

*The creation of the Zulu kingdom, 1815-1828: War, Shaka, and the consolidation of power*

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Elizabeth A Eldredge is an independent scholar whose publications include: *A South African kingdom: The pursuit of security in the nineteenth-century Lesotho* and *Power in colonial Africa: Conflict and discourse in Lesotho, 1870-1960*. *The creation of the Zulu kingdom* is a scholarly account of the emergence and growth of the Zulu Kingdom in the early nineteenth century. The author used a wealth of Zulu oral traditions coupled with written sources to reconstruct the history of the Zulu Kingdom. The rich Zulu oral traditions reveal Shaka as a nation builder whose ambitions saw him conquer the greater part of Southern Africa, becoming the arbiter of the Caledon valley and beyond.

The author is aware of the shortfalls of oral traditions hence she used vast oral accounts to minimize the bias that may lie in oral history. Oral traditions may seduce historians into taking them literally because of their immediacy and emotional power. Thus a vast collection of oral traditions allowed the author to compare and contrast information provided for authenticity. This helped her uproot bias and address the common oral history twin sins of omission and commission. However on the other hand the accounts may have been affected by their translation from Zulu into English.

Using Zulu oral traditions, Eldredge gives a vivid account of Shaka's birth, his graduation to manhood and his accession to power. As the most junior and illegitimate son of Senzangakhona, he had no claim whatsoever to the Zulu chieftaincy. However Shaka took his position as a chief by force. The author demonstrated that chieftaincy was sometimes fiercely contested. It is thus a position for the powerful and popular.

Shaka used his military to impose the Zulu Kingdom upon other chiefdoms across the region. The author puts no emphasis on Shaka's military revolution that saw him conquer the greater part of Southern Africa. She instead notes that Shaka was socialised into the new fighting methods of Dingiswayo. This reduces Shaka to a position of an imitator rather than that of an initiator. However Shaka was a good student who used the new fighting methods he learnt from Dingiswayo to revolutionalise the Southern African military terrain, hence he has been considered a military genius.

Even though Shaka is painted as a blood thirsty tyrant in Eldredge's gathered oral accounts and other Eurocentric scholarship, he was kind to the poor and the disabled. The Eurocentric scholarship that demonises Shaka was meant to discredit his military account and legitimate the destruction of the Zulu Kingdom and eventual colonization of the region. Eldredge rests the responsibility of the disturbances in Caledon Valley squarely on the shoulders of Shaka. It is however paramount to note that Europeans and slave raiders from Delagoa Bay were also responsible for the political disturbances in the Caledon Valley as argued by Julian Cobbing in his seminal article: *The Mfecane as Alibi: Thoughts on Dithakong and Mbolompo*.

The author, though she used Zulu oral accounts to concur with Eurocentric scholarship also contradicts them, revealing a more humane side. He was kind to the poor and mentally disabled. He rewarded courage and loyalty. He spared women and children in most of his military expeditions assimilating them into the Zulu socio-political structure. He even went further by welcoming the whites to his kingdom (even though he was advised to kill them) and forging alliances with them. Like other chiefs, Shaka felt threatened by the powerful leaders in Nguniland which explains his violence against them. Eldredge notes that women in precolonial history of Kwa-Zulu Natal were less visible. This is because women were in patriarchal societies trapped in domesticity and viewed as instruments of reproduction and production. The production of historical literature was done by men about men for men. However the author's strength is to reveal women's active participation in political and socio-economic arenas of the Zulu Kingdom. Women actively participated as regents, soldiers and mat carriers for warriors. Shaka relied on royal men and women to govern the large Zulu Kingdom. Wives and daughters of the royal family were also involved in succession disputes. Chiefs chose their wives from royal families to create and reinforce political alliances. Thus

women like their male counterparts played significant and necessary roles in the Zulu Kingdom.

Shaka's iron rule led to his attempted assassination and eventually his death. He was assassinated by his half-brothers Dingani and Mhlangane. This confirms that those who live by the sword die by the sword. Dingane took over as the Zulu Chief after the assassination of Mhlangane. It was the change of personalities at the helm but the continuation of the same socio-political system that prevailed under Shaka's reign. Dingane continued killing his opponents and his brothers to consolidate his power. His accession to power coincided with the increased migration of Europeans – with their superior firepower – into Southern Africa. This ultimately led to the disintegration of the Zulu Kingdom and opened a new era of exploitation.

*The creation of the Zulu kingdom* is a very valuable study of the emergence and growth of the Zulu Kingdom in Southern Africa under the leadership of the military genius, Shaka. The author was able to use diverse Zulu oral traditions to reconstruct the history of the Zulu Kingdom under the leadership of Shaka. The vivid oral accounts coupled with the analysis of the events keeps the reader riveted. The scholarly account is therefore a valuable font of information for historians wishing to study the history of the Zulu Kingdom from 1815 to 1828.

*Race, class and power. Harold Wolpe and the radical critique of apartheid*

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Harold Wolpe and three other detainees captured the imagination of an international audience after their daring escape from a South African prison in 1963. Wolpe had been arrested a month before for his involvement at the anti-apartheid base at Liliesleaf. Unable to continue his life in apartheid