

# *Book Reviews and Notices*

## **NORWEGIAN MISSIONARIES IN NATAL AND ZULULAND: SELECTED CORRESPONDENCE 1844–1900**

By FREDERICK HALE (ed.)

Cape Town, Van Riebeeck Society, Second Series No.27, 1997. pp.xvi,222, illustrated.

Frederick Hale has been an affable and welcome presence at academic and, especially, Norwegian commemorative occasions in KwaZulu-Natal. With his local knowledge of Natal, Zululand and Norway, and with his qualifications both as historian (his numerous degrees not least!) and as Norwegian linguist, he is an ideal editor for this edition of the correspondence of Norwegian missionaries housed mainly in Stavanger or contained in the missionary journals of that time. His aims were fourfold: to make available at least some of a large cache of material hitherto largely inaccessible to South African readers owing to the language barrier; to compile a documentary history of the Norwegian missionary endeavour; to provide contemporary perceptions of the process of evangelizing the Zulu indigenes for us to project against the later perspective of more than a century of unhappy race relations, and, finally, to cast oblique light on the unfolding secular history of those times. In these aims he has succeeded.

Missionaries continue to enjoy a mixed press. As 'Majeke', Dora Taylor once cast them as the fifth column of European imperialism. Many critics still see them thus – as forward agents softening up indigenous societies for later, more relentless economic exploitation and political oppression. But the primary intention of missionaries – as this selection abundantly testifies – was the saving of souls. How far they succeeded therein remains, of course, hidden from mere mortals; so our concern must be more with their secular impact. And here the Norwegian missionaries do provide plenty of commentary on the change wrought by their own, and the general European, presence on the cosmology, political institutions and material culture of the Zulu.

The key personality of the early years is Bishop Hans Schreuder. A tall, impressive man, he personified the 'fundamental transition in the religious life of Norway' of the early 19th century that had inspired the missionary effort thence. Hale's introduction usefully sketches out these theological developments and the fact that the Norwegian missionary effort sprang mainly from the inspirational root of Lutheranism, and only later on diversified in South Africa into several

denominational branches. Indeed, his last chapter, which deals with the struggling 'Free East Africa Mission' serves as the clearest example of this diversification.

The early section on 'Penetrating Natal and Zululand, 1844–77', revolves largely round the larger-than-life figure of Schreuder. Even for this formidable man the going was hard: it took fourteen years to baptise his first convert at Umpumulo in Natal. In Zululand his Ntumeni station was evidence of how his medical expertise, when put at King Mpande's service, had won the Norwegian missionaries some limited purchase beyond the Tugela. For many years it remained, nevertheless, a toehold rather than a foothold.

Chapter III, the 'Era of the Anglo-Zulu War' will probably be, for most readers, the most interesting. Cetshwayo's attitude toward the missionaries was ambivalent, though he and Ommund Oftebro appear to have got on well at times. But the growing border dispute with Shepstone's Transvaal increased friction between the foreign churchmen and the Zulu state. As a symptom, there were the sporadic executions of mission Africans. By 1878 the Norwegian missionaries saw the crisis as sufficiently acute to justify their withdrawal from Zululand. At that time, too, Schreuder described his consultations with Frere and, elusively, his limited role in the Anglo-Zulu negotiations that followed (pp. 102–6).

Frere's partiality for missionaries is of course well known; and certainly his plans for Zululand, when conquered, seem to have been premised round a larger calling for them. Yet it would be wrong to ascribe too great an influence either to advice offered by the Norwegians, especially Schreuder, to imperial administrators such as the High Commissioner or to the missionary element in the then British plans for Zululand after the conquest. Anyway, Isandlwana and the advent of the unsympathetic Wolesley largely neutralized such schemes. Missionary comment upon Wolesley's subsequent Zululand settlement (and on the position in it accorded to the equally unsympathetic John Dunn) is predictably adverse. It does, however, emerge that the potential for making converts was somewhat more promising than before the war.

