

THE PORTUGUESE MUZUNGOS AND THE ZAMBESI WARS

by

M. Newitt

The Ruling Elite

Until the late nineteenth century the Portuguese presence in Mozambique was sustained by the muzungo community - men and women linked to Portugal by ties of wealth and status but frequently very African in their way of life, their modes of thought and their social structure. As a result of the Zambesi Wars and the stresses and strains of the "scramble" for Africa, the Portuguese made a determined effort to crush the power of this class and dissipate its prestige, and what the might of imperial Portugal failed to complete the sharp dichotomies of the nationalist struggle have finally brought about - the mulattos are now stranded on the frontiers of society, a forgotten minority, their mediating role no longer relevant, saved from oblivion only by romantic Brazilian social historians.

The term mulatto, however, with its rather precise suggestions of miscegenation, is misleading when applied to the elite of Portuguese Zambesia. This elite, already powerful in the 1570s and still dominating politics three hundred years later, was made up variously of European or Indian born merchants, deserters, convicts or officials, of Chinese, Indo-Chinese or coastal Muslims, of the off-spring of these groups marrying among themselves or marrying with Africans, and of men and women of wholly African parentage. Antonio Miranda's account of the racial composition of leading members of the Portuguese community in the 1760s shows that, of heads of families, 20 were Portuguese, 11 Indian, 7 mulatto, and 1 Chinese, and that of their marriages 13 were of Portuguese to mulatto, 5 Portuguese to Indian, 1 Portuguese to Chinese, 6 Indian to mulatto and 1 each of Indian to Indian, Chinese to Chinese, mulatto to Indian and mulatto to mulatto.

The predominance of white Portuguese males in this analysis did not continue in the nineteenth century, when the Indian element became very much more important. Only João Bonifacio Alves da Silva of all the leading muzungos of the Zambesi Wars is known to have a European ancestry. The ruling elite, however, also included men of pure African parentage who had, for one reason or another, deserted or been uprooted from their traditional societies. These men

took service with a Portuguese senhor as soldiers, traders, skilled artisans, or simply as house-slaves. They were often referred to by the Portuguese as slaves and certainly many of them were captured in wars, bought and sold in slave markets, or enslaved in punishment for crimes. This, however, does not adequately describe the clientship bond which gave the slave comparative security and protection as well as the opportunity to enrich himself, to acquire reputation and status, to buy slaves of his own and to establish himself as a kraal head or, more formidably still, as a chief or war-lord.

On these slave bands depended the power and position not only of the Portuguese senhors but also of the whole Portuguese government, for there was no other military force of any significance in Zambesia. There is ample evidence of the power of these fighting bands of slaves at the end of the sixteenth century and something of their organization can be seen in seventeenth century documents. In the eighteenth century, however, they appear as a fully organized group capable of taking independent action, and are referred to by the name of chicunda - a name which later came to describe a distinctive cultural group.

During the eighteenth century this independence was only sporadically displayed, for the connection with the shadowy government of Portugal was too important for the Zambesi muzungos or their slaves to want to break away entirely. From Portuguese governors came land titles, land grants, official ranks and government offices, all of which conferred status and economic power; from Portuguese priests came the baptismal passport to Portuguese society; from Portuguese ships came firearms and trade goods. For men who had broken with or been torn from their own communities, the hierarchies of Portuguese society and Portuguese service were the only available alternative system.

On the other hand, there were many powerful forces pulling the muzungos and their chicunda followers towards Africa. Few of the European or Asian immigrants brought wives with them and, even when they did, few were content to live contently with one wife. Generation by generation the visages of the most powerful families grew darker and their education and modes of thought ever more influenced by the African women of their households. Another powerful Africanizing influence was the position of the great prazo senhors towards the free peasantry on their prazos. The African population retained their traditional chiefs and traditional social structure, but inevitably the powerful prazo senhor appeared as the repository of ultimate authority. The evidence for the precise nature of this relationship is varied, but it bears out that the most successful muzungo senhors were those who played the role of chief - who levied tribute, saw to the appointment of headmen, performed certain ritual functions, and maintained ultimate judicial authority.

The Growth of the Muzungo States

Early in the nineteenth century the relationship of the muzungo clans to each other and to the government began to alter. Years of famine, the rise of the slave trade and the Ngoni raids led to many of the lesser muzungos leaving Zambesia, with the result that power became concentrated in the hands of a few powerful families. Then followed the gradual tightening of the screws on the slave trade. Portugal, caught between the powerful pressure of Great Britain and the inescapable fact that the whole existence of her East African territories was tied up with the slave trade, hesitated and wavered but finally turned against the slavers. This weakened perceptibly the interest which the muzungos, with their deep commitment to the slave trade, had in the Portuguese connection. Finally, there came the direct pressures from Portuguese colonial reformers and

other European powers to whom the world of the muzungos appeared as good an object for their civilizing attentions as any other traditional African society.

