin Mission. As a result of this set-up, through which Merensky occupied the position of "Paramount chief at Botshabelo, he did not find favour with the Christians at the mission station. They viewed the set-up structure as an "Onnatuurlike samestelling".

Chiefs at Botshabelo felt that the missionaries were exploiting them. They decided to

pull out from Botshabelo to a free land where they would be independent. By the year 1866 a large number of Rammupudu's subjects were no longer prepared to stay at the mission station. They all felt that it was humiliation for their chief to be subordinate to Merensky. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of October of 1873 another group under Dinkwanyane, the half brother of Sekhukhune, left Botshabelo for a place called Mafolofolo with about 400 people.

In giving his view as to the main cause of the exodus, Merensky wrote as follows to the Home Board in Berlin.

"The missionaries can protect the blacks against arbitrary demands by the Boers, but against arbitrary demands by the government they cannot do anything ..... As such we cannot blame them too much for having left."

It must be remembered that Merensky owed his loyalty more to the British government, arising out of his agreement between himself and President Burgers. We can conclude by saying, Merensky in South Africa experienced not only the work of missionaries among the heathen, but he had also learned to bind the wounds of soldiers by stopping the blood that flowed, as a doctor. He also learned to be in between the two fighting groups negotiating peace and love amongst them. On the 6 January 1883 Merensky preached his last sermon at Botshabelo, and on that day, he baptized eighty-five people adults and children. He then left for Germany to rest. But in Germany he held administrative posts in his Society until the Berlin mission sent him again to Malawi in 1891. In Malawi he established the first mission stations, called Wangemannshohe and the second station called Manow. Merensky worked very hard in Malawi. He then moved forward to the Zambezi River where he met the expedition led by Hermann von Wissmann, which was dispatched to East Africa to establish German authority in the area which was



called Tanganyika later.

Merensky was able to give them more information about Africa and its people. While he was stationed in Malawi, Merensky had the opportunity to visit his old mission station at Botshabelo after paying a visit to the Transvaal President, Paul Kruger, to discuss matters of common interest. Alexander Merensky returned to Germany in 1892 and remained there for the rest of his life. Merensky died in 1918 in Germany.

After his return to Germany Merensky did excellent missionary as well as scientific work. He was highly honoured during his life. The University of Heidelberg honoured him with a doctoral degree in Philosophy.

The university of Berlin (Friedrich Wilhelm) also honoured Merensky with doctoral degree in Theology. He was also made honorary member of a number of famous academies and international scientific societies.

Merensky's contribution can therefore be classified as follows.

1. As a missionary

- He was an outstanding figure in the history of the Berlin missions. He was a pioneer missionary par-excellence in whose disposition there was not a single weak trait.
- He was a hard worker, healthy and undaunted, a man of perception and will-power, he could handle with ease a team of oxen in the wilderness.
- He was an unshakeable religious zeal. His eloquence and extraordinary power of persuasion made him a particular preacher in South Africa and Germany, his home country.
- Practical work was an essential aspect of his training of black Christians.
- Developing leadership was part of his method as he allowed members of his congregation to select their own leaders to develop their sense of responsibility.

- He produced a number of interesting publications indicating the thoroughness of his knowledge
- Amongst them we can name the following:
  - His memories published in 1888, became an important source for the study of mission work in South Africa.
  - In 1875 he published in Germany a considerably improved Map of the Transvaal Republic.
  - On his return to Germany he published a map of the whole of South Africa.
  - Later he published a small map of the shire region in East Africa and of Malawi, and finally he published an atlas covering the whole mission areas.
  - He composed and translated into Sepedi a number of hymns, including hymns No. 198 and 339, which appear in the Lutheran hymnal.
  - He had four individual publications, which are partly autobiographical, seven brochures, two narratives, four cartographical works, five articles which appeared in the “Berichte Berliner Missions Gesellschaft” – Twelve articles sounded in the “Deutsche Kolonial-zeitung” and Ten articles in the “Nova Acta Leopolding”.
  - He was very much interested in geography, which led to his contribution to the discovery of Zimbabwe ruins. Rumours about legendary ruins in the North caused him to study native folklore and manuscripts.
  - Merensky often studied this folklore and was convinced that the ruins existed in Zimbabwe. He also indicated where a search could be made.
  - He was prevented by a small pox epidemic from finding the ruins himself.
  - At Botshabelo he gave his friend, Karl Mauch, the information about Zimbabwe and its ruins.
  - Mauch convinced him that Zimbabwe had been a gold producing center in the country Ophir during a period of trade between Solomon and the Phoenicians.

3. Merensky as a medical doctor

- He was very good as a medical practitioner and this attracted many Whites and Blacks to his mission.
- He began his work by knowing only the basic principles of first Aid, but his knowledge increased through his hard work and dedication. He furthered his studies in Pretoria where he became a qualified doctor.
- At that time he was the only trained and qualified doctor in the area of Middelburg.
- After his return from Germany he addressed medical meetings speaking with authority on tropical disease.

4. His other contributions

- He took an active interest in the German Colonies in Africa. In 1884 he became a member of the board of Management of the Gesellschaft für Deutsche Kolonialzeitung.
- He also emphasized the importance of the economic relationship between whites and blacks in South Africa.
- He advocated the allocation of gardens and land to blacks working on farms and plantations.
- He discouraged forced labour and slavery.
- He encouraged segregation and the establishment of reserves and locations for blacks.
- He wanted the paying of taxes to encourage diligence, good treatment and judicial protection.
- He opposed Europeanization and emphasized the protection and maintenance of distinct national character for blacks, including the preservation of the authority of families and tribal chiefs.



- He was interested in the success of his mission at Botshabelo and would do anything possible to realize this. He went overseas regularly to raise funds.
- He remained friendly with the government of the day as long as it promised peace so that missionary work could go on peacefully.
- He never stopped to criticize the shortcomings of the government in the Transvaal.
- When it came to work Merensky wanted to keep everybody busy like a bee, with himself setting the pace. Thus earned him the nickname "Phakisa" meaning "be quick".
- He believed that the only solutions to this country's problem were when whites and blacks regard this country as their home.
- He also believed that it is the duty of whites in the south to encourage civilization throughout the entire continent.

#### Merensky's contributions in education

Merensky started educating the Botshabelo residents as early as 1865. By 1875 more than ten types of schools were established. The kinds of schools were as follows: the Congregation School; the Catechumenal School; the Confirmation School; the Evening School for Adults; the Youth School; the Sunday school; the Trade School; the Evangelist School and the Evangelist Seminary, though some of them were closed down.

The main aim of education was a religious one, i.e. to convert and evangelize the Black residents at Botshabelo, so that they could also do missionary work among the black masses. Merensky was concerned with the spiritual upliftment of the black people and teaching them to read and write so that they could be in a better position to understand the Bible and other related literature. The other key position he held at Botshabelo is that of a personnel recruiter. The main objective was to organize the seminary within and even from abroad. Teachers were called from Germany viz. Reuds Hermann During, Johannes Winter and Carl Richter. Among the converts Maritinus Sebushane and Ezekiel Mampe, who became assistant teachers.

This is one side of the story about Revered Merensky. We need to know the other side from the day he met the Bapedi people in Sekhukhune land, how he dealt with Pagan people and their culture.

*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.

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.

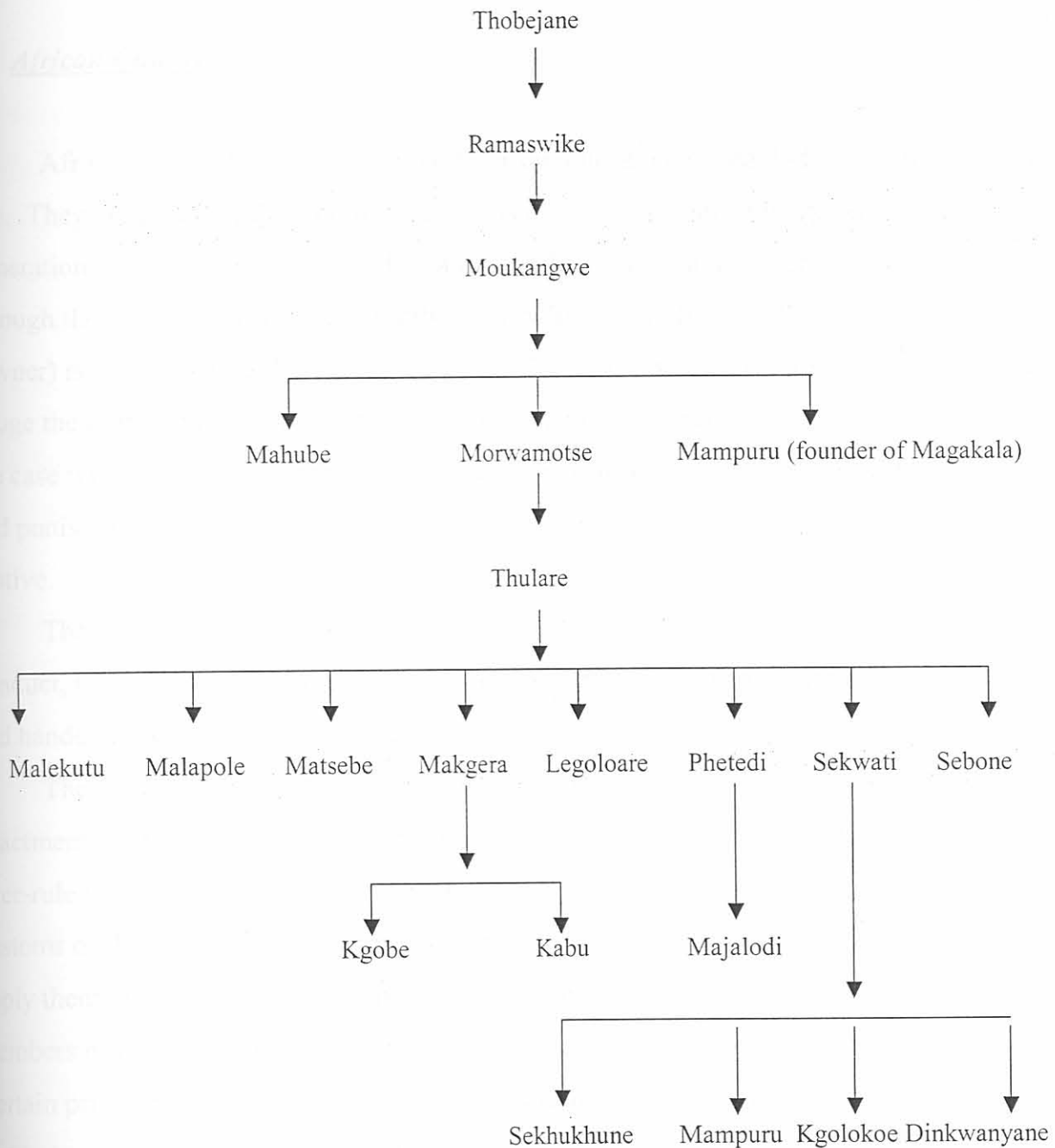
At the other edge of the sword, the army gathered on that day and the missionaries estimated their numbers to be some ten thousand men. Beside the Bakopa and the Ndzundza Ndebele who had not showed up, none of the chiefdoms, which had recognized Maroteng rule during Sekwati's reign, withheld their regiments. 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)

Chapter 4

African Culture

Africans like all other races have their own heritage of legal ideas, beliefs and social life. They are proud of their culture, and it is always inherited from generation to generation. Their life style is not the same as Christians, but they too believe in God. Though they don't pray to God directly, they believe that the world has its owner. The (owner) is a supernatural being. The body of law is probably a safer standard by which to gauge the moral view of people than that affected by their religious practices. This is also the case with the Africans, for their conduct is not influenced by a belief in future rewards and punishments, and their conception of moral duty is but lightly tinged by any religious motive.

The code of rules approved by a tribal tradition is the hereditary body of established conduct, that which has been observed, recognized, and enjoyed from time immemorial, and handed down by their forefathers.

The prescribed rule of conduct is not changed by any deliberate legislative enactment. A Chief may promulgate some local order, but in no case will this affect or over-rule the established body of law or custom. The recognized body of laws and customs of the people are carefully conserved. It is the duty of the chief to interpret and apply them, but not to change them by directive command. In general, the chief and members of his family always enjoy the privileges or liberties denied to the commoner. Certain privileges are also attached to the position of a headman or councillor referred to as an "Induna" and even the officer of diviner, though much of his social status may be directly attributed to the alleged powers with his person and the fears that such powers instilled in the community.

1. Laws concerning females

The female always a minor in the law, she is under the control of her father or his representative and after marriage she falls under the control of her husband. But the responsibility of her own conduct or acts does not cease entirely on her marriage.

## 2. *Spirituality*

The spiritual duties of the chief as head of the tribe, is to give direction with regards to sacrifices after consultation with the diviners or the direction received from a duty. The sacrifices, offered mainly to the ancestral spirits of the royal house are made by a tribal priest or Kinsman of the Chief. We must remember that a diviner is consulted on a multitude of personal, family and tribal questions, because of fear of the spiritual and magical forces, mainly of the evil intent.

### *Kinds of African beliefs*

The influence exercised by the spirits of the dead over the physical world is very great among the Africans. The tribal spirits, that is the spirits of the dead chiefs have a wider range than the purely domestic ones. It is believed that the spirit of the dead or departed chiefs affect the whole community and may cause drought, famine, epidemics and floods, while the spirit of the departed ordinary man is limited to the activities of his family circle. Another type of belief is that of wizards and witches. They also have superhuman powers to harm the body, cause illness, death, infertility of men and fields, which may be the work of the malignant practicing witchcraft. Everything may be attributed to the action of either a spirit or a witch: very little is due to chance or accident or purely natural cause. "Letlalo la motho ga lebapolelwe fase" in Sotho.

The belief is that after death man continues to exist in spirit form. But no one knows where the abode of shade is. Only those who have married or who have set up a family, that is, those who have reached a definite social status, have spirits which enter the realm of shades, and as such, can affect the family for good or evil. Children and all those who, though adolescent, have not contracted marriage or borne offspring, do not necessarily become extinct, but have not final rites paid to them. As immature spirits they do not count as members of lures, but merely buzz about like flies. The ordinary spirit generally assumes the form of a snake and in that guise will visit its earthly abode without being harmed. Its appearance will necessitate a consultation with a diviner to ascertain the cause of such a visit. If anything should be amiss, steps are taken to quiet the spirit by rites or offerings.



Ceremony is the essence of the African society. It permeates all phases of life, in both private and public transactions. The giving or exchange of tokens is an important factor to which great value was attached, for it forms the great record of such transactions.

Public business was transacted at the whole village courtyard where men congregate to do their work to discuss family and other matters, receive visits and to gossip. Women and children are excluded from the courtyard, unless especially invited to attend. Men even have their food and beer at the courtyard apart from women and children.

It is in this courtyard where matters concerning the initiation schools will be decided. The chief will set a date together with his tribal authority. The date is normally chosen in winter months and all boys of the same age grouping will be taken to this bush school. Before leaving, usually the big kraal is built near the courtyard of the chief, and all men, that is the fathers of the boys and their children gather at this kraal for a night. Singing and dancing take place, until the next morning. Men and brothers, as they are usually called, especially those who are from this school, enjoy the whipping, and this is taken as a sign of manhood. Circumcision takes place early in the morning. Boys will stay there for two to three months. When they come home they are now called men and no longer boys. During this stage of their stay in the mountain school, women and children are not allowed to see them or go near the school. It is meant for men only and it is their secrets.

The same can be said of women, for they too grow girls to womanhood. They do go to this type of school, usually near the village. Men respect the place where women do their things. Other Africans like the Ndebeles and the Tsongas or Shangaans bring their daughters up at their homes rather than taking them to a bush. An outside room is chosen for this event and girls will stay there for a month or so without being seen by men and children. When they come back to the public, a goat, sheep or cattle is slaughtered for this wonderful day or ceremony.

It is only then that these children are called women. They are then ready to start

their own families. Boys as men are able to search for their partners, and if they succeed then the ceremony of wedding will be celebrated. The two extended families become friends. The groom's family will be expected to pay dowry or "Lobola" to the bride. This is usually paid in the form of cattle. The bride's family will set a fixed amount and that will be calculated in terms of cattle even if that is thousands of Rand. The advantage of this is to make the bride to stay in her new family and the smooth relationship between the two families.

Another thing that is important in African marriage is that men are really heads of the family. Their words are always final. The chief can marry as many wives as he wants. The tribal authority decides the queen amongst his wives. Usually it is announced when the king wants to marry the Queen mother. It is out of this marriage where the king's successor will be born.

This type of marriage, that is the chief does not practice polygamy only. Even his subjects, men of the village do practice polygamy. It is believed that man must not be asked, where he is from when coming late at home.

The Africans are very fond of music. Singing and dancing are forms of recreation to which they are much devoted. The Principal instrument is a drum, then follow many other instruments. Children have their own musical and dancing games, which are usually performed in the evening after eating.

### Worship

Worship is the greatest African heritage. There are many forms of worship in the African community, family, and tribe. They worship their ancestral spirits and their deity. They observe the commands of their deity strictly and his promulgations are adhered to without questions. Homage and reverence are paid, of all things; they do not forget to thank him by gifts. He must be given cattle, corn, money, beer, etc.

Africans as mentioned above, believe mostly in the departed person or the ancestral. They believe that they are the one who knows the problems of this world best. In the case of a family they believe that the spirit of the departed parents still lives and it takes care of its family. But above that there is God who is controlling the world. So the



spirit of the dead is near God and is the one that pleads with God on their behalf. The form of worship is not direct to God but the name of the deceased is called and through him or her they are able to tell the living deity or god about their problems.

Usually blood of any animal is shed. That is in a yard where there is a place where an alter is built. Each time they remember to worship their ancestors, the head of the family will call all family members to kneel down before this alter. If it is just a minor thing only snuff and some African beer is used. The father will call all the names of the departed family members to have mercy on them who are still living. But if it is a big thing or ritual, then the blood of chickens, goat, lamb or cattle is sprinkled on an alter. When doing the celebrations, not only the family members are called, but even the extended families are called to the ritual ceremony. On the side of a chief, if there is drought, famine, floods or disaster that involves the community. The chief after consulting his guide or the diviner instruction is extended to the whole community to observe certain things. Maybe not going to field on Wednesdays. Coming together and worship as a nation at the royal court. Even to go to mountains or bush in searching for anything that can be associated with the problem. Usually it is believed that the land has been bewitched.

