

4.4.12 Appendix 12 - Concept of Mhondoro Amongst the Korekore Speaking People in North-Eastern Zimbabwe

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The following is a summary extracted from Lan, David. 1987. *Guns & Rain : Guerrillas & Spirit Mediums in Zimbabwe*. James Currey London and University of California Press Berkeley and Los Angeles, with notes and illustrations provided by R Wade:-

Unlike all other mhondoro mediums Nehanda is believed to have two separate, equally legitimate traditions of mediums. One in the Mazoe region near the capital, Harare, the other in Dande. A medium of the Mazoe Nehanda, a woman named Charwe, was a major leader of the 1896 rebellion against the new colonial state of Rhodesia. Together with another leader of the rebellion, the medium of Kagubi, she was sentenced to death and hanged. A powerful and prolific oral tradition grew up around her name. As hero of the national resistance she was rivaled only by Chaminuka, a mhondoro of the Zezuru peoples of central Zimbabwe who came to be regarded as her brother. In many of the new versions of old myths that grew out of the years of struggle, this brother and sister pair are characterized as the original founders of the Shona nation.



Mudau, E & Motenda, M.M. 1958 "The Drum of Ngoma-lungundu and Chief Ramabulana" History of the Venda People Northern Transvaal. By The Government Printer 1958. (Union of South Africa Department of Native Affairs).

