

# The royal women of the Zulu monarchy – through the keyhole of oral history: Princess Mkabayi Kajama (c.1750 – c.1843)

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## Abstract

*Since the beginning of time, women have had a great share in shaping history by different means during different epochs. Historians, following typical chauvinistic tendencies, wrote about women in a manner that considered them as inferior citizens whose existence was limited to the confines of homes and the care of children. Despite this, Africa in general and South Africa in particular, are replete with examples of female dynasties, regents and rulers who took up positions of leadership through periods of nation-building and wars of resistance. Zulu culture is fraught with women, the most important of whom were princess Mkabayi Kajama; Queen Nandi, the mother of Emperor Shaka and also Queen Monase who contributed in shaping the Zulu monarchy behind the scenes to what it became in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the contribution of Princess Mkabayi Kajama to the Zulu monarchy. Historical and archival sources about the Zulu royal women provided information for this study. It was largely through the keyhole of oral history or indigenous knowledge that one could comprehend what their thinking, character traits and contributions were. Unravelling the important role played by Mkabayi in the Zulu monarchy and nation is assumed to be the major contribution of this paper.*

**Keywords:** Oral history, royal women, Zulu monarchy, Princess Mkabayi KaJama

## Introduction

From a socio-economic point of view, Zulu royal women of the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, whether they were princesses, queens or members of the palace (isigodlo) had more privileges than responsibilities. This was attributed to the fact that they were always served by the court servants (izinceku) and slaves (izigqila) or prisoners of war. The lives of princesses were somewhat restricted in that they were discouraged from marrying commoners (Gunner 1991: 253).

The praise poems of royal women were not performed socially as were those of married women. These praises would be used rather as salutations or greetings by both men and women on their arrival at the royal house. They would also be used by the women attending the queen. Furthermore, they would be bellowed as a way of expressing thanks by men after they had been served with the royal food.

In the latter case it would not be necessary to repeat the whole praise poem. It would be considered sufficient to call out a single praise name, such as “Msizi”! Before embarking on an analysis of the praises of the individual royal Zulu woman, it is imperative to provide a biographical outline of each woman to obtain a better understanding of the incidents and places alluded to in the praises. Msimang (1991: 51) concurred with this point of view when he attested that it was common knowledge that, due to their allusions to the historical events and personalities, praise poems were not always intelligible to people unfamiliar with the relevant history.

Zulu history is interspersed with oral traditions in the form of izibongo (praise poems). Praise poems were and are still a form of history in which the world view of the rulers was expressed, and a vehicle for the expression of social disaffection. They were and still are the chronicles of individual lives, of both rulers and commoners, for praises were not confined to the scions of the royal houses (White 1991: 17).

A discernible contribution of women in the Zulu monarchy could be traced from the chieftaincy of Jama in 1771 who built his palace of Nobamba (the place of unity or binding together), near the Mpembeni stream. Jama had two wives, the chief of whom was Mthaniya, daughter of ManyelelaSibiya. Mthaniya begot twin girls, Mkabayi and Mmama, as well as a boy named Senzangakhona and finally a girl, Mawa.

The three daughters of Jama became heads of military harems (izigodlo) and evinced aversion to matrimonial bonds, preferring to remain princesses. Mkabayi headed the ebaQulusini, meaning: “where they pushed out buttocks”; Mmama ruled the Osebeni, meaning “on the river bank”, while Mawa reigned over Emperor Shaka’s eNtonteleni. Jama died in 1781 and due to the minority of Senzangakhona, his heir Mkabayi became regent.

