





King Shaka ka Senzangakhona: The Great Military Genius and Nation Builder

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ABSTRACT

The development and expansion of the Zulu Kingdom under Shaka has received much scholarly attention from scholars interested in Southern African state formation systems. Shaka has been extensively written about in history; however, mostly in unpleasant terms. European historians have described him as a bloodthirsty tyrant, a despotic, cruel monster and a savage whose kingdom was founded on the blood of the martyrs. The scholarship about the rise of Shaka and his consolidation of power is one of the greatest themes in South African history, and it is littered with controversy. This article is a revisionist history of Shaka whose purpose is to demythologise his white image and lionise him, at the same time, adding to the existing scholarship on Shaka, the great military genius and nation builder. Using a qualitative research approach which weaves together the available primary and secondary sources, it presents a shift from the Eurocentric image of Shaka, arguing that although he ruled with an iron fist, he was a great military genius and an outstanding nation builder of his time. Using the new fighting methods that he learnt from Dingiswayo, Shaka expanded the small Zulu clan into one of the biggest and most feared kingdoms in Southern Africa. He absorbed the defeated people into the Zulu social, political and economic systems, inevitably leading to the aggrandisement of the Zulu Kingdom. The article concludes that the rise, growth and survival of the Zulu Kingdom, beyond colonialism, must be credited to Shaka's military account.

Keywords: Shaka, Bloodthirsty, Tyrant, Martyrs, Nation Builder, Military Genius.

INTRODUCTION

Historians of the old school of thought, particularly the British imperialists, settlers or colonialists, Afrikaner nationalists and liberal historians, have portrayed Shaka in unfriendly terms: as a despot, bloodthirsty tyrant, barbaric megalomaniac, monster and a savage who did not value human life. King Shaka ka Senzangakhona has been (mis)used to explain the socio-political upheavals that rocked Zululand and its peripheral regions in the first half of the 19th century. Consequently, the historians of the old school of thought used Shaka's perceived cruelty as an excuse for the colonisation of Zululand and South Africa in general. As alleged crusaders of civilisation and peace, the settlers colonised South

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Africa to save the indigenous people from Shaka and themselves.¹ However, the available historical evidence refutes the allegation that the Europeans were saviours of humankind and crusaders of peace and civilisation. Their conquest wars in Africa, Asia and the Americas were bloodier than Shaka's conquest wars. Furthermore, the colonial wars destroyed and destabilised the African kingdoms, and the indigenous communities were reduced to cheap labourers who ministered to the needs of the white capitalist economy. Therefore, to understand how mainstream historians portrayed Shaka, this study will review some relevant historical literature on Shaka and his rule.

Jeff Guy, in his work entitled *Shaka ka Senzangakhona: A Reassessment*, noted that Shaka's history is marred with controversy.² Guy points out the dangers of the inevitable reliance on the first European traders' accounts of Shaka in the reconstruction of Zulu history. These accounts have led to a misrepresentation of Shaka and the Zulu history in general. It is in these accounts that Shaka is depicted as the most barbaric, cruel and savage of all African rulers. While some historians portrayed him as a bloodthirsty tyrant, the most recent interpretations, from the modern school of historical thought, portray him as one of the greatest nation builders and a military genius who tried to protect his kingdom from slave raiders and Western intruders.³ What is more fascinating about Guy's article is that it explores Shaka's relationship with the encroaching European world. His paper presents Shaka as a king who identified the imminent danger of European traders and, therefore, tried to devise strategies to ward off the new threat to African independence.⁴ However, it does not sufficiently explore Shaka as a military genius and a nation builder.

Michael Mahoney, in his article entitled *The Zulu Kingdom as a Genocidal and Postgenocidal Society, c. 1810 to the Present I*, uses the oral data from the Zulu informants to reveal how they viewed Shaka as a king.⁵ According to Mahoney, the informants presented Shaka as a genocidal, ruthless and vengeful king. He contended that his insatiable vengeful passion saw him annihilate his opponents and use genocidal policies to maintain his authority.⁶ Furthermore, Mahoney maintained that the conquered clans, who pledged their allegiance to Shaka, enjoyed his generosity in bestowing them with gifts and food supplies pillaged from the defeated enemies. Shaka also tolerated some degree of insubordinate behaviour from his inner circle and high-ranking members of the conquered chiefdoms, such as Ngomane of the Mthethwa or Nqetho of the Qwabe.⁷ Perhaps this reveals Shaka's human side, which most historians of the old school of thought, particularly European historians, tend to ignore consciously or unconsciously. Most of these historians elected to present him as a grossly inhumane king who employed genocidal policies to consolidate his power.

According to Max Gluckman, Shaka was responsible for the so-called *mfecane*, which led to the mass migration of chiefdoms from Zululand to southern, eastern and central Africa in search of political asylum.⁸ Whilst Gluckman concurred that Shaka was a great nation builder and military genius of his time, he described him as an idiosyncratic, latent homosexual and a near psychotic with a disturbed psychosexuality.⁹ He argued that these traits were exacerbated by growing up isolated with his mother and sister, and being endlessly mocked as a boy. Gluckman concludes that Shaka achieved limited structural changes, and radical changes only came with the conquest by the Whites.¹⁰ The main limitation of Gluckman's article is that, like most European historians of the old school of thought, he portrayed Shaka in harsh and unfriendly terms, basing his arguments on myth.

Caroline Hamilton, in her article *An Appetite for the Past: The Re-Creation of Shaka and the Crisis in Popular Historical Consciousness*, explores the recreation of Shaka's image by Zulu

¹ Michael R Mahoney, "The Zulu Kingdom as a Genocidal and Post-Genocidal Society, c. 1810 to the Present 1," *Journal of Genocide Research* 5, no. 2 (2003): 259-62.

² J. Guy, "Shaka Ka Senzangakhona-A Reassessment," *Journal of Natal and Zulu History* 16, no. 1 (1996): 1-30.

³ Guy, "Shaka Ka Senzangakhona-A Reassessment," 1-4.

⁴ Guy, "Shaka Ka Senzangakhona-A Reassessment," 1-4.

⁵ Mahoney, "The Zulu Kingdom as a Genocidal and Post-Genocidal Society, c. 1810 to the Present 1," 251-268.

⁶ Mahoney, "The Zulu Kingdom as a Genocidal and Post-Genocidal Society, c. 1810 to the Present 1," 255.

⁷ Mahoney, "The Zulu Kingdom as a Genocidal and Post-Genocidal Society, c. 1810 to the Present 1," 258.

⁸ Max Gluckman, "The Individual in a Social Framework: The Rise of King Shaka of Zululand," *Journal of African Studies* 1, no. 2 (1974): 115.

⁹ Gluckman, "The Individual in a Social Framework: The Rise of King Shaka of Zululand," 140.

