

ZWAYI ka MBOMBO

20.2.1910

File 30, item 17, pp. 2(a) - 4(a).

<Zwayi's testimony on superstitions should be read in conjunction with that given by Ntazini on 20.2.1910 as rendered in Stuart Archive, vol. 5, pp. 188-90, and that given by Socwatsha kaPhaphu on 21.2.1910 as rendered in the present volume, pp. 75-9.>

- 2(a) Zwayi ka Mbombo ka Makata; chief: late Langalibalele.¹ Mbombo was a son of a Hlubi girl.

My mother was an iHlubi.

Hammerhead bird (utekwane) not killed, builds nice nest with *headrest (umcamelo)*, possibly for its headfeathers. If killed, person killing dies. Boys nowadays tend to ignore custom. If flies past kraal, flies straight on for some days and simply goes 'keke-keke' etc., that means that a girl will marry at kraal at which this is done. This always comes true. Some boys have medicines to cause *tekwane* to go round and round a kraal and sit on a hut, this means that a storm will come and burn the kraal. If many *tekwane* fly past or many fly round, it is a very good or a very bad sign.

The ground hornbill (insingizi) was not killed. If killed accidentally it is reported to the chief possibly by the person who killed it. He reports because afraid the storm will come. Chief directs it be carried off to some precipice where there is not much rain and there carefully concealed behind a stone, just as if the corpse of some great chief. The rain will then come down properly. If left in open, very bad rains will come (not lightning and storms). The death was reported to chief. But if a man of high standing in tribe sees the *insingizi* there would be nothing amiss in his going and burying it or hiding (buried in a place where no *precipices*). He would then report to chief what he had done.

The *udoye* (crane) - *intungunono* - is also a rain bird.² If comes to kraal, lightning will come, same as to *insingizi*. The *insingizi* is much respected, *sayo ngi muke ngiye kiti*,³ *ukusata* etc.⁴ It and the *intungunono* <sic> live on snakes, etc. The *intungunono* will pass its tail or wing feathers into the hole into which snake has gone, then *stir*

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them round there in such way as to cause snake to turn, come out and crawl quickly off, only to be caught and eaten.

- 3 If *tekwane* gets up and *defecates ahead*, then *journey* will be *one of good fortune (mhlope pambili)*.

Fieldmouse (imbiba), with stripes, if crosses path or road in front of people on journey, it is a sign that much beer and meat will be found ahead.

Lark (inqomfi) also brings luck if repeatedly crosses road or path, i.e. as to food and beer.

*Pempetwana snake*⁵ - like cobra - if gets up and hisses, sign that there will be plenty of Xmasing on ahead.

The monitor lizard (imbulu) has a *bad habit*, sucks cow's udder - cuts udder badly so can't be milked. Stands up on hind feet. If it comes to kraal, it means that a storm will come. It may then be killed. If *at the meeting place (enkundhleni)*, the cattle will suffer from storm, but if at huts, then the huts will suffer most.

Cupukumuka's man at Umgeni close to Albert,⁶ an *intungunono* came and sat *on a post at the cattle enclosure* in January and 3 cattle were struck and killed by lightning. When a storm has come and struck, those unaffected stay until a doctor comes and *punga's* them,⁷ say for 2 or 3 days. I did not for this reason go to the man of C.'s tribe referred to because I knew I might be detained so as to be *punga'd*, for I would be *affected by a harmful influence (rabul' umkond' omubi)*. It is not essential for somebody or some beast to be actually killed at a kraal for the doctor to be called in. He is called even if lightning is known to have struck a few yards off, say 30 or so off.

Put fire outside.

The 'herdboy' of the weather (umfana we zulu) - i.e. the headman, or if afraid sends his son out or another to watch the storm whilst raining, and by so doing to keep the lightning and thunder away. If remains inside, storm will be much louder. Is called *'herdboy' (umfana)* as he *'herds' (alusas)* the storm. Formerly the elderly men used to herd cattle during a storm and keep them from getting in gardens.

