

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Our Story – Godongwana becomes Dingiswayo*

(South African Heritage Publishers, Johannesburg, South Africa

2020. ISBN: 9781928326298)

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The book presents a narrative account of King Dingiswayo, a role model for peacemakers who managed to evade assassins sent by his own father for five years. Upon his return he renamed himself Dingiswayo (Wanderer), who came across as a westernized, diplomatic and intellectually smart man to the astonishment of many abaNguni kings. He came up with an innovative policy aimed at developing abaNguni Federation where amakhosi retained their clans and prestige while paying tribute to him as sovereign, after realizing that incessant battles would depopulate the land to a larger extent. He also introduced several reforms particularly to traditional practices as well as in the military, which resulted in the creation of employment on a larger scale based on trade and agriculture. Furthermore, the formation of a formidable KwaMthethwa Kingdom under him that seemingly surpassed other neighbouring Kingdoms such as those for AmaNdwandwe and the Swazi Kingdom that was in the distant north under Sobhuza, is also covered in the book. Dingiswayo became the most modern King in the Southern tip of Africa for many reasons that inter alia included, the upbringing of King Shaka and the initiation of regimental conscription. In his system of conscription, he based this formidable task on the regimental enrolment (*ukubuthwa kwamabutho*) that was age-based and they were given regimental names that marked their age group or peers such as *Izichwe*.

Chapter One presents a context of Africa's Oral Tradition. Here the author details how oral tradition played out through educational fieldtrips and excursions, where the learners got an opportunity to interact with primary evidence. Nkosikazi Khumalo, a schoolmistress took her learners on a trip to historical sites around KwaZulu-Natal. They visited Emakhosini Heritage Site, the burial site of the early amakhosi akwaZulu, the Gqokli Hill, where King Shaka defeated inkosi yesizwe sama Ndwandwe around

1818, Ulundi, the site of the final battle between the British and amaZulu on 4 July 1879 and KwaDukuza, exploring the dark and dense eNkandla forest. It is interesting how the learners critically examine the bloody battles that characterize the history of the Zulu Nation through questions. The fundamental question raised through these constructive engagements is; to what extent have treachery and senseless killings influenced life in modern times? This is to a large extent what historical enquiry seeks to achieve. In this chapter the role and significance of oral history have been clearly demonstrated. The learners were able to interrogate the past, in an attempt to understand the present and also to determine future possibilities. The second chapter does not delve deeper into the crisis and conflict at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, it merely provides the background and the description of the four dominant groups of the Northern abaNguni clan as follows:

- The Dlamini who were the royal line of the amaNkwane, who occupied the area around Delagoa Bay for several centuries before moving south in the 18<sup>th</sup> century to settle north of u Phongolo River.
- The amaNdwandwe who lived between u Phongolo and the Black u Mfolozi Rivers, straddling the trade route from the coast to the interior.
- The abakwaMthethwa who dominated the area between u Mfolozi and u Mhlathuze rivers.
- The amaQwabe who occupied u Ngoye hills between u Mhlathuze and u Thukela rivers.

The author further provides incisive accounts mainly on the bureaucracy of these competing chiefdoms. Pivotal to the competition among these societies were land suitable for grazing and fertile for agricultural production, as well as available water sources. The issue of resources could not be resolved, it culminated in the revival of old and almost forgotten rivalries among the chiefdoms, at first simmering and later reaching a boiling point. A new social order developed with the formation of centralized systems of authority and the rapid development of armies. There is no explanation in this chapter of how these social and bureaucratic reforms affected the balance of power among the chiefdoms to a point of conflict. The presentation of Dingiswayo's family tree and the lineage of his forefathers on page 13, is commendable. It will assist in probing the genesis of the tribal conflict. However, a brief account on their political agenda informed by their heritage, would have been more welcome. It

would also assist those readers who seek justification for these conflicts. Trade relations with the Portuguese particularly at Delagoa Bay, have been mentioned on the last page of the chapter. However, the reader is kept in the dark as to the economic impact of these trade engagements. It would have been interesting to learn how the chiefdoms benefitted from such economic activities. Perhaps the reader would have been able to reasonably speculate on how these tribal battles could have been averted. Chapter 3 is missing in the book, this has somewhat affected the coherence and blending of events in the entire narrative. Chapter 4 presents Godongwana's ordeals and his journey to greatness. Here the author provides an insightful account of how the family feud got escalated into the tribal battles that claimed the lives of innocent people. It all began with a rivalry for the throne between the two sons of inkosi uJobe wesizwe sabakwaMthethwa, Godongwana and Mawewe. Their mothers were of different clans. King Jobe favoured Mawewe over Godongwana who was the eldest. When Godongwana turned 24 in 1804, Mawewe's friends and fellow initiates, desired to have Mawewe as the heir to his father's throne. They circulated a rumour that Godongwana intended to assassinate his father because he was impatient of his rule. Upon receiving this information, inkosi uJobe believed the rumour and ordered a party to destroy his son together with his adherents. Godongwana managed to escape with his younger brother Tana and thus began his life as a fugitive. It is interesting how the author takes the readers through the genesis of treachery, betrayal and killings that characterized the Zulu nation back in the day.

