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# *T H E S W A Z I*

*An Ethnographic Account of the Natives of the  
Swaziland Protectorate*

BY

BRIAN ALLAN MARWICK

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*To*  
R. L. M.  
AND  
MASHIPISA

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## P R E F A C E

Much of the information for this book was collected in the field during July and August 1934. The remainder was culled from the scanty literature on the subject, and from nine years' experience of the Swazi as a government official.

For the task of obtaining, in the field, all the information for a monograph of this nature, the time at my disposal was all too short. In order to make the best use of that time, I employed it in the following manner.

In the first place I visited the village of Chief Dinaabantu Gama in the Mbabane district. This I did because of (i) his status as a chief, and the opportunity it afforded of studying the working of local government; (ii) his personal attributes—he is an elderly man full of wisdom and common sense; (iii) the long connexion of his clan with that of the royal family for whom he and his ancestors were 'army doctors' and custodians of the royal graves at Makhosini; (iv) his being polygamous; and (v) his being chief of a fairly thickly populated Native Area.

At this village (Dlangeni) I spent a fortnight observing and making enquiries, not only on matters concerning village life but also on affairs of local and national government, and on the whole complex of tribal life.

I subsequently made a similar visit to the area of Chief Mvemve Hlophe, also in the Mbabane district, but stayed in a village adjoining the chief's—that of Zabeneni Mkhonta.

Mvemve's area was different from that of Dinaabantu for the reason that it was European-owned land. Mvemve himself is a man of outstanding intelligence who has served many years at Swazi headquarters as a *libutfo* (warrior).

With Dinaabantu's and Zabeneni's villages respectively as headquarters, it was possible to make expeditions to other villages, etc., for example to visit a native blacksmith and a native witchdoctor and a native school.

During the remainder of the period at my disposal, I was

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able to pay several short visits to the villages of both the paramount chief and the queen mother, and to gain impressions of national life from that angle.

In addition I proceeded to Mankaiana for a few days to interview Mficela Dlamini who, as an important member of the royal clan, was able to give me information on land tenure, the constitutional position of the chief, and the function of the *lisokancanti* in clan and family affairs.

I also took the opportunity of visiting traders' stores and of observing the nature of the business being transacted by natives, and of acquainting myself with the extent to which they now rely on articles of European merchandise.

The missionary and teacher were not overlooked and, when opportunity offered, I discussed with them questions relevant to my work.

A certain amount of research among government publications and documents was necessary. In addition aspects of the contact between officials and natives were observed.

I endeavoured to study each element of culture in its own cultural background, and to rely on informants only if there were no means of obtaining information from personal observation.

As an assistant I employed a Swazi, Mashipisa Fakudze, who had grown up under tribal discipline; and who was, as a boy, closely connected with the paramount chief and the Swazi Court. Subsequently he received a European education in Swaziland and the Union of South Africa. He has also been employed as a store assistant *cum* recruiter's clerk and book-keeper. He has now embraced the Christian faith, but retains a lively interest in, and a genuine respect for, Swazi institutions. He was therefore valuable both as an informant and as a liaison between the natives and myself.

During my sojourn at native villages I was the guest of the village head, who in each case provided me with one of his huts, and with occasional presents of food.

The tangible results of my work in the field are contained in the following pages. In addition to these results, the work

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has wrought a change in my personal outlook on the science of anthropology and upon the Swazi himself.

It is as well at this stage to state that before undertaking this field work, I was interested in the natives of Swaziland as a subject race, members of which I came into contact with most often out of their own environment, e.g. at government offices, at tax camps, in the criminal courts, and at meetings of chiefs, but rarely, and then only momentarily, in the background of their own tribal life. On the other hand, anthropology was to a great extent a somewhat nebulous abstraction: the science of man in society, a man who existed only in so far as he was brought to life in the books of such as H. A. Junod and B. Malinowski. The two outlooks were in effect not adequately synthesized.

My field work has made it possible to obtain a fresh outlook upon the problems of the relations between a European government and subject native races, and also has generally intensified my appreciation of the value of anthropology in native administration. That is to say, it has brought about a realization that in the particular task in which I am interested—native administration—a knowledge of anthropology is a primary essential and that it is not merely an academic science dealing with the ‘savage’ in the abstract.

The field work I have done has, in the first place, revealed to me the extent to which Swazi institutions still control native modes of life and how few individuals have been completely ‘detrribalized’.

Most impressive is the fact that Swazi culture remains a working whole, in spite of the influence of European civilization. Many elements of European culture have been assimilated, e.g. the use of the plough and of blankets, but the whole synthesis of essentially Swazi culture is still preserved. Sanctions and institutions which existed prior to European influence still operate even where attempts have been made to uproot certain elements of culture. Examples are frequent of Christian converts who, as soon as some trouble befalls them, hasten to consult the witchdoctors.

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This led me to the realization that Swazi culture is still very real, and that it is closely woven into the fabric of the people's lives and maintained there by their own institutions.

Attempts by officials and missionaries to eradicate certain elements of native culture have been ill-rewarded. This is significant because it shows a failure to realize the ramifications, meaning and value of the element which it was sought to uproot. The lack of success of these attempts has been due, in many cases, to complete failure to comprehend the implications of such uprooting and the lack or inadequacy of the substitutes offered for the uprooted element.

