

Henry Francis Fynn: The Long-tailed finch that came from Pondoland?

by Adrian Koopman

‘Of all the whites who were trading from the settlement at Port Natal in the 1820s and 1830s, Henry Fynn is, to posterity, probably the best-known.’

So begins historian John Wright’s mini-biography of Henry Francis Fynn¹ in *Natalia* 4. Trevor Cope² in introducing the Zulu praises of two white men (Fynn and Sir Theophilus Shepstone), says of Mbuyazi (Fynn’s Zulu name)³

Farewell was the leader of the first white settlement at Port Natal ... However, it was Fynn who became the great favourite of Shaka and who was in closest contact with the Zulu people; hence his praise-poem.

The praise-poem itself, as given by Cope is 31 lines long.⁴ According to Cope’s ‘Preface’,⁵ Fynn’s praise-poem was one of 258 praise-poems collected

by colonial magistrate James Stuart, all of which were translated by Dr Daniel Malcolm, the first lecturer in Zulu at the University of Natal (1942–1962).⁶ Of the praises given by Cope, it is only lines 2 and 5 which interest us in this note.

line 2: *Ujoj’ ovel’ emaMpondweni*

The long-tailed finch that came from Pondoland

line 5: *Ujojo kethekeli kanjengamak-hafula*

Finch that never begged, unlike the Kaffirs

Cope’s footnote 2⁸ explains the use of the word *ujojo*, for which he gives the translation ‘long-tailed finch’:

For many years Fynn always wore a bunch of tail-feathers of the *sakabuli* (long-tailed widow bird) in his hat. He

prized it because it had been presented to him by Shaka.

We will return to Cope's explanation and his linking of the word *ujojo* to the 'sakabuli' below. The use of *ovel' emaMpondweni* ('that came from Pondoland') is explained by Wright⁹ who refers to Fynn's 'ten years of trading in Natal and the Zulu and Mpondo countries' and to how he looked in 1825 'on his return to Port Natal from an eight-month trading trip among the Mpondos'.

But it is when we unpack the three words of line 5 that a different interpretation offers itself. Let us take the three words *ujojo*, *kethekeli* and *kanjenga-makhafula* separately:

ujojo

Cope has translated the word *ujojo* as 'long-tailed finch' and suggested that Fynn was called this because he always wore a bunch of the tail-feathers of the 'sakabuli' finch in his hat as a result of once being presented with such a bunch of feathers from Shaka. But in fact *ujojo* and *isakabuli* refer to two different species of birds. The *isakabuli*, the Long-tailed widow bird (*Euplectes progne*) has abundant long tail feathers, and these have been used for centuries as head ornamentation. The *ujojo* finch is the Red-collared widow bird (*Vidua ardens*),¹⁰ the male of which does have a long tail in the breeding season, but not as long or as abundant as that of the *isakabuli*. There is little record in the literature of the feathers being used as ornamentation.

So if the word *ujojo* did not refer to the *isakabuli* feathers Fynn always wore in his hat, what other meaning can the word have? Colenso¹⁵ gives the meaning of *ujojo* as 'finch with long tail', but uses the word quite differently in

several other entries in his dictionary, suggesting that at that time *ujojo* also had the meaning of 'Everyman', or simply 'chap' or 'fellow'. For instance, we find under the entry **vetula** ('kick out') the example *ihashi lika'Jojo limtshaye izito ngesivetula* ('Jojo's horse hit him with kicking yesterday'); under the entry **zaleka** ('be rich') is the example *wazaleka umfo ka'Jojo, uyise wamshiya nefa elikulu lezi-nkomo* ('the son of Jojo is rich; his father left him a large inheritance in cattle'); under the entry **zibadu** ('multi-coloured') is the example *ngiyibukile inkabi ka'Jojo e'mabala a'zibadu njengovemvane* ('I have seen Jojo's ox with speckled colours like a butterfly'); and under the entry **landelisela** ('follow up thoroughly') is the example *walandelisa uJojo namazwi, ukuba aye kuye, ati, &c. ...* ('he sent Jojo after him with a message that he should go to him and say ...').

kethekeli

This word is the verb *ethekela* with the negative prefix *ka-* and the negative suffix *-i*, so Fynn is the 'ujojo' that does not 'ethekela'. Doke and Vilakazi give the verb *ethekela* as a variant of the verb *thékèlà* ('solicit food from a friend in times of scarcity'). They also give the verb *tékèlà* ('speak in Swazi, Lala or Baca fashion'). As can be seen by the acute and grave accents,¹⁶ both these verbs have the same tonal pattern, the only difference between them being that in the first the initial 'th' is aspirated, and in the second, 't' is unaspirated. This difference was not distinguished in the orthography used by Bryant in 1905, when he gives both verbs as *tekela*. Nor would Stuart have marked the aspirated verb, and Cope (or Malcolm before him) would have had to choose whether 'Fynn-as-ujojo' did not beg for food in

time of famine, or did not speak like a Swazi, Lala or Baca person. As we see, they have opted for the first meaning, and Cope has Fynn as ‘The finch that never begged’.