However, the story of the Zambesi Wars is not simply the story of the negative resistance of an old established community to the explicit and drastic threats of imperialism and capitalism any more than is, for example, the Mahdiya. The nineteenth century was a period of expansion for the Portuguese muzungos such as they had not enjoyed since the heroic days when Sisnando Dias Bayzo had marched his slaves from Manica into the heart of Butua (Matebeleland), and with this expansion came military and institutional innovations of considerable interest.

It is probable that in the slaving states such as those of Al Zhubeir and Tippu Tib one can see the line of evolutionary change that Africa might have followed had there been no European partition of the continent. In the states of the Zambesi muzungos this line of development had greater time to unfold and reached a stage of greater maturity than in East Africa or the Sudan.

Since the late eighteenth century the trade of northern Zambesia had become increasingly dominated by the Caetano Pereiras. The family never held any prazos but built their power solely on trade and the successful exploitation of chiefly rivalries amongst the Marave. In 1840 the head of the family was Pedro Pereira (known as Choutama), a man with a formidable following of slave clients and with ivory and slaving interests throughout Zambesia. He had been invested with the chieftaincy of Chicucuru by Undi, the paramount chief of the western Marave, and built a strong state astride the trade routes from the Portuguese capital at Tete. This state was called Macanga.

So effective were Choutama's power politics that it was said that more trade was done in Macanga than at Tete itself and his soldiers were able to enforce his trade monopoly as far away as the Luangwa and the Shire.

The Shire route to the interior was opened in the 1850s by Galdino de Sousa, who secured control of the dominant Mount Morumbala. His inheritance fell to Paul Marianno Vas dos Anjos, who built up the state of Massingire independent of Portuguese jurisdiction. On the lower Zambesi a similar state-building process began with the leasing in 1849 of prazo Massangano to Joaquim da Cruz and of Gorongosa to Manuel Antonio de Sousa in 1855. During the 1860s the state of Maganja da Costa took shape on the coast between the Quelimane prazos and Angoche, while above Tete embryo state systems appeared under Inacio de Jesus Xavier at Chicoca, under Kanyemba in the Kariba region, and under Matakanya on the Luangwa.

This state building process transcended the limits of the old prazos, although the Portuguese government continued to divide the newly occupied territory into prazos and to make grants to the muzungo chiefs, in the hope that they would fly Portuguese flags and keep other Europeans at bay.

The muzungo states developed in different ways. Some were merely areas occupied or dominated by bands of chicunda soldiers; others, like Sousa's vast domains round Gorongosa, depended on the personality of one man and crumbled with his death; others like Massingire and Maganja da Costa developed into something resembling military republics ruled by the chicunda captains. Finally, there were Macanga and the da Cruz domains round Massangano, both of which established a line of succession in the chiefly family and proved able to

weather military setbacks and fluctuating fortunes.

In all these states the chiefly families were forced to share power and the chief was hedged about by the customary checks and restraints which feature in most African polities. Members of the chiefly family and the captains of the chicunda shared power with him, forming the council of grandes who advised, helped and sometimes dominated and dethroned the head of the family. Dethronings were, in fact, common and there are examples in the Vas dos Anjos, Pereira and da Cruz families. Also influential were the spirit mediums and keepers of the royal graves of the dead muzungo chiefs, and in Sousa's vast territories the ninety or so wives of Manuel Antonio played an important role, being placed strategically through the country to try to check the power of the captains.

The political and economic centre of the muzungo states was the great aringa. The aringas were large and formidable defensive works built by making a palisade of green stakes which rooted to form a wall of living trees. They were frequently strengthened by stone-work and by bastions and were usually sited near banks of rivers. The aringas could be as much as a mile in circumference and might contain the huts of hundreds of the chief's followers. They were also the economic centre of the state where trade was conducted, booty shared out, sugar refined, and round which there might be extensive areas of cultivated land.

Very often there were also outlying aringas protecting the borders of the state, and commanded by trusted chicunda captains. These often bore the brunt of the fighting and, when Sousa's vast empire broke up in 1890, it was the local aringas which became new power nuclei.

The aringa was the most successful military answer that any African people found to the military technology of the European armies. When an aringa was defended with determination it could defy artillery and rifle fire and wear down the resources of the best equipped military force. There is only one case of an aringa being taken by military action - the final fall of Massangano in November 1888 - to set against the dozen or so military disasters suffered by the Portuguese in their attempts to storm them.