¹⁰ Gluckman, "The Individual in a Social Framework: The Rise of King Shaka of Zululand," 143 - 145.

nationalists.¹¹ She maintained that the move to promote the Afrocentric image of Shaka gained impetus in the 1970s with the reconstitution of the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) – a Zulu nationalist political party. Chief Mangosuthu Gatsha Buthelezi, the founding member of the IFP, urged the university history departments to correct Shaka's distorted history that depicts him as a bestial and insane tyrant.¹² Mangosuthu blamed the production and reproduction of the bad image of Shaka on the earliest European visitors to the Zulu Kingdom, such as Nathaniel Isaacs and Francis Fynn. Hamilton concludes that whilst the past is heavily contested, there is a growing appetite for the past that can be loosely translated as popular historical consciousness. Although Hamilton, in her polemic work, explored the recreation of Shaka's image, she did not discuss his military achievements coupled with his nation-building prowess, which is this article's chief aim.

Dan Wylie's article, *A Dangerous Admirer: E.A. Ritter's Shaka Zulu*, is a response to E.A. Ritter's *Shaka Zulu: The Rise of the Zulu Empire*.¹³ Ritter admired Shaka and portrayed him as a great warrior whose unmatched military skills led to the aggrandisement of the Zulu Kingdom. His work was a shift from the orthodox European image of Shaka. Wylie dismissed Ritter's work as a dangerous admiration of Shaka. Furthermore, he argued that his work was furnished with inventions and fantasies that inevitably led to the lionisation of Shaka. After an assessment of Ritter's early life, Wylie concluded that Ritter and Shaka were men who were steeped in masochistic stoicism.¹⁴ He contended that Ritter's invention of Shaka from a monster to a hero was fuelled by the psychological energies of the writer, rather than by new empirical evidence.¹⁵ Wylie's article is a confirmation that historians whose work legitimately lionised Shaka were treated as outcasts trapped in stoicism labyrinths. Consequently, the White image of Shaka was treated as orthodoxy and gospel truth. Dissenting narratives about Shaka were harshly criticised for maintaining the monolithic presentation of Shaka as a monster and barbarian.

Julian Cobbing's polemic article, *The Mfecane as Alibi: Thoughts on Dithakong and Mbolompo*, using empirical sources, dismissed the *mfecane* as an apartheid state creation.¹⁶ Shaka became an explanation for everything wrong in Zululand. Although in the historiography of the apartheid state, Shaka has been portrayed as a bloodthirsty monster, responsible for endless wars in Zululand and the mass migration of chiefdoms from Zululand to the north, Cobbing exonerates Shaka from this charge. Theal, Walker, Omer-Cooper and other historians from the British imperialism, settler/colonial, Afrikaner nationalist and liberal schools of thought are guilty of blaming *mfecane* squarely on the shoulders of Shaka, without empirical evidence. According to Cobbing, slave raiders from Delagoa Bay, Griqua slave and cattle raiders, and settlers from the south were responsible for the mass movement of chiefdoms further north. Cobbing contended that there is no empirical evidence for Zulu agency in the mass migration of chiefdoms from Zululand to the north. He concluded that the *mfecane* myth is a product of the South African liberal history to legitimise White settlement and apartheid.

Mazisi Kunene's book, entitled *Emperor Shaka the Great: A Zulu Epic*, written from the prism of a Zulu African, is a scintillating work that pays due homage to King Shaka ka Senzangakhona.¹⁷ Kunene argues that Nandi, Shaka's mother, played a pivotal role in instilling in him a sense of purpose, self-will and self-determination against all adversities.¹⁸ Chapter 7 is a discussion on Shaka's military and political genius. Kunene portrays Shaka as a revolutionary, political visionary, military and political genius. Whilst Shaka learnt the new fighting methods from his military and political mentor, Dingiswayo, he superseded him in creating one of the most feared military machines in Africa, south of the Sahara. He, therefore, is a good example of a student whose courage, dedication and hard work served to dwarf the achievements of his mentor. Shaka's military reforms, 50 years after his death, led

¹¹ Carolyn A Hamilton, "'An Appetite for the Past': The Re-Creation of Shaka and the Crisis in Popular Historical Consciousness," *South African Historical Journal* 22, no. 1 (1990): 141–57.

¹² Hamilton, "'An Appetite for the Past': The Re-Creation of Shaka and the Crisis in Popular Historical Consciousness," 142.

¹³ Dan Wylie, "A Dangerous Admirer: EA Ritter's Shaka Zulu," *South African Historical Journal* 28, no. 1 (1993): 98–118.

¹⁴ Wylie, "A Dangerous Admirer: EA Ritter's Shaka Zulu," 103.

¹⁵ Wylie, "A Dangerous Admirer: EA Ritter's Shaka Zulu," 103–104.

¹⁶ J. Cobbing, "The Mfecane as Alibi: Thoughts on Dithakong and Mbolompo," *The Journal of African History* 29, no. 3 (1988): 487–519.

¹⁷ M. Kunene, *Emperor Tshaka the Great: A Zulu Epic* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press., 2017).

¹⁸ Kunene, *Emperor Tshaka the Great: A Zulu Epic*, xv.

to the most dramatic defeat of the British army in all its colonial history. The only limitation of Kunene's book is that it is written in a conversational style that is deficient in historical analysis. For this reason, in this study, it is treated as a primary source.

According to Wylie, White writers refurbished their inventions about Shaka to suit their times and audience, without questioning the veracity of their stories.¹⁹ Moreover, he posits that White myths of Shaka were largely propaganda, which served the social, psychological and political needs of the colonists in Southern Africa.²⁰ Whilst the historians of the British imperialism, settler/colonial, Afrikaner nationalist and liberal schools of thought portrayed Shaka in derogatory terms, revisionist historians have debunked this harsh portrayal. The revision of Shaka's image has been presented in popular texts, such as those of Rider Haggard, Ritter and Morris, and in prescribed school textbooks.²¹ Shaka's atrocious rule is unadulterated propaganda spearheaded by European historians to justify colonisation of Zululand and its surrounding regions. The early White visitors to the Zulu Kingdom are responsible for the creation of bigoted and sensationalist accounts of Shaka. Theophilus Shepstone, skilled and perdurable Secretary of Native Affairs for Natal, on his failure to credit Shaka as an astute military genius and inventor, argued that he might have lived at the Cape and witnessed White soldiers at drill.²² Such fictitious history meant to discredit Shaka is informed by the myth that precolonial African leaders lacked sound military skills and, therefore, were not capable of making any military inventions. This article, therefore, is a demythologisation of Shaka, which argues that although he sometimes ruled with an iron fist, he had his human side and great military achievements, which must be credited to his military achievements. Using the James Stuart Archives' six volumes and other secondary sources, the article explores King Shaka's early life, his military reforms and nation-building prowess. It concludes that the survival of the Zulu Kingdom beyond colonialism and apartheid must be credited to King Shaka ka Senzangakhona's military and nation-building prowess.

METHODOLOGY

This article is a revisionist history of Shaka that utilises a qualitative research approach. It weaves together the publicly available primary and secondary sources to demythologise and lionise Shaka. It relied more on the publicly available James Stuart Archives' six volumes, which is a collection of recorded oral evidence relating to the history of the Zulu and the neighbouring peoples.

