

# MAQHAMSELA KHANYILE

FIRST CHRISTIAN MARTYR OF THE  
NORWEGIAN LUTHERAN MISSION SOCIETY

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Kwa-Zulu-Natal Association  
of Heritage Societies

OCTOBER 1998

MAQAMUSELA KHANYILE'S GRAVE

HILLTOP

ROUGH DIRT ROAD 1 km

SANDSTONE SURFACE

1.5 km

KWAMONDI GRAVESTONES

TAR ROAD 1.6 km

SIGN SAYS GEZINSILA\*

MELMOTH

TARRED HIGHWAY

DURBAN

TO GEZINSILA\*

TARRED HIGHWAY

MELMOTH

DURBAN

ESHOWE

TAR ROAD (NOT TO SCALE)

19.3 km

# ESHOWE'S NORWEGIAN HISTORICAL SITES.

Prof. Tony Cubbin  
JUNE 1996

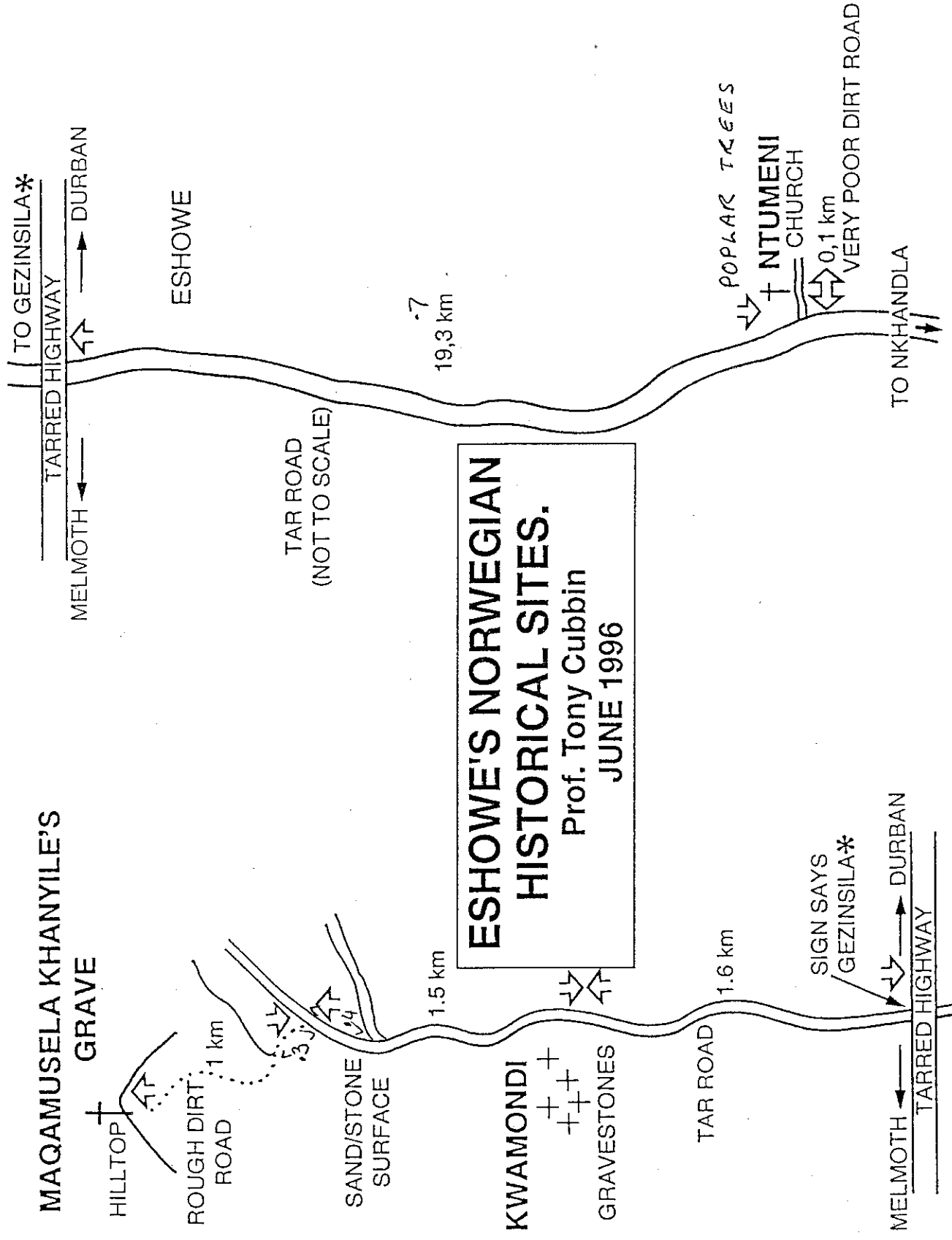
POPLAR TREES

NTUMENI CHURCH

0,1 km

VERY POOR DIRT ROAD

TO NKHANDLA



MAQAMUSELA KHANYILE'S GRAVE

HILLTOP

ROUGH DIRT ROAD  
1 km

SANDSTONE SURFACE

1.5 km

KWAMONDI

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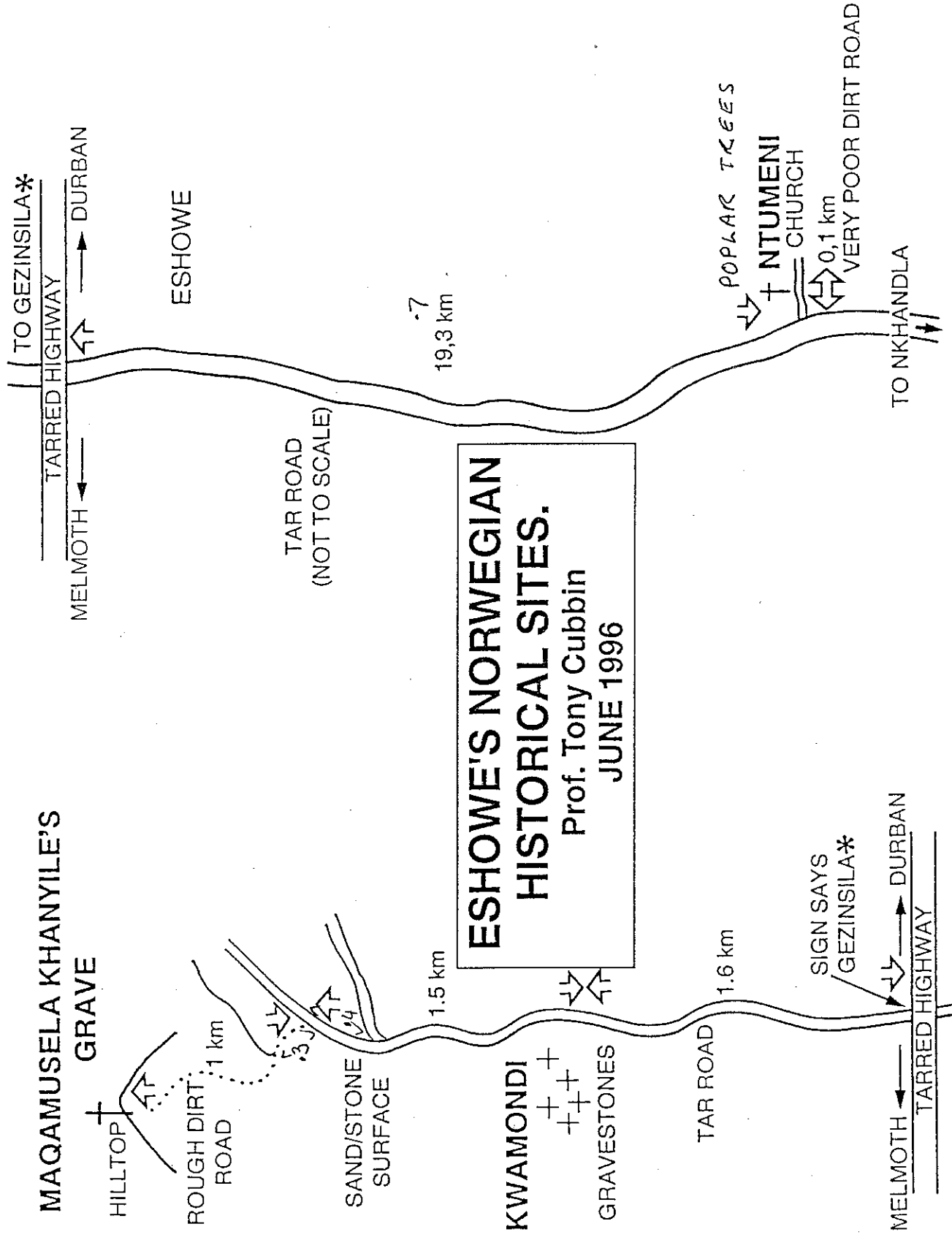
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# MAQHAMSELA KHANYILE

