At a time when, in Lesotho, the Paramount Chief was, politically, dependent on the advice and support of the Resident Commissioner, and religiously a devout member of the Roman Catholic Church, whose influence he supported with all his authority, two men among the people spoke for change and a restoration of the idealized past, a past when Paramount Chief and people consulted together at the great pitso of the Nation and no foreign officials and missionaries of conflicting views brought in alien laws and ideas and confused the forces of unity and tradition.

Walter Matitta, the prophet, and Josiel Lefela, the politician, were born in the same year, 1885. They shared aspects of a common vision, though they chose different routes to realize it, and they liked and respected each other. So it was that when Walter Matitta asked his consistory in 1920 for advice on whom he should marry, the Women's Association, who considered the matter carefully, dismissed a number of candidates and favoured Miss A. Lefela, a sister of Josiel Lefela. In fact this particular link did not come into being, but Josiel Lefela for his part named his third son Walter, in Matitta's honour, and frequently asked Matitta's prayers for his work, remembered in a hymn sung by Matitta's followers to the present which in thirty-nine verses gives the history of the Church, concluding with these verses:

Ka mor'a lilemo, Fora, Roma, Chachi, Matitta ts'eliso
Ha hlaha khotla Tsa hana kopo Khotieng la Bafo
La Bafo Lesotho, Ka baka la khano Bakeng sa thapelo
Le tsekang pallo Kerekeng tsena 'Nos'a la Jesu
Tsa Moshoehoe' Musong Lekhota la Bafo Mokhethoa oa Molimo,
Ka tse'a khotso La kopa Walter A e-so tsoloe
La kopa thapelo Le moruti Coillard A phetha tsa thomo
Kerekeng tsolhe. Le bo Mahonko. Ea leholimong.

1 This paper was originally presented at to the Canadian Association of African Studies meeting Dalhousie University, Halifax, Canada, in March 1974 as Part II of a paper 'Religion and Politics in Lesotho'. Since then some changes and additions have been made.
Which being translated reads roughly as follows:

After many years,
There appeared on the scene in Lesotho
The Council of Commoners
Which demanded implementation
Of Moshoeshoe’s mutual assurances with the Government
In a peaceful way,
And it asked for prayers
Of all churches.

The French Church, the Roman Church, the Anglican Church
Refused to pray for them.
Because of the refusal
Of these churches
The Council of Commoners
Requested Walter
And Pastor Coillard
And Mahonko, to pray for them. 2

Matitta, the Comforter
Of the Council of Commoners
In so far as prayer is concerned,
Messenger of Jesus;
Elected of God
Before he was born,
He fulfilled the
Heavenly errand.

WALTER MATITTA

Matitta 3 was born into an Nguni section of the Basotho in 1885, and grew up in his home village in the Berea District. 4

Although some accounts suggest that he grew up as an adherent of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society, (i.e. the ‘Church of

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2 Coillard Monathi and J. Mahonko were two of Matitta’s chief lieutenants.
3 Born as Matitta Phakoa (Nguni form: Phangwa) he later called himself Walter Matitta.
4 Berea is inhabited by Ngwane and Hlubi groups who settled in this area during the Lifaqane. Matitta’s people were the Hlubi and Mr. M. Damane has provided me with the following data on his family:

“Matitta’s grandfather was a Zizi called Maxama. He had many sons, one of whom, Mpolim married Makoanyane’s daughter who after her marriage was called Nothaweni ‘Mathaweni) for one of her children was Thaweni.

In the family there were six children Matitta being the fifth. The others were: Sekota, Mosoeanyane, Thaweni, Nomacala (a daughter) and lastly Mpharane.”

Matitta’s father appears to have died before he began his work. His mother lived longer, and significantly adopted the name ‘Maria’ when his evangelistic work had become a success.