Shaka's early life

Using the James Stuart archival material, tales and secondary literature, Elizabeth Eldredge, in her book, *The Creation of the Zulu Kingdom, 1815-1828*, gave a balanced narration of the history of Shaka's early life in chapter 3. However, the history of the birth of Shaka ka Senzangakhona, also known as Sigidi kaSenzangakhona, remains a contested terrain. Eldredge contends that the contradictions found in various stories about his conception, birth and early life obscure the life of Shaka.²³ The contradictions leave an ambiguity surrounding the crucial events of his early life. Information about Shaka's early years is entirely gleaned from oral sources, particularly the James Stuart Archives, which is a collection of recorded oral evidence relating to the history of the Zulu and neighbouring peoples. Nandi was a daughter of the eLangeni chief, Mbengi, and her mother was Mfunda, a daughter of the Qwabe chief, Nkondlo.²⁴ By birthright, Nandi was a royal princess, and that makes Shaka an unadulterated royal prince. It is on this basis that Kunene posited that Shaka was a product of a relationship between two members of aristocratic families.²⁵

¹⁹ D. Wylie, "White Myths of Shaka," in *Zulu Identities: Being Zulu, Past and Present*, ed. B. Carton, J. Laband, and J. Sithole (Durban: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2008).

²⁰ Wylie, "White Myths of Shaka."

²¹ Hamilton, "'An Appetite for the Past': The Re-Creation of Shaka and the Crisis in Popular Historical Consciousness," 142.

²² Eugene Victor Walter, "Rise and Fall of the Zulu Power," *World Politics* 18, no. 3 (1966): 557.

²³ Elizabeth A Eldredge, *The Creation of the Zulu Kingdom, 1815-1828* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 42.

²⁴ Eldredge, *The Creation of the Zulu Kingdom, 1815-1828*.

²⁵ Mazisi Kunene, *Emperor Shaka the Great* (East African Publishers, 1978), XXVI.

Whilst oral traditions are not in agreement on how Nandi met the Zulu, Prince Senzangakhona, it is generally agreed that they met while Senzangakhona and his men were out herding cattle.²⁶ Ndhlovu ka Timuni ka Mudhli from the Zulu tribe stated that:

... having the inclination to see and marry Senzangakhona, King of the Zulu people, Nandi, who not only had the approval but active assistance of her relatives, arranged to go out from time to time to a particular spot behind some bushes where, unseen, she, with her companions, could watch the royal youth Senzangakhona. Accompanied by men and girls, she proceeded on several occasions to this spot, which was close to Senzangakhona's shelters, and beheld the object of her choice at a distance, being afraid from maiden modesty of making any nearer approach ... Several of Senzangakhona's men went to find out who they were. They greeted the strangers and, on enquiring their business, Nandi had come to see Senzangakhona because she liked him ... Reporting to Senzangakhona what had transpired, the latter proceeded to the spot and met Nandi who, by this time, had been deserted by her men companions. A conversation took place, and the acquaintance sprang up. On subsequent occasions, as often as Senzangakhona came to herd cattle, Nandi would come bringing beer for him to drink in his shelter. And so, a very close relationship came about between them. The result of this intimacy was that Nandi was found to be pregnant, for she no longer menstruated ...²⁷

Shaka's name is allegedly derived from Senzangakhona's claim that Nandi was not pregnant but had a stomach disease called *isishaka*.²⁸ Baleka stated that:

Before the name Shaka became current, there was a disease, which caused people's stomachs to swell out; the name of the disease was *isishaka*. So, when Nandi was pregnant, people were constantly saying that she was sick, suffering from *isishaka*, and she was continually given medicine. Increasingly, her stomach stood out; it became obvious. They then asked, 'By whom were you made pregnant?' Nandi said, 'I was made pregnant by Senzangakhona.' She then bore the child; she bore it at the home of her Langeni people. Senzangakhona was told. He admitted that it was he who had made Nandi pregnant. She then married him. She was now his wife.²⁹

Senzangakhona admitted that he was the one who made Nandi pregnant, and as per the Zulu customs and tradition, he paid lobola and married her. The Langeni Princess was accepted into the Zulu clan as Senzangakhona's third wife.³⁰ Nandi was a Langeni Princess and thus, royal-blooded. Senzangakhona could not impregnate the princess and could not marry her. This move would have been viewed as an insult to the Langeni people and a poison to the diplomatic ties of the two clans. Mayinga ka Mbekuzana of the Zulu tribe, who belonged to Cetshwayo's faction in the 1856 succession feud with Mbuyazi, maintains that:

Senzangakhona gave lobola for Nandi. Nandi became pregnant by Senzangakhona when he *hlobonga'd* with her. She went home, and she was found to be pregnant. She said the Zulu chief had caused her to be pregnant. The Langa people sent to the Zulus, and the chief admitted having caused her pregnancy. Cattle were then set apart, Nandi was *lobola'd* and came to bear Shaka.³¹

Mruyi ka Timuni concurs that Nandi was lawfully married to Senzangakhona.³² Kunene agreed that King Senzangakhona was legally married to Princess Nandi and, therefore, Shaka was not an illegitimate son.³³ According to Ngidi ka Mcikaziswa of the Langa tribe:

²⁶ Eldredge, *The Creation of the Zulu Kingdom, 1815–1828*, 42.

²⁷ C. Webb and J. B. Wright, "James Stuart Interview with Ndhlovu Ka Timuni," in *The James Stuart Archives*, ed. C. Webb and J. B. Wright, vol. 4 (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 1986), 201–2.

²⁸ C. Webb and J. B. Wright, "James Stuart Interview with Baleka Ka Mpitikazi," in *The James Stuart Archives*, ed. C. Webb and J. B. Wright, vol. 1 (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 1976), 5.

²⁹ Webb and Wright, "James Stuart Interview with Baleka Ka Mpitikazi."

³⁰ Webb and Wright, "James Stuart Interview with Baleka Ka Mpitikazi."

³¹ C. Webb and J.B. Wright, "James Stuart Interview with Mayinga Ka Mbekuzana," in *The James Stuart Archives*, ed. C. Webb and J.B. Wright, vol. 2 (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 1979), 246.

³² C. Webb and J.B. Wright, *James Stuart Interview with Mmemi Ka Nguluzane*, ed. C Webb and J.B. Wright, vol. 3 (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 1982), 248.

³³ Kunene, *Emperor Shaka the Great*, XXVI.

Nandi was light in colour (mpofazana, mpofukazi) and rather tall ... Nandi was asked for by Senzangakhona from Mbengi; he asked for a girl of another clan (intombi ye zizwe). Nandi danced (*sina'd*) for Senzangakhona. She was *lobola'd*, many cattle being paid for her.³⁴

Contrary to the legitimate notion is the illegitimate notion. Mmemi ka Nguluzane asserts that it was widely known that Nandi was not married to Senzangakhona, which implies that Shaka was an illegitimate son and, therefore, had no claim whatsoever to the Zulu throne.³⁵ According to Baleka ka Mpitikazi³⁶ of the Qwabe people, Nandi bore Shaka in 1787 out of wedlock, and this makes him an illegitimate son of Senzangakhona ka Jama ka Bayeni ka Punga Ka Mageba, the ruler of the small Zulu clan.³⁷ Mkehlengana ka Zulu contends that Shaka was conceived before Senzangakhona was circumcised and that this makes him an illegitimate son.³⁸

However, Baleka, Mayinga, Ngidi, Mruyi and others refute this oral history, arguing that Nandi was from the royal family; she was not *umuntukazana* (a general person) and, therefore, Senzangakhona was obliged to marry her. The marriage between Nandi and Senzangakhona made Shaka an eligible heir to the Zulu throne.

