

166

THE VACHOPI OF PORTUGUESE EAST AFRICA

(Lenge: *lihandi*, Khoka: *libandi*), whereas Chopi knows only *mtshanu* (a Bantu form), notwithstanding the fact that they are to-day the most disintegrated groups of the tribe.

Many Chopi words are common to the Central group of Bantu, such as:

	Chopi	Lenge	Khoka
hut	nyumba	nyumba	nyumba
ox	ngombe	ngombe	ngombe
blood	mnoha	mnoha	noba or mulopa

The locatives are expressed by suffixes. There may however be noted in this case the very interesting influence of the Central group of Bantu in such forms as *ditikoni kwangu* or *thembweni kwangu*, where the locative is not followed by the genitive particle of the class, but the preposition. One very often finds also the double use of prefix and suffix, example, *munyumbani*, "in the hut". In syntax, Chopi apparently follows the South-Eastern Bantu type, but in phonology all laterals of Thonga-Sutho-Nguni become affricates. These facts seem to place Chopi between the Central and the South-Eastern Bantu groups. Clicks do not exist except in words borrowed from Nguni.

In the formation of the past tense, there is a very interesting form: *Kungako ni di kala hatsile*, meaning "when I sat down", where the suffix of the past is not applied to the verbal root itself, but to the adverb *ahatsi*.

This very short description of some of the linguistic peculiarities of Chopi will perhaps enable my readers to understand the unity of the different groups of the VaChopi, and the place which the Chopi language occupies among the Bantu languages.

CHOPi MATERIAL CULTURE AND TECHNIQUE are among the most interesting and distinctive characteristics of the people. Firstly, the VaChopi are remarkable for being the master-makers of xylophones. I have already described these beautiful instruments at length.* The *mbila* or *muhambi* has been developed in a very ingenious manner, for

* Junod, II, 275-285.

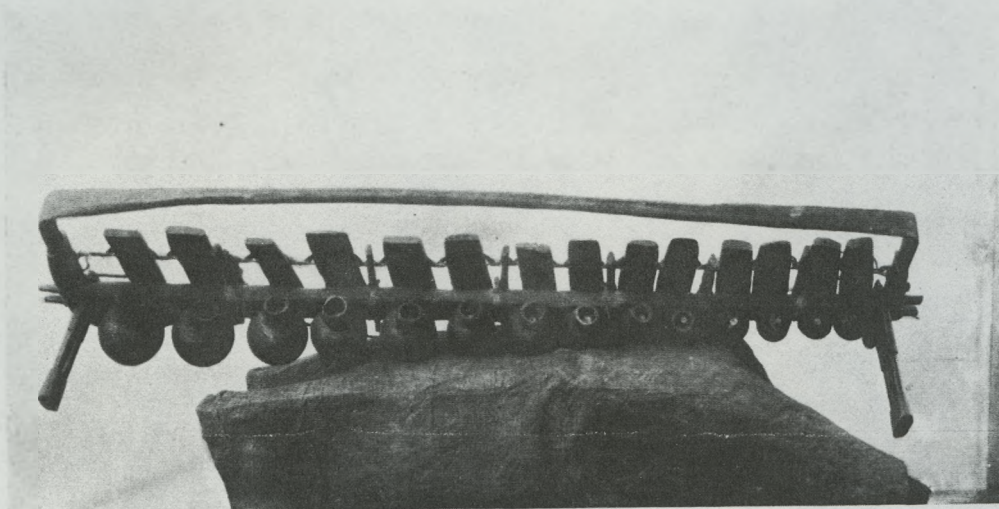
instead of adding to the instrument many keys (*makho khoma*) as did other races,* they differentiated the xylophones into four different instruments: the *tshilandzana*, soprano or equivalent to our first violin in the orchestra; the *didole*, alto; the *dibinda*, tuned one octave below the *tshilandzana*, the bass; and the *tshikhulu*, the contrabass, whose huge keys and resonators play the part of a powerful tuned drum. All these instruments are grouped together in an orchestra. A full description of Chopi xylophones may be found in Kirby's recent work,† as also his opinion that Chopi music is not so highly developed as the *mbila* music of the BaVenda. This may indeed be the case, but the interesting fact, as far as technique and ability are concerned, is the differentiation of the instruments. A genuine Chopi achievement, it opens up the possibility of a large orchestra and an extraordinary volume of sound. One has to witness a genuine *mbila* dance in the bush (*msaho wa mkoma*) to evaluate the ability of this tribe in music and eurhythmics. On the mines of the Witwatersrand most imposing ensembles may be heard, but the material used in the making of the *mbila* is not genuine, and so one's evaluation of it may be slightly incorrect.

