

A History of the Mutapa Empire

The Mutapa empire, or the Great Zimbabwe empire, was a vast empire which covered both Zimbabwe, Central Mozambique, and other parts of neighboring countries. The Mutapa empire was led by the Mwene-Mutapa, and his title means “Lord of the Realm” or “Owner of the Mines”. Mwene means “Lord” or “Owner”, and Mutapa means “Realm” or “Mines”. The Mutapa empire existed from about 900CE to 1902CE (CE = Common Era), and was about 1002 years old. In the 1400s, the capital now known as Great Zimbabwe, was abandoned by the majority of leaders of the empire.

Two princes would take many people with them; one would go north and the other west. Although the main leader of the empire moved north, the ruling dynasty was still the same bloodline, and the empire continued to thrive and expand, gaining new trading routes and partners. The people of Mutapa were mainly from the Shona group, also known as the Karanga group. Other groups such as the Lower Zambezi Tonga (of modern-day Mozambique) also served in the Great Council of Mutapa. The Mutapa empire covered a large area which included modern Zimbabwe and Central Mozambique to the Indian Ocean.

The mutupo, or totem of the royal dynasty of Mutapa was originally the soko totem, or the vervet-monkey totem. The royal Mutapa dynasty grew so large over the centuries that due to certain circumstances, some members of the dynasty changed their totems or created Sub-Totems. Mwene-Mutapa Nyatsimba Mutota, who moved the Mutapa capital from Great Zimbabwe north to Dande to lead the expansionist of the empire had the moyo totem or heart totem.

With many members born into the royal dynasty, the ruling family was divided into houses with different totems. HuMwene, or the kingship, rotated around these Mutapa houses. The royal houses, or the royal totems, of the Mutapa dynasty included Soko (Vervet Monkey), Shava/Mhofu (eland), Moyo (Heart), Nzou Samanyanga (Elephant Keeper of Tusks), and Tembo (Zebra, which would become Shumba Tembo).

Religion

The Shona/Karanga people believe in one supreme being named Mwari. According to the Shona, Mabweadziva, or Matopos, is where the first man was created by Mwari. Mwari, the Supreme Being, made the first man, Musikavanhu, in the heavens. He put the man to sleep and dropped him down to earth. As Musikavanhu was falling he awakened and saw a stone falling near him. Mwari told him to step onto the stone, and they landed softly on the ground.

Water gushed from the place the stone landed with Musikavanhu and it became a scared place for the Karanga/Shona people. Musikavanhu had dreams and visions of birds and animals. When he awakened, his dreams and visions had come true. Birds flew through the skies and animals roamed the earth. A woman appeared and when Musikavanhu touched her, she came to life and became his wife. Musikavanhu instructed their children in the ways they were to live and then he and his wife went to the heavens to dwell with Mwari.

After Musikavanhu and his wife departed to be with Mwari, humans (Vanhu) now lived in peace on the earth (Pasi) that Mwari had created. They lived in peace for a very long time — this period was Pasichigare or “the Ancient Paradise”. But it happened that Musikavanhu’s children, drunk, were overcome by pride, insisting that Mwari was dead, and that one of them would become the new Mwari. A voice, the voice of Mwari, warned them, but they were proud.

Mwari’s anger deepened, and it is said that he cursed the earth — Pasi pakarohwa ne nyundo: sea water became salty, the land dried up, thorns appeared. Rivers overwhelmed people during the rainy season, and crocodiles emerged. The sun became hot, animals ate one another and assaulted humans. And people started to kill each other.

The Shona / Karanga people believe their dead ancestors go to Nyikadzimu (the Ancestral Spirit World), and refer to them as Mudzimu. They call upon them in times of need. The spirits of their kings return as lions called mhondoro. The word mhondoro is also used to refer to the spirits of Kings, or the founding father of the Dynasty.

The Mhondoro ancestral creed, and the Mwari Creed, were the largest and most extensive creeds in Southern Africa. In the hierarchy of spirits, Mwari is the Supreme Being and Lord of all spirits. Under Mwari is the Gombwe spirit. The worship of Mwari is done through

ancestral spirits known as mhondoro. There is a hierarchy of ancestral spirits. On the top being the mhondoro, and on the bottom being the mudzimu. A mhondoro is an ancestral spirit of a king, or a king who started a dynasty. A mudzimu is a family ancestral spirit.

