

NC'WALA
The First Fruits Ceremony of the Ngoni



**Mtenguleni Village, Chipata
Zambia**

**R. L. Hewitt and Samson Phiri
2014**

A Photographic Record

The photographs that follow were taken by Samson Phiri at Mtenguleni Village, in the Eastern Province of Zambia, on the occasion of the final day of the Nc'wala Ceremony, which was celebrated in 2014 on Saturday, 22nd February.

1. Preliminary and Arrival of Guests of Honour

(Right) Ngwenyama (the Great Lion) Inkosi Yamakosi (King of Kings) Mpezeni IV, Paramount Chief of the Jere Ngoni, will preside over the Nc'wala Ceremony. His image stands alongside the Bwalo (arena) at Mtenguleni Village

'This statue of Ngwenyama Inkosi Yamakosi Mpezeni IV was unveiled on 28th February 2009 by His Excellency Rupiah Bwezani Banda, President of the Republic of Zambia, and President of ANC Jacob Zuma, who later became Fourth President of South Africa'

(Below) The black bull (mkomo) is tethered to a tree, where it will await sacrifice. It is the gift of Chief Mzamane



The arrival of dancers from Tsambani Village, Tete Province, Mozambique

They wear ligubo (bark cloth)



The permanent Bwalo, which is raised above the ground, was constructed in its current form for the 2012 ceremony

Pupils of Chipata Primary School dance Ingoma



Pupils of Madzimoyo Secondary School, near Mtenguleni, dance Ingoma



Dress...

Chief Mzamane arrives as a girl from Lusaka looks on
Both the middle class attire of Lusaka and the traditional dress of the Ngoni are to be observed



Disabled people from Petauke dance Ingoma





Dr. Nevers Mumba, President of the opposition Movement for Multiparty Democracy and himself a Ngoni, enters the Bwalo. He arrived together with his wife and entourage in two helicopters





Pupils of Chankhanga Secondary School, near Chipata, dance Ingoma

Dress...

Women from Mazima Village arrive

The Ngoni say that they bare their bodies to express power



Senga-speaking women from Mozambique resident in Chipata dance Chiwoda

Pupils of Kasenengwa Boarding High School, Kasebo, near Chipata, dance Ingoma



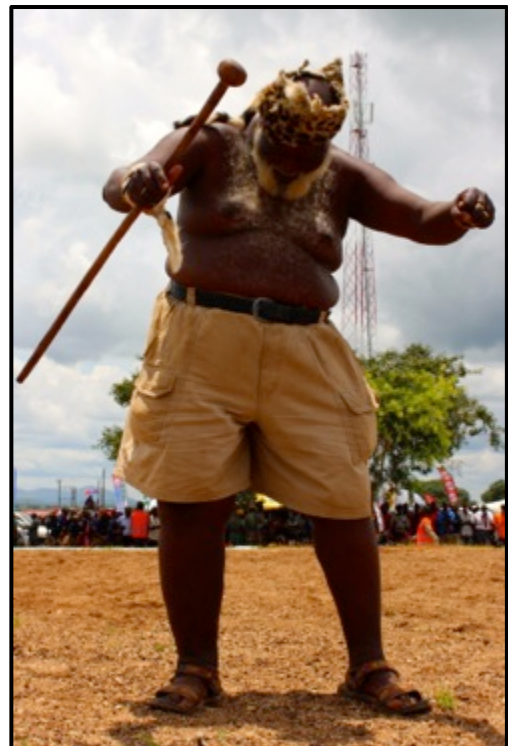


H.E. Mr. Michael Chilufya Sata,
President of the Republic of
Zambia, and his wife arrive in
armed convoy and receive homage