kanjengamakhafula

This word combines the negative prefix *ka-* with the adverbial prefix *njenga-* (‘just like’) and the word *amakhafula* (‘kaffirs’), which gives Cope his translation ‘unlike the Kaffirs’. It is worth looking here at Bryant’s explanation of the word *ikhafula*.¹⁷ He explains this as a word adopted from the English ‘Kafir’ which the ‘Natives’ understand as a term of contempt and which they use of each other. Thus, says Bryant, ‘the inhabitants of Zululand might contemptuously refer to the Natal Natives as *ama-Kafula*.’ The six volumes of the *James Stuart Archive* frequently mention the contempt with which the ruling Zulu clan, who lived north of the uThukela, spoke in the ‘courtly *zunda*’ fashion, and considered themselves to be the high status *amaNtungwa*, held other people who lived south of the uThukela, spoke in the *tekela*’ fashion, and were members of low-status groups like the Swazis, the Lala and the Baca. This would include all people living in and around the Port Natal area.

But we can take this interpretation of ‘*khafula*’ further: Bryant is clear in his mind that it is derived from the English word ‘Kafir’ but it is also possible that it is derived from the existing Zulu verb *khafula* (‘to spit out’). The *zunda*-style language as spoken by the Zulu clan and other high-status clans, is seen as soft and flowing. The *tekela*-style language is what phoneticians describe as ‘ejective’, meaning that certain phonemes, particularly the plosive sounds /p/, /t/ and /k/ are ‘spat out’. So taking *keth-*

ekeli and *kanjengamakhafula* together, we could interpret this phrase as ‘[he] does not speak in the *tekela* fashion of those [low-status people] who spit out their sounds’.

Wright’s mini-biography and Fynn’s own autobiography make it clear that he spent much time among members of the Zulu clan itself, and Mbovu in Vol III of the *James Stuart Archive* says ‘Mbuyazwe¹⁸ could speak Zulu well’¹⁹. So despite having come from both Pondoland and from Natal (both south of the uThukela), Fynn presumably did not speak in the ejective fashion of people from these regions. And so, rather than being the ‘long-tailed finch that never begged, unlike the kaffirs’, Fynn may rather have been seen by the *imbongi* (‘Zulu bard’) who composed his praises as a ‘regular-speaking sort of bloke, one who talks just like us’.

It is often said of a white person who speaks Zulu well that ‘he speaks Zulu like the Zulus themselves’. Fynn may well have been one of the first whites of whom this was said.

NOTES

- 1 Wright, John, ‘Henry Francis Fynn’, *Natalia*, 4, 1974, pp.14–17.
- 2 Cope, Trevor, *Izibongo: Zulu Praise Poems* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1968) p.190.
- 3 He was also known as Msifile, a Zulu phoneticisation of ‘Mr Fynn’.
- 4 Cope, *Izibongo*, pp. 192–195.
- 5 *Ibid.* pp. vii–viii.
- 6 James Stuart’s notebooks have been edited and published by Colin Webb and John Wright.
- 7 Webb, C. de B. and Wright, J., *The James Stuart Archive of Oral Evidence Relating to the Zulu and Neighbouring Peoples*. Vols I to VI. (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press and University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 1976–2014).
- 8 Cope, *Izibongo*, p.192.
- 9 Wright, ‘Henry Francis Fynn’, p.14.
- 10 Doke and Vilakazi give *tjojo* as ‘Long-tailed Kafir Finch, (*Penthetria ardens*)’, taking this

definition, the English name and the Latin name directly from Bryant, who in turn took it from Woodward and Woodward, who give 'Kafir finch (*Penthetrai ardens* ... Native name "Ujjoerjo"' (a spelling which persisted even until the 1978 fourth edition of *Roberts' Birds*).

- 11 Doke, C.M. and Vilakazi, B.W., *Zulu-English Dictionary* (Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, 1958) p. 362.
- 12 Bryant, A.T., *Zulu-English Dictionary* (Pine-town, Marianhill Missionary Press, 1905) p. 280.
- 13 Woodward, R.B. and Woodward, J.D.S., *Natal Birds* (Pietermaritzburg, P. Davis and Sons, 1899) p. 67.
- 14 McLachlan, G.R. and Liversidge, G. *Roberts Birds of Southern Africa*. 4th edition. (Cape Town. John Voelcker Bird Book Fund, 1978).
- 15 Colenso, J.W., *Zulu-English Dictionary*. 3rd edition. (Pietermaritzburg and Durban, P. Davis and Sons, 1884) p. 229.
- 16 A high tone is marked as [é] and a low tone as [è].
- 17 Bryant, *Dictionary*, p. 286.
- 18 Fynn's Zulu name is given variously as Mbuyazi, Mbuyaze, and Mbuyazwe.
- 19 Webb and Wright, *James Stuart Archive* Vol III, p. 27.