Having said that, that doesn't justify the actions taken by the missionaries particularly when African people were evangelized. It goes without saying that there are parts of the African heritage, which should be adopted as they are in the Christian community as a Christian heritage. When Africans greet their superiors or give praise to their god, they adopt a different mode of reference from that of the other races. To show their respect they always sit down when he speaks or when an elderly person speaks to them. They stand up when singing or giving praise to their God. In order not to make an African a stranger or foreigner in our Christian services, it would be well to adopt his accustomed manner in worshipping.

As it stands it is not that easy to decide or say which parts of the African heritage are or are not suitable for the Christian community. A theologian is greatly needed on this subject. But the theologian's visions must not lose sight of the living conditions of the African people. Knowing the African language or dialects does not qualify a theologian as knowing an African. I refer here to "Lobola" the customary law on dowry.



Two views prevail. Some see it purely as a buying and selling transaction which renders it unchristian. Others look at it from a different angle and consider it a safeguard of the matrimonial contract and family structure, especially at this delicate transition stage.

Chapter 5Culture versus Christianity

When Christianity was brought to the African people, it was presented not only as public and male domination, but also as a preserve of whites and of the ruling class. The result was an overlong precaution with missionaries and of course an important topic in political history. They were often agents of British imperialism as well as opponents of white settler regimes. But far more missionaries were agents of cultural change. (Elphick 1995:10)

That can be said of Alexander Merensky as an example. “Members of the community at Mafolofolo began to enunciate a profound criticism of the role of the missionaries. They argued that they were enemies of the converts. For they teach you that you must be subordinate to the Boers, and although the Boers cannot enforce their laws, the missionaries assist the Boers to place you under their yoke”.

As the differences mounted between the community of Mafolofolo and the missionaries, the Berlin missionaries reached a conclusion that “it would be best for the mission if a foot is placed on the neck of the blacks”. (Delius 1983:176)

Merensky believed that his Christian converts must subject themselves under the Z.A.R, which was governed by Britain at that time. He wrote: “I made it clear to my people that as Christians we could not serve two masters, both Mapoch (Mabhoko) and the Boers. This would only be possible through total deceit”. Merensky denied the converts the options of recognizing the authority of their traditional leader. He was influenced by the fact that his ultimate authority was based on a property right, which in turn depended

on the authority of the Z.A.R. This entailed meeting demands for tax and labour. This ultimately brought a clash of ideas between the traditional chiefs and the missionaries.

This will also mean that the converts or Christians would become more loyal to missionaries than their own chiefs.

Hence chief Dinkwanyane had this to say: “Do we have no land or place .... Have we not continually worked for Merensky and so served him? ..... We helped to build the mill and were not paid, the school and churches. Further we have worked the land for him in the form of the tithe”. (Delius 1983:168)

This difference between Merensky and the traditional leader was based on the traditional practice, which is African culture. Those explanations that have been advanced have been shaped, in the main, by a crude cultural determination. The dominant missionary view was that the conflicts were an inevitable consequence of the fact that the essential basis of chiefly power was religious. This view of the chief's paramount is also facilitated by the conclusion, which became increasingly prevalent amongst the Berlin missionaries that Christian advance depended on the destruction of chiefly power.

The best way of doing was to convert a person wholly. By this it is meant to convert him fully, that is to make him different from his people, that he must be different from his family, different from his nation and different from his Chief. You must isolate yourself from them. You are not like them. You are a Christian and they remain a heathen nation. This means missionaries were to convert people and isolate them from their Traditional Chief. The missionaries were doing that for the sake of the Z.A.R., which wanted to control the whole Transvaal. For they were not controlling the land under Sekhukhune. So Merensky was used by the Republic to isolate King Sekhukhune. After the building of



Botshabelo Merensky believed that the station would develop into an institute. He defined an institute as a mission station located on B.M.S. property and the form of administration being determined by the fact that the mission society both claimed rents from the inhabitants and through its missionary representative governed by the community through mutually agreed codes of law and discipline. He believed that the missionary would on occasion have to enforce the law of the state and represent the interests of the landowners. In 1861 Merensky wrote to the Z.A.R. in Lydenburg through the landdrost. Stressing that he wished to remain nothing more than a missionary in the eyes of his congregation, nonetheless, he will always be willing to support his government in its attempts to maintain law and order.

Merensky and his colleagues were never to display more commitment to the cause of the Pedi paramount than the French missionaries mustered in their support of Moshoeshoe. Merensky and Grutzner were careful to observe the code of conduct laid down for missionaries by the Z.A.R. and sought to avoid presenting any open challenge to the claims of authority of the Boer state or the paramount. Hence Sekhukhune describing the missionaries as people of the Boers in 1864.

The one other factor that made Sekhukhune not to trust the missionaries was their Christian beliefs that seemed to be contrary to the African belief. This double standard by the missionaries, made them to lose support even to their own converts. As one of them by the name of Sam had this to say with a Bible in his hand in Pretoria. "The baruti ba Berlin (The Berlin missionaries) are the Nebuchadnezzar, the men in furnace are Marishani, the heathen and the poor Wesleyan Christians..... These men from Germany bring false doctrines into the land ..... And deliver us over to the Boers". (Millard 1994:149)

“I mean here, the struggle was about land. More and more land was lost to the farmers. Traditional leaders like Sekhukhune as the paramount Chief, Mabhoko and Boleu were not only losing power, but even their subjects were taken as labourers to farmers and the land was steadily moving into the hand of the white man. Chief Mabhoko of the Ndebele was quoted saying: “Mabhoko is for peace if the Boers are prepared to pay Mabhoko one beast for each house because it is his land..... He said earlier that it was his land ..... and he would fight to his death for it”.

Despite the opposition of the landdrost of Lydenburg and the subsequent disapproval of the Uitvoerende Raad these burghers agreed to pay forty head of cattle to the Ndebele ruler. Although these contributions were changed as the land was bought and the buyer received the right to stay, all this happened with the approval of the missionaries. The only things that they did not know or say was that they were not always aware of the suspicion with which they were viewed or of the difference between their British Colonial culture and methods and the culture of the people among whom they were working.

The other methods that the British Colonials used was that of starving the African tribes for submission, they can destroy their crops, or make them to pay tribute to the Z.A.R. with herds of cattle, for instead Sekhukhune was commanded to pay not less than 2 500 cattle to Z.A.R. as war expenses. The whole aim was to make a black man poor so that he may render service to a white man.

The next step Shepstone took was to deliver an ultimatum to the paramount. A message translated into Sepedi by Nachtigal was sent to Sekhukhune informing him that:

“All persons, natives and especially their chiefs as well as whites residing within the territory who wished to continue their residence there as subjects of the Great Queen and

enjoy her protection and other benefits pertaining to such privileges would be obliged to render due obedience to the Governance and to pay such tax as may be found necessary for protection and to enable his excellency to provide for the necessary expenditure contingent on the good government of the country”.

Sekhukhune’s position was clear and he was not prepared to pay anything to the British, to him, there was no difference between the Boers and the British. Sekhukhune had refused to recognize himself as a subject of the Z.A.R. He said:

“I will not stand under the law. I am willing to pay taxes. I have to live by my people and any tax payable by them should come to me as a Chief”. (Delius 1983:211)

When this reached the Z.A.R. they aimed for war with the Pedi Dominion. They started preparing to attack the Maroteng Kingdom. They found it difficult to govern the Z.A.R. with some independent Chiefdom who seemed to be united. The Zulu were still independent. So they planned to attack Sekhukhune through this trap of 2 500 cattle for war expenses. Shepstone had this to say: “There are indications of the existence of a kind of common desire in the Natives mined in S.A. to try and overcome the White intruder..... They are however incapable of precise combination and so long as we can roll one stone out of the way at a time, we shall be alright. Sekhukhune is my first stone”.

When all these plans were made, the missionaries were aware of it. There was nothing that they did to stop the British Colony to destabilize the tribes which they were converting. Instead they became the ones who prepared more for the war. Their aim was to have a good government from Britain. A government to govern better than the Boers.

On 13 May 1875 Nachtigal wrote to the mission director in Berlin: “I read the secret orders from the President to Mr Cooper. If it comes to war I will go with the army as a



preacher for Blacks if my health permits..... I could write a great deal about the plan but it is still secret .... in time you will hear everything ..... God's mills grind slowly but fine, Johannes and Sekhukhune will also learn this lesson but only when it is too late". (Delius 1983:199)

Nachtigal as a companion of Merensky should have discouraged this for he knew that many people were going to die especially children and women, who had nothing to do with the stubborn minds of men. As a Pastor and a missionary he should have protected the tribe he was converting to know God. He should not have been happy to preach to corpses. I mean man needs repentance whilst alive. As a missionary, he should have preached the Gospel of Christ, which is based on the love of one another. Even if he didn't like Sekhukhune and Johannes, he should have remembered what Christ taught about the law of forgiveness.

Let me conclude the land problem by clearly stating the position of the missionaries when blacks wanted to have land of their own. I mean if they wanted to buy land of their own from the Z.A.R. for the missionaries it didn't matter, whether you were a convert Christian or not. The case here-involved Johannes Dinkwanyane one of their converts who had some differences with them concerning culture and Christianity. In October 1875, the acting Landdrost of Lydenburg visited the settlement of Mafolofolo to order Dinkwanyane to count his subject in preparation for the payment of tax within four weeks. Dinkwanyane had rejected this on the reason that they lived on the land belonging to Sekhukhune and could not see how the government had any right to demand taxes from them, and when it was necessary that their people or men should be counted then they join Sekhukhune and let him do the counting. In 1876, with war looming Dinkwanyane dispatched a letter to the

Landdrost of Lydenburg which was forwarded through Nachtigal and which gave some sense of his view of events.

“To the office, all the people ....I will address you Boers, you men who know God, do you think there is a God who will punish lying, theft and deceit? I ask you now for the truth. I pray for the truth because I also speak my whole truth. I say: The land belongs to us, this is my truth, and even if you become angry I will nonetheless stand by it. See that other people... blacks... have settled around here, but they are not so clever as to sell the land because they are ignorant, but you were all too clever... Your cleverness has turn to theft. When I say your cleverness has turned to theft, I say it in relation to the land, because you came to this country, you knew God’s word but ate everything up...and said nothing to anybody, only flogged the people: Your theft has now come into the open. Other men came here who were not of your kind who taught the people about this ... and I mean: those who have bought the land let them take their money back. Let these words be read before all the people so that they can hear the same. I am Johannes the younger son of Sekwati.” (Delius 83:178)

I want to conclude this section by quoting one example taken from “Berliner Missions Werk 2000:4”

“The missionary’s primary and most crucial task was preaching the gospel, encountering African culture and religion, and the gathering and leading of indigenous congregations and Churches over decades. We look back with gratitude, respect and joy on the past achievements of our mission workers in the mission fields, in the church, as well as in the fields of education, school and health. They were leaders in many areas. But unfortunately that is also where the roots of many detrimental developments can be found.”

Today we realize:

The motivation for mission was very complex. In addition to the zeal of the revivalist movements, the feelings of superiority of the White Europeans' in all areas including the religious one, played a huge role, the conviction of a necessary civilizing mission, which was partly colonialist and racist.

Today we recognize and deplore that:

- Our virtues became our snare. The missionary impulse was often stepped in and overwhelmed by the white Europeans' feeling of superiority by colonialism and fascism.
- To this day we often seem to act and conduct ourselves in different manners because of feelings of superiority and the urge towards self- realization.

We confess:

Due to lack of sensitivity towards African history and cultures we have often concerned customer, conduct and religious beliefs foreign to us.

Merensky's account of the position of the paramount in relation to the missionaries and the converts published in 1863 does not reconcile well with his later writings or with his explanation of the conflicts.

"It cannot be ignored that such an enduring movement as the Christian movement in the midst of the society feeds an ever increasing hostility on the parts of the



witchdoctors, the higher classes and the masses. After the protection of God, it has been the arm of King Sekhukhune which had shielded the Christians from the great harm”.

One element in the hostility towards the Christians was the reaction against the cavalier fashion in which converts treated conventional ritual forms and observances. There were complaints that converts did not perform the appropriate rituals of the death of relatives, and so endangered the land and its inhabitants. Christians were also blamed that the attack launched by the Swazi was caused by their disloyalties to the ancestors. These breaches, in a community could bring drought and diseases as a sign of showing that the fathers are angry. In June of 1864 with the outbreak of fever at the capital and in an atmosphere of sharpening animosity towards the converts, Sekhukhune tackled Sebushane.

“Do you not see, son of Mokganedi, how the people here are dying from fever? All the people say that the believers have bewitched them. And divination also points to you”.

All these beliefs and other concerns mattered either for the chief or the community, the Christians have given themselves more time to deal with these concern. Instead the opposite happened. Everybody hold on things that could suit him. Initially the role of the missionaries was to bring light to the people who were living in darkness. It was their responsibility to keep on telling people about the love of God and the peace that God brought to them. The King and the nation were still far from knowing God. They still needed the attention of the missionaries. It seemed that the converts under them then satisfied the missionaries. And the converts were now used to hurt those who are not Christians. Sekhukhune was not exceptional.

African people were always happy when life was lived in full, when children grew to manhood, marrying and ultimately reaching old age. To them, this indicated the positive ness of their gods, which were on the side of the living. Life is the opposite of death. Man is afraid of death. Death comes about the negligence and the disregard of the customary laws of the nation. Death is, a punishment that the departed can use to the living. A healthy nation can defeat death. Death is defeated when people live happily, get married and bear children. When death comes, it must cut the upper layer. The layer of the aged. Such death is not painful like the death of young people and babies. It is believed that if someone dies, the spirit is kept in the world of the dead. That meant that people continued to live or exist in the hereafter. Their spirit particularly that of adults is remembered up to four and five generations. When children are born, the believe is that, one from the departed has come back to life in a form of a spirit. Hence African people take the resembling and likeness serious.

For a nation or community to enjoy life, there must be peace in the land, rain must fall for the sake of crops and their animals, that is livestock to have water and enough food. This can only happen if the gods are showing a shining face to the living. The shining face can only be shown when the living who are the children of the departed are practicing and following the customary laws put down by the ancestors. It is upon their chief or head of the family to encourage their subjects to respect their culture and tradition.

The nation must also remember their gods or ancestors during the time of first fruits. The blood letting ritual ceremony must be conducted as a thanksgiving for the kindness they received from their gods. The same can be said if it is in counter reaction

or different from the above, that will be regarded as a sign showing that, the gods has turned their faces against the living. The ancestors are not happy. These will remind them that there are things which they are not doing right. The gods are talking by bringing in famine, drought, or wars. Punishment by wars could result in letting the death to children and tiny babies. The chief and the nation must look at their footprints or steps to see where they have gone wrong. This also brought conflict of ideas and beliefs at the time of Rev Merensky. An example here is given of Andries Moloi the convert who was Christianized by Rev Merensky.

“Andries Moloi in 1862 in an excess of religious zeal and in order to demonstrate his freedom from superstition shot an ibis, despite taboo’s against harming the bird. When the rains failed to arrive later that year Moloi’s act of bravado was recalled with foreboding, and Lekgolane, whose village lay close to Kgalatlou sent to chief Sekhukhune to discover the appropriate steps to expiate the breach of ritual prohibition”. (Delius 115:83)

The other thing that troubled Sekhukhune as a Chief is that of the royal wives. It is commonly known that the chiefs or kings married more than one wife. The citizen or the chief subjects must respect that and even respect royal wives. The introduction of Christianity in Sekhukhune’s land brought some changes of beliefs. Christians believed in a monogamous marriage. Christians believed that monogamy is God’s plan for marriage that is the teaching of the New Testament. (*For the two shall no longer be called two people but one*). That is the ideal relationship for the expression of love between a man and a woman, and is the proper atmosphere within which to develop a Christian family.



Therefore the final decision, Christians affirmed that, the entering into a polygamous marriage by a Christian whether through the normal channels of giving dowry or through inheritance, or gift, is an offence against the laws of the church. The church recommended that:

- Christians who enter into polygamous marriages shall be excommunicated.
- Advising the man to put away all but the first wife, either arranging for the remarriage of those put away or providing for them under a suitable guardianship.

These recommendations caught Sekhukhune napping. Rev Merensky baptized more than two of his wives. Tlakale, one of Sekhukhune's wives was seen moving under the arm of Sebushane, the Christian. The royal house took this seriously; it was against the law for Martinus Sebushane an ordinary man who turned to be a Christian to have an affair with the royal wife. As if this was not enough, Johannes Kgalema Dinkwanyane, the son of Chief Sekwati and the half brother to Sekhukhune became a Christian and was also baptized by Rev Merensky. This also aggravated anger and pain to the king. Dinkwanyane's relationship with the Christians was dividing the nation and the royal house, which Sekhukhune aimed at uniting. Sekhukhune already had problems with the Transvaal Boers who wanted to annex his land. Sekhukhune "described the Berlin Missionaries as the people of the Boers". (Delius 120:83)

Almost everything that the chief valued to be important was rejected by Merensky's converts. The Chief believed that an adult man must drink beer and smoke a pipe of tobacco. The man's wife must make beer for him and his fellow country men to drink. That is done for the sake of demonstrating the independence men have over their wives. It must be remembered that during those days men were idle during peace times

book and even to drink their medicine called the blood of Jesus and the bread called his body was annoying the King. The King did not understand why his people failed to listen to him as their chief when he gives orders? But Merensky whom he regarded as one of the Boers is highly respected by his own people. The King simply believed that the Boers bewitched his nation or Rev Merensky by the simple medicine called the blood of Jesus. The chief did not understand why his people or nation did not want to drink the medicine from his divine healers? The chief believed that the medicine from his divine healers was given to them by their ancestors to heal the nation and it was the only true medicine. His fathers lived and depended on these roots and herbs. It is the only medicine used to protect the land and people. He also depended on it. Instead his nation, because of the Christians called this medicine to be ineffective. They regarded this medicine as something, which was not real. It was a superstitious belief and heathenism. Christians do not believe that the dead has a superpower. Christians believed that the king's divine healer was nothing more than a witchdoctor. He did not have any power from the departed spirit. He was just a liar who enriched himself by telling lies, claiming huge amounts from the people who were consulting him for help. The King on the other hand saw Merensky using his medicine to take control of his subject for the sake of ruling the land.

The king failed to understand why after drinking this red wine called the blood of Jesus the Christians became submissive to Merensky and stubborn to him as a King. That is, Christians are no longer listening to him as their king, but Merensky instead gives directives and orders they simply obeyed. So gradually Rev Merensky is replacing him as king. These and many factors brought conflict between Christians

and African people of Sekhukhuneland. The early Christians or missionaries to Africa failed to think that God has given heritage to every race, tribe and nation to be treasured for its own good. It is my belief that the African community has a heritage, which must be influenced and modified according to the Christian teaching. Let us not simply believe that everything that the missionaries brought or came up with is of real Christian origin like it was during the apostles preaching period. The only thing that could hold us hostage is the central message, which is the gist of the New Testament. That is Salvation by faith alone.

