

**IN SEARCH OF THE UNDERSTANDING OF
THE OLD TESTAMENT IN AFRICA:
THE CASE OF THE LEMBA**

by

MAGDEL LE ROUX

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Contemporary (1964) Ethiopian painting on cloth depicting how the Queen of Sheba journeyed to King Solomon by boat accompanied by her retinue (Photo: Kessler 1982)

'WE CAME BY BOAT TO AFRICA ...' (A LEMBA TRADITION)

'Solomon sent his ships to get gold from Ophir ... Some of the Jews who went on those boats stayed in Africa. That is the origin of the Lemba' (cf pp 155,156)

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- The LEMBA people all over the world, but especially those in Southern Africa, without whose hospitality, support and co-operation, this project could have not taken place.
- My dear FAMILY and FRIENDS without whose encouragement this thesis would never have been completed.

SUMMARY

This project seeks to determine, to what extent the culture of early Israel (1250-1000 BC) is similar to African cultures, more specifically, to that of the Lemba. However, a comparison between the cultures of early Israel and those of certain African tribes is not the primary objective in this case. This project is neither an anthropological study nor does it intend to mainly focus on the Lemba as such – though this may appear to be the case. This endeavour primarily fits into the ambit of *Old Testament Studies*. The investigation into the Lemba is meant to be subsidiary to the *point of contingence* between their culture and Old Testament customs and traditions, and how this information affects the interpretation of the Old Testament and its teaching in Africa. A number of comparisons between the early Israelite religion as reflected in the Old Testament and the Lemba are drawn. Though the qualitative research (*inductive approach*) is employed in the field work, the greatest part of the data on religious perspectives and practices is mediated by the theory of a phenomenological approach as advocated by Ninian Smart on matters of experience, mythology, ritual, and ethical/judicial dimensions. Therefore, the approach is also *deductive*.

The Lemba is a very specific group with claims about Israelite/Judaic origins. Their early departure from Israel (according to them *ca* 586 BC) can mean that there are remnants of a very ancient type of Israelite religion, now valuable when juxtaposed to that of early Israel. This study takes Lemba traditions seriously, but finally does not verify or falsify Lemba claims – but the outcomes in this thesis may take this debate a step further.

Their claims make them special and extremely interesting to study from the point of view of oral cultures. Their oral culture is constitutive of their world-view and self-understanding or identity. It incorporates the role of oral traditions, history and historiography and parallels are drawn between orality in early Israelite and Lemba religions. The reciprocity between orality and inscripturation of traditions, yielding valuable information on what may have happened in the development of traditions in Israel, are also attended to in this project.

Nevertheless, this project is primarily a search for the understanding and relevance of the Old Testament in Africa and is, therefore, a selective and not an exhaustive comparison between the Lemba and early Israel. And so, taking cognisance of the hermeneutic of contextualisation in Africa in particular, a teaching module syllabus for Old Testament Studies is developed, of which the very strands of religion among the Lemba and early Israel are constitutive for teaching Old Testament Studies in present-day African cultures (and perhaps elsewhere).

KEYWORDS

Early Israel; Africa; Old Testament Studies; Lemba; qualitative research methods; historiography; history; archaeology; oral traditions; Smart; comparative religion; contextualisation; inculturation; Judaising movements; teaching module; missiology; socio-cultural practices; religious practices; genetics; 'lost tribes' in Africa; Biblical Archaeology; Biblical Studies; Black Jews in Africa.

REFERENCE SYSTEM, SPELLING AND BIBLE TRANSLATION

In the main, the following reference system and typographical guidelines were used in this thesis:

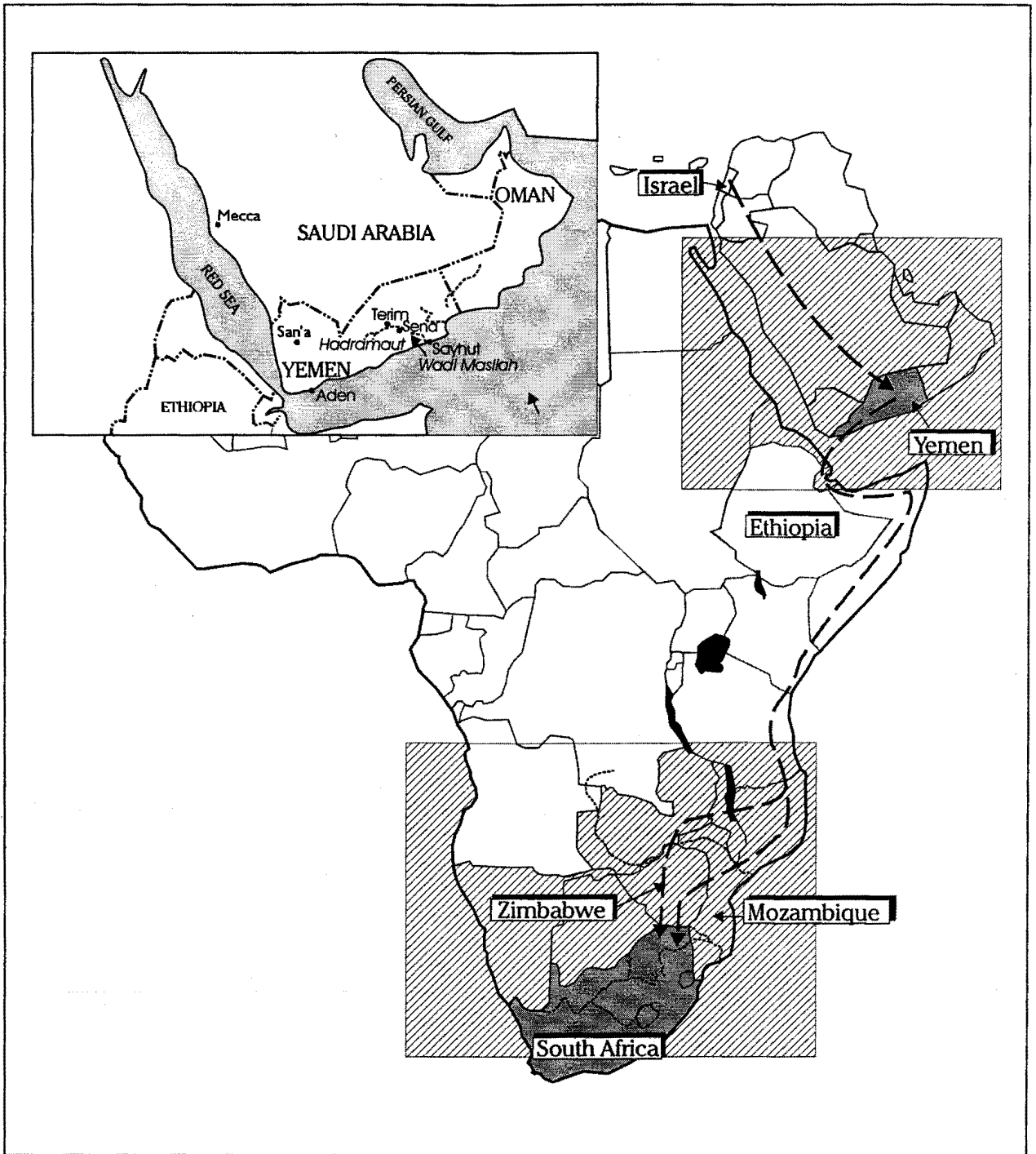
Kilian, J 1989. *Form and style in theological texts. A guide for the use of the Harvard Reference System*. University of South Africa: Pretoria.

For the spelling of words in the English language the following lexicon was consulted:

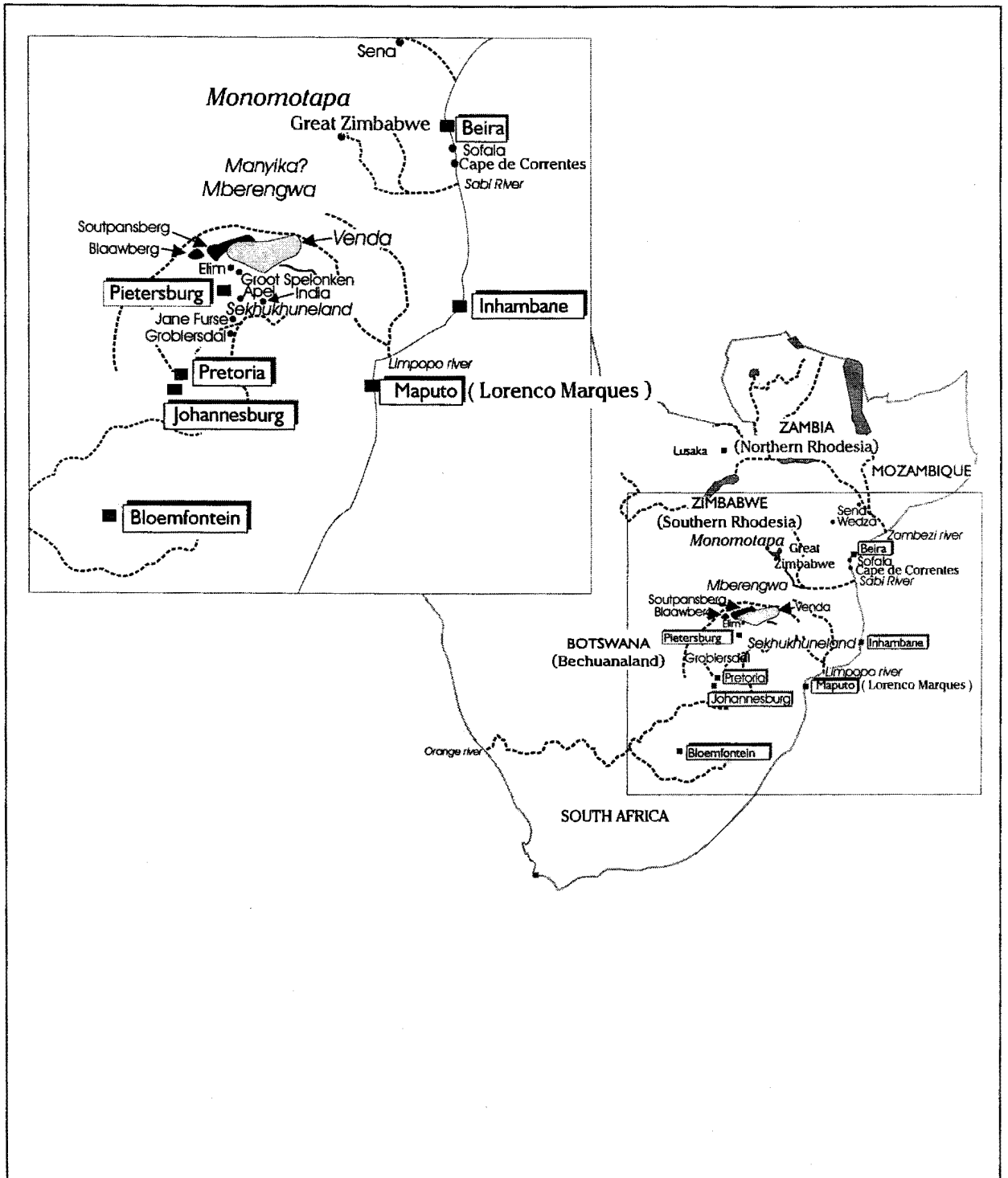
Collins Dictionary of the English Language. 1998 (Fourth Rev Ed). London: Collins.

The English rendering of biblical passages was taken from the following translation, unless otherwise indicated:

New American Standard Bible (NASB), 1960. Carol Stream Ill: Creation House.



Map I: The Lemba's supposed journey to the South



Map II: Some Lemba territories in Southern Africa

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 HISTORY OF THE PROJECT

I had a farm in Africa, at the foot of the Ngong Hills. The Equator runs across these highlands, a hundred miles to the north, and the farm lay at an altitude of over six thousand feet ... (Blixen[1937]1954:1).

These words signal the well-known opening sentence of the famous novel, *Out of Africa*, by Karen Blixen. Merely *opening* words, since one can never exhaust Africa by dissertating on it – her stories and rituals are mysterious, earthy, passionate and engenders respect.

My personal story also hails from Africa and could have had a similar opening sentence¹, since it began when my father bought a farm – high up in the Soutpansberg². There, for the first time, did I hear the Lemba story ... and since then, this African story became my own.

Although this is more or less where the parallels between my story 'Out of Africa' and that of Karen Blixen's come to an end, since I grew up in Africa (unlike that of the main character in Blixen's book) and I actually know the peoples living in the South of Africa, or so I thought. But it was in this Soutpansberg area, where our family were introduced (in 1984) to a farmer, Piet Wessels, who told us all he knew about a fascinating group of people with their Semitic features and practices and who distinguished themselves from the surrounding Venda by their special way of living. Moreover, most of these Lemba people regard themselves as Israelites who have migrated southwards into Yemen and later into Africa.

My general interest in history and post-graduate specialisation in the Old Testament, prompted me to collect as much information about this interesting group as possible. The mere possibility of such a group in our midst, absolutely intrigued me. I thought I might just have discovered a 'lost tribe of Israel' right on our doorstep, who may be able to enlighten one's concept of pre-monarchic Israel.

But, it was only after my father died, and after the completion of my MA dissertation on the pre-monarchic clans of Israel, that I first had an encounter with (the retired) Prof Mathivha, President of the Lemba Cultural Association (LCA; cf *Photo 10*). This took place in August 1994, at his home in Shayandima (Northern Province). After this interview I attended a special LCA Conference in April, and thereafter the Annual Conferences in October, at Sweet Waters, in the Northern Province, ever since.

¹ *'We had a farm in Africa, at the foot of the massive Soutpansberg. The Tropic of Capricorn runs across these highlands, fifty miles to the south and the farm lay at an altitude of five to six thousand feet ...'*

² Louis Trichardt, Republic of South Africa.

I soon learned that the Lemba people are scattered all over South Africa and the rest of Southern Africa and that they are directly related to the Varembe in Zimbabwe and the Mwenye in Mozambique and elsewhere. However, most of them are concentrated in the former Venda (present-day Northern Province), Sekhukhuneland (present-day Mpumalanga) as well as the southern parts of Zimbabwe. It was only in the early sixties of this century, that some of the leaders of these different groups learned about each other.

Already during the April conference (1995) Chief Mpaketsane of Sekhukhuneland invited me to pursue my research in their communities. I willingly accepted and decided to conduct this from a *qualitative research* point of view (Taylor & Bogdan 1984), mainly in three geographical areas namely, Sekhukhuneland (Mpumalanga), Venda (Northern Province) and the southern parts of Zimbabwe. This study remains, therefore, regionally and contextually restricted.

The Lemba's enthusiasm for sacred hills, animal sacrifice, ritual slaughtering of animals, food taboos, their circumcision rites and endogamy – all seemed to suggest a Semitic influence or resemblances, imbedded in an African culture. Therefore, my focus remained on their customs, festivals, ceremonies, rites, holy places, religion and whatever illuminates their culture as such. I further learned that most of them are Christians as well and I was interested in their way of interpreting the Bible from their 'Semitic' background.

Therefore, before I formally gave attention to archival (secondary) sources and any other literature in 1997, I decided first to conduct qualitative research. This turned out to be a wise decision, since one could then weigh secondary material against *first-hand information*, gained from the Lemba themselves. Finally, however, this project is based on both secondary sources (when and where available) and qualitative field research. Due to the limited scholarly attention devoted to the Lemba, secondary material alone would have been inadequate. Therefore, qualitative research methods were used, which included participant observation, in-depth interviewing and falsification (testing the validity of material by using false statements).

In October 1995 I did not only attend the annual LCA Conference (as mentioned above) but started the field research in the former Venda (Northern Province), conducting numerous interviews in the Soutpansberg area. During the period February 1996 to October 1996 (more than four months interrupted), I returned to the field, staying among the Lemba, observing as much as I could and interviewing as many Lemba possible in the northern and eastern parts of South Africa and the southern parts of Zimbabwe. As far as I know the Lemba in Sekhukhuneland have never before been included in a field study. In the end, this area produced very worthwhile information on their traditions, as well as remarkable genetic results (cf 3.3.1.1).

During our (my husband who was also photographer and my) stay in Sekhukhuneland, Chief Mpaketsane (cf *Photo 2*), organised a special LCA Conference in his kraal in India Village (Sekhukhuneland), in order to assist me in my research in their area. Dancers, drummers and speakers performed, demonstrated and explained anything I asked for (cf *Photo 37*). This meeting also gave me the opportunity to interview and observe many more people and situations, than would have been otherwise possible.

In fact, the purpose of my field study was consequently to gather all existing oral traditions (as far as possible) with an Old Testament resonance, from amongst the mentioned Lemba communities, in order to observe their 'Jewish' customs, religious pluralism and interdependence – subjects which have thus far not yet received due attention from scholarship. It has to be explained though, that the word 'Jewish' in connection with the Lemba was an invention by President Paul Kruger in the late 19th century when he first called them 'Jews' in public. Before that, so the Lemba tradition holds, they had only known that they were 'children of Abraham' or Israelites who came from the north from a place called 'Sena' (cf Chapter Three). Subsequently the two names (Jewish and Israelite) will be used interchangeably.

I was guided by three themes in my inquiry: (i) the oral traditions of the Lemba people, (ii) their customs, festivals, ceremonies et cetera and (iii) their concept of God and of Christianity (cf 1.2.1.4).

From March 1997 until October 1997 (another three months or more, interrupted) we had the opportunity to return to most of the places we visited the previous year. The purpose was mainly to verify information gained during the former visits, to fill up certain gaps in the information, by making use of falsification, as a method of elimination of data. With the assistance of Proff M Daneel³, F de Beer and Dr J Boeyens⁴, I tried to adapt and improve my interview guide from time to time. Their contributions as advisors to my study were invaluable and are highly appreciated.

In what follows, I shall first discuss the methodology (including the approach) used during the field research and then attend to the purpose and the layout of the remainder of this thesis.

1.2 METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

1.2.1 Qualitative research methods

Qualitative research refers to research that focuses on *qualities of human behaviour*, as well as the holistic nature of social behaviour (Mouton & Marais 1988:1). Taylor and Bogdan (1984:5) define qualitative research as research that produces descriptive data. The researcher collects people's own written or spoken words and observable behaviour. Rist (in Taylor and Bogdan 1984:5-8) points out that qualitative methodology is more than a set of data gathering techniques and mentions the following features of qualitative methodology:

- (i) 'Qualitative research is inductive. The researcher develops concepts, insights and understanding from patterns in the data'.
- (ii) 'The qualitative researcher looks at settings and people holistically....'
- (iii) 'researchers are sensitive to their effects on the people they study.'
- (iv) 'researchers try to experience reality as others experience it.'

³ Prof M Daneel formerly attached to the Department of Missiology at Unisa (University of South Africa), is a world-renowned expert on African theology and African Initiated Churches, especially those among the Shona-speaking people in Zimbabwe.

⁴ De Beer and Boeyens are lecturers in the Department of Anthropology and Indigenous Law, at the University of South Africa.

- (v) The researcher does not seek 'truth' or 'morality' but rather a detailed understanding of others' perspectives.
- (vi) 'Qualitative methods are humanistic.'
- (vii) The researcher obtains first-hand knowledge of social life filtered through concepts, operational definitions and rating scales.
- (viii) 'all settings and people are worthy of study.'
- (ix) 'Qualitative research is a craft.' The researcher is encouraged to create his or her own methodology.

During this project I attempt to keep these principles of qualitative research in mind and to apply them as far as possible, in order to justifiably claim that I follow a qualitative approach.

1.2.1.1 *The phenomenological perspective*

Broadly speaking, a phenomenological perspective is employed for the execution of this study, which is also central to the concept of qualitative methodology. Taylor and Bogdan (1984:2; cf Andersen et al 1995:175) describe the phenomenological approach as a way to understand social phenomena from the actor's own perspective. In anthropological terms, such an actor-orientated approach is called an *emic* approach, *vis-à-vis* the *ethic* approach which is usually conducted from the researcher's perspective. According to Taylor and Bogdan (1984), in this approach the researcher examines how the respondents experience their world and what they perceive as essential reality. This is, similarly, the field of study of cognitive anthropologists.

The phenomenological perspective is tied to symbolic interactionism which rests on three basic premises: (i) Meaning determines action, (ii) people learn to see the world from other people's perspective and (iii) social actors attach meanings to situations, to other items or matters, as well as to themselves, by a process of interpretation (Taylor & Bogdan 1984:2-9). This project attempts to understand the motives and beliefs behind the Lemba customs and practices. According to this principle the Lemba are therefore, not being studied merely as Jews (or a tribe of Israel) *per se*, but rather as a manifestation of Judaism or Jewishness as experienced by a specific group or individual. Anderson (1996:161) stresses that 'ascertaining the "truth" of a belief is less important than the realization that the belief makes sense in relation to one's overall world-view.' We live in a world of fragmented identities, and in terms of postmodernism, we have learned that we all construct our own (fragmented) identities (cf Anderson 1983:3). Thus we are not to search for some 'ideal' identity out there, neither are we to impose such an identity on others.

Each religious orientation has a different vision of ultimate reality. However, there is always a common goal: To be in harmony with what is most important, what is eternal and what is most powerful. Qualitative research methods, as well as anthropological relativism demand tolerance for other religious experiences, an awareness of a new fairness and openness in the study of the Other (whether it is another culture, colour, religion or gender), and ultimately demand a more holistic approach (cf Hutcheon 1988:61-62). A new respect for the wisdom of traditional societies and religions is imperative, when one realises that some such

societies may have endured many onslaughts and other adverse circumstances, for thousands of years, whereas modernist society may not even last for another century.

These remarks lead one to inquire into the particular method of inquiry in research, which does justice to a phenomenological approach.

1.2.1.2 *Participant observation*

The phenomenological method seeks understanding through *participant observation* and *in-depth interviewing* (Taylor & Bogdan 1984:2-9). 'Participant observation' refers to inquiry which involves social interaction between the researcher and respondents within the milieu of the latter. During this time, data are systematically and unobtrusively collected. A basic feature of participant observation is to hold not too tightly to any theoretical interest, but to explore phenomena as they emerge during observations (Taylor & Bogdan 1984:15,16).

If I have learned anything from the field work facet, it is that the researcher needs to be extremely sensitive towards the subject matter and adjust the methodology accordingly. Although I had some general questions and theories in mind the specifics of the methodology evolved as I proceeded.

For example, during the first days in the field, I tried to remain relatively passive, but soon realised that I might not be able to return to specific settings and people. I was, therefore, forced to apply both non-directive and directive questions during the same interview (cf 1.2.1.4). The idea that one is supposed to conduct interviews with *individuals*, similarly need adjustment for Africa. The culture of the Lemba people does not really allow them to continue with an interview or any discussion, before everybody of importance (the elders, etc) in a specific village, are not present. John Mpaketsane (my organiser in Sekhukhuneland; cf *Photo 3*) pointed out that they always want to be very 'democratic'.

The first days in the field were, furthermore, characterised by feelings of doubt, uncertainty and frustration. Interviews with individuals are not supposed to be longer than two hours (Taylor & Bogdan 1984). My 'group interviews' with groups between seven and twenty-five people, lasted from three to four hours at a time (cf *Photo's 16,17,18*). That of course also left us with less time to record field notes. I just had to adapt to the group interview idea and conducted much longer interviews than were planned for. Although Taylor and Bogdan (1984) foresee problems among Black, male-dominated communities, we did not ever experience any hostility because of colour or gender.

My field notes include descriptions of the settings, of my actions and comments, as well as the sequence and duration of events and conversations (cf Taylor & Bogdan 1984:53). Describing the setting, provides a mental picture of the place and the activity where the interviews took place. Drawing a diagram of the layout of the setting, enabled me to trace my movements and indicated on which page of my notes each movement is described. My comments include my awarenesses, feelings, hunches, preconceptions and indicates future areas of enquiry. By way of metaphor, the 'flesh' added to the bare 'skeleton', created by the field notes, was my interview data (cf Clasquin 1995:271).

1.2.1.3 *In-depth interviewing*

Although participant observation and in-depth interviewing go hand in hand, the main differences between these two reside in the setting and situations. Participant observation contains 'natural field study' – a first-hand experience of a social world. It was meaningful, for example, to have attended the LCA Conferences the year before I formally started my research and to have stayed with the people for a few days. This participant observation provided a yardstick against which to measure data collected through interviewing, and *vice versa* (Taylor & Bogdan 1984:83).

In-depth interviewing suggests that situations are arranged for purposes of the research and relies on second-hand accounts of others. In-depth interviewing is well geared to study a relatively large number of people in a relatively short period. Due to time constraints, I found it ideal to turn to interviewing immediately after conducted participant observation for some time.

Like participant observation, qualitative interviewing calls for a flexible research design (Taylor & Bogdan 1984:83). As far as the latter is concerned, Taylor and Bogdan is obviously correct (cf 1.2.1.2). However, in other regards I found that their book is not entirely suited to an African context: Individual interviewing does not easily go down with the Lemba (cf 1.2.1.2).

1.2.1.4 *The interview guide*

My guidelines for the interviews developed in the following way. Since I had already learned something about the respondents from the conferences we had attended and from preliminary interviews, I had a certain degree of knowledge about the Lemba (as mentioned above). This enabled me to develop further guidelines for the interviews, thus in this way the *emic* dimension of my approach continued. These guidelines ensured that key themes were explored when interviewing a number of respondents. Although I had specific ideas about the information I required, I tried not to inhibit, dominate or restrict the participants in their answers. For example, I did not insist that they cover the topics in the order presented on my list. This approach allow respondents to speak freely, but it places demands on the interviewer, such as having to make mental notes on what had already been discussed and what not. Consequently, not all interviewees actually got around to answer all the questions.

After the first round, in the former Venda (Northern Province; October 1995), I felt the need to reduce the 'academic' nature of some of the questions, analysed the questions and rephrased some of them.

Most of the Lemba indicated that they are Christians, on account of this it was clear that much depended on the church that the particular person or group belongs to, whether they understood the questions about certain religious elements. I found that they could not relate to certain questions at all, for example: 'Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?' or 'How do you understand the way of salvation?' or 'Do you have a personal relationship with God?' Therefore I was prepared to drop these questions in specific settings and rather ask questions such as: 'Are you a Christian?' 'Do you pray?' 'To whom do you pray?' 'When do you pray?'

'How do you understand the Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit)?' and, 'What is the relationship between Jesus and the ancestors?'

During the second round of testing the guidelines (this time in Sekhukhuneland, Feb 1996), I, once again, realised that the educational level of the respondents is another major factor which will determine the ease or difficulty of conducting the interviews, and that this is applicable to any cultural group. After careful consideration and the experience of the 'second round', it was decided to include additional topics and to drop others (cf ADDENDUM I).

After another round of field work in 1996, I consulted the anthropologists (as referred to above) at the University of South Africa, and they assisted me in refining the questionnaire yet further. The use of the standardised questionnaire by Van Warmelo [s a], was suggested, and I used this with great success. Although not all the questions were used in every interview, this, nevertheless, offered effective guidelines, according to which additional information was gathered (cf ADDENDUM II). The more incisive questions were especially posed to the academics from among Lemba ranks and other interested parties from the University of Harare and elsewhere. Obviously, not all the information obtained from the field work can be used in this project, but every bit of information contributed to the image which could be formed of the Lemba, even if it is impossible to write it all down. Hopefully one did justice to their story.

1.2.2 Processing and interpretation

Most of the interviews were recorded on a tape and (or) video recorder. This allows me to write down my own comments (clearly indicated as 'O C' [Observer's Comments]). The tapes were later transliterated and the transcriptions were then lightly edited. Each transcript of interviews as well as the video tapes were specifically numbered according to the number given to the specific interview or tape during the field work (cf Bibliography). Sometimes more than one interview was recorded on the same tape and then the numbering was changed accordingly. 'D' usually stands for the transcribed document, 'V' for a specific video tape, and 'F' indicates interviews conducted by Filemon Khadeli (field worker in Venda). The numbers 1, 2, 3, etc. following 'D', 'V' or 'F', usually indicates a following video or tape. 'A' or 'B' thereafter, indicates that the same interview lasted longer than one tape or side of a tape. I found that during the field work the numbering of the tapes made perfect sense to me, but a year or so later it was not always so clear anymore why a specific method was followed. Unfortunately, the numbering system cannot be changed at this stage, since reference has already been made to some of these documents in other articles. The limitation of space prohibits the inclusion of the interviews, however, they are available should anyone wish to read them.

Once the printed copies were made, the actual words of the participants were retained, as far as possible, in the transcription. Obviously, the translation itself could have altered the original somewhat, then there is also the inevitable interpretation of the information by myself. Here and there, explanatory notes were added and indicated by means of brackets, but overall I endeavoured to keep as close as possible to the original, thus veering away from editing the

language. In this way my own world-view or viewpoints should have a minimum impact on the text.

Where possible, a copy was then sent to the respondent(s), together with a letter of thanks for the opportunity to interview. This courtesy gesture could allow the interviewee to check the transcript for accuracy and to change if necessary. Even until recently, I attempted to have any uncertainties explained or cleared away by the Lemba themselves, before completing this thesis.

1.2.3 Conclusion

The qualitative method is not, as some would have it, an easy way out of rigorous and exacting research. It requires a great deal of time, sacrifice and patience on the part of the researcher. In fact, I also found that field research calls for a high degree of sensitivity towards the subject matter, for a flexible research design and the preparedness to alter one's own methodology even in mid-stream.

I found it highly rewarding that I had attended the Lemba conferences and spent substantial time with some of the respondents before I started to interview them formally. It provided the possibility to be able to make use of a interview guide and also opened many doors for contact.

Fortunately, it seems to me as if recording, taking notes and even video-taping did not disrupt the natural flow of conversations, which I thought might have been the case. In fact, it appeared in the most cases if the Lemba were not even aware of the tape recorder or other appliances and they spoke freely.

What seems to be important is not how many settings or people I have studied, but that I have developed an understanding of something that was not understood before (cf Taylor & Bogdan 1984:66). If this objective is not kept in mind, then the ideals and 'objectives' of qualitative study is not attained. Obviously, one could have always interviewed more people, and have visited more places.

Likewise, one has to keep in mind that in qualitative research one is not interested in some kind of non-existent 'pristine truth' as such, but rather in perspectives which can emerge. The challenge is that this 'story' must be able to reflect an honest account of how respondents actually view themselves and their experiences.

1.3 THE PURPOSE AND STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

1.3.1 The purpose of the thesis

One of the purposes of this thesis is to reflect some of the results of the field work conducted in the above mentioned geographical areas for about seven months, interrupted, from October 1995 to October 1997, as well as to reflect information from other written documents on the Lemba. Throughout the research the impact of the Old Testament in the creation of oral traditions and identity is kept in mind. Attention is paid to the way the identity of the Lemba is manifested in the traditions of their origin and through their religio-cultural practices. The purpose is further to determine in what way might this group shed new light on our concept of

early Israel (1250-100 BC) and in our understanding of the Old Testament in Africa. It should be noted though, that historiographically speaking, some scholars regard the existence of ancient Israel as a historic entity, as an ever greater problem.

I compare the Lemba with early Israel (1250-1000, i.e. before the monarchy), since: (i) their communities function according to a segmented clan system without a common leader; (ii) it is interesting for the study of oral cultures, and (iii) they regard themselves as 'children of Abraham' who at one or other stage came to Africa.

Various traditions exist as to when the Lemba came to Africa. Some say it was during the time of Solomon, other again aver that it happened along with some Arab traders coming to southern Africa and a few informed leaders maintain it happened about 586 BC (cf Chapter Three). This implies that a comparison to the post-exilic era could also have been done. The Lemba are merely used as an example, because they make particular claims, and because they are accessible to me (hence the subtitle of the thesis 'case of the Lemba').

During the field study the following questions emerged: What role did the missionaries play in the invention or creation of specific traditions and eventually in Lemba identity? Is their use of 'Judaism' merely a biblical veneer to essentially traditional African practices? Or is their symbolic use of 'Judaism' one that had been channelled through Christianity or Islam? What is the role or function of oral traditions in the creation of identity? What role does oral tradition play in the preservation of history? And finally: What is the function of oral traditions in oral cultures such as the early Israelite and the Lemba communities? All these questions are important, but not all of them will be addressed.

Many comparative studies between the Old Testament and Africa have been done already (cf the Nuer of Southern Sudan, the Tallensi of Ghana, the Tiv of Nigeria, the Masai of Kenya, Fiensy 1987:74), and this research has indicated that there are numerous points of contingency between most African cultural customs, which are also reflected in the Old Testament. Many have observed these similarities, yet few have investigated the *extent* to which the Israelite culture is similar or different to African cultures. Although few have compared the cultures, yet several have written on the Israelite culture only, while others have written about certain African cultures. These studies are usually predominantly anthropologically orientated. The premise is usually that oral cultures all have the same inherent tendencies and therefore by means of comparisons between the cultures, one can arrive at general theory, a kind of inductive method.

This project seeks to determine, to what extent the culture of early Israel (1250-1000 BC) is similar to African cultures, more specifically, to that of the Lemba. Although a mere comparison between the culture of early Israel with that of certain African tribes (the Lemba included) is interesting, and do receive a substantial amount of attention (cf Chapters Four to Nine), that is not the primary objective here. The points of comparison therefore serve to ultimately reach the purpose of this project, where it is endeavoured to come to a better understanding of the Old Testament. There are a considerable number of points of contingency between the cultures of the Old Testament and that found in Africa and this implies that considerable understanding may be cast on the Old Testament by a study of these cultures.

This has implications for the teaching and interpretation of the Old Testament in Africa. I studied both groups and did field work where possible. The comparisons should provide relevance to my eventual conclusion. At the end of Chapters Four to Nine I shall endeavour to indicate the practical implications of the comparisons in connection with the material which is specific to each contingent chapter.

Furthermore, to my mind the Lemba and their particular traditions of origin and identity, as well as their particular characteristics and practices, open numerous possibilities for further research. It may be that these people with their oral culture and 'double' identity are of the very few extant 'living sources', which may still make a possible contribution for the better understanding of the Old Testament in Africa. By referring to the Lemba as a 'living source', I do not necessarily accept their claim to be Jews or Israelites, but that communities, as they are reflected in the Old Testament, are becoming scarcer in the presentday world. I might, for example, just as well have learnt from the Indians in the USA, about a custom such as polygamy, since such a 'living source' could similarly teach us much.

It should further be clarified that this thesis is neither an anthropological study, nor is it the intent that the emphasis should be on the Lemba as such. The objective is to situate the study of the Lemba within the ambit of Old Testament Studies. The focus upon them is therefore subsidiary to the *points of contingency* which their culture may have with the Old Testament customs and traditions. Furthermore, how this information can affect the interpretation of the Old Testament texts, as well as the understanding and teaching of the Old Testament in Africa, then becomes of great importance.

Therefore, this project also comprises some comparisons, but is different from previous studies in a number of respects:

One, although use was made of qualitative research (inductive method) in the field study, the greatest part of the *application of the data* (about religious perspectives and practices) in this thesis, is *mediated or guided by theory* (that of Smart, cf Chapters Five to Eight) thus it is *deductive*. The project also deals with the role of oral traditions, history and historiography.

Secondly, the Lemba is also a very specific African group with claims about Israelite origins. Their early departure from Israel (according to them) can imply that their religion could contain remnants of a very ancient type of religion, which might be of great value when these two are juxtaposed to that of early Israel. This study *takes Lemba traditions seriously*, however, it does not endeavour to verify or falsify Lemba claims. It is an interesting additional datum, which makes this group special and especially interesting to study segmented clan systems, oral cultures and the numerous points of contingency which may possibly exist between early Israel and the Lemba (cf Chapters Four to Nine). Account should be taken of this for the purpose of this study, since it is part of the Lemba's viewpoint and self-understanding (world-view, identity, etc). Their claims are tested, in a number of ways by other scholars (e g Spurdle & Jenkins 1992; Thomas [et al] and others 1998; [1999]). Questions such as whether their so-called Jewish origins can be 'proven' by their oral traditions and whether a comparison between Lemba traditions with the Old Testament can make a

contribution to the debate about the claims of the Lemba, are addressed, but only as a sub-theme (cf Chapter Three).

Thirdly, this project is *primarily a search for the understanding and the relevance of the Old Testament in Africa* and is, therefore, selective and not an exhaustive comparison between the Lemba and early Israel. I have mainly selected representative social and religious practices from these two entities and principally those which are most important for understanding the world of early Israel and of the Lemba. When dealing with biblical texts in the rest of the thesis, I employ elements of the historical-critical approach. The respective readings of biblical texts are meant only to highlight the way in which particular social or religious practices function and are not meant to provide a complete exegesis. Therefore, the purpose is not to provide intensive exegesis of certain Old Testament passages, neither is it to determine the historicity of certain narratives or customs. It is rather *to determine what early Israel's experience about certain customs and rituals was* and what role it played in their communities. It has to be accepted that the Book of Judges is the only direct source of information for early Israel and therefore it should be used with great circumspection. Although the Book of Judges forms part of the Deuteronomistic historiography, and may therefore, be dated long after the events (e.g. during the Exile), it probably still contains traditions about early Israel, and thus early conditions are reflected therein.

1.3.2 Limitations and delimitations of this project: the structure of the thesis

Chapter Two deals with a number of Judaising groups, as a worldwide phenomenon, as well as in Africa and then more specifically in Southern Africa. Specific attention is being paid to possible reasons which could underlie a religious shift, the role missionaries played in the invention and creation of especially Jewish traditions, and the identity of numerous groups (cf the Zulu, Xhosa, Hottentots, Boers, etc). Other groups in Southern Africa such as the AIC (African Independent [or Initiated] Churches) also show vibrant interest in the Old Testament. I shall refer to them, but the actual study of those groups, resides outside the purview of this investigation. There is focus on the Lemba, who regard themselves as the 'Black Jews' of Southern Africa and on the social processes that may have created their unique identity as well as possible reasons for what makes them think the way they do.

Chapter Three presents the history and customs of the Lemba, as it had been recorded by various authors. This will draw from anthropological, archaeological, ethnological, genetical and many other sources, in an attempt to provide maximum understanding from divergent sources. Every possible connection the Lemba could have had with Semitic influences are indicated, from their own indigenous accounts, to those in colonial archives, to travellers' accounts and reference is even made to museum collections. In this chapter, as well as in other chapters, reference is also cursorily made, when applicable, to similar customs and practices with other African groups.

Understandably, agreement among scholars has not been reached regarding the *origins* of the Lemba and it definitely not the intention of the present study to resolve the issues surrounding this problem. One needs to accept though, that the various reports or accounts

about the Lemba have been interpreted through the presuppositions and motives of each respective author. Of this no one is free. Therefore, this chapter is entitled 'Conflicting accounts on the "Semitic" history and origins of the Lemba'. For various reasons, there is unfortunately little information available about the recent history of the Lemba, and more attention is given to the possible *Semitic* origins and customs of the Lemba, than to anything else. One reason for this may be their particular Semitic appearance, which compelled authors to write about this special group of people. A further purpose of this chapter is to illustrate or measure to what extent written history concurs with oral traditions (which is referred to in Chapters Four to Nine) and whether oral traditions continue alongside written traditions.

Any striking concurrences between social and religious practices and viewpoints of the Lemba and early Israel, discovered during the field work and emerging from Chapters Two and Three, resulted in Chapters Four to Nine. However, attention given to the most salient differences between the two societies are also highlighted, since these form part of the comparison and to balance the dominance of the occurrences. In Chapters Four to Nine, it is therefore, attempted to reflect as much as possible of the results of the field work, in comparison with the possible corresponding customs or rituals of early Israel, as reflected in the Old Testament.

Chapter Four deals with the social practices of the Lemba and early Israel: food rituals, marital customs, burial customs, special skills and their social organisation. The main questions addressed here are: 'Who are subjected to whom?' and 'Who may marry whom?' However, many questions still remain to be asked.

The theoretical framework for *Chapters Five to Eight* is that by Smart (1983), a scholar in the field of comparative religion. He proposes that the religion of pre-industrial communities need to be studied under the title of 'Worldview' (sic) and this title would then mean an individual or a group's orientation to life. Questions need to be asked about the 'very nature of existence': 'Our place in the cosmos and our connections with other human beings – those within our family and culture and those we consider foreign and different' (Smart 1983:22-27).

According to Niditch (1997:4), a 'worldview [sic] analysis' seeks to understand 'symbolic patterns that serves as templates for the patterns of our existence', 'contradictions and tensions in life as well as potential resolutions and the chaos that threatens and the order we seek.' 'Symbolic patterns are acted out in ritual performance', retold in tales that ostensibly seem to be ancient or 'encapsulated in proverbs or parables.' Smart stresses that world-views are neither monolithic nor static and provides different heuristic categories or dimensions that he found useful in exploring the religious aspects of ancient Israel (1983:2-31). The categories taken as basis for explaining religious views and practices of the Lemba and early Israel are the following: the experiential (Chapter Five), the mythical (Chapter Six), the ritual (Chapter Seven) and the legal and ethical dimensions (Chapter Eight). These categories often overlap and may be broken down into many other facets, but these are helpful and they provide a way of obtaining a perspective on traditions. Differences and similarities of the oral traditions and practices that are investigated between the different groups, are discussed.

Fundamental questions behind *Chapter Nine* are: 'To what extent are *oral traditions* a search for identity of the Lemba?' 'When did certain oral traditions become important to them?' 'What is the purpose of folklore, traditions and customs within a society?' 'What role does identity play in determining whether a group is inclusive or exclusive?' And many more. Considering the way in which oral traditions functioned within Lemba communities, the most pressing need would be to apply this discussion to the oral traditions reflected in the Old Testament on early Israel. This juxtaposition is necessary for a better understanding of the role different oral traditions played in ancient Israel, as well as for the possible functions of these oral traditions and practices within the social structure of the Old Testament. A more accurate understanding could be required within the complexity of cults, movements and political structures in relation to oral traditions, as a type of social process. This of course is no simple task.

Traditions most certainly change to accommodate new circumstances, but once the traditions relating to community identity are written down, a new model of an unchanging body of traditions was created. To a certain extent this might have been the case with Mathivha's book (1992), since this might have been the case with the historiography of the Deuteronomist. The moment these were fixed, they became something else. Which social processes lead to the creation of identity through historiography? What were the social contexts within which both these bodies of texts originated? Does it reveal something about the kind of text? However, this is only an explorative study, which is not discussed in much detail. Nevertheless, there is room for more research, regarding matters such as the functioning of customs, narratives, sayings in a pre-industrial community. All these details cannot be covered here.

In the conclusion, *Chapter Ten*, reference is once again made to the relevance of the Old Testament in Africa, the possible implications thereof for the interpretation of the Old Testament (with reference to other areas for further research) – thus a 'propaedeutic' in a proper sense of the word for further study about these phenomena in Africa. A proposal for a new module in the teaching about customs and practices of the Old Testament in Africa is also made here (cf ADDENDUM III). This is all on account of the numerous points of contingency between the customs of, among others, the Lemba and those customs reflected in the Old Testament, which will differ from those on other continents and in other countries. This implies that the teaching of the Old Testament in, for instance, Denmark or Germany will be different, than what it would be in Africa. Lastly, reference is also made to the implication of this kind of study for the relevance of the Old Testament for missionary endeavours in Africa.

The results of this thesis fit into a contextual (Africanised) theology, recently proposed by the Department of Old Testament at Unisa. The Department is in the process of developing a new curriculum which includes contextual (Africanised) exegesis (and much more). The last chapter can directly contribute towards this objective.

CHAPTER TWO

VARIOUS RECEPTIONS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT IN AFRICA: SOME OBSERVATIONS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

History books and other accounts report that during the pre-Islamic period (before 600 AD) Judaism spread into Saudi Arabia, Africa and the rest of the world, resulting in more than one tribe in Africa embracing a self-declared form of Judaism (cf *Photo's* 70, 71, 72, 74). Different reasons were offered for these claims of Jewish roots (Israel 1984; cf Goitein 1969; Connaway 1978; Parfitt 1987:36ff, 88ff). At present there are numerous synagogues in India, and Judaising groups in Japan and in Yemen. There are also many 'Black Jews' in the USA, who came from West Africa (Israel 1984; cf Goitein 1969; Connaway 1978; Parfitt 1987:36ff, 88ff⁵).

The problem is that each Judaising group embraces/d an identity shaped by ideology; a Jewish identity which differs from Judaism proper. 'Jewishness' often denotes/d something very far removed from what we might term 'authentic' Jewish tradition (Parfitt 1997b:2⁶; cf Eilberg-Schwartz 1990). The truth of this is most clearly seen when one observes the adoption of Judaism *en masse* in some form or another by peoples, groups or religions. It should therefore be noted that the idea of 'Jewishness' is neither specifically nor exclusively Jewish (Parfitt 1997b:2). The phenomenon of Jewishness has been borrowed by various groups and peoples throughout history and made to serve a variety of functions for different reasons. The beliefs and practices of the Falashas in Ethiopia, for example, have very little to do with real Judaism (Goitein 1969:228; see below). They probably adopted a form of Judaism to distinguish themselves from other groups. Although such a religious shift seems to be a fairly lengthy process, some scholars support the view that their form of Judaism was preceded by other forms of religious experience and identification (Parfitt 1997b). This immediately provokes the question as to how 'Judaism' should be defined. 'There is, of course, no stable object called Judaism' (Eilberg-Schwartz 1990:2), but one possible definition of Judaism is that it is

the system and practice of the religion that emerged from the study of the Old Testament after the exile, laying heavy stress on the precepts of the law⁷ and nowadays consisting in conservative, reform, orthodox and reconstructing Judaism (Deist 1984:88; my footnote).

⁵ I am greatly indebted to the research done by Parfitt on this subject. Parfitt is Reader in Modern Jewish Studies and Chairman of the Middle East Centre at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, who in 1996 became a member of the Centre for Genetic Anthropology at University College, London.

⁶ Parfitt's paper on 'Judaising movements' was read at the joint congress of the Southern African Missiological Society and the research project 'African Initiatives in Christian Mission,' held at Unisa, 13-17 January 1997.

⁷ It was precisely its attitude to, and interpretation of, the Law, that distinguishes Judaism from both Christianity and the Old Testament.

Commonly, Judaism refers to both a religious as well as an ethnic community who reflect a particular way of life, and who practises a unique set of beliefs and values (cf Ellison 1988b:631; Bentwich 1969:59ff). This leads to the datum that it is virtually impossible not to be a member of the Jewish ethnic or religious community if one was born of Jewish parents (Jung 1980:59).

In order to facilitate the understanding of the so-called Judaizing groups in Africa, the following problem areas will be investigated: the Judaism of Judaizing groups, and 'authentic' Judaism, as well as the historical and existential relationship of Balemba or Lemba⁸ 'Judaism' with 'authentic' Judaism. Did the Lemba specifically make a religious shift at one stage or another? Or did they choose to identify with the idea of being Jewish or rather Israelite, because it confirmed and reinforced their traditions of origin and Semitic customs? Or are they simply one of the lost tribes of Israel or part of a number of tribes? Although Judaism and Jewishness are not equal denominators, in the contexts of these groups, these concepts are now sometimes used interchangeably. The question remains: To what should Judaism or Jewishness be reduced before it stops being Judaism (cf Parfitt 1987:3)?

All over the world definitions of religion and identity are changing and we realise that we live in a world of fragmented identities. In general, religion can be described as belief, as well as a link with specific images and emotions (Jung 1980). Religion is also closely related to cosmology and magical practices. These beliefs (among other possible factors) constitute 'identity'. There are, however, many expressions of belief which may appeal to people, but they usually seek a community that (mostly) expresses or confirms what they already believe (Jung 1980).

The theory regarding the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel, links up with the history when the Ten Tribes of the Northern Kingdom (of Israel) were carried off into exile by the Assyrians (722/1 BC), never to return (cf 2 Ki 15:29; 17:4-6; 18:11). Those tribes of course were not known as Jews, but as Israelites. Over the centuries there were many theories about what happened to these tribes, and today there are many groups who claim to be descendants of the Ten Tribes, even in Africa. What impedes the situation is that many other indigenous groups in Africa have many manners and customs with a Semitic resonance. Where did they get this from? Are they descendants of the lost tribes? Or is there any evidence of a more general religion that existed earlier throughout the world? And where does the Lemba fit in?

An impediment to this study is the apparent non-existence of any Jewish record of ties with 'lost' tribes elsewhere. Also, for approximately the last fifteen hundred years Judaism has not looked very favourably on such 'conversion' to Judaism movements and tended to ignore them (Parfitt 1997b; 1987). Currently the Israeli Government does not have a particular interest in any Jewish groups in Africa. Smythe (1962:101) confirms

⁸ For the purpose of this study I shall make use of the name 'Lemba', since anthropologists approve of this.

that the refugees who have come to Israel in more recent years, especially the darker-hued Jews from North Africa and Yemen, have found themselves segregated and looked upon as inferiors. Although the Israeli Government officially opposes any undemocratic practices against these diverse newcomers they are still considered less equal than the dominant population group and suffer some form of discrimination and segregation.

These factors constitute a paucity of written (historical) record of these groups. Only oral and ceremonial traditions preserve possible links with Judaism 'proper'.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, comparativists⁹ (colonialists, observers, missionaries and others) who came to southern Africa imposed the idea of a Semitic heritage on almost all the indigenous peoples – from the 'Hottentots' to the Dutch Boers – instead of considering them in their own contexts (cf Chidester 1996). This led to biased and one-sided interpretations of traditional African religions. Theorists firmly believed that all 'savages' were degenerated remnants of more civilised races (Whately 1879:22; cf Schapera 1930). As a matter of fact, Parfitt is convinced that 'there is scarcely a people in the world which has not at some time been identified as one of the lost tribes of Israel' (Parfitt 1987:2).

In the long run, very few of these groups in southern Africa really accepted the 'Jewishness' imposed upon them. Others identified with the notion of Jewishness, probably because it confirmed and reinforced their own ancient traditions and customs.

During the field research, it became clear that the Lemba have oral traditions claiming that they came from Israel as well as many practices with an Old Testament resonance, but most of them are converted to Christianity. Therefore, to a certain extent, the Lemba should rather be seen as Christians with Judaising tendencies. But, for the purpose of this study I am particularly interested in these practices and rituals with a specific Old Testament resonance and would mainly focus upon them (cf Chapters Four to Nine). The field study elicited the following questions:

- (i) What role did consciousness of identity play (among Judaising groups in Africa and worldwide) in the process of making a religious shift? And, what would the reasons be for such a religious shift (cf 2.2; 2.3) ?
- (ii) To what extent should the work of the missionaries (and others) and perhaps the way they brought the gospel to Africa, be taken into consideration (cf 2.3)?
- (iii) Why do the Lemba perceive themselves as being Jewish or Israelite (cf 2.3.2)?
- (iv) Did they 'adopt' a form of Judaism and if so, how did it happen? Or are they perhaps one of the lost tribes of Israel in Africa? (cf 2.3.2)

Given the purview of this study, not all these issues will be addressed, but they certainly require further investigation.

⁹ A term used by Chidester (1996) for theorists who believed that specialised knowledge about religion only began and developed with the exploration of two or more religions (cf Kruger 1995:98).

2.2 OSTENSIBLE REASONS FOR 'RELIGIOUS SHIFTS'¹⁰ WORLD-WIDE

A variety of ostensible reasons could underlie a religious shift as Parfitt (1995:3) observed it elsewhere in the world and in Africa:

the Judaisation of Himyar may for example best be viewed as a gesture of Yemeni nationalism directed against the encroachments of Ethiopia and Byzantium whereas conversely the adoption of Christianity by the Kiev state was a desire to be united with Byzantium – the cultural Eldorado of the day. In present times the Judaising process at work among the Shinlung can be seen as emanating in part at least from their desire to extricate themselves from their unenviable state as 'tribals' – too lowly even to form part of the Indian caste system. The Judaising activity of the Japanese groups Makuya and Beit Shalom on the other hand may be seen as an attempt to escape the suffocating anonymity of Japanese society. In the case of the Falasha their elaboration of a separate religious tradition formed part of a desire to further buttress existing differences between themselves and neighbouring groups.

Social reasons seem to have been the main motivation for these shifts. Parfitt (1995:3) contends that religious shifts are similar in different regions of the world, and are most likely to occur after missionary or other ideological activity, or after the manifestation of some historical reminder of what a given group considers to have been its original religious state (cf Chidester 1996:238-240). One wonders to what extent the fact that the missionaries first translated and brought the message of the *New Testament* to Africa, and only *later* brought the *Old Testament*, should be taken into consideration. This might have given the impression, especially to some tribes in Africa, that the Old Testament is the more important (thicker) and therefore some of the tribes eventually rejected (or minimised) the message and customs of the much thinner (therefore less important) New Testament (cf Mafico 1979:110; 1982).

The occurrence of a religious shift is often explained as having taken place because of transmitted traditions and as a result of the *choices* that have been made. Parfitt explains that such a movement from one religious system or identification to another, could be brought about by 'sudden conversion or by an almost imperceptible and gradual process' (1995:2; 1997; cf Price 1954; Smith 1982). A specific group will often revert to their oral traditions or folklore as resources during a phase of renewal. Choices often involve a well-acknowledged charismatic national or group leader, who carefully weighs the pros and cons of different religions.

Parfitt (1995:2) uses Central Asian (Russia) traditions as an example of free *choice* being exercised, when decisions had to be made between the competing claims of Nestorian Christianity, Islam and Manicheism. In the debate that followed their deliberations, Prince Vladimir first eliminated Islam for obvious reasons. Islam prohibited alcohol – and this he considered unacceptable for the Russian people. Because of the traditional enmity between the Khazar

¹⁰ A term (borrowed from linguistics) which indicates 'a movement from one religious system or identification to another, whether it is brought about by sudden conversion, or by an almost imperceptible and gradual process, normally along the slippery axis between poles of similar religious ideologies', is often explained via various kinds of transmitted traditions as a product of choice (Parfitt 1995:2).

Khanate and Kiev – Judaism was rejected. And this left Christianity as the only option (Parfitt 1995:2).

Because of the strong racial and ethnic character of Judaism, Weingarten (1992¹¹ quoted by Parfitt 1995:2) points out that most Judaising groups make some attempt to legitimise themselves by claiming that they have always been Jews. The Yemenite Jews insisted that they migrated to South Arabia forty two years before the destruction of the First Temple (approximately 630 BC). Judaising Japanese sects claim kinship with the lost tribe of Zebulun, who made their way by sea to Japan, bringing with them the Mosaic law. The *bene Israel* of western India (who probably came to Judaism via Islam) claim kinship either with the lost tribes of Israel or with those Jews who left Palestine as a result of the persecutions by Antiochus Epiphanus (165 BC; Parfitt 1995:2). The Judaising Shinglung of eastern India, who accepted a kind of Judaism via Protestant Christianity, claim descent from the lost tribe of Manasseh, while the central theory of Falasha origin, involves descent from Solomon and Sheba, although other historical periods and situations are involved as well (Parfitt 1995:2). The 'British-Israelism' in Britain insisted that the prophet Jeremiah and the daughter of king Sedekiah (the last Judaeen king) ended up in Ireland after the Babylonian Exile. According to them, she married the Irish monarch, Hermon, who himself was a descendant of Judah¹² (Ned. Geref. Kerk van Transvaal, Sektebearbeiding no 17).

The Lemba cannot recall the particular tribe of Israel from which they have descended, but they regard themselves as an offshoot of Yemenite Jews who left Israel during the Babylonian invasion, crossed the Phusela (but they do not know where or what Phusela is) and came to Africa (see below).

Parfitt explains that groups are sometimes attracted to specific inherent characteristics of an ideology such as Judaism (1995:3). In certain cases it is the exclusivity of Judaism that exerts a certain fascination; and in other instances the historical experience and suffering of Jewish people serve as a powerful magnet and as an usable paradigm to explain and make more bearable their own suffering or when their own identity is under siege (Parfitt 1995:3). This may have been the case with the South African Boers and some Black people when they were suffering at the hands of the British (cf the Manifesto of the Emigrant Farmers, compiled by Piet Retief, 2 February 1837, published in *The Graham's Town Journal*,¹³ Van Jaarsveld 1971:54,55). A specific small right-wing group of Christian Dutch Boers in South Africa were known as

¹¹ See for example Weingarten, M. A. 'The Genetic Identity of Yemenite Jews', paper read at the Second International Congress of Yemenite Jewish Studies, Princeton University, 1992.

¹² The present monarchy of Britain (derives from the Hebrew: 'berit ish' = covenant man) are therefore seen by this group as their descendants.

¹³ E.g. 'we complain of the unjustifiable odium which has been cast upon us by interested and dishonest persons, under the cloak of religion, whose testimony is believed in England to the exclusion of all evidence in our favour; and we can foresee as the result of this prejudice, nothing but the total ruin of the country;' and 'we are now quitting the fruitful land of our birth, in which we have suffered enormous losses and continual vexation, and are entering a wild and dangerous territory; but we go with a firm reliance on an all-seeing, just, and merciful Being, whom it will be our endeavour to fear and humbly to obey' (1971:55).

'Jerusalem-gangers', since they perceived themselves to be 'the chosen people of God' (without mention of a connection to a specific tribe; De Vaal [s a]a:1).

2.3 'JUDAISING' MOVEMENTS IN AFRICA

Before introducing the 'Judaising' of the Lemba, we refer to this phenomenon in the wider context of Africa. The maritime activities of one specific group, the Sabaeen (Yemenite) Arabs, provide a background. According to folkloristic evidence their forebears migrated from Palestine to Yemen 'exactly forty-two years before the destruction of the First Temple' (as mentioned above; Aharoni 1986:25). In view of the maritime enterprises in the Red Sea by King Solomon and some Judaeen kings, it is not far-fetched to assume that some Judaeans settled in Yemen and eventually in Africa during that early period (Goitein 1969:226; cf 3.2.1.1; 1 Ki 10:11-15). Goitein (1969:226) makes it clear though, that no historical record of such settlement has been found thus far, but their presence (or perhaps a later group's) is attested for the centuries immediately preceding Islam by Islamic and Christian literary sources, as well as local inscriptions in the Himyarite language. According to Goitein (1969:226) these sources also bear witness that the Judaeans in Yemen proselytised vigorously in their adopted country and abroad.

Gayre of Gayre (1972:88-92) observes that (according to early maritime accounts) the great Semitic maritime power of ancient times, the Sabaeen Arabs, in whose country the Judaeans settled, had been very much involved in settlement and exploitation of the coast of East Africa at the beginning of the seventh century BC and early in our era (cf 3.2.1.2). He added that the Yemenites - Jews and Arabs - had been exposed to many different religions. They were, for example, converted from 'heathenism' to Christianity, under which they remained until in the fifth century (AD) when they came under the control of a Jewish dynasty. According to Gayre of Gayre, their (Sabaeen Arabs') very early influence, in Ethiopia on language and writing characteristics, and also on the Lemba, who have an oral tradition that they came across the sea from Yemen to Africa, can clearly be surmised (1972:88-92).

The best-known (Judaising) group in Africa today, are probably the 'Jews' (or 'Black Israelites') in Ethiopia, who from approximately the 1920s were known as the 'Falasha'¹⁴ (cf *Map I*). In 1985 the Falasha, with their form of Judaism, were rescued from persecution and taken to Israel by the Israeli Government (cf Parfitt 1985). Goitein (1969:228) is convinced that

the type of religion developed by a foreign population won over to Judaism may best be studied in the Falashas. Their beliefs and practises have very little to do with Judaism.

The Falasha is a 40,000 strong African tribe and the fairly long process during which they obtained this identification, has much in common with religious developments elsewhere in the

¹⁴ The word Falasha is derived from an ancient Ethiopic, or Ge'ez term, meaning an 'exile' or a 'stranger'. It is not known when it was first introduced. Many Falashas themselves prefer to call themselves *beta Israel* - the house of Israel (cf Kessler 1982:xiv).

world. Gotein maintains that they have preserved rabbinical Judaism, familiar to the Christian reader from the New Testament (1969:228). According to Kaplan, this is a typical example of a group who chose to make a religious shift (1993:645–658; cf Parfitt 1985:16ff).

According to Spurdle & Jenkins genetic tests have shown that in contradiction to the Lemba, the Falasha are not Jewish or Israelites by blood but Ethiopians who simply made a religious shift (cf 1992; 1996; cf 3.3.1.1). Therefore, the Falasha's claim to be Jewish, is not based on proposed genetic tests, as in the case of the Lemba.

Other Judaising groups in Africa include the Aba-yudeyo group in Uganda, the Moyo or Amwenye in Malawi and Maputo, the Ibo in Nigeria, groups in Kenya and others for example the Berbers in North Africa (Price 1954:31ff, Parfitt 1995:1). The recent 'discovery' of a synagogue in Mozambique might necessitate the rewriting of the history of Jews in Africa.¹⁵ Although the groupings of people who lived in southern Africa before contact with the Europeans, had beliefs and practices that by any modern definition were religious, these Europeans tended to report that the Africans had no religions. However, once they had been conquered and dispossessed it was 'discovered' that African people had a God and a religious system after all. It was firmly believed that the subjugation of native people (especially unbelievers) was legitimate. According to Chidester (1996) and Anderson (1983), the categorising of their religious systems is an European invention.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries European colonialists, observers, missionaries and travellers rushed to Southern Africa for various reasons. In the process of identifying the languages and 'superstitions', the manners and customs of the indigenous peoples of Southern Africa, demarcations were drawn around human groupings who came to be designated as 'Hottentots' and 'Bushmen', 'Kafirs' and 'Zulus', 'Basutos' and 'Bechuanas'¹⁶ (Chidester 1996:22). We cannot suppose that these terms refer in any unproblematic way to 'natural' groupings of people, who lived in the region prior to contact with Europeans (Chidester 1996:22; cf Bryant 1949; Ranger 1993:252; Kruger 1995:193). The terms by which they were identified were probably totally of European invention (cf Anderson 1983; Kruger 1995:210–212).

¹⁵ I was only informed by friends about this ancient synagogue found on an island in Mozambique (Isle de Mozambique). However, this needs further investigation.

¹⁶ The denominators *Hottentot*, *Bushman* (and later *Boers*), etc. refer to contemporary usage and are not used in a derogatory sense here (cf Chidester 1996:22). However, designations such as *Khoikhoi*, 'pastoralists', 'aboriginal hunter-gatherers' or simply 'aborigines' of southern Africa should rather be used (Kruger 1995:212; 257). The term 'Kafir' was used by the Europeans but originally this had been incorporated in Jewish and Muslim discourse. Jews referred to those who denied their 'true' God as *Cofar* or 'unbelievers' and the Muslims identified people who rejected the religion of Islam as *Cofers* or *Caffers* (Chidester 1996:73). Since all Blacks were called 'Kaffirs' by the British this was perhaps a way to distinguish them from 'Hottentots' and 'half-breeds' (Price 1954:32). Thus these terms were initially used by colonialists to 'clarify' specific groups of populations in South Africa; eventually these obtained derogatory connotations.

It was found that the beliefs and practices of indigenous people were derived from ancient sources, most often from the religion of ancient Israel, since it was familiar to Christian comparativists from their reading of the Old Testament (cf Kolb 1719; Rose 1829; Isaacs 1836; Peppercorne 1852-1853; Colenso 1855; Shaw 1860; Stuart 1901, in Webb & Wright 1976; Schapera [1937]1946; Anderson 1983; Eilberg-Schwartz 1990). Chidester (1996:22–27) explains how these frontier theorists (comparativists), in order to define unfamiliar African religions, resorted to comparisons with the more familiar religions of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism, as well as with the ancient religions of Israel, Egypt, Arabia, Greece, Rome, and Europe. As Whately (1879:22) observed it: '[A]ll savages are degenerated remnants of more civilized races.' In this process of delineating specific African religious systems these theorists, in 'creating' and identifying all the religions of the world, made knowledge available to the indigenous people.

Comparative religion provided further terms for differentiating among local people: the Xhosa were Arabs; the Zulu were the 'Hottentots', the Dutch Boers were Jews and the Sotho-Tswana ancient Egyptians¹⁷ (Chidester 1996:240). In this fanciful genealogy of religions, frontier comparative religion was used in ways that both transferred the Middle East onto the southern African landscape and conceptually displayed the indigenous people of Southern Africa to the Middle East (Chidester 1996:238,240).

It seems as though colonialists and others endorsed the idea of linking a Semitic identity with the indigenous people for their own specific needs – they relocated Judaism to southern Africa, as an opposition to Christianity. The religions or religious movements in South Africa, therefore, should be evaluated within a history of the relationships of colonisation, domination, resistance and recovery (Chidester 1992:238-240).

I will now differentiate in the *Southern African* context, between those groups on whom the idea of Jewishness was either imposed, or those who identified with the concept, because it may have confirmed and reinforced ancient traditions and customs.

2.3.1 Groups upon whom the idea of Jewishness was imposed

2.3.1.1 *The 'Hottentots'*¹⁸ as children of Abraham

Taking oral tradition as his primary evidence, Kolb (in Chidester 1996:50-72), a German visitor to the Cape in 1705, compared the religion of the 'Hottentots' (Khoikhoi) with what was known from written sources about other nations. He calls the 'Hottentots' children of Abraham, who had preserved, in distorted form, religious traditions that could be traced back to ancient Israel. Kolb's

¹⁷ They could therefore have been responsible for the assimilation of some of the elements of those identities, by indigenous groups.

¹⁸ 'Hottentots' is the name used by Chidester (1996). The Khoikhoi (= 'Hottentots') developed into cattle herders with a loose clan structure. They were mainly migrants who arrived after the San. As long as 2000 years ago they were already roaming the southern parts of Africa. They are a pastoral society with larger entities than the San (Cameron & Spies 1991).

comparative method revealed that the Khoikhoi were like Jews, with a religion derived from Abraham. Kolb found grounds for resemblance in:

sacrificial offerings, the regulation of their chief festival by the new and full moon, avoidances between husbands and wives, the abstention from eating certain foods, especially swine flesh, the circumcision of males, and the exclusion of women from full participation in religious ritual. However, the Hottentots lack any memory of the Children of Israel, Moses or the Law (in Chidester 1996:51).

Kolb, therefore, proposed that it was more likely that they had descended from the Troglodytes, children of Abraham by his wife, Chetura (= Keturah; Gn 25:1-4; Chidester 1996:50-72) and informed his readers that the religion of the Khoikhoi could be imagined, not as barbaric paganism, but as a variety of Judaism. By emphasising comparisons between the Khoikhoi and Jews, Kolb reinvented Judaism in Christian terms, by relocating it in the Cape as an opposition to Christianity. Two decades later other observers concluded, however, that there was absolutely no common ground between Khoikhoi and Jews (cf Mentzel 1785-1787) and that Kolb was an unreliable witness. However, the social anthropologist Schapera in the 1930s admitted that Kolb's account, 'notoriously inaccurate as it is in many respects, is by far the most detailed and useful' (1934:233).

2.3.1.2 *The Zulus and ancient Israel*

Shaka, Chief of a small Zulu-speaking Nguni-clan, founded the Zulu empire from the Nguni group and other surrounding tribes early in the nineteenth century. Shaka began attacking and establishing his supremacy over his neighbours with the result that many tribes and groups of people left the country in all directions never to return. Many smaller groups were totally destroyed or incorporated. An oral tradition holds that the Lala section of the Zulus at the time of Shaka were Lemba people (Mathivha 1999a). According to this tradition they were the group who introduced the Zulu to circumcision¹⁹ (cf Van Dyk 1960).

The magistrate and linguist Stuart in 1901 (in Webb & Wright 1976:262-263) noted that a Zulu philosopher, Mxaba (1839-), referred explicitly to the precedents of ancient Israel and Greece, in order to reconstruct an ancient history of Zulu religion. Mxaba observed, that many Zulu customs were held in common with Jews. Both the Zulu and ancient Jews 'slit their earlobes, burned incense in ritual, spread chyme on graves, and burned the bones and divided the meat of sacrificial animals in similar ways' (in Webb & Wright 1976:263). Mxaba cited these commonalities as evidence of a prior historical contact between the Zulus and Jews and was convinced that their lineage could be traced back to the lost tribes of Israel (in Webb & Wright 1976:262-263). Stuart (in 1901, in Webb & Wright 1976:262-263) responded that there were

¹⁹ Van Warmelo ([1937]1974:58) maintained that the Zulu (and the Venda) do not practice circumcision. Whether his information is correct is not sure, since it differs on this point from the inventory produced by Fynn (already in 1820; see below) and other researchers.

even 'people in England who believed that the British were descended from the same lost tribes. When Mxaba asked him to elaborate on the correspondence between English and Jewish customs, Stuart was at a loss' (cf 2.2). Mxaba proceeded that the Zulu had forgotten their God, their home, their mother tongue and original religion, but under the influence of Christian mission, however, they would remember. For Mxaba, Zulu religion was recognisable as the same type of religion that had been practised in ancient Israel, and that Zulu life seems to have been organised on an ancient Israelite pattern (Webb & Wright 1976:262-263). Peppercorne (1852-1853:62-65) characterised this pattern as pre-monarchic of which the basic form had appeared in ancient Israel. To know more about Zulu religion, he said, one only has to refer to the Hebrew Bible. Relevant knowledge about their religious system was readily available not only by direct observation but also by comparison with the Old Testament.

In the 1820s, Fynn (in Stuart & Malcolm 1950:86-88) produced an inventory of the most striking similarities between the religious life of the Zulu and that of ancient Israel:

sin offerings²⁰; propitiatory offerings; festival of first fruits; the proportion of the sacrifice given to the Isanusi (or witch doctor, as termed by Europeans), periods of uncleanness, on the decease of relatives and touching the dead; circumcision; rules regarding chastity and the rejection of swine's flesh.

Along the same line as Fynn (Mxaba and Peppercorne), Colenso (1862-1879:9,10) conceded that the Zulu not only provided a model for reconstructing the religion of ancient Israel but they are also a touchstone of universal religion. Thus he proposed a rereading of the Bible in terms of the patterns and rhythms of African life. Colenso proposed that the Zulu provided a measure against which the scientific or historical accuracy of the Bible could be tested, as well as representing evidence of a more general religion that had appeared in sacred texts and traditions throughout the world. The similarities between the ancient Israelites and the African offered an indispensable tool for interpretation. Customs such as polygamy could for example best be understood by a comparative approach (Colenso 1855). Colenso was perhaps one of the few scholars of his time, who took seriously the problem of the cultural distance between the England of his day and ancient Israel. It is important to note that by 1900 the comparison between the Zulu and Jews had been thoroughly internalised in Zulu reflections upon their own religious heritage (Webb & Wright 1976:217,247,298; Bryant 1949).

Isaacs (1836) denied the existence of any religion among the Zulu, while Gardiner (1836) found in 1835 a diversity of religious ideas among the Zulu-speaking people. Bleek (1857:205) reported that the Zulu are extremely religious, 'but their religion consists of veneration for the spirits of their ancestors, in particular the souls of their departed chiefs' (cf also Callaway 1862).

²⁰ Cf G C Oosthuizen 1989. According to him there is no ethical dimension present in indigenous cultures: Sin is and never was an issue among Bantu-speakers. This is of course a debatable statement by Oosthuizen. Interestingly, the Lemba similarly indicated that they do not have particular sin-offerings.

2.3.1.3 *The Sotho-Tswana and the laws of the Old Testament*

With the exception of some Tswana, all the members of this group call themselves baSotho. The Sotho seem to fall into three major divisions (cf Van Warmelo [1937]1946:75):

- The South Sotho in Lesotho;
- the Western Sotho or Tswana; and
- the remainder in the northeast.

The northern and eastern grazing areas of the Kalahari were inhabited by the Sotho-Tswana. They adopted a small village system and were all cattle people (Goodwin [1937]1946:40). From Tswana traditions, concerning their origins, one gathers that their ancestors arrived from the North in several migrations separated by time.

Only a few reports made passing mention of apparent similarities between certain Sotho-Tswana customs and 'Mosaic' or 'Levitical' laws of the Old Testament. Many European observers however, speculated that the system of sacred animals and the practice of burying the dead with their faces turned towards the northeast of the Sotho-Tswana, originated from ancient Egypt (and even Abyssinia). Therefore, most reports (cf Bryden 1904:127; Casalis 1861:180) rather identified the Sotho-Tswana as ancient Egyptians (Chidester 1996:215).

2.3.1.4 *The Xhosa: an ancient priesthood*

The Xhosa are described by Soga (1932:130) as a 'group of related tribes', under the heading of the Cape tribes of the Nguni group. A few centuries ago the Xhosa dwelt along the upper reaches of the St Johns River, far to the northeast of their present home. In 1831 the Glasgow Missionary Society called upon its agents in southern Africa to investigate Xhosa customs with a view to comparing them with the customs of the Jews. However, no one responded (Chidester 1996:88).

By analysing their language and customs, missionaries who were also comparative religion theorists, in the Eastern Cape, developed a genealogy for the Xhosa that suggested that they were the Arabs of southern Africa. Other missionaries proposed that Xhosa-speaking people once had a religion, perhaps even a religion based on revelation, but that they had subsequently lost it – African superstition was the trace of a lost religion (Chidester 1996:90,91; cf Rose 1829:77,78). According to William Shaw (1860:188,189):

from the absence of any form of ... writing, tradition has merely served to preserve certain outward ceremonies, which have necessitated the perpetuation of a class of persons who are obviously the living representatives of *an ancient Priesthood*, that was accustomed to celebrate the rites of some old but *unknown form of religion* (my italics).

Sometimes, that higher religion was identified as Islam (Chidester 1996:92-94). Fleming (1853:117), for example, concedes that the Xhosa had maintained beliefs and practices such as sacrifices and circumcision, 'which refer the origin of this people to Ishmael, the son of Abraham by Hagar.' These missionary theorists, of course, knew Muslims were in fact living on the Eastern Cape frontier.

2.3.1.5 *The Dutch Boers²¹ – ancient Jews*

British reports also consistently applied a particular kind of comparative religion to the Dutch Boers. They identified the phenomenon of the Boers as a kind of frontier Judaism (Chidester 1996:174). It was alleged that they lacked genuine religion, like the other indigenous people, and they were thus also idolaters. The comparativists observed that the Boers ‘had walked straight out of the Old Testament’, and that they imagined themselves to be the ‘chosen people’ of God. They concluded that not the African but these Boer ancestors of White Afrikaners were the ancient Jews on the northern frontier of southern Africa. According to Chidester (1996:174) the Boers were Christians, but nevertheless preferred the Old to the New Testament. The ‘Dutch Boers’ or ‘Hollandsche Afrikaansche Emigranten’, characterised their trek as an ‘exodus’, away from being British subjects, or being oppressed. The feeling of being a people of the covenant, who were elected, became quite entrenched over the years (Van Jaarsveld [1957]1959:23,24).

One small group of Boers in the 1860s, on the northern frontier, were known specifically as ‘Jerusalemgangers’ or ‘Jerusalemtrekkers’, because they thought they were approaching the Holy City (De Vaal [s a]a:1). Places like ‘Nylstroom’ and ‘De Nyl Zyn Oog’ got their names on their journey to ‘Jerusalem’.

Tangye also declared that the Boers identified with ancient Jews and that ‘they take the Old Testament as their only guide’ (1896:54,55). However, it is known from other accounts that the Boers were Calvinists who baptised their people (not circumcised) and partook of the holy communion (cf the diary of Erasmus Smit 1972).²²

2.3.1.6 *Possible remnants of the concept of being Jewish*

Remains of the concept of being Jewish or Israelites were very much alive in the 1920s (cf the Israelites in the eastern Cape, Bulhoek; Edgar 1988:1-40) and are still very much alive today in some small right-winged Afrikaner groups in South Africa and in the Independent Churches of some Black groups such as the so-called African Hebrew community, the Church of God and Saints of Christ, the Zionist Church and the International Pentecostal Holiness Church. The latter’s headquarters and temples, near Krugersdorp (Oskraal), for example, are known as Shiloh and Jerusalem (The Rev Tshelane 1999; cf Oosthuizen 1989:333-345). All these groups have some Christian connection as well, but perceived themselves as Israelites or Jews. Both religious dogmas were assimilated into their religious experiences and beliefs.

To conclude, none of these groups as a whole (Khoikhoi; Zulus; Sotho-Tswana; Boers or Independent Church groups) currently accept or publicly declare themselves to be Jews or Israelites. Therefore, all the assumptions of yesteryear colonialists and missionaries rested on misunderstanding and unwarranted inferences. It was highly fashionable to append Semitic traditions to indigenous people, and the Europeans totally misunderstood the realities of pre-

²¹ See footnote 16.

²² Most of the above sources are applied, somewhat one-sidedly, for the specific purpose of this chapter.

colonial Africa. These societies certainly had valued customs, but their customs were clearly more loosely defined and infinitely flexible – they helped to maintain a sense of identity, but also allowed for adaptation so spontaneous and natural that it was often unperceived. Ranger (1993:248) explained that far from being a single ‘tribal’ identity,

most Africans moved in and out of multiple identities, defining themselves at one moment as subject to this chief, at another as a member of that cult, at another moment as part of this clan, and at yet another moment as an initiate in that professional guild. These overlapping networks of association and exchange extended over wide areas. Thus the boundaries of the ‘tribal’ polity and the hierarchies of authority within them did not define conceptual horizons of Africans.

It is a question whether ‘tribal’ identity really was as dispersed as Ranger describes it. A group in southern Africa who even today regard themselves as Jews or Israelites are the Lemba, and to my knowledge the only group in southern Africa who have specific oral traditions that they originally came by boat to Africa (‘from a place called Sena on the other side of the sea’; see below).

2.3.2 The Lemba and their ‘Jewish’ identity

The Lemba are also known as the *Varemba* (‘people who refuse’), *Basena* (‘people coming from Sena’), *Basoni* (a greeting used by Lemba women), *Vamwenye* (‘foreigner’, ‘guest’, ‘Arab’ or ‘people of the light’), *Vhalungu* (‘Europeans’, ‘non-Negroes’ or ‘strangers’), *Mushavi* (‘traders’), *Balepa* and perhaps *Mapalakata*. The meaning or origin of all these names is not sure and different explanations have been presented (cf Von Sicard 1952:140,141; Price 1954:33; Ravele 1958:76,77; Hendrickx 1991:174,175), but each name used for the Lemba is actually telling its own story and already suggests other influences sometime in their past.

The Lemba live among other peoples in southern Africa, mainly in Sekhukhuneland (Mpumalanga, RSA), Venda (Northern Province, RSA) and the southern parts of Zimbabwe. They speak the language of the groups surrounding them, go to local schools and hold positions in the communities. Their uniqueness, however, lies in that they keep themselves separate from other peoples, regard themselves as an offshoot of the Yemenite Jews, have a religion which stems from Abraham, and came from a city called Sena (cf Nh 7:38; Gayre of Gayre 1967:16; Goitein 1969; Connaway 1978:31; Aharoni 1986). According to their tradition, they centuries ago crossed the Phusela (although they did not know what or where the Phusela was) and came to Africa ‘at the back of a tree’. Here they rebuilt Sena, perhaps in more than one place, and helped to construct a great stone city which they identify as Great Zimbabwe (D:J:1; D:O:6; D:G:6; Mullan 1969; Gayre of Gayre 1972; Mathivha 1992), the ruins of which have intrigued archaeologists for the last hundred years.

To return to Chidester, he discusses in detail how comparativists (colonialists, missionaries, travellers, etc) imposed the idea of a Semitic heritage on almost all the indigenous people in southern Africa, but he scarcely refers to the Lemba (1996:215). However, he does mention that

while the Boers were like the ancient Jews on the northern frontier, the Lemba were exceptional, because they were often traced back to an Islamic origin: in the 1850s some Dutch Boers described the Lemba as 'Zlámzie (Islám or Mahometan) Kafirs' between the Soutpansberg and the Blue-berg (Baines 1854:290). Did they escape the speculations about being 'Jewish' by earlier comparativists?

As a matter of fact missionaries and others did have great interest in the manners and customs of the Lemba, but their documents or accounts on the Lemba date from a century later than those of the comparativists, missionaries and colonialists described above (cf for example Schlömann 1894; Theal [1898–1903]1964a; Hall 1905; Junod 1908; Lestrade 1927[1960]; Van Warmelo 1935; Schapera [1937]1946). Van Warmelo ([1937]1946:65) points out that the Lemba are strongly suspected of being Semitic in origin. They eat no pork, no animal which has not been *kosher*-killed by the slitting of the throat and they do not intermarry the *vhasenzi*: (*washenzi*) 'wild folk, or pagans'.

It is curious that the Lemba, who received least attention in Chidester's (1996) work, and who were described by some as 'Slaamzyn', regard themselves as Israelite (not Islamic) and are the only group in southern Africa today who have very specific oral traditions about their Semitic origins. None of the other groups, recognised or identified by the colonialists as Jewish, *chose* to identify with the inventions of comparativists or have such traditions. The question is whether the Lemba simply accepted the notions imposed upon other groups, or did they perhaps impose these on themselves? It might also be that they (as mentioned earlier) chose to identify with the idea of being Jewish or Israelite, because it *confirmed* and *reinforced* the traditions of origin and Semitic customs they already had. This necessitates inquiry into their historical and genetic roots, and practices and rituals (cf Chapters Three to Nine).

When discussing a number of groups who are attracted to symbolic uses of Judaism, Parfitt (1995:3) refers specifically to the Lemba, whom he regards as having undergone a lengthy process during their religious shift, and who now largely regard themselves as Jewish. The Lemba were probably attracted to the *exclusivity* of Judaism, because it is still one of their own main features (cf D:M:10). Perhaps the strong sense of ethnic otherness attracted the Lemba to Judaism and reinforced ancient traditions and customs. The Lemba distinguish themselves from others by their customs, traditions, religious practices, features, skills and aloofness (for example endogamy).

Furthermore, Parfitt (1995:3) suggests that the historical experience and suffering of the Jewish people might have been a powerful magnet and useful paradigm to explain, and alleviate their own suffering at the hands of the colonialists. He believes that the Lemba or Varembe (in the former Rhodesia, Zimbabwe) responded to the self-serving interests of European missionaries, colonists and adventurers, and that their interaction with colonialism produced a radically changed view of themselves (1995:3; cf Chidester 1996). According to Parfitt the colonisation of the Lemba heartlands in present-day Zimbabwe, depended to a large extent on certain historical issues: It was firmly in the colonial interest to be able to prove that White supremacy was a fact

and that subjugation of native peoples was legitimate. Most White settlers believed that the Great Zimbabwe constructions were built by ancient Phoenicians – this theory could help in some sense to legitimise the British presence. The Lemba with their Semitic customs and Judaic habits, fitted this particular historical vision admirably and their identification as Jews (or a Semitic group) thus suited imperial needs of the British (the Lemba were seen as the descendants of the Phoenicians). If the country could once have been controlled by a small maritime nation, why should it not be controlled now by another small maritime nation (cf Garlake 1973; Hall 1905:101; Peters 1902:127)?

Parfitt (1995:4–6) briefly discusses those factors which, according to him, created the ambiguity the Lemba felt about themselves, and which created the obvious diversity of their religious traditions. He (1995:4) is therefore convinced that the Lemba

seized upon a particular myth – one which was suggested to them – and used it as a means of ridding themselves of a rather ancient ambiguity at a time when in the context of colonial Rhodesia new ambiguities may underline many examples of religious shift.

Parfitt (1995:5) states that ‘any confusion the Lemba felt found its antidote in the myth of Jewishness.’ He added that this particular myth was perhaps a means of reflecting on and clarifying the colonial situation.

According to Buijs²³ [s a:1], empirical evidence has shown that ethnic consciousness is a twentieth-century construct, not a carry-over from the past. She is convinced that the creation of the Lemba Cultural Association (LCA)²⁴ in the forties (1947), for example, can therefore be viewed ‘as a direct reaction to European encroachment on, and aggrandisement of, previously African sources’. She [s a:1] adds that

the founding of the association was an attempt, through creating or recreating *a separate and distinct cultural identity* for the Lemba people, to proclaim the value and importance of the Lemba in the Northern Transvaal and at the same time to identify them with a non-African community at a time when European domination in South Africa seemed irreversible (my italics).

This might be true, but some Lemba informants told me that during the years of the Black liberation struggle in South Africa, they kept up their culture but many were not so willing to be associated with a non-African (White) race (cf D:J[1]). Precisely for this reason they preferred not to disclose their identity during census recordings and other occasions. This was the main reason why the Lemba were never properly counted. But since the election in 1994 this perception has changed (to a certain extent): they are much more keen to identify themselves as Lemba and not just as another one of their host peoples (as earlier).

²³ Lecturer in Anthropology, University of Venda.

²⁴ The Lemba are organised in a national Lemba Cultural Association (LCA). Prof M E R Mathivha (retired, formerly at the University of the North) is the president of the LCA.

Referring to Parfitt's theory of a possible religious shift among the Lemba – during my field research, I neither got the impression that liberation theology had ever played a pertinent role among the Lemba, nor that they felt threatened by apartheid. On the contrary, for the last few years and after the election their leaders have endeavoured to obtain their own territory. They want to remain exclusive with a view to preserving for posterity what is precious to them.²⁵ Cultural diffusion²⁶ has always posed the greatest threat to them, and still in this new dispensation in South Africa engenders the greatest concern for their leaders (D:J[2]). It thus appears that the Lemba's desire to be associated with Judaism and to maintain a 'separate and distinct cultural identity' is a much wider and profound factor than a mere reaction to colonialisation, as Parfitt suggested or 'a direct reaction to European encroachment' (as suggested by Buijs).

Also, to frame ethnic consciousness²⁷ as a twentieth-century construct (as Buijs [s a:1] does), is in contradiction to what we have learned from Chidester (1996:4) and others. He explains how colonialists in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had already imposed an ethnic consciousness on most indigenous groups in southern Africa, while Weingarten (1992; in Parfitt 1995:2) emphasises the strong ethnic character of Judaism to which so many groups were attracted and still are. It seems possible that political and other situations to which Parfitt and Buijs refer (in the above), as well as activities of missionaries (and others), could have strengthened the Lemba's existing traditions and customs, especially if one takes into account the many old reports and references to the activities by these different groups in Africa.