According to Baleka ka Mpitikazi, Shaka was tall, dark and had a big nose.³⁹ He spent his childhood years at his father's EsiKlebeni homestead, near the present-day Babanango, in the EmaKhosini area or the Burial-place of the Kings.⁴⁰ EsiKlebeni used to be Jama's kraal, which was inherited by Senzangakhona on the death of his father.⁴¹ The raising of Shaka at his father's homestead further confirms that he was not an illegitimate son but rather the heir apparent. Ndhlovu's narrative that when Nandi was found to be pregnant, an *impi* was sent to kill her and the child, and that the warning received beforehand helped them escape is far-fetched.⁴² Whilst oral traditions do not agree on why and how Nandi and the baby left Senzangakhona's homestead, the notion that the relationship between Nandi and Senzangakhona was unhappy, compelling the chieftain to drive Nandi from his court, seems more admissible.

Ngidi notes that Nandi sought sanctuary with the Langeni people because she was not Senzangakhona's favourite wife.⁴³ Thus, Nandi possessed a strong will, a sense of authority and was far from being an obedient, domesticated and subservient woman.⁴⁴ She felt that she deserved to be treated better because she was a royal princess.⁴⁵ These qualities did not appeal to her husband, King Senzangakhona. Consequently, the discord between the two compelled Nandi to wander from one relative to another, in search of a home to raise her children. Nandi's departure from the Zulu Kingdom confirmed the failure of her marriage and marked the beginning of her single motherhood journey. The children had to face the reality of being raised in a social environment of an absent father. Growing up in the absence of his father, Senzangakhona, Shaka was often the victim of humiliation, resentment and bullying. According to Ndhlovu:

... Mbikwana decided to take him (Shaka) to Dingiswayo's Mtetwa tribe, the tribe, it will be remembered, where his grandmother would have come from. No sooner did Dingiswayo receive him than he placed him with an *induna* of his, Mqoboli by name. At Dingiswayo's,

³⁴ C. Webb and J. B. Wright, "James Stuart Interview with Ngidi Ka Mcikaziswa," in *James Stuart Archives*, vol. 5 (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2001), 29.

³⁵ C. Webb and J. B. Wright, "James Stuart Interview with Mruyi Ka Timuni," in *James Stuart Archives*, ed. C. Webb and J. B. Wright, vol. 4 (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 1986), 38.

³⁶ Baleka was a daughter to Mpitikazi and was born around 1856 in the present day KZN Province. She was a maternal relative to Nandi, Tshaka's mother and one of James Stuart's informants.

³⁷ Webb and Wright, "James Stuart Interview with Baleka Ka Mpitikazi," 4.

³⁸ C. Webb and J. B. Wright, "James Stuart Interview with Mkehlengana Ka Zulu," in *James Stuart Archives*, ed. C. Webb and J. B. Wright, vol. 3 (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 1982), 218.

³⁹ Webb and Wright, "James Stuart Interview with Baleka Ka Mpitikazi," 8.

⁴⁰ C. Webb and J. B. Wright, "James Stuart Interview with Madikane Ka Mlomowetole," in *The James Stuart Archives*, vol. 2 (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 1979), 47.

⁴¹ Webb and Wright, "James Stuart Interview with Madikane Ka Mlomowetole," 48.

⁴² Webb and Wright, "James Stuart Interview with Ndhlovu Ka Timuni," 198.

⁴³ Webb and Wright, "James Stuart Interview with Ngidi Ka Mcikaziswa," 59.

⁴⁴ Kunene, *Emperor Shaka the Great*, XXVII.

⁴⁵ Eldredge, *The Creation of the Zulu Kingdom, 1815-1828*, 44.

Shaka, still unknown to his anxious father, served in the army. He became distinguished as a warrior and was a noted warrior (*iqhawe*).⁴⁶

Whilst Ndhlovu posits that Nandi and her son sought asylum from the Mthethwa clan, what is evident is that Nandi and her children first sought sanctuary in the Mhlathuze Valley of the Langeni people.⁴⁷ She left eLangeni to live among the Qwabe people, where she met and married Prince Ngedeyana, because she could not tolerate the hostility amongst her people (eLangeni people). According to Kunene, Shaka, now a young man, found life intolerable among the Qwabe people because of his temperament and the arrogance of Prince Phakathwayo.⁴⁸ Consequently, he was sent to his political mentor, Dingiswayo. The available oral evidence concurs that Shaka was later taken to the Mthethwa clan to be mentored by Dingiswayo. Ndhlovu ka Timuni stated that:

It is among the Mthethwas that Shaka learns a great deal about statecraft. He also gets an opportunity to put into practice some of his military tactics and theories. With the help of Dingiswayo, Shaka emerges as a serious, responsible young man, eager to create a powerful, centralised state.⁴⁹

Dingiswayo mentored Shaka to become one of the most tactful soldiers in the Mthethwa clan. However, it is worth noting that Shaka's leadership qualities and intelligence, coupled with his military skills, made it easy for him to be recognised by Dingiswayo as a young man with great potential. Outwardly, Shaka was tall and powerfully built, and his skill and bravery gave him a natural mastery over the youth of his age group; inwardly, he was developing a thirst for power. Probably, when he was about twenty-three years old, he was drafted into the Mthethwa iziCwe regiment, where he found a satisfaction he had never known before. His outstanding deeds of courage attracted the attention of his overlord and, rising rapidly in Dingiswayo's army, he became one of his foremost commanders. At this time, Shaka was given the name Nodumehlezi (the one who, when seated, causes the earth to rumble). After the death of his father, Senzangakhona, with the help of his mentors, Dingiswayo and Mnkabayi, Shaka eliminated his brother, Sigujana, to secure his accession to the Zulu throne. According to Ngidi ka Mcikaziswa, after the death of Senzangakhona, Shaka was summoned to the Zulu state to appear before his three aunts – Mnkabayi, Mmama and Mawa – who objected to Sigujana being made king because his mother, Mpikase, was not from a royal family.⁵⁰ They further argued that Shaka's mother was a daughter of Mbengi, the eLangeni King, which validated Shaka's selection to succeed his father. His great military skills inevitably led to the expansion of the Zulu Kingdom.

