

HA-MULELU

BACKGROUND

PRINCE MAATAMELA RAMABULANA

The Mulelus are of the Singo clan, from the house of Ramabulana. They are the descendants of King Ramabulana, the father of the legendary King Makhado.

Ramabulana had eleven sons. These were Davhana, Rasikhuthuma, Nthabalala, Khangale, Ramalamula, Liswoga, Maatamela, Ramaru, Ramanala, Raliphaswa and Makhado.

The duties and obligations of the Ramabulana monarch as the highest authority in Venda was, amongst others, to see to it that Venda as a whole was properly administered and governed. Whenever there was instability in any part of the kingdom, the king would deploy a delegation led by his trusted lieutenants to restore peace and stability in the area.

During King Ramabulana's reign, there was instability in Tsianda, a chiefdom under Khosi Netsianda. Ramabulana deployed his seventh son, Maatamela, who was also known as Ratshikosi to Tsianda to mediate peace and restore stability in Tsianda.

Maatamela was able to restore peace and stability in Tsianda. On his departure from Tsianda to go back to Tshirululuni (present day Makhado town [Louis Trichardt]), he was given a traditional military farewell by Khosi Ntsianda.

Because of his leadership and mediation skills, and before he could return to Tshirululuni, he was ordered to proceed to Phiphidi, an area in the Tshivhase chiefdom, to intervene and address the war of succession between Ligegeise and Tshivhenga. Maatamela stayed in Ha-Tshivhasa for several years, monitoring peace and sustainability.

After his successful mission in Ha-Tshivhasa, Maatamela left for Tshirululuni to report back to Ramabulana about his success at restoring peace and stability in the Tsianda and Ha-Tshivhasa. But while on his way to Tshirululuni, Maatamela's first born daughter died at Tshamutshetshe, Dopeni, after a short illness. Maatamela and his family stayed at Tshamutshetshe for two years, mourning his daughter.

KING RAMABULANA'S DEATH AND THE WAR OF SUCCESSION

During Maatamela's stay at Dopeni, King Ramabulana died at Vuvha, one of his palaces, after a long illness. The royal family suspected Ramabulana's eldest son, Davhana, of being responsible for Ramabulana's death. This was despite the fact that Ramabulana was very old when he died. But what led to members of the royal house suspecting Davhana of having a hand in his father's death was the fact that when Ramabulana was ill, Davhana had secretly removed him from the Vuvha palace, and accommodated him in a humble dwelling outside the royal palace. Davhana had given instructions for the dwelling to be erected, for Ramabulana to receive treatment in isolation. Ordinary people and relatives, including vhomakhadzi (paternal aunts) and makhotsimunene (paternal uncles) were forbidden to visit him. As the closest relatives were not told why they could not have access to their ruler, an aura of suspicion surrounded the prevailing situation. This prevailing opinion amongst the Venda people had an influence on Davhana's failure to succeed his father.

After Ramabulana's death, some of Davhana's younger brothers approached Rambulana's sister and khadzi, Makhadzi Nyakhuhu, to have Davhana installed as king. Although this was contrary to accepted custom, as the sons could not choose and install one of their own, Makhadzi Nyakhuhu directed them to bring all the sons together. They did so, but excluded Makhado. When Makhadzi Nyakhuhu wanted to know why they had excluded Makhado, they stated Makhado was no longer one of them as he had forfeited his rights by getting circumcised.

Makhadzi Nyakhuhu, who was against the sons' demand, and after being pressurised by the princes, told Ramabulana's sons to do as they pleased. Davhana therefore forced himself into the position of Thovhele. He usurped the throne. But he did not have the support of Makhadzi Nyakhuhu and Khotsimunene Madzhie, and his ascendancy to the throne was therefore null and void.

Davhana was also not loved by ordinary Vhavenda who saw him as a dictator and who regarded him as cruel and evil. This was due to the fact that when Ramabulana was ill, Davhana was in charge of royal affairs at the Vuvha royal residence and was heavy-handed in his judgements and sentences. He was also alleged to have murdered innocent people cruelly and to have had their corpses hidden in maize storage pits. Oral accounts have it that even his father, Ramabulana, was worried about Davhana's cruelty. Ramabulana is said to have told Davhana that "hanga u nga si vhu dzhene vuhosi", meaning "you will never succeed me as the king".

The majority of people supported Makhado whose mother, Limani, was loved by commoners and royals. Limani was known for her kindness, generosity, caring attitude, and treating visitors well. The royal residence of Tshirululuni, where Limani was based, was more welcoming as opposed to the one at Vuvha where Davhana's mother was based. Moreover, Davhana's mother was suspected of practicing witchcraft. The suspicion of witchcraft, coupled with Davhana's cruelty, led to some influential people suspecting that Davhana was himself a tshivhimbili (sorcerer).

