THE BAVENDA

Hugh A. Stayt

AFRICAN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDIES OF THE 20TH CENTURY

ROUTLEDGE

AFRICAN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDIES
OF THE 20TH CENTURY

Volume 62

THE BAVENDA

Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group
http://taylorandfrancis.com

THE BAVENDA

HUGH A. STAYT

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published in 1931 by Oxford University Press for the International African Institute.

This edition first published in 2018
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 1931 International African Institute

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Trademark notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-0-8153-8713-8 (Set)
ISBN: 978-0-429-48813-9 (Set) (ebk)
ISBN: 978-1-138-59835-5 (Volume 62) (hbk)
ISBN: 978-0-429-48637-1 (Volume 62) (ebk)

Publisher's Note
The publisher has gone to great lengths to ensure the quality of this reprint but points out that some imperfections in the original copies may be apparent.

Disclaimer
The publisher has made every effort to trace copyright holders and would welcome correspondence from those they have been unable to trace.

Due to modern production methods, it has not been possible to reproduce the fold-out maps within the book. Please visit www.routledge.com to view them.

THE BAVENDA

By HUGH A. STAYT
M.A. (CANTAB.), PH.D. (CAPETOWN)

With an Introduction by
MRS. A.W. HOERNLÉ
(M.A. CANTAB.)
LECTURER IN SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY AT
THE UNIVERSITY OF THE
WITWATERSRAND

Published for the
INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
AFRICAN LANGUAGES & CULTURES
by OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
LONDON : HUMPHREY MILFORD
1931

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
AMEN HOUSE, E.C. 4
LONDON EDINBURGH GLASGOW
LEIPZIG NEW YORK TORONTO
MELBOURNE CAPETOWN BOMBAY
CALCUTTA MADRAS SHANGHAI
HUMPHREY MILFORD
PUBLISHER TO THE
UNIVERSITY

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

TO
MY WIFE

Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group
http://taylorandfrancis.com

INTRODUCTION

IT has always been a matter of great regret that no adequate monograph on any of the South African tribes has been written during all the years in which the White and the Black races have been in contact in the sub-continent. It is true that in the course of the 300 years since white people settled permanently in Southern Africa a great deal of information concerning the organization, the beliefs, and practices of the various Bantu tribes has gradually been accumulated. In particular, from the records of travellers, of settlers, and later of missionaries and administrators, it is possible to gain a connected idea of the history of these Bantu peoples during these years and to check native tradition by independent written accounts in a way that is not possible for most African people in other areas during the same period. It is true, further, that various Government Commissions have made careful inquiries into certain aspects of Bantu custom and belief for administrative purposes. Above all, missionaries and disinterested travellers have tried to gain an adequate idea of the culture of the peoples with whom they came into contact. Nevertheless, no one has found it possible to give us a full picture of the life of any of these tribes nor the whole background of belief on which their culture rests. The Union of South Africa has no monograph which can at all compare with Henri Junod's *Life of a South African Tribe* which portrays the whole cultural background of the BaThonga of Portuguese East Africa, and which to this day ranks as one of the most complete accounts of the culture of any African people.

Since the Great War, however, a decided impetus has been given to the study of African peoples. The whole continent has been opened up. The increasing importance of Africa, both as the source for many of the raw products and also of many of the metals needed in modern industry, has made it essential that those nations which are at work in Africa should know better the African peoples upon whom they will have, in the main, to rely for the production of the things they want. The increased need for the co-operation of these Africans comes at a time when the very causes which make them valuable to the Europeans are threatening to destroy their own indigenous societies and to lay them open to all the dangers of cultural disintegration.

More disinterested students, alarmed for the well being of the Africans themselves who are exposed increasingly to contact with an economic and social system totally new to them, are anxious to understand all the institutions in African cultures which may be supported and strengthened, with a view to helping the Bantu in the transition period. Finally, purely theoretical students of Culture are coming more and more to realize that Africa, with all its variety of societies subjected to intense influence by an alien culture of very different order, offers an unrivalled field for the study of the processes of diffusion of culture, and of all the forces which are at work in its maintenance and gradual remoulding.

Both in Europe and in Africa itself the universities have set to work to train students especially in the methods of field observation, so that now, year by year, students are going out to Africa for the single purpose of immersing themselves in the whole life of some one particular African community. Their aim is to come gradually to understand it and to describe its institutions and their functions.

The Monograph which Mr. Stayt has written on the BaVenda of the Northern Transvaal is one of the first-fruits of this new type of research that is being carried on among Africans. Mr. Stayt is himself South African born; he grew up among the people to whom he was later to return as a student of their culture. Blinded in the Great War, he decided to devote himself to the study of Anthropology. When the opportunity came he returned to what we may call his own people, who received him with all the greater kindliness and solicitude because of his handicap. They vied with one another to help him, as he and his wife worked together during all the months they spent in various part of the Zoutpansberg with different communities of the BaVenda.

The results of these labours are of the utmost value to all students of culture. Of all the tribes living in The Union of South Africa the BaVenda are the latest arrivals from the North. In their social organization and beliefs, as revealed by Mr. Stayt's study, they differ in many respects from the rest of the tribes in the Union.

Both in their legends and in some of their customs they seem to be linked more closely with the culture that has been revealed in connexion with the ruins of Southern Rhodesia than any of the other Union tribes. In general their affinities are not so close with the tribes in the Union as with those of Southern Rhodesia. Their language, their older type of building, links them with these latter, while they

alone of Bantu peoples in the Union used formerly to weave a cloth from wild cotton and they alone (and those influenced by them) plant the eleusine grain whose proper home is far to the north.

Mr. Stayt further furnishes evidence that these BaVenda worked the copper mines around Messina in the Northern Transvaal, whether they were the first in the field or not, and he further proves them to have been skilled workers and traders in iron.

The whole social organization of the BaVenda shows that they had a very advanced type of culture for an African people. The well-knit political organization is excellently described, and the whole account of the various officials who assisted a chief in his administration gives one a clear idea of the actual working of a Bantu society The chief is revealed as the representative of a ruling family controlled by properly appointed and hereditary officials, and the whole people is drawn into the circle of government by the system of three councils through which the administration works. Unique for South Africa is the high position given to women in this society both in administration and in religious ritual. No account of the function and the capacity of women in Bantu societies will henceforth be complete which does not take account of the responsible and efficient work which is being done by women among the BaVenda.

Another feature of BaVenda organization which is extremely interesting and important is the double system of kinship groups. A man belongs not only to a patrilineal lineage but also to a matrilineal one. By a very careful analysis of the physiological beliefs of these people Mr. Stayt shows us why it is that it is the mother's maternal kin and the father's paternal kin who are of the most importance to him all through life. The great care that has been taken to show the interconnexion of all aspects of the custom and belief of these people is specially to be commended. Thus Mr. Stayt shows us that it is because certain parts of a child's body are thought to be built up by the male, and other parts by the female alone, that we get these double controls right through the life of a MuVenda; further it is because of these twofold influences that it is necessary in the religious life of the people to keep in touch both with the patrilineal ancestors on the father's side and the matrilineal ancestors on the mother's side. The sacred bull representing the paternal ancestors, and the female goat representing the maternal ancestors, are very important in BaVenda religion, the ceremonies in which they play an essential part have been admirably described in this monograph. Especial

care has been taken to study the native beliefs connected with the stars and with the phenomena of nature in general. A full account is also given of the method of divination used by these people. Indeed, every effort has been made to give as complete a picture as possible of the life of the BaVenda, though owing to the rapid changes that have been brought about by the intensive settlement of white people in their country, many of the customs are now falling into decay.

It is impossible to deal with all the features of culture in which the BaVenda differ from most other Bantu around them. Attention must, however, be called to their complex system of initiation schools. Mr. Stayt has given us fuller and more connected accounts of these various schools than have been given before, and has also been able in many cases to get at the function of ceremonies which on the surface seem entirely purposeless.

No one can read this book without gaining a deeper understanding of the ways of thought of a Bantu people, and every one will, I think, be amazed at the wealth of detail Mr. Stayt has been able to bring together. I know that Mt. Stayt has spared himself no pains to gather all the information that was available. In spite of his blindness he has climbed rugged mountains, pushed into remote valleys, climbed almost inaccessible crannies in his search for the right informant to fill in a gap in his information. I think that those who read the result of his labours will be grateful to him for his efforts and filled with profound respect for the courage and perseverance with which he has accomplished his task.

A. W. HOERNLE

UNIVERSITY OF WITWATERSRAND
JOHANNESBURG.

PREFACE

THIS monograph is the outcome of three successive seasons' work among the BaVenda in the Northern Transvaal and Southern Rhodesia. Research was made possible by a Frank Smart Studentship from Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge (renewed for three years), and by grants from Capetown University. Through the kind interest of Professor Westermann the publication of the book was undertaken by the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures, helped by generous contributions from the Bantu Research Grant Fund of Capetown, from the Capetown University, and from the Rivers Memorial Fund.

The photographs in the book (except plates XXVII, XXXVII, XLVI, and XLVIII, which were given to me by the Rev. G. Westphal of the Berlin Missionary Society) were taken by my wife, who was my companion throughout my wanderings, and to whose enthusiastic help, both in the field-work and in the preparation of the monograph, I am deeply indebted.

