

Perhaps this is because many of these stories stem from the author's experiences as a child. Childhood memories may be more vivid than later experiences and, with the passage of time, become romanticized. I certainly enjoyed a wave of nostalgia while reading about many of the same things that I did as a youngster, including sampling that most wonderful of indigenous fruits, the snot apple (I much prefer its delightfully onomatopoeic Sindebele name — *Xaguxagu*).

The third part of the book ('Abdul') is about an injured Abdim's Stork which the author rescued and cared for until it was able to fly away. This is an interesting and well-written piece which taught me something about these birds, but I feel that Abdul's story does not deserve such a large proportion of the book and that one or two chapters could have been eliminated without much loss.

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The Praises of Dingana: Izibongo zikaDingana Edited by D. K. Rycroft and A. B. Ngcobo. Pietermaritzburg, Univ. of Natal Press, Killie Campbell Africana Library Series, 1988, xiii, 258 pp., ISBN 0-86950-629-7, R46,50.

It is a fitting tribute to Dingane (Dingana) that Rycroft and Ngcobo should have reproduced his praise-poem (*izibongo*) in written form. This poem brilliantly illustrates the genius of the Zulu *izimbongi*, perhaps most memorably expressed in the following immortal lines (p. 74)

Vezi kof' abantu
Kosa' izibongo
Izona zosala zibadalula
Izona zosala zibalil' emanxiweni

Vezi, though people may die, praises remain
 These will remain and bring grief for them
 Remain and lament for them in the empty homes.

The book is also a tribute to James Stuart's extended study of Zulu history and culture. The present *izibongo*, a tremendous 432 lines, were collated by James Stuart from sixteen different sources and have never been published before in this full form. The present transcription was made from six recordings made by Stuart for the Zenophone Record Company in London between 1927 and 1930, of which only the first was ever issued commercially. Accompanying the transcription is an English translation with a detailed line-by-line commentary to aid the literary historian and the literary critic. It provides the reader with material as near as possible to the nineteenth-century recitals of *izibongo*, and the sound recording has been diagrammized to represent the way in which the *imbongi* recited the poem, thus animating the frozen *izibongo* as much as possible.

But for a reader seeking ground-breaking research on *izibongo*, this book is a disappointment. There is a lack of rigorous analysis that such a subject now requires. For example, Rycroft and Ngcobo do not defend their definition of

izibongo as 'eulogies' beyond simply telling us that it was a term James Stuart 'favoured' (p. 11). The term is ideologically inadequate, thinly selective, and may cause misunderstanding of the institution of *izibongo*. Gunner,¹ Mapanje and White,² and Opland,³ among others, see the need for a more informed definition.

Rycroft and Ngcobo's work is deeply concerned with the question of authorship (see Chapter Three and Appendix). They recognize Magolwana as 'the greatest *imbongi* of all time' (p. 38) and maintain that he was Dingane's *imbongi*, who later served both Mpande and Cetshwayo, but who did not serve Shaka. Cope quotes Kunene,⁴ who 'attributes the perfection of the stanza [structure of *izibongo*] to Shaka's famous praiser, Magolwana'. Since Rycroft and Ngcobo concede Magolwana was the greatest *imbongi*, it is sensible to assume that Magolwana in fact predates Dingane and that he could have composed the beautiful praise-poem of Shaka. There is need for further research into the matter of Magolwana.

For the Zimbabwean reader there are numerous references to Mzilikazi which are very interesting, sometimes because they are misleading: for example, line 65 'Wadl' uMlomo-wezingaba kwaMashobane' (You killed Mlomo-wezingaba among the Khumalo), means that Mlomo-wezingaba was killed by Dingane, but in fact Mlomo-wezingaba was still alive at the time of Mbiko's rebellion in 1870 in which he (Mlomo-wezingaba) took Lobengula's side.

Despite the detailed commentary, there is a nagging feeling that we never sense, any more than we do in Nyembezi's collection,⁵ the presence of Dingane, the usurper who, history has shown, was able to maintain the Zulu martial culture that Shaka had built.

This book is, however, important as a contribution to the literary studies of Zulu.

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¹ E. Gunner, 'Forgotten men: Zulu bards and praising at the time of the Zulu kings' *African Languages/Langues Africaines* (1976), II, 72-3.

² J. Mapanje and L. White, *Oral Poetry from Africa* (London, Longman, 1983), 7.

³ J. Opland, *Xhosa Oral Poetry* (Cambridge, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1983).

⁴ R. Kunene, 'An Analytical Survey of Zulu Poetry, Both Traditional and Modern' (Pietermaritzburg, Univ. of Natal, MA thesis, 1962), quoted in *Isibongo: Zulu Praise-Poems* coll. James Stuart, trans. D. Malcolm, ed. T. Cope (Oxford, Clarendon, 1968), 53.

⁵ C. L. S. Ngembezi, *Isibongo zamakhosi* (Pietermaritzburg, Shuter and Shooter, 1958).