It could be argued, however, that the evolution of the ideal of nationhood among the Zulu people had its genesis in Senzangakhona’s praises. The court poet or praise-singer (Dingizwe 1984: 4) to Senzangakhona said:

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A cord of destiny let us weave,  
 O Menzi, scion of Jama,  
 That to universes beyond the reach  
 Of spirit – forms, we may ascend

He was indicating that the destiny of the Zulu people was to traverse the universe and transform the human being into a conscious citizen of the cosmic order (in southeast Africa). The Emperor Shaka adopted this imbongi's (court poet's) ideal as the main inspiration for the revolution which he led after his father's death. It was the ideological blueprint on which he built the Zulu monarchy. The death of Senzangakhona, Shaka's father, in 1816 marked the end and the beginning of two distinct periods in East-Nguni political history. Under Shaka a new era in Zulu history was inaugurated.

The earlier system of countless clans would be gradually demolished; out of its ruins would be built a grand nation ruled by an imperious emperor. Thus, the Zulu monarchy began with Shaka who reigned between 1816 and 1828. Shaka was able to fully apply his military and political genius. It was he who brought together the people from different clans as one mighty sovereign nation. It was during his twelve (12) year rule that Princess Mkabayi Kajama became famous.

### **Princess Mkabayi Kajama (c.1750 – c.1843): a biographical outline**

Oral history sources portrayed Princess Mkabayi as a callous woman. A twin born in 1750, she was destined to be obliterated from the face of the earth at infancy. Her compassionate father, inkosi (potentate) Jama, acted *contra bonos mores* (against the morals of Zulu society) when he refused to kill her. Thus, Mkabayi and her twin sister Mmama both survived, much to the displeasure and disapproval of the Zulu society (Stuart 1914: 46-47).

The continued existence of both twins kept gripping cardinal men and women of the monarchy with fear of ancestral wrath. This fear became a reality when the queen mother died before bearing the royal house an heir. Mkabayi, with a stronger character than her twin sister, bore the brunt of the people's disapproval and hatred. She was held responsible for all misfortunes of the royal family and the Zulu people at large.

In March 1777 Mkabayi realized that the Zulu people were still yearning for an heir and wooed Mthaniya for her rather uninterested father. However, the *inkosi* married Mthaniya and from this marriage came the long awaited heir, named Senzangakhona (or well-doer). Mkabayi was hailed as a heroine and her status elevated for having successfully courted Mthaniya for Jama (Zondi 1996: 5-6). This swayed the hearts of the Zulu people towards her, especially since the erratic Jama had offended his subjects in November 1776 by marrying an already pregnant Thonga woman who had given birth to Sojyisa. There was fear that this 'illegitimate' boy would usurp the Zulu chieftaincy (Stuart 1914: 46-47).



Modern portrait of Princess Mkabayi kaJama

However, Mkabayi soon lost that love of the people when, on the death of Jama in 1781, she declared herself regent for her brother Senzangakhona. This was unheard of in Zulu history, but men succumbed to her guile and domineering character.

Mkabayi's unscrupulousness shocked the Zulu people once again when in 1785 she instructed her army to destroy the powerful Sojyisa, who posed a threat to Senzangakhona's reign. She was dubbed a blood-thirsty despot and a terrible woman of antiquity, whose primary aim was the continuance of the Zulu culture and traditions (Krige 1957: 64-68).

Nevertheless, when Senzangakhona came of age in 1787, she stepped down as regent. Unfortunately, Senzangakhona was not destined to live long. After a short reign he was succeeded in 1816 by his son Shaka, one of the most able emperors the world had ever known. Shaka, on ascending the throne, ruled his people without recourse to anyone for advice. It could be argued that this was one of the major reasons why Mkabayi plotted his assassination.

Despite Shaka's success, when he was accused of abusing power, Mkabayi did not hesitate to conspire against him. She, together with her nephews Dingane and Mhlangana planned the assassination of the emperor on 24 September 1828. Desirous of putting Dingane on the throne, she later murdered Mhlangana (Nyembezi 1975: 21-28).

Mkabayi remained unmarried, preferring to retain her independence and political influence as well as her position as head of the Abaqulusi military palace. She played a major role in the history of the Zulu royal family, deposing and promoting various monarchs to the throne. Mkabayi's power and influence were felt during this time of great historical importance to the Zulu monarchy.

