

## MNKONKONI

<The evidence reproduced below should be read in conjunction with that of Giba kaSobhuza which appears in Stuart Archive, vol. 1, pp. 149-53. Although Giba and Mnkoni were interviewed together, Stuart, in writing up his notes of his interviews with them, attributed some of the evidence to 'Giba and Mnkoni', and some to 'Mnkoni and Giba', thus apparently distinguishing between the relative weight of their individual contributions. We have preserved this distinction in reproducing their evidence separately - eds.>

26.11.1898

File 74, pp. 26-7.

Also present: Giba

26 (Circumcision), Swaziland, per Mnkoni and Giba ka Sobuza, 26.11.1898.<sup>1</sup>

Circumcision used to be practised in the old days, for instance in Sobuza's and Mswazi's reigns.<sup>2</sup> The reason for it was in order to prolong life, and so that people should not die soon. As soon as the *circumcision* ceremony was over, the man might marry. It was Mswazi who put an end to the custom because he wanted his army always close at hand to deal with the civil war, as well as with the Zulu *impi* when it came. If they *were circumcised* they would want to be at their homes with their wives. Those who *were circumcised* were about 33 or 34 years of age (about the age of the Ndhlavela (regiment)); but orphans were permitted to *undergo circumcision* earlier, so as to be able to look after their father's kraal. After a man *was circumcised* he put on the headring. Giba himself *was circumcised*, Mnkoni not. The people belonging to Zwide *practised circumcision*; also the Basutos, who also circumcised their girls.<sup>3</sup>

27 Giba and Mnkoni think that this custom will not again be revived in Swaziland. Mbandeni tried to start it, but Malunge, Mjokovu's father, Ndabambi and Ncabeni opposed its revival on the ground that people who were circumcised did not escape death.<sup>4</sup> They thought people should be left alone. Mbandeni then went no further into the matter.

Girls used to prefer those who had been circumcised. Swazi women have never *undergone circumcision* like the Basutos. Women have said nothing in complaint about the discontinuance of the custom.

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File 74, p. 50.

Also present: Giba

50 (Crimes). Swaziland, per Mnkonkoni and Giba, 26.11.1898.

In Somhlola's day if a girl who had *juma'd*, i.e. *hlobonga'd* with a man became *pregnant* with child, both man and girl were put to death, because (it was said), 'He has soiled a man's child and insulted his father'. A case is known of a girl of *the Mamba people*, who admitted having done wrong, but pleaded that she had done so because it was so nice and sweet. Sobuza in this instance agreed to both girl and man escaping with a fine of cattle. The lover in Swaziland is called not *soka* but *likwa*, i.e. something liked, a sweetheart. In these days, when a girl *becomes pregnant*, as was decided by Mswazi, the man pays to the father of the girl a beast known as the *ukuvimba* beast, and (he) punishes both by having the girl given to some other man. When this was done, the girl was sometimes released from her new husband by the payment of a beast, paid to him by the girl's lover or *likwa*.

<26.11.1898?>

File 74, p. 58.

Also present: Giba

58 (Laws). Swaziland, per Mnkonkoni and Giba.

Mswazi ordered the Giba regiment not to *juma* (i.e. *hlobonga*). He said, '*They are still growing up* and will have to fight.' [In this he seems to have followed Tshaka, who prohibited the custom.] Somhlolo and Mbandeni made no order in the matter.

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File 74, p. 76.

Also present: Giba

76 (Taboo). Swaziland, per Mnkonkoni and Giba. The *inkovunkovu* [red scarf?] was not allowed to be worn by common people, also *loury feathers*. Even at this day the *lion skin* is worn only by the king. Leopard skin is freely worn.

The *imvu* or sheep (*itihuku*) is not eaten by the Madonsela people, i.e. Mnkonkoni's clan, nor by the *a ba kwa Ngwane people*. Mnkonkoni himself does not touch the meat. This animal [its blood?] is a medicine used upon mad people.

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File 74, pp. 86-7.

Also present: Giba

86 (History). Swaziland, per Mnkonkoni and Giba. [See above.]<sup>5</sup> There are very few of the old men left who can give the history of the country. Mtshengu (Zicelecele regiment) and Mhlaba (Indhlovu regiment) are good. Mamisa was only a man noted for his *physical prowess (jara)*, and could not know much. Malunga and Sobandhla are dead.