## FIRST CHRISTIAN MARTYR OF THE

## NORWEGIAN LUTHERAN MISSION SOCIETY

King Shaka had established his authority over the Zulu people by the time the first few Europeans traded and hunted from Port Natal in 1824. They were no threat to the Zulu sovereignty. The large numbers of Voortrekkers with their deadly "roers" (muskets), horses and wagons, arrived in Natal in October 1837. There was a cataclysmic clash for land, water and cattle with the Zulus which saw the Voortrekkers establish their hegemony in Pietermaritzburg and create Mpande a vassal Zulu King on 14 February 1840. President A.W.J. Pretorius "seized" all land up to the Black Mfolozi river and well over 40,000 head of cattle. By 1842 the British had conquered the land south of the Thukela river.

Against this background, British, America and later Norwegian missionaries sought to convert the heathen Zulus. Missionaries sought sites for their mission stations from Kings Dingane 1828-1840 and Mpande, 1840-1873. But in these dealings there had always existed confusion in the minds of the Zulu as to what a missionary was, the nature of their apparently wrathful God<sup>1</sup> and especially their loyalty. Rev. Francis Owen, missionary to King Dingane, became involved in providing the highly desirable muskets and gun powder supply from the beginning.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cory, G E The Diary of the Rev. Francis Owen. Van Riebeeck Society. Cape Town. 1926. p.81. Consider what Owen terms Retief's "excellent reflections and advice on the conduct of wicked kings".

<sup>2</sup> Op.cit., pp. 40, 66-7, 72. inter alia.

Rev. Aldin Grout, the American, from his Inkanyezi mission station (May 1841- 25 July 1842) on the Mpangeni river was condescending and paternalistic towards King Mpande and his Zulu people. He, although isolated from Port Natal and Pietermaritzburg, foolishly allowed himself some political leverage: "I hear the people saying publicly and before one another, that if Mpande does not treat them well, they will just walk off, or move their village upon my place, taking it for granted that if they are upon the station, they are out of the way of Zulu authority."<sup>3</sup> Grout further said: "Umpandi (sic) now (3 August 1841.) does not and cannot hinder missionaries coming and locating where they please."<sup>4</sup>

Owen, Retief, Grout and many other visitors to kwaZulu-Natal were to learn through devastating experience the folly of this condescending eurocentric thinking. Mpande was sovereign king of the Zulus and his authority was to be respected. Rev. Hans Schreuder, who began the first Norwegian Lutheran Mission north of the Thukela river in May 1851 at Mpangeni, was especially appreciative of this fact. His mission stations proliferated throughout Zululand and no Norwegian appears to have been directly hindered in his work or felt threatened by the Zulu King who from August/September 1873, was Cetshwayo.

