

THE INSTALLATION OF INKOSI YA MAKOSI GOMANI III

by

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Only two persons in Malawi are entitled to be saluted, *Bayetel*. On cold geographical grounds it is surprising that there should be so many. The eldest traditions of the Bantu speak of slow movements of people from north to south, west to east, less commonly east to west; only in comparatively recent and rare instances, from south to north. The sudden northward irruption in the second quarter of the last century, of Kalolo into the headwaters of the Zambesi, and that subsequent and lesser extension of theirs in the company of David Livingstone which ended in the assumption of a handful of minor chieftaincies in the Shire valley, were remarkable enough; but the convulsion which sent whole brave regiments of Zulu and Swazi warriors to extinguish what remained of the empire of Monomotapa, to establish a hegemony over the Tumbuka, to halt the Yao, to cleave the Marabvi in two and to set up outposts as far from their starting point as central Tanganyika, may not unworthily be compared with certain of the *völkerwanderungen*, so pregnant with consequences, of the dark ages of Europe.

In July, 1824, Shaka, king of the Zulu, dancing at night, was set upon by assassins and nearly killed. The attack was blamed, apparently justly, on Zwide king of the Ndwandwe, and a punitive expedition was despatched. At that time the Nguni peoples of the south-eastern division of the Bantu had not yet completely settled out into their present-day tribal patterns. The Zulu power was recent, and was to depend for its consolidation on the activities of Shaka and his successors. Its boundaries were ill-defined, and the Ndwandwe lay between Shaka's people and the fierce little band which was simultaneously carving out a kingdom, based on Hoho in northern Swaziland, for the father of the eponymous Mswazi. According to the traditions of the Ngoni of Malawi, Zwide was an unjust man, a ruler who used his authority to seize without provocation the womenfolk and goods of his subjects, and when it was known that a leader of Shaka's renown was preparing to attack him, one of his principal chiefs, Zwangendaba Jele (or perhaps Nxumalo) decided that he would leave the country rather than fight for the king. Zwangendaba later founded the royal Jele line in what is now northern Malawi; from him is descended Inkosi ya Makosi M'belwa, Paramount Chief of the northern Ngoni and one of the two people to whom *Bayetel* may be said.

The ancestor of the other left the same area at about the same time, and for similar reasons. Ngwana Maseko was living adjacent to the territory of Nqaba, a lesser Swazi chief, who made war on Shaka and was defeated. The invasion of the Ndwandwe country came to appear as if it might extend into a pursuit of Nqaba, and Ngwana knew that if this happened he would himself inevitably be involved and overcome. After defeating, reputedly with the help of witchcraft, a Swazi army which was trying to ingratiate itself with Shaka by detaining him, he and his people joined Nqaba in flight. In time they separated, Nqaba going towards the Moçambique coast and Ngwana north-westwards. Eventually he reached the Lozi country, which he ravaged and where he died. Under two successive regents the party moved across present-day Mashonaland and Manicaland, clashing with Zwangendaba's people, whose path it crossed, and at long last turned north again. According to the story, a crossing of the Zambesi was contrived by magical means, an unspecified army, possibly that of Kaphwiti Phiri, defeated at Kalumbi, and a little later the second of the regents either died or gave up his authority. Mputa, the son of Ngwana, then assumed the chieftainship. He took the Ntumba country, the Kirk Range area of what are now Ncheu and Dedza districts, and settled there.

The party had grown on the march, which had lasted by this time some thirteen years. Apart from natural increase, there had been the incorporation of numbers of Venda and Ndaou, and some people of other tribes, notably Karanga. The country they had taken was already fairly well populated by the Ntumba ("the people found there"), a putative mixture of Marabvi and yet earlier settlers; and Ngoni grazing practices and agronomical methods were not careful of the land. It became necessary to move on, and Mputa led his followers across the upper Shire River and along the hills to the east of Lake Malawi until he reached the neighbourhood of Songea in Tanganyika. There he died. Zwangendaba's people, the northern Ngoni, who had settled on the other side of the Lake, now began also to expand into Tanganyika. An army under Zulu Gama met and defeated the regent Cidyanga, Mputa's brother, and forced him and his people to go back the way they had come. By this time the original Nguni stock had become further diluted by the incorporation of the Ntumba who had accompanied Mputa to Songea and the Matengo who joined him there. Cidyanga brought all these to the country around Domwe mountain near Dedza, where a settlement was made; but this proving inadequate, it was left to the Phungwako clan, keepers of the royal medicines, while the rest of the people spread out over what are now the southern and eastern parts of Dedza district, the whole of Ncheu district, and the "Reino d'Angonia" in Moçambique.

