

SCULPTURAL IMAGES OF THE WARRIOR KINGS MONUMENTS OF THE LIMPOPO PROVINCE – A REFLECTION ON THE DESIGNS

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The results of official government decisions made in Limpopo Province, Warrior Kings Monuments inevitably took two dominant forms: the statue of a king sitting and that of another king standing there brandishing a weapon as if ready for war. The emergence of these forms of memorials suggest the extent to which the responsible officials with the power to shape commemorative plans reached agreement about how to look back at the wars of resistance. This kind of patterning also provides consistency regarding the interpretation of the designs in line with the instructions to the sculptors by those government officials involved.

Key words: commemoration, monument, statue, memorial, dispossession, colonialism, imperialism, subjugation, resistance, ritual, social cohesion, traditional leadership, nation building.

Monumentbeelde van die Krygerkonings van Limpopo – 'n Besinning oor die ontwerpe

Gedenkbeelde van krygerkonings het volgens ampsbesluite van die Limpopo-regering twee onvermydelike vorms aangeneem: eerstens die sittende figuur, en tweedens die staande figuur, gewapen asof oorlogsgereed. Die opwagting van gedenktekens van dié aard gee 'n aanduiding van die mate waarin die amptenare wat daartoe gemagtig is om gedenkprogramme te bepaal hul gesamentlike stempel geplaas het op waarneming van die oorloë wat teen oorheersing gevoer is. Hierdie rigtinggewende optrede dien dan ook as konsekwente rigsgaander by die vertolking van voorkoms (dit wil sê uitbeelding) volgens opdragte wat die betrokke regeringsamptenare uitgereik het.

Sleutelwoorde: herdenking, monument, standbeeld, gedenkteken, onteiening, kolonialisme, imperialisme, onderwerping, weerstand, ritueel, sosiale kohesie, tradisionele leierskap, nasiebou.

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Introduction

This article reviews the sculptors' designs for the four statues commemorating warrior kings who were leading figures in the wars of resistance against colonialism and imperialism in Limpopo Province. The commemorated warrior kings are Sekhukhune I of the Bapedi at Tjate, Makhado of the vhaVenda in Louis Trichardt, Ngungunhane of the Shangaan in Giyani, and Malebogo of the Bahananwa in Blouberg. A reflection on the sculptors' proposals offers insight into the warrior kings' significance as historical figures and reveals a remarkable consistency in the interpretation of their characters. The designs also provide seminal points of reference for the evaluation of sculptural interpretations of wars of resistance as conceived almost a century after the wars were fought. This reflection also provides a perspective on how leaders of the retrospective view propagated by the Limpopo Provincial Government of the historical train of events at issue and how that perception is pressed into service for present purposes. The wars and popular commemorative imagery depicting the former marginalised warrior kings served a particularly useful purpose, namely to unite the fragmented Limpopo community.

The plurality of Limpopo Province requires some qualification. The population consists of several ethnic groups distinguished by culture, language and race. Based on 2001 census statistics, BaPedi/Northern Sotho speakers make up the largest proportion, being nearly 57 percent. The Tsonga/Shangaan speakers comprise 23 percent while the Venda make up 12 percent. Afrikaans speakers make up just more than two and a half percent while English-speaking whites are less than half a per cent. Compressed within the borders of the province are the four previous administrations created during the apartheid era: Lebowa, Gazankulu, Republic of Venda and Transvaal.²

The multi-layered significance of the Warrior Kings Monuments in Limpopo Province will be analysed in this article. The objective is to gain a clear understanding of both the nature of public sculptures in South Africa during the first years of democracy, and the culture that underwrote the endeavour.

Methodology

To understand the importance of the Warrior Kings Monuments, one must understand the high esteem and reverence in which black South Africans still hold the memories of these selected kings. They are especially significant as symbols of reconciliation with a difficult past. The expression of that esteem culminated in the decision to

² A profile of the Limpopo Province: Demographics, Poverty, Inequality and Unemployment, Provide Project: The Provincial Decision-making Enabling Project, Background Paper, August 2005 1(9), Elsenburg, p. 2. Available at www.elsenburg.com/.../BP2005_1_9%20%Demographics%20LP.pdf 2009-05-17; See also <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limpopo> 2009-05-17.

commemorate their role as pioneers of the liberation struggle by launching the costly public theme titled ‘Wars of Resistance against Colonialism and Imperialism’ in Limpopo Province. It is the most costly heritage project initiated by the provincial government to date.

Plaster models submitted by sculptors competing for the opportunity to create the statues are no longer available, but the erected statues themselves and their designers’ descriptions were available to enable the researcher to reconstruct the envisaged works. These documents provide not only an artistic and philosophical context in which to view the designs that were chosen, but also a comprehensive picture of how some of the country’s leading commemorative sculptors perceived the kings’ characters and significance.