But the missionaries had worked on their mission stations long and hard with minimal reward. Lasting and meaningful conversions from 1851, without the support of the Zulu King, had been inconsequential. There had been fifteen converts between 1873-5 of

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<sup>3</sup> Missionary Herald. Vol. XXXV111. No. 4. April 1842. p.132.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

which eleven were from Mapumulo south of the Thukela river border.<sup>5</sup> In 1872, after twenty one years of dedicated work, there was not one Zulu Christian in Mpangeni.<sup>6</sup>

The Rev. Knud Skaar from Mahlabatini was of the opinion that "If there were freedom of religion in this country many would certainly convert to our side".<sup>7</sup> Missionary life must have been very frustrating. Johannes Kyllingstad, for example, wrote from Mfule in 1875 that "political unrest" lay behind the low level of attendance at his services and of the difficulty he had experienced in finding Zulus who were willing to work at his station.<sup>8</sup>

In fact, when Sir Theophilus Shepstone became Administrator of the Transvaal on 12 April 1877, he espoused the Boer cause for land in the disputed territory north of the Mzimyathi (Buffalo) and Ncome (Blood) rivers as he worked to create Carnarvon's Federation of Southern Africa. For this vision the mighty Zulu nation was expendable for they were a threat to the Transvalers who were apprehensive of the mighty Zulus in the south east. Cetshwayo prepared, reluctantly, to defend his nation against British and Boer aggression.

Against this background the Christian missionaries were inevitably forced into a partisan (pro-British) position in the impending conflict. It was an extremely difficult situation. Ommund Oftebro stated that despite "hindrances ..... we have nevertheless lived quite securely in this country and have been able to witness to everyone about the truth without

<sup>5</sup> Hale, F., Norwegian Missionaries in Natal and Zululand. Selected correspondence, 1844-1900. 1997. p.78.

<sup>6</sup> Dahle, S. History of the Empangeni Mission. 1851-1951. p.2.

<sup>7</sup> Hale Norwegian Missionaries p.78. N.M.S. Archives. Stavanger. box 133. folder 10. K. Skaar (Mahlabatini) to N.M.S. Jan 1876. Hale. Norwegian Missionaries. p.78.

<sup>8</sup> Det Norske Missionsselskabs 33 de Aarsberetning (1874-1875) (Stavanger: Det Norske Missionsselskab, 1875). p.37.

often having met with obvious enmity on the part of heathens. The King, the chiefs and the people have looked the other way when individuals have joined us and been baptised. Although we have had ample opportunity to see that this has not pleased either the king or the chiefs, in most instances it has happened so peacefully with regard to those who have become Christians that we have sometimes been amazed..... When no fewer than twelve natives were receiving baptismal instruction here (eShowe) at the station last year (1876). I heard that some of our neighbours were hinting that the king would be indignant when he learnt that so many of his people were leaving him and that soon he would surely chase the missionaries out of the country. Especially one of the king's servants who lives near us was grumbling and making threats because of this scandal, namely that so many Zulus were becoming amakholwa (i.e. Christian converts). 'What wrong have you been done', he asked them, 'that you are leaving the king and your home and going to the Whites? You shall see that we will soon take your trousers off. Moreover, our believers often people speak enviously about their - the believers - large fields, abundant food, and (other) great advantages gained by khonza abelunga (sic) (i.e. going over to the Whites). Finally there were rumours after the royal festival that all who had not attended it would be 'eaten up' or killed, and that was to apply to Christians at the stations. The chiefs of every regiment were thus ordered to punish their respective soldiers who had not attended the festival. That this also applied to those who had converted to Christianity was soon apparent, as Samuel at Mfule (N.M.S. mission station) had to pay a fine of cattle but otherwise he was pardoned..... The believers began to be afraid. There was also jealousy

against the amakholwa. The irritated Zulus were heard to say: "Truly your God must be with you and protect you; otherwise you would not be able to live in peace as you do".<sup>9</sup>

Thus it was obvious that the Norwegians and their converts were worried about their precarious position.