One who is afraid may stick long sticks in the hut outside to point towards the storm; as soon as storm passes, he *'calls back the herdboys' (buyisa's abafana)*, i.e. the sticks, i.e. withdraws them. These are like our lightning conductors. They are not ordinary sticks but sticks given by doctors to the kraal head.

A hyrax (imbila) which lives in a ravine - if comes to a kraal, bad sign just as with *tekwane, insingizi*.

The big doctors, i.e. king's doctors, were able to repel the evil omen if quickly appealed to, i.e. before the storm has time to come.

A son of Mangena was a big doctor, so my father told me, for repelling bad omens.

- 3(a) With all evil omens, e.g. coming of *utekwane, inzingizi, imbulu* etc., doctor was quickly resorted to or the storm would come. Doctor has *vessels (izicelo) for sprinkling medicines*, prepares the black sticks (*abafana*), calls for black sheep or, if wanting, a black *steer* (2 years old), kills, and doctors (*punga's*) *the evil omen*.

This doctoring goes on for the whole summer, when, the storms having all gone by, the man is given a beast.

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The red hare (intenetsha) - an evil omen (umtakati omubi) when comes to kraal; the kraal would be burnt at once by lightning.

If *duiker (impunzi)* comes, the kraal head dies - can be *pungwa'd*. Came once to our kraal near Estcourt - was 'sent' and stabbed a man, he died very rapidly - this was in Langali<balele's> time. Necessary for person to be on alert to kill the animal when it appears. If asleep etc. it is said it has a *harmful influence (isitunzi)* and his body *becomes enfeebled (yeta's, dangala's or katala's)*, i.e. depressed in consequence. Even before a bad omen comes, a person's body *dangala's* and afterwards people say, 'I saw so-and-so that he was depressed yesterday' etc.

An *impunzi* is said to be 'sent' (*tunyelwe*) as *ilumbo*,⁸ i.e. is sent by someone, for that is an *ilumbo*. Others say it is simply *a sickness which affects that umuzi (isifo esibabele kulowo muzi)*. Others call it *isiponso*.⁹ The true, old saying is that it was *isiponso* or *isifo*.¹⁰ The *ilumbo* word is used nowadays.

If a man drinks too much beer he does not go to wives much - this is well known.

The imfundamakwelo - to teach whistling.¹¹ I believe this as I was bitten and quickly learnt to whistle.

Umtshingo and *amagekle* - not played until *amabele* are starting to turn brown.¹² This is the month in which they are begun to be played - if played before the proper time would bring cold winds on and spoil *amabele* and not ripen properly. The winds make *mabele* hard. Boys play.

Insema,¹³ *umtshingo*, *amagekle*.

Boys must not roll stones down hills in the summer for this will bring on hail and smash *mabele* etc. In winter no harm in this. I did this at Ingqiya hill (Ramncane's) as a boy with their boys, we were beaten.¹⁴ We did it over above other people's kraals too and they threatened to report us for destroying their food.

- 4 *Pumpkins (amatanga)*, mealies, *sweet-reed (imfe)*, *amabele* are what are forbidden to be eaten before *the chief* eats. If he does so, he is *made to pay reparation (hlaulisa'd)*, and asked why he eats and so *harms the chief*. He *harms the chief* for if he comes, after wrongly partaking of these foods, and receives beer-pot and drinks therefrom (before chief has eaten first fruits), <he> causes chief to become ill, getting the illness through coming in contact with one who has wrongly partaken of season's first fruits.

If spider comes from top of hut, down its web, it means a friend of yours is coming, but the spider must be killed so as to hasten arrival of the person, and it must moreover be killed to prevent it entering one's ear.