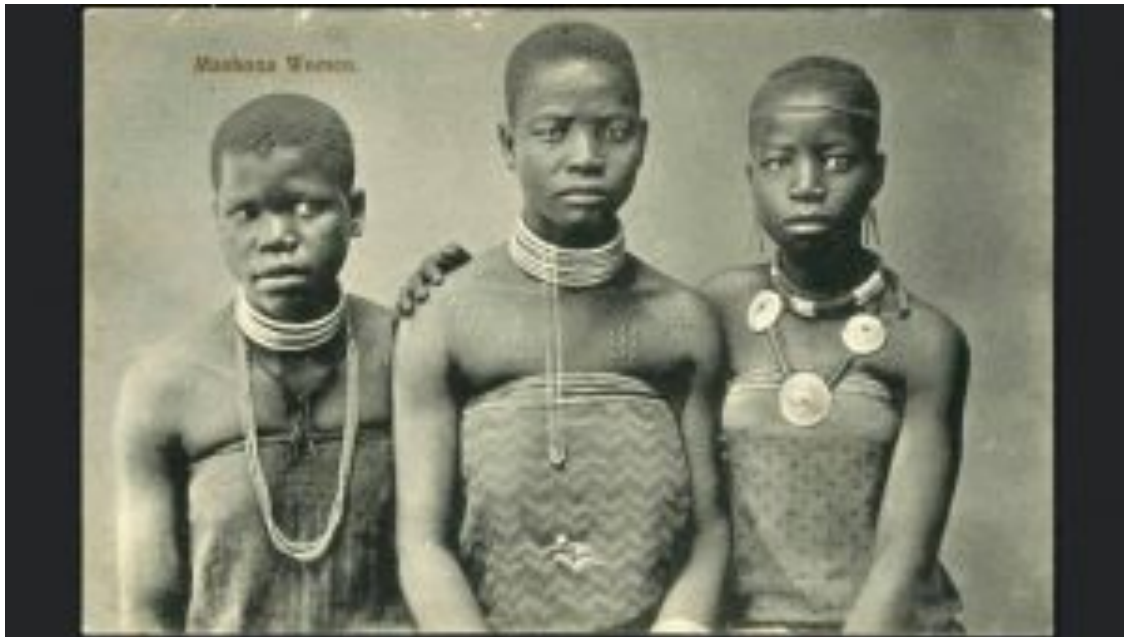
The Pre 1450CE Mutapa Empire

The Mutapa empire was an expansion of another Shona / Karanga civilization which dates back a century or so from the year 1000CE. This civilization is known as Mapungubwe, and its first king was called Tovera (Thovhele) Nemapungubwe. To know who the Shona, and their close relatives are, we must know their sacred ancestors.

The ancestors of most of the Shona/Karanga people as well as their relatives were the VaMbire or the VaMbiri. Mbiri means “glory” in ChiShona or ChiKaranga, and the word VaMbiri means “the Glorious Ones.” The earliest recorded “Mhondoro”, or royal ancestor of the Shona, and their close relatives such as the Venda, and Lobedu is Tovera. He is also known as Thobela or Thovhele (Nemapungubwe) by the Venda, and he was the earliest recorded legendary king.

There is a song which recognizes Tovera as the royal ancestor of the Shona, it includes the following lyrics: “Tovera mudzimu dzoka! Vana vanorwara. Mudzimu dzoka! Kwaziwai Tovera!” There is also a road in Zimbabwe named after Tovera. The son of Tovera was Mambire. He was the father of the legendary Murenga Pfumojena Sororenzou, also known as Thohoyandou. Murenga Sororenzou was the founder architect of Zimbabwe, and is also the legendary ‘Murenga’ after whom all the liberation wars of Zimbabwe are named.

He was of the Soko totem, and is revered as the great ancestral spirit of war. All the Shona Mwene-Mutapas, Changamires, (emperors) and most Madzishes are direct descendants of Murenga. It was recorded that during the Chimurenga war, Shona warriors would shout the war-cry “Murenga wamuka!” meaning “The God of War has risen!” When hunting, Shona hunters would shout “Komborera, Murenga” meaning “Bless, oh God” and the animal would instantly fall or die. Murenga was the father of the original Runji, Chaminuka, Nehanda, and Mushavatu. Today there is a city in South Africa named after him. Murenga was the manifestation of Mwari who aided the Shona/Karanga people in great wars.



Mapungubwe was one of the first major cities in Mutapa / Madzimbabwe, or Southern Africa. Mapungubwe in the old ChiShona / ChiKaranga and ChiVenda language means “Rock of the Great Bateleur Eagle. The Kalanga or Western Shona name for the bateluer eagle bird is Tjipungu / Chipungu and the plural form is zwipungu. The prefix “Ma”- represents personification. So “Mapungu” means the “great bateleur eagle” (in description of a person.) Just like the Venda VhaKwevho call their king MaGuluvhe aLuonde. (Meaning great pig of Luonde). So, if we assume the meta language of Mapungubwe is similar to Venda, then Mapungubwe would mean “Rock of the Great Bateleur Eagle”.

In other words, a personification of the great king Shiryadenga. Tovera / Tovhele is the earliest recorded Shona/Karanga and Venda royal ancestor. He led at Mapungubwe with the praise names ‘Shiryadenga’ and ‘Nemapungubwe’ (King of Mapungubwe). The Soap Stone Birds of Great Zimbabwe have a connection to Tovera Shiryadenga Nemapungubwe as he was the Mhondoro or royal ancestor of the kings of Great Zimbabwe.

The Shona / Karanga later moved to Zimbabwe and built their capital at Wedza in Marondera. The original Chaminuka’s son, Kutamadzoka, became Mwene-Mutapa I. After Kutamadzoka his brother, Chingwangu, became Mwene-Mutapa II. He moved the capital to Great Zimbabwe and he became known as Rusvingo, which means “Stone Mason” or “Builder of Stone Walls”.

Great Zimbabwe is actually the largest of many zimbabwes, or stone cities, built without mortar in Southern Africa. Mwene Mutapa Chingwangu Rusvingo instructed through his council, that every visitor to the city of Great Zimbabwe had to bring three stones.

This was to build the walls of Great Zimbabwe. On every valuable thing exported from the empire of Mutapa, the leaders of Great Zimbabwe took a 50% cut. If Swahili merchants extracted ivory from an elephant, the emperor would keep one tusk. Elite warriors from all over the Mutapa empire were sent to Great Zimbabwe to defend and fight for the Mwene-Mutapa as a way of paying tribute by vassal kings (Madzishe).

The conical tower, which lies in the Imba Guru, or the Great Enclosure, was a male fertility symbol which was made in honour of Murenga Sororenzou. His spirit was housed within the tower and some of his power still remains there, even after his spirit went to Njerere / Njelele. Murenga was the ancient Shona / Karanga Nembire, or King, from whom the word Chimurenga is derived. The conical tower represents his uncompromising valour.

Great Zimbabwe is located in the Masvingo province of the modern-day country of Zimbabwe. The city was built almost 1000 years ago by the ancestors of the Shona people. After the era when Great Zimbabwe was the capital of the Mutapa empire, the sub kingdoms, or provinces, in the east or in modern day Mozambique included the sub-kingdom of Gambe and zimbabwes which were called Manyikeni and Chibuene.