Rev. Ommund Oftebro the N.M.S. Superintendent at kwaMondi, eShowe, sincerely believed that a "crisis" was "approaching" and it is clear that the missionary establishment actually welcomed the confrontation: "We anticipate and expect it in the hope that after it has been fought through and experienced there will be new and better prospects for missionary endeavour in this country. For many, many years it has been our daily prayer that the Lord of the church..... will, in His great grace and for the sake of His name's honour, intervene with his strong arm and sweep away the great hindrances which, in the form of the people's customs and the governance of the country, in general stand so deplorably inhibitingly in the way of His Words and Kingdom's progress..."<sup>10</sup>

Metaphorically he saw the storm clouds begin to gather in 1876, the thunder in 1877 and by 1878 it had begun to pour down. Despite the hope provided by seven adult baptisms in 1876 the killing of Maqhamusela Khanyile and others in 1877 shocked the missionary establishment to its roots.<sup>11</sup>

We now need to focus our attention on Maqhamusela Khanyile himself. In 1874 the Norwegian Missionary at eShowe, Rev. Gundvall Gundersen, reported: "You should know that Maqhamusela Khanyile wants to become a (Christian) believer as a true Zulu,

<sup>9</sup> Hale, Norwegian Missionaries, pp. 84-5. (Oftebro. N.M.S. Archives, box 134, folder 6.)

<sup>10</sup> Hale, Norwegian Missionaries, p.84. (N.M.S. Archives, box 134, folder 6.)

<sup>11</sup> Hale, Norwegian Missionaries, p.78. Oftebro. Det Norske Missionssekelskabs 37 te Aarsberetning (Stavanger: Det Norske Missionssekelskabs, 1880), p.21.



with a ring on his head and a native dress, and serve the king (Cetshwayo) with his body as all other Zulus, while giving his heart to God, thus showing that Christianity does not lie in clothing and that it does not rob people from the king, thus was his speech and intention last year (1873). But no royal service has materialised, even while scores of boys and men have been executed for not turning up promptly for such service. He is now safe under our protection and calls himself, "our man" and considers himself freed from royal service. Poor man...<sup>12</sup> Ommund Oftebro reported that Maqhamusela Khanyile had settled at eShowe and regarded himself as released from the duty of doing military service in spite of the fact that he confirmed that "scores of boys and men have been killed because they have not turned up promptly for such service." <sup>13</sup>

This clearly illustrates the problem of double loyalty among the early Zulu amakholwa (Zulu converts). The situation had not arrived that the Zulu monarchy was prepared to relieve any member of its amabutho from his duties to the Zulu state. The Zulu King was not prepared to share political power with the missionaries. Gundersen seems to have understood this but not Maqhamusela Khanyile who in fact did not render obligatory service to the King. But Gundersen is totally wrong in assuming that Khanyile was "safe under our protection". He did not know the mind, position, authority and nature of King Cetshwayo especially with war clouds looming.

Rev. Ommund Oftebro had taken a personal interest in Maqhamusela Khanyile's conversion and the meetings preparing him for baptism. He had actually taken the trouble to see King Cetshwayo to ask permission to baptise Maqhamusela Khanyile in view of the

<sup>12</sup> Simensen. Norwegian Missionaries. pp. 270-271. (N.M.T. November 1874. p.402).