Makhadzi Nyakhuhu and Khotsimunene Madzhie came together and agreed to install Makhado as the new king. Funyufunyu, Rasivhetshele, Nndwayamiomva, and Makhado were asked by Madzhie to call in Makhado's supporters. The number of Makhado's supporters was swelled by his maternal uncles and cousins, the Vhakwevho of Luonde, Tshivhilidulu, Ha-Matumba, and Vumbani, and Makhado's age group, Madali, with whom he was circumcised and initiated at Ha-Mashau.

Meanwhile Davhana, who knew that he was not favoured by Makhadzi Nyakhuhu and Khotsimunene Madzhie, was restless and was looking for Makhado so that he could kill him. Makhado remained in hiding at Ndouvhada. In his quest to locate Makhado, Davhana further alienated the few supporters he had. He also had a clash with his cousin, Khosi Maphaha of Phawe, the son of Makhadzi Nyakhuhu.

After arrangements for Makhado's installation had been finalised, his councillors advised him to embark on making ritual preparations under the direction of maine (a diviner). This ritual preparation, known as tshirovha, is believed to cause heavy rains or mist thereby allowing the army to advance under the cover of rain or mist without being detected by the enemy. These medicinal preparations were intended to strengthen and fortify the army and to confuse the enemy.

After Makhado had gone through all the ritual preparations and when the maine told him to go and attack Davhana, it is reported that, as expected, heavy rains fell. The army then went to evict Davhana from Vuvha under the cover of these heavy rains. Davhana and his supporters could not withstand this onslaught and they hurriedly fled, leaving the zwitungulo (important religious instruments) behind. These were then taken by Makhado who handed them over to Makhadzi Nyakhuhu at Tshirululuni.

MAATAMELA SETTLES AT TSHILATA

Although the war of succession between Makhado and Davhana was fierce, Maatamela didn't know that his father had died and that Makhado and Davhana were fighting over the throne. After a two-year stay at Dopeni mourning his deceased daughter, Maatamela left Dopeni for Tshirululuni. He was looking forward to briefing his father, King Ramabulana, and the whole Venda Royal Council about his successful peace missions in Tsianda and Tshivhasa. He was, however, informed that his father King Ramabulana was no more and that his younger brother, Makhado, was the new King.

King Makhado had also moved the main musanda from Tshirululuni to Luatame on Mount Songozwi. Tshirululuni became the cattle post.

Bitter as Maatamela was that Ramabulana's youngest son, Makhado, was the one who took over from his father, Mulelu nevertheless briefed the new Royal Council at Luatame about his expeditions. He also recognised and acknowledge Makhado as the undisputed king of Venda.

Ramabulana's other sons had settled in different places. After fleeing Vuvha, Davhana settled on Mount Luvhola. Ramalamula had settled at Khavhambe, known today as Wyliespoort. Liswoga had settled at Mudzivhadi (8 kilometres from Makhado, where the hotel Mountain Inn Country Hotel is located). Rasikhuthuma settled at Tshitungulu. Nthabalala settled at Vari, known today as Ha-Nthabalala, while Ramaru settled at Shehe (known today as Mpheni and Elim).

King Makhado gave Maatamela the land of Tshilata, a beautiful green mountainous area situated less than 5 km east of Makhado (Louis Trichardt). After many years as the chief of Tshilata, Maatamela passed on, and was buried at Tshilata.

MULELU LINEAGE

Khosi Maatamela was succeeded by his son, Mulelu Ramabulana, as a Chief of Tshilata, and Tshilata was referred to as Ha-Mulelu (Mulelu's land). Mulelu Ramabulana ruled for several years, and was succeeded by his son, Radzilani.

Radzilani was succeeded by his son, Johannes Maatamela Mulelu-Ramabulana. The Tshilata-Mulelu community lost its land, as a result of land grabbing by apartheid rulers, during the reign of Johannes Mulelu-Ramabulana. Johannes Mulelu-Ramabulana, like most chiefs and political leaders, had vigorously resisted land grabbing.

The Tshilata-Mulelu community was later forcibly relocated to Nzhelele. Mulelu's cousin, King Patrick Ramaano Mphephu-Ramabulana (King Mphephu III), who was also the Chief Minister of the Venda Bantustan, persuaded him to relent and agree to leave his prime land since Africans were being forcibly removed from their land in the whole of South Africa. King Mphephu III indicated that the time would come, as it is the case now, for people to reclaim back their lost lands through proper legal channels.

The Tshilata-Mulelu community was resettled at a portion of land under Khosi Netshituni, and the place where they were resettled became known as Ha-Mulelu. Khosi Johannes Mulelu-Ramabulana lost his status as chief and was reduced to a vhamusanda (headman).