In 1835 when Captain Allen F. Gardiner, Royal Navy, visited the Zulu emperor Dingane on missionary work, he found Mkabayi old, but still very powerful (Fynn to Shepstone 1857: 58/381). She died a lonely woman in 1843 during the reign of Mpande who succeeded Dingane to the Zulu throne. For her part in the assassination of Emperor Shaka, Mkabayi remains condemned to the present day.

### **Princess Mkabayi: through the keyhole of oral history**

Praises were generally regarded as a male domain, both in composition and content. They were and are still associated with feats of bravery and battle. The analysis of Mkabayi's praises in this paper will determine whether she fits the description associated with feats of bravery. It should also be noted that Vilakazi, Turner and Cope are key among scholars that provided an in-depth exegesis of Mkabayi, Nandi and Monase through oral history. In their analysis they discovered a few facts worth mentioning here (Vilakazi 1945: 41; Turner 1990: 5; Cope 1968: 167).

Quoted from Cope (1968:173), the following entails Princess Mkabayi's complete praise-poem:

USoqili!  
 Iqili lakwaHoshoza  
 Elidl'umuntu limyenga ngendaba;  
 Lidl'uBhedu ngasezinyangeni,  
 Ladl'uMkhongoyiyana ngasemaNgadini,  
 Lad' uBheje ngasezanuseni.  
 UBhuku lukaMenzi,  
 Olubamb'abantu lwabenela;  
 Ngibone ngoNohela kaMlilo, umlil' ovuth'intaba zonke,  
 Ngoba lumbambe wanyamalala.  
 Inkom'ekhal' eSangoyana,  
 Yakhal' umlomo wayo wabhoboz'izulu,  
 Iye yezwiwa nguGwabalanda  
 Ezalwa nguNdaba wakwaKhumalo.  
 Intomb' ethombe yom'umlomo.  
 Zaze zayihlab'imithanti zawonina.  
 UMthobela-bantu izinyoni,  
 Bayazibamba usezibuka ngamehlo.  
 UVula-bangene-ngawo-onk'amasango,  
 Abanikazimuzi bangene ngezintuba.  
 UMcindela kaNobiya,  
 UMhlathuz' uzawugcwal' emini.  
 Imbibakazan' eyaqamb' imigqa kwaMalandela,  
 Yathi ngabakwaMalandela,  
 Ithi yikhona bezoqananaza ngazo zonk'izindlela

Father of guile!  
 Cunning one of the Hoshoza people,  
 Who devours a person tempting him with a story;  
 She killed Bhedu amongst the medicine men,  
 And destroyed Mkhongoyiyana amongst the Ngadini,  
 And killed Bheje amongst the diviners.  
 Morass of Menzi,  
 That caught people and finished them off;

I saw by Nohela son of Mlilo,  
 he fire-that-burns-on-every-hill,  
 For it caught him and he disappeared.  
 Beast that bellows at Sangoyana,  
 It bellowed and its voice pierced the sky,  
 It went and it was heard by Gwabalanda  
 Son of Ndaba of Khumalo clan.  
 Maid that matured and her mouth dried up,  
 And then they criticized her amongst old women.  
 Who shoots down birds for her people,  
 As they catch them she is simply watching on.  
 The opener of all main gates so that all people may enter,  
 The owners of the home enter by the narrow side-gates.  
 Sipper of others of the venom of the cobra,  
 The Mhlathuze River will flood at midday.  
 Little mouse that started the runs at Mandela's,  
 And thought it was the people of Mandela  
 Who would thereby walk along all the paths.

The opening address of *Soqili*, 'father of guile' addressed Mkabayi as a male and the unmarried one of the royal blood. She was commonly referred to as Baba, indicative of importance and high standing among the Zulu people. This transformed her from the subservient and insignificant status of a woman to one of a prince and later a fatherly figure, commanding the utmost respect and obedience.