The Project Team on the Warrior Kings Monuments led by officials of the Department of Sports, Arts and Culture (DSAC) in Limpopo Province asked prospective entrants in 2004 to create designs that would represent the character and individuality of each selected king. When the models were finally approved, there was hardly a dissenting voice about the proper expression of each king’s persona by members of the project team and members of the kings’ respective royal houses.³

The designs for execution of the statues commemorating the warrior kings⁴ associated with Limpopo Province

Most visible about the designs of the Warrior Kings Monuments is the dominance of two types of composition: the statue of a king sitting (see statues of Makhado and Malebogo) and the statue of a king standing in a posture as if ready for war (see the statues of Ngungunhane and Sekhukhune), with a weapon in one hand. The emergence of these forms of icons suggests the extent to which the responsible people in Limpopo with the power to shape commemorative plans reached agreement about how to look back at the wars of resistance. This sort of pose [at least where the four are concerned] seems to represent the idea of “vigilance”.

Vigilance seems to have also been the “typical idea” represented by a number of Civil War monuments in the United States of America (USA). As products of independent decisions in that country, some Civil War monuments inevitably took a wide range of forms, but more striking than that variety are the dominance of one

³ Interview: M.M. Mulaudzi, Senior Heritage Manager, DSAC Limpopo province, Polokwane, 2013-07-16.

⁴ On the inscriptions of each of these commemorated leaders, the subject is written in the language of origin, e.g. Kgosisikgolo, Khosikhulu and Hosinkulu in Sepedi, Venda and Tsonga respectively, but on the text following that the word King is used. The word “king” is used in the traditional English sense throughout the article to denote the position of authority held by these leaders.

type of composition: the statues of a uniformed standing soldier holding the barrel of a rifle that rests upright with the butt on the ground in front of him. Contemporaries often read these as depictions of soldier at “place rest” or “parade rest.” However, when the 1861 Civil War commenced the Seventh Regiment memorial in Central Park, New York City – an early example of the same pose that had become standard – was said to be on guard, prepared for immediate action and ready to take its place as a watchful *Sentinel* in front of the picket line.⁵

The designers of the Limpopo Warrior Kings Monuments seem to have taken a leaf out of the USA’s book and replicated, if not copied, the Central Park figure as well as the interpretation of it, though not explicitly. The warrior king’s attitude is one of watchful alertness on guard, and ready to take their place as leaders of the warriors under their command. The warlike stance is exemplified in each case by the weapon held at the ready [see all the pictures below with Malebogo still holding some bullets in his left hand].

The physical characteristics no less than the pose, expressed ideas about the warrior king – clearly representing a traditional African leader. The perception, particularly in view of the assortment of arms held, [assegai/spears in the case of Sekhukhune and Ngungunhane; knobkerrie in the case of Makhado]⁶ and traditional attire worn, is that the typical warrior king’s monument illustrated the patriotism, self-sacrifice, bravery and devotion which traditional leaders in the mould of Shaka, Moshweshwe and Sekhukhune (to name just a few), have always displayed and therefore would, in the words of former President Thabo Mbeki, inspire viewers to follow their example.⁷

The king at rest was evidently an image that appealed to the Limpopo Provincial Government as sponsors of the monuments.⁸ Alternatives were hotly debated, for example between advocates of monuments and proponents of utilitarian memorials. Names of streets, towns and cities and other geographic features were also brought into the issue of commemoration. For example, Pietersburg became Polokwane, Potgietersrus became Mokopane, Bochum became Senwabarwana, Nylstroom Modimolle and Louis Trichardt Makhado (fiercely contested and reversed).⁹

⁵ T.J. Brown, *The Public Art of Civil War Commemoration: A brief History with Documents* (Boston, 2004) p. 26.

⁶ The provenance of the word “assegai” is Catalanian (Spanish).

⁷ In his celebrated speech delivered on the occasion of the adoption of the Constitution, former President Thabo Mbeki, paying homage to the heroes and heroines, the forebears of liberation struggle, said, “*I am the grandchild of the warrior men and women that Hintsa and Sekhukhune led, the patriots that Cetshwayo and Mphaphu took to battle, the soldiers Moshoeshe and Ngungunyane taught never to dishonour the cause of freedom*”.

⁸ Interview: M.M. Mulaudzi, Senior Heritage Manager, DSAC Limpopo province, Polokwane, 2013-07-16.

⁹ M. Thotse, Contesting and scaling the Makhado memory: Battles for the control of the Louis Trichardt commemorative city-text in Limpopo Province, South Africa, *Kronos*, Vol. 36 (1), November 2010, p. 176.