Another area of interest in this chapter is the chronological presentation of key events and how they unfolded:

- The killing of Tana, Godongwana's younger brother.
- The escape of Godongwana and the tribes that offered him refuge.
  - » AbakwaMbokazi
  - » AmaQwabe
  - » Mlotha
  - » Mthimkhulu
  - » AmaHlubi
- The killing of Godongwana's servant.
- Godongwana's demonstration of bravery: The milking of the remaining cattle after others had just been struck by lightning, the killing of the lioness single-handed.
- Godongwana's relationship with Dr Cowan, a Scottish explorer.

- The attack and defeat of amaQwabe by Godongwana.
- The change of name from Godongwana to Dingiswayo which means the one in distress or in exile-an allusion to the hard times he had experienced as a wandering outcast.
- The killing of Mawewe by Dingiswayo.
- Dingiswayo's victory as the ruler of the abakwaMthethwa clan.

As it was stated earlier, this chapter provides a chronological presentation of the events that characterized Dingiswayo's journey to chieftainship.

Chapter 6 presents a relationship between Dingiswayo and Shaka. The author spells out the extent of Dingiswayo's influence on Shaka. It is interesting to learn in this chapter how Shaka used his military prowess to extend Dingiswayo's sphere of influence through the battles that he fought and conquered as a young recruit into his army. The author does however point out that despite Shaka's contribution to the military conquests, Dingiswayo on the one hand, did not approve of Shaka's philosophy and fighting strategies. Shaka on the other hand, was not always in agreement with Dingiswayo's military tactics. On page 32 paragraph 1, when Dingiswayo attacked amaNkwane under Matiwane and drove them across the Buffalo River. Shaka tried in vain to persuade Dingiswayo to make this campaign one of total war. Dingiswayo would not allow the young commander to make use of his new military instrument, allowing him to scare Matiwane into a quick surrender. This he believed would be followed by submission and the incorporation of Matiwane's territory into the Commonwealth of clans under Dingiswayo. As Matiwane began his defeated migration, Dingiswayo gave him a lecture. He laid down the rules and stated his firm resolve to maintain order among the quarrelsome abaNguni clans, attempting to raise them into a great and good nation under his own paternal supremacy. Shaka thought Dingiswayo's goal may have been a noble one, but it was doomed to fail. He was annoyed frankly pointed out that Dingiswayo was merely making enemies and had no friends at all. It is interesting how the author presents diverse views held by Dingiswayo and Shaka in this chapter. Equally commendable, is the extent to which the author detail translation of Dingiswayo and Shaka's ideological military stances into practice through the fought and conquered battles, resulting in the extension of Dingiswayo's territory and sphere of influence.

Chapter 7, concludes the entire story by detailing how Dingiswayo's

death was orchestrated by inkosi uZwide yesizwe samaNdwandwe. He was the only inkosi that Dingiswayo had not been able to subdue, after successfully conquering the neighbouring clans. In his description of inkosi uZwide, the author makes value-laden statements quite a lot in the chapter, which leaves no room for other perspectives. Dingiswayo viewed Zwide as a recalcitrant king who challenged Dingiswayo in various respects. He copied Dingiswayo's methods of raising an army by mass conscription and establishing himself as a feudal lord. He increased the size of his fighting force through defeating some smaller neighbouring clans, then forcing them to swear allegiance and pay homage. Dingiswayo was enraged by Zwide's actions whose military tactics brought Dingiswayo into submission. The last stages of the chapter show how betrayal and treachery by both Shaka and Zwide led to the demise of Dingiswayo and the subjugation of abakwaMthethwa clan by amaNdwandwe under the chieftainship of Zwide.

Finally, the closing comments by the author: "Dingiswayo was a humane soul who was ahead of his time and thus not appreciated then. Contemporary society could have learnt so much from the lessons of such a leader, especially where we have not recovered or overcome the ravages and evils caused by colonialism and apartheid," is somewhat open to the discourse of ideal political leadership in modern times. In the main, the book has captured the essence of Godongwana's story so well, detailing how he came to be known as Dingiswayo. The title is suitable in terms of what the book has covered, except for minor lapses in content particularly the missing of chapter 3.