Military Genius

When Shaka rose to power, he inherited an insignificant Zulu clan that was surrounded by powerful kingdoms, such as the Mthethwa and the Ndwandwe. Allen concurs that the Zulu clan spent the greater part of the eighteenth century in relative insignificance.⁵¹ However, as a renowned consummate military general who had already proved himself under Dingiswayo's army, he introduced several military reforms that revolutionised the Zulu warfare. Kunene contended that he revolutionised African warfare at an unparalleled scale.⁵² According to Allen, he placed emphasis on military organisation and skills.⁵³ Above all, the success of his military innovations depended on the strict military discipline he imposed on his soldiers. He increased the size of the Zulu army and its capability through rigorous training, coupled with the introduction of strategic and tactful manoeuvres.⁵⁴ Kunene posits that Shaka nurtured

⁴⁶ Webb and Wright, "James Stuart Interview with Ndhlovu Ka Timuni," 198 – 204.

⁴⁷ Kunene, *Emperor Shaka the Great*, XXVII.

⁴⁸ Kunene, *Emperor Shaka the Great*, XXVII.

⁴⁹ Kunene, *Emperor Shaka the Great*, 44.

⁵⁰ Webb and Wright, "James Stuart Interview with Ngidi Ka Mcikaziswa," 42.

⁵¹ Calvin R Allen, "Shaka Zulu's Linkage of Strategy and Tactics: An Early Form of Operational Art?," 2014, 5.

⁵² Kunene, *Emperor Shaka the Great*, XXVII.

⁵³ Kunene, *Emperor Shaka the Great*, 1.

⁵⁴ John Laband, *The Rise and Fall of the Zulu Kingdom, Zulu Identities: Being Zulu, Past and Present* (Durban: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2008), 88.

the Zulu army from a small volunteer army of approximately 200 men into a cumbersome military machine of more than 60,000 well-trained men.⁵⁵⁵⁶ Allen posited that:

Shaka was a military genius for his reforms and innovations in the art of war. He changed the nature of warfare in Africa from an exchange of taunts and spear throwing, producing minimal loss of life, to close combat warfare. Together with his bullhorn tactics, the combination of assegai and shield, Shaka inflicted crushing defeat upon his enemies.⁵⁷

His intimate understanding of the psychology and mechanics of conflict made him a breed apart. Laband maintains that Shaka consolidated his position over the Nguniland through extremely skilful diplomacy and the use of his sharp army.⁵⁸ He manipulated the events to his advantage and used his military skills to minister to his expansionist designs. His military expansion shaped the politics in the Nguniland and beyond. Therefore, the aggrandisement of the Zulu state is attributed to Shaka's military genius. Therefore, this section discusses Shaka's military reforms.

An assegai (short stabbing spear) for close combat

The pre-Shakan era was comparatively bloodless and characterised by reluctant warfare, which was less effective. Thus, before the rise of Shaka to power, Nguni soldiers used long spears that were thrown at the enemy. This was an exhaustive exercise that Shaka disapproved of, hence the introduction of a short stabbing spear, commonly known as an assegai.⁵⁹ Allen posits that Shaka "envisioned an army's ability to perform effectively in close combat."⁶⁰ Kunene concurred that Shaka commissioned the making of the short stabbing spear and convinced his unit of the effectiveness of close combat, as opposed to spear throwing.⁶¹ Tzu contended that close combat is an effective winning strategy.⁶² According to Ivey, the assegai, designed for close combat, was one of Shaka's most iconic inventions.⁶³ Eldredge concurs that the assegai is attributed to Shaka's initiative, however, with the approval of Dingiswayo.⁶⁴ After the death of Senzangakhona, Shaka took over as the Zulu King and put to effective use the new short stabbing spear. According to Kunene, each man was expected to carry one short stabbing spear to the battlefield and to return with it.⁶⁵ Allen maintains that the short stabbing spear was more effective in inflicting casualties than the traditional long-throwing spear.⁶⁶

Cowhide shield for protection against the enemy's darts or spears

Shaka introduced a longer and wider shield (*isihlangu*) for protection against the enemy's darts of spears. Each Zulu regiment had its distinctive colour-coded shields for easy identification. According to Allen, the use of colour-coded hides was a major innovation by Shaka to easily identify his regiments and provide command and control on the battlefield.⁶⁷ He trained his warriors on how to use the shield to hook the enemy, push them to the left and then stab them using the assegai. According to Knight, the cowhide shields were used by the soldiers to batter the enemy and expose them to a short stabbing spear.⁶⁸ Allen argues that, using the modern shield in this manner, the Zulu warriors transformed it from

⁵⁵ Kunene, *Emperor Shaka the Great*, XXVII.

⁵⁶ Allen, "Shaka Zulu's Linkage of Strategy and Tactics: An Early Form of Operational Art?," 20.

⁵⁷ Allen, "Shaka Zulu's Linkage of Strategy and Tactics: An Early Form of Operational Art?" 20.

⁵⁸ Laband, *The Rise and Fall of the Zulu Kingdom*, 88.

⁵⁹ C. Webb and J.B. Wright, "James Stuart Interview with Baleni Ka Silwana," in *The James Stuart Archives* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 1976), 34-35.

⁶⁰ Allen, "Shaka Zulu's Linkage of Strategy and Tactics: An Early Form of Operational Art?" 4.

⁶¹ Kunene, *Emperor Shaka the Great*, XXVIII.

⁶² Meng-Tzu Cheng et al., "Drugs and the Brain: Learning the Impact of Methamphetamine Abuse on the Brain through a Virtual Brain Exhibit in the Museum," *International Journal of Science Education* 33, no. 2 (2011): 299-319.

⁶³ J. Ivey, "Revolutionary Material Culture Series," 2019.

⁶⁴ Eldredge, *The Creation of the Zulu Kingdom, 1815-1828*, 61-62.

⁶⁵ Kunene, *Emperor Shaka the Great*, XXX.

⁶⁶ Allen, "Shaka Zulu's Linkage of Strategy and Tactics: An Early Form of Operational Art?" 9.

⁶⁷ Allen, "Shaka Zulu's Linkage of Strategy and Tactics: An Early Form of Operational Art?" 14.

⁶⁸ Ian Knight, *The Anatomy of the Zulu Army: From Shaka to Cetshwayo, 1818-1879* (Frontline Books, 2015), 32.

purely defensive into an offensive implement.⁶⁹ It is on this basis that Knight contends that Shaka, using his new military reforms, took the fighting technique to an unprecedented degree.⁷⁰

Going to the battlefield barefoot for greater speed and mobility

With the introduction of the short stabbing spear and a cowhide shield, Shaka believed that speed was a decisive factor in a battle of any magnitude. He believed that sandals were heavy and slowed the pace of his warriors. Therefore, he prohibited his soldiers from putting on sandals when going to battle. For greater speed and mobility, Shaka trained his warriors barefoot. Knight contends that on average, Zulu warriors ran twenty to thirty miles a day on rugged terrain to build stamina and speed.⁷¹ As a result, the Zulu warriors were faster than their enemies on the battlefield and easily outmanoeuvred them. Allen notes that “discipline, speed, and close-quarters combat became the trademark of Shaka’s regiment.”⁷² With great speed and mobility, the Zulu warriors became the most feared military force in Zululand. They conquered and absorbed most of the chiefdoms and clans within their proximity, leading to the ennoblement and magnification of the Zulu Kingdom.