Any hope that the aringas might develop into urban centres, however, wilted as the elites who had formed them were smashed and dispersed during the fighting.

The Zambesi Wars

The conflicts of the nineteenth century which are honoured with the name of the Zambesi Wars were, then, very much the product of local politics in a society which was changing and evolving as rapidly as the world outside was changing.

The first phase of the wars falls between 1840 and 1862. During this period the Caetano Pereiras of Macanga contested, first with the Tete authorities for control of the land of northern Zambesia and then with the da Cruz for control of the river itself. When Choutama died in 1849 Macanga had a virtual monopoly over all the trade routes to the northern interior. However, his son and successor, Chissaka, in alliance with the chiefs of independent Barue, was defeated in 1853 by the da Cruz outside the walls of Massangano.

A similar duel took place lower down the Zambesi, where the Portuguese first tried to use the slaving interests of Vas dos Anjos and Cruz Coimbra to oust the da Cruz and then, under increasing pressure from Britain, broke the power of the Vas dos Anjos by capturing their stronghold at Shamo near the mouth of the Shire.

Shortly after this the expansive forces of the muzungo traders and their chicunda made two significant advances. In 1861 João Bonifacio attacked and seized the sultanate of Angoche, and in the following year the fair at Zumbo was reopened by Albino Pacheco and a base was established for the invasion of Luangwa and Kafue territories.

Few, if any, metropolitan Portuguese troops were involved in these campaigns. The conflicts were between rival settler factions, one of which would be nominally fighting for the government and the other against, but both of whom would in reality be pursuing their own expansive ends.

The second phase of the fighting, which lasted from 1867 to 1875, was a much more direct confrontation between the power of the da Cruz family and the government. The sensational and gruesome disasters suffered by one Portuguese army after another during these years led the Lisbon government to commit more and more of its prestige and more and more of its European army to the crushing of the da Cruz. Each of the four expeditions, however, was also accompanied by contingents provided by the muzungo opponents of the da Cruz, and the campaigns which were so signal a disaster for Portuguese prestige were the making of the reputation of Manuel Antonio de Sousa and the means by which he built up his formidable fighting machine.

The third phase of the Wars, from 1880-1892, is the most complex, for Zambesia was under strong international pressures from greedy European powers and from Portuguese colonial reformers. At the same time, independent African states like Gaza, Barue and the Shona, Macua and Ngoni chieftaincies were also threatened. The muzungos were increasingly faced with the choice of reaching an accommodation with the Portuguese or attempting resistance. So evenly balanced appeared the advantages that at different times all the muzungos tried their fortune in collaboration with the Portuguese. The cleverest of them, like Sousa, Xavier and Kanyemba, always knew how to pursue their aims under the Portuguese flag, but even the da Cruz, the Pereiras and the Vas dos Anjos tried to make terms with Portugal, while the chicunda captains of Maganja da Costa took service with the Portuguese as mercenaries as often as they led raids on Portuguese territory.

Inevitably, however, the rivalries of the muzungos among themselves threw some of them into opposition to Portugal, and these found allies among the African chiefs who were trying to keep the Europeans at bay.

The third phase opened with Manuel Antonio de Sousa seizing control of Barue in 1880 and then leading his army to put down the Massingire rising of 1884. Thereafter, in alliance with an imperial entrepreneur called Paiva de Andrada, Sousa laid plans for the occupation of Mashonaland. In 1886 the chiefs of the lower Mazoe were swamped and early in 1887 Sousa led his army onto the high veld to attack Mtoko. Mtoko sent messengers to the da Cruz, to Chidema and to the exiled Barue aristocracy. This alliance of muzungo and traditional chiefs was successful. Defeated, Sousa fell back on Barue and turned his attention to dealing with the da Cruz. As a result of family quarrels the da Cruz did not resist the attack when it came, and Andrada was able to take Massangano without

a fight late in 1887. The following year, however, the da Cruz were back and the resistance was joined by the Pereiras of Macanga. Not until November 1888 was the governor-general, Castilho, able to take and burn the da Cruz stronghold and put an end to the bloody history of this fortress.

The revolt, however, continued, and with the capture of Sousa and Andrada by the BSA police in Manica in 1890 the whole of Barue rose in rebellion as well, while Sousa's captains deserted their master's cause. Released in 1891, Sousa tried to reconquer Barue with the help of João Coutinho but early in 1892 he was killed in battle.

At the same time the Zumbo muzungos lost the richest of their slave-hunting grounds when the Kafue and Luangwa valleys went to Britain in the 1891 partition treaty.