Turner (1990: 6), quoting Koopman's study of Zulu names, made note of the fact that 'the morpheme -so- does not necessarily mean father or owner of anything'. Doke recorded it as a contraction of the old Bantu form of *uyihlo* which could be used purely as a male marker. Koopman's interpretation, however, seems fitting here (Cowley 1966: 43-46).

In the first stanza Mkabayi was praised thus:

USoqili!  
 Iqili lakwaHoshoza  
 Elidl'umuntu limyenga ngendaba  
 Lidl' uBhedu ngasezinyangeni,  
 Ladl' Ubheje ngasezanuseni  
 Ubhuku lukaMenzi  
 Father of Guile!  
 Cunning one from Hoshoza  
 She killed Bhedu amongst the medicine men,  
 And killed Bheje amongst the diviners.  
 Morass of Menzi

The use of a powerful metaphor here deserves mention. Msimang (1980: 60) explained the idea of Mkabayi being likened to a morass as significant in that she was a dangerous and powerful woman responsible for the deaths of emperors (like Shaka) and commoners alike. She had the deceptive appearance of a shy person who remained unobtrusive.

Like a marsh, her presence was inviting, but her victims soon got themselves bogged down and died. Mbopha and Mhlangana were enticed by Mkabayi to take part in her plot to assassinate Shaka without any of the promises made to them being fulfilled. Another facet of this vivid metaphor which illuminated Mkabayi's character is the fact that she never actually wrestled with her victims, but rather connived and plotted behind the scenes. Mkabayi, like the marsh, was also passive and the more the victims resisted the inevitable, the more they submerged themselves leaving no evidence.

In most instances, women were portrayed as docile and helpless. On the contrary, Mkabayi assumed powerful attributes that were associated with men, thereby contradicting the stereotype that women were docile and submissive. She was a brave, quick-in-the-head woman who was prepared to take risks (Zondi 1996: 3; Schipper 1987: 15).

It could be argued, justifiably, that Mkabayi lived in a male-dominated traditional setting. She survived in a cut-throat environment where her decisions were questioned with cynicism because of her sex. She was in a position where men

were supposed to rule the country and women to obey the rules. Hence, as a survival skill, she resorted to shrewdness, plotting and conniving tactics to secure her position as key royal Zulu woman.

In the following lines, Mkabayi was presented (like Shaka) in the form of a beast, another very rich metaphor.

Inkom'ekhal' eSangoyama,  
Yakhal' umlomo wayo wabhoboz' izulu,

Beast that bellows on Sangoyama,  
It bellowed and its voice pierced the sky

This illustrates the fact that when Mkabayi spoke, monarchs, emperors and commoners alike listened in silence. This was due to her seemingly undeniable influence as a power behind the scenes in the affairs of the Zulu monarchy.

Mkabayi's association with a beast could be regarded as a great honour because possessing livestock was a male preserve and only men could make decisions as far as cattle were concerned. In terms of Zulu customs, cows had connotations of wealth, ritual values, legal value (with regard to lobola) (Zondi 1996: 2). They were regarded as life givers in terms of the meat, milk and *amasi* (sour milk) they provided. Cows possessed several other valuable properties, such as hide and horns used for clothing and by the *inyangas* (traditional healers). This implied that Mkabayi was awarded the status of a man, a powerful and skillful diplomat.

Eisenstein has argued that:

The moment of truth, in consciousness-raising, came at the point where the 'exceptional woman' understood that to be told 'You think like a man' was to be told, 'You are not a 'real woman' and (simultaneously), 'Real women are inferior to men' (Eisenstein 1988:39).

It would have been an insult to Mkabayi to be told that she thought like a man, as she was indeed a man in deeds and thoughts.

Intomb' ethombe yom'umlomo  
Zaze zayihlab' imithanti ezawonina.