Most of the information recorded here was collected as we travelled in the country of the BaVenda, camping beside their villages, and visiting all the important chiefs in their own kraals. The extent of the country, the mixed origin of the BaVenda, and their increasing contact with European culture, all add to the difficulty of the ethnographer and make it almost impossible to recapture indigenous beliefs. Customs and rites differ, or may be differently interpreted, according to the locality. However, when my informants disagreed about the data they gave me, I always sought an opportunity of laying the disputed matter before the district chief. When he and his councillors had thrashed out the subject, often with much heat, I was generally able at least to arrive at the opinion of the majority.

Two successive non-Christian interpreters, Mafunisa Masia Senthumule and Mashinya Mbizaan, made themselves invaluable to me. These boys, who were fully initiated members of the tribe, were familiar with the whole country and understood the different Venda dialects in addition to knowing Zulu, English, and Dutch. They helped us to make contact with their people and created a friendly atmosphere between us and them.

Being neither a linguist nor a trained musician I should like to apologize here for any inadequacies in my rendering of Tshivenda

words, phrases, and songs. Some of the secret formulae are so difficult to obtain that I have ventured to include them for the benefit of other investigators, even when I am not prepared to vouch for their exact linguistic accuracy. The songs, some of which were given to me by Stephanus Dzivani, a Venda teacher and evangelist at Sibasa, also fall short of accuracy, in so far as the Western notation is inadequate to represent the intervals of the African scale.

We received help and kindness from numbers of other BaVenda and were treated most courteously by their chiefs. I should like to thank particularly Chief Senthumule and Chief Tshivhase's brother Takalani for the valuable information they gave me, for their willing assistance, and for their courteous hospitality.

It is only possible to make a general acknowledgement here of the friendly co-operation and hospitality shown to us by government officials, missionaries, farmers, and traders. Colonel Lyle of the Native Affairs Department at Louis Trichardt helped me in finding interpreters and in many other ways. The Rev. G. and Mrs. Westphal of Makonde, the Rev. D. and Mrs. McDonald of the Gooldville Presbyterian Mission, the Rev. F. and Mrs. Burke of the American Mission at Nzhelele and Mr. S. A. Cilliers of Happy Rest Farm gave us wonderful hospitality.

In the actual preparation of the monograph, I owe much to the Rev. G. Westphal who, having made a special study of Tshivenda, translated many songs and phrases for me; he also helped my wife to prepare the map. Mrs. Stanford, who has made a study of Bantu music, was kind enough to transcribe some of the songs which appear in this book.

I also take this opportunity of thanking Dr. A. C. Haddon, Professor T. Barnard of the Capetown University and Mrs. A. W. Hoernlé of the Witwatersrand University for their encouragement and help.

The few passages which treat of the Venda connexions with Zimbabwe, together with five photographs which illustrate them, appear as a short appendix to Miss Caton-Thompson's book, *The Zimbabwe Culture: Ruins and Reactions*, as well as in the text of this volume.

H. A. S.

LONDON,
March 1931.

CONTENTS

I. GEOGRAPHY 1
Position 1
Topography 2
Flora 4
Fauna 4
Climate 5
Archaeology 5

II. HISTORY 9

III. PHYSICAL AND PSYCHICAL CHARACTERISTICS, CLOTHING AND DECORATION . . 20
Physical Characteristics 20
Psychical Characteristics 21
Clothing 22
Ornaments 25
Beads 26
Personal Decoration 27
Scarification 28

IV. THE VILLAGE, AGRICULTURE, AND DOMESTIC ANIMALS 29
Village 29
Huts 31
Agriculture 34
Cattle 37
Dipping 42
Other Domestic Animals 44

V. FOOD AND NARCOTICS 46
Food 46
Beer. 48
Snuff 50
Smoking 50

VI. INDUSTRIES 52
Pottery 52
Calabashes 53
Woodwork 54
Basketry 56
Wirework 58
String 58

VI. INDUSTRIES (*cont.*)—
Weaving 58
Skin-dressing 59
Ivory 59
Iron 59
Copper 62

VII. WAR, TRADING, TRAVELLING, AND HUNTING 69
Weapons 69
Warfare 70
Travelling 74
Trading 75
Hunting 76
Fishing 80
The Crocodile 81

VIII. BIRTH AND INFANCY 83
Pregnancy 84
Normal Births 85
Abnormal Births 90
Twins 91
First Teeth and Weaning 93

IX. CHILD LIFE 95
Boys 95
Girls 97
Mixed Games 97
Mahundwani 99

X. PUBERTY AND INITIATION 101
Boys' School (*thondo*) 101
Girls' School (*vhusha*) 106
Pre-marital Unions 110
Joint Initiation (*domba*) 111
Boys' Circumcision (*murundu*) 125
Girls' 'Circumcision' (*musevheto*) 138

XI. MARRIAGE 142
Lobola 143
Marriage Arrangements 144
Marriage Ceremonies 147
Elopement 150
Avoidances 151
Marriage Irregularities 152

XII. FAMILY LIFE AND ETIQUETTE . . . 153

XIII. MORTUARY RITES 161
Death 161
Burial 162
Unusual Deaths 163
Purification 164
Mourning 165

XIV. PROPERTY, SUCCESSION, AND INHERITANCE
Property 166
The Heir 167
Inheritance of Widows 169
Heir to Female Fathers 170

XV. RELATIONSHIP TERMINOLOGY AND KINSHIP SYSTEM 172

XVI. SOCIAL GROUPINGS 185
Patrilineal Lineage 185
Matrilineal Lineage 185
Sibs 185
Dialectic Divisions 192
Age-sets 193

XVII. THE CHIEF 195
Nature of Chieftainship 195
Officials 198
The Chief's Wives 201
The Chief. 201
Death of the Chief 205
Installation of New Chief 208
Variations in Burial and Installation Procedure . 210

XVIII. TERRITORIAL DIVISIONS, GOVERNMENT, REVENUE AND TAXATION, LAW AND JUSTICE 214
Territorial Divisions 214
Government 215
Revenue and Taxation 217
Law and Justice. 218

XIX. CONCEPTIONS OF THE UNIVERSE . . 225
Meteorology 225
Astronomy 226
Time and the Seasons. 228
Numbers 229

XX. RELIGION 230
The Supreme Deity 230
The Spirit World 236
Dissociated Spirits 238
Ancestor Cult 240
Sowing and Harvest Rites 252
Review of Ancestor Cult 259

XXI. MEDICINE AND MAGIC 262
The Medico-Magician and his Work . . . 263
Diseases and their Treatment 267
Witchcraft 273
Black Magic 276
Divination 279
The Effect of the Medico-Magician on Society . 300
Possession 302

XXII. RAIN-MAKING AND FERTILITY OF CROPS . 309
Rain-making 309
Fertility of Crops 313

XXIII. MUSIC, DANCING, AND SONG 316
Musical Instruments 316
Tribal Dances 320
Other Dances 323
Songs 325

XXIV. FOLKLORE 330

XXV. MISCELLANEOUS BELIEFS AND SUPERSTITIONS 362

APPENDIXES

I. *MEFUVHA* AND *NDODE* 364

II. TABLE OF HEAD AND HEIGHT MEASUREMENT 368

III. PLANTS AND THEIR IDENTIFICATION . . 374

ARCHAEOLOGICAL NOTE 376

BIBLIOGRAPHY 377

LIST OF CERTAIN TSHIVENDA WORDS . . . 380

INDEX 383

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

I. Phiphidi Falls . . . . . *facing p.* 2
II. Lake Fundudzi . . . . . „ 3
III. Ruins on the Farm Verdun . . . . . „ 4
IV. Dzata . . . . . „ 5
V. Part of the Wall of Milaboni's Kraal . . . . . „ 6
VI. Stone on the Wall of Milaboni's Kraal . . . . . „ 7
VI. Stone near Mukombani . . . . . „ 7
VII. Old Stone in the Yard of Petty Chief Ratomba . . . „ 8
VIII. MuVenda Man . . . . . „ 22
IX. MuVenda Woman . . . . . „ 23
X. NeThengwe's Village . . . . . „ 30
XI. Huts in Course of Construction . . . . . „ 31
XII. Look-out from which the Crops are Watched . . . „ 34
XII. Granaries . . . . . „ 34
XIII. Stamping the Corn . . . . . „ 46
XIII. Winnowing . . . . . „ 46
XIV. Pots . . . . . „ 52
XIV. Calabashes . . . . . „ 52
XV. Wooden Utensils . . . . . „ 54
XVI. Wooden Door from Tshikobakoba's Kraal . . . „ 55
XVII. Baskets and Sleeping-mat . . . . . „ 56
XVII. Drums . . . . . „ 56
XVIII. Basket-making . . . . . „ 57
XIX. Wire Bracelet-making . . . . . „ 58
XX. Bellows . . . . . „ 59
XX. Axe, Adze, and Hoe-head . . . . . „ 59
XXI. A MuLemba . . . . . „ 62
XXII. Iron Tools . . . . . „ 66
XXII. *Musuku* (belonging to Chief Mphephu) . . . . „ 66
XXIII. Old Warrior, showing *Tshiala* . . . . . „ 71
XXIV. Part of Old Hunting-net . . . . . „ 80
XXIV. Trap . . . . . „ 80
XXV. Boy . . . . . „ 96
XXV. Girl . . . . . „ 96
XXVI. Girls Practising the Drums . . . . . „ 97
XXVII. Girl Initiate in the River . . . . . „ 108
XXVIII. Girl after the *Vhusha* in the Humble Attitude Wearing the *Thahu* . . . . . „ 110
XXIX. The Python Dance . . . . . „ 114
XXX. The *Sali* . . . . . „ 116
XXXI. Wooden Models . . . . . „ 120
XXXII. Girls Saluting, soon after the *Vhusha* . . . . „ 158
XXXIII. Chief Tshivhase . . . . . „ 202
XXXIV. Chief Senthumule, with Two Wives and Some of his Councillors . . . . . „ 203