Witchcraft is a case in point. In former times sorcery was punishable by death after the sorcerer had been smelt out at an *umhlahlo* (public smelling-out). These *imihlahlo* were declared illegal by the European government, partly on the grounds that the victims were not given a fair trial. The fact that natives do not regard it as being possible to bring a sorcerer to book by an ordinary trial was overlooked. As a consequence sorcery has increased in its forms and extent until the natives maintain that more people now die by witchcraft than ever died from bloodshed in pre-European days.

The missionary's insistence on monogamy illustrates the inadequacy of the European substitute for a native institution. Polygamy is regarded in Swazi society as in no way degrading or dishonouring to the women. On the contrary marriage confers a dignified status upon them. Missionaries have insisted upon monogamy with the result that polygamy is becoming discountenanced. The woman who would have been content to become the wife of a polygamist now occasionally refuses to do so, but not infrequently becomes a prostitute or a concubine instead, since there are few occupations by which a native woman can earn her own living. The net result is that a woman who would have been accepted in society as a useful and respected social and economic unit is despised by the conservative natives and by the missionaries if she falls into loose ways as a result of the modification of the outlook upon polygamy.

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It has been impressive to discover from work among the Swazi the value of native institutions and their adequacy in meeting the requirements of native life. It was patent that these institutions were not disjointed and unrelated, but that they were woven into a unity, functioning to preserve the society as a working whole.

The individual is in command of a wide and detailed range of information within his own particular sphere. This makes apparent the futility of catechizing the native as an ignorant savage.

The science of anthropology is apt to become divorced from reality in the mind of the student if it is accepted as a body of generalized rules concerning 'man in society'. What is most important, is to observe the operation of these rules in the field, and to test their validity and to modify them where necessary in the light of additional information and experience.

A question which naturally arises is whether field work is a necessary part of the study of social anthropology.

An understanding of the science presupposes a certain amount of knowledge of culture and, in my opinion, field work is necessary in order to gain a proper perception of the science.

Without the linkage between the actual and the academic which field work is able to provide, social anthropology is apt to remain an abstract science and analogous to the studying of physical laws without applying them to phenomena which are surrounding us, and without modifying those laws when they can be disproved by fresh evidence.

To revert to the particular problem in which I am interested, that is, native administration, it is at once apparent that the native must be studied in the background of his culture, and the elements of that culture carefully assessed in order to make it possible, in the task of administering the natives, successfully to make use of existing native institutions or to modify them, or to eradicate them.

At the present time particularly, when there are so many

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influences at work—the official, the missionary, the trader, the settler and the recruiter—changing the form and content of Swazi culture, is it especially necessary that field work should be undertaken. Without this it is impossible to envisage the adequate handling of any problem of administration because it will not be possible to estimate the repercussions of interference with any given element of native culture.

The orthography used in writing the Swazi words in the text is that approved for the writing of Zulu (with certain modifications owing to dialectical differences between Zulu and Swazi) by a conference of representatives of the Natal and Transvaal Education Departments and of the Swaziland Government, held at Piet Retief in 1933. For example the plural prefix *ama* in Zulu is pronounced *ema* in Swazi and has been so written. Again, the *z* in Zulu words like *umuzi* (a village) becomes *t* in the Swazi equivalent, thus—*umuti*. One exception is made in the case of the spelling of the word *Swazi*. This is pronounced *Swati* by the people themselves but the form with *z* has such a wide currency in writing and in speech among Europeans that it would be unnecessarily confusing to use the *t* form. Other modifications are the use of *s* after *t* where it occurs before *a*, *e* or *i*, and where the sound would be represented by *t* in the Zulu form of the word, e.g. the Zulu word *umuti* (a tree) is *umutsi* in Swazi. Similarly *z* is used after *d* where it occurs before *a*, *e* or *i*, and where the sound would be represented by *d* in the Zulu form of the word, e.g. *umgod* (Zulu for a hole) is *umgodzi* in Swazi. Again, *v* is used after *d* where it occurs before *o* or *u* and where the sound would be represented by *d* in the Zulu form of the word, e.g. the Zulu word *indoda* (a man) is *indvodza* in Swazi. Similarly *f* is used after *t* where it occurs before *o* or *u* and where the sound would be represented by *t* in the Zulu form of the word, e.g. the Zulu word *intombi* (a girl) is *intfombi* in Swazi.

In the following pages an attempt has been made to cover all aspects of Swazi life. In order to do this it has been thought necessary to incorporate all the information at my



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disposal. A certain amount of the technology of arts and crafts has been included, e.g. hut building and beer making, and much other detail has been added at the expense of balance and polish in the work. In extenuation it can only be said that no systematic attempt has hitherto been made to make an ethnographic study of the Swazi and that this attempt, though it may be wanting in symmetry, is at least capable of providing a foundation for further studies.

I am deeply indebted to Professor I. Schapera of the University of Cape Town for encouragement and advice. The section on military organization would have been lamentably inadequate had I not been permitted to incorporate much of the valuable report written by Professor Schapera and Mrs A. W. Hoernlé on the *libutfo* system for the Swaziland Administration.

I wish to record my gratitude also to the Swaziland Government for a generous grant which has made possible the publication of this work, and for allowing me to quote from official documents.

B. A. M.

*Mubi, Nigeria*

*August 1939*