2.4 CONCLUSION

Judaising movements are a phenomenon all over the world and very much so in Africa. The interest that missionaries, in particular, and others had in Jews and in the 'mystery of Israel' – an interest which could perhaps be explained because of a particular theological system – led them to infer that the Lemba were Jews or 'Slaamzyn'. But the traditions among Lemba societies – whether invented by the Europeans or by the Lemba themselves in response to those invented by Europeans – distorted the past (as it was before the colonialists came) and became realities through which a good deal of colonial encounter was expressed. It could also be that the phenomenon of a search for a new or earlier identity by the Lemba was encouraged or reinforced

²⁵ On more than one occasion, Mathivha, president of the LCA, for example, advised Afrikaners not just to follow every wind of change, but to maintain their own identity and cultural heritage. He also expressed his appreciation for the role President Paul Kruger played in their history, when he regarded the Lemba as 'Jews' in public. In certain sources, the Lemba is known as 'Kruger's Jews'. The Lemba annually hold their conference on 10 October, which is Paul Kruger's birthday.

²⁶ In anthropological terms the concept 'cultural diffusion' is often used to refer to the transfer that takes place by means of the TV, radio or the press. It does not seem to be the same concept as used by the Lemba. The situation that other cultural customs and traditions are threatening to inundate their own, on account of intermarriage and assimilation, is largely seen by the Lemba as 'cultural diffusion'.

²⁷ The ethnic character of the Jews is a problem (especially if it has to include the Lemba). It most probably rather deals with race and religion.

by these comparativists. Clearly earlier populations and contacts about which we know nothing have left their mark on the people of southern Africa.

Furthermore, similarities between the ancient Israelites and the Old Testament and African tribes should not be neglected. They offer an indispensable tool for interpretation. The functioning of oral traditions and customs such as polygamy, circumcision and sacrifices could be best understood through the use of a comparative approach, but a researcher should take seriously into account the problem of the cultural distance between the modern Bible reader and ancient Israel (cf Chapters Four to Nine).

The question of what Judaism could be reduced to, before it stops being Judaism should be asked again. Ben Gurion, modern Israel's first prime minister, believed that 'a Jew is someone who believes himself to be one.' Maybe by virtue of not knowing exactly where they belong, or to which tribe they belong, so-called Judaising groups, lost tribes or *bene Israel* all over the world will qualify for the 'Thirteenth Gate' one day.²⁸

²⁸ 'The twelve of the thirteen gates of Jerusalem corresponds to the twelve tribes, through which the prayers of each of them ascend to the heavens The thirteenth gate is for him that does not know which is his own tribe' (Dov Ber the *Maggid* of Mezericz, Hasidic leader, d. 1772).

CHAPTER THREE

CONFLICTING ACCOUNTS ON THE SO-CALLED SEMITIC HISTORY AND ORIGINS OF THE LEMBA

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter deals with the conflicting accounts on the possible Semitic history and origins of the Lemba. Information from all possible sources (anthropology, archaeology, ethnology, history, genetics and other reports) was gathered, in order to obtain a more holistic picture of the Lemba. This is not primarily an anthropological study, but the advice of anthropologists was nevertheless gained, wherever possible. Understandably, there has been no general agreement among scholars regarding the origin of the Lemba, but it is not the intention of this study to solve that issue at all. The purpose of this background is to be able to show in Chapters Four to Nine (especially in Nine), how oral traditions agree or differ from that which has been written down over the ages and the possible influence of the written text on the oral traditions. The background provided by this chapter serve as a measuring rod whereby oral traditions and practices of the Lemba discussed in Chapters Four to Nine can be compared.

The reconstruction of the prehistory of any tribe in Africa is no easy task and this is very much the case with the Lemba. This task is even more difficult if we accept that 'unnatural' boundaries, drawn around human groupings, were most probably the invention of seventeenth and eighteenth century European colonialists, missionaries, travellers (etc) in southern Africa (and elsewhere; cf Chapter Two). In the process of identifying the language, superstitions and the practices of the indigenous peoples, these boundaries were invented and groups were designated, for example, as 'Hottentots', 'Bushmen', 'Basuto's' and 'Bechuanas' (Chidester 1996:240; 1992; cf Chapter Two). Regarding Africa, we therefore, have to search in earlier (than the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries') records for references to human groupings other than those invented by comparativists. The earliest available accounts, that in one way or another refer to tribes or groups in Africa, come from maritime undertakings of different groups (trade or missionary) all over the world, mainly the Phoenicians, Arabs and the Portuguese.

Most of the available anthropological, archaeological, genetic and other literature on the Lemba, were studied in their different communities *after* the completion of my field research. In this chapter, however, the anthropological, archaeological and other accounts will first be discussed. Special attention will be paid to all possible Semitic (Phoenician, Hebrew, Judaistic, Christian or Moslem) connections from this material and to the three different schools of thought regarding possible theories of origin, concerning the specific nature of the Semitic culture involved in the origin of the Lemba: One, a pre-Islamic-Judaic-Arabic origin; two, an Islamic-Arabic origin and, thirdly a Falasha-Abyssinic origin.

3.2 ANTHROPOLOGICAL, ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND OTHER ACCOUNTS ON THE HISTORY AND ORIGINS OF THE LEMBA

3.2.1 Maritime undertakings between the Semitic world and East Africa and references to possible 'Semitic' groups in Southeast Africa

From anthropological and archaeological evidence it became clear that Southeast Africa was visited, among others, by Phoenicians, early pre-Islamic Arabic explorers, Indian, Chinese, and even Malay settlers, before the relatively late (approx 684 AD) Moslem power (Kenyon in Mullan 1969:136) in East Africa, which immediately preceded the coming of the Portuguese (cf Gayre of Gayre 1972:34). One of the earliest documents on maritime undertakings and trade between the Semitic world (Tyre, Israel and Saba) and Africa is probably the Old Testament (and extra-Biblical accounts).

3.2.1.1 *The Phoenicians and the Hebrews*

According to the Old Testament, it was the *Phoenicians* (or Tyrians) who traded with the Land of Ophir (I Ki 10:11-15; Gn 10:29), from where *King Solomon* (approx 1000 BC)²⁹ drew rich merchandise after he had formed an alliance with Hiram, King of Tyre. Ophir could have been in Southern Arabia, India or even East Africa (Sofala, with their merchants and markets), but that the *Phoenicians* (and other Semitic peoples) circumnavigated Africa from West to East and traded with East Africa at least by 110 BC, seems certain (cf *Periplus* [of the Erythraean Sea, first century AD]; in Landström 1964:52; Gayre of Gayre 1972:15-30). The fleet of Solomon took three years to return and brought various kinds of items that would be the combined products of the coast of East Africa and of Southern India (Gayre of Gayre 1972:28; Landström 1964:52). Because of the distance it was, nevertheless, impossible to voyage to and from Ophir (if it was India) without making a principal landfall at Sofala. There was of course also an overland route to the South along the Nile, and consequently Ethiopia could have had an interest in the merchandise from 'Rhodesia' and other gold-rich countries in the South (cf Gayre of Gayre 1972; Anderson 1887). Therefore, at a very early stage, continuing influences between the Semitic world and that of the southeastern parts of Africa had a reciprocal impact on one another.

3.2.1.2 *The Sabaeans or pre-Islamic Arabians (Yemenites)*

The Old Testament, similarly, refers to the 'kingdom' of Saba from which the famous Queen of Sheba came to visit King Solomon. It is clear that Saba was a rich merchant nation in the gold trade, since Arabia itself is deficient in gold. The *Assyrian Inscriptions* tells us that Teima, Saba and Haipá paid Tiglath Pileser III (733 BC) tribute in gold, silver and incense; similarly Sargon

²⁹ More recent archaeological inquiry questions, to some extent, the conventional dating of the Solomonic era.

(715 BC), Eratosthenes (276-194 BC), Agatharchides (120 BC) and Artemidorus (100 BC) speak of the wealth and greatness of the Sabaeans (Müller 1888:739,741; ANET 1969). According to the *Periplus* the Sabaean colonies were very early (at the beginning of the *seventh* century BC) established in Ethiopia as is proved by the characteristics of the Ethiopian language and writing, *as well as* by the oral traditions of the Lemba (Gayre of Gayre 1972:89).

Referring to this early dating, Mathivha³⁰ (1992:1-7) suggests that the 'Jewish' ancestors of the Lemba migrated from 'the North' to Yemen as traders in the 7th century BC, where they established a large community at a place called Sena (see *Map I*). He says the Jewish community of Sena termed 'Basena' was expanded by Jews who escaped the Babylonian Exile in 586 BC (cf below). Here they met Phoenician merchants who introduced them to trading with the Orient and Africa. By 600 BC trouble already broke out between the Basena and the Arabs which caused some to return to Jerusalem while others left Phusela I and Sena I, and crossed the sea into Africa (Mathivha 1992:1-7).

In concurrence with the latter, one of the oldest oral traditions that Junod (1908:277),³¹ the Swiss missionary and scholar, recorded, was that the ancestors of the Lemba came to Africa as traders by boat, from a remote place on the other side of the sea. They erected trading posts at different places, and each time some of their people were left behind to take charge. They kept themselves separate from the native peoples, but after a war broke out in their country, they could not return and had to take wives from the local peoples, because they did not bring their own wives along (cf Wangemann 1868:436; Van Warmelo 1966:273-283 and others).

According to the folklore of Yemenite (Sabaean) 'Jews', their ancient forebears migrated from Palestine to Yemen, 'exactly forty-two years before the destruction of the First Temple' (Aharoni 1986:25). 'In view of the maritime undertakings of King Solomon and later some of the Judaeans kings in the Red Sea, it is not far-fetched to assume that some Judaeans settled in Yemen in that early period' (Goitein 1969:226; cf Mathivha 1992). Goitein makes it clear that no historical record of such settlement has been found thus far, but their presence is attested for the centuries immediately preceding Islam by Islamic and Christian sources, as well as by local inscriptions written in the Himyarite language. These sources also bear witness that the Jews in Yemen were in close contact with their co-religionists in Palestine and that they proselytised vigorously in their adopted country (Goitein 1969:226). Goitein (1969:227) stresses that the flourishing Christian elements in Yemen disappeared under Islamic rule, but Judaism stood firm throughout the history of that country.

In Yemen, another oral tradition (which again constitutes a tradition of the Lemba) still exists, namely that a group of Jews left Yemen centuries ago (how long ago is not certain) for Africa, and did not return (Parfitt 1995:5). In addition, Beeston (1952:16-22) confirms that in the

³⁰ As with all historiography, any remark by Mathivha, obviously needs to be subjected to a measure of doubt, since he is representing a particular ideology, and therefore views history in this light.

³¹ This indicates that the tradition may at least be 90 years old.

pre-Islamic times, Judaism was indeed widely practised in the area (Yemen) and that there were Jews in the Hadramaut even after the rise of Islam (such as the famous Jewish noblewomen who rejoiced on the day when Muhammad's death were announced, in 632 AD). Goitein (1969:228) suggests that the Yemenites are 'the most Jewish of all Jews, so that it is rather unlikely that all or even most of them should be the offspring of Himyarites (Yemenites), for Judaism used to be essentially the religion of a people, not one adopted by conversion.' Only after the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 (and until 1962) the whole Jewish community in Yemen was repatriated to the newly founded state (Goitein 1969:228). They formed a large section of Yemen's *artisans, gold and silversmiths and weavers*, who played a specific role in the economy of the castelike society of Yemen (1969:227-230). According to Goitein, they preserved rabbinical Judaism, to a certain extent, which is familiar 'to the Christian reader from the New Testament', as he puts it (1969:228).

As far as the Christian period is concerned *The Periplus* (first century AD) records that the *Sabaeans* (pre-Islamic-Arabian, from what is now the Yemenite) King Kharabit, in AD 35, was in possession of the eastern coast of Africa 'to an indefinite extent' (Bent 1895). The *Sabaeans (Yemenites)* were one of the great Semitic maritime powers of ancient times, who must have been involved in any settlement and exploitation of the coast of East Africa³² (cf Gayre of Gayre 1965:212). To my mind, this is significant information, since it confirms a very early pre-Islamic-Arabic influence in East Africa. Putting aside the earlier Hebrew influences in Saba, in our era the Sabaeans' widespread commerce brought them into contact with both Christianity and Judaism. Gayre of Gayre explains that (1972:89; cf Müller 1888:739)

they were converted to Christianity under Constantius II by the Indian Theophilus, but another account credits this event to the reign of Anastasius (491-518 AD). Their ruler Dhú Nuwás became converted to Judaism, and from this event Ethiopia was led to invade the Yemen. This weakened both Christianity and Judaism and opened the way for conversion to Islam of the Arabian peoples.

The last Himyarite ('Homeritic') king, King Dhú Nuwás (who had become Jewish), was notorious for his persecution and massacre of the *Christians*, which already in 399 AD, led to the termination of his reign and the invasion by Ethiopians on behalf of their Christian brothers (Hendrickx 1991:181; cf Gayre of Gayre 1972:94). In turn, the Jewish (and Judaised) Arabs were persecuted by the Christians and after several conquests and resultant pressure to migrate, they left for the Himyarite colonies in East Africa and Mashonaland (present-day Zimbabwe), in ships, of which their merchants had plenty. The Persian conquest of Southwest Arabia, only at the end of the sixth century (AD) made it possible for the proselytism by Islam of Yemen (Saba). The groups who left for Africa were *not Muslim*³³ (cf Hendrickx 1983:69-74; Gayre of Gayre 1972:90-94).

³² Some scholars suggest that the Sabaeans were an integral element of the development of the Zimbabwean civilisation (Mullan 1969:135). This subject, however, falls outside the framework of this investigation.

³³ Cf the Lemba tradition.

The Sabaeans, most probably could have been the pioneers of Arab influence as far south as Mozambique, *before the arrival of later Islamic Arabs*. Therefore, it could have been possible for a group such as the Yemenite Jews to become involved in this way in Africa and eventually established themselves here. We may expect that wherever the Sabaeans settled, even when they were Judaised or Christianised, some elements of their 'original' Arabian religious concepts (based upon Attar or Venus and Almaqah or Sin, the moon god) would always be evident, in some way or another (Gayre of Gayre 1972:96). We may also expect that from the time that the Semites first made contact with the coast of East Africa, both cultural mixing and genetic miscegenation, could have taken place with the native populations³⁴ (Gayre of Gayre 1972). However, what is important, is that it seems clear that influences of religions such as Judaism and Christianity were operative in Africa, long before that of Islam.

3.2.1.3 *Islamic Arabs*

A further important source of information, is the records or accounts of Arab historians and traders. Marco Polo, the twelfth century (AD) Venetian writer and explorer, made it his business to learn something about East Africa and mainly used these much earlier Arab sources. Polo's account again confirms that not only the *Arabs*, but many other nations were involved in the east coast of Africa from very early times (Theal [1898-1903]1964d:437; cf Stayt 1931:237; Gayre of Gayre 1972:34; Mandivenga 1989:99-102). Important though, is that Arab travellers and writers actually recorded their visits and accounts of the east coast from Mombassa and Kilwa southwards to Sofala (at the Zambezi; see *Map II*).

It was only in 943 AD that one of the Arab historians, Masudi wrote that the *Muslims* of Oman in Arabia, of the Al-Azd tribe, sailed on the Zang, Zing, Zenj or Negro Sea (Indian Ocean) as far south as Madagascar, and to Sofala (Sufalah) in the land of the Wak-Wak (Khoisan, either 'Bushmen' or 'Hottentots'³⁵; cf Theal [1898-1903]1964c; Hall 1909; Dart 1955; Gayre of Gayre 1972:38; cf *Maps I & II*). Kenyon (in Mullan 1969:136) tells us that the *first* Arab refugee settlement on the East African coast was in 684 AD and that they were the descendants of *immigrants from Yemen*. Kenyon apparently neglects the much earlier *pre-Islamic* Arabian (Sabaean or Yemenite) involvement and influence in Southeast Africa.

It is also known that in the year 696 AD, the two princes of Oman, Sulaimân, and Sa'îd were attacked by the forces of the Khalif Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan of Damascus, and forced to flee to the Land of Zanj (East Africa). There we also find the tradition of the coming of the Arabs who settled along the coast, and the name of their chief was Haji Sa'îd (Van Warmelo [1937]1974:83).

There is every reason to believe that the above-mentioned earlier immigrants from (pre-Islamic) Yemen would soon have associated with those Muslim refugees, (newcomers; followers

³⁴ As the Lemba tradition holds.

³⁵ These denominators are not used derogatory here (cf Chapter Two).

of Zaid³⁶ or Sa'îd from Yemen) to the coast of Africa and that there soon would have been no apparent differences between the two groups and would they only be described by historians and missionaries as 'Moorish' people. Although the two groups (if they could be identified as such) apparently shared much in common from their outward appearance and practices, it does not mean that religious differences could not have existed between them.

Gayre of Gayre (1972:35) states that between the tenth and the twelfth centuries, the Bantu Zenj had displaced the Khoisan Wak-Wak people in the district of Sofala. That the term 'Zenj' or 'Zang' was used at that stage by the Arabs for the Muslim Negroes³⁷ or more specific the Swahili-speaking coast peoples³⁸, is of some significance (cf Theal [1898-1903]1964d:253,348,289,371; Stayt 1931:237; Van Warmelo 1935:122; De Vaal 1958:67; Gayre of Gayre 1972:36; Parfitt 1992:250). Masudi also uses a similar word, *Zindji*, to refer to the aborigines of Central Africa (Theal [1898-1903]1964b). Stayt (1931a:236) observes that after 1 000 years, the Lemba preserved this word with the same meaning and the same disdain (as the Arabs): They call their own women and other peoples, *Vhazhenzhi*³⁹ (*Gentiles*) because they say they came to Africa without wives and had to marry the local people (Bullock [1927]1950:22; cf Junod 1908:285; Van Warmelo 1935:122; 3.2.2).

3.2.1.4 *Abyssinians*

Important information is provided by Masudi who informs that Sofala, from which much gold was brought, was inhabited by *a tribe of Abyssinians* who had emigrated there *recently*, and whose king, the Waklimi, had his capital there (in Theal [1898-1903]1964b; cf Parfitt 1992). Caton-Thompson found that in the original Arabic text of Masudi, no such word as 'recently' occurs and that leaves the period to which he refers, completely in the air (in Mullan 1969:134). Many centuries later the Dominican friar, Dos Santos (1609), who spent four years in Sofala observes, however, that the Monomotapa⁴⁰ and his people, in many respects resembled the Abyssinians (cf Thompson 1942:85; cf *Map II*). They celebrated a festival called 'Pemberar' which very much resembled the 'Toscar' of the Falashas (Abyssinians). This, in fact, seems to be the only resemblance between the two groups (cf Thompson 1942).

³⁶ Mullan (1969:137,138) remarks that these Zaid followers were almost identical in faith to the Sunnis (orthodox Muslims). According to him, the Lemba greeting 'Vhasoni' appears to be a corruption for 'Sunni' (followers of Zaid, orthodox Muslim).

³⁷ In the light of further information, I assume that this term chiefly refers to being Negroes (Africans), rather than Muslims (or perhaps both).

³⁸ Swahili was the language used by the Sultanate of Zanzibar and was a Maneno Unguya dialect, mostly influenced by Arabic, Persian, Indian and other foreign elements (Gayre of Gayre 1972:36; cf Othenius 1938:70).

³⁹ In Swahili, *wa-shenzi* = uncivilised people/heathen (cf Othenius 1938:70).

⁴⁰ The so-called 'Emperor' who ruled a group of tribes from some stone built centre such as Great Zimbabwe.

3.1.2.5 *The Portuguese*

Wilmot (1896) collected information from letters of early Portuguese missionaries preserved in the archives in Rome. Those sources tell us that, 'Abou-Feid Hassn, who lived in the tenth century, wrote a book supposed to contain the travels of a merchant Soleyman who describes the country of "Zenj" ', and elsewhere that

[d]e Bãnos, the Portuguese writer, reproduces from Arab Chronicles information respecting the foundation of several towns and the character of their inhabitants. From this source we learn that a great number of Arabs emigrated in three ships under the command of seven brothers who fled from the persecutions of the Sultan of Bahharin. The first city they found in Africa was Magadaxo (Moguedchou[sic]), afterwards that of Braoua, which was still, on the arrival of the Portuguese, ruled in the manner of a republic by twelve chiefs who were the descendants of the seven brothers just alluded to They subsequently formed a mixed population intermediate between the Arabs and the Kaffirs. It was the people of Magadaxo who with their ships first reached the country of Sofala and commercially exploited the gold mines of the region (Wilmot 1896:111,107-8).

Wilmot (1896:110) supposes that 'Moguedchou [sic] was founded about 930 years after Christ, and there seems little doubt that the political establishment of Arabs at Sofala can be shown to have taken place about 1100 AD.' According to Gregson (1973:418) 'another documentary source places *Muslims* in Ibo Island north of Moçambique Island in *c.* AD 771.' This is apparently still much later, than the pre-Islamic-Arab and Christian groups, who came to Africa (see above).

Returning to the land of Ophir (as mentioned earlier), it was a firm Arab tradition that Ophir (cf I Ki 10:11-15) might well have been situated along the East African coast. Thomas Lopez reported (1502) about Sofala that

the Moorish merchants were telling us that in Sofala there is a wonderfully rich mine to which, as they find in their books, King Solomon used to send every three years to draw an infinite quantity of gold (Von Sicard 1955:67).

In the light of the foregoing influences and immigration of Semitic groups to Southeast Africa, it is in no way clear who the 'Moorish merchants' were to whom reference is made here. Were they from the early immigrants from the Middle East or from the Islamic Arabians or were they perhaps a combination of the two groups? Moreover, the question is who linked the mines of Sofala with the story of King Solomon and whether this was merely transmitted to each other from generation to generation. However, if it were not for the reports of the Arabian and Portuguese seafarers, these oral traditions would apparently have been lost.

This same tradition is repeated by the Portuguese missionary, João dos Santos (1609), who lived and worked among the people of this region (Sofala, as mentioned above; cf *Map II*). He added that some old Moors narrate that the ruins on top of the mountains were in older times the trading depots of the Queen of Sheba (*Saba*) and that from this place a great quantity of gold was

brought to her⁴¹ (Theal [1898-1903]1964c:275-280; cf Schapera [1937]1946:5, 6,13; Von Sicard 1952:170; Marole 1969:1,2; Parfitt 1995:3-5). The Arabs used the name Sofala not only for the town of that name, but also for the whole region between the Zambezi and the Limpopo. And the region behind Sofala⁴² was known to the Arabs as 'Saba', which is the same as Sheba, the historical name of what is now Yemen (Junod 1938:14; Baines 1877:vi).

The late Wilfred Phophi's story concerning the origin of the Lemba differs from that told by Mathivha and links up with the preceding traditions (in Parfitt 1992:48; cf 3.2.1.2). According to him,

Solomon sent his ships to get gold from Ophir, that is Zimbabwe. Some of the Jews who went on those boats stayed in Africa. That is the origin of the Lemba. Our name means 'those who avoid eating with others'. That means Jews. The others we did not eat with were the *wasenzhi*. That means gentiles. And for all this gen [sic] do not think that I am relying on the dictum of old Mathivha. My father could read and write. I got it all from him. He told me things that Mathivha will never know (in Parfitt 1992:48).

As already stated above, Dos Santos and Senhor Ferão (1609) found many Christian and many (not clearly defined) 'Moorish' people at Sofala and Sena at the Zambezi (and other places; Theal [1898-1903]1964d:185,188,223,268,365). Dos Santos mentions specifically, that the Moors had their own kings (Mambos⁴³) but most of them were killed upon the entrance of the Portuguese to these lands. Ferão says they were mainly *merchants*, the woman manufactured *earthenware, cultivated rice* and *distinguished themselves* from the other inhabitants by refraining from pork, and rejecting meat that was not killed by the hands of one of their sects (in Theal [1898-1903]1964d:371). Dos Santos adds that further inland,

these lands belong to the Monomotapa. They are inhabited by heathen Kaffirs and Moors, some black, some white, some of whom are rich, although they are the subjects of Monomotapa they live there almost independent, being at a great distance from the court of the king

And elsewhere (in Theal [1898-1903]1964d:330) he writes:

they are barbarians and very fond of wine, and are *only Moors in name* and in the practice of circumcision, and neither know nor keep the creed of Mohammed that they profess. The principal observance, in which they are most exact, is celebrating, with great feasting, every new moon, upon which occasion they usually get intoxicated – although their creed forbids them to take wine [my italics].

It is probable that there were very early (from the 7th century BC to the 7th century AD) Phoenician, Hebrew and Sabaeen activities on the east coast of Africa. In contrast the commercial

⁴¹ A White farmer from Zimbabwe told me that there are still treasures, received from the Queen of Sheba, hidden in a cave in that area.

⁴² The hinterland of Sofala where the Lemba were living around 1777, comprises the Zimbabwe and Belingwe (Mberengwa) regions (Junod 1938:14).

⁴³ The Monomotapa ('Emperor' and the gods) of this period also bore the title of 'Mambo'. A title which would appear to have been in use among the chiefs of different tribes across the Zambezi (Mullan 1969:123,124; cf Möller-Malan 1953:1; 3.2.3).

and other activities of the Islamic Arabs only commenced during the 7th or 8th centuries (AD) on the east coast.

According to the different above-mentioned sources it is also possible that by the sixteenth century, there was already a substantial degree of purely African custom in 'Moorish' religious and social practices (cf Parfitt 1992:250). Who those 'Moorish' people were is not clear. Nevertheless, prominent characteristics of those 'Moorish' people were, they came as merchants to Africa, already possessed skills as goldsmiths, potters and cultivators of rice, distinguished themselves from the people of Africa by referring to them as the *vhazendji* (heathen), practised circumcision, celebrated the feast of the new moon and practised *kosher* slaughter and eating habits. Furthermore, they were 'Moors' (Muslim) only in name, and neither kept, nor knew the law of Mohammed. This information largely concurs with oral traditions as well as customs which are still found today in traditional communities of the Lemba (cf Chapters Four to Nine).

3.2.2 Accounts on the history of the Lemba north of the Limpopo

Nothing precise is known of the history of the Lemba north of the Limpopo, or even of the Lemba in the former Rhodesia and we have to rely heavily on oral traditions. Oral traditions do not provide us with chronology and for the purpose of historiography it is, therefore, very difficult to discern between the history of the Varella⁴⁴ in Rhodesia and of those in the Soutpansberg area. Because they were traders who moved around a lot, it makes it even more difficult to determine where and when they lived.

Among most clans of original Lemba stock, the tradition is to be found in various forms, that they reached their present home from across the Limpopo, but in the remote past they crossed the 'Phusela', from a place called Sena (cf *Map II*).

In his 'Ein Reise-Jahr in Süd-Afrika' Wangemann (1868:437) collected several oral traditions on the origin of the Lemba and observed their most important customs. He reported that the Lemba

sagen, sie haben bei dem Flusse Loathe früher gewohnt, bei den Portugiesen, sie nennen sich Banyai-Bachalaka ... ihre Väter seien grosse Könige gewesen und haben *masila* (gemachte Kleider) getragen Sie haben neben Moselekazzi am Zambezi früher gewohnt.

(they say, that before they lived at the River Loathe, with the Portuguese, they call themselves the Banyai-Bachalaka ... their fathers were great kings and wore *masila* (fabricated clothes) Earlier they lived next to Moselekazzi at the Zambezi [my translation]).

This tradition is in close relation to what some old Balemba of both the Spelonken and the Modjadji country later told Junod (1908:277; see above; see *Map II*):

[We] have come from a very remote place, on the other side of the Phusela [but they do not know where Phusela was]. We were on a big boat. A terrible storm nearly destroyed us all. The boat was

⁴⁴ As the Lemba in Zimbabwe are known.

broken into two pieces. One half of us reached the shores of this country; the others were taken away with the second half of the boat, and we do not know where they are now.⁴⁵ We climbed the mountains and arrived among the Banyai. There we settled, and after a time we moved southwards to the Transvaal; but we are not Banyai [my insertion & footnote].

With the assistance of the Lemba Phophi (in the Soutpansberg area), Van Warmelo (1966:273-283) recorded similarly that the Lemba came from a remote place on the other side of the sea, but the informant added 'that they had come to Africa as traders' (cf Marole 1969:1). They were in search of gold and after each trading expedition they went back to their country by the sea. They could not remember the name of their country but they were masters of *iron and copper-smelting*. In their country they made pots, grew and *wove cotton*, and were also masters of *timber-work*, because they had to build their own ships for their maritime undertakings (Van Warmelo 1966:273-283).

At different places in Africa they erected trading depots and left some of their people behind to take charge. They did, however, keep themselves separate from the native peoples because they felt themselves *superior*. Then something bad happened in their country of origin – a war broke out and they (the šavi [*traders*]) could not return. Because they did not bring wives along, they now had to take wives from the Rozwi, Karanga, Zezuru and Govera tribes (Van Warmelo 1966:273-283). The above mentioned traditions still exists among the Lemba today.

I have already mentioned the possibility that the first pre-Islamic immigrants from the Yemen related with the Mohammedan refugees who came much later to the east coast of Africa (followers of Zaid and Suleiman from Yemen in 684 AD; cf 3.2.1.3) or the other way round. Whereas the leader of the Emozaid-Arabs (the Ameer⁴⁶) had his residence at Sena, Sena⁴⁷ seems to be the place where the intermarriages between the locals and the Arabs (or Judaic-Arabs) from Yemen could have taken place. This could be the birthplace of the first real Lemba as we know them today (Connaway 1978:33; cf Mathivha 1992).

An old Lemba praise song collected by Stayt (1931a:237) also reflects something about their past: *Nemanga vhazungu vha no senna, vha no vha mbila ya sose* ('master of the monkey nuts, White men who come from Sena, who come from the place of the rock rabbits at Sose'). How old this song is, is not known, but Stayt (1931a:237) explains that Sose is a place near Sena on the Zambezi, *Nemanga* is one of the Lemba clan names, *vhazungu* or probably *vhalungu* (White men) is a honorific title and it is very possible that it was the Lemba who first brought monkey nuts south, to the Transvaal. This praise song does not only emphasise that they were traders and that they looked different from others, but also indicates their location before they moved southwards.

⁴⁵ This sounds legendary, since it is improbable that only half a boat would sink. Obviously, it depends on what the boat looked like.

⁴⁶ That means 'governor' (Connaway 1978).

⁴⁷ On the banks of the Zambezi. Cf Theal [1898-1903]1964d:255,267; Junod 1938:25; Von Sicard 1952:145; Motenda-Mberengwa 1958:62; Liesegang 1977:165; Gotein 1969:230, 234; Gregson 1973:418; Mandivenga 1989:102-107.

According to Idrisi ([circa 1150] in Mullan 1969:73-76,) the Senzi (Zanji⁴⁸ people – possessors of the *ngoma lungundu*; cf Junod 1927:430; Van Warmelo 1935:122; De Vaal 1947:46; Von Sicard 1952; Gayre of Gayre 1967:5; Davison 1984:119) were forced from their territory and down into the Sena area (at the Zambezi). These people of the magic drum, calling themselves the BaSenzi (probably the Venda), became closely associated with the Lemba in the same area (cf 3.2.1.3).

Mullan (1969:73-76) comes to the conclusion that possible pressure from Malawi caused these two groups (the Vhasenzi and the Lemba under Mposi) to move away from Sena and after a period of residence among the Banyai (according to their tradition) they possibly made their way into the Butwa-Torwa Kingdom, to Buhwa (Vhuxwa),⁴⁹ ‘the place of dying’, a hill in the Belingwe district (Southern Zimbabwe; approx in 1600; Mudau 1940; Schofield 1948:75). It seems to me that a mixing of traditions took place as far as the origin of the Lemba is concerned. Hundreds or even a thousand years could have elapsed between the oldest historical core of a tradition and the next (cf Chapter Nine).

According to Mullan (1969:98) many Lemba from the Butwa-Torwa Kingdom died in wars against the Karanga (the people of Mambo; cf Hall 1909) between 1493 and 1497. Close links of the Lemba to groups such as the Rozwi, Venda, Shona and Karanga continually appear in their oral traditions, but the relationships are not always very clear. According to Möller-Malan (1953:1), ‘Mambo’ means ‘king’ and ‘god’ and the people of Mambo is the same as the Vhasenzi (Venda). The sacred drum (*ngoma lungundu*; cf *Photo 38*), carried by the Lemba for the Vhasenzi, was called: ‘The voice of the great god, *Mambo wa denga*, king of heaven! He was also called Mutumbuka-Vhathu, the creator of man’ (1953:1).

The tradition continues that at Buhwa, many royal marriages took place between the Venda (Vhasenzi) and the Karanga from which two important leaders were born – Rozwi and Vele Lambeho. Rozwi became the leader of the Rozwi tribe and Vele Lambeho the leader of the Venda. Mullan (1969:114,120,124; Schofield 1948:76) mentions that in 1893 the Rozwi defeated the Karanga, only to be defeated later by the Venda and the Lemba. According to Fage & Oliver (1970:169,196) the Rozwi was defeated in 1834 by the Nguni under Chief Zwangendaba and their remnants were absorbed in other tribes. They also maintain that the Venda are of Rozwi origin (cf Moshekga 1983). If that is so, how could the Venda have defeated the Rozwi then? Van Dyk (1960:1,2) refers to the influence of the Lala section of the Zulu tribe (Nguni’s) on the latter. Mathivha (1999a) is of the opinion that this Lala section were Lemba people. That means that the Lemba should have been in close contact with the Nguni or Zulu somewhere in their past (cf Wangemann 1868:437 above).

⁴⁸ Alternative terms for Zindji, Vhazhenzhi, Zang, Zing or Zenj (cf 3.2.1.3; Theal [1898-1903] 1964d:200; Junod 1938:25; De Vaal 1947:47; Gayre of Gayre 1972:33-41; 165,200; Connaway 1976:13,14).

⁴⁹ Cf Möller-Malan (1953:1).

A tradition recorded by Motenda (1940:62), Marole (1969) and others, states that the ruler of the Lemba at that stage, Mulembe/Mulambe – a Vha-Kalanga induna, had his residence on the Belingwe Hill⁵⁰ (cf Stayt 1931:237; Van Warmelo 1935:122; Motenda-Mberengwa 1940:64; Thompson 1942:76; Von Sicard 1952:150). One of the names the Lemba call themselves by, is ‘the Good Men’ and they usually refer to their sacred mountain as the ‘Belingwe of the Good People’ or ‘the mountain of the Good Men’. Parfitt (1992:18) found that an area not far from Sena (on the Zambezi), in the vicinity of Cape Correntes (cf *Map II*), had indeed been named by Vasco da Gama ‘the land of the Good People’ – *Terra da Boa Gente*.

According to the tradition, Mulembe and his people traded from one place to another and later were given the name of *mushavi* (‘traders’⁵¹). After his death Mulembe was succeeded by his son, Ngwedzi and the latter was again succeeded by Shambani (Motenda-Mberengwa 1940:64). The Lemba mainly became famous for their *medicine* and the *magic power* they had over their enemies (cf Wangemann 1868:436; Theal [1898-1903]1964d:188; Junod 1908:280; Jaques 1931:248; Von Sicard 1952:165; Janzen 1982:3,4; Mathivha 1992). The tradition holds that they, unfortunately, lost their secret weapon (potion) and power when a Rozwi married a Lemba girl and encouraged her to steal the magic potion for her husband. Hereafter, the Lemba were defeated by the Rozwi and moved away to the Nzelele Valley with Thoho-ya-Ndou (leader of the Venda; Soutpansberg; cf *Map II*).

Another rendering of their history records that Nkalahonye Mulembe⁵², son of a Karanga induna, among other young men from Mashonaland, went to look for work at Great Zimbabwe, when it was still under control of Jewish and Arab gold diggers (De Vaal 1958:65; cf Bothma 1969:195; Connaway 1978:35,36). Nkalahonye was hired in the kitchen of an Arab and although he was liked, he still needed to be circumcised in order to cook for them. After he was circumcised (in private), he was much more wanted by the Arabs. Later he married one of the Arab (Moslem or Jewish?) women, kept their customs and circumcised his own sons according to the *Palestinian* law (De Vaal 1958:65; cf Motenda-Mberengwa 1940; Marole 1969:2). It might be of some significance that Nkalahonye kept the customs of the ‘Arabs’ and circumcised his sons according to the ‘Palestinian’ law (cf above). And again that he learned the new moon celebration and the circumcision from the Arabs *and* the Jews in Zimbabwe. It is naturally true that some of the customs of the Arabs and that of the Jews are so closely related, that it could have been very difficult to discern between the customs of those two groups.

⁵⁰ Many Lemba traditions are still related to the Mberengwa Mountain in Southern Zimbabwe (cf Chapters Four to Six).

⁵¹ Cf Theal [1898-1903]1964d:186; Wessmann 1908:129; Junod 1908:280; Stayt 1931:236; Jaques 1931:248; Van Warmelo 1935:122; Mphelo 1936:41,42; Thompson 1942:81; De Vaal 1958:63; Marole 1969:8,9; Liesegang 1977:166; Gregson 1973:418; Janzen 1982:3,32, 81,95.

⁵² No indications are given when this leader lived and no specific date is connected to this narrative.

An old Lemba song⁵³ summarises the list of animals that Nkalahonye was not allowed to eat (De Vaal 1958:57; cf Marole 1969:3; note that the translation by Maringa, P E of the song is presented verbatim; cf 4.1.1.3):

The Jews does not eat a pig even the Mu-Lemba does not.
The Jews does not eat a hare even the Mu-Lemba does not.
The Jew does not eat a rock rabbit even the Mu-Lemba does not.
The Jew does not eat an owl even a Mu-Lemba does not.
The Jew does not eat an eagle even the Mu-Lemba does not.
The Jew does not eat an ostrich even the Mu-Lemba does not.
The Jew does not eat the crow even the Mu-Lemba does not.

Many other prohibitions, similar to those of the 'Arabians and the Jews of Jerusalem', held by Nkalahonye were recorded by Marole (1969:3). Probably when the work at the mines of King Solomon stopped, the Arabs and those who came from 'Palestine' went back. Nkalahonye and his married sons Mbelengwa, Tanganalo, Sadiki, Mposi and Mpilo (Marole [1969:4] also adds Bakali) remained and traded mainly with arm, leg and earrings (De Vaal 1958:57; cf Connaway 1978).

Nkalahonye went through the country trading and reached a certain tribe called the Vhasia (Marole 1969:4). The tradition proceeds that the Vhasia are people who keep their water clean by putting it in new dishes. When they expect the new moon they will stay watching the water in the dish during the day so that they could see the new moon before any other person could see it (cf Chapters Seven & Nine).

Nkalahonye was very old when he died (no date is given) and was succeeded by his son Mbelengwa, who settled at the Dumbwi/Dumbghe Mountain (Belingwe district; cf Neuk 1923:51-54; Marole 1969:5,10; Connaway 1976:22; Liesegang 1977:174; cf *Photo 30*). Mountains play/ed a very important role in the history and at present in the lives of the Lemba people (cf 5.1.4). Mbelengwa (the son of Nkalahonye) on his turn built a big village next to this mountain – 'then the mountain was also called Mbelengwa till today' (Marole 1969:4).

On their stay at their stronghold Dumbghe, Dyke Neuk recorded a few Lemba traditions (1923:51-54). Once again the lack of dating makes it difficult to fit in the chronology, but according to these traditions the Varembe lived close to the Wamali tribe at the time when Mzilikazi (Nguni; Zulus) ruled over Mashonaland. The Lemba informant recalls that one night the Varembe were attacked by the Madumbuseya tribe under leadership of Mpapuri. Nearly everybody was killed but Mposi and the remnants fled to the land of the Vhavezha or Vhavenda, south of the Limpopo river.

Stayt (1931:232) points out that during the reign of the Venda chief Ramapulana (or Ramabulana) there were extensive Lemba settlements in the western part of Vendaland and that his son Makhado (who died in 1899) gave them *Ndovhada* near Waterpoort where they called

⁵³ Once again oral traditions leave us with no chronology or dates.

their mountain Tshilimani. Other large groups settled in the east of Vendaleland and Tshinapfene, near Sibasa in the Soutpansberg (cf Möller-Malan 1953; De Vaal 1958). Later they wanted to return to their Dumbghe stronghold so much that they decided to ask Mzilikazi's assistance. The only reason he helped them, was because of their knowledge of medicine and witchcraft. So the king gave his consent that some of his Godhlwayo might accompany the Varembe to Dumbghe. They defeated Mparuri and his men and some of the Varembe were again able to live at Dumbghe under Mposi (Dyke Neuk 1923:51-54), until today.

In a study on the Islam in Africa, Price (1954:32-36) refers to the Mwenye⁵⁴ (whom the Africans call Balemba) as depressed and broken tribes (cf Anderson 1888:384; 3.2.3), scattered among the Mashona (a mighty nation before the Matebele overran them). According to Price several observers note especially their *Semitic physical features* and the fact that they do conduct the non-Bantu practise of *male circumcision of infants* (1954:33):

the Mwenye profession of Islam depends on the observed food tabus, the circumcision of male infants denoted simply by *mwambo waana wathu* – 'our custom with regard to children' They do not have the Qur'ān or any system of instruction in orally transmitted texts, they do not keep ritual observances of the day or the week, nor the fast of Ramadan. They in fact appear to be very thorough-going materialists at their present stage, lacking serious interest in either the beliefs of their fathers or the religions of the people they have come among. They are aware ... of the existence of the powerful Yao Islamic community not far north, but they have made no attempt to join it or to associate with the ... groups. The *msikiti* or mosque is a feature of Yao villages, but the Mwenye have none, and take no trouble to assemble as a religious community (Price 1954:35; cf Mathivha 1992).

The fact that there are hardly any oral tradition among the Lemba referring to a Muslim history or connection; that in general they have no significant exclusive Muslim practises or interest in their beliefs are, as far as I can judge, of significance. The Mwenye group did not associate with the local 'beliefs of their fathers' – a very peculiar phenomenon for an 'African' people, neither did they make any attempt to join or to associate with the Muslim groups. This leads to the conclusion that this group of people were confused. The fact that they clung to their food taboes and the circumcision of their *male infants* may be of significance and earlier observers overlooked or misjudged this. It may also be that the conclusion by Price indicates the result of the lack of contact which the Mwenye perhaps previously enjoyed with Semitic, Arabian and Jewish groups (as referred to in the tradition recorded by Marole; cf Othenius 1938:69).

⁵⁴ Many scholars and the Lemba themselves aver, that they are the same people, but the differentiation between Lemba and Mwenye needs further investigation (cf Theal [1898-1903] 1964d:222-275,304,351; Von Sicard 1952:141; Gayre of Gayre 1972:132,135; Gregson 1973:420-422; Connaway 1976:1,14,166; Mandivenga 1989:100-1-2,106,107; Parfitt 1995:6; Hendrickx 1991).

3.2.3 Accounts on the history of the Lemba south of the Limpopo

In what follows I shall try to give, more or less in chronological order, the accounts of different writers on the Lemba south of the Limpopo. This however, does not necessarily reflect a chronological history of the Lemba.

The earliest mention of the Lemba name, the 'Walembers' is most probably in 1721 and 1726, in the Dutch East India Company's reports on the conditions in the interior. This constitutes the first reference in modern times to the presence of this people south of the Limpopo. A further report made by 'a negro', Mahumane⁵⁵ for the Dutch at Delagoa Bay in 1728, again refers to the 'Walembers' in the vicinity of the Zoutpansberg as being *traders* and a *separate* people. These two traits very often comes to the fore in accounts on the Lemba and in the oral traditions of the Lemba themselves – even when other groups refer to the Lemba. The account of Mahumane shows that from the early eighteenth to the second half of the nineteenth centuries, cultural and political changes occurred, which influenced the identification of groups by outsiders and to some extent also their self-identification. Liesegang published Mahumane's report on the first trading partners of the Dutch from the small states bordering Delagoa Bay:

[T]hese traders were from 'Sanguano' (Hlanganu area), 'Inthowelle, Paraotte, Machicosje, *Walembe* and *Chiremandelle*' The *Walembers*, who are always coming here with those of Inthowelle,... are a nation which lives on top [north] of the country of Inthowelle The aforementioned *Walembe* was said to be rich in gold too, and this nation was also doing trade with the Portuguese in the direction of the aforementioned Sena and Manica ... (Liesegang 1977:166,171; [my italics]).

The only historical reference in Mahumane's report being the emigration of the Lemba from the area north of the Limpopo. This account further shows that there is no reason to doubt oral traditions referring to the Lemba as a separate group or as traders north of the Limpopo and in the Soutpansberg area. Oral traditions do not provide us with a firm chronology as to their movements between the North and the South, but to my knowledge, Mahumane's account provides (except that of the Dutchman) the first literary evidence of this group of people and he was also the first to identify them by name (Liesegang 1977:163-181; and not Anderson [1887 & 1888] as some scholars have indicated, see below; cf Thompson 1942, Mandivenga 1989; Hendrickx 1991:174). Parfitt (1992:253) finds it interesting that the 'Walembers' in Mahumane's report are 'described neither as Muslim nor as Moors ... but simply as a wealthy nation which had been defeated in battle at some time in the past.'

Historically, we can at least trace the name and presence of the Lemba in the Transvaal-Belingwe (Mberengwa) regions, based on Mahumane's report, back to the 18th century. Loubser

⁵⁵ An African from the chiefdom of Mpfumo near the Dutch trading factory who had visited the Venda 'king' in 1727/28 and who gave the Dutch important information they needed (Liesegang 1977). This report was transcribed by the head of the Dutch trading station, J van de Capelle (cf Liesegang 1977; Sutherland-Harris 1970).

(1988:6-9) indicates that it can be established that the Lemba arrived in Transvaal in approximately 1790.

Yet, another source confirms the much earlier identification of the Lemba (this time again north of the Limpopo). In his search for gold (and other things) for an Austrian agency, William Bolts (1777) reports to Mr Andrew Daniel Pollet, agent for 'their Imperial Majestics' (sic) in Mcafūmo River, that

[t]he Natives of this part seem to have no knowledge of gold ... But as the River of Maneefs (Manees?) traverses an immense track on the back of Sofāla a people called *Malembe* resort to this place at stated periods from a country that way, said to be several weeks journey from hence ... on diligent inquiries from these people, who must necessarily have had some communication with the distant Inland factories of the Portuguese, we may be able to trace that precious metal I have some suspicion that these people come from the country called Manica [Manyika?] in the old books, concerning whom, Purchass, in his *Pilgrimes*, (printed 1537) records many curious particulars ... some of which I have selected for that purpose, as follows In Manica they have smiths who make spades, hatches etc and weavers who make cotton cloths ... (Bolts 1777:6; [my italics and insertion]).

Commenting on the Austrian's presence in Zimbabwe, Punt (1975:26,27) indicates that Bolts reported in one of his letters to the authorities in Vienna about a big and important city called Zimbabwe, where gold was mined and gold articles were manufactured by a tribe known as the Balemba. From these letters of Bolts it is further clear that the Lemba lived in the hinterland of Sofala (which included the vicinity in which Zimbabwe and Belingwe was located) in 1777 and most probably even before that time (1537; De Vaal [s a]c:12; cf *Map II*).

To return to their stay south of the Limpopo, in the early 1850s, Thomas Baines had heard of gold among the '*Slaamzyn* (Islaams or Mahomedan) Kafirs,'⁵⁶ between the Zoutpansberg and the Blueberg (cf *Photo 27*; 1854; 1877:71; cf Schlömann 1894:66). In 1899 Flygare added that

[m]idden tussen de Bawenda in woont de kleine verachte stam der Balemba. Zy verschillen geheel met deze in voorkomen, taal, gewoonten en godsdienst. Hun geschiedenis en oorsprong blyft een geheim Hun nederzettingen vindt men hoofdzakelik in het noorden en noordoosten. Zy houden zich geheel afgezonderd van de Bawenda en hebben geheel afgescheiden godsdienstgewoonten die wyzen op enig verband en verwantschap met Semitiese volken [1899:6].

(The Balemba, a small despised tribe lived among the Bawenda. They completely differed in appearance and language, customs and religion. Their history and origins remains a secret One finds their settlements mainly in the North and Southeast. They kept themselves completely separate from the Bawenda's religious customs, which indicate in some way connections and relatedness with the Semitic nations [my translation]).

It is significant that Flygare also mentions the *separateness* and *Semitic related religious practices* and *appearance* of the Lemba.

⁵⁶ The term 'Kafir' had very early been incorporated in Jewish and Muslim discourse. Jews referred to those who denied their 'true' God as *Cofar* or 'unbelievers' and the Muslims identified people who rejected the religion of Islam as *Cofers* or *Caffers* (Chidester 1996:73). Since all Blacks were called 'Kaffirs' by the British (and the Dutch) this was perhaps a way to distinguish them from 'Hottentots' and 'halfbreeds' (Price 1954:32; cf Chapter Two, footnote 16).

In the meantime, the occupation of both the Transvaal and Southern Rhodesia by the British, made it possible for ethno-historians and others to study the so-called 'Islamic Kafirs' closer. It was only by the end of the 19th century that Anderson (1887:144), who travelled to the old Mutapa Empire wrote: 'The natives state that the gold was worked and the forts built by the *white men* that once occupied this country whom they call *Abberlomba* (men who made everything⁵⁷), and there is every appearance that it is so ...' [my italics]. And later he reported about *broken tribes* (clearly not Islamic) who flourished mainly among the Venda and the Shona:

[W]ere these Monomotapa people black or white, and from whence did they come? They were evidently a *separate* people from those who now occupy the country. May not an Arab tribe have passed down along the east coast, and established themselves in the Mashona region ...? ... for the word Emperor is not a word used by any African races south of the Zambezi ... except they are of Arab blood, or closely connected with that race. There is at present that tribe ... to the north of my explorations ... may not this remnant be descendants of the Monomotapa people, and those the Mashonas call '*Abberlemba*'? (Anderson 1888:384; cf Price 1954; [my italics]).

The German explorer Mauch (1874), credited with the 'discovery' of Great Zimbabwe, noted that, 'It is firmly believed that in former times white men had lived in this area' Parfitt (1992:80) is of opinion that Anderson's Abberlomba are Lemba and that Mauch's White men could also be Lemba⁵⁸. This leads Parfitt to the conclusion that at the beginning of this century at least the Lemba were still called *valungu* – White men, which also means: 'spirits of the dead' or even 'gods' (Parfitt 1992:80).

Nevertheless, writing in 1894, the German missionary the Reverend Schlömann, who studied the Malepa (Lemba) of Northern Transvaal, maintained that the Lemba had lived in the area between the Zambezi and the Limpopo rivers during the eighteenth century and that those in the Transvaal had previously migrated from the region in Zimbabwe. Schlömann was probably one

⁵⁷ Cf the word Mwenye or Mwenya (another name for the Lemba) which means in the Swahili language 'one who owns something' (Othenius 1938:69).

⁵⁸ Numerous scholars (cf Van Warmelo 1935:122,283; De Vaal 1947; 1958; Mullan 1969:83; Gayre of Gayre 1972; Mathivha 1992) and the Lemba themselves connect them in one way or another to the building of Great Zimbabwe. Motenda-Mbelingwa (1958:62) explains the Lemba meaning for the name 'Zimbabwe': *Dzimba*=houses; *Mabwe*=stones. Therefore, the name should be: *Dzimba-Mabwe*, 'houses of stones' (cf *Photo 25*). According to him the first Europeans were unable to pronounce both names properly together, so they said: '*Zimbabwe*'. Mathivha (1992:1-7) records that at a specific stage in their history (300-200 BC) the Basena were guided to a particular place by a star. Here on top of a hill they built a fort and a place of worship. The Tovhakale, Tovakale or Thobakgale lineage were especially famous for their stone masonry. In fact, the name means *Nhovele wa kare*, *Thovhela-wa-kale* or *Thobela-wa-kgale*, which is 'king of long ago'. Tovakare is also called 'Makudo-a-Zimbabwe', which means that the Tovakare men 'climbed the walls like monkeys or baboons when they were building the walls.'

Summers (in Mullan 1969:9) comments about the Lemba as possible Zimbabwean builders that[t]he Lemba have undoubted connections with the Arabs and they may well have inherited some of the secrets of masonry ... it may be that the Lemba provided the technical skill The discrete groups of Lemba have common ideas which separated them from people among whom they live ... their physical features (preserved by marriage) are distinctly Semitic: above all they are exceptionally good craftsmen in iron and bronze as well as in pottery. The building of Zimbabwe presented many technical problems which they are more likely to have been able to solve than their Venda, Karanga, Rozwi, Duma or other Shona neighbours.

of the first missionaries who had the opportunity to live among the Malepa and had a chance to observe and record their special customs (cf Winter 1912:90; De Vaal 1958:51; Marole 1969:1,5-7; Mandivenga 1989:100,101). The Reverend Schlömann highlights that they held prayer meetings more frequently than other natives, they used a special language⁵⁹ of which they don't know the meaning themselves and that they concluded their prayers, addressed to the ancestors, by the Hebrew word 'amena' (cf Jaques 1931:249; Mphelo 1936:42; Motenda-Mberengwa 1940:66,70; De Vaal 1958:54; Gotein 1969:231-235; Marole 1969:5). He also mentions that the number 7 is sacred to them, that they earlier had a fasting ceremony and that they bury their people differently from the other tribes.

In 1908 (:278) Junod was of opinion that the Lemba reached the Selati district (near Leydsdorp) before the Ba-Thonga – that is at the end of the eighteenth century. In his view there was no doubt that the Lemba had been submitted to *Semitic influences* and that they were in contact with Muslims. One can deduce that he does not necessarily equate the Semitic influence and the contact with the Moslems in this instance. He noted that it is with remarkable obstinacy that they preserved some striking habits and customs from these influences earlier in their history. Junod (1908:278) mentioned, among others, the following characteristics of the Lemba which he observed: He stressed that the Lemba bled animals and only eat meat that is *kosher* killed⁶⁰ by a Mulemba, they did not eat pork⁶¹ and practised *ngoma* (circumcision; cf Le Roux 1997:499). He observed that they keep these customs without knowing why and that it only became for them a national habit to *preserve their identity as tribe*.⁶² Another custom is that they keep every new moon which they could observe before the non-Lemba (heathen, Vhazendji). Junod (1908:238) adds that the shaving of the head is 'for the Suto and the Thonga' a principal sign of mourning and that this custom accentuates some of the many differences between the Lemba and the other tribes (cf Stayt 1931). For the Lemba it is clearly a symbol of cleanliness and of festivity, and (according to them) because they are a wise people. Another sacred principle for the Lemba is not to intermarry⁶³ with other tribes. Junod (1908) also describes the *crafts and industries* of the Lemba, the skill of the women in making *earthenware* and the remarkable *metallurgical technique* of the men. He also mentions that most of the Lemba's merchandise often consisted of *medicine*.

⁵⁹ Cf Junod 1908:277; Lestrade [1927]1960:xxviii-xxxix; Jaques 1931:245-247; Stayt 1931:235; Motenda-Mberengwa 1940:67; Mphelo 1936:36; Van Warmelo 1935:122; Thompson 1942:76; De Vaal 1942:49; Von Sicard 1952:167; Price 1954:36; Gayre of Gayre 1965:241; Jenkins 1995:1126.

⁶⁰ Cf Wangemann 1868:436; Theal [1898-1903]1964d:371; Von Sicard 1952:161; Gotein 1969:231; Jaques 1931:246; Stayt 1931:235; Van Warmelo 1935:122.

⁶¹ Cf Schlömann 1894:67; Theal [1898-1903]1964d:351,371; Wessmann 1908:129; Stayt 1931:235; Jaques 1931:246; Van Warmelo 1935:122; Motenda-Mberengwa 1940:65; Mphelo 1936:41; Von Sicard 1952:147; De Vaal 1958:57.

⁶² Could the same not be said of the Israelite clans at the period of the Judges (religious mingling; cf Chapter Seven).

⁶³ Cf Theal [1898-1903]1964d:222; Wessmann 1908:129,130; Stayt 1931:233,234; Jaques 1931:246; Van Warmelo 1935:122; Mphelo 1936:41; Motenda-Mberengwa 1940:65,66; Thompson 1942:79; Von Sicard 1952:142,161; De Vaal 1958:59; Janzen 1982:4,5,42.

Junod (1908:286) concluded that the advent of the European civilisation was rather disastrous to the Balemba, because European wares and wire were surplanting theirs, and Christianity caused them to lose their special characteristics. He stressed that on the one hand, the Balemba did not seem to have kept the slightest trace of their faith in Allah, but on the other, that their *Semitic* habits show that 'Mahommedanism' has a wonderful grasp on the native mind.

In the same year Wessmann (1908:129-132) observed that

[o]ne cannot avoid the often striking similarities between the African and the Jewish types. Again and again we find laws and customs amongst the African which force the impression that there has been at some former time some kind of connection between the Blacks and the *ancient Hebrews*. In the Balemba tribe, one may find especially distinct traces of such a contact or connection. Reminders of this tribe are found amongst the Bawenda as well as in Rhodesia, and (as I have been told) particularly in the Congo

[H]ere they keep strictly *separated* from the Bawenda, and will hardly allow any *marriage* of one of their family to a Bawenda They also have the *circumcision*, and claim a *certain authority* before the others; and although they are subjects to the Bawenda, they will rarely or never do socage for them. They *eat no pork*, and avoid all meat of *animals* which have *cloven hoofs*, and animals which do not *chew the cud* They do not touch the meat of *fallen animals* *kill* the animals according to the Jewish rite, as if to render it 'kosher'. Formerly they were, a great *commercial people*, and there still exists among them, as well as the Bawenda, that ancient Israelite law, the '*Levirate marriage*'.

There are also *proverbs and peculiarities* in actions which strongly savour of Israelite and Biblical soil. Thus stories and tales from the Old Testament are without difficulty translatable into the language of these tribes. The conditions also throw some light upon the meaning of different expressions and names in the Bible. For instance, the statement in the Bible relating to the different names of the father-in-law of Moses, or the expression 'brothers of Jesus' which gives rise to so many objections on the part of the uninitiated. For all cousins, male or female, from the mother's family are called brothers and sisters, as well as the children of the many wives of one man. The Hebrew also performs his important *work in the morning*, and as in Israel all *law business is transacted sitting*. Further, the tales of the blacks are always very voluble and full of parables and word-pictures. *At the gate*, as it was in Israel, public opinion is formed.... As only recently, after lengthy researches, the original relationship of the Semitic and Indo-Germanic languages has been proved, in the same way science will at some future time report on the relationship of these languages to the Semitic. Only to mention one feature: as in the Hebrew, one finds in these languages the same original forms of deflection and a wealth of deflected original forms ([my italics]; cf Hendrickx 1991).

The ethnologist, Bullock ([1927]1950:22), is also of the opinion that the Lemba were the descendants of a Semitic race, probably Arab, who had come inland from Kilwa or Zanzibar, trading or raiding. Bullock ([1927]1950:22; cf Wangemann 1868:437; Schlömann 1894:68; Theal [1898-1903]1964d:213,223; Stayt 1931:234; De Vaal 1958:55,59; Van Warmelo 1966:273) is convinced that the custom of the Lemba of interring their deceased in a cavity in the wall of the grave pit (in which the corpse was laid to rest fully stretched), is of Muslim influence. However, this specific custom was, to a certain extent, also found among early Israel (cf De Vaux 1973:56; 4.3.1). A few years later Jaques (1931:245-251) added that the Lemba of Northern Transvaal buried their dead fully stretched out facing their direction from origin, namely north of the Limpopo of Southern Rhodesia.

In 1931 (:245-251) Junod again noted that the Lemba were anxious to preserve their tribal and ritual purity and stressed that they were sufficient 'traders'. A man of importance is shown

great respect when he is addressed as *mušavi* (buyer; cf Tonga – *šava* ‘buy’ a connection has also been suggested with Saba, Sheba; Van Warmelo 1935:122), *nyakuwana* (‘the man who finds the things which are bought’) or *mulungu*, probably ‘White man’ or ‘the man from the North’.

Jaques (1931:248) contributes by adding family traditions which bear witness to the commercial activities of the old Lemba:

[A]n ancestor of Mosheh [an informant], called Mbalanyika, was given the nickname of Gumboyi ‘leg’, because he used to travel much on business. When people mocked him because he did not plough and did not even possess a hoe, he used to say, *Gumboyi baaza, mašango nda feza* ‘My leg is my hoe, I walk about to every country’ [my insertion].

This Lemba forerunner of the commercial traveller, evidently found it more profitable to devote his whole time to trade rather than to agriculture (see *Photo's 40-42*).

An outstanding feature of the Lemba which was recorded in 1894 by Schlömann and others (1894:64; cf Stayt 1931:234; Jaques 1931; Junod 1908; Huffman 1984:593-612; Parfitt 1992) is that ‘they are the only African tribal group in this country which practises circumcision. Other groups who now practise it have almost invariably been influenced by the Lemba.’ And Stayt (1931:234) also remarked: ‘Every MuLemba boy must be circumcised at puberty.... I tentatively suggest that the BaLemba introduced circumcision to all the tribes in the Transvaal.’ This might be true in the (former) Transvaal but earlier missionaries, travellers and others (mainly in the Cape; 16th and 17th centuries’) observed that groups such as the Xhosa, Khoikhoi and Zulus similarly had the circumcision ceremony (cf Chapter Two).

Many scholars have little doubt that the Venda were introduced to circumcision by the Lemba. But Jaques (1931:247) commented: ‘They [the Lemba] play a prominent part as surgeons and medicine men in the circumcision ceremonies practised by the Venda, Tonga and Suto of the northern Transvaal.... [my insertion].’ And Junod observed that his informant was convinced

that the Balemba have brought it into the country, and that the Suto and even the Tonga have borrowed the custom from them. It is true, at any rate, for the great BaVenda tribe. When Ramapulana, the grandfather of the present Venda tribe, was living, he strongly objected to the *ngoma* (circumcision lodge) being introduced amongst his people. But his son Makhado got into the circumcision lodge, and was initiated. His father said: ‘He has become a Mulemba, kill him.’ But the people had pity on him, and when he became chief the nation adopted the new rite (1908:44; cf Parfitt 1992:49; [my italics]).

Thomas Huffman (1984:593-612), Professor of African Archaeology, at the University of the Witwatersrand, explains a good deal about the organisation of structures at Great Zimbabwe in terms of circumcision and initiation schools. His argument is that since such schools now exist among the Venda – a tribe more likely than any other in his view to have had something to do with the Great Zimbabwe culture – such schools must have existed at Great Zimbabwe. Using the same argument, Parfitt (1992:50) suggests that one could conclude that since the Lemba were a circumcising caste among the Venda, they may well have played a similar role in Great Zimbabwe. Huffman, however, uses the *domba* (initiation school) from amongst the Venda as a model to

explain the interpretation and the function of certain structures at the Great Zimbabwean complex, and *not the murundu* (school of circumcision; Boeyens 1997).

Van Warmelo (1935:122 and 1937) describes the Lemba as, ethnologically speaking, one of the most important tribes of South Africa and indexed them as one of the five main Bantu tribes of South Africa (cf Van Warmelo 1977). He is convinced that they are, beyond all doubt, Semites who have gradually drifted thus far to the South.

In 1936 Mphelo (a Lemba) commented that although little had come to light on their origin, they remained wanderers who at least before 1835 had migrated into the Transvaal.

In his turn, Leo Frobenius (1938:162) describes the more 'recent' history of the Lemba as descendants of nomads, who spread from the 'Pungwe River in Mozambique, Vhendaland in Northern Transvaal and from the north of the Limpopo River.' He informs that two groups lived among the Venda in Northern Transvaal (present-day Northern Province), two groups were found between the Nuanetsi and Ingezi (Southern Rhodesia), and one group lived in a nook between the Sabi and Rusape Rivers in Southern Rhodesia. He also submits that the Lemba used to pay tribute to the Karanga kings (Mambos), but they always reserved the right to move from one area to another. He stresses the fact that the Lemba designated all uncircumcised people, including their women, as *Vhasenzi*. Frobenius emphasises, the restlessness of the Lemba, their constant *longing to travel* and the importance to them, to preserve the purity of their tribe and of their culture with profound tenacity, and even with fanaticism.

In 1942 Thompson came to a somewhat different conclusion, that the Lemba are somewhat like the Falasha, the 'Black Jews' in Ethiopia and could perhaps have originated from an Abyssinian tribe, the Waklimi in the Sofala and stresses that the Lemba could have both an Islamic element, as well as a Jewish component. Von Sicard (1952) adds to this notion by submitting that the Lemba descend from the Zambezi Sena (who had been influenced by Islam; 19th century) and a much smaller group of Abyssinian Black Jews or Falasha.

Chigiga's study in 1972 concludes that Lemba had been employed by Arabs to look for gold and that Sena (on the Zambezi) had been a place where they stayed before their wanderings as traders. He also provides information on the seven laws to be recited during their circumcision ceremonies in the Gutu District (Zimbabwe). While most of the laws are couched in an unfamiliar language, he states that the fifth law is pure Arabic: *Bismillah Allahu Akbar* (in the name of God, God is most great), uttered by Muslims whenever they pray. The indication of the Gutu District is of significance here. The Muslim influence could only be due to the fact that the Gutu District is the main Muslim centre where, in comparison with the rest of the Lemba in Zimbabwe and South Africa, only a small group of Lemba were converted to this religious group. In contradiction to the conclusion of Chigiga I found during my field research that many other Lemba in the Gutu District and elsewhere indicated that they do not want to be associated with the Muslim whatsoever.

Beach (1980:307) describes the ancestors of the Lemba as Shona-speaking, Sena-speaking or Swahili-speaking Muslims who crisscrossed the Mutapa empire as traders during the 16th and 17th centuries and who initially crossed the Limpopo into 'Northern Transvaal' (present-day Northern Province) but later returned to settle in Mberengwa again.

In 1983 and in 1989 (:108,109) Mandivenga, to my mind, mistakenly judge that most of the Lemba in Zimbabwe are Muslim and refer to the conversion of the small group of Lemba to the Muslim faith, as the re-Islamisation of the Varembe. He concludes that the Semitic influences among the Lemba are Islamic, and not Jewish.

Recently, Mathivha (1992:5) records that the Sadhiki lineage which succeeded the Hadzhi dynasty in Mberengwa first moved southwards to the Dumbwi (Dumbghe, cf *Photo 30*) Mountain (100-50⁶⁴ BC) and then went into the Limpopo valley (in the Northern Transvaal) in order to be nearer to the copper ore. This group built another big village where they smelted iron, gold, copper and silver and called it 'Mapungubwe' (i.e. 'the stones flowed like a liquid'). From Mapungubwe, he said, they migrated in an easterly direction until they joined another group of Basena from Mashonaland and settled at Dzata (50 AD; cf Lestrade [1927]1960:24; cf *Photo 23*). Mathivha points out that here again they built with stones as they did in Dumbghe and Great Zimbabwe. De Vaal ([s a]d:2) is convinced that the Lemba were also involved in the building of the walls at Machedema (north of the Soutpansberg Mountain; cf *Photo 24*).

In the light of recent archaeological evidence from Mapungubwe and Great Zimbabwe it seems more likely, that a group from Mapungubwe moved northwards to assist in the building of Great Zimbabwe. Mapungubwe and Great Zimbabwe are some of the best dated archaeological areas in Southern Africa. The occupation of the Mapungubwe dates from about the 10th to the 12th century AD (Fagan 1970:173-199). These accounts also indicate that the explanation of the name Mapungubwe is rather the 'place of the jackal'. There is also no evidence that the Mapungubwe kingdom came into being at the beginning of the era, as Mathivha indicates, and even less evidence that the Lemba can be linked to this. According to oral traditions of the Venda, a near contemporary witness, as well as radiocarbon datings, the occupation of Dzata by the Singo already commenced in the second half of the seventeenth century AD. There is no evidence that Dzata was already occupied by the Venda and Lemba in 50 AD (cf Fagan 1970:173-199; Boeyens 1997).

Parfitt (1992:249-250), tracing it way back in history, has no doubt about the similarities between the practices of the 'Moors' and the Lemba, and in particular their enthusiasm for lunar festivals and circumcision. According to him (1992:79), various oral traditions agree that the Lemba and Venda came to the South together and that the Lemba actually guided the Venda and told them where to go. The Lemba knew the routes south, probably as traders or because of their magical powers. Lestrade ([1927]1960:28) assures, however, that the Lemba came from groups

⁶⁴ Mathivha, however, does not provide any reasons for this date.

allied to the Karanga groups and that they have settled in Venda territory 'in comparatively recent times'.

3.2.3.1 *The 'genealogies' and more recent accounts on the history of the different Lemba clans*

On account of the fact that the Lemba were traders or wanderers their history differs from clan to clan. A reconstruction depends solely on oral traditions and therefore only a few 'genealogies' (without references to any dating) and histories could be traced. Connoway (1976; 1978; cf Von Sicard 1962; Chigaga 1972; Chapter Four) refers to the 'genealogies' of at least nine groups of Lemba: the Nyakavhi clan, the Hadzhi clan, the Bakali clan, the Sadiki clan, the Buba clan, the Hamisi clan, the Tovhakhali clan, the Mhani clan and lastly the Bhenga, Hasane, Ngavhi, Maange and Salifo clans. Other divisions of Lemba clans are also possible and do in fact exist (cf Chapter Four).

It is clear from this division that the Lemba is comprised of different clans and that every clan has its own historical and genealogical background. The traditions of each clan played a role in their identity formation but yet they all were known as the Lemba. In time they will have to adjust to each other, differences will apparently blur and they will move across boundaries to remain or become 'one' (cf Chapter Nine).

From the 'genealogy' and history of the Nyakavhi clans⁶⁵ recorded by Connoway, the inference could be drawn that *Ya swoswe* (in the footnote) is most probably a reference to a place near Sena on the Zambezi (cf Stayt 1931:237). In the meantime, the informant Phophi died, but he still recorded clear traditions of their Israelite origins and specific customs from their ancestors.

⁶⁵ [T]he founder of the Nyakavhi (also called the Razwimisani), a Lemba who lived at Vhuhindi Nyakvhi moved from Vhuhindi to mBila *ya swoswe*, a place between Mozambique and Rhodesia. He died at mBila *ya swoswe*.... His oldest son was called Seremane; he lived at Bela. He moved from there on account of commercial considerations to Tshilamba.... His son, Ngonga, moved.... to Makovha.... Ngonga's son, Lumunda, moved from Makovha in Southern Rhodesia to Venda and founded a settlement, Makovha, in commemoration of the Makovha in Rhodesia.

At Makovha in Rhodesia the Nyakavhi's came into contact with the Venda. This was near Venda's Dzata in Rhodesia. On account of disputes the Lumunda left the Venda and moved southwards to the second Makovha south of the Luvhuvhu River His son Netshapfumba, left Makovha because he was attracted to the gold mines at Tshinavheni (near Giyani in Gazankulu). At Tshinavheni Netshapfumba and his people practised their expertise as *goldsmiths and potters* the followers of the Nyakavhi moved under the leadership of Netshapfumba's son, Gangazhe to Tsoni.... His son, Ratundu, moved to the Makonded district in Venda, and settled at Matavhelami.

[Here] the Lemba was attacked by the Mphaphuli forces [and they] fled to Tshatsimba in Tshakuma. Ratundu moved back to Rhodesia where he settled under the captain Makuvhile After the attacks by the Ndebele of Moselekatse, his son, Phophi, fled from Mashona Land southwards to Vhufuli in Venda His son, Tongabona, moved from Vufuli to Makonde He had a son by the name of Vhushetsho Wilfred Phophi, who was his successor (Connoway 1978:35; [my italics and translation]).

On the Hadzhi clan Connoway reports

Traditions has it that the founder of the clans was known as Nkalahonye. Nkalahonye's son, Tshinyamaseto, led by Dimbanyika (father of the legendary Thoho-ya-Ndou) emigrated with the Venda to the Singo tribe from Rhodesia [from the mountain Mbelengwa] and went to live in the Nzelele Valley, where they built Dzata.... Since this area was so beautiful, [Tshinyamaseto] returned to Mbelengwa, and convinced other Lemba of the Tovhakhale, Sadike and the Mhani clans to move south. Tshinyamaseto died in the Nzelele Valley, and was succeeded by his son, Gwizi-gwa-Vhembe... he [was] succeeded by his son Livhoya. During the disputes which led to the destruction of Dzata, it was Livhoya who went to live at Swongozwi, a place near Louis Trichardt ... [and] he became good friend with Ramabulana, a Venda captain. In acknowledgement of this friendship he was given an area to control at Mara (Buffalo Valley). [H]e [was].... succeeded by his son Ndiliwahonye. After his death Makhado followed. He lived during the reign and exile of Chief Mphhephu. Makhado was succeeded by Maipane Frans Ndouvhada.

The other Hadzhi lines' history is a typical example of a clan with a heterogenous past (Connoway 1978:35,36; [my translation]).

Many of the Hadzhi's ancestors were buried at Buffalo Valley (Mara, near Elim in the Northern Province), and the Shimbani Mountain is one of their holy mountains where various religious ceremonies and rituals still take place. In fact it is on account of the history of this area and the sentiments attached to it, that the Lemba lay claim to this area, and are, until today, still negotiating on government level for an area of their own (cf 2.3.2).

According to Connoway (1978:36) the Bakhali clan came from Masenzhele to Venda, but not as one group: one of the Bakhali lines moved southwards and later another group moved with the Venda to Nzelele Valley and later on account of the wars they moved to Dzimauli. Here the two groups divided again, the one moved to Mahuvha and the other to Thengwe, Vhondwe and Tangaheni. Connoway, however, does not indicate where Masenzhele is.

On the Sadiki clan he collected that

[t]he name, Sadike, did not like the other clan names disappear in the course of time. Today there are numerous lines of the clan with the name of Sadike. Although this is the case, they cannot trace their genealogical connections to one another (Connoway 1978:37,38; [my translation]).

All the Sadiki's record today that they came from Rhodesia to Venda (Joseph Sadiki 1996).

According to the Lemba the Buba is the oldest and originally the priestly clan of the Lemba, and the tradition holds that they were actually led from Judaea to Yemen by a man named Buba. Experts among the Falasha in Ethiopia aver, according to Mathivha (1992; 1997), that 'Buba' is an aberration of the name 'Juda'. DNA results, specifically involving the Buba clan, only became known in 1998 and 1999 (cf 3.3.1.1; cf *Photo 13*). This means that the Lemba already had these traditions on the Buba as the priestly clan before the genetic tests had been done, which show their concurrences with the Jewish priests elsewhere.

More recently, the Buba clan lived at Nyaodha in the Mbelengwa district (Rhodesia). Connoway (1978:38) records that

a [s]ection of the clans moved from there to Madzivhanombe. The latter is a mountain in Giyani. From there they migrated to Luvhimbi (near Makonde). The leader there was Tshirumbule. [His] successor [was] Itani and [his] successor was, Swiswi, they all had chieftain status (subservient to a Venda chief). After Swiswi's death a Venda took over the chieftainship. Swiswi's successor (not a chief) was Maanzhi, the father of Maphwanya, the father of Nthangeni and Ambani. Maphwanya and his sons lived at Miluwani near Sibasa....

Another section of the Bhubha clan, the Matshili's, trekked from Nyaodha to Dzinghae in Venda. On account of the wars amongst the Venda of Mphaphuli, they moved to chief Mphigalale (under the leadership of chief Tshivhase) in Vhufula, and lived there. After the wars they went to Ngwenani and eventually again to Dzinghae. From there some moved to Mbahe [my translation].

Presently, the greatest concentration of the Buba clan can be found in India Village, in Sekhukhuneland (present-day Province of Mpumalanga) and Shiyandima (in present-day Northern Province).

Connoway (1978:39) further records that the Hamisi clan came from an area next to Mountain Makotole, as well as from a place named Bhela (in Rhodesia). From there they moved to Makonde. From Makonde

[t]hey moved from there past Malungudi to Makonde. From Makonde the Mailanombes trekked away to Tshiombo. The Rasilingwani line migrated to Muvhuya and the Ngwana line to Thenzhani. The Rasilingwani line moved from Muvhuyu to Ngwenani. With the outbreak of the war between Mphaphu and the White people, they fled to Lunungwi, where they lived for two years. After the wars they moved back to Ngwenani. From there they trekked to Vuvha. Because the White people began to buy farms in that area, they went to live at Tshilivho.

The history of the Moeti line could also be partly traced. According to Hendrik Moeti they moved from Vhukalanga to the Transvaal, on account of trade considerations. Later they moved from an unknown place in Venda on account of the wars amongst the Venda, to an area near Elim [my translation].

Today, Samuel Moeti, a Member of Parliament in the Northern Province (cf *Photo 34*), lives on his farm in Elim. This is very close to the farm Sweet Waters where the Lemba annually have their LCA Conferences. A farmer, Henning, kindly gave them permission to use his farm for their meetings where they erected a permanent structure for themselves, to use as an annual gathering place.

As far as the Tovhakhali clan is concerned, Connoway (1978:40) mentions the following tradition:

The Tovhakhale clan trekked from Busena and Tshamulungwana in Rhodesia (near Mbelengwa) to Tshingoma and thereafter to Messina in the Transvaal. They were the first people who excavated the mines at Messina. Some of them trekked from Messina to the Mountain Mashau in the south of Venda, since the land there was more suited to agriculture.

As was the case of the Sadikis, there are still lines who presently carry the original clan name [my translation].

Busena is most probably the same as Basena. Much have been written on the so-called 'copperminers' of Musina (cf Van Warmelo 1940).

A group of the Mhani clan,

reached Luonde in Venda Land by the time the Venda had already settled there. They originated from Muthavhanane, a place near Mbelengwa. According to an informant the Lemba clans lived amongst one another when they still lived in Rhodesia. For instance the Mhani clan lived amongst the Tovhakhale's. The only line of whom a genealogy can still be traced, was the Phathela line (Connoway 1978:40; [my translation]).

One of the leading Lemba at the LCA Conferences, is Chaplain Mhani, who usually open the occasion with Scripture reading and prayer (cf *Photo 11*). The selection of Scripture is usually taken from the Old Testament.

Finally, the Bhenga, Hasane, Ngavhi, Maange and Salifo clans:

About these clans, no substantial information could be gleaned, since their current membership are relatively small, and they live over a wide area. Thus it is difficult to get into touch with them. Besides this, the members of these clans are young, and they could hardly provide any useful information in this regard (Connoway 1978:40; [my translation]).

Today the greatest concentration of Lemba are still to be found in the southern parts of Zimbabwe amongst the Shona and in the Northern Province (RSA) amongst the Venda, in Mpumalanga (RSA) in Sekhukhuneland amongst the Sotho and in the Mara and Elim districts (also amongst the Sotho). Mountains usually played a central role in the areas where they lived or to which they moved and settled.

Various interviews were conducted during my field research in the Soutpansberg (Northern Province) which included people who grew up with the Lemba in that area, or who were in daily contact with them. Among these were the Lemba and Venda art collectors, Victor Madden, Karen Marais (on the farm Studholme) and Dr Smalle (on the farm Hilltop), as well as Piet Wessels (farmer) and Piet van den Berg (a principal in the former Venda). They especially testify of the uniqueness of the Lemba and their exclusive customs.

According to Norbert Hahn, a botanist, a number of plants reached the Soutpansberg Mountains by means of the Lemba's trade and other connections with the Arabs. There is a whole story to be told about the Arabian and other plants which can be found in these mountains. According to him most of these plants were probably imported for use in their cultic practices. Once again, it is striking how even this aspect has certain points of contingency with the oral tradition of the Lemba and other groups.

To conclude: Estimates of the size of the Lemba people vary greatly. Schapera ([1937]1946:65) wrote: 'Some hundreds of adult males in the Union [and] in Southern Rhodesia... 1500 males...' Blacking (1967:41) estimated: 'There are probably no more than about 2 000 Lemba living scattered or in little pockets among the Venda ... few others may be found in different parts of the Transvaal...' and the Rand Daily Mail of 15 September 1982 spoke rather extravagantly of 'South Africa's 250,000 "black Jews" the Lemba' Today, in the vicinity of Sekhukhuneland (Mpumalanga) alone, there are about 10 000 – 20 000 Lemba, in the former

Venda another 30 000 and in the southern parts of Zimbabwe there are at least another 20 000 Lemba. These numbers exclude the Lemba in the rest of South Africa, Zimbabwe and Mozambique. In an article we (Thomas 1999 et al; [in press]) estimated the total of the Lemba today on about 50 000, but it could even be more. However, Mathivha (1999b) considers it to be about 250 000.

3.3 THEORIES OF ORIGIN

To a certain extent all early traditions of the Lemba tell the same story. The consensus of opinion among all the researchers who have studied seriously this people, has been that there are Semitic elements in their ancestry (cf Schlömann 1894; Wilmot 1896; Dyke Neuk 1923; Bullock [1927]1950; Junod 1908; Stayt 1931:237; Van Warmelo 1935; Schapera [1937]1960 etc). Although, one of the main differences of opinion about the Lemba is whether they are Islamic or pre-Islamic in origin. Very few scholars even consider the possibility of a pure Bantu origin. Connaway (1976:11ff) discerns between three different schools of thought concerning the specific nature of the Semitic culture involved in the origin on the Lemba: (i) a pre-Islamic-Judaic-Arabic origin, (ii) an Islamic-Arabic origin and (iii) a Falasha-Abyssinic origin.

3.3.1 A pre-Islamic-Judaic-Arabic origin

Gayre of Gayre (1972:199) holds that available evidence is consistent with a pre-Islamic and Judaised Arab origin. He believes that the Lemba's history can specifically be traced back to the pre-Islamic Saba (or Sheba) in Yemen, which was converted to Judaism (cf Junod 1908:277; Van Warmelo [1937]1974). Gayre of Gayre (1972:134) contends that the evidence of the Lemba tradition leaves no room for doubt that the only time when Judaised Arabs could have settled in the Himyarite colonies in East Africa and former Rhodesia to give birth to this cross-bred people, was around the *sixth century AD*. This happened before the Arabs were Christian or pagan, and afterwards Muslim. He (1972:131,132; cf Hall 1909:364,366) further argues that the Lemba have very clear traces of Jewish religion for example circumcision and their *kosher* laws, as well as very strong *Armenoid racial traits* (cf De Vaal 1958:57; cf *Photo's* 32-36). These traits can still be seen amongst some of the Lemba: they are taller than other people, have prominent noses and are fair skinned.

To strengthen his argument, Gayre of Gayre (1967:6,7) suggests that the rejection of pork, or killing in the *kosher* manner by bleeding, would be a remarkable coincidence on its own, but when the prohibition from eating hares, rabbits, scaleless fish and carrion is added to the list,

the probability against coincidence is so great that we have to accept the fact that the Lembas observe the Mosaic code, and that we have to explain its occurrence among this small tribe of traders who have *Caucasoid genes* and live in northern Transvaal and some adjacent parts of Rhodesia. Moreover, only the Lembas bleed animals to death as enjoined by the Mosaic code, and this act is restricted by them to the circumcised [my italics].

At the beginning of this century Jaques (1931:248-250) could find no trace of 'Mohammedanism', in the Lemba's religious ceremonies as suggested by Junod. He did find, however, that they refer to Moses in their prayers and that their prayers were ended by the word 'Amin'⁶⁶. He also connects one of the clan or family names of the Lemba, the Sadiki, with the Hebrew צדיק (the righteous). Some of the other names he assumes could be Arabic or Bantu (cf Van Warmelo 1935; Von Sicard 1962). He, however, concludes that the Lemba show strong traces of 'considerable Semitic influence'.

In the light of the genetic research being done by Spurdle and Jenkins, they also, to a certain extent, support this theory of Gayre of Gayre (cf 3.3.1.1). They summarise the characteristics and history of the Lemba as follows (1996:1131): 'Jewish settlements were common in Yemen up to the 6th century AD (cf Baron 1952), although it is likely that some of these Jewish groups were Arab proselytes.' They are further convinced that certain features of Lemba culture would seem to suggest that Jewish ancestry is more likely than Arabic – a fact reflected in the present-day genetic profile of Yemenite Jews' (cf 3.3.1.1). They specifically refer to the practise of separating milk and meat, which is a dietary law, observed in Judaism and not in Islam. Nabarro (in Spurdle & Jenkins 1996:1131) further maintains that the method associated with male circumcision used by the Lemba 'differs markedly from that of Muslims, in that the incision is small and possibly similar to the mode of circumcision practiced in biblical times, before the introduction of more extensive circumcision during the Talmudic period' (Gutmann 1987; De Vaal 1958:57; Gayre of Gayre 1972; cf 7.1.1.1).

Hendrickx (1991:175-181) also considers this theory a possibility (but not without reservation). He observes the theory pointing to a pre-Islamic-Arab-Judaic origin as very interesting. He is convinced that 'one cannot assume that seemingly contradictory theories exclude each other ... the more sophisticated studies also came several times to a point where the Lemba's origin, when dissected in its ethnic religious, linguistic and cultural elements, seemed to find its roots, among others in Jewish *and* Arab phenomena at a very early stage' (in terms of this theory). In this regard he refers to the Annals of Oman, de Barros's Asia, Kitab al Zanj, Chronicles of Lamu, Pate and Kilwa, which all in conjunction with each other refer to the early Arab (Yemen) immigration to Africa (Mathews 1963:102-105).

3.3.1.1 *Relating oral history and historical facts to genetic data*

Although it is difficult to 'prove' the Semitic claims of the Lemba, genetic tests by Spurdle and Jenkins (1992; 1996; cf Gayre of Gayre 1967) from the South African Institute for Medical

⁶⁶ This word could also have been from Christian origin.

Research at the University of the Witwatersrand (Johannesburg), and Bradman (and Parfitt⁶⁷) from the Centre for Genetic Anthropology at University College, London, have shown interesting connections between the Lemba people and those from whom they claim to have originated. This is in contradistinction for example, to similar tests taken from the Falasha and other African peoples surrounding them.