Another interesting feature of Chopi technique is the making of bark-cloth (*tshibvenyula*). As I am familiar with the process of manufacture as practised in this country, it may be as well to describe it here. Bark-cloth is of course made in many parts of Africa, from Portuguese East to French Gaboon, but here again, as in the case of xylophones, the VaChopi have brought its manufacture to a very remarkable state of perfection. The method which I am about to describe was observed at Nyankhale in the Makupulana region.

There occurs very generally in Chopiland a large *Ficus*, not the *mphama* of the BaRonga mentioned by Miss Earthy, but the *mphayi*, a species of more slender habit and with lighter coloured leaves. When the tree has matured, it is cut at its base, and it then produces shoots which grow on the old stem or around it. When these are about the height of a man, and the thickness of the arm, a craftsman makes an

* Duggan-Cronin, I, Pl. xv, A Venda Xylophone.

† Pp. 57-65.



The *tshilandzana*, the soprano of Chopi orchestras.



The *tshikhulu*, the contrabass.

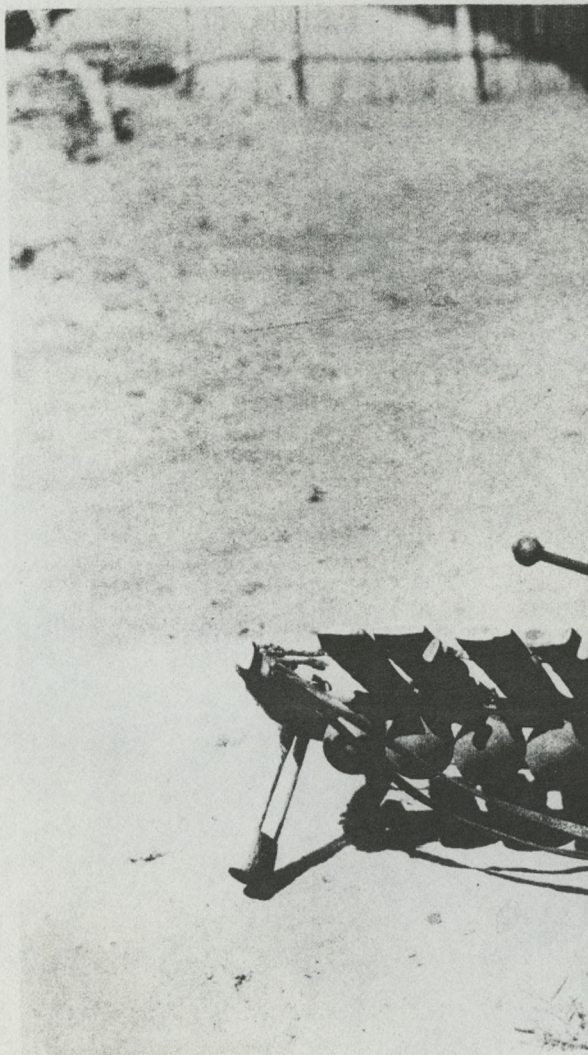
THE MUHAMBI

PLATE LXX
CHOPI XYLOPHONIST

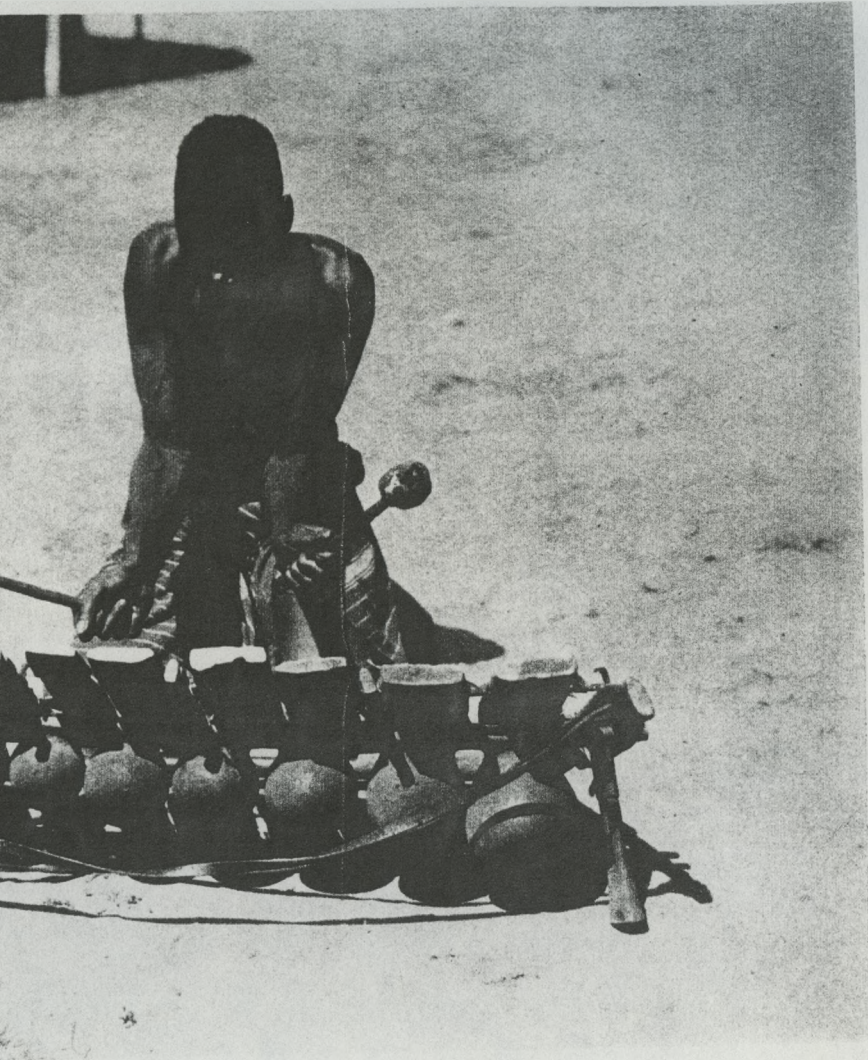
He is performing on a *tshilandzana*, the soprano of Chopi orchestras. Note the manner in which he holds the playing sticks (*tikhongo*); he half supinates, a position which allows of greater freedom for the wrists than pronation.

The generic name of the xylophone is *muhambi* (Chopi) or *mbila* (other tribes), an instrument described by João dos Santos as early as the year 1609.* Chopi xylophones and orchestras are one of the important contributions of the tribe to Bantu culture.

* *Ethiopia Oriental*, ed. 1891, Lisboa, p. 73.