The cow horn formation

The cow horn formation was a three-part attack system that resembled the horns of a cow. The seasoned and bravest warriors formed the butt/chest of the cow’s horns, pinned the enemy to a position where it became exposed and easy to attack. Behind the butt/chest were reserve warriors who formed the loins, with their backs to the battle, protecting against any attack from behind.⁷³ They also served as the reserve army that replaced seasoned warriors in case of a violent attack. The younger warriors, with great mobility, formed the horns, which enveloped the enemy and hammered from multiple directions, eroding the morale and cohesion of the enemy. Figure 1 is a depiction of the cow horn formation.⁷⁴

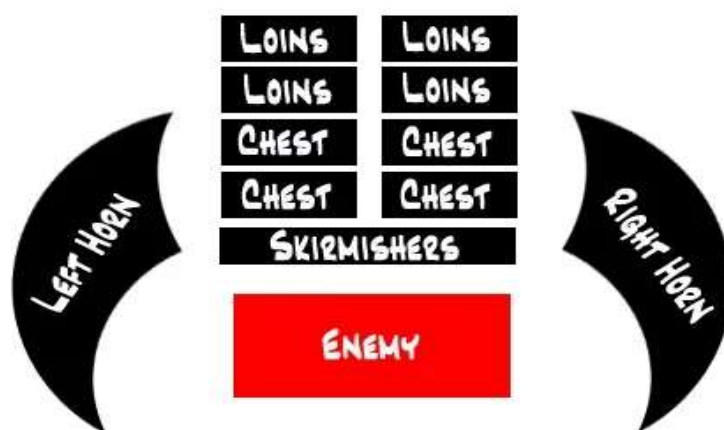


Figure 1: The cow horn formation from <https://moguldom.com/57305/16-things-made-shaka-zulu-a-military-genius/6/>.

According to Allen, Shaka realised that attacking the enemy from three sides was physically and morally effective.⁷⁵ Physically, the cow horn formation compelled the enemy to fight non-linearly, creating exploitable gaps.⁷⁶ Morally, the desired objective of the cow horn formation was to encircle the enemy, leaving it with no room to escape and, thus, instilling panic and fear, creating a psychological

⁶⁹ Allen, “Shaka Zulu’s Linkage of Strategy and Tactics: An Early Form of Operational Art?” 9.

⁷⁰ Knight, *The Anatomy of the Zulu Army: From Shaka to Cetshwayo, 1818–1879*, 32.

⁷¹ Ian Knight, *Warrior Chiefs of Southern Africa: Shaka of the Zulu, Moshoeshoe of the BaSotho, Mzilikazi of the Matabele, Maqoma of the Xhosa* (Riverside Press, 1994), 48.

⁷² Allen, “Shaka Zulu’s Linkage of Strategy and Tactics: An Early Form of Operational Art?” 10.

⁷³ J. Austin, “Things That Made Shaka Zulu a Military Genius,” *The Moguldom Nation*, 16AD.

⁷⁴ Austin, “Things That Made Shaka Zulu a Military Genius.”

⁷⁵ Allen, “Shaka Zulu’s Linkage of Strategy and Tactics: An Early Form of Operational Art?” 17.

⁷⁶ Allen, “Shaka Zulu’s Linkage of Strategy and Tactics: An Early Form of Operational Art?” 17.

impact on the enemy. The early success of the cow horn formation elevated it to become the main fighting technique of the Zulu army.

Shaka effectively used the cow horn formation in a battle with Zwide of the Ndwandwe people at the Battle of Gqokli Hill, on the Mfolozi and on the confluence of the Mhlatuze River with the Mvuzane stream. Anger and an insatiable appetite to control Zululand and its surrounding areas inevitably led to the downfall of Zwide. Tzu agrees that in a war, anger and greed are fundamental causes of defeat.⁷⁷ The cow horn formation helped the Zulu Kingdom under Shaka to eclipse its enemies, prompting Allen to assert that Shaka's cow horn military strategy, which resulted in a decisive victory, was ingenious. It was later exploited by Cetshwayo at the Battle of Isandlwana in 1879 to defeat the British army. Whilst some historians argue that the cow horn formation was already in existence long before Shaka, it can be agreed that Shaka popularised it and was effective in using the method. On this basis, Allen argued that the cow horn formation brought Shaka's military capabilities to the core, for easy admiration from both his people and enemies.

The age-regiment system that helped to produce enough soldiers and reserves

Whilst Knight argues that there is empirical evidence that suggests that the age-regiment system was utilised during the wars that preceded Shaka's rise, he concedes that Shaka turned them into a professional and fully-fledged national army.⁷⁸ Shaka understood that to defeat his enemies, his army needed a shared sense of belonging and unity. According to Kunene, the need for commanders and soldiers to share the experience of daily life was imperative for the Zulu army to win its battles.⁷⁹ To meet this crucial need, Shaka recruited his soldiers (able-bodied men who were 40 years and below) on the grounds of their common age and organised them into age-regiments. Wright argued that the organisation of the soldiers into age-regiments, instead of on a regional basis, side-stepped the possibility of dissent of the soldiers from the conquered people.⁸⁰ The soldiers were expected to render military service to the king for a period of 15–20 years, although the king could still call upon them when the need arose.⁸¹ After their military service, they were allowed to marry.

The *amabutho* system was a principal means by which the king controlled his young men.⁸² According to Cope, the organisation of *amabutho* (soldiers) into age-regiments was the main centralising agency in the Zulu Kingdom.⁸³ He contends that young men were enrolled into the army not on a territorial basis, but on a nationwide scale.⁸⁴ They were quartered in military barracks, each with a commander chosen by merit rather than family affiliation, as in any modern army. *Amabutho* worked for the king as hunters, herders, crop cultivators and homestead builders. Cope maintains that the age-regiment system can be loosely described as the Zulu taxation system.⁸⁵ This potential wealth was transferred from the territorial chiefs to the king, leading to the accumulation of wealth, which was a metaphor for power. However, spoils of war taken from the defeated armies were split among *amabutho*, and this solidified their loyalty to the king. Mkabayi's assertion that when his half-brothers, Dingane and Mhlangana, approached him and complained about his leadership, confirms this: "Shaka is the only ruler who shall make our nation great. He does not hoard the loot of wars, like others ..."⁸⁶ In order for the soldiers to courageously participate in the war, they must have been motivated by rewards at the conclusion of the war.⁸⁷ Allen contends that the highest law governing the Zulu nation was that of sharing the resources and a common fate in peace and war.⁸⁸ It can be argued that the early Zulu tax

⁷⁷ Sun Tzu, "The Art of War, Translated by Thomas Cleary," *Boston: Shambala*, 1988, 14.

⁷⁸ Knight, *The Anatomy of the Zulu Army: From Shaka to Cetshwayo, 1818–1879*, 33.

⁷⁹ Kunene, *Emperor Shaka the Great*, XXXII.

⁸⁰ Knight, *The Anatomy of the Zulu Army: From Shaka to Cetshwayo, 1818–1879*, 32.

⁸¹ I. Knight and A. McBride, "Zulu 1816-1906." (London: Osprey, 1995), 4.