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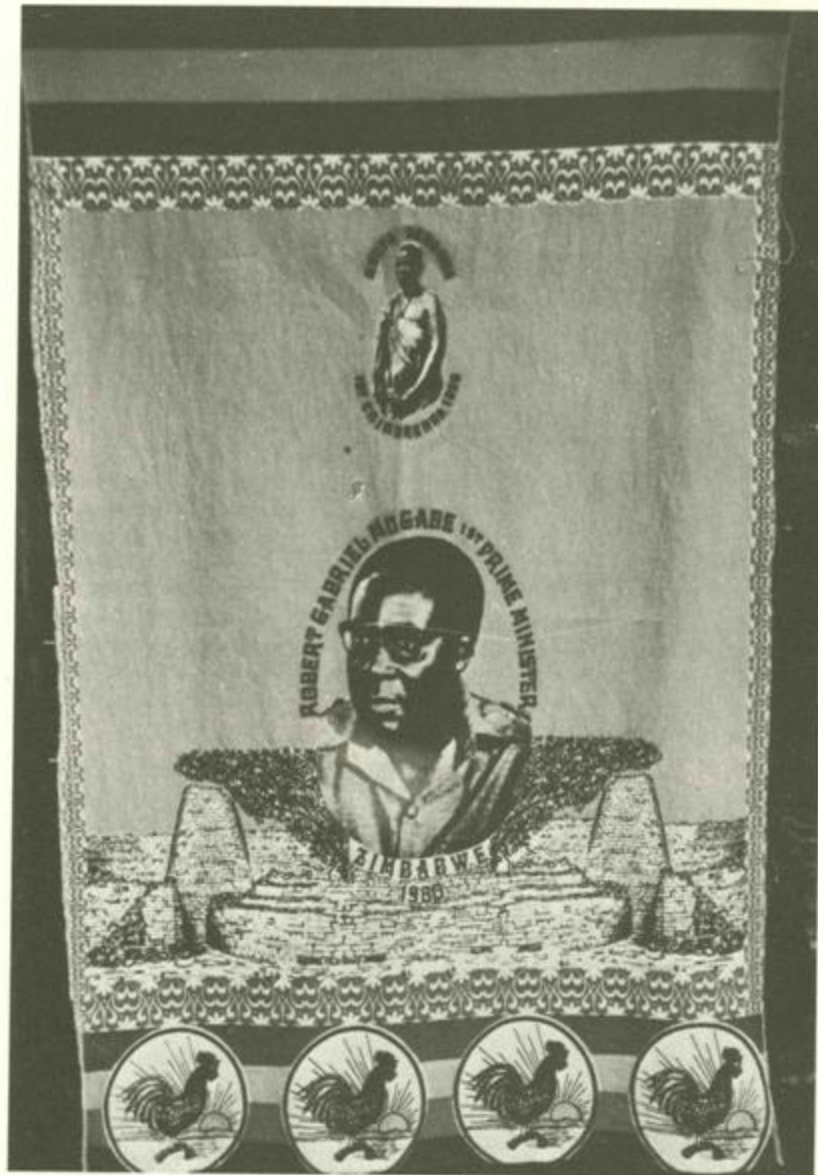
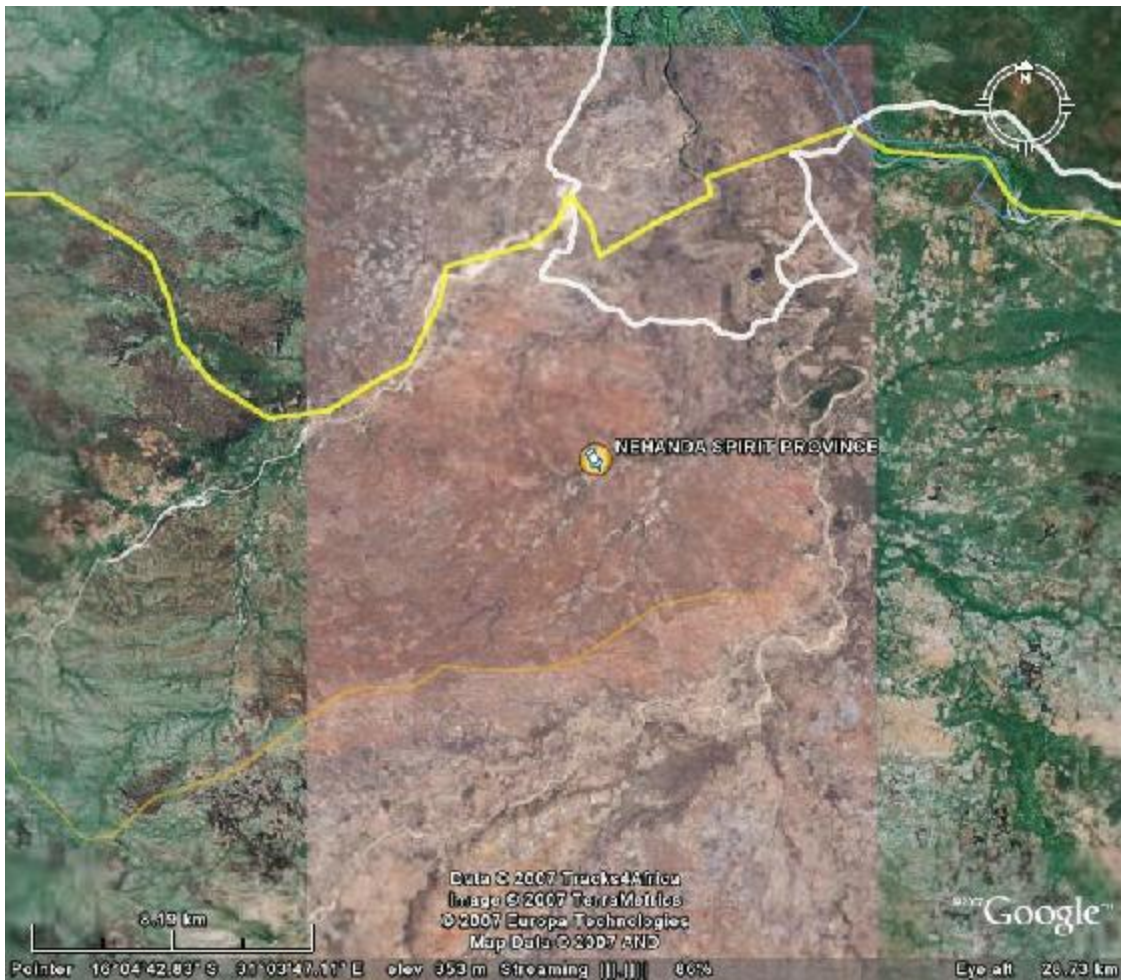