Arguing in support of name changes, the National Heritage Council (NHC) noted that South Africa has suffered a long history of typologies of colonial conquest not only in a material sense, but also in the form of psychological plundering, and of the distortion and obliteration of the history and heritage of African people that is often inscribed on ancestral land and cultural landscapes. Volumes of historical accounts, ranging from popular travel writings to racial science (anthropometrics), would partially narrate the early European experiences of Africa and encounters with its peoples, where the European travellers and historians often depicted territorial places of African people as open, depopulated vast tracks of barren land, while in contradiction, describing Africans as “noble savages” occupying the territory.¹⁰ The NHC contends that colonialism and later apartheid shared a particular obsession with territorial acquisition and the obliteration of the indigenous African names of places occupied by indigenous African people. According to the NHC, the deliberate intention here was to displace African people and render them landless without a sense of belonging except in the carefully constructed tribal reserves. Indeed, according to some scholars, colonial and apartheid domination resulted in the subjugation, denigration and marginalisation of languages, cultures, customs and traditions of the indigenous communities.¹¹

Other commentators noted that the obliteration of pre-existing indigenous names was accomplished by imposing European names. The displacement of names became institutionalised and formed part of the dominant political discourse, defining and characterising South Africa’s social, political and heritage landscapes. Such colonial reconfiguration impacted and still impacts on the human psyche.¹²

¹⁰ The notion of ‘noble savages’ was used up by J.J. Rousseau and applied in his novel *L’Ingénu* which was based on the presupposition that people come into the world as a ‘tabula rasa’ (blank slate). Rousseau’s ideas were supposititious but had a long run before they were destabilised and basically discredited for lack of scientific substance. They were pervasively applied in education but are no longer taken seriously and have actually been supplanted by other theories. Vacant land was another matter altogether. The impression may have been created by tribal warfare that left vacant stretches of land at the time, and the impression may have been mistaken (or not). Belated squabbles about who owned what seem misplaced at this juncture, not to say unprofitable, in light of the difficulty of proving things on the basis of claim against counterclaim, especially given the poor outlook for the country’s immediate to longer-term future as a result of various crises of mismanagement and adverse natural conditions.

¹¹ S. Mancotywa, *Politics of change of place names in South Africa*. Unpublished paper presented in celebration of 5 years 2004-2009 of the National Heritage Council, East London, 2010-10-19.

¹² T. Ntsewa, *Pursuit of geographical names transformation on the African continent: towards a common African destiny*, unpublished paper delivered at the Indaba Hotel, Fourways, JHB, 09-10 June 2011 under the theme Forging a common South African identity and nationhood through naming; C. Cleane, Name change can affirm black folk, *Sowetan*, 19 June 2006, p. 13.

The public discourse around changes of place names was mainly informed by the conditions sketched above and to devise endeavours to assuage the negativity of the siege mentality experienced under colonial and apartheid domination. The advent of a democratic government ushered in the hope for social transformation and restorative justice.¹³

A survey according to Mulaudzi found that the Limpopo community had dedicated libraries, town halls, or other public buildings to warrior kings. On the whole, however, support for remembrance of the wars of resistance through museums was weaker than the momentum behind monuments or statues.¹⁴ The warrior king statues offered more as a strategy for remembering collective effort and sacrifice.

Positioning of the warrior king statues

Positioning of the warrior king statues was crucial because they had to occupy a prominent position exemplifying leadership. Each figure had to portray a king in the aspect of a warrior leading his people. The figures therefore had to be raised above eye level to a position of physical eminence: on a hill in the case of King Sekhukhune, and on a high plinth or pedestal in the other cases as a mark of respect for the status of the personage represented. To some extent the positioning reveals a metaphorical association of height and power as theorised by Kress and Van Leeuwen.¹⁵ Drawing on Arnheim's theories on the visual composition of works of formal art to develop their semiotic theories on the information value of left / right / centre / margin composition of image on the page, Kress and Van Leeuwen show how angles can realise particular power relationships between that which is represented and the viewer. However, a display of the metaphorical association of height with reverence warrants a further investigation, which is not the topic of this article. In this instance the object is to indicate that social distance, closeness and attitude can all be suggested by the angle from which the artefact is viewed. Thus if the viewer's position is lower than that of the object viewed, the viewer has to look up towards the object, with the result that the object is in a commanding position as regards the viewer, whereas an object placed at the viewer's eye level suggests equality between viewer and viewed. As

¹³ L. Nawa, *Naming and Local Government in South Africa: What are the ingredients for successful implementation?* unpublished paper delivered at the Indaba Hotel, Fourways, JHB, 09-10 June 2011 under the theme Forging a common South African identity and nationhood through naming; S. Mancotywa, *Politics of change of place names in South Africa*. Unpublished paper presented in celebration of 5 years 2004-2009 of the National Heritage Council, East London, 2010-10-19.

¹⁴ Interview: M.M. Mulaudzi, Senior Heritage Manager, DSAC Limpopo province, Polokwane, 2013-07-16.

