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UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND

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Title: Mwali in Venda. Some Observations on the Significance of the High God in the Late 19th and Early 20th Century.

by: A.G. Schutte

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UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND - AFRICAN STUDIES INSTITUTE

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A.G. Schutte

MWALI IN VENDA. Some observations on the significance of the High God in the late 19th and early 20th century.

Introduction

The title of the paper suggests a tentative investigation into the nature of the belief in Mwali in Venda and its historical significance. Initial research into the problem was stimulated by reading Daneel[1] and Ranger's[2] studies on the Mwari cult in Rhodesia. Ranger looked at the tremendous influence the cult had during the 1896-97 rebellions in Rhodesia. The cult had an intertribal nature and also fulfilled the role of an "intelligence service". It is a striking feature of revolts encountered in many Third World countries that an alternative source of legitimation for political authority and action is often ultimately located with the highest religious authority. This, for example was the case with Ngai the High God of the Kikuyu during the Mau Mau movement. An activation of an otiose Being in terms of the legitimation of an alternative desired order of things is not unknown in the literature. Revolts aiming at the realisation of a new state of affairs also have to cope with the ethnic diversity of those who wish to change their fate. This also has consequences for the source of legitimation who may then be accorded an intertribal character.[3] In the case of Mwari however, there is clear evidence that he had intertribal significance for a long period before the rebellions occurred.

Daneel concurs with the view of Von Sicard that the name used for the High God in the Kilimanjaro region, muali may well be related to Mwari.[4]

The Mbire tribe, one of the oldest groupings associated with the predecessors of the present day Shona, migrated, according to tradition, from the lakes region of Tanzania. They acted as priests in the Mwari shrines during Rozvi rule which had its headquarters at Zimbabwe.(5) The name muali means "sower" and the god is mainly associated with fertility(6) Mwari is also chiefly associated with fertility of crops and of women. He is the giver of rain and his most popular praise name is Dzivaguru, great pool.(7) In addition he also has great curative powers. He has both male and female features. As a male he reveals himself in the name Sororezhou, "head of the elephant" and as a female, in the pool, the dark recesses of fertility.(8) He is the father of creation who manifests himself in lightning or in a shooting star coming from above. He is a personal being beyond and above ancestral hierarchies and could only be approached through the mediation of the senior lineage ancestors (mhondoro or vharudzi) or through his special messengers. Through the centuries syncretism with other cults such as the Chaminuka and mhondoro probably took place(9) which also may have contributed to the popularity of the cult in the intertribal context. The Mwari priesthood acted as a coordinating agency in the Rozvi confederacy. Through the cult, especially through the interlinking of its shrines, some degree of centralisation could thus be achieved. When the Ndebele conquered a large part of southern Rhodesia, they concentrated their power in a relatively small area and had no need for a coordinating agency or for other political functions of the cult. Its relevance for fertility and harvest remained important to the conquerors.(10) The coordinating function of the cult acquired a new significance during the rebellions. Its importance can however be overstressed as other political factors also played a role in the spreading of the rebellions.

We may thus conclude that the Mwari cult had for a long time preceding the rebellions around the turn of the century, been associated with intertribal affairs and that, at least as far as the Rozvi are concerned, it was associated with the legitimation of political authority.

The intertribal aspect even extends to the Whites because it is reported that when the BSAC started moving across the Limpopo in 1890 the Voice

of Mwari told Lobengula that he was a small man killing others - he should look at Mwari's "white sons" (vana)crossing the river.(11) Later the appellation changed and the Whites were called "sister's sons (vazukuru) in relation to Blacks. This implied not only a joking relationship but also that the muzukuru should not abuse his privileges and that he should acknowledge the relative senior position of his mother's brother to whose status he cannot succeed.(12)

The most important feature of Mwari in Rhodesia is however that it is an organised cult with a regular priesthood associated with it. Daneel considers the Matonjeni shrine complex to be the centre of the cult. At Matonjeni itself some six offices could be distinguished. There is a high priest, a keeper of the shrine, a hosannah or dedicated male, a jukwa dancer, a second priest and interpreter of the Voice of Mwari and a medium. Messengers called vanyai from ritual outposts, situated in Ndebele and Karanga territory normally undertake two trips per year to Matonjeni. An average of about forty messengers still annually visit the shrine. Gifts are collected in sub-chieftainships from headmen and these are passed on to the messenger of the chieftainship. This money is then brought to Mwari. A messenger usually makes two trips, one before the rainy season and another after the harvest. The gifts are brought at the first visit.(13) Special visits were also made. The Venda were also involved in the cult organisation. The keeper who is also called the 'eye of Mwari' is a Venda and Daneel maintains:

> "Here we find the links with and continuation of the historical past, because even before they migrated to the southern parts of Rhodesia and northern Transvaal, the Venda had been closely associated with the Mbire tribe and regularly sent delegations to the Matonjeni shrines. Though their messengers now visit Matonjeni less frequently than before, we see that some of their kinsmen are still actively involved at the cult shrines."(14)

After the granting of Responsible Government in 1923 the relevance of the cult

seems to have suffered. There was a despondency among the priests. The Shona lost faith in the power of their traditional God to rid the country of White settlers. The cult gained some political influence with the rise of nationalism in the 1950's[15] and it also suffered competition from Zionist church leaders. One prominent Zionist leader succeeded in supplanting the three main functions of the cult namely promoting crop fertility, healing and the influencing of tribal politics through the adaptation of his church practices and litugical patterns.[16]

Before we move on to a discussion of Mwali in Venda and the articulation of phenomena there with those in Rhodesia, we will first look at a most important piece of oral evidence which relates to the earliest history of the Venda and their interaction with Rhodesian peoples. (Very little is known about the Mwari cult in other areas of South Africa. Van Warmelo reports that there are some people in the Mapungubwe area connected with the Ngwale cult.[17] Various scholars are however working on the problem at present.[18]

Mwali in Venda Legend

Ngoma-lungundu[19] is the name of a legend recorded by the teacher E. Mudau in the thirties. At the time of its publication the authenticity of the traditions was questioned because of certain parallels to the Old Testament contained in it. Ngoma-lungundu is the name of the drum which accompanied the Venda on their journey to the south. Its role in the history of the trek was assumed by some scholars to be similar to that of the Ark of the Covenant of the Israelites. Neither the Diffusionist hypothesis about the Semitic origins of the Lemba/Venda nor the possible Biblical origin of the legend will interest us here. Instead, we will focus on the relationship between the Venda and their God through the period of time spanned by the legend.

> Originally the Vhasenzi, the ancestors to the royal Singo clan of the Venda lived in a city called Matongoni (The Graves). They had this tremendous drum which was not to be seen by anybody. It was the drum of Mwali, the Voice of the Great God, King of Heaven. (Mambo wa Denga).

But also of the Ancestor God of the Vhasenzi and Vhakalanga. The king's name was Mwali and no man was permitted to see him except the high priest to whom he spoke in a great voice. Before he spoke the drum was sounded. He was concerned at one stage in history about the quarreling and factionalism among his subjects and punished them by having the drum beaten very loudly. Many people died as a result; only the Vhalemba survived as a group because they had been observant of the law. Eventually, and as a result of strife among his subjects, Mwali took leave and went to live under the earth. He is also said to walk on the clouds at times. A smaller drum, called by the same name, was given his son, Tshilume. This drum resembled the big one in magic and killing power. (In the same text there follows what appears to be a parallel account with an added description of the burning of Matongoni by princes fighting for the chieftainship. In this account the successor was instructed by Mwali to depart from the country and to move to the south). On their move southwards, the members of the house of the maternal uncle of Tshilume, the Vhandalamo and the VhaLemba had to carry the sacred drum. The drum never had to touch the ground. After a month of travelling the VhaSenzi arrived in the country. In trepidation the chief of the VhaKalanga or VhaNyai allowed the VhaSenzi to sojourn in his country and implored Tshilume not to sound the drum. They did not accept the gifts of the local chief but moved on to the territory of another Kalanga chief called Tshivhi (evil). This chief killed their messengers and didn't allow them to live in his country. Instead he prepared for battle. The drum was beaten and all the soldiers of Tshivhi, except himself fell into a deep sleep and were killed. After this chief was killed the Venda remained in the country for three years. They started intermarrying with the Kalanga. Mwali appeared in a fire that lit up the whole mountain.