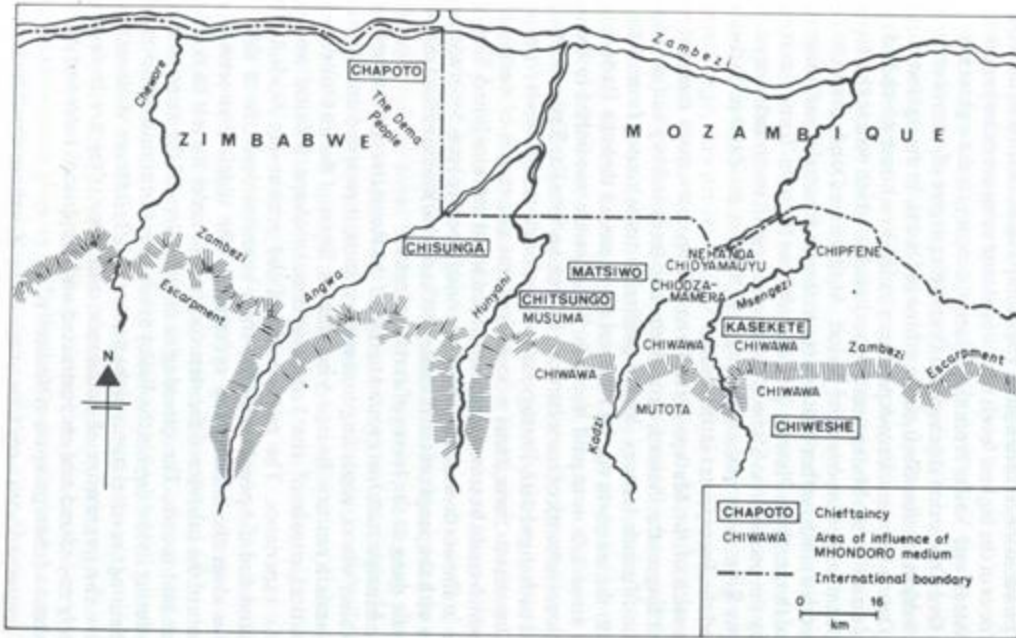
Plate 15 The medium of Nehanda, hanged in 1895 (see Plate 1), bequeaths the authority of the ancestors to the first prime minister of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe. Many similar designs appeared on cloths printed to celebrate Independence in 1980