The ensuing twenty-five years saw the consolidation of the central Ngoni kingdom, and culminated in what must at the time have seemed to be its downfall. The death of Cidyanga resulted in a disputed succession, his son Cifisi claiming the chieftainship against Cikusi the son of Mputa. Victory for Cikusi led to the secession of the Dedza lakeshore area, where Cifisi's great-grandson Kachindamoto still rules. It was the hey-day of the Zanzibar slave-trade, and the Arabs and their Yao auxiliaries had become accustomed to raiding deep inland across the Kirk Range and the plateaux. The interposition of a powerful force of well-disciplined Ngoni warriors across their routes curbed their activities considerably. Though in war they would acquire domestic slaves, and though surplus prisoners were sometimes sold to the Arabs, the Ngoni were not interested in the trade for its own sake. An attempt by the Arabs to attack from the rear, in concert with the Bemba, was foiled by the Ngoni on the north; and the upper Shire Valley was controlled by Cikusi's war *induna* Makwangwala Ndaou. In 1884 another *induna*, Nyamuka, led a most daring attack on Kapeni's Yao and the European settlement at Blantyre. The Ngoni army was not repelled without guile, and its withdrawal was as much a matter of logistics as of military defeat.

Cikusi died in 1891, and was succeeded by his son Gomani I. The time was not auspicious for the maintenance of African autonomies. In obedience to the prudent counsels of the Scottish missionaries to the north, M'mbelwa's people had already placed themselves under British protection and were actively assisting in the suppression of the slave-trade at their end of the lake. The missionaries who had entered the central kingdom were, however, less well-organized and imaginative, and tended to operate tactlessly and with little sympathy for the beliefs and customs of the people. Furthermore, the Portuguese were expanding their sphere of influence northwards from Tete, and it seemed for a time as if they might even establish themselves on the western shores of the lake. The young Gomani was unfortunately not equal to dealing with such a state of affairs.

The character of Gomani I, as it emerges from the accounts of those who knew him, was not an amiable or an admirable one. Idle and inconstant, he sought British protection without understanding what it entailed and thoughtlessly repudiated it without preparing for the consequences of his action. He appears to have embroiled himself with the missionaries through frivolity and vanity rather than through fear of their attitudes and teachings. When they requested military support from the British forces in Zomba, he made no effective preparations either to placate or to oppose them. The

faults lay not only on the side of Gomani, and the provocation he gave seems by any standard to have been mild; but it provided the British with an excuse to interpose themselves between the Portuguese and the lake, and they moved swiftly. Before Gomani could assemble sufficient forces, he was defeated and taken prisoner; and, refusing to walk to Zomba, was shot near Dombole.

This atrocious treatment of a captive ruler has had its effect on relations between the Ngoni and the British ever since, and might seriously have marred the course of the Protectorate government that followed, had not Gomani II turned out to be a wise and patient man. At the time of his father's death, however, he was only three years old, and the regency was assumed by Gomani's brother Mandala and his stepmother, the fierce and terrible woman after whom Fort Mlangeni is said to have been named. A border commission delimiting the extent of British and Portuguese territory divided the kingdom in two. Mandala and NaMlangeni fled into the Portuguese half, where, after trying to raise an army, they were imprisoned and eventually died. A descendant of Mandala was recognized as Paramount Chief by the Portuguese, and a member of his family still holds the hollow title of King of Angonia.

Custody of the true heir was taken over by the great *mulumuxana* Cakumbira Ndau of Lizulu. The boy was hidden away lest the British should try to kill him. He remained in the care of Cakumbira and his co-regent Mambeya Moyo until a Mr. Walker, a friend of his father, succeeded in convincing them that he could safely be produced. With the consent of the people, Mr. Walker undertook to see that he received an adequate European-style education; and this wise course greatly assisted the stable transition of the central Ngoni into the modern world.

