

# Some notes on the early history of the Tembe, 1280 AD-1800 AD

Mandla Mathebula  
*Xitsonga Heritage Foundation*  
sanewsagency@webmail.co.za

## *Abstract*

The Tembe tribe, which resides south of Maputo Bay, originates from the present day Zimbabwe and is also linked through archaeological evidence to the ancient state of Mapungubwe. It migrated to Mozambique and later occupied the land south of Maputo Bay, straddling between Mozambique and South Africa, from Mkhuzi and Maputo.

The list of its rulers has been confused over the years due to the repetition over various generations of most of the names and distortion of some of the names to suit the Tsonga language (or its Rhonga dialect), which the Tembe adopted in later years. A close look at the names, however, does give a chronology of the history of the tribe from its breakaway from the Mapungubwe.

Therefore, the focus of this article is on the time of the breakaway to the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when it was in its apogee with a recognised kingdom. It looks into the migration route from Mapungubwe and the succession history of the ruling lineage during this period. The article helps to boost the understanding of the Tembe's Kalanga links and could help assist future research of other Kalanga migrations to the south around the same period.

**Keywords:** Tembe; Kalanga; History; Migration; Genealogy; Lineage; Tribe; Kingdom.

The Tembe currently occupy the area between the Mozambican capital Maputo and Mkhuzi in the South African province of KwaZulu-Natal. They have a unique history that sets them apart from their Zulu, Swazi and fellow Rhonga neighbours. After migrating to this area around the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, they established a mighty kingdom among the Tsonga, which reached its apex in the 18<sup>th</sup> century under King Mangobe.

Historical sources suggest that the Tembe is one of the lineages which emerged from the Kalanga in the beginning of the second millennium AD.<sup>1</sup> Its history among the Tsonga is recorded in Portuguese sources from the

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<sup>1</sup> HA Junod, *The life of a South African tribe*, 1 (MacMillan & Co., London, 1927), pp. 21-23; DW Hedges, DW Hedges, "Trade and politics in southern Mozambique and Zululand in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries" (PhD, University of London, 1978), pp. 114-115; M Mathebula, *800 years of Tsonga history* (Sharpshoot Publishers, Polokwane, 2002), p. 22.

middle of the millennium, when the lineage had established a large kingdom among the Tsonga.<sup>2</sup> Nothing about the lineage is recorded before this period and very little is documented in its first hundred years of its contact with the Europeans. Thus, oral and archaeological evidence is the only tool to reconstruct the missing data.

Oral accounts of the Tembe associate them with the Kalanga, prior to the lineage becoming part of the Tsonga.<sup>3</sup> Tembe people have a salutation, “Nkalanga”<sup>4</sup> similar to “Khalanga”<sup>5</sup> of the Valoyi, another lineage with Kalanga origin and a kingdom among the Tsonga<sup>6</sup>.

New evidence suggests the Tembe were part of the Mapungubwe culture<sup>7</sup>, which dates back to 1075 AD.<sup>8</sup> The evidence is based mainly on the discovery of pottery at the Tembe cemetery at Matutwini (also Matutuine or Matutuini), suggesting a link to Mapungubwe,<sup>9</sup> either posterior or from common background.<sup>10</sup> The period of the decline of Mapungubwe also coincides with the period of the Tembe’s movement towards Mozambique, datable to around 1280 AD through oral and archaeological evidence. Sources also suggest that the Tembe are an eastern outlier of what they call “Mapungubwe K2 formation”.

There is generally confusion regarding the genealogy of the Tembe from this period, mainly due to the repetitive nature of the names among their leaders across the generations. Therefore, the name of the leader of the Tembe around this period is not mentioned among the various works that have so far been

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- 2 RJ Kloppers, “The history and representation of the history of the Mabhudu-Tembe” (MA, University of Stellenbosch, 2003), p. 10; D Webster, “Tembe-Thonga kinship: The marriage of anthropology and history”, *Cahiers d’Etudes Africaines*, 104 (XXVI), 1986, p. 613.
  - 3 HA Junod, *The life of a South African tribe*, p. 23; E Eldredge, *Kingdoms and chiefdoms of southeastern Africa: Oral traditions and history* (University of Rochester Press, Boydell & Brewer, 2015), p. 122; M Mathebula (Personal Collection), interview, G Liesegang (History professor, University of Eduardo Mondlane, Maputo)/ M Mathebula (Researcher, Xitsonga Heritage Foundation), 11 December 2012; D Webster, “Tembe-Thonga kinship...”, *Cahiers d’Etudes Africaines*, 104 (XXVI), 1986, p. 613; RJ Kloppers, “The history and representation of the history of the Mabhudu-Tembe” (MA, University of Stellenbosch, 2003), p. 14.
  - 4 HA Junod, *The life of a South African tribe...*, p. 23; DW Hedges, “Trade and politics...”, p. 115.
  - 5 AA Jaques, *Swivongo swa Machangana (Vatsonga)* (Sasavona Publishers, Braamfontein, 1938), p. 127
  - 6 HA Junod, *The life of a South African tribe...*, pp. 21-22.
  - 7 G Liesegang, “Of doubt dates, invisible states and partly visible population movements: New views on political structures and population movements in southern Mozambique ca. 1100 to present” (Paper, African Archaeology Network Conference, Kampala, 2-8 August 2012), p. 25; M Mathebula (Personal Collection), interview, G Liesegang/M Mathebula, 11 December 2013.
  - 8 E Eldredge, *Kingdoms and chiefdoms of southeastern Africa Kingdoms and chiefdoms ...*, p. 11.
  - 9 M Mathebula (Personal Collection), interview, G Liesegang/M Mathebula, 11 December 2013
  - 10 G Liesegang, “Of doubt dates, invisible states and partly visible population movements...” (Paper, AAN Conference 2012), p. 25.

published. However, its mystery may be hidden in the story of origin among the Rhonga, a sub-identity of the Tsonga to which the Tembe belong.