According to currently available genetic evidence the proposed relationship between the Ethiopian Jews, the Lemba and the Jews in Israel, is highly questionable. Genetic studies (Mourant et al 1978; Zoosmann-Diskin [et al] 1991) indicate that the Ethiopian 'Jews' are similar to other Ethiopian populations. It exhibits a genetic profile that represents admixture of African and Caucasoid (probably Mediterranean) groups (cf Spurdle & Jenkins 1996:1131-1132).

Relating oral traditions and historical facts to the genetic tests by the University of the Witwatersrand, Spurdle and Jenkins summarise the history of the Lemba as follows (1996:1131,1132):

[J]ews are believed to have entered Yemen before the destruction of Jerusalem in the 6th century BC (Nyrop 1985), may well have been involved in trade at this stage (Wenner 1991), and certainly played a role in the crossroad of caravan routes during the 2d and 3d centuries A.D. Jewish settlements were common up to the 6th century A.D. (Baron 1952), although it is likely that some of these Jewish tribes were Arab proselytes (Baron 1952) – a fact reflected in the present-day genetic profile of Yemenite Jews, which shows them to be similar to their Arabic neighbors (Mourant et al. 1978; Livshits et al. 1991). Furthermore, Sa'na was a powerful city controlling trade routes of the Sabaean empire (Lewcock 1986), and Jews of Sa'na worked mostly as artisans and craftsmen, specializing in pottery and metalwork (Goitein 1971). Thus it is entirely possible that the ancestors of the Lemba were Jewish craftsmen and traders from Sa'na in Yemen. However, the migration of Semitic women with the Lemba is doubtful, since mtDNA variation in the Lemba [women] provides no evidence of Semitic admixture (Soodyall 1993; [my insertion]).

According to Spurdle and Jenkins, it is therefore, entirely possible, that ancestors of Lemba were Jewish craftsmen and traders from Yemen (600 AD and later), which constitute an oral tradition. The genetic results are also consistent with the oral tradition that only males came by boat to Africa and later had to take local wives. This study suggests both a Bantu and Semitic contribution to the Lemba gene pool (Spurdle & Jenkins 1996).

In order to provide a more detailed picture of the Lemba paternal genetic heritage, scholars (Thomas and others⁶⁸) 'analysed 399 Y chromosomes for six microsatellites and six biallelic

⁶⁷ Parfitt became a member of the Centre for Genetic Anthropology at University College, London in 1996.

⁶⁸ This specific genetic side of the investigation started when Dr Karl Skorecki, a kidney expert at the Technion – Israel Institute of Technology, was sitting in an Orthodox synagogue in Toronto (*Jerusalem Report*, May 1999). Skorecki, who is a כהן himself, wondered if a fellow כהן who was called to attend the first Torah reading, traditionally reserved for כהנים, might be distantly related to him, as the tradition of priestly descent from Aaron implied. He realised that it might be possible to check: Under religious law, כהן status is obtained through patrilineal inheritance. He contacted Dr Michael Hammer of the University of Arizona, an expert who studies the genetics of human populations through males, or then the Y-chromosome. He agreed to cooperate and at a later stage Skorecki, teamed up with Neil Bradman, chairman of the Center for Genetic Anthropology (continued...)

markers in six populations (Lemba, Bantu, Yemeni-Hadramaut, Yemeni-Sena, Sephardic Jews and Ashkenazic Jews).’ In 1996 Bradman and Parfitt collected 120 male DNA samples in the Hadramaut from Terim and Sena for this purpose (cf *Map I*). The results show a significant similarity between markers of many of the Hadramaut Y-chromosomes and those of the Lemba. Even genetic markers common in Jewish groups, including the Jewish priesthood (כהנים, in Israel and world-wide) show up both in the Hadrami DNA and in the Lemba. According to Parfitt (1997:343-345) these results could indicate that in the remote past Jews or descendants of Jews inhabited the Hadramaut and emigrated to the shores of Africa (cf *Map I*), but he does not indicate a specific date; not even BC or AD. This reflects a change in Parfitt’s earlier theory that the Lemba most probably underwent a religious shift (cf 2.2).

During my field study (1997/1998) I was asked by Parfitt and Bradman from the Centre for Genetic Anthropology at University College, London, to participate in the gathering of DNA samples (using saliva samples) of the Lemba in the southern parts of Zimbabwe and in South Africa (cf *Photo 52,52*). The results are due for publication (Thomas et al [1999]). From DNA samples, taken specifically from the Buba clan (the priestly clan), in Sekhukhuneland and elsewhere, a very close relation has emerged between them (the Buba) and those of the כהנים (Priesthood; singular כהן) in Israel (Bradman and Parfitt 1998; cf 9.1.2.6).

It should be clarified that the כהנים are not the same as rabbis. The latter are appointed functionaries while members of the priestly class inherit their position through the male line. The *leviim* or Levites are non-כהן members of the paternally defined priestly tribe of Levi.

In biblical tradition, Aaron, the brother of Moses, was the first priest (cf Nm 25). God awarded the priesthood to him and his sons, in other words, the priesthood is passed on through the Y-chromosome and there is no legitimate way in which a non-priest can become a priest. We reasoned that if tradition had been faithfully maintained, with the priesthood being passed, by and large, from father to son throughout the generations, an island of Y-chromosomes of Jewish priests would have been created within, but separated from a sea of non-priests. There is no way to identify the descendants of the priesthood except perhaps through their oral traditions and by the distinctive pattern on their Y-chromosomes.

The distinctive pattern predominantly found among members of the Jewish priesthood, the כהנים is called the *Cohen Modal Haplotype* (CHM).⁶⁸ This pattern of paternal inheritance (common set of genetic markers on the Y-chromosome) has preserved the CMH as a potential

⁶⁸ (...continued)

at University College, London. Thus the collection of DNA from Jewish males began – כהנים and members of the two ancient classes, Levites and Israelites. Parfitt, director of the Center for Jewish Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies, who has done research among the Lemba suggested that the Lemba should be included into this investigation.

⁶⁹ The set of *alleles* borne on one of a pair of homologous chromosomes. An *allele* is one of a number of alternative forms that can occupy a given genetic locus on a chromosome (Thomas et al 1998:33).

watermark for Judaism. The frequency of the CMH differs considerably among the three groups mentioned above (*kohanim*: 0.509, *leviim*: 0.037 and Israelites 0.118; Thomas et al 1999, [in press]). Equivalent figures for the frequency of the modal haplotype in the other populations are Ashkenazic Israelites 0.150, Sephardic Israelites 0.100, Yemeni 0.020, Sena 0.407 and Lemba 0.118. Specifically the samples taken from the Buba (the priestly clan of the Lemba), indeed showed a high frequency of this same pattern (CMH). In other words it was found that 45 percent of Ashkenazi priests and 56 percent of Sephardic priests have the *kohen genetic signature*, while in Jewish populations in general the frequency is 3 to 5 percent. Among the Lemba it is 8.8 percent, a similar frequency to the Israelites (Jewish males). Among the Buba, though, it is as high as 53.8 percent.

According to Thomas (et al 1998) these results are supportive evidence that there was a 'Jewish' element in the history of the Lemba and it could have been 3,000 years ago. Hammer (Turetsky, *Jerusalem Report*, May 1999), a world expert in evolutionary genetics at the University of Arizona (Tucson), says

it is incredible exciting to find something that could be tracing paternally-inherited traits over 40 to 50 generations, three or four thousand years of history. This is the first time ever we have been able to make a correlation with the ethnographic record over this time scale. Some people keep records that go back three, may be four generations. But 50 generations!

In 1999 Thomas (et al, [in press]) adds that

the genetic evidence revealed in this study is consistent with a Lemba history involving an origin in a Jewish population outside Africa, male mediated gene flow from other Semitic immigrants and admixture with Bantu neighbours. All three groups are likely to have been contributors to the Lemba gene pool and there is no need to postulate an either/or question of Arab versus Judaic contributions to that gene pool; both are likely to have occurred.

Furthermore, Thomas emphasises that the presence of the CMH in the Buba could, however, 'have an *exclusively* Judaic origin' [my italics]. This information is once again consistent with the oral traditions of the Lemba and specifically the Buba tribe (cf 3.2.3.1; 9.1.2.6).

It is evident that the Lemba are accepted by some authorities in Israel as Jewish even before the latest genetic results were made known. This is to some extent in contradiction to Parfitt and others who earlier discern a negative attitude by the Israeli Government towards groups in Africa, who regard themselves as Jewish. How widely the Lemba are accepted as Jews, I am not too sure, but a letter from Rabbi David Marciano Ben Yishai (distributed by Mathivha, president of the Lemba Cultural Association [LCA] in April 1997) officially declared that the Lemba of Southern Africa were Jews, and insisted that they should be treated as such by all their Jewish institutions worldwide. He said they should now begin the process of returning the Lemba Jews to the mainstream of world Jewry. He further decreed that they should help the Lemba Jews in every

way to realise their identity as an authentic 'tribe of Jews'. This is of course biased evidence that could not yet be checked with the Rabbi and the authorities he represents.

In 1999 after the remarkable genetic results were made known in the *New York Times* (Wade, 9 May 1999) and the *Jerusalem Report* (10 May 1999; e-mailed by Turetsky) some Jewish rabbis and other interested Jews worldwide announced that they will in the very near future send representatives to the different Lemba communities in Southern Africa (Levi, e-mail communication, 1999). However, the article in the *Jerusalem Report* entails a letter received by Bradman from an adviser to British Chief Rabbi, Jonathan Sacks, saying he rejects genetic testing in determining Jewish status. Presumably, Israel's Chief Rabbi would give the same answer. The 'Who's a Jew' issue, says Bradman, 'is a matter for the rabbis. Not for scientists'.

At least the inference can be drawn from the genetic results that it is in concurrence with the oral traditions of the Lemba.

3.3.1.2 Criticism on the pre-Islamic-Judaic-Arabic theory

Connaway (1978:32) gives credit to Gayre of Gayre's criticism on the theory of Mullan (cf 3.3.2), but considers Gayre of Gayre's justification for a pre-Islamic past for the Lemba as ungrounded. He (1978:32) criticises the fact that Gayre of Gayre jumps to the conclusion that because the Lemba have additional food taboos on the eating of hares, rabbits and scaleless fish, the Lemba observe a Mosaic code and, therefore, do have pre-Islamic ancestors. Connaway (1978:32) maintains that in the same way, he could connect the Lemba's totem, the elephant to the Muslim religion, which considers the elephant as a holy animal – not to be eaten.⁷⁰

Nevertheless, Connaway (1978:33; cf Parfitt 1992:249-250) also criticises Gayre of Gayre (1972) and De Vaal (1958:57) that they consider the circumcision rite as typical Jewish. He maintains that circumcision is also practised by the Muslim and also during puberty, like the Lemba, and 'not 7 days after birth like the Jews.' Price (1954:33) in his study on the Islam in Malawi, however, states that the Lemba do not circumcise their boys during puberty as the other Bantu groups, but as infants. Phophi and others also indicated that earlier they circumcised their boys on the 8th day, but now other groups influenced them to do it later.⁷¹

Hendrickx (1991:181) in turn, gives credit to Gayre of Gayre's facts, as far as the rule of Dhú Nuwás and the consequent war with the Ethiopians are concerned, the existence of a type of Mosaic Code (cf Lv 9:3-10,39) amongst the Lemba as well as some Ethiopian and/or Sabaeen influence in old Rhodesia are arguments in favour of his (Gayre of Gayre's) theory. However, Hendrickx surmises that there is not enough evidence for the alleged flight of the 'Jewish'

⁷⁰ This is no valid argument since the Lemba as such do not consider the elephant as a holy animal.

⁷¹ Cf Phophi's 'report' in Chapter Four.

Yemenites to East Africa, and says that the question of Himyarite colonialisation are still controversial. But in general Hendrickx could concur with this theory.

3.3.2 An Islamic-Arabic origin

Stayt (1931:231-238) is convinced that the Lemba are really the descendants of Arab traders who took wives from the races with whom they traded, that they were associated with Sena and had Arabic or Swahili derived names such as Seremane, Hadji and Salifo (cf Othenius 1938:70; Mphelo 1936). He (1931:238; cf Mullan 1969:9ff; Connaway 1976:12,24) connects the identification of the Emozaid (Islamic) with the Lemba. He quotes an Arab writer, Dimashqui, who wrote *circa* 1320, that 'the inland of Quambalu (Madagascar) had a negro Mohammedan population of the Zaidite and Shafite sects.' McCall Theal (in Stayt 1931:231) comments that at the time of the arrival of the Portuguese 'there were feuds between nearly all of the Mohammedan settlements on the coast ... it was at Sofala. Acote was at the head of a party at variance with Mengo Musafi ... very likely Acote was made Sheik of the Emozaid, as he is stated to have been of that sect, and Suleiman – Sheik of the other Mohammedans.'

Mullan (1969:19) draws the attention to the way 'all of them [Mposi's people and Ba-Mwenye] ... greet one another as "Musoni" which appears to be a corruption for "Sunni" – the name used from the beginning of their faith, by all who regarded themselves as orthodox Mohammedans.' Mullan's arguments are mainly based on customs, oral traditions, linguistic interpretations and historical chronicles (Hendrickx 1991:12).

Bullock ([1927]1950:45) writes of the Lemba that they still swear by Sayid (Zaid) but they don't know who he was. With names such as Zaid (or Sayid⁷²), Sadiki (from the Arab surname, Sadiq) and Seremane (from the Arab surname, Suleiman), Stayt (1931:236,237 and later Mullan 1969), therefore accepts the Lemba's ancestors to have been Arabic-Mohammedan refugees under the leadership of Suleiman and Zaid and the later Emozaid-Arabs (cf Wilmot 1896:107-8; 110-111; 233; Stayt 1931; Schofield 1948:75; Van Warmelo 1966:282-283; [1937]1974; Connaway 1976).

Also agreeing on an Islamic-Arabic origin of the Lemba, Chigaga (1972:19) submits that the Lemba ancestors had been employed by Arabs to look for ivory and gold and Sena had been the place where they stayed before their wanderings started. He also emphasises that they were traders. In the Gutu area, where a number of Lemba were recently converted to Islam (cf Mandivenga 1983), he 'discovered' numerous laws, words and utterances that are, according to him, clearly Arabic and derived from the Islamic faith (cf Mandivenga 1989:105-107).

⁷² Hendrickx (1991:12) mentions that both Mullan (1969:138-139) and Van Warmelo (1974:82) incorrectly use Zaid, Said and Sayid, as alternative spellings of the same word.

In 1992 (:254) Parfitt already kept a back door open by stating that the Lemba are of composite origin; in the remote past Arabs, Indians and perhaps others took Zanj wives and gradually came to form a separate people. However, he concludes that in religious terms, most of the Semitic characteristics which existed in the tribe's past may be explained via Islam. But he also opines that 'we should accept that in some sense all religions are syncretistic and therefore we know that Christianity borrowed heavily from Judaism [and] Islam from both Judaism and Christianity.' Parfitt (1992:254) therefore, concludes:

In the Lemba case what remained was an Islam without the Quran, without the Prophet Muhammed, without the name of Allah. What remained was a series of religious practices which, despite many curious features, substantially resembled the religious culture of the ancient people of Israel⁷³ [my footnote].

In fact, it is this possible resemblance and the preservation of an ancient type of religion that will be studied in the following chapters: Chapters Four to Nine of this thesis..

3.3.2.1 *Criticism on the Islamic-Arabic theory*

Gayre of Gayre (1972:162) explains that Mullan (and others) could be correct, in general, when they argue that the ancestors of the Lemba were Arabs who, when entering the country (the former Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe), found Arabs from Yemen (Saba) in Rhodesia. However, Gayre of Gayre shows how Mullan's theory falls apart when he connects the building of Zimbabwe with these Arabs, the first phase of Zimbabwe was build long before the Islamic period. He (1972:162) similarly criticises the importance that Mullan places on the name Zaid, and argues that the ancestor of the Lemba could have been any Zaid, not necessarily the founder of the sect. And the names Sadiki and Seremane only stresses the Arabic (Yemenite) origin of the Lemba, nothing else. Gayre of Gayre (1972) is further convinced that Mullan's explanation of the word 'Musoni' is a mere misinterpretation. If *musoni* were a Semitic related word, it does not mean that it comes from *sunni*, as used by the Muslim-Arabs.

Connaway (1978:33) can neither accept the theory of Gayre of Gayre (1967; 1972), nor that of Mullan (1969), and he adds that the only reason why he would rather accept the theory of Mullan above that of Gayre of Gayre, is because Mullan went deeper into their history than did Gayre of Gayre, who only speculates about their origin. My argument, on the contrary, is that Mullan does not search sufficiently far back into the Lemba's past for possible clues, nor does he give sufficient attention to the oral traditions of the Lemba and groups in the Yemen and obviously could not bring other disciplines such as genetics into account.

Parfitt's theory (1992) of an original Muslim Lemba people, is according to Hendrickx (1994:195) 'tempting, but ... far from proven':

⁷³ Parfitt does not indicate what is meant by 'ancient Israel' or which period in history he has in mind.

[He] does not explain why the Lemba (or most of them) selected a Jewish identity (as stated in his *Prologue*). Nor does he explain most of the Transvaal Lemba's aggressive negation of a possible Muslim or Arab origin. And why is there – seemingly – on this account some discrepancy between the attitude and beliefs of the Transvaal Lemba and the Zimbabwe Mwenye (as the Lemba call themselves in the latter region)? Parfitt does not examine the theories sufficiently which connect the Lemba origin with the Moslem immigrations to the east coast of Africa, nor does he make room for a more sophisticated ethnogenesis of the Lemba people

Especially the vehement negation of a possible Muslim or Arab origin by most of the Lemba themselves, should be taken into consideration. This negation occurs at many different places despite the remoteness of location or language.

3.3.3 A Falasha-Abyssinic origin

Thompson (1942:85) seemingly introduced (there might have been others before him) the idea that in some of their rites and observances, the Lemba were somewhat like the Falasha, the Black Jews of Abyssinia (Ethiopia). He held that Sofala, from which much gold emanated in the past, was inhabited by a tribe of Abyssinians. He refers to Dos Santos (1609), who confirms that the Monomotapa and his people resembled the Abyssinians. Thompson emphasises thus that both Islamic and Jewish elements are the culture of the Lemba.

Thompson (1942:85,86) further records that the ancestors of the Lemba came from Sena on the Zambesi River (where the Islam influence occurred), and Sofala on the east coast of Africa. Although, according to him they had an *admixture of Arab blood*, he stresses that it is unlikely that they were originally Arabs, since their style of architecture is not Arabic, but in their former industries some rites and observances they have are rather akin to the Falashas of Abyssinia. He holds that Sofala, from which much gold was brought, was inhabited by a tribe of Abyssinians who had migrated thereto and whose king, the Waklimi, had his capital near the famous gold centre (cf Musadi 900-920). Thompson therefore, posits a Jewish-Lemba link and suggests that the culture of the Lemba could have both Islamic and Jewish components.

Von Sicard (1962:68-80; cf 1950:141) contends that the Lemba descended from two originally distinct tribal groups: the numerically stronger Zambesi Sena, who had been influenced by Islam (with ethnic ties with the Arabs), and a much smaller group of Abyssinian Black Jews or Falashas.⁷⁴ The latter brought to the southern interior Old Testament traditions and rituals (Von Sicard 1950:141), but he does not name the specific traditions and rituals he has in mind. Later Von Sicard (1952:149) adds a third group coming from the east and arriving at the Sabi River before the end of the 16th century, and puts forward his theory of the Lemba ethnogenesis evolving from these three above-mentioned groups and in effect stresses an Arab-Jewish origin.

⁷⁴ Cf R C Samuelson, in Whiston 'Josephus Antiquities of the Jews' (38-100 AD), a descendent from the Ethiopian people who had been assimilated into the tribes of Israel.

In his book *Ngoma Lungundu* ('The drum of the ancestors')⁷⁵ Von Sicard (1952:10-36) examines the parallels between the *ngoma lungundu* story and the Old Testament story (the Israelite Ark of the Covenant; cf Ex; 1 Sm 3,4) and those between *ngoma lungundu* and the Ethiopian *Kebra Nagast* (1952:170-175) in order to prove his theory. The 13th century *Kebra Nagast* ('Splendour of Kings') relates how Prince Menelik, son of King Solomon and Queen Makeda of Sheba, visited Jerusalem and returned to the South with an escort of Israelite priests, who stole the sacred Ark out of the Temple of Jerusalem, left a replica in its place and took the real Ark to Axum (Ethiopia; cf *Photo 73*). In the same manner, the Lemba, in the *ngoma lungundu* story, carried with them the sacred drum downwards to Southern Africa (Von Sicard 1952:170-175; cf Hendrickx 1991:182).

Of course, this is an unfounded tradition. What is interesting though, is that both the Lemba and the Ethiopians possessed a kind of an 'ark' tradition. The Ethiopians believe that it was a real ark, whereas early observers (not specifically the Lemba themselves) believe that it was something that resembled an ark (meaning the *ngoma lungundu*; cf 6.1.3).

In particular, Von Sicard (1952:170-175) indicates that the *ngoma lungundu* traditions could not have derived from the Islamic Lemba group seeing that the Ark of the Covenant did not play such a role in the Koran or in the Islam faith, that Abyssinia is literally called the 'Trommelzentrum' and lastly that the Ark of the Covenant played a dominant role in the religious life of the Abyssinians and in the *Kebra Nagast*, their holy book.

Von Sicard concludes (1952:175) that

[t]here is good reason to suppose that the Hamitoid people of Rhodesia brought with them the Jewish Lemba who were black-smiths and builders and it was through this that Old Testament traditions entered Rhodesia. Among these traditions the *ngoma lungundu* occupied a special place. The belief in God of the Lemba has been preserved along with that part of Mwari [Mwali] worship which emphasises God's sacredness and uniqueness

Mathivha (1992:1-7) similarly believes, that after they had arrived in Africa one group of the Lemba went westwards and settled in Ethiopia while the other group led by Hamisi migrated southwards along the coast until they first settled on mountains at a place they called Sena II, and after that at Sena III, in the valley. None of the early ethnographers that I could find, report Lemba claims of Falasha ancestry.

3.3.3.1 Criticism on the Falasha-Abyssinic theory

Mandivenga (1989:103) is convinced that Thompson's Jewish-Lemba link is improbable, although not impossible. He feels that Thompson does not adduce any real evidence for this hypothesis and he is convinced that there is not a single Jewish custom or trait among the Lemba which cannot

⁷⁵ Von Sicard's book was based, in part, upon the notes of the missionary Rev J Othenius (1938). He was forcibly circumcised by the Lemba.

be explained equally well by means of Islamic influence (1989:98-124). The opposite is of course also true. There is not a single so-called Islamic custom among the Lemba which cannot be explained equally well with reference to Jewish influence and then there are Semitic influences which are also not Islamic.

Connaway concludes (1978:33-41) that

Thompson and Von Sicard's theories can not be rejected off-hand. The Lemba could possibly have originated by the joining of two racial groups. [V]iewpoints about the origins of the Lemba indicate that there is a considerable difference from the rest of the Bantu of the South, namely that they are the descendents of Semitic traders from the East Coast of Africa...; [my translation].

Connaway (1978:33) compares the Lemba with other Judaizing movements elsewhere in the world, where Judaism had such a great influence on the religion of these movements. Ethnically, these groups could clearly be distinguished from other Jews in Europe and America, but the only strong Jewish elements in their culture is their religion (cf Baker 1974:233). In the case of the Lemba, not only ethnically, but also their religion, is totally different from Judaism, says Connaway.

I have already attempted in Chapter Two to indicate that the Lemba was not a regular Judaizing group. In my opinion, no religious shift was made in their case, but the possibility exists that, the Lemba do have archaic remnants of an ancient type (Israelite?) of religion (cf Chapters Four to Nine). In more than one respect these remnants could differ from what is expected of 'Judaism' proper.

Spurdle and Jenkins (1996:1131, 1132) react as follows to Mathivha's proposed relationship between the Ethiopian Jews and the Lemba:

The proposed genetic relationship between the Ethiopian Jews and the Lemba, as suggested by Mathivha (1992) is highly questionable. Data from various classical, nuclear-DNA, and mtDNA genetic studies (Mourant et al. 1978; Zoosmann-Diskin et al. 1991) indicate that the Ethiopian Jews are similar to other Ethiopian populations, exhibiting a genetic profile that represents admixture between African and Caucasoid (probably Mediterranean) groups. The genetic evidence also suggests that the African contribution was introduced more by females and that the Caucasoid contribution was introduced more by males (Zoosmann-Diskin et al. 1991). However, results from Y-chromosome studies on a small ($n = 17$) sample of Ethiopian Jews (Ritte et al. 1993) are not entirely consistent with this hypothesis: 16 (94%) of the male individuals were shown to possess 49a/*TaqI* haplotypes Ht32 or Ht33, which are rare or absent in both Negroids and Caucasoids (Torrioni et al. 1990; Spurdle and Jenkins 1992), and Ht33 is found at notable frequencies only in Khoisan populations (Spurdle and Jenkins 1992). These findings would seem to suggest either that the study on Ethiopian Jews was subject to sampling error due to the small sample size or that tremendous genetic drift has taken place in this largely endogamous group. The currently available Y-chromosome genetic data do not support a close genetic relationship between the Ethiopian Jews and the Lemba. In conclusion, the historical facts are not incompatible with theories concerning the origin of the Lemba, and the Y-specific genetic findings presented here are consistent with Lemba oral history.

Except for the three above mentioned conflicting theories of origin postulated by Connaway, Hendrickx (1991:183-185; cf Othenius 1938:65-70) adds more theories for the origin of the Lemba: a Bantu origin (Swahili, Venda, Shona, Muslim Yao, the Lamba of Zambia; cf Doke 1931); an Indo-European origin and the so-called Azanian theory connected to the mysterious builders of Zimbabwe (cf Beach 1980; 3.3.2). Other scholars such as Nelson (1975:78), also classify the Lemba as a Bantu subgroup. Most of these theories are based on insufficient information and further research should be undertaken, which falls outside the parameters of this investigation.

3.3.4 Evaluation

It is clear that there is no consensus about the origins of the Lemba and no consensus will probably ever be reached. Various authors wrote within their own contexts of time and location, and for this reason, it is difficult to align the arguments of all these authors, and a clear link can also not be established, between the various oral traditions.

What we could say, is that the Lemba themselves, as well as all authors who studied them seriously, are in agreement that the Lemba constitute *a separate or distinct group* from the Bantu groups who are their hosts. The Lemba are especially distinguished from others by their customs, traditional religious practices, features, skills and aloofness (cf De Vaal 1958:67; Thompson 1942:79; Frobenius 1938:159-160). Many scholars hold that the Lemba have many customs with a Semitic or an Old Testament resonance.

From the sources used for the purpose of this chapter not much concrete information could be collected. In fact, the majority of historical data rest on speculative inferences, let alone that some rest on traditions that cannot be verified.

However, the oldest oral traditions and written documents available (e.g. the Assyrian inscriptions, 700 BC and the *Periplus*) refer to the pre-Islamic-Arabian (Sabaean or Yemenite), Phoenician and Hebrew activities in Southeast Africa. At a very early stage, continuing influences between the Semitic world and that of the southeastern parts of Africa had a reciprocal impact on one another. Later documents (684-900 AD, e.g. the Arab and Portuguese) also refer to some kind of 'Moorish' people along the east coast of Africa. But from those written sources it is clear that authors were uneasy, or unable to differentiate between for example Jews and Semites, Arabs and Muslims, Arabs and Swahili.

Exactly who the 'Moors' were and what the nature of their religion was, are therefore, important questions, which are as yet, only partly answered. The Africans for example called some of those groups 'Moors' or '*vaMwenye*' and occasionally they are called the 'Arabs' in works on Southeast Africa. Whereas the Portuguese found traders who, 'in features and appearance in no way differ from ourselves' (Theal [1898-1903]1964b:123-124), in Sofala the inhabitants were '*dark-skinned*' (Theal [1898-1903]1964b:123-4) and in the Angoche Islands were 'peopled by

Moors and Kaffirs intermixed' (Theal [1898-1903]1964b: 217). In another account the 'Moors' are described as 'black men, and among them some are dark brown, some of them speak Arabic, and the others use the language of the country ...' (Theal [1898-1903]1964a:94). In 1505 a Portuguese noted, that 'two pieces of cotton cloth' were the dress of '*white Arabs and slave owners*' (Freeman-Grenville 1962:107) and elsewhere, that the Zambezi was 'inhabited by heathen Kaffirs and Moors, *some black, some white, some of whom are rich*' (Theal [1898-1903]1964c:252). And, Dos Santos describes the Moors as 'barbarians, and very fond of wine; ... *only Moors in name* and the practice of *circumcision*, as they *neither know nor keep the creed* of Mohammed that they profess' (Theal [1898-1903]1964c:330; [my italics]). It is also striking that one of the earliest literary works (1721) which refers to the Lemba, namely the account of Mahumane, in no way describes them as 'Moorish' nor links them to the Islam faith.

This information might point to these 'Moorish' or 'Arab' groups being just as well having been 'Jewish' or rather Israelite descendants coming from Yemen or even Israel or Tyre. It is just as difficult to prove this issue, than it is to refute it. Even the names such as Sadiki or Seremane only stress the Arabic origin (or rather stay) of the Lemba, nothing else (cf Gayre of Gayre 1972).

My field work report (cf Mandivenga 1983) also shows that the conversion of the handful of Lemba to Islam in the Gutu area, is more of an exception than a rule, and that the conversion took place very recently. In general the Lemba groups in South Africa, as well as in Zimbabwe outrightly dissociate themselves from an Islamic-Arabic origin.

A further possible conclusion from the information above, could be that most of the references constitute to the presence of people mainly in the Zambezi region possessing notably Semitic characteristics without being clearly Muslims. It seems reasonable to assume that although the 'Moorish' or 'Arab' people were not specifically referred to, their traditions and customs were reminiscent of those people that we know today as Varembe ('people who refuse'); Mushavi ('trader'); Vhasoni (great word of Lemba women); Mwenye ('foreigner', 'Arab', 'white people' or 'people of the light');⁷⁶ Malepa; Vha-Sena ('people of Sena at the Zambezi'); Vhalungu ('Europeans', 'non-Negro's' or 'strangers') or simply the Lemba or Balemba (cf Connaway 1978:31; Hendrickx 1991:174; Ravele 1958:76-77).

If they were the descendants of the Falasha, the question is, where did the Falasha come from or where did they get their Semitic customs? In fact, if the Lemba were from pre-Islamic Arab groups or from Falasha-Abyssinian origin, it explains their affinity towards 'Jewishness', rather than to the Islam. According to the genetic reports the Falasha have nothing in common with the Lemba or Jews in Israel (cf Spurdle & Jenkins 1996).

⁷⁶ This is only one possible translation. In the Handbook of Nyasaland (1936) the Amwenye are referred to be descendants from the Arabs found by the Portuguese at Sena.

Some studies conclude that where the Lemba's origin is dissected into its ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural elements, there seem to be, among others, Judaic *and* Muslim, and Jewish *and* Arab elements (Mphelo 1936; Thompson 1942:85; Price 1954:37; De Vaal 1958:54-67; Hendrickx 1991:181; Parfitt 1992; Spurdle & Jenkins 1996). It is striking that a considerable number of scholars opt for both a Jewish as well as an Islamic source or influence.

To my mind, the Lemba are most probably of *composite origin*. Not a single so-called Islamic custom among the Lemba, cannot equally well be explained by Jewish influence (as mentioned before). It is with remarkable obstinacy, that they preserved some habits and customs from these influences earlier in their history. Many scholars mention their anxiousness (or even fanaticism) to preserve their tribal and ritual purity. It is indeed the preservation of a part of a very ancient type of religious group which makes the Lemba so valuable for the historian of religion. When Islam emerged, the Jews of Yemen, were cut off from the rest of the Jewish people. If the Lemba originates from the Jews in Yemen, the Yemenite community (Jews) in Africa is perhaps the only one that remained practically unaffected by intra-Jewish migration (cf Chapter Four). Dates for the migration from Yemen, however, appear to be inconsistent, and those quoted for settlement *en route* to Southern Africa range from 450 BC, to the 6th century AD (cf Mathivha 1992).

The oral traditions of the Lemba and the historical, archaeological and genetic data constitute the possibility that the immigration of the Lemba to Africa could have taken place even before the Christian era, but more probably before the 6th century AD. Later migrations could also have occurred but it is evenly difficult to determine. If we take the Yemenite Jews seriously, that they left Israel exactly forty two years before the destruction of the Temple, it seems that their descendants who at some time or another fled to Africa could still have borne a type of religion that could have similarities with early Israel (before the exiles had taken place). Therefore, there seems to have been a historical link between the Lemba and Yemen. Influence from the Jewish or Israelite religion found the strongest expression in the Lemba culture, probably through their historical connection with Jewry or Israelites, and even through Christianity. The arrival of Christianity most probably reinforced the ancient traditions and practices of the Lemba. The 'success' that the Christians had in the conversion of most of the Lemba, could be as a result of their close relationship with the traditions, practices and lifestyle preached in the Bible (cf 10.4).

From discussions with various scholars, I detect a reticence or a block against the notion or possibility, that the Lemba had Israelite forebears; this in spite of the most recent scientific genetic findings, as well as in spite of the concurring oral traditions of the Lemba. It is also striking, that certain scholars are rather prepared to accept an earlier link with the Muslim faith, than a Jewish or a Judaic-Arabic influence. Such a reaction could be a remnant of the idea that a 'primitive' culture cannot be compared to the more 'exalted' cultures in the Old Testament or Judaism.

One must possibly concur with Flygare (1899:6): that ‘hun geschiedenis en oorsprong blyft een geheim ...’ (their history and origin remain a secret [my translation]). That there are strong indications from various sciences about their origins, is indeed true. Whether the Lemba had merely assimilated the comparison between themselves and Jews in their reflections on their own religious heritage, is impossible to say. It seems, however, that their self-identification both evidences and conceals a much older and very complicated religious identity.

CHAPTER FOUR

SOCIAL PRACTICES OF THE LEMBA AND EARLY ISRAEL

On the basis of the research reflected in the previous chapters, as well as on the basis of the results of genetic testing, I postulate that the Lemba could have preserved elements of a very ancient type of religious group. If they originated and migrated from Israelites in Yemen, here to Africa, they were then cut off from the rest of the Jewish people, after the emergence of Islam. Therefore these descendents of the Yemenite Jews in Africa, could be the only group that remained practically unaffected by intra-Jewish migration. That is, they remained free from other Jewish influences.

During my field research (cf Chapter One) I conducted an inquiry into the possible ancient practices of the Lemba. Respondents were asked to list any customs, festivals, rituals or ceremonies, which they considered to be unique to the Lemba people. Most of them firstly mentioned circumcision, and hereafter their *kosher* eating habits, the new moon festivals, their special way of slaughtering animals, their arts and crafts or their marriage laws - these are all mainly social and religious practices.

After they presented these answers, I inquired from them (if it was not already stated) if they or their parents ever practiced or kept the following customs or festivals: fasting, Sabbath, the feast of the first-fruits, special burial customs, traditional clothes and the *Pesah*.⁷⁷ Very few interviewees indicated that they were still practicing fasting, keeping of the Sabbath and *Pesah*. Nevertheless, the feasts, burial customs and traditional clothes were either all still known or even practiced. It was only later on that I could confirm (in all possible accounts) that most of these observations about customs and practices had already been noted by early ethnographers a century or three ago (cf Chapter Three). This is a strong indication for the authenticity of some of these customs.

For the purpose of this chapter it is extremely difficult to determine whether a specific custom is a 'purely social practice', rather than a 'purely religious practice', if there is actually something such as pure religious practice, void of social meaning. This implies that the categorisation of the customs are tenuous, and not fixed. Salient again, as was mentioned earlier (cf Chapter Two and Three) is that many of these practices and customs have a Semitic resemblance and more specifically, they resonate the culture of some ancient Israelite clans. A comparison of the social and religious practices of the Lemba, which concur in so many ways with that of early Israel (oral cultures, segmented clan systems, marital laws, rituals etc) could contribute to a better understanding of the Old Testament in Africa. It is no longer possible to address many questions to early Israel. Possibly much information and background about the meaning and understanding of many of their customs may emerge by means of this way of investigation. At the end of each of the following six chapters (Four through Nine), which deal

⁷⁷ Meaning the ancient Israelite feast.

with comparisons between socio-cultural facets of early Israel and the Lemba, I shall indicate the contribution of this project to facilitate a better understanding of the Old Testament in Africa. In the discussion of the Israelite clans, sources sometimes refer to 'tribes'. However, it is not a foregone conclusion that there were actually tribes. 'Tribes' are usually linked to specific tribal areas, but it is improbable that these can be indicated as such in early Israel (1250-1000 BC). In this connection I, therefore, prefer to use the notion of 'clans', to acknowledge this uncertainty. The order is usually from a family to a clan, and from a clan to a tribe. For this same reason as applies to Israel, reference to the Lemba groups will be as 'clans', in fact some of them prefer to do this themselves.

Although the Lemba belong to different Christian denominations, their *culture* – as they call it – reflect almost all the characteristics of an own unique religion; one may define it as a 'syncretising Judaism'. There are numerous salient concurrences between the social and religious practices and viewpoints of the Lemba and that of early Israel, which will emerge in the following five chapters, nevertheless the most salient differences between the two communities will also be accentuated, since these are part of the comparison, and this also facilitates a judgement on the dominance of the concurrences.

The purpose of this thesis is not to do any intensive exegesis of certain Old Testament sections, or to determine the historicity of various stories or customs, but to determine what early Israel's experience was concerning certain customs or rituals, and what role these played in the communities. It is accepted that the Book of Judges is the only direct written source of information for early Israel, and that it can, therefore, be used only with great circumspection as the main source.

In the ensuing chapters (Four to Eight) I shall discuss some of the Lemba's social and religious customs and practices as I encountered them during my field study, with reference to available archival and other sources. In fact, in the world-view of the Lemba there is no difference between their social and religious views and practices. As far as possible either the original transcribed 'oral texts', or direct translations, done by the interpreters, will be used. To avoid the imposition of another world-view onto these documents, they were not edited. Thus specific Lemba practices with a resonance of the culture of ancient Israel, will be discussed, comparing these, where possible, with the customs and practices of early Israel.⁷⁸

4.1 FOOD RITUALS AND TABOOS

4.1.1 The Lemba

4.1.1.1 *The 'wasenzhi' or heathen*

Almost all the respondents pointed out that their dietary laws and eating habits differ and are distinct from those of other peoples in the country, these people are called the 'wasenzhi' or heathen. One of the most important laws they were taught, was that they may not eat food with, or from, the *basetse* (Sotho – they are not Lemba and are therefore gentiles), or *food from the*

⁷⁸ Taken primarily from my unpublished MA dissertation 'Anargie in die Beloofde Land. 'n Holistiese benadering tot die 'Rigtertyd' (Le Roux, M 1995).

wasenzhi in Venda; cf D:J(1):5) They stress that, 'like the Jews', they keep themselves separate from the gentiles. Ethnographic literature often points out that the Lemba refer to other Africans as *wasenzhi* (cf Bullock [1927]1950:22,44). Sometimes they use a more complete qualification for these peoples: '*wasenzhi – vali va nama ya vafu – wasenzhi*' ('the eaters of dead meat'). The Lemba are specifically told not to cook in utensils used by the *wasenzhi*, and not to eat with them (cf D:L:4,5; D:N:8; Parfitt 1992:34,35).

The Lemba still refer to their own women as *wasenzhi*, because they came to Africa without wives (and could not go back to their country) and had to marry local, 'heathen' women (cf Bullock [1927]1950:22,44). Important though, is that the 'pagan' women with whom they married, all first underwent a purification process, before they could take this step (cf 4.2.1.2).

4.1.1.2 *Ritual washing*

Cleanliness, and the law that they have to wash their hands before partaking of any food, are very important to the Lemba (D:J(1):5). In fact, Mathivha (1992:61) avers that cleanliness is their most important dietary law – all food is therefore prepared with the greatest care and according to regulations of cleanness. He adds that the dictum '*Bata-u-shambe*' (hold and wash) is adhered to in many instances (cf D:G:11; D:O:7,10,11). Apparently, they were instructed before to follow an even more strict dietary code, but as a result of 'cultural diffusion most of them don't obey these laws any more.'

During our first visit to Mathivha's house in the former Venda (1994), his wife entered the room and stood at the side of my friend, Filemon Khadeli (cf *Photo3*), holding a round plastic bowl. She smiled at us, and then Mathivha explained that we should wash our hands before having tea and something to eat. He said it is one of the customs of the Lemba and they read all about it in the Bible. Parfitt (1992:170) had similar experiences during his stay in Zimbabwe: even when there was water for nothing else, there was always water for ritual washing before and after meals.

4.1.1.3 *Dietary laws*

The Lemba stress that they *do not mix meat and milk* in their foods, without giving any reference to a Bible text. The milk is drunk or eaten separately from meat dishes and vice versa. They find the code for this behaviour in the Book of Leviticus (D:G:11). Phophi (Parfitt 1992:56), similarly places much emphasis on the chapters in the 'old, old book' which describe the 'old religion of the Jews'. He confirms that the Lemba follow exactly the special rules for eating (for example those in Lev 11).

During the field study, I did not find many people who still maintained the custom of keeping milk and meat separate. Most of the older people in the communities, however, could still remember that their parents ate their food in that way, but they themselves neglect to keep all these practices.

One of the very strict laws of the Lemba which is still kept by most of them, is that they should only eat the animals allowed to be eaten and only in the proper way. An old Lemba song summarises the *list of animals* that Nkalahonye (son of a Karanga-induna, in Mashonaland) was

not allowed to eat (Marole 1969:6; note the translation [Maringa, P E] of the song is presented verbatim; cf De Vaal 1958:57):

The Jews does not eat a pig even the Mu-Lemba⁷⁹ does not.
The Jews does not eat a hare even the Mu-Lemba does not.
The Jew does not eat a rock rabbit even the Mu-Lemba does not.
The Jew does not eat an owl even a Mu-Lemba does not.
The Jew does not eat an eagle even the Mu-Lemba does not.
The Jew does not eat an ostrich even the Mu-Lemba does not.
The Jew does not eat the crow even the Mu-Lemba does not [my footnote].

Except for the elephant and above mentioned animals, the Lemba also have a taboo on the zebra, the rhinoceros and the hippopotamus. It is noteworthy that the totem of the Lemba is an elephant (*Zhou*), within the Star of David (cf Othenius 1938:70; cf *Photo 51*). Bullock ([1927] 1950:45) maintains that 'in this there may be a trace of Semitic inhibition combined with Bantu totemism' (cf Lv 11; 17 and Dt 12; 14). The elephant (who never forgets) in the Star of David reminds the Lemba to remember their history.

Other dietary laws which many scholars and others observed are that the Lemba bled slaughtered animals, only eat meat that is *kosher* killed by a Lemba (cf Junod 1908:278; Wangemann 1868:436),⁸⁰ and also do not eat pork (cf Schlömann 1894:67; Theal [1898-1903] 1964d:351,371).⁸¹ Junod (1908:278) points out that it appears as if they keep these customs without knowing why and that they do this in order to *preserve their identity as tribe*.

Wessmann (1908:129-132) explains that they 'avoid all meat of animals which have cloven hoofs, and animals which do not chew the cud....They do not touch the meat of fallen animals....[they] kill the animals according to the Jewish rite, as if to render it "kosher." '

Gayre of Gayre (1967:6,7) avers that the rejection of pork, or killing in the *kosher* manner by bleeding, would be a remarkable coincidence by itself, but when the prohibition of eating of hares, rabbits, scaleless fish and carrion is added to their list,

the probability against coincidence is so great that we have to accept the fact that the Lembas observe the Mosaic code, and that we have to explain its occurrence among this small tribe of traders who have Caucasoid genes and live in northern Transvaal and some adjacent parts of Rhodesia. Moreover, only the Lembas bleed animals to death as enjoined by the Mosaic code, and this act is restricted by them to the circumcised.

Phophi similarly informed Parfitt (1992:55) that in the past, the Lemba preferred a diet based on fish and rice:

in fact, some people have claimed that once the Lemba ate only fish and rice – an unheard of diet in the Transvaal and Zimbabwe, and one which is strongly suggestive of a coastal origin. According to Portuguese documents, we know that in the sixteenth century rice was cultivated in the Zambezi

⁷⁹ A Mulemba is the singular for Balemba or Lemba (plural).

⁸⁰ Cf also Theal [1898-1903]1964d:371; Von Sicard 1952:161; Gotein 1969:231; Jaques 1931:246; Stayt 1931:235; Van Warmelo 1935:122.

⁸¹ Cf also Wessmann 1908:129; Stayt 1931:235; Jaques 1931:246; Van Warmelo 1935:122; Motenda 1940:65; Mphelo 1936:41; Von Sicard 1952:147; De Vaal 1958:57.

delta and around Sofala and was even exported to Indian Ocean ports. According to oral traditions, it was also grown in the past near Mberengwa, the area of Lemba settlement in Zimbabwe: "The Lemba", runs one account, "said they came from across the sea to the hill 'Mberengwe of the Good Men' ".... Here they cultivated much rice, the plant of the white man.

We often encountered Lemba who prefer to *eat fish instead of meat* (D:3:C(1):7,8). The circumcision ceremony in Sekhukhuneland, similarly includes the eating of fish and porridge (cf 7.1.1.1).

4.1.1.4 *Slaughter rituals*

As mentioned above, it is very important to the Lemba that they should not eat meat which has not been killed according to *kosher* regulations (D:3:A:8,9). This implies that the animal has to be killed in a special way by a circumcised Lemba man who is 'clean' (cf D:G:10,11; D:J(1):3; D:L:5; D:N:8; Parfitt 1992:113). They do not eat the blood of the animal that is killed – the blood has to be shed on the ground (cf Gayre of Gayre 1967:6,7).

During our (my husband and my) stay in Sekhukhuneland (Feb 1996) 'chief'⁸² Mpaketsane provided a cow to be slaughtered for a special LCA Conference held at his kraal. On that occasion we were invited to observe their special way of killing their animals (cf *Photo 34*). It was also our privilege to share in the eating of the animal, specially cooked for the occasion. First we were honoured, by sharing with other special guests in the eating of the fried intestines. Much to our surprise they also offered us the 'best' part of the meat to be 'fried' in the way they thought we would perhaps prefer it. We felt very honoured and were, once again, deeply impressed by their overall hospitality and sensitivity towards us.

Without the special blessing and *kosher* killing, called the *shidja*⁸³ (mainly in Zimbabwe), dead meat is unclean, and only the Lemba have the sacred words which could declare it clean. These sacred words are a Lemba secret known by no one else. Van Warmelo (1940:66) recorded an oral tradition that further reveals that a special knife was used for *shidja*. They called it *tshishizho*, which means an instrument for *kosher* killing meat (D:L:5).

Hall (1905:101) describes the 'defilement of eating flesh containing blood', as well as the 'sprinkling of worshippers with blood' as some of the distinct Jewish customs of the Karanga-speaking Lemba (cf 7.1.2.5).

4.1.1.5 *Fasting*

As far as the custom of *fasting* is concerned very few of the respondents indicated that they fast. Phophi and others contend, however, that

my father had told me long ago, before the arrival of Europeans, the Lemba used to hold a fast once a year. On this all-important day, warriors went around the Lemba village to make sure that no food was being consumed and that no cooking fires were burning. On this day, the notables wore white robes and the chief sacrificed a black ox, unblemished in any way.... It's the Yom Kippur of the Jews... (Parfitt 1992:58).

⁸² He 'acted' as chief although he was not yet married (at that stage). His mother is still alive and therefore, she became the legitimate chief after her husband died (cf *Photo 7*).

⁸³ The meaning of the word is unknown.

Although not occurring or being in use frequently, the idea of a kind of day of fasting, is still deeply engraved in their memories. Especially notable, is the memory of the white clothes and the sacrifices of an unblemished black ox (cf 7.1.2.5).

4.1.2 Early Israel

4.1.2.1 The heathen

The notion that they are the 'chosen nation', and that all other people are 'heathen' or Gentiles, is still prevalent among the Jewish people. According to the Old Testament, God selected the descendants of Abraham to be a chosen people, a vehicle of God's mighty acts in history. Furthermore, the Old Testament frequently refers to the notion of Israel being a holy nation and therefore not supposed to mix with the pagan nations surrounding them. Specific purification (Lv 11-16) and holiness laws (Lv 17-26) were therefore prescribed for Israel (De Vaux 1973:460; cf Kauuova 1997:9,10).

In the Book of Deuteronomy the community is clearly described in Jahwistic terms. 'We' and 'they' are unambiguously defined. 'They' are the non-Israelites, and are described in terms of the enemy (Niditch 1997:82).

4.1.2.2 Ritual washing

All kinds of purification regulations were in the order of the day in old Israel (not only during the times of the Israelite clans). To have touched a dead person, bones or a grave was for instance considered a contamination, and for this reason the house and furniture of the deceased were purified by means of the sprinkling with water (Nm 19:11-22).

Specific purification laws were also presented to the *kohen* or priest. He had to purify himself before he could go on duty at the tabernacle (or later into the Temple), since he was going to tread on holy ground (Ex 29:4; 30:17-21; Lv 8:6; 16:4). On the other hand, all containers, clothes and persons who touched anything holy, had to be washed in order to 'desecrate' themselves (Lv 6:21; 16:23-28; Nm 31:16-24; De Vaux 1973:461).

Numbers 31:16-24 also refers to the purification of metals by fire, as well as the purification of other objects by using holy water. De Vaux is of the opinion that this rite probably originated from a heathen practice (1973:461).

4.1.2.3 Dietary laws

The diet of the ancient nomads consisted of various breads, milk, curds, fruit and nuts – mainly vegetarian. Eating meat occurred for the most part only on important occasions. Abraham prepared for example a feast for his guests (Gn 18:6-8), consisting of bread made in the form of cakes, milk, curds, and a roasted calf (cf ANET:146). Animals allowed to be eaten, included sheep, cattle, goats, deer, fish with fins and scales and certain fowl (Lv 11).

Besides the expression in Deuteronomy 14:21 and Exodus 23:19, there is no other law indicated in the Old Testament (as far as I know) against the mixing of meat with milk. The literal interpretation of the metaphor or euphemism for another matter (cf 4.1.3), reminds of the expression in Deuteronomy 14:21: 'You may not boil the kid in the milk of his mother.' For some

primitive communities, for example the Ndembu, who maintains that the 'mother is like a pot' (Turner 1967:250; Gn 38), this expression would rather indicate the prohibition of a sexual relation between a mother and her son, as indicated by separation between milk and meat. Milk is often the natural symbol for the relationship between a mother and her child (cf Turner 1967:19-47; Dt 27:20; Haran 1997:23-35). A literal execution of that which was possibly only meant to be a metaphor, probably found its deposit (this time in Judaism) in the commandment on the mixing of milk with meat.

Eilberg-Schwartz (1990:125) argues that 'one might say that the dietary laws are a dramatization of the metaphors that govern Israelite thought.'

4.1.2.4 *Slaughter ritual*

According to the Old Testament (Lv 7:26,27; 17:11,14; Gn 9:4; Dt 12:23) blood contained 'the life of all flesh' and therefore the blood belonged to God alone (De Vaux 1973:416). The slaughter of the above mentioned animals are supposed to be painless and bloodless (Kauuova 1997:9). The man sacrificing, would himself cut the throat of the victim, some distance away from the altar, and the priests would then pour the blood around the altar. In the sacrifice for sin, blood plays a more important part than in any other. Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness at all (De Vaux 1973:419).

According to the late Mishnaic law (approximately 300 AD), an Israelite may not eat any animal that has not been slaughtered in accordance with the prescribed procedure (Eilberg-Schwarz 1990:212).

4.1.2.5 *Fasting*

Fasts were prescribed by the Mosaic Code (Lv 16:29) for the Day of Atonement – to 'afflict your souls' – to commemorate the breaking of the tables of the law and other such events in history. Fasting in the Old Testament is also a sign of sorrow (1 Sm 31:13; 2 Sm 1:12; 3:25) or of repentance (1 Sm 7:6; Jl 1:14; 2:12ff; Parker, Tenney & White 1980:468). It might be accompanied by prayer to give it added urgency (Ezr 8:23; Jer 14:12), or mark a day of battle to intensify the appeal to God for help (1 Sm 14:4).

4.1.3 **Evaluation and comparison**

Most of the Lemba's food rituals and taboos involves that they look upon themselves as different or special (among others because they are circumcised). And this has a direct influence on their daily activities. One of their most important dietary laws, are that they have to separate themselves from the 'heathen', because they are uncircumcised and are 'eaters of dead meat' and therefore they are not allowed to eat with them and may not use their cooking utensils.

Similarly, most of the customs of early Israel are emphasised. The Israelites were not allowed to mix with the heathen. However, it is not certain whether the law not to *eat* with them, is emphasised just as much.

The ritual washing of the Lemba deals more with the individual's daily eating and drinking, whilst the Old Testament customs were more applicable to the priestly 'sanctification' and

'desecration' in connection with the service at the altar (much later than early Israel). It is noteworthy that most people wash their hands before they eat but not necessarily because it is a specific dietary law.

The dietary laws of the Lemba include the prohibition to eat certain animals (cf Lv 11), the mixing of meat with milk and the eating of animals that have not been slaughtered by the Lemba in the correct manner. It may appear from information from the Old Testament, that the communities in early Israel, probably either did not know the prohibition of the mixing of meat with milk, or that they understood this as a symbol for something else, or that they did not consider it as important.

To the traditional Lemba, it is of utter importance that an animal should be slaughtered in the correct manner by a circumcised Lemba. The Lemba does not eat the blood of the animal, and a blessing (*shidja*) needs to be said over the meat. There are special sacred words for this blessing. Similar principles were found in this connection in early Israel, but these applied more to the slaughter of animals at the altar (cf 4.1.2.4). It may be that the everyday customs were just not recorded. However, I am not aware of a particular blessing that is pronounced before the eating of meat. The Lemba custom deals more with the everyday slaughtering and eating of meat, although the slaughtering of an animal is usually a luxury, which is connected to the one or other specific ritual.

The Old Testament regulations for fasting are very clear, whilst the memory of similar customs with the Lemba are only maintained or kept alive by oral tradition. Below follows a table in which the most salient concurrences and differences between the social customs of the Lemba and that of early Israel are indicated.

TABLE 1: COMPARISON – FOOD RITUALS AND TABOOS (cf 4.1)

<p>The Lemba (4.1.1) <i>The wasenzhi or heathen (4.1.1.1)</i> <i>Similarities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Their dietary laws are distinct and different from that of the heathen ▪ They are not suppose to mix with the heathen because they are eaters of dead meat ▪ They are the ‘chosen people’ and have to eat differently <p><i>Differences</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ They may not eat food with or from the heathen neither use their cooking utensils ▪ They call the Lemba women <i>wasenzhi</i> and they have to undergo a purification process before marriage <p><i>Ritual washing (4.1.1.2)</i> <i>Similarities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cleanliness is the most important dietary regulation ▪ ‘Cultural diffusion’ resulted in disregard for these laws ▪ They should wash their hands before working with any food. The dictum ‘hold and wash’ is adhered to on many occasions ▪ Nobody is allowed to touch a dead person, bones or a grave and if so that persons needs to be cleansed <p><i>Differences</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Their earlier laws were more strict <p><i>Dietary laws (4.1.1.3)</i> <i>Similarities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Do not mix meat and milk (Lv 11) – probably later influence of Judaism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lv 11 is very important to them 	<p>Early Israel (4.1.2) <i>The heathen (4.1.2.1)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Their dietary laws are distinct and different from that of the heathen ▪ They are not suppose to intermarry with the heathen ▪ They are the ‘chosen people’ and have to eat differently <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No such practice is known ▪ Their women are also ‘chosen people’ <p><i>Ritual washing (4.1.2.2)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cleanliness was the most important dietary regulation ▪ ‘Cultural diffusion’ resulted in disregard for these laws ▪ They had numerous purification regulations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Nobody was allowed to touch a dead person, bones or a grave, or the house and furniture of a deceased person, and if so that persons needs to be cleansed by sprinkling with water <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Their later laws became more strict ▪ Specific purification regulations and laws dealing with defilement were given to the priest ▪ Certain metals needed to be purified by fire, and others by water for purification (cf Nm 31:16-24) <p><i>Dietary laws (4.1.2.3)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No specific indication that it was not acceptable that they mix milk with meat, but it is possibly a later (than early Israel) interpretation (Lv 11; 17; Dt 12; 14) ▪ Lv 11 became very important
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- Only clean animals may be eaten (Lv 11; 17; Dt 12; 14), but the elephant, zebra, rhino and hippo are also not allowed
- Mainly vegetarian

Differences

- They sometimes eat fish and rice (may be an influence from their stay on the East Coast)

Slaughter rituals (4.1.1.4)

Similarities

- Meat is only considered *kosher* killed when killed by a circumcised Lemba man in the correct way
- The animal should be bled to death and the blood should be shed on the ground

Differences

- The special blessing (*shidja*) makes it clean
- A special knife (*tshishizho*) is used

Fasting (4.1.1.5)

Similarities

- They remember that they had an annual day of fast

Differences

- The priests wore white robes
- The chief sacrificed an unblemished black ox

- Only clean animals might be eaten (Lv 11; 17; Dt 12; 14)

- Mainly vegetarian

Slaughter rituals (4.1.2.4)

- An animal should be *kosher* killed

- The killing should be painless and bloodless, and the blood should be shed around the altar

- Without blood their is no forgiveness

Fasting (4.1.2.5)

- A day of fasting is prescribed in the Mosaic law

- Usually fasting is a sign of sorrow and repentance

4.2 MARITAL CUSTOMS

4.2.1 The Lemba

4.2.1.1 *Endogamy*

The Lemba do not give their daughters in marriage to any but their own people and discourage them to marry an uncircumcised person. The men should also avoid marriage with local (non-Lemba) women. This strict endogamy was the secret of their survival as a distinct people.

Mathivha (1992:51) also states that ‘traditionally the boy preferentially must marry a girl who is the daughter of his uncle i.e. the daughter of his mother’s brother. The boys are the sister’s sons while the girls are the brother’s daughters.’

Most of the respondents in Sekhukhuneland and Zimbabwe indicated that according to their culture they are *not supposed to marry outside their tribe*, but they also ‘confessed’ that because of ‘cultural diffusion’ (once again), many of them do not adhere to that any more. During our second visit to Sekhukhuneland (1997) John Mpaketsane emphasised:

we are not happy the way we are living now because we are not sticking to our culture, our laws because of the acculturation it has become inevitable that we just marry from different people with a woman it is not much difficult because we can marry them and then we teach them (D:K:1).

Girls were traditionally not permitted to marry foreigners lest they should make them eat 'Nyamafu' (i.e. pork, dead animals, etc; Mathivha 1992:51). During initiation the Lemba women are told that the uncircumcised are weak persons and that they should not get married to such individuals (cf D:A:2; D:G:11). Their endogamy is, therefore, based on the dogma of the 'uncleanness' of non-Lemba (cf Van Warmelo [1937]1974:82).

4.2.1.2 *Proselytisation and purification*

'In the olden days', relates Servias (from Zimbabwe; Parfitt 1992:123), 'you could only be a Lemba by birth or, in the case of a woman, by marriage.' Nowadays a foreigner might become part of the tribe through circumcision, but it is not the norm (D:A:2). In the past few years, even a few groups of German men have been initiated into the Lemba communities in Zimbabwe (Mberengwa) through circumcision (D:A; D:L:4; D:M:7).

An interesting case study of proselytisation was that of Bishop Marinda (Zion Apostolic Church [ZAC], Masvingo, Zimbabwe), a Shona who is married to a Lemba. He replies that it 'was difficult [to get permission to marry a Lemba girl] but because of the virtue of my religion I am more devoted to clean methods ... it was easier for me we don't eat unclean meat, ... have *kosher* killing I had to go for circumcision ... [but] I [rather] gave my children for circumcision....' ([] – mine; D:P:1,2).

For a woman to be accepted into the Lemba clan, she is subjected to a *very strict* purification ceremony where she is initiated into Lemba laws and customs:

she had to crawl through a hole in an ant-hill.... The idea was that the ants sting and suck off all the pig blood that this non-Lemba woman has eaten in her life.... A fire would be lit on top of her which could burn the contamination, and then, just before she was roasted, they pushed off the branches and threw her into the river to get purified A baptism by fire In some places, another custom was followed: when a woman from another tribe was being admitted as a Lemba, an ox would be slaughtered and some of its meat, mixed with an emetic herb, would be given to the woman. After she vomited, the impurities in her were deemed to have been removed. She was then taken behind one of the huts, where a hole had been made in the wall. She put her head through the hole and it was shaved. She then crawled through the hole and thus became a Lemba. Once she had undergone this ritual, she was never allowed to return to her native village unless accompanied by a Lemba lest she be tempted to eat forbidden foods (Parfitt 1992:51).

The women who are married to the Lemba men, whether they are foreigners or Lemba, constitute the Lemba family. The foreign women are regarded as Lemba because the children will be Lemba. Therefore a Lemba is one who is born of the two Lemba or a woman who is married to a Lemba man, since she would have gone through the initiation into the Lemba customs and culture (D:K:15,16; cf Parfitt 1992:51; Bullock [1927]1950:20). The Lemba believe that these foreign women only become wiser by having their heads shaven (Van Warmelo 1940:67).

4.2.1.3 *Polygamy and monogamy*

A Lemba man may marry more than one wife, and the ranking of the wives determines the succession of the children. The succession follows the father's line (Mathivha 1992). The first wife whom a man married is usually the most important wife, the other wives rank as minors in order of marriage. The first wife is always consulted by her husband.

The purpose of polygamy is to ensure descendants, but a man is not allowed to take more than one wife if he could not properly look after them. According to Mathivha (1999b) such a family always eat together and learn to share everything (even their husband). In this way, a spirit of charitableness to one another is created. It is only when a husband shows favouritism towards a specific wife that rivalry among the wives occur.

Schapera says ([1937]1946:203): 'Polygamy is practised; but, except in the case of chiefs and other prominent wealthy men, not to any marked extent'. It is practised by most African tribes, but not every man has many wives. In fact, Junod (1927:282) found that many men are monogamists, not by choice, but by force of circumstance (e.g. economical factors). He surmises that monogamy existed first and that polygamy emerged only later as a result of the following main reasons: One, wars diminished the number of men, and two, the laws of succession (levirate; young brother inherit the widow of this elder brother, whether he is married or not).⁸⁴ Most of the Lemba, however, also feel strongly in favour of a monogamous marriage; this probably on account of economical reasons and the influence of Christianity (Mathivha 1999b).

4.2.1.4 *Levirate marriages*

Some interviewees indicated that they do have the practice of *Levirate marriages* in their communities, but could not always explain how it works (D:L:7). However, scholars who had observed the practice among the Lemba, described it as follows: '[T]here still exists among them, as well as the Bawenda, that ancient Israelite law, the "Levirate marriage"' (Wessmann 1908:132) or as: '[W]hen a brother takes two wives, the wives of his deceased elder brother, and raising the offspring, they rank in office as if they were the children of the deceased' (Hall 1905:101; cf Schapera [1937]1946:189). The purpose of these marriages is mainly to protect the family. The brother or closest family member who marries the widow has to look after her and her children as his own. The children from this Levirate marriage are considered as the children of the deceased and inherit from the deceased.

⁸⁴ Junod (1927:285) researched the consequences of the custom, mainly among the Tsonga people, and found that no disconsolate old maid could be found. However, he stresses that there are also a downside to this, namely the 'dreadful development of sexual passion which occurs amongst polygamists, the domestic quarrelling which prevails in these villages and lastly that polygamy brings about the ruin of the family.' Junod's observations are obviously from a Western perspective.

4.2.1.5 *Lobola*

*Lobola*⁸⁵ is the price for the bride, negotiated between the two parties involved. Before marriage Lemba girls had to subject themselves to inspection by some old women, to prove their virginity. If she had lost her virginity she was sent back to her parents and the *lobola* has to be paid back (Theal [1898-1903]1964e:202,203). Both boys and girls inherit from their fathers. The heir is determined by the *lobola* (bride's price) cattle which are given by the husband's father to the father of the bride (Mathivha 1992:51). This custom is still in force. The price for the bride can be negotiated between the two parties involved. It could be either cattle or money, or both. Usually it is through the payment of *lobola* that a man obtains a right to the children he begets by a woman, or to any other children she may bear during the existence of the marriage.

'A child born to a divorced woman by any man to whom she is not married belongs to her former husband if his *lobola* cattle have not been returned, and to her own people if they have been' (Shapera [1937]1946:189). Only if a woman remarries and a new *lobola* has been paid, the children from that marriage belongs to her new husband.

Schoffeleers (1966:26) refers to the Mwenye (presumably Lemba; cf Parfitt 1992:291) who, in his opinion, differ from the neighbouring groups as they do not allow premarital co-habitation until the husband has paid the full bride's price and built a hut.

The meaning of the *lobola* is mainly to determine if a man is able to look after this woman. It means you are committed to see this through and you prove that you are responsible enough to take a woman as your wife.

4.2.1.6 *Women marrying other women*

Mathivha (1992:51; and other interviewees), refers to the phenomenon of Lemba women in Venda marrying other women⁸⁶:

[T]he married women are subjected to the authority of the woman who has paid *lobola*. She is the father to the children of the woman she has married. All *lobola* property goes to her. The children of the woman married by her, inherit her property while her children inherit from their father.

Mathivha does not explain the meaning of this relationship, but another respondent (Refilwe Mpaketsane 1999), told me that the single woman who may decide to marry another woman with children (perhaps from different men), is usually someone who is handicapped in one way or another and wants the support of other people (a women and children). Usually men are not interested in marrying a handicapped (often sterile) woman and therefore, the only way out is to marry another women who also needs support. In this way she secures her own support system.

⁸⁵ The Venda word for marriage chattel is *mala*. One would, therefore, expect that those Lemba who speak Venda would also use the same concept (De Beer 1997). Mathivha and others, however, use the Zulu word *lobola*. The system of *lobola* occurs amongst most tribes in Africa.

⁸⁶ This phenomenon also occurs among the Venda (cf Van Warmelo 1948:391 – Venda Land Part 1; Preston-Whyte [1937]1946:191), the North Sotho and the South Sotho.

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This is usually not a sexual relationship, because men from outside may still be used for procreation purposes. In these cases the 'wife' bears children for her 'husband', either by an appointed lover or by a suitor of her own choice (Preston-Whyte [1937]1974:177-210). Woman-to-woman marriages is yet another means of ensuring the continuity of a family in the absence of sons, through raising an heir to inherit a property or position.

4.2.2 Early Israel

Most scholars confirm that the most tribes from the ancient Near East were endogamous (cf Lemche 1985:377-385; Gottwald 1980:285-287) and that this is an important part of the Israelite clans, as well as their view of marriage. Social organisation would then have determined every facet of marriage, and all that accompanied that, from the choosing of a life companion, to the dissolving of marriage (for whatever reason).

4.2.2.1 *Endogamy*

Mayes (1985:49-50) explains that within the wider association of a clan, family members could get married and enjoy material help and protection. In terms of the expanded family, Gottwald (1980:285-287) is of the opinion that there were especially two matters of importance, namely the relationship to the tribe, and the place of dwelling. For this reason it was very difficult for the individual to function within such a community and he or she had to, as far as possible, remain within the group context (Jdg 9:2). The choosing of a bride was an integral part of the social life of Israelite clans.

Examples of marriages within the kinship or social group are mainly found among the narratives concerning the patriarchs, such as in the cases of Isaac (Gn 24:34-50) and Jacob (Gn 26:34-35). Such marriages between cousins (Gn 25:20; 29:9-30), but also to strangers (Jdg 1:4), as well as for political reasons, could take place. However, De Vaux (1973:31) is of the opinion that marriages between brothers and sisters or between other close relatives, were prohibited (Lv 18:6-18). Nevertheless, he does not distinguish the historical eras to which these references apply.

Apparently, parents played the most important role in the choice of a life companion for their children, so for example in the case of Caleb (Jos 15:16) who chose on behalf of his daughter. However, if we may infer anything from the narrative about Samson (Jdg 14:2-3), it does seem as if a child's preferences and disapprovals could also have played a role. Furthermore, it appears from Judges 14 (especially the era of Israelite clans) as if it was customary to choose a life companion from own ranks (endogamy), and not from outside of the group. Samson did not only manage to marry someone of his own choice, but also against the wishes of his parents, a Philistine girl from Timnah.

According to Gottwald (1980:285) marriage connections could sometimes include members of the family, but sometimes exclude blood relatives. Exclusion would take place when someone

would decide out of own choice, or on account of circumstances, to separate himself from the group, or to marry someone from outside.

In the case of Jephthah, it was held against him that he was born from a 'prohibited' relationship (Jdg 11). It is probably on account of his 'undesirable' past, that he was prohibited from participating in politics and religious life. We can infer from Deuteronomy (23:2), that at least later (during the Babylonian Exile) there was the situation or perception that a 'bastard' was not allowed into the assembly of the Lord.

The prohibition to marry someone outside your group was applied very strictly by the leaders of the nation within the exilic communities (Ezr 9:2,10-15; Matthews 1996:163, 174, 175, 180).

4.2.2.2 *Proselytisation and purification*

Gottwald (1980:285) points out that families could be extended in various ways. One way, for example, was to be adopted as a stranger into the extended family (cf also Miller & Hayes 1986:91). A male proselyte had to undergo circumcision, a rite of witnessed immersion, and had to offer a sacrifice (Rowley [1877]1968:76). Such a stranger who had been circumcised, could even participate with the Israelites in the Passover (Ex 12:48-49; cf Nm 9:14).

In this connection Lemche (1988:94-95) indicates how women, particularly unmarried daughters, were often accepted as barter. This was one commercial article in which all families were interested, and they went to great lengths to fulfil in this need. It is not certain whether the narratives of Judges 21 should be read within the context of the period of the Judges, nevertheless, it is narrated how the inhabitants of Jabesh-Gilead was murdered in order to kidnap four hundred virgins, and how the Benjaminites simply went and captured themselves each a wife in the vineyards of Shiloh (cf 8.2.4.4).

It does not seem as if there was mention of any purification ceremony for 'heathen' women during the pre-monarchical period or thereafter.

4.2.2.3 *Polygamy and monogamy*

It is difficult to determine what the real situation was in early Israel. De Vaux (1973:25) maintains that the marriages from the posterity of Seth (e g Noah, Gn 7:7) are portrayed to have been monogamous, but Lamech, from the line of Cain, set the way for polygamy, by taking two wives for himself (Gn 4:19). According to tradition, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Esau each had at least two wives or concubines (polygamy). However, Gideon had many wives, in order for the seventy sons 'to have issued from his loins' (Jdg 8:30-31). More than one wife, such as in the cases of Hannah and Penina, also probably did not always contribute to harmony in the household, and often resulted in bitter envy and disharmony (1 Sm 1:5-6). De Vaux (1973:25) infers that monogamy was the general norm in old Israel, and he then refers specifically to Samson's parents (Jdg 13:2) as example. This deduction is most probably made from a Western perspective.

However, it appears as if there were no particular regulations concerning the number of wives that could be taken, and that it was left to every man to decide for himself.

4.2.2.4 *The levirate marriage*

The word levirate originates from the Latin *levir* which is a translation of the Hebrew **לוי**, which means ‘brother-in-law’. The purpose of the levirate was probably to hold together the family ties, to ensure a male heir and to ensure that a property does not fall into the hands of strangers (De Vaux 1973:38; cf Lv 25:25; Ruth 4:1-6). The custom was that if a man died without having had children, then his brother (the **לוי**, redeemer) would have to marry the widow, and then the children from that marriage would be reckoned as that of the deceased. Only two examples of the levirate marriage are referred to in the Old Testament, of which one possibly dates from the times of the Judges, namely Ruth to Boas (Jdg 1-4; cf Loader 1994:12, 21). The author of the narrative may have been correct concerning the customs which he portrays in the story. Given the restless political situation within which Israelite clans had to establish themselves, it is understandable that the preserving of property was of extreme importance – for this reason the levirate.

4.2.2.5 **מורה** (dowry or bride’s price)

De Vaux (1973:27) argues that marriage ceremonies were in the first instance not a religious, but a family event, and for this reason the bridegroom had to pay the **מורה** to the bride’s father (cf Gn 34:12; Ex 22:16; 1 Sm 18:25). However, there is no certainty about how much this amounted to, and whether it was a fixed amount. According to De Vaux (1973:27), the dowry could be paid by doing a duty of labour, or by executing certain specific duties (Jdg 1:12 and 1 Sm 18:25,27). Apparently it was customary for the father of the bride to put away the **מורה** for his daughter, so that she may enjoy the benefits thereof when her husband would die one day (cf Gn 31). According to Genesis 31:15, Rachel and Leah complained to Jacob, since their father have squandered the money which was supposed to have been given to them (probably the **מורה** paid by Jacob).

Deuteronomy 22:28-29 indicates that if a man, would ‘seize’ a young girl who are not betrothed, and had intercourse with her, he was under an obligation to marry her. He would have to pay the dowry in advance, and was denied the right to ever divorce her (De Vaux 1973:30; Dt 22:28-29).

After the first night of marriage (according to Dt 22:13-21, 28-29) there needed to be proof of a bride’s virginity. If a man were to have accused his wife falsely in this matter, he was not allowed to ever divorce her, however, if he were to discover something ‘shameful’ (i.e. that she was no longer a virgin), he could divorce her. But it does not seem as if this situation has any relevance to the dowry paid.

4.2.3 Evaluation and comparison

The concurrences between the ‘marital laws’ of the Lemba and that of early Israel are rather striking. Almost the same purpose is reflected by both groups when practising endogamy and the levirate. There are also more similarities than differences regarding the dowry.

In some respects there are, however, some differences regarding the marital laws. In the case of the proselytisation of the non-Israelite (*vis-a-vis* that of the same with the Lemba, cf 4.2.2.2) among others implied that he had to profess his faith and bring a sacrifice, whilst with the Lemba there are much more emphasis on the purification rites of the ‘gentile’ woman (who had to be allowed into the community on account of her contracting of a marriage; cf 4.2.1.1). With the Lemba communities it is probably more the issue of purification from gentile practices, such as the eating of unclean meat and so on, whilst the ‘initiation process’ in old Israel, apparently was about the ‘purification’ of the influences from other faith viewpoints. From this point of view, the latter had more of a religious tack than the purification had with the Lemba communities.

As far as my knowledge goes, the Lemba custom (and that in other communities) of marriage of a woman to another woman was completely foreign to early Israel. If it were to have existed, it was probably just not taken up in the canon. Below follows a table of the most salient concurrences and differences between marital customs of the Lemba and that of early Israel.

TABLE 2: COMPARISON – MARITAL CUSTOMS (4.2)

<p>The Lemba (4.2.1) <i>Endogamy (4.2.1.1)</i> <i>Similarities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ This custom was based on purity ▪ This was their secret of survival as a distinct people ▪ Daughters could only marry their own people and only circumcised (‘clean’) men ▪ Men avoid non-Lemba women ▪ Non-Lemba people will make them eat pork and other prohibited food ▪ They may not marry their own brothers and sisters <p><i>Proselytisation and purification (4.2.1.2)</i> <i>Similarities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Earlier one could only become a Lemba by birth, but nowadays – men through circumcision ▪ They are then allowed to use <i>Pesah</i> 	<p>Early Israel (4.2.2) <i>Endogamy (4.2.2.1)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ This custom was based on purity ▪ This was their secret of survival as a distinct people ▪ Daughters could only marry their own people and only circumcised (‘clean’) men ▪ Men were not supposed to marry gentiles ▪ The gentiles will lead them astray ▪ They may not marry their own brothers and sisters <p><i>Proselytisation and purification (4.2.2.2)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Male proselytes undergo circumcision; witness immersion and offer a sacrifice ▪ They are then allowed to use Passover
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Differences

- A woman has to undergo purification before she can become a Lemba:
- She has to crawl through an ant-hill and the ants purify her from the pig blood, etc
- Fire burns away all contamination
- Ox blood mixed with emetic herbs brings out all impurities when drunk
- Her head is put through a hole in a hut and after it is shaven she crawls through the hole
- She may never return to her native village lest she be tempted to eat forbidden foods

Polygamy and monogamy (4.2.1.3)

Similarities

- Men may marry more than one wife, but most men are monogamists – forced by circumstances (economical reasons)
- Not every man has many wives, only the wealthy
- Consequences: No disconsolate old women are found.
- Ranking determines the succession of the children
- The succession follows the father's line
- The first wife is usually the most important wife
- Reasons for polygamy (1) wars diminished men (2) the levirate marriage (3) man's nature

Levirate (4.2.1.4)

Similarities

- The brother takes the widow of his deceased elder or younger brother
- The offspring are raised and rank in office as if they were the children of the deceased
- The purpose was to preserve family ties, in order to have the security of a husband and father, to ensure a male heir and that property would not fall into foreign hands

- No purification for women is known

- Women were often used as barter items

Polygamy and monogamy (4.2.2.3)

- Descendants of Set were monogamists, but Lamech was the first to have two wives (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Esau, etc, had more than one wife). However, most men are monogamists – forced by circumstances
- Not every man had many wives, only the wealthy
- Consequences: No disconsolate old women were found.
- Ranking determines the succession of the children
- The succession follows the father's line
- The first wife is usually the most important wife
- Possibly the same reasons as that among the Lemba, for polygamy

Levirate (4.2.2.4)

- The brother takes the widow of his deceased elder or younger brother
- The offspring are raised and rank in office as if they were the children of the deceased
- The purpose was to preserve family ties, in order to have the security of a husband and father, to ensure a male heir and that property would not fall into foreign hands

<p><i>Lobola (4.2.1.5)</i> Similarities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Lobola</i> are given by the husband's father to the father of the bride ▪ The dowry can be negotiated. It could be cattle, or money, or both <p>▪ No pre-marital co-habitation before full <i>lobola</i> has not been paid and a hut is built</p> <p>▪ Girls are inspected by old women to proof their virginity</p> <p>Differences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Divorced women's children belongs to her former husband if the <i>lobola</i> is not paid back ▪ The children belongs to her own people if the <i>lobola</i> is returned ▪ If virginity was lost the bride is sent back to her parents, the <i>lobola</i> is to be paid back and they should pay the groom's parents <p><i>Women marrying other women (4.2.1.6)</i> Differences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A handicapped woman who wants the support of another woman and children will marry a woman and children with similar needs ▪ This is probably not a sexual relationship and men from outside are being used for procreation purposes 	<p><i>Moher (4.2.2.5)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The dowry had to be paid by the husband to the father of the bride ▪ It was uncertain how much was to be paid, nevertheless, it could be paid by means of labour or tasks rendered ▪ No intercourse was allowed, unless they were engaged, otherwise the <i>moher</i> had to be paid in advance, and the man was not allowed to ever divorce her ▪ After the first marriage night, there needs to be proof of the bride's virginity <p>▪ It is not sure what exactly the regulations were in these instances</p> <p>▪ It is not known what happened to the children in such a case</p> <p>▪ If she was falsely accused of lost virginity, her husband was not allowed to ever divorce her. If, however, she had lost her virginity before, he was allowed to divorce her</p> <p><i>Women marrying other women (4.2.2.6)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No such practice was known in early Israel
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4.3 BURIAL CUSTOMS

4.3.1 The Lemba

4.3.1.1 *The procedures*

During the field research, the respondents only referred to the fact that they were told to bury their dead with their heads in a northerly direction – to indicate the place where they came from (cf D:4:1). An interesting piece of information emerged during a 'group interview' at Mogabane in Sekhukhuneland. Here one of the respondents, John Peta, said that

in the olden days the Lemba had special burial customs. First they dug a room-like hole so that the whole soil must not be deep. And then they put the person on a shelf. And they make a door there like a tomb There are still such graves somewhere at Pench (near Burgersfort) in the Eastern Transvaal (D:4:4).

It is obviously not possible to see those graves without them being excavated. Bullock ([1927]1950:22) is convinced that the custom by the Lemba of interring their deceased in a cavity in the wall of the grave pit (in which the corpse was laid to rest, fully stretched) is of Muslim influence. This specific custom of course was to a certain extent also found among the Israelite clans (De Vaux 1973; cf Wangemann 1868:437; Schlömann 1894:68; Theal [1898-1903] 1964d:213,223; Stayt 1931:234; De Vaal 1958:55,59; Van Warmelo 1966:273).

A few years later Jaques (1931:245-251) also witnessed that the Lemba of the former Northern Transvaal, buried their dead fully stretched out, facing their direction of origin, namely north of the Limpopo of Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe).

If a Lemba burial is performed properly, says Mathivha, they will pour water in the grave when the body lies there, because this water symbolises that they crossed the sea to come to Africa. He adds 'they sailed across the sea and that symbolises the water through which the soul has to pass back, because it goes back to Jerusalem' (D:R:10).

It is worth mentioning that most of the early ethnographic accounts agree on the Lemba's burial procedures (cf Hall 1905:94; Thompson 1942:79; Bullock [1927]1950:21). The body was wrapped in an ox skin (some say white cloth) and laid on its side or on its back on a shelf excavated in the side of the grave, which has to be six feet deep.⁸⁷ Children are buried in the same way as adults.

Some ethnographers mention the Lemba ritual of cutting a dying man's throat with his own razor, or slitting that of a corpse of a man found dead before being buried (Bullock [1927]1950:44). According to many respondents this conclusion is a total misunderstanding of the real custom. Phophi explained to Parfitt (1992:71-72) that it is the custom that no Lemba male should be buried with long hair. Therefore, before he dies or just thereafter, a Lemba goes to the dead man and shaves his hair. Parfitt and others nevertheless, are convinced that they did in fact cut a dying man's throat in the past and perhaps still do so.

4.3.1.2 *Mourning*

The relatives of the deceased used to shave their heads and mourn for seven days, during which time they were not permitted to work. On the seventh day a feast was held, at which an ox, a sheep or a spotless goat was sacrificed. According to Jaques the blood of the animal was either sprinkled over the heads of the assembled men or the blood was drunk⁸⁸ (1931:249; cf Lv 11). The priest prayed to the ancestors, calling on them by name (7.1.2.5). The prayers ended with the word '*Amin*'. Later the men all knelt and the word '*Hundji*' was called out. According to another respondent *Hundji* was supposed to be the Lemba's country or place of origin (Jaques 1931:249;

⁸⁷ According to ethnographers (cf Hall 1905:94; Thompson 1942:79; Bullock [1927] 1950:21), all other tribes in southern Africa buried their dead in a sitting position.

⁸⁸ The drinking of blood is not in concurrence with general Lemba tradition.

cf Parfitt 1992:42). The seventh day was the day on which it was believed a man's soul returned to his body.

A funeral prayer that was recorded by the German, Wangemann (1868:437) goes as follows: 'Schlaf wohl, schlaf bei Gott, wir, die wie zurückbleiben, sind froh.' Lemba respondents emphasise that their way of mourning is different from other African groups. Because they believe that the deceased's soul is not dead, but alive (it is only in transit), they are glad and sing praise-songs instead of crying like many other groups do. This difference, once again, convinces them that they are from a different descent than the others around them (Mathivha 1999b).

4.3.2 Early Israel

4.3.2.1 The procedures

Archaeology contributed substantially regarding research on burial customs during Iron Age I. For example it appears that the deceased during the Iron Age were usually buried in collective family tombs. Inside graves (hewn from limestone), the deceased was apparently laid down with his or her clothes on their backs (Gilbertson 1961:50; Fritz 1994:145; Matthews 1996). Barkay (1988:49) points out that the access to the burial chamber was through a single shaft, which was usually sealed by means of a stone or rubble.

According to Barkay and Kloner (1986:36,56) burial chambers with shelves against the walls were discovered at Beth-shemesh, Lachish and Mitzpahmatza, in which the deceased could find their last place of rest. The sides were slightly higher in order for the deceased not to roll down. Noth (1966:170) confirms that these chambers were typical of the Iron Age.

Apparently it was important for the Israelites to be buried with their ancestors in the family grave (Gn 25:8,17; 49:29,33). The burial chamber represented the 'house of the father' in Sheol. Barkay and Kloner (1986:36) aver that the burial tombs were used repeatedly, and that the bones of the deceased were merely collected into chests, or merely moved aside (or cast beneath the bench) to make room for others. The bones of deceased family members could also have been collected in places of protection. Later when these tombs became too small, more 'rooms' were added. In this way, they surmise, the extended tomb system came about. References such as 'and he slept with his fathers and was buried with them' (2 Ki 8:24); or 'I shall gather you with your fathers, and you will be gathered with peace into your grave' (2 Ki 22:20), obtains new meaning in the light of the above (Noth 1966:170).

In connection with the tomb system, A Mazar (1976:5) refers to the so-called 'two room structure' (from the Iron Age) which was found near the Philistine-Israelite border in the Shephelah. This two room structure consisted of two burial chambers and the one room ran into a place where bones were kept.

Sometimes jars were used to bury small children under the floor of a house (Burger 1991:14). To my mind these customs are not related to the burial ritual, as Burger (1991:14) indicates, but rather with the Canaanite religious practice, to build a child into the foundations of your house in order to appease the gods (cf the Moloch worship, Lv 18:21; 20:2-5 and especially

Jos 6:26; Thompson 1988b:789). There are archaeological proofs that the Canaanites at Tirsha, Sichem and Gezer sacrificed people, and specifically built in children under the floors of their houses (cf 1 Ki 16:34; De Vaux 1973:441ff). The fact that the Israelites so readily took over the practices from the Canaanites, in order to appease the gods, confirms the suspicion that child sacrifices often form part of the ritual.

