

# Early History

## NYAMINYAMI - THE ZAMBEZI RIVER

The Zambezi and the Congo, the two great rivers of south-central Africa, have their source in what is today Zambia. The watershed between the basins of these rivers forms much of Zambia's northern boundary with the Democratic Republic of the Congo, while the Zambezi defines the southern boundary with Zimbabwe.

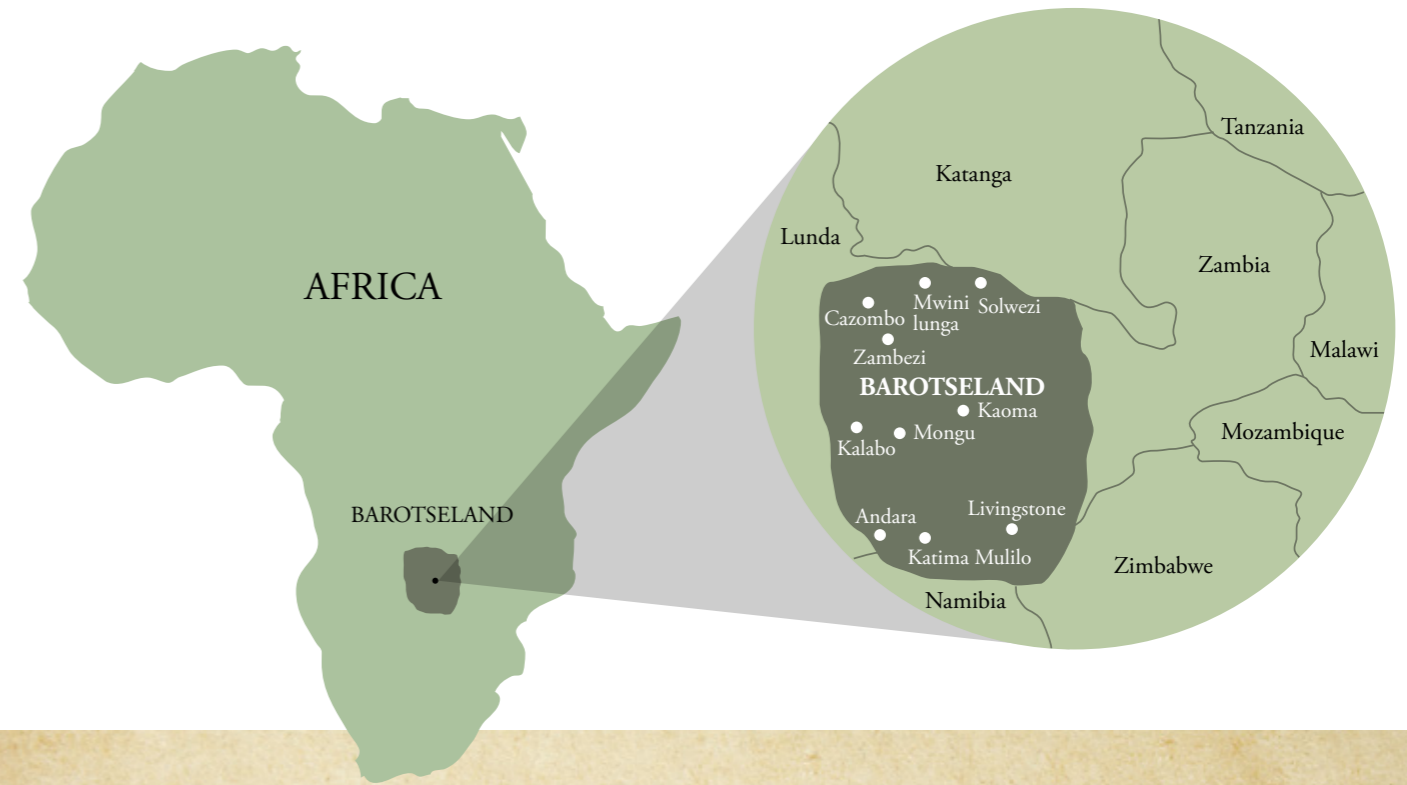
Over the centuries, the Zambezi River has played an essential part in the lives of the people who have lived in the region. Trade in ivory, cloth, and guns between the Buluzi (Lozi) and the people to the west, north, and east depended on the river for transport and communication. The Zambezi watered the fertile areas in the flood plain that sustained its population.

The Nyaminyami (Zambezi River God) is a legendary creature in Tonga mythology. A dragon-like creature with the body of a snake and the head of a fish, the Nyaminyami is believed to reside in the Zambezi River and to control the life in and on it. The spirits of Nyaminyami and his wife who reside in the Kariba Gorge are regarded as God and Goddess of the spirit world.

In the late nineteenth century various colonial European powers, Great Britain, Portugal, Germany, France, and Belgium, competed for the acquisition of land in what was called the 'Scramble for Africa'. The borders of the country now known as Zambia, which fell under British control, were determined by colonial rule according to natural geographic frontiers, particularly the great rivers, and not according to the pre-existing African state.

## ORIGINAL INHABITANTS

When the Jews began to arrive in the region in the late nineteenth century, the prominent tribes were the Bemba in the North, the Ngoni in the East, and the Luvale, Lunda, Tonga, Ila, and Lozi peoples in the West. The Lozi Kingdom, the largest and most prosperous, was located on the fertile upper Zambezi flood plain, with a capital in Buluzi. From the seventeenth to the late nineteenth centuries, it was an important pre-colonial centre. The governors of Buluzi were the Luyana Kings, who oversaw and traded in this area which was rich in grain and cattle, as well as in ivory. But the Luyana Kings were threatened by the Ndebele kingdom in the south so their Lozi king, Lewanika, sought the protection of the British and signed a treaty with them in 1890. The territory became known as Barotseland.



An early image of Kuomboka traditional ceremony on the Zambezi river



Zambezi river spirit, Nyaminyami



Early pioneers meeting with Lozi



King Lewanika at his traditional homestead