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VALIDATION OF THE TSONGA BELIEF SYSTEM THROUGH TRADITIONAL SONG

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Tsonga folksongs function to present and justify Tsonga culture to the young, and to ensure conformity to expected social behavior among adults; they thus possess a didactic and a regulative purpose. A third function is that they constitute a compensatory mechanism, allowing a certain amount of escape-in-fantasy.

Among the various peoples of the Northern Transvaal (the Venda, Pedi, Lovedu, and Tsonga) and of Mozambique (the Chopi, Hlengwe, Ndau, Tsonga, and others), the Tsonga are renowned for the richness of the folklore heritage and their insistence upon its importance. Junod states that "where the Tsonga excel is in the art of speech . . . Tale-telling has developed into a real dramatic art,"¹ and the Tsonga writer Marivate states that "We, the Tsonga people, have many folklore stories . . . it is our duty as Tsongas to preserve this treasure, more especially to preserve the songs which accompany the stories."²

In this paper, a group of Tsonga song-texts is examined for references to cultural values.

Song-text from a beer-drink, recorded at Mhinga's location, 1969. (Diagonal strokes in our transcriptions represent an interpolation of the repeated response.)

Inge Ndzi Nga Swi Vonangi!

Call: Hi vuhuza bya ku
Lava ku tekiwa loko a ndzi
Lo tshama ka mhani
Response: Inge ndzi nga swi vonangi!
Call: Hinkwaswo leswi inge!
Nhlomulo lowu / Mahahlwa lowa

I Would Not Be Experiencing Such Anguish

Call: I was foolish to marry hurriedly
I wish I had stayed
At my mother's house
Response: I would not be experiencing such anguish!
Call: I was foolish to marry / What sorrow
is mine! / Now I have conceived in twos /

Song-text from a puberty school coming-out, by the initiate's sisters.
Recorded at River Platz, 1969

Ku Tswala Hi Vambirhi!

Call: He mhane mdzi na khombo
Response: Ndzi na khombo

Call: A ku tswala hi vambirhi!
 Response: Ndzi na khombo
 Call: Khombo ra vatswari
 Solo Shout: Sikayi xikwembu!

To Conceive in Twos!

Call: Misfortune befalls me
 Response: Such misfortune
 Call: To conceive in twos!
 Response: Such misfortune
 Call: It's the curse of parenthood
 Solo Shout: It's the decree of the gods!

As early as 1897 Junod noted that the Ronga, a southern group of the Tsonga, sang songs "quand il est ne des jumeaux (when they give birth to twins)",³ and Krige reports of the neighbouring Zulu that "when twins were born one of them was killed by having a lump of earth placed in its throat."⁴ The Tsonga fear of twins may be explained in part by the following Tsonga proverb:

Ndzeni ka mhunu a ku nge
 huma tihosi timbirhi

From the womb cannot
 emerge two chiefs

One twin would be senior in rank to the other and a struggle for power would take place, as has frequently occurred in Bantu history.

Song-text from a beer-drink, recorded at Bija, 1969

N'wana A Va Lombi

Call: Mi ku n'wana a va lombi
 N'wana a va lombi!
 Response: A va lombi, a va lomb'
 Call: Va lomba nteواني
 Response: A va lombi, a va lomb'

A Child Is Never Lent Out

Call: You say a child is never lent out
 They never lend out a child!
 Response: They never lend out, they
 never lend out
 Call: They lend out a winnowing basket
 Response: They never lend out, they
 never lend out

The subject of this text is a childless woman's barrenness, and among the Tsonga this condition may be 'caused' by the ancestral spirits of her mother if an insufficient portion of the lobola (bride-price) has been paid to the maternal uncle. The text reveals that a barren woman seeking to 'borrow' a child may be offered a basket instead. This symbolic substitution is a recurrent theme within Tsonga folklore, and the following song-text was collected among the Ronga prior to 1897:

