

THE POLITICAL ORGANISATION OF THE TSHIDI

The Tshidi Barolong form a distinct political unit. Although they are related to the Tlou, the Rapulana and the Seleka Barolong, and together with them formed one tribe during the reign of their chief Tau II. in the latter part of the eighteenth century, the process of sub-division which followed the death of Tau led to the formation of four separate political units. These sections still have much in common. They speak substantially the same dialect of Tswana; all venerate the same animal -- the koodoo (tholo), although the separate sections have assumed subsidiary objects of veneration (seano). The Tshidi often refer to themselves as Ba-bina-Tshini (those-who-venerate-Iron). This seano is supposed to be derived from the name of a former Barolong chief, Noto (a hammer). The Ra-Tlou speak of themselves as Ba-bina-Tlou (those-who-venerate-the-Elephant), this seano also being derived from the name of the founder of this section of the Barolong, Tlou. The Seleka venerate the lion (Tau), also derived from the name of a former Chief, Tau. So far as I have been able to make out, the Rapulana have no subsidiary seano. But when the separate Barolong sections make reference to their common origin, they speak of themselves as Ba-bina-Tholo (those-who-venerate-the-koodoo).

The whole species of animal which constitutes the seano is taboo. It is not killed nor eaten, nor is its skin used for clothing or any other purpose. There is, however, no idea of descent from the seano such as is found in connection with the totem of some Australian tribes. Again there is no connection between the seano and the Barolong idea of exogamy. It is perfectly permissible for people with the same seano to intermarry, although where the seano of the husband is different from that of

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When we go further back into their history, we find that the Barolong once formed one tribe with the Batlhaping, and at that time they had the tholo (koodoo) as their seano. The Batlhaping have since their separation from the Barolong taken the Fish (Tlhapi) as their subsidiary seano, but when they want to emphasise their genetic relationship with the Barolong they say "we also venerate the tholo".

the wife, the children take the seano of the former. I found no trace of any ceremonies or songs connected with the seano animal, although it is by no means far-fetched to suppose that in the distant past such dances or songs may have existed. Evidence of their former existence may be based primarily upon the expression used when a person is asked what his or her seano is. The question is: "U bina'ng?" ("What do you dance or sing to?"). The reply in the case of the Barolong is: "Ke bina tholo?" ("I sing or dance to the koodoo."). But when one inquires into the connection between this expression and any particular <sup>type</sup> ~~kind~~ of dance with which it might be or have been associated, no clear information is forthcoming. Finally the Rolong seano is typically applied to the tribe as a whole or to that portion of it which constitutes the original nucleus of the tribe now enlarged by elements of diverse origin and not to ~~sibs~~ or clans as is the case among other people among whom this social phenomenon is found. In the main it seems to provide a method by which the tribe distinguishes itself from other tribal groups of Tswana or other origin.

In spite of their common origin, these sections, as has been pointed out, now constitute separate political units, with different Paramount Chiefs. Theoretically the Tlou section is acknowledged by all as being the senior section of the Barolong people, with the Tshidi as next, followed by the Seleka and, lastly, the Rapulana; but in practice members of the different sections only acknowledge the authority over them of the Paramount Chief of their own section.

Since the coming of European administration, the Tshidi have  
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The words go bina are very seldom used to mean "sing" among the Barolong, and in fact among most of the Tswana it simply means "to dance". But among the Southern {Sotho} (Basutoland) and the Northern Sotho (Pedi) it is used to mean either to sing or to dance.