Two names are believed to be those of the first recorded human beings among the Rhonga. Both names are repeated in the Tembe genealogy in later years. One of these is “Nsilambowa”,<sup>11</sup> which repeats itself in the Tembe genealogy in later generations in a slightly different form.<sup>12</sup> The Tembe is also the only lineage that regards this name as its traditional possession rather than any of the other lineages that share this legend.<sup>13</sup> The name means “one who grinds vegetables”.<sup>14</sup> The other historic name is that of “Likalahumba”, meaning “the one who brought a glowing cinder in a shell”.<sup>15</sup> Some accounts seem to suggest that Likalahumba was a man and Nsilambowa a woman,<sup>16</sup> while others regard them simply as the first two human beings.<sup>17</sup> The name Likalahumba also repeats itself among the Tembe in later generations in the form of “Dhlahumba” or “Ludahumba”.<sup>18</sup>

Therefore, it is likely that the names represent the originator and successor to the originator of the Tembe.<sup>19</sup> Although many accounts do not state, who among these names came first, thus portraying the names as belonging to either the same man or the first man and woman, those who do are consistent in stating that Likalahumba emerged first, followed by Nsilambowa.<sup>20</sup> Other sources simply state that Likalahumba was senior and Nsilambowa junior.<sup>21</sup>

In similar circumstances, there is a legend of “Gwambe” and “Dzavana”, who are also thought to be first men among some Tsonga groups with Kalanga

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11 HA Junod, *The life of a South African tribe...*, pp. 21, p. 349.

12 RJ Kloppers, “The history and representation of the history of the Mabhudu-Tembe” (MA, University of Stellenbosch, 2003), p. 10; AT Bryant, *Olden times in Zululand and Natal* (Longmans, Green & Co Ltd, 1929), p. 293; AA Jaques, *Swivongo swa Machangana...*, p. 122; HA Junod, *The life of a South African tribe...*, p. 25; DW Hedges, “Trade and politics...”, pp. 261-262; M Mathebula, *800 years of Tsonga history...*, p. 23.

13 M Mathebula (Personal Collection), interview, M Tembe (Member, Tembe Royal House, Manguzi)/M Mathebula (Researcher, Xitsonga Heritage Foundation), 19 October 2006.

14 HA Junod, *The life of a South African tribe...*, 1, p. 21; M Mathebula (Personal Collection), interview, XE Mabaso (Senior Lecturer, UNISA, Linguistics)/M Mathebula (Researcher, Xitsonga Heritage Foundation), 8 June 2017; M Mathebula (Personal Collection), interview, T Khosa (Co-Editor, VIVMAG, Johannesburg)/M Mathebula (Researcher, Xitsonga Heritage Foundation), 8 June 2017.

15 HA Junod, *The life of a South African tribe...*, p. 349.

16 HA Junod, *The life of a South African tribe...*, pp. 349-350.

17 HA Junod, *The life of a South African tribe...*, pp. 21-22.

18 D Webster, “Tembe-Thonga kinship...”, *Casiers d'Etudes Africaines*, 104 (XXVI), 1986, p. 613.

19 HA Junod, *The life of a South African tribe...*, p. 21.

20 M Mathebula (Personal Collection), interview, M Tembe/M Mathebula, 19 October 2006; M Mathebula (Personal Collection), interview, T Khosa/M Mathebula, 8 June 2017.

21 M Mathebula (Personal Collection), interview, M Tembe/M Mathebula, 19 October 2006; M Mathebula (Personal Collection), interview, M Mthembu (researcher, Department of Education, KwaZulu-Natal, Durban)/M Mathebula (researcher, Xitsonga Heritage Foundation), 11 November 2000.

origin.<sup>22</sup> The two names are found among the Copi, as the originator of the tribe and his successor, although the successor's name often takes the form of Zavala.<sup>23</sup> Other sources interpret the two names to refer to Gwambe as the originator of the Valoyi<sup>24</sup> and Dzavana as the originator of the N'wanati<sup>25</sup> (both found among the Tsonga), apparently because the name Gwambe appears in both the Valoyi and the Copi; and the N'wanati are part of the Copi.<sup>26</sup>

Therefore, from Mapungubwe, the Tembe nucleus would have moved to the direction of Pafuri<sup>27</sup> with Likalahumba, and proceeded to the lower Limpopo valley.<sup>28</sup> They would have arrived in Nkomati valley,<sup>29</sup> with Tembe,<sup>30</sup> probably by the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. By the time they were encountered by the Portuguese in 1554,<sup>31</sup> they would have been in that region for more than half a century.<sup>32</sup>

Some accounts suggest Tembe was the son of Mwali<sup>33</sup> (who would be Mwali I, judging by the appearance of the name in later generations). Mwali I, therefore, is likely to be the son of Nsilambowa. Thus, Tembe could be the fourth generation leader after the lineage left Mapungubwe.

Their arrival at Nkomati is a subject of legend among the Tembe, claiming to have arrived there "on a floating island of papyrus"<sup>34</sup>. They also have a traditional saying that goes: "Phandje Phandje ra nala – Tembe kulu a wela",<sup>35</sup>

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22 HA Junod, *The life of a South African tribe...*, pp. 21-22, 349.