During the third phase of the Zambesi Wars there had been a certain amount of unity of purpose and sometimes of action as well - between the different groups hostile to the Portuguese. There is evidence of considerable influence exerted by the spirit-mediums and there were "dynastic" marriages between the muzungo families and with traditional chiefly houses. The result had been to nullify the political wiles of the Portuguese and to gain a military success against artillery, machine-guns, and gun-boats unique in the history of African resistance in southern Africa.

However, there were to be no further successes. True, with the fall of Sousa, Gorongosa and his other territories were taken over by the leading chicunda captains and most of these adopted a very independent attitude towards the Portuguese, but there was no focus of leadership. The same was true of Barue, where rival branches of the royal house remained in conflict and allowed the country to be exploited by white adventurers. The da Cruz never regained their former influence and Mtoko was now in British territory. Although there was considerable resistance in Rhodesia to the BSA Company, there was never any successful combination with the resistance groups in Portuguese territory. The failure of African resistance in this fourth and final stage is not easy to explain except in terms of lack of leadership and lack of a common objective.

As a result the Portuguese were gradually able to isolate and destroy the different elements of opposition. In 1897 Coutinho broke the power of Cambuamba, the most important of Sousa's captains, and followed this up with a successful campaign against Maganja da Costa in 1898. In 1902 it was the turn of Barue. During this final war some vestige of the old unity returned. The two royal houses agreed to combine against the Portuguese and they were joined by Cambuamba and contingents from the da Cruz prazos. But this combination laid them open to the single decisive defeat, and this was swiftly inflicted on them by Coutinho. They were not joined by Luis Santiago, one of Sousa's captains who still held Gorongosa, and this may well have been disastrous for both parties, because with the defeat of Barue a column was sent against Luis and he was captured and shot.

Finally, in 1902, a force of Ngoni raised on the frontiers of Nyasaland attacked Macanga and crushed Chinsinga, the last Pereira chief. 1902 is usually taken to be the end of the Zambesi Wars, but it was not the end of resistance in Mozambique. Not until 1910 could Portugal occupy the hinterland of Angoche, and in 1917 there was serious rising in all the areas where fighting had been endemic during the previous century.

The end of the fighting did not, however, see the end of muzungo power entirely. The big families had been broken but there were many lesser families who had held onto much of their position on the pretext of aiding the Portuguese. After 1892 the prazos were all reauctioned on new terms and most of them fell to scratch commercial companies formed to exploit the masses of easily available land. Most of these companies were undercapitalized and had no skilled personnel or administration. They tended to sublet their prazos to the more enterprising of the old muzungo families. The most striking examples of this were the leasing of much of northern Zambesia to the Caetano Pereiras in 1895 and the contracts made by the Mozambique Company with Luis Santiago, Cambuamba and Eusebio Ferrao.

Under the new prazo law, the renters provided their own police and collected the taxes - it was the old regime in new guise. And the old regime of the slave trade revived as well, for the demand for labour in the surrounding British colonies was so great that the new prazo senhors happily recruited their peasantry and packed them off to South African mines or Rhodesian farms.

The real decline of muzungo power in Zambesia came after the First World War when the concession companies began at last to establish administrations of passing efficiency.

-----oOo-----

Bibliography

1. The Ruling Elite

A. C. P. Gamitto, "Prazos da Coroa em Rios de Sena", Arquivo Pitoresco, Vol. 1, 1857-8, 61-3, 66-7.

Miranda, Antonio Pinto, "Memoria sobre a Costa de Africa" in Andrade ed. Relações de Moçambique Setecentista (Lisbon, 1955), 231-312.

Lacerda e Almeida, Francisco Maria de, "Diario de Viagem de Moçambique para os Rios de Senna", in Murias ed. Travessia de Africa (Lisbon, 1936), 79-136.

Lobato, Alexandre, Evolução Administrative e Economica de Moçambique (Lisbon, 1957)

Isaacman, Allen, "The prazos da coroa 1752-1830 - a functional analysis of the political system", Studia No. 26, April 1968.

" " "The Origin, Formation and Early History of the Chikunda of South Central Africa", Journal of African History, xiii, 3, 1972, 443-461.

2. The Growth of the Muzungo States

Foa, Edouard, Du Cap au Lac Nyasa (Paris, 1901).

Courtois, Victor, "Terras de Macanga", Boletim da Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa, serie 5, No. 8, 1885, 502-20.

Mesquita e Solla, A. de F., "Apontamentos sobre o Zumbo", BSGL, 1907.

Newitt, M. D. D., & Carlake, P. S. "The Aringa at Massangano", JAH viii, 1, 1967, 133-56.