The eight Greater Mwene-Mutapas of Great Zimbabwe:

- 2 Mwenemutapa Chingwangu Rusvingo,
- 3 Mwenemutapa Chidyamatamba,
- 4 Mwenemutapa Chimedzamabwe,
- 5 Mwenemutapa Mombemuriwo,
- 6 Mwenemutapa Mavhudzi (Chibatamtosi),
- 7 Mwenemutapa Kangambeu-Kurima-Kwakona (Dyambeu, first recorded ancestor of the Moyo totem),
- 8 Mwenemutapa Nyatsimba Mutota (A Moyo and successor of Dyambeu; he would later move to Dande)
- 9 Mwenemutapa Munembire Mudadi

According to oral history, Great Zimbabwe also served as a sanctuary for Murenga Sororenzou, and his spirit was against blood being shed among his children. It was said that during the fight for the throne

there was bloodshed. Murenga's spirit was appalled and then it moved away from the site, moving west to Njerere at Mabweadziva or Matopos. Nyatsimba Mutota, the Mwene-Mutapa, and a former feuding prince, moved north to expand the empire, and Mukwati/Torwa (a former rival of Mutota) moved west; following Murenga's spirit to Mabweadziva.

According to some historians that is when the city of Great Zimbabwe started to decline: however, there were Portuguese manufactured shells which were discovered at the ruins. There were also people living at Great Zimbabwe in the 1890s, who were removed by the British South African Company, meaning the site was still occupied after the departure of the princes. The Mutapa empire and the Great Zimbabwe empire were one and the same. The name of this empire was Mutapa. The bloodlines of the dynasties were the same, sharing common ancestry. Nyatsimba Mutota's movement northwards was to lead the expansionist of the same empire, and to secure more convenient trading routes.

Much of the Shona royalty left the city of Great Zimbabwe and went to surrounding countries in the region to expand the Mutapa empire and gain new trading routes and partners. It is said that Princess Dzugudini a descendant of the Mwene-Mutapa returned to modern day South Africa and became the Lobedu and Venda people. Others abandoned Great Zimbabwe and went back beyond the Vembe/Limpopo river to build zimbabwes or stone cities. Among some of their zimbabwes was the stone city of Thulamela.

Other Shona/Karanga people went east to modern day Mozambique. Those following Mukwati or Torwa went west to expand and secure the spiritually significant and mineral rich sub-kingdom of Guruhuswa. Their zimbabwe was Khami. It was thought that there was rivalry between Nyatsimba Mutota and Mukwati/Torwa, however in the future, Torwa's people paid tribute to the Mwenemutapa in the north.

They even kept the northern Mwene-Mutapa's cattle. Those under Nyatsimba Mutota, as stated, went north to find new resources/trade routes, and expand the Mutapa empire, though some of the Mwenemutapa's wives stayed at Great Zimbabwe. Their zimbabwes were Zvongombe, Tuuyu Tusere, and Mount Pfura. Pfura means Rhino in ChiShona/Chikaranga, and it is respected in Shona tradition. There was a golden rhino found at [Mapungubwe](#).

Nyatsimba Mutota was the son and successor of Chikura Dyambeu (Kangambeu Kurima Kwakona) the earliest recorded Mwene-Mutapa with the Moyo totem. Dyambeu's mother was Senwa (meaning Woman Regent) or Nehanda, and she had a son by an unknown father. Some say the father was Mwari, other's say it was her relative who was the NeMbire, or Mwene-Mutapa.

If the father of Dyambeu was indeed the Mwene-Mutapa then she must have performed the Kupinga Pasi ritual, and then afterwards became known as a Nehanda / Mbonga for she would have been consecrated. The Kupinga Pasi ritual is only performed by those of the high royal blood, the Mambo/King and his sister, and is forbidden among ordinary people.

This might be an early example of the tradition of the Mbonga. As the keeper of the Makona (The clan's war medicines), the Mbonga, also known as Zimbuya Guru (Great Ancestress), was the most important person in the community after the Ishe/Chief. The power of the Ishe and the security of the whole dzinza was in the safety of the gona and its keeper, especially the winning and losing of wars. To consecrate (bless) a mbonga, a virgin princess of the clan was supposed to sleep with her brother, the chief/Ishe to arm and sustain the power of the gona (this ritual is known as Kupinga Pasi).

Before Nyatsimba Mutota left Great Zimbabwe for Dande, incidentally there was a fight for the throne. The story states prince Mukwati of the Soko totem said "bva torwa" or "bva togwa", meaning "then let's fight", and thus he was given the praise name Torwa. A war of succession broke out at the stone city. Mukwati/Torwa fought against Nyatsimba Mutota, but nobody won the war. Murenga's spirit moved to Njelele at Mabweadziva or Matopos as a result of the bloodshed, and Torwa followed it.

Meanwhile Mutota stayed at Great Zimbabwe for a while before moving to northern Dande. The two former rivals would leave behind Great Zimbabwe under the leadership of their relative, Mwene Munembire Mudadi. Nyatsimba Mutota arrived at the Zambezi where he built the Zimbabwe called Zvongombe and Tuuyu Tusere. Prince Mukwati/Torwa was forced to move away from Great Zimbabwe to the province of Guruhuswa, because of Murenga's departure.

He ended up moving west where he built the famous Zimbabwe or stone city of Khami, which was near Murenga's great spirit. The dynasty he left behind was the Torwa/Togwa dynasty of the kingdom

of Guruuswa or Butua. Nyatsimba Mutota established another new capital, Zvongombe, by the Zambezi. Mutota achieved total control of the area through conquests, intermarriage, and economic intercourse with the northern people. Under Mutota, political control extended to the South, and the North to include the Mbire province.

Nyatsimba Mutota was said to have had many wives. Eight baobab trees were planted at the site where he was buried along with his eight friends / council members centuries ago. The site was called Tuuyu Tusere, meaning "Eight Baobabs."

The Post 1450CE Mutapa Empire

Nyatsimba Mutota ruled from 1430 – 1450. Nyatsimba Mutota's successor, Mwenemutapa Matope Nyanhehwe Nebedza who ruled from 1450-1480, extended the Mutapa empire to encompass most of the lands between Tavara and the Indian Ocean, securing new trade routes, and provinces.