¹⁵ G. Kress, & T. van Leeuwen, *Reading images* (Abingdon, 2006) p. 56.

regards the matter of elevation in the case of the warrior king monuments, Kress and Van Leeuwen explain that:¹⁶

If the represented participant is seen from a low angle, then the relation between the interactive and represented participant is depicted as one in which the represented participant has power over the interactive participant.

As with angles in art or photography, this analysis demonstrates how looking upwards to view a sculpture on a plinth places the sculpture in a commanding position overlooking the viewer's position, thereby establishing a superior/inferior power relationship between viewer and viewed.¹⁷ Marschall corroborated the idea of relative power by suggesting that statues in Durban be lowered to the ground, though in a standing position, thereby effectively deposing them by bringing them down to earth and depriving them of the psychological advantage of eminence thus meant rendering them more human.¹⁸

These new monuments in Limpopo Province exemplified a new breed of warrior-kings monuments and reflect an expression of changing ideas about the object of war (of resistance) and its place in the life of African traditional leadership, ideas that found considerable sculptural expression after 1994 in South Africa. The appearance of the new iconographic type seemed to have established a tradition which will continue to influence sculptural commemoration of African traditional leadership, particularly in South Africa.¹⁹

The four statues effectively amounted to an overture of peace, which was supposed to be the guiding principle of their design and their construction of the said overture was done in realistic terms, partly explaining the choice of the pose depicting 'the king at rest'. The bronze warrior king had become an icon in Limpopo Province. The provincial government had available funds and a desire to erect monuments of greater originality, uniquely reflecting the true nature of the warrior king, defender and champion of his people and exemplifying the sensitivities of the first decade of the new millennium in Limpopo Province. In one of its circulars sent to the prospective competitors for the warrior kings monuments, the Project Team stipulated that it would not accept a figure that looked ashamed of his status as a royal soldier.²⁰ Similarly, an

¹⁶ G. Kress, & T. van Leeuwen, *Reading images*, p. 140; N.G. Abousnougou. *Visual and Written Discourses of British Commemorative War Monuments*, PhD thesis, Cardiff University, 2012, p. 8.

¹⁷ N.G. Abousnougou. *Visual and Written Discourses of British Commemorative War Monuments*, p. 8.

¹⁸ S. Marschall, *Landscape of Memory: Commemorative Monuments, Memorials and Public Statuary in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (Brill, 2009) p. 149.

¹⁹ S. Marschall, *Landscape of Memory...*, p. 149.

²⁰ Terms of Reference: Sculpting of statues of Warrior Kings who fought the Wars of Resistance against Colonialism and Imperialism.

observer of the model designs in Polokwane complained that some of the entries lacked “that original and earnest force so much needed in a warrior king’s monument.”²¹

Mulaudzi commended the selected designs as examples of a new breed of memorials in the province which better reflected the values and aspirations of African traditional leadership.²² Harry Johnson’s models were proposed as examples of statuary that conveys meaning, or emphasises a quality not only of human nature, but one of traditional leadership which will teach a lesson for all time. Instead of being yet another of the “simple effigies” which were “but models depicting ordinary soldiers”, Johnson’s Sekhukhune model designs spoke to the viewer of contemplation, edification, and emulation, its message relaying “the character of an African warrior leader—projecting endurance, devotion, [and] heroism”. Sekhukhune’s monument was the first of the four to go up in 2004. Johnson concluded in an interview with a plea for the creation of more of these assertive and didactic monuments, a call that other sculptors heeded:²³

An African warrior monument should give place to some originality, wherein the warrior’s deeds could be extolled, not by meaningless effigies, but by single statues or groups, in which virtue or idea connected with the warrior king might be handed down in imperishable material, not only in ‘memoriam’ of the deeds performed, but suggestive of what kind of a man the warrior leader of the Wars of Resistance was among his people. These monuments successfully represent the patriotism, self-sacrifice, bravery and devotion which our traditional leaders have always displayed. These works hopefully exalt present and future generations of South Africa to emulate the deeds of their forebears during the Wars of Resistance.

Most importantly, the Limpopo Provincial Government noted that because some of the wars had been fratricidal, nothing in the monuments’ conception should suggest the cruelty or atrocities of war. Such a portrayal, it was believed, would have only served to perpetuate disunity not only in the province but in the country at large. In keeping with this view, the seeming reluctance of the statues were also hoped to assert that the province stood on the eve of a new era of hope and reconciliation, of region-wide harmony.²⁴

²¹ Interview: M.M. Mulaudzi, Senior Heritage Manager, DSAC Limpopo province, Polokwane, 2013-07-16.

²² Interview: M.M. Mulaudzi, Senior Heritage Manager, DSAC Limpopo province, Polokwane, 2013-07-16.

²³ Interview: H. Johnson, Johnson’s studios, Groblersdal, August 2009.