23 HA Junod, "The Bathonga of the Transvaal", *Addresses & Papers of the British South African Association for the Advancement of Science*, 3, 1905, p. 151; AA Jaques, *Swivongo swa Machangana...*, p. 138.

24 HA Junod, *The life of a South African tribe...*, pp. 22; AA Jaques, *Swivongo swa Machangana...*, pp. 125-127.

25 M Mathebula (Personal Collection), interview, MP Mathebula (Deputy Chairman, Huvonkulu ya ka Valoyi, Giyani)/M Mathebula (researcher, Xitsonga Heritage Foundation), 28 August 2012 ; M Mathebula (Personal Collection), interview, D Baloi (headman, Nkovele community, Nkovele)/M Mathebula (researcher, Xitsonga Heritage Foundation), 9 August 2012.

26 HA Junod, *The life of a South African tribe*, p. 21.

27 M Mathebula (Personal Collection), interview, H Mabasa (researcher, Tsonga History Discourse, Alberton)/M Mathebula (researcher, Xitsonga Heritage Foundation), 1 October 2013.

28 RJ Kloppers, "The history and representation of the history of the Mabhudu-Tembe" (MA, University of Stellenbosch, 2003), p. 14; M Mathebula (Personal Collection), interview, G Liesegang/M Mathebula, 11 December 2013.

29 HA Junod, *The life of a South African tribe...*, p. 23; AA Jaques, *Swivongo swa Machangana...*, p. 121; DW Hedges, "Trade and politics...", p. 115; M Mathebula (Personal Collection), interview, G Liesegang/M Mathebula, 11 December 2013.

30 DW Hedges, "Trade and politics...", pp. 114-115; M Mathebula, *800 years of Tsonga history...*, p. 22.

31 RJ Kloppers, "The history and representation of the history of the Mabhudu-Tembe", p. 15; D Webster, "Tembe-Thonga kinship...", *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, 104 (XXVI), 1986, p. 613.

32 HA Junod, *The life of a South African tribe...*, p. 27.

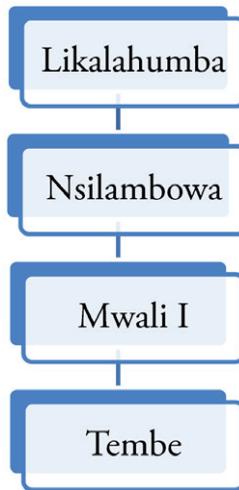
33 M Mathebula (Personal Collection), interview, M Tembe/M Mathebula, 19 October 2006.

34 HA Junod, *The life of a South African tribe...*, p. 23.

35 E Eldredge, *Kingdoms and chiefdoms of southeastern Africa...*, p. 122.

explaining the arrival of Tembenkulu (the first or great Tembe). The coastal area east of Manyisa in Mozambique is still called Kalanga, which adds impetus to their claim of having stayed there<sup>36</sup>. They would have crossed over to the south bank later. The Tembe branch at Inhambane could have emerged in the same period<sup>37</sup>, because the Matshinye oral accounts claim its originator, Matshinye, has direct ancestry from Tembe (as his father).<sup>38</sup>

Image 1: The first four rulers of the Tembe



Source: Author's compilation.

By the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, around 1554, there was already a river around Maputo Bay, known as Tembe and recorded by the Portuguese as “Zembe” (‘Zembe’ could be the original form of the name ‘Tembe’, meaning ‘charcoal’ in Kalanga). It was described as “flowing to the mouth” (of the Bay) and “separating the king of that name from the dominion of the king Nyaka (of the kingdom with the same name).<sup>39</sup> Junod<sup>40</sup> explained the naming:

36 Liesegang 2012:13; M Mathebula (Personal Collection), interview, G Liesegang/M Mathebula, 11 December 2013.

37 M Mathebula (Personal Collection), interview, G Liesegang/M Mathebula, 11 December 2013.

38 AA Jaques, *Swivongo swa Machangana...*, p. 64.

39 HA Junod, *The life of a South African tribe...*, p. 27; A Kuper, “The academic frontier: History of social anthropology”, P McAllister (ed), *Culture and the commonplace anthropological essays in honour of David Hammond-Tooke* (Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, 1997), p. 24; RJ Kloppers, “The history and representation of the history of the Mabhudu-Tembe”, p. i; J Write, C Hamilton, “Traditions and transformations: The Pongola-Mzimkhulu region in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries”, A Duming, B Guest (eds), *Natal and Zululand from earliest times to 1910* (Pietermaritsburg, A New History, 1989), pp. 57-58.

40 HA Junod, *The life of a South African tribe...*, p. 27.

If the Natives already called rivers after the name of these chiefs, it is probable that the chiefs themselves were already dead, and had lived in a more or less remote past.

Therefore, if the Tembe arrived further south with their leader with the same name, the man who was reigning as king Tembe in the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century was probably his successor. Although records are scarce on his name, some sources suggest he was called Nkupu or Nkupo<sup>41</sup> (otherwise referred to as Nkupu I or Nkupo I due to the name's prevalence in later generations).