Chapter IV deals with 'Lutheran Consolidation and Expansion, 1880–99'. The troubled nature of Zululand in the early post-conquest years, from 1880 to 1888, is well documented, as, too, is Norwegian missionary apprehension about the return of Cetshwayo in 1883. But the selection also illuminates the nature of missionary activity in its daily round of social, religious, educational and economic activity. Readers with gender preoccupations will find such extracts particularly relevant. Of significance, too, is the question of cultural interaction. Sometimes it was easy and informal; but, as the white missionary community grew, there were segregatory influences at work – especially concerning the shielding of young white mission children from what were considered the negative aspects of black society. In missionary eyes the easier-going rhythms of African life seemed to contradict their own obsessive work-ethic; while 'sensuousness' was a vice from which the young must at all costs be kept!

Such strains can be exaggerated. There was obviously a good deal of mutual respect between individuals from the traditional tribal society and the Norwegian missionary enclave. The latter's efforts to communicate new skills and attitudes were both dedicated and, often, quite understanding of the traumas that such

transitions could involve. For the missionaries, too, the life was harsh and subject to all kinds of vicissitudes, not least those of pestilence, weather, penury and spiritual backsliding. A major question thus arises from Hale's well-chosen extracts: was the lot of the indigenes eased, or exacerbated, by such intermediaries during the transformation – probably inevitable – imposed by this early (and painful) part of the overall process of incorporation in a wider world? (As encouragement to sample the selection, this reviewer leaves the answer to potential readers!)

In sum, the book can be freely recommended to both an academic and a lay readership. The introductions to the theme, period, and to the individual letters are apt; the texts themselves illuminate many key facets of Norwegian missionary life; the illustrations, albeit slightly fuzzy in places, reflect the characters of the individuals and environments; and wider historical processes are detectable throughout the work. Both Dr Hale and the Van Riebeeck Society are to be congratulated for their initiative in making this key documentary commentary about our region available to us. (The Society may be contacted at P O Box 496, Cape Town 8000. Tel. 021-238 424.

JOHN BENYON

### **TERRIFIC MAJESTY : The powers of Shaka Zulu and the limits of historical invention**

By CAROLYN HAMILTON

Cape Town and Johannesburg, David Philip Publishers, 1998. xxii, 278 pp. ISBN 0 86486 4213. R79.95

King Shaka kaSenzangakhona, in his various literary manifestations, is probably the most widely-known figure in the history of the KwaZulu-Natal region. This book, based on the author's doctoral research at the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, investigates the various ways in which Shaka's career has been represented since the mid-1820s when the first white traders moved into his sphere of influence. A critical re-examination of the early nineteenth century sources upon which so many subsequent images of the Zulu king were based reveals the extent to which the perceptions of the Port Natal trading community concerning Shaka were shaped and changed by the shifting fortunes of their own competing commercial activities, their personal standing in the Zulu court, and the views of indigenous peoples who were either subjects or neighbours of the kingdom.

The initial image of a benevolent, hospitable and co-operative monarch who ruled over an orderly and well-mannered people was tainted only by the self-seeking and quickly discredited aspersions cast by the trader James King on a Shaka who was otherwise portrayed in the Cape colony as being so 'civilized' that it was suggested he might be 'of white extraction'. It was only after the Zulu king's assassination in 1828, as circumstances in the region changed and British colonization seemed to be the best way of reversing their mounting personal losses, that the trading community as a whole began to vilify his memory, embellishing their unfavourable representations with anecdotes previously supplied by indigenous informants. In this way Shaka the tyrannical monster assumed his place in history,

in competition with Shaka the benign founder of a nation and patron of foreign traders.

Both these images were also evident in contemporary Zulu interpretations of Shaka's reign and one of the significant contributions which this book makes to our understanding of that period is to demonstrate the extent to which early literary accounts of it were indelibly influenced by the indigenous African representations with which there was extensive interaction. Divisions within Shaka's recently-formed kingdom and the enmity of subjugated neighbours, particularly south of the Thukela river, provided ample scope for the generation of oral traditions which portrayed him as a tyrant and marauder, in contrast to those which extolled him as military hero, founding father and able unifier of the kingdom. Many of the Africans who joined the growing trading community at Port Natal brought with them the negative oral traditions concerning Shaka, being victims of his territorial conquests and, in some cases, fugitives from Zulu justice.