come to be regarded as the most important section of the Barolong. This is partly due to the fact that they constitute the largest section of the Barolong in point of numbers, and partly because of the fame which their Chief, Montshiwa, acquired during the disturbances in the nineteenth century, which finally led to the declaration of a British Protectorate over, among others, Barolong territory. When the Voortrekkers, in their migration northwards, reached Barolong ~~territory~~ country and attempted to establish themselves there, Montshiwa, the Tshidi Chief, resisted their encroachment upon what he considered his territory. The Boers concerned disputed Montshiwa's claim to speak and act for the Barolong as a whole, and with the Ra-Tlou as their allies they endeavoured to assert their rights to what they considered either vacant territory or territory belonging to their allies, the Ra-Tlou. When Montshiwa perceived that his resistance to these encroachments would be of no avail, he applied to the British for protection. After Sir Charles Warren's expedition in 1884, Bechuanaland was declared a British <sup>Colony</sup> ~~Protectorate~~, the boundary between the Transvaal and Bechuanaland was fixed and a Land Commission was appointed, among other things, to set aside Reserves for the different tribes resident in Bechuanaland. In 1896 British Bechuanaland was annexed to the Cape. Ever since the British occupation of Bechuanaland the Tshidi have regarded themselves as the most important section of the Barolong. As one of them put it to me: "The Tlou may be senior to us by blood, but we fought for this country, assisted by Monkuroane of the Batlhaping, and therefore we are senior by deeds." One need hardly say the Ra-Tlou do not admit the alleged superiority of the Tshidi. As to the Rapulana and the Tshidi, there is not much love lost between them, and even within recent times there have been armed conflicts and protracted lawsuits between them. The Tshidi are on the best terms with the Seleka. Whether this is because these two sections are the most widely separated in location or because the Tshidi

once found a place of refuge from their enemies <sup>among</sup> ~~from~~ the Seleka at Thaba Nchu, it is difficult to say. The Seleka are concentrated in the Free State and the Tshidi in British Bechuanaland.

With regard to their attitude to other Tswana tribes, the Barolong tend to look down upon them, and in particular upon the Tlhaping, and Barolong pride is a common topic of conversation among the Tswana and one does not have to live long among the Tshidi in particular to discover that they look upon themselves as the leading Tswana tribe. That there is any justification for this attitude is of course not admitted by other Tswana tribes.

The Tshidi Barolong to-day live as a separate tribe under their own paramount chief, Lotlamoreng, a grandson of the famous Tshidi Chief, Montshiwa. Like the other Tswana, the Tshidi live in what have come to be known in South Africa as towns or stads. This means that instead of living reasonably far apart in small, semi-detached villages, they live close together in a large central settlement having as its nucleus the place of abode of their Paramount Chief. The principal stad of the Tshidi is situated about two miles from the European town of Mafeking, Mafeking is an important railway centre where railway lines from Bechuanaland Protectorate and Southern Rhodesia to the north, from the Transvaal towards the east, and the Cape Province, converge. The Bechuanaland Protectorate Administration has its headquarters at Mafeking which is also surrounded by a number of important European farms. The result is that a small town of considerable importance has grown up in Mafeking, made famous also by the historic siege and defence of it by Baden-Powell during the Boer War, and this township is not without its influence upon the Tshidi town. In fact it is one of the main avenues through which foreign influences come into Tshidi life. And yet <sup>in</sup> Mafeking, the Tshidi has a relatively independent existence.