Romans 1:17 reveals how God put people right with himself: it is through faith from beginning to end. As the scripture says: “The person who is put right with God through faith shall live”. The challenges facing African people in this new millennium is to reawaken and try to see the gifts God the almighty has given us in our African religion. It is for the African people to set their religion at par with that of other races and even allow the Holy Spirit to cleanse and see to it that their religion is used for the glory of the living God and in the services of all those who are called upon to serve God.

#### 4. Witchcraft

There are elements in the African religion which are opposed to the will of God. They remain a problem as they are clearly heathen customs and practices. Christians must stand up and fight a clean Christian warfare against the practice of the heathenism without compromise and some delaying tactics. I am referring here to superstition and



witchcraft. These practices and beliefs are still going strong today in the minds of our youth. Many are burnt to death and many are still to die before heathen beliefs are put to rest. It is the role of the church to stand up on its ground and give a final ruling on the matter once and for all. It was not even good to enter the new millennium with this kind of belief. An example:

*Twenty on witch-hunt rap*

*Twenty men arrested in connection with the murder of two elderly women, whom they accused of being witches, appeared in court in Umtata yesterday.*

*Police said the two women were beaten to death and a third injured at Lucingweni village, in Ngceleni, near Umtata, on Sunday night. A group of young men from the same village attacked and accused them of witchcraft. - Sapa.*

5. *Circumcision initiation school*

Circumcision is not against the will of God, though I believe that Christ and the institution of baptism replaced what was good in our heritage and that it is through Christ's grace that we can be saved. But also believe that in this initiation ceremony we must remove the heathen elements attached to it and keep it.

6. *Singing and dancing*

The other important aspect in African religion, which the missionaries disregarded, is

the way of singing and dancing. It is in Africans themselves to sing and dance when they are happy or celebrating a climatic event of the year or give thanks to their gods for a wonderful rainfall or harvest time. That is, first fruit was always celebrated. To sing and dance show oneness of the people. They become one in happiness and even in sorrow. They become one even when they are facing a common enemy. The thing that give them strength and going is to sing. Even women usually came together carrying babies on their back for a common job. Singing whilst working, people will come together singing even if they are burying their dead. Songs become a single comforting word from the masses that are bereaved.

#### 7. Worship (Modimo) as God

The African people as a nation or tribe or family often worship their deity and ancestral spirit. They observe and respect the commands or laws of their deity without questions. They don't forget to give thanks to them. Their gifts to their deity or ancestors are usually cattle, goats, corn, money and some home made beers. This promoted the spirit of giving the gifts of love. These gifts are also given to ordinary man. Hence you will find Africans giving gifts to foreign people as a sign of welcome.

All these wonderful things were ignored by the missionaries in their way to evangelizing African people in Sekhukhuneland. I also believe that the missionaries should have studied carefully this kind of behaviour and beliefs by the African people, then start Christianize some of good the elements and removing totally that is full of paganism. Thus an African man may see his faith growing rather than changing wholly from being African into something else.

Let me conclude by stating the very last thing that pulled the trigger between Christians and African religion, i.e. “Dowry” or “lobola” in Sekhukhune’s language, which is Sepedi. It is the present given to the bride’s family from the groom’s family. This is paid in the form of cattle. Today it is money. The Bapedi people believed that, the marriage gifts or lobola is the outward symbol of a serious undertaking by the families concerned. They bind the husband and the wife together in the sight of their families. The gifts or lobola remained the symbols of the marriage covenant. The gifts prove beyond doubt that the groom will be able to maintain or support his wife. It makes the parents of the bride to release their daughter with open hearts. The dowry or lobola sealed up the scared relationship established through marriage, a relationship which will be enjoyed for a life long period of time. The lobola brings together families of the two people who become one. The extended families of the new family remain their parents and legal advisers. As far as Rev Merensky and the Christians are concerned, they viewed dowry as a purely buying and selling business. They declared it an un-Christian matter, and Christians must avoid it. It is a daylight robbery business. No one must buy or sell love. To Bapedi custom, you must pay lobola or you remain nobody. No one must recognize you as a son in law or sister in law. You are no name.



9. Renaming Christians by foreign names

This brings me to the renaming of Christians. All converts who were baptized were also given Christian names or new names. New names must make it easier or simple for the missionaries to pronounce it. It must be names, which are found in the Bible, or Western names. John, James, Peter, Andries, Jacob, etc. What they never thought of is that their names are also difficult for the Bapedi people to pronounce. These names are also difficult like the African names, Matlakala, Mokgadi, Nkwegadi, Tlakale, etc. By taking away those names, missionaries were unaware that these names have meaning. They are not just names. The names are given according to events, nature and inherited names. For an example names like Motlalepule are given according to nature, Radintwa named after the events and Thulare as inherited name.

One good example can be the name given to Rev Merensky's child "Mamotshaba". The converts named the child for the child was born when the Christians were on the run. Mamotshaba meaning mother of the flight. The child was named after the events. The name will remind them of the day when they run and hide. Hiding away for Sekhukhune's soldiers. But for missionaries all these were not considered. It is meaningless. Everything was associated with heathenism. African people are born heathens and living lives of heathens. The missionaries are given tasks. They must name Africans with Christian names. Changing them to disregard their culture and customs. Converting them to dislike and hate anything that is regarded as unchristian. Your brother or sister is your enemy if he or she does not become a Christian like you. You must not listen to your father or mother if they don't become Christians like you. They will teach you to be a heathen like them. The missionaries converted their Christians to

disregard the laws and customary teaching passed down by the fore-fathers. The Chief in particular Sekhukhune represented the ancestors or heathenism. He must be rejected. A person was wholly converted, isolating him from his or her roots. All that brought him or her up is unchristian.

There are still many things that Africans of the Bapedi people are observing and respecting which can be modified and be changed into Christian religion as a Christian African heritage. That can only be possible if Africans themselves play their full roles in the Christian community.

The following points stand opposing each other or conflict of ideas

<i>Christian beliefs</i>	<i>African Bapedi beliefs</i>
<p>1. <u>Marriage</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Singing and buying rings</li> <li>➤ Monogamy</li> </ul> <p>2. <u>Youth to manhood</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Confirmation class and baptismal</li> </ul> <p>3. <u>Social lives</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Medical doctors</li> <li>➤ Prayer</li> </ul> <p>4. <u>Beliefs</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ God is a creator</li> <li>➤ Jesus is God and the mediator</li> <li>➤ Holy spirit</li> <li>➤ Devil cause all the bad and evil things</li> <li>➤ Resurrection of the dead to eternal life after judgment</li> </ul>	<p>1. <u>Marriage</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Lobola</li> <li>➤ Polygamy</li> </ul> <p>2. <u>Youth to manhood</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Circumcision and initiation school</li> </ul> <p>3. <u>Social lives</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Traditional healers</li> <li>➤ Ritual ceremony</li> </ul> <p>4. <u>Beliefs</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The living deity (Modimo) is the creator</li> <li>➤ The ancestors are gods and the mediator</li> <li>➤ The spirit of the departed</li> <li>➤ Witchcraft the causing of all misfortune</li> </ul> <p>Resurrection in a form of spirit to live again (children bearing)</p>

The importance

It will be a serious mistake if I refrain from mentioning or writing the kind of education given to the young men in the initiation school. It is an informal education because nothing is written down. It is the education that separates men from boys. It equips one with the knowledge of his own culture.

Learning and Teaching method

The education is passed on by the word of mouth from generation to generation. Learners at school keep on repeating the words as taught over and over again, until the words are memorized and can be said by heart. Everything that men are doing at the school is kept secretly from women, children and even men or young men who are not from the school. The language used at this school is different from ordinary language. This is used to keep their secret to them only. The language is also used to detect men who might claim to be from the school only to find that they are not.

Philosophy behind it

African people believe mostly in this kind of education. They believe that men who are not from this school will always act irresponsible, ignorant and unreliable. He always behaves like women or children. He has no morals and respect. Their forefathers not from the hands of men who are taught to love their country and to respect the laws put him down.



### Benefits

Men like women and children who are not from this school are not allowed to sit in the courtyard where real men sit and discuss their affairs and try cases. In the courtyard the future of the country or land is decided. It needs men who can stand up and fight for their country or land. According to them men who are not from this school are not taught how to head a family in an African way, so he cannot lead the country for that matter.

### Segregation

It is sometimes difficult for men to be in the same place with men who are not from an African school (initiation school). They cannot bath together in the same room or river. When men are sitting together discussing matters, some idioms are used to highlight those who are not aware of the status where the other one is coming. Their language becomes that of parables, an example can be that of a direct translation. "Goat amongst sheep". All will realize that they are being joined by the uncircumcised men.

### The lesson

The following are examples of the kinds of education taught at the initiation school. These are some of the things which are forbidden for all men when they are at home or in the community. All men must avoid doing them because they are disgusting. The Leader or the educator will say to the Learners: "If something that I am going to say is not good, you must spat saliva to show that you dislike it."

- Educator : “Having sex with another man”.
- Learners : “Spat saliva, not our culture”.
- Educator : “Going naked before women and children”.
- Learners : “Spat saliva, behaving like a crazy man”
- Educator : “Marrying your own daughter”.
- Learners : “Spat saliva, not our culture”
- Educator : “Talking about initiation school to women and children”.
- Learners : “Spat saliva, it is men secrets”.
- Educator : “Disobeying your teacher and elder people”.
- Learners : “Spat saliva, you will make the ancestors angry”.
- Educator : “Failing to attend meeting called by your king”
- Learners : “Spat saliva, your king own you and the whole land”.

### Teaching responsibilities and loyalty

There are other teachings which encourage them to remain loyal and obedient to their teachers, parents and their king.

- Educator : “Defending your own country in a war?”
- Learners : “You are a real man”.
- Educator : “Marrying and bearing children?”
- Learners : “You are a man.”
- Educator : “Heading and giving instructions to your family?”
- Learners : “You are a real man.”
- Educators : “Taking instructions and guidance from the Chief or King
- Learners : “You are a man.”

Young men must know the responsibility facing them in the community and the manner in which they are to respond to these new challenges.

The aim of this kind of informal education is to encourage the graduates to be self-supportive. To work for their daily food for an example the educator or leader will shout. "The spider goes up." The learners respond by saying. "It goes up by its webs." This simply means that for one to rise up or to be rich, he must use his own efforts or resources. Stealing other people's property is strictly condemned. Man must eat the sweat of his own face.

The leader may say : "standing still", the learners respond by saying "like a pole dug in the ground." This also educates them that one must show that he is living, one must progress. The wealth that he might have from his father, like cattle, sheep or goats as a gift that he inherited must grow. It must not be static or decrease. That will make one poorer. For a family man to be poor is a curse. They dislike it, hence saying "Modiidi wa go hloka le pudi ya leleme le letala" meaning so poor that you don't have a mere goat with a blue tongue. Children at the initiation school are not only introduced to the blunt knife that run through their penis's foreskin, but the ignored fact is that, children are taught to be self-disciplined, self-innovative and self-creative.



Chapter 6

Christians are Persecuted

Rev Merensky and Nachtigal were the first missionaries to settle in the land of Sekhukhune in 1860. They are the missionaries who contributed a lot in bringing Christianity to Sekhukhune land, although much can still be said about the lay people from the very same land who also helped in introducing Christianity to their own country men. They do this by living a Christian life. These are people who earlier went to the Cape Colony and Natal to the White men in search of guns and employment. Instead they find themselves in the circle of missionaries who introduced the Gospel as a new religion to them. Amongst those who heard the word of God we can count Samuel Mathabatha, Jacob Mantladi, Jan Mafadi and many others like Kgasane the Prince who was shot dead while reading the Bible.

These are the Christians who openly professed their faith and believed in the living God on their return to their motherland. So most of them took it upon themselves to evangelise their fellow brothers and sisters on their return. Somehow this makes it easier for missionaries like Merensky to enjoy their work, for there are people who can assist in interpreting to both parties. With people like Martinus Sebusane, missionaries could also put their hope on them. They were also given some task of having some classes or groups of people who want to hear more about the word of God in their mother tongue.

Although their contributions cannot be clearly distinguished, Nachtigal has this to write.

“They and other from their chiefdom earlier worked in the English Colonies. One had been in British Kaffraria and the other in Pietemaritzburg in Natal. There they had learned to know and love God’s word and had also learned to read. One had been baptized in Pietemaritzburg by missionary Allison but the other had not been baptized. They had returned to their homeland and had told their countrymen the things they had heard and some of these had come to share their faith. Each Sunday they preached in a small church which they had built and many came to listen.”  
(Delius: 112:83)

Charity begins at home, the lay people started their congregation at home first, by repenting their own family members. That can refer to Jacob Mantladi who was baptized with his family including his mother.

### Jan Mafadi

Jan Mafadi had travelled to Port Elizabeth in 1857 in search of work and to purchase a gun. The gun was to be used when defending his motherland. It was also a dream of all young man of his age to possess a gun. In Port Elizabeth he was introduced to a Methodist Church. The love of his new religion pushed him into baptism. He also learnt to read and write. In 1860 he together with Jacob Mantladi, Joseph Kathedi, Samuel Mathabathe and three other converts returned to Bapediland, later to be known as Sekhukhune land. Jacob Mantladi became one of the pioneers Church – planters.

### Jacob Mantladi

Jacob Mantladi went to the Cape Colony and worked in Uitenhage where he heard the word of God for the first time. Later he moved to Port Elizabeth where he met Jan

Mafadi his homeboy. Mantladi dreamt that God was speaking to him and felt called to return to his motherland. In 1860 together with the other six converts they returned home. Together with Mafadi, Jacob began preaching to the people and formed a prayer group. They were lucky to convert young people like Sebushane and Joseph Kathedi the blind young man.

The group prayed for the missionaries to come and work in Bapediland. They did this in consultation with the King (Sekwati) who was also longing for missionaries in his land. So when Rev Merensky arrived in 1861 they believed that God had answered their prayer. Jacob Mantladi was baptised by Rev Merensky in 1862. He continued to work as an evangelist under his guidance.

### Martinus Sebushane

Martinus Sebushane was among the first seven converts to be baptised by Rev Merensky at Kgalatlou on the 14<sup>th</sup> January 1862. He was about twenty-two years. He gained the missionary's favour because of his hard working and intelligence. Because of his colleague's help, he made a good progress in reading and writing. The love of Jesus and faith in Him grew with him. In 1864 he fled with Merensky's Christian group to Botshabelo. At Botshabelo he received further upgrading and became one of the powerful preachers. He was a devoted and a fearless layperson. When Merensky left for Germany in 1882, the Rev asked him what he would like to have. To Merensky's surprise, Sebushane who never asked for a beautiful gift from Germany, requested an "Elijah's Garment" meaning a pastor's gown.



Martinus was ordained, and he served at Lobethal, Dilokong and Kgalatlou together with Rev J. Winter. He became one of the founders of Lutheran Bapedi church. The Lutheran Bapedi Church is still a thorny issue to the whole Evangelical Lutheran Church in South Africa (ELCSA).

The first mission station to be established in Sekhukhuneland is Kgalatlou at the mountain foot of Thabantsho under chief Boleu in 14 August 1860. The mission station was named Gerlaschhoop in honour of General Van Gerlach who had just died. The naming of this mission station showed clearly the position of the missionaries and the Lydenburg republic. They were so close, having one aim to penetrate the Bapedi kingdom and to bring in their influential law to the whole land of Sekhukhune.

Co-incidentally this is the very same mission station where persecution of Christianity started, and it is the very same station to be closed. The second mission stations were founded on the 28 August 1861 at the heartland of Sekhukhune Kgalatlou. Both the mission station was founded under the leadership of King Sekwati. Surprisingly under King Sekhukhune two more mission stations were founded, that is, Ga-Ratau, Garbelstadt mission station among the Matlala people of chief Maserumule. Garbelstadt is also known as Phatametsane together with the two mentioned above.

#### Reverend Heinrich Grutzner

Rev. H. Grutzner was born on the 20<sup>th</sup> March 1834 in a small town called Strehlen in Silesia, Germany. He came to South Africa in 1839 as a Berlin missionary. He was Merensky's right hand man. Together with his friend Merensky, Rev Grutzner left Emmaus in the Natal Colony to Swaziland though Swaziland was still part of the

Lydenburg Republic. However their aim of evangelising the Amaswazi was adjourned because the Amaswazi king expelled them from his country. Unlike Merensky who worked at the heartland of Sekhukhune, Grutzner worked under the Boleu chief or Bakopa. The distraction of Gerlachshoop in 1863 under the Amaswazi raid, made him to come and work under his friend Merensky for a while, before the final persecutions of all Christians in Sekhukhuneland in 1864. Grutzner was one of the founder members of Botshabelo. But Grutzner did not take Botshabelo as a place of “rest”. He left and worked in the Northern Transvaal where he worked amongst the BaVenda people. In late 1874 Grutzner came back to Botshabelo where he worked as superintendent of the mission station. When Merensky returned to Germany, Grutzner acted as a superintendent of the Transvaal Synodic Region. Grutzner arrived at Botshabelo at a time when the mission station was experiencing a very hard time, because of Chief Dinkwanyane who had pulled off his subjects to a place called Mafolofolo, but because of his hard work, Grutzner was able to re-organise the congregation that was scattered because of this confusion. In 1878 after the return of Rev Merensky Grutzner was sent to Bethany in the Orange Free State, where he became the superintendent of the Free State Synodic Region. He went back to Germany where he died on the 7<sup>th</sup> April 1910. Grutzner was one of the greatest Berlin missionaries who worked hard amongst his converts. He is still remembered by the Northern Sotho Christians of the Lutheran Church for his well-known hymn 110, though he translated many hymns into Northern Sotho and Southern Sotho.

The missionaries couldn't find a mission station in the area controlled by chief Mabhoko of the Ndzundza Ndebele. The aim of the missionaries was to convert all black peoples in the independent kingdom of the Bapedi. Persecution began before the area was

University of Pretoria etd – Rikotso, G J (2005)<sup>65</sup>  
covered. It developed because of the suspicions that, blacks leaders have against the missionaries. The black leaders have never trusted the kind of role the Lydenburg government was playing. The country was divided with borders, and there were areas where blacks were not allowed to walk or settle. Missionaries though played an independent part, but they remained puppets of the Boers in Lydenburg. Their mission was well understood, particularly by king Sekhukhune who was once quoted saying: “The word of God is powerful, it doesn’t force me, but like oil in a dry skin, it has already softened my heart.”

The word of God was correctly executed, but the close link between the missionaries and the white Government in Lydenburg gave them suspicions. Rev Merensky was also quoted saying: “ He wished to remain nothing more than a missionary in the eyes of his congregation, nonetheless, he will always be willing to support his government in its attempts to maintain law and order.”