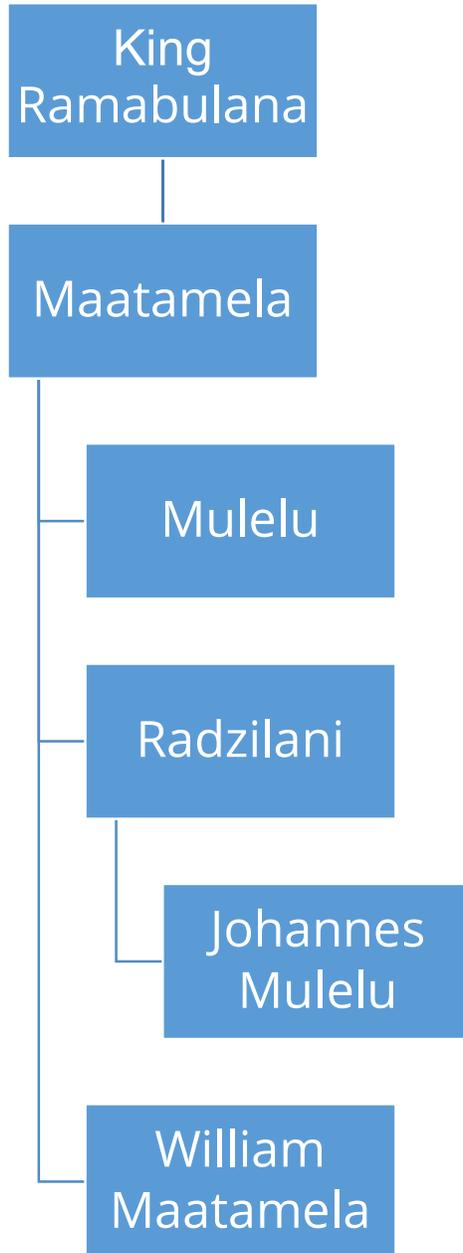
Khosi Netshituni is one of the unsung heroes of the struggle for liberation. He accommodated stranded chiefs and their communities that had lost their land between Muraleni in the west and Old Mauluma in the east. These chiefs and communities included:

- The Tshifhefhe community, under Khosi Sinthumule, that was forcibly removed from Tshifhefhe. Some members of the community settled at Ha-Sinthumule, while others settled at Tshirolwe;
- The Vhalaudzi community of Makwatambani, under Khosi Makongoza, that was accommodated at Ha-Mugobi. Khosi Makongoza's status was reduced to that of headman and he became the Vhamusanda (headman) of Ha-Mugobi, known today as Makongoza;
- The Vhalaudzi community of Phawe and Vhulorwa, under Khosi Maphaha, that was accommodated at Matanda. Khosi Maphaha was also reduced to a headman;
- The Funyufunyu community of Ha-Funyufunyu, next to Vhulorwa, under Khosi Funyufunyu, that was accommodated at a place known today as Ha-Funyufunyu;
- The Vhakwevho community of Luonde (Luvhuvhu River valley), under Khosi Matidze Mukwevho, that was resettled at a portion of Tshituni tsha Fhasi where a new village was established and became known as Ha-Matidza. Khosi Matidze also lost his chieftaincy and became a headman of the newly established village of Ha-Matidza;
- The Ramavhoya community (next to Muraleni, present-day Ha-Sinthumule), under Khosi Ramavhoya, that was resettled at a portion of Tshituni tsha Fhasi. A new village was created and became known as Ha-

Ramavhoya. Khosi Ramavhoya also lost his chieftaincy and became a headman of the new village of Ha-Ramavhoya; and

- The Tshidzivhani community (Luvuvhu River valley), under Khosi Ratombo that was resettled at a portion of Tshituni tsha Fhasi. A new village was created and became known as Ha-Ratombo. Khosi Ratombo also lost his chieftaincy and became a headman.

Johannes Maatamela Mulelu-Ramabulana was succeeded his son, William Maatamela-Muleu Ramabulana.



The descendants of the community forcibly removed from Tshilata Ha-Mulelu are now scattered all over Venda. The only thing bringing them together is their burning desire to reclaim and resettle at Tshilata, the land of their parents and grandparents. The Mulelu-Tshilata Community Property Association has been established to reclaim the land. Some portions of Tshilata Ha-Mulelu have already been successfully reclaimed and are administered by the Mulelu-Tshilata CPA. The CPA wants the beneficiaries of Tshilata Ha-Mulelu to be allowed to go back to their land also have the chieftom of Tshilata Ha-Mulelu restored. This would mean that ruler of Tshilata (Ha-Mulelu) becoming a senior chief (Khosi) instead of the current status of headman.

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