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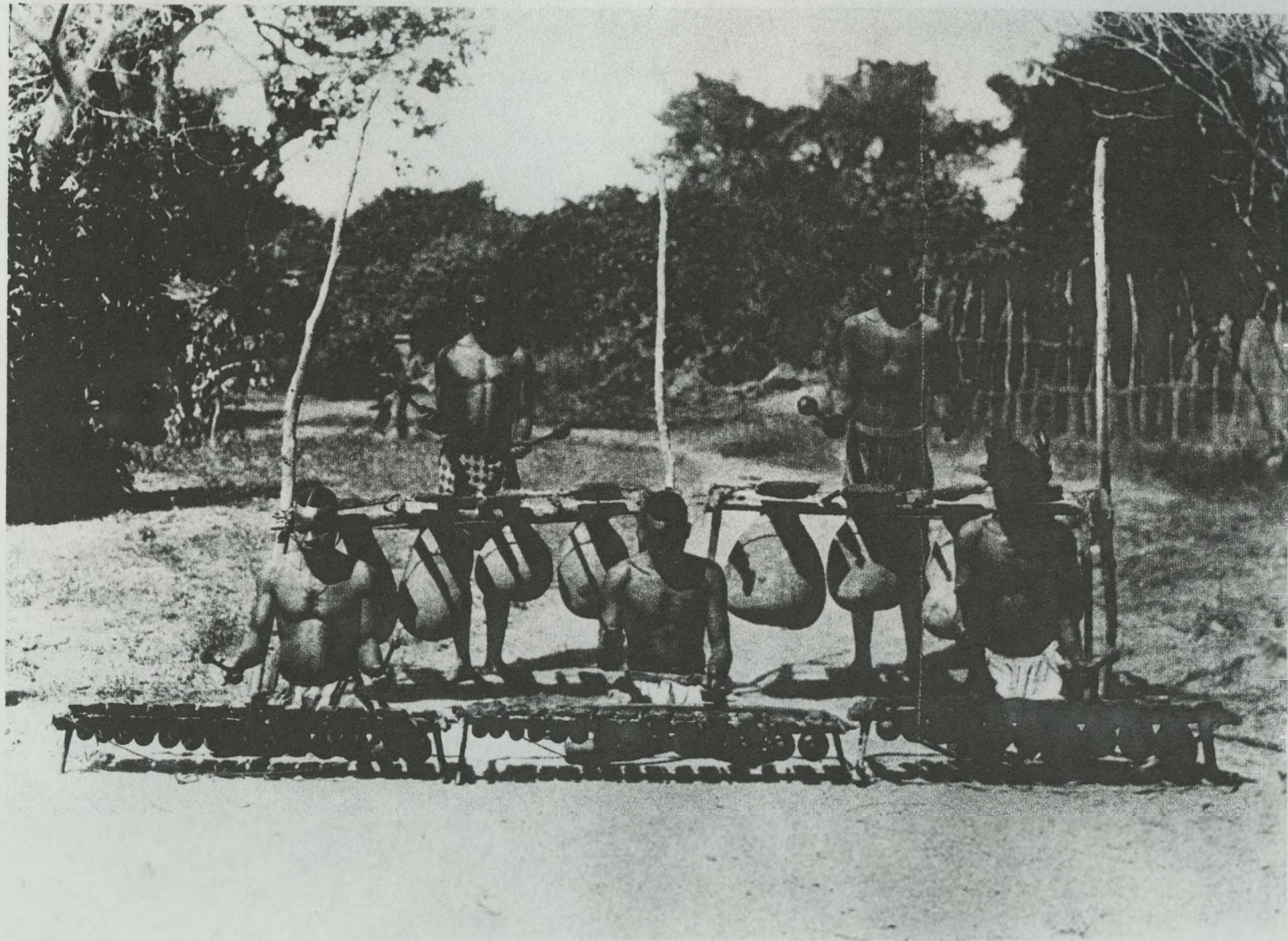
CHUPI XYLOPHONIST

PLATE LXXI

SMALL CHOPI ORCHESTRA AT ZAVALA

The conductor (*msiki wa timbila*) always sits in the middle of the front row of players and performs on a *tshilandzana*.

Here he has a second *tshilandzana* at his right hand, a *dibinda* (one octave lower) at his left, and two *tshikhulu* behind him.



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SMALL CHOPI ORCHESTRA AT ZAVALA

PLATE LXXII

DANCE OF THE CHIEF AT MAHLATINI'S
KRAAL, ZANDZAMELA

The warriors have formed a circle behind the orchestra, instead of dancing in front of it, as is customary. A younger man (*mdotho wa ndjele*) is marking the rhythm with a rattle (*ndjele*) in front of the players.

The dance of the chief (*msaho wa mkoma*) is always the occasion for tremendous dancing contests and much beer-drinking.



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DANCE OF THE CHIEF AT MAHLATINI'S KRAAL,
ZANDZAMELA

PLATE LXXIII
KHOKA DANCERS

The VaKhoka appear to have little knowledge of xylophones. Note the absence of these; and the two big drums, generally scooped out of the trunk of the mafureira.

One of the dancers brandishes a knobkerri (*tshigomba*) and the others a short assegai.



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KHOKA DANCERS