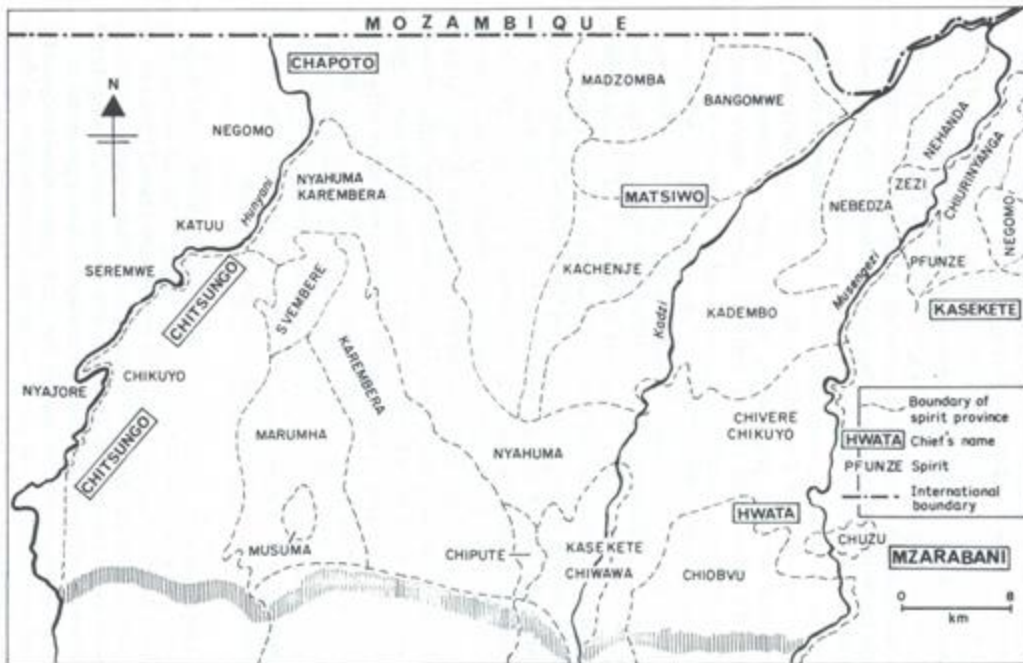
The Dande Area and the location of the Spirit Province of the mthondoro of Nehanda along the Zambezi River in Northern Zimbabwe / Mozambique, 800 km north of Tshiendeulu



The Dande Area and the location of the Spirit Province of the mhondoro of Nehanda along the Musengezi tributary of Zambezi River in Northern Zimbabwe / Mozambique, 800 km north of Tshiendeulu



Map 2.2 The chiefs and the major mhondoro, c. 1980



Map 3.1 The mhondoro of southern Dande, c. 1960 (adapted from Garbett, 1977)

All men and women are expected to provide for and protect their families as best they can. Even when they die and leave their bodies in the grave they do not cease to care for their descendents. Women and men with their limited powers, their ignorance and weaknesses have been transformed into ancestors or *midzimu* who know the future before it happens and can cure every ill.

The form an ancestor takes is *mweya* (breath or air). Ancestors have no material form and so can be in all places at the same time. But they continue to have sensory experience. They can see and hear, they have emotions and desires. But they are never frivolous or mean. The welfare of their descendents is their sole concern. There is only one reason why they make a descendent ill. This is to give a sign that they wish to possess him or her, to speak through her or his mouth to all their descendents to warn that some disaster is about to strike or to complain that they have been forgotten and to ask that beer be brewed or a child named in their memory.

When a chief dies he is transformed into a *mhondoro* and becomes a source of the fertility of the land itself. He provides rain for the fields and protects the crops as they grow. Rain will only be withheld if the *mhondoro's* laws are disobeyed. If incest, murder or witchcraft take place drought follows and crops will fail. But if the descendents of the *mhondoro* obey his laws and perform his ceremonies in due time, they will live in peace and plenty.

The word *mhondoro* means lion. When a chief dies his spirit makes its way into the bush where it enters the body of a lion. Some people say that a few days after a chief is buried, a tiny lion without a mane crawls up through a hole left for it at the side of the grave and scampers off into the forest.

One of the most unusual features of the *mhondoro* is that each is thought to rule over a specific territory which he is believed to have conquered or been given when he was alive.

Two categories of people cannot become *midzimu*. These are *ngozi*, people who have led an unsatisfactory life, and the *muroyi* or witch. People who are childless cannot become *midzimu* because, so it is argued, they have no descendents to look after or to act as mediums for them. When such a person dies she or he becomes a *ngozi* who wanders through the villages angry and malicious, bringing harm and destruction for no other reason than its unquenchable fury and spite.

The second category of people who cannot become ancestors is the witch or *muroyi*. The typical act of witchcraft is cannibalism or, more accurately, necrophagy. Witches kill people, including their own children, or rob graves to find human flesh to eat. They commit incest and adultery. They run about to do their evil deeds naked at night. They ride on the backs of hyenas. They can transform themselves into hyenas, crocodiles or snakes at will. Hyenas, crocodiles or snakes act as familiars for witches, as may *zvidoma*, very small people the size of children who carry out the witches' commands.

