

1. This poem subject of this praise-poem is Montshwa the son of Tawona, who held the chieftainship among the Tshidi Basolong from about 1850 to 1896. The incident to which it refers took place in May 1881. The scene of the action was Lotlhekane (Rutfontein), a ~~place~~ village situated a few miles from Mafikeng, the headquarters of the Tshidi Basolong. The ~~little~~ village of Lotlhekane has on several occasions in Basolong history been a bone of contention between the Tshidi and the Rapulana sections of the tribe. The Rapulana have always laid claim to Lotlhekane as the place to which their forebears repaired when the Basolong broke up into the four sections - Ratlu, Seleka, Rapulana and Tshidi - into which they are usually divided. The Tshidi to on the other hand have always maintained that the Rapulana forfeited their claim to this area when they on the return of the Basolong from Phobu Ncheu in the late forties of the last century, they (the Rapulana) decided to remain at Mochavostad (Matlabai's Stad) under the jurisdiction of the Transvaal Republic. In 1873 President Burgers of the Transvaal Republic decided to move the Rapulana from Mochavostad, ^{the present town of} near Mochavostad, to Rutfontein situated on the western boundary of the Transvaal, only a few miles away from the Tshidi Basolong. About 1874 some of the Rapulana crossed the Transvaal boundary and moved over into Tshidi territory, to Lotlhekane (Rutfontein), in the Cape, where they settled ~~the~~ according to Tshidi tradition, with the permission of Chief Montshwa who was then at Scheeba, a place not far from Lotlhekane. For a few years the

1. For a full account of the part played in the history of the by Montshwa in the history of the Tshidi Basolong see Matthews, Z.K.: "A Short History of the Tshidi Basolong" Fort Hare Paper, June 1945.

Ropulona and the Tshidi lived together in peace in the land of their forefathers, but about 1880 Mantswana became dissatisfied with the attitude of the Ropulona who apparently refused to acknowledge that they were subject to his jurisdiction, although they lived within what he (Mantswana) regarded as his territory. Mantswana accordingly made an attack on the Ropulona and drove them out of Letshakane across the Transvaal boundary to Polfontein where the main body of the Ropulona had remained since they placed there by President Burgers. A Polfontein counter-attack was organised. With the help of the Retloux — another section of the Basuto — under Moshekete and some European freebooters the Ropulona returned to attack Mantswana and they succeeded in dislodging him from Sehuba. ~~He~~ Hard pressed, he withdrew to Mafikeng (Place of Rocks) where owing to the natural fortifications of the place he was able to ward off all the attacks of his enemies. It was during this campaign that the "battle" referred to in this poem took place. Although the Tshidi did not get the balance get the better of their enemies in the campaign they nevertheless here ^{in their triumph for him} indulge in fulsome adulation of the exploits of their warriors and their chief and play down the achievements of their opponents.

The praise-poem is a well-known form of traditional
Bantu literature. It usually consists of the subject
of the praise-poem is usually some individual, either a
chief or a warrior who has distinguished himself in one way or
~~another~~ in tribal ~~history~~ history, usually in battle or
in hunting. These praise-poems are recited on various
occasions when these exploits are called to mind. Some
become so commonly known that the individuals concerned
~~are~~ are known by certain key-words in these praise-poems
imposed in their name. Thus among the Tshidi Bawling
Montshwa everyone who is familiar with has even a nodding
acquaintance with the history of the tribe knows that the
word "Sya-Nkalo" refers to Montshwa, the son of Tawana.
Not infrequently these praise-poems are referred to as
"the names" (inama) of the persons to whom they refer. As is
well known, among Africans a name is ~~usually~~ ^{usually} not simply a mere label.
The term "African name" does not imply a mere label
but implies more than that a distinguishing intended
to distinguish one thing from or person from another.
It implies the attributes of the person to which it
is applied. Therefore as these praise-poems usually
dwell on the qualities of the persons who form their
subject matter they are quite rightly referred to as their
names.

In various Bantu languages collections have
been made of praise-poems, but a great deal of
the value of these collections is lost on their readers
because of the obscure allusions contained in them,
the archaic forms and words used and the fact
that the incidents to which they refer