He enjoined his people to arise and go to the country he had promised them and not be beguiled by the local women. In this period the VhaLemba however, did not intermarry. The people then moved on to the country of Mubvumela. The drum was handled carelessly and it fell to the ground. As punishment Mwali sent lions which devoured many people. The king poured many libations when he observed the slaughtering of the princes and people, but to no avail. He went up the hill of Mubvumela and disappeared.' A great voice spoke to the high priest informing him that Tshilume would not return. A new king, called Tshikalanga because of the country of sojourn, was installed. He was given the sacra of the tribe, including the drum. Mwali again told the people to go to the promised land across a river which was the younger brother of the Dzambwedi (Zambesi). After reaching the Limpopo, they built camp again but many people as well as the king died of Malaria, at Bogwa (the place of dying). Under their new king, Hwami who was installed through the high priest on Mwali's order. (It is not stated that Mwali named a specific son of Tshikalanga. He may have been the choice of the high priest). Under Hwami the VhaSenzi settled on Tshiendeulu mountain overlooking the Nzhelele valley. The original inhabitants of the country subjected themselves freely because of the reputation the drum had. Another trek was started down south to Pedi country but eventually Hwami and his people returned to settle under Tshiendeulu mountain. They built a great town Dzata, to resemble the city of Matongoni and the town of Mubvumela as they have heard it from their fathers.

Various oral traditions are available for the subsequent history. Ngoma-lungundu continues to relate the subsequent involvement of Mwali in the history of the VhaSenzi:

Dyambeu, the successor to Hwami[20] after subjecting many peoples, received the order from Mwali in his private shelter to attack and subject the Vhatavhatsindi, a mountain people living near lake Fundudzi. Dyambeu thought it would have been an easy victory and ordered that the drum be hung in a tree as it would not be used. The drum fell to the ground however and the Vhatavhatsindi routed them and captured the drum. Dyambeu was flung into the lake but one of his hands again rose above the water holding a fire-brand. The drum was damaged in its fall. Eventually the Vhatavhatsindi were conquered with the aid of a magic horn given to Tshishonga, a Ndalamo, by Mwali and the drum was recaptured. On his return Mwali instructed him to place someone on the throne. The makhadzi (eldest sister of the late chief by a different mother - AGS) selected the eldest son of Dyambeu, Bele. A new priest was also installed from a different house than that to which the old ones who have died out belonged. Tshisonga fell out with Bele and a war ensued. A great fire "not lit by a human hand" raged in the countryside and many people died. Tshishonga overcame Bele who was killed. Tshishonga still possessed the sacred lore and horn of Mwali and was therefore powerful. He installed a new king, Dimbanyika and subsequently after he died the youngest son of the last mentioned: Thoho-ya Ndou (Head of the Elephant). Gole, the high priest, and Magoro, a commoner who found much favour at Dzata called the other brothers together in order to attack Dzata. Thoho-ya-Ndou fled with his people and disappeared. Ravhura, one of the latter's brothers who turned back on the way to Dzata to fetch arms, was ordered by Mwali to go and live at Makonde.

In summarising the above legend we have been deliberately selective in favour of those elements that relate to the Rhodesian phenomena as well as those

which relate to my, as yet, incomplete field data. The following features of the legend should be emphasised:

1. Mwali originally was a sacred king and apex of the ancestral line of the VhaSenzi.
2. He disappeared under the earth (in an uncited account at Mubvumela) and so did a series of chiefs who were faithful to him.
3. Obedience to him and respect for his symbol was of supreme importance. Discord and factionalism, especially in regard to chiefly succession should be avoided. National or tribal unity and the purity of the stock had to be upheld.
4. Mwali's concern for fertility is not a central theme.
5. Communication between religious functionaries and Mwali varied through time. First there was the high priest, then Tshilume, the successor to Mwali as king. The ritually pure Lemba and the wife-giving lineage of the Ndalamo gained in importance until direct communication was established with Tshishonga. A priesthood of kingship seems to be installed with Gole without any direct links to Mwali.
6. The appointment of successors to chiefly position passed from Mwali, probably to the high priest then to the Ndalamo chief and then to the makhadzi in conjunction with the priest (for lineage ancestors.)
7. Mwari also revealed himself directly to chiefs. (Hwami, Ravhura and of course the oldest: Tshilume).

The Ethnographic Evidence.

Stayt[21] reports that, at the beginning of the ploughing season petty chiefs would bring seed gathered from their people to the chief who would them mix (suka) this with a magic powder which was sometimes obtained from Mwali by a messenger sent specially to Rhodesia with a heavy payment. An emissary was also sent to Mwali with presents of oxen and money when there was insufficient rainfall. This was not necessarily done because the chief's diviner may have established this to have been due to witchcraft or some ritual neglect. The art of rainmaking in Venda does not seem to be specifically tied to Mwali.