At the head of the Tshidi town called Mafikeng (at the place of rocks) because of the large boulders which abound on the banks of  
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the Molopo River on which it is situated, is the Paramount Chief, Lotlamoreng. The people living in the "stad" owe allegiance to him. The population does not consist of Tshidi Barolong only, but in addition to people of Barolong extraction, various foreign elements are included in the tribe. These include other sections of the Barolong such as the Tlou, the Rapulana or the Seleka, people of Kwena extraction, some Bamangwato, some Bahurutse, and others. Where these sections are large enough to warrant it they form separate makgotla under their own heads of makgotla (bagolwane); otherwise they form part of Tshidi makgotla. But whatever their origin and whatever the manner of their incorporation in the tribe, they owe allegiance to Lotlamoreng. Those who do not desire to come under his authority may live in the local urban location which is under the administration of the Mafeking Town Council. The inhabitants of the location are a heterogenous group of diverse origins, including Tswana, Nguni and other elements such as Coloureds, i.e., people of mixed African and European descent. The inhabitants of the location are mentioned here only for the purpose of contrasting with them the residents of the "stad" who recognise the authority of Lotlamoreng. Lotlamoreng adjudicates upon disputes between his people; they look to him or to those to whom he has delegated his powers to provide them with land to plough or establish their cattle-posts and their homes. He expects them, among other things, to turn out annually to plough and reap his fields and to carry out other public duties entrusted to them. In the past the Chief "doctored" the seed of his people at the opening of the ploughing season and performed also the rain-making and the first-fruit ceremonies or arranged for their performance. Chief Montshiwa, the grandfather of the present chief, is said to have been a great "rain-doctor" himself, and during his reign he had personal charge of this work for the tribe, which probably accounts, at least in part, for the great prestige which he enjoyed among his people, and still does so long after his death. He died in 1896.

At present these ceremonies are no longer held but the Chief, being a Christian, arranges for a religious service of intercession for rain in which the ministers of the various denominations working in the "stad" participate. It is a command performance, and all are expected to attend. In legal matters the Chief has original and exclusive jurisdiction over the members of his tribe in all civil cases and in all criminal matters, except in the more serious offences such as murder, rape, etc., which are tried by the local European courts. These powers the Chief retained under a proclamation passed in 1885 when British Bechuanaland was declared a British Protectorate. Appeals against the decision of the Chief lie to the Native Commissioner of the district, and thence to the Native Appeal Court in civil matters and to the appropriate division of the Supreme Court of South Africa in criminal cases. In point of fact there are not many appeals to the Native Commissioner against the decisions of the Chief's court. The reasons for this are not far to seek. Appeals to the Native Commissioner are regarded with disfavour both by the Chief and the elders of the tribe as a mark of disrespect and disloyalty. Anybody who takes a case on appeal, therefore, runs the risk of incurring the displeasure of tribal authorities who may express their feelings on another occasion in a matter quite unconnected with the original dispute. Again, in the majority of cases litigants seem to feel that they get substantial justice in the Chief's court. They may feel dissatisfied with the decision of their headman or their sub-chief, but once they have taken the matter as far as the Paramount Chief they reckon they have gone far enough and let the matter rest there. Another deterrent as far as such appeals are concerned is the fear of the expense connected with European trials or lawsuits -- the necessity for getting the services of a lawyer if the other side should elect to do so, court fees if the case goes against one -- all these are apt to be more in cash than what the Chief's court would charge in kind. There is also a noticeable distrust of

European courts simply because they are European. The atmosphere of the kgotla where one is tried by people with whom one is familiar is much more congenial to the litigants.

Not only does Letlamoreng exercise authority in the central town -- Mafikeng -- but over all his people scattered in different parts of the Molopo Reserve and adjoining reserves such as Mareetsane, a few miles south of Mafeking, and the Barolong farms which are situated in the Bechuanaland Protectorate. In fact the Chief himself spends a great deal of his time at the Barolong Farms and seldom visits the other outlying villages in which his people are settled. In these villages he is represented by a sub-chief or headman who exercises similar authority in all matters but with Lotlamoreng as the final court of appeal. The Molopo Reserve is fairly extensive and not all the people living in it recognise Lotlamoreng as their Chief. There are rather important Ra-Tlou and Rapulana settlements in the Reserve, especially at Tshidilamolomo and Lotlhakane respectively. At Disaneng, about twenty-four miles from Mafeking, is a small group of Batlharo under Chief Masibi, who have lived for many years in close proximity to the Tshidi. They claim to owe allegiance not to Lotlamoreng but to a Tlharo Chief at Tsoowe in the Kuruman district. Reference is made elsewhere to the quarrels and dissensions which have been occasioned by Tshidi attempts to establish their authority over non-Tshidi elements in the Molopo Reserve.