Apart from the Nyaka kingdom that bordered the southern part of the Tembe, there was another kingdom called Belingane. It was situated between the present day Maphutha (or Maputsu) and Tembe rivers, in the south and north, respectively, including some parts of Maputo Bay. It was bordered by the Nyaka in the east and the Lebombo (or uBombo) Mountains in the west<sup>42</sup>. Like the Nyaka and the Tembe, the kingdom was probably named after its leader. Some sources mention a man called Buyingane (as in Belingane), who reigned in the area. The Tembe River was also recorded by the early European explorer, Lavanha, as Mclengana. There is a hill not far from the mouth of Maputo River called Nkelengana. Both names are thought to have been derived from Belingane or Buyingane.<sup>43</sup>

In later years, the Tembe abandoned their area north of Nkomati and occupied land of the two southern kingdoms. The first of these kingdoms to fall in their hands was the Belingane as the latter's demise coincided with the rise of the Tembe in the same area.<sup>44</sup> Nkupo I probably spearheaded this expansionist movement, considering the presence of the Tembe already in the area in the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and their expansion towards the end of the century. Therefore, Nkupo I should be regarded as the first king of the Tembe. There is no evidence suggesting that all the other rulers before him presided over an entity qualifying as a kingdom; hence, the reference to the Tembe merely as a lineage in their earlier history.

Nkupo I's successor was Xiguge (also Xiguge I<sup>45</sup> or Sikuke<sup>46</sup>). He probably reigned around the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century or beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century,

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41 HA Junod, *The life of a South African tribe...*, p. 25.

42 DW Hedges, "Trade and politics...", pp. 103.

43 HA Junod, "The conditions of natives in East Africa in the sixteenth century according to the early Portuguese documents", *Report of the South African Association for the Advancement of Science*, 1914, p. 148

44 DW Hedges, "Trade and politics...", pp. 103,117,136,192.

45 AA Jaques, *Swivongo swa Machangana...*, p. 122; M Mathebula, *800 years of Tsonga history...*, p. 12.

46 AT Bryant, *Olden times in Zululand and Natal...*, p. 293.

contrary to sources that put his reign to the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century (all derived from Bryant's estimation).<sup>47</sup> In the same century (17<sup>th</sup> century), two other rulers led the kingdom: Ludahumba<sup>48</sup> or Dhlahumba<sup>49</sup> or Dhlahumbe<sup>50</sup> (probably supposedly Likalahumba II) and Silambowa<sup>51</sup> (probably Nsilambowa II).

Dlahumba should have reigned until around the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century or slightly beyond,<sup>52</sup> but certainly not until 1728, as some records suggest.<sup>53</sup> Dlahumba was succeeded by his son, Silambowa,<sup>54</sup> around this period, who had two known sons, Mwali (corrupted by the Tsonga into N'wali - he would supposedly be Mwali II) and Mangobe (also N'wangove/Mangove).<sup>55</sup> Some sources say Mwali II did not reign,<sup>56</sup> but those who claim he did,<sup>57</sup> argue that his reign was brief and ended around 1720.<sup>58</sup> They argue that this was the reason, why his heir, known in Dutch records as Madomadom, was still a minor.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, it is safer to say Mwali II had a short reign than that he did not reign at all. The name Madomadom is probably derived from "mudlomadlomana", a sacred wood of the Tembe, where sacrifices for spirits were held.<sup>60</sup> Madomadom was also known as Nkalanki among his people.<sup>61</sup> Mwali II's younger brother, Mangobe, was the ruler of the kingdom as regent for Madomadom.<sup>62</sup>

Mangobe was already a renowned leader among the Rhonga in the early 1720s. In 1723, he approached the Dutch with the aim of establishing trade relations with them, capitalising on their attack earlier that year by the people recorded as "Hottentots" (certainly the Khoi). He is said to have gone to the Dutch fort to offer assistance against the attackers, if they would supply

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47 AA Jaques, *Swivongo swa Machangana...*, p. 122; M Mathebula, *800 years of Tsonga history...*, p. 12.

48 DW Hedges, "Trade and politics...", p. 262.

49 AA Jaques, *Swivongo swa Machangana...*, p. 122; M Mathebula, *800 years of Tsonga history...*, p. 12.

50 DW Hedges, "Trade and politics...", p. 261.

51 HA Junod, *The life of a South African tribe...*, p. 25; AT Bryant, *Olden times in Zululand and Natal...*, p. 293;

AA Jacques, *Swivongo swa Machangana...*, p. 122; M Mathebula, *800 years of Tsonga history...*, p. 12.

52 DW Hedges, "Trade and politics...", p. 262; M Mathebula, *800 years of Tsonga history...*, p. 12.

53 AA Jaques, *Swivongo swa Machangana...*, pp. 122; AT Bryant, *Olden times in Zululand and Natal...*, p. 293; DW Hedges, "Trade and politics...", pp. 123-134.

54 M Mathebula, *800 years of Tsonga history...*, p. 12.

55 AA Jaques, *Swivongo swa Machangana...*, p.122; M Mathebula, *800 years of Tsonga history...*, pp. 12; AT Bryant, *Olden times in Zululand and Natal...*, p. 293; HA Junod, *The life of a South African tribe...*, p. 25.