When the Lydenburg government and the Amaswazi impis attacked and destroyed the chieftdom of Boleu at Thabantsho, Merensky was quick to warn Sekhukhune that the same event can happen to him, if he keeps on defying the government of Lydenburg. Sekhukhune avoided dealing directly with the missionaries. He assembled all his subjects from all over the country in the royal kraal. The aim was to find out from them, what it is which they have not done right and a way forward. It must be remembered that, the king believed that the land has been bewitched because of the outbreak of fever that killed many people.



*The following are resolutions from the gathering.*

- Christian beliefs must be stopped in the whole land.
- Missionaries must never be trusted as they represent the white government and therefore they must go out of the land.
- Traditional beliefs must be adhered to and be practiced by all people.
- Traditional healers must heal the land and Christians who are also bewitched by the cleverness of a white man.
- All people must take orders from the king and that includes Christians and missionaries.
- No day must be put aside as a day of rest or worship that includes Sunday, for the king needs soldiers' everyday.
- That Martinus Sebushane the convert must stop moving around with the royal wife under his arm.

At the end everybody believed that Christianity has brought nothing than division, confusion and misery in the community. Finger was pointed directly to the converts whom they believed had done more damage than missionaries.

From 16 June 1864 persecution followed one another, Christians were made to chop wood on Sundays. The whole aim was to keep them busy so that they may not have time of attending church service. And even to prove that they are taking orders from the king and not the missionaries. Christians responded by chopping more wood on Saturday so that, on Sunday they may go and worship their God. That was a sign to prove to the king that they are still his subjects and they will remain loyal to him.

Realising that Christians are not prepared to abandon their faith in God, the king gave orders that all Christians not be allowed to plant their fields and, their livestock were taken to the royal camp. Still Christians were not prepared to recant. The King called another royal meeting; in that gathering Christians were beaten and tortured before the multitude. Stick and knobkerrie were used. It was a matter of death and surrender. More than 30 people lost their lives. Still Christians could not agree to the demands of the King. Because of the night darkness and sympathy from other people, few Christians were able to escape to the mountains but their huts or houses were burnt down. Their wives were taken to royal court and ordered to work in the royal fields. And all women who remained steadfast to their beliefs were also tortured.

S. S. P. Mminele reported that, "Christian women were made to stand half naked in the river of Moutse for the whole day. No food was given to them from Thursday to Monday. But still Christian women stood firm on their faith. The king called his half brother prince Dinkwanyane to the royal court. The King wanted him to abandon his religion and that can be proven by him starting drinking beer and marrying many wives. The Prince made it clear that, he is not prepared to go back to heathen lives and that he is prepared to live by his new religion and God is the only God who will shape his life."

As if this was not enough, the King found out that, his principal wife Tlakale and the Prince had been baptised on the 7<sup>th</sup> November 1864. He then called a big meeting at Thaba Mosego, which drew soldiers from all villages under him, and the few numbers of Christians were also called to appear before the great council of blood. The King made clear his distrust for the missionaries by telling them that they were liars and thieves who had stolen his people and that the missionaries want to make themselves chiefs in his land.

On the very same day Christians were made to submit to the traditional healers or diviners of the country to heal them. The King and the nations believe that the blood or the red wine they drink during the holy service as the blood of Jesus or the bread of the holy communion as the body of Christ is a white man's medicine that is used to bewitched the King's subjects to turn against him and follow Christ like tamed sheep. The truth about it was that Christians were made to drink wine and eat bread. So the Christians were made to vomit the blood, and this resulted in making them to be weaker in their bodies because of the loss of water in their bodies, and as such more than two lives were lost.

When the King realised that the Christians were still holding to their faith, he banned them from his land and commanded them to leave his country. Martinus Sebushane one of the converts was quoted saying. "You... are driving us out of this country today, but know that the word of God will come back here at Thaba Mosego" (Mminele: 26:83)

Christians who have escaped this "blood" torture and killing live on mountains. Their wives at home were allowed to work at the fields of the King. They were also told to stop praying as their husbands were dead on the mountains. The King gave the instruction that no one must give them food. The Christians survived by drinking water at Steelpoort River and because of the fact that it was raining there was more water. So even during that hard time, when Christians were dying everyday, were losing their field, livestock, houses, children and wives, those who survived remained steadfast in their faith, and when asked why are they not preparing to renounce their faith and come home, and live a normal life again, their responses, were simple:

*"Our bodies get hurt, but our soul remain free and unharmed. They comforted one another by this." "Be not afraid of those who kill and harm your body, but not your soul because of my name: Anyone who stand and witness about me I will also witness for him before my Father in heaven."*



Chapter 7

Crossing the Steelpoort River

The main river Steelpoort is called Tubatse in Sepedi. It flows from the West of Lydenburg and pour its water into the Olifants river. It was the south boundary of Sekhukhune land and the Lydenburg government.

After realising that Sekhukhune has made his intention clear that Christians must leave his country or suffer the consequences. Martinus Sebushane one of the converts paid a cow to the king pleading that the king may have mercy on them: That the king relax his intention and allow Christians to stay in the country, and that Christians will remain loyal and obedient to the great king. Sebushane also felt that they are children of the soil and they have nowhere to go. The king remained their only master. The king received the gift and remained stubborn to his decision, nothing could change him.

Merensky and Nachtigal also went and plead with the king. The king made it clear that he did not want to quarrel or fight the missionaries, but only those of his subjects who proclaimed Christianity in his country. The king also proposed to the missionaries to put sense in the minds of his subjects who are now called converts to change their minds and join the masses by renouncing their new religion and follow the religions of the fore-fathers: worshipping the ancestors by doing the customary laws, particularly when burying their dead one. The king concluded to the missionaries by saying that he needs peace in his land and missionaries as people who know God can help in this regard but the ball is in their court: let them decide. The king wanted everybody to join him in building his kingdom. The king as a new king to the people of Bapedi knew that a divided nation couldn't be successful. There were many people who were now turning to be the enemies of the Bapedi kingdom. That includes his half brother Mampuru and the neighbouring chiefs who were once under his father's leadership.

The king prefers rather to deal with the outside pressures and challenges than the inside squabbles. If the missionaries can understand his position and see things the way he saw them the better the problems can be solved. The king believed that the gods of the forefathers' has turned their shining face against him and the nations. This is caused by their negligence of the fathers teaching and allowing the new religion that imposes the Lord Jesus as a king to the whole nations. So the punishment will be that, the white man will take the land of the forefathers and destroy their graves, and in place of graves build the church and the altar to worship Jesus who is a foreign king in their country. That will be an insult to the ancestors.

Rev Merensky became more frustrated. He found it difficult to work with an independent king of the Bapedi who felt it was his land, his people and the Lydenburg Republic has little or no say to this self governing state of Sekhukhune.

Merensky had planned earlier to leave Sekhukhune land and settle in Natal. Unfortunately he felt that he is not solving the problem. He already had a congregation. He cannot leave them now. It was at the time when his converts needed him more. He cannot run away alone and leave them behind. He also felt that the obligation and the oath he took when he left Germany as a missionary would be violated. Merensky strongly believed that he couldn't separate himself from the people he worked hard to convert. The converts are now like his own family. He will live and die with them for the sake of his God.

The ideal of converting Sekhukhune turned to be a risk. Sekhukhune's hostility on Christians reached a climax when the king made it clear that all Christians must be driven away from his land. Soldiers were given a simple message, " hunt them and kill them".

It was raining and Christians were trapped within three rivers. The Moutse river, Steelpoort and Olifants river. These rivers were flooded. The king was sure that they won't go any further. Their plan of escaping is doomed to a failure.



Mminele has this to say: -

*“Early on Wednesday morning of the 23 November 1864, despite a heavy downpour the previous night, a group of Christians among them Johannes Dinkwanyane and Merensky converged at Tubatse (Steelpoort) river drift. Finding the swollen river having ebbed, they crossed. They were in all sixty-nine Bapedi souls. They crossed at the spot where Merensky crossed when he entered Bapedi for the first time four years earlier. Soon after the Christians had crossed, the river came down in full spate again just in time to bar Sekhukhune’s soldiers who were pursuing them”. (Mminele 82: 27)*

The crossing itself is significant in the minds and memories of the Botshabelo peoples or Christians. To them, it is like the miraculous event in the Exodus book, when Israel crossed the Red Sea followed behind by Pharaoh’s soldiers only to die in the Red Sea when water closed them up.

Unlike the Egyptians, to them the enemy was not dead, but prevented from advancing to kill. The enemy was only separated for a while, the enemy will go back and strategise, the enemy will come back to strike.

The river became flooded in time to save them from Sekhukhune’s soldiers. The soldiers couldn’t cross the flooding river to catch up with the enemy. Christians are called enemies because they have not renounced their new and dangerous religion. Their religion was dangerous because it was believed to have brought harm, sickness and death to the people.

The river has come in between to separate the two religions. Sekhukhune and all those who listen to him are heathens. Heathens are now enemies of Christianity. They are enemies because of their evil and cruel deeds they have done unto Christians. Many lost their lives because of their cruel deeds and many are still suffering.

The heathens on the other side of the river have failed to fulfil the obligation. They should have killed the converts before crossing the river. It was believed that the Christians are bringing in all the miseries in the country. They are allowing the White man in the form of



a missionary to use them to disobey their culture and their own king. The fear was that they will come back with the whites to take their land and even to kill their king.

So the river has let the enemy escape.

It was a sad day for Merensky who had just been blessed with a baby girl. The girl was named “Mamotshaba”, an African name meaning “mother of the flight”. Her mother called her that because she came at the time when her father Merensky and his converts were planning the run and the crossing of the Steelpoort river. Sekhukhune’s soldiers arrived at the house of Merensky looking for the converts, only to find her mother sleeping on a bed in great pains. It was the time of her arrival. Soldiers had no business with whether a woman was sleeping on a bed screaming in pains. What they wanted were Christians of their own colour. They have been tipped that they have entered Merensky’s house. The Rev agreed that they were there and they have been given food although they had already gone to hide. Their blind eye of ignoring the woman on top of a bed made them to forget to search for their victims under the bed. What they could have found was Marothi’s family quiet as a mouse under Merensky’s bed. Stephanus Marothi was one of the 69 converts who crossed the Steelpoort River the following day, 23 December 1864 into the free land, the land of refuge.

It was times of many memories for Rev Merensky. The place, which he crossed running, was the very same spot he crossed when he came for the first time in this land of Sekhukhune. He remembered the day when he was to meet the great king Sekwati the father of Sekhukhune who now made him to run without looking back. The great king welcomed him with no conditions. He was to work and do his mission with no interference. His mission was to proclaim the word of God to the nations, which has no idea about the God he was bringing. The people or the nation had a choice, to accept him or reject him. He never thought that after four years he will be running for his dear life for the sake of the scripture.

He also remembered that the mission society sent him to the Swazis not the Bapedis who now threatened his life. He recalled how the great king of Swaziland turned him down. The king welcomed him with conditions. To bring in the gun powders from whites in

Lydenburg and that the king will pay him back in exchange of young girls as slaves.

Merensky rejected the conditions or the proposal, blacks were not allowed to carry guns and trading with human was also forbidden. So the Reverend and his company were told to leave the country of Swaziland with immediate effect.

How can Merensky forget that on the day he came to Sekhukhune Heinrich Grutzner and their wagon accompanied him. Today he finds himself accompanied by black converts who had nothing to offer or to help because they were all on the run. As on the first day when he came to Sekhukhune land with his wagon and a missionary friend. Today they have no food, cattle and nothing together with his fellow Christians. Their muddy house in which the Reverend slept fell down because of heavy rainfall immediately after he vacated it for the run. It was a sign that there is no turning back and there is not much time. You have to be quick or you will not make it to the river. Soldiers are coming behind you.

Finally the river has done it. Two different groups of people are now separated. They are different because of the social beliefs. Their story has an unpleasant ending. Their squabbles are not properly solved. As they go in different and opposite directions, the grudges in their hearts grow. They were aiming hard in teaching one another a lesson. The lesson of respecting one's king or Reverend. The converts or Christians though were not physically hurt but spiritually they were. Inside they were burning. Time was not on their side. They couldn't wait to explain their feeling any longer. Their own people had taken a last step to kill them all because they are all enemies of the king. As the gap widened between them, the flooding river continued flowing as if nothing had happened. But deep in it, the river carried squabbles and insulting words into the next river, which is the Olifants River. The Olifants will do likewise by taking this to the Indian Ocean. No one can tell their story. It remains in their hearts. Their children will hear and learn this story from them. Rev. Merensky has written and explained the story to his mission society in Berlin, but Rev. Merensky cannot bare witnesses to himself. The fact is that any Evangelical Lutheran Church in southern Africa (ELCSA) member wants to know what happened to their forefathers in late 19<sup>th</sup> century.



What happened when the king heard that his subjects were Christians? What made them to run for their dear lives and leave their properties and families behind? The question is, why should a brother turn against a brother. Was there any third party? This became an open challenge for all members of the church to look for more information and facts about their own church and start writing their own church history so that the church's history may no longer remain oral or verbal history, that is something passed down by the word of mouth from generation to generation. We want the church to have its history written down for the sake of our future generations and the church itself.

The king keeps hoping that his subjects will come back one day. Instead the opposite happened. Many of his subjects that are Christians left behind, followed their leaders at the other side of the Steelpoort River. Rumours had reached them that Rev. Merensky had bought land near Middelburg for his Christians. The area was named "Botshabelo" meaning a place of refuge. Merensky had to welcome 98 Christians that included more than 30 children amongst them from Sekhukhune capital. As if this was not enough for the king to stomach, three of his wives including Tlakale fled the area via KgalaTlou and knocked at the door of Botshabelo. While the king was still asking himself questions, news reached him that another seven Christian women had left the capital. This became clear to the king that the remaining stations in his land influence his subjects.

Nachtigal reported that certain white people involved in arms trading with the king influenced Sekhukhune. They told him that, missionaries are using this mission stations to spread propaganda against the king and that the stations are also used for the benefit of the Boer Republic in Lydenburg. The king reacted by closing all missionary stations in the whole region of his domain.

In January 1866 news from the king reached Rev. Knothe who had taken over from Merensky at gaRatau and Rev. Nachtigal who was still at Marotheng capital to leave the area immediately. The mission stations were closed immediately. Rev. Endemann who was serving at the area of chief Maserumule was also informed to move out of the area.



The closing of all the Berlin mission stations in Sekhukhune's main domain area gave negative feelings for the mission society in Berlin. It struck harder on Merensky, who was quoted by Nachtigal,

*"When brother Endemann and I visited Merensky on the 20 November 1864, the latter said " we should all decide to leave our station with our converts. When we hesitated he asked to be allowed to leave. He wanted to be the scapegoat. In this way he would emerge as a martyr and further, his departure and his reluctance to negotiate with Sekhukhune over his and his converts' return would be well received in Berlin".*

The Berlin mission society's aim of sending missionaries to the heathen nations in Africa was never meant to divide the peaceful nations. It was not in the mind of the mission society that missionaries would form their own regime or kingdom. What was not clearly defined is the fact that Sekhukhune pointed a finger at Merensky as someone who wants to take his place as king and that the Reverend was working for the Boers.

According to the information from the king's followers Merensky has failed in his call. He was sent to do mission work not politics. He should work harder to influence the king and his subjects to see the objectives of being a Christian. Because of the missionaries' behaviour the invisible wall now divided the nation. The wall of hatred. The converts are now given or named names. They are called Majakane, meaning that they are Christians but deep in their hearts the name meant that people who have turned against their culture and traditions in favour of the white man's culture.

In short it meant that they are "sell outs". Where as the missionaries were called "Monere" which means meneer a better name to the word "Baas" which was mostly used when they were calling the Boers. On the other hand the people who remained calling Sekhukhune a king and do his will, for instead taking their children to mountain school and doing most of the customary laws are called the heathens. The word sounded good but deep in it means the Devil worshippers because of there being anti-Christians.

Quoting what Nachtigal wrote in his diary can support that,

*"Sekhukhune, was when one views him quite objectively as a heathen sovereign, in the right when he grew angry and drove us from the land".*

Botshabelo, place of refuge

S.P.P. Mminele reported that

On the 30<sup>th</sup> December 1864 Rev Merensky summoned all missionaries of the Berlin mission in the Transvaal to a conference at Gerlachshoop at which they had to decide on what next to do with the Bapedi Christian refugees and the remnants of the Bakopa Christians. Merensky and Grutzner were charged with the task of finding a vacant farm within the Transvaal Republic, which could be suitable as a mission station. But before they could embark on this mission, Endemann informed them that he had met a Boer who told him of a farm, Boschhoek, which was for sale along the Klein Olifants (Mohlotsi) river, some sixty-five kilometres south of Gerlachshoop and about twelve kilometres North of Nazareth. The owner was selling it at a low price of \$75 (+- R150.00) because it had poisonous plants.

(Mminele 28:83)

After the crossing of the Steelpoort River, it was not clear whether the mission will continue with its work. The converts were scattered in the district of Lydenburg, whereas Merensky stayed in Lydenburg for a while. The news about the land gave Merensky and his converts hope. It was not a dream but a reality. The land was inspected and approved to be good for a mission station. It was a free land from Sekhukhune and Mabhogo's influence or control. It was surrounded by white farms and claimed by the whites as their area. The other good thing about it was the fact that it has sufficient tall trees to provide wood for the building of houses and making fire. It was also found that it has a good climate and high rainfall in summer. Finally the Klein Olifants River that runs through it will provide water for them and their animals.

The whole work was left in the hands of Rev Merensky to negotiate with the Zuid Afrikaanse Republiek on behalf of his Christian converts. He immediately established a Commission consisting of the Landdrost, the field-cornet and a farm inspector, to look at the possibility of such a mission station to come into reality.

*This is all what they found:*

- The farm was lying between two rivers, that is Olifants and Sterkspruit, so the rivers formed a boundary between the Middelburg Town, the farm and the station.
- The high ridges between the Town and the farm or station gave a safety between the two groups.
- That Rev Merensky must commit himself to look after and to take care of his Bapedi group or Christian refugees and the responsibility of any harm or danger to the state from the side of his Christian converts.
- It was also agreed that the responsibility of the Reverend was to see to it that his Bapedi Christians are not recognized as an organized tribe rather than being Christians.
- The Commission further stated that the Bakopa group must be allowed to settle on the farm on condition that:

- ✓ Chief Rammupudu would subject himself to the power of the Zuid Afrikaanse Republiek.
- ✓ The Chief would take control of his subjects and be able to identify them.
- ✓ The Chief must not give shelter to enemies of the Republiek or state.