They won't lend me a baby!
 They lend me but a mortar
 Were I an eagle
 Were I a bird of prey
 Quick would I carry it away⁵

There is an old Tsonga folktale in which the girl asks for a baby but "they gave her a zirondo basket," and this theme may be related to Tsonga use, in former times, of baskets as lobola. Lobola, though generally thought of as 'bride-price,' with the Tsonga more closely represents 'child-price' because the lobola is repayable in the event of barrenness. Going further afield for instances of child/utensil substitution occurring within folklore, one notes that the Masai have a folktale in which a barren woman is told to "take three cooking pots."⁶ Pots are made from the earth, and man returns to dust.

Song-text accompanying a game, recorded at Rivola, 1969

Ntshengu-ntshengu!

Call: Hi yo vana vanga
 Response: Hi yo manani utshengu-ntshengu!
 Call: Va nga hela / Hi tinghala / Na
 timhisi /

Ntshengu-ntshengu!

Call: O my children
 Response: O mother, ntshengu-ntshengu!
 Call: O they are finished / By the
 lions / By the hyenas /

In this game an older girl plays 'mother,' protecting her children behind her with outstretched arms. A second girl plays 'child-eater' and steals the smaller children one at a time during the Response portions of the song.

The disappearance of a child was, in former times, associated with the presence of marauding hyenas which, however, were considered as being bewitched humans. Tsonga divining-bones contain the astragalus of a hyena, and this astragalus represents the valoyi (evil spirits) because they eat the flesh of a stolen children. Of the neighbouring Zulu it has been observed that "when children cry they are sometimes silenced by being told that they will be carried off by the Isithwalangcenge. This animal is like a hyena."

Song-text for a rain-rite (now primarily a song for children), recorded at Dunani, 1969

Xikhongolotana! Hi Lava Mpfula

Unison chorus: Mbelele, mbelele, mm
Xikhongolotana! Mm
Hi lava mpfula, mm

Black Millipede! We Want Rain

Unison chorus: Mbelele, mbelele, mm
Black millipede! Mm
We want rain, mm

The formula mbelele mbelele with which this text commences, has been used exclusively in connection with rain-rite songs for as long as living Tsonga memory can recall, and it is also the name of a ceremonial dance called ku cina mbelele.

The xikhongolotana is a shiny black millipede four-to-six inches long. Observation of its habits may aid the n'anga (doctor) in forecasting rainfall, for the Tswana have a praise-poem containing the following lines:

I said, if you want a village, first make it rain; . . . people won't come while it's hot, they will insist on sticking to the plain; they keep saying, "We are settled", and they will stay like that forever. The centipedes go along the roads . . .

The colour of the millipede in our text is significant as far as rain-rites are concerned, for Junod states of Tsonga beliefs that "colour acts on colour; black sheep and black smoke produce a black cloud full of rain." Comparing this belief with that of other tribes, we read that a Lovedu Queen once requested the doctor Mankhelu to make rain, which he did thus:

Having returned with the precious charm, when summoned by any chief to act as rain-maker, Mankhelu employed it in the following way. He first asked the chief to kill a black goat or sheep. . . .¹⁰

Of Zulu rain-rites it has been stated that "with the medicines it is essential to mix the flesh of a black sheep . . .".¹¹ and of the Wagogo that "in order to procure rain the Wagogo sacrifice black fowls, black sheep."¹²

Song-text from a puberty school coming-out, recorded at Mhinga's location, 1969

Ntengu, Ntengula N'wananga

Call: Ntengu, ntengula n'wanaga
 Response: Ha manana mantengula wa
 teka ta vona
 Va funenge ta hi tshuri
 manana mantengula!

Child-of-the-Drongo Bird

Call: Drongo, my Child-of-the-Drongo Bird
 Response: You reveal all my misdeeds
 Cover yours under the mortar!