XXXV. Chief Mbulahene Mphephu . . . . . *facing p.* 204
Chief Phaphuli . . . . . „ 204
XXXVI. Chief Lwamondo. . . . . „ 212
XXXVII. The Rite of the Hoe Handle . . . . . „ 242
Ranwasha's Sacred Stones . . . . . „ 242
XXXVIII. Tshikobakoba's Sacred Stones . . . . . „ 243
An Offering to the Spirits. The Sacred Spears and Axe on the Stones . . . . . „ 243
XXXIX. Woman Wearing *Malembe* and Small Wooden Charm . „ 248
XL. Mushapa Throwing the Bones, with his Horn, Switch, and Medicines behind him . . . . . „ 266
XLI. Mushapa's Dice and Supplementary Objects . . . „ 267
XLII. Divining Dice . . . . . „ 286
XLIII. Tshiobi's Divining Bowl . . . . . „ 292
XLIV. Mukharu's Divining Bowl . . . . . „ 296
XLV. Decorations on Backs of Divining Bowls . . . . „ 300
XLVI. *Tshijolo* with Bow . . . . . „ 318
Mbila . . . . . „ 318
XLVII. The *Tshikona* Dance . . . . . „ 320
XLVIII. *Mefuvha* . . . . . „ 364
Ndode . . . . . „ 364
MAP. Vendaland in the Zoutpansberg District of the Northern Transvaal . . . . . at end

I

GEOGRAPHY

Position—Topography—Flora—Fauna—Climate—Archaeology.

Position.

THE BaVenda occupy approximately a third of the inhabited territory of the Zoutpansberg district in the Northern Transvaal. Owing to the mingling of the tribes on all the boundaries, and the fact that the tax pass receipts are framed on a territorial and not a tribal basis, it is very difficult to obtain adequate information as to the numerical strength of the BaVenda proper. According to the figures supplied to me at the office of the Sub-Native Commissioners in Louis Trichardt and Sibasa, the population may be roughly estimated at about 150,000.

The territory is bounded on the north by the Limpopo river, on the west by the Sand river, and on the south and east by the Levuvhu river, which rises east of Louis Trichardt and flows east for some distance forming roughly part of the southern boundary; the remainder of the southern boundary is formed by the farms adjoining the south of Senthumule's location. Owing to the incursion of the Europeans and their annexation of lands for farms, the bulk of the people are to-day concentrated in locations and crown lands, approximately from longitude 29° 40′ E. to 30° 50′ E. and latitude 22° 20′ S. to 23° 10′ S. (*see Map*).

Scattered groups have filtered back across the Limpopo into Southern Rhodesia and are to be found around Nuanetsi and Bubye and west as far as Gwanda and the Shabani river. Other small groups have wandered south and west, where, although in some cases they have left a cultural mark, they have been absorbed by the tribes among whom they settled and have completely lost their identity.

The Mashona, whom the BaVenda call collectively BaKaranga, are their neighbours on the north; these people call the BaVenda BaVeya. The BaThonga live on the east and south-east and are known as BaThonga to the BaVenda, whom they call BaVesha. On the west and south west are the Sutho groups, Maguvhu to the BaVenda; to them the BaVenda are BaDzweda. Near Mara, on the extreme west, there is a small group of half-castes, called the Buis, after the founder

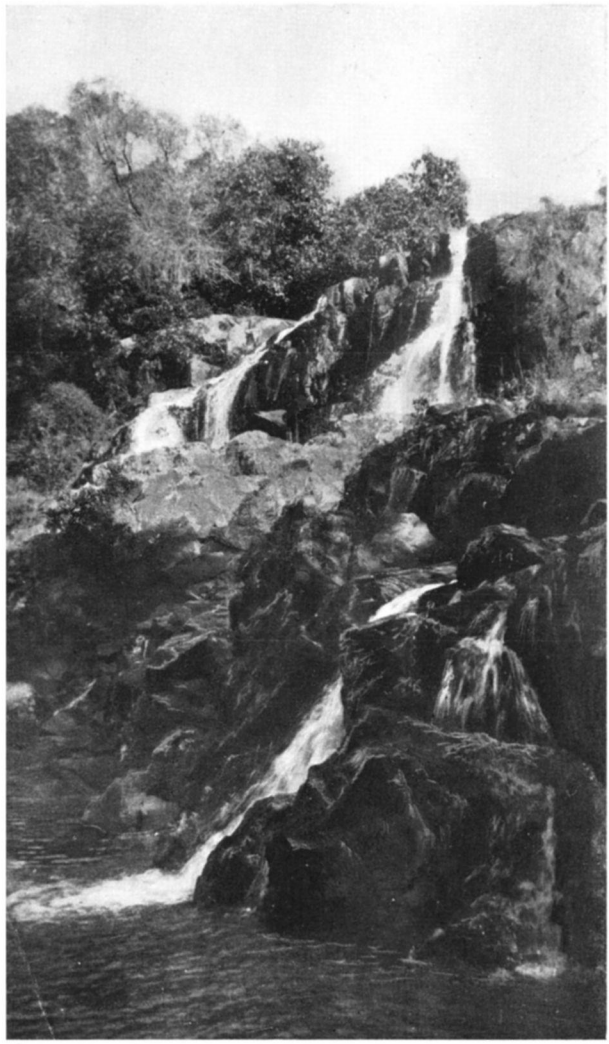
of the group. He was a European named Buis, who in the early days settled among the natives of that part, took their women as wives and made himself their head.

Topography.

The Zoutpansberg district is mountainous and rugged with a varied climate and rainfall, and a rich sub-tropical vegetation. The Zoutpansberg mountains stretch roughly east and west for approximately eighty miles, with several branches and only one large break. The range is bounded on the east by the Rooi Rand, where it runs down into small kopjes and finally terminates in Tshikundu Kop. The western boundary is the Harlequin river, which the early Voortrekkers mistook for the Nile. Just opposite Louis Trichardt there are three distinct branches of the mountains. The whole width of the range varies between eleven and twenty miles, with large table-lands. The range received its name from the early settlers, who called it Zout Pan, after the large salt-pan at the west of the range. Excellent salt is obtained from this vicinity.

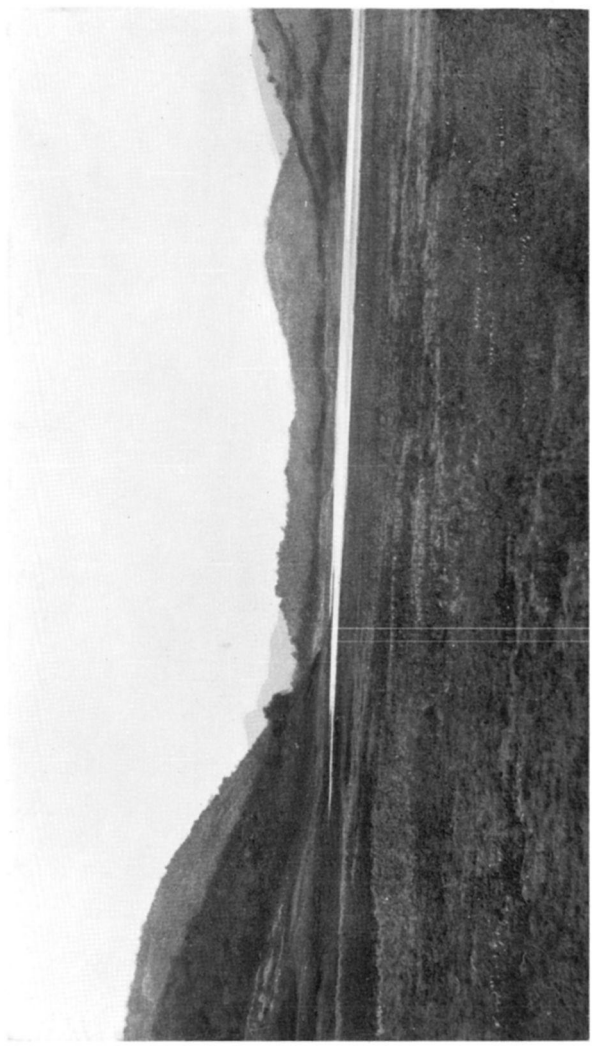
The BaVenda are scattered over the greater part of this range. Its kopjes and spurs, precipitous slopes and general unapproachable character, have played an important part in protecting them from their enemies, and account for their being the last tribe in the Transvaal to submit to white domination.