Wagtail (umvemve) - if comes frequently and keeps on whistling, means that a friend is coming, not killed in former times. This was looked on as our 'letter' (*incwadi*) or messenger. 'Tiyoh! Tiyoh!' it goes, this is greeting and means or indicates that the inmates of kraal will in same way greet some friend to come.

Cockroaches (amapela), white ones, very small, if fall in a lot between *roof prop (insika)* and doorway and then disperse in different directions means that a visitor from far off will arrive and take hold of this *insika*.

There are *izivivane* in our part of country (Estcourt) but not *common* now. Were set up on large paths, on a hill, so as to be seen. I have never seen *on a flat ridge (okalweni)*.

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Many *baboons* on the berg. If these cross and re-cross one's path, you will soon feel yourself getting tired *in the knees*, and getting hungry. I cannot explain but it is so. I saw a herd of them, old and young, a mile long. The tired feeling is not caused by fear.

4(a) *Amazimu, abatakati, nswelaboya* - formerly men.¹⁵

If not shown hospitality late at night and told to go on, this shows that such people are *izinswelaboya*.

Imikovu - very many.¹⁶ I was once nearly killed by one - Mabonsa knows.¹⁷ The *imikovu* are kept (*fuywa'd*) by *abatakati*. They go and rouse (*vusa*) every man who dies and collect them together. I once had a strange experience. Woke at night hearing birds making noise, set out, crossed 2 dongas but when I got to 3rd the boy I was with began crying. I then saw numerous men of stunted growth like short boys. I struck out on every side, turned and my brother and I ran back to where we had come from as hard as we could, reaching there in a very broken down state (of collapse). *Imikovu* are only about size of small, cheeky boys. If one sees them you get ill for some time. We saw it at 3rd donga, big one, *steep drops* on both sides - it was rather dark, there was a moon, small clouds over it. Had sticks and threw sticks at us. The old men of our tribe said there must have been relatives of ours among them to throw sticks so as to warn us. Had there been no relatives, we would have been allowed to come up and then be caught and murdered.

I know of Pilisi, of Natal Police, in Nov. last had been on visit to Mveli.¹⁸ Started back late. Dark and misty. When he got to above Edendale the horse refused to go on.¹⁹ He tried to push on, still refused. Again he pressed, then saw a woman busy feeding a lot of *imikovu* on both sides of the road. The horse on being urged forward caused the woman to shout out in terror whereupon all the *imikovu* dispersed and the horse bolted forward. The *imikovu* had thought only horse present whereas there was man on it.

Imikovu are black. It is clear that they are the spirits of dead natives.

Abatakati were caught by *umnumzana* remaining late and coming back with 2 or 3 others. He would then catch *umtakati*, there would be *holding of an umhlahlo*²⁰ and ...

<Stuart's notes end at this point. We have been unable to find a continuation – eds.>

Notes

¹ Langalibalele kaMthimkhulu of the Hlubi was an important chief in Natal until his deposition by the colonial authorities in 1873. He died in 1889.

² *Intungunono* or *intingino* is usually given as the secretary bird.

³ Bryant, *Dictionary*, p. 654, under *i-nTsingizi*, comments, 'The cry of the female hornbill is said to be *Ngiyamuka, ngiyamuka, ngiya kwabetu* (I am going, I am going, off to my people)! to which the male-bird replies in an undertone *Hamba, hamba; kad'usho* (Go, for goodness sake; you've been saying so long enough)!'

⁴ Bryant, *Dictionary*, p. 564, gives *sata (ukusatha)* as 'Have illicit sexual intercourse externally with a female (... only used in vulgar conversation) ...'. The implications in the present context are not clear.

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⁵ Doke and Vilakazi, *Dictionary*, p. 654, give *uphempethwane* as ‘Black-necked cobra ...’.

⁶ Cuphukumuka of the amaQamu (abasemaQanyini) people was an acting chief with adherents in five magisterial divisions round Pietermaritzburg. Albert is a reference to Albert Falls, a locality on the Mngeni river twenty kilometres north of Pietermaritzburg.