56 AT Bryant, *Olden times in Zululand and Natal...*, p. 293

57 AA Jaques, *Swivongo swa Machangana...*, p. 122; M Mathebula, *800 years of Tsonga history...*, p. 12.

58 DW Hedges, "Trade and politics...", pp. 124, 262.

59 DW Hedges, "Trade and politics...", p. 124.

60 HA Junod, *The life of a South African tribe...*, pp. 382-283.

61 DW Hedges, "Trade and politics...", p. 261.

62 DW Hedges, "Trade and politics...", pp. 124, 262.

firearms in order to execute such aid. The request for arms was declined,<sup>63</sup> but he went on to spearhead major expansions of the Tembe territory to the south from the middle of the third decade of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>64</sup> In 1725, his forces crossed the Maputo River and invaded the Maxavane (a splinter kingdom of the Nyaka), defeating their forces. They acquired a large number of cattle from the territory, and confiscated 80 of what the Dutch records describe as “marketable goods”. They also took most of the land belonging to the Maxavane and reduced their country and power and, to a large extent, their significance in the region.<sup>65</sup>

In 1728, Madomadom took over from Mangobe and forced the latter into exile in Maxavane’s country.<sup>66</sup> Madomadom probably learned a lot from the prowess of Mangobe. He soon proved himself as one of the respected military men in the region. He joined forces with his neighbour in Mpfumu, Mbhinyi (also recorded as Biri or Bin), in a series of conflicts with another of his neighbouring kingdoms, Mazwaya, to help the Mpfumu break away from the Mazwaya overlordship.

Earlier in 1720, the Mazwaya had attacked Mbhinyi and reduced his kingdom to their tributary. An officer of the Mazwaya, known as Mateke, had been appointed as governor over Mpfumu.<sup>67</sup> The combined forces succeeded in forcing the Mazwaya to retreat northward to the left bank of the Nkomati River. By October 1728, they had penetrated further north to the village of Maswanganyi (recorded as Massanguano),<sup>68</sup> called Byandlani,<sup>69</sup> on the Nkomati. The army then turned to attack the Matsolo, whose chief was also forced to abandon his lands.<sup>70</sup> In the beginning of 1729, the Mpfumu and the Tembe moved successfully further north against the N’wamba. In April 1729, however, a combined force of Manyisa, Matsolo, Mateke and Mazwaya marched against and defeated the Mpfumu, who, on this occasion, were not aided by troops from the Tembe. Nevertheless, Mbhinyi took refuge in Tembe country,<sup>71</sup> but later returned to rule his people.<sup>72</sup>

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63 DW Hedges, “Trade and politics...”, pp. 123-124.

64 DW Hedges, “Trade and politics...”, p. 124; AA Jaques, *Swivongo swa Machangana...*, p. 122; D Webster, “Tembe-Thonga kinship...”, *Cahiers d’Etudes Africaines*, 104 (XXVI), 1986, p. 613.

65 DW Hedges, “Trade and politics...”, pp. 124; A Smith, Delagoa and the trade of south-eastern Africa”, R Gray, D Birmingham (eds), *Pre-colonial African trade: Essays on trade in central and eastern Africa before 1900* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 281.

66 DW Hedges, “Trade and politics...”, p. 125.

67 E Eldredge, *Kingdoms and chiefdoms of southeastern Africa...*, p. 127.

68 DW Hedges, “Trade and politics...”, p. 124.

69 AA Jaques, *Swivongo swa Machangana...*, p. 62.

70 DW Hedges, “Trade and politics centuries...”, p. 124.

71 DW Hedges, “Trade and politics...”, p. 125.

72 DW Hedges, “Trade and politics...”, p. 126.

However, Madomadam's power was soon challenged by Mangobe, who launched a series of attacks from Maxavane's country.<sup>73</sup> By November 1731, Mangobe had taken over as the ruler of the Tembe, and Madomadam was in exile in Mpfumu. Mbhinyi attempted to help his dispossessed neighbour and friend regain his throne, but to no avail.

The dispute between the two branches of the Tembe ruling lineage continued for some years, until Mangobe totally defeated Madomadam,<sup>74</sup> who eventually died in 1746.<sup>75</sup> Some sources suggest he was killed by Mangobe and Maputsu (Mangobe's junior son),<sup>76</sup> but the two houses continued to fight until around 1795.<sup>77</sup>

By the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Tembe territory had expanded extensively south of Maputo Bay. It stretched from the ocean in the east to the Lebombo hills in the west and from Maputo Bay to a distance of "twelve days" in the south,<sup>78</sup> around Mfolozi and Mkhuze. It was one of the largest kingdoms in the region.

The might of Mangobe and the immensity of the area he controlled are reflected in traditions among the tribespeople, which show his status as the "maker" of the kingdom.<sup>79</sup> He later established his capital near the present-day village of Madubula, next to the forest, where his remains lie in the royal cemetery, in the southern part of the province known as Matutwini<sup>80</sup> (Some sources suggest it is probable that Madubula could have been forced south by the Portuguese occupation because the old cemetery is west or northwest of Matutwini, partly under the road from Porto Henrique to Matutwini, east of the former S Roque Mission. The 1.250.000 map of the area has a small flat valley (baixa) identified as Mangobe nearby).<sup>81</sup>

Mangobe further ensured his control of the lowlands, including the right bank of the Maputsu River, by placing his sons there as governors. Of his chief wife, Mitshandlwane,<sup>82</sup> Mangobe had three sons, each with a responsibility

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73 DW Hedges, "Trade and politics...", p. 125.

74 DW Hedges, "Trade and politics...", p. 126.

75 DW Hedges, "Trade and politics...", p. 12.

76 M Mathebula (Personal Collection), interview, G Liesegang/M Mathebula, 11 December 2013; DW Hedges, "Trade and politics...", p. 125.