Maid who grew to maturity and her mouth dried up  
And then they criticized her amongst the old women

Zibani (1997: 28) argued that there were many possible interpretations that could be given about these verses, but two possibilities would be considered. Firstly, this could refer to her rejection of men who wanted her in marriage. The elderly people possibly scolded her, showing their disapproval of her behaviour. Secondly, this could refer to Mkabayi's venture and determination to be her younger brother's regent. The elderly people disapproved of a woman taking up kingship, which was regarded as a responsibility for men.

There is a Zulu expression which says '*Umuntu ukhuluma kome umlomo*', meaning she or he speaks clearly leaving no room for misunderstanding and misinterpretations. Possibly this is what Mkabayi did when she announced her intention of becoming regent for Senzangakhona, her younger brother. She could have meant that in by denouncing marriage and devoting her entire life to building the monarchy.

In traditional Zulu society, the old women in most instances symbolized female integrity. They were regarded as custodians of social values. The old women in this praise were appalled by Mkabayi's 'deviant' behaviour. Where women were expected to toe the line, Mkabayi seemed to have 'freed' herself from social expectations. Little (1980: 134) stated the following about a free woman:

By free woman is meant one who flouts or disregards conventional beliefs concerning the proper role and position of the female sex. One of the common of these beliefs is that it is wrong for a woman on her own to take a major decision. This is a male prerogative. It is also wrong to undertake roles, including occupational ones, traditionally ascribed to the male sex. Perhaps the most common belief of all is that a woman's place is in the home and her duty is to marry and have children.

Society predetermined what role girls could play. Every child learnt these gender-linked roles from infancy; they were reinforced as she went through the various stages of her life. This ultimately left those affected with no real personal choice. This convention did not apply to Mkabayi, as she stood her ground with vehemence.

The following lines commend Mkabayi for her diplomatic skills, as she was easily approachable and able to settle problems facing the monarchy. She was an avenue of advancement for people, regardless of status, and they used her position as a go-between in providing commoners with access to the king.

Bayazibamba usezibuka ngamehlo  
UVula-bangene-ngawo-onk-amasango,  
Abanikazimuzi bangene ngezintuba.

They catch them and she looks at them with her eyes.  
 The opener of all gates so that people may enter,  
 The owners of the home enter  
 by the narrow side-gates,  
 (Zondi 1996: 4; Cope 1968: 174)

Mkabayi was portrayed in the above praise lines as a woman with good eye-sight. She was approachable as a woman-ruler and her subjects felt comfortable enough to air their grievances. She ruled by the precept *Inkosi inkosi ngabantu* (a monarch is a monarch by his subjects). A clever ruler would prioritise and make time for his or her subjects. Winning the hearts of the subjects through diplomatic skills was the ruler's indispensable attribute (Cope 1968: 175).

It could be argued that subjects liked to be in the company of their monarch. Mkabayi and emperor Shaka were always accessible during their rulership. Dingane, unlike his predecessors, recoiled from the public eye and kept to himself in order to, presumably, brood on his evil plots without disturbances.

This conduct did not meet with the approval of his subjects. They started comparing him to Shaka who was always in the company of his people, especially the royal council. This is why the bard indicated that the people enjoyed having an audience with their monarchs and communicating with them (Dhlomo 1960:20).

The following praise lines specifically referred to Dingane's recoil from the public:

Quiet one, he speaks not, he is mouthless;  
 He is unlike Shaka,  
 Who finished off the household by chattering  
 Turning away like elephants ...  
 Rise, O Sun, let the Zulus warm themselves [in you]  
 (Msimang 1991:57)

Interestingly, the following two stanzas indicated a difference of character between Mkabayi and Dingane:

UMcindela kaNobiya,  
 Mcindela, descendant of Nobiya.