During the Iron Age I, single burials also sometimes took place. Such a single grave was scarcely the depth of one metre, and usually had engraved stela that were dedicated to one or other god or goddess. Prausnitz (1969:85-87) explains that such a tomb was found in the eastern graveyard of Achzib on the coast between Acco and Tyrus. The deceased was lying on this back, and his head rested on a mixing bowl amphora. The man's seal ring and weapon was also found in the tomb, and clay articles such as lamps and libation cups which were found on top of the grave were usually used for religious rituals. Next to him was a crater amphora, with the remains of a cremation (Prausnitz 1969:85-87).

4.3.2.2 *Mourning*

The information about the process of mourning does not date from the period of the Judges, but the process of mourning (from early Israelite history) most probably concurs with that which is found in the rest of the Old Testament.

When death sets in, it is a sign for the spectators to begin wailing aloud (Gilbertson 1961:50). De Vaux (1973:61) points out that the loud cries of sorrow in Micah 1:8 can be compared to that of a jackal or an ostrich. He/she comments that the mourners began to, at the same time, both praise the good qualities of the deceased as well as mourn his/her bad fortune. However, there does not seem to be any religious significance appended to this.

At reception of the news of death, a person usually tore his/her clothes (2 Sm 1:11; 13:31), clothed him/herself in sack cloth (2 Sm 3:31), took off his/her shoes (2 Sm 15:30) and bared his/her head (Ex 24:17,23). To place your hands on your head was a further sign of sorrow and shame (2 Sm 13:19; De Vaux 1973:59). The head was also covered with soil (or ashes? Jos 7:6); or a person would roll in the dust (Ex 4:3; Is 58:5). Thus he/she literally was in sackcloth and ashes. De Vaux (1973:59) is of the opinion that mourners usually did not wash during the period of mourning, but the Canaanite custom to shave your hair or beard in order to injure yourself during mourning was condemned (Lv 19:27,28; De Vaux 1973:59). The fact that it was condemned shows that the Israelite clans were most probably tempted to follow suit in these practices. We can perhaps infer that the practices that were condemned later, probably dated from pre-monarchic times.

According to Leviticus 9:1-11:47 Moses specifically directs the כֹּהֲנִים (*cohanim*, priests – the descendants of Aaron; cf Nm 25) to their behaviour during the mourning period and warns that they must not drink intoxicating beverages before serving in the Tabernacle.

4.3.3 Evaluation and comparison

Both the procedure of the burial, as well as the process of mourning amongst the Lemba, concur remarkably with that of early Israel (more specifically with the clan era of Israelite history). Some of the Lemba customs that can be ascribed to Israelite influence could stem from early Israel such as the procedure that a person would be buried stretched out on his back, on a bench or shelf against a wall in a 'room-like' grave. Apparently, the Lemba do not have the custom of burying more than one person in the same grave.

However, it is not typical of the customs of early Israel that someone would cut their hair or beard during the mourning process. On the contrary, it was typical pagan or Canaanite, and there is strong polemising against that.

The killing of an animal in the Lemba culture, and the custom to invoke the ancestors by name, or speak with them, is probably on account of influences from traditional African cultures. The unblemished animal sacrificed by the Lemba and the blood sprinkled over the people, seems again to have come from early Israelite influences (probably a sacrifice of atonement).

It is remarkable that the Lemba often during an important ritual or ceremony would confirm something about their history to one another, for instance by naming the order of their ancestors and the place where they came from – almost like a confession that is being pronounced.

With both these communities it is clear that there is faith in a kind of a life after death. Archaeologists have found remnants of food that in the graves of the Israelites clans in the times before the monarchy, which was brought to the dead. The Lemba actually say it in so many words and they confirm this through their *Gshamo* (cf 7.1.2.5) and other rituals, as well as through the fact that food and beer are given to the dead in various ways. These resemblances and differences can be tabled as follows.

TABLE 3: COMPARISON – BURIAL CUSTOMS (cf 4.3)

<p>The Lemba (4.3.1) <i>The procedures (4.3.1.1)</i> <i>Similarities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Only single graves are known ▪ The grave is a room-like hole ▪ The deceased is laid on his/her side or back on a shelf ▪ The grave had a door like a tomb ▪ They are buried in a fully-stretched out position <p><i>Differences</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Water is poured into the grave to symbolise that they cross the sea to come to Africa 	<p>Early Israel (4.3.2) <i>The procedures (4.3.2.1)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sometimes single graves were used ▪ Room-like graves ▪ The deceased is laid on his/her side or back on a shelf ▪ The grave had a door like a tomb ▪ They are buried in a fully-stretched out position

- They are buried with their heads in a northerly direction – to indicate their direction of origin
- They believe the soul returns to Jerusalem
- Some say they cut a dying man's throat with their own razor, others say it is a misunderstanding
- Children were buried in the same way as adults
- Collective graves are not used

Mourning (4.3.1.2)

Similarities

- The prayer is ended with 'Amin'

Differences

- Everybody shave their heads and mourn for seven days
- They are glad for the deceased and praise-songs are sung

- No work is done at that time
- On the seventh day they have a feast. An ox or goat without blemish is sacrificed
- The blood of the animal is sprinkled over the heads of the men or is drunk (the latter is in contradiction to the general perception)
- The priests pray to the ancestors – calling them one-by-one, by name
- Then they all kneel and the word 'hundji' is called out
- On the seventh day a person's soul returns to his/her body

- Children were sometimes buried in urns under the floor of the house
- Collective family graves were common practice
- Bones were collected over time

Mourning (4.3.2.2)

- Prayers are ended with 'Amin'
- Hair were not shaven – Canaanites did this
- When a death is announced the spectators begin to wail
 - The good qualities of the deceased is loudly praised
 - Clothes are torn, sackcloth is worn, shoes are off, head is bare and ash or soil are strewn on the head

4.4 SKILLED PROFESSIONS

4.4.1 The Lemba

4.4.1.1 *Masters of magic arts and 'medicine men'*

Parfitt (1992:249-250) notes that 'the descendants of the Moors had a huge reputation as men of magic and medicine and as such played an important role in African society...' (cf Stayt 1931:237). The Portuguese trader Antonio Caiado, who accompanied Don Gonçalo da Silveira to the court of Monomotapa in 1560, added to this supposition by his statement that 'Moorish

*ngangas*⁸⁹ were the principal wizards of the country' (Theal [1898-1903]1964c:102). Parfitt (1992:250,269) connects the above facts to the explanation for the word Lemba that one finds in Jantzen (1982:3; cf Miller 1976:69): 'Conflicts of interest between the trade and social order may explain why Lemba – a word meaning 'to calm' (*lembikisa*) took the form of a therapeutic association, a "drum of affliction" (ngoma)'

Parfitt (1992:250) considers it possible

that these Mwenye *ngangas* travelled further afield and established themselves elsewhere in Africa as a sort of secret guild. In any event, it is interesting that in West Africa a curious sort of cult, which took the form of a therapeutic association called a 'drum of affliction' [*ngoma*], was known as the 'Lemba'. Similarly in Angola, in Mbundu society (and perhaps in Zaire), the word Lemba refers to a noble and traditional elite [my insertion].

The *ngangas* are specialists, men skilled above their fellows and the number of different types is very great in the different clans (cf Van Warmelo [1937]1974:226). All these information correlates with the fact that till today the Lemba are viewed as masters of magic arts and as medicine men (Van Warmelo [1937]1974:81). The Sadiki clan are specifically known as the medicine men of war, a tribe that knew all the herbs/medicine of war and their special praise goes *Rudzi rwavo vaiva nganga dzokurwa, vaiziva miti yose* (Von Sicard 1962:70). The Hamisi clan again were known as 'medicine men who treated people in order to get children': *Basa ravo raivo rokusimikira* (cf Von Sicard 1952:70; Chigaga 1972:10).

4.4.1.2 Pottery, iron and copper smelting, cotton weaving and building skills

In his search for gold (and other items) for an Austrian agency, William Bolts (1777) already reported to Andrew Daniel Pollet, agent for their imperial majesty in Mcafũmo River that

[t]he Natives of this part seem to have no knowledge of gold But as the River of Maneefs [Manees?] traverses an immense track on the back of Sofãla ... a people called *Malembe* resort to this place at stated periods from a country that way, said to be several weeks journey from hence on diligent inquiries from these people, who must necessarily have had some communication with the distant inland factories of the Portuguese, we may be able to trace that precious metal I have some suspicion that these people come from the country called Manica (Manyika⁹⁰; see *Map II*) in the old books, concerning whom, Purchas, in his *Pilgrimes*, [printed 1537] records many curious particulars ... some of which I have selected for that purpose, as follows 'In Manica they have smiths who make spades, hatches etc and weavers who make cotton cloths' (Bolts 1777:6, [my italics, footnote and insertion]).

Junod (1908; and many others) also describes the crafts and industries of the Lemba, the skill of the women in making earthenware and the remarkable metallurgical technique of the men. Lestrade (1937b:124) explains the special technique in the working with gold, and the use of it for plate and bead ornamentation (as reflected in the Mapungubwe gold in the Northern

⁸⁹ Wizards or masters of magic arts. These skills are evenly known among other peoples (cf Van Warmelo [1937]1974:226).

⁹⁰ There are still Lemba (Jewish) groups in the vicinity (Rusape and Mutare) today (The Reverend Banda 1999).

Province), as an 'Arab' influence which was presented by Lemba traders (about 900 AD; cf Mathivha 1992). He maintains that they were either Arabs themselves or they were an admixture of Semitic groups who traded between Mapungubwe and the east coast of Africa.

The Lemba could not remember the name of their country but they know they were masters of iron and copper smelting and working. In their country they made pots, grew and weave cotton and were also masters of timber work, because they had to build their own ships for their maritime undertakings. Numerous spinning wheels were found at Machedema, north of Waterpoort and the Soutpansberg, which are linked to the Lemba by some scholars (cf De Vaal [s a]c:13). All their skills are learnt within the family connection, and are carried over from one generation to the next. It occurs that each clan has its own specific skills (cf 4.4). In certain localities they had the monopoly in these crafts (Van Warmelo 1966:273-283; [1937]1974:82,83; cf De Vaal [s a]b and 1952b:405-408, about the pottery of the Lemba and their copper and ironwork; 1952a:591-596; Hoernlé 1931:255).

4.4.1.3 *Traders*

With the assistance of the Lemba, Phophi, Van Warmelo (1966:273-283 and others; cf Chapter Three) recorded that the Lemba came to Africa from a remote place on the other side of the sea, and that at different places in Africa they erected trading depots, and left some of their people behind to take charge. They did, however, keep themselves *separate* from the native peoples, because they felt themselves superior.

The Portuguese Father Fernandes, was the first to have recorded the following song in 1561/62 (Von Sicard 1962:78):

Gombe zuco virato
Ambuze capana virato

Translated by Fernandes as:

The cow has leather for shoes,
and the goat has no leather for shoes.

This translation is debatable, especially when one reads the song recorded by Stayt (1931a:236):

The best businessmen are the ones who bring the cattle home;
Those who bring home goats are nothing.

Unfortunately, Stayt did not provide the original text as well. But this song again stresses the fact that the Lemba were traders, and how the world-view or interpretation by a translator can influence them in the outcome of an interpretation.

A report by 'a Negro' Mahumane⁹¹ for the Dutch at Delagoa Bay in 1728, refers to the 'Walembers' in the vicinity of the Zoutpansberg as being *traders* and a *separate* people. These two traits very often come to the fore in accounts on the Lemba and in the oral traditions of the Lemba themselves – even when other groups refer to the Lemba.

Junod mentions that most of the Lemba's merchandise would often consist of medicine, and that they introduced fowl into the country (1908; 1927:73). In 1938 (:245-251) he remarks that they were anxious to preserve their tribal and ritual purity, and stresses that they were competent 'traders'. A man of importance is shown great respect when he is addressed as *mušavi* (buyer), *nyakuwana* (the man who finds the things which are bought), or *mulungu*, probably 'the man from the North'. Jaques (1931:248) contributes by adding family traditions which bear witness to the commercial activities of the old Lemba:

[A]n ancestor of Mosheh [a respondent], called Mbalanyika, was given the nickname of Gumboyi 'leg', because he used to travel much on business. When people mocked him because he did not plough and did not even possess a hoe, he used to say, *Gumboyi baaza, mašango nda feza* 'My leg is my hoe, I walk about to every country' [my insertion].

This Lemba forerunner of the commercial traveller, evidently found it more profitable to devote all his time to trade, rather than to agriculture (cf *Photo 41*). In order to sell their wares such as medicine, metalwork, pottery and textiles, they accepted grain, livestock or anything else they could use or resell, and they also undertook long journeys to find customers (Junod 1931:248).

Another old Lemba praise song collected by Stayt (1931:237; Chapter Three), reflects more about their view of the past: *Nemanga vhazungu vha no senna, vha no vha mbila ya sose* ('Master of the monkey nuts, white men who come from Sena, who come from the place of the rock rabbits at Sose'). This praise song does not only emphasise that they were traders and that they looked different from others, but also indicates their location before they moved southwards.

Schoffeleers (1966:26) refers to the Mwenye (Lemba clan) in Malawi who are very prosperous traders and keepers of cattle (cf De Vaal for various trade routes in his personal notes). In his personal notes De Vaal recorded a praise-song usually sung for their chiefs:

Great trader,
Lion of the Induna.
He who pierces assailants,
Thundering on the white-ant hills,
Roamer of hills and vales.
Numerous are the only in the land,
Thunder of the land [my translation].

This praise-song emphasises that the Lemba are traders and that they know all the trade routes in the country (wherever that was at the stage when the song was sung). Today there are

⁹¹ An African from the chiefdom of Mpfumo near the Dutch trading factory who had visited the Venda 'king' in 1727/28 and who gave the Dutch important information they needed. This report was transcribed by the head of the Dutch trading station, J van de Capelle (cf Liesegang 1977; Sutherland-Harris 1970). They refer to Mahumane as 'a Negro'.

numerous Lemba who conduct their own businesses. In fact, they feel strongly about these and believe that they should preferably not work for someone else. This indeed encourages initiative to undertake their own businesses. Numerous Lemba who do work for others, work for Jews.

4.4.2 Early Israel

4.4.2.1 Pottery, jewellers, weavers and the metalwork industry

The pottery work of the Israelite settlements in the mountain area, indicates materially a very poor culture (A Mazar 1992:290-293; 1990:345-348). With single exceptions, the ceramic wares generally kept their same Late Bronze forms (Fritz 1994:142). The large storage tanks (hewn cisterns) and *pithoi* (large pots, mainly used for the storage of water), are characteristic of this period. However, A Mazar (1990:247; Fritz 1994:144) is convinced that this is not unique to the Israelites as is often maintained. Similar *pithoi* also occur in typical Canaanite areas. In the Israelite settlements, smaller storage tanks were found, which were used for the storage of wine and oil, pots for cooking and other utensils. In general these utensils did not have any ornamentation (A Mazar 1992:290-293).

Almost no further indications of other forms of art is known with Israelite clans from the Iron Age, except for burial utensils, oil lamps, and so on. Dothan (1984:38) and Weippert (1988:327-329) points to the possibility of the metal industry during the Late Bronze Age, which should be taken account of, and that the chances that the Iron Age continued, is highly probable. Evidence of this is found at Israelite fortresses such as at Tell Hareshkim and Khirbet Raddana (Fritz 1994:144), but there are few remains of these. A few eleventh century products such as the typical bronze bull figurine was found near the sanctuary in Dothan (Wiseman 1988:86-88). Bronze items were still the most frequent in the Iron Age, however, weapons and implements were made of iron. At Khirbet-el-Meshâsh about fifty six implements of copper and bronze were found, and only six made of iron (Fritz 1994:144).

Various trades such as musicians, millers, bakers, weavers, hairdressers, potters, bleachers, locksmiths, metal workers and jewellers are mentioned in the Old Testament, and the same skills probably also occurred in early Israel (cf Gn 4). There is very little information about weaving in early Israel, but there are specific references to wool from sheep, goats' hair and flax, which were probably used to weave with (cf Gn 38:12; 1 Sm 25:2; Jos 2:6). This idea is endorsed by the various small spinning wheels and related articles, which were found by archaeological excavations in Israel and elsewhere (Irvin 1977:313).

The economic progress and the symbiotic relationship with the urban areas, brought the Israelitic clans into contact with new trades and skills, which the Canaanites and other inhabitants had developed already, over a long period. Exchange of knowledge and skills took place between these groups. Bright (1972:170; cf Stander & Louw 1990:146) explains, that initially the Israelite clans did not know many technical skills, but gradually learnt new skills, which implied a consequent economical growth. De Vaux (1973:76-77) and Kimbrough (1978:50) are convinced that skills were learnt within family context, and delivered from generation to generation.

4.4.2.2 *Traders*

Coote and Whitelam (1987:85-86) indicates how Palestine was known, through the ages, to be a thoroughfare – not only did trade routes run through the country, but the country also benefited from the flourishing trade between Africa, Asia and the West (cf Olivier 1991:139-140). For instance, many luxury, expensive commercial articles were found in Late Bronze tombs. Palestine could play its, mainly geographical, role without being exploited by any of the two greater political powers, but the melting pot of various cultures and the strategic military trade position did take its toll in the lower lying areas. These easily accessible areas, were, according to Coote and Whitelam (1987:85-86), often the victim of fragmentation and destruction, which consequently brought about restlessness. The cities surrounding the trade routes, were also often exposed to plunder and so on. The situation in the lowlands was possibly one of the reasons why the Israelites rather would have settled in the safer, more protected lying highlands.

The settling of Israelite clans in the mountain areas, also resulted in new trade routes, and other possibilities. Coote and Whitelam (1987:86-87) indicate that a considerable number of scholars are convinced that there indeed had to be trade between the established farmers and the semi-nomads during the Iron Age. They for example refer to bartering that probably took place between the groups in the areas north east of Jerusalem (Michmach, Geva, Azmareth and Anathot) and Tekoa further south.

Dothan (1984:40-41) surmises that there had to be trade connections and military ties between Israel and the Philistines, since some Philistine pottery were found in Israelite settlements such as Tell Masos, 'Izbet Sartah, Tell Qiri, Hazor and Dan. Another possibility is that they just shared the same pottery.

The importance of controlling the various trade routes and the various economic advantages which accompany these, probably often lead to political conflict in the period of the Judges. Something of this is indicated in some of the narratives in the Book of Judges.

The story of Jephthah (Jdg 10:6-12:7), as that of Gideon, needs to be read against the above mentioned economical background. Judges 10:9, for instance refers to the children of Ammon who crossed the Jordan in order to do battle against Judah, Benjamin and the house of Ephraim, and caused Israel to be in dire straits. Aharoni (in Aharoni & Avi-Yonah 1979:map 78) illustrate that the capital city of Ammon (Rabbath-bene-ammon) lies very strategically, where the eastern and western branches of the Royal Highway (the only communication route between Eilath and Damascus) joined. Hamlin (1990:109) emphasises the importance of this route for the transporting of (for example) the medical ointment from Gilead, and other products from Egypt, Arabia, Canaan, Syria and Mesopotamia. In his opinion the Israelite clans were an impediment for the Ammonites, since they occupied the area between Ammon and the Jordan River, in the vicinity of Gilead (cf Aharoni & Avi-Yonah 1979:46).

In the ancient Near East, trade did not only take place along the trade routes, but also on rivers and on the sea. Noth (1966:84), however, is convinced that this type of trade (on rivers and sea) did not occur in Palestine and especially that sea trade could not be of any significance, since Israelite clans only occupied a limited region next to the Mediterranean Sea.

However, De Vaux (1973:72,207) surmises that the Israelites would have soon learnt the art of trade from the Canaanites – in certain contexts the word Canaanite means ‘trader’ (cf Job 40:30, B Mazar 1992:19). As an example of trading that took place, Joshua 24:32 refers, to the parcel of soil which Jacob bought from the sons of Hamor, the father of Sichern, for four hundred pieces of silver. However, the value of the pieces of silver (שקל) is unknown. It is not certain whether it was in any case pieces of silver (De Vaux 1973:168).

4.4.3 Evaluation and comparison

Also with regard to the various skills of the Israelites and the Lemba communities, the concurrences are very much the same. Although by itself this is not so unique, since all peoples do have their skills. The question, however, is whether there are salient resemblances.

Noth (1966) is quite convinced that sea trade was not a considerable factor for the Israelites, since they occupied a very limited region bordering on the sea. The possibility exists that the narratives of the Lemba are true, and that the Israelite communities in Yemen did actively conduct trade with the Arabian sea traders of the east coast of Africa, and possibly also with Israel itself. These may be narratives which simply did not reach the canon of the Old Testament. However, the dating of these narratives of the Lemba are problematic.

Considerable research has been done about the various trade routes which ran in East Africa, and more locally north and south of the Limpopo (cf De Vaal 1958). In more than one ethnological report the role of the trader and the middleman has been linked to the Lemba (even at Mapungubwe, Thulamela and Mutokolwe; cf Lestrade 1937b). Spinning wheels, copper and gold objects, have also been discovered, in both areas in the Northern Province (RSA), where the Lemba probably played the role of middleman between the villages and the Arabian and Portuguese traders (cf Lestrade [1927]1960:124).

It is striking to see how many Lemba have their own businesses, or are in one way or another involved in the world of business. Living proof of the Israelite clans’ potential or abilities to conduct trade, is today still visible in the particular competence of Jewish people world-wide.

The material culture of the Lemba does not indicate much, since they usually moved or lived with other groups. The same is actually true of the material culture of early Israel.

TABLE 4: COMPARISON – SPECIAL SKILLS (4.4)

<p>The Lemba (4.4.1) <i>Masters of magic arts and medicine men</i> (4.4.1.1) <i>Differences</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ‘Moorish’ <i>ngangas</i> already were the wizards of the country (probably the Lemba themselves) ▪ The word ‘Lemba’ means, among others, ‘the calm’ or ‘a drum of affliction’ 	<p>Early Israel (4.4.2) <i>Masters of magic arts and medicine men</i> (4.4.2.1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No such skills connected to specific clans are known
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- The Lemba form a secret guild
- Especially the Sadiki clan are known for their skills as medicine men
- The Hamisi treat people to get children

Pottery, iron and copper smelting, timber work, cotton weaving and building skills (4.4.1.2)

Similarities

- They are known for their iron and copper smelting, their metallurgical skills (the men)

pottery manufacturing
cotton weaving (spinning wheels were found) and timber work
(especially the Tovhakhare clan)

- Skills are delivered from one generation to the next within the family context

Traders (4.4.1.3)

Similarities

- They came to Africa to trade. Africa has many trade routes

- Trade usually took place between the established farmers and the semi-nomads (clans)

- Trade probably took place on sea and rivers

Differences

- Their merchandise consists mainly of medicine, fowl, peanuts, iron, copper, gold
- They are called 'musāvi' or 'nyakuwana' (traders)
- They rather trade than practice agriculture
- Mainly work for themselves or for other Jews

Pottery, iron and copper smelting, timber work, cotton weaving and building skills (4.4.2.2)

- They are known for their iron and copper smelting; their metallurgical skills (cf Tell Hareskim and Khirbet Raddana)

pithoi (hewn gathering tanks)
possibly also weaving (spinning wheels were found)

- Skills delivered from generation to generation

Traders (4.4.2.3)

- Israel served as thoroughfare between numerous trade routes, this made trade inevitable

- Trade usually took place between the established farmers and the semi-nomads (clans)

- Trade probably also took place on sea and rivers

- Mainly trading with food

- They probably learnt from Canaanites ('traders')

4.5 SOCIAL ORGANISATION

4.5.1 The Lemba

4.5.1.1 Twelve clans/lineages

Mathivha (1992:23; and many others) explains that the Lemba initially had ten clans, and then only later, two more were added here in the South of Africa. Each one refers to a specific ancestor and in the past had its own history and purpose. It is clear that each clan has stories of its own specific magic, building or other skills.

According to Mathivha (1992:8; and others) there is a tradition that the oldest ancestor, Buba, brought the people from Israel to Yemen. This senior house ruled in Yemen. Hamisi brought them to Africa and in Africa the house of Hamisi was succeeded by the Bakari. The Bakari were followed by Seremane, followed by Tovakare, then by Ngavi (or Zungunde), Mhani, Hadzhi and Sadiki, and finally by Sarevu and Chineravhi. Raulinga (1995) provides the following order, with accompanying reasons (and spellings that he did not specifically mention) of his own: Buba, Hamisi, Bakali, Seremane, Thovhakale, Ngavhi/Zungunde, Mange/Nemange, Mhani, Hadji, Sadiki, Tshinyaladzi and Salefu. The two latter clans were added here in the South. However, the order of the names has to do with the order of the ancestors, and during certain feasts the representatives of each clan had to sit in this specific order (D:R:1-9; cf Mathivha 1992).

Connoway (1976; 1978) adds that the genealogies of at least nine different clans of Lemba: the Nyakavhi clan, Hadzhi, Bakali, Sadiki, Buba, Hamisi, Tovhakhali, Mhani and lastly the Bhenga, Hasane, Ngavhi, Maange and Salifo clans (again different spellings and order). But there are also many other lists (cf Motenda 1940; Von Sicard 1962).

Von Sicard (1962:68) observes the tendency (from informant, Solomon Hamandishe), to see in the Lemba traditions, more Old Testament similarities than there actually are, and that explains why there are, according to him, *twelve* tribes. Von Sicard (1962) found at least another six clans, and it becomes clear that it is hardly possible, to separate strictly, the different clans from one another.

Motenda (1940:65) explains that besides their proper clan names the Lemba acquired additional names (way back in history), for fear of being slaughtered by the enemy for some reason or another. From this the many variations or sub-clan names of the Lemba received their origins.

There are many traditions and praises surrounding the different clans of the Lemba. I have already mentioned that most of the names could be traced back in one way or another to either a commonplace name in the Hadramaut (Yemenite) or to a Hebrew word (cf Chapters Three and Five; Van Warmelo 1966). Von Sicard (1962:77) is convinced that all names of the original immigration, which can be fixed to about 1745/46, are decidedly of Swahili-Arab origin.

4.5.1.2 *Praises and praise-songs*

Each tribe has many stories of the role they played in their history and their special skills which give them a very special feeling of belonging and self-identification. This survey of some of the praises, proverbs and songs of the clans does not pretend to be complete (cf *Photo 37*). Only a few praises or songs related to some of the clans, will now briefly be discussed.

There is the tradition, for example, that the oldest ancestor, Buba, the priestly clan brought the people from Israel to the 'promised land'. This senior house ruled in Yemen (Mathivha 1992). It was quite an experience to realise that the newest information on the results of the DNA samples of the Buba clan in Sekhukhuneland (information disseminated by Thomas et al [1999]), correlated with the existing oral traditions (D:R:1-5).

Mathivha explained (I thought at first that he was improvising it quite creatively right there and then) that according to a Judaising group in Ethiopia, 'Buba' is a corruption for 'Judah' (1997; D:R:1-5). According to him, they were actually the leaders of the Sena group who were

the carriers of trade between Yemen and Judea. 'When we refer to them we always called them Basena,' he informs (D:R:1-5). Furthermore, the Buba (Judah) was responsible for the so called 'secret sacrifices' which had to be brought. In fact, there is a proverb that specifically refer to the Buba, namely: *Bhuba malinga lu tanga*, which means: 'Buba, the one who keeps that kind of seed/crop (*tanga*)'. The seeds of this special kind of crop were used for the sacrificial ceremonies. One can still find these crops in Zimbabwe today, Mathivha remarks (D:R:1-5). The Buba were therefore, according to this tradition, the priests among the Lemba clans. The 'headquarters' of the Buba tribe in South Africa, was Tzaneen (Phusela)⁹², but moved from there to the village, India in Sekhukhuneland (D:R:1-5,10,11). Another special name of praise for Buba (and all the other clans) is *shvhanani*, a word derived from the old Jewish *shabi* which means 'the giver of Abraham's faith' (D:R:1-5). I was quite amazed that Mathivha (1992) had already written down most of the above traditions long before the current genetic research was undertaken; as I realised only later.

According to tradition Hamisi brought the Lemba to Africa (Mathivha 1992). The Hamisi is said to have 'lived in Sena at a place which is identified with Gorongoza' in Portuguese East Africa: *PaSena vaHamisi vakagara panzvimbo yaGorongosi*. They came to Southern Zimbabwe from the former Transvaal and settled at Dumbwe Hill in Belingwe. As mentioned above they are known as 'medicine men who treated people in order to get children': *Basa ravo raiva rokusimikira* (Von Sicard 1962:70).

In Africa the house of Hamisi was succeeded by the Bakari (Mathivha 1992:1-6). One of the praises of the Bakari is, *Vasera mupunga*: 'those who sifted rice' (Von Sicard 1962:76).

The Bakari were followed by Seremane (Mathivha 1992:1-6; Serimani). Von Sicard (1962:76) describes Serimani as a general designation of the Lemba, rather than the name of a particular clan. Stayt (1931:233) renders the name Sulemani (cf Chapter Three).

The Seremane were followed by Tovakare/Thobakhali. Their praise names are (with the English translation on the right):

Dzimbabwe guru, Murozvi,	The Big Stone, of the Rozvi tribe,
vaChizendangwa,	(clan name; Mr) The one we lean on,
vaMashura,	(clan name; Mr) Mystery Man
vaChamhembe,	(clan name; Mr) North
Vanomuruka mananga akaparapatana,	[meaning uncertain; archaic Shona]
Ho! Vovo, vovo! Tovakare,	Ho! There he is, there he is, Tovhakare
muRemba unenge Tovera,	of the Remba tribe like Tovera
coMurungwane,	(clan name)
vaMaponga-miti,	(clan name)
vaMaringa,	(clan name)
vaMashandika,	(clan name)
vaBungu,	(clan name)
vacere-nyama.	Who fed on meat only.

They are also known as 'those who provide meat for the people in the circumcision lodge'. Their speciality was further 'to pile up, without difficulty, the iron ore and mark them': *Ndivo*

⁹² *Phusela* probably derives from the word *Masilah/Massilah* (the word for the valley which goes from Sena [in Yemen] to the sea; cf Chapter Three; cf *Map I*).

vaiva vabati vokuronga nyora mabwe iwawo emhangura. Not all of the praise names are always clearly understood by everybody, because they are recited very fast, and in their language of the circumcision lodge (Von Sicard 1962:71).

The name Tovakare (also Tovhakale or Thobakgale), means *Nhovele wa kare*, *Thovhela-wa-kale* or *Thobela-wa-kgale*, which is: 'King of long ago'. Some respondents in Zimbabwe maintain that the Tovakare lineage were especially famous for their *stone masonry*. But Tovakare is also called '*Makudo-a-Zimbabwe*'. This means that the Tovakare men 'climbed the walls like monkeys or baboons when they were building the walls' (Mathivha 1992:1-7). The Tovakare group still lives in the southern parts of Zimbabwe today, and Marimazhira (D:F:9) witnessed how among the 'Varemba' they referred (and are still referring) to the Tovakare as 'those who built Great Zimbabwe'. They also came from Sena.

After the Tovakare leadership came the Ngavi (or Zungunde, Mathivha 1992:1-6; Mkavi or Kavi, Von Sicard 1962:68). Von Sicard is convinced that the Ngavi is a section of the Madi clan.

Mani (sometimes written as Mhani, Manhi or Madi) succeeded Tovakare and left Sena on account of a bad drought (Von Sicard 1962:69; cf Mathivha 1992:1-6) and succeeded Tovakare. It was the Madi clan who was particularly famous as iron workers, but also as medicine men and judges: *Vaiva nezvido pose-pose, vachiti vunganga vuye kutonga kamwe nebasa ravo rokupfura. Rinova ndiro rinotendekana nokuti Mupfure* ('they had love for many trades, divining, ruling/governing other tribes and smelting', [this denotes goldsmiths]). In Stayt's list of Lemba clans (1931:233), Madi does not even find a place.

According to Mathivha (1992:1-6), Hadzhi succeeded Mani. Von Sicard (1962:75) records them as the Hadzi-Mberengwa clan, and collected only one of their praises, namely *Mberengwa ina-vavuya, negore raManyeruke*: 'Belingwe were occupied by people who came during the reign of Manyeruke (referring to ancestors who lived at Belingwe Hill). Stayt (1931[1968]:237) remarks: 'The Hadzhi family is the most important among the BaLemba, and the name is an interesting one to find so far south.' He reminds that *Hadji* is an Arabic word for pilgrimage, specifically referring to the Kaaba. 'The Hadji once performed, the pilgrim never omits to prefix the title Hadji to his name. One wonders what ancestor of the Transvaal Hadzhi made the famous pilgrimage' (Stayt ([1931]1968:237).

Von Sicard and Stayt of course did not yet have the information from the genetic tests and other findings from Yemen, that are compatible with the Lemba traditions (that they actually came from there). Thus an ancestor need not have come from the Transvaal to do the pilgrimage to Israel, but could have done it earlier on in their history, when still living in Yemen.

After the Hadzhi ruled, Sadiki the clan of Chief Mposi followed (Mathivha 1992:1-6). This was the clan of the medicine men (as was already mentioned), since they knew all medicines: *Rudzi rwavo vaiva nganga dzokurwa, vaiziva miti yose* (Von Sicard 1962:70). Another praise says: *Sadiki muzungu anokubwa sena*, which indicates that they originally came from Sena. In fact, most of the clans have a praise which relate their origins to Sena (Mathivha 1999b).

Finally, according to Mathivha, they were led by Sarevu and Chineravhi. Sarevu or Sarifu (Von Sicard 1962:71) have the praise names *Chakarungwa, kukaka wakazvirunga umene* ('that which has been made well; the milk is in itself savoury/natural'), meaning: *Isu hatitongwi nomunhu, asi tinotongwa naMwari, wakarunga mukaka*: 'We are judged or ruled by nobody, only by God who has made the milk savoury/who gave the milk that natural taste.' They were also the winders of bangles from copper and brass wire. It is also said that the Sarifu have been the first to have discovered the Musina copper mines (Von Sicard 1963:72).

Von Sicard argues the possibility that Sarifu comes from the Arabic word, *sherif* (noble). Van Warmelo ([1937]1974:82) lists many more words that could indicate Arabic influence: Bakali (Ar. *Bakr*), Haji (Ar. *hajj*), Hamisi (Ar. *hamis*), Hasane (Ar. *hasan*), Sadiki (Ar. *sadih*), Salifo (Ar. *sharif*). He is also convinced that the ancestor cult with its annual rites hold the family organisation together: 'Ancestors are addressed by name (genealogies are therefore important) and age-old prayers are recited ... and responded to by all present. No strangers are allowed to attend' (Van Warmelo [1937]1974: 82).

Other scholars tend to see the correlation between the twelve names and the Hebrew language. Selemane could be a corrupted form of 'Solomon' and Sadiki (the medicine men) is close to the Hebrew term *tsadik*, which means 'righteous man' (Parfitt, in Ahuja 1999:3).

4.5.1.3 *A segmented society with a loose social organisation*

Geographically the Lemba are distributed over the whole world but more specifically in Southern Africa, and therefore the Lemba are (and were in the past) a segmented society. They are principally not bound to a specific area and are practically a *Diaspora* society. They are without a central chief or national unity but with characteristic customs to which they adhere from generation to generation and which keep them together.

The Lemba are communally organised into clans or lineages with each lineage headed by its own chief (or *ish* in olden times; cf the Hebrew word ΨN [a man]). The Lemba are further a patriarchal community with their social organisation based on the extended family which is the focus of life (Mathivha 1992:51). This social organisation might differ from clan to clan and even from family to family. It is a patriarchal system, yet at the same time *egalitarian* (as far as the position of the men in the communities are concerned). In other words, they are egalitarian, but as far as the position of women is concerned, they are selectively egalitarian. Although the authority in the villages is vested in the chief and the elders, one does not get the impression that they wield absolute power over the others in the community. It may be a result of 'cultural diffusion', but they always want to be very democratic in their negotiations and decision-making. My overall impression was that the Lemba are people with much respect for one another. A value perhaps gained from their initiation teachings.

We observed that women would not say anything, unless you ask them specifically, but once they start they are not at all shy to tell their stories. It seems to me though, that the women are less informed than the men in the communities. The reason could be that women usually do not

form part of a discussion or negotiations about important matters with the elders in the chief's kraal, which is typical of a patriarchal society.

Another example of this could be pointed out. At one time in Sekhukhuneland (Feb 1996) the 'elders' gathered with the chief in his kraal to decide who would join my husband and I the following day, to visit the villages in the vicinity, as well as to decide other important issues. A deceased chief's wife is supposed to be the acting chief until her son gets married and take over the duties from her. But to my knowledge she was not even heeded in those matters. Since her husband's death her son had attended the LCA Conferences (being referred to by others as Chief Mpaketsane) without any acknowledgement of his mother, as the 'real' acting chief. This situation again reflects something of the inferior position of women in this patriarchal society.

4.5.2 Early Israel

4.5.2.1 *Twelve clans*

There are different theories regarding the existence and functioning of a kind of a federation of twelve clans during the pre-monarchic period (cf Noth [1958]1983; Bright 1981; Gottwald 1980), but it seems as though the clans in the first stage of settlement in Canaan were conscious of the bonds which united them. They shared, for example, the same name (Israelites or Hebrews), the same customs, acknowledged the same God, Yahweh (Jos 24:18,21,24), and in times of crises a group of clans stood together to face the trouble (cf Jdg 1:1-17; 1:27-33; 3:5-6; 4; 5). But they had no common head. According to Judges 5, there were only ten Israelite 'tribes' (as mentioned there), and only later were more added.

4.5.2.2 *Praises and sayings*

Very little is known about praise-songs or specific skills of the twelve clans in ancient Israel, but the various sayings in Genesis 49 (at the death bed of Jacob and in passages such as Jdg 4 and 5), provide in brief some of the strengths or weaknesses, the myths and stories and geographical settings of the various clans. It is not known anymore whether these characteristics or information were presented in praises or praise-songs. De Moor (1999) surmises that not only the blessings in Genesis 49, but also the sayings concur with oral poetry from central Arabia (specifically animal metaphors).

Reuben, the *first-born* is described as 'unstable as water' (Gn 49:3,4). He had many talents but he had polluted his father's bed by incestuous intercourse with his mother-in-law. With this deed he had thrown away the dignity which he received on the day he was born. He was supposed to be Jacob's strength and the beginning of his manly vigour, but he has disappointed Jacob shamefully (cf Sheriffs 1988:1023,1024). He was not the only one who was disappointed in Reuben. Deborah (Jdg 5:15,16) expected this clan to help her against the Canaanites at Hazor, but in vain.

Simeon and Levi are described as brothers, but it is also mentioned that they are *instruments of cruelty* (Gn 49:5-7; referring to the massacre of the city of Sichem; cf Overduin 1963:46). This curse on Levi is in sharp contrast to their task as priests (De Moor 1999).

Judah is the first one to receive a blessing from Jacob (Gn 49:9-12). Jacob foresaw that Judah would be praised by his brothers⁹³. Although he would not be free from enemies, Jacob promises him victory. He is described as a *lion's whelp*. This similitude confirms that he would be a great leader and formidable towards his enemies (etc; cf Ellison 1988a:626-631).

Jacob (Gn 49:13) gives a maritime region to Zebulun. Probably because they had special skills in *maritime activities* (cf Cundall 1988:1274).

On account of his strength, which would enable him to endure labours, Issachar is called a *bony ass* (Gn 49:14). Being content with their fertile and pleasant country, Issachar were as ready to bear the burden of servitude as mules are to submit their backs to a load (cf Niditch 1996:19). In pre-monarchic times the clans had a choice either to go into a guerilla war against Egypt or adapt to peaceful co-operation. Some of the clans supposedly found the latter more promising than armed confrontation (De Moor 1999).

Jacob announces that Dan will be one of the judges of Israel (Gn 49:16-18). He compares this people (Dan) to *serpents*, who rise out of their lurking-places. Possibly the sense is that Dan will not be so courageous to engage in open conflict, but he will fight with cunning and snares (Calvyn [1954]1965:461-462). But there are also other interpretations.

Gad is described as a *troop*. He will conquer his enemies (Gn 49:19; cf Dt 33:20-21) perhaps because he had special warfare skills (cf Kitchen 1988b:398).

Jacob declares that Asher will have the *best and finest food*. That is interpreted by some scholars that he will have abundance at home (Gn 49:20; cf Kitchen 1988a:93-94).

Jacob compares Naphtali to a *hind let loose*, and one who uses sweet words (Gn 49:21). He perhaps assigns them rather to fortify themselves by the use of sweet words than by the defence of arms (cf Jdg 1:33).

Joseph is also blessed in abundance (Gn 49:22-26). He is like a *tree situated near a fountain* and by its beauty and lofty stature, it may surmount the obstacles around it (and many more).

And finally, Benjamin shall be as a *wolf* (Gn 49:27). This most probably indicates that they will live by plunder (cf Jdg 3:15; 20:16). De Moor (1999) surmises that specifically Dan, Gad and Benjamin had the custom of attacking their enemy from the back. Plundering was a typical bedouin norm.

This passage in Genesis 49 reflect something of the possible characteristics the sons of Jacob (the clans) had and the role they played in their different communities. This collecting of tribal sayings were, according to De Moor, incorporated into the Deuteronomistic history in order to boost their history.

⁹³ Maybe this prophecy was once again fulfilled when the genetic results specifically on the Buba (corruption for Judah?) were in concurrence with their oral traditions and brought 'fame' to the Lemba.

4.5.2.3 *A segmented society with a loose social organisation*

For the purposes of this study, the social organisation of the clans, as with other aspects, are only briefly discussed – thus there is no pretence of completeness. For the notion of loose social organisation, I mainly link up with Mayes (1985; Miller 1986, in Miller and Hayes; Le Roux 1995). In my opinion, it is clear that within Israelite segmented society there was only mention of a loose social organisation (cf Gn 49). This implies that the activities that are discussed here below, were probably not centralised, but possibly varied from tribe to tribe, or that they may even have had unique arrangements from family to family. Thus there was no indication of a kind of federation (contra Noth [1958]1983).

The social structure or inner structure with which most scholars (Noth [1958]1983:106; cf also De Vaux 1973; Miller 1987) link up is found in Joshua 7:14-18. In this passage reference is made to tribe, clan and family. Miller (in Miller & Hayes 1986:91-93) concludes that the role of the family and clan were more part of the social structure, than of the tribe. One does read of 'tribes', but if Miller is correct, then these are retro-projections to the time of the Judges. Similarly, Kimbrough (1978:44) maintains that the clan probably played a lesser and lesser role after the settlement in the land, while the extended family (בית אב) began to take up a more prominent place. It seems as if the heads of families or elders also began to carry more and more responsibility (1 Sm 30:26-31; Mazabow 1973:123; De Vaux 1973:22). Kimbrough (1978:44; Mayes 1985:73) is of the opinion that the most political, economic and domestic decisions were taken by the town's elders, who gathered in the gates of the city, but these could not be summarily enforced upon the community. Kimbrough (1978:43) also avers that it is the family who was the anchor of the social structure of the Israelite 'tribes' in early Israel. According to him, the families were initially bound together by bonds of blood and tradition, but later the possession of land became more important as a binding factor. This means that the clans eventually became divided, and some traditions were lost.

Within the greater whole of clan organisation or of interim governments, the political as well as the social authority was disseminated on ground level, where the father exercised authority over his family. To describe the real organisation of Israelite clans is no easy task, since the Old Testament data is difficult to interpret. It is difficult to determine when which terms are meant, and what exactly should be understood under a certain term. What we can infer with certainty, is that it was essential that every individual belong to a family, and that the family ties were treasured.

It appears from various ancient Near Eastern texts that there were different kinds of family relationships (De Vaux 1973:19-20; see Gn 24; 34). In the Hetite and Hurrivic families in Assyria and Elam we find characteristics of a fraternal family. In this case the eldest brother takes responsibility for the family, and his position and authority is carried over together with the property, from brother to brother.

The matriarchal family was more common in primitive communities. Some scholars surmise that we find a matriarchal setup in Judges 14. Samson marries a girl from Timnath, but she does

not leave her clan, and he visits her there only. Within the matriarchal setup the mother never exercises authority, but the child's family ties, that is his or her genealogy is linked to that of the mother, as we read in Judges 4 (De Vaux 1973:19-20). However, there are divergent opinions, whether we have an example of a typical matriarchal situation in Judges 14 (De Vaux 1973:19-20).

De Vaux is of the opinion that the oldest texts that we have from early Israel, indicate that the extended family of Israelite clans were mainly patriarchal (1973:19-20). The story of Ruth, situated in the period of the Judges, represents such a typical patriarchal setup within a family (cf Loader 1994; Ruth was possibly written much later, but it reflects much of the pre-monarchical conditions). This means that the father of the family, had absolute authority over his children and even over his wives – that is if they were living with him. This also meant that the man was the *בעל* or 'owner' of his wife, and that his wife and family were completely at his mercy. He could bless or curse them, disinherit them, or sold them as slaves (except for his wife) – he could even have them killed if he wished this (De Vaux 1973:19-20). The wife's status and respect in society, however, largely depended on the birth of her first child – especially if it was a boy (Gn 16:4; 29:31; cf Bird 1987:401).

In spite of the divergent social models there exists reasonable consensus about the fact that the 'father's house' was the primary social unit within this loose social organisation. The 'father's house' or extended family, usually existed of two or more core families, which could even include up to five generations. Gottwald (1980:285) maintains that this extended family usually included the head of the family, his wife or wives (etc), their sons and unmarried daughters, the sons' wives and their children, and also the slaves and the strangers in the city gates.

The head of the *בית אב* (Gottwald 1980:285) was the oldest male person of the extended family, and that position was again transferred on to the shoulders of the oldest son. Jephthah, however, could not inherit the headship from his father, since he was the son of another woman (Jdg 11:2). Yet, he still claimed that position, since he still belonged to the 'house of his father' (Gottwald 1980:287). Gottwald (1980:287-290) also indicates other usages of the word *בית אב*, namely as a metaphor for *משפחה* (family/clan Nm 26:23; Jdg 18:11) and *מטה/סבת* (tribe, Jos 7:18; and staff Nm 17:2; cf also Rogerson & Davies 1989:56-58).

Mayes (1985:74) agrees that the extended family would, under normal circumstances, have been able to take care of itself within this loose organisation in matters such as: the planting of crops, harvesting and in the storing or selling of the surplus. However, in times of crises, your lineage was important if you had to appeal for help from the larger group. He emphasises that the Israelite clans, living in the mountainous area had to support one another at all cost, when for instance conflict arose regarding borders or crops, or when crop failures were staring them in the face. It was during such situations of conflict that a judge was appointed to decide the conflict (Mayes 1985:73; cf Lemche 1988:93; Gottwald 1980:286). When there were no external threats and under prosperous economic circumstances, the extended family could thus prosper. In fact,

the blessing of Jahweh was measured by the good harvests, socio-political peace and human fertility (Gottwald 1980:286).

4.5.3 Evaluation and comparison

The idea that the Israelites acted and existed as twelve tribes, was probably a later projection on an earlier situation. Within the segmented Israelite societies there could probably have been a free associations of different clans. It was mainly in times of emergency that the groups cooperated, and could claim the protection of the group, while under normal circumstances they could take good care of themselves. Thus there was no mention of any central government, but activities probably varied from clan to clan, and even from family to family. The social organisation of the Israelite clans was thus based on the extended family, with the father at its head (patriarchal).

Almost the same could be said of the Lemba. The notion that they consisted of 'twelve' clans, and functioned as such, still play a major role in their oral tradition, and in the stories that are narrated during important ceremonies and rituals. Similarly one finds this notion with the Israelite clans. If one were to look at their present situation, and the distribution, it is clear that there is not mention of any central government over the different clans or families, and that the one clan's stories and experiences are also incorporated by others as their own. When a specific event or skill is narrated, then mention is still made of the specific clan with whom this happened, or whose skill that would have been. Such a story is, however, considered to be common possession, since they are all known as 'Lemba'. Today there may be even more than twelve clans.

It is clear from this division that the Lemba are comprised of different clans, and that every clan have its own historical and genealogical background. The traditions of each clan played a major role in their identity formation, yet they were all known as the Lemba. Over time they had to adjust to each other, differences apparently blurred and they could move across boundaries to remain or become 'one'. This is similar to what happened to the different Israelite clans after settling in the 'Promised Land'. The Lemba had no concept of a 'Promised Land' or the latter did not play a specific role in the traditions of the Lemba.

An unbelievable tolerance of the Lemba towards everybody (especially toward men) was rather striking. Not for a moment will one person openly oppose another if they differ from them. However, if you were to ask such a person if he or she agrees with that previous speaker, they will without hesitation say the opposite from what the previous person just said. Nobody would easily dare to answer a question, when he or she knows that there is an older person present who should rather speak on behalf of the extended family. A meeting of the Lemba can also not begin before all the elders in the area have not first arrived. An observation (I may not understand this fully) is that one needs not remain with a previous day's long and extended negotiations and decisions. It is almost as if they negotiate for the sake of the negotiation, in order to remain as

democratic as possible. But the next day they begin anew, and the decisions are not necessarily binding. A person or a group are apparently led by the circumstances.

De Vaux (1973:19-20 and others) have the idea that many customs (for example the matriarchal setup) occurred more in *primitive* societies. He thereby suggests that the Israelite clans should not be reckoned as primitive. In the light of the many concurrences between the two groups one should reconsider this notion.

Repeating the names of the ancestors during important ceremonies, rather reminds of the creed of the Israelite clans that were repeated at important events, and in which reference were made to the mighty deeds of Jahweh in their history, but where reference was also made to the role in the history of their ancestors.

The overarching emphasis of most of the social laws, among both Lemba and early Israel, fall on the protection of family ties, but also the protection of the individual, property, cleanliness (ritual and otherwise) and on the protection of their exclusivity. Therefore, in more than one respect it emerges that (in both communities) the basic need to belong to a group, to enjoy protection and the importance to an heir, underlie all the above mentioned customs. It is especially true of all pre-industrial communities. From the available information, it appears that there are strikingly more concurrences than differences. Here below the most important concurrences and differences are indicated in tables.

TABLE 5: COMPARISON – SOCIAL ORGANISATION (cf 4.5)

<p>The Lemba (4.5.1) <i>Twelve clans/lineages (4.5.1.1)</i> <i>Similarities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Initially only ten, later twelve ■ Each clan has its own ancestors, history, purpose and skills <p><i>Differences</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Successive leadership (from one clan to another) took place in the past <p><i>Segmented society with a loose social organisation (4.5.1.2)</i> <i>Similarities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Principally not bound to a specific area ■ Without a central chief, but each clan or lineage has its own chief (<i>ish</i>) ■ Characteristic customs are adhered to from generation to generation ■ The social organisation could differ from family to family, and from clan to clan 	<p>Early Israel (4.5.2) <i>Twelve clans/tribes (4.5.2.1)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Initially only ten, later twelve ■ Each clan has its own ancestors and history, purpose and skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Leadership did not take place in a specific order <p><i>Segmented society with a loose social organisation (4.5.2.2)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Principally not bound to a specific area ■ Without a central judge, only in times of war ■ Characteristic customs remain with them from generation to generation ■ The social organisation could differ from family to family and from clan to clan
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- Egalitarian, except for the position of women
- Patriarchal system
- The chief and the elders have authority in the villages
- They have a loose social organisation
- Every individual was connected to a family and family ties are rated highly

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With reference to the comparisons in this chapter, many similarities and dissimilarities between Israel and the Lemba have been pointed out. One such comparison which can help to understand the Old Testament better, is the 'segmented clan or tribal system' of the Lemba (and also other groups in Africa). The teaching situation can be arranged in an interactive way, in order for the learners to have the opportunity to tell how their own clan or tribal system functioned within a particular culture (where applicable). The following questions may be addressed: How does he/she experience this? Do they experience this way of life as a threat or means of protection? How does this social organisation function in practice? This 'familiar' situation offers a route of access into the tutorial matter of the Old Testament, especially where it deals with tribes, clans, extended families, etc. Furthermore, such a discussion will stimulate the possibility for qualitative research (even on postgraduate level) within a particular culture or religious society. This may eventually lead to a possible 'reconstruction' of the Old Testament tribes or the system of clans (cf 10.2.1.1 and ADDENDUM III, no 3).

CHAPTER FIVE

RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE AMONG THE LEMBA AND EARLY ISRAEL

Although the Lemba belong to different Christian denominations, their *culture* – as they call it – reflects almost all the characteristics of an own unique religion, so much so that one may define as a ‘syncretising Judaism’. There are numerous salient concurrences between the religious practices and viewpoints of the Lemba and that of early Israel, which will emerge in the following four chapters, nevertheless the most outstanding differences between the two communities will also be accentuated, since these are part of the comparison and this also facilitates a judgement on the dominance of the concurrences.

The purpose of this thesis is not to do any intensive exegesis of certain Old Testament sections, or to determine the historicity of various stories or customs, but to determine what early Israel’s experience was concerning certain customs or rituals, and what role these played in the communities. It is accepted that the Book of Judges is the only direct written source of information for early Israel (before the monarchy), and that it can therefore be used only with great circumspection as the main source.

Many possible theories or models could be used in the study of cross-cultural human beliefs, but variants of some of Smart’s categories prove useful in exploring and comparing the religion of early Israel (before 1000 BC) to that of the Lemba. Smart (1983; 1989; 1995), a scholar in the field of comparative religions, suggests that we should study religion under the broad heading of ‘worldview’ (sic), a term that refers to both traditional religions as well as to ideologies. Niditch (1997:4) endorses that ‘Worldview [sic] analyses’ [seeks to]

understand the symbolic patterns that serve as templates for the patterns of our existence, the contradictions and tensions in life as well as potential resolutions, the chaos that threatens and the order we seek. Such symbolic patterns are acted out in ritual performance, retold in ancient-seeming tales, or encapsulated in proverbs or parables.

Smart points out that there will be variations in world-views even among those who understand themselves to be part of the same religious tradition (1983:22-27). He divides ‘worldview’ (sic) down into several useful facets or ‘dimensions’ (1983; cf 1989; 1995).

These dimensions have been adapted for the purpose of the discussion of the religious views and practices of the Lemba and early Israel. They are the following: (1) the experiential, (2) the mythical, (3) the ritual and (4) the legal or ethical. For practical reasons it is decided to deal with each of these different categories or dimensions successively in different chapters (i e Chapters Five to Eight).

The *experiential* dimension involves direct experiences of the presence of God, the *mythical* dimension refers to the rich narrative traditions which symbolises the invisible world, the *ritual* dimension expresses, in a dramatic form some of the symbols found in a group's myth, and the *legal or ethical* dimension comprises a group's moral guidelines (Smart 1995:7-9). Niditch (1997) applies Smart's framework to the religion of ancient Israel and I find parts of her division useful as framework for my Chapters Five to Eight. A comparison follows at the end of each of the different dimensions (in the ensuing chapters, beginning with Chapter Five). These are presented by means of tables in which the major similarities and differences will become clear.

The categories that Smart implements, elicits aspects of a comparison between the two religions to the fore, which would not otherwise have attracted any attention. It is tenuous as to which practice or ritual belongs to which category. The various dimensions are often so intertwined in the various rituals and customs, that it is difficult to extricate them from one another. This implies that one facet of religion could just as well be discussed under another heading. For example, circumcision (cf 7.1.1.1), mainly defined as experiential, can also be categorised as a ritual, and the story of the *ngoma lungundu* ('the drum that thunders', cf 5.1.3) is evenly at home under the experiential, the mythical or even the ritual dimension.

It is clear that various religions exerted an influence on early Israel, and others still exerts an influence on the thought of the Lemba. In order to have a better understanding of the religion and world-views of the these groups (the Lemba and early Israel respectively), one also needs to be aware of the possible influences of other religions on these religions under discussion. This aspect does not so readily fit into the framework by Smart, but it will be referred to throughout, and briefly be treated at the end of this chapter.

Smart (1983:21-25; cf 1989:13) explains the *experiential* dimension as 'the direct experiences of the numinous [by means of] visions, trances, messages from God or more subtle indications of a divine presence' (cf Niditch 1997:34ff). These experiences or emotions of men and women feed or carry the other dimensions of religion: for example, *ritual* without compassion or feelings is lifeless, *myths* which do not move hearers are feeble and the application of *laws* without keeping in touch with people's emotions are irrelevant (Smart 1983:21-25). In fact (as was already mentioned), many of the practices or events discussed under this dimension are very closely related to one another and they are not easily categorised. A brief introduction will summarise the different *conceptions of God (or the numinous)*, within the communities of the Lemba and of early Israel. How a community *experiences* God, is indeed reflected in their concept or understanding of God.

5.1 THE RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE AMONG THE LEMBA

5.1.1 Conceptions of God/gods⁹⁴

The way in which God is perceived, on account of various encounters, reveals numerous nuances and these are determined according to the variation in people's world-view (Niditch 1997:35). Different groups and individuals often have different names for God, and these reflect their different concepts and experiences of God. During the interviews with Lemba people, it occurred to me that their concept of God was probably to a large extent influenced by their church affiliation or exposure to Christianity or to other religions (e.g. Islam, Judaism; cf 5.3). Except for one interviewee, all the Lemba people indicated that they believed in God and, according to them most of them are Christians (so-called Messianic Jews).

In spite of many different church affiliations and resultant conceptions of God, there appears to be very little religious intolerance amongst these people. Even when they completely differ from each other on certain points, they will never interrupt one another, or indicate their disagreement, except when asked directly. I never experienced that they were confrontational, nor were they affronted by something someone may have said.

The first interview I had with a Lemba was with the retired Professor Mathivha, President of the Lemba Cultural Association (LCA; in 1995). He avers clearly that the Lemba people

believe in the God of Abraham, the God of heaven who controls all things the Lembas don't worship ancestors as has been mistaken by the early missionaries. The ancestors are the mediums to God. They get the message to God ... even the Jewish use Jacob, Isaac and Abraham ... they did not pray to their ancestors. People mistook things without understanding them ... we are different from other tribes The religion of the Lemba is centered around the God of heaven (D:1:B:24,25; cf 1992).

In this regard Mathivha makes an interesting comparison between the Lemba's cult of the ancestors, and that of the 'Jewish people who, like the Lemba, did not *pray* to their ancestors.' It is obvious that he may have read some of the accounts by the early missionaries and others⁹⁵ and that he does not agree with their interpretation of the Lemba's way of worship. This remark by him incited me to investigate the role that the forefathers played in Israel of antiquity (cf 5.2.5).

When speaking to the people on grass roots level, one often obtains a different picture. I experienced the respondents as very naive and honest and it was evident that nobody had been influenced beforehand as to what to say in order to provide the 'correct' answers. The following are answers given to various questions during the field research. Many more quotations and references could be provided. However, due to the constraint of space, the examples provided below demonstrate the variety of answers that were received. Some interviews were conducted within group context, and others individually (more detail on each of the respondents may be found in the list of participants at the back of the bibliography).

⁹⁴ Reference to God in this thesis is not intended to be a view of God influenced by any particular persuasion or dogma, but refers to the widest possible understanding of the idea of God.

⁹⁵ Cf Van Warmelo 1940:11-15; Jaques 1931:248; Junod 1927:302; 1938:59,124-141.

During a group interview, different respondents, at Mamone (Sekhukhuneland), answered the question 'What is your perception of God?', as follows:

- (i) God is my mother and my father. My ancestors. I don't know any other God.
- (ii) We've heard about God but we don't know him.
- (iii) We just know it's Modimo (D:3:C(1):2-4).

Here three different answers, reflect three different perceptions and these are very closely tied up with these people's view of God in the past. Many of the respondents experience God, as one would experience a parent – close and caring, in other words, a feeling of nearness and safety. However, the experience that God is a parent, can also be accompanied by fear, especially when the person has not acted correctly, or transgressed certain rules. One may read an influence from the traditional African 'cult of the ancestors' into this (cf 5.2.5).

Participants (in a group interview) in Mogabane (Sekhukhuneland) responded:

We have just heard of God, but we believe in God because whatever we ask of God, he gives. The other thing that we know and we are thankful to God, is that God gave us all the parts that we have, starting from our hair, the head, the hands, the mouth and all these parts. God made them for us to be able to use them ... if we use them we will be able to work to get food to eat (D:5:1).

These people believe because they *experience* results to their prayers. They experience that whatever they ask they receive. They also experience God as the Creator, the Provider and One who cares for them. This consequently engenders a feeling of gratitude.

Chekure (a very devoted Christian lay-preacher), one of the participants in Gutu, Zimbabwe said:

God is Jehovah who made the earth and what is in it and who came within his Son to preach about Him so that the traditional customs which we were doing should vanish. Which means God disliked the traditional customs which we were doing and he is confirming that. That's why he sent His Son to come and stop all those customs (D:D:5).

Foremost in this remark is the notion that belief in a life of dedication to God and Jesus Christ brings about a change in the way one lives. The Creator God described here is in control. He sent his Son Jesus Christ to earth and that which He came to do on earth, according to Chekure, has had implications for everyday practices and customs. The influence of missionaries, clearly emerges in this answer.

One of the High Priest's wives at Mberengwa (Zimbabwe) experiences God as

very great. I see God as a great thing because there is nothing that I can do in my life, which is very important, without God. If God is in control of everything that I do ... then I know things will go well in my life (D:B:6).

The greatness and importance of God's role in her life is accentuated and her *experience* is that God is in control, that He is good and that He can accomplish things for her. This priest's wife is also a professing Christian.

The Priest himself has a quite different opinion and replies that

what confuses us Africans now is that we don't have a picture of God. So we don't know what God is like. But in every picture that we are seeing nowadays, God is a White person. So we think that maybe God is a White person. If we don't rely on the pictures that we see which are painted white, we say God is that God who moved with our ancestors. He inspired our ancestors and revealed himself to our ancestors Some people call him Dandanakutanda or Dzivaguru. But that is only attribute names, but we call him Mwari (D:C:3).

The priest is much more sceptical about Christianity than his wife and he rather sees the Lemba as Israelites, who have to live according to Old Testament guidelines. The need is expressed to be able to see God, since he could only experience God and has never seen him – the presentations of God in Christian books confuses him. These do not concur with their image or experience which they formerly (before colonialism) had of God in their minds. For this reason he does not trust these pictures, but rather the experience of God which they had in the past – that God who revealed himself to them and to their ancestors. In other words, that which they *heard* and *experienced* from their ancestors mean more than that which they now see from the White people. The priest explains the names for God which tells of his attributes: *Dandanakutanda* means 'extending over and over' and *Dzivaguru* means 'big pool'.

Mutazu (a Lemba), a Muslim *imam*'s⁹⁶ perception is that

the Varembe believe in God who created man. We call him *Musika Vanhu*. We have learned more about him when we read the Bible also. That God who is mentioned by the Christians and we the Varembe and the Muslims, is one God. But in Arab they can call him Allah it is the Old Testament which governs us, and the way we live is pending to Moses only, but we are told to believe in all or to take all the messengers of God who were sent by God. So the New Testament also have got some words of God and also the Old Testament has also words of God (D:O:7).

It strikes one that Mutazu who is trained in the Muslim faith emphasises that the God of whom one reads in the Bible is the same as the God of the Lemba, of the Christians and of the Islam. The importance of the Old Testament and association with it, as well as the role of Moses emerges very pertinently in this statement, despite him being a Muslim.

In general the respondents perceive God as their mother or father, the provider, the creator and the one who is in control. To some He is the one who moved with and inspired their ancestors. Others perceive God as the One who became flesh in Jesus Christ. Interviewees in Venda mostly referred to God as *Jehovah* (F:1:1; F:2:1) and in Sekhukhuneland they call God *Modimo* or *Morena* (the Northern Sotho name for the supreme deity; cf D:3:A(1):8; D:3:C(1):3; D:5:1; D:H(1):6). In Zimbabwe the Varembe speak of *Jehovah* (probably Christian influence),

⁹⁶ A Lemba and the *imam* (head) of the Muslim centre at Chinyika (Gutu-district, Zimbabwe).

or of *Mwal/ri* (the supreme god of the Shona, around which they weave their entire culture; D:D:5).

The influences and elements of the various religions, namely the traditional African religions, traditional Christian religions, the religions of the African Independent Churches, as well as the Muslim faith are reflected in these quotations (cf 5.3).

After approximately a hundred to two hundred interviews, I found only one person who indicated that he does not at all believe in a God. But for the rest (this variation in concepts) it is no easy task to determine specifically what the Lemba's conception of God is, since it obviously varies from group to group, and even from one individual to another. In brief, it seems as though the concept of God among the Lemba has three facets.

Firstly, there is the concept of *Mwari* (Shona) or *Modimo* (Sotho, the Supreme Being) which they knew long before they heard about Jesus or the Holy Spirit. The ancestors are seen as mediators through whom communication with *Mwari* or *Modimo* takes place. Although not all Lemba are committed to the cult of their ancestors, most of them still are. The belief in God by the Lemba, has been preserved with that aspect of *Mwali* (*Mwari*) worship, which emphasises God's sacredness and uniqueness (Von Sicard 1952:175). *Secondly*, there is a Semitic related deity, also known as *Mwari*, *Modimo* or *Jehovah* – the God of the Bible who also contributes to their concept of God. And *thirdly*, there is the New Testament notion about Jesus, the Son of God and the influence of the Holy Spirit. Christ and the Spirit are seen as subordinate to the Father because their relational figures always seem to be either super- or subordinate. Relationships with other persons in their communities, are usually ranked, hence their understanding of Christ being lower than the Father (cf Daneel 1970; Nyirongo 1997:25-27; Le Roux 1997).

The general impression obtained from the interviews, is that all the Lemba (traditionalists, Christians, Muslims, etc) agree that the God whom they have known and experienced for a long time (especially through their ancestors), is the same God about whom they have heard of now, either from missionaries, ministers or from whoever. The Lemba also have a particular affinity and sensitivity for the Old Testament 'which governs' them.

5.1.2 Covenant-making with men

The High Priest, Zvinowanda in Mberengwa, Zimbabwe, stressed that the circumcision ceremony is the occasion where 'newcomers' become part of the covenant with God/*Mwali* (D:A:4). The circumcision ceremony as such, will be discussed under the ritual dimension (cf 7.1.1.1), but it could as well have been discussed here. The *making of a covenant*, an act between God/*Mwari*, and the male Lemba, is however, discussed under this rubric of the *experiential*. In accordance with the making of the covenant, it is accepted that God is entering into an agreement with them, and that they will *experience* his presence in that.

To the Lemba High Priest, the most important section of Scripture is Genesis 17 (the making of the covenant between God and Abraham as an eternal Covenant; D:A:4; D:M:11, 12).

Runesu (D:L:8) confirms that ‘we are the *children of Abraham* in our faith, but in our own tribe and how we were born, we are really Lemba people by birth and Abraham is our father. Our *covenant* applies to us that we are the children of Abraham and God’ ([my italics]; cf D:O:7,10,11).

The fact that the Covenant is specifically connected to male circumcision among the Lemba communities, suggests that making a covenant belongs to males, but it also has implications for the other members of the communities. According to the Lemba perspective, the Covenant is a manifestation of a relationship between Israel (they are also Israel in their view) and with God, in which there are specific obligations for both partners. It is in the light of the particular making of the covenant that they experience themselves (and others who see them as such) as ‘chosen people’, ‘the Good Men’ or ‘a holy people’. Furthermore, other groups are seen by them as ‘heathen’, with whom they do not interdine or intermarry.

5.1.3 *Ngoma lungundu* (‘the drum that thunders’)

There is a Lemba saying: ‘Once we had a *drum* because we were a holy people’ The narrative behind this story of *ngoma lungundu* (the name refers to a particular sound of the drum) and the emotion of the specific *experience of God*, behind this, classifies this as experiential (cf also 6.1.3; cf *Photo 38*).

It is recorded by Möller-Malan (1953:1-7) that the *ngoma lungundu* (some say it was made of ivory) was at one stage located somewhere north of the Limpopo in a mountain, where the Lemba and the Senzi (Venda) lived together and experienced the sound of the sacred drum with *awe and fear*, since it was perceived as the voice of the great god, *Mambo wa Denga*, ‘king of heaven’, speaking to them (cf Mathivha 1999b). For many days they felt afraid as they had been aware of the far away rumbling of the earth. The high priest, who was the mouthpiece of the king would hear the prayers of the councillors and transmit them to the king when the drum ‘spoke’ again, and the people trembled and fell on their faces in terror, making humble obeisance, saying: ‘Great king! Male elephant! Light of the country! Great ancestral spirit! Ruler of heaven!’ (Möller-Malan 1953:1-7). Clouds of smoke were coming from the mountain, blackening the sky in a terrifying manner. Blazes of fire were seen above the central cloud. In complete silence the king spoke with a voice that sounded like rolling thunder. The high priest interpreted the words of the king. He was deeply dissatisfied with the evil practices of his people and ordered them to stop, otherwise he will afflict them and vanish and go and live beneath the earth from where he will slay them by earthquakes and many other terrible things would befall them. Many of them fainted at the sound of the voice, and the fear of the others grew with the increased shaking of the earth and the blazing of fire against the black smoke. Although many of the other peoples died, nothing happened to the Lemba, as they lived devoted to Mutumbuka-Vhathu, their father (Möller-Malan 1953:1-7).

For a long time the *ngoma-lungundu* was heard no more and then one day the high priest, Dzomo-la-Dzimu, received instructions to beat the drum in a special way (Möller-Malan 1953:1-7). They say this happened somewhere around the year 1700 (during the month of July), just after the harvest (perhaps during their annual harvest festival; cf 7.1.2.3). In the evening of the full moon (cf 7.1.1.3), the alarm came from the royal enclosure: *Ngunduu! Ngunduu! Ngunduu!* The people trembled with fear once again, as they saw flames coming from the sacred places which were the dwelling place of the ancestral spirits, coming nearer to the shrine where the drum was, kept together with all the sacred amulets and weapons of the gods. Nobody was able to save the sacred objects since everyone was only trying to save themselves. As a result everything burnt to ashes. The Lemba went to the sleeping place of the king himself, reciting praises and prostrated themselves before the place. Then all of a sudden a voice spoke with the roar of thunder, ordering them to go back and call Tshilume, the Virtuous. After a while a voice was heard again which ordered Tshilume to take his people and depart from that country and make their way to the South. He said: '[There you will settle and govern the whole of the country beyond the Vembe [Limpopo]' (Möller-Malan 1953:1-7; [my insertion]).

Mutumbuka-Vhathu gave his son (Tshilume) a small drum which he called by the same name of *ngoma-lungundu*, 'which possessed all the magic and killing powers of the old drum, also the spears and banner of royalty and many badges, white cotton garments and the *madi* and *denga*⁹⁷ royal beads' (Möller-Malan 1953:1-7). These beads were worn by the high priest as a distinction of his rank and he puts those beads around his neck especially during the circumcision ceremonies. Mutumbuka-Vhathu also said:

Call the Lemba to carry these things, and take charge of them on the journey to the south Do not fear, for everything will go well. For have you not in your midst the magic drum? Beat the rain-making drum and all that is alive will be seized with fear and fall down as if in death, all excepting yourselves (Möller-Malan 1953:1-7).

Indrisi records (Mullan 1969:73-76, [circa 1150]) that the Senzi (Zanji⁹⁸ people) – possessors of the *ngoma lungundu*, were in fact forced from their territory and down into the Sena area (at the Zambezi). These people of the magic drum, calling themselves the *BaSenzi* (probably the Venda), at that stage became closely associated with the Lemba in the same area (cf Junod 1927:430; Van Warmelo 1935:122; De Vaal 1947:46; Von Sicard 1952; Gayre of Gayre 1967:5; Davison 1984:119).

Some believe that the original drum (*ngoma lungundu*) which helped them on their journey from Sena might still be in one of the caves on Dumghe Mountain in Zimbabwe or perhaps somewhere in the Soutpansberg area (Von Sicard 1943:140; Parfitt 1992:142). But they are very

⁹⁷ Madi means 'blueish water' and *denga* means 'heaven'. Together they are 'blueish beads which came from heaven.

⁹⁸ Alternative term for *Senzi*, *Zindji*, *Vhazhenzhi*, *Zang*, *Zing* or *Zenj* (cf 3.2.1.3; Theal [1898-1903]1964d:200; Junod 1938:25; De Vaal 1947:47; Gayre of Gayre 1972:33-41,165, 200; Connaway 1976:13,14).

secretive about its whereabouts. The fact that the – for some fearsome – drum may still be in the mountains, but guarded very well, does not only keep the traditions alive, but also contributes to the *experiences* of the mysterious of the supernatural powers or influences, linked to the drum. In fact, the Lemba see the drum as a *symbol* of their deity's presence (cf 5.1.3).

Although the Lemba themselves do not mention a parallel between their drum and the Ark of the Covenant, many scholars and observers do refer to such parallels. In his book *Ngoma Lungundu* (The drum of the ancestors⁹⁹), Von Sicard (1952:10-36) examines the parallels between the *ngoma lungundu* story and the Old Testament story about the Israelite Ark of the Covenant (cf Ex; 1Sm 3; 4), and those between *ngoma lungundu* and the Ethiopian *Kebrā Nagast* – 'Splendour of Kings' (1952:170-175), in order to prove his theory as to how the Old Testament traditions entered the former Rhodesia. The 13th century *Kebrā Nagast* relates how Prince Menelik, son of King Solomon and Queen Makeda of Sheba, visited Jerusalem and returned to the South with an escort of Israelite priests, who stole the sacred Ark out of the Temple at Jerusalem, left a replica in its place and took the real ark to Axum (Ethiopia). In the same manner, the Lemba, in the *ngoma lungundu* story, carried (for the Vhazendji) with them the sacred drum down towards Southern Africa (Von Sicard 1952:170-175; cf Hendrickx 1991:182; Möller-Malan 1953).

In particular, Von Sicard (1952:10-36) argues that the *ngoma lungundu* traditions could not have derived from the Islamic Lemba group, seeing that: (a) The Ark of the Covenant did not play such a role in the Koran or in the Muslim faith, (b) that Abyssinia (Ethiopia) is literally called the 'Trommelzentrum', and lastly (c) that the Ark of the Covenant played a dominant role in the religious life of the Abyssinians and in the *Kebrā Nagast*, their holy book. Von Sicard concludes (1952:175) that

[t]here is good reason to suppose that the Hamitoid people of Rhodesia brought with them the Jewish Lemba who were black-smiths and builders and it was through this that *Old Testament traditions entered Rhodesia*. Among these traditions the *ngoma lungundu* occupied a special place. The belief in God of the Lemba has been preserved along with that part of Mwari [Mwali] worship which emphasises God's sacredness and uniqueness [my italics].

Zvinowanda, in Mberengwa (D:A:6) assured us that he cannot tell us what he knows about the sacred drum (*ngoma lungundu*) 'because we are not allowed to reveal to people who are not circumcised....' but he did inform us that they know

just a little of what happened to the *ngoma lungundu* or the 'Ark of the Covenant' The Ark of the Covenant is with us, within our people. We always keep the law and we are still having it because we continue regarding our laws [my italics].

This answer is of course avoiding the issue by spiritualising it. I never got the impression that the Lemba themselves substituted the Ark of the Covenant by the drum, or *experienced* it as

⁹⁹ Von Sicard's book was partly based on the notes of the missionary Rev J Othenius (1938).

such. Marimazhira (D:G:2:6) averred: 'I wouldn't talk of a *sacred* drum but we had our drums and the drums were sacred in the sense that they were used for religious celebrations'

From the narratives it could possibly be inferred that the narratives of the *ngoma lungundu* already existed very early in the thought-world of the Lemba and of Venda (Senzi), however, the link of that to the Ark of the Covenant, was possibly only suggested later by Jewish groups or missionaries.

Nevertheless, such *experiences of the divine* (as described above), associated with fire or other violent manifestations are quite pervasive in their traditions (cf Niditch 1997:47,48). These examples reflect and facilitate to obtain a clearer picture of certain threads in the world-view of the Lemba: in the relationship between divine and human each partner has certain rights as well as responsibilities (cf Chapter Eight).

5.1.4 Mountains, rivers and other sacred places

In order to describe the spirits around the people (especially the Romans), Otto (1869-1937, in Smart 1989:13) uses 'numinous'. These spirits are present at brooks and streams, mountains and other dwelling-places and they are to be treated with 'awe and a kind of fear'. Otto portrays this as 'a mysterious something which draws you to it but at the same time brings an awe-permeated fear' (in Smart 1989:13).

The spirits or *experiences* of the divine surrounding the Lemba, are often present on, or associated with mountains, rivers and symbols (e g the *ngoma lungundu*) and are indeed treated 'with awe and a kind of fear'. It is evident that the Lemba have a special enthusiasm for sacred hills, rivers and a few other places. They firmly believe that *Mwali* (God) invariably guided them by means of a star from mountain to mountain. The last two mountains in Zimbabwe to which they had been guided and where they had settled, are the Dumghe and Mberengwa¹⁰⁰ mountains in Southern Zimbabwe. This might be one of the reasons why they consider these to be sacred.

From the dwelling of the High Priest Zvinowanda in Mberengwa, we could see the towering mass of *Dumghe* (cf *Photo 30*) and he confirmed that the Dumghe mountains are

very sacred ... you cannot just climb up there If you climb on top then you were going to be mad and then sometimes you would not come back to your home. So this mountain, they [the Lemba] were born here and lived here. It is a mountain they know that is so sacred to them and their ancestors, some of them are buried there The *river* that is coming from the top ... doesn't get dry during a dry season or whenever there is drought. It can't get dry it is a blessing from God given to the Lemba people around here (D:A:1-4; [my insertion & italics]).

Likewise the *Mberengwa* Mountain (and Buchwa, D:M:5) has a very special meaning in the lives of the Lemba people. Many refer to this mountain as the 'Mountain of Good Men' (meaning the Lemba) that has two outstanding features: 'it could set itself alight [mainly in October, cf D:M:5] and it could roar like a lion. The name is therefore explained from *yaka berengwa*, which

¹⁰⁰ Some consider these as two different names for the same mountain.

means “it was considered peculiar” (Parfitt 1992:142; [my insertion]; cf D:M:2). It is also a burial place for their ancestors, which is probably why they consider it sacred (D:M:3). According to another tradition, ‘two groups of Lemba first met at Mberengwa where they started counting each other to find out how many they were.’ Hence this is another explanation of the name Mberengwa, since *kuverenga* means ‘to count’ (Parfitt 1992:105). Strange and mysterious things took place in the valley in front of the mountain. There was a white lion which was sometimes seen, wailing sounds were heard, which people interpreted as the Lemba ancestors weeping for the land from which they had come and sounds like that of a moving car, but there was no car. If these rushing sounds were heard (drums, cattle that bellow, etc) over a period of seven successive days, it would certainly rain (cf D:M:3). One respondent tried to explain that the ‘sounds that we hear are natural sounds which we call miraculous sounds, which we could associate with God’ (D:M:4).

It is also at the foothills of the Mberengwa where their circumcision ceremony (cf 7.1.1.1) usually takes place. Mathivha (D:1:A:19,20) also stresses that you cannot go up the Mberengwa Mountain without being circumcised (cf D:A:1-4). Before you can climb the mountain you first have to fulfil

certain ceremonies and certain customs. You see we went there in the evening and you must do all these things so that in the morning then we can climb The priest will lead the relatives of descendants there. If a person goes into that mountain without permission you would get lost and you could not be able to come back again (D:M:3).

Some of the ‘ceremonies and customs’ Mathivha and other referred to, were circumcision, but also confession of sin and other purification rituals, which had to be done before encountering and experiencing the divinity located in the mountain. It happened for example that The Reverend Othenius (1938) once dared to climb this holy mountain without permission, with the result that he was forcibly circumcised by the Lemba. The Lemba consider God to be accessible to all, but not just anyone may unconditionally ascend the holy mountain where God’s presence can be overpowering. Other mountains of importance to the Lemba in the southern parts of Zimbabwe, are *Chilamba* and *Mapakomere* (Mathivha 1999a).

In Sekhukhuneland the *Leolo* and *White* Mountains, where the circumcision of the males and initiation of females respectively take place, are also considered sacred. Once a year, the people from India village in Sekhukhuneland also go up the Leolo Mountain ‘to stay there and ... sit down ... to pray for rain’ (D:3:A(1):6,7). The White Mountain is sacred for another reason: The *Mohlotloane* River originates in this mountain (cf *Photo 28*). Chief Mpaketsane explains that ‘[i]t was a sacred river because the forefathers they sat down and took the *muti* to put in the river. The river was dry Over there right at the mountain they put a certain *muti* there. This river must always flow. And even now the river is still running’ (D:3:A(1):6,7).

The latter is almost exactly the same as the tradition that exists in Zimbabwe concerning the Dumghe Mountain and its sacred river (cf D:A:1-4). To my knowledge this tradition (of a

mountain with a special river ‘touched’ by the ancestors) is not written down anywhere in any account that could have enabled different groups to have added this tradition to their own world-view (cf Chapter Nine).

Similarly the *Shimbani* mountains near Mara (Ndouvada) in the Northern Province are of importance to the Lemba. The circumcision ceremonies are also performed there, the presence of a sacred river, the graves of the ancestors and the history mentioned above give these mountains a special meaning in the lives of the Lemba (cf Mphelo 1936:42). At Ndouvada certain trees are even considered sacred – the Lemba respected it as holy because their ancestors chose it to be holy (Mathivha 1999b).

5.1.5 The cult of the ancestors

The ancestors form a significant part of the spiritual world of the Lemba. In the world-view of most of them the dead live on in an underworld and have the power to continue to protect or punish them. This cult where they achieve a *trance like communion* with their ancestors, forms part of their experiential world of the supernatural, and of the divine dead.

After the first rounds of field work (1995; 1996), I realised that I shall have to adapt my interview guidelines in order to obtain a better understanding of the ancestral world of the Lemba (cf ADDENDUM I & II). At first I did not obtain satisfying answers or clarity about the spiritual world of the Lemba and what Mathivha said about the role of the ancestors kept coming to mind. He, perhaps apologetically (D:1:B:24,25), stressed that the Lemba do not worship ancestors, since this has been mistakenly believed by early missionaries and others, but that the ancestors are only the mediators to God in the same way as the Jewish people made use of the names of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in their prayers. He contends that they do not pray to their ancestors, but only use their names when praying. In retrospect, however, this seems to be only one side of the picture.

The response I received to the question: *Where does Jesus fit into your spiritual world?*, confirmed the idea that Jesus might be seen by some as a kind of a ‘senior ancestor’, subordinate to the Father (or God), and this answer simultaneously revealed much of the function or the role of their ancestors. Through his naive way of explaining his religious experiences, Ratsoma (a Roman Catholic), one of the respondents, made an important contribution to my endeavour for a better understanding:

I pray to Jesus in the church. To Modimo who is a councillor of God ... it’s still something different to me ... but it comes straight from my heart ... other times I try to kill something,¹⁰¹ a fowl or a sheep, goat go to the graveyard to do all this ... we take Bantu beer. All the family must come there and pray to god¹⁰² because we must tell the god that we are suffering and I want this and this. We eat all the food at the graveyard, we don’t take it home
Before I go to church in the morning I first pray to my ancestors, telling them grandfather, mother, all – understand I go to church now, be good to us. We Lembas they are very good to us we

¹⁰¹ According to De Beer, among Black peoples, slaughtering is always related to the ancestral spirits (1998; cf Eiselen & Schapera [1937]1946:254).

¹⁰² The reference to ancestors was inferred from the conversation, but he said ‘god’.

believe in our hearts our ancestors, that is the basic praying for us. There may be some other one that we lack since we came from Yemen, but we don't know because cultural diffusion has taken place ... (D:3:A[1]:8,9; [my footnotes]).

Ratsoma (D:3:A[1]:8, 9) experiences Jesus' presence in the church and the presence of the ancestors in the graveyard or at his special aloe-plant next to his house, where he prays to his ancestors everyday (cf V:1:SEK). In other words there is a reciprocity between the two worlds. However, in his perception, the one world is not altered by the other, or is not displaced. Ratsoma only recently embraced Christianity and he is still trying to marry the two worlds with one another. During the interviews conducted with missionaries at the Roman Catholic missionary station in Sekhukhuneland (where Ratsoma among others links up to), it became clear that they experience no problems with the notion that 'the saints' or living dead intercede for one. Hence the possibility that Ratsoma can relate the two worlds to one another in such a way and yet find a link with the church.

And Mpaketsane observes:

As I am saying that the cultural diffusion has taken place and now we have a lot of beliefs.¹⁰³ We just go to the church to talk about Jesus and read the Bible. Our culture is not in the Bible as far as the Lemba and the ancestors – the forefathers are concerned (D:3:B[1]:1; cf D:H[1]:10,11; [footnote mine]).

Mpaketsane experiences that the ancestors or forefathers are part of their culture, but is not found in the Bible. The cult of the ancestors might be an influence from the traditional African religions, but it similarly might be a remnant of an ancient Israelite religion (cf 5.2.5).

At India (Sekhukhuneland), a devoted young Christian woman explained that

[t]he Lemba culture are depending on the forefathers. They like forefathers more than God. My grandmother says they like God, they like forefathers ... if they need something like rain they go into the graveyard and then at the grave they ask *rain to fall*, they ask the forefathers. That's why they are praying and then *that rain it really comes*. That's why they do pray to the forefathers maybe. If they ask something from them they get it. That's why they like the forefathers very much (D:I[2]:8,9; cf D:3:A[2]:6,7).

Reflecting her own beliefs the respondent remarked:

I was baptised in 1982 Since [then] I believe in God only [now] you must choose. If you believe you must believe in God only (D:I[2]:8,9;[my brackets]).

The respondent implied that her people have success with the ancestors, that this practice is familiar to them and that it is for these reasons that they remain so very faithful to this cult, but she herself made the choice to believe only in one God, and she believes that this is how it should be. It is probable that it is the faith of her church (Apostolic Faith Mission) which causes her to believe thus. It possibly also reflects something of the way in which she sees the ancestors as the

¹⁰³ 'Syncretism' to which De Beer (1998) referred earlier.