During Matope's war with the Tavara leader Karuva, he ordered his whole army to put on the royal Ndoro shells, and red cloths. Matope knew that the Tavara were of the Dziva clan, thus they had an aversion to fish, shells, and red cloth. Karuva's powers became useless against Matope, thus Matope routed Karuva and his followers.

Karuva and his followers are said to have retreated to Nhenhene or Mitimichena and disappeared into the water sanctuary. Matope was the most powerful African leader south of the Equator in the latter half of the 15th century. His regal costume included an exquisitely decorated small hoe as part of the belt. The hoe had an ivory handle and suggested peace through the ability to gain wealth from the earth. Other symbols of the kingship included granaries, animal horns, and spears or weapons.

The Mwenemutapa or Emperor was believed to be the "lord of the sun, and the moon, king of the land and the rivers and conqueror of enemies." This symbolized that the Mwene-Mutapa was a divine king. Mwene-Mutapa Matope, the son of Nyatsimba Mutota, declared that his spirit was immortal, it transformed into a lion, a Mhondoro, so killing a lion was considered an unforgivable crime in some parts of Mutapa.

After Mwene-Mutapa Matope, came Mavura Maobwe who was succeeded by Mukombero Nyahuma who ruled for 10 years. Mwene-

Mutapa Mukombero Nyahuma was killed by a rebel provincial lord named Changamire, who usurped the Mutapa throne. Changamire was a son of Mwene-Mutapa Matope, and he ruled from 1490-1494. After 4 years he was killed by Chikuyo Chisamurengu (Kakuyo Komunya) who ruled from 1494-1530.

The Rise of Mwene-Mutapa Chikuyo Chisamarengu (1494 - 1530)

Mwene-Mutapa Matope Nyanhehwe Nebedza (1450 - 1480) expanded the vast Mutapa empire during the latter half of the 1400s. Matope then appointed his children as the provincial lords of Mutapa, including his son Changamire, who was appointed as the vassal king of the southern regions known as Mbire and Guruuswa.

A decade after the death of Mwene-Mutapa Matope, Changamire allied with his relative, Togwa, to revolt against his elder brother, Nyahuma Mukombero. Nyahuma had succeeded to the Mutapa throne, and became the reigning Mwene-Mutapa.

Changamire, being assisted by Togwa's forces, battled the Mutapa army. At the head of the army was the Mwene-Mutapa himself, Nyahuma Mukombero. With the help of Togwa's forces, Changamire defeated the Mutapa army and Nyahuma was killed in battle. The victorious Changamire then entered Nyahuma's Zimbabwe (capital) and killed 21 out of 22 of Nyahuma's sons.

Unknown to Changamire, a son of Nyahuma was on a visit to his mother's people at the time his father and 21 brothers were killed. This son, Chikuyo Chisamarengu, eldest of Nyahuma Mukombero's sons (except Munyore Karembera who was ill), grew to manhood during the 4 years that Changamire sat on his father's throne.

Chikuyo secretly assembled a powerful army to avenge his father, and reclaim the Mutapa throne. In 1494 Chikuyo Chisamarengu battled the usurper and avenged his father, Mwene-Mutapa Nyahuma Mukombero, in an epic fashion. During that year in 1494, Chikuyo Chisamarengu, ascended to the Mutapa throne, and regained control of most of the empire.

The Mutapa empire had achieved uniting a number of different peoples in Southern Africa by encouraging states to join voluntarily, offering membership in the Great council of the Empire to any whom joined without resistance. The General of Mutapa's armies was a

figure known as Zono, while the Mukomohasha or General of Mutapa's vassal kingdom of Barwe was said to be always a royal Tonga.

The Mwenemutapa became very wealthy by exploiting copper from Chidzurgwe and ivory from the middle Zambezi. Matope's armies secured the kingdom of the Manyika as well as the coastal kingdoms of Barwe, Uteve and Madanda. By the time the Portuguese arrived on the coast of Mozambique, the Mwenemutapa Empire was still the premier Shona polity in the region.

The Mutapa Empire had a social welfare system for the blind, and the maimed who were known as the "King's poor". The empire had expanded to its full extent by the year 1480 a mere 50 years after Nyatsimba Mutota left Great Zimbabwe. The Portuguese made contact with South East Africa by around 1515. Their main goal was to dominate the trade with India; however, they unwittingly became mere carriers for luxury goods between Mutapa's sub-kingdoms/provinces and India.

As the Portuguese settled along the coast, they made their way into the hinterland as sertanejos (backwoodsmen). These sertanejos lived alongside Swahili traders and even took up service among Shona sub-kingdoms as interpreters. One such sertanejo, António Fernandes, managed to travel through almost all the Shona/Karanga sub-kingdoms and provinces, including Mutapa's metropolitan district, between 1512 and 1516. Antonio Fernandes also witnessed a smaller Zimbabwe being built by the Shona in 1511. The Portuguese finally entered into direct relations with Mutapa in the 1560s.

The Military of the Mutapa empire.

At the peak of the Mutapa empire, the Mwene-Mutapa had a standing army of 100,000 men but he could mobilize 300,000 should the need arise. Mutapa, covering much of Southern Africa, relied on its own military power for support. Damião de Goes wrote of the Mwene-Mutapa: "Whether in time of peace or war he always maintains a large standing army, of which the commander-in-chief is called Zono, to keep the land in a state of quietness and to prevent the lords and kings who are subject to him from rising in rebellion." Before the Mukomohasha, the captain general of the Mutapa armies was a figure given in the records as Zono, or Sono.

As stated the Mwene-Mutapa had a large standing army, and could

also easily summon thousands of extra warriors within less than 24 hours. These armies had their own herds of cattle, and they fed off the land as well. They were so powerful that they once made the majority of people between the Zambezi and Vembe/Limpopo (including the invading Portuguese) submit and pay tribute to the Mwene-Mutapa.