Subsequent indigenous representations of Shaka, it is suggested, were often linked to royal succession disputes – from Dingane and Mpande through to the struggle between Cetshwayo and Mbuyasi, and beyond – when the legitimacy of his birth and the merits of his own actions were either supported or questioned as the need arose. While this book focuses primarily upon the ways in which 'white' interpretations of Shaka and early Zulu history were shaped, it reveals that there was no single and consistent Zulu opinion on these subjects during the course of the nineteenth century, and that indigenous formulations of this history in and beyond Zululand probably exerted as much influence on the literary accounts produced by white writers as did their own identities and prejudices.

*Terrific Majesty* shows how literary representations of King Shaka had undergone several metamorphoses by the twentieth century when Zulu nationalists tried to use his image as the basis of a common Zulu identity among disparate social groups, while the architects of political segregation attempted to deploy it as the foundation of a Zulu 'homeland'. By the 1920s the various interpretations of Shaka had become so blurred as to make any clear classification of them impractical. Prominent among these were the colonial perceptions which helped to shape Theophilus Shepstone's system of 'native' administration in Natal, a reconstruction of Shakan-type rule which was subsequently disputed and modified from the time of the 1879 Anglo-Zulu War.

This study goes on to consider the efforts of James Stuart, the colonial official who between 1897 and 1924 tried to revive what he regarded as the essential Shakan principles of Shepstone's administration by investigating the Zulu King's reign through the extensive collection of oral evidence. It evaluates Stuart's work in relation to his motives, methods and social context, its relationship to contemporaneous 'native administration' and academic endeavour, and the way in which his and Shepstone's writings promoted a particular image of Shaka in fictional and semi-fictional works like E.A. Ritter's *Shaka Zulu*. For them Shaka represented firm but orderly government, a necessary alternative to lawless violence even though its own authority was based on military conquest. This approach, it is argued, drew heavily upon earlier Zulu perceptions of Shaka and was subsequently

incorporated into apartheid philosophy, in opposition to which Shaka and Zulu militarism also became a metaphor for stout resistance.

One of the achievements of *Terrific Majesty* is to marry within its covers two previously quite disparate types of scholarship in the form of those studies which have attempted to reconstruct the historical course of events in nineteenth century Natal-Zululand and those focusing essentially on representations of the Zulu and Zulu identity. It also demonstrates the dynamic interrelationship between past and present by showing how the memory of Shaka as founding father has become central to the promotion of Zulu nationalism as a political ideology which exerts forceful sway over large parts of present-day KwaZulu-Natal. The author argues that the power of Shaka's image, not least as a contemporary 'central metaphor in South African politics', does not lie, as others have argued, in its amenability to re-interpretation and exploitation but rather in the historical limitations upon its depiction, as revealed by her own historian's analysis of the processes upon which the history of Shaka and his times has been based.

This book is an invaluable contribution to the historiography, and literary discourse, surrounding the early nineteenth century in this region. As such it will have strong appeal not only to anthropologists and historians but also to those engaged in literary analysis and cultural studies. It is not particularly easy to read, being tightly argued and unwaveringly focused as one would expect of a work based on doctoral-level research. Nevertheless, in common with the author's earlier edited work *The Mfecane Aftermath* (Witwatersrand, University Press and University of Natal Press, 1995), it is an essential purchase for informed readers who want to keep abreast of the latest scholarship pertaining to the history of KwaZulu-Natal.

BILL GUEST

### **A FIELD GUIDE TO THE WILD FLOWERS OF KWAZULU-NATAL AND THE EASTERN REGION**

By ELSA POOLEY

Natal Flora Publications Trust, 1998. 630 pp., illustrated. Soft cover:R145, hard cover:R185

I approach the task of reviewing this book from the standpoint of a natural historian, which I suspect will be the background of the majority of potential readers – or users, rather, for one does not read a field guide such as this, one uses (and enjoys) it. As a zoologist I am not in a position to comment from a detailed botanical perspective; I leave that to others with more relevant experience.

South Africa is world renowned for its floral heritage, much of which is centered in the Cape, in what is recognised to be perhaps the world's hottest hotspot of botanical diversity and endemism, the Cape Floral Kingdom. The eastern parts of the country, however, also have an extraordinarily rich flora, and indeed the region is home to three internationally recognised centres of plant diversity, in Pondoland, Maputaland and the alpine Drakensberg. The geographical coverage of the book rightly includes much more than the province of KwaZulu-Natal, for political boundaries have no meaning for biogeography, the spatial distribution of organisms.