⁸² Knight, *The Anatomy of the Zulu Army: From Shaka to Cetshwayo, 1818–1879*, 32.

⁸³ Richard L Cope, "Political Power Within The Zulu Kingdom and the 'Coronation Laws' of 1873," *Journal of Natal and Zulu History* 8, no. 1 (1985): 12.

⁸⁴ Cope, "Political Power Within The Zulu Kingdom and the 'Coronation Laws' of 1873."

⁸⁵ Cope, "Political Power Within The Zulu Kingdom and the 'Coronation Laws' of 1873," 13.

⁸⁶ Kunene, *Emperor Shaka the Great*, 168.

⁸⁷ Tzu, "The Art of War, Translated by Thomas Cleary," 270.

⁸⁸ Allen, "Shaka Zulu's Linkage of Strategy and Tactics: An Early Form of Operational Art?" 16.

system, marshalled around the age-regiment system, confirms how organised and sophisticated the Zulu Kingdom was under Shaka.

Young boys were recruited as luggage (weapons and food stuff) carriers, and *inyanga* (doctors) were also employed to attend to the medical needs of the army. Allen notes that this ensured freedom of action, extended operational reach and prolonged endurance.⁸⁹ Shaka also incorporated female regiments into his military system. Female warriors acted as reserves in case there was a need for additional soldiers in a battle. He trained his female regiments on how to effectively use the assegai and thus, they were fierce in executing their military duties like their male counterparts.⁹⁰ The female regiments were led by royal women and they were strong enough to defend against superior forces until reinforced.⁹¹ Knight contends that the *amabutho* system was an extremely effective means of centralising power and instilling a sense of nationhood.⁹² Allen concludes that “Shaka’s regimental concept became the army of armies in Southern Africa that would overwhelm all opposition.”⁹³ The utilisation of the age-regiment system for the extraction of wealth and as an effective military machine led to the unification of Nguni tribes in the area between the Tugela River in the south and the Pongola River in the north, under Shaka, and consequently, the expansion of the Zulu Kingdom.

Izigodhlo and Amakhanda, headed by royal women

According to Ndlovu, *izigodhlo* and *amakhanda* occupied central positions in the king’s homestead enclosures.⁹⁴ Royal women or senior women appointed from within the ranks of *izigodhlo* headed *amakhanda* and *izigodhlo* (a place where all unmarried women lived). The gender oppression school of historical analysis that is spearheaded by Jeff Guy and Cheryl Walker describes *izigodhlo* as a harem of the king.⁹⁵ In contrast to this view, *izigodhlo* were havens of safety for all unmarried women. Ndlovu contends that *izigodhlo* were focal points and sources of regal patronage within the Zulu Kingdom.⁹⁶ The existence of *izigodhlo* during Shaka’s reign is a confirmation that women were highly valued in the Zulu Kingdom. They were protected from their male counterparts and preserved for marriage. Thus, young women only graduated from *izigodhlo* when they got married. Perhaps this explains why in the precolonial Zulu Kingdom, there were limited single-headed families and single mothers. Therefore, it can be argued that *izigodhlo* strengthened the Zulu social fabric.

Besides being safety nets for women, *izigodhlo* also served as army reserves that were, however, seldom used during military campaigns. Mkabayi led ebaQulusini, and her twin sister, Mmama, controlled eTonteleni. *The leaders of Amakhanda and izigodhlo* were consulted before launching military expeditions. Kingmakers in the Zulu Kingdom were also influential women revered as the guardians of the state. Mkabayi, as a skilful kingmaker, approved the respective kings and most of their decisions. Female leadership took on various forms, ranging from military to religious and economic. These roles defined their power and influence within the Zulu Kingdom. Therefore, influential women who headed *izigodhlo* or *amakhanda*, such as Queen Mkabayi kaJama, played crucial roles in the political aggrandisement of the once minute Zulu clan, transforming it into one of the strongest polities in Southern Africa.

According to Ivey, Shaka did not invent new weapons or new fighting methods; instead, he used what he inherited from his mentor, Dingiswayo.⁹⁷ Wylie argues that Shaka’s contribution was in organisation and control, and not in the reinvention of military technology.⁹⁸ From the assertions of Ivey and Wylie, it can be inferred that Shaka’s military account can only be credited with imitation rather

⁸⁹ Allen, “Shaka Zulu’s Linkage of Strategy and Tactics: An Early Form of Operational Art?” 18.

⁹⁰ Allen, “Shaka Zulu’s Linkage of Strategy and Tactics: An Early Form of Operational Art?” 13; Cope, “Political Power Within The Zulu Kingdom and the ‘Coronation Laws’ of 1873,” 13.

⁹¹ Allen, “Shaka Zulu’s Linkage of Strategy and Tactics: An Early Form of Operational Art?” 13; Cope, “Political Power Within The Zulu Kingdom and the ‘Coronation Laws’ of 1873,” 13.

⁹² Knight, *The Anatomy of the Zulu Army: From Shaka to Cetshwayo, 1818–1879*, 33.

⁹³ Allen, “Shaka Zulu’s Linkage of Strategy and Tactics: An Early Form of Operational Art?” 14.

⁹⁴ Sifiso Ndlovu, “A Reassessment of Women’s Power in the Zulu Kingdom,” *Zulu Identities: Being Zulu, Past and Present*, 2008, 114.

⁹⁵ Ndlovu, “A Reassessment of Women’s Power in the Zulu Kingdom,” 114.

⁹⁶ Ndlovu, “A Reassessment of Women’s Power in the Zulu Kingdom,” 114.

⁹⁷ Ivey, “Revolutionary Material Culture Series.”

⁹⁸ D. Wylie, *Myth of Iron: Tshaka in History* (Durban: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press., 2006), 217.

than invention. However, a close analysis of his reign reveals that he invented new fighting methods that transformed him from an upstart to the arbiter of Nguniland. The effective use of spies helped to gather crucial information about the operational environment and the terrain of the enemy. The infiltration of the enemy allowed Shaka to understand his moves, strengths and weaknesses. Allen commented that “without good intelligence, military actions can lead to blind attrition rather than the desired strategic end”.⁹⁹ Knowledge of the enemy informed Shaka’s military planning and strategy. As argued by Allen, Shaka’s efficient use of intelligence supports the concept of operational art. Therefore, the exploitation of a legendary intelligence network, led by Prince Mzilikazi of the Khumalo clan, coupled with the use of his well-oiled military machinery, led to the complete defeat of Zwide of the Ndwandwe Kingdom at the Battle of Gqokli Hill. Shaka ordered the destruction of Zwide’s military supply, and through starvation and direct military attack, the cumbersome Ndwandwe army was nearly annihilated. The defeat of Zwide made Shaka an unchallenged master of the region.