Ntengu (the Tsonga name for the drongo bird) possibly derives from the verb tengula, to meddle in the affairs of others, and thus may identify the tale-telling bird of children's stories. A Ronga folktale features a tale-telling bird singing the following song:

Tsenengu! Tsenengu! There is one who fell down!
 He fell down on the square of the village
 His flesh hangs and swings
 It is that which you carry on your head¹³

Blacking collected a Venda song containing the following lines:

Dzi tshi shavha thengu

When they run away from the thengu bird

A Rhodesian Tonga folktale contains the following lines:

Ajoke boobo, waba kare ntengwa

She had already become a ntengwa bird¹⁵

Seeing that a terminal gu in Tsonga becomes gwa in many Bantu languages, the Rhodesian Tonga may be referring to the same bird as the Tsonga, Ronga, and Venda, thus indicating certain universals in Bantu folklore.

Song-text from an 'exorcism' rite, recorded at Segalo's location, 1969

Hayi Nyoka Leyo Vimbha Mlomo

Call: Hayi nyoka leyo vimbha mlolo!

Hayi nyoka

Response: Ngi ya hisabaa!

The Snake Which Blocks the Mouth

Call: The snake which blocks the mouth!

The snake

Response: I fear it!

The singer has supposedly been possessed by ancestral spirits, who frequently take the form of small green snakes. There are two further reasons for associating ailments with snakes: (i) the Tsonga occasionally suffer from tapeworm; (ii) they have noticed, at ritual sacrifices, the splayed snake-like bowels of a goat, so when suffering from stomach-ache they think of their own 'bewitched' intestinal tubes within. Blacking encountered the following Venda song emphasizing this point:

Hop-hop! He has
A snake in his stomach¹⁶

Song-text from a puberty school dance, recorded at Machekacheka, 1969

He Valoyi Aho Mi Nga Ni Dlayi Mpelo

Call: Lo ma rhumbini ya vona ya siye xikhova
na swona

Loko xi ni vona xo hlamba mahlweni xiku
pembu

Response: He valoyi aho mi nga dlayi mpelo

Call: Ndzi mi lorhile matolo mi ndzi tshame
nhlokweni /

O Witches, Do Not Kill Me

Call: They have left an owl at their ruins
 When it sees me it washes its face
 Response: O witches do not kill me
 Call: I dreamt last night that you were
 sitting on my face /

Valoyi (witches, wizards) are nocturnal, as the following Ronga song, collected by a Mrs. Audéoud for Junod, demonstrates:

Goodbye, wizard!
 You will kill people
 You come during the night¹⁷

Owls are also nocturnal; hence they are associated with valoyi and feared. Sticks are inserted in the straw crowns of Tsonga huts in order to prevent the screech-owl from settling there at night and frightening the occupants. In Maputju the non-Christians once accused the Christians of "bewitching them by means of the owls which took shelter under the roof of the chapel."¹⁸ The wording of this song ("they have left an owl at their ruins / O witches do not kill me") suggests that the singer has married without revealing her non-virginity, because the song may be related to the following Tsonga proverb:

Manyana a chati muchatu wa
 ku chachela hi swikhova

So-and-so has had a marriage
 feast where the dancers were owls

Song-text from a beer-drink dance, recorded at Langutani, 1969

I Ngwenya!

Solo: I ngwenya yi lo rhumeriwa
 I ngwenya yi ta ndzi dlaya
 Ka mhani va ndzi rhumele ngwenya

'Tis a Crocodile!