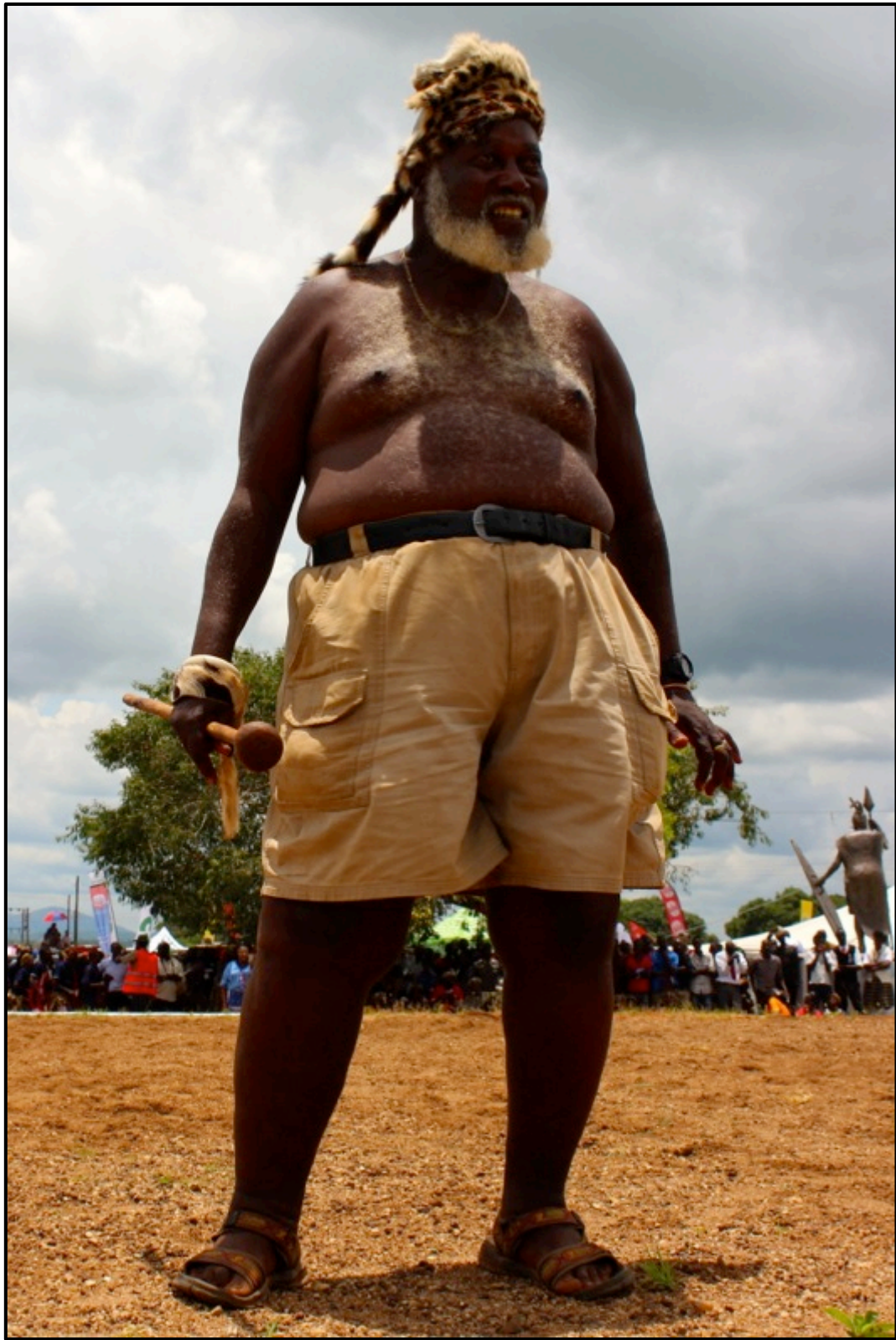


Pupils of Katete Girls' School dance Ingoma



Mr. Mikias Jere dances with pupils of Chipata Boys' Secondary School







Pupils of Chizongwe Technical High School dance Ingoma, together with Mstr. Dickson Shumba, son of one of the teachers

Comment:

At this point in proceedings the crowds gathering at Mtenguleni Village, which is situated to the West of Chipata, in the Eastern Province of Zambia, have been entertained by local dance groups, representing schools and other institutions. Both the President of Zambia and the Leader of the Opposition have made their dramatic entrances (in armed convoy and by helicopter respectively). Numerous chiefs have brought their people from throughout the Eastern Province and from as far afield as Mozambique and Malawi, where there are also substantial Ngoni populations. There is a small but significant body of onlookers from without the Ngoni kingdoms.

The extraordinary diversity of the Ngoni who have come to celebrate the Nc'wala Ceremony will already be apparent. We see 'Western' and traditional dress, men and women, young and old, the urban middle classes of Lusaka and Chipata and the rural peasantry, the 'real' Ngoni and 'the poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind'. There is no inhibition or reserve in this celebration of the wealth of Ngoni cultural inheritance.