²⁴ Interview: M.M. Mulaudzi, Senior Heritage Manager, DSAC Limpopo province, Polokwane, 2013-07-16.

Location of the warrior kings monuments

Appropriate siting was the overriding concern at the initial meetings of the Project Team which suggested that an even better location for a king's monument would be on the site of a battlefield.²⁵ In proposing sites, concerns were voiced that battlefields should be chosen to give precedence to people's sense of place, as well as to the consideration of local distinctiveness, and culture, as well as the local population's understanding and celebratory/venerating perception of the past. Battlefields, it was also argued, should also offer a rich resource for education and research, including family histories. The selected battlefields where these kings fought would obviously have a significant place in the history of the people of the province and by implication in the South African national conscience. The proposed statues on the battlefields would also have a strong resonance in the sense of provincial and national identity. Some of these battlefields might still contain physical remains associated with the battles or have the potential to yield important archaeological evidence that can enhance an understanding of events.²⁶

Further arguments in favour of the statues being placed at battlefields were that such sites, particularly modern examples, are often viewed as memorials in their own right, failing which the focus could become detached from the site of the conflict, with the result that the memorial itself could effectively usurp the significance of the event. The above proposals presented challenges, too, as they raised the real issue of demarcating the location of the site of battle.²⁷ Unfortunately, in Limpopo such demarcations rarely happened. The Project Team made no final site selections though, and left the question of specific placements of the monuments open to prospective advisers.

Eventually, the Project Team agreed that appropriate siting of the monuments to coincide to best advantage with the meaning of the site was possible, dependent also on what the future plans were for such identified sites. So the future development of the sites became a much discussed topic in Limpopo, as members of the Project Team began their search for suitable sites.²⁸

Siting of the monuments to the warrior kings eventually materialised from the discussions and collaborations between the Project Team and associated institutions such as the Limpopo Heritage Resources Authority (LIHRA), as well as delegated

²⁵ Interview: M.M. Mulaudzi, Senior Heritage Manager, DSAC Limpopo province, Polokwane, 2013-07-16.

²⁶ African Heritage Consulting, *Report on the Assessment of the Cultural Heritage Resources on the Provincial Heritage Site of Tjate on the Farm Djate 249KT in Sekhukhune*, Limpopo Province, July 2008.

²⁷ T.L. Sutherland, *Battlefield Archaeology – A guide to the Archaeology of Conflict*, November 2005.

²⁸ Interview: M.M. Mulaudzi, Senior Heritage Manager, DSAC Limpopo province, Polokwane, 2013-07-16.

members of the communities and representative members of the royal houses involved. This shows that these bodies formally or informally joined forces and created mutually beneficial liaisons which ultimately resulted in placement of the Warrior Kings Monuments' in premier locations, thus providing anchors for the Limpopo Government to lend substance to the 'Warrior Kings who fought the Wars of Resistance against Colonialism and Imperialism' as the thematic focus of the commemorations intended to be the unifying structure of the province's ceremonial core.²⁹

Significance of selected battlefield sites as heritage sites and tourist attractions

To understand the importance of the collaborations mentioned above, one must first gain an understanding of the potential of the identified sites as tourist attractions and of the provincial government ambitions for the sites as heritage sites. As the Premier of Limpopo Province, Sello Moloto, indicated in September 2006:³⁰

There are many sites of historical significance in our Province that only deserve to be graded to the status of heritage sites. High amongst these include, Tjate in Sekhukhune, Soutini in Baleni (Mopani), Fundudzi Lake and Dzata in the Vhembe District. These sites are a legacy from our ancestors and are equally deserving to be called national symbols. Our Government is committed to doing everything possible to facilitate the optimum conditions in which these sites can be developed and marketed for the benefit of local communities and for tourism purposes.

In terms of its location, Tjate valley lies east of the Leolo Mountain and west of Modimolle hills on the farms Djate 249KT and Hackney 116KT. It is south of the road from Mosego to Swale. On the other hand one must also note that the events of the Sekhukhune Wars cover a large portion of what is today known as 'Sekhukhuneland', but also link up with Burgersfort, Steelpoort and eventually with Mapoch's caves at Roosenekal and Botshabelo near Middelburg.³¹ Kgoši Sekhukhune's long and bitter struggles against the ZAR between 1876 and 1877 as well as against the British in

²⁹ Interview: M.M. Mulaudzi, Senior Heritage Manager, DSAC Limpopo province, Polokwane, 2013-07-16.

³⁰ S. Moloto, Limpopo Premier, speech during heritage day and the unveiling of Kgoši Malebogo statue, Ben Seraki Sport Centre, September 2006.