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Ludonga died a minor.<sup>6</sup> Mgenge was *his induna* at Inkanini. His mother was Sisila.<sup>7</sup> One of Sobuza's sisters was married to that important chief Zwide; she was daughter of Ndungunya, her name being Posile.<sup>8</sup>

Zwide's *sibongo* was Nxumalo or Mkatshwa. Zwide attacked Sobuza in Tshaka's reign. Zwide's father was Langa. He, Zwide, lived at Emagudu near the Pongolo. It was the Amapela regiment with which Zwide *scattered the people* at Etshiselweni.<sup>9</sup> The kraal burnt was called Nobamba.

When Ncaba and Mpakani fled they came from the direction of Zululand, from Epondwane.<sup>10</sup> They did not join Sobuza when he fled after Zwide's attack.

Etshiselweni is the name of the *old site*, i.e. of Nobamba, which kraal was burnt. Etshiselweni was reoccupied immediately after Sobuza's return from his flight. The Emcinsweni was one of Sobuza's kraals; Zombode and Hoho were others.

The word Ngwane does not mean anything so far as Mnkonkoni knows. The people of Swaziland were so called after the old king, Ngwane.<sup>11</sup>

Zwide did not fly to the southern uBombo as stated by Mr Miller in his history, there to reorganise his forces.<sup>12</sup> He went north as stated.

Mhlangala was a Basuto - *his sibongo was a ba kwa Magagula*.<sup>13</sup> They conversed in a language different to that of the Swazis. When Sobuza defeated Mhlangala, he built the Elangeni kraal, which was situated just behind the old Zombode *site* near *that of Ncabane*. Mjoli, the man mentioned by Mr Miller, was a brother of Mhlangala's. Mhlangala, after attack and defeat by Somhlolo, did not *konza*, but fled north into what is now the South African Republic. There seems to have been no good reason for attacking Mhlangala, except that Sobuza wanted to have his cattle.

87 The Maseko people were dispersed by Mswazi.<sup>14</sup> Mnkonkoni is not aware of the reason.

When the Swazis arrived at Etshiselweni, they found already established there or near there Mngayi *of the people of Madonsela ka Ngonyamana*. They occupied land close to that hill opposite the Mahamba one called Madhletshane.

A man called Moyeni, who was *an elder brother of Mhlangala*, fought with Sobuza; *their dispute was about people of Zwide*.

The chief of the Maseko people when dispersed was Mgazi.

Those people of Mhlangala's who remained occupy ground near the Mliba hill. The meaning of the word Mtimba (Mdimba) is not known. The hill now known by that name was so called by Mhlangala's people, who spoke a different language to the Swazis.

A war once broke out against Lubelo near the uBombo; the reason for this was that when a Zulu *impi* came to *attack* the Swazis, Lubelo assisted it.<sup>15</sup>

No fighting ever took place with the Tongas. Messages were sometimes exchanged between the king of the Swazis and the king of the Tongas. Sobuza's messenger was Mgodhlolo; Mswazi's *messenger* was Holo (of the Inyati regiment). The Tonga children that were seized or raided were got from people living far down the Inkomati river, near where chief Nomahasha lives now.<sup>16</sup>

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File 74, p. 96.

Also present: Giba

96 (Customs). Swaziland, per Mnkongoni and Giba, 26.11.1898.

When cattle are killed in Swaziland at the king's chief kraal and the *ancestral spirits* (*amadhlozi*) are *praised*, only those *amadhlozi* are *praised* which appertain to the royal house or dynasty. They are invoked as *amadhlozi* of former kings and rulers, and no other *amadhlozi*, i.e. of other peoples and tribes living within the same country, are called on. On these occasions as many as 30 and 40 beasts are slaughtered, one being awarded to each king's *dhlozi*. [Note, at the most the kings do not exceed 25 or 26 in number.]<sup>17</sup>

