

## MLAMULANKUNZI: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF DICK KING

by JACQUELINE KALLEY

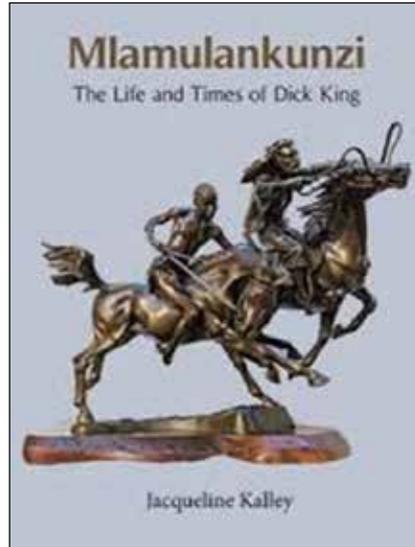
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160 pages, illustrated, bibliography, name index

THIS was a difficult book to write, I would imagine. However, Jackie Kalley has assembled an engaging narrative of conflict and strife in researching and presenting the life and times of her ancestor, Dick King. In an historical environment that does not value hagiographic accounts of settlers, a broader brush has succeeded in diluting the hero worship and presents, rather, a revisit of the confusing and conflicting events that took place in the times around the celebrated ride of Dick King to Grahamstown to seek relief from the British garrisoned there.

The author weaves in a strong acknowledgement of changed historiographical contexts: she starts with the words of Ndongeni, King's companion on much of the celebrated journey and, indeed, closely associated with him for most of his life. At the unveiling of the statue, which is situated on the Esplanade in Durban, she paints a scenario of Edwardian women and a red-faced mayor, and an old man, Ndongeni arriving in a bath chair. 'Mlamulankunzi!' he shouts upon the unveiling. Certainly, consulting more time-sensitive texts such as those in the Campbell collections and the James Stuart Archive has achieved a certain balance in the narrative which allows for a revisit of early Durban (and Natal) history. Kalley reminds us of the bizarre events of the first Anglo-Boer war and the battle for Congella, the backdrop to the ride itself. This contextualises the speed with which the event happened as well as allowing for a discourse that presents



different opinions and interpretations of a journey that reached the realms of worship for some scholars in Natal in the mid-twentieth century.

Importantly, extensive endnotes pointing to commonly sourced and more independent sources enrich the text and allow for multiple interpretations. The position of many of Natal's settlers is not celebrated, but they are presented as they were, or could have been: Nathaniel Isaacs is acknowledged as perhaps being involved in slaving. The mercenary nature of many of the early inhabitants is exposed, reminding us that they were all people doing what they needed to in order to survive.

King is woven into the events, rather than the discourse being driven by King. Seldom celebrated details such as his walk to alert the Boers encamped in

the Midlands of impending invasion by Dingane's troops is a case in point, weaving together the British, Zulu and the Boers, rather than considering them as separate entities in what was an extremely tense situation, centred on land allocation.

Written over nine chapters which bleed into each other, the book is highly illustrated in black and white, drawing from multiple sources including maps, portraits, monuments and documents. It has both an introduction and a prologue, which sets the scene for the following pages with the opening of the statue.

Importantly, Kalley acknowledges the slippery nature of hagiographic writing in describing the statue as being covered in paint as a result of the 2015 #rhodes-mustfall campaign. Sadly, all this does is highlight the paucity of context most learners at schools have of the colonial past and the uncomfortable context for the descendants of Boer, Brit and Zulu. In addition to the front matter, *Mlamulankunzi* has a bibliography and a name index for those wishing to explore the contested past in more detail.

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