The *mashave* (sing. *shave*) are the last category of non-material beings we need be concerned with. All *mashave* are the spirits of animals or foreigners. They are spirits that

emanate from outside known human society. The mashave shoulder no responsibility and have no message to communicate. Mediums of mashave never dance with mediums of midzimu or mhondoro.

When an ancestor feels the need to communicate directly with its descendents it chooses a woman or a man and uses his mouth to speak. It is said svikiro inobatwa nemidzimu, the medium is grabbed by the ancestor. The medium does not want to be possessed. Indeed possession is a hardship and a trial. It is the all-powerful ancestors who make their choice, 'grab' their mediums and take control of their lives. The medium is thought to lose all control of their lives. He is a person of no special powers and he is the source of the most significant powers on earth.

Unlike possession in many other societies, amongst the Shona possession is never spontaneous. It only occurs at highly structured rituals, which in Dande are known as humbikumbi for midzimu, and mashave for shave. These require weeks of preparation. Beer must be brewed, a team of drummers engaged, all members of the patient's lineage as well as his mother's kin must be invited and given time to arrive from their villages or from the towns. To accommodate town dwellers these rituals are usually held on Saturday nights, starting soon after dark and continuing until long after Sunday's dawn. At the height of the possession season, which starts after the harvest when grain for beer is plentiful, there may be two or even three possession rituals in most villages each week.

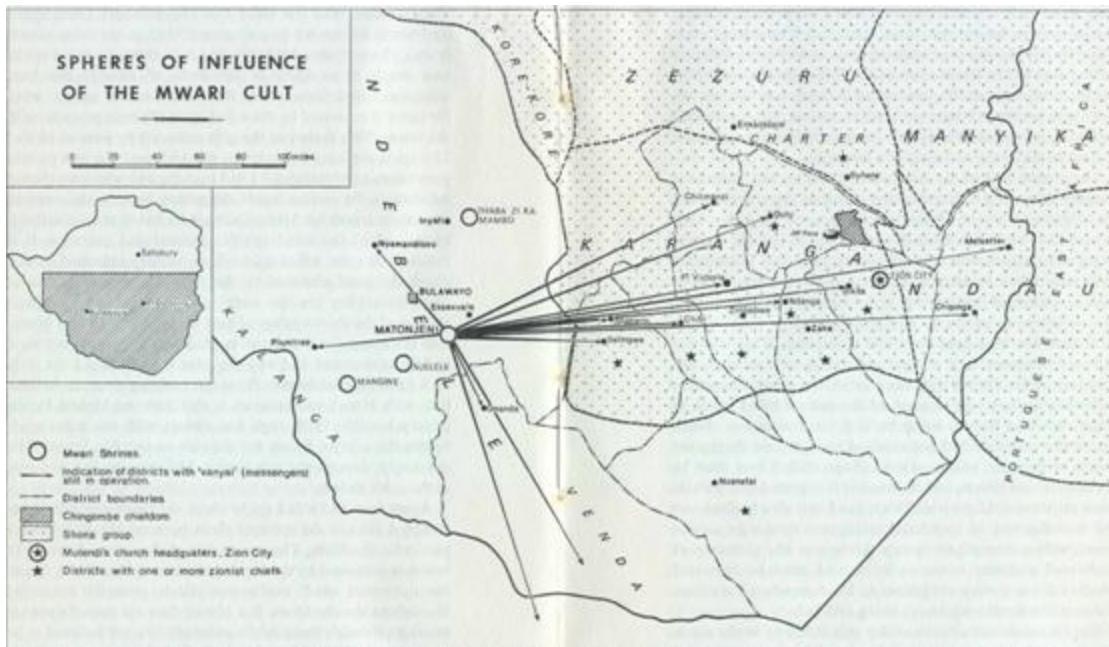
A mhondoro will never possess one of its own descendents.