Mkabayi was portrayed as a person who protected others from the displeasures of the monarch. She dealt with very tricky and dangerous situations, as reinforced by the image of the cobra. She was diametrically opposed to the abuse of power. This apparently revealed itself when it came to the protection of defenseless subjects from the wrath of the monarch. She knew how to handle most of the monarchs who ascended the throne because she had made most of them. In fact, arguably, Mkabayi's word was law.

Mkabayi ruled in accordance with womanist ideas. In this regard, Nkumane (1999: 28) argued:

Womanists are concerned about the entire community and are holistic in approach, which means that both men and women can come together in a dialogue to define and address the needs of the entire community.

This holistic approach proved womanism as a non-elitist movement. It did not prioritize people's needs according to the particular class to which they belonged in society. Hence it was virtually classless. It considered all people in the community irrespective of gender. The recurrent humanist vision was central to black feminism. It was closely associated with human solidarity more than anything else (Nkumane 1999: 29).

The following praise lines portrayed another image of Mkabayi:

UMhlathuz' uzawugcwal' emini.  
 The Mhlathuze River will flood at midday.

Mhlathuze River was used as a metaphor to indicate qualities of size and importance and unpredictability in terms of unexpected flooding. This was similar to Mkabayi's moodiness and sometimes erratic behaviour.

About hysteria, Reber, as quoted by Nkumane (1999: 130) argued that:

Hysteria is a kind of emotional outburst and was viewed as a psychiatric female disorder. Hysteria, was, until recently, assumed to be solely a dysfunctional of women caused by a wandering uterus.

He continued to explain that:

... the link in psychoanalytic theory has helped in providing a more reasonable etiology but the link between gender and disorder has not been completely severed as males were rarely diagnosed (Nkumane 1999: 29).

This confirmed one of the many stereotypes attached to women. The stereotype that women reasoned with their ovaries was one stereotype intended to dishearten or demoralize a woman when faced with a difficult decision. Since it could not be proved that hysteria was a female attribute, it would be unfair to conclude that Mkabayi's temperamental behaviour was the result of her wandering uterus. Any person in any leadership position, male or female could be prone to temperamental behaviour since ruling a monarchy as huge as that of the Zulu people was a mammoth task.

These concluding lines contain an interesting metaphor used by an imbongi (court poet). Mkabayi was likened to a little mouse, elusive and secretive in its movements, an image which portrayed her as someone who concealed her true self and preferred to work in secrecy. We are reminded of her status as a mere woman, who was to be the guiding light and power behind the Zulu throne.

Imbibakazan'eyaqamb' imigqa kwaMalandela,  
Yathi ngabakwaMalandela,  
Ithi yikhona bezoqananaza ngazo zonk' izindlela

Little mouse that started the paths at Malandela  
And thought it was the people of Malandela  
Who would thereby command all the routes  
(Zondi 1996: 4; Cope 1968:173)

Notable here was the complete lack of any physical references made to Mkabayi. This could be attributed to the fact that Mkabayi did not have any exceptional physical oddities, and therefore the court poet omitted this fact. It is worth emphasizing here that Mkabayi's praise poem did not mention any physical attributes like bodily beauty and most qualities expected from a Zulu woman. She was clearly never considered as a woman in the strict sense of women in Zulu society at the time.

The fact is that she shunned marriage and played an active role in the nurturing of the Zulu monarchy. She was regarded as being a prince, not a princess, and was accordingly addressed as Baba by all her subjects and her nephews who became the powerful rulers of the Zulu nation (Uys 1842: 37-39).

As a result, we find Mkabayi's praises being very similar in content to the large body of praises that were composed in honour of men and that she displayed qualities that were highly regarded among them as opposed to women.