<sup>13</sup> Simensen. Norwegian Missionaries. pp. 211-212 (N.M.T. November 1874. p.402).

fact that he was regularly attending baptism courses at the eShowe mission. But although Cetshwayo was inordinately friendly he prevaricated and had found an excuse for not taking a decision because his lesser nkosi, who knew Maqhamusela Khanyile, were not present.<sup>14</sup> When Oftebro reported this to Khanyile the latter interpreted this reaction of the King as being life threatening.<sup>15</sup> There was a warning of things to come. Joseph, of the Hermannsburg German Lutheran Mission run by J.F.T. Fröhling, was killed five days prior to the death of Maqhamusela Khanyile on the 9 March 1877.<sup>16</sup>

Maqhamusela Khanyile had returned home to Nkandla<sup>17</sup> as one of his brothers in law had been killed. On the day before his death he had returned to kwaMondi to receive baptismal instruction as usual. When Oftebro informed him of his meeting with King Cetshwayo on his behalf, Maqhamusela Khanyile thanked Oftebro profusely being particularly pleased that Oftebro had told the King that he loved the Word of God. "If he now has me killed, I will rejoice in it. I am not afraid. It is not good to die for Christ's name? Did He not die for me? He will give me a little place in his kingdom up there."<sup>18</sup> He approached martyrdom unafraid. The next morning, (Friday 9 March 1877), Maqhamusela Khanyile attended devotions as usual (Oftebro points out that he was almost never absent), even though he intended going a long way that day. This was the last time Oftebro saw him. At dinner time (midday), he explained that he wanted to go over to Chief Umujejanes (sic) umuzi. He was dressed in a white shirt and his normal Zulu attire. On the way he was confronted by the King's executioners on Mpodweni hill. As

<sup>14</sup> Hale. Norwegian Missionaries. p.85. (N.M.S. Archives. box 134, folder 6).

<sup>15</sup> Simensen. Norwegian Missionaries. p.270. (N.M.T. November 1874. p.402).

<sup>16</sup> Hale. Norwegian Missionaries. p.86. (N.M.S. Archives. box 134, folder 6).

<sup>17</sup> Khanyile, Patrick. Oral evidence recorded. p.1.

<sup>18</sup> Hale. Norwegian Missionaries. p.86 (N.M.S. Archives. box 134. folder 6.)

they laid their hands on him in order to bind him, Maqhamusela Khanyile, asked them why they wanted to kill him. They replied that it was because he wanted to be baptised and all that that implied. He was satisfied and thanked God without showing any fear. He asked for time to pray. They consented. He knelt down and prayed. After he had finished praying he stood up and said "Sengiqedile (I have finished - John 19.30 - a possibility?). Now I am ready; kill me." The executioners were filled with awe at the courage of this brave man of God. After the musket initially misfired, Maqhamusela Khanyile bravely said "You should not shoot me because you are related to me; but you will have to hurry now, for a storm is coming". A young man fired the fatal shot. The storm broke and the men ran for cover leaving the body. In the morning the body of Maqhamusela Khanyile had inexplicably disappeared.

Maqhamusela Khanyile's wife and son hid from the executioners while some thirty people sought sanctuary in the mission station. Soon afterwards his wife and son and the amaKholwa left kwaMondi for the relative safety of Natal i.e. south of the Thukela.<sup>19</sup>

On the following day - a Saturday - a group of men from the local chief's umuzi came in search of Maqhamusela Khanyile's wife. An impi (army) had gathered at this chief's umuzi to carry out their instructions.

Perhaps the greatest positive contribution of Maqhamusela Khanyile's martyrdom was the inspiration he was to future amakholwa (Zulu Christians). His witness was that: "He died keeping Sunday," it is said of him; "He prayed for all of us and did not show the slightest

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<sup>19</sup> Hale, Norwegian Missionaries pp.86-87. (N.M.S. Archives box 134. folder 6.) Cubbin, Empangeni. p.43 Inland Marit Rodseth. p.63. for composite narrative.

fear.” According to Ommund Oftebro, Maqhamusela Khanyile “is thus the first person in our Zulu mission to have lost his life for the sake of his faith.”<sup>20</sup>