His new military reforms led to a military revolution that triggered the wide expansion of Zulu power. Although he was Dingiswayo’s military student, he is an example of a genius student whose achievements surpassed his mentor’s. Laband contends that the expansion of the Zulu Kingdom must be credited to Shaka’s extraordinary military abilities to transform his *amabutho* into the most effective fighters in the region. According to Kunene, the military machinery he initiated, fifty years later, was exploited to lead to the first-ever defeat of the British army in its colonial history.¹⁰⁰ He concluded that:

Shaka’s reforms enabled the Zulu army to operate as a swift, effective military machine, conquering powerful rulers like King Phakathwayo, King Phungashe and King Zwide. In one of its most spectacular victories, Shaka’s forces completely destroyed Zwide’s army in 1818, despite the enemy’s superior numbers.

Shaka’s effective military reforms allowed the Zulu army to operate as a swift and effective military machine, conquering powerful and less powerful rulers alike. By 1824, Shaka had become the absolute ruler of the Nguniland. King Shaka did not annihilate the defeated clans; instead, he absorbed them into the Zulu social, political and economic systems. Some of the defeated chiefdoms remained semi-independent, however, a tributary to the Zulu Kingdom. According to Laband, smaller chiefdoms that submitted to Shaka provided manpower to the Zulu Kingdom in times of war, in return for their protection. Through scrupulous political manoeuvres coupled with calculated diplomacy, Shaka nurtured the Zulu Kingdom into one of the most powerful polities in Nguniland and beyond. The historical continuity of the Zulu royal family, which is a symbol of Zulu nationalism, must be credited to Shaka’s military accomplishments. Therefore, the expansion of the Zulu Kingdom must be credited to his unparalleled military and nation-building abilities.

Nation builder

Before the advent of Shaka into the Zulu political arena, the policies of persuasion did not create lasting peace, since the enemy had an opportunity to regroup and forge new alliances. According to Allen, Shaka believed that the enemy must be completely defeated, and its fragments absorbed into the Zulu nationhood. As one of the greatest nation builders of his era, Shaka engineered the expansion of the Zulu Kingdom across the Nguniland. His rule extended over a larger part of Southern Africa, and areas that were not under his direct rule were under the suzerainty of his trusted generals. This led to the effective and efficient administration of the Zulu Kingdom. According to Socwatsha ka Papu, Shaka established twenty-two kraals (modern state house equivalent) in the area, and these were: Kwa Bulawayo – head kraal, Kwa Gibabanye, Kwa Gibixhegu, Mgumanqa, Ufasimba, Mbelebele, Dukuza, Kangela, Ozweleni, Entekelweni, Mdadasa, Ntonteleni, Dhlangezwa, Kwa Guqu, Obimbini (built in the Mthethwa country after the death of Dingiswayo), Emkandhlweni, Emyeheni, Nomdayana, Obadaneni, Ekuwazeni, Isipezi and Empangisweni.

After the death of his military mentor, Dingiswayo, Shaka forged alliances with smaller neighbouring clans to counter the growing threat of the Ndwandwe under Zwide. Shaka’s political

⁹⁹ Allen, “Shaka Zulu’s Linkage of Strategy and Tactics: An Early Form of Operational Art?” 18.

¹⁰⁰ Kunene, *Emperor Tshaka the Great: A Zulu Epic*, 164.

manoeuvres were defensive and offensive; however, where diplomacy alone could suffice, it was calculatedly utilised. Through his nation-building abilities, he consolidated the scattered Nguni clans together with the much larger Mthethwa under Dingiswayo to create the Zulu nation. Although he was a resolute and strong-willed leader, he was magnanimous; hence, he spared the lives of the defeated people and asked them to submit to him. Furthermore, he was a generous leader who cared for the poor and the disabled. Baleni ka Silwana posited that Shaka was a generous man who gave food to the poor and strangers.¹⁰¹ Allen stated that:

Shaka practised operational art because he had military and diplomatic power in his hands and could directly tailor military actions to his strategic aims. First, he introduced a system based on merit, from which he achieved a nationally motivated army. Second, he provided the means to raise, equip, manoeuvre, and sustain a large army.¹⁰²

Shaka's hegemony in Nguniland was based on three pillars: military might, diplomacy and patronage. Friendly chieftains were incorporated into the Zulu Kingdom and these included Jobe of the Sithole, Zihlandlo of the Mkhize and Mathubane of the Thuli. Furthermore, Shaka incorporated the scattered remnants of the defeated clans into his own army. On this basis, Knight and McBride pronounced that the Zulu Kingdom was by no means politically monolithic; it was rather a conglomerate of clans that were defeated by Shaka and then incorporated into the Zulu socio-political system. Contrary to this view, Allen argues that Shaka exploited his organisational tactics, coupled with his military skills, to assimilate the defeated clans into one Zulu nation. His assassination at KwaDukuza on 22 September 1828 by his half-brothers, Mhlangana and Dingane, with the assistance of his bodyguard, Mbopha, marked the end of an era of the aggrandisement of the Zulu Kingdom. He even gave them a prophetic warning that they won't rule the Zulu Kingdom he established; instead, it will be ruled by White people who will come from the sea. However, Shaka laid a solid foundation for a united, proud and strong Zulu nation.

Walter's assertion that the Zulu Kingdom is not extinct, it survives in the imaginations and the latent social practices of the Bantu people, is far-fetched.¹⁰³ The Zulu Kingdom not only exists in the imaginations and latent social practices of the Zulu people, but it also enjoys physical existence under King Misuzulu, with a fat state budget of close to R70 million per annum. During Shaka's brief reign, more than a hundred chiefdoms were brought together into the Zulu Kingdom, which survived not only the death of its founder but later military defeats and calculated attempts by colonists to disintegrate it. The Zulu Kingdom and its social practices survived the vagaries of colonialism and apartheid unscathed. Thanks to Shaka's military genius and his nation-building prowess, which laid a solid foundation for the Zulu Kingdom. Today, the Zulu Kingdom remains one of the strongest kingdoms in Africa, whose people remain strongly attached to their cultural practices presided over by their king. Allen concludes that the success of the Zulu Kingdom under Shaka and beyond is related to the application of military operational art.

CONCLUSION

This article explored Shaka as a military genius and a skilled nation builder of his time. Historians of the old school of thought dispute the military and social inventions attributed to Shaka, arguing that the inventions must be credited to European influences. Moreover, competing narratives were suppressed in an attempt to convey an ugly, monolithic portrayal of Shaka. However, the available oral evidence reveals that Shaka was a great military genius whose inventions led to the reconfiguration and expansion of the Zulu Kingdom. He introduced great military reforms that helped the Zulu clan conquer the kingdoms and clans scattered in Nguniland. As a nation builder, Shaka absorbed the defeated people into the Zulu socio-political and economic systems. He harnessed the manpower of the newly incorporated groups for the aggrandisement of the Zulu Kingdom. The strong foundation of the Zulu

¹⁰¹ Webb and Wright, "James Stuart Interview with Baleni Ka Silwana."

¹⁰² Allen, "Shaka Zulu's Linkage of Strategy and Tactics: An Early Form of Operational Art?" 20.

¹⁰³ Walter, "Rise and Fall of the Zulu Power," 546.

Kingdom that was laid by Shaka is the source of Zulu nationalism and ethnic identity. The article concludes that the rise and expansion of the Zulu Kingdom must be credited to Shaka's military account.

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