The Mutapa armies also repelled the Maravi hordes north across the Zambezi. The Shona / Karanga armies went to war under battle standards / banners of basketwork covered with cloth (machira), in the shape of leopards, lions, elephants, or bulls. Their weapons were spears, clubs, axes, and bows and arrows. The armies of Mutapa also carried large shields as tall as a man and three palms wide, made of wood with a spike at the bottom.

They were commanded by means of signals from horns and drums, the distinctive note of the commander's drum being easily distinguished. Preferring pitched battles fought in the open, Mutapa armies attacked in crescent formation with a strong center and two wings. For retreat they formed a three-sided square with interlocking shields.

The Shona/Karanga people of the early seventeenth century used the crescent formation similar to the so called cow-horn formation, which they called "Muromo", and had developed a defensive technique that could be used in the field; on the blowing of a given signal on a horn, the men would plant their spiked shields in the ground in a formation that made three sides of a square, with the baggage in the middle and an open rear from behind which they could use their weapons more freely.

This gave their attacking formations a degree of security if the battle should start to turn against them. In the early seventeenth century, the Mutapa armies were likely to come up against the African slave-armies of the Portuguese prazo-holders, and this involved the possibility of coming under the fire of guns. Guns had also been in the hands of the Shona and their neighbors since about 1515, and by the late 1590s they were sufficiently common for there to be a prohibition against carrying them in Mutapa.

The Mutapa empire's military also recruited young warriors known as the Nyai. The rise of the Portuguese prazo warlords and their Chikunda slave armies involved a great deal of violence which threatened the people of the Mutapa empire. In the Zambezi valley the central province of the Mutapa empire developed its own defense.

Because the valley was dry, there were those with no cattle who depended upon the wealthier people. These young men of Mutapa became the Nyai. The Nyai in the south of the plateau at that time simply meant the subjects of the Changamire, but in the Mutapa kingdom it referred to the young fighters. The Nyai gathered under local leaders, chosen by the subruler, known as makurukota, and were trained by him as fighters.

They also took part in other activities traditional to young men, such as hunting, helping with the crops at peak work periods, running messages, and herding whatever livestock existed, but their main value was as a fighting unit that was highly appreciated. They were subdivided into boka (companies) and sixteen of these were named in the 1760s. They only retained a separate existence until their members were able to marry, and then they were replaced by fresh recruits.

The emergence of the VaNyai appears to be one of the reasons for the continued existence and continued resilience of the Mutapa kingdom. They also provided the military muscle to repel Portuguese, and Nguni / Ngoni attacks and to maintain the Mwene-Mutapa's influence. In 1835, the Nyai forces of Mutapa defeated the Nguni led by Nxaba and Maseko, who invaded the eastern part of the kingdom near Tete.

In the end, the Nyai forces of Mutapa forced the Nguni to retreat. Later, Nxaba's Ngoni and Mzilikazi's Ndebele moved close to Zumbo on the Zambezi, but the Mutapa kingdom held off these Nguni offensives into the 1860s. Though reduced in size, Mutapa survived as a kingdom until 1902. At the twilight of the mighty kingdom, Mwene-Mutapa Chioko Dambamupute, the last Mwene-Mutapa, was guarded by 300 men armed with modern rifles. Mwene Mutapa Chioko Dambamupute showed himself 'really hostile' to Portuguese and British alike, stimulating tax refusal, armed raids and other manifestations of rejection of administrative authority both British and Portuguese.

The Economy of the Mutapa empire

In 1648 Antonio Gomes observed that the Karanga produced a surplus that lasted until the following year; further 'they never see the bottom of their grain bin'. In 1696 Antonio da Conciecao observed that in the Mutapa empire people 'do their own farms and the king

has one cultivated by his people which stretches where the eye cannot see and sometimes see personally but in a grave manner.

He eventually collects so much food that he lives in plenty and even luxury, not only he but also his women'. We also learn from Jesuit Father Julio Cesar, who visited the Mutapa court in 1620, that this reigning Mwene-Mutapa, Gatsi Rusere, paid so much attention to agriculture. Julio Cesar reported that the Mwene-Mutapa did not despise or hate the title of farmer; on the contrary, this priest says that he was quickly dispatched because the Emperor wanted 'to go and see to his farming activities because it was time to sow the fields'.

Mutapa grew cotton, and wove its own cloth, known in the local language as nguo, or machira. Cloth was a very well-established import in the Zimbabwean plateau by about 1500, and had been imported far earlier. The actual techniques of spinning and weaving were imported along with the cloth.

By the 14th century spinning was going on at several sites on and near cities like Great Zimbabwe, Khami, and Nyanga, and by the 16th century the growth of cotton and the weaving of cotton were well established. Moreover, before long the technique of weaving had been applied to the fibers that came from the bark of certain trees like the mupfuti tree. A Portuguese traveler who visited South East Africa in the 16th century described meeting the emperors of Mutapa, the Karanga empire.

He reported that; "They were black men who got naked save that they cover themselves with cotton cloth from the waist down. Some clad in the skins of wild beasts, and some, the most noble, wear capes of these skins with tails... as a token of state and dignity. They leap as they go, and sway their bodies so as to make these tails fly from one side to the other.

They carry swords thrust into wooden sheaths bound with much gold and other metals... These are warlike men, and some too are great traders." It is clear that there was an old, and powerful Shona empire in Southern Africa. The Mwene-Mutapa and his vassals wore Ndoro or conus shell discs on their foreheads or as necklaces. The Ndoro was the royal emblem.

According to foreigners who observed, 'The months are divided into three weeks of ten days each, and have several festivals. The first day of each month is the festival of the new moon (Chisi); and the fourth

and fifth day of every week are kept as festivals. On these days all the natives dress in their best apparel, and the king gives public audience to all who present themselves, on which occasion he holds a truncheon about three quarters of a yard long in each hand, to leap upon.

On the day of the new moon, the king runs about the palace with two javelins in his hand, as if fighting, all the great men being present at this pastime. When this is ended, a pot full of maize, boiled whole, is brought in, which the king scatters about, desiring the nobles to eat, and every one strives to gather most to please him, and eat it greedily as if it were the most savory dainty. 'The account goes on to say, 'Their greatest festival is held on the new moon in May, which they call Chuavo.