Shona chiefs have no ritual functions, no 'mystical power over the land'. These functions and powers are entirely in the hands of medium of the chief's ancestors.

The duty of the chief is to rule. The duty of the spirit mediums is to advise the chief. Strictly speaking, it was not the medium who was thought to advise the chief but the mhondoro that possesses him. The living chiefs took responsibility for the spheres of politics and law while chiefs of the past were in charge of fertility and morality.

The mutapi (pl. va tapi) is the manager of the shrine of the mhondoro. His main responsibility is to act as an intermediary between the mhondoro and those who wish to consult with him. He interprets or explains the statements the mhondoro makes.

Another term frequently used to refer to the medium's assistant is munyai (pl. vanyai).



Extracted from: Daneel, M.L. 1970. *The God of the Matopo Hills: An Essay on the Mwariva Cult in Rhodesia*. Mouton, Leiden (1970). Indicating extent of Mwariva influence.

As new areas of land are opened up for cultivation, so the spirit realm expands. New mhondoro and new spirit provinces appear. Mutapi-munyai are chosen. As soon as their rituals succeed and the mhondoro speaks through his medium for the first time, the ownership of the spirit province is established. What belongs to the chief's ancestor belongs to the chief. As long as the mhondoro continues to supply rain to his followers, the chief's ownership of the land seems beyond question, beyond doubt¹⁷⁸.

¹⁷⁸ President Robert Mugabe recently advocated that the land be returned to the people as a means to prolong his stay in government. By returning the land, new spiritual realms were opened and the ancestors returned. Rain was unfortunately not forthcoming at the time and so Robert Mugabe placed a censorship on all weather reports. The people therefore gave their support in return for their ancestor spirits. The Urban vote however was lost. Shortly thereafter, it rained more than ever before in Zimbabwe and Mozambique - 2001.

Plate 5 Nationalist leaders Joshua Nkomo (left) and Robert Mugabe (second from left) being greeted at Salisbury airport in 1962 by a veteran of the 1896 uprising. The ceremonial axe with which they are being presented is identical to those used by spirit mediums and symbolises the legitimate ownership of the land. (See Plate 3.)



The term mambo, meaning chief, is commonly used to refer to a medium. If you were near a medium's home and asked where the medium was, you would be directed without hesitation to the home of a medium. The gano or ritual axe which all mediums carry is a symbol of the ownership of the chieftaincy as is the unique fur hat which some mediums wear. Even more strikingly, a medium is given precisely the same burial as a chief. His body is allowed to disintegrate from the bone, before it is finally placed inside the earth. Very few mhondoro mediums are women.

The critical difference between n'anga and spirit mediums in Dande is that the n'anga do not become possessed.

Throughout the many changes in Dande over 150 years, two features have remained constant: the possession rituals of the mhondoro mediums and the belief in the power of the mhondoro to bring the rain. All mhondoro mediums may be addressed by the title samvura, literally 'owner of the rain'.

Even though Nehanda has been referred to as the spiritual rainmaker she had no rainmaking powers at all. Her father Mutota, also was regarded as the big rainmaker but only the mhondoro of the autochthonous Tavara people, Musuma has this power.

On the one hand the Korekore ancestors are responsible for providing the rain, the source of fertility and life. On the other hand the Tavara mhondoro is the only one who has this power. In ritual practice these two ideas are partially reconciled.

It is dangerous for mediums to see human corpses. They may not attend funerals.

Of all substances blood is the most dangerous to the mhondoro. If blood falls on the ground drought follows. Blood is as it were, anti-rain. By their ability to control the rain the mhondoro, the ancestors of the lineage, demonstrate that the only kind of fertility that is worth having is in their gift.