Otherwise the informants of Stayt have identified Mwali with the deity Raluvhimba who revealed himself at "Mbvumela in the Matoba hills".(22) This deity would reveal his desires to the chief in a voice of thunder and in a fire near the chiefs kraal. The fire always disappeared before a person could reach it. The chief entered a hut and addressed the deity who either replied from the thatch of the hut or from a tree nearby. More specifically Stayt reports that Raluvhimba appeared in a cave at Luvhimbi on a mountain called Tsha-wa-dinda. Mwali appeared in a great flame on a platform of rock above the cave. This was before Rambura, "one of the sons of Thoho-ya-Ndou..at the time of the disintegration of the tribe .." took the district from Muthivhi, a Muthavhatsinde chief.(23) Normally a special messenger, whose office was hereditary, was sent with a black ox and a piece of black cloth to Mbvumela in the Matopo hills. The voice, "speaking in Tshikaranga accepted the offering, and the messenger refreshed himself with beer and meat, which he found mysteriously placed for him under the trees."(24) The father of the present chief Mphephu once sent to Modjadji in order to ask for rain but that year the drought was very bad. The chief then sent £100 in cash to Mwali who accepted the gift and cared for the emissaries on their way back again, in a miraculous manner. In other ethnographic and missionary descriptions very little is to be found in addition to this.

As a spin-off of my own research into the problem of the territorial organisation of the supra-lineage ancestral cults, I was also interested in Mwali's significance. The evidence from the Rhodesian material, the legend and the ethnographic accounts, I assumed, need not be contradictory. As stated in the beginning, my initial interest was prompted by the significance the Mwari cult had in times of rebellion and political crisis. My first interview with one of the widows of Mphephu I, against whom the Boers waged war in November/December 1898, did not amount to much. This war was provoked, in the eyes of the Boers, by Mphephu's continuation of his father's aggressive and expansionist policy towards neighbouring tribes. Mphephu I also did not pay the backlog in hut tax expected from him and the Transvaal Government was approached to intervene by one of his brothers, Sinthumule, who believed that he was the legitimate heir to the throne and who pressed for recognition by the government. The Boers hopelessly overestimated the power of Mphephu

and drove him and his whole section of the royal Singo clan over the Limpopo where they found a home through the favour of the BSAC.

The first interview soon led me to a very old woman in her nineties who was at present at Mphephu's stronghold at Songozwi below the krantzes of Hanglip at the time of attack. She related how she had to cook for the messengers of Mwali before the outbreak of hostilities. The messengers said that Mphephu's people shouldn't shoot first or should not shoot at all for the "white ants" would just come and settle peacefully at the foot of the mountain. They would subsequently return to the place from which they had come. If Mphephu would have shot first there would have been a retaliation and his people would scatter. The Funyufunyu people, living at the foot of Magoni mountain (i.e. towards the south-west of the stronghold) attacked the cattleherds and outposts of the white army. The stronghold was thus attacked and Mphephu and his people had to flee. The Funyufunyu people belonged to the Ndalamo (wife giving) section of the royal Singo clan. These people assumed that Mphephu was a coward and therefore they attacked the enemy where they could find him. Nyandalamo stated that the messengers of Mwali came from Mudzivhadi.

At the turn of the century this town was ruled by a makhadzi of Mphephu. The town was situated about 8km. east from the stronghold on the Soutpansberg mountainside. Headman F. Mudimeli the great-grandchild of the original ruler showed us the heavy but finely built stone enclosures. The Mudimeli people were evicted and the site became part of an aforestation scheme.

The headman, who is about 55 years of age, has a keen interest in the history of his people. In his youth the old people related how messengers (vharumiwa) were sent to Mphephu with the message. The name of one of them was Ndzogo. An old man Ma. at Mudimeli's place could remember another name - that of Malada. These messengers brought the news from Vhukalanga and passed through Mudzivhadi before going to Mphephu. Ma. also added that the message, apart from the injunction not to shoot first contained the promise that Mwali would send his 'helpers'. Who these were the old man couldn't say.