On this day all the great men of the empire, who are very numerous, resort to court, where they run about with javelins in their hand, as in a mock fight. This sport lasts the whole day, at the end of which the king withdraws, and is not seen for eight days afterwards, during all which time drums beat incessantly. He reappears on the ninth day.' Mutapa mined \$7.5 billion worth of gold, and exported 20% of the world's gold at that time.

Mutapa and Maravi

During the reign of Gatsi Rusere (1585 – 1623), in 1597, two groups of Zimba-Maravi people crossed south of the Zambezi and entered Mutapa territory. They were led by Kapambo and Chikanda. Some of the Maravi offered to pay tribute to emperor Gatsi Rusere, but Gatsi Rusere ordered his general, known as the Mukomohasha, to defeat the Maravi, and conquer their whole homeland.

The general went to war against the Maravi and drove them north across the Zambezi. However, the Mukomohasha was not able to conquer Maravi and capture Kapambo who took flight. This was because the fleeing Maravi would burn their villages and supplies as they ran away from the Shona/Karanga warriors who were led by the Mukomohasha.

When the Army General (Mukomohasha) returned to the Mwenemutapa, he was asked by the emperor why he did not follow up on his victory on the Zimba and conquer their whole homeland. Not pleased with the response, Mwenemutapa Gatsi Rusere then had his own

general executed. The Mukomohasha was an important figure in the empire of Mutapa.

He was a member of the great council, a leader with great influence. The people had great respect for him, and when he was executed the people of Mutapa revolted against the emperor. They ousted Gatsi Rusere from his own zimbabwe, though, Gatsi Rusere would later reclaim the Mutapa throne. Gatsi Rusere was against the Portuguese and their religion taking a foot hold in the Mutapa region. He was succeeded by his son, Mwene-Mutapa Nyambo Kapararidze.

Conflict within Mutapa

After the death of his father, Mwene-Mutapa Nyambo Kapararidze (1623 - 1629) worked to fulfill Gatsi Rusere's goal of ridding Mutapa of the Portuguese and their foreign religion. However, the Portuguese supported, and influenced a converted Mutapa prince, Mavhura Felipe Mhande, to fight against Mwene-Mutapa Gatsi Rusere's son, Nyambo Kapararidze for the throne.

Mwene-Mutapa Nyambo Kapararidze, the son of emperor Gatsi Rusere had defeated 300-400 Portuguese forces along with 6,400 of their armed African slave soldiers in 1631. In response to this, his half Christian rival, Mavhura Phelipe Mhande challenged him with support from the Portuguese. Mavhura was one of the Mutapa princes who could read and write well, but he was not supported by many Mutapa citizens because he was educated by the Portuguese.

Mavhura Phelipe Mhande then claimed to have had 'a vision of light and a cross in heaven', helping him assembled an army of 40,000 men including many Maravi warriors from north of the Zambezi, and Portuguese gunmen along with their Chikunda slave armies. Mavhura's forces would eventually defeat Nyambo Kapararidze's forces.

35,000 people died in the battle between Kapararidze and Mavhura, who were mostly on Kapararidze's side. They fought again and Nyambo Kapararidze's forces lost with about 12,000 casualties in one battle. Mavhura took over as the new Mwene-Mutapa, however Kapararidze would retreat north of the Zambezi and threaten Mavhura for the next 20 years. Because of his reliance on the Portuguese guns and their slave armies, the Portuguese made

Mavhura their puppet. Mavhura died from accidental gunshot wounds in 1652.

When the Portuguese made Mavhura their puppet, they angered the Lower Zambezi Tonga population of the empire and many of the Shona / Karanga people. The Portuguese warlords, and prazo owners violently took many lands from the indigenous people of the Mutapa region. They even assassinated Mwene-Mutapa Siti Kazurukamusapa after 10 years of his rule. The Mutapa empire was actually weakened and reduced in size when the Portuguese expanded their influence in the land, forcing the once loyal provincial rulers to disobey the emperor.

However, a Mwene-Mutapa named Kamharapasu Mukombwe successfully drove back the Portuguese from several lands in Mutapa, and managed to resettle various Mutapa families in the lands he had freed. For this he was given the praise-name, Maguranyika/Goveranyika, meaning 'The Divider of the Land.' Mwene-Mutapa Mukombwe reunited the Lower Zambezi Tonga and the Shona/Karanga under the Mutapa empire, and fought the marauding Portuguese with their aid. Many of the Shona/Karanga people were still not happy with Mavhura and his successors' decisions, and so they continued to fight for their land.

Civil war raged in the empire of Mutapa until a man related to the Mwene-Mutapa named Changamire Dombo appeared and quelled these wars with his fierce army known as the Rozvi. This event is said to be the actual very first Chimurenga, and it resulted with the Rozvi bringing peace to the region of Hukaranga or Mutapa (Madzimbabwe). Although the dynasty survived, the Mutapa empire now had to share its territory with the Rozvi empire.

The rise of Changamire Dombo, and the Rozvi Empire

Due to increased violence, local Shona leaders with cattle developed their own armies. Young men offered several years of military service in exchange for cattle. Beginning as one of these local Shona leaders, Dombo gained the title Changamire (lord) and developed an effective army known as the Rozvi, that, by the 1670s, became a major force in the northeast of the Zimbabwean plateau. During the early 1680s, Dombo led his army to the southwest, where he conquered the Torwa. He then challenged the Portuguese of the Zambezi valley.

Dombo's first military encounter with the Portuguese and their African mercenary armies took place just before June 1684 at the Battle of Maungwe. Rozvi bows and arrows vs Portuguese firearms, the engagement lasted an entire day. Although Changamire Dombo managed to rout the Portuguese four or five times, his army took heavy casualties from gunfire.