Solo: 'Tis a crocodile, it has been sent
 'Tis a crocodile and it will kill me
 Mother, they have sent a crocodile
 after me

Song-text from a puberty school dance, recorded at Mahonisi, 1969

Yi Mitile Vanhu Ngwenya

Call: Wa yi vona?
 Wa yi vona ngwenya nkelenga?
 Response: Heya, heya, wa vona ngwenya nkelenga?
 Call: Yi mitile vanhu ngwenya /

That Crocodile Has Devoured People

Call: Do you see it?
 Do you see the cruel crocodile?
 Response: Hey, hey, do you see the cruel
 crocodile?
 Call: That crocodile has devoured people /

Sixty miles southeast of the Tsonga village of Langutani is a place called Ngwenyeni--Place-of-the-Crocodiles, and just north of Langutani is the Luvuvhu River, the crocodiles of which are mentioned in the following Venda song:

By the other bank of the Luvuvhu
 There are two crocodiles¹⁹
 They churn the water

In the village of Khosen, Tsonga Christians were once accused of having sent a crocodile from Nkomati River into Sokotiba Lake to kill the unconverted,²⁰ and fishermen of the Tsonga Maluleke clan (fearing the presence of crocodiles) employed a Nyai doctor to say the following prayer of protection:

If you are here, crocodile,²¹ go away!
 You, hyena, do not bite!

So much for real crocodiles. The songs may, however, refer to human action such as that of the warring marauders of the nineteenth century, for the Tsonga royal herald Mawewe used to greet his chief Mahlaba thus:

You are like the crocodile
 Which lives in water;
 It bites a man!
 You are like its claws
 It seizes a man by his arms and legs

It drags him into the deep pool
 To eat him at sunset!
 It watches over the entrance to prevent
 Other crocodiles from taking its prey²²

Reinforcing this likening of the Chief to a crocodile is the fact that "crocodiles' brains are used in the Northern Transvaal as Chiefs' medicine,"²³ and also that certain Tswana clans call the crocodile their 'father.' This latter fact has been remarked upon thus:

The Bechuanas, of the Crocodile Clan, think it "hateful and unlucky" to meet or see a crocodile; the sight is thought to cause inflammation of the eyes. Yet the crocodile is their most sacred object; they call it their father²⁴, swear by it, and celebrate it in their festivals.

Beer-drink recitation, recorded at Chavani, 1969

Ku Luma Nguva

Solo speech: Ju ne N'wa-Mkhacane!
 A wu ti na swlangi haleno ke?
 Hi la ju ta hi ta chela mati
 Rixile mi ta dya matimba
 Na makalavatla mi nga ta yiva
 Tanani na swihlangi
 Ku yima Mgwanya!

Shouted order: Ku phokoteriwa!
 (All start slow rhythmic clap)

Solo speech: A hi sunguleni ka!
 Pfumelani!

Half-sung choral

response: Sika!

Solo speech: Wena Mkhacane la / Na wena
 Mgwanya / Na wena Hanyeleni,
 na wena Makhawukani, na wena
 Madumelani / Ringani byalwa
 hi byo byebyi / Hi dya matimba
 la / Vana va tsaka ka / Hi nga
 vona va mikanyi ne vakuhlu hi
 vonavu vutomi / Vutomi ha ku saseka
 / Lo na mina ni n'wi rivaliku ka /
 A ndzi rivalivu / A ni swi tivi /
 N'wana ntsanana / Wena Makhandeni /
 Kyanani matimba hi lawa / Hi dya
 mbila hi heyi / Hi yo mbila ya ka
 hina ya xikhale / A mi nga swi tivivu
 ka / Mi hi tivivu n'wina vo fa khale
 / Na wena N'wa-Rhangani / Makhandeni

kwi? / Minyayi kwi? / A hi n'wi riva-
 langi / Bvumela vutomi / Ne vurha
 bye mdzimu / A hi dyeni hinkwerhu
 / Na vankanyi na vagugu / Nkulungwani
 hayi xeeeee! Ewee! / Nkulungwani-i-i!

To 'Bite' the Fruits of the New Season

Solo speech: You, Child-of-Mkhacane!
 Shall we assemble the children?
 We want to spill water together
 It is already late
 Thus will you eat sugar-cane and
 watermelon
 No need to steal
 Come, Mgwanya

Shouted order: Make sound with your hands!
 (All start slow rhythmic clap)

Solo speech: Let us commence then, assail me with
 your "Sika!"