The Zoutpansberg range cuts the country into two distinct areas. To the north of the mountains it is dry and arid, with small rainfall and few rivers. Except in the extreme east, the Nzhelele is the only river of importance in that part; it provides a plentiful supply of water throughout the dry season, and flowing as it does through the parched bushveldt, is extremely beautiful; it rises near Khalavha in the heart of the mountains and runs down through Mphephu's mountains where it is joined by four small tributaries; it continues in a north-easterly direction, joined in its course by the Mufumgodi and Matamba spruits, until it reaches the Limpopo, into which it empties itself about four miles east of the Sand river; it is a swift stream of good water, teeming with crocodile and fish, and flowing through tracts of easily irrigable land. Most of the other rivers are of little use to the people, as, except in flood times, they are quite dry apart from occasional water holes which provide little more than drinking water. In contrast with this hard, dry, cruel country are the well-watered southern and eastern areas, with the Levuvhu and Mutali rivers and



PHIPHIDI FALLS

PLATE II



LAKE FUNDUDZI

their various tributaries always full of water, making the whole country fertile and providing for abundant vegetation, in spite of several intractable marshes. The Levuvhu rises just east of Louis Trichardt, running due east and then turning north at Mphaphuli's location, from which point it is often called the Mphaphuli river; it is joined in its course by various tributaries, the largest being the Dzindi, the Mutshindudi and the Mutali, before reaching the Limpopo in the extreme north-east corner of Vendaland. The Phiphidi Falls (Plate I) are on the Mutshindudi river, a few miles from Sibasa; though small, they are in an extremely beautiful setting, and are the centre of numerous mythological beliefs. Perhaps from a purely artistic viewpoint the river Mutali is the most picturesque of any in the Zoutpansberg; it rises in the mountains above Lake Fundudzi and trickles gently down through dense, almost impenetrable bush into the lake below, where it apparently ends; but some distance below the lake it bubbles up again from beneath the rocks and then flows on uninterruptedly in a north-easterly direction until it joins the Levuvhu, fed on its way by several smaller tributaries.

Lake Fundudzi (Plate II) situated in the heart of the mountains, cannot be reached readily except on foot, or on horseback, and then only by small footpaths, crossing the mountains from Tshivhase's kraal, Khalavha, or Tshikombani. The lake is about three miles long and two miles broad when it is full, but in the winter months it is very much smaller. Although it is fed continually by the Mutali river and two or three smaller streams it has no apparent outlet; it was formed originally by a large landslide, which completely blocked the river, so that the whole valley, shut in as it is on all sides by mountains, soon became a lake; gradually the water trickled through and found an outlet among the rocks, a long distance beyond the rocky boundary formed by the landslide. It is full of crocodiles and the centre of dreadful interest to the BaVenda. The isolated position and rather forbidding appearance of the lake, combined with the fact that water is continually running into it and apparently never out, have given it an unfavourable notoriety and have resulted in its being connected with all manner of strange and sinister occurrences. Apart from its ethological connexions, it is a site of unusual interest to the traveller. From the far end, where the river eventually bubbles out from underground, there is a view of unparalleled breadth. The Drakensberg mountains and Portuguese East Africa can be seen across the low-lying country, and Southern Rhodesia beyond the Limpopo

river; also the Sabi river and Sabi mountains, the Waterberg range and Bechuanaland.

The mountains and valleys, beautiful well-watered lowlands, dense forests and wide plateaux make all this district one of peculiar beauty and variety. The network of rivers formed by the tributaries feeding the Mutali and Levuvhu rivers form very fertile valleys, rich pastureland, and in some parts dense vegetation. This district is the most populated part of Vendaland, in marked contrast to the practically unoccupied area to the north.

Flora.

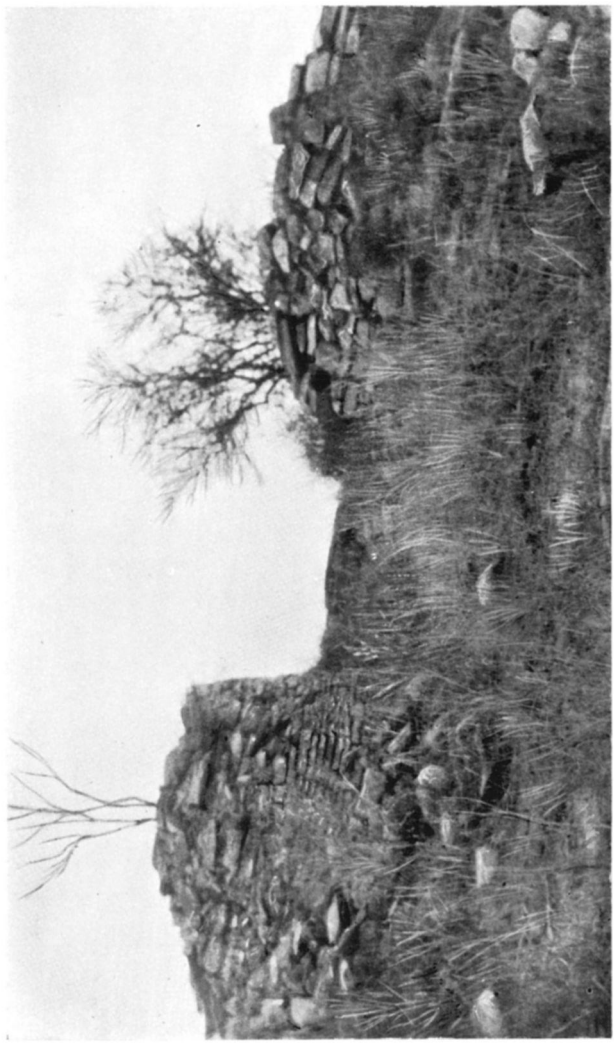
Until some thirty years ago the whole mountain range was clothed in valuable timber, including yellow-wood, stink-wood, sneeze-wood, red almond, African iron-wood, bitter almond, and many others. Mimosa trees flourish all over the country, in at least fifteen varieties. In certain localities the mupani tree is found in profusion, although it does not occur beyond a certain point on the southern slopes. The baobab tree is found in the mountain gullies on the northern side of the mountain, especially near Messina, but not south until one reaches the low country and the far east. The veldt is very variable. On the virgin mountain soil the tombeitje and dekgras (used for thatching) grow, but as soon as the ground has been disturbed sweet grass takes its place. Good sweet buffalo grass grows all over the country.

The fertile red loam which covers a large proportion of the land is excellent for crop raising, and the favourable conditions make it possible to raise two crops a year, one in December and the second in April, without any fertilizing or special treatment of the soil. The traveller in Vendaland finds ample variety on his journey. There is the dry, stubborn bushveldt on the south-west, growing on hard, rocky, unpromising ground, turning into green pasture land on the plateaux and by the rivers, and stretching out on the east into beautiful wide parklands with large stately trees and a profusion of wonderful flowers.

Fauna.

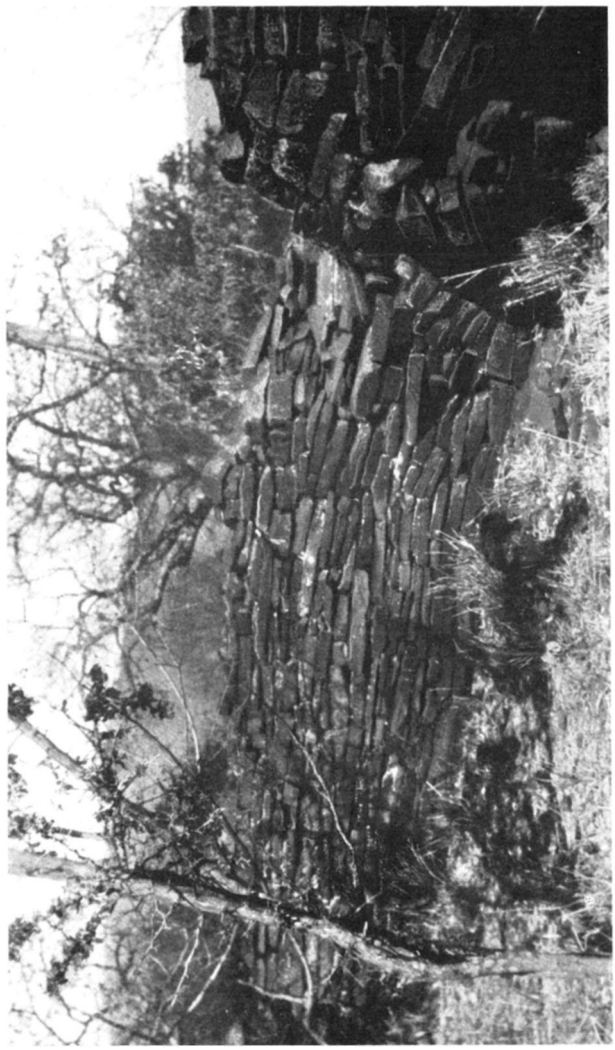
Until fifty years ago big game of every description roamed all over the BaVenda country. Elephant were plentiful, as were herds of koodoo, sable, buffalo, giraffe, zebra, eland and wildebeest. Rhinoceros were sometimes encountered, while the lion, leopard, hyena, wild dog, and jackal played havoc with the natives' herds. Innumerable smaller buck and other game such as waterbok, impala, duiker,

PLATE III



RUINS ON THE FARM VERDUN

PLATE IV



DZATA

stembok, warthog, and bush-pig were a constant source of trouble and danger in the land. Hippopotamus, the *muvuvhu*, after which the Levuvhu river was named, were to be found near most of the rivers, all of which were infested with crocodile.