Both armies camped on the battlefield and intended to resume fighting the next day. At 1 am the Portuguese awoke to see that they were surrounded by fires made by Rozvi women on Dombo's order. Believing they were surrounded, the Portuguese and their African allies ran off into the night, and when the sun came up, Changamire Dombo's army looted their abandoned camp.

Changamire Dombo did not pursue the Portuguese because of the heavy casualties his army had suffered and because he had to content with a Mutapa force, including some Portuguese invading Butua that he eventually defeated.

From around 1685 to 1692, Changamire Dombo consolidated his hold on Butua. In 1693, a new Mwene-Mutapa called Nyakunembire, who wanted to establish his independence, invited Dombo's Rozvi to assist him against the Portuguese. In November that year, a Rozvi army attacked Portuguese settlements, destroyed the churches, and dug up graves to use the remains as war medicine. Many Portuguese fled to Tete.

Changamire Dombo's Rozvi invaded Manyika, where they replaced the ruler and destroyed Portuguese presence. Further Rozvi campaigns to the northeast were delayed by Changamire Dombo's death in 1696, which allowed the Portuguese to flee the plateau. Changamire Dombo had defeated the military superpower of that era.

Records say the Rozvi also used the so called "cow horn formation" long before the Zulus. They called this battle formation "Muromo" / "Mulomo Acumba". Before going into battle the Rozvi armies were always doctored. Traditions abound claiming that the Rozvi used supernatural powers against their enemies. It is said that the Rozvi could change the color of cattle, summon bees to fight for them if need be, and send their enemies to sleep by magic.

They could make their warriors brave by supposedly immunizing them against bullets or spears. Even Portuguese sources remark on

this reputation of the Rozvi. In 1698 the viceroy of India wrote that the Portuguese soldiers in the Rivers of Sena believed that the then Rozvi Mambo had magic oil with which he could kill anyone simply by touching the person with it. The viceroy implored the Portuguese king to send a new lot of soldiers from metropolitan Portugal who would not believe in such superstition.

The Portuguese in the Rivers of Sena had reason to fear the Rozvi magic because in 1693 after the great Rozvi Mambo, Changamire Dombo 1, had slaughtered all the Portuguese at Dambarare, he had two Dominican priests flayed and their heads cut off and carried in front of his army.

On that occasion, it is reported that Dombo also disinterred the bones of some of the Portuguese and had them crushed in order to prepare a powerful medicine for his soldiers. This association of the Rozvi with the supernatural clearly gave their armies a vast psychological advantage over their potential enemies.

The credit for the last stand of the mighty Rozvi goes to emperor Tohwechipi, or 'Chibhamubhamu', who took over as Changamire and whose use of firearms allowed him to defeat the Nguni on many occasions until he was subdued in 1866; even then, he continued to win clients in the traditional fashion of parcelling out land. He had the praise name 'Chibhamu-bhamu', meaning 'the gun', because he used firearms to defeat his enemies.

The list of Mambo-Changamires are:

- 1 Mambo Changamire Dombo (Dombodzvuku / Domboraikonachingwangu / Chirisamhuru I)
- 2 Mambo Changamire Negomo
- 3 Mambo Changamire Rupengo Rupandamanhanga
- 4 Mambo Changamire Mutanda Ngabate (Empress / Mambokadzi)
- 5 Mambo Changamire Gumboremvura
- 6 Mambo Changamire Nechasike
- 7 Mambo Changamire Chirisamhuru II
- 8 Mambo Changamire Tohwechipi Chibhamubhamu

The Royal Dynasty of Mutapa was last based in Chidima, in the Tete province of Mozambique. The last Mwene-Mutapa was Chioko Dambamupute. With the help of the Dzivaguru priestesses, Makombe Hanga, and Mapondera; Chioko reunited the Shona/Karanga, the Lower Zambezi Tonga, the Sena, and the Chikunda.

The last Mwene-Mutapa initially drove out the Portuguese in 1901 from the Changara region, and retook the areas of Zumbo, Tete, and his forces surrounded Sena. The reason why they did not retake Sena was because the svikiros of the area did not want bloodshed at the site, stating that Sena was the burial place of the first Barwe king.

In 1902 the Portuguese returned and with many African mercenaries. The last Mwene-Mutapa, Chioko Dambamupute, was killed in Central Mozambique in 1902 while fighting the Portuguese & their African allies. However, Makombe Hanga survived and the Barwe Rebellion continued until 1920 under Hanga's successors.

Mwene-Mutapa Chioko was always surrounded by 300 loyal soldiers who were armed with modern guns, and he raided both the British and Portuguese. Today there is a town named after him in Central Mozambique (Tete Province). His armies were composed of people who formed the core of the Mutapa empire. He planned to march with this united army towards Salisbury and destroy British presence in his realm.

The Mwenemutapas who reigned from the North:

- 8 Nyatsimba Mutota (c. 1430–c. 1450)
- 9 Matope Nyanhehwe Nebedza (c. 1450–c. 1480)
- 10 Mavura Maobwe (1480)
- 11 Mukombero Nyahuma (1480–c. 1490)
- 12 Changamire (1490–1494)
- 13 Chikuyo Chisamurengu (Kakuyo Komunyaka) (1494–c. 1530)
- 14 Neshangwe Munembire (c. 1530–c. 1550)
- 15 Chivere Nyasoro (c. 1550–1560)
- 16 Chirisamhuru Negomo Mupunzagutu (1560–1589)
- 17 Gatsi Rusere (1589–1623)
- 18 Nyambo Kapararidze (1623–1629)
- 19 Mavura Mhande Felipe (1629 – 1652)
- 20 Siti Kazurukamusapa (1652 – 1663)
- 21 Kamharapasu Mukombwe (Maguranyika / Goveranyika) (1663 – 1692)
- 22 Nyakunembire / Nyamubvambire(1692 – 1694)
- 23 Nyamaende Mhande (1694 – 1707)
- 24 Nyenyedzi Zenda (1707 – 1711)
- 25 Baroma Dangwarangwa (1711 – 1712)
- 26 Samatambira Nyamhandu I (1712 – 1723)
- 26 Samatambira Nyamhandu I (1723 – 1735)