77 M Mathebula (Personal Collection), interview, G Liesegang/M Mathebula, 11 December 2013.

78 DW Hedges, "Trade and politics...", p. 12.

79 DW Hedges, "Trade and politics...", p. 126.

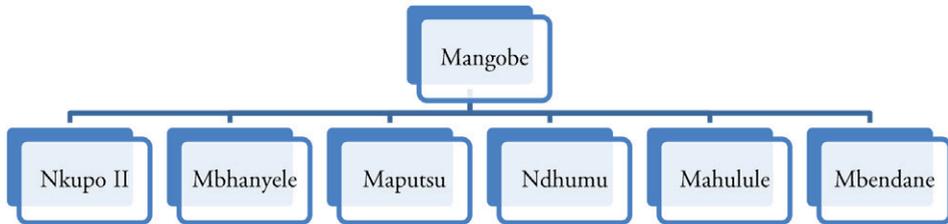
80 DW Hedges, "Trade and politics...", pp. 134-135.

81 M Mathebula (Personal Collection), interview, G Liesegang/M Mathebula, 11 December 2013.

82 M Mathebula (Personal Collection), interview, M Tembe/M Mathebula, 19 October 2006.

for a major province of Tembe country: Nkupo II was given the northern province, bordering the shores of Maputo Bay; Mbhanyeke ruled Matutwini (including the new capital); while Maputsu was appointed to the area south and east of the river to which later custom gave his name. A fourth son, Ndhumu (also Ndumu or Ndumo from a junior house), was given the area near the confluence of the Pongola and Great uSuthu rivers.<sup>83</sup> Nkupo II was the eldest and heir, Mbhanyeke the second eldest and Maputsu the youngest from the great house.<sup>84</sup> Two other sons from junior houses are also mentioned: Mahulule<sup>85</sup> and Mbendane.<sup>86</sup> Around this time, the Tembe was the most powerful kingdom around the present-day Maputo Bay.<sup>87</sup>

Image 2: List of Mangobe's sons



Source: Author's compilation.

Only Maputsu took it upon himself to expand the territory he was given by his father. He and his sons further consolidated the kingdom to the south and southeast, effectively absorbing the southern Nyaka and its constituent chiefdoms and subjugating the reigning king Muthovotahomu.<sup>88</sup> Maputsu is remembered as “the most intelligent, proud, arrogant, warlike and intrepid’ (of Mangobe’s sons). Among the tribespeople, he is known as the *hosi* (chief) who “lit the fire”, the man who “founded the kingdom”,<sup>89</sup> certainly in reference to consolidating his own kingdom in the south later on.

83 DW Hedges, “Trade and politics...”, p. 135.

84 HA Junod, *The life of a South African tribe...*, p. 329

85 DW Hedges, “Trade and politics...”, pp. 144,261.

86 DW Hedges, “Trade and politics...”, p. 261.

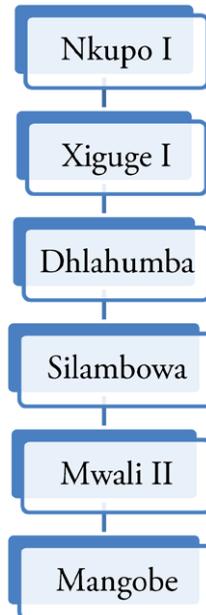
87 A Smith, Delagoa and the trade of south-eastern Africa”, R Gray, D Birmingham (eds), *Pre-colonial African trade: Essays on trade in central and eastern Africa before 1900* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 281; RJ Kloppers, “The history and representation of the history of the Mabhudu-Tembe” (MA, University of Stellenbosch, 2003), p. i .

88 HA Junod, “The conditions of natives in East Africa...”, *Report of the South African Association for the Advancement of Science*, 1914, p. 147; HP Junod, *Matimu ya Vatsonga (1498-1650)* (Sasovona Publishers, Braamfontein, 1977), pp. 71, 73.

89 DW Hedges, “Trade and politics...”, pp. 137-138.

Though there is no certainty about the date of Mangobe's death, some sources suggest that this occurred in the period 1758-1765.<sup>90</sup> Some sources suggest 1764<sup>91</sup> and 1754,<sup>92</sup> although records exist of some activities still reflecting his name as late as 1758.<sup>93</sup> Because no other activities in his name are mentioned beyond 1758, this could be the more realistic year of his death. Nevertheless, Mangobe became the last king to rule over the united Tembe kingdom.

Image 3: List of rulers in the united Tembe kingdom



Source: Author's compilation.

Nkupo II, as the eldest son and legitimate heir, succeeded Mangobe. However, his capital remained in a forested part of northern Tembe, in the area immediately south of the bay, rather than in the south near that of Mangobe. Tradition relates that he had none of the spirit of a ruler, but was weak and indecisive. His conduct of affairs was so out of keeping with that of his father that his brothers in the southern provinces of the kingdom were inspired to declare their independence.<sup>94</sup>

90 DW Hedges, "Trade and politics...", pp. 137, 282; RJ Kloppers, "The history and representation of the history of the Mabhudu-Tembe", (MA, University of Stellenbosch, 2003), p. 17.

91 DW Hedges, "Trade and politics...", p. 293.

92 AA Jaques, *Swivongo swa Machangana...*, p. 122; M Mathebula, *800 years of Tsonga history...*, p. 12.

93 DW Hedges, "Trade and politics...", p.138.

94 DW Hedges, "Trade and politics...", p. 137.

Image 4: Tembe Provinces that seceded after the death of Mangobe. Maputsu (marked Mabudu) was the largest of these provinces. Mbhanye's province (formerly Matutwini, marked Mapanielle) incorporated Ndhumu's province in the west. Nkupo II retained the northern province which retained the name Tembe.