We await the arrival of Ngwenyama Inkosi Yamakosi Mpezeni IV, King of Kings and Paramount Chief of the Jere Ngoni, whose father re-established the Nc'wala Ceremony on 24th February, 1980. For the last three days he has left his palace at Feni Village close to the Malawi border to remain in seclusion at Kampala Village. Today he will make the short journey to Mtenguleni Village to break his fast and to eat the green maize of the new harvest, allowing his people to do the same and inaugurating a new regnal and agricultural year. He will enter amidst his people to the accompaniment of gunfire in sumptuous lion-skin raiment and lead them in joyful song and dance. The culmination of the ceremony is the sacrifice of a black bull, whose blood the King of Kings will drink in communion with his royal ancestors.

The dance most commonly performed is the Ingoma, which is a celebration of harvest home. It is characterized by rhythmic stamping and by the thrusting of spears (mikondo) and knobkerries (nduku). Drums are not used. We see also women's dances: Chiwoda, which is performed by mature women, and Chinamwali, which is associated with girls' initiation. Throughout proceedings the praises (izibongo) of the King of Kings are sung, by Praise-singers (iimbongi) and by bare-breasted women who express the ecstasy that they experience in his presence by ululation and by rolling on the ground before him. Common refrains are the cries of Bayete and Siyaduma Inkosi, 'Hail to the King of Kings'!

This Photographic Record follows the order of events. It cannot begin to convey the full colour and spectacle of the occasion: celebration outside the Bwalo and, for that matter, throughout Chipata District, is just as engaging as what is presented before the King of Kings. However, it is hoped that it will serve both as a memorial of the proceedings of a remarkable day in the Ngoni calendar and as an invitation to those who have not enjoyed the privilege of attending in person. Please see the Bibliographical Note for further information.



2. Inkosi Yamakosi Mpezeni IV emerges from Seclusion and Proceedings begin



Gunfire heralds the arrival of Inkosi Yamakosi Mpezeni IV

The King of Kings is preceded (bottom right) by Mr. Gilbert Jere, bodyguard





Ngoni fill the Bwalo and adjoining area, and dance aggressively in order to defend the King of Kings against his enemies



Ngwenyama (the Great Lion) Inkosi Yamakosi (the King of Kings) Mpezeni IV







The National Anthem is sung



Women from Feni and Mazima Villages ululate to shew respect for the King of Kings...





(Left) A Praise-singer acclaims the King of Kings in the Ngoni language (Old Zulu)



(Top) The King of Kings is flanked (left) by Chiefs Maguya, Mlonyeni, Kamwendo and Saili and (right) by Chief Chinyaku, Mr. Gilbert Jere, bodyguard, and Chief Kapatamoyo



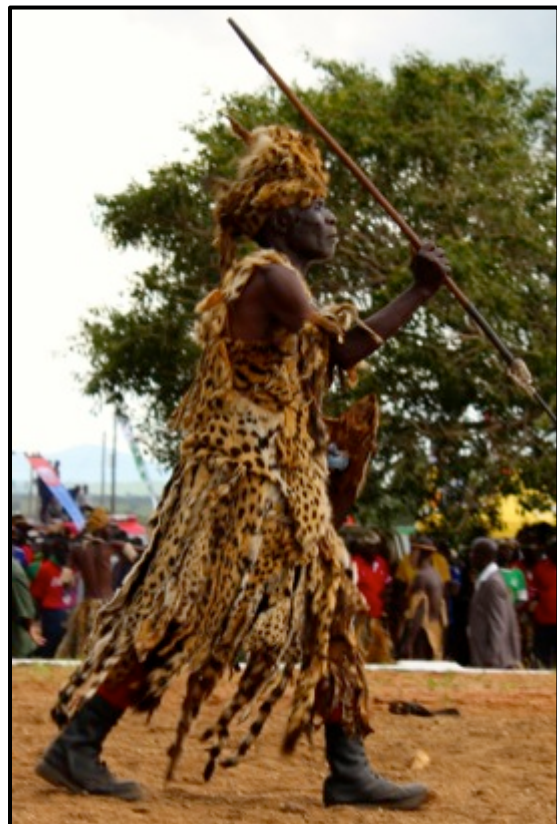
... and roll on the ground in self-abasement before the King of Kings