³¹ *Limpopo Heritage Resources Authority: Declaration of Sites as Provincial Heritage Sites*, a notification that Limpopo Heritage Resources Authority in terms of section 27 (6) of the National Heritage Resources Act, 1999 (Act No. 25 of 1999) declare the following sites as Provincial Heritage Sites (Grade 2): Tjate; Soutini-Baleni; Dzata and Malebogo-Boer War Battlefields; Provincial Heritage Sites. *Mapungubwe News, The Official Newsletter of the Department of Sport, Arts & Culture*, Heritage Month edition, back page.

1879 were determined and submitted by the Limpopo Government to SAHRA as the significance of the battlefield for the consideration of its declaration as a provincial heritage site.³²

Soutini-Baleni is situated 25 km further east of Nkomo-Goxani village near Mahumani on the southern bank of Klein Letaba River. The significance of Soutini-Baleni is demonstrated in its hot mineral spring (geothermal spring) – a unique natural feature in the otherwise arid Mopani veld wilderness, south-east of Giyani. It has been declared a Natural Heritage Site (1999), because of its unique ecology. A species of fish, the stunted population of Mozambique tilapia (*Oreochromis mossambicus*) live in the fountain. The surrounding swamp is covered mostly by bulrushes and reeds.³³

Other than its scientific significance, archaeological evidence is that indigenous people have harvested salt at the Soutini-Baleni fountain for the past 2000 years. Stone tools also tell a story of Stone Age people being active at Baleni. Soutini-Baleni is thus the only salt production site, where indigenous people harvested salt according to indigenous technologies, practices and customs, in this part of Limpopo Province. Traditional customs which accompany salt making processes at Baleni include interaction with the ancestral world through ritual and appeasement offerings at the sacred dry leadwood tree (the shrine) – (see Fig. 1). It forms part of the community's tangible or living heritage.³⁴

Oral history abounds at Baleni and because of all the myths, legends and other stories that are well known to all the people in surrounding communities and regularly told to visitors, the place and the fountain are considered sacred. Besides being sacred,

³² *Limpopo Heritage Resources Authority: Declaration of Sites as Provincial Heritage Sites*, a notification that Limpopo Heritage Resources Authority in terms of section 27 (6) of the National Heritage Resources Act, 1999 (Act No. 25 of 1999) declare the following sites as Provincial Heritage Sites (Grade 2): Tjate; Soutini-Baleni; Dzata and Malebogo-Boer War Battlefields; Provincial Heritage Sites, *Mapungubwe News, The Official Newsletter of the Department of Sport, Arts & Culture*, Heritage Month edition, back page.

³³ *Limpopo Heritage Resources Authority: Declaration of Sites as Provincial Heritage Sites*, a notification that Limpopo Heritage Resources Authority in terms of section 27 (6) of the National Heritage Resources Act, 1999 (Act No. 25 of 1999) declare the following sites as Provincial Heritage Sites (Grade 2): Tjate; Soutini-Baleni; Dzata and Malebogo-Boer War Battlefields; Provincial Heritage Sites, *Mapungubwe News, The Official Newsletter of the Department of Sport, Arts & Culture*, Heritage Month edition, back page.

³⁴ *Limpopo Heritage Resources Authority: Declaration of Sites as Provincial Heritage Sites*, a notification that Limpopo Heritage Resources Authority in terms of section 27 (6) of the National Heritage Resources Act, 1999 (Act No. 25 of 1999) declare the following sites as Provincial Heritage Sites (Grade 2): Tjate; Soutini-Baleni; Dzata and Malebogo-Boer War Battlefields; Provincial Heritage Sites, *Mapungubwe News, The Official Newsletter of the Department of Sport, Arts & Culture*, Heritage Month edition, back page.



Figure 1: The ancestors must be informed at the sacred leadwood tree.³⁶

Figure 2: Woman engaged in salt harvesting activities.³⁵



it is especially a gendered site, because salt making here is an activity that is only practiced by women (see Fig. 2)³⁷.

In an address at the Summit of Limpopo Traditional Leaders in 2007, the Premier Sello Moloto declared that the newly proclaimed provincial heritage sites of Tjate in Sekhukhuneland, Dzata in Vhembe, Soutini-Baleni in Mopani and the Malebogo-Boer War battlefields in Capricorn (see Fig. 3), are important tourism icons, which must be linked to other offerings to attract even more visitors to the province.³⁸ He exhorted traditional leaders to help sustain the memory of the tales associated with these sites.

³⁵ With acknowledgement to www.travelground.com/accommodation/baleni-camp 2014-10-11.

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³⁸ S. Moloto, Limpopo Premier unpublished speech at the Summit of Limpopo Traditional leaders, The Park Hotel, Mokopane, Waterberg, 2007-04-19, p. 6.



Figure 3: Declaration of sites as Provincial Heritage Sites.
(Source: Author).

The potential of other battlefield areas (eg. the Magoebaskloof), though also tested, were not declared heritage sites.