By contradiction there is found in the villages of many mediums a woman who is thought of as a wife of the mhondoro. She is known by the archaic term for women, mukaranga, which is also used to refer to the wife of the chief.

Within each chieftaincy and within each spirit province there live people who are not descended from these royal ancestors, who are not, as it were, entitled to the rain provided by them. These people are the 'strangers'. The threat therefore is that if these affines, who by definition are members of other clans and descendants of other mhondoro, arrive in sufficient numbers they will begin to perform their rituals to their mhondoro, their rain come to them and the land of the royals will fall under the affines' control. The royal lineages nonetheless assert their dominance over the strangers and affines living in their midst by transforming them all into vazukuru (sing. muzukuru) or descendants of the mhondoro in whose spirit province they live. You therefore treat the mhondoro of your hosts as if he were your own.

A pangolin or ant-eater (haka) usually curls up and waits to be taken to the mhondoro in whose spirit province it was found. Strict taboos surround the pangolin and the pangolin is treated like a mukaranga of the mhondoro.

4.4.13 Appendix 13 - Map of the Dying Sun Chariot Temple and of the Pilgrims Way North (in on-site pamphlet by Hromnik, C.A. 1994 November. The Dying Sun Chariot: Suikerboschfontein, Komatiland. Cape Town).

THE DYING SUN CHARIOT

Suikerboschfontein, Komatiland

By Dr. Cyril A. Hromik



The axis of the Dying Sun Chariot Temple drawn through its door aims at the Winter solstice sunset behind the Qanda (egg-shaped summit) of Doornkop.

SOUTHERN AFRICA: THE LAND OF GOLD

With the discovery of gold, ancient man moved from the age of stone to the age of metals, a transition which occurred somewhere between Indian and Mesopotamia. Man's search for gold caused Africa to enter the age of history. Not surprisingly, southern Africa, the world's greatest repository of gold, caught the attention of Indian prospectors and traders at least as early as the 1st millennium BC, if not earlier. The Buddhist literature of India refers to Africa's gold trade in pre-Buddhist times i.e. at least as early as the 6th century BC. The early prospectors left evidence of their search not only in the form of alluvial diggings, reef workings and ore processing plants, but also in agricultural terraces and religious structures built of dry stone. Since 1983, these structures have been the subject of study by this research team.

SUIKERBOSCHFONTEIN IN KOMATILAND

The area of Suikerboschfontein hiking trail drains into the Komati River, the main commercial artery of the ancient gold-producing region known as Komatiland (Mpumalanga, Swaziland and northern Zululand). This region was prospected and traded during the 1st and early 2nd millennium AD by Dravidian (South Indian) goldseekers along with the emerging Quene (Hottentots) and, later, with Bantu speakers. Gold was found in the Komati valley and copper deposits were

detected in the immediate vicinity of Suikerboschfontein. Throughout this region, ancient prospectors and traders constructed numerous shrines, temples and other places of worship – some of them visible along this trail. Only a few of more than a dozen stone ruins at Suikerboschfontein have been investigated to date.

THE CHARIOT

The most interesting of the ruins along the trail are the ruins of the Dying Sun Chariot temple, so named because of their shape and function. The temple consists of the shield-shaped body of the chariot and two wheel-like compartments attached symmetrically to each side. Several auxiliary structures are attached to the chariot from outside. The well-preserved body of the chariot can be mounted through a narrow door on the eastern side. Its front arch, marked by an upright stone built into the wall inside, aims at the Qanda (egg-shaped summit) of Doornkop, where the dying sun of the winter solstice sets at about 4.50 p.m. on June 21. On the outer side of the arch begins a narrow passage which pierces the outer enclosure on the winter solstice sunset line thereby indicating the way of the dying sun's demise. Clearly this chariot is celestial rather than terrestrial.