To raise the Paramount Chief as a Christian might have been expected partially to destroy, or at least seriously to damage, the coherent culture of which he formed so emphatic a centre. Instead, in Gomani II the Ngoni found a leader capable of breeding acceptable new traditions from the old, a man prepared to jettison practices which hampered his people and yet determined meticulously to preserve their identity as a nation. He co-operated with the protecting power, and his Paramountcy was officially restored to him; but when concessions were called for that appeared to him to threaten Ngoni interests, he steadfastly refused to make them. In 1953 his opposition to Federation led to an uprising, which was put down. He went into exile, and returned only to have his authority abolished. In 1954, still sustained by the loyalty of his people, he died.

For the next twelve years the Ngoni were officially without a Paramount Chief, though the heir, Willard Gomani, remained at the Great Place and was treated with considerable respect, and the aged Mambeya Moyo carried out certain of the duties of a regent. With independence the people were free to acclaim Willard as their true Chief, and, after a period as a Member of the first Malawi Parliament, he was restored to the position of his father, in which he was ceremoniously installed in May, 1966.

In this historical context the installation was of greater interest than might, to some of the visitors present at it, have been apparent. For one thing, it was only the second time this century that a Maseko chief of the direct line had ritually assumed his inheritance; for another, it represented a melding of the authority of a new African state with one of the traditions that had produced it. Not the least curious aspects were the use in the ritual of a Bantu language other than that commonly spoken by the people, and the concomitant resurgence of the musical and poetic patterns characteristic of that language. Thirty years ago Ngoni, described by the early European settlers as Zulu but more properly a form of Swazi, was still spoken by the old people. Today, despite the numbers of young men who have been to South Africa and come in contact with one or other of the Nguni languages there, it persists only in the songs and praises; and, as might be expected where the communication is by ear and is not written down, and where the meaning is only remotely comprehended, has undergone considerable modification.

The public part of the ceremony fell into two sequences, one traditionally oriented, the other perhaps more significant of the new Africa. Whether there was any more private part, and what form it took, are not certain: I thought it tactless to enquire. Traditionally, it would have consisted in essence of a ritual purification, smearing of the Chief with ashes followed by washing with the *tonga* medicine. This medicine, whose nature I do not know, is believed to protect the Chief and the nation from harm. (There appear to be several different types of *tonga*. I have heard of one used in another part of Ncheu district to protect a chief, subordinate to the Inkosi ya Makosi, while out hunting: it was held by a boy who kept a certain distance from the chief and played no other part in the hunt. It is said to be very efficacious in keeping off lions, leopards and other predators); it is a source of oracles and auguries. Its whereabouts is kept secret, and it is the responsibility of the Phungwako semi-royal clan to care for it. It is probable that it was used on this occasion as, after the guests had waited for some time, when the Paramount Chief appeared he was already wearing the *luve* headdress and was escorted by a crowd of warriors performing the *ligubo* war-dance. He took his seat on a newly-erected dais adjoining the grave and memorial of his late father: the dance surged past, the warriors now joined by onlookers and flanked by ululating women.

The burden of the first *ligubo* song was simple, and bore a strong resemblance to certain songs of the Zulu and Swazi. It posed, during the advance of the Inkosi to his place, a relevant question:

1st group	..	<i>Umalile - ?</i>
2nd group	..	<i>Dinga 'mbla'.</i>
1st group	..	<i>Umalile - ?</i>
2nd group	..	<i>Ziyo wa ba'.</i>
Chorus	..	<i>Uyambekwa nguban' ?</i>

(Who is this? He seeks a country. Who is this? (obscure). By whom is he put there?).

When he was seated the answer was produced in the second *ligubo*, introducing the strong and obstinate refrain, both musical and verbal, which to a large extent dominated the subsequent proceedings:

Ban' umtaba te - Ban' umtaba te - Oziyo - ho-ho-ho etc.

(Those of the country, it is they, those of the country.)