To-day elephant, rhinoceros, hippopotamus, and buffalo have completely disappeared. Giraffe and zebra are rare, and there is a yearly decrease in all the other animals, owing to the steady encroachment of civilization and the large toll taken by hunters both black and white. There is now the Shingwedzi game reserve, bounding Vendaland on the east, where it is to be hoped that many of these one-time owners of the bushveldt will find sanctuary.

Climate.

The year is divided into two seasons, the wet and the dry. The dry season is in the winter between May and September, when the weather is very pleasant, with fresh bracing days and cool nights. On the southern slopes of the mountains it is often intensely cold with heavy frosts at night, but there is seldom frost to the north, except near the rivers. In normal seasons the rains start in October or November, and from that time onwards the weather becomes moist and hot, the shade temperature generally ranging between 80° and 90°, and north of the mountains often being 110° or more. South-east of the mountains the rainfall is very good, but it is not always regular so that local droughts are fairly common. At Louis Trichardt the annual rainfall is over 30 inches and at Sibasa the records for the last ten years show an average of 45 inches. December, January, and February are generally the wettest months, and at this time practically all the rivers are in flood. North of the mountains it is very different, the annual average rainfall being about 10 inches and often much less; droughts are frequent and often prolonged, the people being obliged to buy food from their more fortunate southerly neighbours. During the wet season the whole country is malarial.

Archaeology.

In the north-west of Vendaland there are traces of some very ancient occupation. Colonel Piet Moller, who was an early settler in the Zoutpansberg, has found what he considers to be indisputable evidence of ancient irrigation works. Most of the old furrows are near Chepisse and it appears that the water was diverted from a small stream there in a series of furrows to a distance of about four and a

half miles south. Traces of furrows are also discernible at Sulphur Springs, and at several places by the Nzhelele river, where some of them have been reopened and are utilized by the BaVenda to-day. Colonel Moller says that when he first came across these some forty years ago, there was no doubt of their antiquity; to-day they are very difficult to trace, as roads, modern agriculture, and furrows have altered the face of the country considerably and have practically hidden the ancient workings.

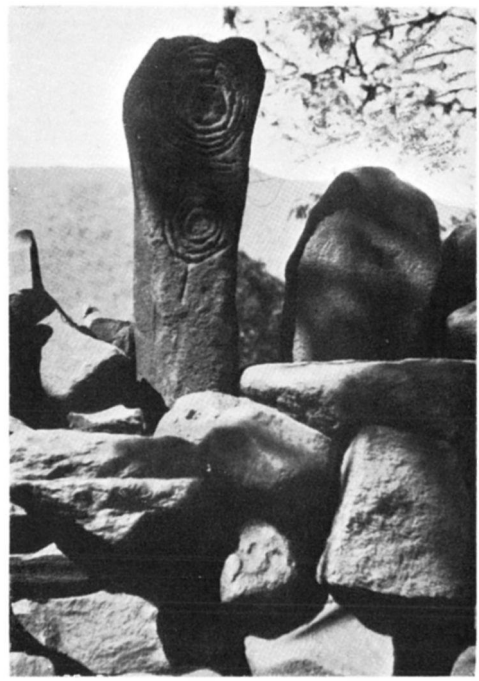
In the extreme north, near the Limpopo river, ancient workings for copper ores, extending from the Limpopo southwards for a distance of twenty-five miles, were traced by Mr. J. M. Calderwood, M.I.M.M., when the Messina area was first surveyed for copper. Further reference will be made to these workings in connexion with native copper work.

There are also stone ruins, similar to the smaller and rougher outcrops of the Zimbabwe Ruins in Southern Rhodesia. One of these is situated on the farm Verdun, four miles west of Mopani, (Plate III) on the summit of a small kopje. It shows the remains of a rounded passage, leading into what must have been the main structure. The two sides of the wall are constructed of smooth, regular, brick-shaped stones, the intervening space being packed with rubble; there are only fragments of two or three walls standing. On the farms Rembander, south of the Lwamondo location, and Diamond on the Sand river, and at Pont's Drift on the Limpopo similar ruins are to be found.

No history of the origins of these ruins has survived. All definite traditions are associated with the ruins of Dzata (Plate IV), situated about two miles from Chief Mphephu's village. Dzata is well known to every MuVenda as the remains of the first permanent home of the MaKhwinde sib, after they crossed the Limpopo to settle in Venda-land. It is reputed to have been built by Thoho-ya-Ndou, from stones carried from Vembe, just the other side of the Limpopo. One tradition says that Thoho-ya-Ndou was afraid to use the stones of the newly conquered country for his capital; another that he forced the BaKaranga under his domination to bring the stones as tribute, making them carry them the long distance from across the Limpopo, to demonstrate his power. The ruins of Dzata are situated on a slight elevation, with a stream of water running near, except in times of severe drought. The whole site covers two or three acres and consists of very fragmentary remains of a series of walls, most of which appear to be made from the ordinary stones of the locality packed up with

PART OF THE WALL OF MILABONI'S KRAAL

PLATE VI



STONE ON THE WALL OF
MILABONI'S KRAAL

STONE NEAR MUKOMBANI

earth. Towards the middle of the site there is an inner structure of ruined walls which are different. The stones on the two surfaces of each wall, which is about 6 feet thick, are fitted one on top of the other, to make a strong, regular face, and then the space in between is packed up with rubble. These walls, which are very much broken down, measure about 6 feet in the highest part, and no consecutive piece of wall is more than from 10 to 15 feet long. The stones are large, flat, and fairly regular, much larger than those in the ruins at Verdun; they could, however, all be handled easily by a single man. The largest, an odd stone not actually part of the wall, measures 54 inches by 15 inches by 6 inches.

There is reputed to be another ruin at Tshiendeulu. NeTshiendeulu was chief of the Vhatavhatsinde people when Thoho-ya-Ndou's father first led the MaKhwinde into Vendaland and conquered him. The traditions of these two ruins are definitely Bantu and show that the early BaVenda settlers had a considerable knowledge of the method of stonework employed by the builders in Southern Rhodesia. Indeed, in some of the mountain villages to-day, villages actually built by the veterans still living in them, a similar building plan and technique has been employed. At the kraal of NeMenanga at Milaboni, in the Tononndwa location, (Plate V) the walls and passages are built in this way, and if the huts were to be removed this village would give a very similar appearance to that presented by the ruins of Dzata.

There is other evidence that the BaVenda were accomplished stone-masons in the days when they were bound to take refuge in their mountain fastnesses to escape from their enemies. Near Makonde, on the face of the mountain there stand some interesting ruins, formerly inhabited by the forbears of the headman still living in the district. The small creeks and recesses in the sheer precipice have been bridged and fortified with stone-masonry, making an impregnable hiding-place from which the defenders could do yeoman service with the bow and arrow, unseen by the enemy; the little balconies and recesses appear like so many swallows' nests, most of which were reached by the defenders by scrambling to their perches, with the help of monkey ropes, up the sheer face of the cliff.

Another feature of some interest is the occurrence, in different places, of odd stones (Plate VI) put up for some undiscovered reason. The shape of these stones suggests that they were of phallic origin, and possibly that the people who erected them were influenced by their contact with Zimbabwe, where so many phallic symbols have

been identified. Frequently one or more such monoliths are placed on the wall at a village entrance or in the main yard (Plate VII) apparently for no specific reason, but merely in imitation of their ancestors.

Impressions resembling human footprints have been found in rock near Mphephu's village, and others near Mutali resembling footprints of human beings, buck and dogs.[1] These discoveries have not been properly investigated but would seem to be similar to those in Bechuanaland.

There are Bushman paintings at Waterberg.

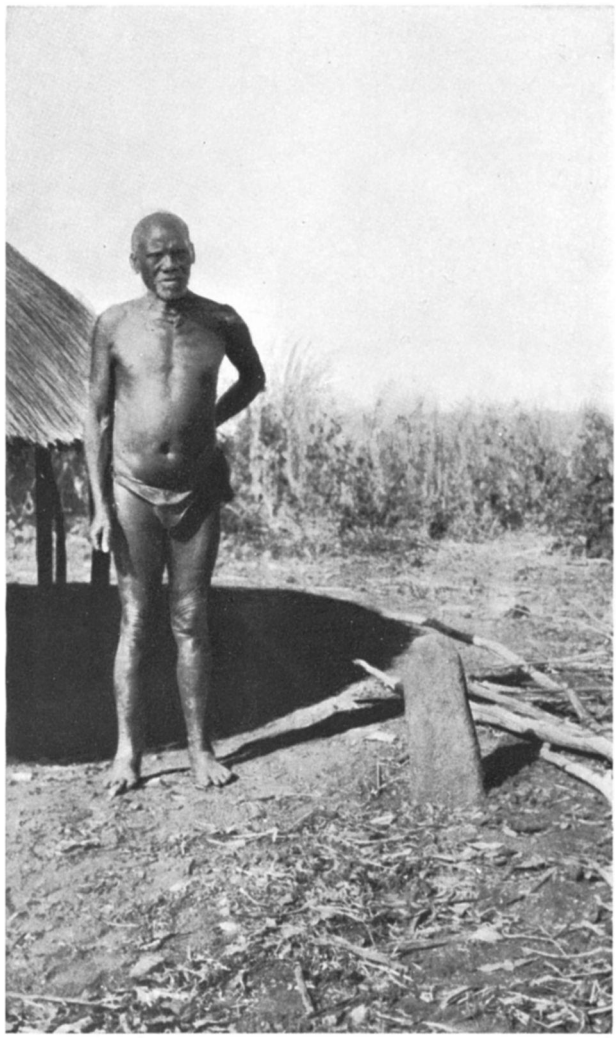
The archaeological wealth of Vendaland has not yet been explored. Most of the ruins referred to here are in the north-west of the country; it is highly probable that in the future many other ruins, and other evidence of the past occupants of the country will be brought to light.