'divinely dead'. If they did not exist in her world-view, or were not a threat to her, it would not have been necessary to choose.

From the group that was interviewed at Mamone (Sekhukhuneland) an old man replied:

I just know about my mother and my father. I don't know God and does not even know the flesh of Jesus (D:3:C(1):3).

And a woman in the group (at Mamone) said,

we also believe in ancestors but Jesus Christ we know as the Son of God ... it maybe through the God who gave me my mother (who is dead). My ancestor might give me a child and then I am sure that therefore the child is from God through her mother We pray in this way. Firstly we ask from our mother, from our parents, meaning the ancestors and after we pray we end in the name of Jesus Christ hoping that Jesus is related to them¹⁰⁴ (D:3:C(1):4; [my footnote]).

A syncretism with 'cult of the ancestors' and the Christian religion is evident here, but the ancestors especially play a role in securing a posterity.

A participant in Mogabane pointed out:

We believe that the gods [the ancestors?] are immediate ... to the people. From them the prayer goes to Jesus and from Jesus to God. They give whatever they want to the god and then god say to Jesus (D:5:2; [my insertion]).

In this case the role of the ancestors as *mediators* between them and God is portrayed. Once again, Jesus is portrayed as a kind of senior ancestor.

Hwingwiri (Gutu-district, Zimbabwe) explained that 'the ancestral spirits and God himself are the same' (D:N:9) and the priest in Mberengwa is convinced that God is the One who moved with their ancestors (southwards), who inspired their ancestors and who revealed himself to them (D:C:3).

According to *many* respondents, the Lemba are mainly Christians (very few have become Muslims) in South Africa and Zimbabwe, but many are also still traditionalists. Mandivenga says 'they still practise *mandiras* (cult of the ancestors) and so on, they behave like any other Shona in many ways in terms of ancestors' (D:Q:13). Mandivenga (in Harare) experienced that

the Reformed Church ... are the ones who in the beginning said no songs outside the hymn book. If you sing traditional songs ... the *Mashabi* or tribal spirit will get into you and then there will be no space for the Holy Spirit and that kind of thing. It is one of the churches which changed its attitude of encouraging people to change their customs I certainly think that those Christian churches which try to accommodate local culture have found it worthwhile to do so (D:Q:12).

The interviews provided insight into yet another aspect of Lemba images of the *experiential*. They achieve a *trance like state*, or communion with their ancestors, by following specific ritual actions at specific places: beer-drinking, the slaughtering of an animal in a *kosher* manner (cf 4.1.1.4), the use of secret words (cf 7.1.1.1), prayers, songs and the repetitive calling of the names of the ancestors, play an important role. During this trancelike state they often tell the ancestors

¹⁰⁴ Once again the syncretism to which De Beer referred to in the above.

about their suffering, asking them for rain or whatever they need. All these elements contribute to the experience of the otherworldly. As the process continues some of the participants would scream out in a loud voice, suddenly receiving insight into matters. My impression is that the ancestors do not necessarily speak to the descendants (to provide this sudden insight) but that they do answer their requests in one way or another. In all modesty and innocence, Ratsoma explained that he had more success with the ancestors thus far, than he has had with God, but he is willing to learn.

The high priest (and others) explains that they 'have got *secret words* which must not be revealed to people ... it is a *different language* which is the language left to us which we inherited from our forefathers when doing circumcision' (D:A:10; cf 7.1.1.1). Secret words¹⁰⁵ or songs are generally used during the circumcision ceremony, or burial practices (cf 4.3).

From this cult of the ancestors it is clear that the Lemba do not believe that a person really dies. Instead, Mathivha explains: 'They do not die, they sleep' (D:1:B:24), and Phophi: 'To die is to go on a journey' (Parfitt 1992:67). The fact that the Lemba communicate with the 'dead' in more way than one and during different occasions, also evidences that they do believe in a kind of a hereafter.

This idea is further substantiated, by the *Gshamo* ('to join the other spirits') ceremony which is held for the return of the spirits of the deceased. Mathivha referred to this special religious ceremony (which is held for the return of the spirits of the departed), after the funeral (D:R:8-10). According to him this is a special ceremony held for a person who died in some far off place and who was buried by strange people. During the *Gshamo* that soul is brought back by one of the ancestors.¹⁰⁶ If it is a Buba conducting the ceremony, the participants will specifically start calling out the names of the ancestors of the different clans: 'Is the Buba here?' then 'Is the Sadiki here?', 'Is the Hadzhi here?' and each representative will stand up and say: 'We are'. They usually start with the clan who is conducting the ceremony and then they will call out the names of the ancestors in the proper order (D:R:8-10).

In their world-view they believe that the dead live in a different place, this means that the dead can either help or hurt the living. Although it is not the general viewpoint, it so happens that most traditionalists see the dead as 'gods'. This view is probably tantamount to a devotion to the family.

5.1.6 Annunciations and other encounters

According to the information that has been collected during the field work, it is not clear whether the Lemba still receive any specific annunciations or messages from the deity, such as they

¹⁰⁵ The use of 'secret words' or an exalted or strange language also intrigues the minds of Western people, and contributes to the experience of the numinous and leads to an *experience of feeling exalted*. This supersedes the experience of profane language. It is as if one can lay hold better of the deity, and more direct communication becomes possible. The reasoning is usually: God is exalted and for this reason one needs to speak to him in an exalted language.

¹⁰⁶ This ceremony could just as well have been placed under 'rituals of passage' (cf 7.2.1).

experienced before with the *ngoma lungundu* (cf 5.1.3). But it is clear that they can still testify more about the so-called annunciations or guidance from the ancestors. Requests are specifically directed at the ancestors (such as for instance for rain or fertility) and they receive messages in a similar fashion. Both men and women communicate in this way with the spirit world. Mathivha writes that

it is the Lemba practice that only women can get 'Madlozi' (spirits of the dead) because the women always act in a manner which will resemble their old ancestors who were non-Lembas, i.e. the Lembas married foreign women when they migrated south in Africa after they had crossed the sea. The men represent Mwali as they are sometimes addressed as 'Muungu or Mulungu' which means 'God' (1992:46).

Ratsoma confirmed that his mother played the leading role in praying to the ancestors during the harvest festival (D:3:A[1]:8,9), but he also referred to the possibility that the Lemba women (*vhase ndji*) might know more 'spirits of the dead' than the men, because the men are not originally from here but from Sena.

It is told that the Lemba's movements from one place to another during their migration southwards, was marked by an *experience* that God showed them the way by means of a star guiding them (cf 6.1.3). Specifically how this annunciation or guidance was experienced is not known anymore.

On account of the question of guidance by the Holy Spirit, the 'witch doctor' (as referred to by the Lemba themselves) in Mogabane, told how the Holy Spirit once made him aware of people who wanted to cast suspicion on him, by hiding stolen goods in his room. By means of a timely warning, he could remove the stolen goods from his room, and was not suspected of theft (D:3:C[2]).

5.2 THE RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE IN EARLY ISRAEL

5.2.1 Conceptions of God/gods

Three important traditions, which among others brought salvific acts by Yahweh to memory, could possibly be used to conceive an idea of the concept of God in early Israel (pre-monarchical). These are the traditions surrounding the experiences of the patriarchs, the exodus from Egypt and the events surrounding Sinai (cf Noth [1958]1983). After close scrutiny, it thus would appear as if the concept of God was largely formed on account of the *experiences* of God by their ancestors in the past, but also by the influence that the Canaanite and other religions had on them. All three these traditions could eventually be linked to Canaanite agricultural feasts, and then obtained new significance for Israel.

The tradition of the *patriarchs*, mainly deals with their relationship with El, God of the fathers and particularly the eternal Covenant made between Abraham and God (Gn 17). He will be a God for them, and they should be his people. Promises of a large posterity and a special country were also linked to this covenant.

In order to understand the development of Yahwism and the world-view of early Israel, it is important to clarify the connection between El and Yahweh. However, this is no easy task. Mettinger's (1990) investigation, to my mind, casts much light on the history of the Israelite clans and the religions of the patriarchs/ancestors. He (1990:406) points at the importance of the Merneptah stele, which early (ca 1219 BC) already refer to a group of people, who were known in Canaan as 'Israel' (a pre-Yahwistic Israel, according to Albertz 1994 and others). According to Mettinger the portrayal of the Israelites (on reliefs), who helped defend the cities of Ashkelon, Gezer and Jenoaam, outwardly (i.e. hair styles, clothing, etc), remained the same as the Canaanites. Mettinger (1990:405) surmises that according to the patriarchal traditions later at the River Jabbok, they became 'Israel'. However, they kept living among the Canaanites, and outwardly began to look like them, even though there was no genealogical connection between them. The tradition that the 'God of the fathers', or to say El, made an eternal Covenant with Abraham (Gn 17:7), bound them together and thus separated them from the other people. According to tradition a group of the people under Joseph's (Jacob) guidance who left for Egypt, were under the mediatorship of Moses (in Egypt). They learnt to know Yahweh as the God of the Covenant (cf. the opposing viewpoints by Van Seters 1975:309-312; Lemche 1988:166; 1989:93 and others).

Freedman (1987:315-334) finds his arguments for the prehistory of early Israel and their *experience* of God (El or Yahweh), in especially five of the oldest poetic sections of the Bible: Genesis 49 – the Blessings of Jacob; Exodus 15 – the Song of the Sea; Numbers 23-24 – the Oracles of Bileam; Deuteronomy 33 – the Blessings by Moses and then Judges 5 – the Song of Deborah. He (1987:317-333) finds these sections the most useful for the study of Israel's religious life during the times of the Judges, and he maintains that there is a clearly distinguishable chronological pattern, according to the names that describe the deity.

Deist (1985:36-37) finds the first evidence of 'conflation' between Yahweh and El (which of course implies that already earlier there was such a distinction), in Deuteronomy 32:8-9:

When the most high [El] gave the nations their inheritance,
 When he separated the sons of man,
 He set the boundaries of the peoples
 According to the number of the sons of Israel.
 For the Lord's [Yahweh] portion is his people
 Jacob the allotment of his inheritance (NASB - [my brackets]).

According to Freedman (1987:331-333) the same idea occurs in Numbers 23-24, where an amalgamation of the patriarchal and Mosaic traditions can be found. According to him this is a further development of the history of Israel's religion and a reconfirmation of the covenant between the 'tribes' as a nation of Yahweh, could be present in the Mosaic blessing (Dt 33).

The tradition of the *Exodus* is important, since this created the background against which the Hebrews learnt to know Yahweh through the mediatorship of Moses, and to which tradition were linked the mighty salvific acts of Yahweh. It is important to try and determine what these

remembrances were and what their influences were on Israel's experience of God in the pre-monarchical period.

Exodus 15 describes Yahweh's distinctive characteristics – his particular relationship with His people, and His matchlessness regarding other gods. Freedman (1987:330) interprets the episode of the golden calf during the Israelite journey through the desert, as a possible confrontation between the supporters of the old patriarchal religion and that of Yahwism.

Freedman (1987:330) puts it as follows: After many adaptations and much shedding of blood (Ex 32), it was accepted that Yahweh, was El. Therefore he is of the opinion, that the events concerning the golden calf were an important phase in the development of Mosaic Yahwism.

However, Freedman (1987:330) surmises that no compromise in the development of Israel's religion, between Baal and Yahweh can be considered (cf 1 Kn 18:29) – a long history of conflict and certain irreconcilable characteristics just do not render it possible that one could say that Yahweh 'is' Baal – nevertheless, even on this level a measure of syncretism did take place. Numerous characteristics of Baal, especially concerning fertility, have been taken over into the Yahweh religion.

Others (Miller & Hayes 1986:111) follow the traces of worship of Yahweh to Moses and the Exodus group (Ex 6:3). According to Exodus 3, Moses for the first time comes into contact with Yahweh in Midian south of Palestine. This connection is of great importance. Exodus 18 tells of Jethro, a priest of Yahweh, later Moses' father-in-law. As descendant of Esau, Jethro did not depart to Egypt, but nevertheless knew the traditions of the patriarchs. Gottwald (1985:195; cf De Moor 1990:223-224) maintains that it is not impossible that Moses introduced the Midianites to Yahweh and he still finds it difficult to determine Moses' exact role in Israelite history.

I support the supposition of Deist (1985:36-37) that there is a continuation between the name of the patriarchs for God, and the name given by those who participated in the Exodus. He explains that El and Yahweh should not be seen as two different gods, but as one. Does Deist surmise that already with the entrance into the land, that El and Yahweh were experienced to be one or was this only later? Although he does not expound this more clearly, the people who participated in the Exodus, later probably did consider El and Yahweh to be one and the same God. Albertz (1994:30,78) points out that nowhere in the Old Testament a polemic is conducted against the god El and that the integration between the Exodus group and the Canaanites, apparently took place without any problems. He stresses, however, that the El religion of the patriarchs most definitely was not identical to the developing polytheistic system of the city states of Canaan. De Moor (1990:223-224; 255-261) is also of the opinion that Yahweh and El became one God and that He is totally different from the old god Ilu, as he was known in the Ugaritic texts. He maintains Yahweh-El possibly later took over the functions of Baal (cf Dt 33; cf Dever 1990). He argues a case that Yahweh's name was already early linked to the name El, and for this reason they were essentially the same God. This confirms the suspicion that the same God was

indicated by names. The El worship of the patriarchs could obviously also be a retrojection. Until their settlement in the land, everything remains rather uncertain.

Albertz (1994:48-49, 52) is of the opinion that the *experience* of the separation between Yahweh and the people became real after the settlement in the Promised Land. He maintains that early, before the settling in the land, God's (El) intervention was more directly or personally directed, but with the larger group (all the Israelite clans) it was different. Now a mediator was necessary. He thus accepts the role of Moses in the history of early Israel – he was not the founder of Yahwism, but he became an important mediator. Albertz (1994:23-32) is convinced that in spite of the mediator, a personal bond between Yahweh and the larger group of people remained, and that this is unique to Israelite religion.

According to the *Sinai tradition*, Yahweh appeared to Moses on Mount Sinai, when he called him to deliver the people from slavery and again later when He gave Moses the Ten Commandments, by means of which the Covenant between himself and his people was reconfirmed (Ex 19-21). In this connection there are also some indications of a link between Yahweh and his region in the South. This area is called Sinai, Seir, the Fields of Edom, Teman or the mountains of Paran (Jdg 5:4ff; Ps 68:8ff; Dt 33:2; Hab 3:3; cf 5.2.4). In Judges 5:5 and Psalm 68:8(ff), Yahweh is given the name of the 'the One from Sinai' (Albertz 1994:51). Albertz is of the opinion (1994:51-52) that Yahweh had been worshipped for a long time already in the South, before he became the God of the Exodus group. He finds evidence for this viewpoint firstly in the Egyptian 'Shasu texts' from the time of Amenhotep III and Raamses II, that refer to 'Yahweh in the land of the Shasu' (a region probably to be found in the vicinity of Seir) and secondly in the reports by the Old Testament that refer to the connection between Moses and the Midianites in the South. Thus he argues that Yahweh is 'older' than Israel, and that He could be described as the 'South Palestinian mountain god'. Therefore it would appear that Yahweh was a God-from-the-outside (from the South) who at most only shared certain characteristics with the Ugaritic Baal.

Wolfe (1982:104) shows how Joshua gave a totally new dimension to the *experience* of the Israelites of God, on account of his violent actions. Joshua repeatedly heard Yahweh saying: 'Kill and destroy' (Jos 10:20, 28-39). And through this, Yahweh became a God of war – the War God (Albertz 1994:47). Albertz (1994:44, 46-47, 49) surmises that the Yahweh religion was especially directed at the needs of the larger group, and that at that stage it was mainly politically oriented. He avers that the origins of Yahwism, is ineluctably linked to the process of deliverance.

Different from the most other ancient Near Eastern religions, where the emphasis was on the *cultic experience*, less on the *historical level*, Israelite religion retained both these elements. The stories as they were experienced and shared by both groups, were in all probability part of their thinking and later automatically became part of the clans' religious viewpoint and experience.

5.2.2 Covenant-making with men

According to the world-view of the Israelites, one of the most definite guarantees of their alliance with God, is expressed in his covenant with them (Gn 17; Ex 19ff). It is clear that the episodes of the establishing of his covenant with them, belonged to *males*. Exodus 19:5 commands that the males at Sinai were not allowed to touch women sexually, which implies that the divine message is conveyed to and through men (Niditch 1997:48). This is in contrast with the becoming one with the godhead, precisely by the ritual enacting of the sexual deed, such as in the Canaanite fertility religions in Canaan.

Be this as it may, a tradition that certainly contributed most extensively to the dimension of *experience* in the religion in early Israel, was meeting God at Sinai (cf 5.2.1). Albertz (1994:43-56) points out that no pre-Exilic prophet refers to the Sinai experience (cf De Moor 1990). However, according to Albertz there is not yet a satisfactory solution or explanation for the presence of the Sinai pericope (Ex 19 – Nm 10; cf Gottwald 1985:207) in the Pentateuch. He stresses that the references to the *theophanies* at Sinai (Ex 19; 24:1,9-11; 24:15b-18a; 33; 34) repeatedly concur on their description of the majesty of Yahweh (1994:43-56). On the one hand, the *love* and the *involvement* of God with mankind was experienced, but on the other hand, also the *wrath of God* when He punishes sin. These occasions would have led to a new element in the relationship of the Israelite clans with God who led them out of Egypt, namely that they would have experienced Yahweh in the process of history, that is, besides the historical experience of Yahweh they also now, at Sinai, learnt to know the *cultic nearness* of Yahweh. Albertz (1994:43) describes it as follows: 'Through the experience of the theophany, Yahweh, the God of a historical liberation, becomes an all-embracing symbol of sacral integration for the wider group.'

Mettinger (1990:402,406; cf also Gottwald 1980:33) considers the possibility that a kind of 'tribal' covenant in Israel, already existed in pre-Yahwist Canaan and that *El-berith* at Shechem was a mixing of the traditions of the patriarchs in Canaan and the Canaanite religion. In my opinion this is an important consideration. The fact that the name Israel was not linked to Yahweh, but to El (cf Albertz 1994:76), possibly confirms a connection with *El-berith* at Shechem. Among others the name Baal means lord or master, so that this reference could have been to the 'LORD of the Covenant'. The fact that there is mention here of the God of the Covenant, possibly indicates to the one or other historical connection to the God of the Covenant of the Israelites, and probably contributed to the co-operation between the inhabitants of the city of Shechem and the new inhabitants in the land, namely the Israelite clans (Deist 1985:31). De Moor (1990:225-261) and others points to the fact that the making of a covenant between a deity and an individual was a well-known custom in the Late Bronze Period, especially among the Hittites in general.

In connection with this, Noth ([1958]1983:91-93) surmises that the six 'tribes' from Leah, already at an early stage, had their religious centre at Shechem and the twelve 'tribes' later continued this tradition (Jos 24). According to Joshua 24, a very important meeting between the clans took place at Shechem. Unfortunately, our information about this meeting is very limited.

According to this story, the emphasis was more on the confession of their faith in Yahweh, the God of the Covenant, than on the actual ceremony itself or the experience thereof. At this meeting of the 'tribes', they were, among others, put before the choice to choose between who they would serve from then on: Baal or Yahweh (Jos 24; Noth [1958]1983:100; Deist 1985:30-34).

Archaeological evidence closely links up with the story in Joshua 24 and casts a bit more light on this. The one sanctuary in Shechem dates from the early Canaanite period and it was at a holy tree or pole (a consort of Baal) אֱלֹהֵי, dedicated to 'El (or Baal/ba'al or lord)-berith', that is 'El (or Baal/ba'al or lord) of the Covenant' (Jdg 9:27,46; Wright 1965:82-87; Dever 1987:223; Mazabow 1973:129). Zertal (1990:100-107) is convinced that the other structure (on Mount Ebal) in the vicinity, is nothing other than an altar described in Joshua 8:30-32 (and Dt 27:4-8). He made a reconstruction on account of the description in the Bible and the Mishnah. B Mazar (1992:295) similarly does not exclude the possibility that this Iron I area is the one to which Joshua 8 refers (cf also Deist 1985, this has also been suggested by Noth [1958]1983:91). Some scholars still differ about the precise interpretation of the structure that has been discovered, but it quite clearly dates from the twelfth century (Dever 1987:245, n 66). However, the historical accuracy and dating of this covenant is not of importance here, but the experience of early Israel, surrounding this tradition.

5.2.3 The Ark of the Covenant

Except for the established sanctuaries in Canaan, the Exodus group probably also brought a portable sanctuary into the land, which stemmed from their 'wilderness sojourn' – namely the Ark that was linked to the Covenant with Yahweh. It is very difficult to determine how old the stories surrounding the description and the existence of the Ark actually are, or how old the traditions are on which these are based. There are nevertheless, various traditions concerning the remembrance of a cultic object that was apparently of great significance for the Israelites on their journey through the desert and also in the period of the Judges (Kraus 1966:125; Deist 1985:40). Old Testament sources (cf Dt 10:1-8; 31:9, etc) are too incomplete to provide clarity about this matter and to complicate matters even further, the various traditions concerning the tabernacle, the Ark and the temple probably became intertwined and are therefore difficult to distinguish (Schmidt 1983:113). Schmidt remarks that it is also no easy task to determine whether the Ark was possibly a 'sanctuary on wheels', or whether it was just linked to the sanctuary and whether it had perhaps even been taken over from Canaanites (1983:133). If it were to be accepted that some of the Israelite clans themselves, came from Canaanite ranks, it is not improbable that they took the notion of the Ark over from the Canaanites.

From the point of view of 'an infiltration perspective', on their entrance into Canaan, Alt ([1925]1966:150,327) suspects the Israelites could not at the beginning of their settlement reconcile themselves with the lifestyle of the Canaanites and their established sanctuaries. Therefore, at first they conducted their great feasts around the Ark and the Tabernacle, as

symbols of God's presence, in the wilderness, as they were accustomed. Gradually, however, they were to find a spiritual home in Canaan, nevertheless, not without adaptations or conflict (Jdg 6; Kraus 1966:133).

Apparently, the Ark accorded importance to a sanctuary or a height, which those places did not have before (Noth [1958]1983:91-93). However, the reasons why it moved from the one sanctuary to another, is uncertain (cf Jos 8:30; Jdg 20:27ff) and there is no historical support for the notion that it rotated on a regular basis (Noth [1958]1983:91-93). Although such a practice could still fit into the idea of a loose federation or segmentary community. The fact remains that the Ark played an important, mysterious and sometimes fearsome role in the military actions of the Israelite clans – namely that it symbolised the presence of Yahweh, without which there would have been no victory (Jdg 3:28; cf the sojourn of the Ark in Canaan, 1 Sm 1; 3; 4; 5; 14).

Albertz's (1994:57) viewpoint is that the Ark probably did not have cultic significance from the beginning, but that it was only a symbol that guaranteed the presence of Yahweh. He surmises that the Ark was only later considered as part of the sanctuary at Shiloh and thereafter in Jerusalem as part of Yahweh's throne in the Holy of Holies. Furthermore, he maintains that the Deuteronomist accorded it the function of the 'bearer of the document of the Covenant' (or the Ten Commandments). If the idea of the Covenant is only dated much later, and thus was retrojected onto this period, then such an idea could be considered. However, Noth ([1958]1983) Fensham (1969:v) and Gottwald (1985:281) maintains that the structure of the Covenant, according to which the Israelite clans had to organise their daily lives, had already been established much earlier in the pre-monarchic period.

5.2.4 Mountains, rivers and other holy places

A number of Old Testament texts (cf Nm 22:41; 1 Sm 9) suggest, among other, that the sanctuary as such played an important role in the history of Israel (Noth [1958]1983:92). A sanctuary was not only a place of worship, but apparently it was also a very important place of gathering of the Israelite clans and possibly of the Levites (on their own; Deist 1985:30-34; cf Schmidt 1983:116; Jdg 4:6,12,14).

The sanctuary was probably also not the only place of worship, or not necessarily the original place of worship or holy place. Albertz (1994:57,82-88,99-100; cf Dever 1990:128-138) avers that the human-made sanctuaries or high places were firstly connected to natural holy places such as *mountains, glades and fountains*. Such a venue was usually linked to a theophany, such as at Sinai or Horeb (e.g. Moses). Alt ([1925]1966:150,327; from the perspective of infiltration), suspects that the Exodus group, began to hold their cultic feasts, soon after the settlement still in the desert, specifically at Sinai where they had special experiences, until they found a spiritual home in the land (cf 5.2.3).

Quite a number of structures of typical Israelite *במות*, or open air sanctuaries (moulded on the pattern of the Canaanite sanctuaries) from Iron Age I, have been exposed at various sites in

the country, such as near Dothan (probably Israelites from the tribe of Manasseh), at Mount Ebal and at Hazor (A Mazar 1983:39; cf Nakhai 1994:23). A Mazar (1983:39) usually determines the typical Israelite sanctuary by whether or not it was situated near to a large Canaanite city state. Albertz (1994:57) stresses that three kinds of sanctuaries (with limited cultic equipment) that have been discovered, correspond well with the cultural and economic circumstances in which the Israelite clans found themselves. He confirms the notion further, by showing that the existing city temples in Hazor, Shechem and Megiddo, were not taken over by the Israelite clans, but that a sanctuary for Yahweh, was frequently erected outside the city. The reason for this, he surmises, is that the Israelite clans did not have the economic resources to maintain these temples.

The Canaanite heights and temples (with their Baal worship and fertility cults) did nevertheless, exert a tremendous influence on the religion of Israel. It added a further element of *ecstasy* and *experience* especially on popular level.

Although still no consensus about the precise meaning of a *במה* has been reached, most scholars agree that it was a kind of open cultic place or high place. The fact that it was an open place, could also have had an influence on their religious thought, such as for instance the *metaphors from nature* for the description of Yahweh and so on. Nakhai (1994:20-21) surmises that the earliest reference to an open cultic place, dates from the period of the Judges (Lv 26:30; Nm 33:52), and then with the meaning of a 'stage' for rituals, an open air cultic area, an altar or a temple (open air temple?). In this connection A Mazar (1983:39) maintains that the open air sanctuaries were a permanent characteristic of the Israelite clans since the 'patriarchal period' (the dating of this period is uncertain, until the reformations by King Josiah in the seventh century BC). According to biblical traditions the patriarchs erected altars at places such as Shechem, Bethel, Jerusalem, Hebron and Bersheba. These altars were possibly erected later, but were linked in ancient Israel specifically to the ancestors (cf 5.2.5).

Besides the sanctuaries at Dothan, Mount Ebal and at Hazor, Aharoni (1993:87-88) also indicates an eleventh century *במה* or altar, discovered at Arad, and Biran (1993:327) suspects that the remains in Stratum VI, Site T at Dan, possibly could be connected to the data in Judges 17-18. Stratum V represents strata of destruction from the middle eleventh century, which could possibly agree with the destruction referred to in Judges 18:27:

and came to Lais, a people quiet and secure, and struck them with the edge of the sword; and they burned the city with fire (NASB).

Excavations expose a cultic centre at Shiloh from the Late Bronze Period I, as well as an Iron I cultic centre to the adjacent settlements in the northern hill of Samaria. B Mazar (1992:292-293) is convinced that in all probability Shiloh, at least during the late era of the Judges became the central sanctuary of the Yahweh worship (cf Jdg 9:26-27; Jdg 21:19; 1 Sm 1:3; Deist 1985:34). According to Judges 21:19(ff) an annual feast was held at the 'temple' in Shiloh, which was accompanied by *ecstatic dancing* in the vineyards – a feast which indicates which is reminiscent of Canaanite religion and the fertility cult.

Noth ([1958]1983:94-96) offers interesting arguments about how the central sanctuary moved from Shechem (Jos 24) to Bethel (Jdg 20:26; 1 Sm 7:16), then to Gilgal (Jos 3; 1 Sm 10:8; 13:4), and then lastly to Shiloh – this according to the need for the experience of the presence of the Ark as symbol of the presence of Yahweh ([1958]1983:94-96). Deist (1985:34) also refers to other ‘rural’ sanctuaries of importance, namely Tabor (Jos 19:22-33; Jdg 4:6,12,14), Hebron-Mamre (2 Sm 7:5-12,16), Beersheba (Amos 5:5; 8:14) and Mishpa (Jdg 11:11, 34; 20:1, 3; 1 Sm 7:5-12, 16). The sanctuary at Zorah, in the mountain region of West-Judea, only later apparently came to belong to Dan and then later to the tribe of Judah (Jdg 13; Föhrer 1973:111). After the Philistines and the Ammonites made life impossible for them, the Danites moved northward, where they erected a sanctuary (cf Jdg 17-18), and came into conflict with Micah and his idols (at his house altar; cf 5.2.5).

Except for holy places and public open-air sanctuaries, Albertz (1994:99) also identifies house altars. He is of the opinion that the report about Michah’s house altar (Jdg 17-18) was in no way an isolated case only, but that it may possibly have been accentuated since this was such a luxurious setup. A typical example of a house altar from the tenth century was discovered at Megiddo (cf Dever 1990).

Except for the River Jordan, Palestine does not really have any rivers of note. However, we do know about the *place of the experience* where Jacob wrestled at the River Jabbok with a ‘man’ until daybreak (Gen 32). The force, or as some interpret it – a river spirit – is rather ominous and the loneliness of the night together with the seclusion of the river, creates an atmosphere of *experience of the numinous*. In spite of his injury in the process, Jacob maintained his hold and by daybreak he demanded to know the name of the ‘man’ and also that the ‘man’ would bless him. However, the ‘man’ refused to disclose his name and Jacob realised that he had seen God face to face (Gen 32:31), and yet survived.

This is one of the passages which are more difficult to explain in the Old Testament, but it nevertheless, provides some insight into the deity or the force, over against the transcendent, supra-human Covenant Partner of Genesis 12, 15 and 17, as well as Exodus 3, 6 and 19. The experience of the aggressive numinous person at the river, once again, reveals something of early Israel’s thought world, and confirms their faith and their disposition for meeting the power or deity.

5.2.5 The cult of the ancestors

In all of the important oral traditions of early Israel (as referred to in the above; cf 5.2.1), the ancestors play an extremely important role. One of the most prominent oral traditions of the Israelite clans, was indeed the stories about the relationship within which their ancestors (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) stood with El, the God of the fathers and in particular the eternal Covenant which was transacted between God and Abraham. It seems as if the ancestors almost fulfilled a type of mediatorial role between the clans and Yahweh. The Israelite clans could

probably appeal to the good relationship between God and their ancestors – as if God would have been better informed as to whom He was dealing with, when the names of the ancestors (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) were mentioned. From the traditions of the ancestors, the Israelites learned that God was highly exalted, that He performed mighty deeds in the past, that He is faithful to his covenant, that he appeared to them and that He communicated with them.

But besides the stories and the role that the ancestors played in this way in the lives of early Israel, it does appear as if there was a particular cult of the ancestors, which should be taken into account, when one is contemplating the world of their religious *experience*. Although it does not specifically deal with the ancestors, Niditch (1997) refers to the ‘divinely dead’ who live in Sheol (in an underworld existence). She for instance refers to the example of 1 Samuel 28:9, where Saul went to the medium of Endor, in order to call up Samuel in order to receive counsel from him. However, the detail of how this specifically took place and what accompanied this, is not mentioned.

Van der Toorn’s extensive investigation into the ‘cult of the ancestors’ in the Old Testament, yielded remarkable results (1996:206-266). Scholars agree that biblical records are especially riddled (by later editors) of references to the cult of the ancestors (cf Niditch 1997:46-48). If not, it is disguised and obfuscated in written records – compare for example Exodus 21:6 with the much later Deuteronomy 15:17, where the reference to ‘gods’ is left out (where a slave is supposed to be presented to his gods or forebears). The editors of the Hebrew Bible perhaps purposefully did not include references in the canon and did not record it as it happened, since cults of the dead were not considered to be part of Yahwism (Van der Toorn 1996:206-266; cf Dt 18:12).

However, the social framework within which this cult functioned, as well as the texts where the prophets polemicised against it (cf Lv 19:28; Dt 18:11-12) impregnates many passages. For example, in 1 Kings 21:3 the reference to the ‘inheritance of the father’ elucidates the ineluctable link between land and ancestors. Van der Toorn (1996:206-266) avers that places named after ancestors, who later inhabitants believed still lived there (cf Jos 15:56; 17:11-12; 19:12,14,18; Jdg 1:27), and the concern for the survival of the names of the dead, were deeply rooted in the mind of early Israel (cf 2 Sam 18:18). Practices to bring about ritual communication between the living and the dead (Dt 14:1-2; Ps 16:2) as well as sacrifices to the dead were not unknown in Israel (Dt 26:14; Tobit 4:17). There were numerous vituperations against Israelite practices (Van der Toorn 1996:206-266).

Van der Toorn (1996:206-266) is convinced that early Israel surmised that forsaking the ‘cult of the ancestors’, could have caused the living to lose the innate right to the land and therefore, for the welfare of his family, the head of the family would have been advised not to neglect this ‘cult’.

Research done on the Babylonian cults (Van der Toorn 1996) could shed more light on the frequency of sacrifices to the dead. Families came together monthly, during the absence of the moon, for a feast, which included offerings to the ancestors. The banquet for the royal family in

have the capacity to help or hurt them. But on the whole the religion of Israel was not of an eschatological nature.

5.2.6 Annunciations and other encounters

Another theophanic form, are annunciations. Mothers usually play the role as primary receivers of the divine message and experience (cf Niditch 1997:39). It usually happens against the background of the birth or youth of a male hero and the recurring markers of the future importance of a child are the barrenness of the mother, or the endangerment of the child (Niditch 1997:39). Examples of divine annunciations from the patriarchal narratives would be Sarah (and Isaac, Gn 18), Hagar (and Samuel, Gn 16; 21) and Rebekkah (Esau, Gn 25).

‘Wer politisch nicht vollberechtigt war, war es auch religious nicht’ (Wellhausen 1958:94). One would surmise that in a patriarchal setup, females would not be prominent, neither politically, nor in the religious arena. And yet, in the times of the Judges, women did act in public and contributed significantly to society. Bird (1987:401) shows how Deborah acted as a female prophet, how Jephthah’s daughter initiated the annual commemoration event and how Hannah went to the house of the Lord alone to worship, to sacrifice and make a promise to Yahweh (1 Sm 1:1-28). Thus it appears as if (e.g. 1 Sam and Jdg at least) it was not only the privilege of men, as heads of families, to go to the sanctuary – women probably also participated in religious activities. According to Wellhausen (1958:94), their participation was not essential, so that it probably took up a less central role in their lives as in that of men. The question remains, as to when something is essential and when not? From the viewpoint of a woman, her participation would indeed have been essential.

Nevertheless, Albertz (1994:33-34) also indicates the important role of women as recipients of promises (Gn 16:11; Jdg 13:3 e v). One of the basic promises for the continuation of the family, was most definitely the promise of having a son. He points out how remarkable it is, that receiving this promise was repeatedly a typical female experience and concludes that although women were primarily excluded from the official cult, they did play a central role in the family worship (cf Rabičev 1995:111-143).

A specific example from the Exodus settlement period, where a woman is again the recipient of the divine message, is in the case of Manoah’s wife (Jdg 13). She was also a barren woman who experienced this awe-inspiring annunciation by the appearance of ‘the angel of God’ or ‘man of God’, a divine figure. He announced that a hero, Samson, would soon be born. The woman immediately recognised this as positive power and knew it came in peace and with blessings. The fire was also recognised as a sign from God. Her husband, however, was uncertain and first wanted more information (Niditch 1997:39).

Other examples from the *experiential dimension* in early Israel, include all portrayals or descriptions of theophanies by God or his emissaries on earth (cf also Moses and others in Ex 24).

5.3 INFLUENCES FROM DIFFERENT RELIGIONS ON THE RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE OF THE LEMBA AND EARLY ISRAEL

Concerning a discussion of the diverse influences other faiths had on the religious convictions and life of the Lemba and also that of early Israel, Smart (1983; 1989) in his framework has, to my mind, not conveyed sufficient space to this topic. This matter has in this thesis been referred to before and will constantly be returned to further on. At this stage, however, it appears necessary to briefly point out some matters in this regard.

5.3.1 Influences from other religions on the religious experience of the Lemba

5.3.1.1 *African traditional religions*

In more than one way, I have already referred to the strong influence of the African traditional religion on the minds and world-views of the Lemba. It did not only influence the perception they have of God but also had an influence on some of their particular practices and customs (see above). The religion or culture of the Lemba is embedded in African traditional cultures. Due to a limitation of space I will not specifically go into those aspects again.

5.3.1.2 *Christianity*

(a) Church affiliations

Most of the informants indicated that they belong to some kind of Christian church, but generally see no contradiction in believing in Jesus while insisting on being Jewish. Their churches are very important in their lives, but as far as the Lemba as Jews or Israelites are concerned, church or religion does not seem to be the binding factor to them. They might be Jewish or Israelite but on the whole they do not cling to present-day 'Judaism' as such, rather to their particular Lemba or 'Judaic' culture. They insist that their religious affiliation is not as important as their ancestral history. However, these Christian churches have a major influence on the concept they have of God and the Christian way of salvation.

From the very first interview I conducted (with Mathivha, 1995) I got the impression that the Lemba's Jewishness (as some call it) is neither political nor religiously coloured, but rather cultural.¹⁰⁷ Speaking of the LCA Conferences and other Lemba gatherings Mathivha confirmed:

[W]e have a culture and the communities are organised around culture. Church denominations don't matter there. All denominations are welcome and you find them all there. But we are not bound by church affiliation. We are bound by culture we have a communion to come together for sacrifice (in Zimbabwe) ... it's culture, the whole meeting is culture. Our people are Lutherans, others are Catholic, others are Presbyterian, others are Dutch Reformed¹⁰⁸. They are all there but when it comes to culture they are one (D:1:B:31,32; [my footnote]).

¹⁰⁷ Politics and religion is obviously, part of their culture.

¹⁰⁸ Most interviewees in Zimbabwe belonged to the Reformed Church, the Roman Catholic Church or Lutheran Church (D:N:1).

Ratsoma (D:3:B:[1]1; Apel, Sekhukhuneland) also mentioned some of the churches the Lemba belong to: 'We believe in different denominations.... We have different churches like Roman Catholic Church, Presbyterians, Zion Christian Church¹⁰⁹ and others. We believe in them' [my footnote]. Only two have indicated that they do not belong to any church whatsoever (D:3:B[1]:2). Most of the Lemba in the village India (Sekhukhuneland) are affiliated to the Apostolic Church or the ZCC (D:K:4).

Mpakestane (D:K:4,7) commented:

My culture is very important, it is in a church in which I believe because I've been protected for a very long time I feel I was protected by God through that when I was praying with those under the church. And then my culture is my culture. I just want to adopt it (Christianity?) into my culture' (my insertion).

And Runesu replies (D:L:8): '[C]ulturally our Lemba customs are very important, but likewise, we take the church to be very important because of the salvation that we got from Jesus Christ.'

After our second visit to Sekhukhuneland it became clear that many Lemba people, especially in Mogabane, are joining the ZCC because, they say, their culture are very closely related to the rules of the ZCC:

If I can stick to my culture, it is very much important ... because ... the rules the Lemba people are applying are very close to God's need the rules that the Lembas are applying ... are just like the rules that are being applied in the ZCC church because the first priest in the ZCC was a Lemba. Rametsi Nomadi was the first priest in the ZCC church (D:K:4).

Mpaketsane added that 'our bishop ... prays in the name of Jesus, but my worry is that some people [pray] in the name of the bishop' (D:K:4). This might imply that he himself is aware and concerned about a syncretism between African religions and Christianity.

Most Lemba Christians, for example conduct both circumcision and baptism ceremonies and still stick to many other traditional Lemba customs and practices, without any conscientious objection. Many other influences from the different Christian churches could have been mentioned here. However, such an in-depth investigation falls outside the purview of this research.

(b) The influence of some Lemba practices on the Christian church

The Reverend George Murray and his wife, both retired missionaries of Morgenster and formerly from Buhera (Zimbabwe), told us that the Church (DRC, the Dutch Reformed Church) had for example taken over the idea of the *Makapola festival* from the Lemba. During this festival first fruits of the harvest were offered to the ancestral spirits and prayers of thanksgiving were offered for having food to eat. When the church adopted this usage the custom was established of having

¹⁰⁹ According to De Beer, Christianisation usually results in syncretism among the Lemba, which gives rise to a mixture of traditional and Christian values. This is especially the case with members of the ZCC (De Beer 1997; cf D:1:8).

manner exercised by adjacent Canaanite neighbours. It was common practice in those days to act in such a way as to keep the gods content, a precondition for survival in the specific area. Monotheism, as preached by the prophets, was most probably a foreign concept during the era of the Judges. The Israelites in course of time identified with Canaanite agriculture to which evidently they gradually wedded aspects of Yahwism. It will appear as if Baal was indeed worshipped and with time influences from this cult began to infiltrate Yahwism – some attributes peculiar to Baal were transferred onto Yahweh. This trend may have commenced as early as the days of the Judges.

One may gain the impression that the Israelites had renounced Yahweh totally and were consequently adhering to the gods of the land of Canaan. This however was evidently not the case. Despite Old Testament traditions relating of the Israelites worshipping at Canaanite shrines, following Canaanite rituals and holding Canaanite gods at awe, they in fact maintained their faith in Yahweh, their national God, who had delivered them in times of crises and war and would continue to do so in future (Mazabow 1973:130).

As time went by, the Israelites probably became so familiarised with the Baal-cult that both Yahweh and Baal were associated with phenomena in nature (Ringgren 1966:43; Mazabow 1973:131; Jdg 5:4-5). Yahweh, however, was never connected with the god of fertility, who it was believed, analogous to the cycle of nature, died and consequently rose from the dead. The Song of Debora (Jdg 5) provides a further possible indication of 'syncretism'. The song refers to a certain Samgar, son of Anat, the goddess who assumedly had her shrine at Bet-Anat (Jdg 1:33; 3:31). Kapelrud (1969:27-28; cf Albertz 1994:86; Dever 1990:129-131) emphasises that in the texts of Ras Shamra, Anat, either sister or spouse of Baal, is seen to be goddess of war, love and fertility. Mazabow (1973:133) suspects that such 'syncretism' (as he calls it) was caused by a decline in standards in respect of the Mosaic faith. For this reason the people of Yahweh were continuously admonished by the judges to cease following the Baals and Astartes (Jdg 2:13; 10:6; 3:7). Most probably (on ground-level) no pure Mosaic faith existed in early Israel, nor can one definitely speak of Yahwistic monotheism being practised at that time. These most likely merely constituted a part of the Baal and Astarte cult.

Such religious intertwining is strikingly evidenced by the bull figurine discovered on the Israelite cult sites in the vicinity of Dothan (Dever 1990:129-131). A Mazar (1983:38) expounds on this find, stating that the bull figurine on the one hand symbolised a deity (Yahweh) itself and on the other was characteristic of the god of storms (Baal). Both these aspects have important bearing on the cult of the golden calf, though the precise meaning of the bull figurine remains unclear. The open question persists of who exactly was worshipped by this symbol. Judges 6:25, furthermore, illustrates this blend of religious elements and hints at the possibility (as already explicated above) that a certain syncretising pluralism was a common phenomenon in those times.

Despite this, the Bible creates the impression of a tremendous contrast between Yahwistic monotheism and Canaanite polytheism, emphasised vigorously by the firm exhortations of the

Judges for the Israelites not to associate themselves with exotic gods. Still, in reality the two currents happened to be very much interrelated and thus could not be kept apart at the best of times. Clearly monotheism did in all likelihood not manifest itself before Elijah (ninth century) and Hosea (eighth century).

5.3.2.2 *Egyptian monotheism and other religions*

Possibly the Israelite clan was introduced to monotheism during its sojourn in Egypt. For if it holds true that Moses was indeed schooled in the house of the pharaoh, it follows that he must have been informed of the religious reforms introduced by Amenhotep IV (Akhenaten) who pioneered the thought of monotheism. Influences by other religions such as those of the Moabites and Ammonites may perhaps be deduced from certain practices such as child-sacrifices (Jdg 11).

5.4 EVALUATION AND COMPARISON

Many striking concurrences occur in the life-worlds of the Lemba and of early Israel, nevertheless, there are also significant differences. Substantial differences that necessitate attention, are a comparison of those traditions in a society that have been written down by its leaders, to that of the understanding and experience of people at grass roots level of the traditions in question. Regarding the Lemba, the differences between what the leader of the LCA observes and notes in his book (Mathivha 1992) and that experienced by the people on grass roots level, should be noted. Obviously, it is not that one record is correct and the other wrong. I would think that both contains something of the truth. Each person or group experiences God in a different way, but often that which is eventually written down, becomes normative and receive permanence.

For example, the connection Mathivha sees between the Lemba's and the Israelite clans' conception of God, and the role which the ancestors play is noteworthy. For Mathivha there is no difference. Mathivha argues that the ancestors (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) only acted as mediators between God and the Israelites, and they were not worshipped themselves (exactly as it is in the Lemba communities; cf D:1:B:24,25). However, when one takes notice of Van der Toorn's research, then it appears as if Mathivha possibly underestimated the role of the cult of the ancestors in early Israel. The ancestors were most probably seen (unofficially) as gods, they were worshipped and were not only mediators, as Mathivha surmises. The particulars of this cult against which the prophets polemicised, were probably elided by editing, by later authors. Among the Lemba communities themselves, there is often reference to the ancestors as 'gods' and they are worshipped as such.

Some would say it is unacceptable to speak of *Modimo* or God, as if they are one and the same God. We find, however, a similar kind of situation in the names given to God in the Old Testament. Some of those, were the names of the Canaanite gods El and Baal and there are even references to a possible consort for Yahweh from much later artefacts (*Kuntillet Ajrud*, in the eighth century; Dever 1990:140-149). The mixing of names for God, thus occurs amongst both the

communities: El with Yahweh and for example Modimo or Mwari, with Jehovah. As with Baal and Yahweh in early Israel, the characteristics of Mwari were eventually transposed onto the God of the Bible, and vice versa. That most Lemba belong to Christian churches, may have had the effect that Jesus Christ may have eventually forced out other ideas about God or a godhead.

On the one hand it is easier to determine when and which names were used for God in early Israel and whether it is the same God spoken of, since the stories of the Israelite clans were partly written down. However, it still remains problematic. On the other hand, that these stories were written down so many years after the events, resulted in the loss of much recording of *experiences* and it might also have happened that the author have imbued a story with his/her own bias. This is inevitably also true of the Lemba's ancient stories and experiences, when these were written down. The advantage with the latter is that one can at least clarify some uncertainties, or verify certain data, although they can obviously also just provide their own interpretation of what they experienced or understood.

Currently, many theologians in Africa (and elsewhere) are convinced that the Africans had already worshipped the living God long before they came into contact with the gospel (cf Adamo 1998; Mafico 1979). The beliefs of the Lemba are even more remarkable, since they consider themselves as 'children of Abraham' and the fact that they worshipped the *God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob* long before they heard about that same God from the Bible.

When one reads the Old Testament, there are clearly specific commandments as to how God wants human beings to know him and worship him. The prophets and judges heavily polemicised against the mixing of the cults and abandoned any form of idolatry. Over against this, the tolerance of both groups (the Lemba and early Israel) over against 'other gods' in the land is very striking. Intolerance and exclusivity only developed much later among the prophets of Yahwism. However, intolerance toward other persons or 'heathen' is striking amongst both groups.

It is also clear, that not all Lemba are conscious that some connect circumcision to the Covenant with God. It is mainly the leaders in the communities, such as the high priest at Mberengwa, and Mathivha who mostly emphasise this link. It may simply be that tradition have not yet reached all the Lemba clans and thus was not yet part of the life-world of everybody. The same can also be said of the Israelites, namely that the making of the covenant probably were not necessarily part of all of the clans' conceptual world, and thus of their memories and experience.

That various traditions indicate that as traders, they blazed the trail in Southern Africa for other groups such as the Vhasendji, contradicts, to some extent, their narratives about being guided by Mwari by means of the star and the *ngoma lungundu*. Or did their competence as traders provide them with an advantage and the sensitivity to be led in the right direction?

It is by nature virtually impossible for a religion to develop or function independently or isolated from other religious convictions and customs. The phenomenon of cross-fertilisation of religious thought and custom is thus very real and not to be scorned at. This is true of the 'syncretism' found in the case of early Israel which can be compared to a similar kind of

'syncretism' observed amongst the Lemba today. Lemba religion may be described as an amalgam of their specific 'Judaism', Christianity, traditional African religions and Islam, whereas, early Israel fused into Canaanite, Egyptian and other faiths such as those of the Ammonites and Moabites. In order to compare the possible concurrences and differences of the experiential dimension and the religious viewpoints and customs between the two communities, a table is presented below.

TABLE 6: COMPARISON – EXPERIENTIAL DIMENSION

<p>The religious experience among the Lemba (5.1)</p>	<p>The religious experience in early Israel (5.2)</p>
<p><i>Conceptions of God/gods (5.1.1)</i></p> <p><i>Similarities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ They worship the God of heaven, the God of Abraham ▪ The ancestors are mediators through whom communication takes place ▪ Their idea of God has largely been formed by experiences that they, and especially their forefathers had ▪ Moses plays a role in their traditions ▪ Their idea of God is also determined by influences from other religions ▪ Emphasis is placed on Mwari's sacredness and uniqueness ▪ God is the creator, provider, controller, Ancestor, but also the One who punishes the evil deeds of men ▪ Other gods are accepted but they do not mix with the 'heathen' nations ▪ In times of war Mwari assisted them <p><i>Differences</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Their concept of God has three facets: ▪ (i) The concept of Mwari or Modimo the Supreme Being ▪ (ii) A Semitic related deity also known as Mwari. Modimo or Jehovah – the God of the Bible ▪ and (iii) the New Testament notion of Jesus Christ the Son of God and the Holy Spirit. Jesus is seen as a senior ancestor 	<p><i>Conceptions of God/gods (5.2.1)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ They worshipped the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob ▪ Perhaps the ancestors played a role as mediators between God and his people ▪ Their idea of God was largely formed by their own experiences, and especially by their ancestors' experiences ▪ Moses played a role in their traditions ▪ Their idea of God was also shaped by influences from other religions ▪ Their God is sacred and unique ▪ God is the creator, provider, controller but also the One who punishes the evil deeds of men ▪ Other gods are accepted, but 'heathen' nations are not tolerated ▪ Yahweh is also known as the God of War ▪ Their concept of God included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ El, and the eternal covenant with their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob ▪ Yahweh revealed himself to them at Mount Sinai and who confirms the covenant ▪ The gods of the Canaanites, Baal and Asthoreth played a role

Covenant-making with men (Lemba; 5.1.2)

Similarities

- Genesis 17 is the most important scripture
- They perceive themselves as ‘children of Abraham’ by faith and birth, ‘chosen people’, ‘the good men’ and ‘holy people’
- The circumcision ceremony is the occasion where ‘newcomers’ become part of the Covenant of God or Mwari
- Other peoples are perceived to be ‘heathen’ or unclean
- The Covenant has obligations for both partners
- Covenant-making belongs to men

Differences

- To some of the Lemba clans the Covenant is an important insurance
- The emphasis is invariably on circumcision
- No promises of descendants or a specific land are being emphasised
- Confession of sin plays an important part

Covenant-making with men (Israel; 5.2.2)

- Genesis 15 & 17 refer to the Covenant between El and the forefathers
- They perceived themselves as ‘children of Abraham’, ‘chosen people’ and ‘holy people’
- The circumcision ceremony was the occasion where ‘newcomers’ became part of the Covenant of God
- Other peoples were perceived to be ‘heathen’ or unclean
- The Covenant had obligations for both partners
- Covenant-making belonged to men
- The Covenant was the most important assurance of an alliance between God and Israel
- The emphasis especially rested on the Covenant
- Promise of descendants and a land was made
- Confession of faith in Yahweh, played an integral role during the ceremony
- Traditions about God’s acts of redemption, were linked to other religious feasts
- The Covenant was renewed as Sichern

Mountains, rivers and other sacred places
(Lemba; 5.1.4)

Similarities

- Experiences of the divine are often linked to mountains, rivers and other symbols
- A holy place was linked to a theophany of a kind
- The Mberengwa, Dumghe and other mountains are considered sacred because:
 - Their ancestors are buried there
- Strange and mysterious sounds (associated with God or the ancestors) are heard from the mountain

Differences

- Peculiar things takes place in front of the mountains
- Circumcision takes place on the mountains, and no uncircumcised persons may climb the mountains without permission
- Confession of sins and purification should first take place before entering the mountain
- Their life-giving rivers originate on top of these mountains
- The rivers are a blessing from God (some say the ancestors)
- They go up the mountain to pray for rain once a year
- The African traditional cultures added to their ecstasy and experience of the divine

Mountains, rivers and other sacred places
(Israel; 5.2.4)

- All sanctuaries, or high places were connected to the natural holy places such as mountains, glades or fountains
- A holy place was associated with a theophany e g Moses at Sinai (or Horeb)
- Mountains such as Sinai (or Horeb) were considered sacred because:
 - It was connected to the ancestors who worshipped there, not necessarily buried there
 - God spoke to Moses and others at the mountain
- No such things could be substantiated from the Old Testament except for thunder and lightning
- Only Moses was allowed to ascend Mount Sinai
- Encounters with the divine took place at rivers (e g Jacob)
- The Canaanite high places added to their ecstasy and experience of the divine
- The open high places gave them the opportunity to describe God in metaphors from nature

The cult of the ancestors (Lemba; 5.1.5)

Similarities

- The names of the ancestors are mentioned in each prayer
- For the welfare of the family the head of the family should not forsake the cult of the ancestors. Some perceive them as 'gods'
- Prayer-meetings are held during which they address the ancestors and end their prayers with 'amu, amune'
- The dead live on in an underworld existence
- Forsaking the ancestors, the living will lose their moral right to the land
- The role of the living dead was a daily reminder to the family of its own past and identity
- Offerings are being brought to the graveyards
- In practice the cult of the ancestors is present
- Some respondents see their ancestors as gods who can help or hurt them

Differences

- Some of the Christians see Jesus as the Senior forefather
- Mwari's presence is experienced in warfare and the ancestors at the graveyard
- To honor one's parents is to provide for them after death as well
- When they need rain, are suffering or in times of barrenness the help of the ancestors are asked (at the graveyards)

The cult of the ancestors (Israel; 5.2.5)

- The names of their forebears Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were mentioned in most prayers
- For the welfare of the family the head of the family should not forsake the cult of the ancestors. Some perceived them as 'gods'
- Prayers were ended with the Hebrew word 'amen'
- The dead lived on in an underworld existence
- Forsaking the ancestors, the living would lose their moral right to the land
- The role of the living dead was a daily reminder to the family of its own past and identity
- Offerings to the dead was not unknown in Israel. Many polemics were addressed against these practices
- In practice the cult of the ancestors was present
- Some perhaps saw their ancestors as gods who could help or hurt them

- Yahweh's presence was experienced in warfare and at the open shrines and the presence of the Canaanite gods were experienced at their high places (but not the ancestors)
- Some interpreted the commandment to honour one's parents as having to provide for ancestors after death as well
- They prayed to God for rain

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ A trancelike state or communion with the ancestors is achieved through specific ritual actions: beer-drinking, the use of secret words, prayers and songs, the calling of the names of the ancestors in a repetitive way and the screaming out in a loud voice ■ The <i>Gshamo</i> ceremony is held for the return of the spituts of the deceased 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ It is no easy matter to gauge the feelings and sentiments which this ‘cult’ inspired in the living. The detail is no longer known. The concern for the survival of the names of the dead are deeply rooted in the mind of early Israel ■ No such ceremony is known
<p>Annunciations and other encounters (Lemba; 5.1.6)</p> <p><i>Similarities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The male and female ancestors reveal themselves mainly through the women ■ Prophets also get messages from God <p><i>Differences</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Usually the ancestors bring messages ■ They are also aware of the guidance of the Holy Spirit 	<p>Annunciations and other encounters (Israel; 5.2.6)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Barren mothers played the role as primary receivers of the divine messages ■ Moses and the prophets also received messages from God ■ Usually the ‘angel of God’ brought the message that a son will be born ■ The Holy Spirit was not present in such a way in early Israel

The numerous similarities as well as the meaningful differences which are pointed out by the comparisons, may be employed for the better understanding of the Old Testament. As an example of this, one may refer to the ‘cult of ancestry’. In the teaching situation, this theme from the learner’s own life-world could be used to serve as means to actualise their own pre-knowledge when new tutorial matter is offered, which then deals with the role of the ancestors in the life-world of the early Israelite clans. Many of the questions about the role of the ancestors, the belief in the common ancestry and the importance of their entire existence, can possibly elucidate certain parts of the Old Testament (cf 10.2.1.2 and ADDENDUM III). In this case it may actually be the differences about the cult of the ancestors (cf the comparisons) that may contribute to a better understanding of the Old Testament. Other possible themes that may be mentioned in this connection, are the Covenant (inquiry about the occurrence or function of covenant terminology in the context of Africa), and the Ark of the Covenant. The latter may be done by inquiring after the practices concerning cultic objects within tribal contexts as possible elucidation of Old Testament references in this connection.

CHAPTER SIX

MYTH AMONG THE LEMBA AND EARLY ISRAEL

The experiential dimension is often conveyed by means of myths. Myths, stories or images symbolise the invisible world (Smart 1989:15,16). In fact, the origin of the word 'myth' (Gk *muthos*) means 'story'. Deist (1984:110) defines myth as 'a story dealing with primeval, eschatological or cosmic time and conveying a universal message or responding to questions that cannot be answered within the category of real time.' However, many scholars agree that the mythical does not necessarily imply that which is fictitious (Smart 1989:15,16; cf Georges 1968:27,137; Jason 1977:11,33; Finnegan 1976:327; Jobling 1987:17). On the contrary, Bascon (1965:4) for example provides a useful basis to define what is meant by 'myth':

Myths are prose narratives which, in the society in which they are told are considered to be *truthful accounts* of what happened in the remote past. They are accepted on faith; they are taught to be believed; and they can be cited as authority in answer to ignorance, doubt, or disbelief. Myths are the embodiment of dogma; they are usually sacred; and they are often associated with theology and ritual. Their main characters are ... animals, deities, or culture heroes, whose actions are set in an earlier world, when the earth was different from what it is today, or in another world such as the sky or underworld [my italics].

'Myth' in relation to religious phenomena, is quite neutral and has no bearing on the veracity or falsity of a story enshrined in the myth itself (cf Smart 1983:17,19; Lestrade [1937]1946:292). The mythical dimension is concerned with reporting what is believed by a specific group or person. Thus without prejudice, one can refer to stories about God and gods (heavenly beings; cf Deist 1984:110) and stories relating to historical events of religious significance in a tradition as 'myths' or the 'mythological'.

Most Lemba and ancient Israelite myths and traditions are transmitted through songs, sermons, prayers, conversations, recitations, symbols, proverbs, sayings, written documents and numerous other media (Vansina 1985:16,46; Finnegan 1976:206; cf Lemba initiation chants, 7.1.1.1; Chapter Nine). The Lemba narratives and those of early Israel that are told or acted out on different occasions mainly reflect their *origin* and *identity* (or cultural-religious practices) as transmitted to them by their ancestors. At this stage only some of these myths with an Old Testament resonance will be briefly discussed. With regard to the Lemba, this study mainly focuses on the oral traditions gained from field research.

6.1 MYTH AMONG THE LEMBA

6.1.1 Creation mythology

According to my knowledge of the Lemba, the earliest creation narrative recorded, was done by Wangemann (1868:437). He describes it as follows:

Sie lehren, Gott ist da, er hat den Menschen gemacht; man hört oft Gewehre oben und Trommeln in der Erde, dabei ist es Gott. Er hat erst den Mann erschaffen, dann das Weib, im Anfange, dann hat

er gesagt, sie sollen sich mehren; von Jobzoane sind die Menschen im Anfang gemacht. Zuerst hat er das Haupt und die Arme gemacht aus demselben Stoff wie die Steine.

(They teach that God is there. He made people; people often heard guns and drums in the earth, this was from God. At the beginning He first created the man and then the woman, then He said that they should multiply; people were made from 'Jobzoane' (sic) at the beginning. First He made the head and the arms, from the same material as the stones [my translation]).

When one asks the Lemba where they come from and who made them, they usually answer that they came from a land on the other side of the sea, and that Mwari, 'the God of Abraham, the heavenly God' made them. No other stories about creation have been encountered during the field work. Their experience of God in this story, is closely connected to their narrations about the *ngoma lungundu* (see 5.1.3), but very much so with the narratives of early Israel (cf 5.2.3). As far as I can judge there is no other group in Southern Africa who have a tradition of origin so closely related to that in Genesis 2.¹¹⁰ Another coincidence? In the light of all the foregoing, maybe not.

6.1.2 From the 'Promised Land' through the desert, by sea to Africa

Nothing precise is known about the origin of the Lemba, but elderly Lemba informants still recall the story told by their grandparents (D:G:6; cf Junod 1908:277):

We have come from a very remote place [Sena], on the other side of the Phusela [but they did not know where Phusela was]. We were on a big boat [some say on the back of a tree]. A terrible storm nearly destroyed us all. The boat was broken into two pieces. One half of us reached the shores of this country; the others were taken away with the second half of the boat, and we do not know where they are now. We climbed the mountains and arrived among the Banyai. There we settled, and after a time we moved southwards to the Transvaal; but we are not Banyai [my insertions].

Mathivha (1992:1-7) explains that before 586 BC when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians and many Jews were captured (and even earlier), some of the Basena escaped and migrated to the open spaces in Yemen.¹¹¹ There they met Phoenician merchants who introduced them to trade with the Orient and Africa. In the meantime they established themselves at Sena and 'Phusela' in the Yemen Peninsula. 'Judaism' was practised to the full in the city of Sena, where they stayed for a long time, trading by means of boats with the East coast of Africa (cf 3.2.1.2; Mathivha 1992:1-7).

¹¹⁰ According to a creation myth of the Zulu people, human beings emerged from the *Uhlanga* (the source of all life), without any thing. The Black men came out naked, leaving most things behind, because they came out first. They only emerged with some cattle, corn, spears and picks for digging the earth. Later the White men came out with ox-drawn wagons bearing abundant goods and which were able to traverse great distances (Callaway 1868-70:79-94).

The Nguni and Tsonga believed that 'the creator "broke off the nations" from a bed of reeds and the South Sotho, perhaps influenced by Nguni, taught that all true Sotho came from a reed bed at Ntsuanatsatsi in the Free State' (Hammond-Tooke 1993:150). Hammond-Tooke also records that according to the Xhosa, all people, stock and all forms of animal life came out of a cavern 'in a land in which the sun rises' and the Tswana, Tsonga and Lovedu referred to certain places where the god's footprints could still be seen on the rocks (1993:150).

¹¹¹ The linking of a date to these migration traditions is obviously a very recent addition by leaders, such as Mathivha.

According to Mathivha, already by 600 BC (before the exile) conflict arose between the Basena and the Arabs which caused some to return to Jerusalem while others left Phusela I and Sena I (in Yemen) and crossed the sea to Africa (Mathivha 1992:1). Some Lemba use Nehemiah 7:38 to confirm that some of the children of Sénaä [Sena?] returned after the Exile. The Reverend Father Marimazhira in Zvishavane, still recalls the story his parents and grandparents told him: '*We are people who came on the back of a tree to Africa*' (as referred to above; D:G:6). Hwingwiri (D:N:3; Gutu, Zimbabwe) points out that 'our forefathers used to tell us that when the war started in Arabia, we ran away facing an eastern direction. Some also went in other directions. Then it was from East Africa that we came here. So we were refugees' (D:N:3). His brother Abia adds that

in connection with the Arabian traders, [our forefathers] ... were helped to cross the sea because the Arabs wanted ivory from Africa. So it is the Arab trade to Africa which enabled them to come from Arabia to Africa. They were using wind driven ships. People were also sold at a market and those people who were used to that. Some could escape from being taken as slaves. I am pleading for the fact that we came from Israel on the ground that the customs or the culture which is being practised by the Israelites is the same we are performing, like circumcision (D:N:3,4).

Whether the Lemba originally crossed the sea from Yemen, is not certain (and besides the point for this chapter), but oral traditions throughout the different Lemba communities concur on at least two points: They trace their immediate origins to Sena (at the Zambezi; see *Map II*) and their remote beginnings to Phusela and a city called Sena on the other side of the Phusela. But the myth's lack of sophistication renders it more notable that it begins in some land beyond Sena (D:O:6).

It may be significant that Parfitt (1995:5,7) 'discovered' an ancient city called 'Sena' in the Eastern Hadramaut (in South Arabia; see *Map I*), which has preserved traditions of ancient migrations to Africa. Moreover, many clan names of the Lemba are commonplace names in the Hadramaut such as Hadji, Hamisi and Sadiki.

The story of the late Wilfred Phophi concerning the origin of the Lemba differs from that told by Mathivha. According to him:

Solomon sent his ships to get gold from Ophir, that is Zimbabwe. Some of the Jews who went on those boats stayed in Africa. That is the origin of the Lemba. Our name means 'those who avoid eating with others'. That means Jews. The others we did not eat with were the *wasenzhi*. That means gentiles. And for all this gen do not think that I am relying on the dictum of old Mathivha. My father could read and write. I got it all from him. He told me things that Mathivha will never know ([my italics]; Parfitt 1992:48)

Closely related to the story that the Lemba came from Israel, are the different terms which the Lemba use to describe themselves, as well as terms used by other people: Israelites,¹¹² Jews¹¹³ or 'Black Jews' (see above; D:I(1):10; D:M:8), 'children of Abraham' (D:L:8; D:K:5) or 'the Good Men'; and they refer to their sacred mountain in the Mberengwa district as 'the mountain

¹¹² Mposi comments, 'when we read the Bible and see that we're like the Jews and the Israelite people who didn't like to mix with other people – who regard other people unclean [then we know] that's what we are....' (D:M:10; [my insertion]).

¹¹³ Again in other sources, Lestrade ([1937]1946) and other authors indicate a strong Arabic influence.

of the Good Men'. Again, Parfitt (1992:18) found that an area (this time on an old map) not far from the Zambezi (where the Lemba rebuilt Sena), perhaps in the vicinity of Cape Correntes (see *Map II*), had indeed been named by Vasco da Gama 'the Land of the Good People' – *Terra da Boa Gente*.

Some of the respondents even used the designations, 'chosen people', 'elite' group and 'holy people'. They averred that they are treated by the Venda as a 'sort of upper class, almost like gods' and that they were previously 'light-skinned – white men really' (cf Parfitt 1992:78).

Some said that their parents had told them that they are Jews. Others 'admitted' that they had heard about this 'Jewishness' for the first time at the LCA Conferences held at Sweet Waters (Venda). Other respondents, for example those at Mamone in Sekhukhuneland, who never attended the conferences, confirmed that they knew nothing about being Jewish, but that they had come from Egypt.

Mpaketsane explains that

now that Professor Mathivha has revealed or maybe told [the Lemba] that they are Jews, some start to remember. Yes, they have been before, but it is just because of the cultural diffusion they have just forgotten a little bit. But really we are the black Jews I believe I am from there [Judah]. I am the son ... the grand, grand, grandson of Abraham' (D:K:1,5; [my insertion]).

At a Muslim centre in Chinyika (Zimbabwe; cf *Photo 20; 69*), Ali Mutazu told me that '[Mathivha] is a Christian, he follows the Lutheran church. So he is a Muremba [Lemba] that professor, but he is trying to convince the Varemba [at Mberengwa] that they are Jews not Muslim' (D:O:11; [my insertions]).

In connection with the notion that they were not originally from Africa, there is the other story which maintains that the Lemba once spoke a language of their own (cf Junod 1908:277; Jaques 1931:245; Gayre of Gayre 1967:10,12). The priest as well as Napi, a traditional healer in Sekhukhuneland, informed us that they 'have got secret words which must not be revealed to people ... it is a different language which is the language left to us which we inherited from our forefathers when doing circumcision' (D:A:10). Today there are still certain grammatical forms and words that are not to be found among other Black people (cf De Vaal 1958:53,55). Many of these words can be traced back to Arabic and Hebrew words (cf 7.1.1.1). Mutazu (Chinyika, Zimbabwe) assumes that the Lemba are Arabs, especially because 'the names of their forefathers [which] are completely from the Arabian language, such as Yukari and Seremani' (D:O:6; [my insertion]; cf Chapter 3). Some specialists maintain that the 'secret words' that remained relate to Karanga which served as a kind of *lingua franca* for the groups of people who were associated with Great Zimbabwe at the time of Monomotapa (cf De Vaal 1958:53; Gayre of Gayre 1967:10,12; see *Map II*).

Possibly the Lemba came from Yemen to the East coast of Africa with Arabic traders, or they are a mixture of Arabic traders and the local populations (cf 3.2.1.2). From this point of view, the Lemba probably traded between the East coast and the interior. The story runs that war broke out in their country of origin and that they could not return. Therefore, they had to take local 'heathen' wives. Until this day, they refer to their wives as 'vhasendji' or 'heathen'.

6.1.3 Guided by a star and *ngoma lungundu*

The Lemba believe that they were guided by a star (sent by God/Mwari) from Sena (on the Zambezi) to what we call Zimbabwe today, (and southwards to other places). The star served as a symbol of Mwari's presence.

Together with the star, it appears that on their journey to the South, the *ngoma lungundu* ('the drum that thunders') played a more or less similar role to that played by the Ark of the Covenant for the ancient Israelite tribes (cf 5.1.3; although the Lemba themselves never make this connection). The *ngoma lungundu* was considered holy and was not to be touched improperly or placed on the bare ground (Möller-Malan 1953). Inside this drum were sacred objects which belonged to the Vhasendji (probably the Venda). Therefore, because of their magical skills especially during warfare, the Lemba had to carry the drum (for the Vhasendji; cf *Photo 38*) and was guarded at night by a mythical pillar of flame (Bloomhill 1960:165). If this magic drum was lost, calamity would befall them.

According to Ravele, (1958:76-77) the name Lemba is derived from *lembe*, which means 'a secret iron affixed to the beads worn by Vendas when doing their ceremonies.' The Lemba were also obliged to carry a wooden basket full of *Malembe* for the Venda (cf Jantzen 1982:3; Parfitt 1992:250,269; Miller 1976:69). When the enemy heard the sound of this magical drum, it had a special effect on them – they were not able to move, since it rendered them utterly powerless (cf 5.1.3). The following poem by Mudau (in Bloomhill 1960:167) is founded on this legend of the *ngoma lungundu*:¹¹⁴

NGOMA LUNGUNDU

Mount Mbelengwa¹¹⁵ of the Good People
Whither hail we – MuLemba, children of Mambo! –
Of *Ngoma Lungundu* the drum of the Lord!
Strength of our nation we bore from the Northland
Chastened by fire and harried by men!
Guarded by cloud and at night by a pillar of flame.
Wind spurned by warrior, machila and caravan
Vainly wrought gyves for our feet
At the throb of Thy beat
– Of Thy beat.

Mount Mbelengwa of the Good People
Whither hail we!
Mountain of beauty laved by the waters of life!
Murm'ring Dzanu and Nahwe the daughter of laughter
Sparkling Mutentenwa caressing the mountain's green grass-beard,
And Nwanzhi the singing stream.

Mount Mbelengwa of the Good People
Whither hail we!
Mid clouds of thy flame and thy thunder
Mwali, High Priest of *Mambo*,
Was promised the fertile land.

¹¹⁴ In 1928 Mr E Mudau won First Prize for this Venda essay in a competition set by the International Institute of African Languages (Bloomhill 1960:167).

¹¹⁵ Cf Mberengwa above. The 'r' and 'l' is often interchangeable in African languages (Bloomhill 1960:165).

But Thy wrath it would seek us and slay us
If we lay with the stranger's daughter,
If we ate of the unclean flesh.

And so through the wastes and the grasslands,
Through vlei and o'er kopje,
River and rainburst and drought
Have we borne Thee, *Ngoma Lungundu!*
Have we winged Thee o'er earth and clothed Thee in myst'ry,
That the strength of Thy children live on,
Timeless and ageless and deathless.
And at night in our forefathers' name
We bow 'fore Thy pillar of flame.

According to Bloomhill (1960:165) it could be derived from this essay that the origin of the legend were traced back to the Chasenzi of Matongoni (from where they were driven), while carrying the drum to the South. This all happened before missionary influence was known by any of their people. There is also specific mention of some of their dietary and marital laws. Bloomhill is further convinced that 'no other legend is so imbued with the mystic enthrallment of African folklore as that of *Ngoma Lungundu*' (1960:165).

Mathivha (1992:10) narrates that in Africa one group (of Lemba) went westwards and settled in Ethiopia, while the other group led by Hamisi, migrated southwards along the coast until they settled on mountains (where the star guided them) at a place called Sena II, and thereafter at Sena III in the valley (cf D:P:5; only Sena I in Yemen and Sena III in the Zambezi can be indicated geographically). After Sena III they settled at a place called Bhela (in the present Mozambique; cf D:M:2). In Bhela many died from disease. According to Mathivha, the Bakari, the ruling house at that time, is still a strong dynasty in Mozambique. From Bhela they spread to areas such as Gorongozi (or Gorongoza).

Mathivha further narrates that between 400-300 BC, the Basena left Bhela and migrated westwards under the leadership of Seremane, until they settled at Chilamba (Chiramba; 400-300 BC; cf Chiremba above) in the Wedza district (the mid-eastern part of Zimbabwe; Mathivha 1992:1-7). Here they mined *iron, copper* and other minerals and manufactured iron articles, *clothes* and *pottery* for trading (cf D:H(1):4; D:J(1):6). The community under Seremane soon became a large community and Hamisi decided to proceed into a southwesterly direction until he reached Gokomere, to the South of Zimbabwe (Mathivha 1992:1-7).

Marimazhira was told by his grandparents that in Gokomere they settled for a short period of time, and then moved on under Tovakare-muzimbabwe to mountains similar to those at Sena II (D:G:6). Tradition avers that they were guided to this particular place by a star¹¹⁶ (D:G:6, the Hadzhi were specific led by the star). Here on top of a hill, they built a fort and a place of worship (300-200 BC). The Tovakare lineage were especially famous for their *stone masonry*. The name Tovakare, Tovhakale or Thobakgale means: *Nhovele wa kare, Thovhela-wa-kale or Thobela-wa-kgale*, which is 'king of long ago'. Tovakare is also called 'Makudo-a-Zimbabwe', which

¹¹⁶ According to De Beer (1997) this tradition is probably intertwined with the story of the birth of Christ. He observed that syncretism is apparently a general phenomenon amongst Bantu speaking and other groups.

means that the Tovakare men ‘climbed the walls like monkeys or baboons when they were building the walls [of Great Zimbabwe]’ ([my insertions]; Mathivha 1992:1-7; cf 4.5). Even today, the Tovakare group still lives in the southern parts of Zimbabwe, near Great Zimbabwe. Marimazhira (D:G:9) and many others witnessed how the Varembe referred and still refer to the Tovakare as ‘those who built Great Zimbabwe’.

Mathivha (1992:4) relates that *circumcision* was practised at Great Zimbabwe, and that the pottery industry developed to an advanced level. The Tovakare Dynasty was succeeded by Zungunde, Ngavi or Ngavi-Zungunde. Zungunde ruled until their God Mwali or Mwari¹¹⁷ (the heavenly God) brought illness to the community because of unbecoming practices. This caused the dispersion of the Basena who left Zimbabwe and divided into two groups. Mathivha (1992:4) further relates that the one group went southwards under Zungunde and settled in Mapakomhere (200 BC), where they can still be found under Chief Machipisa Tadzembwa. The other group (under Mhani), went westward under the guidance of a star which appeared every evening and showed the way. They followed the star until it stopped over the little hills of Zvishavane, near Masvingo. Here they discovered asbestos and once again practised their skills of iron manufacturing.

During the long rule of King Shabi of the Mhani tribe, the star continually reappeared to remind them that Mwari was not satisfied with Zvishavane (Mathivha 1992:4). So one night they followed the star in a southerly direction, until it reached the mountain where it stopped. The leader of this group, Mbelengwa of the Hadzhi tribe established his village on the mountain and named it Mberengwa (200-100 BC). From here the traders travelled all over seeking trade. It was also here that the Basena changed their name to Balemba, that is, the community of Mbelengwa.

At almost all the feasts and ceremonial occasions of the Lemba, stories of their origin and history are presented and transmitted to the following generation by means of songs, recitations and chants, et cetera (cf 9.1.1). The Lemba (and other people) express their desire to find out who they are by telling a story about how they came to be what they are and where they came from. *Myth* is thus a source that provides a sense of identity. Moreover, myth is given additional impact when one’s identity and destiny is expressed in terms of the unseen world (Smart 1995:89) – such as the guidance by a star, the *ngoma lungundu*, ecetera. It is noteworthy that the main stories of the Lemba do not necessarily include animals or cultural heroes as characters, as indicated by Bascon (1965:4), but that they are considered as truthful accounts of what happened in their past.

6.2 MYTH IN EARLY ISRAEL

Ancient Israel remembered the patriarchs, the Exodus, their wandering through the wilderness, the ‘conquest’ of Canaan, as well as numerous other myths with historical and religious significance. Within these narratives the Covenant with God played a major role. Whether early Israel (before the monarchy) already had a creation myth is not certain, but most probably at that stage, Genesis 2 was in its oral phase (maybe that of the Yahwist).

¹¹⁷ The supreme deity of the Shona, who was also later taken over by the Mathebele. More than one interviewee indicated that Mwari is or was also the supreme deity of the Lemba.

Possibly oral traditions increasingly obtained a more prominent place among the clans of Israel. These could have been important in establishing their *identity* and the *uniqueness* of their God in the midst of the conglomeration of other nations which also laid claim to the same land. Their traditions can therefore be described as a sacred factor of coherence with a political undertone.

The need to remember and recite the stories on special occasions implies the possibility that the stories could have been forgotten. Harris says, 'by linking herself to the past Israel becomes part of the future because past and future are in God's purpose' (1992:54). The most obvious place where the clans would have had the opportunity to exchange their traditions was at the sanctuaries (as already mentioned; Schmidt 1983:116; Deist 1985:30-34; cf Noth 1943:47ff). There the clans presumably participated in the Canaanite agricultural feasts. Possibly during the worship of Baal as the god of fertility, they felt the need and desire to also proclaim and laud the acts of Yahweh's redemption. Thus, these acts also obtained cultic significance, since the clans linked one or other cultic activity or confession of faith to them (Noth 1981:257).

6.2.1 Creation mythology

Anthropologists and other scholars have discovered that every culture embraces creation myths – stories of how life began. Whether early Israel, the focus of discussion here, already knew the creation myth narrated in Genesis 2, is not certain. Nevertheless, this version, as a narrative, presents a less majestic and transcendent God than the version in Genesis 1 (Niditch 1997:52-54).

Genesis 2 employs the motif that God created by *making* people (Van Dyk 1987:7). He behaved like a farmer in the Garden of Eden and moulded his creation of human beings as a sculptor would have done. A single male was created followed by plants, and only then the woman (cf Gen 1). In Genesis 2 and 3 no real attempt is made to give any sort of chronological sequence of events in the creation story.

The uncreated world is presented as a desert, where neither rain nor dew fell and where no fountain sprang (Van Dyk 1987:52-54; Jobling 1987:17ff). Moreover, Genesis 2 portrays a God who fears the potential power of the humans to become too much like God himself. However, He could still banish his creation from the Garden when He realised their intention to usurp his power, but in this Israelite narrative, God is the sole Creator who does not assume power in a tale of war (Niditch 1997:52-54; cf Niditch 1996:28-33).

Approximately five hundred years later, the Israelites were confronted with the different creation myths in Babylonia and were forced to decide where their God fitted into the pantheon of gods. Genesis 1 boldly affirms their belief: God is the all-powerful sole Creator! The God of Israel is unique. He only needed to use the words of his mouth in order to create. No battle was necessary (in contradiction to other gods). Genesis 1 reflects Israel's (not early Israel's) uncertainty at a time when it had been conquered by the adherents of the god Marduk¹¹⁸ (Niditch 1997:53).

¹¹⁸ Marduk was the primary deity of Babylon. The Babylonian epic of creation commemorates the god's victory over forces of evil and his honour as 'king of the gods' (cf ANET:1-9).

6.2.2 From Africa, through the sea and the desert to the 'Promised Land'

A number of stories which may have served as the historical basis for the clans of Israel were: their deliverance from Egypt (Africa) and concomitant slavery, when they built the cities of Pithom and Raamses, the journey through the Red Sea and the desert, the encounter with God at Sinai and the entry into the 'Promised Land' by certain clans of Israel from the southern Trans-Jordanian region (cf Noth 1981:47-51; [1958]1983:111; Gottwald 1980:88,93-99). These stories and others were probably the oldest traditions already in circulation in early Israel and they were interwoven with their identity (Smart 1995:81).

Noth ([1958]1983:111; 1981:47-51; Albertz 1994:40-45) considers Yahweh's salvific act of delivering the 'Israelites' from Egypt, as the oldest and the most important element of the Israelite faith (Nm 23:22-24:8; 2 Sm 7:23; 1 Sm 4:8; Jdg 6:13) that already functioned in pre-monarchical times. The story delivered by the 'Exodus group' later became part of the creed of the entire Israel (Noth [1958]1983:112-114; 1981:47-51). Noth also suspects that the earliest deposit of these events is contained in a section of the so-called Song of Moses found in Exodus 15:21b: 'The horse and his rider he [Yahweh] has hurled into the sea' (NASB, [my brackets]; ([1958]1983:112-114). The oral tradition (of early Israel) could have more or less entailed that 'a group of Hebrews fled from Egypt, that Yahweh hurled horse and rider (Egyptians) into the sea, and that Moses was involved in the process.' In due course, possibly during the time of the Judges, the significance of this song had to be explained to their posterity. Attempts could have been made to explain or expound finer details of the events (cf Albertz 1994:44-45; Noth 1981:257; Gottwald 1985:180-227) and mythical elements such as the ten plagues, how the sea split into two and numerous others could have been added.

One of the elements contained in the story about the exodus from Egypt is the Passover ritual, according to which the Exodus people had to eat unleavened bread (cf 7.2.2.1; Ex 12). In the light of this, it is not unusual that the clans of Israel would without any ado link the tradition of the deliverance from Egypt to the Canaanite agricultural feast, *הג מוצת* (the Feast of Unleavened Bread). Another Canaanite agricultural feast where the Exodus people probably would have relived and narrated the story of the exodus is the *הג ה'סא* (the Feast of the Ingathering), which probably was known as the Feast of Booths or of Tabernacles already in early Israel (cf 7.2.2.2 no 3). Other traditions connected to the exodus are Yahweh's appearance to Moses at the burning bush at Mount Horeb (Sinai), where He called him to deliver his people from Egypt and later at the same mountain, when Yahweh made known the Ten Commandments to the people with thunder and the rumbling of the earth (cf Ex 20).

All these stories and connections to the Canaanite feasts were attempts to convey past events to future generations, thereby keeping Yahweh's acts of salvation alive in their memory.

6.2.3 Guided by a pillar of cloud and fire and the Ark of the Covenant

Linked to the above-mentioned (cf 6.2.2), the Exodus group also had the reminder of the mobile sanctuary, namely the Ark of the Covenant, which dated from their desert wanderings. In addition to the Ark, which symbolised the presence of Yahweh and which, according to tradition, contained the Decalogue, the clans of Israel, were also reminded of God's presence. By means of the pillar

of cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night a further symbol of God's presence was presented to them. When the cloud or fiery pillar moved, they moved. When it stood still, they remained where they were.

It is very difficult to determine how old the stories concerning the existence and appearance of the Ark are or to date associated traditions. Nevertheless, different traditions exist concerning the memory of a cultic object that apparently was of great significance for the clans of Israel during their sojourn in the desert (cf Kraus 1966:125; Deist 1985:40).

6.3 EVALUATION AND COMPARISON

The similarities between the myths of the various groups (the Lemba and early Israel) are remarkable. In my opinion, the Lemba's creation story which concurs very closely with that of early Israel is unique in comparison with the indigenous groups in Southern Africa. The age or the historical accuracy of the stories is not of importance here. However, what is important is what they believed and what formed part of their world-view. How many elements of the stories were only conveyed much later is also uncertain. Nevertheless, these stories have both historical, as well as religious significance.

Both groups express their experience by means of these stories. Since I am neutral (for the purpose of this study) regarding the authenticity or falsity of the stories enshrined in these myths, I cannot express a judgement regarding their origins and identity. A purpose of this thesis is to give a more or less honest rendering of what these groups believe their history to be. Their myths of the remote past 'are taught to be believed' and 'are cited as authority in answer to ignorance, doubt and disbelief' (Bascon 1965:4).

The tables below reflect the most salient similarities and differences of the mythical dimension of the religious practices and viewpoints of the Lemba and of early Israel.