After a time the dancers subsided, and the Minister of Local Government, who was also on the dais, made a speech in Nyanja. This was followed by a scriptural reading and prayers for the Inkosi ya Makosi and his people. These specifically Christian elements of the ceremony did not obtrude unduly, or clash with the traditional performances; sandwiched between the speech and the ensuing praise-song, they quite effectively highlighted the modes of accretion and adaptation which kept ritual alive and acceptable to a nation in which social change is taking place.

Two praise-songs were given at the installation. Unfortunately, such is the nature of delivery of *izibongo* that I was unable to transcribe either, and the recordings I took are virtually unintelligible; but the Inkosi subsequently arranged for me to take down an appropriate praise-song which I shall quote later as a typical example of the *genre*. That delivered by Induna Golozero of Mcakatha, one of the old men who are repositories of the songs and customs, differed from it in content and intention. It formed, in fact, the principal item of the ceremony.

At the termination of the prayers the Induna rose, supported by two attendants, and faced the people. He traced the ancestry of the Inkosi ya Makosi and the history of the royal Maseko clan, and of the northward march. Turning to the Chief, he introduced him to the people and the people to him; acclaimed him as worthy of his ancestors; and, for the first time, gave him the Bayetel salute. This was taken up by the warriors, who shouted it three times in deep and solemn voices. The rest of the people followed, combining the salute with all manner of shrieks of joy and excitement.

The turn of the official *mbongi*, Induna Zakulanda, came next. On the actual day, his *isibongo* deviated rather markedly from the usual pattern, in that it incorporated a large amount of political reference which, however acceptable to the politicians present, was not entirely relevant to the occasion. In addition, parts of it were couched in a curious hybrid language, part Ngoni, part Nyanja, more than a little - God save the mark! - Fanakolo. It opened in the orthodox manner, on a high note descending in the course of each stanza, but steadily became more rhetorical and less poetic, and might, in places, have been simply a political speech. This was clever, but a little disappointing; everyone was pleased by it except for those few who really cared for the proper forms and words of *isibongo*, and they did not matter.

The next day, however, when all the important visitors had left, I heard the same *mbongi* deliver a much more suitable praise-song, and it is a version of this that now follows. It is probably incorrect to describe it as a song; it resembles more — though the style, of course, is not related — *Sprechstimme* such as Schoenberg used in the *Gurrelieder* and *Moses und Aron*, speech at varying pitch and with a strong rhythmical balance. In a language as tonally expressive as Ngoni, effects of great power and beauty can be produced: the formal requirements of linguistic tone are either preserved and emphasized, or, for the evocation of wonder and awe, may be reduced or even inverted. Generally the overall pattern of an *isibongo* requires that every stanza should begin on a high note, and loudly; that pitch and intensity should descend, necessarily unevenly, to its conclusion; and that there should be a pause at the end. A large part of the art of the performer consists in the proper management of these pauses. They differ in length according to the sequential requirements of the wording, and a good *mbongi* will vary them considerably, sometimes enhancing the effect by altering the terminal pitch of succeeding stanzas.

Iiiiiii -

I - zwa - ke -

Unemandhla ujinga pansi ujinga pezulu -

Wena tsbinyakanyaka tsba mabandla -

Wena kukapakapa nkomo, ziya gongoseya ziya nyukayo -

Waigwax' nge nqombo mblaxi -

Wena entwana ka Ngwana ka Gwekweni -

uNgwana wadauka wa Shaka kwa Mxilikaxi ngo kwa Mbekwani -

Wadaulo liz'u lonke nge nkhondo wa kwa Zulu -

Wepbuxa mazi nge nge muyomo -

Ubekiwe ndabonye ne zintabeni, waphuxa ubende wa zinkomo -

Ubekiwe ng'ani? -

Ubekiwe ngo Thixo, nguyobekayo ukuti ublale sokho ya linzwe lo-o-onke la pansi -

Wena intombi ya majagha, we' ngublangubla knunzi ya malanga -

Une gama liya ziwa ezizweni ka mabandla -

Unesibongo zikangowalala ndaxizitha -

Wena nkunzi wa ezizwayo, ezizweni, wena uNgwana 'Ngwana 'Ngwan' -

Uzibekerayo sithumbo sa wa pansi nge nkhondo wa kwa Zulu -

Emiblobo yablala epansi nga madolo -

Wena wiyapapa, njenga le nyoni, bati unguyo uNgwana lo-o -

Utinxebe ngebemgebe nyengeza ndhlovu -

Liyatsba liyatsb' ungenampendulo.