3. The Zambesi Wars

Almeida de Eça, F. G. de, Historia das Guerras no Zambeze, 2 vols (Lisbon, 1951).

Castilho, Augusto de, Relatorio da Guerra da Zambesia em 1888 (Lisbon, 1891).

Coutinho, João de Azevedo, Manuel Antonio de Sousa (Lisbon, 1936)

" " As Duas Conquistas de Angoche (Lisbon, 1935)

" " Memorias de um Velho Marinheiro e Soldado de Africa
(Lisbon, 1944)

Paiva de Andrada, Joaquim Carlos, Relatorio de uma Viagem as Terras do Changamira
(Lisbon, 1886)

" " " "Campanhas de Zambesia, 1887", BSGL No. 7, 1887,
713-38

" " " "Relatoria de Major Paiva de Andrada", BSGL 1888,
No. 8, 405-39.

Newitt, M. D. D., "The Massingire Rising of 1884", JAH ix, 1, 1970, 87-105.

" " Portuguese Settlement on the Zambesi, Longmans, 1973, chapters
15-18.

Rowley, Rev. H., "Slavery among the Portuguese in Eastern Africa", Mission Life
March 1868, 197-206.

-----oOo-----

Chronology of the Zambesi Wars

- 1840 Choutama attacks Marave chief Bive
- 1841 Choutama defeats Portuguese attack on Macanga
- 1843 Portuguese force to Choutama to sue for peace
- 1849 Death of Choutama followed by raids by Macanga on Tete prazos
Joaquim da Cruz rents Massangano
- 1852 Galdino Faustino de Sousa opens slave route up Shire
- 1853 Defeat of Macanga and Barue at Massangano
- 1854 Death of Galdina de Sousa
Cruz Coimbra leads settler expedition against da Cruz
Sicard leads first government expedition against da Cruz
- 1855 Death of Joaquim da Cruz. Manuel Antonio de Sousa builds base in Gorongosa
Mussa Quanto of Angoche starts raids on Zambesia
- 1856 Livingstone's first passage down Zambesi
- 1857 Arrest of Paul Marianno Vas dos Anjos I
- 1858 Death of Chissaka
Portuguese defeat Vas dos Anjos and take Shamo
Beginning of Livingstone's Zambesi Expedition
- 1861 João Bonifacio da Silva conquers Angoche and is killed
- 1862 Albino Pacheco refounds Zumbo
- 1863 Kanienzi of Macanga makes treaty with Portuguese
Antonio da Cruz makes treaty with Portuguese
Death of Paul Marianno Vas dos Anjos I
Manuel Antonio de Sousa becomes capitão-mor of Manica
End of Livingstone's Zambesi Expedition
- 1867 Miguel Gouveia defeated and killed at Massangano
Oliveira Queiros expedition against Massangano fails

- 1868 Portugal's Vasconcellos army wiped out in front of Massangano
- 1869 Tavares de Almeida expedition against Massangano routed
- 1874 Supposed homage of Manica to Manuel Antonio de Sousa
- 1875 Kankuni of Macanga signs treaty with the Portuguese
Antonio da Cruz and Portuguese make peace
- 1876 Marriage of Manuel Antonio to daughter of Macombe of Barue
- 1879 Death of Antonio da Cruz
- 1880 Paul Marianno Vas dos Anjos II makes agreement to aid Portuguese
Death of Macombe. Sousa seizes power in Barue
- 1882 Paul Marianno Vas dos Anjos deposed and killed. Portuguese annex
Massingire
- 1884 Massingire rising
- 1885 Andrada's exploration of lower Mazoe
- 1886 Andrada and Sousa occupy lower Mazoe
- 1887 Sousa defeated in Mtoko
Chatara (da Cruz) deposed. Sousa and Andrada take Massangano
- 1888 Macanga rebels against Portugal
Castilho's expedition to take Massangano
- 1889 Cordon/Serpa Pinto expeditions to central Africa
- 1890 Britain's ultimatum to Portugal
Sousa and Andrada captured in Manica. Rebellion in Barue
- 1891 Maganja da Costa mercenaries in Barue under Coutinho defeated
Anglo-Portuguese frontier agreement
- 1892 Maganja da Costa soldiers attack Quelimane prazos
Defeat and death of Manuel Antonio de Sousa
- 1895 Chinsinga of Macanga rents prazos from Zambesia Company
- 1897 Defeat and flight of Cambuamba in Sena district
- 1898 Coutinho suppresses Maganja da Costa
- 1902 Defeat of Macanga and death of Chinsinga
Defeat of Luis Santiago in Gorongosa
Defeat of Barue/Cambuamba alliance