Maqhamusela Khanuile’s death had a dramatic influence on the events leading up to the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879. This death, according to Jarle Simensen: “represented proof that the King was persecuting Christians because of their faith”.<sup>21</sup> Hans Schreuder was alarmed and reported that... “Since the beginning of March we were held in uninterruptedly fearful and extremely disturbing suspense by one piece of bad news after the other from the stations in Zululand”<sup>22</sup>

Other similar Zulu deaths went unrecorded.<sup>23</sup> These were held by the British authorities against the so-called “coronation laws” that Cetshwayo was purported to have agreed to on 1 September 1873 with Sir Theophilus Shepstone. In particular, they became convinced that the indiscriminate shedding of blood without trial had to cease.<sup>24</sup> But it may be sincerely doubted whether Cetshwayo, as a sovereign independent King, would accept the imposition of foreign pressure. This, after all, was what the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879 was to be about.

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<sup>20</sup> Hale. Norwegian Missionaries. p.87. (N.M.S. Archives. box 134. folder 6).

<sup>21</sup> Simensen. Norwegian Missionaries. p.79. Inland Marit Rodseth. p.63.

<sup>22</sup> Hale, Norwegian Missionaries. p.91 (Missionblad, II, no.2 September 1877, pp. 17-22. Also on page 92.

<sup>23</sup> Hale. Norwegian Missionaries. p.79. Inland. Marit Rodseth. p.63.

<sup>24</sup> Laband. Rope of Sand. p.171.

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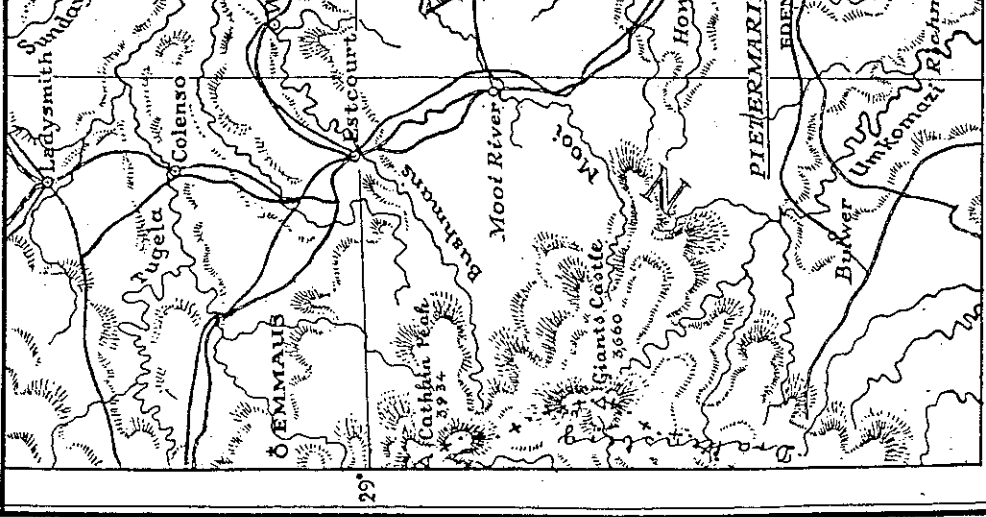
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**JOHANNESBURG**  
med omgivelser  
hvor N.M.S. har arbeide  
(Hovedkartets målestokk)



Arbeidsfelt for  
Det Norske Misjonsselskap,  
Schreudermissjonen (Den Norske Luth. Kirke i Amerika)  
og Det Norske Misjonsforbund i

**SØR AFRIKA**  
MÅLESTOKK 1:11 MILL.  
50 Km.

Misjonstasjoner.  
Misjonsst. bestyrt av innfødt prest.  
Andre selskapers stasjoner.  
Hovedveier.  
Det Norske Misjonsselskap.  
Schreudermissjonen (Den Norske Luth. Kirke i Amerika)  
DNM.