Half-sung choral

response: Sika!

Solo speech: You, Mkhacane here / And you
 Mgwanya / And you also Hanyenleni,
 Makhawukani, and Madumelani /
 Taste the beer, here it is / We eat
 the sugar-cane / Children, it is time
 to rejoice / To see marula and kuhlu
 beer-fruit / We see life also / Life
 is beautiful / The one whom I do not
 remember, then he also must forget
 me / I know nothing, for I am in my
 youth / You, Makhandeni / Eat sugar-
 cane, here it is / We also eat maize
 porridge here / This is our food of
 olden times / Know ye it also / You
 must know us also, you, our ancestors
 / And you, Child-of-Rhangani / Where
 is Makhandeni? / Where is Minyanyi?
 We did not forget her / Whosoever
 forgets me, I forget her / We are
 provided for, thus we have health /
 Like a bright rainbow / Therefore,
 let us all eat / Let us eat the nkanyi
 fruit / Thus I call Chay-weee! / Thus
 I call! /

In former times, recitations such as this accompanied the cere-
 mony of luma (consecrating fruits of the new season), and the third
 line--"we will spill water together"--may refer to a ritual called
ku kapitela, wherein the officiant expels water from the mouth. The



Two Tsonga women accompany themselves as they perform traditional songs.



Elderly Tsonga sings traditional songs, accompanying herself on a large drum.

Tsonga sometimes talk of "drinking water" when they mean beer, as the following song (collected by Junod) indicates:

Are you the master of the village?
 Are you not going to give us water
 to drink?
 We don't mean well-water,²⁵
 We mean beer and brandy!

The marula beer-fruit (mentioned in our long recitation from Chavani) comes from the nkanyi tree, and for this reason the latter is revered. When adolescents of either sex come of age they are said to have 'drunk the nkanyi,' and when the dead are interred a branch of the nkanyi serves as a pillow.

Of interest, also, is the line "like a bright rainbow," for many African tribes dislike the rainbow, associating its presence with the cessation of rain. The Luyi believe that it is a fire which burns the leaves off trees; the Kikuyu, that it is a man-eating beast; the Ewe of Togo, that it is a snake's reflection;²⁶ the Ila of Zambia, that it is a fire-breathing ram; and the Masai, that it swallows their cattle.²⁷ The Pedi, however, who are neighbours to the Tsonga, sing a chief's praises by comparing him to a giant rainbow.²⁸

Bone-throwing consultation recorded at Bija, 1969

Ju Hlahluva

Diviner: Xo harhi xi nge te karhi!
 Audience: Si ya vhuma!
 Diviner: A mi vonangi xo karhi? / Xi taku la ko karhi? /
 A hi hlahluveni! / Chayani / A hi chayeni /
 Hi vona mkhuva leyi / Leyi taku leyi / Laha
 xikarhi xale kayala / La xikarhini xa le' tiko
 leri / A hi chaveni / Vhuma / Minga chavi /
 Hlahluvani / Mi nga chavi / La tihluveni ta ka
 hina / Ta karhi ta hlahluva / Ti mi byela
 mikhuva / Leyi taku / Yi taku hi le ndhaku /
 Hi nga ta vona makhombo / Ya mindyangu vaka
 nwina / A hi hlahluveni / A hi hlahluveni /
 Vhuma / Ku va na ku miyela nyana / Ha hi
 swona / Hi swona leswi mi hi hlahluvaku na
 swi twa leswi / Ee! Wa swi tiva / La swi
 taku hi kona / Hi mkhuva leyi / Ee! Hi vuya
 tingomeni / Hi hlangene na valungu / Va hi
 teka xifaniso / Laha muntini / A hi hlahluveni
 / A hi chayani / A hi chayani / Hi hlahluva
 ngopfu / Hi mi hlahluva hikwenu / Laha kaya
 ka hina / Ha karhi hlahluva / Tinguluvi / Ti
 yaku ti ya karhala / Va hi vangelaku mathwarima
 / A hi hlahluveni / Ee! Pfumelani / Mi hlahluva
 tihlolo / Leswi ti nga wisa swona / A hi

