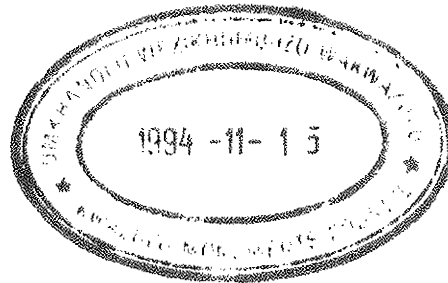


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HISTORICAL LINGUISTICS:

THE HISTORICAL ORTHOGRAPHY AND MEANING OF

KING DINGANE'S IKHANDA, MGUNGUNDLOVU:

A STUDY IN ONOMASTICS

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THE HISTORICAL ORTHOGRAPHY AND MEANING OF KING DINGANE'S  
IKHANDA, MGUNGUNDLOVU

INTRODUCTION

As a historian this contribution to historical linguistics will be to present, in chronological order, the variety of spelling and meaning of Dingane's *Ikhanda*, *Mgungundlovu*. Obviously the examples will be carefully selected from the fascinating and numerous sources over a period of 165 years.

BACKGROUND

Having participated in the fratricide of Shaka on 24 September 1828 at *Dukuza*, it became imperative for Dingane to establish his own seat of government and military *Ikhanda* which would be the pivot of Zulu hegemony in south eastern Africa.

From *Mgungundlovu* Dingane, King of the Zulus, exercised his awesome power on behalf of the burgeoning Zulu nation.

Significantly he chose a picturesque site 31° 16' E and 28° 26' S in eMakhosini, the valley of the Zulu kings. Custom and tradition would suggest that building of the capital began in the winter months of 1829. An excellent physical description based on the using all the original eye-witness accounts has been produced by Wendy Cubbin.<sup>1</sup> Approximately oval in shape it contained between 1,700 - 1,400 thatched huts which were enclosed by a strong wooden pallisade.

Interestingly *Mgungundlovu* was destroyed by fire on orders from Dingane in December 1838 when threatened by the Voortrekkers who were following up their victory at the battle of Ncome (Blood) river on 16 December 1838. Fortunately the heat of the ensuing fire baked the clay floors to a hard brick-like consistency which resulted in their preservation. Resident archaeologist, Frans Roodt, has been responsible for recent excavations and studies of this grand Zulu historic site.<sup>2</sup>

EYE WITNESS ACCOUNTS:

The first recorded use of this place name was the work of the young trader Nathaniel Isaacs on 12 December 1830 when he mentioned the Zulu King's residence "Goobinschlofe"<sup>3</sup> a surprisingly recognisable rendition by a total stranger.

The second example is the responsibility of the trader Henry Francis Fynn. He visited *Mgungundlovu* on 17 April 1831 and spelt the word accurately.<sup>4</sup> He was able to do this because he had shown great early initiative to learn the Zulu language proficiently.<sup>5</sup>

The next usage was by Dr. Andrew Smith on his unusual visit to Dingane in 1832. In outlining the Zulu regiments Smith notes that the "Umbellibelli" regiment was stationed at "Uncong, -inlof, overthrow of the Elephant, named after Chaka's death." <sup>6</sup> This was recorded circa 2 April 1832. This is the first recorded attempt to produce an explanation of the meaning of the word which is interesting and worthwhile. There is no specific mention as to where Smith derives his information and one wonders whether Dingane would have wished to laud the act of fratricide. What is really valuable about Smith's diary is that he also produced the first rough sketch of *Mgungundlovu*.

Captain Allen Gardiner R.N., described his first view of "Unkunginglove on the afternoon of 10 February 1835" <sup>7</sup> while the American missionary Rev. George Champion also gave a description of "Gungunghlovu" on the 18 January 1836. Later in his journal he spelt the *Ikhanda* "Umgunghlovu." <sup>8</sup>

The Rev. Francis Owen, resident at *Mgungundlovu* for four months, spelt the name of the *Ikhanda* "Umkunginglovu" on 10 October 1837. <sup>9</sup>

These are the eye-witness accounts of *Mgungundlovu*. Hereafter I shall select certain historians to keep track of the spelling and meaning of the *Ikhanda*.

#### HISTORICAL RECORDS:

In 1855 Rev.W.C.Holden spelt the word "Umgungunhlovi" which he averred meant "the rumbling place of the elephant" and opposite this reference he has a valuable and interesting woodcut of *Mgungundlovu*. <sup>10</sup>

There will be several references to evidence from the James Stuart Archive. I have a problem putting these under eye-witness accounts because in some cases e.g. Lungunza, these were written down by Stuart 72 years after the event. I therefore believe that one should treat these sources with some caution.