The whole country has undergone considerable changes since the advent of the European. Louis Trichardt is a fair-sized farming town, and Messina one of the richest copper mines in the Union of South Africa. The railway was brought through Louis Trichardt and on to Messina in 1914, and is now being extended across the Limpopo into Southern Rhodesia. A road, which is fast becoming the main arterial road from Johannesburg to Rhodesia, passes right through western Vendaland. From Louis Trichardt it traverses the mountains and passes through Wylie's Poort, one of the most remarkable gorges in South Africa, and continues through Messina to Rhodesia.

The mineral potentialities of Vendaland are considerable. Besides the rich copper that is found in such abundance at Messina, there are deposits at Matamba and Mutali. There are evidences of vast coal deposits, and there is little doubt that in the course of time great mineralogical wealth will be discovered in this country where, up to the present time, only the surface has been scratched.

The fertility of the soil and, in parts, the good rainfall are favourable to the farmer, who finds that conditions are excellent for citrus, bananas, rubber, cotton and other tropical growths as well as for mealies and staple crops. The administrative centre of Vendaland is Louis Trichardt, and at Sibasa there is also a Sub-Native Commissioner and a police camp. For over fifty years now the natives have been subject to missionary influence, and for about the same number of years there have been growing up ever-increasing numbers of European trading stores.

[1] See note on p. 376.



OLD STONE IN THE YARD OF PETTY CHIEF
RATOMBA

Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group
http://taylorandfrancis.com

II

HISTORY

THE BaVenda are a composite people who have been gradually welded into a compact whole in the locality which they now occupy. The tribe is composed of sibs and groups of unrelated peoples who have, in varying circumstances and localities, come in contact with a small homogeneous nucleus and become identified with it. The ethnological origin of this nucleus, in which many diverse races have become incorporated, is uncertain. In spite of cultural differences among the various sibs the Venda tribe to-day considers itself as a single unit which, with slight dialectic differences, speaks a common language. Lestrade[1] says, in discussing the language of the Venda group:

> The phonesis and phonology of TshiVenda finds its nearest equivalent in the Karanga group, and it is quite sharply distinguished from the Sotho and Thonga groups in this regard, though from the former far more than the latter. This is of interest, since the ethnic influence of the Thonga upon the Venda tribes seems to be the least of all the influences brought to bear on them, except in very recent times. With regard to grammatical structure, TshiVenda is sharply marked off from the Sotho and Thonga groups, and as sharply reminiscent of the Karanga group and of the groups to the north-east of the latter, namely the whole of the East African group of Bantu languages, of which Swahili, in its grammatical structure at least, and in such of its vocabulary as is not Arabicised, may be cited as an example.'

There can be little doubt that linguistically and culturally the BaVenda have a place in the congeries of people that form the wedge which starts north of the Zambesi and passes through Mashonaland, tapering away amongst the BaPedi south of Vendaland.

All current oral traditions show that the important migrations came from north of the Limpopo river. Many of these migrations were composed of small sibs or sections of sibs, and there are many sibs among the BaKaranga to-day whose names have their counterpart in Vendaland. Two migrations stand out among the smaller infiltrations, that of the Vhatavhatsinde group, composed chiefly of the VhaKwebo and Ndou sibs, followed later by the MaKhwinde group, who became masters of the whole country. The traditions of these two groups make

[1] Lestrade, G. P., 'Some Notes on the Ethnic History of the BaVenda and their Rhodesia Affinities', *South African Journal of Science*, vol. xxiv, p. 487.

a reasonable reconstruction of the history of the BaVenda in their present country possible.

The word *mutavhatsinde* has been variously interpreted. The Rev. G. Westphal of the Berlin Missionary Society, living at Luvhimbi, has obtained what appears to me to be the most reasonable interpretation and one that has been confirmed by many informants. It is, according to him, composed of the words *muta* (the small yard surrounding the women's huts) and *tsinde* (the stem or trunk of a tree). At one time members of this group used to erect a pole in the yard of their kraals, and so were dubbed *muta vha tsinde* (yard of the stem) by their neighbours. The plural, *vhatavhatsinde*, doubtless followed when the appellation became general. The exact significance of this obsolete custom has been forgotten, but it probably had a religious motive and was associated with the fact that many families in this group were great medicine men, and that a powerful antidote for evil was supplied by them from the *mutavhatsinde* tree, which grows in their part of the country; it is possible that this was the same tree that was erected in their yards. Nethengwe and his family used to have a great reputation among the Vhatavhatsinde, and indeed through the whole country, as powerful medicine men.

When the Vhatavhatsinde crossed the Limpopo and settled along the Zoutpansberg range they found another tribe, the BaNgona, in occupation there. The BaNgona were a non-warlike rather disorganized people, who allowed the invaders to settle peacefully among them, soon recognizing them as their superiors. The chief of the Vhatavhatsinde group was Netshiendeulu, whose descendants still live on their original mountain, in what is now Mphephu's location. Other important petty chiefs were Matidza of Luonde; Nemaungani of Maungani; Rapuli, whose village was at Tshirululuni near Louis Trichardt, but whose line is now extinct; Netshiavho, who first settled at Khalavha and then went to Lake Fundudzi; Manenzhe at Manenzhe; and Nethengwe, whose old village was at Shakhadzi, but who fought his way two generations ago to his present stronghold where his descendant is the only Mutavhatsinde chief who has maintained his independence.

One of the great cultural differences between the Vhatavhatsinde and other Venda groups is their method of disposing of the dead. The Vhatavhatsinde practise a form of cremation; the bones of the dead are exhumed some months after burial and burnt ceremonially at certain specified rivers, in which the ashes are finally scattered. Other groups generally bury their dead.

Very little is known of the BaNgona. It is probable that they were concentrated in the eastern portion of the country. Many places that were associated with the BaNgona in the past are feared and avoided by the BaVenda. There is a superstition that they should not build where the BaNgona have built, as it is feared that the BaNgona ancestral spirits may still have a sinister influence over their old territories. This dread has been the sole agent in retarding their complete absorption into the tribe of their conquerors. It seemed impossible to find a self-avowed MuNgona to question as to their early history, until a discussion on an irrelevant subject revealed the interesting fact that a certain religious ceremony could not take place without the co-operation of a MuNgona hereditary priest. This priest, Netshitumbe, until three years ago lived at Tshaula the home of his ancestors; he was turned out to give place to one of the chief's relatives, and now lives at Luvhimbi. He was very willing to talk, but unfortunately had only a limited knowledge of the history of his people; he did, however, volunteer the following facts and also gave me the names of his paternal ancestors for the last sixteen generations. According to Netshitumbe the original inhabitants of the eastern part of the Zoutpansberg were BaNgona, a race of short, slight, dark, flat-nosed people. The chief at the time of their subjugation was called Diwase. He lived at Tshaula, where he was powerful and influential, receiving tribute in ivory, skins, &c., from many neighbouring peoples; he was subjugated by Bohwane, of the MaKhwinde sib, but was obliged to remain at Tshaula as high priest to forestall the vengeance of the BaNgona ancestors. Certain other petty chiefs still have BaNgona priests, and encourage them to live in the district to act as mediums between them and the BaNgona ancestral spirits. Netshitshivhe, Nedzinghe, Tshisinavhutu and Nephindula are all BaNgona priests living at Thengwe, Thenzheni, Mianzwi and Mukula respectively. There are probably others, scattered about the country, and a short time ago quite a large group are reputed to have been living in Majaji's country near Pietersburg. The BaNgona have adopted Venda sib names in place of their own and their women have been married by the BaVenda, so that except in connexion with their religious rites, they have completely lost their identity and race-consciousness and become absorbed into the body of the Venda tribe.

It is impossible to determine the relative position and numbers of the BaNgona and Vhatavhatsinde peoples or to what stock either originally belonged. When the MaKhwinde entered the Zoutpansberg

they were living side by side, the former to the east and the latter, apparently the rulers of the country, mostly concentrated to the north and centre of the mountain range. It is probable that the Ma-Khwinde sib, often called *vha-ila-mbudzi* (those who tabu the goat) were led across the Limpopo under a certain Vele Lambeho or Dimbanyika. Mr. G. Wessman, of the Native Affairs Department at Sibasa, found some evidence that this man was descended from Mambo, who was reputed to be the ruler of both BaKaranga and BaVenda in Southern Rhodesia at this time, before the migration. The term *mambo* signifies chief, and it is quite possible that in view of the numerous names these chiefs possess, that particular Mambo and Vele Lambeho are one and the same person. It is uncertain when the name Venda was first used among them; there is a tradition that Vele Lambeho called the country Venda after his settlement in the Zoutpansberg. The German missionary Beuster[1] says that *BaVenda* means 'people of the world' derived from *Venda* ('land' or 'world').