Mr. Sibusiso Jere, Feni Village, recites the history of the Jere Ngoni: their departure from South Africa under Zwangendaba as part of the diaspora occasioned by the rise of Chaka Zulu and the Mfecane in the early years of the nineteenth century; the solar eclipse that marked the parting of the waters of the Zambezi at Zumbo and the crossing of his people in 1835; the death of Zwangendaba at the northernmost extent of the Ngoni migration in Matema District, Tanzania, toward the shores of Lake Tanganyika, ten years later, and their eventual settlement under Inkosi Yamakosi Mpezeni I in the Fort Jameson District of Zambia (now Chipata) in or around 1865



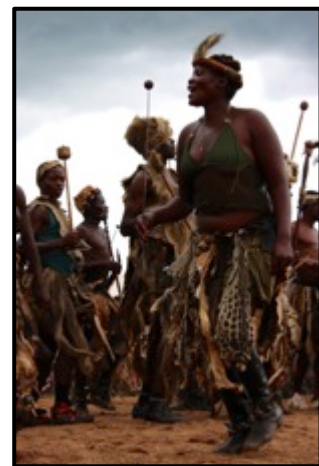


Chiefs Kamwendo and Chinyako dance Ingoma before the King of Kings with dancers from Feni Village





Kamwendo Village (Mchinji District, Malawi) dances Ingoma



They are joined by Mr. Bruno Chakhumbira Jere...







...who blows the kudu horn before the King of Kings



Mr. Jere is described by onlookers as a 'real' Ngoni



A Ngoni woman dances behind her man



Dancers from Feni Village return to the Bwalo...



... together with Mstr. Dickson Shumba and Mr. Sibusiso Jere





3. Inkosi Yamakosi Mpezeni IV dances with his People and with the Guests of Honour



The King of Kings is preceded by Mr. Gilbert Jere, bodyguard, and Chief Manyuka holds his lion-skin train. He wears bracelets of ivory: the elephant serves also to express his royal nature





The King of Kings dances with Mr. Michael Sata





Bare-breasted women continue to circle the King of Kings singing his praises while he dances with his people

He departs from the Bwalo





Chief Kamwendo (Malawi) dances with an Ngoni princess



Dr. Nevers Mumba dances with his people





4. Speeches

Mr. Michael Sata delivers his address

Although there is increasingly a political and a commercial aspect to the Nc'wala Ceremony, attention remains focused on the King of Kings and the Ngoni ritual throughout



5. Slaughter of the Black Bull of Sacrifice and Communion with the Royal Ancestors



Mr. Madisi Zulu, the warrior chosen for the slaughter (left), must slay the bull with a single thrust of his spear

In preparation he has abstained from sexual activity for thirty days



The bull is raised to its feet and slain with a single thrust of the spear

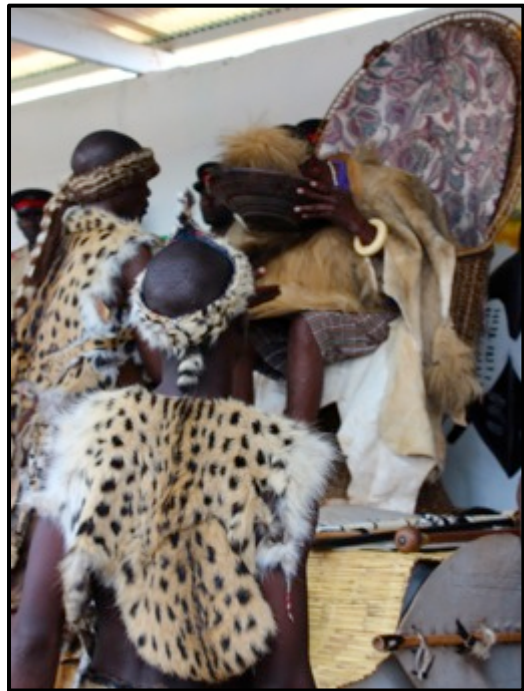




Messrs. Gilbert Jere, bodyguard, Bongani, Charles Govati and Masuki bring the blood to the King of Kings...