In the production of any field guide, one is faced with choices and compromises – does one treat the organisms in strict systematic order, or opt for a more pragmatic approach facilitating identification by the non-specialist? Does one use hand-drawn illustrations or photographs? In this guide, the author has chosen to treat the species in terms of flower colour, giving the user an immediate handle for the identification of a particular plant. Although pragmatic, this means that the representatives of a particular family or genus are frequently scattered through the book, leading to some repetition of introductory remarks, but to a large extent this is unavoidable. Treating the plants in systematic order would necessitate the use of complex terminology and the close scrutiny of flower parts. In any event, for those with such a bent the author also provides a key to families, at the same time trying to keep the language as simple as possible.

Colour photography has been chosen as the medium of illustration, and the result is a stunning floral portfolio which vividly reveals the great beauty and diversity of the region's wild flowers. The book has benefited greatly from the generous donation of these photographs by a number of talented botanical photographers. The treatment of the individual species follows a more or less standard format, with descriptions of the flowers and vegetative parts as well as information on flowering time, habitat and distribution, including maps. In addition, there is frequently a 'general' section that often contains interesting information about the biology of the plants, their uses in traditional medicine and as garden plants, their cultivation and their value to other organisms such as birds and insects. It is information of this nature that adds a further dimension to the book, contextualising the subject matter both in nature and in human society.

All this notwithstanding, the flora of the region is remarkably diverse (estimated by Pooley to be in excess of 10 000 species) and the book covers more than 2 000 species of flowering plant. Consequently, the task of identifying any given wild flower in eastern South Africa is not always a simple one. However, it is a task made all the more possible with this book at hand, and one that can be attempted by a much wider audience. It is far more comprehensive in its coverage than previous popular literature on the subject.

If I have any criticism of the book it would be to say that the introductory chapter is rather brief. I would have welcomed some kind of synthesis of the region's flora, discussing its origins, its relationships with neighbouring floras, levels of endemism and the effect of regional environmental history. Particularly pertinent would have been some discussion of the various vegetation types occurring in the region, including information on any unique or characteristic features of their wild flower floras. But perhaps all this would be too academic for an essentially popular publication.

Field guides of this nature have an extremely important role. Our only hope of stemming the tide (perhaps a tsunami!) of environmental degradation sweeping the Earth is through education and increased public awareness. But without adequate tools that bring rarefied and scattered academic literature into the public domain, the job is almost hopeless.

Elsa Pooley, the Trustees of the Natal Flora Publications Trust and all those who helped and supported the publication of this book are to be thanked and

congratulated for their very worthwhile product. It is a fine companion to the team's earlier volume 'A Field Guide to the Trees of KwaZulu-Natal and Transkei'.

D.G. HERBERT

**WAY UP WAY OUT. A satirical novel**

By Harold Strachan

Cape Town, David Philip, 1998. 168 pp., R44,95

Despite its sub-title, this is clearly an autobiographical book. Names of people and places may have been changed, and events sometimes conflated, but this is the story of Harold Strachan. It takes us from his childhood in Pretoria and Pietermaritzburg, through his schooldays and adolescence, to his wings parade at Central Flying School, Dunnottar, a culmination of his fascination with flight. The 19-year-old pilot can hardly believe his good fortune, his achievement, his freedom of the skies.

As I read this book with growing enjoyment and delight, I asked myself whether my response had anything to do with my closeness to its subject-matter and setting. About eight years younger than Strachan, I grew up in the same neighbourhood, attended his Ma's kindergarten, have dim memories of him and his sisters (awesomely grown-up they seemed, to a four-year-old) went to the same two schools as he, roamed the same fields along the 'Duzi, and could probably name the man he and his friends negotiated with to buy their nag, Mary. His accounts of boyhood experiences in Maritzburg, the Karkloof and the Drakensberg awaken some of my own boyhood memories forever bound up with those places. Did all this predispose me to enjoy the book, regardless?