This migration probably took place towards the end of the seventeenth or the beginning of the eighteenth century, and must have consisted of a strong body of people, who found no difficulty in making themselves masters of the country, completely subjugating the Vhatavhatsinde and BaNgona. Vele Lambeho, or Dimbanyika, as he is more popularly called, placed his various sons as petty chiefs throughout the country and himself settled at the stronghold of Tshiendeulu.

The death of Dimbanyika is a favourite and much disputed myth. Some traditions say that his eldest son, Popi, was guilty of parricide and having killed his father, declared himself chief, boasting that although the elephant was dead, he, the head, still remained and was called Thoho-ya-Ndou (Head of the Elephant). The present Netshiendeulu tells another story. He says that Dimbanyika was hunting rock rabbits with his dog and followed the dog into a deep cave; a rock fell across the entrance of the cave entombing him alive inside; his son looked everywhere for him and after a long search found the cave with the dog keeping guard outside; he called out to his father, 'Are you there?' and Dimbanyika answered, 'Yes, take care of the dog and leave me here. I shall not return. I am quite content.' Popi returned to his father's village and said, 'My father is imprisoned in a cave here so that I cannot remain'. He then set off across the mountain with his followers and built a new capital at Dzata, which is to-day regarded as the ancestral home of the BaVenda in the Zoutpansberg.

[1] Beuster, C. L., 'Das Volk der Vawenda', *Berlin. Zeits. Ges. Erdk.*, 14, 1879, p. 236.

He never saw Netshiendeulu again, and from that day it has been tabu for any chief of the MaKhwinde sib to look on the face of the descendants of Netshiendeulu or any of the other Vhatavhatsinde chiefs. This tabu has lapsed in the case of the Thengwe chiefs, probably on account of their great power as medicine men. But even to-day, if Chief Mphephu wishes to speak to Netshiendeulu, he must do so with an intervening wall between them. The MaKhwinde also fear to visit other places occupied by the Vhatavhatsinde. Another result of the incarceration of Dimbanyika is that *tshiendeulu* has become the traditional name for ancestral graveyards.

Thoho-ya-Ndou is the great legendary hero of the BaVenda. Many and various are the stories told about him. He is said to have ruled over a large country, some traditions include parts of the Karanga country and also ascribe to him domination over certain Sutho groups in the Transvaal. He was undoubtedly enormously rich and powerful, and even the sound of his drum was reputed to bring instant death to any of his subjects who heard it. His great power provoked the jealousy of his brothers. He set out one day with a small following, possibly on a hunting trip, but more probably on an expedition to solicit support against his hostile brothers. He crossed the Nzhelele river and was never seen again. It is still believed that one day he will return to his people to restore the BaVenda to their former greatness.

The MaKhwinde and Vhatavhatsinde form the nucleus of the BaVenda as they are to-day. At frequent intervals infiltrations of unrelated peoples have penetrated into the country and been absorbed. The VhaMbedzi, living in the extreme east, probably entered the country at an early date. The VhaDau, living around Messina, came later in their history, and other small Sutho groups have also settled in different parts, each retaining vestiges of their own culture, while becoming absorbed in the wider culture complex of the BaVenda as a whole.

Traditions concerning the early history of the original BaVenda, prior to their entry into Rhodesia, are vague and fragmentary. Beuster, one of the earliest missionaries among them, came to the conclusion, on the slenderest evidence, that they originated in the Lower Congo. He based this supposition on a supposed similarity of name and language to a tribe in that region. Lestrade,[1] however, demonstrated the improbability of this theory and supports an alternative possibility,

[1] Lestrade, G. P., 'Some Notes on the Ethnic History of the BaVenda and their Rhodesia Affinities', *South African Journal of Science*, vol. xxiv, p. 490.

namely, that their place of origin was on the east coast in the neighbourhood of the great lakes. Linguistic and cultural evidence both support this theory which was first propounded by the missionary Gottschling[1] and enlarged upon in a paper by Stubbs[2] containing oral traditions collected by himself. It appears that the BaVenda lived originally in a very warm climate where many rivers emptied themselves into large 'silent stretches of water', the description of this country all leading to the assumption that it must have been in the great lake region of East Africa. Most of my own informants who have any opinion to offer as to the original home of their ancestors, confirm this view. Chief Senthumule is vehement in his assertions that the ancestral home was in the region of Nyasaland, and says that he can readily understand the language spoken there. So many changes have affected the original group, around which the BaVenda tribe has grown up, that it is impossible to speak with any degree of certainty on this subject. From this region, wherever it may have been, a tribe, which formed the nucleus of the BaVenda, journeyed south into Rhodesia, absorbing on the way a certain tribe called the Mashamba and other unknown peoples. After a long march, possibly occupying centuries, they eventually settled at a place in Rhodesia of which the locality is unknown. This place of settlement was called Dzata, and when they resettled on the Nzhelele after a second migration they not unnaturally called their new home Dzata as well. All the stories and traditions concerning these migrations are associated with the MaKhwinde sib. The Vhatavhatsinde and other sections of the BaVenda group have no traditions of their early history prior to their entry into the Zoutpansberg.

Many place-names in Southern Rhodesia are repeated in the Zoutpansberg, e.g. Makonde, Nzhelele, Thengwe, &c., and there is no doubt that, whatever their pre-Rhodesian history might have been, they sojourned in Southern Rhodesia for a great many years and lived closely allied to some of the groups which are now collectively termed Mashona. Lestrade[3] found informative data regarding this period of their wanderings. He says:

'Some interesting points relative to the history of the wanderings previous to the immigration from the Karanga country are to be found in the evidence

[1] Gottschling, E., 'The Bawenda: A Sketch of their History and Customs', London. *J. Roy. Anthrop. Inst.*, xxxv, 1905, p. 365.

[2] Stubbs, E. T., Pamphlet (Grahamstown, 1912).

[3] Lestrade, G. P., 'Some Notes on the Ethnic History of the BaVenda and their Rhodesia Affinities', *South African Journal of Science*, vol. xxiv, p. 491.

collected by the Transvaal Natives Locations Commissions of 1907–8, and in that of 1910, and quite independently collected by Mr. C. N. Manning, whilst stationed in the Zoutpansberg district. These accounts mention the names of tribes with whom the original BaVenda are said to have been in close contact, and from one of which they are stated actually to have descended. Two such names are the BaNyai and the BaLozwi (BaRozwi), the former allied to the Karanga group, the latter, according to Mr. Manning's informant, the tribe with whom the BaVenda were intimately connected: "While Mpefu's people were settled in what is now Rhodesia", he says, "some of the BaLozwi people visited us there and presented us with a leopard's skin, saying that we were of the same stock originally as they".'

My own informants confirmed this very close connexion with the BaRozwi.

There is no evidence of any sudden crisis which instigated a hurried migration into the Transvaal. It seems probable that small hunting parties were the forerunners of larger migrations, and it is possible that the disruption of the Monomatapa Empire was in some measure responsible for their movement south.

The golden age of the BaVenda was probably during the reign of Thoho-ya-Ndou, but at his death jealousy and family feuds disintegrated the tribe through internecine warfare, which continued intermittently until the country was brought under European domination.

Mr. G. Wessman of the Native Affairs Department, Sibasa, has compiled genealogies of the chief branches of the royal houses with traditions and other interesting information connected with them. I am indebted to this compilation for most of the following information concerning the history of the BaVenda after the MaKhwinde occupation.

Vele Lambeho had many sons of whom the four eldest were Popi (who after his father's death became Thoho-ya-Ndou), Tshisebe, Raluswyelo or Tshivhase, and Bele; these four sons were appointed to be petty chiefs at Nzhelele, Makonde, Phiphidi, and Vuba respectively. When Thoho-ya-Ndou became chief, the other three, jealous of his power, prepared to make Tshisebe chief by force. Soon after Thoho-ya-Ndou disappeared, as has already been described, the other three declared themselves independent chiefs, Tshikalanga or Rampofu, the son of Thoho-ya-Ndou being elected chief at the Nzhelele river in his father's place.

After Tshikalanga's death the succession was again disputed. This

resulted in his second son Tshigebeti, with the assistance of a large force of Malaboch allies, establishing himself as chief and receiving the name of Ramapulana, the treacherous. Ramapulana was succeeded by his son Makhado, who became famous as the 'Lion of the North', on account of his long and determined stand against the European occupation. Makhado was succeeded, after disputes among his sons, by his second son Mphephu, who was driven out of Vendaland by the Dutch and settled, with a considerable number of his people, in Southern Rhodesia. He was allowed to return after the Anglo-Boer war, but a number of his followers remained behind in their new home. When Mphephu was driven out his brother Senthumule was recognized as chief, and when he returned his country was divided up among the three brothers Mphephu, Senthumule, and Khuthama, all being recognized as independent chiefs, governing the country of Ramapulana. These BaVenda are often called the people of Ramapulana. Mphephu died in 1924 and was succeeded by his son Mbulahene, who is chief to-day, Senthumule and Khuthama still being supreme in their own comparatively small locations.