Vumani mbuthu, sithokoza we 'Nkosi, siti zinko-o-oma gumet' -

Beeeee -

Bayete gumete!

Bayet' Inkos'!

(Let it be known -

You are strong, you can see below and above, you, the fertilizing rain of the regiments,

You who constantly oversee the cattle that go along tapping their hooves,

You have pierced the fish with a fish-spear,

You, the son of Ngwana and of Gwekweni.

Ngwana it was who departed from Shaka to Mzilikazi's place and to where Mbekwani was,

Who divided the land with the spear of Zulu,

Who drank with his mouth to the water,

Who was placed together with the mountains

And drank the blood of cattle.

Who put him where he was?

He was put there by God, Who has appointed you to be the head of all that is below.

You are the darling of your warriors, you saunter like the bull of days,

Your notable name is famous among the regiments,

The name of your clan is familiar and precious.

You are the famous bull, well-known Ngwana of Ngwana of Ngwana.

You who are able to eviscerate with the spear of Zulu,

Before you the tribes stay down on their knees.

You can fly like a bird, so that the people say, That is Ngwana there.

You can convince the ears of the elephant.

The sun is burning and you do not answer.

Stand up, all of you, acclaim the Chief, shouting your thanks to the Ruler -

Beeeee -

Hail the Chief!

Hail the King!).

It will be obvious to those familiar with the Nguni of the south that the vestiges of the language still found in central Malawi have gone through considerable changes; and this seems to have happened in the comparatively short period of thirty years since the last people died to whom it was an everyday tongue. It is difficult to explain some of the agreements, and a good deal of the word-division, in the foregoing text; but that is how it was given to me. In places it has been necessary, while translating, to make perhaps unwarranted assumptions about words which have undergone modification (e.g. *muyomo* = *mulomo*, *sokho* = *intloko*); otherwise, when no Zulu or Xhosa equivalent could be guessed, a word would be presumed to be Nyanja. In such cases the meaning generally fitted the context (e.g. *tsbinyakanyaka*, 1, 2).

This *isibongo* bears some resemblance to one transcribed and published by Margaret Read in 1937*; four lines (11, 13, 10, 9 and 21, in that order of her version) are almost identical. Its historical statements, however, depart in several particulars from those of the earlier song and appear at first sight to be at variance with some of the accepted accounts of the migration. Read has mentioned the suggestion that Nqaba and Mzilikazi may have been the same person, but the connections of Nqaba with the Tsonga (Shangana) would seem to contradict this. Mbekani, if it is he who is meant, was the father of Nqaba; his name may have been applied to his son. It is possible to suppose that Ngwana may have encountered Mzilikazi while he was on his way to Ulozi, probably when the latter was settled near present-day Pretoria; but it was not Ngwana, but the regent Magadlela after his death, who sought the help of Nqaba against Zwangendaba.

An odd correspondence between this *isibongo* and that of the Swazi chief Bhunu† is perhaps worth mentioning. Bhunu, known by the royal name of Ngwane II, was the

* READ, MARGARET: Songs of the Ngoni People. *Bantu Stud.* 11 (1), 1-35, 1937.

† COCK, P. A. W.: History and *Izibongo* of the Swazi Chiefs. *Bantu Stud.* 5 (2), 181-201, 1931.

father of the present Paramount Chief Sobhuza II. The earlier Ngwane was the great-grandfather of Mswazi, and the praises of Bhunu contain reference to this ancestor. They conclude, just before the Bayetel, with the line *Nkomo zapel' izinselo ziye mzi ni omkulu wase Gogqeni*, the cattle wore out their hooves going to the great enclosure at Gogqeni. One of the names given for the father of Ngwana Maseko is Goqweni (Gwekweni in the *isibongo* above; other names are Songobe and Msizi no bulako) The name appears to have a locative form, and is more probably that of a place: "ka" may be construed as "from" rather than "son of". The mother of Ngwana Maseko was NaNqongwane, also "from Goqweni". Naming for ancestors is very common among all branches of the Nguni. It is amusing, but idle, to speculate on a possible connection between the two lineages.