*Amandiki* in Swaziland.<sup>18</sup> This was the complaint which killed Mbandeni. The *amandiki* came from the Gasa (Gasaland), the people who have numerous medicines. The Gasa people, Mnkongoni thinks, *are like the Basuto* in regard to these medicines which cause *amandiki*. *Amandiki* are still in existence in Swaziland. The word *guzela* now so generally applied to cattle seizures was derived from the *amandiki* practice, for, in this observance, a drum is used and *guzela'd* or beaten or thumped. Formerly, it was said, in respect of cattle seizures, '*Zi ya dhliwa,*' as in Zululand.<sup>19</sup>

The reason why women have come to *rule* here in Swaziland is because it was thought undesirable for a man to act as regent, as he, afterwards, when the heir grew up, (would endeavour) himself to control the government and usurp power. The heir's mother was then regarded as least likely to cause trouble at a later date; but she, as a matter of fact, was never anything else than a regent. She only *superintended* (*pata'd*). She was saluted as '*Nkosi!*', not as '*Bayete!*'<sup>20</sup>

26.11.1898

File 74, pp. 115-16.

Also present: Giba

115 (Contact with civilized races). Swaziland, per Mnkongoni and Giba, 26.11.1898.

It is an old, well-known crime in Swaziland for women to *use medicines to work evil against* (*loya*) their husbands. But since white people, especially the English, have come to the country, the crime has undoubtedly become more common. Women have learnt that their sex is defended against the oppression of the males by the white people. They have grasped the principles of several of the more important laws of civilised communities, and the knowledge that they are protected is the true source for the increase of *loyaing*. It is common knowledge amongst the natives of Swaziland that this *loyaing* is increasing.

The woman reasons thus: she has heard of the various orders prohibiting 'killing-off' that have come from the white people, especially, if not solely, the English; she has observed that these orders are respected by their kings; she knows, moreover, that women are protected by the same people which give these orders; she knows that the English are more powerful than their own sovereign; she therefore concludes that if she is oppressed by her husband, and if on that account she should take what she regards, to a certain extent, as the law into her

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own hands, and put her husband to death, her conscience is salved in a certain degree by the knowledge she has of the apparent unjustness of her position. (Above all), as no more smelling-out and killing-off is permitted, and, as far as she is aware, the only means that exist of detecting the crime of *loyaing* is smelling-out by *izangoma* (and this practice is a purely native and not a European one), she finds herself at liberty to do much as she likes, without fear of discovery and consequently of punishment. These orders of the white people therefore touch and invade the sanctity of domestic life and largely influence a woman against her husband, especially the husband of many wives, for no other reason but that she may commit adultery with another man because she no longer cares for her own husband. It is not to gain a higher, purer freedom, but a lower, baser bondage and immorality.

116 The first people *loya'd* were the old men who were, as it were, the recognised historians or tradition-holders of the country, and used to educate such kings as Sobuza and Mswazi in the ancient customs of the land. In these days, Mnkongoni asserts, women obtain their poisons from the white people, (particularly), again, the English, the method whereby they do so being by 'selling their persons' to these said English people, for, it is common knowledge, the Boer is averse to touching or holding any intimate intercourse with the native. At least that is the impression conveyed by the Boers to the natives, though Mnkongoni does not know if it is really fact or not. Streams of native girls go into the village of Bremersdorp now and become (prostitutes to the white people and to their native police and servants). Prostitution is not an unknown evil amongst the Swazis. When the Magagula people were attacked and defeated, the Swazis were then told that the drinking of the waters of the river Mtilane, which flows along the eastern side of the Mtimba mountains, caused laxity of morals, incest and prostitution (*ubudhlundhlulu*); they gave that as their experience. 'The waters of the Mtilane are abstained from; it (the Mtilane) is not drunk.' In spite of this, Mnkongoni adds, the river is freely drunk or partaken of. The true reason why women *loya* their husbands is because their husbands do not care for or like them (the women), i.e. the woman who takes it upon herself to *loya* him. The attitude of women towards their husbands has thus become much worse than it was, the cause being as above stated which, in other words, amounts to this, the destruction of native authority over people (women) amenable in every other respect to their own laws and customs.