- 27 Nyatsusu (1735 - 1740)
- 28 Dehwe Mapunzagutu (1740 - 1759)
- 29 Changara II (1803 - 1804)
- 30 Mutiwapangome (1804 - 1806)
- 31 Mutiwaora (1806)
- 32 Cipfumba (1806 - 1807)
- 33 Nyasoro (1807 - 1828)
- 34 Chimininyambo ou Kandeya II (1828 - 1830)
- 35 Dzeka (1830 - 1849)
- 36 Kataruza (1849 - 1868)
- 37 Kandeya III (1868-1870)
- 38 Dzuda (1870-1887)
- 39 Chioko Dambamupute (1887-1902)

The 1800s Clashes

In 1835, the Nyai forces of Mutapa defeated the Nguni led by Nxaba and Maseko, who invaded the eastern part of the kingdom near Tete. In the end, the Nyai forces of Mutapa forced the Nguni to retreat. Later, Nxaba's Ngoni and Mzilikazi's Ndebele moved close to Zumbo on the Zambezi, but the Mutapa kingdom held off these Nguni offensives into the 1860s. Mutapa survived as a kingdom until 1902.

According to Joshua Chidziva, during the Mfecane at that time in the country of Chief Mangwende of vaNhhohwe, they were troubled by a group of maZwangendaba who were killing many people. They took women, cattle, sheep and goats. Mangwende was troubled very much and he sent men to Chief Chinamora, of the Vashawasha people, to ask for help to fight against maZwangendaba.

Chinamora agreed and he sent men among whom were Chingoma, Samukange, Mazuru, Nyava, Gutu, Gwindi, Mafusire, Madzima and Chikaka. When they arrived at Mangwende's home Mhotani, he explained to the people of vaShawasha saying, 'In this country we are in trouble. Many people are being killed by the maZwangendaba and some have been captured. Even my own sons, Katerere and Mukarakate have been captured and other people too have been taken to Maravi (Nyasaland) by maZwangendaba.' When the vaShawasha heard this story, they asked where the maZwangendaba were.

Once more the vaShawasha leader consulted maGumbatya and the signs were favorable, the smoke pointing to where the

maZwangendaba were. Then they mixed some of the medicine with the porridge. The warriors having eaten, went forward and defeated the enemy, killing many of them. For thanks, Mangwende gave them the usual presents.

He was sad about the capture of his two sons. On their return to Chinamora they gave him the news and asked him to send a N'anga (Healer) to find Mangwende's sons. He sent two n'angas, Murerekwa and Gadaga. He told them to go to the villages in Maravi and heal the people with their medicine. Eventually they arrived at the village where Mukarakate and Katerere were living and persuaded them to leave with them one dark night.

The n'angas were suitably rewarded for their services and settled down in Chinamora's country. Mukarakate and Katerere presented cattle to Chinamora and later Mukarakate married Hwedza the daughter of Chiyanika, one of the Chinamora family.

Later on, Chinamora fought the Matabele at the Mapfeni river near Goromonzi and defeated them. The leaders were Chingoma, Samukange, Mazuru, Mafusire, Madzima, Nyava, Mazarura, Guzha, Chikowore Gutu, Chizema, Gwindi and others. From that time the Matabele did not come near Chishawasha.

Sekuru Chaminuka

The original Chaminuka was the son of Murenga Pfumojena Sororenzou, a founding father of Zimbabwe or Mutapa as a nation. He was based around Mapungubwe, which was one of the first cities of the Shona/Venda in Southern Africa. His sons, Kutamadzoka, and Chingwangu Rusvingo would go north into the Zimbabwean plateau to build the city of Great Zimbabwe.

Chaminuka's first medium was Kachinda, but his most famous was Pasipamire Tsuru. A European hunter who saw Chaminuka (Pasipamire) would claim that Chaminuka was "a powerful god". Chaminuka is a Mhondoro, a royal ancestral spirit who foretold the future, and possessed other powers.

Mbuya Nehanda

The original Nehanda was the child of the early Shona / Karanga King, Murenga Pfumojena Sororenzou. Nehanda's brothers were Chaminuka, Runji, and Mushavatu. Nehanda's spirit is a Mhondoro (a

royal ancestral spirit / lion spirit), and it returned to possess powerful svikiros (spirit mediums). The ritual sister of the Mwene-Mutapa was called Nehanda. Mbuya (Grandmother) Nehanda once possessed a Mutapa princess named Nyamhita, however her more popular svikiro was Charwe.

Mbuya Nehanda advised the traditional leaders of Zimbabwe (madzishu) to fight the European invaders in the 1890s Chimurenga, also known as “Hondo ye Chindunduma”, or “The War of Rage.” When Mbuya Nehanda was eventually captured, she refused to convert to her enemy’s religion and was eventually executed. However, before she died, she said “My bones will rise again”, and indeed they rose, and indeed independence was eventually won...

Final Comments

There was no slavery in the Mutapa, or the Rozvi empires. Slavery was forbidden according to the tradition (Chivanhu/ChiKaranga) of the Shona or Karanga people. They believed that one must be payed or compensated for his/her labor, or “kuripwa”. Failure to do so would result in Ngozi, or misfortune for the employer.

The relatives of the Shona / Karanga people such as the Sena and the Venda used the Autonomous African Adoption System, which was in accordance to their Unhu (similar to ubuntu), to integrate refugees, known as Varanda or Akaporo (in Sena). From the late 15th Century to the 19th Century, the Portuguese slave hunters and their agents desperately wished to treat the relationship between Akaporo and the Sena as one of slavery.

This would have allowed the Portuguese to buy or capture Akaporo for shipment and sale to Brazil. Throughout that long period the Sena refused to betray Akaporo. They would not hand them over to the Portuguese despite many attempted inducements.

Credit: [Mhare Yenhaka](#)