Tshivhase, the third brother of Thoho-ya-Ndou, declared himself independent chief in the east of Vendaland. He became wealthy and powerful and was succeeded by his son Mukesi Tshivhase. Mukesi's reign was occupied with battles with his neighbours, his arch-enemy being Ratsibi Mphaphuli, an independent chief living close to him. Mukesi lived to an old age and at his death was succeeded by his son Legegisa, who before his death removed his kraal from Miluwani to Mukumbani, where it is now situated. He was succeeded by his son Ramaremisa, the present chief Tshivhase.

During Mukesi's reign one of his brothers, Popi Rambuda, deserted him and declared himself independent, building his head kraal at Dzimauli. He collected a fairly large following and on his death was succeeded by his son Vele Rambuda. Vele had two sons, Bele and Tshikose, who on their father's death fought for the chieftainship. Bele was killed in the struggle, but his son Khaku was elected independent chief of Madala, where his father had been a petty chief. Tshikose Rambuda died in 1924 and was succeeded by his minor son Ratsibvumo Rambuda. Khaku died in 1923 and his minor son Tshitongani was appointed chief.

The three lineal descendants of the second and fourth sons of Vele Lambeho are head-men under Chiefs Tshivhase and Mphephu.

To-day the important independent chiefs of the MaKhwinde sib

are Mbulahene Mphephu, Senthumule, Khuthama, Tshivhase, and Rambuda. These chiefs are all recognized as rulers in their respective locations by the European administration. Mbulahene Mphephu and Tshivhase have the largest territories and the greatest wealth and power.

The third section is that of Mphaphuli, always an independent chief. Mr. Wessman says that:

'Shamboko Mpafuri is said to have been an independent chief at the time of Vele Lambeho, who was a close friend of his. It is not certain whether Shamboko came from Rhodesia, or whether he had already established himself at Tshitomboni (now forming part of the Knobnose Location) when Vele Lambeho came to this district from Bukalanga (i.e. S. Rhodesia). It would, however, appear that Shamboko was the Mpafuri or Mpafudi, the son of the great Ndebele chief Musi, as this Mpafuri is said to have fled from the "Musi" kraal towards Rhodesia on account of tribal wars, and further that Shamboko was in no way related to Vele Lambeho.'

There is another tradition that Shamboko entered Rhodesia with a horde of marauding Swazis and later attached himself to Vele Lambeho as one of his court officials, and after the migration south set up as an independent chief, in more or less his present position. The subsequent history of this group is one of perpetual quarrels between brothers as to the succession, it being a recognized tradition that every heir must fight and conquer his intriguing rivals before he could consolidate his claim to the chieftainship. There was also constant war against the Tshivhase chiefs, large expanses of land continually changing from one to the other. Ratsibi Mphaphuli was succeeded by Makwarela after the latter had killed his brother Tshikalanga. Makwarela died in 1927 and was succeeded by his son Paswane, in spite of a most persistent attempt by another brother to obtain recognition in his place. The Mphaphuli line of chiefs have adopted the goat as their totem animal, in emulation of the great MaKhwinde sib, hoping thereby to enhance their prestige.

Two other chiefs of probable non-Venda origin are Madzivhandila, now living on the farm Goedverwachting, whose ancestors lived at Mutali on the Levuvhu river, and Lwamondo, whose ancestors fled from Balauri and were appointed keepers of the chief's cattle by Tshikalanga Mphephu, becoming independent during the Anglo-Boer war. Both of these are probably of Sutho stock. In the western area there have been several small BaSutho settlements, which have become absorbed into the Venda group.

All the non-Venda elements have left their mark on Venda culture, although, generally speaking, they have received more from it than they have given to it. To-day MaKhwinde and Vhatavhatsinde and all the other sections of the people that live in Vendaland are proud to call themselves BaVenda, while those whose origin can be traced to other tribes are inclined to resent a reference to their foreign ancestry.

There is one group which is an exception to this tendency, and which does not share the Venda pride of race nor wish to sink its cultural and physical individuality in the tribe among which it lives. The BaLemba are found scattered in small villages or single kraals throughout Vendaland, more particularly in the west, without chiefs and without any political bond of union. They possess marked Semitic characteristics, and are the metal-workers, traders, and business men among their Bantu brethren, wandering among the BaVenda, indeed, anywhere among the tribes from the Zambesi to Pietersburg, absorbing the language of the people among whom they have settled and maintaining by endogamy (at any rate until recently) the purity of their race. The life and customs of this peculiar people are strangely reminiscent of the wandering Jews of medieval times. They are rapidly losing their individuality since European traders have robbed them of their heritage.

The BaVenda have been able to maintain their supremacy in the Zoutpansberg, and on many occasions have been saved from annihilation by their mountains. In the past they were subjected to constant raids from outside, and although there was never a combined effort against the raiders, each independent chief harried the enemy from his mountain stronghold and let him pass on to the next, where he was similarly treated, so making settlement impossible except by peaceful arrangement.

Gottschling[1] mentions two outstanding raids by the BaPedi and Zulus respectively.

'In the beginning of the nineteenth century the BaPedi under Tulane, the grandfather of Sekukuni I, invaded the country of the Bawenda, but the mountains secured the victory for the Bawenda. . . . After the Matabele kingdom in Mashonaland had been established by Moslekatse in 1838, they were troubled by the Zulu hordes crossing their country in order to follow the Matabele to Mashonaland. About 1840 a Zulu horde under Ngoano played havoc amongst the Bawenda, and was followed by a strong Zulu force

[1] Gottschling, E., 'The Bawenda. A Sketch of their History and Customs', *J. Roy. Anthrop. Inst.*, 1905, p. 366.

led by Songandawe, but the latter went over the Limpopo and joined Moslekatse. The mountain fortresses again saved the Bawenda from destruction.'

Their hereditary enemy the BaThonga also continually harried them, particularly the Knobnose branch. Another section, under the leadership of Albasini, a renegade Portuguese, was a continual source of trouble and acted as a convenient buffer between the BaVenda and the Transvaal Republic, which was not then in a strong enough position to subjugate this last obstinate opposition to their authority.

The BaVenda were most antagonistic to European settlement, and until 1872 no missionary was allowed to settle among them. Yet even prior to this date, they made use of the white man for their own ends, in spite of their hatred of him. In 1859, when Ramapulana was struggling for the chieftainship against his brother Ramvuma, he asked help from the independent Dutch Republic at Lydenburg, and returned to his capital with Commandant Potgieter and a strong Boer commando. The Boers remained near Dzanane and founded the prosperous village of Schoemansdal, where they traded for ivory with the natives. This settlement supported Makhado's claim to the chieftainship on Ramapulana's death. In 1867 Makhado raided Schoemansdal and annihilated its inhabitants, for a time freeing his country from the steadily increasing influence of the white man.

The native power in the north was a constant menace to the Transvaal Republic, and it was not until 1899, after various ineffectual attempts to subjugate Ramapulana's section of the tribe, that General Joubert finally succeeded in driving Mphephu into Rhodesia, thus breaking down the last obstinate resistance to European domination. This war has been described by Mr. R. Wessman[1] who took an active part in the proceedings.

After the Anglo-Boer war the whole country was divided into Locations under white administration, a large part being demarcated for white settlement.

[1] Wessman, R., *The Bawenda of the Spelonken*, London, 1908.

III

PHYSICAL AND PSYCHICAL CHARACTERISTICS, CLOTHING, AND DECORATION

Physical Characteristics—Psychical Characteristics—Clothing—Ornaments —Beads—Personal Decoration—Scarification

Physical Characteristics.

IT is impossible to dogmatize about the typical Venda facial characteristics, as the constant absorption of other peoples that has taken place from very early times, particularly the intermixture during the last century with Sutho people, has resulted in a tribe of very varied appearance.

There is the flat-faced, broad-nosed, thick-lipped MuVenda, possessing all the common negroid features and varying in colour from light to very dark brown. There is also a much more alert-faced individual with sharp well-defined features, clear-cut pointed nose, and moderately thin lips, presenting a distinctly Hamitic appearance, which is accentuated among the old men by the fact that they wear long undressed beards; this type is on the whole more uniformly dark brown than their less aristocratic-looking brethren. Between these two extremes are to be found every shade and degree of Bantu facial type. They are of medium stature and in general physique inferior to the coastal peoples, though strong and wiry and capable of great physical endurance and strain. An interesting feature is the fairly common occurrence among them of soft hair, which they call by a special term, *hulele*, which differs considerably from the ordinary more typical ulotrichous hair; this may possibly be derived from the early Arab colonists, who are known to have mixed with the peoples of Southern Rhodesia, probably at a time when the BaVenda were living there. Small ears, small hands and feet and small dark brown eyes are common among them.

Of 168 men and 56 women whom I measured, the average stature was found to be 167·6 cm. for the men and 153·9 cm. for the women. Head-measurements show them to be dolichocephalic, the average cephalic index being 75·2. The nasal indices give an average of 92·3, placing them well up in the platyrrhine division. Although these measurements were determined from such a negligible proportion of