hlahluveni / A! Pfumelani / A hi Pfumelani /
 Hi vula-vula / La tihlohliveni taka hina /
 Loko hi karhi hi hlahluva / Pfumelani / Mi
 nga chavi / A hi pfumelani tihlolo / Loko
 ti ri hani / Mi nga chavi / A hi hlahluveni /
 Hi ju lexo karhi xi nge te karhi / Xi hume ko
 karhi / A hi hlahluveni / Hi hlahluva ngopfu /
 La tihlolweni ta ka hino / A hi chayani / A hi
 chayani / A hi chaya / Hi swo swi nga swona /
 Loko hi karhi hi mi hlahluva / Hi ta kuma ku
 hanya / Hi byelaku mgunga / N'wi byela mkhuva
 ya matiku / Leswi yi humisaku swona / A mi
 tivoni ti be miraru / Xa mirani a xi le kule /
 La ku Hlahluveni ka hina / Loko hi ta vula-vula
 / A tihlolweni ta ka hina / A hi hlahluveni /
 A hi hlahluveni / Pfumelani / A tihlohlweni /
 Seswi ti vulaku swona / Ee! Hi hlahluva swinene
 / Hi telaku hi ti gramophone / Hi ta ya pfumela
 ama tikweni / Ee! A hi swi voni ku hi ya chaya
 matikwenike / Na chaya mihlahli / Ku va na ku
 vula-vula / Leti be mirani / Mirani wa vutlhari
 / Wa vutlhari bya ka hina / Ti ya ba bvuri / Ra
 makume ya madzana / Ku va na ku vula-vula/ Mi
 nge yima ni teka kambe / Hiswona kunene la /
 Swi dlaya mina la / Swi dlaya mina la, navani
 vitani la / Vito ra mina a n'twali la kaya la
 / Swi dlaya mina vuvabyi lebyi / Na fa la kaya
 la / Bya ni dlaya vuvabyi lebyi, ni hanyi/
 Kunene va dlaya mina / Kunene va dlaya mina/
 Va ni vangela Huwanina/ Ro pfurheli hi
 mindzilo / A phakati ka le kaya / Loko ni
 tshamile / Tinghala ta'Hela/ La swi nga
 swi nga swikwembu swa mina / Mina ni ya ni
 ya karhala / Hi ko ku ni dlaya / Lahaya ni
 ya vange n'tshweli/ Ni ku ra yini ke? / A
 hi hlahluveni / Ti ya hahluva nsati wa nhenga
 / Leswi hi hlahluvisaku swona / La mutini we
 ka hina / Loko hi tshamile / A hi hlahluveni
 / A mi voni leswi ta ku ke? / A hi hlahluveni
 / Vonani leswi halakaku / Lahe matikweni ya ka
 hina / A hi hlahluveni tihlolo / Mina na
 karhala / I ku fa ka mina / Va la ku ta dlaya
 mina/ Ku sala tiku ri borile / Va ta tsaka /
 Mi ta sa mi teka yini ke? / La ha mutini wa
 minake? / Loko ni ta mi hlahluva / Ni khe na
 mi hlahluva / Leswi tinghala hansi / Ta vula-
 vula / Tinghala tinwani ti yimili / Tinwani
 ta 'tlele / A mi tivoni tinghala ti 'nge
 'tlele / I! Hi swo swi vanisaku swikwembu /
 Leswi swi nga ni khoma / Ti va ni vangele
 ritsuka / Leri karhi ri nga la kaya / Ti va
 ti ya ni bele matsukwanany ku fambe-famba /
 Ee! La mutini wa ka hina / Loko hi ta hlahluva /

To Divine With the Bones

Diviner: This and that!

Audience: It is thus!