TABLE 7: COMPARISON – THE MYTHICAL DIMENSION

<p>MYTH AMONG THE LEMBA (6.1) Creation mythology (6.1.1) <i>Similarities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The God of heaven first created male, then female from the dust of the earth ▪ God is the all-powerful sole-Creator ▪ God creates by making people <p><i>Differences</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The sound of strife and drums were heard from the earth 	<p>MYTH AMONG EARLY ISRAEL (6.2) Creation mythology (6.2.1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ God created male, then the plants, then the female from the dust of the earth (Gn 2) ▪ God is the all-powerful sole-Creator (Gn 2) ▪ God created by making people <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The uncreated world was portrayed as a desert
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From the 'Promised Land' over the sea and through the desert to Africa (6.1.2, Lemba)

Similarities

- In Yemen they met Phoenician and Arab traders who introduced them to trade with the Orient and Africa
- In Africa they were guided by a star and the *ngoma lungundu* as symbols of Mwari's presence
- They perceive themselves to be Israelites, Jews, children of Abraham, chosen people, etc
- During their festivals, ceremonies and conferences, they remind their children of their history and culture and the mighty acts of Mwari

Differences

- They escaped the Babylonian Exile and migrated into the open spaces of Yemen
- They came from a place on the other side of the Phusela
- They came to Africa by boat
- War broke out in their country of origin and they couldn't go back. They had to take local wives
- They once spoke a language of their own
- They still have secret words which should not be revealed to uncircumcised people, which could be traced back to Arabic and Hebrew words

From (Egypt) Africa through the sea and through the desert to the 'Promised Land' (6.2.2, Israel)

- In Canaan they 'met' the Phoenician and Canaanite traders
- They were guided through the desert by pillars of cloud and fire, and the Ark of the Covenant as symbols of God's presence
- They perceived themselves to be Israelites, children of Abraham, chosen people, etc
- During their special festivals and ceremonies they reminded their children of their history and culture and the mighty acts of God (Yahweh)
- God delivered them from slavery in Egypt
- God led them through the Red Sea and the desert to the 'Promised Land'
- They came by foot to the 'Promised Land'
- At Mount Sinai God appeared to Moses, and renewed the Covenant, and gave the Decalogue to the people

Guided by a star and *ngoma lungundu* (6.1.3, Lemba)

Similarities

- In Africa they were guided by the *ngoma lungundu* and a star sent by Mwari to guide them southwards into Africa
- The drum is alleged to be still in one of the caves of the Dumghe Mountain in Zimbabwe
- The drum was considered holy, symbol of Mwari's presence and was not to be touched in an improper way or have been put down in the dust
- The Lemba had to carry the drum

Guided by a pillar of cloud and fire and the Ark of the Covenant (6.2.3, early Israel)

- In the desert they were guided by means of a pillar of cloud and fire, by Yahweh to the 'Promised Land'
- Some allege that the Ark might still be somewhere in Israel or Africa (Ethiopia)
- The Ark of the Covenant was considered holy and may not have been touched or put down in an improper way
- The Levites had to carry the Ark of the Covenant

- God struck his people with illness because of unbecoming practices.

Differences

- After their arrival at Mozambique and Zimbabwe, they migrated further south of the Limpopo
- They had a drum as symbol of God's presence
- The drum contained sacred objects such as beads, *malembe*, etc
- The drum was guarded by a pillar of fire or cloud

- God brought illness to his people because of their unbecoming practices (cf 6.1.3)

- They entered the Promised Land from an easterly direction
- They had an Ark as symbol of God's presence
- The Ark contained the Ten Commandments

The numerous concurrences and differences are by themselves highly significant and interesting, but the real value of these are to be found in the teaching of the Old Testament in Africa, as well as the possible interpretation of certain Old Testament sections. Since many narratives and myths about the past, play such an important role in the Old Testament, learners could be encouraged to reflect about the creation stories or the myths in their own cultures or religions. The familiarity to the material then offers access to a more relevant presentation of, for instance, the biblical creation narratives and myths. It may also stimulate possible further research about similar topics within learners' own communities, which may somehow be significant for a better understanding of the Old Testament (cf 10.2.1 and ADDENDUM III). It may even be felicitous for scholars to take cognisance of the various creation narratives in Africa, because these situate the biblical narrative within a broader context.

CHAPTER SEVEN

rites among the Lemba and Early Israel

The dimension of ritual is central to religion, and vital for the understanding of world-views. The experiential is not only channelled and expressed by myth, but also through ritual. Every tradition has its rituals and practices such as regular worship, sacrifices, sacraments (rituals which are believed to convey God's grace) or other patterns of behaviour, which fulfil a function in developing spiritual awareness or ethical insight (Smart 1989:13; 1995:13). Niditch (1997:99) affirms this viewpoint: 'the ritual dimension serves to restore the image of order when it falls into disarray or becomes clouded.' In trying to analyse and understand the ritual process in both the Lemba community and early Israel, two examples will be investigated, namely *rituals of sacrifice* and so-called *rites of passage* or transition. There is usually a story behind a ritual and therefore, the stories (narratives or myths) of religion are often integrated into the ritual dimension (cf Smart 1989:16).

The *rites of passage* are ceremonies or rituals which accompany vital transitions during life, such as the transition from puberty to adulthood, from outside to inside the tribe (e.g. rituals associated with marriage) or the Covenant of God and from one cycle in nature to another (new moon or new year etc; Smart 1995:129-133).

7.1 RITES AMONG THE LEMBA

7.1.1 Rituals of passage

7.1.1.1 Male circumcision (*ngoma*)

The Lemba practice of male circumcision is called *ngoma*. *Ngoma* in the African languages generally means drum (e.g. *ngoma lungundu*) or dance, but not circumcision. Therefore, Kritzinger (1997) suggests that it seems as though the associations among the central elements of the Lemba identity are so strong, that this word is also used for circumcision.

During the field research one of the most informative interviewees, who answered most questions about their history and more specifically, questions concerning circumcision, was William Ratsoma (alias Napi), a traditional healer in India, a Lemba community in Sekhukhuneland (Mpumalanga; cf V:1:SEK; see *Map II*). Apart from being the traditional healer (from Mogabane), he is fully involved in the circumcision and initiation of males and females in Sekhukhuneland.

Napi (V:1:SEK) was most willing to show us the route up the Leolo Mountain and to describe how the boys pass through the initiation ceremony. He described the atmosphere and the procedures. He sang every song or chant, usually sung by the elders of the tribe and recited at the important localities. These kind of songs and recitations are also part of the teaching, when they, for example, conduct *kurubha* (circumcision teaching) in Zimbabwe at the Mberengwa Mountain. It has a secret meaning, which may not be revealed to the uncircumcised (D:M:6). In other words,

the transmission of information during this ceremony takes place by means of songs, chants, recitations and so on. The information conveyed is usually not meant to be known by uncircumcised, since they are 'heathen' or 'unclean', and are not privileged to learn about it. What has become known over a period of time is that during the ceremony the 'novices' are informed about all facets of Lemba culture and history, especially about the secret ways and formulae to perform certain procedures and rituals.

In the section below there are two songs and chants used during the circumcision ceremonies in the Mberengwa District, in Zimbabwe (translated into Shona and into English). Special permission had to be obtained from Zivengwa Mposi, the brother of Chief Mposi in Mberengwa (D:M:6) to publish these. These songs are presented with English translation where possible:

<i>Oh! he he he he-e</i>	Oh! (He he he he-e) Humming
<i>Oh! hiye hiye hiye</i>	Oh! (Hoye hiye hiye) Humming
<i>Oh! hera Maria ho here here re</i>	Oh! Holy Maria (ho here he - he) Humming
<i>Here hiye-e</i>	(Here hiye-e) Humming
<i>Oh! hera Maria ho here he-he</i>	Oh! Holy Maria (ho here he he)
<i>Oye hiye hiye</i>	(Oye hiye hiye)
<i>Oh nhamo inouya here he he he</i>	Oh! poverty will come (here he he he)
<i>Ewoye hiye ye a! Heya heya hee-hee</i>	(Ewoye hiye ye a! Heya heya he-e he-e)
<i>vaMaria wonde</i>	Holy Maria definitely come
<i>Oh hiye he dzvotsvo</i>	(Oh hiye he) upheaval

On face level this song does not seem to have a special meaning, but this song or chant tells much about the Varembe tribe (as Mposi calls them; D:M:6). According to Mposi, it reflects their traditional religion especially as it was practised by their ancestors, but the song is so secret that no other person or tribe knows it – others are not aware of its real meaning (D:M:6):

SAISA WAKAFA

Saisa wakafa akafira mubani raRengwe
Hiye hiye yiye here
Ho! Here hiye woye
Hiye hiye saisa iwe
Ho! Here ha! Hoye
Hoye Saisa wakafa ha e he e eha eha
Hongo kubani revengwe
Ha! e - ere here ha! Heya heya - heya
Huwe yi Saisa iwe
Ho! yere iye iye
Hiye yi saisa here
Hoiyere ha woye - e
Ho! Kubani rokwedu
Ha-a! Eha-eha e-eha e-eha chakafirapo
Hongodzi yaisa mposi
Ha! Eha here ha heya heya chakafira Maroza

Mposi (D:M:6) explains that this song reflects some of the problems they came across when they were in the jungle (during circumcision). It is about Saisa who died on the plain of Rengwe (Mount Mberengwa), because the enemy had bewitched him. He died at Maroza (probably

because his parents did not confess all their sins before their son went for circumcision; see below). Both songs form part of their teaching or *kurubha* during circumcision.

Other secret or special words used by the priest when performing the circumcision is '*El pharusia*,'¹²⁰ which they interpret as God, the wise one (D:P:4). The respondent does not know 'whether it is a prayer or ... an address, actually that wisdom to God, or whether it is the wisdom from God to the priest to circumcise.' Mposi contends that '*(S)elemane shidja*' are other Hebrew words of which he does not know the meaning anymore, but which are used during circumcision or animal slaughter (D:P:11; cf 4.1.1.4). *Selemane* could be a corrupted form of *Solomon* (cf Ahuja 1999:10).

Whenever there are sufficient boys or girls who need to be circumcised and enough food and water, the elders gather at the chief's kraal and decide to hold such a ceremony (V:1:SEK). As far as the boys are concerned, on the agreed evening their fathers bring them to the chief's kraal, and all the elders of the clan join them to lecture the boys on this important step in their lives. Later that same evening Napi and the elders take the boys to the nearest clinic at Jane Furse hospital (near Schoonoord) and after a thorough examination, the doctor will inject each candidate with local anaesthetic for the pain. Then they return to the chief's kraal.

At exactly two o'clock the next morning, they depart from the chief's kraal from the one side of the valley, to the opposite side, where the circumcision takes place on the Leolo Mountain. In an attempt to confuse the boys (lest they decide to run away), the elders lead the boys along a longer road through the valley into the mountain. Along the way the elders stand side by side to make sure that no one runs away. If a boy should succeed in running away after the circumcision, he will most definitely perish in the mountain. Walking up the mountain they sing a certain chant to indicate that 'there is some serious business going on' (V:1:SEK).

The boys gather at a certain spot behind the hills at the foot of the mountain, and from there they are taken one by one up the slope to the 'chair' in front of the witch doctor. There the elders say to them: 'You want a chair at home – here is a real chair. If you want to become a man you must be able to sit on this chair.' This expression reflects some of the psychological reasons for the circumcision. It is seen as a ceremony where a boy enters both the community of God and the entire Lemba community (where he learns all about their practices, etc). In other words this is an initiation into adulthood, but, they first have to pass through hardships to become an adult. Then only are they prepared for life (Mathivha 1999b).¹²¹

¹²⁰ The Hebrew phrase that most closely relates to this, I think, could be *אל פרסיה*. *Pharas* meaning 'to make distinct', or 'to declare' or 'to separate' ('god of separation'). The Greek word *παρουσία* (second coming) could perhaps also be applicable in this context ('god of the second coming'). A possible Arabic meaning for this word should also be investigated.

¹²¹ The first President of a democratic South Africa, Nelson Mandela, in his autobiography interestingly describes his own circumcision and initiation and remarks that the Xhosa people (and other groups) the circumcision similarly represents the incorporation of males into their communities (Mandela 1994:24).

This famous chair is made of two stones – one to sit on and the other to support your back. When the boy sits in the chair two elders each take one of the boy's arms, while the witchdoctor opens his legs to give the boy 'a proper view', and that is when he circumcises the boy with a sharp knife (cf *Photo's 45-46*). Napi (the traditional healer) usually stands close by with his assegai and a spear as a dire warning to the boys, lest they succumb to the urge to scream or cry. Nevertheless, some of the boys do scream or cry, but the elders do not hold it against them, according to him. In the background the elders sing out loud and beat the drums to drown out the screams or cries.¹²² Each boy is given a can after being circumcised, so that the blood from the wound can be prevented from spilling on the ground. With an elder at each arm, the boys are guided to a specific place where they have to rest on their hands and knees to bleed. Afterwards, the witch-doctor comes to 'collect' the blood. In this way evildoers or people with bad intentions are prevented from getting hold of the boys' blood. This practice is most probably the influence of the traditional African religions. The wound is wrapped up for four or five days in leaves possessing some curative or healing properties.¹²³ The patient is not allowed to remove the dressing or apply any other form of lotion (Wheelwright 1905:251-255). Wheelwright records that after that time the patients paint their entire bodies with white clay. Napi did not mention any painting activities, but said it takes about forty-five hours before the bleeding stops. In all the time, Napi and the witch doctor are on stand-by in case of an emergency. If anything goes amiss with one of the boys, they are immediately taken to hospital. Napi also showed us a kind of sacrificial altar or cairn on the mountain, where the boys learn other Lemba practices and ceremonies specifically associated with their ancestors (V:1:SEK). The graves of powerful ancestors, especially the chiefs, become the places of worship where meat and beer are offered to their spirits.

During the circumcision ceremony, Napi continued, the girls and the women do the cooking called 'Chivonero' or 'Thivhanelo' (cf Mathivha 1992:47; Wheelwright 1905:254). A specific place is chosen where the men come to fetch the food (usually fish and porridge) to be used at the circumcision lodge. Leaves serve as plates for the food. According to Napi, the boys remain in the mountain for three months until their wounds have healed (cf *Photo 47*).

At the end of that period they go to another place where they stay for another week and then they return to the chief's kraal where he has prepared a meal for them and their fathers (V:1:SEK; cf Wheelwright 1905:254). Napi added: 'Now they are men and prepared for marriage.' Then Napi made an interesting remark. He said that after the meal they go home where their fathers 'cut their hair just a little bit around their heads' (V:1:SEK).

Napi further explained that we would find many people in the Lemba community who are not circumcised. No one can be forced, but if one does not report for circumcision, one owes the

¹²² In the Xhosa culture flinching or crying out was also a sign of weakness (Mandela 1994:26).

¹²³ Cf Mandela (1994:26) for the same practice among the Xhosa people and Bryant (1949:490) for the same practice among the Zulu people.

chief two heads of cattle. The reason is that they don't want their people's blood to be shed at other people's places, because people with bad intentions could get hold of your blood (during circumcision) and 'use it to bewitch you and then you will get many diseases' (V:1:SEK).

It could be possible that somewhere in the past the Lemba received the practice of circumcision from Muslim influence. Nabarro (in Spurdle & Jenkins 1996:1131), however, maintains that the method associated with male circumcision used by the Lemba differs markedly from that of Muslims. The incision is small and possibly similar to the mode of circumcision practised in biblical times, *before the introduction of more extensive circumcision during the Talmudic period*¹²⁴ (Gutmann 1987:4; De Vaal 1958:57; Gayre of Gayre 1972).

Most of the respondents indicated that the circumcision ceremony is unique to the Lemba people, but some admit that 'nowadays you cannot say unique because if you talk about circumcision you find everybody is doing something [b]ut originally I think that is the Balemba people who did it' (D:G:2:7,8; cf D:M:5; Chapter Three). Mpaketsane remarks that 'presently the circumcision is a little bit going down and down and down.... This is the cost of acculturation. Just because of the cultural deficient it is gradually being avoided ...' (D:K:14).

Napi could not tell us much about the general meaning behind the ceremony, but Father Marimazhira (in Zimbabwe) contends that the circumcision

has something to do with our physical and spiritual cleanliness. And the cleanliness indicates discipline of mind, because if one is not prepared to go for circumcision the others will always know "he has not been there, so what good can he be?" He has no discipline, he has not been taught, he does not know what he has to do. If you attend the circumcision you are easily accepted into the community and you have learned how to *kosher*-kill an animal (D:G:9,10).

Mathivha (1992:47) adds that

the curriculum [during circumcision] consists of the learning of the formulae and the observing of proper procedure and the love for the truth. Honesty is emphasized now and again so that the Lembas must love one another. They are taught to respect the elders and to listen to them i.e to every father and mother [my insertion].

Thus it is a kind of initiation ceremony into the Lemba clan. The do's and don'ts (the curriculum during the ceremony) of this particular culture and covenant are stressed very strongly at this occasion. However, it is not clear what specific education they receive on their history and requirements for marriage.

To the Lemba circumcision is an important ritual to which many of their traditions are linked (cf Chapter Five). The traditions relate that they are the group who have knowledge of how and why circumcision has to be practised. Those who do not practise this are the 'heathen' and they are 'unclean', while they themselves are the chosen people, who are incorporated into the

¹²⁴ 'The rabbis of the Talmudic period perhaps added *peri'ah* (the tearing of the genital mucous membrane and laying bare the glans), and *metzitzah*, when the *mohel* fills his mouth with wine and applies suction either orally or through a mouthpiece to stanch the flow of blood' (Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 133a-b, in Gutmann 1987:4). This latter practice has now been generally abandoned (Gutmann 1987:4).

Covenant of God. Certain perspectives of their world-view emerge here, namely that this practice establishes them as the elect, and makes them unique and special.

(a) The narratives behind the circumcision ritual for boys

(i) It is mainly the Lemba clans from the southern parts of Zimbabwe, who perceive circumcision for men as the incorporation of newcomers into the *Covenant* with God/Mwari. Priest Zvinowanda directly relates his viewpoint to Genesis 17 and adds that they sometimes combine this occasion with the celebration of the *Pesah* Festival, as they call it (D:A:4; D:M:11,12). Other respondents in Zimbabwe refer to themselves as the ‘children of God in our faith and how we were born’ and that ‘the circumcision is an order from God’ (D:L:8; D:O:7,10,11).

Even Shef Ali Mutazu¹²⁵ agrees that ‘the circumcision is an order from God, that is our current attendance. It was an order from God to whom we pray. Then the second thing is cleanliness’ (D:O:7,10,11). He explains that

the Varembe here in Zimbabwe – whether he is in any Christian church with a certain rank or not, he must abide with the laws which he learn when we are in the circumcision culture of Varembe. When we go there we learn and when we come back we preach Islamically. But now the Varembe take it to be culture (D:O:12).

It is remarkable that a Lemba such as Shef Ali Mutazu who underwent a thorough Muslim education retains his loyalty toward his Lemba culture, which he imbibed from birth. It also appears from what he says, that the one culture does not replace the other, but that the one only adds to the existing one.

(ii) Mposi (brother of the late chief Mposi of Mberengwa) would concur: ‘we still regard it [circumcision] to be a covenant between the Lemba people’ [and God], and points out another important element: ‘if a person is not holy and he has not *confessed all his sins* [it happens that] when his son goes into a camp for circumcision initiation he dies [the son]’ (D:M:11,12; cf D:N:7; D:P:2,3; [my insertion and italics]). The parents of the boy have to confess all their sins, otherwise their son will die during the circumcision.

It is said that any deaths occurring during the course of the initiation ceremony are kept secret. The bodies are quietly buried in the vicinity without any form of mourning and the deceased is simply looked upon as having disappeared. Overall a profound secrecy is maintained by all who attended the lodges (Wheelwright 1905:255).

It appears as if there is something inherent to the notion of original sin or collective guilt. Unconfessed sin by the parents can actually cause the death of the child during the circumcision ceremony. The holiness of the Covenant, or incorporation into the clan may also underlie this belief. This emphasis on the confession of sin ostensibly occurs mainly among the communities

¹²⁵ A Lemba and the *imam* (head) of the Muslim centre at Chinyika (Gutu district, Zimbabwe).

in the South of Zimbabwe. This may also reflect some influence of Christianity on the Lemba culture.

(iii) Another important story behind the ritual is that many respondents remember that the *circumcision of male infants* usually took place on the *eighth day*. Phophi (Parfitt 1992:50) argues that

in the past the circumcision took place on the eighth day. And then, in remembrance of the eighth day, we circumcised in the eighth year. Then the influence of the other tribes' initiation rites became very great and we started doing it whenever there were enough boys to make up a group big enough for an initiation school. (cf D:M:6; D:P:2)

Runesu is convinced that 'it is only because of poverty [that we lack to go into camp for the initiation ceremonies] but if we can just get people who might assist we can do it so early as eight days' (D:L:8; [my insertion]).

In a study of the Islam in Africa, Price contends that several observers especially note the Semitic physical features of the Lemba (Mwenye) and the fact that they conduct the 'non-Bantu practice of *male circumcision of infants*' (1954:33; [my italics]):

The Mwenye profession of Islam depends on the observed food tabus, the circumcision of male infants denoted simply by *mambo waana wathu* – 'our custom with regard to children' They do not have the Qur'ān or any system of instruction in orally transmitted texts, they do not keep ritual observances of the day or the week, nor the fast of Ramadan. They in fact appear to be very thorough-going materialists at their present stage, lacking serious interest in either the beliefs of their fathers or the religions of the people they have come among.

Price notes that these Mwenye groups have neither significant Muslim practices nor interest in their beliefs nor in the beliefs of their fathers (a very peculiar phenomenon for an African people). Price further observes that the circumcision of the Mwenye was different from the general Bantu practice, because they conduct the circumcision of male *infants*. This statement collaborates the oral tradition of the Lemba that they earlier conducted the circumcision on the eighth day (that is, to babies). Other observers also noted (as Price does above) that the Lemba do not really fit in – they were amazed to find the male circumcision of infants among an African group. These observations lead to the conclusion that these Lemba (or Mwenye) groups were confused, that they perhaps did not feel at home with either of the two religious groups (i.e. Muslim or Bantu) mentioned above.

(iv) Father Marimazhira at Zvishavane and other respondents explain that at the end of the circumcision school, the boys are given *new names* in addition to their first names. The new names all start with '*Ra*' such as Rambevha, Rasivheshele and Razwimisani (D:G:2,3). The prefix '*Ra*' indicates that this is now a man 'who can reproduce Lembas when he is married' (cf Mathivha 1992:48; Motshekga 1983).¹²⁶ But this '*Ra*' is also connected to a name of one of the ancestors.

¹²⁶ There might just be a possibility that this '*Ra*' originally had a connection with the Egyptian Sungod '*Ra*', especially if their traditions that they came from the North are true (Motshekga 1998). But this needs further investigation.

'Ra' actually means 'father' in Venda, therefore this prefix connects the person with his specific ancestor. Mathivha indicates that the girls are similarly given new names at the end of their initiation, after which they are called by new names. Those names, he explains, are not so characteristic as those of the boys. Refilwe Mpaketsane (1999) said that those names are simply the names of their grandmothers or aunts.

(v) Many scholars and interviewees are convinced that *the Lemba introduced circumcision (ngoma) into Southern Africa* (cf Junod 1908:283; cf Chapter Three). They were even called the 'masters of *ngoma*' and that they 'hold a special position in the [circumcision] lodges' (Junod 1927:73). Phophi (Parfitt 1992:50; cf D:L:7) is convinced that

the Lemba were once *Moors* But please do not think these Moors were Muslims. They were, of course Jews. And in any case long before the Portuguese came, we were doing circumcision at Great Zimbabwe. They found phallic stones there And guess what? They're circumcised [my italics].

Parfitt (1992:249-250) has no doubt about the similarities between the practices of the 'Moors' and the Lemba, and in particular their enthusiasm for lunar festivals and circumcision. In fact, one of the transmitted traditions of the Lemba holds that the Lemba were the builders of Great Zimbabwe. Phophi, therefore, finds a confirmation in the discovery of the circumcised phallic stones for their participation in the building and their influence there (cf Chapter Three).

7.1.1.2 *The initiation ritual for women*

In a recent newspaper article Rademeyer, (Beeld 1996) maintains that female circumcision does not occur in South African communities.¹²⁷ During my first visit I was amazed to learn that the Lemba community in Sekhukhuneland performs not only male circumcision but also female circumcision. According to my respondent, Napi (less than two hours' drive from Pretoria), female circumcision¹²⁸ is in full practice (V:1:SEK; cf D:G:2:8).

Napi continued that this ceremony is performed on the opposite side of the Leolo Mountains across the valley (where the male circumcision takes place), on the mountain just behind the chief's kraal (cf *Photo 22; 29*). Napi explains that like the boys, the girls, together with their mothers and the older women in the community gather at the chief's kraal and are taken to the clinic, but then they go home again. Each Lemba community has its own kind of women's league to help one another during the initiation of women (Mathivha 1999b). Early the next morning the girls and the older women ascend the mountain and there, at half past five, the girls 'take a bath' in a deep pool in the Mohloloane River. Napi did not show the same liberty to explain and demonstrate as he did with the boys' ceremony, but he nevertheless explained, that 'to take a bath means that the witch doctor's wife circumcises the girls in the pool in the river' (cf D:I:5-7). This

¹²⁷ However, Stayt ([1931]1968:138-140) explicitly states that this occurs with the Venda and certain Sotho tribes.

¹²⁸ Female circumcision of course does not have any Old Testament connection, it is probably Arabic in origin.

circumcision, Napi explained, entails an operation. Higher up the river he showed us a much deeper pool where the Christians baptise or immerse their people. As a matter of fact, most of the Lemba simultaneously declare Jesus Christ as their Saviour. They do not have any problem in adding the Christian beliefs and doctrines to their existing Lemba culture and beliefs. Napi was very proud to show us their holy river and the chief later explained why it is sacred to them in particular (cf 5.1.4).

Napi further informed us that after the circumcision at 19:00, the girls return to the courtyard from where they return home for one week. After that they go back to the mountain where they stay in the vicinity of another branch of the river. During the day they sit half-immersed in the water in the shade of the trees, and at night they sleep in a more sheltered place. Here they stay for one week and during that time the male witch doctor and the traditional doctor (Napi, in this instance) examines each one of them to see if everything is fine (V:1:SEK).

Parfitt (1992:177) was similarly told (in Zimbabwe) that a Lemba girl, at the onset of puberty was traditionally expected to sit up to her neck in river water, (depending on how much it rained that year), for two weeks, with a gourd on her head. She was also presented with a sharp conical wooden object decorated with a red tassel, upon which she had to impale herself in the river for a further three days. These immersions were considered exercises in humility.¹²⁹ But they did not mention any operation.

Whether the female circumcision contains an operation, at first remained a question. I observed that Mathivha (1992) who lives in Venda as well as other scholars neither mention the circumcision of girls in terms of an operation, but indicate that they do attend an initiation ceremony called 'Vhusha' or 'Vhukomba'¹³⁰:

During this week the girls are taught all about womanhood and the way in which she can entertain her future husband. In this ceremony she is also subjected to a rigid discipline and her physical fitness is tested. She is also taught that the uncircumcised are weak persons and that she should not get married to such individuals....¹³¹ The old women are also relying on the women with one or more children who illustrate the customs of married life. The girl is taught to respect the elders and to observe good order in the family. The principles of cleanliness in her sexual life are emphasised very strongly. She is taught how to plan her family by spacing her children. She is also taught to obey the parents in matters of observing the laws and customs of the Basena (Mathivha 1992:48; [my footnote]).

As far as my knowledge goes, neither Lemba groups in Venda and Sekhukhuneland, nor in Zimbabwe perform female circumcision by means of an operation, although they do have initiation schools for the girls. During my second visit to Sekhukhuneland (1997) this notion was reinforced. The chief's mother, Mante Mpaketsane, and other women confirmed that no operation whatsoever is involved during the initiation process of the girls, but that they do agree with the rest of Napi's

¹²⁹ These customs also occur among the Venda (cf Bullock [1927]1950:212).

¹³⁰ Stayt ([1931]1968:138) indicates that the *musevetho* is the circumcision ceremony for women.

¹³¹ Similarly, in the Xhosa tradition an uncircumcised man may not marry. He may not be heir to his father's wealth or officiate in tribal rituals (Mandela 1994:24).

version of the ceremony (D:I:5-7; cf *Photo 7*). They explained that the reason for dipping the girls into cold water (and beating them) is mainly to make them tough. But, according to them, there is no operation involved. They suppose Napi gave me a wrong impression simply because he (a male) does not know exactly what is happening during the initiation ceremony for girls and could only guess. The possibility, exists that they could, in fact, have had a ceremony for the girls in the past which included some kind of operation. But this requires further investigation.

However, the period spent in the mountain is a respite in nature, before assuming the cultural responsibilities of wife and mother. In a way the ritual acknowledges the young women's uncertainty during this transitional period in their lives.

7.1.1.3 *The New Moon ceremony*

Some of the interviewees remembered that they once had a sabbath or a day of rest. It is noteworthy, however, that they put much emphasis on the observance of the new moon and all the rituals that should accompany it. Interestingly, the traditional Lemba consider the day of observance of the full moon as a day of rest, as the Jews would consider the Sabbath.

During my field research I found very few Lemba who still know the ceremony surrounding the New Moon Festival. Most of the respondents in Sekhukhuneland and Zimbabwe could only remember that, according to their culture, 'they must remove their hair every month when the new moon starts.... So the head must always be shiny' (D:M:7). Most of them still keep this custom of shaving their heads (cf De Vaal 1958:56).

During a special LCA Conference in April 1995, Mhani (Chaplain of the LCA) explained the activities surrounding the New Moon Festival in the Lemba communities (V:1:LCA). Just before the time of the new moon, a bowl is placed under a tree or in the shade of a hut. Then a day before the moon is seen by anyone, sometimes two days before, the moon become visible, it reflects in the water in the bowl, usually around noon. The one who sees the moon before the others shouts: '*Ha lea e bonala lapeng*' ('you were not there when I came home'; [the moon] is not visible at the lapa) and runs to the chief to inform him. Then the chief sends his servants to the river to see if they can really see the moon in the dish. Marole informs that if they confirm it, the chief will *blow the horn* and the 'indunas' (a Zulu word used by Marole) will follow suit, blowing their horns (1969:4; cf *Photo 44*). When the people hear the horns, they will leave everything behind and run to the river (cf Marole 1969:4). All the old men and old women shave their heads and everybody *fasts* for the rest of the day. The following day *no work is done*. It is kept as a day of cessation and everybody brings food to the chief. That evening the Lemba would look at the moon and say, 'This is the batsetse's moon, our moon has been seen in the pot.' Mathivha (D:1:B:5) explains that if a person's head is not clean-shaven he or she becomes foolish. The

Lemba women specifically shave off their hair to become wiser.¹³² This ritual is accompanied by different chants and songs.

Stayt (1931:232) refers to a new moon ceremony among the Basia, recorded by Ellenberger and MacGregor in their history of the Basuto¹³³:

tradition tells of an ingenious method in use among the Basia, whereby the crescent could be detected in the sunlit firmament with the minimum of trouble to the observer. An earthen pot, made of glazed pottery, was filled with very clear limpid water, and as soon as the crescent appeared, it was reflected in the water even in the most glaring sunlight, and the first observer to discover the reflection in his pot ran to report to the chief, who announced the fact and summoned the feast by messengers. The successful astronomer was, according to custom, declared to be ruler of the feast, and was entrusted with the distribution of the refreshments.

Could this *Basia* be the same group as the above-mentioned *Vhasia* (cf 3.2.3)? This custom accentuates some of the many differences between the Lemba and the other tribes. For the Lemba this is a sign of festivity and wisdom.¹³⁴ Thompson (1942:77) recorded that the Lemba's New Year begins when the new moon is first seen at the end of the month of November.

During a recent visit to Yemen, Parfitt (1992:340) was informed about the customs and traditions of the tribes of the *wadi* Sena (the people in the vicinity of the old city of Sena) and was surprised to find that they have the same new moon celebrations as practised by the Lemba in Southern Africa. Nowhere else during his many travels could he find this same practice. In the world-view of the Lemba the new moon ceremony accompanies the transition from one cycle in nature to another.

7.1.2 Rituals of sacrifice

A sacrifice is like a gift that opens communication with a god and also establishes good relations, but sincerity on behalf of the one sacrificing is a prerequisite. Because the parties in the relationship that is, humans-god/God are not equal, the human being 'has to make his sacrifice into an act of praise. Praise or worship acknowledges the god's might as well as the inferiority of the worshipper' (Smart 1995:123-128).

Lemba respondents likewise indicate that offerings are seen as a gift to God through the ancestors, but that it has no connection with the expiation of sin as is often the case with other religious groups (Mathivha 1999b).

¹³² Dos Santos (Gregson 1973:419; cf Chapter Three) refers to the similarities between the practices of the 'Moors' in South-East Africa and those of the Lemba. He wrote: 'The Kaffirs hold a great feast on the day of the new moon and I think they got this custom from the Moors who are scattered about this land and do the same....' And again 'the principal observance, in which they are almost exact, is celebrating, with great feasting, every new moon, upon which occasion they usually get intoxicated – although their creed forbids them to take wine.'

¹³³ Ellenberger, D E; V D M & Macgregor, J C 1912. *History of the Basuto*. London: Caxton.

¹³⁴ Junod (1908:283) adds that the shaving of the head for the 'Suto' and the 'Thonga' is principally a sign of mourning.

Smart (1995:124) is of the opinion that 'the victim is killed because it is taken out of the visible world and sent to the unseen world Burning a sacrifice ... transforms the victim into sky-going smoke and the essence of the sacrifice rises up and disappears in the direction of the abode of the gods.'

7.1.2.1 *The Pesah*

The Lemba sometimes combine the circumcision of the boys with what they call the *Pesah* (Passover). According to priest Zvinowanda they sacrifice a lamb or whatever animal is available, but they emphasise that they do not follow the church calendar in determining the dates of these festivals (D:A:4; D:M:11,12):

during circumcision initiation we also take a sheep and then slaughter – put it on the altar as a sacrifice for the circumcision to appease God, we are still doing it (D:A:6).

No further detail is known about this sacrifice. This custom can be a result of the influence either of Christianity or Judaism or it may be a remnant of the ancient religion of early Israel.

7.1.2.2 *Thevhula and unleavened food*

De Vaal (1958:54-55; cf Van Warmelo 1966:273) records the annual (usually in July) so-called *thevhula* ceremony, during which the Lemba come together to worship and to bring sacrifices. Depending on the occasion, he observed that three kinds of prayers are used: a prayer for the *dead*, a prayer for *sickness* and one for *joy*. In preparation for the *thevhula* young women grind hard mealies which have not been soaked and *nothing fermented* may be used. On a specific day the people wash themselves carefully, shave their heads and sit in a circle. Then they take a *spotless, black bovine*, or a black goat in the case of a smaller group and place it in the middle of the circle. The priest will then rise and pray for the victim in the tshiKaranga language, with a sharp knife, smeared with red stone, in his hand (De Vaal 1958:54,55).

According to Van Warmelo (1966:277), the ancestors are enumerated in genealogical order and everyone is represented by a spear (cf *Photo 77*). Each one's place of birth and dwelling place are remembered, for example: 'Buba from Nyao'cla.' In this way significant information is transmitted from one generation to another. The priest ends his prayer with 'amune' (= amen), after which everybody repeats after him 'amu, amune, amu' (amen). Then they slaughter the animal by *shedding the blood on the ground* (De Vaal 1958:55). Already in 1905 (:101) Hall describes the 'defilement of eating flesh containing blood' as well as the 'sprinkling of worshippers with blood' as some of the distinct Jewish customs of the Karanga-speaking Lemba.

While the meat is cooking, the young men start dancing and when the meat is ready, they gather together again and repeat a certain prayer with the priest which again ends it with 'amu, amune'. At this stage they eat the meat without any salt and put the bones neatly together (cf Schlömann 1894:67).

With regard to the above meaning of *thevhula*, Mathivha (1999b) explained that it is the Shona who use the word *thevhula* for their specific prayer-meetings, not the Lemba. According to him the ceremony with the spears referred to by Van Warmelo (1966:277) is indeed called *thevhula* (among the Lemba) and these meetings are usually held when they are facing the army of the enemy. They point the arrow or spear in the direction of the enemy. The Lemba are known for their specific skills and use of magic during warfare (cf Chapter Four). However, Mathivha also mentioned that the Lemba have yet another practice called *thevhula*, which refers to the occasions when they meet 'to use magic in order to hurt somebody' (especially an intruder). Usually such a person's movement (hands or legs) will be affected in one way or another, but he or she could be cured by his own people's traditional healer. In the light of Mathivha's comments, it seems as though some of the elements of the *thevhula* became intermingled in different people's communities. This is not unusual since the Lemba have always lived among other people (although separate) and observers from outside could easily come to wrong conclusions.

Nevertheless, amongst other special customs of the 'Malepa' (Lemba), the Reverend Schlömann (1894:65) also accentuated that the 'Malepa' held *prayer meetings* more frequently than other natives, they used a special language¹³⁵ of which they did not know the meaning themselves and he added that they concluded their prayers, *addressed to the ancestors*, by the Hebrew word 'amena' (cf Jaques 1931:249; Motenda 1940:66,70; Mphelo 1936:42; Marole 1969:5; De Vaal 1958:54; Gotein 1969:231-235). Schlömann (1894:65 and others) also mentioned that the number *seven* is sacred to them. Wangemann (1868:437) found that before they pray they first wash their hands and dress in white clothes and then they pray: '*ha mena oa honzó oa farafatela oa helezano oa honzo oa helezana oa farafatela.*' At that stage already Wangemann indicated that not even the Lemba knew the meaning of that prayer anymore.

An informant Mosheh (Jaques 1931:249), remembered a funeral ceremony (closely related to the above rituals) from his childhood. Only the men were present and they wore their loin-cloths the other way around and took all their ornaments from their necks and put them aside. The Lemba who took the lead, girded his loins with a *sekgwele* (a cotton cloth), probably with ceremonial significance. Then a spotless beast, sheep or goat was slaughtered and some of the *blood was drunk*¹³⁶ by the men, and the rest was *sprinkled over the worshippers*. They all knelt down and the leader prayed '*xo ndziye*' (meaning not known). Then the priest prayed to their *ancestors* and called them by name. Some of the words in the prayer were: '*A sasa sa e se a bona, Mose a vuye popa, munhu umbi mutsa mbona kwava ku fa, wa enda*', freely translated as

Let Moses return to us again.
Man is evil.

¹³⁵ Cf Junod 1908:277; Lestrade 1927:xxviii-xxxix; Jaques 1931:245-247; Stayt 1931:235; Motenda 1940:67; Mphelo 1936:36; Van Warmelo 1935:122; Thompson 1942:76; De Vaal 1942:49; Von Sicard 1952:167; Price 1954:36; Gayre of Gayre 1965:241; Spurdle & Jenkins 1996:1126).

¹³⁶ This is not in concurrence with information given by other respondents that the Lemba are not suppose to drink blood. It may, however, be the case during burial ceremonies.

We'll not see a man like him again.
Death is a journey....
(Jaques 1931:249).

This prayer was also ended with 'amin'. Then the meat was eaten and they went to swim in the river. Mention of Moses occurs quite readily in Lemba traditions.

7.1.2.3 *First Fruit and Harvest Festival*

Another festival that seems to reach back to an Old Testament festival (cf Dt 16:11; Is 9:2; Lv 23:10) is the Feast of the First Fruits.¹³⁷ The older people in the community can still recall how they took part in such an occasion once a year. Mathivha (D:1:B:24) remarks that although 'the majority of the Lemba is converted to Christianity, in their practical time they stick to their First Fruit Festival. They stick to the time around December and others when they collect all the seeds' (cf the Makapola festival; cf 5.3.1.2). The ingathering of the seed usually takes place during springtime. On these occasions the horns are blown and thereby God is requested to make their seeds fruitful and let them multiply (Mathivha 1999b).

Nabarro, (who accepted the Jewish faith and her Jewish husband; 1999) came across a very fascinating group (long before they knew about the Lemba or the Mwenye) in Southern central Mozambique – then still a Portuguese colony. They mentioned that there was somebody with a kudu-horn, and the man was playing little phrases, numes or whatever they were. It struck them as being extraordinarily like the Jewish New Year service (*shofar* ceremony in September). The man did not just play, but somebody called the name of the phrase and then he sounded the phrase. The Nabarro's recorded these calls and played them to other Jewish scholars. They compared them to those in a Jewish prayer book reflecting the playing on a Jewish New Year's day in the synagogue, to determine how they corresponded to the recordings made in central Mozambique. It appeared later that the group was most probably the Mwenye, who are closely related to the Lemba in South Africa. It was only later found that the Lemba (in South Africa) employ similar calls on the horn when they call the ingathering of the seeds. Mathivha (1999b) explained that horn blowing is used for calling together meetings (usually in September), when they ask God to bless and multiply their seeds (as mentioned above).

Ratsoma from Apel in Sekhukhuneland remembers that the First Fruit Festival took place after the first fruit (he remembers the sorghum) was harvested (D:3:A(2):7,8). He then actually demonstrated how they knelt down to drink from a pot, while the women poured a special brew of the sorghum into the pots. It is noteworthy that his mother took the lead in this ceremony (cf 5.1.6) during which she usually prayed to their forefathers for a blessing on the food. He remembers that the children would drink and eat first at such occasions (D:3:A(2):7,8; V:1:SEK; D:R:14).

¹³⁷ This is also a custom which occurred among all Black tribes. Especially the Swazi's *Incwala* and *umemo* feasts, are similar and undoubtedly unique to themselves (De Beer 1997).

Phophi (in Parfitt 1992:51) refers similarly to a sort of harvest festival – their annual *Utungura* ceremony. During this occasion,

we can recite the names of our departed ancestors from the recent times to the distant-distant past. The spirit of one of these ancestors has the job of keeping the names of all the rest just in case we forget one or two. While we're getting ready we take a special brew of sorghum and pour it on the ground as a, what you'd call, libation. Then we recite the names (Parfitt 1992:51).

Ratsoma explains that the first fruit ritual was also a method to keep sicknesses and demons away (D:3:A(2):7,8; D:R:14). Perhaps this was also the purpose for the *Utungura* ceremony, if it was not the same festival.

7.1.2.4 *Fasting*

Only a very few of the respondents indicated that they fasted. One such example is Phophi who explained to Parfitt (1992:58) that his father told him that long before the arrival of the Europeans, the Lemba held a day of fasting once a year. On that day the leader wore a white cloth and the chief sacrificed an *unblemished black ox*. According to Thompson (1942:77), some of the meat was sacrificed at the graves of the ancestors and the remains of the meat was eaten (cf Schlömann 1894:67). However, the meaning behind this fasting is not clear.

7.1.2.5 *Other sacrifices*

Before a *new kraal* is occupied the priest sacrifices a sheep and sprinkles the blood on one of the upright posts and on one of the rafters of each hut (Thompson 1942:77). The rest of the blood is sprinkled on the ground of the kraal. Then the meat of the animal is consumed by the members of the kraal.

Thompson (1942:77) also notes that a *new granary* must first be consecrated by a priest before it could be used. He sacrifices a *white fowl* and sprinkles the blood on the floor and inside the walls.

Ratsoma who recently became a Christian explains that when they have problems, they still take them (by means of a sacrifice) to their ancestors (as already mentioned above, cf 5.1.1):

other times I try to kill something¹³⁸, a fowl or a sheep, goat go to the graveyard to do all this ... we take Bantu beer. All the family must come there and pray to God because we must tell the God [ancestors] that we are suffering and I want this and this. We eat all the food at the graveyard, we don't take it home (D:3:A[1]:8.9; [my insertion]).

Ratsoma maintains that he has had more success with the cult of the ancestors so far, but he is willing to learn as far as the Christian way is concerned.

¹³⁸ According to De Beer, slaughtering, among the Bantu, is always related to the ancestral spirits (1998; cf Hammond-Tooke 1993:6). During the field research the same idea occurred to me. The occasions when it is not related to their ancestral spirits are more the exception than the rule.

7.2 RITES IN EARLY ISRAEL

7.2.1 Rituals of passage

7.2.1.1 *Male circumcision*

In terms of this custom in early Israel, De Vaux (1973:47,48) argues that circumcision was probably originally an 'initiation-rite before marriage', 'which makes a man fit for normal life'. This was also intended to be an initiation into the respective clan (cf the story of the Sechemites in Gn 34). Eilberg-Schwarz (1990:147) stresses that the 'priestly author' in the Old Testament frequently refers to human fertility and the results thereof in terms of the Covenant of God with Abraham (cf Gn 1:22; 9:1,7; 27:28,29; 28:3; 35:11; 48:3; as well as the preoccupation with detailed genealogies by the 'priestly author' 5:1-28; 30-32; 10:1-7; 11:10-26; 25:12-18; 36:1-14; 46:6-27 and Ex 4:24-26).

A confirmation of this is found in the story in Exodus 4:24-26 (NASB), where Moses was returning to Egypt:

Now it came about at the lodging-place on the way that the Lord met him and sought to put him to death. The Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin and threw *it* at Moses' feet, and she said, "You are indeed a bridegroom of blood to me." So He let him alone. At that time she said, "*You are a bridegroom of blood*" – because of the circumcision.

In this story and in other narratives circumcision is ostensibly compared with marriage: after Zipporah circumcised her son with a sharp stone (cf Jos 5:2,3), she 'threw *it* [probably the part which had been removed] at Moses' feet' ('feet' is probably an euphemism for the action of 'touching his [Moses's] genitals' [my insertion]; De Vaux 1973:47). Gispén (1964:61) maintains that the touching of Moses' feet with the foreskin of her son is symbolic of the sacrifice (namely, her son's circumcision) that she had to bring in order to be married to Moses. Kruyswijk (1935:24) suggests that the significance of this story involves the promises of the Covenant with Yahweh. It is on account of the Covenant that God wanted to deliver his people from Egypt. For this reason, Moses and his family had to comply with the covenantal stipulations first, before he could become an instrument in the hands of God.

Some maintain that Moses himself was not circumcised, thus the circumcision of his son protected him as well. Why this would have been neglected is unknown, but now Moses was protected by the blood of his son and is called therefore, a 'bridegroom of blood' (De Vaux 1973:47). Gispén (1964:61) further explains that Zipporah calls Moses thus, since she wanted to express her feelings about the cruelty of having to circumcise her child. Yet, she realised that she could not have her husband in any other way. Kruyswijk (1935:24) argues that Zipporah uses this word to indicate that she had received her husband back from death through the bloody circumcision of her son. The Hebrew for 'bridegroom', 'son-in-law' and 'father-in-law' derive from the same root, *hatan*, which in Arabic means to 'circumcise' (De Vaux 1973:47; cf Gispén 1964:61). The agreement could possibly refer to an earlier covenant usage, when a young man

was still prepared by his father-in-law by the circumcision ritual for marriage (Packer, Tenney & White 1980:448).

The ritual of protection by blood, is similar to the smearing of blood (of the sacrificial lamb) on the doorposts during the celebration of the *Pesah* (Passover), as sign of renewal of the Covenant (Ex 12:24). Just before the Israelites left Egypt and just before the 'entrance into the Promised Land', it is mentioned that they connected circumcision (also as renewal of the Covenant) to the celebration of the *Pesah* (cf Jos 5:2-5; Matthews 1996:28, 85).

De Vaux (1973:47,48) stresses that the connection of circumcision to the Covenant with Yahweh imbued this ritual increasingly with a religious character and separated it from its sexual connotation. Eight days after birth of the child,¹³⁹ circumcision was performed (according to the Law, Lv 12:3) as a religious rite with a purification function, which acted as a sign of the Covenant with Yahweh (Gn 17:12-13; 21:4; cf Matthews 1996:85). According to the Book of Joshua (5:4-9), this practice was neglected during the sojourn in the desert, but it was resumed at the entry into the Land (De Vaux 1973:48). The operation was usually performed by the father by means of a stone knife (Gn 21:4,9) and in singular cases by the mother (Ex 4:25, as in the above; Jos 5:2) and only much later by a doctor or a specialist (cf 1 Mac 1:61; Gutmann 1987:3).

Often reference is made to the Philistines as the 'uncircumcised' (Jdg 14:3; 15:18), but this is never applied to the Canaanites. This could imply that the latter practised circumcision or that the Israelites possibly took this custom over from them. Thus it was an early practice among early Israel. Moreover, it is possible that there is no reference to the Canaanites as 'uncircumcised', since the Israelites originated from them. Be that as it may, this communal custom could be one of the reasons why the clans of Israel so readily assimilated with the Canaanites.¹⁴⁰

(a) The meaning behind the male circumcision ritual

(i) The origin of this ritual of male circumcision is thus still very uncertain, but Gutmann (1987:3 and others) describes it as a '*rite de passage*, an *initiation rite* symbolically marking the boy's death and resurrection and his acceptance as a full member of the community [my italics].'

(ii) Other scholars describe the male initiation ritual as a '*pars pro toto* – a substitute for castration or human sacrifice', an outward or ethnic identification, or merely a practice for medical or hygienic reasons (especially in the desert, where water for washing was very scarce). Gutmann

¹³⁹ Dan refers to *Pseudo-Ben Sira* (a late genic work) according to which an oral tradition existed among the Ashkenazi (Franco-German area), that a mother had to protect her child against spirits and demons, such as Lilith. The history of Lilith is complex, but it amounts to the following: three angels (Sanoi, Sansonoi and Semangalof) made an agreement with Lilith which limited her power to harm little boys until the eighth day; little girls were exposed to harm for somewhat longer. However, her power was completely limited when the three angels were present or when their names appeared on an amulet (Dan 1980:17-40).

¹⁴⁰ This custom was also known in Egypt, Edom, Moab, Ammon and in Arabia (Jer 9:25) and therefore not unique to Israel.

(1987:4) also mentions that it was associated with 'marriage or fertility rites'. However, the later Jewish tradition was linked to the events in Genesis 17.

(iii) According to the ceremony of the covenant, God and Abram had to receive *new names* after their agreement. God's name became Yahweh and Abram became Abraham. Even Sarai became Sarah (Gn 17:5). At a later stage, after his struggle at the River Jabuk, Jacob was called Israel. New names were usually linked to the deity with whom the covenant or agreement was made.

7.2.1.2 *The initiation ritual for women*

As far as known, circumcision for women did not occur in Israel, but the possibility of a special occasion during which young women underwent a kind of initiation as preparation for adulthood, more specifically for marriage, did exist (cf Jephthah's daughter in Jdg 11).

The dramatic story of the judge Jephthah who had to sacrifice his daughter after a military victory (Jdg 11:29-31) was possibly not strange during those times. Everybody in the story appears to be quite satisfied with the state of affairs – the only ostensible sadness was that the daughter had to die a virgin (Wolfe 1982:135). Rea (1988:558) also surmises that Jephthah promised Yahweh a human sacrifice with premeditation. He probably intended to sacrifice a slave, since an animal sacrifice would have been too insignificant to serve as a sign of a solemn promise to Yahweh. The LXX's translation of Judges 11:31 of 'whoever may come out', also endorses such an interpretation. Rea points out that Jephthah lived amongst the 'heathen', who regularly brought human sacrifices to their gods (cf 2 Ki 3:27). Jephthah could have judged wrongly that 'Jehovah would need to be propitiated by some offering as costly as those which bled on the altars of Chemosh and Moloch' (Farrar, in Rea 1988:558). For this reason he promised a burnt sacrifice to Yahweh. Fact is, that Rea stresses the argument of Farrar: that Jephthah did not merely 'sacrifice' his daughter to a life of celibacy, since there are no records that females who served at sanctuaries should be virgins (cf Lk 23:36). However, if it were the case, that might be a reason why Jephthah's daughter went to the mountains with her friends to lament her virginity, which could have formed part of a regular initiation ritual.

Niditch (1997:115) stresses that Judges 11 becomes a model for and a symbolic mirror of a woman's passage of life. It suggests to every young woman, about to make the transition from her father to her husband, or from virginity to married life (in this case from life to death), that she is to be sacrificed by leaving the safety of her home. A young woman and her family may well regard her new husband and his family to be the 'fearful other'. This ritual acknowledges that transitions in a woman's life are fearful and could evoke sadness.

Lemche (1988:216) sees this narrative merely as a story or legend that was widely known in the cultures surrounding the Mediterranean Sea area. This may confirm the notion that human sacrifices had been clearly imprinted in their memories.

7.2.1.3 *The New Moon ceremony*

Grant (1984:59) points to the custom by the Babylonians and the Canaanites who set a day aside concerning their cult of the moon. Interestingly, the observance of the full moon is called 'sabbath', derived from *shabbatu*, the Accadian word for full moon (cf Wolfe 1982:144). In the Bible the word sabbath is often connected to the new moon (e.g. Am 8:5; 2 Ki 4:23; Ezk 46:1; Is 66:23; Schmidt 1983:89). However, the day of new moon was regarded as dangerous. The Israelites could possibly have associated their labour and toil in Egypt with this day and thus considered it as a day of safety and rest to be celebrated in their 'Promised Land'.

Wolfe (1982:87) and others are convinced that the fourth commandment (Ex 20:8), namely to keep the Sabbath, is not correctly translated. He is of the opinion that it should read: 'remember the day of the *cessation*, to keep it holy' [italics mine]. According to him, the notion of 'cessation', was replaced by post-Exilic redactors six centuries later, when their notion of 'sabbath' had developed. He maintains that it was Moses who gave this command in order to distinguish Israelite religious practices from other religious practices. He proposes a free translation: 'Remember the holy day to keep it sacred!' Thus it does not refer to 'sabbath', as it was known later, but to a day of cessation equivalent to the New Moon celebration.

Although difficult to prove, it seems as if there could possibly have been mention of a holy day, a *day of cessation* in early Israel. The possibility that it could have had the same content and significance as acquired by the Sabbath later in history, is improbable.

The first day of each month was considered to be holy, hence the association in the Old Testament of the monthly 'new moon' with the weekly sabbath (e.g. Is 1:13). This new beginning was inaugurated by special sacrifices (Nm 28:11-15) which were made when the *horns were blown* (Nm 10:10; Ps 81:3; Mitchell 1988:793).

7.2.2 *Rituals of sacrifice*

Without referring to the significance of each respective sacrifice, the general religious significance of the sacrifices are briefly dealt with. To bring a sacrifice, was probably the most important cultic activity among the clans of Israel. Sacrifices were considered to be acts of worship by themselves, according to De Vaux (1973:471; cf Höhne 1966:2049). He points out that the three major annual feasts which were accompanied by sacrifices, namely the Feast of the Unleavened Bread (חמץ, March/April), the Feast of Weeks, seven weeks later (שבועות), and the Feast of the Ingathering (האסף) in Ex 23:16; later known as the Feast of Tabernacles or Booths (Sept/Oct) were shared with the Canaanites. According to Canaanite beliefs, Baal controlled the seasons. Therefore it was of extremely importance that the Israelite farmer not only would have maintained his relationship with Baal, but also with Yahweh. According to historical tradition, he was in a relationship with Yahweh and he could seek as refuge in times of crisis (Kraus 1966:124; Von Rad 1962:261). In spite of the sacrifices made to other gods, Wolfe (1982:139; Jdg 5:8; 6:25-32; 8:33;

10:6-16), surmises that Yahweh remained the most important in the Israelite religion (especially later in history).

Gray (1949/50:207) is convinced that almost every possible act of sacrifice was taken over by the Israelites from the Canaanites. According to him it was especially the Ras Shamra texts that cast light on this matter. However, to almost every of these borrowed elements, the Israelites gave new meaning and content (vgl Kraus 1966:122), although old practices continued (cf Dever 1990).

Schmidt (1983:129) explains that except for during the feasts, there were also many other reasons why Israel sacrificed, namely to bestow a gift, to bestow honour, to show gratitude and to experience fellowship with Yahweh and with one another or to do penance. Therefore, sacrifices were used exclusively to express the relationship between humankind and God. Schmidt (1983:129) is of the opinion that, although the notion to provide food to the deity occurred during Old Testament times, it was never the main purpose (cf however, Van der Toorn 1996; 5.2.5). Schmidt also maintains that the cultic community sought fellowship with Yahweh, by means of their religious practices and thus wanted to strengthen their relationship with him. Von Rad (1962:26) and Kraus (1966:121) link this with: Purification, cleansing, or reconciliation which could be brought about by means of the sign of blood – blood had to flow to effectuate reconciliation. Kraus (1966:114) understands the significance of sacrifices as follows:

In the gift offering a powerful intention is directed from the giver to the one to whom the gift is offered. The deity is meant to receive homage, gratitude and reverence in the gift, but the original conception of feeding the spirit is in the background. The Ugaritic texts show us what significance this supply of power had in Canaanite religion.

Therefore, it seems to be that sacrifices were the central feature of Israelite ritual life – a means of mutually mediating the relationship between God and humans by sacrificing something of value. It was also a means of mediating between people who share in a portion of this precious food source (Niditch 1997:103).

7.2.2.1 *The Passover or Pesah*

The Passover (פסח, Lv 23:5) was probably the oldest and only feast which 'Israel' (some proto-Israelites) already celebrated before their settlement in Canaan and a feast linked to their exodus from Egypt. Possibly this feast was eventually (probably not in the time of the Judges) linked by Israel to the Feast of the Unleavened Bread (cf Childs 1974:184; Hyatt 1971:136,187; Sarna 1986:87-89). According to Joshua 5:10-12, the first פסח was celebrated in the Promised Land in the times of the Judges. Later (cf 2 Ki 23:21-23) it was presented as the height of Israelite spirituality. The link between פסח (*Pesah*) and the *הג מוצת* (Feast of the Unleavened Bread) probably took place in the times of the Judges. The Passover or *Pesah* was probably first only celebrated in each family or clan in each home and was only centralised later (Albertz 1994:35; vgl De Vaux 1973:486). However, Kraus (1966:47; cf Noth [1959]1962:88-89) makes the clear

distinction between the Canaanite Feast of the Unleavened Bread (הַגַּ מִצֵּת), which had a clear agricultural character and the Passover which had a semi-nomadic origin.

According to Niditch (1997:102-106), the foundation text for the Passover is to be found in Exodus 12, where the emphasis is on the animal sacrifice, specified as an one year old male lamb or goat, sufficient for a family or a number of families. No uncircumcised person might join in the meal, which takes place in a sacred setting. The meal binds those who share the meal by means of the special ritual/s that are observed. The participants are bound by the blood that is shed and they participate in the eating of roasted flesh in communion with the deity. Niditch (1997:104; cf 1993:60) describes this meal as an 'unbanquetlike repast marking a rite of passage or transition from the status of slaves to the status of free men and women.' The question remains whether this was a pre-monarchical institution, or whether this was a retro-projection of later practices.

The shedding of the blood was sanctified and had to take place in the prescribed fashion (Dt 12:16,23; Niditch 1997:104) along with the slaughtering of the animals. The latter was not undertaken lightly. The blood had to be applied to the lintel and the doorposts of each house. When this requirement had been met, then God's angel of death would pass or skip over Israelite houses during that night; hence the notion of *Passover* (cf Noth [1959]1962:89,90-91).

On the same night, the lamb or goat was roasted or burnt with head, legs and organs still intact (cf Niditch 1993:58). It was then hurriedly eaten along with bitter herbs and unleavened bread. The participants were girded at the loins, wore sandals and had a staff ready in the hand. This was a symbol of the Israelites who had to leave Egypt in a hurry (Ex 12:39). This celebration taught the children about the saving deeds of God and Israel's escape from Egyptian oppression and slavery. Exodus 12 is therefore, a narrative 'about threat and fear and the desire to escape, with overriding themes of group solidarity and the making of transitions' (Niditch 1993:52).

7.2.2.2 *The Festival of the Unleavened Bread*

De Vaux (1973:490; cf also Kraus 1966:47-49) is of the opinion that the Feast of the Unleavened Bread (הַגַּ מִצֵּת, Ex 23:15) could have for instance indicated the beginning of the grain harvest, when the first sheafs were gathered (Ruth 1:22; cf Loader 1994:39). The word 'unleavened' or 'unleavened bread' derives from מִצֵּה ('bread of misery'). Thompson (1988c:55) explains that the grain was harvested in March (Abib), about seven weeks or fifty days before the wheat in May-June. According to Numbers 28:16-25 and Deuteronomy 16:1-8, sacrifices of dedication were brought on the first day and the last day, and no *ordinary work was done*.

For seven days in the month of Abib (March), the Canaanites eat unleavened bread during this feast (Dt 16:1; Ex 23:15). The eating of the *unleavened bread* was an ideal opportunity for the Exodus group to call to remembrance the act of Yahweh's deliverance. Thus the story was also transmitted and kept alive for posterity. The question is inevitably whether the tradition did not in the course of time become entangled with the festive activities, so that it was no longer

possible to distinguish between the elements of the Exodus story, and that of the Feast of the Unleavened Bread.

7.2.2.3 *First Fruit or Harvest Festival*

Another Canaanite agricultural feast was the הַגְּדֹלִים (the Feast of the Ingathering) that later – possibly already in the times of the Judges – came to be known as the Feast of Tabernacles or Booths. During these feasts, families entered the vineyards and lived for a week in makeshift shelters, while the harvest was gathered. Obviously, this was to remind them of their sojourn in the wilderness and already in the times of the Judges, this tradition could possibly have been linked to a feast (Jdg 21:19; Wolfe 1982:144). In fact, most of the Israelite feasts and rituals reminded them of important stories or events from the past.

The seven weeks until the Harvest Festival or Feast of First Fruits, was calculated ‘from the time you begin to put the sickle to the standing grain’ (Dt 16:9-11; cf Gn 30:14; Jdg 15:1; Is 9:2; Freeman 1988:374). During the first seven days of the grain harvest, bread made from the new grain and yeast is offered. Nothing of the previous harvest could be used, since the feast indicates a new beginning. According to De Vaux (1973:490), the first sheaf of the harvest was brought to the priest (כֹּהֵן ; Lv 23:9-14). A year old lamb without blemish was prepared as a burnt offering for Yahweh, ‘two tenths of an efa fine meal [was] mixed with oil’ was offered as a burnt offering to Yahweh, and a drink offer of wine was poured. According to De Vaux the offer to Yahweh was a very important element to the clans of Israel.

De Vaux also avers that there is no indication that this feast was celebrated before they settled in the Promised Land (1973:493-494). Since it was a feast celebrated by established farmers, it was probably only taken over from the Canaanites by some Israelite clans once they were in Palestine. They then gave it new meaning and content. Both the Feast of Unleavened Bread as well as the Feast of Weeks were linked (when, is uncertain) to the deliverance of Israel from Egypt (De Vaux 1973:493-494).

7.2.2.4 *The Day of Atonement*

The Day of Atonement was probably not yet known or celebrated in the pre-monarchical times, most of the information come from Leviticus (from the priestly author, which is much later), but since there are concurring characteristics with other sacrifices and rituals among the Lemba, brief reference is made to it.

The כֹּהֲנִים (‘priests’) were instructed to take extreme care when entering the Tabernacle. In contrast to Exodus 12, the role of the high priest (כֹּהֵן גָּדוֹל) in Leviticus 16:29-34 is central to the performance of the ritual on the Day of Atonement (יּוֹם כִּפּוּר ; Yom Kippur). It was an annual ceremony that *cleansed the people of all their sins*. The sacrifice and the purification elements of blood and water played key roles. The כֹּהֵן or the one who seeks atonement for his community

himself had to be cleansed or purified by offering a bull for himself and his household. He wore special *linen garments* after he was cleansed by bathing.

Lots were cast to determine the fate of the goats, allowing forces beyond human reason to determine the actions one should take in a situation of uncertainty (cf Jos 7:14-18; 1 Sm 14:41-42). Two identical goats, the 'scapegoats', on whom the sins of the people were placed, were brought to be offered. One was for God and was sacrificed in the Tabernacle, the other was 'for Azazel' and was sent into the desert. The obligations for *Yom Kippur* (יום כפר; fasting, etc) were then given. The blood of the bull and the goat was applied to the horns of the altar and *sprinkled* with the finger seven times over the altar (Lev 16:1-20-27). The priest (כהן) laid his hands on the goat and conferred upon it all the transgressions of the people, then the goat was sent into the wilderness. A reversal of the actions took place again to 'desecrate' the priest (כהן) and his people. He removed his holy garment, bathed himself in water and put on his regular clothes (cf Lv 16:29-34).

7.2.2.5 *Other sacrifices*

Unfortunately, we are largely dependent on the Book of Judges for more information concerning the various sacrifices. Moreover, some scholars have misgivings whether history is reliably reflected in the Book of Judges. A variety of activities surrounding the sanctuary (or house altar) took place, but one of the most important was the sacrificial practice. A few of these will be highlighted.

According to Schmidt (1983:127) the communal sacrifice, known as the זבח ('sacrificial meal') was usually held within the family, clan or larger circle of invited 'tribes' as a holy meal (Jos 22:27; cf Albertz 1994:100-101). Thompson (1988c:1050) and Lemche (1988:216) call this sacrifice the 'thank-offering', while Kraus (1966:118) calls it a 'peace-offering' (Lv 7:11ff). *Communio* (or gathering the community unto Yahweh is the basis of the offer) is its purpose (Kraus 1966:118). The fat is sacrificed to Yahweh and the rest was eaten together. Albertz (1994:102) remarks that the daily fare of the clans of Israel was mainly vegetarian. They could only afford to eat meat at such communal meals.

Other sacrifices which are mentioned more generally differ in character from the burnt offerings. The מנחה ('food-offering') included many bleeding as well as non-bleeding sacrifices (Schmidt 1983:127; Jdg 6:18). Schmidt (1983:127) is of the opinion that in the course of time the food offering probably lost its identity and became the animal sacrifice.

Kraus (1966:115) is convinced that the מנחה later just became a vegetable sacrifice and that after this, the animal sacrifices were referred to as the עולה ('burnt-offering'). According to Leviticus 1:1-5:26, the animal was brought to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. The one who brought the animal placed his hands on it, and afterwards it was slaughtered and the כהן ('priest') *sprinkled its blood* on the altar. The animal was skinned and then cut into pieces which were arranged, washed and burnt on the altar.

7.3 EVALUATION AND COMPARISON

To place the circumcision (and other customs) in the Old Testament on equal footing with the 'primitive' custom in the Lemba (and other) communities might be perceived by some as trespassing on holy ground. However, this would illuminate the significance of this ritual to both groups and provide thought provoking questions about 'Judaism' or 'Judaising groups' and possibly provide new answers (cf Eilberg-Schwarz 1990).

Much more information concerning the ritual, the related teaching, its duration, and when and where it took place and so on is known with regard to Lemba practice *vis-à-vis* that in the Old Testament. Of course certain information is also available from orthodox Judaism, but their customs are no longer the same as in the Old Testament, on account of inner-Jewish migration.

Oral traditions among the Lemba, as well as the application of this custom obviously keep their customs and traditions alive. With the Lemba the 'elders, the traditional healer, the witch doctor, the doctor at the hospital, the chief, the fathers and even the women who do the cooking play an important role in the execution of this ritual. Thus the entire community is involved. According to available information from the Old Testament, it appears as if especially the father and sometimes the mother were involved with the execution of the ritual (Ex 4; Gn 34). It is probable that eventually the Israelite elders at the gates played a major role in the execution of this ritual (cf 7.1.1.1). Only much later the help of a specialist or doctor was used.

If the Old Testament circumcision custom was originally an 'initiation rite before marriage', then it is not clear what the content of instruction was at such an occasion and how this was conveyed. It is probably still very similar to what is happening among the Lemba communities today. Instruction about cleanliness, the learning of secret formulae, observing of proper procedures (e.g. *kosher* killing; married-life; how to entertain your husband), love for the truth and one another, respect for elders and parents, their history et cetera, mainly takes place among the Lemba by means of songs, chants and recitations that are taught and also by demonstrations.

De Vaux (1965:47-48) acknowledges that circumcision was probably a pre-marriage rite to make man fit for normal life (probably sexual life), but he emphasises that the connotation disappeared when it was executed on the eighth day (cf also Gutmann 1987; Vriezen 1967:151; Hyatt 1976:630; Plaut 1974:118). This maybe the case today, but it seems as if it was not always a purely religious act as is presented by Bible authors and scholars (cf Eilberg-Schwarz 1990:147).

The *covenantal* character linked to circumcision by the Lemba, mainly occurs in the southern parts of Zimbabwe where Protestant and other missionaries performed dedicated service for many years amongst these communities. It seems as if the specific connection between circumcision and the covenant with the Lemba (at least in the beginning) was quite territorial. The possibility exists that they themselves added the idea of the covenant to their tradition or that it was 'suggested' by missionaries. However, it could also be that it was the only place where the original tradition remained. Either way, very early ethnological and other reports indicate clearly that the Lemba considered the practice of circumcision to be a commandment from God given them as an elect

nation and this also distinguished them from the surrounding heathen nations. However, the significance of the circumcision ritual is in general still linked powerfully to the incorporation into a clan and especially to marriage and specifically as preparation for the sexual aspect of marriage. In early Israel it was also a specific group, the so-called 'Moses people' during the Sinai experience, who were the initial carriers of the idea of the Covenant which only later became part of the entire nation.

Napi remarked that after the circumcision, they 'cut the hair of the boys just a little bit around their heads' (cf 7.1.1.1). Later it struck me that this expression or practice is similar to a *metaphor* used in Jeremiah 9:26 *for circumcision*: 'who clip the hair of their temples'. Is this a coincidence, or would this custom have been a literal execution of the archaic metaphor that Jeremiah (9:26) uses for the circumcision? According to recent ethnographies root metaphors often provide a foundation for rituals and narratives (cf Eilberg-Schwarz 1990:25). The archaic expression interpreted *literally*, may perhaps suggest authenticity. In other words the symbolic meaning of the expression for circumcision, may have become vague and was then 'wrongly' implemented literally. The question is: How old is this custom and where does it originate from?

It is striking that the Lemba also laid so much emphasis on the change of name, or give new names during circumcision or during initiation ceremonies. In the light of Exodus 12, the similarity between circumcision and the Passover (*Pesah*) is likewise remarkable.

Customs such as circumcision differ from community to community and factors such as nature and environment influence the way in which they live out their culture.

'Circumcision' (as some respondents called it) or then the initiation of women during their years of puberty, fulfil a very important function during their years of puberty among Lemba, while a similar practice was not in use in old Israel, as Old Testament sources seem to indicate. The possibility that a similar custom was in use among the clans of Israel, should be considered strongly, especially when one thinks of the event when Jephthah's daughter had to mourn her virginity along with other young girls (Jdg 11).

Reciting the names of ancestors among the Lemba occurs at most rituals and ceremonies of their religious life, during burial ceremonies such as the *Gshamo*, the *thevhula*, festivals and prayer meetings. All these and other occasions are very closely integrated with the cult of the ancestors (cf 5.1.5; 5.2.5).

Sacrifices with the Lemba are of a totally different nature and different contents are appended to these, than to those in early Israel. And yet, there are similar elements in early Israel, even though these may not agree with every sacrifice. It appears that many elements of the religion of early Israel could be still present in the religion of the Lemba, but these have often become intertwined with other religious ideas, or they have become diffuse and were then assimilated into other rituals or customs than what was originally intended. The idea of an unblemished ox and the sprinkling of blood is often present among both communities.

We do find much more detail about certain rituals and customs among the Lemba, which may provide some understanding of the concurring customs or rituals in the Old Testament. Much of the detail in the latter have probably not been recorded, or could have been 'edited out', by later authors.

The matter of the day of cessation, which is linked to the new moon with the Lemba's observation of the new moon and the agreement with this custom among the Babylonians, offer interesting possibilities of interpretation to the Sabbath in the Old Testament.

In the following, a table of similarities and differences between the ritual dimensions of the religions of early Israel and that of the Lemba, is presented.

TABLE 8: COMPARISON – THE RITUAL DIMENSION

The Lemba	Early Israel
<p>Rituals of passage (7.1.1) <i>Male circumcision (7.1.1.1)</i> <i>Similarities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Took place on the eighth day ▪ Seen as an incorporation into the Covenant with God/Mwali (by some of the clans) ▪ The circumcision makes the Lemba special, different from the 'heathen' around them ▪ Receiving new names after circumcision ▪ Combines the circumcision ceremony with the <i>Pesah</i> ▪ Practices the cutting of boys' hair just after the ceremony <p><i>Differences</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The whole community is involved ▪ An initiation rite before marriage ▪ Teaching takes place, by means of songs, chants, recitations and demonstrations on the following areas of life: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – observance of proper procedures (e.g. <i>kosher</i>-killing and married life); – love for the truth and one another; – honesty; – respect for elders and parents; 	<p>Rituals of passage (7.2.1) <i>Male circumcision (7.2.1.1)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Took place on the eighth day ▪ Seen as an incorporation into the Covenant with God (by some of the clans) ▪ The Covenant (and circumcision) makes them special, different from the 'heathen' around them ▪ Receiving of new names took place after the Covenant with God was established ▪ Circumcision was linked to the <i>Pesah</i> ceremony ▪ Jeremiah 9:26 uses the metaphor 'to clip their hair on the temples' to refer to the circumcision ▪ Only the father and mother were involved in the ritual and later perhaps the elders ▪ Possibly originally an initiation rite before marriage, but the connection disappeared when the circumcision was connected to the Covenant with God ▪ It is not known which teaching took place

The initiation ritual for women (Lemba; 7.1.1.2)

Similarities

- An initiation ritual for young women during puberty as preparation for marriage
- This practice indicates uncertainty in the lives of young women

Differences

- Teaching by means of songs, chants, recitations and demonstration on:
 - cleanliness
 - married life
 - how to entertain your husband
- One purpose of this ritual, is also to make them tough

The New Moon ceremony (Lemba; 7.1.1.3)

Similarities

- The chief and others blow their horns
- No work on the following day

Differences

- Arrival of new moon seen in a bowl of water, a day or two before it becomes visible
- Old men and old women shave their heads: if you do not shave your head you become foolish
- Everybody fasts for the rest of the day

Rituals of sacrifice (Lemba; 7.1.2)

Pesah (7.1.2.2)

Similarities

- The *Pesah* is linked to circumcision
- An animal is sacrificed and slaughtered in a prescribed way
- The shedding of blood is made sacred
- No uncircumcised person may join the meal or ceremony
- The meal binds participants by special tie of blood

Differences

- They do not follow the Christian church calendar in determining the dates of the festival

The initiation ritual for women (Israel; 7.2.1.2)

- A possibility of an initiation rite for young women does exist (Jdg 11)
- It illustrates an uncertainty in the lives of young women

- Contents of teaching not known

The New Moon ceremony (Israel; 7.2.1.3)

- Trumpets (and horns) were blown
- They kept a day of cessation

- The Babylonians and Canaanites had a special day set aside to observe the full moon and that could have influenced the Israelites to adopt the same
- Shaving of heads unknown

- Fasting during this ritual unknown

Rituals of sacrifice (Israel; 7.2.2)

The Passover or Pesah (7.2.2.1)

- The *Pesah* is link to the circumcision
- Emphasis is on the animal sacrifice and the slaughtering takes place in a prescribed way
- The shedding of blood is made sacred
- No uncircumcised person may join the meal or ceremony
- The meal bonds the participants by tie of blood

- They followed a specific agricultural calendar
- The blood is painted onto the lintel and the doorposts of each house
- The meal was a symbol of the Israelites' hurried exodus; the meat was eaten that same night with bitter herbs and unleavened

- Celebration teaches boys everything about Lemba culture and married-life

- Combined with circumcision as rite of passage from boyhood to adulthood

Thevhula and unleavened food (Lemba; 7.1.2.2)

Similarities

- Only unleavened food may be used

Differences

- Young women stamp unsoaked mealies
- Magic and warfare ceremony
- People wash themselves and shave their heads, form a circle and put on white cotton cloths
- They place a spotless beast or goat in the middle of a circle of people
- The priest pray for the victim
- All prayers are ended with 'amu, amune'
- They slaughter the animal and shed the blood on the ground
- Sometimes the blood is sprinkled over the worshippers
- The meat is eaten without any salt and the bones are placed neatly together
- The priest pray to the ancestors by invoking their names

First Fruit and Harvest Festival (Lemba; 7.1.2.3)

Similarities

- Held once a year (in December) after the first fruit or corn (or whatever) is harvested

Differences

- They kneel down to drink a special brew of sorghum from a pot; brew made by the women
- The mother of the house says a prayer for a blessing on the food, invoking the ancestors by their names

bread; their loins were girded; they wore sandals and were ready with staff in the hand; this marked a rite of passage from the status of slaves to the status of free men

- The celebration was to teach the children about God's acts of deliverance and Israel's escape from Egyptian oppression and slavery
- The Passover is a sign of the renewal of the Covenant

The Festival of the Unleavened Bread (Israel; 7.2.2.2)

- Only unleavened food could be used

- They used other grains (not mealies)
- The feast indicated the beginning of the barley harvest

- On the first and the last days of the harvest they brought dedication offers and they were not allowed to do ordinary work
- The feast was linked more and more to the Passover

First Fruit and Harvest Festival (Israel; 7.2.2.3)

- Held once a year at the end of the harvest and the beginning of offering of first fruits
- No concurrences with these practices are known

- The children drink and eat first
- Then they pour the beer on the ground as a libation

- The purpose is to keep sickness and demons away

Fasting (Lemba; 7.1.2.4)

Similarities

- They remember a day-long fast once a year
- The high priest play a central role in the performance of the ritual (on that day)
- The chief sacrifices an unblemished black ox
- The leader wears a white cloth

Differences

- Some of the meat is sacrificed on the graves of the ancestors
- The remains of the meat is eaten

Other sacrifices (Lemba; 7.1.2.5)

Similarities

- In the main, a vegetarian community; can only afford to eat meat on special occasions
- A sacrificial meal is usually held within family, clan or larger context of the tribe
- The purpose is fellowship with the deity and with one another

Differences

- A sacrifice before a *new kraal* is occupied
- The priest sacrifices an animal
- The blood is sprinkled against one of the upright posts and on one of the rafters of each hut
- The rest of the blood is sprinkled on the ground in the kraal
- Then the meat of the animal is consumed by the members of the kraal
- A *new granary* should also be consecrated by a priest

- Two loaves of leavened bread made of the new grain were offered, a year old spotless lamb as a burnt offering and a libation offer of wine

- Originally a Canaanite festival which obtained new meaning and content by the Israelites

The Day of Atonement (Israel; 7.2.2.4)

- An annual day of fasting to cleanse people from all their sins
- The high priest played a central role in the completion of the ritual
- The high priest had to be cleansed by the offering of a bull
- The priest wore special linen garments

- Lots were cast to determine the fate of the goat
- The priest laid his hands on the victim and conferred all the transgressions of the people upon and sent it into the wilderness
- The priest and people resumed unsanctified role

Other sacrifices (Israel; 7.2.2.5)

- In the main, a vegetarian community; could only afford to eat meat on special occasions
- A sacrificial meal usually held within the context of a family, clan or larger circle of tribes
- The purpose was fellowship with deity and one another

- No such sacrifices are known

- The fat was sacrificed to Yahweh, and the rest of the meat was eaten together
- No such practices are known

CHAPTER EIGHT

LAW AND ETHICS AMONG THE LEMBA AND EARLY ISRAEL

Religions usually incorporate legal and ethical codes. The law incorporated by the fabric of a tradition or sub-tradition can be termed the ethical or legal dimension of religion (Smart 1989:17). Clearly people do not always meet the standards they profess, and often the standards which are inculcated by the dominant faith within a particular society may not be embraced by all members of that society. Smart (1989:19) distinguishes between the moral teaching incorporated in the doctrines and mythology of a religion, and the actual sociological effects on, and circumstances of, those who adhere to the faith in question. In most pre-technical societies, religion is not just a personal matter, it is inherent to daily life. Judaism does not merely have ten commandments, but a complex of more than six hundred rules (from the Mishnah) which, according to them, were imposed upon them by God. This also involves the ritual dimension, for instance the injunction to keep the Sabbath as day of rest, is also the injunction to perform certain practices and rituals on the Sabbath (Smart 1989:17).

It appears that laws or traditions, once written down, become exposed to the world-view and editing by a redactor or writer, and they are fossilised into set codes. These codes do not necessarily represent the real life-world of a community, but are often those of the editor or the writer. Therefore, they often do not relate to the actual way of life at all.

The purpose of this chapter is to refer cursorily to some of the laws and codes used by Lemba communities, as well as to those that occurred in early Israel. Thus no completeness is intended.

8.1 LAW AND ETHICS AMONG THE LEMBA

In Africa, the Lemba have their own particular 'Judaic' oral laws, embedded in traditional African cultures, Christianity, Islam and others. Although they do not have any ancient texts with written laws or ethical codes, they have an oral culture through which they transmit legal and ethical codes from one generation to another. However, they do have an oral tradition that once they possessed an ancient book made of skin, but that the Arabs destroyed that book.¹⁴¹ They say the book of the Arabs was known as the 'book of Allah', but the book of the Lemba was the 'book of the Mwenye' (Parfitt 1992:231). According to Daneel (1996), Mwenye is perhaps derived from a Shona word which means 'light' – thus 'book of the light', or in other contexts 'people of the light' or 'people who bring light' are mentioned.

¹⁴¹ If the Lemba had a book as the tradition holds, it implies that some of them could possibly read.

The Lemba writer, M M Motenda-Mbelengwa recalls:

My father told me that he had it from his grandfather that the Lemba had a priest and a Bible made of skin. He said that it was lost somewhere (in De Vaal 1958:54).

Only recently, Mathivha (1992) tried to commit most of their oral traditions and some of the legal and ethical codes of the Lemba to writing. However, my field research has shown that his book merely includes both fragments and expansions of data gathered during my field work (cf Chapter Seven). Laws or ethical codes are not meant to be complete. They are in a state of constant flux within the community. It seems as though the Lemba probably identified with the notion of 'Jewishness', because it confirmed and reinforced their own ancient traditions and laws. In the ensuing discussion, the laws and ethical codes of the Lemba, which seem to have some resemblance with those in the Old Testament, will briefly be dealt with and compared to the laws and codes that possibly functioned in early Israel. However, major differences between the different communities will also be highlighted.

8.1.1 The Covenant

A covenant relationship implies obligations to both parties involved, or codes, which have implications for their every day life-situation. The sign of incorporation into the Covenant is the circumcision (cf 7.1.1.1).

In the case of the Lemba, it appears that mainly groups in Southern Zimbabwe specifically, link circumcision with the Covenant which God (Mwari) has with his 'chosen' people. Most of these groups regard circumcision as the occasion where 'new-comers' become part of the Covenant of Mwari (D:A:4; D:M:11,12). Unfortunately, it is not always clear whether they all observed the Covenant as a treaty between God and themselves. However, their self-identity shows that they perceive themselves to be in a special relationship with the God of Israel (as they regard themselves to be Israelites; see above) and perceive the Covenant to be an order from God which they have to obey.

Runesu (D:L:8) explains that 'the *Covenant* applies to us that we are the children of Abraham and God' [my italics]. Even Shef Ali Mutazu¹⁴² agrees that 'circumcision is an order from God, that is our current attendance. It was an order from God to whom we pray. Then the second thing is cleanliness' (D:O:7,10,11). Mutazu stresses that despite any Christian or Islamic doctrines the Lemba culture have their own specific laws which they have learned during initiation and must still obey. These laws (link to the Covenant) are supposed to be hidden from the uncircumcised. These laws are probably not static, since they are not written down and may even vary from clan to clan.

¹⁴² A Lemba and the *imam* (spiritual leader) of the Muslim centre at Chinyika (Gutu-district, Zimbabwe).

8.1.2 The 'law'

Many of the respondents refer to their specific guidelines as '*the law*'.¹⁴³ The high priest at Mberengwa said (D:A:5):

we always keep *the law* and we are still having it because we continue regarding our laws. We teach our children in a secluded place ... that they are very different from other people and they are part of the Covenant of God ... [my italics].

Exactly *what* they teach (mostly during initiation schools) is not certain, but some of the laws and values I encountered are also reflected in the Ten Commandments (Ex 20; cf 8.2.1). The following can be mentioned:

- (i) Although no two persons' perception of God is identical, many Lemba said they worship the heavenly God *alone*. According to some respondents this God, is the God of the Bible.
- (ii) Contrary to the second commandment of the Decalogue (Ten Commandments), the traditional Lemba have an image (of a person) made of copper or gold (in the past; or other material) through which they pray to God (cf *Photo 77*). This figurine is seen as a symbol of God (Mathivha 1999b).
- (iii) One also observes traces of a belief that *children* often have to *suffer for the sins of their parents*, for instance, if the parents do not confess all their sins before their son is circumcised, he will certainly die (D:M:11,12). Emphasis is placed on blessings for the faithful and curses for the unfaithful.
- (iv) They are not only taught to have *respect* for God but also for their *parents and elders*. A deviation from that particular law, is that children should not only pay proper attention to those who are still alive but also to those who have already died.
- (v) A few respondents remembered that they used to keep the *Sabbath*, but that was very long ago.
- (vi) Adultery is seen as sin (Wangemann 1868:437). Sexual intercourse with a married woman is considered adultery (not with an unmarried woman).
- (vii) Stealing is considered to be sin (Wangemann 1868:437).
- (viii) The mixing of poison is also considered to be sin (Wangemann 1868:437).
- (ix) Honesty and truth in all circumstances are stressed (cf 8.1.5).

Many scholars in the past noticed the Lemba 'codes' were different and recorded that the Lemba observed the Mosaic Code and their practices are enjoined by the Mosaic Code (cf Gayre of Gayre 1967:6,7; Wessman 1908; De Vaal 1958:54).

¹⁴³ In the Zulu tradition, their 'law' not written, but wholly traditional or customary, was 'based upon a strong foundation of experience, equity and logic' (Bryant 1949:459). Venda law constituted a system designed to guarantee not individual rights, but rather the rights of the family and the chiefdom itself. It broadly corresponds with the Western concept of civil law and criminal law (Van Warmelo & Phophi 1948:10-11).

8.1.3 Case law

8.1.3.1 Covenant obligations

(a) Casuistic laws

A casuistic kind of law, might be represented by the code already mentioned above that, *if* the parents do not confess all their sins before their son goes for circumcision, *then* he will certainly die (D:M:11,12).

(b) Monetary compensation

Monetary compensation concerning a wife becomes valid when it is discovered, on the wedding night, that the newly wedded wife for whom *lobola* had been paid, is not a virgin. Theal ([1898-1903]1964e:202,203) remarks that in such a case the *lobola* has to be paid back to the groom. Other informants argue that the parents of the bride have to pay the groom's family. When a woman commits adultery, it is not considered as a cause for divorce, since it is not regarded as the woman's fault. But, the man who is involved, will be charged by the woman's husband – a certain amount of money, or three heads of cattle have to be paid (Mathivha 1999b).