[Thus it is that the white man's order about killing-off strikes at the very root and life of the native people. Here it is, I think, that we have, and have quite clearly, what Kidd refers to as the disappearance of the savage races through the effect of mere contact; here is the nature of the mere contact; one can put one's finger on the spot.<sup>21</sup> One sees this best in a country like Swaziland, where the paramount chief is said to control the whole of his people as before. Note: Tikuba's evidence on pp. 69 and 112 must be read in connection with Mnkongoni's.]<sup>22</sup>

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Sobhuza (Somhlolo, Ngwane) was Swazi king from c.1815 to c.1839.

<sup>2</sup>Sobhuza's successor, Mswati (Mswazi, Mavuso), ruled c.1845-1865.

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- <sup>3</sup>Zwide kaLanga was chief of the Ndwandwe in the early part of the nineteenth century.
- <sup>4</sup>Mbandzeni (Mbandeni, Dlamini) ruled from 1875 to 1889.
- <sup>5</sup>Stuart is presumably here cross-referring to Giba's testimony on Swazi history. This is reproduced on pp. 149-50 of vol. 1 of the Stuart Archive.
- <sup>6</sup>Ludvonga (Ludonga) was a minor when he succeeded his father, Mswati, as king. He died without issue in 1872.
- <sup>7</sup>Sisila (Sisile) of the Khumalo is better known as LaMgangeni or MaMgangeni.
- <sup>8</sup>Ndvungunye (Ndungunya, Zikodze) was Dlamini chief in the late eighteenth century.
- <sup>9</sup>EShiselweni is the name of a locality north of the middle reaches of the Phongolo where many of the *imizi* of the Swazi (Dlamini-Ngwane) chiefs were built. Sobhuza was living in this locality when he was attacked by Zwide and forced to take refuge further north.
- <sup>10</sup>The informant is here referring to the Msane chief, Nxaba (Ncaba) kaMbekane (Mpakani). After Shaka's defeat of Zwide, c.1818, Nxaba made his way northwards into Central Africa at the head of a group of refugees.
- <sup>11</sup>The name Ngwane recurs in the Swazi (Dlamini-Ngwane) chiefly genealogy. (See, e.g., Bryant, Olden Times, opp. p. 314; and Stuart Archive, vol. 1, pp. 133-34, 151-52, 360-64.) It is not clear which of the several persons of that name the informant is here referring to.
- <sup>12</sup>Allister M. Miller, who played a prominent role in the affairs of Swaziland in the late nineteenth century, wrote extensively about the Swazi people and their history. It is not clear which of his numerous articles and published works is here being referred to.
- <sup>13</sup>Mhlangala was involved in a dispute over the succession to the chieftainship of the Nhlapho people, who lived near Ntabande mountain at the source of the Ngwempisi river, south-west of the present-day village of Amsterdam. For a brief account of his defeat by Mswati see Matsebula, History of Swaziland, p. 39.
- <sup>14</sup>The Maseko people lived in the valley of the uSuthu river.
- <sup>15</sup>Lubelo was chief of the Mngomezulu people, who lived in the Ngwavuma valley near the Lubombo mountains.
- <sup>16</sup>Nomahasha's chiefdom was situated where the present-day boundaries of Swaziland, Mozambique and the Transvaal meet.
- <sup>17</sup>Cf. the Swazi chiefly genealogies reproduced in Stuart Archive, vol. 1, pp. 133-4, 360-2.
- <sup>18</sup>Bryant, Dictionary, p. 411, gives *i-Ndiki* (*indiki*, pl. *amandiki*) as 'Person...suffering from some neurotic or hysterical disease...prevalent in the north of Zululand; a leper (this application of the word is of very recent use...)'.  
<sup>19</sup>'*Zi ya dhliwa*' ('*Ziyadliwa*') literally means 'They are eaten up'.  
<sup>20</sup>'*Nkosi!*' means 'King!'; '*Bayete!*' was a salutation reserved for the reigning king.
- <sup>21</sup>Dudley Kidd established a mission station in Swaziland in 1890. He published three books on African society between 1904 and 1908. Stuart's reference to Kidd's work indicates that he wrote up his original record of Mnkonkoni's and Giba's testimony at least six to ten years after his interview with them had taken place. His original notes appear to be no longer extant: it is his rewritten version which

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we reproduce in the present volume.

<sup>22</sup>The evidence of Tikhuba kaMagongo will appear in a subsequent volume of the Stuart Archive.