The headman wasn't absolutely sure whether the messages originated at Mudzivhadi itself whether they were brought from Rhodesia. The messengers were in any case residents of Mudzivhadi, but when they came to Mphephu "they spoke a language which the Venda couldn't understand". Mudimeli and Mphephu would send for rain-making use of such messengers. Mudzivhadi itself was a very important centre where Mwali revealed himself. In fact after the messengers were sent to Mbyamela (Rhodesia), Mwali would 'visit' Mudzivhadi to see whether rain has fallen. But these were not the only visitations for he came regularly once or twice a year. These visitations seem to have started during the reign of Makhado, i.e. the beginning of the second half of the 19th century. Before the end of the 19th century Mwali was also concerned with war medicine apart from agriculture. Through the makhadzi who acted as medium and interpreter of Mwali, he would forewarn the Mphephu people of impending attacks and danger. He would also give her medicine which would protect the soldiers from bullets. This medicine would induce the enemy to shake when pulling the trigger and so miss his target. There is no clear evidence of war medicine being supplied before the war of 1898. Other sources however indicate that doctoring of the soldiers did take place before the war but not with reference to Mwali. The supply of protective war medicine coincide with Makhado's military exploits in the Northern Transvaal.

The main emphasis of Mwali's visitations here at Mudzivhadi was on agriculture. He set the time for ploughing as well as the quantity to be ploughed. He predicted the abundance of the harvest and the occurrence of drought. When he came to Mudzivhadi he appeared as a very bright light or star. This light moved and stopped over a thicket (ancestral graves?) called Nyadombo. It lit up the whole countryside and the women would make mufululo (high pitched trilling sound). The light would then move on to the makhadzi's house where it would grow dimmer and enter the house. Here Mwali would speak to her. (The light must have been visible for when he left darkness came very abruptly according to my informants). The thicket is still respected today even when Mwali doesn't visit there anymore. Mwali ceased appearing here in 1929 according to headman Mudimeli. An old resident maintains that Mwali later hurt the priest of the Mudimeli lineage and he was asked by the

chief not to come again. The makhadzi subsequently however, did send people to Mbvumela to ask for rain. The chief of the Singo clan, Mphephu was not allowed to enter Mudzivhadi because it was the sacred precinct of the makhadzi. He had to stay at a place called Tshamulomba, about 300 metres to the north of the town. There he received his food and beer.

The other centre where Mwali regularly visited was at Makonde in the east of Vendaland. In Ngoma-lungundu, the first chief Ravhura was ordered by Mwali to break off the pursuit of his younger brother, Thoho-ya-Ndou, and to go and live at that place. It was also from here that a messenger was regularly sent to Rhodesia. In this case however the place where rain was asked, was Malungudzi just north of the Limpopo.(25) This mountain was the place of origin of the first inhabitants of the area especially of the people of Luvhimbi and Mianzvi who are considered to have been Mbedzi by Dzivhani.(26) Headman Ravhura, who was my informant may have confused Malungudzi with another place because he maintains that this place was north of Zimbabwe and distinct from Mbvumela. The picture becomes even more complicated because the messenger to that place, Magwabeni was a Ngona and the language of these people Ravhura considers to be related to Tshikalanga, the language Mwali spoke. This may have been the case but we have already noticed that the makhadzi of Mphephu I could also understand the Karanga which Mwali spoke.

As in Mudzvhadi, Mwali appeared at Makonde in a great light which lit up the whole mountain. The light arrived with a thud and was accompanied by a great wind that flattened huge trees. As the light grew dimmer it either went into the mouth of a cave on the mountain or hovered near the house of the medium, Magwabeni. The messages given to him were exclusively concerned with agricultural matters. Apart from announcing the times on which tilling and of maize and groundnuts sowing should commence, Mwali also prohibited his people to use oxen and ploughs. Only the use of the hoe was permissible. Obedience to these rules would have guaranteed an abundant harvest. Cattle were to be used for milk and meat only. Apart from stipulating and separating the planting times for groundnuts and maize gave instructions about the gathering of morula fruit

Magwabeni was also the messenger to 'Malungudzi' from where he brought instructions with more or less the same content as those given locally at Makonde. He also told the people that Wednesdays and the first day of the new moon should be days of rest. No tilling should be done on this day. Ravhura maintains that the people at Mianzvi, Luvhimbi and Thengwe were subject to these instructions which they had to receive at Ravhura's place. Ravhura never went to Tshisinavute, a famed rain maker at Mianzvi who has close ties to Modjadji in order to ask for rain. In fact her relative, the headman of Luvhimbi, had to bring a black sheep to Ravhura in order to obtain phamba (medicine) for making rain. Magwabeni was the last messenger and local medium of Mwali at Makonde. He was active during the reign of the present headman's father, Masindi Ravhura. In either 1922 or 1925 after the death of the medium,Mwali stopped his visits.(27)

