

DEARE, G. R.

17.7.1902 - <evidence given 16.7.1902>

File 71, pp. 232-3.

- 232 The Angonis. Conversation with George R. (Russell?) Deare (Major), 16.7.1902.

Yesterday inside the Post Office, Durban, at about 4.15 p.m., I met Deare and had the following conversation. He was formerly a sub-inspector of police, Zululand, about 1889 and 1890. I knew him there. He said he had occasion in 1896 to go on an expedition to the land of the Angoni people which lies to the west of the lower portion of Lake Nyasa. He went straight to the king, an old man of about 80 named Mpezeni.¹ (He lived with, or very near, this man for about 18 months.) He got very fond of the man, as the king did of him, and this was largely due to the fact that Deare had formerly lived among the Mtetwa people (viz. when, in Zululand, he was stationed at Dondota, Lower Umfolozi district).

He very frequently had long talks with the king on Zulu affairs. He learnt the Angoni were an offshoot of the Mzilikazi people who fled from Tshaka in the early part of the century. He cannot account for the origin of their name. The king declared that he was himself born in Zululand and had left there with his parents when a little boy, able to walk a little. Mpezeni had not *twanga'd*, though the putting on of the headdress was a custom of the people. The Angoni allowed the hair to grow high, and it was on top of that when done up high that the ring was sewn. Mpezeni evidently *buta'd* regiments. The principal or one of the principal kraals numbered over 1,200 huts, dotted about, not after the manner of the Zulus, but like a little village. The Angoni would number say 250,000.

- 233 Deare had to walk from Tete (where the boat from Chinde left him) to Mpezeni's through very hilly, broken, and swampy country, a distance of over 200 miles. He was assisted by carriers. The people had already begun to feel the nuisance of having white people among them, and wanted to arm and fight. Deare dissuaded the king from taking any measures to that end. It seems he wanted to form a league with one or two neighbouring states. The country did afterwards come into conflict with the B.C.A. Company. Mpezeni was captured, his son was put to death, and the B.C.A. are now governing, but over people who have scattered in many directions. Mpezeni died. Deare gave warning that as soon as he left there would be war, but the Company took no heed, imagining he was merely serving his own ends. Deare considers there is little or no trade to be done in the country.

There is a custom by which girls at a certain period are taken to a bush and 'stretched' with a mealie cob. Deare persuaded some native to take him and spy, which Deare did.

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On the whole the Angoni speak a language very much like Zulu; indeed it is Zulu with slight variations. There is no *hlobongaing* there. The customs are similar on the whole to Zulu ones, but differ in various respects. Shields are differently made. Livingstone's Zambezi and Its Tributaries is an excellent description of what is to be seen in that country. Had he been a good linguist, Deare would have taken down a great deal of what he heard from the king. When the conflict above referred to occurred, Deare, as one knowing the country, was asked by the Company to lead the forces in. This, on account of a promise to the king, he refused to do.

Deare met H.H. Johnston. He does not think much of the man, whom he classes with Baden-Powell as a self-advertiser. Johnston's books contain for the most part information he has gathered from other peoples' brains.

Deare did however keep a diary with notes of what he saw, and has maps, as well as a photo of his good friend Mpezeni. Mpezeni on two occasions saved Deare's life. Deare speaks of Ngungunyana's people² as an offshoot again of the Angoni above referred to. Higher up on Lake Nyasa, on its west side, is another country with Angoni. These people Mpezeni referred to in his talks.

Notes

¹A son of Zwangendaba; see Bryant, Olden Times, pp. 466-7, and Omer-Cooper, Zulu Aftermath, ch. 5.

²The Shangana people of the Gasa kingdom.