Maputsu was first to secede with his large province, followed by Mbhanye, who also took the territory of Ndhumu with him. In addition to the secession of his brothers, Nkupo II's much reduced kingdom faced another threat. Madomadom had left a son, Xiguge II, who claimed his rightful inheritance shortly after Nkupo II's accession.<sup>95</sup>



Source: L Chewins, "Trade at Delagoa Bay: The influence of trade on political structures, 1721-1799" (MA, Wits, 2015), p. 110.

Tradition recounts that Nkupo II succeeded in capturing the pretender, who was bound hand and foot and thrown in the river; however, Xiguge II actually had the good fortune to escape this predicament.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>95</sup> DW Hedges, "Trade and politics...", p. 143.

<sup>96</sup> DW Hedges, "Trade and politics...", pp. 143-144.

Nkupo II's short reign was followed by that of Muhari<sup>97</sup> (also called Mhali<sup>98</sup> or Muhali<sup>99</sup> – probably from Mwali and would have been Mwali III) in 1771.<sup>100</sup> He seems to have been a statesman of much greater energy, but his leadership was soon challenged by Xiguge II, whose second attempt to install himself also failed. On this occasion, however, Xiguge II was not captured, but became a fugitive, eventually taking up residence in Matsolo country.

However, the arrangement between Xiguge II and the chief of Matsolo became a cause of dispute between the Matsolo and the Tembe. In July 1777, Xiguge II was expelled from Matsolo. Towards the end of July 1777, Muhari called a meeting of his councillors to discuss the situation brought about by his rival's expulsion. Xiguge II went to the Tembe capital and appeared at the meeting, determined on a conciliatory course. He asked, however, for the restitution of the province that his father had governed as a young man. Instead, Muhari executed him and fourteen of his family members.<sup>101</sup>

Though Muhari thus regained authority and prestige in northern Tembe, he did not succeed in achieving control over his uncles' territories to the south. During the famine of spring 1777, Mbhanye, who ruled over the province which included Mangobe's gravesite was host to Maputsu, Ndhumu and Mahulule, but not Muhari, when they gathered to slaughter cattle as a sacrifice to their ancestor Mangobe.

Muhari was unable to control the relationships between his uncles and the Austrians, despite the fact that the Austrian factory was in his territory and, when signing the treaty with the Austrians he claimed that Maputsu and Mbhanye belonged to his kingdom. The Austrians later made separate treaties with Maputsu and Mbhanye to facilitate trade in their respective areas.<sup>102</sup>

The common and probably correct view is that Maputsu died in 1782.<sup>103</sup> However, there are sources suggesting that he was still alive in the early

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97 HA Junod, *The life of a South African tribe...*, p. 25; DW Hedges, "Trade and politics...", pp. 143-144.

98 DW Hedges, "Trade and politics...", p. 261.

99 DW Hedges, "Trade and politics...", p. 262.

100 HA Junod, *The life of a South African tribe...*, p. 25.

101 DW Hedges, "Trade and politics...", pp. 143-144.

102 DW Hedges, "Trade and politics...", p. 144.

103 AA Jaques, *Swivongo swa Machangana...*, p. 122; DW Hedges, "Trade and politics...", p.262; M Mathebula, *800 years of Tsonga history...*, p. 12; D Mthethwa, "The mobilization of history and the Tembe chieftaincy in Maputaland, 1896-1997" (MA, University of Natal, 2002), p. 50.

1790s,<sup>104</sup> apparently because of his name still lingering in political circles. According to some accounts among the Tembe, Maputsu was supposed to have been succeeded by his son, Mwayi<sup>105</sup> or Muwayi<sup>106</sup> (certainly a corruption of Mwali<sup>107</sup> and therefore supposedly Mwali IV). These sources suggest that he did not reign and that Maputsu's substantive successor was Makasane, the son of Mwayi.<sup>108</sup> However, Mwayi seems to have reigned from 1782. Some historic sources recount that Mwayi was as forceful and authoritative as his father, and remembered particularly for his defeat of Sabi, the son and successor to Mbhanye, whose territory was brought within the ambit of the Maputsu<sup>109</sup> (Mbhanye had died somewhere around 1780).<sup>110</sup> Mwayi died during this battle in 1798<sup>111</sup> and Makasane succeeded him.<sup>112</sup>

Muhari was succeeded by the man known in ancient records as "Kapell" or "Capella"<sup>113</sup> (probably Khavele), in 1795.<sup>114</sup> His relationship with Muhari is not clear. Some records seem to suggest he was his son<sup>115</sup> and others state he was his brother.<sup>116</sup> Sources suggest "Kapell" was "very powerful and had always with him a merchant, who traded in ivory".<sup>117</sup> His royal salutation was "Ngholanyama", meaning lion, which men recited, while crawling on their knees before the king.<sup>118</sup> This salutation could have been shared with the southern kingdom of Maputsu, in addition to the ones it had.

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104 DW Hedges, "Trade and politics...", pp. 153; RJ Kloppers, *The history and representation of the history of the Mabhudu-Tembe*, (MA, University of Stellenbosch, 2003), p. 10.

105 AT Bryant, *Olden times in Zululand and Natal...*, p. 293; HA Junod, *The life of a South African tribe...*, pp. 25; D Mthethwa, "The mobilization of history and the Tembe chieftaincy in Maputaland, 1896-1997" (MA, University of Natal, 2002), p. 50.