... who drinks it in communion with his royal ancestors







The wooden platter (chipale) is returned

Now the liver is cut out and roasted, and then divided into small pieces





The roasted liver is brought to the King of Kings, who distributes it among his people

Chief Kapatamoyo consumes his portion (left)



6. Presentation of Gifts and Departure



Mrs. Kanyama, who represents the Maseko Gomani Ngoni (Malawi), and a daughter of Inkosi Yamakosi Mpezeni IV (foreground) look on while the King of Kings receives gifts



Chief Mtondweni



H.E. Mr. Ratxide Gogo,
Governor of Tete Province,
Mozambique (bottom left)





Inkosi Yamakosi Mpezeni IV departs (also with gunfire), followed shortly after by Mr. Michael Sata and Dr. Nevers Mumba



Proceedings conclude with more dances from Mozambique, including performances of Chinamwali, which is associated with girls' initiation, and (by the Zintambira Maseko Ngoni) of Ingoma (p. 40)

The dancers of Chinamwali wear ligubo







Bibliographical Note:

The Nc'wala Ceremony of the Jere Ngoni of Zambia was suppressed by the colonial Government in the aftermath of the Anglo-Ngoni war in 1898 and restored by Nkosi Yamakosi Mpezeni III on 24th February, 1980. Since then it has been celebrated annually, with the exception of 1982, when Nkosi Yamakosi Mpezeni III passed away and his son succeeded to the throne as Mpezeni IV.

There are three principal sources of information on the Nc'wala Ceremony available to the author in Malawi.

Margaret Read sojourned among the Maseko Gomani of Nyasaland (present day Malawi) on three occasions in the 1930's: they are related by ancestry and custom to the Jere Ngoni of Zambia. The principal memorials to her research are an elegant essay on the educational model that she discovered there, *Children of their Fathers: Growing Up among the Ngoni of Nyasaland* (London, 1959) and a full ethnographic study, *The Ngoni of Nyasaland* (London, 1956).

In the latter she comments, 'The national ritual of the first-fruits festival (*incwala*), which brought all the people to the royal village, was also abandoned before the Ngoni kingdoms were finally established, for no old person alive in the 1930's had seen the *incwala* ceremony' (pp. 21 – 22).¹ Subsequently she reports that the tradition had been brought by the Ngoni from their ancestral home in Swaziland (which is now the only place to celebrate the Nc'wala Ceremony outside Zambia²), and quotes extensively from the Rev. Yesaya M. Chibambo, who 'collected from the old men in the northern kingdom the following account of what took place at the *incwala*' (pp. 59 – 61).³ The interest of this account of a ceremony in Nyasaland related to, but also significantly different from, proceedings as observed at Mtenguleni Village, and the relative inaccessibility of the source, justifies its reproduction in full:

'Among the dances of the Ngoni, ngoma, umsindo, ligubo, incwala was the best and most important. They say it lasted about two weeks, or if it began when the moon was full until it became new again. When they said 'incwala is closed', no one sings the songs of incwala and no others. This dance belonged to the Paramount of the whole country. A description of incwala is difficult because it was given up long ago. Even the old people of today have never seen it.

'It began in the middle month of Intokoni (January). Young men were sent to look for ripe food in the garden by streams. The owners had not picked any nor was much of the crop nearly ready. They took some juicy stalks of maize, and pumpkins with their roots. They also looked for a wild fruit like a gourd, very bitter, which some people use to stir up their dogs to make them fierce in hunting and quick in scent. This fruit the Ngoni call igumuzo. These they mix with medicines and the inkosi eats it without the people knowing. The belief was that if the Paramount ate the first-fruits carelessly, or if the people were the first to taste the first-fruits of the year, there would be disaster for the inkosi and the country. After a month, when the crops were ripening, the incwala began, the crops not being completely ripe and no one having yet tasted the new crops.

¹ *Incwala* is the Malawian orthography for Nc'wala. Conversely, it is commonly said that *Ngoma* is the Malawian orthography for *Ingoma*, and that there are significant differences between the two dances. This convention has been followed here, but what one hears in Zambia is often *Ngoma*. As ever, the linguistic situation in an oral society is fluid.

² The dance troupe of Kungoni Centre of Culture and Art, Mua Mission, Malawi has attended the Nc'wala Ceremony and has learned the dances and the songs. It performs a version of the ceremony in Malawi, but in the absence of royalty and a ritual context this is for interest and aesthetic effect only. See <<http://www.kungoni.org/>>.