Following the *izibongo* the regent Mambeya divested himself of his interim authority. This was done ritually; a tall and dignified man, now bent with age, he performed a short dance, singing antiphonically with his attendants:

Mambeya: *Songwe.*

Attendants: *Hyeiye.*

Mambeya: *Songwe.*

Attendants: *Hyeiye.*

Attendants: *Kusali?*

Mambeya and Attendants: *Kusali Mambeya, bwenzi tienderana?*

(The weaver-bird, *hyeiye*, the weaver-bird, *hyeiye*. If he had not been there? If there had been no Mambeya, would there still have been friendly contact among us?).

Mambeya is a strange and interesting figure, the last of the *alumušana* of Cikusi. He first became regent some time after the death of Gomani I, held that position until the accession of Gomani II, and assumed it again after his death. Nearly seventy years elapsed between his first appointment to the regency and his final relinquishment of it. The moment was not without pathos.

With his abdication, and the ensuing resumption of the *ligubo*, the traditional sequence came to an end. The Inkosi retired, and after a while reappeared dressed in Western clothes. This initiated the second, governmental, phase of the installation ceremony. It consisted almost entirely of speeches punctuated by patches of *ligubo*.

In the course of the first speech the Government Agent, Ncheu, on behalf of the then President-Designate, Ngwazi Dr. Kamuzu Banda, invested the Inkosi with the style and dignity of a Higher Native Authority. This strangely-named post is a relic of Protectorate rule, a recognition that some chiefs are more so than others, but it happens to accord quite aptly with the current Malawi policy of accepting the traditional rulers as an integral part of the state, and the title was respectfully conferred and received. Then there was a speech by the Minister of State, followed by an address from Chief Mambeya. The proceedings concluded with a speech of thanks from the Inkosi ya Makosi.

I say "concluded", and indeed officially they had; but the people still wished to see their Chief, and for four days they continued to call at the Great Place, bringing offerings, singing and dancing, and accepting the lavish amounts of food and drink that, in accordance with custom, he had prepared for them. Calling to offer my congratulations the next day, I shared in this hospitality: as I left I was presented with a bottle of wine. On the last day of the celebrations the President-Designate called on the Inkosi, and though the visit was semi-private it added a further dimension to the careful but still spontaneous blending of tradition and modernity which characterized the installation.

One of the happiest and most hopeful virtues of the Bantu African is his capacity simultaneously to conserve and to adapt. The whole tenor of the ceremonies at Lizulu illustrated this, and seemed to emphasize that, perhaps paradoxically, there is a future for tradition. Fortunately or unfortunately, the musical part of the proceedings was entirely traditional; had it been otherwise, it might have been of greater interest, but it

would certainly have caused some offence. And however backward-looking the forms may be, the substance tends constantly towards the contemporary. While typing out the earlier part of this article, I was visited by the Inkosi and his *mbongi*, and permitted to record another, freshly composed, *isibongo*, far more relevant to the deeds of its immediate addressee. In it the Chief was reminded of his war service and his quite extensive travels, and was praised for having taken part in the defeat of Germans, Italians and Japanese.

NOTE ON NGONI HISTORY:

Part of the earlier section of this article relates facts which are at variance with certain published work on Ngoni history. Much of my information was obtained from Margaret Read's "Ngoni of Nyasaland", and confirmed by reference to local informants, including the Inkosi ya Makosi. I believe Prof. Read's work to have been much more careful and accurate than that of the authorities who dier from her, and have accepted it as being, within the bounds of probability, definitive.

I must express my thanks for help received from Inkosi ya Makosi Gomani III, Induna Zakulanda, Induna Golozera, Mr. H. Mambala Loga, Mr. L. H. Mambala and Mrs. Crispin Jones in the preparation of this article.