(c) Earning one's own living

The Lemba are not supposed to enslave themselves and are not supposed *to work for other people* but rather to supervise (cf D:J:(1)5). The argument is that they have learned many skills such as pottery, building, metal and copper work (called *safuri*, bangles; D:M:2,3) from their ancestors and that they should earn their own living as far as possible. It might be pure coincidence, but many Lemba people I have met prefer to work or have worked for 'other' Jewish people before they started their own businesses (cf e.g. Luke Mpaketsane, Mr and Mrs Mack Ratsoma at Apel, Sekhukhuneland; D:J:(1)1,3; D:K:2; D:M:2; see *Photo 8*).

(d) Love for your neighbour, care for the poor and show hospitality

Love for your neighbour (widows, orphans, etc), care for the poor and hospitality are very important principles to the Lemba. They are convinced that they are obliged to help the poor, because he or she is created by God. They must give them something to eat and a place to sleep, (D:1:A:17,18). In particular, the members of their own extended family who suffer should be looked after. According to Mathivha (1999b), they should be protected, fed, clothed and be provided with education and shelter. The extended family are obliged to look after one another.

A very appealing characteristic among the Lemba people which is their *hospitality* towards strangers, reflects another facet of their ethical code. The friendly reception my husband and I received in different communities could have been due to the interest I showed in their most precious inheritance, their history and practices. Nevertheless, the way they accepted and treated us and others in all their different communities in Southern Africa made a profound impression on us.

It was only after this positive experience during my field work in Sekhukhuneland and Zimbabwe, that I remembered what Mathivha once said in connection with these codes:

The poor ones must look after the rich ones and the rich ones must look after the poor ones. It is not communism, other people mistook it for communism. It's not communism. Communalism is togetherness. You see according to basic African custom you are not allowed to laugh at anyone and you are not allowed to see anyone die of starvation. You take the old things, money, anything you give him so that he must not die in the street You must love that one because that one is also God's creation. You must help him. You must give him something to eat. You must give him a place to sleep socialism will not work in Zimbabwe ... Africans are communalists, not communists, and in communalism there is rich and poor, but each must look after each other ... (D:1:A:17,18).

In light of what Mathivha said it thus seems as if these communal values are part of most African communities. They are probably not unique to the Lemba.

(e) Offerings made at childbirth

The Lemba have the code that when a son is born a lamb has to be slaughtered and when a girl is born, a cock has to be slaughtered. The purpose of this custom is according to them, to unite a child to the ancestors and finally to God, by means of the spilling of blood. Usually a child is given the name of one of his or her ancestors. It is understood that the spirit of this particular ancestor enters this child and protects him or her.

8.1.4 Family ethics and women

8.1.4.1 *Chief, elders and a patriarchal family*

The Lemba are communally organised into clans or lineages. Each lineage is headed by its own chief (called *ishe*¹⁴⁴ in olden times). Although the authority in the villages is vested in the hands of the chief and of the elders, it does not seem that they wield absolute power over the others in the community (cf 4.5).

Furthermore, the Lemba are a patriarchal community with their social organisation based on the extended family, which is the focus of life (Mathivha 1992:51). This social organisation might differ from clan to clan, and even from family to family. Women and daughters are subject to the authority of their husbands or fathers. This means that the father makes the final decisions in the extended family, but the wife also has an important role to play in the household. The husband will usually consult his wife in decision-making (Mathivha 1999b).

During the circumcision ceremony the boys are taught to respect their parents and elders in the community (D:A:5; cf Mathivha 1992). They have to care for both the living and the living-dead (cf 8.1.4). The Lemba place great stress on blessings for the faithful and curses for the unfaithful.

¹⁴⁴ Cf the Hebrew word *ישׂן* (*ish*) for 'a man'.

8.1.4.2 *Inheritance*

Mathivha (1992:51) explains that both the sons and daughters inherit from their fathers. The heir is determined by the *lobola* cattle which were given by the man's father. He says:

The women are ranked¹⁴⁵ according to the preferential marriage already given. It does not matter whether the cousin is married first or last, her children are the rightful successors to the estate. The heir does not inherit property only but also all the liabilities of the father (1992:51; [my footnote]).

Mathivha explains that in the case where a woman marries another woman, the woman who paid the *lobola*, is over the other woman. All *lobola* property goes to the primary woman and the children of the secondary woman inherit her property, while her primary children inherit from their father (Mathivha 1992:51; cf 4.2.1.5).

8.1.4.3 *Virginitly of women*

In the traditional families a little ceremony usually takes place before the actual wedding. The bride's family brings a basket with a *kalabash* to the family of the groom. When the *kalabash* is still whole, it symbolises the virginity of the future bride. If it has a hole in it, it means the opposite. Many scholars point out that the Lemba take marriage seriously. Therefore, girls are subjected to inspection by old women to prove their virginity (cf Theal [1898-1903]1964e:202, 203; cf 4.2).

8.1.4.4 *Women as items of chattel*

Mathivha (1992:51) explains that all unmarried girls are the father's property and he receives all *lobola* cattle, since he is the father of the family. Daughters are therefore valuable items of exchange to the father.

8.1.5 **Economic ethics**

The Lemba stress the importance of economic justice. In fact, the economically *disadvantaged* and *foreign* people should be cared for, as well as for the material needs of the priest (cf 8.1.6.3). During the circumcision ceremony, the boys are taught specifically to love the truth and to be honest in legal transactions (cf Mathivha 1992).

8.1.6 **Dietary laws, cleanliness and other codes**

One still finds strong remnants of the Lemba's earlier dietary laws, sexual taboos and arrangements for priestly groups. These are discussed below and were extensively expounded in Chapter Four ('Social practices of the Lemba and early Israel').

¹⁴⁵ The ranking of women among the 'Southern Bantu' was important since it had major legal implications, especially for inheritance (Hammond-Tooke 1993:55).

8.1.6.1 *Leviticus 11*

It is noteworthy that in one way or another, most Lemba laws and codes relate very closely to the priestly codes found in Leviticus, since they especially stress the importance of *cleanness and uncleanness* (cf 4.1). Many respondents replied that they follow the directions in Leviticus 11 exactly. Mathivha (1992:61) points out that cleanness is their most important dietary law and that they find the code for their behaviour in the Book of Leviticus.

Virtually all respondents mentioned that their dietary laws and other customs are distinct from those of other peoples in the country and they stress the fact that, 'like the Jews', they keep apart from the Gentiles. One informant remarked 'To us other people are *unclean*' (D:M:10). He said that all food is prepared with the greatest care and *cleanness*. This respondent adds that the dictum '*Bata-u-shambe*' (hold and wash) is adhered to on many occasions (cf D:G:2:11).

Some respondents maintain that they adhere strictly to the laws of Leviticus 11 (D:G:2:11; cf Parfitt 1992:56). They stress that they are *not* allowed to eat pork and they may not eat the meat of animals that have cloven hoofs or those which do not chew the cud such as hares, rabbits, scaleless fish, carrion, birds (like owl, eagle, ostrich and crow), as well as the zebra, rhinoceros, hippopotamus and elephant (which is their totem, cf 4.1.1.3; Wessman 1908:129-132; Gayre of Gayre 1967:6,7; De Vaal 1958:57; Marole 1969:3; Bullock [1927]1950:45).

Most Lemba respondents emphasise that they may not mix milk with meat products. They similarly confirm that they will not eat meat which is not slaughtered according to *kosher*¹⁴⁶ practice (D:3:A:(2)8,9). By this they mean that the animal has to be killed in a special way by a circumcised Lemba man (who is *clean*, cf D:G:2:10,11; D:J:(2)3; D:L:5; D:N:8; Parfitt 1992:113). They neither eat the blood of a slaughtered animal and the blood must be shed on the ground. Without the special blessing, called the *shidja* (in Zimbabwe), dead meat is also *unclean* – only the Lemba have the sacred words which could make it clean (Junod 1908:278; Van Warmelo 1940:66).

8.1.6.2 *Sex taboos and prohibited marriages*

The Lemba have many rules governing the body and in this regard distinguish in more than one way clearly between what is clean and what is unclean. Since they are chosen people, circumcised and eat only food allowed by their code, the Lemba regard themselves as *clean* and others as *unclean*. Therefore, Lemba people in Sekhukhuneland, Venda (present-day Northern Province) and Zimbabwe indicate that, according to their culture, they are *not supposed to marry outside their tribe* (endogamy; cf 4.2.1.1). Lemba women are told that the uncircumcised are weak persons (*unclean*) and they should not marry them (cf William Ratsoma and the Priest; D:A:2; D:G:2:11; Wheelwright 1905:253). They also run the risk that they will be made to eat '*Nyamafu*' (Venda for 'unclean food' i.e. pork, dead animals, etc; Mathivha 1992:51). The principle of

¹⁴⁶ This word is mainly used by earlier observers, ethnologists, etc, but at present some of the Lemba use this word themselves. This may be due to modern Jewish influence.

cleanliness in a girl's sexual life is similarly emphasised very strongly (Mathivha 1992:48). However, once again many Lemba admit that on account of 'cultural diffusion', many do not adhere to endogamy anymore.

8.1.6.3 Priestly groups

The Lemba have a code which stipulates how to care financially for the family of priests. The people in the communities usually pay the priest for his services conducted during circumcision ceremonies and when he makes his other skills available in the villages, the people will pay him with 'tokens of appreciation' (D:A:4).

Tradition holds that the senior clan, the Buba, are the original hereditary priests among the Lemba, who led them from Israel to Yemen many centuries ago. According to a tradition in Ethiopia, 'Buba' is a corruption for 'Judah'. Another tradition holds that Buba were specifically responsible for the secret sacrifices which must be made. They are also carriers of a special kind of 'crop' used for ceremonial sacrifices.

Such families of priests can for example be found today in Mberengwa/Zimbabwe (Mathivha 1994). I managed to visit this priesthood which makes sacrifices on Mount Mberengwa (D:1:A:19).

Motenda-Mbelengwa (founder of the LCA [Lemba Cultural Association] in the 1930s, 1940s) recalls that his father told him:

The priest spoke from high places while others listened. The Lemba therefore knew God. What strikes me is that most of the laws found in the Old Testament books are also found among the Lemba. This is striking to someone who reads the books and who knows Lemba laws (in De Vaal 1958:54).

The priest could be asked (by a group of Lemba, or others) to conduct the circumcision in their community, or just to make his skills as a traditional doctor available to the people. He inherited or learned these skills as a high priest from his father, and in turn prepares his son to become the next priest (D:A:4):

The succession is just from our forefathers right up to this generation and it will just continue like that. You see there is just a house of priesthood like in the Old Testament and this priesthood is not something of imposition or something that you do to yourself. It was something bestowed to a particular house by God (D:A:4).

During many important ceremonial gatherings the Buba still take the lead, but today there are also many other priestly families who officiate at various occasions (Mathivha 1992:8; 1999b). Fact is, there are certain implications or rules in the Lemba community which imply that they should look after the material needs of the priests and rules according to which the priestly family should act or behave.

8.1.7 Enemies within

One of the greatest internal threats to Lemba laws and codes are the dangers imposed by ‘cultural diffusion’ as they express it. On account of this, they can no longer adhere loyally to many Lemba rules and regulations, as they would have preferred. For instance, on account of their assimilation with other groups, they no longer practise the laws of circumcision regularly on the eighth day, as they did previously, much more intermarriage occurs and many traditions have been abolished (cf D:K:2).

8.1.8 No centralised authority to enforce these laws

The Lemba do not have any centralised authority to enforce their codes, except for the elders and the chief of the clan. The initiation ceremonies, however, plays an important role in the entrenchment of certain codes, in the sense that those who attend the ceremony have to learn the laws and customs of the Lemba. If a person is not going to be circumcised, they have to pay the chief a certain number of cattle.

A study of their history makes it clear that they often submit themselves to the chief in whose vicinity they live, although they keep themselves separate (cf Chapter Three). The detail of how their clan system functions/ed requires further investigation (cf 4.5).

8.1.9 Proverbs

Proverbs often entail unwritten laws and wisdom which should be considered in the daily life situation. Many proverbs exist among the Lemba people but ‘cultural diffusion’ has made it difficult to discern which are of Lemba origin and which are not. That means that they usually lived among other ‘host’ groups, speaking their languages etcetera, impede the possibility to discern which proverb is of Lemba origin and which is not. The following are collected among the older people in the communities, but there might be many more (Mathivha 1999b):

Nasa ya la munuwa a i humi

‘If a duiker eats a bean plant, it will repeat it.’

(If a person commits a mistake, he will commit it again [especially if it is sweet.])

Wa sa li pfa u vhadzwani u do li pfela vhulaloni

‘If you do not heed a warning you will learn it when you are in bed.’

(Always take advice or you will regret.)

Khosi ndi khosi nga vhatu

‘A chief is a chief because of people.’

(A leader should not undermine his subjects.)

Vhuhadzi ndi nama ya thole ya fhufhuma ri a fhunzhela

‘A wife’s in-laws are like veal for if it starts to boil with froth, then one is in trouble.’

(Always stay cool with the in-laws because problems are part of life.)

Hu ambuwa vhunanga vhukololo a vha ambuwi

‘The witch-doctor’s/herbalist’s art can be imparted but royalty cannot.’

(You can learn an art but not inherit it.)

Muvhuda a u na zwilalo zwivhili

'A hare does not have two sleeping places.'
(Do not handle more than you can manage.)

Thoho thema i laya thoho tshena

'A black head gives advice to the white head.'
(Even younger people can give the elderly advice.)

U luvha a hu na mapone

'To pay homage has no blisters.'
(You do not lose anything in paying homage.)

Ya longa khwanda yo nwa

'Once it puts its hoof inside (the water) it has drunk.'
(A mistake is a mistake.)

U beba a si u ka murobo

'To bear a child is not like collecting vegetables.'
(Said by a parent whose child is being ill-treated.)

A u lati nwana nga phadi

'You do not disown your child because of chicken-pox (eczema; minor things).'
(Your child is your child never mind his mistakes.)

Funguvhu lo ri thi laiwi la fhira mudi lo kovhela

'The crow said I do not need your advice and passed a home very late at night.'
(If you do not take advice, you will be in trouble.)

Li naka li tshi hoha linwe li tshi hohwa li ri mavhala anga

'It is nice to do good when you are hurting others, but when you yourself are being hurt you have concern.'
(Some people rejoice when they hurt others, but if it is their turn they have concern.)

Hezva zvavauya vachiti vanoda sudza mumba wanga makwati

'Since they say they have come to arrange a marriage with my daughter, where is the money.'
(Translation and explanation from Venda into English, Mr Sengani (a Lemba), Department of African languages, Unisa).

Some of these proverbs do, for example, occur among the Venda as well, but the Lemba are convinced of their Lemba origins. Obviously, there should be many more proverbs among the Lemba but these are considered by the older people as the most important ones. Nevertheless, these proverbs deal mainly with relationships. Noteworthy, is that the explanation is often slightly different from what you expect when reading or hearing the proverb. This has implications for the interpretation of a proverb, it should not be taken literally.

8.2 LAW AND ETHICS IN EARLY ISRAEL

The Babylonian Dynasty left a number of laws, of which the Codex of Hammurabi is probably the most important (1700 BC). Although five hundred years earlier than early Israel, this Codex perhaps provides a good indication of what was possible by 1200 BC. The possibility even exists that Israel made use of the Babylonian laws and other sources from the ancient Near East, or possibly the clans of Israel initially knew the Hammurabic laws due to trade between the two

regions, but they developed their own unique character on account of their religious traditions. On the other hand, De Vaux (1973:146) and other scholars find it improbable that Israel's civil legislation was of a Babylonian origin (cf Alt in McKenzie 1966:115; Grant 1984:60). According to Grant, Israel's apodictic laws and the covenantal character of the law was quite unique (cf Noth [1958]1983:100; Jos 24:25-26).

The clans of Israel had an oral culture and therefore oral codes (legal and ethical), but to a certain extent, this mode ended about five hundred years later, when some of their oral traditions and legal and ethical codes were encapsulated in some of the books of the Old Testament¹⁴⁷ (some date these laws even later, e.g. sixth century). These written laws were possibly only a selection of the laws and codes they had, and were probably not meant to be written down. Possibly these laws reflect much more of the world-view of the different writers and editors and therefore, do not necessarily reflect actual Israelite law customs (cf Chapter Nine).

8.2.1 The Covenant

8.2.1.1 *Exodus 20*

From the pages of the Old Testament one of the most important elements of the religion of early Israel was the Covenant, or their relationship with Yahweh. Most of their laws and codes emanated from this. The patriarchs also refer to *El's* eternal Covenant which He made with Abraham and his posterity, together with the accompanying sign of *circumcision* for all males (Gn 17:7-11; cf Bunte 1966:225). McKenzie (1966:114-115) and others maintain that Israel regarded its laws as stipulations of the Covenant, according to which they had to live. This comprises the distinct difference between Israel's legal system and other collections of laws in the ancient Near East. However, within the wider Ancient Near East, the conclusion of covenants was a political concept. These covenants mainly involved the relationship between lords and their vassals in a feudal form of government. According to Hittite treaties (1450-1200), every contract consisted of a preamble, a history of the relationship, stipulations regarding the relationship of the partners, an invocation of the gods as witnesses, the inscription of the treaty and its placement in a temple as well as blessings and curses (De Moor 1990:225-261). Archaeologists unearthed many treaties, characterised by a recurrent covenant format (Niditch 1997:71). The discovery of the Hittite treaties and others illuminates texts such as Exodus 20, Joshua 24 and some chapters in Deuteronomy (cf Fensham 1969:v-xix).

The suspicion with regard to the historical connection of the Covenant is further strengthened by the tradition that Jacob, the patriarch (Gen 33:20), had already erected an altar at Shechem which he called אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (*El*, the God of Israel; Miller & Hayes 1986:109). The tradition of the Covenant between Yahweh and the clans of Israel was probably conveyed to others here (Jos 24ff), that is, those not present at the making of the Covenant at Sinai or those

¹⁴⁷ Although the Book of Judges and Deuteronomy are part of the Deuteronomist's historiography (thus dating from the Exile), they probably do contain early traditions, and do reflect early conditions.

who did not know about it. If the traditions of the patriarchs concerning Shechem contain a historical core, it seems reasonable that the clans of Israel (according to Jos 24) would have met at the sanctuary of *El-berith* at Shechem to renew the Covenant (even though it was a 'covenant' in terms of their relationship with Yahweh): a type of feast for the renewal of the Covenant (cf Jos 24; Noth 1943:47ff). On this occasion it was confirmed that Yahweh was their God and that they were his people and the Covenant stipulations were again clearly stated (cf Noth [1958]1983:100).

Exodus 20 could be seen an 'abbreviated version of a treaty form' (Niditch 1997:71). The opening verses contain a brief preamble and a historical prologue, followed by blessings and curses in verses 5 and 6, and a set of stipulations or rules of behaviour required of Israel as treaty partner.

8.2.1.2 *Joshua 24*

According to Noth (1943:47ff) Joshua 24 represents a feast of the renewal of the Covenant, where the *Covenantal stipulations* were read again, and the people had the opportunity to choose whom they would serve in the future. Some other aspects of a treaty form which are absent in Exodus 20 are represented in Joshua 24 (and Deuteronomy), for example the naming of the witnesses and the provision for deposit (Niditch 1997:72).

Joshua 24:25-26 specifically mentions Joshua giving the *book of the law* to the people at Shechem. The whole idea of the Covenant and its stipulations (laws) is very clearly stated on this occasion. Bosman (1991:210; cf Albertz 1994:60) maintains that, in spite of later editing, there may in fact have been a *core collection of legal stipulations*, which dated at least from the era before the monarchy.

8.2.2 **The Ten Commandments (Ex 20)**

According to the Sinai tradition the Israelites received the Decalogue from Yahweh at Mount Sinai in the desert. Some scholars, however, date the Decalogue much later. Gottwald (1985:209) is of the opinion that the Decalogue was already part of Israelite life, probably in pre-monarchical times (cf Grant 1984:59; Wolfe 1982:144). Nevertheless, the commandments can roughly be divided into two tables. On the one hand they deal with the way people should relate to Yahweh and on the other, the way they should relate to one another. Regarding the first part (Ex 20:1-11),

- (i) God is the deliverer; the only God.
- (ii) No other images or idols should be worshipped, as God is a jealous God who judges the fathers' transgressions on the children of the third and fourth generations of those who hate him, but who also shows his love to the thousandth generation of those who love him and who keep his commandments.
- (iii) God's name must be honoured.

(a) Casuistic laws

Deist (1991:118) argues that the laws in Exodus 21-23 were probably part of the common law which was conveyed orally in the community. Common law, especially as it occurs in the Covenantal Code (Ex 21-23) and elsewhere, involves the interpretation or the application of the law in everyday life, almost a type of situational ethics. For instance, is it as great a sin to steal bread when you are hungry, as it would be if you were to steal jewelry or other valuables (cf Niditch 1997:76)?

Without going into detail on each of these laws, it may be briefly pointed out that the format of the material in Exodus 21-23 represents a casuistic framework, namely: 'If' (21:30), 'When....' (21:28), or 'Who....' this or that, 'has to....' this that and the other (Niditch 1997:76).

(b) Monetary compensation (Exodus 21; 22)

The Covenantal Code shares some essentials with other Near Eastern and modern codes, such as monetary compensation for example for slaves (Ex 21:6-7, 26-27,20; 22:1-15), the offering for the first-born (Ex 13:12-13; 34:19-20; Nm 3:41,45) and the economic worth of a daughter (Ex 21:7; 22:16). The offering for the first-born of humans and animals is described as a most valuable offering, a precious commodity (cf [e] below). The writer often calculates human worth in financial terms (Niditch 1996:76-79).

(c) Slavery (Ex 21:1-12)

A good opportunity to obtain slaves, was of course during wars (Lemche 1988:93). Every soldier received at least one girl after the campaign of Deborah and Barak against Sisera of Hazor (Jdg 5:30). Slave girls were obviously a popular item at the slave market, since they could also fulfil the personal needs of the housewife, as well as that of her husband (as concubine). However, there are not much data about how many slaves the early Israelite household had, but there is an indication that Gideon for instance (Jdg 6:27) send ten of his slaves to go and destroy the altars of Baal. This implies that he probably had even more slaves than just the ten indicated (Lemche 1988:93-94; cf De Vaux 1973).

Like strangers, slaves were generally treated well. By legislation special care was taken that slaves should be treated well (Ex 21:2-11). Lemche (1988:93) mentions that a slave had the right to marry and have children, while he still belonged to his owner. He is also of the opinion that the Hebrew word for slave, עַבְד, can also be translated as 'worker'. Slaves had to be compensated for the work they did, or they had to receive a piece of ground on which they could become self-supporting (1988:94). Such laws, dating from much earlier, probably polemicalised against earlier situations of misuse.

It was probably only on account of debt or impoverishment that an Israelite could allow himself to become a slave. In such a case, he may also have only worked for a fellow Israelite and the slavery was temporary until he paid his debt. Apparently an Israelite who allowed himself to

be enslaved by his own free will, was called a Hebrew (cf 1 Sm 14:21). For instance, the Israelites who found themselves in bondage of slavery in Egypt, were called Hebrews (Jagersma 1982:12). As the head of the home, a father could also decide to sell his daughter on the slave market when he was indebted.

(d) Widows, orphans, resident aliens and hospitality (Ex 22:21ff)

According to Niditch (1997:77-78) most ethically appealing in the Covenantal Code, is the concern for widows, orphans and resident foreigners – the marginal figures of society. The society had to care for this category of people since God had mercy upon them. God is compassionate to members of the underclass and he is perceived as the court of appeal and the champion of such victims, and the punishment for the oppressor is according to the principle of the *lex talionis* (an eye for an eye; cf Ex 22:21,22,24,27; Niditch 1997:77-78).

Depending on which ‘entrance model’ is accepted, the Israelites could of course also be seen as ‘strangers’ in Canaan. However, if the Israelites were seen to have been indigenous, then all non-Israelites (although also perhaps ‘indigenous’) will be seen as strangers, which the Bible indeed does. In everyday life there were no ostensible differences between strangers and the Israelites. Strangers are classified along with the poor, widows and the orphans, who in fact had to receive alms (Ex 22:20; 23:9).

Many scholars suggest that the prominence of *hospitality* in the Old Testament is partly due to Israel’s nomadic origins (Selman 1988:494-495). This nomadic practice is best illustrated in Abraham’s generosity towards the three strangers (Gn 18:1-8; in contradistinction to the narrative in Jdg 13:15). The concern for the sojourner (Ex 22:21; cf Lv 19:10; Dt 10:19) indicates the extent of hospitality in early Israel. That the host was responsible for the safety and welfare of the guests, is illustrated by Lot and by the old man referred to in the narrative on the incident at Gibeah (Gn 19:8; Jdg 19:24-25). Failure to provide for the traveller’s needs was a serious offence and was liable to be punished by God (Dt 23:3-4) and man (1 Sm 25:2-38; Jdg 8:5-17; Selman 1988:494-495).

(e) Offering for the first-born (Exodus 22:29-30)

Bosman (1991:210; cf Wolfe 1982:134) refers to the stipulation where Yahweh gave the command that the ‘The first-born of your sons you shall give to me. You shall do the same with your oxen and with your sheep. It shall be with its mother seven days; on the eighth day you shall give it to me’ (Ex 22:29-30) – as a gruesome remnant from the pre-monarchical era (cf Deist 1991:118; De Vaux 1973:143). Wolfe (1982:134) is of the opinion that Exodus 20:23-23:33 was written by Israel’s second lawgiver, Samuel (1 Sm 10:25; Moses being the first). Later it was added to the Decalogue by those who canonised the traditions. This would imply that this commandment was also valid for early Israel. In connection with the notion of human sacrifice, Albertz (1994:103) refers to two kinds of first fruit sacrifices, that of animals and that of fruit and

vegetables. He argues that in theory, Yahweh also claimed the first-born from people and similarly refers to the reference in Exodus. However, he surmises, that in practice the first-born were never sacrificed, but was always replaced by a sacrificial animal (cf [b] above).

8.2.4 Family ethics and women

Family codes reflect the intention to purify the community, which should be well-integrated and sound (Niditch 1997:86,87). The evil should be rooted out from Israel's midst (cf Dt 21). Some of these codes are reflected in the Book of Judges and in Deuteronomy.

8.2.4.1 Judges, elders and a patriarchal system

Within the segmented Israelite communities there was also mention of a loose social organisation, which probably varied from clan to clan or even from family to family. Only in times of need did a judge step in to lead the clans of Israel against the enemy. The heads of the families or the elders eventually began to play a greater role (cf 1 Sm 30:26-31; Mazabow 1973:123).

The story of Ruth, which can probably be situated in the times of the Judges (but not to be dated there; rather post-Exilic) – and therefore reflects something of the laws of early Israel, represents a typical patriarchal setup within a family (cf Loader 1994). This implies that the father of the family had absolute authority over his children (cf Dt 21:18-21), even over his married sons and their wives, that is if they lived with him. Reference has already been made to the woman's subservient position within the patriarchal society – she was at the mercy of the authority of her father, husband or brother. At best, she was considered to be the personal possession of her husband, who could deal with her as he thought well, except to sell her as a slave (Dt 21:14; De Vaux 1973:19-20). Respect for both parents is clearly emphasised by the promise of longevity in the land which God was giving them (cf Ex 20).

8.2.4.2 Inheritance

According to De Vaux (1993:53-55) there is no mention of a written will in the Old Testament. Before the father's death, he verbally informed his family about the division of his possessions (2 Sm 17:23; 2 Ki 20:1). Only sons could inherit, and the eldest usually received a double portion of inheritance. Widows could not inherit, except when there were no children. Sons and female slaves, could apparently also not inherit, except if they were adopted legally, and daughters could only inherit if there were no sons (cf Nm 27).

The levirate marriage (cf 4.2.2.4) provided for the widow. The deceased's brother or nearest family usually married the widow and the children from that marriage was deemed to be those of the deceased (cf 4.2.2.4; cf Matthews 1996:72,73).

In spite of all the propitious laws, it does not seem as if widows in early Israel had an enviable position. They were mainly left to the mercy of their children, for example, according to Judges 16-17, Michah's mother was openly (Kitchen 1988c:1250) exploited by her son.

8.2.4.3 *Virginity of women*

Another feature of the male-dominated system, is the emphasis on a woman's virginity. A bloodstained cloth or chemise was exhibited after the wedding night, as a proof of the bride's virginity (Dt 22:13-21). Adulterous women, and women found not to be virgins at the time of their marriage were to be stoned (Dt 22:21,22): '[B]urning out the evil from your midst' (cf Wright 1988:744-746; Thompson 1988a:744-746).

Except for the absence of virginity as reason for divorce, there were also other circumstances that made it possible for a man to divorce his wife. However, what the situation was in early Israel, is difficult to deduce. De Vaux (1973:34-36) refers to Deuteronomy 24:1-2, where the possibility is mentioned why a man could decide to give his wife a bill of divorce, but his wife could not decide by herself to divorce her husband. Generally divorce was not condoned (cf Lv 18:20; and 20:17-21 for other 'forbidden degrees of marriage'), because according to later (post-exilic) laws of purification (Lv 17-26; Bosman 1991:215) it rendered you unclean and it was considered to be a sin against you and Yahweh (cf 4.2).

8.2.4.4 *Women as chattel*

Deuteronomy provides certain rights or protection for women, which are not necessarily related to early Israel, but within the androcentric system women were seen as valuable chattel (Niditch 1997:86). In spite of all the laws which were supposed to protect widows and orphans in society, the Book of Judges describes numerous situations within which women were simply at the mercy of male dominance and authority. So for instance women were used as a human shield to protect men, they were raped, caught and stolen, even chopped into pieces, as it pleased men (cf the 'robbing' of virgins as it is described in Jdg 19 and 21; Van Dijk-Hemmes 1992:16-17). At least, when they were sold as slaves, women were freed like the men in the 7th year (Beeching 1988:1258).

8.2.5 **Economic ethics**

The law in Deuteronomy (written much later than the period of 'early Israel'), also deals with the economically disadvantaged members of the society (Dt 15:7-11). Special concern is expressed for the widows, orphans (Dt 10:17-18) and Levites (Dt 24:13,14). The perspective of the Deuteronomist (Dt 10:18) was that strangers enjoyed the special protection of Yahweh. He avers that strangers were indeed free in every respect, but that they did not enjoy the same civil rights as the Israelites, since all land belonged to the Israelites, and for this reason strangers could only offer their services in the Promised Land for payment (Dt 10:18; 24:14).

Economic ethics mainly involved the sabbatical (Dt 15:1-18), to give the land a 'sabbath' or rest, the freeing of slaves, to make loans to a borrower, to forgive debts and not to charge interest to fellow Israelites (Dt 23:19; Niditch 1997:81).

8.2.6 Priestly codes in Leviticus

8.2.6.1 *Leviticus 11*

Niditch (1997:89) demonstrates that key aspects of priestly world-views are represented in Leviticus and Numbers (cf Deist 1991:118; Fohrer 1968:160-163). For instance, *laws about clean and unclean* food found in Leviticus 11, reflect attempts to present a systematisation in daily living. *Uncleanness* was a more global metaphor for sin, one's behaviour towards others and one's relationship with God could be classified as *clean* or *unclean*. Uncleanness was also 'contagious', that is, these states could be transferred (Niditch 1997:89). According to Leviticus (9-11) edible animals included mammals with divided hooves, which chew the cud, and fish which have fins and easily removable scales. All birds not included in that list of forbidden foods, were permitted, but all types of insects except four species of locusts were forbidden. Swarming creatures were unclean (Lv 11:29) and contaminated like an invisible poison (Niditch 1997:90). Thus, nothing that was considered as unclean, or that was not handled according to the prescribed stipulations, could be eaten (cf 4.1.2). Specific details were given of the ritual process of purification, after coming in contact with impure species, because the children of Israel were commanded to be different and holy.

There is uncertainty whether all the laws and stipulations already applied in early Israel, but in general, a vegetarian diet of bread, milk, fruit and nuts was followed, and only on special occasions meat was available (cf 4.1.2; Matthews 1996:19).

8.2.6.2 *Sex taboos and prohibited marriages*

Rules which regulated the body were also presented in terms of *clean and unclean*, and there were separate rules for men and for women (Lv 12; 15). There are also laws found in Leviticus 18, which governed prohibited marriages. Marriage could not take place too far outside the ambit of the group, neither could there be marriages too close within the group (endogamy).

There are references to different kinds of punishment regarding sexual taboos within the wider context of the Old Testament, some of which are also mentioned in the Books of Joshua and Judges. These may then also characterise early Israel (De Vaux 1973:157-159). Serious transgressions incurred the death penalty as in the case of sexual indiscretions such as adultery (Lv 20:10; Dt 22:22) and incest (Lv 20:11,12,14,17; De Vaux 1973:158-160). Niditch (1997:90) surmises that 'Israel developed a system of conjugal categories that order their world, and the system' (cf 4.2.2).

8.2.6.3 *Priestly groups*

Besides the role of the heads of family, judges and a few women, it is virtually impossible to think that a sanctuary without a priest (כֹּהֵן) could function. However, it is difficult to date precisely the inception of the priestly class (כֹּהֲנִים; Deist 1985:21). If Moses' father-in-law was indeed a

Yahweh worshipper, a kind of priestly class may have already existed by 1250 BC, if not, then it probably followed soon thereafter.

A כהן, called a 'teacher' or 'father' (Jdg 17:10), probably on the basis of heirship, came from well-known families such as from the posterity of Aaron (Nm 25; Jdg 18:30). The status of כהן could therefore only be obtained through patrilineal inheritance. That is, a son could only become a כהן if his father was a כהן. The difference between the priests (כהנים) and the Levites is not always clear. We are probably dealing (in the Book of Judges) with the beginning of the development of the priesthood, and it is possible that later developments were projected onto the times of the Judges.

Albertz (1994:58-59) accepts the description in Judges 17-18 as a very realistic picture of the Levites (from the clan of Levi), during the 'period before the state', as he calls it. To him, this narrative corresponds in more than one way with other information at our disposal. The inference can be drawn that the tribe or clan could appoint their own priest or priests as they thought it well, as is mentioned in Judges 18:19 (Kraus 1966:93). According to the story in Judges 17-18 the son, as head of the family, fulfilled the role of priest, until his father could appoint a Levite.

Who the Levites were, and what their actual connection was with the clan of Levi, is very uncertain (Kraus 1966:95; Noth 1948:197). According to Judges 17:7-9 it appears that the Levites also fell into the same category as strangers or foreigners, since they could not possess any property or land.

Another example from the Book of Judges, is that of the father of Gideon, Joash, who was probably also a serving priest at a Canaanite sanctuary in Ophra (Jdg 6) – however, it is not clear whether he was a Levite. Except for heads of family and judges, priests possibly also regularly lead worship, but this is uncertain, since very little information exists about this (Deist 1985:21; cf Albertz 1994:48-49).

8.2.7 Enemies from within

The writers of Deuteronomy polemise strongly against the enemies within the ranks of the nation. They agitated for wholeness and cleanness of the society, and to be uniform in values. This stance may reflect a retrojected world-view from early Israel, when life and belief were very much perceived in terms of clear cut terms, those who worship other gods were to have been executed, child sacrifices were outrightly condemned (18:10) and the practice of consulting the dead (18:11,12) were utterly rejected as an abomination before Yahweh.

8.2.8 No centralised authority to enforce the Code of the Covenant

There is no specific reference to any centralised authority who could enforce the Covenantal Code. Only the reference to a 'leader of your people' (22:28) may refer to some kind of tribal or clan chief or judge (Niditch 1997:78; Noth 1943:47ff).

In countries outside of Israel the king was seen as lawgiver. In Israel a judge (and later also the king) had to see to it that the law (made by the people?) was applied. Thus they only had executive but not lawmaking authority. In early Israel the judges probably also acted in a legal capacity, and according to Fensham (in Fensham & Pienaar 1982:102) the Hebrew lexeme וְשֹׁפֵט (Jdg 3:10; 14:6) is more felicitously rendered as 'ruler'. However, this also includes his or her other tasks (cf also Manley 1988; Jagersma 1982). Deborah is a good example of a judge who also acted in a legal sense of the word (as well as a prophet). She was known for her jurisprudence under her palm tree (or court of law?) between Ramah and Bethel in the mountains of Ephraim (Jdg 4:5). Samuel, who is also seen as judge by some, possibly also served as judge (in a legal sense) in Ramah, Beth-el, Gilgal and Mizpah (1 Sm 7:16,17). Probably on account of other nations, the Israelites clamoured for Samuel to provide them with a king – that the king may judge them (1 Sm 8:5; De Vaux 1973:150-152), since every one of them were doing 'what was right in their own eyes' (Jdg 21:25).

On account of the fluid and segmented nature of the clans of early Israel, jurisprudence on ground level either took place through the fathers of families, or through the elders of the town who met at the gates. It also seems as if the judges such as Deborah and Samuel possibly judged more widely than their own clans (Jdg and 1 Sm).

8.2.9 Proverbs

Deist (1991:117-119; and others) suspects that during the times of the pre-monarchical period, certain proverbs existed, which were conveyed from generation to generation within the ranks of the clans, and were later written down. He especially refers to tribal or clan values (or clan wisdom, cf Gerstenberger 1988:29), which he thinks, is verbalised by Proverbs 10-16:

Poor is he who works with a negligent hand,
 But the hand of the diligent makes rich (Pr 10:4).
 The merciful man does himself good,
 But the cruel man does himself harm (Pr 11:17).

The soul of the sluggard craves and *gets* nothing,
 But the soul of the diligent is made fat (Pr 13:4).

Better is a little with the fear of the Lord
 Than great treasure and turmoil with it (Pr 15:16).

It may be that these proverbs date from pre-monarchical times, but could also have been from any other time in history. That the content of these proverbs could possibly reflect contemporary wisdom, indicates that their earlier stages could also have been applicable to early Israel. Proverbs usually entail some guideline against which a group or people could measure their daily living. These proverbs for example reflect among others the world-view that hard labour and the fearing of the Lord are rewarded, but that laziness ends up in a disaster. Mercy is also seen as a virtue against cruelty.

8.3 EVALUATION AND COMPARISON

At closer investigation, it appears that some of the Lemba's legal and ethical codes closely resemble those in Exodus, Deuteronomy and especially those in Leviticus (with many traces of influence from the life-world of the Old Testament). Comparative laws which do agree with some of those of the Lemba occur in later sections of Deuteronomy. The Law in Deuteronomy overlaps with the Covenantal Code and the Ten Commandments in Exodus in the following ways: the importance of respect for parents, the command to worship only Yahweh and honesty in legal transactions (Niditch 1997:79). In Deuteronomy, however, the Sabbath is grounded in the Exodus and the remembrance of God's deliverance (Dt 5:15) and not in the creation as in Exodus 20 (Niditch 1997:80; cf Ex 23:14-19). Observers from previous centuries similarly referred to these resemblances. If the Lemba were to have any remnants of the laws which originate from Exodus, Leviticus or Deuteronomy then it is impossible to determine this in a definite sense, but there are at least traces of a possible connection in the past. The Lemba obviously also have codes which do not concur with that in early Israel.

Although the Lemba have no written laws or regulations available in one or other holy book, an oral tradition holds that they have had a kind of book at one or other stage in their history. There is strong remembrance that it was a kind of a law book and that the coming of the missionaries perhaps refreshed their memories about this book. They especially had a sense of 'déjà vu' when they came in contact with the so-called 'Priestly Code', or maybe the missionaries made them aware of how their own customs and laws resembled that of the Old Testament. Some respondents averred that they *strictly* adhered to the laws in Leviticus 11. Hence their tremendous emphasis on the laws for cleanness, thus avoiding uncleanness – virtually in every instance of self-identification these categories are mentioned. However, real life shows that not all of them live according to Leviticus 11. The same could probably have been said of ancient Israel. Written laws and codes represented the ideal as it was presented to the nation, but this does not imply full-scale adherence to the law.

It became clear that most Lemba rank their specific cultural laws or principles higher than any of those of the churches to which they belong (cf D:O:12). Other teachings are mainly added to their existing cultural teaching or values. Most of their rituals and laws are in some way or another related to their spiritual or physical cleanliness.

The most important agreements and differences as they emerge from the discussion in the above, will be presented in table form below.

TABLE 9: COMPARISON – THE LEGAL AND ETHICAL DIMENSION

<p>The Lemba The Covenant (8.1.1) <i>Similarities</i> ■ See themselves in a special relationship with God/Mwari of heavens/the God of the Bible</p>	<p>Early Israel The Covenant (8.2.1) ■ Saw themselves in a special relationship with the Yahweh</p>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ See themselves as 'children of Abraham' (Gn 17) ▪ Circumcision is the sign of the Covenant ▪ Stress that circumcision is the occasion where initiates are incorporated into the Covenant ▪ The Covenant has obligations for both parties <p><i>Differences</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No written treaty form is extant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Saw themselves as 'children of Abraham' (Gn 17) ▪ Circumcision as sign of the Covenant ▪ Stressed that circumcision is the occasion where new members were incorporated into the Covenant ▪ The Covenant had obligations for both parties <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Exodus 20 is an abbreviated form of treaty between the two unequal parties
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<p>The 'law' (Lemba, 8.1.2) <i>Similarities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Only refer to their 'law' <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Some say they <i>only</i> worship the God of Bible ▪ Children suffer for the sin of parents but are also rewarded for faithfulness ▪ Remembrance of a sabbath ▪ Adultery is considered a sin ▪ Stealing is considered a sin ▪ Emphasis is placed on honesty and the truth ▪ Respect for ancestors living and dead <p><i>Differences</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Figurines are made by means of which God is worshipped <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mixing of poison is a sin <p>Case law (Lemba, 8.1.3) <i>Covenant obligations (8.1.3.1)</i> (a) Casuistic laws <i>Similarities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A kind of casuistic law occurs <p><i>Differences</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ If the parents do not confess all their sins their son will certainly die during circumcision <p>(b) Monetary compensation <i>Differences</i></p>	<p>The Ten Commandments (Israel, 8.2.2)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Received the commandments as Covenant principles from Yahweh at Mount Sinai ▪ They could worship Yahweh only <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Children suffered for the sins of parents but were also rewarded for faithfulness ▪ Kept the Sabbath ▪ Adultery was considered a sin ▪ Stealing was considered a sin ▪ Emphasis was placed on honesty and truth ▪ Respect for living (and dead?) ancestors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No images or icons of God were allowed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The name of the Yahweh could not be taken in vain ▪ Condemned murder and coveting ▪ No similar law was known <p>Case law (Israel, 8.2.3) <i>The Covenantal Code (Ex 21-23, 8.2.3.1)</i> (a) Casuistic laws</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Material in Exodus 21-23 represents a casuistic frame <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No substance in the Old Testament for Lemba casuistic laws <p>(b) Monetary compensation</p>
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- *Lobola* has to be paid back if it is discovered on the wedding night that the newly wedded wife is not a virgin

(c) Earn one's own living

Similarities

- The Lemba are not supposed to 'enslave' themselves;
- They should not work for other people

Differences

- No mention of the buying and selling of slaves

(d) Love for your neighbour, care for the poor and show hospitality

Similarities

- Poor people should be helped because they have been created by God

- Hospitality towards strangers is a communal value

(e) Offerings made at childbirth

Similarities

- Blood has to be spilled

Differences

- A lamb or cock is slaughtered to unite the child with their ancestors and with God

Family ethics and women (Lemba, 8.1.4)
Chiefs, elders and a patriarchal family (8.1.4.1)

Similarities

- Clans or lineages headed by their own chief and elders
- Patriarchal community with their social organisation based on the extended family
- Social organisation differ from clan to clan and even from family to family
- Egalitarian as far as the position of men is concerned
- Women are subject to the authority of their husbands

- The bride was sent back to her parents or was stoned to death when it was discovered that she was no longer a virgin

(c) Slavery

- Israelites were not supposed to have themselves enslaved
- In case of impoverishment they are only suppose to work for fellow Israelites

- A father could sell his daughters on the slave market when he was in debt

(d) Widows, orphans, resident strangers and hospitality

- Marginalised people had to be cared for since God had compassion for them and He was perceived to be the court of appeal for victims of injustice
- Hospitality towards strangers was highly valued

(e) Offering for the first-borns (Ex 22:29-30)

- Blood had to be spilled

- First-born had to be redeemed by means of sacrifices

Family ethics and women (Israel, 8.2.4)
Judges, elders and a patriarchal family (8.2.4.1)

- A loose social organisation with a judge who led from time to time
- Patriarchal community with their social organisation based on the extended family
- Social organisation differed from clan to clan and even from family to family
- Egalitarian as far as the position of men is concerned
- The woman was considered to be a personal possession or chattel of the husband. He could treat her as he saw fit, except for selling her as a slave

- Ethical and family codes reflect the intention to purify the community, which should be uniform and whole
- Respect for ancestors, living and dead and for the elders

Inheritance (8.1.4.2)

Similarities

- Boys and girls inherit from their father and the heir is determined by the *lobola* cattle given by the father of the man
- Women are ranked according to the preferential marriage already given

Differences

- A woman married to another woman is subject to the authority of the woman who has paid the *lobola*
- All the *lobola* property goes to her father
- The children obtained by this marriage, inherit her property, while her own children inherit from their father

Virginity of women (8.1.4.3)

Similarities

- Lemba girls are subject to inspection by some old women to prove virginity

Differences

- If a woman had lost her virginity she is sent back to her parents

Women as items of chattel (8.1.4.4)

Similarities

- Within an androcentric system women are seen as valuable possessions
- Unmarried daughters are the property of the father and all *lobola* cattle go to him

Economic ethics (Lemba, 8.1.5)

Similarities

- Economically disadvantaged people and foreigners should be cared for
- They have to care for the material needs of the priest
- Love for the truth and honesty are emphasised

Differences

- No such laws are known

- Ethical and family codes reflected the intention to purify the community, which had to be uniform and whole
- Respect for ancestors, living (and dead? cf 5.2.5) and for the elders

Inheritance (8.2.4.2)

- Only the sons could inherit; the eldest son usually inherited double

- Widows could not inherit, except when there were no children

- No substance for such marriages (a woman to another woman) in the Old Testament

Virginity of women (8.2.4.3)

- Women had to give proof of their virginity on their wedding night by presenting a blood-stained cloth

- If a woman had lost her virginity she was stoned

Women as chattel (8.2.4.4)

- Within an androcentric system women are seen as valuable exchange items
- Unmarried daughters were the property of the father and a dowry had to be paid

Economic ethics (Israel, 8.2.5)

- Economic disadvantaged people and strangers had to be cared for and received special protection from God
- Material needs of the Levites had to be cared for
- Love for the truth and honesty was stressed

Dietary laws, cleanliness and other codes (Lemba, 8.1.6)

Leviticus 11 (8.1.6.1)

Similarities

- Stress the importance of cleanliness and uncleanliness
- They are not allowed to eat with the *wasenzhi* (heathen; unclean people; eaters of dead meat)
- They follow the regulations in Leviticus 11
- They avoid all meat of animals with cloven hoofs and animals which do not chew the cud
- They do not touch the meat of fallen animals
- Bleed animals to death and the blood must be shed on the ground (Dt 12:6, 23; Nm 19)
- They do not eat the blood of animals they kill
- The animal must be killed by a circumcised Lemba (who is clean) in a special way

Differences

- They do not mix meat and milk in their foods (following the code from Leviticus). Probably influence from modern Judaism.
- Without the special blessing, called the *shidja* (in Shona), dead meat is unclean
- Only the Lemba know the secret words for the special blessing
- Taboo on eating elephant, zebra, rhinoceros and hippopotamus

Sex taboos and prohibited marriages (8.1.6.2)

Similarities

- The Lemba have many rules governing the body
- They are not supposed to marry outside their tribe or to an uncircumcised Lemba
- The principle of cleanliness in the girls' sexual life is emphasised very strongly

- Business ethics involved the sabbath year, etc

Priestly codes in Leviticus (Israel, 8.2.6)

Leviticus 11 (8.2.6.1)

- Stressed the importance of cleanliness and uncleanliness
- They were not suppose to mix with the heathen
- They followed the regulations of Leviticus 11
- They avoided all meat of animals with cloven hoofs and animals which did not chew the cud
- They did not touch the meat of fallen animals
- Bled animals to death and the blood had to be shed on the ground
- They could not eat the blood of animals which they killed
- Animals had to be killed in a special way

- There are no specific indications that meat and milk were not mixed in early Israel (cf 4.1.2.3)
- Swarming creatures were considered to be unclean and contaminated, like an invisible poison
- No such words are known

Sex taboos and prohibited marriages (8.2.6.2)

- The Priestly Code had many rules governing the body
- They were not suppose to marry outside their kinship or social group (cf 4.2.2.1)
- There were respective rules for men and for women concerning cleanliness and uncleanliness

Priestly groups (8.1.6.3)

Similarities

- The priesthood is something bestowed on a particular family by God
- The people give the priest some tokens of appreciation for his services but pay him for circumcision

Differences

- In the past a priest spoke from high places while others listened
- The priest avails his skills as a traditional doctor to the people
- The priest conducts circumcision

Enemies within (Lemba, 8.1.7)

Differences

- Cultural diffusion is their greatest enemy
- The Lemba do not specifically mention whether child sacrifice and consulting the dead are prohibited

No centralised authority to enforce these laws (Israel, 8.1.8)

Similarities

- Elders and chiefs had limited authority

Differences

- Initiation ceremonies play an important role in the 'enforcing' of certain laws

Proverbs (8.1.9)

Differences

- If person commits a mistake, he will commit it again
- Be aware of danger and always take advice
- You can't be a chief without a people
- To bear a child is not easy
- Minor things is not important
- If one wants to marry your daughter he has to pay
- Do not handle more than you can manage
- Even young people can give the elderly advice

Priestly groups (8.2.6.3)

- The priesthood was something bestowed on a particular family by God
- The people were supposed to look financially after the priests and Levites

- The father or mother conducted circumcision
- The Levites were a family appointed by God to serve at the places of worship

Enemies within (Israel, 8.2.7)

- The worship of other gods: idolatry
- Child sacrifices were prohibited
- The practice of consulting 'the dead' was an abomination

No centralised authority to enforce the Code of the Covenant (Israel, 8.2.8)

- Elders and the judges/leaders of the people had some authority

Proverbs (8.2.9)

- No concurring proverbs are known.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ You do not lose anything in paying homage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Diligent work is rewarded ■ One with a kind heart profits him or herself; and <i>vice versa</i> ■ The sluggard suffers hunger, and the diligent person suffers no want ■ Wealth incurs stress; therefore having little but serving the Lord is propitious
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The purpose of the comparisons is to facilitate a better understanding of the Old Testament in Africa. I cite as an example, the legalistic orientation of many groups in Africa (more particularly the Lemba) within a tribal system or within a clan. In the teaching situation, new tutorial matter dealing with codes or commandments in the Old Testament (e.g. the Pentateuch) will link up with learners' own background. Learners may reflect about rules and regulations within their own tribal context (if applicable). It has the added value that such discussions may lead to further qualitative research in this field of study (cf 10.2.1 and ADDENDUM III).

CHAPTER NINE

THE LEMBA AND EARLY ISRAEL AS ORAL CULTURES

In this chapter, I am demonstrating the significance of the predominantly oral nature of sources in the study of religious phenomena amongst the Lemba and early Israel, and what impact orality has on the study of these phenomena. An overview of the transmission of oral traditions in these two oral cultures will be followed by a brief review and evaluation of functioning of traditions within the receptive two cultures. The role of oral traditions in the creation of *identity*, the influence of *change* on oral traditions as well as the effect of *inscripturation* on the shape of oral traditions will, for example, be discussed. These observations are not necessarily systematic, definitive or exhaustive, however they do suggest areas for further investigation (cf the validity of this as suggested by De Bono 1987:37). Furthermore, these observations are incited mainly as I encountered them during the field research. Much of the actual content of the oral traditions in both communities, have been discussed more extensively from a social as well as a religious perspective in Chapters Four to Eight.

Obviously, the notion of 'oral traditions'¹⁴⁸ is very wide and it should be more clearly defined and explained, since various viewpoints and definitions on oral traditions and folklore exist, as well as the possible differences between them. Thus Vansina (1985:27) defines *oral traditions* as 'verbal messages which are reported statements from the past beyond the present generation.' He specifies that the 'message must be oral statements spoken, sung, or called out on musical instruments only', and maintains that 'this distinguishes such sources not only from written messages, but also from all other sources except oral history.' However, oral traditions can also be seen as 'the handing down of folklore from one generation to the next by word of mouth' (Deist 1984:119). *Folklore* can be defined as 'the beliefs, customs, stories and sayings of a community passed on from one generation to another' (Deist 1984:63). Two distinct facets emerge from Vansina and Deist's view, respectively. Vansina (1985:27) defines oral traditions as the *verbal messages themselves*, spoken, sung, called out, et cetera; while Deist defines them as the *process or handing down of folklore* (beliefs, customs, stories, sayings, etc).

For the purpose of this study, I prefer to define 'oral traditions' as that which includes all songs, recitations, prayers, sayings, praises and any historical or cultural statements from the past, transmitted from one generation to another. The term *oral tradition* therefore, applies to both the *process* as well as its *products*. Among the various kinds of historical sources, traditions occupy

¹⁴⁸ In this project, oral traditions which were obtained from the Lemba by means of recorded performances, interviews, etc. during the field work, were translated directly by an interpreter from the original language into English, while they were being taped. Thereafter they were transcribed and documented (cf Chapter One, Methodology). As far as possible the actual words of the participants were retained in the transcription (cf Chapters Four to Eight).

a significant place (cf Nielsen 1961; Culley 1976:31; Vansina 1985:27; Niditch 1993:3; Niditch 1996:18-10).

9.1 ORALITY AMONG THE LEMBA

9.1.1 Transmission of tradition

9.1.1.1 *General remarks*

Oral cultures simply rely much less (mostly not at all) on reading and writing, than do modern cultures. Most Lemba traditions are transmitted by means of songs, sermons, prayers, praises, proverbs, conversations, recitations, symbols, rituals, stories, written documents and numerous other mediums. *Songs, recitations* as well as *certain prayers*, could be described as poems or set speech, which form part of everyday language and which are memorised. Stories and proverbs tend to be transmitted in a less fixed form as spoken prose, whereas praise songs or poems are chanted in various kinds of recitative, employing a semi-musical framework (7.1.1.1 & 7.1.2.1). Performances often combines words, as well as dance and thus traditions can actually be conveyed by means of these performances. One of the striking characteristics of orality over against written literature, is its *verbal variability*.

Messages sung, ensure reliability of transmission, since the 'melody acts as a mnemonic device' (Vansina 1985:16,46). Lemba songs, recitations and prayers are mainly divided into two groups: (i) Those which all (even uncircumcised non-Lemba) may hear; and (ii) those which are kept secret (only known by those people, circumcised by the Lemba). The latter are usually sung or prayed at special occasions, such as at the ritual slaughter of animals, or during the circumcision rites (cf Chapters Four & Seven; Von Sicard 1943; 1963; Finnegan 1976:206).

The transmission of traditions also takes place during festivities and other 'formal' events of the Lemba (of which many are traditional African feasts and rituals) when the Lemba's own cultural traditions are recalled. In this way these are transmitted from one generation to another.

The occasions for public performances as expressions of traditions are limited and can generally only be observed in the field. In many parts of Africa, as well as among the Lemba, these tales are usually not to be told during daytime (cf Vansina 1985:40; Jason 1975b; Nielsen 1961:11; Lord 1960; Culley 1967:9). No definite reasons are given for this, but that the ideal setting is in the evenings, with the family sitting around the fire. Everybody, especially the children listen intently to the old and beautiful stories of the distant past. A tale is acted out with bodily gestures, and those acting will dramatise by raising or lowering their voices. Sometimes a performer may move around, recite a part of the story and even mime parts of the action narrated. The storytellers are usually very creative and can truly make a tale come alive. He or she tries to frighten, to entertain and even to make their audiences worry by using different techniques. Some of course, are more talented than others, but throughout the performance the family or the listeners interact with the storyteller. In order for it to be a success, the story needs to be well-known, which is usually the case. The audience should not be overly preoccupied by concentrating

on the content, that they may enjoy the tale and appreciate the creativity involved in it being told. The manner in which the tales are usually related by the reciters and the effect it can have, becomes unforgettable. Every performance is new, but presupposes something old, the tradition itself. To a certain extent, this is the same with our sermons today – the performance is new, but it presupposes something old (cf Deist 1994:160).

Oral traditions were the ‘vehicle’ whereby I learnt to know the Lemba. Their mode of communication has always been oral traditions and their reception always took place in this way. Unfortunately, this living source is slowly but surely disappearing and the transmission of traditions are kept alive artificially by the annual LCA (Lemba Cultural Association) Conferences. Nevertheless, these traditions are retained and affirmed by these conferences.

9.1.1.2 *The role of the LCA Conferences*

Apart from the routine occasions during which the Lemba convey oral traditions to the younger generation, the LCA annually initiates the holding of a special conference at Sweet Waters, Elim in the Northern Province and also at other places on special occasions. Apparently, the Lemba hold their conference as closely as possible to 10 October, which is Paul Kruger’s birthday. This expresses their appreciation for the role Paul Kruger played as President of the ZAR (Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek; 1884-1902) in their history, when in public he declared the Lemba to be ‘Jews’. In certain sources, the Lemba is known as ‘Kruger’s Jews’ (cf Parfitt 1992:25). The LCA Conference event also falls closely to the Jewish New Year. I would not be surprised if in future, on account of influence from Jewish groups who wants to invest into the Lemba communities, this annual meeting will loose its ‘original’ connection (with Kruger) and be linked to the Jewish New Year.

In 1998 the Lemba invited a few rabbi’s to the annual Conference, but they could not attend since the Conference was held on the same date as *Yom Kippur* (the Day of Atonement). The Lemba never held Yom Kippur before, but we (Parfitt and I) were just wondering what effect this incident would have on their planning for the Conference and their own traditions in future (cf *Photo 12*).

However, during these (LCA) occasions every possible means of communication is used to confirm their identity and to transmit this to the next generation. At these conferences the participants are addressed as ‘children of Abraham’ and their ‘Jewish’ customs, costumes and traditions are conveyed and displayed very explicitly.

Moreover, the proceedings are invariably opened by a Christian Lemba minister, (usually Chaplain Mhani; cf *Photo 11*) with Scripture reading (usually from the Old Testament) and prayer (LCA Conferences and programmes). The gowns and Jewish caps of the Lemba leaders and the T-shirts worn by many others often bear the Star of David with their totem¹⁴⁹, an elephant, inside

¹⁴⁹ Deist (1984:175) defines a totem as ‘the creature or object venerated in totemism’ or totemism as ‘the belief that some animal, plant or other natural object is a benefactor of one’s tribe or clan and belongs to it or is ancestrally related to it.’

(cf Chapter Three; cf *Photo 51*). Some respondents tell that the people in the Wedza district in Zimbabwe, have an elephant with a star on its forehead as a totem, because a star guided them southwards in Africa. The Lemba explain that an elephant always remembers and therefore reminds them that they should remember their history and traditions.

It appears that during the LCA Conferences, there is a conscious transferral and reinforcement of cultural identity. The Lemba narratives that are told or acted out at such occasions mainly reflect their understanding of their origin and the belief that their religio-cultural practices were transmitted by their Jewish ancestors.

9.1.2 The functioning of oral traditions among the Lemba

Every tradition has a particular purpose and therefore fulfills a particular function, otherwise it would not survive. It is impossible to list all possible purposes or functions that may be connected to a given tradition within the purview of this chapter, therefore, only a few possible ways of functioning will be discussed below.

9.1.2.1 Different and similar oral traditions within a group and between groups

A salient characteristic of the investigation into the Lemba communities, is the many similar traditions and practices that can be found among different Lemba groups in Southern Africa. Some of these even correspond to those of some Jewish groups in Yemen (cf Chapters Two & Three; Parfitt 1997a:332; Gotein 1969:228ff). It is remarkable that there should be these correspondences of *same traditions and sense of belonging, in spite of the remoteness of location and language* (cf 9.1.2.6, below). Respondents from different places, from different social classes in society and even from different language groups agree as to their initial origin from Israel and also on the many traditions surrounding their numerous practices and rituals.

The comparison of variants (gathered during the field research) shows which traditional elements have remained the same. Many different groups in Southern Africa (and some in Yemen) agree about the following:

- (i) that they came from the North, from a place called Sena, on the other side of the Phusela and they crossed the sea by boat;
- (ii) they came as traders to Africa;
- (iii) they are 'children of Abraham' and the 'chosen people';
- (iv) non-Lemba people are *vhasendji* (heathen);
- (v) they are people with special skills which their neighbours could envy;
- (vi) the way in which they conduct male circumcision;
- (vii) traditions on female initiation ceremonies;
- (viii) traditions on dietary laws;
- (ix) the stories surrounding their sacred mountains and rivers;
- (x) the new moon ceremony;
- (xi) their marriage customs;

- (xii) slaughtering rituals;
- (xiii) burial customs;
- (xiv) different feasts;
- (xv) among most of the groups one finds a strong reaction to the idea that they may be from Muslim origin (cf Chapter Eight); and many more.

That these widely scattered Lemba communities in Southern Africa (and even the groups in Yemen have some) have the same traditions on ancestry and practices, cannot easily be explained, and this is remarkable. There may sometimes be differences about a specific oral tradition within the same group, however interpretations of traditions, or the stories behind a ritual may also differ from one group to another. So the groups in the southern parts of Zimbabwe perceive the *circumcision* of males as the occasion for 'new-comers' to become *part of the Covenant with God*. Only individuals who probably earlier had contact with the groups in Zimbabwe, or who knew the Old Testament connection between circumcision and covenant, have the same interpretation or link for this tradition. However, I hardly ever got the impression that the interviewees or respondents were trying to impress me (or anyone else) with information they gained from the Bible. Thus they may not have been influenced by their knowledge of the Bible.

It is primarily *the leaders* within the various communities, such as the high priest in Mberengwa and Mathivha (president of the LCA), who emphasise the connection between the Covenant and male circumcision. In the past Mathivha often had contact with the groups in Zimbabwe, and could possibly have come to know this emphasis during his first visits to this area. It might also be, that the traditions *have not yet reached all the clans*, and therefore they do not yet share the same frame of reference. However, the principle or motif behind the Covenant relationship, namely that they are a chosen people with special skills, is also present with all other groups. More complete information concerning circumcision will still be disseminated to other groups by means of their leaders, by the written word, or even by the church (especially the African Independent or Initiated Churches) which places strong emphasis on the customs and traditions of the Old Testament.

Nevertheless, *not everyone* necessarily accepts new elements which are added from outside their clan to old existing traditions. They do take cognisance of new information, but in more than one case the respondent merely kept to that which had been transmitted to him/her in his/her specific group. So most respondents say they came from Israel, but some individuals say they came from Egypt, Ethiopia or Arabia. Similarly only individuals (e.g. the traditional healer in Sekhukhuland) propagate female circumcision (by means of an operation; cf 7.1.1.2). Other individuals again maintain that they always kept a day of fasting (7.1.2.4), or a day of rest, specifically called the Sabbath (cf 7.1.2.4). The groups in the former Venda and Sekhukhuland do not have the same remembrance of the role that the *ngoma lungundu* ('the drum that thunders') played in their history, as have the groups in the southern parts of Zimbabwe (cf 6.1.3).

The question remains: Why do different groups and sometimes members of the same group, differ about certain aspects of a tradition, and conversely, why is there sometimes concurrence among them about other traditions? To answer this question, Vansina (1985:55) surmises that it may help to inquire into the *sources* of the authors' traditions. He asserts that if these sources are still alive, one can inquire from them about other versions of the same traditions. With the present Lemba people as a living source, one is to some extent fortunate that one can still verify some of their traditions. However, in most cases, I experienced that the respondents simply received their stories from their parents or grandparents. A respondent would not speak if a parent, grandparent or even an elder brother or sister are still alive, and if they could speak on behalf of the extended family. Most of the time I found that the versions of the extended family are exactly the same as those of their descendants. Many random inquiries were done during the field work, in which individuals, some independent younger and older from the same and different communities. However, very few significant differences were detected.

The answer to the differences in tradition, probably lies in the Lemba comprising of different clans (cf 3.2.3.1) who each had its own historical and genealogical background. The traditions of each clan play a unique role in their identity formation and yet they all were known as the Lemba.

In the course of time, if the Lemba would manage to obtain their own territory or homeland somewhere in Southern Africa, they will be consolidated and their few differences will fade, and they will perhaps be 'one' religious and cultural entity (see below).

9.1.2.2 *Oral traditions, the expression of a world-view and the creation of identity*

Often the ideal to which a group have to conform, is preserved in their oral traditions which mirror society and express world-views. People in a community share many representations (of their world-view) which are collective and dear to them and which differ from others (Vansina 1985:114-133). Therefore, traditions often provide a mechanism for leaders whereby to exert a hold and establish control over a community or traditions could be used as a *raison d'etre* (justification) for existing traditions.

In more than one instance, *charismatic leaders exert a major influence* over a community (cf 9.1.2.1; cf *Photo 12*). It is, therefore, significant to realise that most of the Lemba in the southern parts of Zimbabwe, and many in Sekhukhuneland, neither know Mathivha, nor do have they ever attended the LCA Conferences. In fact, few respondents have read Mathivha's book on their traditions. Obviously, those who attend the LCA Conferences are being exposed to information from different sources. It is this which gives the concurring traditions in the different communities so much more credibility, since it implies that not everything written down or said by the leaders, necessarily reached a scattered group such as the Lemba.

It once again becomes clear that traditions bind people together and play an immense role in the *creation of identity*. All the Lemba songs, recitations and myths are not merely to entertain the listeners, but give them a sense of belonging, since these have a rhetorical function and may

contribute to the reproduction of knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and ideologies of a group as a whole (cf Mumby 1993:125; cf Chapters Four to Eight). Mumby agrees that these traditions reinforce their values, and give them a vision of their origin and hope for the future (1993:125). There has been repeated writing about identity and religion, particularly that those traditions with a religious inclination are more effective in preserving identity.

Without doubt, the Lemba believe that they are unique and have special qualities and skills which their neighbours could envy. This strong sense of 'ethnic otherness,' possibly attracted the Lemba to Judaism and more specifically to the Old Testament, and *reinforced ancient traditions* and customs, since Judaism represents exclusivity, which entirely correlates with the view the Lemba have of themselves (cf Chapter Two; D:K:5; D:O:11; D:1:B:24,25).

The fact that some of the Lemba have been exposed to the Bible and its narratives, or may have read the written records of their customs and traditions, certainly strengthened their traditions and sense of uniqueness. In other instances they were estranged from their own 'sinful' culture by the influence and interpretation of certain missionaries (D:D; D:E).

Especially, when the account of their origin is the only remaining evidence for common identity or when groups feel *threatened by complete assimilation*, then it seems to be that the emphasis in the narratives on their common ancestry is a cohesive factor.

9.1.2.3 *Inscription of oral traditions*

To a certain extent, a reinforcement and confirmation of the identity of the Lemba have been consolidated when their traditions were written down by some of their leaders and other observers. Except for the short notes and articles of Lemba authors such as Mphelo (1936), Mudau (1940), Mamadi (1940), Motenda-Mbelengwa (1958), Marole (1969), Moeti (1989) and others, Mathivha (1992) was the first to have put into writing all possible oral traditions of their culture. It is still remarkable that so many Lemba already have put some of the traditions into writing.

After the field research was undertaken, I read Mathivha's book (for the first time) and some of the other authors' articles, and soon I realised that the stories of the people at grass roots level sometimes *differ from those which are written down*. You often find an author's own elaborations and editing of the beliefs of the people. This may not have been done on purpose, but happened when the authors wrote down one side of a story, while there are more than one way to interpret certain aspects of their beliefs. The traditions that are written down are not necessarily the oldest or the closest to the 'original' practice, if that could have been known. An opinion is often only one person's opinion or one clan's interpretation or perception of a specific event or practice. The same bias or limitation obviously is true of the present writing by myself.

Furthermore, it became clear that traditions once written down were exposed to the world-view and editing of the redactor or writer, which then became fossilised (cf Niditch 1997). Niditch (1996:44) aptly reminds of the truism that 'a person leaves traces of himself in his writing.' However, if it were not for the reports of the Arabian and Portuguese seafarers, the

ethnographers, missionaries (cf Chapters Two & Three), the Lemba themselves as well as that of many others, many of their oral traditions would have been lost.

Without doubt, *oral traditions were never intended to be written down* or to be deposited in writing. By themselves oral traditions have the function or the nature of being adaptable and have the potential for repeated innovation. Although this might be true, it might happen that a written work may be 're-oralised', or made the core of a new orally created work, especially when the conveyer has received new information or something he or she wants to add. Mathivha (1998) for example simply added the information of the current genetic research being done, which remarkably correlates with the story on the Buba clan he had already written down years ago (1992:9; cf 3.3.1.1). It is wrong to think that once reading and writing are available, oral culture dies. The *oral culture* of the Lemba *continues* even though literacy becomes more common (cf Niditch 1996:4; Finnegan 1976).

Another inference that can be drawn, is that the *written text has had little influence* on the people at grass roots level so far (as already mentioned above). Most interviews were conducted with people who have not yet read the book or articles by fellow Lemba, or with people who have not yet attended any LCA Conferences. I have also found that many of the respondents do not necessarily concur with the stories or interpretations of the leaders at the conferences. In fact, many of them stubbornly cling to that which was transmitted by their direct forebears. They will take cognisance of what others may have said, but that is not how it was transmitted to them. I often experienced how a person or persons would patiently listen to another's narrative or story without arguing or indicating that they do not agree and would then in their turn give a completely different interpretation or version of the same story or tell a completely different story altogether. This may mean that they do not necessarily think that another person's version is wrong but that it is just different.

The saying 'once we had a book because we were a holy people....', could allude to the impression that some of the ancestors of the Lemba were familiar with reading (and writing) long ago, even before colonisation in Africa took place. Although there is no proof of such a 'book', this book could greatly have influenced their oral traditions, their view of God and self-identity (cf Othenius 1938:65-70).

One of the main reasons, as far as I can judge, why the Lemba started writing down their oral traditions, is perhaps that they became aware that they and their customs are unique and that they felt threatened by complete assimilation by other peoples. Mathivha and other scholars, before him, were concerned about this 'enemy' from within (cf 8.1.7) – that their traditions of origin and other special customs would not be preserved for their descendants.

9.1.2.4 *The change of oral traditions at different times*

One of the main characteristics of oral traditions is their *malleability*, therefore one might for instance find that a significant historical perspective could originate from an existing political situation (cf Chapter Two). In this way oral traditions reflect a group's world-views, values, sense

of identity and ideology. A group may often revert to their *oral traditions* as resource during a phase of renewal or change (Parfitt 1995; cf Chapter Two). The account of Mahumane in 1728 (Liesegang 1977) shows that from the early eighteenth to the second half of the nineteenth centuries cultural and political changes occurred which influenced the Lemba's self-identification (cf 3.2.3).

In 1995 Parfitt (1995:3) maintained that the Lemba possibly made a religious shift towards 'Jewishness' under the oppressive political system of the British in the former Rhodesia. However, in the meantime the remarkable results of the genetic tests, may have changed his mind regarding a religious shift of the Lemba to some extent.¹⁵⁰ However, the possibility may still exist that the Lemba, at the time of British oppression, could have fallen back on ancient traditions and customs, or that these may have been strengthened in the process.

As far as can be determined the Lemba had no specific tradition of a 'promised land' in Africa, that they may have adapted their tradition to this. However, they believed that Mwari lead them very specifically by means of a star to Southern Africa and the various places they had to live (cf 6.1.3). From here they dispersed in different groups and over great distances.

It is interesting that they have tried, on government level for the last number of years, to negotiate for themselves an own territory in the new South Africa. They especially claim the area in the vicinity of the mission station at Mara (Northern Province), where many Lemba still dwell, and where there is mention of holy places. Whether this is feasible under the notion of the so-called 'rainbow nation' for the New South Africa, still needs to be seen.

The political situation in South Africa in the past forty to fifty years, actually provided the Lemba with the unique opportunity to consolidate their own homeland (with the right to self determination). However, for various reasons they did not claim this right. After the 1994 elections, it came to light that many of the Lemba did not consider it to be politically correct to disclose their possible link to a race with a white identity somewhere outside Africa, and rather kept quiet about it. In this way no mention was made of their own unique identity during the census, and they existed as Sothos, Vendas or whoever. In other words, current politics did 'change' and influence their oral tradition, or kept them from living out or conveying their traditions to the full.

9.1.2.5 *A fusion of traditions*

It is possible that a mixing of traditions could have taken place as far as the origin and other traditions of the Lemba is concerned. Oral traditions *do not provide* us with chronology and therefore hundreds or even thousands of years could have elapsed between the oldest historical core of a tradition and the next. When they tell their stories there is no notion that time has

¹⁵⁰ In the meantime, it has become known that the whole of the Lemba (over against other groups in Africa, such as the Falasha) do not only reveal strong Semitic elements, but that particularly the priests among the Lemba, the so-called Buba clan, are carriers of the specific hereditary mark of the כהנים (priesthood) in Jerusalem (and elsewhere).

elapsed. For example, the oldest historical nucleus is probably that they came from a very remote place on the other side of the Phusela, to this country. However, the time when they lived among the Banyai could have been hundreds of years later (cf 3.2.1.2 & 6.1.2).

Another example of this possible assimilation of traditions is that which Marole (1969:4) recorded about the Vhasia who were known for their beautiful girls (cf 3.2.2). The same is also said about the Lemba, that they were known for their beautiful girls. A specific praise song emphasises: '*Mbelengwa has beauties*' (Marole 1969:4). Do we have a mixture of different traditions to which the Lemba adapted? Or did both groups have beautiful girls? We do not know.

9.1.2.6 *Oral traditions, archaeology and genetics*

(a) Archaeology and other groups' traditions

One advantage of dealing with (or doing research on) a 'living source', is that the researcher can sometimes check some of the information on traditions provided. Remarkable confirmation for some names and places referred to in the traditions of the Lemba, are for example found by different researchers:

- (i) The Lemba aver that they came from a city on the other side of the Phusela, called *Sena*. Parfitt claims to have found an ancient city named *Sena*, at the end of the *wadi* Hadramaut, just before the valley turns away towards the sea (as mentioned above). It was situated on the trade route, from the sea to Terim (cf 3.3.1.1; Parfitt 1997:336).
- (ii) The valley that leads from *Sena* in the eastern Hadramaut (in Yemen) to an old port on the Yemeni coast called *Sayhut*, is the *Wadi al-Masilah*. Parfitt (1997:336; cf *Map I*) believes that *Masilah* may be the 'Phusela' of Lemba oral tradition.
- (iii) It is furthermore, remarkable that some of the clan and sub-clan names of the Lemba correlate with commonplace names (Hadrami names) in the eastern Hadramaut. Not one of them had the means to ascertain in advance, whether their clan names correlated with the commonplace names in the Hadramaut. One conclusion is that their *oral traditions are very old*. Obviously, it took more than just two or three generations to have migrated from Yemen to Southern Africa. All this implies that an oral tradition can *survive many generations* within a group.
- (iv) The Lemba tradition is perpetuated, namely that they rebuilt the city of *Sena* in Africa, on the Zambezi, which has also been located by many scholars, who traced their trail from Southern Africa northwards to their 'vanished city' (as Parfitt calls it, 1997:336).
- (v) One of the praises of the Lemba refers to the Hadzi-Mberengwa clan as the 'Good Men' and to Mberengwa Mountain as the 'mountain of the Good Men' (cf 6.1.2). Parfitt (1992:18) was similarly amazed to find an area (on an old map) that had indeed been named by Vasco da Gama as 'the Land of the Good People' – *Terra da Boa*

Gente, not far from Sena on the Zambezi, in the vicinity of Cape Correntes (cf *Map II*).

- (vi) According to *folklore* of the Yemenite Jews, their ancient forebears migrated from Palestine to Yemen, exactly forty-two years before the destruction of the First Temple (3.2.1.2). This is again in concurrence with the above mentioned tradition of origin of the Lemba.
- (vii) Islamic and Christian inscriptions, as well as *inscriptions* written in the Himyarite language bear witness of Jewish presence in Yemen the centuries immediately preceding Islam (Aharoni 1986:25; cf Goitein 1969:226; 3.2.1.2).
- (viii) Another *tradition* in Yemen, propagates that centuries ago a group of Jews left Yemen for Africa and did not return (cf Beeston 1952:16-22; cf 3.2.1.2).
- (ix) Interestingly, Nehemiah 7 refers to all the different groups of Israelites who returned to Israel after the Exile. Verse 38 specifically mentions the return of the 'children of Sénaä'. Where or who was this place or people? The possibility that some of the children of Sénaä escaped the exile by fleeing into the Arabian Peninsula, such as indicated on *inscriptions* found in Israel (Niditch 1996:47-48), should be considered.

(b) Genetics

In 1992, a study using Y-chromosome markers suggested both a Bantu and *Semitic* contribution to the Lemba gene pool, which is once again consistent with Lemba oral tradition (Spurdle and Jenkins 1992). Referring to the genetic results at that stage, Jones (1996)¹⁵¹ already concluded: 'The Lemba legend of their origin contains a hidden truth'. But this was not yet the end of the story.

In order to get a more detailed picture of the Lemba paternal genetic heritage, 399 Y-chromosomes from 'six micro satellites and six balletic markers in six populations (Lemba, Bantu, Yemeni-Hadramaut, Yemeni-Sena, Sephardic Jews and Ashkenazic Jews)' were analysed (Thomas et al 1998). The results show a significant similarity between markers of many of the Hadramaut Y-chromosomes and those taken earlier from the Lemba (cf 3.3.1.1).

It is known that a male could only become a Jewish priest (כֹּהֵן), if his father was a priest, therefore, it is assumed that a distinctive pattern on the Y-chromosome should be found among members of the Jewish priesthood. As part of an international project to determine whether all progeny of the כֹּהֲנִים (priesthood in Jerusalem and elsewhere; with a possible ancestor such as Aaron), carry one or other characteristic pattern or marker on their DNA, I was involved, among others, in the collecting of the DNA of the various Lemba groups in Southern Africa, and sending these to 'The Centre for Genetic Anthropology, University College, London'.

The results were remarkable. Further support for Lemba oral history came specifically from the Buba-Cohen Modal Haplotype (CMH) Association. The very recent (1997) DNA samples

¹⁵¹ BBC Television series: 'Origin'.

taken from the *Buba*, the most senior clan and *original priesthood* of the Lemba (mainly in Sekhukhuneland, RSA) showed the CMH, the distinctive genetic pattern on the Y-chromosome. In 1999 Thomas (et al, in press; cf Ahuja 1999) went even further by adding that the 'CMH present in the Lemba could, however, have an *exclusively Jewish* origin ...' ([my italics]; cf 3.3.1.1).

To conclude, one could say that the archaeological, genetic and other evidence in the results reported above, which '[involve] an origin in a "Jewish" population outside Africa, male mediated gene flow from other Semitic immigrants and admixture with Bantu neighbours' is in more than one way compatible with the Lemba oral traditions and history ([my insertion], Thomas et al [2000]).

9.2 ORALITY AMONG EARLY ISRAEL

Many modern scholars still admit a discomfort to associate folklore or oral traditions with the Bible (cf Gunkel 1987:33; Zakovitch 1990/1:235), although the work of others such as Culley, Sasson, Niditch and Hendel have gained new acceptance among contemporary Bible scholars. The point of departure for the acceptance of orality, is that the 'Old Testament is a creation of the post-Exilic Jewish community, of what existed earlier undoubtedly only a small part was in fixed written form ...' (Nyberg 1935:8, in Nielsen 1961:39; cf Kaiser 1978). From this perspective the specific parts of the Old Testament, which originated or had their origin in early Israel, were given an own place in history.

Gottwald (1985:94-96) surmises that the oral traditions formed part of the historical consciousness of Israelite clans, as early as 1200 BC. Although, it could only be related historically as far back as the existence of 'Israel' as a 'national' entity, only after settlement in the land (cf Noth [1958]1983:111,117-118; 1981:258), in other words, during 'the period of the Judges'. The Exodus group could obviously already foster their ideas and traditions, but most of the oral traditions which functioned in early Israel, were only finally written down five hundred or more years *after* these events. Thus the *distance in time* complicates ascertaining of the *historicity* of the traditions. Nevertheless, it is a fixed datum that no oral tradition was 'preserved' to this day – the reworked, written sources and material remains are all that we have to work with (Lemche 1988:55). Only a few traditions, or fragments of these, could possibly have remained orally, if they were not recorded in writing very early.

I am not arguing a case for Old Testament traditions and their origin, but I am trying to argue how certain Old Testament traditions could have been made relevant. Also how they could have functioned within the communities of early Israel, in the light of what is now learnt from an existing oral culture such as the Lemba. It is a matter of function over against 'textualism'.

9.2.1 Transmission of traditions

9.2.1.1 General remarks

It appears from available data in the Old Testament as if traditions in early Israel were transmitted from one generation to another, by means of sermons, prayers, praises, proverbs, recitations, fables, and other media. Two of the oldest sections in the Hebrew Bible are songs (cf e g the

Song of Miriam in Ex 15; and the Song of Deborah in Jdg 5), incidentally both of these were 'created' by women. Both of these deal with the early history of Israel, and in both the great deeds of Yahweh are sung. Although inscripturated, they most probably had had an oral phase.

The oral traditions handed down from one person or group to another, were *still in a state of flux*. In other words, what was handed down was not identical to what they originally received. The personal faith of each individual added to his or her own perspective (of the tradition transmitted), since their current faith was greater than its history (cf Brummer 1998:8). As in other pre-industrial cultures, each version should perhaps be seen as a different 'performance' (cf 9.1.1; Niditch 1987:23), keeping in mind the possible authors and audiences to whom, and for whom, each narration of the tale would have been relevant and meaningful (Culley 1976:33-41). These different versions or parallels of the same narrative often occur on the pages of the Old Testament and should be interpreted as such. Precisely how traditions were transmitted, and during which occasions, is not certain, but, we may be able to learn this from other existing 'oral cultures', how this may have taken place.

9.2.1.2 *The influence of assemblies at the sanctuaries*

The typical location where clans would have had the opportunity to exchange their traditions, was at the sanctuaries (such as Shechem and others; Noth 1943:47ff; Schmidt 1983:116; Deist 1985:30-34; cf Jdg 4:6,12,14; Jos 24; 9.2.2.6) although not all clans or people might have attended those meetings. The clans of Israel had many festive occasions during which they met. Not all of these were linked to religious events, but they had a religious character and took place at the sanctuary. It is not certain if these festivities only took place sporadically, or whether there were fixed religious feast days. Two important liturgical calendars are found in the Old Testament – in Exodus 23:14-17 and in 34:18-23. Reference is made here to three great annual feasts of the Canaanites, which were taken over by the Israelites, namely the feast of the Unleavened Bread, and the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of the Harvest (De Vaux 1973:471).

The clans who met in this way, and who more or less shared the same idea about God, were probably the 'people of the patriarchs' who lived in Canaan, and who worshipped the *God of the fathers* (or then *El* worshippers). There could also have been the Joseph people, who also served the *God of the fathers*, and shared the traditions of the miraculous deliverance from Egypt by Yahweh. Furthermore, there were the Moses people, with their specific tradition of Sinai and their notion of the *only God*, who had to be served and honoured, according to his stipulations (cf Deist 1985:33). At the sanctuaries and other places of gathering, much moulding of traditions probably took place and these were adapted to suit the faith needs of the people.

Thus it was at the sanctuaries that the clans joined in the Canaanite agricultural feasts, probably during their worship of Baal as god of fertility. Here they also felt the need and desire to proclaim and sing about the redemptive acts of Yahweh (cf 7.2.2.2) and other traditions.

9.2.2 The functioning of oral traditions

9.2.2.1 *Different and similar oral traditions within a group and between groups*

It may be accepted that there were a number of clans in early Israel, who were related, and who shared the same idea about Yahweh and his great deeds of the past. It may also be accepted that the 'people of the patriarchs', the Joseph people, and the Moses people all had their own and unique religious traditions (Deist 1985:33; cf 9.2.1.2). Noth (1981:47-51; [1958]1983:111; Gottwald 1980:88,93-99) also identifies a number of traditions which could have served as a historical basis for the clans of Israel, such as:

- (i) the deliverance from Egypt and the concomitant slavery when building the cities of Pithom and Raamses;
- (ii) the entry of certain Israelite clans from the Southern Transjordanian region;
- (iii) the narratives concerning the patriarchs, and
- (iv) Moses, as well as meeting God at Sinai.

These narratives were probably the oldest traditions which were in circulation in early Israel. A number of clans or tribes possessed more than one of these traditions, which eventually became the possession of all Israel, probably because they became written down in the process.

The traditions of the various clans differed from each other, but they were nevertheless, to a certain extent also close to one another. The chronological arrangement of the various narratives in the Old Testament was probably the work of later authors. Their respective understanding about God and about their past had to be lined up with those of other groups, and thus the receptive traditions also influenced one another. This does not imply that all the clans all of a sudden came to accept the others', but this was some kind of evolutionary process. It may have been that some of the clans lived in different geographical locations in those early days and did not want to accept the other clans' traditions. Perhaps some only clung to that which was conveyed to them, and to other, acceptance of other traditions was easier. Nevertheless, it could be accepted that there was a cross-fecundation of the different traditions (cf Deist 1985).

It could have been difficult for the people of the patriarchs to accept that Yahweh demanded at Sinai that He *alone* should be served, since they were probably quite used to the polytheism of the Canaanites. Another example of the diversity that became one unity belief system, is that the making of the Covenant was not part of all the clans' experience (cf Chapter Five; Deist 1985:33), but eventually this became part of the tradition of the entire nation of Israel (cf Hab 3:3; Ps 68, etc).