106 HA Junod, *The life of a South African tribe...*, p. 25.

107 Hedges 1978:261; D Mthethwa, "The mobilization of history and the Tembe chieftaincy in Maputaland, 1896-1997" (MA, University of Natal, 2002), p. 50.

108 AA Jacques, *Swivongo swa Machangana...*, pp. 122; M Mathebula, *800 years of Tsonga history...*, p. 12.

109 DW Hedges, "Trade and politics...", p. 153.

110 DW Hedges, "Trade and politics...", p. 261.

111 RJ Kloppers, "The history and representation of the history of the Mabhudu-Tembe", (MA, University of Stellenbosch, 2003), p. 31; HA Junod, *The life of a South African tribe...*, p. 25; AT Bryant, *Olden times in Zululand and Natal...*, p. 293; Mthethwa, "The mobilization of history and the Tembe chieftaincy in Maputaland, 1896-1997" (MA, University of Natal, 2002), p. 53.

112 DW Hedges, "Trade and politics...", p. 153.

113 HF Fynn (letter), MG Theal, *Records of South-East Africa*, 2 (Cape Town, Government of the Cape Colony, 1908), p. 471.

114 HA Junod, *The life of a South African tribe...*, pp. 25; AT Bryant, *Olden times in Zululand and Natal...*, p. 293.

115 Owen 1823 (letter), MG Theal, *Records of South-East Africa*, Vol. 2 (Cape Town, Government of the Cape Colony, 1908), p. 486.

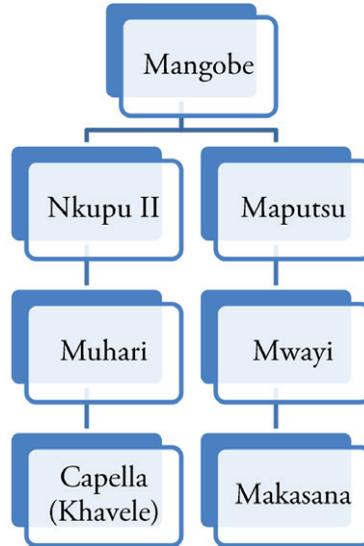
116 HA Junod, *The life of a South African tribe...*, p. 25.

117 HA Junod, *The life of a South African tribe...*, p. 141.

118 HA Junod, *The life of a South African tribe...*, p. 383.

Therefore, by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Tembe had split into two kingdoms: the northern Tembe retaining the original name and the southern kingdom adopting that of Maputsu, its founder. The split effectively took place, when Nkupo II took over, originally splitting the kingdom into three, but the Maputsu soon thereafter brought the other splitter kingdom into their fold and reduced the number to two.

Image 5: Rulers of the two branches of the Tembe at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century



Source: Author's compilation.

## Conclusion

The Tembe's migration is traceable from Mapungubwe in 1280, where they were part of the Kalanga. Although there has been some uncertainty around the originator of the lineage, the two names of the people believed to be “the first men on earth” in the Tembe legend are believed to be the originator of the tribe and his successor. From Mapungubwe, they migrated to Pafuri, then to the lower Limpopo valley, before settling in the Nkomati valley.

Between Mapungubwe and Nkomati valley, four rulers probably reigned: Likalahumba, Nsilambowa, Mwali I and Tembe, the latter certainly arriving with the lineage in the Nkomati valley. While living in the Nkomati valley, Matshinye, one of the sons of Tembe, moved to Inhambane to establish a chieftainship there. He should be the brother to Nkupo I, who succeeded Tembe. Nkupo I is the man, who transformed what could have been a simple

chiefdom into a kingdom of the Tembe.

The expansion of the Tembe power took several dimensions in the early years of the kingdom. Swallowing two other southern kingdoms, those of the Belingane and the Nyaka, was the most significant one, followed by dominance of chiefdoms further south in the final years of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The unity of the Tembe remained intact and unthreatened for the greater part of the reigns of Xiguge I, Dhlahumba, Silambowa and Mwali II. However, once these rulers were gone, tensions arose within the ruling lineage.

First, the successor to Mwali II, Mangobe, expanded the kingdom and immensely increased its power south of Maputo Bay, right up to Mkhuze River. It was perhaps this strength that made him refuse to give up power to the rightful ruler, Nkalanki or Madomadom, on whose behalf he was ruling as regent. Although Nkalanki / Madomadom managed to ascend the Tembe throne for about three years, during which time he made a name for himself as a military man, Mangobe seized the power and effectively dislodged the rightful lineage from the throne. With the help of his sons, he expanded the kingdom to its optimal size.

Although there were continued battles between the Mwali II and Mangobe houses for the better part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Mangobe house managed to completely assert and retain its power. Mwali II's grandson, Xiguge II, was the last to challenge this rule.

Mangobe is effectively the last king of a united Tembe kingdom. When he died, the Tembe kingdom eventually split into three: His successor, Nkupo II retained the northern province, bordering the bay as his dominion; Mbhanyeke retained the Matutwini province that he had been governing on behalf of his father; Maputsu seceded with his southern province almost immediately. At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Maputsu's successor, Mwayi, defeated Mbhanyeke's successor, Sabi, and brought his territory under his ambit. Mwayi, however, died in that battle and was succeeded by his equally fearsome son, Makasane.

Nkupo II, although failing to retain the two provinces under his younger brothers, managed to fend off the threat of members of the Mwali II house, who still wanted power to be returned to their house. His successor, Muhari finally extinguished the threat by killing the last pretender from the Mwali II house. From thereon, there were two Tembe kingdoms, operating parallel to each other: the Tembe and the Maputsu.