Mkabayi was presented as a larger-than-life personality in that Emperor Shaka shared his praises with her. Shaka's praises were composed in similar style to those of Mkabayi. This is a clear indication that Mkabayi had a massive influence on Shaka. This was best exemplified by the following lines from Mkabayi's izibongo:

Elidl' umuntu limyenga ngendaba  
Lidl' uBhedu ngasezinyangeni  
Ladl' uMkhongoyiyana ngasema Ngadini  
Ladl' uBheja ngasezanuseni

Who devours a person tempting him with a story;  
She killed Bhedu amongst the medicine men,  
And destroyed Mkhongoyiyana amongst the Ngadinis  
And killed Bheje amongst the diviners  
(Zondi 1996: 4; Cope 1968: 173)

The above praises of Mkabayi were comparable to the following praise lines extracted from Shaka's praises:

Wadl' uNomahlanjana ezalwa nguZwide eMapheleni  
Wadl' uMphepha ezalwa nguZwide eMapheleni  
Wadl' uNombengula ezalwa nguZwide eMapheleni  
Wadl' uDayingubo ezalwa nguZwide eMapheleni

He devoured Nomahlanjana's son of Zwide of the Maphelas  
He ate up Mphepha's son of Zwide of the Maphelas  
He killed Nombengula's son of Zwide of the Maphelas  
He destroyed Dayingubo son of Zwide of the Maphelas  
(Dhlomo 1960: 8; White 1991:95)

The second stanza tended more towards an ode, which recorded her in true heroic fashion, as one who determined the course of history for the Zulu monarchy. Mkabayi's praise-poem had qualities that overlapped both Shakan and pre-Shakan epochs. She defied all odds and placed herself on a par with men and the elite group that governed the Zulu monarchy. It took a radical and strong personality to venture into such a patriarchal territory. On radical ideology, Moore (1992: 25,27,30) has stated that:

The radical feminists argue that the most fundamental of oppression is patriarchy. In order for women to be free from oppression, the patriarchal structures of society must change. They argue further that women's oppression is biologically based since women are tied to childbirth and childbearing processes, which

continually place them in position of dependence on men to survive. They call for the women's movement to participate in a "biological revolution", freeing women from their biological oppression.

Male and female behavioural patterns, in any given socio-cultural context, were fixed by norms. Mkabayi was presented as a radical, hardcore feminist. She flaunted the conventions of her society, such as marriage and child bearing, obedience and submissiveness.

It could be argued and concluded that Mkabayi's praises determined the course of history for the Zulu monarchy. They possessed unique indices that overlapped both Shakan and pre-Shakan epochs. According to Turner, Mkabayi's praises could also be said to have represented a more acceptable form of the praise poem (Turner 1990:50), containing a more balanced picture of Mkabayi's favourable and unfavourable qualities, despite Cope's (1968: 32) assertion that:

The purpose of the praise-poem is to present the chief as an object of admiration, and there is consequently a tendency to maximize praise and minimize criticism. The praiser may mention weaknesses, but otherwise he prefers to overlook faults.

## Conclusion

This paper has shown that Princess Mkabayi made an historic contribution in shaping the Zulu monarchy. Her praises were modelled in form, content and style on those of the great Zulu kings (iziNgonyama) and potentates (amaKhos). Queen Nandi (see previous article in this issue) was the rallying point in Emperor Shaka's life and greatly influenced the course of events within the royal house during the reign of her son. Nandi's praises, however, did not qualify for the term 'praise poem'. They were entirely devoid of anything praiseworthy. Similarly, the rather short praises of Queen Monase (see previous article in this issue) did not follow the format of praises of kings, but dwelt more on her physical character and antics in a derogatory sense.

This paper has also demonstrated that Mkabayi was portrayed as a strong, ruthless, manipulative yet approachable, elusive and secretive princess. Her praises were composed in a laudatory, eulogistic vein and presented her in way akin to the heroic/epic poetry (praises) of the royal men. Mkabayi's praises were unequivocally in line with her elevated social position (Stuart 1918: 95). She was held in high esteem by both men and women and was never regarded as a woman, as her praises did not allude to her physical appearance.

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