Diviner: Did you not see something? Coming somewhere? /
Let us throw the bones / Throw! / Let us throw!
/ I see something odd / Soon to happen / In the
middle of this village! / In the middle of this
country! / Let us throw! / Vhuma! / Do not show
fear / At these bones of mine! / They are
working! / Throw the bones / Do not be afraid /
They show amazing things / Which come from
behind! / We will witness misfortunes / In our
village! / Let us throw bones / Let us throw
bones / Vhuma! / It is certain! / It is true,
that which the bones show! / Yes, you know /
From where they come? / Those evil omens! /
Yes! From the celebration of our drums! / We met
the Whites / They photographed us! / In this
village / Let us throw / Let us throw / To
divine more! / To divine for each one / In our
village! / We are divining / Pigs! / Going to be
tired! / Causing bad omens for us! / Let us
divine! / Answer me / To encourage the bones to
divine / How they fell to the ground! / Let us
divine / Answer me! / Answer me! / We must
continue / At our bones / When we are divining
/ Let us divine / We believe the bones / If
they're down! / Let us divine / And say this
and that / Comes from somewhere! / Let us throw
/ That is good! / We are divining / To be of
sound body / To live longer! / Telling the
grumbler! / Telling him the misfortunes of our
country / How they occur! / Can't you see they
denote evil things! / Evil things are not far
away / In our divining / If we want to foretell
/ Answer that which the bones say! / The man
with the gramophone came / To go and divulge
in the foreign countries / Yes, can't you see
that we are to play in foreign countries / I
throw the "mihlahli" / They fell here, denoting
evil things! / Denoting serious things of wisdom
/ Of our wisdom! / They denote evil things /
Four-hundred evil things! / Wait, I must take
them again / Yes! / I am being killed here! / I
am being killed here, they do not call me! / My
name is not called! / I am to die because of
this sickness! / I am to die here at home, here!
/ This sickness will kill me, I will not survive!
/ Of course! They kill me! / They bring evil
things to me! / The fire burns for me / On this
village of mine / While seated / With lions fast

asleep / Where my spiritual gods are! / I will become tired / Then they will kill me! / There I caused the fires to burn / For what reason? / Let us divine / They speak about a witch! / Do you not see what is coming on / See what is coming to our village / And also to our country? / I am becoming drowsy / 'Tis my death! / They wish to kill me! / The village is to be left, stinking / For their satisfaction. / What will they obtain / From this family of mine? / They talk when they are doomed / Some lions are on their legs! / Some are sleeping! / Can you not see lions sleeping? / Yes! This is what provokes the gods / The gods which are in my body! / They cause the woods to burn / Which will burn my village! / Here, they denote for me the ill-fated life I lead in this village / While we divine through bones! /

Bone-throwing is an ancient Tsonga custom, for a sixteenth century traveller noted that "the Botonga throw bones, believe in witches, and have many strange customs about the dead, like the one of leaving the hut of the dead."²⁹ The diviner at Bija took her set of sixty bones from a woven pouch, and threw them methodically across a goat-skin spread out on the ground. We will pay special attention to four of her lines:

- (i) "I will be killed here at home;"
- (ii) "The fires burn for me in this village of mine;"
- (iii) "Can you not see lions sleeping;"
- (iv) "They caused the woods to burn."

The divinatory indications for the line "I will be killed here at home" were provided, in this instance, by the astragalus of the mhandzela (ant-bear), and by the astragalus of the mangule (Livingstone antelope). The ant-bear digs large holes, representing 'graves,' and the Livingstone antelope is a bad omen for travellers--people remain home if they see one.

The line "The fires burn for me in this village of mine" can have two possible explanations--either the aged diviner was referring to night-time fireflies (prevalent in these parts) which are identified with magic, or she was referring to her perhaps-impending death.