To the Mudimeli people Mwali had his home at Mbvumela and to the people at Makonde he lived at Malungudzi. He did however show his interest in the Venda by paying visits and it is general knowledge that when a whirring metallic sound moving in an west-east direction is heard people rejoice and ascribe it to Mwali travelling to Makonde.(28)

Mwali appeared at least at three other places namely at a cave at Luvhimbi, at Musekwa and among the Tshivula people who in the 19th century lived near Saltpan. These people directed their special requests to Mwali through the Mphephu people when the latter sent their messenger to Mbvumela. In times of drought, however, they performed their own rain ceremony at the mountain Lijume. This happened long before the war of 1898. Through divination a makhadzi and a man would be chosen to go up the mountain. The makhadzi carried a pot of water and the man accompanied her, playing the phalaphala (kudu or sable) horn. On top of the mountain they said praises to Mwali and selected a big boulder. This was then rolled to the edge and the water poured over it. The stone was then released to crash and break at the bottom. Mifululo was sounded by the people below and the phalaphala was played. Those on the mountain came back and went straight to their homes. The same or next day rain would fall.

Mwali also paid the Tshivula people visits in the same way as at the other

centres Chief Tshivhula then went up the mountain, also called Tshivhula(?) where he received instructions. It is reported that Mwali foretold the occurrence of the rinderpest.

Other accounts I have collected relate to the messengers journeys to Mbvumela. Some informants pointed out that Mwali sometimes spoke in Karanga to the Lemba who officiated at chiefly ancestral rites. Should there be a group of Lemba living near a chiefs place, this section would be called Mbelengwa.(29) The reply of Mwali at ancestral rites and the role the Lemba play still has to be investigated.

Since 1965 E. Mudau took the initiative to organise a Dzata day. This is meant to be a day of national unity and in the speeches some references to Mwali were to be found. Preceeding the meeting at Dzata in recent years, the thevula (harvest) ceremony was regularly performed at the chiefs place. Mudau regrets this because, apart from other reasons, the emphasis on the precedence of the Singo (royal) clan and their ancestors defeats the purpose of a national day.

Conclusions

From the concededly patchy evidence above one can hardly come to some coherent synthesis. In general the Venda material does not contradict the Rhodesian. Mbvumela was the place where Mwali, the first sacred king went underground. This place is located at the Matopo Hills. My informants did not know where Matonjeni was but the two interpreters I used assured me that the Venda equivalent of the name was Matongoni - the same name the Senzi ancestral home had.

Eyewitness accounts also substantiate Daneels material on the procedure followed by the messengers when they reached the shrine of Mwali in Rhodesia. Mudzivhadi and Makonde furthermore were, in Daneel's terminology, ritual outposts of the central cult. Regular biannual visits by messengers do not seem to have been the case. Special requests of headmen and chiefs had to be directed via the two abovementioned centres to Mwali in Rhodesia even in those instances where Mwali revealed himself spontaneously.

The legitimation of political authority is a central theme in the various accounts presented here. The various shifts of the agents appointing successors to political office have been noted (see p. 8). In the 19th and 20th centuries political succession among the Singo was mainly a matter for the makhadzi and priest (tshifhe) for lineage ancestors. Although Mwali did not anymore figure in the appointment of chiefly successors our evidence suggests a strong support for the two traditionally important Singo lineages in the East and West. Makhado received support for his military expansion. It was however more the maintenance of authority which was underscored through Mwali's setting of time and space boundaries in the agricultural cycle. In setting these boundaries meant a control of economic activities. Even the injunction not to use ploughs and oxen meant preventing certain people benefiting more than others and consequently upset the distribution of wealth. The use of the plough would have cut down - in those early times - the amount of labour needed. Access to labour, highly in demand during the tilling and harvesting seasons, was limited and had an equalising effect on the quantity produced in each homestead. Prohibiting the use of the plough meant the maintenance of the status quo.

Ultimately the maintenance of political control by the Singo clan was effected by these regular visitations. They mysteriously came to an end in the mid to late 1920's. The Rhodesian connection may have broken down when the cult suffered a decline after 1923. Internal political developments and White interference in the power structure may be responsible for this. More research in this area is needed.Since this period the legitimation of political authority in religious terms seems to have shifted to the increased relevance of lineage ancestors of the chiefly houses.

17.3.77.

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