³ This description does not appear in Chibambo's portrait of his people, *My Ngoni of Nyasaland* (London, 1942).

'In the month of February the inkosi announced that everywhere the incwala ye'nkosi should begin on such-and-such a day. Quickly much beer was cooked in all the villages by everyone. On the day the beer-making began, the dance began also. The word was sent around everywhere: incwala seigwabuliwe, 'incwala is now opened'. All the people went to the central village of Elangeni, the village of Hlacwayo. They took crops which had been planted in December, impala, and added the first igumuzo fruit to them. Great crowds of people gathered at Elangeni and danced. Many were in the kraal but many more were dancing outside. All were dressed carefully. They danced with reeds in their hands or with the sticks of their shields. It seemed as though the song everywhere was the same. Women going for wood and water, and children and youths, wherever they went, the song was on their lips. In dancing the women were by themselves, and the men by themselves. They faced each other in the dance. They were bending their bodies backwards and forwards, and moving their necks and shoulders.

'The inkosi was all this time as if he were mourning and fasting. He was in the house. His body was painted with medicines, black, red and white; and round his loins was painted with black medicine. He was kept naked except for the cover of his foreskin. They fed him with the first-fruits mixed with medicines. They said that both the Paramount and all the people were fasting and under discipline at that time.

'When the time for closing the incwala came, they again took the fruit igumuzo and threw it in among the dancers and called out 'incwala seimbonyiwe', 'the incwala is closed'. Then the people began to separate and to go home, still with the songs on their lips, and on the way cutting juicy stalks of new maize and picking leaves of pumpkins, which meant that the new crops were set free.'

Matshakaza B. Lukhero offers a brief account of the history of the Jere Ngoni and the restoration of the Nc'wala Ceremony in its present form in *Ngoni Nc'wala Ceremony* (Lusaka, 1985; rev. 1992). His interest is personal, for he was elected chairman of the committee responsible for arranging the Nc'wala Ceremony in 1983. Lukhero provides good historical and contextual information for the ceremony but little information (beyond photographs) or explanation as to its modern constitution, perhaps because he is too closely involved. There is a short but useful bibliography.

Much the most impressive student of the modern Nc'wala Ceremony is Dr. Med. Rupert Poeschl of Germany, who has pursued an amateur interest in the ethnography of the peoples of northern Malawi and eastern Zambia for several decades. He collaborates with Prof. Boston Soko of Mzuzu University (Malawi) to present his record of the Nc'wala Ceremony in a documentary film: *Nc'wala Ceremony: The First Fruit Ceremony of the Ngoni of Eastern Zambia* (2008).⁴ Poeschl's visits over the years (with annual attendance from 2004 to 2008) have generated a wealth of still photographs and video footage: the oldest image to be incorporated is that of the enthronement of Inkosi Yamakosi Mpezeni IV in 1982. Poeschl's account allows the viewer to trace the development of the Nc'wala Ceremony and to see proceedings as they were before the ceremony fell so heavily under political and commercial influence from without the Ngoni kingdoms.

Acknowledgments:

This Photographic Record does not aspire to be an ethnographic study but rather a visual account of the final day of the Nc'wala Ceremony as experienced in a particular year. In this pursuit Samson Phiri, who is a Malawian and neither a professional photographer nor a Ngoni, has succeeded admirably. The majority of the captions derive from subsequent visits that he made to Chipata, in which he shewed the work to friends among the dancers and recorded details of the performance. It is testament to the catholicity of the Nc'wala Ceremony that Samson's principal informant is one Mr. Forty-eight Hours, a pseudonym born of his profession, who, when he is not hustling on the Malawi – Zambia border, likes nothing better than to dance Ingoma before the King of Kings. Thanks are due also to Fr. Claude Boucher (Kungoni Centre of Culture and Art) and to Mr. Charles Govati (Maseko Gomani Trust) for their further help in compiling the captions. Zikomo kwambili!

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Kamuzu Academy, Malawi

Lammas Day, 2014

Samson Phiri
Photographer (right)



⁴ The DVD is published by Ethnographische Filme GbR, Angerstr. 1 C, D-37073 Goettingen. It will be reproduced in due course by Kungoni Centre of Culture and Art.