Of a funeral that he witnessed, Junod writes thus:

The fire which was burning in the funeral hut is removed and carried out into the square. It must be carefully kept alight. This is a taboo. Should there be rain, it must be protected. All the inhabitants must use this fire during the next five days . . . everyone will take³⁰ from it embers to kindle his own fire in the different huts.

The line "Can you not see lions sleeping" resembles a portion of a ceremony attended by Junod, who cites the phrase "let thorns sleep, let lions sleep" as occurring in a traveller's prayer.³¹ The diviner may therefore be referring to a journey of some kind, possibly an after-death journey.

The line "They caused the woods to burn" may refer to the ancient burial woods of the Tsonga. Of these woods it has been reported that "it is forbidden to allow the bush fire to enter them."³²

All Southern African Bantu tribes believe in divination, but not all use a set of divinatory bones. Blacking collected the following Venda song:

When things are too much for me
I go to the divining dice.
I consult the dice at Ratshitimbi's³³
And the diviner tells me the result

Hugh Tracey collected the following Chopi song:

It is said that we should³⁴
To the diviner Mahushulana

The same investigator also collected the following Zulu song:

Rejoice, soothsayer
Go to the fortune-telling at the diviner's³⁵

Most Tsonga music occurs within the strictly prescriptive context of social ritual, where elders validate status and reinforce authority by demonstrating knowledge of tribal mythology and of the belief system. The teaching of ancient songtexts in preparation for ceremonial occasions where the young prove allegiance by memorization is one example. The use by rival kin groups, in the chief's open-air court hearing, of song-duelling, is another. In these social situations and in the numerous rites of passages and life-cycle crises, Tsonga contexts present and justify Tsonga cultural briefs to the young, ensure integration and social cohesion among adults, and aid elders in regulating the community. A particularly interesting example of the latter is to be seen in the travelling rehearsed and uniformed competitive dance teams belonging to different chiefs. With their vociferous singing, loud drumming, and skilled acrobatics these opposing dance teams bring power and prestige to local rulers. Constituents quickly desert a chief without the social means for making music. A lusty contingent of singers, drummers, and dancers, on the other hand, demonstrates a broad base of chiefly allegiance, and validates the power and influence of those able to call upon strong social forces of this nature.

Notes

- ¹ Henri-Philippe Junod, in his introduction to Vol. IV of A. M. Duggan-Cronin's books, *The Bantu Tribes of South Africa*. (Kimberley: Deighton Bell, 1935), p. 16.
- ² C. T. D. Marivate, "Some Traditional Tsonga Songs," *Bantu Education Journal*. (August 1959), p. 341.
- ³ Henri Junod, *Les Chants et les Contes des Ba-Ronga*. (Lausanne: Bridel & Cie, 1897), p. 38.
- ⁴ Eileen Krige, *The Social System of the Zulus*. (1936; rpt. Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter, 1962), p. 66.
- ⁵ Henri Junod, *The Life of a South African Tribe*. (New York: MacMillan, 1927), Vol. II, p. 284.
- ⁶ Claude Hollis, *The Masai: Their Language and Their Folklore*. (London: Oxford, 1905), p. 85.
- ⁷ Krige, p. 353.
- ⁸ I. Schapera, *Praise-Poems of Tswana Chiefs*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), p. 151.
- ⁹ Junod, *The Life of a South African Tribe*. Vol. II, p. 369.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 321.
- ¹¹ Krige, p. 319.
- ¹² James Frazer, *The Golden Bough*. (rpt.; London: MacMillan, 1950), p. 72.
- ¹³ Junod, *The Life of a South African Tribe*, p. 220.
- ¹⁴ Blacking, p. 124. [sic.]
- ¹⁵ J. Torrend, *Specimens of Bantu Folklore from Northern Rhodesia*. (London: Kegan, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1921), p. 149.
- ¹⁶ Blacking, p. 45.
- ¹⁷ Junod, *The Life of a South African Tribe*. Vol. I, p. 149.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 512.
- ¹⁹ Blacking, p. 65.