⁷ Bryant, *Dictionary*, pp. 516-17, gives *punga* (*ukuphunga*, pass. *ukuphungwa*) as ‘Drive off by motioning, frightening, scaring, in some way, as ... evil influences as a doctor when sprinkling an army or kraal with *i-nTelezi*’ ...’. On p. 620 he gives *intelezi* as ‘General name for all those medicinal charms ... administered by a “sprinkling” process ... and not carried about on the person ...’.

⁸ Bryant, *Dictionary*, p. 366-7, gives *ilumbo* as ‘Any wonderful performance, as a surprisingly skilful action, contrivance, or trick ...’.

⁹ Bryant, *Dictionary*, p. 510, gives *isiposo* (*isiphoso*, *isiphonso*) as ‘Medicine supposed to cause hysteria, insanity, etc., in another ...; the disease caused by such medicine ...’. Doke and Vilakazi, *Dictionary*, pp. 670, 671, give *isiphonso* or *isiphoso* as ‘Charm, hypnotism, bewitching medicine’.

¹⁰ Bryant, *Dictionary*, p. 149, gives *isifo* as ‘Disease, a sickness (in a specified sense)’.

¹¹ Bryant, *Dictionary*, p. 158, gives *imfundamakwelo* (*imfundamakhwelo*), literally ‘the one from whom you learn to whistle’, as ‘Species of small aquatic beetle ... which, when applied to the tongue of a small boy, gives it a sharp bite, and from henceforth he is able to whistle!’

¹² Bryant, *Dictionary*, p. 650, gives *umtshingo* as ‘Certain reed musical-instrument or pipe, played like a tin-whistle’. On p. 182 he gives *igerre*, which is his spelling of *igekle* (pl. *amagekle*), as the equivalent of *igemfe*; on p. 181 he gives the latter as ‘Native reed-whistle, the herd-boy’s pan-pipes ...’.

¹³ Bryant, *Dictionary*, p. 646, gives *intsema* (*insema*) as ‘Name of two species of ground euphorbia ... whose large bulbous root is rolled down a slope for them <i.e. boys> to fling the *u(lu)-Kande* at’. On p. 292 he gives *ukande* (*ukhande*) as ‘Stick sharpened at the point for throwing by boys at the *i-nTsema*, etc. ...’.

¹⁴ The reference to Hamncana (Hamncwana, Ramncwana) may be to the chief of that name who headed a section of the abakwaDuma people in the late nineteenth century, and had adherents in the Ixopo and Ipoleta Divisions.

¹⁵ *Izimu* (pl. *amazimu*) is often glossed in English as ‘cannibal’. Doke and Vilakazi, *Dictionary*, p. 894, also give it as ‘Ogre (in folk-lore)’. On p. 773 Doke and Vilakazi give *inswelaboya* (pl. *izinswelaboya*) as ‘... murderer (esp. applied to those who obtain human flesh for witchcraft)’. See also Bryant, *Dictionary*, p. 656.

¹⁶ Bryant, *Dictionary*, p. 322, gives *umkovu* (*umkhovu*, pl. *imikhovu*) as ‘Familiar of an *umtakati*, whom he sends round by night for working evil, placing poison, etc., in the kraals ...’.

¹⁷ Mabhonsa kaSidlayi was another of Stuart’s informants: his evidence appears in *Stuart Archive*, vol. 2.

¹⁸ Mveli kaHemuhemu of the abakwaFuze people was a chief with adherents in eight magisterial divisions in the Natal midlands.

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¹⁹ Edendale adjoins Pietermaritzburg to the south-west.

²⁰ Bryant, Dictionary, p. 234, gives *umhlahlo* as ‘A going together of all men of any particular locality ... to consult an *um-Ngoma* <i.e. a diviner>, that an evil-doer who is supposed to be among them may become “smelt-out”; the actual consultation itself ...’.