The Commission made it loud and clear to the Chief of Bakopa, Chief Rammupudu that if he is found guilty of one of the conditions mentioned above:

- ✓ His tribe would be disbanded and be scattered on the farms to work for the White farmers.



Merensky wasted no time. On the 7<sup>th</sup> of February 1865 he called all Christian subjects to gather at the farm of William Jacobs where he will meet them. The refugees came from all over the Lydenburg district and gathered at the farm. The farm was just near Boschhoek farm which was to be named Botshabelo. On the 8<sup>th</sup> of February 1865 they all arrived at Botshabelo, their new place.

Reverend Merensky had already built a wood house for him on this farm. But because of the heavy rain that welcomed them to their new place, the wood house built by the Reverend fell down.

The Christian converts who had arrived on that day consisted of Eighty-five adults and thirty children. Amongst them were no less than three of Sekhukhune's royal wives who defied the King and finally fled with other Christians.

The other group of Christians who joined the Bapedi Christians at Botshabelo were the Bakopa Christians led by Chief Rammupudu. They were 130 in number.

In that heavy rain they had to sleep without a roof on top of them including their leader Rev Merensky. To them the rain was a sign of blessing. It was a blessing because the rain symbolized happiness. It was a blessing and a warm welcome because a visitor had to be welcomed by the owner of the land. This time the rain was the owner and it opened its hands to give the blessings.

The Reverend was in the company of his wife and their newborn baby named after the events of flight at Sekhukhune's warriors Mamotshaba (Mother of flight). The following day, the 9<sup>th</sup> February 1865 became the busiest day. Men were seen going to the veld to cut wood for their shelters. On the other hand women divided themselves into two groups, the one group for cooking and the other one to cut grass for roofing houses.

The first house to be built was that of Reverend Merensky, a rondavel.

On the other side of the river they built two royal houses, one for the Chief of the Bakopa and the other one for their Chief, Dinkwanyane. Chief of the Bakopa was the son of Chief Boleu. The Bakopa Chief, Chief Rammupudu came to Botshabelo because of the wars in his land, especially wars against the AmaSwazi that left the whole nation unsettled.

It was jubilation on Sunday when they held their first service under the tree. It was as if they are dreaming when for the first time after a long period of time they worship together without any fear of death. It was for the first time after a long period worshipping without being spied by Sekhukhune's soldiers. It was a free service in a free land that gave them powers to think of building their own church in their own land together with their own Reverend for their own God.

The Christians then built their own conical grass-thatched huts, which had stonewalls. These huts were built closer to each other in a form of a circle with an open court in the centre. The aim was for protection against any attack. However this was changed later and people settled in rows. The Bapedi Christians and the Bakopa settled in two separate villages on the Southern part of the valley across a stream. There was only one entrance going to these two villages and the entrance was made out of stonewalls. A wooden door for their own protection closed every night the gate or entrance. Their livestock was also protected by being kept in a big stonewall kraal on the outskirts of the villages.

Later as people were coming to Botshabelo to be Christians, Merensky made some alterations. The AmaNdebele who wanted to become Christians also came to Botshabelo. Merensky made them to settle between the Bakopa village and those animal kraals or enclosures. The other group that arrived later was the Bakone of Phokwane from the abandoned Phatametsane mission station from Sekhukhune land. They arrived with their leader Petrus Maserumule immediately after the founding of Botshabelo and thus formed the third group to arrive at Botshabelo. Beside people or Christians who came as a group or as individuals, more and more people kept on coming to Botshabelo. The last group to arrive was the group, which unlike the others, which came for Christianity, came for education and was a group from Ga-Masemola or Batau also in Sekhukhuneland. Paulus



Mabowe led this group. <sup>80</sup> [University of Pretoria etd – Rikotso, G J \(2005\)](#) The group was mainly attracted by the school and educational opportunities offered at Botshabelo.

### Rules and Regulations for settlement

Because the ground on which Botshabelo was founded was the property of the Berlin mission, Reverend Merensky had the highest authority at the mission station. And because the mission station or Botshabelo was in the land of the Boers, the station was automatically under the control of the Transvaal Republic and the residents were expected to obey the law of the state and to pay their taxes regularly. And the Transvaal Republic will be expected to give the mission station or the people of Botshabelo protection.

On the other hand Merensky as their spiritual leader met the two traditional leaders, that is Dinkwanyane and Rammupudu to strike a deal that would guide them. He made it clear that he expected them and their subjects to be a law-abiding community. A big meeting of all the Botshabelo Christians at which Merensky explained the rules and regulations that will guide and bind all of them followed that.

*“All who live on the farm express their willingness to receive further religious instructions from the missionaries of the Berlin Missionary Society and that God shall always be their highest Master and Leader and they shall ever strive to glorify His Name in all they do.”*

That was made clear to all Christians and it meant the mission station or the people of Botshabelo were a God fearing community, all customs and traditional practices that were at conflict with God’s word were forbidden. That is worshipping false gods, rainmaking feasts, witchcraft, adultery, drunkenness, gambling, marriage by cattle dowry or “lobola”, polygamy and circumcision. But they were allowed to live as Bapedi or Africans in accordance with the customs and traditions of their forefathers. Though they were now closer to whites they were supposed to know that they were not whites but blacks.



### More land needed

Because of many people developing an interest in Botshabelo, more people flocked to Botshabelo and the need to buy big land was a necessity. In 1865 Reverend Merensky increased his area by acquiring Toevlugt farm. As if this was not enough the following farms near Botshabelo were bought by the Berlin Mission Society:

Leewpoortjie farm no. 229 was bought on 18 August 1869, Groenfontein farm no. 410 was bought on 07 January 1871, Draaihoek farm no. 1144 was bought on 18 December 1871 and Doornkop farm no. 42 was bought on 05 December 1876.

All these farms formed the Botshabelo Mission area. There were about 11 395 hectares extended. The money which the Berlin Mission society spent in buying this farms was 10 775 German marks, +- R10 760.00. Toevlugt farm which was 840,5 hectares remained the most important farm throughout the history of missionary enterprise in the Botshabelo mission area because in it they built all the buildings of the mission station except the watermill.

### Buildings at Botshabelo

Beside their huts or houses, the people of Botshabelo also found it good to build their mission station, and their own school to educate themselves and the future generation, and they found it good to build their own buildings for industrial work.

They built the first stonewalled and grass-thatched church in October 1865 at the foot of a hill near Merensky's rondavel. Rev Merensky consecrated the building the same year. The church building was 18 ft x 50 ft, which could be +- 6 x 15 metres in size. But because of the population's growth the church building proved to be small. In that case the second church building followed, it had the capacity of 70ft x 23ft (+- 21 x 7 metres). It could accommodate 600 people and was fitted with a gallery and was built just next to the first one. The church building was completed in February 1868 and on the 15<sup>th</sup> March

University of Pretoria etd - Rikotso, G-J (2005)

1868 the building was consecrated. On the very same day Chief Rammutupudu was baptized and given the name Joshua.

Before the end of that year the very same building proved to be too small. It could not accommodate the rapid growing population of Merensky's Christians at Botshabelo. So the third church was built. It was the size of 120 ft (+- 37 square metres) long. It was built in Gothic style and the church building was consecrated on the 26<sup>th</sup> October 1873. The third building was built across the existing second church building, so it somehow made a cruciform. The church was built by two Europeans, one from Germany who was a missionary and the other one was a carpenter. The Yellowwood used for the roof and gallery was transported by ox-wagon from the Pongola forests in Natal. Reverend Merensky described it as "the most beautiful church in the Transvaal and the biggest". It has a capacity of 800 people. The first church building was turned into a school when the second one was built. That was used until August 1872, when a proper school building was built to the left of the three church buildings. The school building had the capacity of 2 000 square feet (+- 186 square metres). It had three classrooms, two of which had the size of 20 x 25 ft (+- 6x 10 metres). Rev Carl Endemann describes it as "the biggest and stateliest school building North of the Vaal River".

To prove that Christians in Botshabelo had a purpose, not far from this building to the left, a small building meant for the start of the Seminary was completed within a short time because of their hard work. This building was used to train blacks to serve as "National Helpers" or as Evangelists amongst their fellow black Christians. The building had only one class and was completed in 1878.

First it was their houses, the church, school and the Seminary, and the last building that they thought of was a building for industrial work. The building was behind Rev Merensky's dwelling house. Though the building before 1878 was moved to better buildings about half a kilometre West of Merensky's house at the foot of the "koppie" hill.



The workshop was defined as a wagon-making shop, a smith shop, a carpentry shop, and much later, a printing and a bookbinding shop. The original building next to Merensky's house was turned into a wagon shed and a cowshed. Coming closer to the workshop a dwelling house for the German artisans was erected. In addition a watermill consisting of a 30 000 cubic ft (+- 850 cubic metres) trench was built and completed on the 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1869, about twelve kilometres downstream along the Mohlotsi River. Just before the end of 1872 the Berlin Mission Society built a shop. Kamann a certain German hired a shop. But before the end of 1876 Hellmuth Beuster took over the running of this shop on behalf of the Berlin Mission Society. Finally the new and bigger shop was built in 1878. The size of the shop was 80 ft (+- 24 metres).

### *The building of the Fort*

The ongoing wars amongst African Leaders made the Botshabelo Christians unsettled. In order to protect the mission stations against any possible attacks from Sekhukhune, Mabhogo or the AmaSwazi, Merensky organized men from his converts to build a strong-walled –fort on the crown of the Northern hill. The fort was completed in October 1865. He named it “Fort Wilhelm I”. The fort was built in the format of the Boers, while it showed the unique style of the Basotho architecture example. The walls were 12 ft (+- 4 metres) high, much like the walls of the German castles of the middle ages. At the bottom the walls were 5 ft (+- 2 metres) thick measuring upwards. These walls had loopholes from which the whole surrounding area could be clearly seen and controlled. It had five watchtowers, one main tower that was the highest (about ten metres high), plus four corner towers. The main tower was the one overlooking the valley below. From these watchtowers, sentries kept a sharp lookout for enemies by day and by night. Fort Wilhelm was divided on the inside by cross-walls into four independent compartments, allowing the heaviest fighting within the fort to be controlled by the owners or defenders. Whenever the attackers challenged, the residents sought shelter in this stronghold, which was about 100 x 50 yards (+- 40 x 20 metres) in size. The garrison consisted of the fifty best shots and brave warriors under the command of the brave and renowned buffalo-hunter by the name of Jacob Makwetla who manned the bulwark.



This fort was best known as a “schanze” – a true fort built in the accepted European style. Merensky was so overjoyed with this fort that even before it was completed, he happily wrote to the Director Wangemann in Berlin as follows:

“Our fort is not ready yet, but we hope to complete it in a few weeks, and then we will defend ourselves with the help of God against such robbers. Then they will see that here are living Prussians, and not faint-hearted Boers”.

After the expulsion of Mampuru from the fort, he went to Nyabela the son of Mabhoko. The possibility that the fort might be attacked at any time mounted. The residents of the Bapedi and Bakopa villages also built a similar fort but smaller than Fort Wilhelm. This was done to take women and children refuge in the event of unexpected attacks from Chief Nyabela or Mampuru. Not only these but other similar forts were built at the strategic points on the hills surrounding the mission station. This was done in order to cover the different approaches.

Reverend Merensky’s dwelling house was also built in a way that it could also serve as a fort for his family. It was built of burnt bricks. It had a flat roof made of limestone so that it could not be burnt down. A wall protected the homestead.

When the news reached Sekhukhune and the other African leaders who wanted to invade the fort of Botshabelo, their ideas simply faded, and they abandoned their plan for good. It was how Botshabelo was saved.

On top of the main watchtower of the Wilhem’s Fort the following important symbols in history were displayed:

- ✓ The black and white Prussian flag was hoisted.
- ✓ The British Union Jack
- ✓ The Vierkleur of the Transvaal Republic
- ✓ And finally the National flag of the Republic of South Africa.

The fort after 1902 fell into disrepair. It was in 1959 when Otto Schwellnus, the first son of the Rev P.E. Schwellnus drew the attention of the Simon Van der Stel Foundation to the rebuilding of this fort. He gave the reason that the fort was important and it should serve as:

‘n Gedenkteken ter ere van daardie klompie Christene wat nie slegs die pynlikste marteling verduur her nie, maar ook al hul aardse besiftings vir hulle geloof prysgegee het’. (*Mminele* 45: 83)

The fort was rebuilt to its present shape with Simon van der Stel Foundation’s funds, and in 1962 it was declared a national monument. It was then renamed Fort Merensky in remembrance of the builder and the founder of the Botshabelo mission station. The Simon van der Stel Foundation took the responsibility of maintaining this fort. The fort was regarded as an important historical monument in the Republic of South Africa.

The Christians in Botshabelo were not only introduced to the Gospel of the living God that they may live by it, but even to the gun of a white man. What it meant here was that, Christians must know that guns can also defend and protect them in times of danger. Christians must know that those who do not know God are dangerous to them. They kill without mercy or fear of the Law of God that says: “Do not kill”. Christians from Sekhukhune land need not to be reminded because they have seen how cruel Sekhukhune could be if he wanted. They have seen how their brothers and sisters were prosecuted and tortured. They have seen how they died before them.

Just before the dawn of 1866 the Bapedi Christians on the Mission stations had more than thirty guns and the Bakopa Christians had not less than twenty-eight guns and ammunitions. By the year 1870 the black Christians in Botshabelo had more than 109 guns and ammunitions. The government as the main supplier made it clear to Rev Merensky that those guns remained State properties and that Rev Merensky is in charge of their safety. The guns are to be used when the enemies of the state attack. The church and

those black Christians on the mission station must be on the side of the State, even if it was their fellow brothers in Sekhukhune land, Bakopa or from Mabhogo's tribe. Black converts at Botshabelo were not only taught how to shoot but even the art of repairing the guns and they could even make gunlocks. The fort used to have its own supply of gunpowder and lead on hand.

### Problems encountered

The first group of refugees came to Botshabelo in February when it was already too late for sowing. The residents were in need of food and the Berlin Mission Society could not supply more. Some men had to walk fifteen to twenty miles (+- 24km to 32 km) to search for work on Boer farms for their daily bread.

On the other hand Chief Mabhogo of the Ndzunza Tribe (Ndebele) claimed that Botshabelo was built on his farm therefore the residents must pay tax to him directly. As if this was not enough this man kept on watching the fort, and they tried but failed to steal their sheep.

Sekhukhune also tried to attack the fort twice. He attempted in 1865, but the plan failed because before they could reach the station, already the Botshabelo people were aware of their coming and ready for them. The second attempt failed because his men, particularly the leaders or the commandos refused to attack or to carry out the order because they said they were afraid to fight against the God of the Christians. Mampuru the half brother to Sekhukhune and enemy number one to Sekhukhune's kingdom came to Botshabelo mission station in 1867 to persuade the residents to join him or overthrow the Kingdom of his brother Sekhukhune who was also the enemy of the converts. Although Merensky intervened to restore order, many were ignited, especially the Bapedi Christians who felt like going back home to their King Sekhukhune, and that happened when the missionaries enforced the laws and regulations that were foreign to their lifestyle. That came into reality in 1873 when Chief Dinkwanyane of the Bapedi Christians left the mission station with 280 Baptised Christians to a place called Mafolofolo near Lydenburg. Because of all



these threats, Christians of Botshabelo had to live in fear. Some had to stay ready for the fight or wars. They were seen carrying guns to Sunday's worships. They were seen moving around carrying axes or spears and shields under their arms.

The other problem they encountered was the neighbouring Boers or farmers. The neighbouring Boers hated the mission as they were opposed to the education of the Blacks. This was condoned by the fact that some servants ran away from the Boer farms to seek refuge at Botshabelo, so to them Botshabelo became a small haven of laziness and idleness. A number of Boers even planned to attack the mission station to recover their servants. But Merensky stuck to his guns and refused to send the servants back, even with the instruction of the field-cornet. On the other hand some of these servants who fled to the mission had a language problem, they could speak Afrikaans only and knew no Sepedi language as they have been born and bred on the Boer farms. So Merensky had to limit the number of these sanctuary-seekers.

Finally the Government of the Transvaal was expected to bring peace and stability in the country, especially at Botshabelo, only to be found that it was too weak. The Botshabelo residents were promised to be given protection by the State, but the protection was never enjoyed. The Botshabelo residents were expected to pay taxes regularly and fully. They were also expected to buy and possess passes. To their amazement, only blacks in Botshabelo or those staying in White areas were forced to pay tax, but blacks in their homeland or chiefs were not registered and therefore they were not paying tax. So blacks in Botshabelo saw the Boers' government as an enemy. When Merensky tried to intervene by explaining why they should pay tax, he was seen as a traitor and friend of the Boers.

The Transvaal Republic also displayed its weakness by failing to return the children of Chief Rammupudu's subjects who were kept as slaves by the neighbouring Boers who did not want any compensation. The failure of Merensky to convince the State or government to assist in bringing back those children made the Bakopa converts to lose all the trust in the Boer government and in Merensky himself.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of May 1874 Grutzner pleaded to the landdrost of Middelburg to pay the Chief at Botshabelo at least ten percent of taxes collected at Botshabelo because the Botshabelo people were up to date with their payments and these will raise the status of the Chiefs at Botshabelo because Chiefs would also be seen as salaried officials of the State. That would make Chiefs to work hard in organizing their subjects to be law obedient to the Republic of the Transvaal. This humble request was overlooked and rejected by the Middelburg laundress. The failure to recognize the black Chiefs was seriously noted by the Botshabelo Christians because their Chiefs influenced them not to pay taxes of the Republic and the annual tithe, which they had to pay into the mission coffers. Chief Rammupudu planned to leave the mission station, only to be stopped by the laundress.

From 1873 the Black residents of Botshabelo or Christians at Botshabelo were expected to serve as police and prison warders in Middelburg and on the highveld. The workers disliked this type of work because most of the prisoners were their own Bapedi brothers, some were convicted because of not having a Pass. They went to the extent of refusing such work, to their dismay the AmaZulu from Natal were hired to do the job. Once more Rev Merensky was called to intervene but his failure to convince the Middelburg authority was regarded as his aim and selfishness to take the place of their own Chiefs and made himself a Paramount Chief over them.

### *The Land Question*

The Christians at Botshabelo started to ask many questions. They wanted to know to whom does the land of Botshabelo belong? Not many were surprised when they realized that the land belong to the German Berlin Mission Society. They were not at all surprised because all that they achieved went to the Mission Society. For instance when black Christians were asked to help the State in the wars against their fellow Blacks all was done for no financial benefit to themselves as individuals. Any reward went to the Berlin Mission Society. So these made the Botshabelo residents feel insecure and exploited.