In the James Stuart Archive, Ndabambi ka Sikakana made an important statement about *Mgungundlovu*. He maintained that it was "the biggest umuzi in Zululand, bigger than Dukuza, Nodwengu or Ondini (principal amakahanda of King Shaka, Mpande and Cetshwayo respectively). He also had an original and plausible interpretation of the meaning vis:- "The origin of the name is probably from the great bend of the kraal towards the double gate, for one standing at the back of the kraal on high ground would see clearly these great curves going to meet one another." <sup>11</sup>

Also from the James Stuart Archive, Lungunza kaMpukane on 11 March 1909 reported that he "knew *Mgungundhlovu* very

well indeed" but didn't oblige us with any details. However he does help with the meaning. "Mgungundhlovu, I do not know the origin of the name. It may have some reference to ingungu - native drum, goat skin stretched over it." <sup>12</sup> What is noteworthy is that the name spelt with an 'h' represents James Stuart's spelling. Finally Lungunza, via Stuart, has left us with two fine sketches of *Mgungundlovu*.<sup>13</sup>

In 1911 Robert Russell told us that *Umgungundlovu* meant "the place of the great elephant" and consequently Pietermaritzburg inherited the name as being the seat of government (or Governor?).<sup>14</sup>

In a final reference in the James Stuart Archive, Mqaikana ka Yenge on 9 May 1916 informs us that he agreed that *Mgungundlovu* "may be derived from the bend of elephant tusks" and that there was an association between the original and Pietermaritzburg. Interestingly he was of the opinion that "The name was given only after Dingana's great kraal had been destroyed." <sup>15</sup>

Rev. A.T. Bryant in 1929 was not very helpful beyond spelling the place name "emGungundlovu". <sup>16</sup>

In the same year R.C.A. Samuelson was a lot more helpful. Not only did he give the spelling as "Umgungundhlovu" which he maintained was "composed of 'Gunguluza' which means "To nibble ineffectually on the surface of, as the roots of grass which had been eaten down already and 'Indhlovu', an elephant. The Zulu kings were called by the name of Lion, Elephant, Tiger (sic) etc when addressed, or spoken about, so the name Umgungundhlovu would mean the place of the king (here Dingana) lived and had its being." <sup>17</sup> The latter interpretation I believe is basically helpful.

Harry Lugg, the eminent Zulu linguist, gave his interpretation in 1949 as "The secret conclave (a close or secret assembly - Concise Oxford Dictionary) of the king and is derived from the words 'ungungu we ndhlovu', a cleverly coined name to commemorate the success of Dingane's plot to assassinate his brother Shaka." <sup>18</sup>

The only full length biographical study of Dingane, the popular "Rule of Fear", was written by Peter Becker in 1964. In it he spelt the *Ikhanda* "emGungundhlovu" and gives the improbable meaning as "the place surrounded by elephants." <sup>19</sup>

A.R. Booth, the American historian editing Champion's Journal of 1836, gave his explanation in 1967 i.e. "Lair of the elephant, the elephant being Dingane." <sup>20</sup>

Another modern scholar, Brian Roberts, in his book The Zulu Kings in 1974, informed us that "Dingane named it emGungundhlovu or the Place of the Great Elephant." <sup>21</sup>

Again Harry Lugg in a typescript Places of Interest in Natal and Zululand written on 5 December 1977, was responsible for recording a very interesting explanation. "I once asked the late Maphelu Zungu, a member of the Uve regiment that fought at Sandlwana, what Mgungu meant, and he said it could be described as an oblong illustrated (sic) by placing two elephant tusks tip to tip on the ground, thus meaning 'the enclosure of the King Elephant', another splendid example of a Zulu's vivid imagination when applied to the coining of personal or place names."

This contribution brings us to the end of what I would call the historical contributions. What must now be done is to have a look at the modern scholars with particular emphasis being placed on modern Zulu scholars.