THE TIME IS UP WHEN THE SUN IS GONE

The chariot, the celestial car of the sun god (Suryan), is a representation of time. Cyclical year-end festivities were celebrated annually in this temple. Worshippers gathered here to give thanks for the bounty received in the past year and prayed for the return of the dying sun without which there would have been no new planting season or harvest. Offerings of mineral tints, fruit, vegetables, grains, nuts etc. were ground to a paste on rubbing spots on outcrop and on loose stones, which can be seen on both sides of the Sun's path passage in the western part of the temple's enclosure.

These spots attest to the faith of the ancient worshippers. Their trust that their prayers would be answered and the sun would return is indicated by a seat in the left wheel compartment of the chariot. A priest (called *suri*), sitting on this seat and looking over the altar (charioteer's rest post) that separates him from the main body of the chariot, faced the high cliffs in the north-east where the new sun would rise on the morning of June 22. His line of vision runs over a well built "nose" or projection in the right side wall of the chariot. Here the lines of several cosmic alignments intersect.

THE CELESTIAL WHEEL

The chariot's celestial nature is further indicated by its two lunar wheels, located on parallel axes at right angles at the shaft. The North Wheel can be seen under the cliffs across the stream. Its axle runs over the "nose" towards the large flat seat of the officiating *suri* in the southern cell just outside the chariot, and continues to the western edge of the South Wheel. The South Wheel is hidden beyond a low ridge, but its axle intersects the shaft of the chariot precisely at the eastern entrance to the chariot's enclosure and continues to the eastern edge of the North Wheel. The arrangement of the wheel(s) reflects certain lunar connections which are too complex to be explained here.

THE WAY NORTH

A third important line that passes over the "nose" is the axis of a 10.25km-long Pilgrims' way North. It leads from the Penance Triangle in south (a short distance south of Rooikrans Camp) to the Sun and Moon temple on the mountain in the north. It goes by way of the chariot – breaking to allow for worship and sacrifice, and by the sacred pool. Several small shrines, each reflecting different aspect of pilgrims' devotion, line the Way North towards the heaven of final liberation, believed to be located in the North.

The Penance Triangle (*Tapas Mukonam*) contains a hermit's cell, hidden under the boulders from which a narrow crevice path leads to a flat rock table where the inmate performed penance (*tapas*, heat). Sitting in the middle of the SE side of the triangle, the ascetic (*tapasvi*) automatically faced the flame-shaped boulder placed in the NW corner, thus exposing himself to the purgatorial influence of the North West and the Agni (fire) influence of the South East.

Exiting through the best walled North Gate, the Way North led the pilgrim to a precinct at the site of Rooikrans Camp. Thence to a complex at the large vertical slab a meditation seat under a rock that looks like the mouth of a serpent. Next, the Moon's (Chandra's) blessing were invoked on a well-built, NE orientated megalithic terrace. A series of terraces leads to the dramatic, crevice waterfall, another meditation seat and a purgatory crevice.

The wide path of the Way North between the Dying Sun Chariot and the stream suggests that a purifying bath in the sacred pool was an important part of the ritual. Many other stations along the Way North need to be studied and explained. Eventually, the Way North climbs up the high escarpment and, passing through the Sun and Moon Temple, leads by means of a stone passage and a few steps to the natural amphitheater, where an offertory heap of stones marks the end of the journey.

THE HERITAGE

How many people performed the ritual pilgrimage along the Way North and how often will never be known, but the monument as a whole shines brightly on the veil of southern Africa, proclaiming the undeniable message that historically, culturally and religiously speaking Africa is in fact INDO-AFRICA. Here the cultures of Africa and India mixed and produced numerous monuments of this nature. It is our duty to study and preserve these relics of the ancient times.

We therefore appeal all visitors to this extraordinary temple to treat it with respect, to walk on marked paths, not to pick up or move any stones, desist from climbing, walking and sitting on stone structures we owe it to the ancient builders of these extraordinary relics. Vanakkam. Salang. Hamba kahle. Cape Town, November 1994

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