Kgošikgolo Sekhukhune's statue at Tjate

Sekhukhune's lonely bronze statue (see Fig. 4) stands three meters high on the hills of Tjate village, also known as Ntswaneng. At the foot of the hill is the mass grave of thirteen British soldiers who were killed by Sekhukhune's warriors during a battle in 1879. Sekhukhune is characterised as a brave warrior king. Harry Johnson, the sculptor, proposed that Sekhukhune be presented as 'quiet and thoughtful' and that he should be portrayed in his war regalia, holding his assegai/spear and shield. Such weaponry would have been in keeping with those used at the time of the Sekhukhune wars with the Boers and the British, as well as those still circulating in tales told by older generations of the BaPedi households who had an active memory of the king. This design also embodied apparently the calm determination and deep thought shown in Sekhukhune's attitude and facial expression.³⁹

³⁹ Interview: H. Johnson, Johnson's studios, Groblersdal, August 2009.



Figure 4: King Sekhukhune's statue at Tjate.
(Source: Author).

Harry Johnson strove to create an iconic portrayal of Sekhukhune. To achieve this ideal, he proposed that the statue should be marked by its 'calmness' and 'deep thought'. Johnson also said that the guiding motif of the model he designed for Sekhukhune was that the greatness of the king was equalled (ie. exemplified) by his simplicity. The figure of Sekhukhune is treated in a very straightforward way, standing with the sharp point of his assegai or spear in the right hand stuck into the ground, his shield in the left hand slightly lowered. He is thus not in combatively defensive mood, while the face tilted over his right shoulder is expressive of the absence of self-consciousness and the earnest direction of his character. This, the sculptor said, was an instruction from the Limpopo Provincial Government that indicated that all war between cultures is over. Johnson also wished to render Sekhukhune's character and disposition as a plain MoPedi (singular) by representing the leader in a quiet and dignified pose avoiding all manner of flamboyant action.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Interview: H. Johnson, Johnson's studios, Groblersdal, August 2009.

Khosikhulu Makhado's statue in Louis Trichardt

Of all his comments regarding the characterisation of his subjects, Johnson was the most explicit about Makhado (see Fig. 5). He stated, "I had carefully borne in mind the character and individuality of king Makhado, which are the essence of his Venda greatness and simplicity". To best communicate these virtues, Johnson depicted Makhado wrapped in a royal cloth, sitting quietly at ease on a rock with a knobkerrie in his left hand tucked between his legs on the ground, rather than with a rifle, even though Makhado was known to be an expert at handling rifles after he had been exposed at a young age to game hunting by white friends of his father. In striving for such a conception, Johnson sought to approximate the characterisation of Makhado provided by informants from the royal household and the readings he did on the king. The sculptor admitted that he did not claim any originality for the conception of Makhado's quietness and reserve of power. Johnson in fact conceded that he read books and was also informed by people who were close to the Makhado family.⁴¹

The sculptor said that he initially imagined Makhado as a solemn figure on a wooden chair. He later, from a standpoint of characterisation of the king from the readings, imagined the king as more quiet and reserved. Describing the idea behind the posture that was finally approved, Johnson said that members of the royal house and the Project Team chose for their motif the moment when Makhado was considering a proposal from ZAR Commandant-General Piet Joubert about the taking of census among his people.

The statue also zoomed in on a moment when Makhado was gazing at his warriors pondering what the next move would probably be:⁴²

We endeavoured in the statue of Makhado to give something of the latent force of the king, manifesting itself through perfect passivity. If the statue impressed the beholder by its force as having character and stillness, it would have fulfilled its mission".

⁴¹ Interview: H. Johnson, Johnson's studios, Groblersdal, August 2009.

⁴² Interview: H. Johnson, Johnson's studios, Groblersdal, August 2009.



Figure 5: Khosikhulu Makhado’s statue in Louis Trichardt.
(Source: Author).

Makhado’s positioning and the knobkerrie apparently signifies wisdom; one who knew when to attack hence his nickname “Tshilwavirusiku” literally meaning one who fights during the night.⁴³



Figure 6: King Ngungunhane’s statue in Giyani.
(Source: Author).

⁴³ Interview: H. Johnson, Johnson’s studios, Groblersdal, August 2009.