I don't think so. Of course, some of the pleasure it gives derives from its South African setting and flavour, its idiom, its assumption of the common colloquial bilingualism of ordinary people. But I believe *Way up way out* will be appreciated for its universal qualities. It recreates the enthusiasms, preoccupations, crudities and sublimities of childhood and adolescence; it ridicules and castigates schools and schoolmasters unable to tolerate individuality and nonconformity; it mines rich veins of humour (his Ma's driving skills, his unpreparedness for the matric Latin exam, church parade during pilot training, and many more). Its lyricism never strikes a wrong note: the friendship of a childless middle-aged German widow for a small boy in Pretoria; launching a model aeroplane in the veld at Mountain Rise; sleeping under the stars on a pilgrimage to the Karkloof where Goodman Household flew his glider; cycling to Durban to listen again, adoring, to a singer who had captivated him in the Maritzburg City Hall – the medieval courtly love of an adolescent knight-errant on a bicycle. The death of a close friend as they complete their pilot training ends the book, and perhaps Strachan's adolescence also. The ending is truly 'a note of haunting elegy.'

That Harold Strachan is able, fifty years later, to capture all this with such a sure touch, is the measure of his achievement as a writer. I hope he is working on a sequel.

Referring to his pungent satire, the back-cover blurb says it is 'not for the faint-hearted', and predicts that *Way up way out* will cause 'more than ripples amongst

the South African reading public – more like four-metre waves.’ That may be true, but those faint-hearts who can’t allow themselves to be lifted up on the powerful swells of Strachan’s satire, earthiness and lyricism don’t deserve a seaside holiday.

J. M. DEANE

### **WHO WAS WHO IN DURBAN STREET NAMES**

By DAVID DICK.

Scotland and Durban: Clerkington, 1998. 277 pp. illus., R89,95

It is recognised that visitors to a place often know more about it than the locals do. David Dick’s *Who was who in Durban street names* is a case in point.

From its cover – an inviting gateway to the City – to the eight appendices, this book is a fascinating meander through a colonial sprawl which now pulsates with African life.

In some of the street names royal personages are honoured, generals are revered, battles won are recorded, fighting ships are remembered, statesmen are acknowledged and local personalities are commemorated. As these relate to the mother country as well as Africa, and as many of the entries are quite long, one learns the derivation of the name and gains insight to British and colonial history.

In other street namings the layout of the book allows a keen sense of nostalgia to be detected. As evidence, the three appendices dealing with names derived from places in England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales cover twenty-one pages.

As regards the royals, it had never occurred to me that Avondale and Clarence roads were both named after the murky Prince Albert Victor, eldest son of Edward VII and Queen Alexandra. Then to have the titbit thrown in that his tutor at Cambridge was James Kenneth Stephen, a cousin of Virginia Woolf, and possibly the link between the prince and ‘Jack the Ripper’, came as an extra bonus.

There are some points that I would debate with the author as, in his introduction, he encourages readers to do. One is Mr Dick’s claim that Botha’s Hill was named after General Louis Botha. Robin Lamplough in his article ‘In search of Mr Botha’ *Natalia* 12, Dec. 1982, pp. 27-34) confirms Janie Malherbe’s statement that the name derives from Captain Cornelis Botha, the first harbour master of Durban and later keeper of the halfway house at the foot of what became known as Botha’s Hill.

Another is Mr Dick’s repetition of the frequently quoted erroneous information that George Cato was granted Cato Manor for his loyalty to the British Government when the Boers besieged Captain Smith’s garrison in 1842. The reward for services rendered that Cato was ultimately given in 1860 was freehold title to the 2 064-acre farm *Newark* on the Tugela.

If *Who was who in Durban’s street names* goes into a second edition it would be fitting if Feilden Drive and Fenisowles (now incorrectly spelt Fennisowles) Road were included. The splendid record of life in early Durban as recorded in Eliza Feilden’s *My African home* makes her worthy of recognition. So too is her close friend Melesina Bowen after whom two streets are named.

Considering the amount of research that Mr Dick must have done in the Don Africana Library, it will, I am sure, interest him to know that Maze Road was so named because it led directly into the main gates of David and Marie Don’s home



'The Maze'. The gracious house still stands and today is part of St Henry's College, at 210 South Ridge Road.

With so many street names intimately connected with Empire, it is interesting to note the inclusion of Gandhi Square. Perhaps this can be a point of departure for the Durban of the future? It can only be hoped that in this era of negotiated settlements there will be fewer generals and wars to commemorate.

*Who was who in Durban street names* is a lively and informative read.

B. M. SPENCER