Black leaders at Botshabelo took the upfront position. Chief Dinkwanyane of the Bapedi openly opposed the practice of women wearing long hair regarding this as the violation of the Bapedi custom. He wanted the Bapedi Christians to have pates. This also brought misunderstanding between the Chief and the Reverend Merensky.

Christians like Timotheus Maredi from the Bapedi group stood by their Chief and spread the idea of leaving the mission station as a free land. This influenced Chief Dinkwanyane to pull out from Botshabelo with more than 280 of his followers into a free land near Lydenburg on the 4<sup>th</sup> October 1873. The other group of the Bakopa with 222 followers also left the mission station. The exodus from Botshabelo into an independent land was not less than 400 Christians by the end of 1873. The number was not less than a third of the baptized Christian members of the Botshabelo congregation.

In response to the main course of the departure, Merensky wrote like this to the Home Board in Berlin, Germany.

“The missionaries can protect the blacks against arbitrary demands by the Boers, but against arbitrary demands by the Government they cannot do anything ..... as such we cannot blame them too much for having left.” (*Mminele* 53: 8)

It was a clear demonstration by Rev Merensky that he had also lost confidence in the Boer republic hence he welcomed the British annexation of the Transvaal.

#### Early Education offered at Botshabelo

Education started at Botshabelo as early as 1865. It was the aim of Merensky to introduce education to his converts. Within a period of ten years more than ten types of schools had already been established at Botshabelo.



The kinds of schools were:

- ✓ Congregational school
- ✓ The catechumenal school
- ✓ The confirmation school
- ✓ The evening school for adults
- ✓ The Youth school
- ✓ The Sunday school
- ✓ The children school (Elementary)
- ✓ The trade school
- ✓ The Evangelist school
- ✓ The Evangelist Seminary

Although some of these schools were short lived, the following schools were taken as examples to highlight the kind of education which was offered at Botshabelo.

1. The congregation school

The aim of introducing this kind of education was to turn the eyes of all the residents to the eternal. The targeted students were all the Black residents at Botshabelo and even Black people from the neighbouring farms.

Educators

Reverends Merensky, Johannes Winter and Hermann During joined hands in this role; the Evangelists Martinus Sebushane, Andries Sekoto and Jacob Kgafane helped them.

Meanwhile the wives of the Reverends helped the women with religious conducts and handicrafts, such as sewing, knitting and crocheting.

### Time table and the subjects taught

Bible understanding, Hymn singing, good conduct and manual-work formed the gist of the curriculum.

Every Sunday two church services were held. During the first service the catechumens and the outsiders were excluded from the first liturgy with its apostolic creed and from the last liturgy with its Benediction. The outsiders will only be allowed to come in to listen to the sermon. All from the beginning to the end attended the second service.

After the holy service in the afternoons the residents would form groups under the instructions of the Missionaries to continue studying on their own, that can even be done at different venues of their choice including their homes. The main aim was to teach them to read and write. Sunday became a communal learning situation for all black residents of Botshabelo. Besides the Sunday services two bible lessons were held weekly for the whole congregation.

The families were encouraged to pray daily in their homes, that is evening and morning with a hymn and scripture readings and prayer before and after meals. Agriculture was also strongly emphasized and in 1869 the whole harvest of the residents amounted to 3 460 bushels of products of various kinds: Botshabelo became the granary of the surrounding farms.

## **2. The Confirmation school**

This is one of the schools that are still important today in the Evangelical Lutheran Church. The aim of this school is to prepare young boys and girls for full membership of the church. The small catechism, the sacrament and other elements of the Christian faith and hymn singing formed the real contents of the curriculum.

The confirmation class was formed in 1876. The candidates received lessons for one year. In 1877 twelve boys and ten girls became the first youth to graduate from this school. Ever since, the church held this Confirmation class for the different Lutheran Parishes.

### 3. The children's school

The main aim of introducing this school was to give the children a better knowledge of understanding Christianity at an early stage. The school was established for the first time at Botshabelo in 1865.

#### Educators

The Personnel who headed this school at that time were Rev A. Merensky, Rev H. During, Rev Ritcher and Rev Johannes Winter and three black evangelists, Martinus Sebushane, Zebedeus Sebushane and Heskias Mampe.

The project was successful, within a period of ten years the enrolment rose from 150 to 400 pupils.

#### Time Table and subjects taught

At a mission school children were taught bible knowledge, the catechism, Christian Ethics, singing, Arithmetic, Reading and writing and Geography which according to Merensky would make the children "think about and observe the wonderful acts of God in sustaining and governing the Earth".

The school was attended from Monday to Friday, though some other days lessons were combined with manual work, that is making some gardens for the stations. This was done freely because children were not paying school fees.

The first church building was used as a classroom, but later three decent classrooms were built. In 1869 Rev Bruno Kohler from Germany inspected the school and commented.



“I am highly satisfied with the standard of the pupils. Although the children are learning under unfavourable conditions, they could still compete favourably with White children in Germany if they were to sit for a common examination – despite the more and better learning facilities the white children had”.

#### 4. The trade school

The school was introduced for two main reasons. First, to educate black residents to be independent workers, not to look on a farmer to give work opportunities. Blacks must do their own handwork and make a living of it.

Secondly the aim of the mission was to generate funds for the mission stations by producing wagons and furniture, which were to be sold.

Normally the lesson will start at 6am to 6pm in summer or 7am to 7pm in winter. The Berlin Mission Society sponsored the school mostly.

#### 5. The Botshabelo Seminary 1880

Although there were many schools which came into being at Botshabelo which were not discussed, the Botshabelo Seminary of 1880 will be the last important school to write about. It was called the Seminary for Natives (Seminar Eingeborene). There were many reasons which prompted the establishment of this institution. It was the fact that there were no black theologians trained to preach amongst themselves and the fact that by 1869 White Missionaries were no longer allowed to preach in the neighbouring villages occupied by the AmaNdebele. Though reasons were not given, we must not ignore the fact that Nyabela the son of Mabhoko never trusted the Whites.

*Mminele reported that:* “ Some young men of the congregation under Martinus Sebusane and Zebedeus Lefula voluntarily took over and went to preach there. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of June the same year Martinus Sebusane, Zebedeus Lefula, Petrus Tulwane Tebudi and David Motlatle left on a mission trip to Ga-Mankopane and they proceeded even further.” (*Mminele* 74: 83)

So it was a high time for the missionaries at Botshabelo mission station to train black leaders so that they should assist them in establishing and maintaining their own people wherever they may be gathered by using their own mother tongue. Their song closed saying: "Be learned so that you may go and teach people and bring them to God".

At the end of 1872 the first four students graduated from this Seminary, namely Stefanus Marothi and Aaron Mokotedi who were sent to look after the spiritual lives of Botshabelo Christians working at the Diamond Mines in Kimberley. Hiskia Mampe served as a preacher and a teacher on the surrounding Botshabelo farms and at Botshabelo itself. Finally, Joseph Moeti was sent to Chief Mmutle at Ga-Mphahlele to do mission work. By the year 1878 Merensky's dream was realized. Botshabelo had more than 400 school children. In the light of that, the Home Board in Berlin approved Botshabelo as central seminary for the southern Transvaal Synodal Region. The Botshabelo Seminary became the most important educational center of the Berlin Lutheran Missionary Enterprise in the whole of South Africa.

#### The impact of wars and laws

The wars amongst the nations of that time had a serious impact on the running of the institutions at Botshabelo. Although the residents needed peace, the wars launched by their archrival Sekhukhune disturbed them. Black Christians of Botshabelo were forced to take part in the war against Sekhukhune as porters, wagon drivers and ambulance men on the side of the white government. The Bapedi groups did not like fighting their own king. The fact that Botshabelo was made a peace negotiations place between delegates of the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek and the delegates from Sekhukhune and leader Merensky being appointed to act as a mediator by President Burgers made the Botshabelo Christians to mistrust the role of the missionaries and Botshabelo itself.

- ✓ So the disruptions led to the slowing down of progress in education.
- ✓ Many lost their lessons and more so was the loss of lives.

On the score, Merensky had this to write:

“The people were tempted to mistrust the missionaries and the Chief purpose of the Mission society failed to reach their clear conscience”.

Although peace was reached after the defeat of Sekhukhune, damage was already done. More and more people left the mission to be independent. For that reason the number of students dropped. The Seminary was closed down. When it was re-opened, it operated in a different way under a changed condition. The Missionaries were trying to avoid the mistakes of the past.

During the closing and the re-opening, the Anglo-Boer war intervened. The end of war brought the British rule to the Transvaal and with it the first beginning of what came to be known as Native Education. After 1902, the State had a hand in the running of Native education by a system of registration of schools. The Berlin Mission Society registered its school in the year 1906 and the Botshabelo Mission Society was registered.

The First World War of 1914 fought by the mother sponsor, Germany made the seminary to close for ten years, from 1916 –1926. When the institution re-opened in 1926 after the war, it received government recognition again and things started to improve. In 1930 the Institution of Botshabelo welcomed the arrival of women for the first time. Up to 1936 Evangelists were still being taught at Botshabelo and stopped at the end of the very same year (1936). The Evangelist Courses were now separated from the Institution. But the Institution became more of a teacher’s college. The Second World War did not lead to the closing of the Seminary this time, but all the financial donations from the Berlin Mission Society were cut.



The Seminary had throughout its existence prepared men – and later men and women-for service. The motto: (“*Ntlhahle-ke-hlahle*”), that is “*Lead me that I may lead*” was a prayer, of course not all lead and guide, but there are always those who not only pray this prayer found in the walls of the Seminary but also act according to the prayer.

“Teach us Good Lord to serve Thee as Thou deserves.

To give and not to count the cost

To fight and not to heed the wounds.

To labour and not to ask for any-reward

Save that of knowing that we do Thy will.

Where Are We?

Finally we can say it has been a long and hard journey from 1864 to now. Many good and bad things have happened. Botshabelo the place of refuge has been turned into a place of tourism. The Seminary and the Church building became a Museum called Fort Merensky. Its people or former residents are placed at Motetema near Groblersdal. As mentioned many good and bad things happened to the people of Botshabelo; I would like to start with the good things that took place at Botshabelo up until now.

Good things coming from Botshabelo

We must remember that when Rev Merensky and his converts ran away from the land of Sekhukhune, many thought that the Church of God will die, that the word of God will no longer be heard in the whole land of Sekhukhune. But because of the hard work of the early Missionaries and their Christian converts by 1900 already the word of God was preached again in the heart land of Sekhukhune.

The important thing about it is that, all this happened whilst Sekhukhune the Chief of the Bapedi and Merensky the missionary were still alive. They all lived to see their dreams becoming a reality. Unfortunately for the Bapedi King, the dream became a nightmare. He was willing to wipe the white man and his new culture out of his father's land. What he feared most did happen in 1891 when the Transvaal under Bapedi control was annexed. It was a dream come true for Rev Merensky to find his movement now open to go where he wants without fear of any black rulers in the Eastern Transvaal.

It was a dream come true for the converts like Martinus Sebushane, who once said to Sekhukhune,

*“you are chasing us out from your  
land today but the word of God  
will come back to this land.”*

Although Sebushane formed his own Lutheran Bapedi Church because of misunderstanding between him and Rev Merensky, at the end, he and his followers took the word of God from Botshabelo to the heathen nation in Sekhukhune land. Today the Bapedi Lutheran Church is still one of the important churches in Sekhukhune land.

Other people from Botshabelo who helped in spreading the word of God to Sekhukhune land are the two Chiefs. That is, Dinkwanyane of the Bapedi and Chief Rammupudu of the Bakopa tribe.

Johannes Dinkwanyane the Bapedi chief also left Botshabelo because of cultural differences between him and Rev Merensky. He walked out with his followers to a place called Mofolofolo near Lydenburg. The place was still under King Sekhukhune. He pleaded with Missionaries, especially Rev Merensky that, he is not going to abandon Christian beliefs and that they must come and help him and his followers. So Dinkwanyane was able to bring Christianity to the people in Sekhukhune land, more so as he was a Chief in his own right.

The second Chief was Rammupudu of the Bakopa. He left Botshabelo and his followers after the Missionaries and the Republic of the Transvaal gave him permission. He wanted to go to his father's land to rebuild his nation. The Chief made it clear that as a Christian he was prepared to live a Christian life.

What it meant is that, the Missionaries and the people from Botshabelo under difficult conditions managed to spread the word of God throughout the land of King Sekhukhune. They didn't Christianise them only, but they also managed to use the education they received from Botshabelo to the whole land of Sekhukhune. A hymn written by Rev Simelane in Sepedi, but translated into English, has this to say about Botshabelo. The Hymn was composed for the Centenary celebration of Botshabelo in 1965.



Botshabelo 1865 – 1965

*Generations after generations that want education,*

*In the east, in the North –*

*are taught here at Botshabelo.*

*In the West, in the South -*

*are taught here at Botshabelo.*

*We commemorate the past 100 years.*

*We remember the Christians who*

*Left their homes, their friends,*

*Who left all the Wealth due to*

*their faith in God.*

*Here, God is worshipped.*

*Here, there is a fountain of knowledge.*

*It is at Botshabelo where the sun rose –*

*for education –*

*for religion –*

*for civilization –*

*which are lamps of light.*

*The first ministers of the word*

*were taught here;*

*They then returned to their people*

*and taught them.*

*The seed that was sown here*

*spread all over the land*

*amongst the Black people.*

*Let Jehovah be praised for he is merciful.*

*Let "He – who – lives – forever" be thanked*

*For His mercy.*

Black students at Botshabelo learn the importance of being African, unlike their fathers who changed their names to Europeans. They instead named themselves with African names that have a Christian meaning. That is, names like:

<i><u>SEPEDI</u></i>	<i>ENGLISH</i>	<i>CHRISTIAN MEANING</i>
Thapelo	Prayer	
Malebo	Thanks	( To God )
Tshupo	Hope	(In salvation)
Mahlatse	Luck	( from God )
Rebiditswe	We have been called	( by God )
Refilwe	We have been given	( God's grace )
Rekgethilwe	We have been chosen	( by God )
Tumelo	Belief	( in God)
Tumisang	Give praise	(to God )
Rekwele	We have heard	( the Gospel )
Lebogang	Give thanks	( to God )

The kind of education offered at Botshabelo gave the Christians hope and courage. The people found themselves blessed because Botshabelo can provide what other people can't have. They have a free land for them and their domestic animals. They have beautiful schools for their children and a beautiful church where they can worship God without danger. Furthermore Botshabelo is located near the Town where their husbands can go to seek jobs.

But all these came to nothing at the end. The White man didn't want people who are not White to stay near or at the land proclaimed to be a White man's land. There were three groups of blacks living at Botshabelo with different languages. The Bapedi, the AmaSwazi and the AmaNdebele of Mgibe tribe. Each must return to his/her homeland: The Bapedi to Lebowa Homeland under Chief Minister M.M. Matlala who governed before Dr C.N. Phatudi. The AmaSwazi to kaNgwane under Chief Minister E. Mabuza and the AmaNdebele to KwaNdebele under Chief Minister S.S. Skhosana. Because of the

Botshabelo Seminary and the kinds of education offered, the Government felt that people from Botshabelo must be rewarded at their different Homelands with the kinds of education they received at Botshabelo. Three different Training Colleges were built for each ethnic group. The other reason was to make them forget Botshabelo as their motherland.

1. Mgwenya Teacher's Training College (1975)

The AmaSwazi from Botshabelo to KaNgwane homeland, were welcomed by the building of the New Modern Teachers' Training College. All the SiSwati-speaking students at Botshabelo were taken to this college. The idea was to separate students according to their mother tongue. The college was named Mgwenya Training College. It started operating in January 1975.

2. Ndebele Teacher's Training College (1980)

The AmaNdebele became the last group of students to leave Botshabelo to their Homeland, which was also the last Bantustan in South Africa to be established. The Department of Education and Training built yet another new modern Teacher – Training College for the AmaNdebele ethnic group in their homeland, KwaNdebele at their former Capital City at Siyabuswa near Marble Hall. All the Ndebele –speaking students at Botshabelo were transferred to this College. The College started to operate in January 1980. Their Chief Mgibe from Botshabelo was placed at Tweefontein “D” where he is still the Chief of his tribe, though many of his subjects were scattered all over the Homeland, particularly Siyabuswa.

3. Rehlahlilwe Training College (1971)

The Bapedi speaking people from Botshabelo were the first ethnic group to be moved to their Homeland in Lebowa. The department built a new modern Teacher-Training College



at Motetema near Groblersdal. All the students speaking Sepedi were transferred to this college in 1971. The college was named Rehlahlilwe, which means, “We have been led.” The department was forced to build even the Primary and the Secondary Schools for the residents who came from Botshabelo. The Primary like the Teacher’s College was given a name that will remind them of the work done by the Missionaries at Botshabelo: “Ikageng” was the name. The people felt they had been led, so they must lead themselves on. “Ikageng” means “build yourselves”, because they now mixed with people from “Masakaneng” a location near Groblersdal which was also forcibly removed to “Motetema”. Its people had a different background of religion and the people from Botshabelo felt that they must build themselves up against the culture and tradition of their new neighbours. The name also reflects the motto of the Botshabelo Seminary, Ntlhahle ke hlahle”, “Lead me so that I may lead”.

### *Bad things from Botshabelo*

The bad thing was that Botshabelo closed up after the Ndebele students were moved to the New Training College in KwaNdebele Homeland. The Department of Education and Training arranged for an official closing function to mark the end of Botshabelo as an educational centre. The function was held on the 5<sup>th</sup> October 1979.

*The main speakers were as follows:*

- ❖ The secretary for the Department of Education and Training.
- ❖ The Mayor of Middelburg.
- ❖ Rev W. Kramer (on behalf of Berlin Mission)
- ❖ Dr M.J. Madiba (on behalf of ELCSA)
- ❖ Mr Justice Tsungu (on behalf of all former students of the Botshabelo seminary)

*The selling of Botshabelo mission station*

In October 1953 the South African Government passed the Bantu Education Act, by which it was planned to take over from the Churches all education of the Blacks, especially teachers training institutions like Botshabelo. However the churches were given an opportunity of running the school as a private school without the subsidies for teachers' salaries and maintenance of the institution. But because of the First World War and the Second World War that had crippled the German Government, the Berlin Mission Society felt that they cannot raise money to run or maintain the Institution at Botshabelo, other than Evangelisation. For Botshabelo needs capital for new dormitories and living quarters, new and better classrooms, a laboratory, a library, a domestic science centre, a craftwork centre and even teachers salaries.

Rev P.G. Pakendorf in 1955 mentioned two other advantages that would benefit the Botshabelo Seminary if it falls directly under the Department of Education and Training.

- ❖ Those teachers would enjoy pension benefits in their retirement.
- ❖ That it will bring an end to disagreement between denominations.

