

Chalendewa

(A red mask from the Dedza area)



Themes

1) Role & powers of the chief 2) Compassion at funerals 3) Love

Etymology

Chalendewa comes from *chalendewera* which means, 'It is left hanging.'

Description

The mask of **Chalendewa** (30 cm.) depicts a senior man, bald with a grey crown of hair, a moustache and goatee. Sadness and grief have swollen his face. The headband around his head signifies that he has recently lost his wife. His mournful eyes and open mouth with no upper teeth express sorrow. His small ears show that he is deaf to consolation. The red colour of his face depicts the pain of his being deprived of his companion and the pleasure of sex. The rag headgear of the mask suggests the world of the dead. The character wears plain jute overalls and a large belt in which clubs are inserted. This shows his chiefly status in the village.

Chalendewa dances exclusively for funerals of senior people. His performance closely resembles that of Chadzunda (the head of the spirit world). However, the character has a song of his own: "**Chalendewa**, this is (her) funeral, **Chalendewa**. (**Chalendewa** says:) *Maybe, maybe I will reach the*

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cemetery. **Chalendewa, Chalendewa.**” During the funeral rite **Chalendewa** mourns, leaning against the doorpost of the house or a tree. He leads the procession to the graveyard. In Chewa culture, the chief never enters the graveyard, as he is the one who carries life on behalf of the community. The song shows that **Chalendewa** is determined to reach the graveyard to see where his wife will lie despite his chiefly status. His deep grief incites him to compromise the law of avoiding the cemetery. The character reminds chiefs that their duty comes first, above their personal feelings. The deep sorrow expressed in **Chalendewa** also provides mourners with a true example of real compassion befitting the time of funerals.

Song

*“A **Chalendewa** tate (2x) awa n’maliro, a **Chalendewa**. Tate de kaya...kaya ine ndikafika ku msitu tate de a **Chalendewa**, a **Chalendewa**.”*

Source

Interview in 1991