#### MODERN SCHOLARS:

Kenneth Ntshangase an Honours student in History at the University of Zululand has the following contribution to make: "because Shaka was known as the 'Great Elephant' it meant that Dingane has overpowered the Great Elephant and so Dingane's Royal *Ikhanda* was named Mgungundlovu - one who usurped the Great Elephant. 'Mgungu', Ntshangase maintains, means 'something which is taken by force'." <sup>22</sup>

Maxwell Shamase, a Doctoral student in History at Unizul, is very positive about his contribution. He believes that the word 'mgungu' is a Zulu verb that means to surround something. He presents *Mgungundlovu* as coming from Dingane's *izibongo*; he was equated to an elephant. *Mgungundlovu* referred to his homestead/isigodlo hosting an elephant by the name of Dingane, the Zulu King. <sup>23</sup>

The penultimate stage in this paper is to look at the valuable contributions of the dictionaries and other specific sources.

#### DICTIONARIES AND OTHER SPECIFIC SOURCES:

Nyembezi, S. and Nxumalo, Q.E. in 1978 give 'mgungu' as the richest (fatty) part of the heart which is eaten by the best warrior therefore 'mgungu wendlovu' refers to the richest (best) part of the elephant heart. <sup>24</sup>

Peter Raper's Dictionary of Southern African place names written in 1989 has the following entry vis. "uMgungundlovu (N 2930 C.B.) Zulu name for Pietermaritzburg. It is said (source not given) to mean 'place of the rumbling elephant', referring to Dingane who, after killing Shaka, adopted the title of 'The Elephant which Shaka had borne!' (source not given). The link with Dingane's *Ikhanda* is not made <sup>25</sup> nor, incidently, the association with Greytown.

Doke, C.M. et al, 1990, gives 'Ndlovu' (elephant) as the praise name for the king, while 'isigungu' is the secret plot or scheme; something enclosed, sheltered, curved or convex object.' 26

Thokazani Nene of the South African Broadcasting News Department on 28 March 1994 opined that 'isigungu' meant 'the surrounded/protected place' which would give the literal meaning as 'the place protected by the elephant (Dingane) while 'ngungu' meant 'enclosed, sheltered, curved or convex horse-shoe shape.' This could have been borrowed from Doke.

In an attempt to marry the historical with the linguistic explanation I approached my university colleague in the Department of African Languages, Jackie Mashiyane, who produced the following interpretation:

"The place name Mgungundlovu can be broken down into um - gungu - ndlovu. Whilst the prefix 'um-' can be identified and accounted for linguistically, as well as the last part, namely, '-ndlovu' meaning an elephant, the middle part, 'gungu' cannot be explained satisfactorily. Zulu speakers do not seem to be able to account for it with certainty. Linguistically it does not seem to represent any part of speech. Many suppositions are being made as to the possible source from which the word was derived. Two of the most popular ones are the following:

The first view says that '-gungu-' possibly comes from the Zulu verb 'ngunga' which means to surround. Roughly translated the whole name is therefore thought to mean 'surrounding the elephant'. An elephant in this case could refer to the king himself who most of the time was surrounded by his warriors and headmen. Hence up to the present day Zulu kings are hailed by "Wena wendlovu!" (You the descendent of the elephant!). In Zulu life, an elephant is always a symbol of strength, power and greatness just like the king.

## CONCLUSION

Now that our sources have been historically collated and the extraordinary and rich usages and interpretations have been brought to the surface, several conclusions may be made:--

1. The modern spelling of the royal *Ikhanda* is *Mgungundlovu*.
2. The '*mgungu*' component of the place name suggests that the oval form of the *Ikhanda* is reminiscent of the shape or bend of a pair of tusks which surrounds the King who lives within the *ikhanda*. From his seat (refer maps 11 & 13) on the slope of Zingonjama hill overlooking his magnificent *Ikhanda*, Dingane would see the form/shape of the receding flanks of the *ikhanda* down to the *intubu enkulu* suggesting the shape of elephant tusks (refer map on p.11). The form of the *ikhanda* not round but rather oval or elliptical. <sup>27</sup>
3. The '*ndlovu*' component equates the Zulu King, Dingane, symbolically with the great, strong and majestic elephant. <sup>28</sup> He therefore receives the accolade '*wena wendlovu*'.

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28. An interesting and clear confirmation of the custom/fact that the Zulu King was called the elephant comes from the Young Zulu linguist/interpreter, William Wood. In his narrative he records that the Port Natal Zulu hunters/wards sang the following words prior to setting out to make war on Dingane in April 1838: "We are now going to kill the elephant who killed our forefathers, fathers, mothers, wives, and children, and who deprived us of our cattle." Wood, W. Statements respecting Dingaan, King of the Zoolahs. Cape Town. Collard and Co. 1840.p.31.