9.2.2.2 *Oral traditions, the expression of a world-view and the creation of identity*

Oral traditions do reflect the Israelite world-views, values, sense of identity and ideology. 'World-view' includes symbolic patterns which are acted out in ritual performance, retold in stories and encapsulated in proverbs or parables (cf Niditch 1997:4; Georges 1968:169). World-views reflected in traditions, provide answers to some of the difficult questions human beings have to deal with.

However, variations in world-views occur even among people who understand themselves to be part of the same religious tradition (Smart 1983:22-27). Variation and nuances imbue Israel's world-view which is clear from the different ways in which God is perceived in their oral traditions (cf 5.1.2). God is seen by some clans as the Deliverer who brought them out of slavery, no images should be made of him and his name is not to be used inappropriately. The Covenant in other clans' world-view is a manifestation of a relationship between Israel and God, with specific obligations for both partners (cf 5.1.2). These rights and obligations are also reflected in violent manifestations of the divine (e.g. at Sinai; cf 5.2.3). Other examples that form an integral part of their world-view are the ideas that *mountains* are the dwelling place of the divine (cf 5.1.4; 5.2.4) that care should be taken for kin and that hospitality is of utmost importance (cf Culley 1976; 8.1.3.1[d]).

Leaders obviously also played a great role in the expression and transmission of a particular world-view or identity. In Joshua 24, Joshua puts the nation before the decision to choose who they want to serve in future. He then announces that he and his house will henceforth serve the Lord of the Covenant. From this it may be inferred that different groups of people were not all of the same mind. All traditions did also not necessarily reach all the clans at the same time, since they lived over a wide area. During the occasion at Shechem a renewal festival of the Covenant was celebrated, the Covenant stipulations were presented, traditions were exchanged, and certain elements were added to the various 'world-views' (cf Noth 1943:47ff). However, a leader such as Joshua, frequently hears the God of the Covenant saying: 'Kill and destroy'. This contributes to the idea of Yahweh being a God of war, who acts with military might to ensure the victory over their enemies. Kripke (1980:114) points out that there are two necessary conditions to maintain the identity of a name: the continuity of its history, as well as the fixed origin to which it is linked by this continuous history.

Oral traditions probably obtained a prominent place in the clans of Israel, because it was important to *confirm their identity and uniqueness*, in the midst of a multiplicity of other nations who also laid claims to the same land (cf Le Roux 1994:178ff). Questions concerning their self-identification are answered when referring to their covenant relationship with God and the tradition that they are his special 'chosen people'. *Creation stories similarly reinforce identity* in times of uncertainty (Niditch 1997:51; cf 6.1.2). Creation mythology offers a sense of shared identity. More than one story describe the primordial roots, of how life began (Gn 2).

9.2.2.3 *Inscription of oral traditions*

Gottwald (1985:94 and others) accepts that most Biblical literature had a complex and deep seated oral tradition. That is, before anything was written down, there were already oral traditions which were transmitted from generation to generation. The question is whether any oral traditions from early Israel were written down in that period or not and this question is obviously related to whether there was a mastery of writing in early Israel or not.

It is quite generally accepted that the development of the alphabet was done by the Canaanites and Phoenicians, and that it was already developed in the period of the Judges (Ap-Thomas 1973:261-275; antecedents in Mesopotamia). This development can probably be relegated to the continuous correspondence (in Accadian cuneiform writing) which took place between the Canaanite kings and the Egyptian rulers (ANET:485-490ff). Demsky (1977:21) is of the opinion that the need to write down Canaanite language and literature existed. Some of these Canaanite authors experimented a little with these cuneiforms in their correspondence with the Egyptians.

An indication that the art of writing was practised in early Israel, is the references to the official from Succoth who was able to provide Joshua, in writing, with seventy seven names of officials and leaders from that area (Jdg 8:14). Demsky (1977:24) emphasises that the official from Succoth was not an Israelite, but that a leader such as Gideon possibly realised the value of the art of writing as it was practiced amongst the Canaanites. He surmises that the Israelites began their own schools for writing for administrative purposes, in the region of the Joseph tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh.

In addition (according to Demsky 1977:23), the Song of Deborah (Jdg 5) which is invariably linked to the period of the Judges (cf Gottwald 1985:96; De Moor 1993:484; 1990:110,173,198; Föhrer 1968), again confirms to possible literacy among the Israelite clans (5:14): 'from Machir commanders come down, and from Zebulun those who wield the *staff of office*.' Demsky (1977:23 n 21) translates 'staff of office' with 'the scribe's staff', but acknowledges that the interpretation of *בַּשֵּׁבֶט סֵפֶר* is not without problems. Demsky (1977:23) further refers to the important discovery made at 'Izbet Sartah (Aphek). According to him, the oldest, most complete proto-Canaanite 'abecedary' from the 12th century before Christ, was discovered here (cf Niditch 1996:109).

It is thus likely that some (possibly the elite) of the Israelite clans in the period of the Judges could read and write – especially the group who dwelt for a long time in the land – among the Canaanites or who came from Canaanite circles. Joshua 18:8, 9 refers to the 'writing up' of a description of the land and its cities and in Numbers 33:2, Moses is said to have written down the Israelites' itinerary by command of the Lord. Niditch (1996:94) avers that the reference to a written source is used to validate the tradition – to imply that this really is the way things were (cf Lemaire 1981:59; Williams 1962:915; Millard 1987:26:26,29).

It is not that ancient Israelites knew little of writing, but rather that Israelite literacy is not to be confused with modern literacy and that ancient Israelite literacy has to be understood in the context of an oral-traditional culture (Niditch 1996:99,100). That implies that 'doorway writing' or 'body writing' (Dt 6:4-9) could be metonymic and symbolic, a means of reminding one, who sees (or wears) in the writing, God's larger demands – the essentials of Israelite religion.

As far as the inscripturation of oral traditions are concerned the Book of Judges witnesses a long period of development, during which it can be supposed that several editors were at work. Since the book was only compiled about five hundred years after the events (for the first time as

part of the Deuteronomistic History) it appears to be rigorously edited material. The original text was apparently reworked more than once to suit the purposes of the editors. It appears that the writer or writers of the text among others knew about the patriarchs, the Exodus and the settlement of the land. Whether and which traditions were already written down in early Israel or earlier, is a tenuous guess, but examples of these are possibly (i) the oldest narratives about the persons of the judges (cf Culley 1992:97-108), (ii) the victory song of Deborah (Jdg 4 and 5) and (iii) other material which shows nomadic features.

Richter (1964:113-141) identifies sections in the present Book of Judges, which he argues, were originally part of the so-called *Rettersbuch* (Saviour's Book). He refers to the narratives of Ehud (Jdg 3:15b-26, the only part that was probably transmitted in its original form; cf Culley 1992:99); Jael (4:17a, 18-21[22]), as well as the sections about the Gideon traditions (Judges 7:11b, 13-21; 8:5-9, 14-21a), with 9:56 as the conclusion. Richter (1964:113-141; cf also Mayes 1985:22,32; Van Seters 1983:343; O'Brien 1989) surmises that these narratives were possibly the oldest texts, or the first edition to which there were later expansions. But even these narratives were firstly narrated orally (probably already during the times of the Judges), before they were written down. The majority of scholars (cf Noth [1958]1983; Manley 1988; Herrmann 1981; Jagersma 1982; Schmidt 1983) accept the historicity of the traditions, without accepting the present chronology or factual correctness.

Gordon (1985:124) is convinced that the earliest inscriptions of the victories of the Israelites were probably described in the 'Book of the Wars of the LORD (Yahweh)' (Nm 21:14) – this book no longer exists. He is further of the opinion that some of the ancient war cries were preserved in Numbers 10 and Judges 7:18.

From the much later Targums (200 BC) we know that ancient translators thought themselves to be part of the living tradition and therefore, felt free to change and adapt their source texts (Swanepoel 1994:148). It is clear that they did not share, with modern Bible readers, the idea of a 'fixed' or 'final' text. In this sense they were *performers rather than translators*: Larger and smaller variations in a story could occur instantaneously. It is also clear that not all stories or traditions were written down. In other words it was left to the authors to write down or omit what they felt inspired to do. This is the text that we have today. Nevertheless, a reinforcement of their identity probably took place when their traditions were written down (cf Niditch 1996:44; 1997; Mumby 1993:1-11).

9.2.2.4 *Changing oral traditions at different times*

Narratives are the mechanisms which can solve a current problem. These problems often move people to make a 'religious shift', or it causes them to *re-live or confirm* traditions about origins. Mumby (1993:1-11) explains this phenomenon: '[W]e need our myths and stories, but these stories are not fixed. They change as time changes. Stories help us to control our environment – a form of social control.'

Oral traditions were possibly the cohering factor in early Israel, but they also fulfilled a need or had a political function at various times, namely to justify (in times of uncertainty) claims to the land. This especially at the beginning when Israel were establishing themselves in the 'Promised Land', then again later during the Exile – and even today. It was probably much later, during times of 'cultural diffusion', that most of early Israel's traditions of origin were written down. They felt confused and threatened during their Babylonian captivity, being confronted with all the creation stories and stories about the beginning of all things. Therefore, some of the traditions can be described as sacred, imbued with a political tenor. Furthermore, each of these above-mentioned traditions also obtained cultic significance, since the clans linked the one or other cultic activity or confession to it (Noth 1981:257; cf Deist 1985:34,35).

Many different circumstances might change a particular tradition. For example the version of the conquest of the 'Promised Land' by the Israelite clans, it that of a *military conquest* (Jos 1-12), while the first chapter of Judges reflects a totally different story. According to that version the Israelites *could not invade* most of the Canaanite city-states as narrated in Joshua 1-12, and perhaps infiltrated these cities in a more gradual way (cf Deist 1985:32; Culley 1992:109-120; Dever 1990:47-50). One view is not necessarily right and the other wrong, but these are probably different versions, a different performance from another perspective and perhaps for another audience.

Different versions of the same narrative (hidden oral tradition) often occur on the pages of the Old Testament. The so-called wife-sister stratagem in Genesis 12, 20, and 26, reflect something of the world-view of the patriarchs. Each version could be seen as a different performance that was written down at some stage, but they could similarly have been the inventions of the authors who wrote them down, using them for different situations or purposes (cf Culley 1976:33-41; Gn 16:6-14; 21; 1 Ki 19:4-8).

9.2.2.5 *A fusion of traditions*

Schmidt (1983:116; used by Deist [1985:34] and others) is convinced that especially Shechem, but also other sanctuaries in the 'rural' areas, such as Tabor (Jos 19:22,23; Jdg 4:6, 12,14), Bethel (Jdg 20:26; 1 Sm 7:16), Hebron-Mamre (2 Sm 2:1-4), Beersheba (Am 5:5; 8:14), Mishpa (Jdg 20:1, 3; 1 Sm 7:5-12, 16), Gilgal (Jos 3; 1 Sm 10:8; 13:4) and Shiloh (Jdg 9:26-27 and cf 21:19; 1 Sm 1:3) were the crucible where traditions were melted together. It was probably at these locations where self-critical questions were asked, traditions were adjusted and adaptations made.

For instance, the Sinai tradition propagated that Yahweh, the God of War, was the only God, this over against the polytheism of the dwellers of Canaan. Yahweh's mercy, even his jurisprudence, became more and more prominent. It was actually the justice and the mercy of Yahweh that made the world-view of the Israelites so unique (Schmidt 1983:116; cf Deist 1985:36). They also had to adapt to the notion that Yahweh was *one* God (cf Dt 32:8-9), thus there was only one God, and that God was Yahweh. Besides the self-critical correction and the

adaptations, made from Yahwism, these beliefs had to exist in the environment of polytheism. Yahwism had to therefore take up its position against the Canaanite religions (Deist 1985:41). However, eventually certain characteristics of Baal and other gods fused with that of Yahweh, while other characteristics were avoided. In other words, more than one tradition became intertwined over the span of time, and thus a new and richer view of God originated.

Eventually the central traditions (cf 9.2.2.1) obtained the most prominence, and these became the traditions that were written down and were transmitted to posterity.

9.2.2.6 *Oral traditions, archaeology and other sources*

(a) Archaeology

Archaeology confirms, that not everything that happened or how it exactly happened, was written down. Archaeological evidence about the 'entry' into the Promised Land, to mention just one example, contradicts the forceful takeover as it is described in the Book of Joshua, whereas the very scant information in Judges 1, is more pertinently confirmed by what has been disclosed by archaeology, until now (cf Dever 1990:47-50). This opens up the possibility that the tradition of a forceful takeover during the inscripturation of oral traditions (i.e. at a time of political threat), was a *central tradition*, that obtained greatest prominence at that time, and *was written down* for this reason. Some suggest that only one group, probably the clan of Benjamin could have entered the land in a forceful way (cf Gottwald 1985; Mazar 1990 etc).

(b) Extra-biblical sources

A number of extra-biblical sources, in one way or another, refer to Hebrew groups who were slaves in Egypt or even refer to the God of the Israelites in the South. Noth ([1958]1983:112-1154) is of the opinion that the original report to Pharaoh Seti II, by an Egyptian border official (ca 1205 BC) recorded in the Anastasi Papyrus (ANET:259; cf Gottwald 1980:47-49), is preserved in Exodus 14:5a: 'When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled....' Historically one may infer from this only that the Israelites 'fled' from Egypt, without the knowledge of the Egyptians (i.e. at the time of Pharaoh Raamses II – 1290-1223 BC). Noth furthermore, believes that the earliest deposit of these events is contained in the so-called 'Song of Moses' (actually of course the 'Song of Miriam'): 'He [Yahweh] cast the horse and its rider into the sea' (Ex 15:4; Noth [1958]1983:112-114; brackets mine).

Egyptian 'Shasu-texts' from the time of Amenhotep III (first half of the fourteenth century) and Raamses II (thirteenth century), even refers to Yahweh in the 'Land of the Shasu', that was probably in the vicinity of Seir (in the vicinity of Edom; Albertz 1994:51-52). Albertz (1994:51) concludes: 'We cannot rule out the possibility that this could have something to do with the worship of a god of the same name in this region.'

The above-mentioned, are mere fragments which possibly reflect something of the historicity of the oral traditions of the early Israelites.

9.3 EVALUATION

The functioning of oral traditions, as experienced in the oral culture of the Lemba, served as guideline for the framework of this chapter, and how to possibly apply this to early Israel. Certain observations can not longer be made regarding early Israel, and many questions may no longer be asked. In my opinion the Lemba as a 'living source' can teach us much about orality of traditions, as explained above.

The research among the Lemba illustrated and indicated *a diversity and a unity* within the same group. A group sense and the same traditions can exist, *in spite of geographical distance and even language differences* (almost like the European Jews, who were universally dispersed, far and away from present-day Israel; cf Ranger 1993:248). Widely scattered Lemba communities in Southern Africa and Yemenite Jews, who hardly had contact with each other and did not even know of one another's existence, reflect remarkable similarity about ancestry. This could point to at least some 'authentic' Jewish influence in the past (before their Diaspora; perhaps before 600 AD) which has been preserved in their oral traditions (cf Parfitt 1995:6). Similar research can, unfortunately, no longer be conducted among the various tribes of early Israel, but there are traces of a similar feeling of unity and similarity of traditions, in spite of distance and other differences which are reflected on the pages of the Old Testament.

However, the historical claims of the Lemba that they are Israelites, cannot be proven either way, since there are also many of the traditions in the Old Testament that are not found among the Lemba. This could mean that their narratives about origins are not recorded completely, and that we have a limited image of these origins. It is clear from the inscripturation of both the Lemba and early Israel's oral traditions, as well as archaeological, genetic and other evidence, that *not everything was written down*. This implies that many of the oral traditions of the Israelites could also have been lost over 500 years or more and the distance in time complicates the historicity of the traditions.

Oral traditions do not provide us with chronology and, therefore, it should be kept in mind that a *fusion of traditions* could have taken place, and that hundreds or even thousands of years could have elapsed between the oldest historical core of a tradition and the next phase. The possibility that within a group an oral tradition could *survive many generations*, also came to light. In the case of the Lemba this notion is strengthened by archaeological and genetic findings, but also by the narratives of other relevant groups, who were not even aware of each other's existence. This conclusion has incisive implications for the understanding of the Old Testament (cf 10.2.2.1).

Leaders play an extremely important role in the functioning of oral traditions. Mathivha (and others before him), like a Joshua of old, 'called together' the clans at the LCA Conferences, in order to exchange traditions and customs, and to strengthen these similarities and to add where there is anything lacking. As at Shechem (Jos 24), a measure of assimilation of traditions took place and newer and richer ideas about God and traditions came about, but not all these traditions reached every clan and not everybody in an oral culture necessarily accepts new elements. That

means that the stories of the people at grass roots level could differ from those (central traditions) written down by the leaders or writers. It could also have the implication that different traditions or versions of a tradition could be found within the same group.

Serious consideration should be given that the oral phase encapsulated in many sections of the Old Testament, is much more important for understanding the character and essence of certain sections of the Old Testament than the later written phase (Niditch 1996:108-129; Van Dyk 1994:95). Oral traditions handed down were fluid and were *not supposed to be in 'fixed' form*. Literacy in the earlier Lemba communities and that of early Israel has also to be understood in the context of an orality-of-tradition culture.

Certain aspects of the Old Testament *world-view* are fundamentally shared in symbols, narratives and rites that determine the identity of Israel over the ages (this is clear and preserved from the OT world-view; cf Chapters Four to Nine). However, within these parameters great variation of Israelite identity is possible – this includes changes over time and even differences within a similar period. Most important here is that the Israelite society was very complex, over a very long period of time, and even in every era. In both cases there were differences, and different groups and many differences in identity. This is reflected in the great variety of 'voices' in the Old Testament.

The role which oral traditions play in the expression of a *world-view* and in the *creation of identity*, should never be underestimated. Most scholars agree that oral traditions are 'documents' of the present, because they are related in and to the present. However, traditions should always be understood as reflecting both past and present in one single sweep – people reach back into the past to create both the present and a future for themselves (cf Vansina 1985).

The comparisons in this chapter confirmed that the themes about the role and the function of oral traditions offer important angles of incidence for the teaching of the Old Testament in Africa. In the teaching situation the learners can contribute towards the functioning of oral traditions within their own cultures. For example: How are these transmitted within their own communities? On which occasions? Is there something in writing? How do these differ from the traditions which the older people in the community tell? This information holds much promise and interpretive value to scholars (and post-graduate students) in their interpretation of large parts of the Old Testament, which is largely based on oral traditions (cf 10.2.2 and ADDENDUM III, no 3).

CHAPTER TEN

CONCLUSION

The qualitative research method is not devoid of its academic rigours, as some might have it. It requires a great deal of time, sacrifice and patience on the part of the researcher. A high degree of sensitivity towards the subject matter, as well as a flexible research design and a preparedness to alter one's methodology even in mid-stream are called for. The phenomenological perspective employed in this study, central to the concept of qualitative methodology, encouraged me not to focus on the Lemba as Jews (or an Israelite tribe) *per se*, but allows for the phenomenon of 'Jewishness' as it is experienced by a specific group or person. I was not interested in the 'truth' *per se*, but in perspectives. What seems to be important is that I have developed an understanding of something that was not understood before and that this story must reflect a more or less honest rendering of how respondents actually view themselves and their experiences. Therefore, this research is not an attempt to prove the claims of the Lemba true or false. However, these claims are presented since they provide interesting additional data, which renders this group to be special and particularly interesting for a study of oral cultures, the numerous concurrences between the customs and practices of early Israel and the Lemba, in an attempt to understand the Old Testament in Africa.

Obviously, the relevance of the Old Testament in Africa has direct implications for the interpretation of the Old Testament, the teaching of Old Testament Studies in Africa, as well as the work of missionaries in Africa. These implications will briefly be discussed below. It is also clear that there is still much scope for further research in this area and therefore some of these areas will also be pointed out.

10.1 THE RELEVANCE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT IN AFRICA

Research has indicated that Judaising movements are a phenomenon world-wide and particularly so in Africa (cf Chapter Two). There are numerous points of convergence between most African cultures and those embodied by the Old Testament. Where these different African groups' interest in Judaism stems from, or more particularly, what the origins or points of convergence with Old Testament customs are, is debatable. Fact is, many indigenous groups in Africa have a *great variety of customs and rituals* which concur greatly with the practices in ancient Israel as reflected in the Old Testament. Some groups went as far as making a religious shift, such as the Falashas of Ethiopia. This was on account of the attraction of the practices of the Old Testament for them, whilst for others such as the Lemba, it appears to be that they believe to be descendants of early Israelite clans. The Falashas do not evidence any genetic link with the Israelites (cf Spurdle & Jenkins 1992:1131,1132), but they probably made a religious shift by accepting the Jewish faith, since they could identify with the message, and because of other similarities. However, the Old Testament has a special effect on many groups in Africa and to many groups it gives a sense of redemption (cf Chapter Two).

10.1.1 The case of the Lemba

Be this as it may, to a certain extent the Old Testament is probably more relevant to Africa than to many other groups of people on other continents. This is endorsed by the case study of the Lemba, and much other research. In spite of the different identities, linked to the Lemba, most Lemba view themselves to be Israelites or children of Abraham, who for a long time dwelled in Yemen, before they came to Africa together with Arabian and other traders and eventually to southern Africa. The Lemba themselves, as well as the authors who have studied them rigorously over centuries, agree that the Lemba constitute a separate or distinct group amongst the Bantu groups who are their hosts. The Lemba are especially distinguished from others by many of their customs, traditional religious practices, features, skills and aloofness. Most scholars maintain that the Lemba have many customs with a Semitic or an Old Testament resonance (cf Chapter Three).

If the Lemba originated from the Jews in Yemen and before that from ancient Israel, this Yemenite community of Jews in Africa (the Lemba) is perhaps the only one that remained practically unaffected by intra-Jewish migration. When Islam emerged, the Jews of Yemen, were cut off from the rest of the Jewish people. That means that the Lemba and those who stayed behind in Yemen, probably preserved elements of a very ancient religion. In fact, as mentioned above, the Lemba show remarkable obstinacy in the way that they have preserved some habits and customs derived from these influences in their early history. Many scholars similarly mention their anxiety (or even fanaticism) to preserve their tribal and ritual purity.

The Lemba's constant affirmation of their distinct identity suggests that they use their historical consciousness to preserve for posterity, what is precious to them – possibly because they run the risk of losing their unique character through cultural diffusion. It is indeed the possibility of the preservation of that part of a very ancient type of religious group which makes the Lemba so valuable to the historian of religion or of comparative religion. The juxtaposition of the social and religious practices and rituals of early Israel (1250-1000 BC) to that of the Lemba, delivered noteworthy findings (cf Chapters Four to Nine). Consequently this is a clear example of how much similarities can exist between cultures separate in time and space. The numerous concurrences could be of value in more than one way, but not without emphasising the important differences as well.

The Lemba (as many groups in Africa), have particular customs which resemble Semitic customs. What renders this group unique in Southern Africa, is their oral tradition, that they came to Africa as 'strangers'. They would not have been able to exist in Africa, if they did not intermarry with the wasendzhi or the local inhabitants. The result of this intermarriage, is a 'double identity', which at the same time creates two 'poles', which, in this case creates a useful basis of comparison: both to the tribes of Africa, as well as with a possible tribe of Israel in Africa. In this study the salient concurrences have been pointed out, which support the Lemba's claims which they have in connection with their common origins. Furthermore, the comparison showed that there are also significant differences; differences which should possibly be explained in terms of their African character. The possibility should be left open here, that we may merely be dealing with an African group, who somewhere along the way made a religious shift to Judaism (cf 2.2).

Be it as it may, the double identity of the Lemba creates a unique new area of research, which opens new perspectives in two directions:

(i) If the Lemba are studied in their 'Israel context', (if one takes their claims seriously), their presence on the sub-continent of Africa could become a 'dramatisation' of particular aspects of early Israel's socio-cultural life. Whoever may be studying them, may obtain possible insight into Israel of antiquity, which may contribute to a better understanding of the Old Testament.

(ii) If the Lemba are studied within their Africa context, it seems that this group share in more customs with a Semitic character, than most other groups in Africa. This broadens the 'sounding board', so that when inhabitants of Africa are confronted with the Old Testament, there is an immediate 'resonance' regarding their own life-worlds. The same happens when students of Africa study the Old Testament. When someone, therefore, studies the Old Testament from the viewpoint of these cultures, he or she will immediately 'recognise' the similarities which may lead to a better understanding of the Old Testament.

It was further worthwhile to have conducted multi-disciplinary research on the Lemba. Various disciplines contributed to a more holistic picture of the Lemba: anthropology, archaeology, education, history, missiology, comparative religion, Old Testament Studies, genetics and many other disciplines were harnessed in this process. The results of archaeological, ethnological and especially of the genetic research, where it concurs with each other and with the oral traditions of the Lemba, are remarkable (cf Chapters Three & Nine). At least light is cast on many other questions that would have been left unanswered. All-in-all, this multi-disciplinary research shows that there is at least *a very strong indication of an earlier correlation between the culture of the Lemba and that of early Israel.*

By the advent of the Christian mission the Lemba probably found a religious culture that largely expresses or reinforces what they had already believed. Although various religions have had an influence on their viewpoints, and in spite of most Lemba belonging to the one or other Christian denomination, it appears as if we can refer to their social and religious practices and viewpoints, as having resemblances with some kind of *syncretising pluralistic pre-Talmudic Judaism*¹⁵² (cf Chapter Five & Eight; Nabarro [s a]).

The conversion of a group of Lemba to Islam in the Gutu region (Zimbabwe; cf Chigaga 1972; Mandivenga 1989; Chapter Three) does not, however, constitute an argument for the Arabic origins of the Lemba since, according to the pre-Islamic Arabic theory and their own traditions, they dwelt in Arabia (Yemen) and came to the east coast of Africa as merchants together with the Arabs. My field work (cf also Mandivenga 1983) indicate that the conversion of this small number of Lemba to Islam in the Gutu area, is an exception and the conversion took place very recently. In general, the Lemba groups in South Africa as well as Zimbabwe *outrightly dissociate themselves from an Islamic-Arabic origin.*

¹⁵² The oral traditions surrounding the rules and narratives as set out particularly in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, which developed before the Talmud, as it is known today, became known as pre-Talmudic Judaism (before 100 AD; Feinberg 1988:1162-1164; cf Nabarro [s a], personal notes). There are two written versions of the Talmud – the Palestinian or Jerusalem Talmud (400 AD) and the Babylonian Talmud (550 AD).

The invention of traditions by Europeans (colonialists etc) for the Lemba and other African communities did in fact distort the past and their (the Lemba's and other's pre-colonial) identity. One needs to discern to what extent invented traditions of various kinds actually have to do with the African past, and then endeavour to produce more sound accounts of them than what is done in this preliminary overview (cf Chapter Two).

Unfortunately, it also needs to be mentioned that results of research on a community such as the Lemba, is not always positive. For example, after the recent genetic findings (cf 3.3.1.1) Jewish groups want to come to Southern Africa to establish *education centres* among the Lemba communities. Fact is, that they want to teach the Lemba 'how to conduct the services of the Jewish yearly cycle, to teach Torah throughout the year, to begin Hebrew instruction and to act as a co-ordinator for the Lemba to Jews throughout the world, especially Israel' (Levi, 19 th July 1999¹⁵³). This has its advantages, but also definitely its disadvantages. Much will be invested in these communities and at the same time also upliftment in the communities will take place where needed, as well as possible emigration¹⁵⁴ where necessary. But as has been mentioned before, there are possible elements of a kind of religion from antiquity which have been preserved amongst the Lemba communities. These elements indicate close similarities with early Israel and not with contemporary Judaism. This could imply that the possible preservation of an ancient type of religion may forever be lost to research, if contemporary teaching centres be erected. The impact of Christendom, the Islamic faith, Judaism and other African religions, have already had a great influence on the customs, practices and beliefs of certain Lemba communities. The possibility of more influences, makes the current study even more imperative.

10.2 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE INTERPRETATION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

To place the social and religious customs and practices of early Israel in a juxtaposition with that of the Lemba (or other African) communities could be perceived as sacrilegious. De Vaux (1973:19-20), for instance, makes the remark that 'the matriarchal setup occurred more generally in primitive communities', as if the Israelite clans could not be considered as primitive at all. However, the endeavour to juxtapose the manners and customs of these two communities (Lemba and early Israel), illuminated the understanding of the practices and rituals of both sides, and it incites new questions (see below) to be asked about early Israel (and Judaism). Studying the Lemba (and other African groups) suggests new ways of answering these questions (cf Eilberg-Schwarz 1990:147; cf Chapters Four to Nine).

On the one hand, this study is a search for a better understanding of the relevance of the Old Testament in Africa, but more than that, the framework or model by Smart, used to compare especially the religious rituals and viewpoints of pre-industrial societies, provided new insights. Smart's model was found useful as a basis for the comparison of most religious and social aspects

¹⁵³ Internet communication from Yaacov Y Levi: yaacov@juno-com.

¹⁵⁴ No formal inquiry has been conducted, but the impression is that the Lemba are not that interested in 'returning' to their 'country of origin'. Some individuals are interested, but local families and duties would prohibit this (cf Mathivha 1999b). Most Lemba are currently reasonably well-established in their own businesses and professions or trades.

of the Lemba with that of early Israel. Thus a great deal of the research is a comparison, but this was induced by the theory of Smart, which then lead to various inferences.

Chapters Four to Nine are mainly based on the oral traditions and practices of the Lemba (obtained by the field research) and a comparison of the latter with oral traditions and practices of ancient Israel as inferred from the Old Testament. This was done by means of a comparative approach, but I seriously realise the problem of the cultural distance between the modern Bible reader and ancient Israel. In general, it appears for example that in more than one respect the basic need to belong to a group of common ancestry, to enjoy the protection or the importance associated to a group and the security of an heir that family land does not end up in the hands of strangers, underlie most social and religious customs of both the Lemba (and other African groups) and early Israel. Common to both groups, is that the worst that could ever happen to an Israelite or a Lemba (or African), is to be thrown out of the family line.

In order to obtain a better understanding of the Old Testament, scholars could learn from Africa as a *living source* about the practices and customs such as polygamy, endogamy, circumcision, sacrifices, the cult of the ancestors, worshipping God as part of everyday life, sense of community, the importance of genealogy, the importance of the meaning of names, the role of music, social structures, wisdom, oral cultures, the functioning of oral traditions and the implications for historiography and hermeneutics of the Old Testament.

The current practices of the Lemba might not have much in common with modern Judaism, but (as already mentioned) the remarkable commonalities between the Lemba and the communities of early Israel emerge in this study. These similarities (cf Chapters Four to Nine) offer an indispensable tool for interpretation. To mention just a few examples: A person who has lived in an extended family will be more prepared to understand the extended family of Jacob and the other patriarchs. A person who has been brought up living in a clan as a way of life, will be able to comprehend more fully 'clan-life' of early Israel. One who has his or her marriage arranged by their kin, will have a better understanding of Abraham sending his servant to solicit a wife for his son, Isaac. A person who is a despised wife or concubine in a polygamous marriage, and who desires nothing else but to bear her husband a male child, will understand the situation of Leah and Rachel, or that of Sarah and Hagar. Someone who sacrifices his cattle in order to placate God, will be better prepared to grasp the significance of the early Israelites sacrifices and the ultimate sacrifice of Christ. One who is experience-orientated will be able to comprehend the way of life of the early Israelites. Cultures who are used to palavers, can understand more fully the procedure of Boaz in settling the matter concerning the obtaining of Ruth and her property (cf McFall 1970:91). A few more areas for further investigation will be high-lighted below.

10.2.1 Areas for further investigation

10.2.1.1 Segmented societies

Within the segmented Israelite communities there was at most mention of free associations between various clans, and it appears that the idea of the Israelites acting together as twelve tribes (as it is called in the Bible; first ten and later twelve), is a projection from later times onto an earlier situation (cf 4.5.2.2). It was mainly in times of emergency that the groups co-operated and

could claim protection by other groups, while they could look after themselves under normal conditions. There was therefore, no mention of any central government, but activities probably varied from clan to clan and even from family to family. In time they had to adjust to each other, differences apparently blurred and they could move across boundaries to remain or become 'one'.

A living source of such a segmented society can be found in the Lemba (and other African tribes; cf 4.5.1.2). The notion that they consisted of, and functioned as twelve clans, even now, plays a great role in their oral traditions and in the stories which are related during important ceremonies and rituals (cf Chapter Four). If one were to look at their present situation and distribution, it is clear that there is no mention of a central government and that the one clan's stories and experiences are assimilated into other clans. When a specific event or skill is communicated, there is still reference to the specific clan, who was originally involved with that which is being transmitted. Such a story then becomes a common possession, because in the end they are all known as 'Lemba.' It is clear from their division that the Lemba were comprised of twelve different clans (first ten and later twelve) and that every clan had its own historical and genealogical background – the traditions of each clan play a role in their identity formation but yet they all are known as the Lemba.

The segmentary societies of Africa should be used as model in an endeavour to understand pre-monarchic Israel. These societies are mainly leaderless with leaders only arising during critical situations. The Lemba model of segmentation explains for example Judges 5 and 12, where the tribes are both united and yet in opposition to each other.

These concurrences and differences between the two segmented communities, as well as the functioning of the segmented group-system (the twelve clans) lend itself to further research.

10.2.1.2 The cult of the ancestors and the belief in a common ancestry

Noteworthy are the commonalities between the Lemba clans' and the Israelite clans' conception of God and to a certain extent the role the ancestors play (cf 5.1.5 & 5.2.5). This presents another possibility for further research. The possibility for example exists that the ancestors in ancient Israel were seen by some as gods, who were then worshipped, and not only as mediums as some thought it to be the case (cf Van der Toorn 1996:225). In the field one sometimes gets the impression that some of the Lemba respondents want to meliorate this matter, as it seems some of the editors of the Old Testament books tried to do. However, many Lemba refer to their ancestors as 'gods'.

Further, the repetition of the names of the ancestors at important ceremonies of the Lemba, reminds rather strongly of the creed of Israelite clans (cf DT 26:5b-9), which was cited at important events and in which there was specific reference to the mighty deeds of Yahweh, but also to the role of the ancestors in the history. In fact, the Israelites used genealogies to identify their deity and to uncover relationships of people with different names and with different 'tribes' (clans). These long lists of genealogies serve an important *unifying function* in the religious culture of early Israel and later, because they lay bare kinship ties hidden under layers of many generations.

With most Lemba (and other groups in Africa) the cult of the ancestors forms part of everyday life along with faith in a 'common ancestry'. In fact, the ancestor cult plays such an extraordinary part in almost every aspect of social, as well as religious life of the Lemba (and other groups in Africa). Belief in a 'common ancestry' and the importance for their entire existence, repeatedly emerged. For example, when presenting food as a sacrifice, the Lemba dedicate the food to their immediate ancestors, who were asked to give it to *their own* immediate ancestors, and so on down the line, until the gift reached the first ancestor (in some cases this person is seen as Jesus Christ; cf Chapter Five), closest to God. The possibility exists that a similar cult existed in practice in early Israel, although it was not part of the official religion (cf Van der Toorn 1996:206-266; Schmidt 1994:267-275).

10.2.1.3 *Circumcision and initiation ceremonies*

Many scholars are convinced that practices such as the circumcision in the Old Testament is of purely religious nature and it cannot be placed on equal footing with the customs among pre-industrial cultures (as mentioned before; cf 7.1.1.1 & 7.2.1.1). Others again, do admit that circumcision was perhaps originally (as in other cultures) a pre-marriage ritual, in order to equip a man for life (probably for his sex life), but they emphasise that this possible connotation disappeared when it was practised on the eighth day and bound to the Covenant of God (De Vaux 1965:47-48; cf Gutmann 1987; Hyatt 1976:630; Plaut 1974:118; Vriezen 1967:151). This may be the case today, but there are strong indicators that the circumcision was not of such a purely religious nature as what is presented by Biblical authors and commentators (cf Eilberg-Schwarz 1990:147; 7.1.1).

If the Old Testament practice was originally an initiation rite before marriage and not only an initiation into the covenant as some scholars and Judaism wants it to be, it is not clear what the content of the teaching was that took place at such an occasion and in what way it was transmitted. What happened then was probably very close to what happens today among Lemba (and other African) communities. Much more information concerning the circumcision ritual as such, the teaching which accompanies it, how long it takes and when and where it takes place, and so on, is known about the Lemba, this in contradistinction to ancient Israel (especially if it is seen as a pre-marriage ritual). Oral traditions as well as the practice of the ritual keeps the custom in Lemba circles alive. Seeing that the Lemba is the only group in southern Africa, as far as I know, who link circumcision to the covenant of God, this element should further be explored. It is further striking that the Lemba (as in early Israel) put so much stress on the change of names or that they give new names during the circumcision ritual (or initiation) ceremonies. Their link between circumcision and the Passover is quite unique in Southern Africa.

The *initiation of women* during the years of puberty, similarly plays a very important role among the Lemba, whilst when reading the Old Testament at first, it does not appear as if a similar institution existed in early Israel. However, this possibility needs to be considered strongly and also needs further investigation, especially when one thinks of the event when Jephtah's daughter mourned her virginity together with other young girls (Jdg 11; cf 7.2.1.2). This event suggests that

there might have been a similar initiation ceremony in early Israel for young women as it occurs among the Lemba and other African groups.

10.2.1.4 New Moon festival and the interpretation of the Sabbath

The research by Wolfe (1982:87 and others) about the interpretation of the Sabbath (Ex 20:8) and the possibility that the Sabbath is originally connected to the custom of the moon cult of the Babylonians and the Canaanites (to put days aside), is further strengthened by the same idea which occurs with the Lemba (and other groups in Africa) when celebrating the New Moon Festival (cf 7.1.1.3 & 7.2.1.3). A more intensive investigation could yield interesting possibilities and interpretations of the Sabbath.

10.2.1.5 Music and praise-songs

A study of the function or social meaning of praises and praise songs within the Lemba culture (and elsewhere in Africa) may just assist us in understanding psalms such as 'royal psalms' (Pss 2 & 110) and hymnic theophanies (cf Swanepoel 1994:150-154; cf 7.1.1.1 & 7.2.1.1; 4.5.1.2 & 4.5.2.2).

Lemba musical background is both religious and secular and according to Nabarro¹⁵⁵ [s a] they use an instrument which is not found amongst other groups in South Africa. This instrument (and its variations) occurs in different forms in East Africa, Central Africa and Yemen and is called *deza*. Research by Nabarro [s a] have shown that other musical instruments used, are those of the flute family, the kudu horn, drums for dancing, religious funeral rites as well as for the *domba* (initiation rites). Music is necessary for communication with God, circumcision and initiation rites, marriage and funeral rites as well as for secular purposes of ordinary singing and dancing. Antiphonal singing is also prominent in the religious music and some of the music and words used, have a clear relationship with Jewish music (cf the personal notes and recordings of the late Dr Nabarro [s a], placed at my disposal at a very late stage of the completion of this thesis; cf Chapter Seven).

A whole new world could be opened for the Old Testament scholar, if an intensive study could be made for instance, into the correlation between the (probably) Mwenye or Lemba horn-blowers in the 1950s, recorded by Nabarro in central Mozambique and that of the horn-blowing during the *shofar* in the Jewish communities.

10.2.2 The role of oral traditions

A comparison between the role of oral traditions among the Lemba and that in early Israel, is drawn to illustrate or indicate the diversity and the unity within a specific group (cf 9.1.2 & 9.2.2).

¹⁵⁵ Hereby I acknowledge Nabarro's dedicated research, specifically done on the music of the Lemba and how this corresponds to that of ancient Israel. Although we often met at the Lemba Conferences at Sweet Waters and briefly exchanged notes on our specific interests in the Lemba, I did not realise that we actually came to the same conclusion on the Lemba, namely that their customs are closely related to that of pre-Talmudic Judaism. She undertook important research, which needs to be investigated further. Her untimely death in 1997 is a great loss for research on the Lemba.

A group sense and the same traditions can exist in spite of distance in location and language. The historical claims of the Lemba that they are Israelites cannot be proven either way by this comparison, since there are also many narratives in the Bible that have been edited and expanded by authors, according to their own judgement. This also means that the narratives in the Bible about origins are not necessarily complete and that we only have a limited view of these origins.

It is remarkable that widely scattered Lemba communities in southern Africa, which have had little or no contact with each other and did not know of one another's existence, should have come to such similar conclusions about their ancestry and have so many practices in common (cf 9.1.2.1). Having spoken to many of the Lemba communities all over southern Africa, I have cross-checked much of what I have been told by the Lemba, who came from different areas and who have not had communication with each other. They tell the same story. This could at least point to some 'authentic' Jewish influence in the past (before their diaspora) which has been preserved in their oral traditions and practices (cf Parfitt 1995:6). Some archaeological evidence, oral traditions of other groups and even some of the patterns on their Y-chromosomes are not incompatible with this inference (Thomas et al [2000]; cf 9.1.2.6).

10.2.2.1 The implications for historiography, interpretation and the late-dating of the Old Testament

It is especially historiography of early Israel that is a problematic field in Old Testament Studies. There are few written sources available, even over a long stretch of time and therefore researchers are dependent on *hidden oral traditions*. A study into this era usually needs to be supplemented by studies from other disciplines, such as archaeology, anthropology, sociology and even comparative studies, involving those with a similar social structure, for example the groups from Africa with a tribal organisation, with oral traditions and a village culture.

For this reason the problem is the relationship and role of oral traditions *viz a viz* written sources. It is for this reason that the function of oral traditions have been investigated (cf Chapter Nine). Virtually everything appears to have been preceded *by oral traditions, which were eventually written down* (both regarding the Lemba and early Israel). This has the decisive implications for the study of that which has been written down. Oral traditions were originally performed for a specific audience. Therefore, exegetes of the Old Testament will have to read the books of the Old Testament differently than just to regard them as mere literature, since these were probably never meant to be 'fixed', but to be 'fluid' (cf Van Dyk 1994:95; Deist 1994:160).

That the Israelite clans' stories were *written down so many years after the events*, do have further implications for historiography. It could mean that much of the experience concerning certain events was lost. It should also be taken into account, that the author could have imprinted his or her own perspective and interpretation onto certain stories. This is of necessity also true of the Lemba's ancient stories and experiences attached to these stories.

In other words, when a study about the religion or social life of early Israel is attempted, one is largely dependent on ancient, edited and 'set writings' of the Hebrew text rather than the 'orally based culture', as well as archaeological discoveries that can cast light on the specific aspects that can be studied. Unfortunately, one can no longer go back to the ancient Israelite communities, in

order to eliminate certain unclarities, or to verify certain aspects. However, we can possibly learn something from the living community of the Lemba.

An advantage therefore, is that one is not only dependent on the fixed text of the Lemba, but one can verify the data from the written sources as well as the possible archaeological sources with the Lemba themselves. The field research, provided the opportunity to hear the Lemba's stories and customs, and to observe these, as they feel about these themselves. This process can also contribute to the understanding of the role or function of oral traditions in the process of historiography. Fact is, *oral traditions continued in spite of the written form*. However, these processes did exercise an influence on each other but ultimately historiography cannot be separated from oral traditions or folklore.

It can further be inferred that in the case of the inscripturation of Lemba oral traditions, *not everything was written down*, similarly many of the oral traditions of the Israelites could also have been lost over 500 years or more. Strong voices in the Old Testament may sometimes be that of a minority from the midst of a much wider culture. In this way what we have in the Old Testament, may only be fragments of the wider stream of their oral culture. One may ask whether any similarity with Israel can be found in the traditions of the Lemba or even similarities in the developments within the splinter groups in the Lemba of which there are only indications and inferences in the Old Testament and other sources, but which possibly existed in non-establishment oral traditions of Israelite groups? Could the Lemba possibly have originated from groups with oral traditions which are reflected in the Old Testament? Or did they perhaps form part of the groups which fled Israel during the Babylonian Exile, such as is indicated on some inscriptions (cf Niditch 1996:47-48; Neh 7:38; Nabarro [s a], personal notes)? The answers to these questions are not yet known, but needs further investigation. Some of these questions may one day be answered, others might never.

Another very important indication of this research is the possibility that an *oral tradition can survive many generations in a group* (consisting of many clans; cf 9.1.2.6). A holistic approach to the history of the Lemba, for instance, shows that the oral traditions reflect important points of contingency to information from other sources, information which may be as old as 3,000 years (Thomas et al [2000]; cf also the cover article in the New York times by Nicolas Wade, May 1999 & the article in the Jerusalem Report, May 1999). This has serious implications for the late dating of the Old Testament by some scholars who have the notion that an oral tradition cannot survive much more than a hundred years.

Scheffler (1998:523) specifically refers to 'the recent trend among certain Old Testament scholars to assign a post-Exilic dating to all the literature or oral traditions that would still be contained in the literature' (cf Davies 1992:98; Carroll 1986:65-82). The consequences are therefore, that there is no 'pre-exilic ancient Israel because it is only a product of the imagination, it is worthless for historiography and not even containing a historical kernel' (1998:523). Being an Old Testament scholar in Africa, Scheffler contends that the trend in dating the Old Testament late is 'a typically modern, western phenomenon.' He also draws the attention to the existence of folklore or oral traditions among Africans and 'the basic vocality of culture' (1998:525) and supposes that it is perhaps the 'absence of vocality in western culture that ancient oral traditions

mentioned in the Old Testament are denied or not reckoned with' (1998:526). Oral cultures and the transmission of oral traditions from one generation to another (for many generations) are nothing strange in Africa.

10.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE TEACHING OF THE OLD TESTAMENT IN AFRICA

10.3.1 The social relevance of study material

The implication that there are numerous points of convergence between most cultures in Africa and the Old Testament, is that the reception of the Old Testament in Africa would differ from that on other continents or in other countries. This implies, among others, that the teaching of a subject such as Old Testament in Denmark or England would be totally different from that in Africa. Many other comparative studies between the Old Testament and Africa have already been done, but in the quest for a better understanding of the Old Testament in Africa, the research on the Lemba again indicated that there is yet another group whose customs and rituals concur to a great extent with that of ancient Israel (cf Chapters Four to Nine).

How should this change the form of the teaching of Old Testament Studies in Africa and how should this information be assimilated within this teaching? In the last few years countless local and national projects have been launched to reshape curricula, instructions, assessment, university organisation and governance and the professional roles of educators. It is emphasised that Africa has customs and traditions that need to be respected. It is especially some of these which are closely linked to those in the Old Testament that might not be ignored in the teaching of this subject. On the contrary, these need to be pointed out all the more clearly, and be taken into consideration.

Teachers have to accept that many of the learners do not always share their perspectives and probably never will (cf Powell 1997:474). Teachers often try to teach learners to be culturally sensitive: for example, which words to use and which to avoid, how to treat others and how to resolve conflict. But this is of no use if teachers do not take the cultures and backgrounds of the learners into consideration. Central to education, is the need to focus on both the personal as well as the academic needs of learners (cf Powell 1997:474). Therefore, cultural sensitivities, such as ethnicities, languages, religions, social classes, nationalities and daily problems should motivate educators to reshape and align the curriculum to the learners' backgrounds. That implies that contextualisation and experiential learning takes place.

There is a need for a culturally relevant theoretical perspective on the sometimes disparate racial, ethnic and cultural characteristics of teachers and learners (Ladson-Billings 1995). In order to make the teaching more culturally relevant, teaching should use the learner's culture to help them achieve success. In order to do this, one obviously need to know something about different cultures. In order to understand learners, who they are and what their social backgrounds are, a lecturer would need to know where and how most of them live. Even if it is an impossible task in a situation of distance education such as the University of South Africa (UNISA) to make contact with all the cultural groups, it would be worth the while to visit one or two of the cultural groups or communities from which the learners come, and not to just teach somewhere in a far-off lecture hall. Teachers might think that they disseminate their wisdom and knowledge to their learners, but

if this knowledge and wisdom is not relevant, it will not benefit them at all (cf Ladson-Billings 1995).

To be more practical, teachers might systematically include learner culture in their study material as authorised *knowledge*. This is a way to encourage praxis as an important aspect of research (cf Lather 1986; Ladson-Billings 1995:465-473; Powell 1997:473). It means that content should match learners' home and community cultures, it should be 'culturally compatible' (Jordan 1985:110; cf Vogt, Jordan & Tharp 1987:281). Jordan (1985:110) even suggests that the natal culture should be used as a guide in the selection of educational program elements, so that academically desired behaviours can be produced and harmful and undesirable behaviours can be avoided. He argues that in this process teachers should not only encourage academic success and cultural competence, but they must empower learners to recognise, understand and criticise current social inequities (1985:110). In this way they will develop a critical consciousness, that is, they will use what they can build upon and leave behind the undesired elements of a culture or system (i.e. reflective learning). The ideal curriculum should therefore, on the one hand, meet the needs of the students in the world in which they function. And on the other hand, they should also learn that there are world(s) different from theirs.

Central to this teaching is further that it allows learners to 'choose' academic excellence without losing a sense of personal and cultural identity (Ladson-Billings 1990:337). The aim is to empower students to *examine critically* the society in which they live and *work for social change* (Ladson-Billings 1992:314). Therefore, lecturers who are culture sensitive, should build upon learners' cultural and experiential strengths to help them acquire *new knowledge*. This would assist learners to understand their role in the community, the nation and the world. Students from diverse cultural backgrounds should also listen and *learn from one another* as well as the teacher from them. The challenge is to meet the needs of learners who represent a wide variety of abilities, backgrounds and cultures. Crucial themes in this teaching approach are the acquisition of *cultural sensitivity*, the *reshaping of* the curriculum, and the invitation of students to *learn* (cf Powell 1997:467-484; Zeichner 1993; Garibaldi 1992:23-39).

The purpose of this learner-centered learning paradigm in Old Testament Studies is that it would lead to effective learning and improve the quality of learning. In this approach knowledge exists in each person's mind and is shaped by individual experience. The learning is learner-centered and controlled instead of teacher-centered and controlled.

The time for a 'one size fits all' approach towards adult education has run out. All over the world, and specifically in the Republic of South Africa, we live in changing times, in which the curriculum and teaching will simply have to adapt. A new curriculum and qualifications framework as proposed in the Green Paper on Further Education and Training (FET) 'will require a profound shift away from the traditional divides between academic and applied learning, theory and practice, knowledge and skills, head and hand' (cf outcomes identified by SAQA [South African Qualifications Authority] in Government Gazette, March 1998, no 6140, vol 393 and NQF, National Qualifications Framework's 1st discussion paper).

From the above mentioned research (SAQA document and others) it appears as if there are three basic principles which underlie successful and meaningful teaching: (1) The transmission of

new knowledge (general knowledge and specific knowledge) needs to take place (what the learner should know). (2) Learners have to acquire new *skills* in order to contribute to the successful functioning of the society of which they form a part (what the learner should be able to do) and (3) *new values and attitudes* need to be learnt (what attitudes and values the learner should hold to).

10.3.2 A proposal for a teaching module

In the light of the above-mentioned research and principles, a proposal for a module would for example be titled as:

Manners and customs in the biblical world and African traditional cultures
(see ADDENDUM III)

Such a module would mainly focus on the many parallels between the historical-cultural world of the Bible and traditional African cultures or Judaising groups (as it was referred to in this thesis). Different topics or themes from the Bible, such as the numerous social practices, the experiential, mythical, ritual and ethical dimensions of religion, as well as the functioning of oral cultures (related to available archaeological data, where applicable) could be studied in relation to relevant African groups.

This proposed module could also act as an incentive and ‘model’ in the process of ‘indigenisation’ of the Christian faith in Africa, where the groundwork is established in traditional religious culture, with its many similarities to the Old Testament (cf 10.4).

10.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR MISSIONARY WORK IN AFRICA

The above information also has implications for missionary work in Africa. In some instances the Christian missionaries’ efforts in Africa has been adversely affected by two serious shortcomings, (i) an unconditional rejection of the African religion and culture and, (ii) an inadequate knowledge of the Old Testament, which has striking similarities with traditional African cultures (cf Mafico 1986:401).

Most perplexing, is the fact that many Africans who grew up on mission stations and were converted to Christianity, abandoned the mainline churches once they had left the mission school, either to form their own or join another African Independent Church (AIC). My field research (1996-1997) and other projects, for example amongst the so-called ‘Jewish’ groups in Africa and elsewhere, have shown that their ‘Judaism’ had often been channelled through Christianity. After missionaries acquainted some groups with only the New Testament, these groups later, when they at last also received the Old Testament translation, decided that this part of the Bible must be the more authoritative because of its volume and also because it has similarities to their own traditional cultures. They therefore, decided rather to accept the Old Testament, than the New Testament, as guideline for their beliefs. As a result, it seems as though many missionaries’ rigid bias against the Old Testament and the traditional African practices was entrenched and that their communication with Africans were in many cases impeded.



LEMBA HORN BLOWER IN INDIA VILLAGE, SEKHUKHUNELAND

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>A</i>	<i>Azania</i>
<i>AERJ</i>	<i>American Educational Research Journal</i>
<i>AEQ</i>	<i>Anthropology and Education Quarterly</i>
<i>AJS Review</i>	<i>Association for Jewish Studies Review</i>
<i>AmJHumGenet</i>	<i>American Journal of Human Genetics</i>
<i>ANET</i>	1969. <i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts</i> , ed. James B Pritchard. Princeton: University Press.
<i>AnnHumGenet</i>	<i>Annals of Human Genetics</i>
<i>AnnSAfrMus</i>	<i>Annals of the South African Museum</i>
<i>Ant</i>	<i>Anthropos</i>
<i>AS</i>	<i>African Studies</i>
<i>ASR</i>	<i>African Social Research</i>
<i>B</i>	<i>Bantu/Bantoe</i>
<i>BAR</i>	<i>Biblical Archaeologist Reader</i>
<i>BHH</i>	<i>Biblisches-Historisches Handwörterbuch</i>
<i>BK</i>	<i>Bibel und Kirche</i>
<i>BR</i>	<i>Bible Review</i>
<i>BS</i>	<i>Bantu Studies</i>
<i>CMM</i>	<i>Cape Monthly Magazine</i>
<i>DB</i>	<i>Die Brücke</i>
<i>DI</i>	<i>Dine Israel</i>
<i>EB</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia Britannica</i>
<i>FL</i>	<i>Folk-lore</i>
<i>HA</i>	<i>History in Africa</i>
<i>HAR</i>	<i>Hebrew Annual Review</i>
<i>HBAK</i>	<i>Hamburger Beiträge zur Afrika Kunde</i>
<i>HER</i>	<i>Harvard Educational Review</i>
<i>HSM</i>	<i>Harvard Semitic Monographs</i>
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
<i>IsrJMedSci</i>	<i>Israelite Journal of Medical Science</i>
<i>IDB</i>	<i>The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i> . Nashville: Abingdon
<i>IEJ</i>	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
<i>IN</i>	<i>Iscor News</i>
<i>IO</i>	<i>Institut für Orientforschung</i>
<i>IRM</i>	<i>International Review of Mission</i>
<i>JAF</i>	<i>Journal of American Folklore</i>
<i>JAI</i>	<i>Journal of the Anthropological Institute</i>

1.4 RELIGIOUS CUSTOMS, FESTIVALS, ET CETERA

Name any customs, ceremonies or rituals that are unique to the Lemba people.

Which ones do you keep?

What is the meaning behind this (or that) ritual?

More directive questions

Do you or did your parents keep the following customs and festivals?

Circumcision

Fasting

Kosher eating habits

Moon related rituals (New Moon feast, head shaving)

Ritual washing (e g before meals)

Sabbath

Slaughter rituals

First Fruit Festival

Burial customs

Marriage laws

Medicine secrets

Traditional clothes

Any special arts and crafts

Do you have any totems?

Do you know the stories behind the rituals?

1.5 CONCEPTS ABOUT GOD

How do you picture or envisage God?

What names do you use for God?

Are you a Christian?

Who is Jesus Christ? What do you know about Jesus Christ? Why did he die?

More directive questions

How do you understand the concept of the Trinity (the Father, Son and Holy Spirit)?

How do you understand the Christian way of salvation (*Roeponeso* in Shona)?

Everlasting life or life hereafter?

Do you pray? What? To whom? When?

What is the relationship between Jesus and the ancestors? Where does Jesus fit into your spiritual world?

Do you have any prophets in your communities? Where does he get his knowledge from?
What do you do when someone is seriously ill? How does healing take place? What is the cause of sicknesses?

Do you have any sacred places or objects?

Do you have a personal relationship with God? Describe your relationship?

1.3 ORAL TRADITIONS OR STORIES

1.3.1 General

What stories did your parents or tribesmen tell you on your past?

What are your roots, where do you come from?

What is very most important in the stories from the past?

Do you have songs or recitations (traditional poems) which contain stories?

Tell me about your proverbs and riddles (they are of no use unless the respondent explain carefully what they mean and how they are used)?

What do these mean to you?

1.3.2 Country

(1) Make a list of the names of mountains, hills, rivers, streams, pools, fountains, forests, areas and sub(smaller)-districts in your neighbourhood. (2) Tell about each one: did anything remarkable ever happen there? (3) Did anybody of note ever live there? (4) Is there anything people have to do, or not do there? (5) Is there any legend or saying or praise (*serecto, izibongo*) about that place? (6) Are there old paintings, drawings or marks there made by people? (7) Does any place have several names? (8) Who is the headman and where does he live? (Van Warmelo [s a]:2).

1.3.3 Folklore

1.3.3.1 *Nursery tales*

Write these down exactly word for word, (including the songs and strange words that occur in them) just as they are told by someone who really knows them well. Not everybody who knows a nursery tale can also tell that tale.

1.3.3.2 *Praises*

(1) *Izibongo, directo* for various things, even though they may just be a few words. (2) Are there praises of wild animals, antelopes, birds, insects, trees, plants? (3) Cultivated plants? (4) Rivers, mountains, hills, places? (5) Cattle? (6) Utensils, and weapons? (7) Praises for some modern things, like the train and motorcar? (8) Praises for persons are only of use, if they refer to historical events and are carefully explained (Van Warmelo [s a]:61).

1.3.4 Traditions and history

(1) What role does oral traditions play in the preservation of history?

(2) Did or do you learn any Lemba history at your schools?

More directive or obtrusive questions or remarks

- Do you know any stories about the ark of the covenant, *ngoma lungundu* ('sacred' drums), a lost book or that you were White people before?
- What is or was the function of the *ngoma lungundu*?
- Secret words or language: Could you reveal or disclose some of these words?
- If you should, it could help to strengthen your identity.
- If you are Jews why are you in Africa?
- Why do you say you are Jews?
- Is it important to you to be seen as Jews?
- What is typically Jewish as far as your communities are concerned?
- To which tribe of Israel do you belong?
- Some say it is only for political reasons that you want to be Jews
- In political terms, do you think it might mean something to your people in future (or did in the past) that you are Jewish and not just an ordinary Black group?
- Is cultural diffusion a problem to you? Why?
- Is your culture important to you?
- Do you feel in any way threatened by other groups?
- What role did the missionaries play in the creation of your identity?
- Do you think the Lemba's traditions were challenged through the Islam? If so, why did they or you choose the Bible instead of the Koran?
- Do you know of any Lemba people that are still Muslim?
- Do the Lemba latch onto a particular ancient myth in order to protect themselves from cultural onslaughts of today?
- What makes them think the way they do?
- To what extent are their oral traditions a search for or a creation of their identity?
- When did oral traditions become important to the Lemba?
- What is the purpose of folklore, traditions and customs within a society?
- How does folklore mix religion with culture?
- What social processes create such a unique identity for the Lemba?
- Which social-anthropological model could be used to 'compare' the Lemba and Israelite communities to one another?

1.4 RELIGIOUS CUSTOMS, FESTIVALS, ET CETERA

1.4.1 General

- List any customs, ceremonies or rituals that are unique to the Lemba people.
- Which of these do you keep?

What is the meaning behind this or that ritual?

Are there any special arts and crafts?

Do you have any totems?

More directive questions

Do you or did your parents keep the following customs and festivals?

Circumcision

Fasting

Kosher eating habits

Ritual concerning the moon (New Moon Feast or head shaving)

Ritual washing (e.g. before meals)

Sabbath

1.4.2 Slaughter rituals

Under what circumstances are cattle to be slaughtered? Just to have meat? Only when they are sick? For festive occasions? When the animal does something of bad omen? When one prays to ancestors? How is a beast slaughtered? (Van Warmelo [s a]:8).

1.4.3 Festival of the First Fruits

(1) Name all the plants cultivated in your neighbourhood now or in the past? (2) Say about each one: (3) Where they were obtained originally? How? When? (4) Are there proverbs or praises or songs which refers to it or to its origin? (5) What are its good and bad points? Does it resist drought? Not liked by birds? Nourishing? Does it cause constipation? Not pleasant? Useful for beer? Matures early or late? (6) Is there anything that must, or must not be done with reference to the plant, fruit or seed? (Van Warmelo [s a]:6).

1.4.4 Burial customs

Explain the procedures.

What is unique in your way of doing it?

1.4.5 Marriage laws

Do you have levirate marriages?

Do you practice polygamy? And monogamy?

1.4.6 Medicinal secrets

(1) How are medicines collected? (2) Are they dug for or gathered at any time or at certain times? (3) Is anything special done while preparing medicines, such as singing of songs, incantations, saying of formulae? (4) How are medicines, drugs and amulets applied? How placed or used to be effective? (5) Are they taken internally, smeared on, used to wash with, worn around the neck, left at home or hidden? (6) What medicines are used for which ailments or what rituals performed? (7) What medicines are used or what is done to achieve success in love affairs, in looking for work, in business or for other enterprises, to be prosperous in agriculture or with cattle? (Van Warmelo [s a]:60).

1.4.7 Traditional clothes

Did you wear special garments at special occasions? Which occasions? Describe.

1.5 CONCEPT ABOUT GOD AND RELIGION

1.5.1 About God/Mwari (Shona)/Modimo (Sotho)

(1) Is there a belief in a supreme deity? (2) What names do you use for God? (3) Where does He live? (4) Is He almighty? (5) Is He the Creator? (6) Does He rule everything? (7) Does he send rain, drought? (8) Does He concern himself with men's doings? (9) Does He require good behaviour? (10) Does He punish sins? Which sins? (Van Warmelo [s a]:56)

1.5.2 About the Christian faith

(1) Are you a Christian? (2) Who is Jesus Christ? (3) What do you know about Jesus Christ why did He die?

More directive questions/remarks

How do you understand the concept of the Trinity (the Father, Son and Holy Spirit)?

How do you understand the work of the Holy Spirit?

What does it mean to you?

What is a true sign that somebody is filled by the Holy Spirit?

How do you understand the Christian way of salvation (*roeponeso* in Shona)?

How do you understand everlasting life or the life hereafter?

Do you have any prophets in your communities? Where does he or she get his knowledge from?

Do you have any sacred places or objects?

Do you have a personal relationship with God?

Describe your relationship.

1.5.3 Outreach

To what extent are you involved in the outreach of your church?

Are you hesitant to be involved, why?

Are you more intent on your Lemba customs than your church, or do you serve both causes? And if so, to what extent?

1.6 THE CULT OF THE ANCESTORS

1.6.1 The cult and Christianity

Do you pray? What? To whom? When?

What is the relationship between Jesus and the ancestors?

Where does Jesus fit into your spiritual world?

1.6.2 Ancestor worship

1.6.2.1 *Prayer to the ancestors*

(1) Do the ancestors cause illness, send drought and misfortune? (2) How is it discovered that they are angered and what should be done? (3) How are they appeased? (4) Are regular prayers made to dead ancestors? How? By whom? For what reason or purpose? How frequently? What times of day? Is there any particular place for the ceremony; how do you prepare for this? (5) Is any particular person the principal or the priest? (6) What does he or she say or do? (7) Which other person(s) take(s) part? Are certain people excluded? Does each person pray or sacrifice or is this left to certain persons and who are they? (8) Are ancestors invoked before war? During danger? During personal trouble? (9) Which ancestor(s) is/are invoked? Males only or females on the father's side? (10) Is every event of importance reported to them? Such as births in the family, change of name, changes of dwelling, quarrels, deaths, losses? (11) Is the cult of the dead associated with their graves? (Van Warmelo [s a]:55,56).

1.6.2.2 *Ancestors spirits and sickness*

(1) What do you do when someone is seriously ill? How does healing take place? What is the cause of sicknesses? (2) Are persons entered by other spirits or attacked by them, their behaviour? (3) Do such spirits make them ill or mad or strange in behaviour? (4) Reasons for, and circumstances of such obsession? (5) How ascertained? What is the cause? Which spirit causes an illness? (6) What is the remedy? Who is the specialists for treatment? Methods of treatment? Do they drive them out or let them in? (7) Do possessed persons speak prophetically? Do they act as oracles? Do they see things hidden or secret or unknown to other people? (8) Do the healers learn the craft from others? Do they undergo training or initiation? (Van Warmelo [s a]:56).

ADDENDUM III

MANNERS AND CUSTOMS IN THE BIBLICAL WORLD AND AFRICAN TRADITIONAL CULTURES

1 THE PURPOSE OF THIS MODULE

The main purpose of this module is to...

- make people aware of the parallels between customs of African cultures (and those in other contexts) and those reflected in the Bible, specifically Old Testament.
- engender a new appreciation of themselves and of others, by becoming aware of the parallels with the Bible cultures of antiquity.
- enable people to deal with cross-cultural contexts and conflicts.
- serve as an encouragement in the process of 'indigenisation' of the Christian faith in Africa (and elsewhere) where groundwork in traditional religion exists.
- sensitise people with regard to their own religion.

1.1 EXIT LEVEL OUTCOMES

Learners should be able to...

- think critically about their life-worlds and those of other people, as well as to think critically about the life-worlds of biblical times.
- visualise, formulate and reason with confidence about the relevance of the Old Testament in their own contexts and culture and to provide sound reasons for this reasoning.
- think perspectively across boundaries.
- conduct their lives meaningfully everyday by means of their reading of the Bible.
- reinforce and guide their faith by means of the Bible.
- communicate this biblical information or message as a 'fresh' perspective.

2 SPECIFIC OUTCOMES AND ASSOCIATED ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

Specific outcomes	Associated assessment criteria: These could be in the form of learning tutorial matter, reflecting the outcome in written and, in some cases oral assignments; setting of portfolios; performing of projects; researching case studies; sitting for examinations; being assessed their ability to...
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2.1 Essential knowledge that the learners must have to carry out their tasks

They should know, be able to explain or dissertate on...

- the parallels (and differences) between traditional African cultures and the cultural worlds, reflected in the Bible (related to available archaeological data).
- the following themes from the biblical world among certain African groups such as the Lemba, the Zulu, the Xhosa, the Sotho and other peoples, such as:
 - ■ *Social practices* such as burial customs, marital laws, food rituals, circumcision, patron-client relationships, sacrifices and worship and social institutions such as kinship and family structures.
 - ■ The *experiential dimension* of religion for example:
 - the cult of the ancestors
 - sacred places
 - annunciations and other encounters.
 - ■ The *mythical dimension* of religion such as:
 - creation mythology
 - myths of origin
 - ■ The *ritual dimension* of religion which including:
 - Rituals of passage: circumcision, initiation rituals for women and the New Moon ceremony.
 - Rituals of sacrifice: Passover, festivals and fasting.
 - ■ The *legal and ethical dimension* of religion:
 - the Covenant
 - the Ten Commandments
 - case laws
 - family ethics and women
 - economic ethics
 - sexual taboos and prohibited marriages
 - priestly groups
 - proverbs.
 - ■ *Orality* in the Biblical world and in Africa:
 - the transmission of traditions and the functioning of oral traditions.
- the various cultural backgrounds (customs and practices) and the eras within which the different Bible books were written, and how they differ from one another.
- cross-cultural interpretation of the Bible.

2.2 Skills

2.2.1 Hermeneutical skills

Learners will be able to...

- contextualise the Bible in order for the meaning and relevance to be clear within the learner's own critical context and life-world (a contextually-responsible interpretation of the Bible).
 - use examples from the cultural-historical background of the Bible, in order to illuminate Bible texts.
 - know their own history, practices, traditions of origin and identity.

2.2.2 Spiritual skills

Learners will be enabled to...

- function in an integrated fashion with God and their life-world, by acting with perseverance, dedication, faithfulness, respect, etc.

2.2.3 Problem-solving skills

Learners will be enabled to...

- identify, analyse, formulate and solve problems.

2.2.4 Cooperative skills

Learners will be able to...

- work effectively in a team (cf the philosophy of *ubuntu*).

2.2.5 Ability to act independently

Learners will be enabled to have...

- the ability to cope and act as an individual within a complexed society.

- illuminate biblical texts by means of examples from the cultural-historical background of the Bible and archaeological evidence.
- critically evaluate various interpretations of a specific Biblical passage.
- apply cross-cultural interpretation when preparing for a sermon or Bible study.
- look for possible solutions for certain problems, in the Bible.

- provide spiritual and other leadership in their families, and to solve problems in their churches and communities, by providing information and other assistance.

- apply a multi-disciplinary strategy in dealing with problems.
- conduct research in order to get enough information to solve problems.
- formulate alternative solutions.
- execute the solutions and reflect on the consequences thereof.

Learners should...

- promote openness for others' opinions, history and backgrounds.
- demonstrate social skills (compassion, love, patience, respect, kindness, faithfulness, self-control, gentleness, tolerance, empathy, etc).
- lead people effectively.
- communicate the evidence of these group interactions through (written and/or oral) reporting.

Learners should be able to...

- act in their personal capacities.
- take up an individual viewpoint, and formulate an own opinion.
- provide evidence to support decisions.
- assist others to speak for themselves.

2.2.6 Interactive skills

Learners will be equipped to...

- make an active contribution within their communities.

2.2.7 Research skills

Learners will be trained to be able to...

- collect, analyse, organise, as well as critically evaluate information in the life-worlds reflected in the Bible and in their own life-worlds.

2.2.8 Skills to understand culture and aesthetics:

Learners will be sensitised to be...

- culturally and aesthetically perceptive, across a wide range of social contexts.

2.3 Essential values, principles and attitudes

By their training, learners can...

- be shaped and formed to reflect and embody sound values, principles and positive attitudes.

- communicate effectively within the family, church and within social contexts.
- communicate effectively within the group.

- conduct independent research on cultural and/or Bible themes.
- conduct interviews with different people and to weigh divergent opinions.
- deal with differing opinions in a specific case.
- integrate information from various sources.
- structure information in a proper and scientific way.
- communicate the information gained orally in a sermon or in a written report.

- show awareness of cultural diversity.
- deal with cross-cultural contexts and conflicts.
- show tolerance while interacting with people from another cultural background.
- be able to reflect a historical sensitivity regarding own origins and that of other cultural heritage.

Learners should have/make...

- respect for the contribution that their own cultures or that of others can make for humanity.
- a re-appreciation of the own and that of others' cultures should take place.
- ecumenical sensitivity and tolerance of other cultures or religions within Africa and the rest of the world.
- they should be aware of the relevance that the customs of the Lemba and other African groups can have for the understanding of early Israel.
- demonstrate cultural and aesthetic appreciation/sensitivity across a range of social contexts.
- affirm their own theological and cultural tradition.
- a willingness build upon useful elements and forsake undesired elements of a culture or system.
- a consciousness or openness regarding their personal history and the history of the culture of their group, fellowship of faith, continent, and also the history of the

	relationship between God and humanity, as it is recorded in the Bible. ▪ have a critical disposition toward ‘undesirable elements’ in their own life-worlds, and that of others and even toward those in the Bible.
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3 POSSIBLE ASSIGNMENTS

A prospective framework for *assignments* for this module could be as follows:

- (i) Require from learners to reflect on their own traditions, customs or experiences and formulate how they relate to a specific situation or practice (such as circumcision, burial customs or hospitality) in the Old Testament¹⁵⁸ (related to available archeological data). Learners should be given opportunity to evaluate the answers of their fellow students. (In this instance existing knowledge is shaped by individual experience.)
- (ii) Assign to learners to study the three respective wife-sister-stratagem narratives, from Genesis 12:10-20, Genesis 20, Genesis 26:1-14, as these are discussed in a particular textbook (cf e g Culley 1976:33-40). They could then be asked to discuss: (a) aspects of the function of oral traditions in a community, (b) the function of an oral culture, (c) possible audiences and narrators to narrate the different stories or to perform them, (d) possible parallels between the three different versions, (e) the effect of inscripturation on oral traditions and (f) similar kinds of narratives or different versions of the same narrative from their own cultures.
- (iii) With reference to the latter, set an assignment which require that they should make notes (record on audio tape or video if possible) of specific traditions or practices described: (a) in interviews with older persons in their communities or (b) performed during special ceremonies or rituals which relate in one way or another to the cultural practices reflected in the Old Testament. Learners could be asked to illustrate elements of oral traditions (or urban legends) within a community.
- (iv) Set an alternative learning experience, where in the case of not being able to experience an excavation in Israel, to locally (maybe in their own environment) be involved in an excavation. Thus they can learn basic archaeological techniques, and so appreciate and be aware of their own and other cultures.

¹⁵⁸ These assignments may be set as options or in such a way, that those learners whose culture does not have any similar customs or practices (e g orality), will not be disadvantaged.



PHOTO 1: Mr PJ Wessels on his farm in the Soutpansberg area



PHOTO 2: Chief Mpaketsane of Sekhukhuneland, addressing his people during a LCA Conference at India village



PHOTO 3: Field worker Filemon Khadeli and his family



PHOTO 4: John Mpaketsane (and his wife), assistant and organiser in Sekhukhuneland



PHOTO 5: Lemba expert, the late Mr Piet Uys of Waterpoort (Soutpansberg)



PHOTO 6: Dr M Nabarro revealing the genetic results (done by Prof Jenkins and others), at the LCA Conference in 1995



PHOTO 7: Chief mother Mpaketsane (on the right) and her sister, during a group interview



PHOTO 8: Mr Mack Ratsoma, Apel, Sekhukhuneland



PHOTO 9: The High Priest Zvinowanda in Mberengwa (left) and interpreter Bishop Marinda (of ZIRRCO)



PHOTO 10: Prof M E R Mathivha, President of the LCA



PHOTO 11: Chaplain Mhani, during Scripture reading at the LCA Conference



PHOTO 12: Prof Windsor (from the USA) at the LCA Conference



PHOTO 13: Chief of the Buba clan



PHOTO 14: Field research expedition, Mberengwa



PHOTO 15: *Field research expedition, Sekhukhuneland*



PHOTO 16: *Group interview, India Village, Sekhukhuneland*



PHOTO 17: *Group interview, Gutu, Zimbabwe*



PHOTO 18: *Group interview, Mberengwa, Zimbabwe*



PHOTO 19: *Lemba women and children in Mberengwa, Zimbabwe, sharing their sugar-cane with our children*



PHOTO 20: *Muslim centre in Chinyika, Zimbabwe*



PHOTO 21: *A Sekhukhuneland landscape*



PHOTO 22: *India Village from the White Mountain, with the Leolo Mountain in the background*



PHOTO 23: Dzata Ruins, Soutpansberg Mountains



PHOTO 24: Machemma Ruins, north of Waterpoort (Soutpansberg) showing chevron, herring-bone and chequerboard patterns



PHOTO 25: A conical tower at Great Zimbabwe Ruins



PHOTO 26: A conical tower at Machemma



PHOTO 27: View from Machemma, on the Soutpansberg and Blouberg Mountains



PHOTO 28: Mohlotoane River near India Village, Sekhukhuneland



PHOTO 29: Leolo Mountain, Sekhukhuneland



PHOTO 30: Dumbghe Mountain in Mberengwa, Zimbabwe



PHOTO 31: Representatives from Zimbabwe at a LCA Conference



PHOTO 32: A Semitic looking Lemba, in Mposi, Zimbabwe



PHOTO 33: A Semitic looking Lemba, at a LCA Conference



PHOTO 34: Mr Samuel Moeti, Member of RSA Parliament



PHOTO 35: Semitic looking Lemba (Van Warmelo, 1940)



PHOTO 36: Semitic looking Lemba (Van Warmelo, 1940)



PHOTO 37: Dancers, drummers and praise singers at the special LCA Conference, Sekhukhuneland



PHOTO 38: 'The sacred drum' (ngomo lungundu) by artist, Magoro (from the UNISA art collection)



PHOTO 39: Lemba men playing the Deza



PHOTO 40: Boyhood entrepreneurship



PHOTO 41: Lemba businessman Ratsoma's Shopping Centre in Sekhukhuneland



PHOTO 42: Lemba businessman in Mogabane, Sekhukhuneland



PHOTO 43: *Kosher killing at India Village, Sekhukhuneland*



PHOTO 44: *Horn blower in India Village, Sekhukhuneland*



PHOTO 45: *Napi (William Ratsoma) demonstrating circumcision on the Leolo Mountain*



PHOTO 46: *Napi (William Ratsoma) demonstrating circumcision on the Leolo Mountain*



PHOTO 47: *Sleeping place of the boys during circumcision on the Leolo Mountain*



PHOTO 48: *Lemba children in India Village, Sekhukhuneland*



PHOTO 49: *Individual interview in Gutu, Zimbabwe (interpreter: Mr Chewara, ZIRRCO)*



PHOTO 50: *Mrs Mabudafhasi of the Vhasoni Women's League addressing the LCA Conference (Mr Raulinga interpreting)*

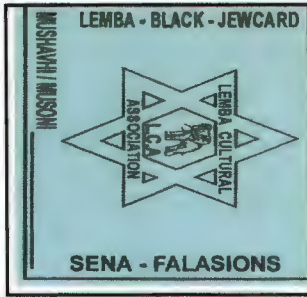


PHOTO 51: The totem of the Lemba: the Star of David with an elephant inside, on a LCA identity card



PHOTO 52: Gathering of DNA samples, by Prof Tudor Parfitt at a LCA Conference



PHOTO 53: Gathering of DNA samples, in Zimbabwe



PHOTO 54: Prof Mathivha wearing ceremonial gown



PHOTO 55: Chaplain Mhani, showing his cloth at the LCA Conference



PHOTO 56



PHOTO 57



PHOTO 58



PHOTO 59



PHOTO 60



PHOTO 61



PHOTO 62



PHOTO 63



PHOTO 64

PHOTO'S 56 to 64: Scenes from the LCA Conferences



PHOTO 65: The Reverend Father X Marimazhira at St Joseph's Roman Catholic Church in Zvishavane, Zimbabwe



PHOTO 66: Mr William Ratsoma (alias Napi), traditional healer in India, Sekhukhuneland



PHOTO 67: ZIRRCOON headquarters in Masvingo, Zimbabwe



PHOTO 68: Research unit of Prof Inus Daneel, in Masvingo



PHOTO 69: Shoes outside the Muslim centre in Chinyika, Zimbabwe



PHOTO 70: A Falasha in Um Raquba, Sudan (Parfitt, 1987)



PHOTO 71: The last bene Israel inhabitant of Navagaon (Parfitt, 1987)

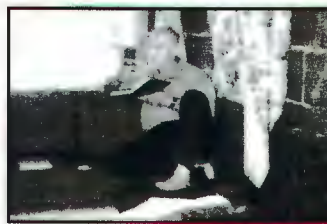


PHOTO 72: A Jew studying in a Damascus synagogue (Parfitt, 1987)



PHOTO 73: An Ethiopian painting depicts Solomon's seduction of the Queen of Sheba



PHOTO 74: A Shinlung youth (Parfitt, 1987)



PHOTO 75: Lemba grave, Sekhukhuneland



PHOTO 76: Ritual washing demonstrated at the LCA Conference



PHOTO 77: Spear ceremony demonstrated at LCA Conference, with figurine at the end of the spears

<i>JIS</i>	<i>Journal for Islamic Studies</i>
<i>JJS</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
<i>JMolEvol</i>	<i>Journal of Molecular Evolution</i>
<i>JNSL</i>	<i>Journal of Northwest Semitic languages</i>
<i>JOAS</i>	<i>Journal for Oriental and African Studies</i>
<i>JRA</i>	<i>Journal of Religion in Africa</i>
<i>JRGS</i>	<i>Journal of the Royal Geographical Society</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal of the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Jewish Social Studies</i>
<i>JTSA</i>	<i>Journal of Theology for Southern Africa</i>
<i>MQ</i>	<i>Mankind Quarterly</i>
<i>N</i>	<i>Nature</i>
<i>NADA</i>	<i>Native Affairs Department Annual</i>
<i>NASB</i>	<i>New American Standard Bible</i>
<i>NBD</i>	<i>New Bible Dictionary</i>
<i>NEAEHL</i>	<i>The New Encyclopaedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land</i>
<i>NGTT</i>	<i>Nederduits Gereformeerde Teologiese Tydskrif</i>
<i>NTJ</i>	<i>Native Teacher's Journal</i>
<i>NZA</i>	<i>Nieuws uit Zuid-Afrika</i>
<i>OTE</i>	<i>Old Testament Essays</i>
<i>PP</i>	<i>Patterns of Prejudice</i>
<i>QSE</i>	<i>Qualitative Studies in Education</i>
<i>RH</i>	<i>Rhodesian History</i>
<i>R&T</i>	<i>Religie en Teologie/Religion and Theology</i>
<i>SAAB</i>	<i>South African Archaeological Bulletin</i>
<i>SAASGS</i>	<i>South African Archaeological Society Goodwin Series</i>
<i>SAJS</i>	<i>South African Journal of Science</i>
<i>SATE</i>	<i>Suid-Afrikaanse Tydskrif vir Etnologie</i>
<i>SJOT</i>	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
<i>ThZ</i>	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>TTE</i>	<i>Teaching and Teacher Education</i>
<i>TWK</i>	<i>Tydskrif vir Wetenskap en Kuns</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<i>ZfE</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Ethnologie</i>

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- D:1:A August 1994. Prof Mathivha (President of the LCA, retired Professor, University of the North) Venda.
- D:1:B August 1994. Prof Mathivha, Venda.
- D:2 October 1995. Peet Uys, farmer, Waterpoort, Northern Province.
- F:1 November 1995. Magret Sadiki, Venda.
- F:2 November 1995. Frederick, Venda.
- D:3:A(1) February 1996. Chief Mpaketsane, India, Sekhukhuneland.
- D:3:A(2) February 1996. Mack Ratsoma (former chauffeur of Harry Oppenheimer), Apel, Sekhukhuneland.
- D:3:B(1) February 1996. Mack Ratsoma, Apel, Sekhukhuneland.
- D:3:B(2) February 1996. Group interview, Mamone, Sekhukhuneland.
- D:3:C(1) February 1996. Group interview, Mamone, Sekhukhuneland.
- D:3:C(2) February 1996. Group interview, Mogabane, Sekhukhuneland.
- D:4 March 1996. John Peta (builder), Mogabane, Sekhukhuneland.
- D:5 March 1996. Group interview, India, Sekhukhuneland.
- D:6 March 1996. Mante Mpaketsane (chief's mother), India, Sekhukhuneland.

- D:A April 1996. High Priest Zvinowanda, Mberengwa, Zimbabwe.
- D:B April 1996. Tatsawan Hamnisi, Mberengwa, Zimbabwe.
- D:C April 1996. High Priest Zvinowanda, Mberengwa, Zimbabwe.
- D:D April 1996. Mutimba Chekure (lay preacher, Reformed Church), Gutu, Zimbabwe.
- D:E April 1996. Mutimba Chekure, Gutu, Zimbabwe.
- D:F April 1996. The Rev G Murray (RC), Masvingo, Zimbabwe.
- D:G April 1996. The Rev Father X Marimazhira (priest, Roman Catholic Church), Zvishavane, Zimbabwe.
- D:H(1) April 1996. Rev Father X Marimazhira, Zvishavane, Zimbabwe.
- D:H(2) May 1996. P W van Heerden (retired Inspector of Bantu Education for the Soutpansberg-Sibasa Circle), Pretoria.
- D:I(1) April 1997. Chiefmother Mante Mpaketsane, India, Sekhukhuneland.
- D:I(2) April 1997. Chief Mpaketsane's niece, India, Sekhukhuneland.
- D:J(1) April 1997. Mack Ratsoma, Apel, Sekhukhuneland.
- D:J(2) April 1997. John Mpaketsane (organiser and interpreter), Apel, Sekhukhuneland.
- D:K April 1997. John Mpaketsane, India, Sekhukhuneland.
- D:L June 1997. Runesu Vhimisai, Nyajena (Masvingo), Zimbabwe.
- D:M July 1997. Zivengwa Mposi (brother of the late Chief Mposi), Mberengwa, Zimbabwe.
- D:N July 1997. Takavada Hwingwire, Gutu, Zimbabwe.
- D:O July 1997. Tinos Mutazu, (Imam, Muslim centre), Chinyika, Zimbabwe.
- D:P July 1997. Bishop Marinda (Zion Apostolic Church), interpreter, Masvingo, Zimbabwe.
- D:Q July 1997. Dr Mandivenga (lecturer Department of Religious Studies), University of Harare, Zimbabwe.
- D:R October 1997. Prof Mathivha, Shayandima, Northern Province.
- V:1:LCA October 1995. Peet Uys and Samuel Sivhaja, Waterpoort, Northern Province and LCA Conference, Sweet Waters.
- V:1:SEK March 1996. William Ratsoma (alias Napi), traditional healer in India Village, Sekhukhuneland.
- V:2:SEK/ZIM April 1996. Interviews Sekhukhuneland and Zimbabwe.
- V:3:SEK April 1997. Sekhukhuneland.

Interpreters of indigenous languages:

Sotho (Sekhukhuneland): Mr John Mapetsane.

Shona (Zimbabwe): Bishop Marinda and Mr T Chiwara (ZIRRCON).

Venda (Northern Province): Mr Filemon Khadeli.

Transcriptions of documents:

1996-1998. Mrs A Pieters, Department of Old Testament, Unisa.

Translations and editing:

Shona (Zimbabwe): Mr T Chiwara (ZIRRCON)

Dr D E Mutasa, Department of African Languages, Unisa.

Venda: Mr T M Sengani (Lemba), Department of African Languages, Unisa.

Editing: Prof H R Lemmer, Department of New Testament, Unisa.

Photographer: Dr P J le Roux.