The real concern facing the Berlin Mission was the fact that religious education would not receive the necessary attention. However Rev Pakendorf wrote as follows:

*“Let all inspectors know that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of all wisdom. They must thus press that the word of God be taught in schools, and they must watch over their servants, the teachers, so that they must not be tired of doing this work.”*

Rev Pakendorf also pleaded with parents and godparents to take care of Sunday schools and to regard the teaching of children as their responsibility. To parents and evangelists he said.

*“Let those Sunday services for children be conducted by you everywhere, where it is possible. Don't say it is the work of teachers” ( Mminele 82 : 241)*

Finally on the 19<sup>th</sup> of March 1956 the Seminary was leased to the Department, with the contract signed between:

*The Rev E.H.M. Jackal and Rev W.K. Leue in their capacity as representatives of the Berliner Mission work in respect of the Botshabelo Institution and the government of the Union of South Africa represented by the Secretary of Natives Affairs. Finally the Institution was sold in 1970. But the agreement to lease was as follows:*

*The Government was to pay the church*

*\$ 800 (+- R1 600 rental for the building)*

*\$ 50 (+- R100 for the land used)*

*\$ 100 (+- R200 for the furniture)*

*or*

*To purchase all listed furniture for the*

*Sum of \$ 3000 – 00 (+- R6000-00)*

The two parties, that are the Church and the State, agreed on the following payment by the State.



- ❖ *Rental for school-building*
- ❖ *Rental for hostels*
- ❖ *Rental for use of electric light supply*
- ❖ *Rental for use of water supply*
- ❖ *Rental for use of teachers' houses*
- ❖ *Use of grounds for agriculture and sport*
- ❖ *Use of equipment in schools and in hostels*

On The 6th August 1970 the Berliner Missionsgesellschaft at a cost of R191 830-00 sold the Botshabelo Mission Area to the Middelburg municipality.

The Berlin Mission Society was represented by Revs. Walter Ernst Johannsmeier and Hermann August Heinrich Schroeder.

The area included the farms Leeupoortjie, no. 267 hectares of 318, 8278. Groenfontein, no. 266 hectares of 532, 9328 and Toevlug, no. 269 hectares of 2428, 4178.

Because of the historical importance of Botshabelo area, the municipality of Middelburg in liaison with The Simon van der Stel Foundation and the Transvaal Provincial Administration's library and museum services decided to make the remains of the Old Mission Station into an open-air museum for a tourist's attraction.

The Trio agreed that all the buildings were to be restored. The old cemetery would also be restored, and the bodies of Missionaries of the Berlin Mission that lay buried all over the Transvaal were, if need be, to be reburied.

### **BOTSHABELO TO MOTETEMA**

It was because of the South African apartheid laws that Botshabelo Seminary to was to be closed. But not all people who were in government were for the idea of the selling or closing of Botshabelo as a place of worship and replaced by the Museum, others were not

happy about these laws. Sadly pity was given more to the buildings than the residents who were forcefully removed from Botshabelo.

That can be proven by the words uttered by the mayor of Middelburg in his address at the closing function on the 5<sup>th</sup> October 1979.

*The Church, next door will be restored and as you can see we are already busy changing the garden around the church to its original appearance. The church will continue to be used for the holding of services. The outdoor oven and wagon-shed will also be repaired. The Old Merensky parsonage will house a Mission Museum. It will contain information and exhibitions in connection with the Mission history and important figures out of the teaching history of Botshabelo. Wagon building and bookbinding at Botshabelo will also again be revived. (Mminele 82: 246)*

Absolutely nothing the Berlin Mission could do to stop or influence the South African government in its idea of resettlement of African people: I mean particularly the Christian converts of Botshabelo whom I believe worked hard to form themselves into a Christian Nation. The Berlin Mission's work was pleased to find that Botshabelo as a Seminary will not be destroyed, but it will be restored to keep their history alive. The letter written by the Mission-Director, the Rev Owe Holm, also can see that.

*"May I express again the gratitude of our Mission for the willingness of the Simon van der Stel Foundation to consider Botshabelo to become such an outstanding place in the Transvaal area."*

The Berlin Mission Society would have been harmed if the Institution built by their own money was to be demolished. The Berlin Mission not did take note of the fact that many houses and belongings of the Botshabelo residents are going to be destroyed for peanuts. It never reached their minds that these Christians of Botshabelo, their forefathers

lost everything they have from Sekhukhune's reign of terror. Not only did they lose goods or property but lives were lost. So Botshabelo the place of refuge was built on a bond of blood, because of their love of the living God.

According to some Christians from Botshabelo King Sekhukhune was evil, while the White Government that intended to destroy many people's lives and placed them where they have no intention of staying there was holy. But Sekhukhune was not that bad. He was able to allow his subjects to become Christians and on the other hand the Missionaries failed him by giving Mampuru his half brother and an enemy to his throne, a shelter at the neighborhood of the Kgalatlou Mission Station. The Berlin missionaries went to the extent of making appeals on Mampuru's behalf. Sekhukhune was on the right track, he only lacked the support of the Missionaries, because he went as far as declaring Sunday to be a day of rest. Hence Merensky had this to write:

*"After the protection of God, it has been the arm of King Sekhukhune which has shielded the Christians from the greatest harm."*

But when the South African Government planned to remove the residents of Botshabelo from the land of their birth, the Berlin Mission was quick to respond in their favour.

*"We should take the first step and not wait until the Department comes with their proposals. We must co-operate with the Department so that they will realize that we are in favour of the new policy. The sooner the better."*



There was nothing that the black Christians of Botshabelo could do. They put their trust and loyalty to the Missionaries from the time of Merensky and Sekhukhune. They have shown their loyalty even in times of wars against their fellow black brothers from Sekhukhune's warriors. The Missionaries as people who introduced the living God to them was always right. The Government that supported them and gave land next to them was always right and must be trusted. But the point is, they are black and they must go to black territory or land.

Mr. Marokane of Motetema, one of the people who were forcefully removed from Botshabelo and was one of the members of the "Back to Botshabelo Campaign or Committee" remembered that:

*"It was on Wednesday the 10<sup>th</sup> of January 1971 when the Government lorries came to collect us to a new place called Motetema next to Groblersdal. Most of us knew nothing about Groblersdal or Motetema.*

*We were told before that the place is beautiful and it has water and electricity. So there will be no need for us to take along our livestock because we are going to a township. We used to do farming and agriculture at Botshabelo. Then I thought to myself what kind of life are we going to live. As Africans we believe in farming and we calculated our wealth through cattle and other domestic animals. The most painful thing was that, white farmers from the neighbourhood came to buy or take our livestock at the cheapest price."*

It will be very difficult for some of the Botshabelo Christian people to ever pick up. I mean a century ago their forefathers lost everything to Sekhukhune and these generations of today lost everything again to the South African Government in 1972. Three decades later they want to go back to Botshabelo, to start farming again. The question is, will the new Government remember all the losses they endured?

Koko Louisa Rantlha, a retired teacher and a chairperson of the Committee in charge of resettling the Community explained the day when their families, furniture and pets were packed onto lorries and driven to Motetema, a township in the Groblersdal district.

*How they entered their new home in poverty, sadness and anger*

The Government gave them only three months notice and no compensation was given for demolishing of their houses. She remembered when their cattle, donkeys, sheep, goats and fowls were sold in a hurry for nothing. They were crying as they left their mealie-fields.

Johanna Motlatle (by 2003) a 74-year-old woman said, *“Everything was black” referring to the day she and her family were moved.* The memory still angers her. She continued by saying, *“How would you feel sitting next to a dog on a lorry, with your wardrobe at your back and children on top of it.”*

One wonders on which side is he? I am referring to Dr Klaus Merensky, a Pretoria engineer and a direct descendant of the founder of the Botshabelo Mission Station. He is in the Committee of “Save Botshabelo Action” chaired by a local businessman Arthur Barlow.

The Chairperson of the commission, Mr. Barlow said, *“Blacks would acquire the mission station and the historical Anglo-Boer War Fort, located on a hill behind the Mission Church over his dead body”.*

Sometimes one had to agree with the report written in the "City Press" dated 11 May 2003.

*"When White Missionaries first set foot in Africa, according to conventional African wisdom, the White man owned the Bible and the Black man a land. When the black man had acquired the Bible, the White man owned the land."*

The quotation directly referred to the people of Botshabelo who had just reclaimed back Botshabelo, the place of refuge.

On September 2000, The Berlin Missionswerk gave the following statement:

- ❖ *After 1950, we did not resist enough on behalf of and for the benefit of the inhabitants against the pressure of the apartheid government to agree to sell mission land or to accept expropriation for the sake of forced removals.*
- ❖ *We were convinced of the advantages of the financial benefit from the sale of the land or from the compensation and took the financial security of the mission, the church and the salaries of the White church workers more into consideration than the human rights of the congregants.*

***We confess:***

- ❖ *We failed to protect the Christians living on Mission land sufficiently.*
- ❖ *We did not take into consideration the possibility of an end to apartheid and of the eventual return and future claims of those who were forcibly removed.*



Life in Motetema

They arrived on 10 January 1971 at their new homes. They found the four-roomed houses built and they were placed on the Southern side and the Masakaneng residents occupied the Northern side. Unlike Botshabelo, Motetema was different it had many denominations. They were used to one denomination, that is, the Lutheran Church, it was easy for them to control their children by using the influence of the Church policy. For an example: If a young lady or girl becomes pregnant before marriage, the church elders were able to excommunicate her until she underwent the Confirmation class before she could be active again in the church activities. That also implied to all members of the congregation who were found violating the church policy. Motetema became a free land and a land of many choices. One could choose to join another congregation or even to stay at home like heathens do.

The other problem they found themselves in was a problem of isolation. They used to be one group or community at Botshabelo, using one school under the influence of their church. At Motetema the local primary “Mafato School” was not under the influence of the church, so they wanted their own primary school for their children. Ikageng Primary School was built particularly for them. Mr Lerutla became the first principal of this school. He was from Botshabelo.

The two primary schools in a small township like Motetema created a division to the local community. Those who are from Masakaneng took their children to Mafato Primary School and those from Botshabelo to Ikageng Primary School. Like the name of the school says “Build yourselves” (Ikangeng), people never built themselves at school only but even their social lives. When coming to their festivals like marriages, birthday parties or funerals, they would come together as one, helping one another or even to comfort each other. They know themselves as one nation, they have been together at Botshabelo from the time of their birth, and now that they are at a foreign land, like Motetema, to them unity is more important than before.

Things started to be better now, because their children who were born at Motetema and the children of the Masakaneng people also born at Motetema took Motetema as their Motherland, and entering into marriages between them brought the whole community together as one big family.

Today the Lutheran Church look back at Reverend Merensky and the Christian converts from Sekhukhune land in pride. It was because of their hard work and dedication to their God that the church today can boast Botshabelo as a Seminary, which has contributed to the country and the church about the big names it has produced. (*see Annexures for big names*). The Christians of today also give thanks to the Berlin Mission Society for the great contribution they have made to the promotion and development of the Sepedi or Northern Sotho as a first language at Botshabelo. S.P.P. Mminele had this to say about the activities of the Berlin Missionaries on this matter:

*We Africans have profited by the Berlin Lutheran Mission in many ways. To mention a few, see what stress this Mission has laid on the teaching of Bantu languages, how it has made an accurate and careful study of them and helped to make them written languages. This Mission has helped in laying the foundation of Bantu literature.”*

There are many things that have happened from 1864 to 1971 when Botshabelo was transferred to Motetema, which were not written down. These are only written for the Lutheran Church in Southern Africa to follow their track record.

Finally Motetema people were given their land back, that is the Minister of Land Affairs, Mrs Thoko Didiza in 2003, handed over Botshabelo to them. Mrs Helen Makwetla the 74 year old lady and one of the members in the committee of “Bring back Botshabelo Campaign.” has this to say:

*We are just like Moses and the Israelites.*

*We are going home to the land of milk and  
honey. God held his umbrella over us. On  
the other hand, it will be as if we are dreaming .....*

*We will be so happy.”*

The community is now waiting for the day when they will be at Botshabelo as residents, particularly as most of them are elder people, and then they could get into full negotiations with the Middelburg Municipality on how Botshabelo Museum is run.



## CHAPTER 10

### CONCLUSION

When King Sekwati met the missionaries in 1860, it was one of the best moments of his life. He could not predict that at a certain point in time, his nation would be torn apart because of their religion and Christianity.

The turning point can be classified under the following headings:

- 1 Wars and stability,
- 2 Culture and tradition,
- 3 Colonialism, and
- 4 Impatience

#### 1. Wars and stability

Sekhukhune became heir after the death of Sekwati his father. Mampuru his half brother opposed him to his Kingship. Even the nations that were once loyal and depending on the great King Sekwati, challenged Sekhukhune for their independence. The Christians on the other hand with their new religion added more to the confusion of the new King. The internal problems weakened the once powerful and united Kingdom of the Bapedi.

#### 2. Culture and tradition

The Bapedi people had their own system of beliefs. Their beliefs had been handed down to them from their fore-fathers by word of mouth from generation to generation. The sudden change brought forward by Christians, was new and unaccepted to them. They hated their own names, which are easy for them to pronounce. Christian names like Johannes, Andries, Merensky or Christians are new to them. To them there is only one King, and that is Sekhukhune. To them there is no other God than their gods, who are their ancestors. And if these Christians' God is going to take the place of Sekhukhune, then King Sekhukhune will fight for recognition and his place.

### 3. Colonialism

The Boers in the Transvaal wanted to annex the whole of Transvaal. The Missionaries were the only white people working in peace amongst the Bapedi people. They were also the only people who were able to talk to the Transvaal or Lydenburg government up to the highest level. Merensky was able to bring closer the two governments. The real aim of the Missionaries was easily shifted, indirectly or directly the Missionaries used forked tongues: Jesus who want people to love Him and obey his commandments and the Transvaal government who wanted people to respect their laws.

### 4. Impatience

Because of the given facts, time was against them. Sekhukhune was impatient, he wanted to unite his nation. He could not tolerate those who wanted to destabilize the country for their own benefits. He would rather use anything necessary before him to remove them. On the other hand was the Transvaal government that could not wait any longer. They could easily lose the Transvaal under the British Empire. Sekhukhune's leadership will not last much longer. It is matter of time before the whole Transvaal is annexed. But Christians in Sekhukhuneland as converts will be forced to cross the flooding river of Steelpoort to Botshabelo near Middelburg.

### The consequences

The impact of this misunderstanding between Christians and the Bapedi divided the people of Sekhukhune's ideology. The Christians from Sekhukhune came closer to the whites and even fought on the side of the Transvaal government. Sekhukhune and the Bapedi people who are loyal to him were called the heathens. To be a Christian will mean to be leaving all that you have inherited from your forefathers and be educated by all that comes with the Missionaries. Your father or brother is your enemy if he doesn't want to change his way of life.

This was the seed that the missionaries were planting. But their seed eventually fell on good soil and thorny soil.

### *1. Seeds falling on good soil*

The Botshabelo people are proud of their products. Besides the aim of making people Christians, they have amongst them Lawyers, Authors, Lecturers, School Inspectors, Political Ministers, Radio DJ, Chiefs, Artists, etc.

### *2. Seeds falling on thorny soil*

When people from Botshabelo were forcefully removed in 1971 to Motetema near Groblersdal, some of them were still living in the past. They looked down on people who were from Masakaneng as uncivilized people. The situation became that of Barbarism versus Boosterism. These people of Botshabelo will not allow their children to mix or socialize with the people or children of Masakaneng. They will want their own church, own school and even conduct their own ceremonies alone.

Thankfully today this seed has died. It never grew well in thorny soil, the Spirit of today is that of Brothers and Sisters between people of Botshabelo and Masakaneng in Motetema.



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4. Winter, J. 1912: History of Sekwati Volume 9.
5. Winter, J. 1913: Bapedi History Volume 10.
6. Winter, J. 1914: The Mental and Moral capabilities of the Natives Sekhukhuneland Volume 11



APPENDICESFURTHER INFORMATION ON PRODUCTS OF BOTSHABELOPRINCIPALS OF POST-PRIMARY SCHOOL IN LEBOWA AND VENDA

<u>Name</u>	<u>Area served or serving</u>
1. Dau, Rufus (B.A.)	Lebowa
2. Hlabangane, Richard (B.A.)	Lebowa
3. Kabu, Polycarpus (B.A.)	Lebowa
4. Kutumela, John (B.A.)	Lebowa
5. Lerutla, William (B.A.)	Lebowa
6. Madavha, Meshack	Venda
7. Makgabo, Kwadi M. (B.A.)	Lebowa
8. Makola, Cleopas (B.A.)	Lebowa
9. Masekela, Paul S.M. (B.A.)	Lebowa
10. Masipa, Joseph L. (B.A.)	Lebowa
11. Mbdaliga, Timothy (B.A.)	Venda
12. Mukwevho, Nehemia M.	Venda
13. Pitje, Daniel M. (B.A.)	Lebowa
14. Ramaliba, Isaac (B.Ed.)	Venda
15. Sefomolo, Epaphras	Lebowa

CHIEFS

<u>Name</u>	<u>Tribe</u>
1. Boleu, Sefako	Mokopa
2. Dinkwanyane, Johannes	Mopedi
3. Mahlangu, Padiso	Ndebele
4. Makhavhu	Muvenda
5. Mampane, Lekoko	Mopedi
6. Manok, Abram	Shangani
7. Manok, Chrisjan	Shangani
8. Marok, Jacobus	Shangani
9. Maraba, Solomon	Ndebele
10. Maserumule, Joseph M.	Mokone
11. Maserumule, Michael Leshalabe	Mokone
12. Maserumule, Petrus	Mokone
13. Masikwa, Ratshivhadelo	Muvenda
14. Mudau, Ernest F.	Muvenda
15. Mukibe, Abraham	Ndebele
16. Muloela, Somchachana	Ndebele
17. Nethengwe, Robert	Muvenda
18. Radzilani, Lucas	Muvenda
19. Ramaube, Seth Kgalema	Mopedi
20. Ramupudu, Joshua	Mokopa

**SONG COMPOSERS**

<b><u>Name</u></b>	<b><u>Ethnic Group</u></b>
1. Dzivani, Stephen M.	Muvenda
2. Lemekoana, Eric M.A.	North Sotho
3. Manyatshe, Bernard R.	Muvenda
4. Mulaudzi, Christian T.	Muvenda
5. Nemaembeni, Gerson B.N.	Muvenda
6. Nephawe, Derick	Muvenda
7. Nephawe, Ephraim B.	Muvenda
8. Ramaila, Epaphras M. (Rev.)	North Sotho
9. Ramokgola, Elifas (Rev.)	North Sotho
10. Ramokgopa, Matome N.	North Sotho
11. Serote, Abraham T. (Rev.)	North Sotho
12. Simelani, Patrick J.	UmSwazi
13. Tseka, Mokebe B.	North Sotho
14. Tshukudu, Johannes "Chooks"	Motswana