King Ngungunhane's statue in Giyani

The supreme quality of quiet strength of Ngungunhane was also foremost in the sculptor Harry Johnson's mind as he designed the model of that warrior king's statue (see Fig. 6). When the DSAC called on Johnson to bring forward a statue of Ngungunhane, among their reasons was because they were uncertain that his portrayal of Ngungunhane would embody the nobility and reserve power that it should possess. Unlike the other kings, who have always been resident in Limpopo, Ngungunhane's residency in Limpopo is questioned and contested. He is largely commemorated in Mozambique, where he had ruled most of the time and where he fought his wars against the Portuguese, which also explains his capture by the Portuguese and exile to Lisbon where he died in 1906.⁴⁴

Ngungunhane's statue therefore, was not readily welcomed without question in Giyani. Given this background, the DSAC did not believe that the sculptor could actually achieve the necessary characterisation of the king as expected.⁴⁵

However, as with Sekhukhune and Makhado, Johnson brought to a higher degree of finish a quiet strength as the key ingredient for proper portrayal of the king and was also confident that the product mirrored the reposeful but uncompromising character of Ngungunhane. The life-size bronze statue portrays Ngungunhane in traditional Zulu-like apparel, standing with his assegai/spear held in both hands with its blade pointing upwards. He is depicted with legs firmly straddled, supposedly observing a stirring scene unfolding at some distance before his eyes.⁴⁶

King Malebogo's statue in Blouberg

The statue shows Malebogo sitting defiant and proud on a rock with his favourite "toy" – a rifle which is pointing down with spent cartridges scattered round his feet (see Fig. 7). Thamagana Mojapelo⁴⁷ notes that the rifle held in Malebogo's hand signified his bravery and his use of the weapon in battle. The rocks forming the base of the statue show that he ensconced himself among them in order to wage battle. This portrayal with a rifle pointing harmlessly earthward, as interpreted by Phil Minnaar, was an instruction from the Limpopo Government to symbolise that all war between

⁴⁴ Interview: H. Johnson, Johnson's studios, Groblersdal, August 2009; Mishack Mulaudzi in his personal interview with Mahunele Thotse also corroborated this information.

⁴⁵ Interview: H. Johnson, Johnson's studios, Groblersdal, August 2009; Mishack Mulaudzi in his personal interview with Mahunele Thotse also corroborated this information.

⁴⁶ Interview: H. Johnson, Johnson's studios, Groblersdal, August 2009.

⁴⁷ Narrator for 'ntwa ya Kgoši Malebogo le Maburu (Malebogo-Boer War) – a documentary written by Tlou Setumu commissioned by the National Heritage Council.

all cultures in the country were over. This monument, while reflecting a relaxed king, also calls to mind the patriotic pride, the consciousness of sufficient strength which animated and sustained his people until that supreme hour when they surrendered to their enemy. Minnaar said it was an honour and achievement for him to have sculpted some of the world's greatest leaders and royalty. He believed this will help future generations learn more about history's heroes.⁴⁸



Figure 7: King Malebogo at BaHananwa Tribal Offices, Blouberg.
(Source: Author).

Grobler comments on statues such as those at issue and the Chief Tshwane (height 4.2 m) figure in Pretoria, saying that they epitomised black South Africans' requirement that new monuments should look "impressive and dignified". I feel that every order to sculpt or install a memorial with its own terms of reference.⁴⁹ As Marschall notes: "the current practice is to imitate western commemorative conventions". A "proper monument" is regarded as a bronze statue on a pedestal, even though this style might be questioned in the post-apartheid context that aims to create an "African Renaissance".⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Interview: P. Minnaar, Pretoria studios, October 2009; R. Nthite, Immortalized for fighting Boers, *IOL News*, 2006-02-30.

⁴⁹ J. Grobler, The impact of politics on the heritage and cultural tourism in South Africa, *S.A. Journal of Cultural History* 22(1), June 2008, p. 176.

⁵⁰ S. Marschall, 2005. Forging National Identity..., *South African Journal of Cultural History*, 19(1), June 2005, p. 84.

Conclusion

The characterisation of the commemorated kings in the various design proposals and the eventual statues erected in their honour is noticeably consistent. In every instance the kings' images project the impression of reluctant heroes, all of whom possessed quiet strength, a plain and direct manner, thoughtfulness, imperturbability, and calm determination. These depictions were an instruction from the Limpopo Provincial Government, acknowledged as such by the official as well as the sculptors. These qualities were also evident in a number of appraisals in the dedication and commemorative speeches, mostly made by black political leaders, which may have laid the foundation in principle for the sculptural interpretations representing the kings. The perception of these selected kings as pioneers of the liberation struggle who launched and fought wars of resistance against colonialism, dispossession and imperialism in the second half of the nineteenth century gave rise to concerted popular interest in the lives of these previously marginalised heroes, which culminated in the inception and pursuit of the commemorative theme "Wars of Resistance against Colonialism and Imperialism" and the subsequent erection of statues in their honour.

In overview it becomes apparent that Limpopo's commemorative warrior kings monuments were multi-produced; the end product was not shaped exclusively by the designer, i.e. the sculptor, but by a chain of agents. Some were elitist (politicians), prominently positioned in government, others were of no special standing, and some were related to the relevant royal families though not particularly influential in their own right. The signs of multi-authorship are there for all to see now, which is probably all to the good as the province had the object in mind at the time to unite the diverse elements of the population which had been characterised by segregation. Hence each of the selected kings represents a different but prominent tribe in the province.