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The hill called Tsolwe

Tsolwe hill is on the southwestern edge of the Mapungubwe National Park can be associated with Lesiba (also Leshiba, Lishivha), another senior Tshivhula chief. After Machete I went to Leokwe Hill, his brother Mankadiko became the senior chief. Somewhat later, Lesiba (a brother) usurped power and split the chieftaincy. Lesiba was such a threat that in October 1856 Field Cornet J.G. Duvenage went to remove Lesiba's guns and to ensure his obedience (Archives of the State Secretary, Incoming documents for 1856, 11: 402, 405). To defend Mankadiko, the Mamadi chief (a Birwa known as Madidimalo) living at Alldays attacked Lesiba in the Soutpansberg, and Lesiba fled north to Tsolwe. The musanda on Tsolwe is well fortified with walls blocking most entrances (E.O.M. Hanisch pers. comm. 2011). It is unclear how long Lesiba stayed there before the Birwa attacked again, this time with a combined force of Mankadiko Tshivhula (the previous chief) and Matlala (Koni from the Blouberg). Because Lesiba came to the Limpopo after the first attack, some related branch of the Tshivhula, equal to Machete, most likely occupied the musanda on Parma and Ratho. Madidimalo, the Mamadi Birwa chief, was willing to help restore the senior chieftainship back to Mankadiko because their dynasties were related through marriage (Table 2). A previous Mamadi chief (Makobela), for instance, had married a sister of Machete I and another Mamadi royal was married to a sister of Machete II. After the victory over Lesiba, Mankadiko gave a girl to Madidimalo as a wife, cementing alliances even further. Birwa alliances also extended to Sotho-Tswana. Madidimalo, for instance, was also married to a sister of Sekgobokgobo, Van Warmelo's aged informant. Because of these alliances, the younger brother of Machete II fled to Madidimalo when he was implicated in his brother's unusual death. These multi-ethnic intermarriages, it is worth repeating, were an important feature of the ethnic heterogeneity in the Limpopo Valley. After the death of Machete II, the chieftaincy disappears from the oral record. The chieftaincy, we know, had disappeared politically by the 1930s and the time of the Mapungubwe expeditions. A variety of factors contributed to its decline and eventual disappearance. Climatically, the Mapungubwe landscape was not as productive in the nineteenth century as it had been in the Khami phase. The nineteenth-century climate instead appears to have been similar to the present, which is dry, with marked variability between wet and dry years, a tendency for wet and dry spells and heavy summer thunderstorms (Tyson & Preston-Whyte 2000). Birwa, Sotho-Tswana and Venda settlements reflect these poor conditions. In contrast to the Khami phase, there are few (perhaps only three) commoner Venda settlements on record: the remainder are all shifting capitals. Some Birwa and Sotho-Tswana settlements were contemporaneous, but there were also few of them. The relatively large number of Venda capitals for such a short period (about 60 years) suggests that resources were quickly exhausted, and people had to shift to better ground. Most settlements associated with Machete cluster near the Kolope, suggesting it was the most reliable source of water and cultivable soil. The 'one chiefdom-one capital' pattern at this time shows that only some 500–600 people were living on the

52 SOUTHERN AFRICAN HUMANITIES 24: 33–59, 2012 same land that had previously supported 2000. Clearly, the landscape could only support small numbers of subsistence farmers in the nineteenth century.

In addition, the rinderpest epidemic of 1896–98 decimated what cattle herds existed in the area. In any case, it is unlikely that the Machete chiefdom had many cattle before this disaster. Perhaps the three commoner sites were cattle posts, but even then the dynasty was not wealthy. Without cattle, Machete's traditional authority would have been considerably weakened. In the end, the ruling Machete could only rebuild his herds by purchasing cattle from the Boers, and Boers could not

regain cattle until after the Anglo-Boer War. For his part, Machete could only pay for new cattle with labour or with ivory. - THIS WAS TAKEN FROM - Historical archaeology of the Mapungubwe area: Boer, Birwa, Sotho-Tswana and Machete

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