**UNIVERSITY LECTURERS**

<b><u>Name</u></b>	<b><u>University Served or Serving</u></b>
1. Makopo, Staupitz (B.A. Hons.)	Rand Afrikaans University
2. Makwela, Adam O. (M.A.)	University of the North
3. Mashabela, Peter H.D. (M.A.)	University of the North
4. Mathivha, Matshaya E.R. (D. Litt.)	University of the North
5. Motshekga, Edward C.N. (M.A.)	University of the North
6. Nokaneng, Mogobo (D. Ed.)	Vista University

**POLITICIANS**

<b><u>Name</u></b>	<b><u>Portfolio Held or Holding</u></b>
1. Kwakwa, Simon P. (B.A.)	Minister of Education, Lebowa
2. Mokale, David C.	Minister of Urban Affairs and Land Tenure, Republic of Bophuthatswana
3. Mudau, Baldwin M. (B.A.)	Leader of the Venda Independence Party
4. Mutsila, J.P.	Member of the Venda Independence Party
5. Nenzhelele, P.H.	Deputy-speaker, Republic of Venda

**SUPERVISORS, INPECTORS AND INSPECTRESSES OF EDUCATION**

<b><u>Name</u></b>	<b><u>Post and Area Served or Serving</u></b>
1. Kganane, Lucas S. (B.A.)	Chief Inspector, Lebowa
2. Kgopa, Rabi (B.A.)	Circuit Inspector, Lebowa

3. Khobo, Moses G.S. (B.A.) Inspector of Schools, Lebowa
4. Lekgetha, Solomon (B.A.) Supervisor of Schools, Central Government
5. Lepelle, Daniel R. (B.A.) Inspector of Schools, Lebowa
6. Maboja, Stephen (B.A.) Inspector of Schools, Central Government
7. Makwala, Silpha P.N. (B.A.) Circuit Inspector, Lebowa
8. Mamogobo, Phorohlo (M.Th.) Circuit Inspector, Lebowa
9. Mangoma, Henry M. (B.A.) Inspector of Schools, Venda
10. Mphanzela, Abigail M. (nee Motubatse) Needlework Inspectress, Lebowa
11. Mashao, Simon J. Supervisor of Schools, Lebowa
12. Mashinini, Lucas Sub-Inspector of Schools, Central Government
13. Matime, Jeremia Supervisor of Schools, Central Government
14. Matime, Solomon Circuit Inspector, Lebowa
15. Mehlape, Phillip N. (B.A. Hons) Inspector of Schools, Lebowa
16. Mminele, Solomon P.P. (B. Ed.) Inspector of Schools, Lebowa
17. Moabelo, Paul Inspector of Schools, Lebowa
18. Modiba, Tebogo Inspector of Schools, Lebowa
19. Mokgoatsane, Simson M. Inspector of Schools, Lebowa
20. Molefe, John H. Supervisor of Schools, Central Government
21. Moloisi, Asaph Supervisor of Schools
22. Moloisi, Joshua C. (B.A.) Circuit Inspector, Lebowa
23. Mudau, Ernest F. First Muvenda Inspector of Schools, Venda
24. Mutsila, Zacharia (B.A.) Inspector of Schools, Venda
25. Nchabeleng, Naomi T. (nee Mminele) Needlework Inspectress, Lebowa
26. Nevhulaudzi, Erdmann M. Inspector of Schools, Venda
27. Ngwana, Paul R. (B.A.) Circuit Inspector, Venda
28. Nkadimeng, Samuel G. (B.A.) Circuit Inspector, Lebowa
29. Radebe, Dan M. Inspector of Schools, Central Government
30. Rakoma, Joseph R.D. Inspector of Schools, Lebowa
31. Ramokgopa, Matome M. (B.A.) Inspector of Schools, Lebowa
32. Ramokgopa, Nathaniel M. Supervisor of Schools, Northern and Eastern Transvaal
33. Serote, Epaphras S. (B.A.) Inspector of Schools, Lebowa
34. Serote, Immanuel N. Supervisor of Schools, Central Government
35. Simelane, Patrick J. (B. Ed.) Inspector of Schools, Central Government
36. Tau, Sophie M. (Miss) Supervisor of Needlework and Domestic Science, Central Government
37. Zwane, Tsiah E. Inspector of Schools, Central Government



**ARTISTS AND ACTORS**

1. Gampu, Ken
2. Rakgoathe, Daniel, B.A. (Fine Arts) with distinction, M.A.
3. Sekoto Gerard J.
4. Tau, sophie M. (miss)

**LEGAL PRACTITIONERS**

1. Mkhambeni, Samuel Shilubane (LL.B)
2. Pitje, Godfrey Mokgonane (M.A., Diploma in Law)

PROMINENT FORMER STUDENTS OF BOTŠHABELO

(a) Preachers and Teachers



Rev. A. Serote  
Ordained 1903, Berlin.  
Helped translate the  
Bible into Sepedi



Bishop S.E. Serote  
First Black bishop of the  
Northern Diocese of ELCSA



Mr. N.M. Ramokgopa  
One of the first two Blacks to be appointed  
Supervisors of Schools in the Transvaal, 1926



Mr. S.P. Kwakwa, B.A.  
President of BSU and TATA,  
Minister of Education, Lebowa



Prof. M.E.R. Mathivha, D. Litt.  
Head of Dept. of Venda and Shona,  
U.N.I.



PROMINENT FORMER STUDENTS

(b) Art, Law, Radio and Television



Mr. G.J. Sekoto  
Internationally famous  
artist



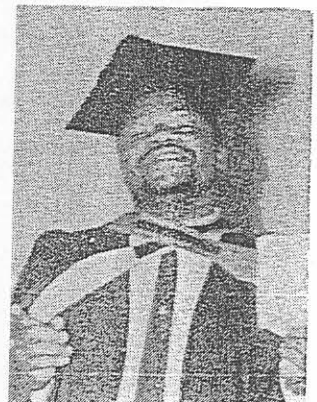
Mr. P.J. Simelane, B. Ed.,  
L.T.S.C., F.T.S.C. An  
outstanding song composer



Mr. O.K. Matsepe  
Prolific author



Mr. J.H. Tsungu  
SABC's Public Relations  
Officer



Mr. S.S. Makhambeni, LL.B.  
Popular attorney



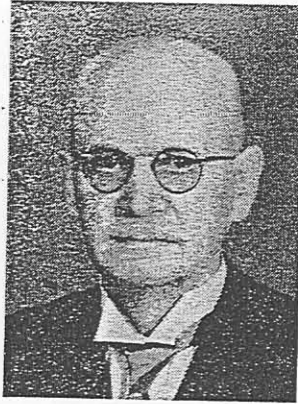
PROMINENT SUPERINTENDENTS OF THE  
BOTŠHABELO SEMINARY (INSTITUTION)



Rev. G. Trümpelmann  
(1884-1889)



Rev. G. Eiselen  
(1889-1906, 1909, 1917-1922)



Rev. P.E. Schwellnus  
(1907-1908, 1909-1912, 1914-1916, 1922-1924)



Rev. P.G. Pakendorf, M.D.  
(1937-1952)



Mr. H.D. Trümpelmann, M.A.  
(1952-1955)





Sekhukhune photographed in Pretoria after his capture.





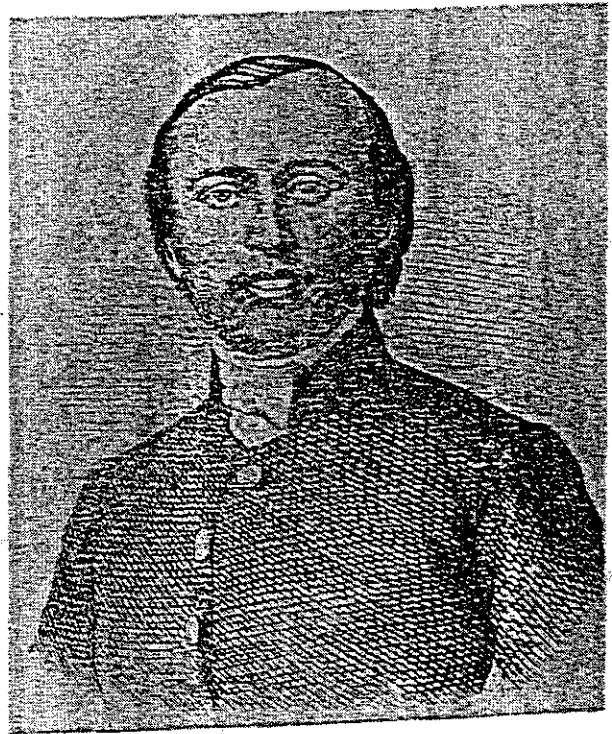
Rev. H. Grütznher  
(1865, 1874-1875)



Jacob Mantladi



Martinus Sewushane

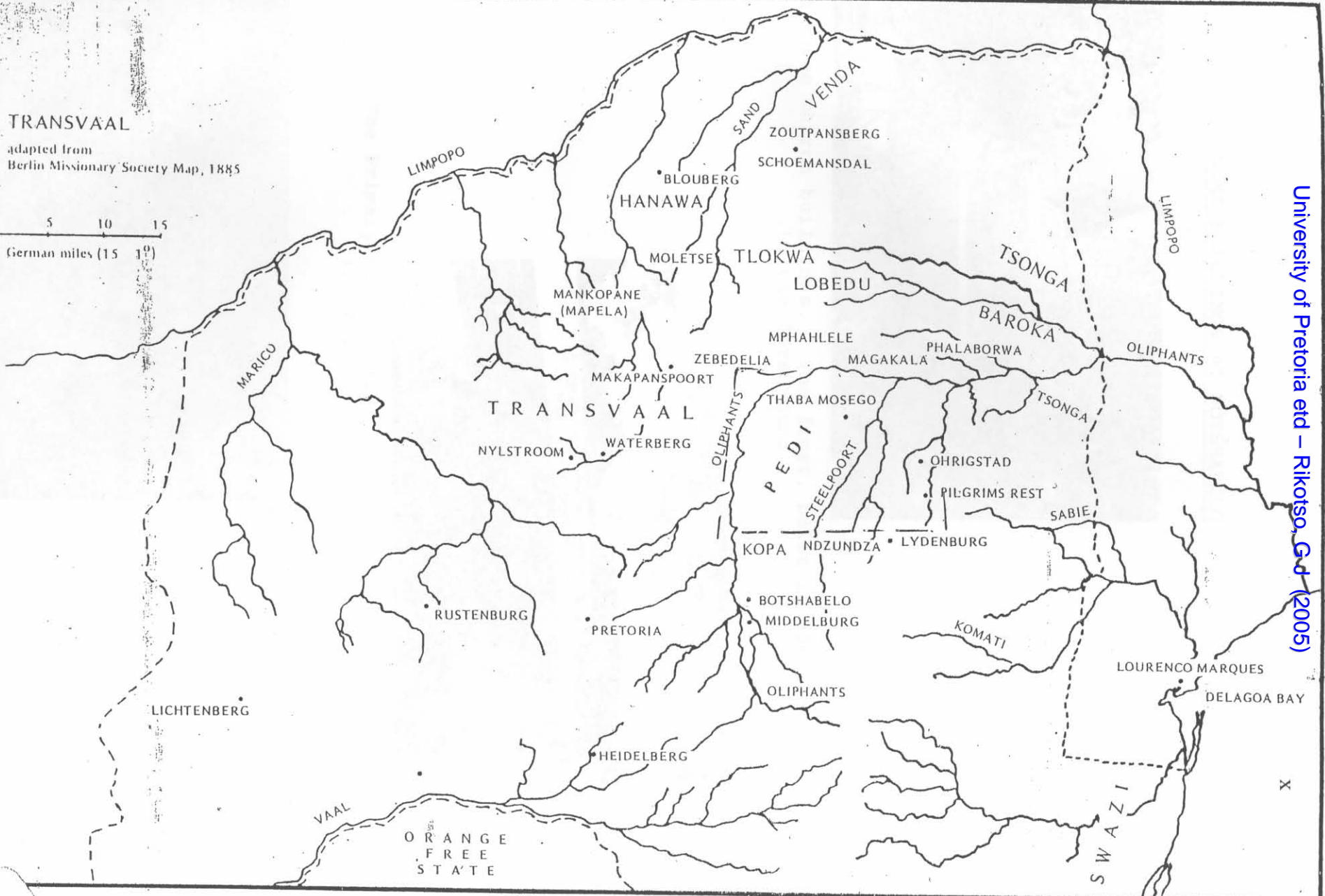
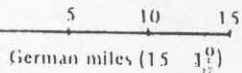


Albert Nachtigal



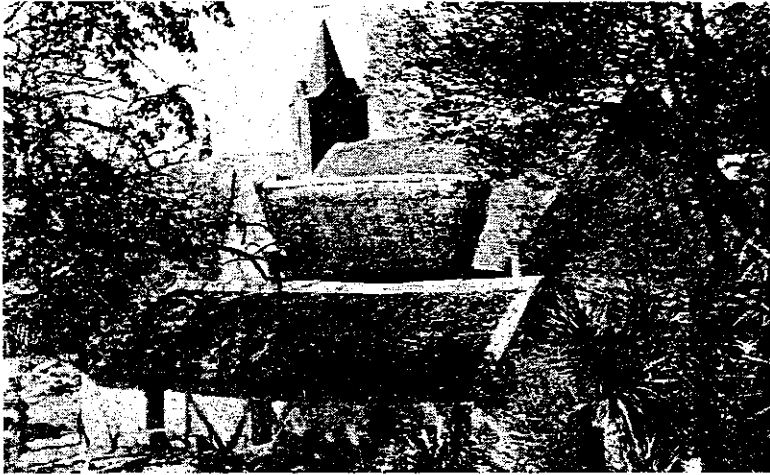
# TRANSVAAL

adapted from  
Berlin Missionary Society Map, 1885

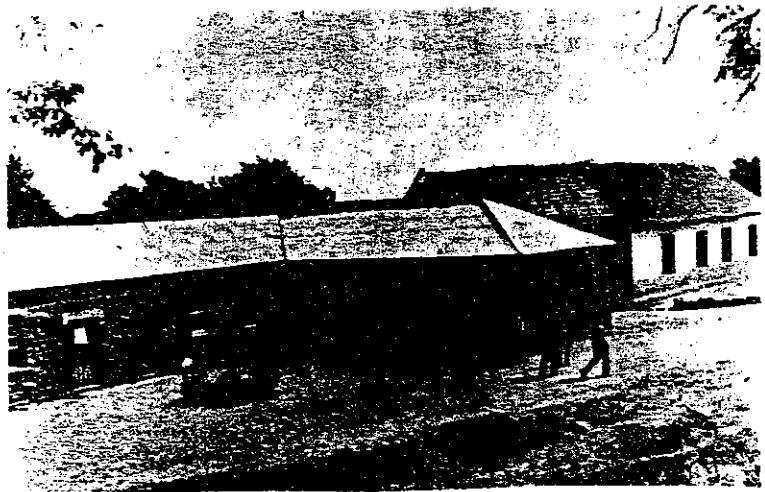


University of Pretoria etd - Rikotso, G.J. (2005)

SOME BUILDINGS AT BOTŠHADELO



The three church buildings. The first, built in 1865, is in the foreground.

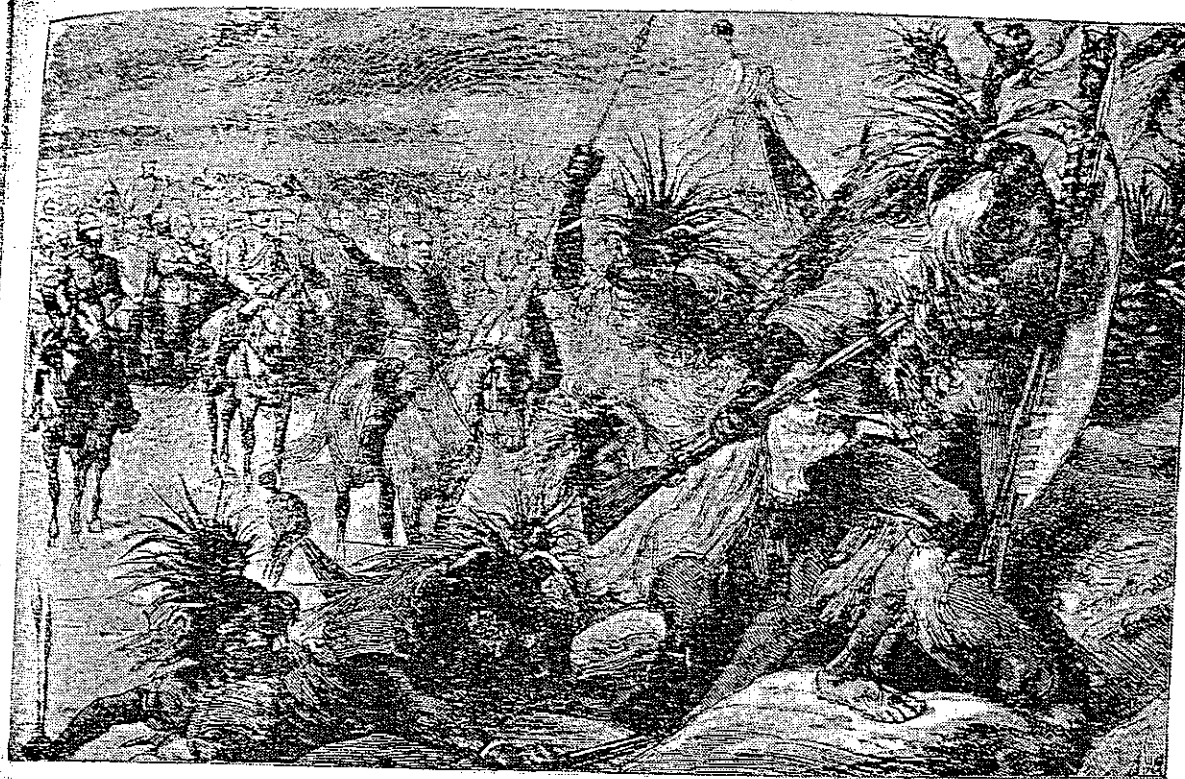


The Primary School buildings. The first, completed in 1872, is in the background.



The High School and Training School buildings. The Training School building, completed in 1909, is in the background.





'Storming of Sekhukhune's stronghold: Sir Garnet Wolseley cheering on the Swazis.' *The Graphic*, 1880.



The captive chief Sekhukhune entering Church Square, Pretoria.' *The Graphic*, 1880.