

„abaQulusi of ebaQulusini“ :
Who are they? Who were they?
Nation- and State-building in pre-colonial South-Eastern Africa
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AbaQulusi are and were the people of the region lying roughly between the *uKhahlamba* mountain-range [Drakensberge], between the rivers *oPhongolo*, *uMzinyathi* and *iMfolozi* – the region part of which was once renamed “Nieuwe Republiek” [1848-1888], “Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek”, the “Transvaal”, declared part of the then British colony (then named “Northern Natal”) and since 1994 part of the Province of “KwaZulu-Natal” with the towns Vryheid, Utrecht, eDumbe (=“Paulpietersburg”) and eNgotshe/eNgoje (=“Louwsburg”) as points of orientation.

AbaQulusi. Who are they? Who were they?

Linguists and orators name them: “*Inqaba kutholwa!*

Isidindi somtshiki!”

What would – more or less – mean: “*Erheblich schwer aufzuspüren!*

Büschel von gewöhnlichem Gras!”

„Extremely difficult to track down!

Tuft of common grass!”

The verb “**ukuqulusa**” means “*remaining exposed whilst believing oneself to be under cover*”; thence the praise-poem on the **abaQulusi**:

“Bathi bacashile;

kanti baqulusile!”

“Sie wähnen sich im sicheren Versteck;
dabei liegen sie völlig in Sicht!”

„*They believe themselves under cover;*

they actually are but wholly exposed!”

“Ostriches! Izintshe!” was the opinion of a researcher on South African history on hearing of this description. The quest for being out of reach by invaders is accurately expressed in the comparison to that peculiar bird of Southern Africa – the ostrich.

In his outstanding record, “The destruction of the Zulu Kingdom”, **Jeff Guy** gives a concise account on the origin and conception of the socio-political system in **ebaQulusini** in the pre- and post-colonial era:

In the region around Hlobane, a recruiting point and a royal centre of influence for the then still developing Zulu Kingdom had to be established round about **1820**. King Shaka kaSenzangakhona wakwaZulu sent Nhlaka wakwaMdlalose to ascertain that the venture were underway.

This “ikhanda” (as such, royal centres of influence were called) was named **ebaQulusini**. It was placed in the charge of a senior female member of the Zulu lineage, Mnkabayi kaJama wakwaZulu, daughter of King Shaka’s grandfather, Jama kaNdaba wakwaZulu.

AbaQulusi, the people – of different clan origins – who were attached to this royal homestead as officers tended in time to establish their private homesteads in the vicinity, and others were sent by the king to settle in this area. By the time King Cetshwayo kaMpande wakwaZulu came to the Zulu throne in **1872** they numbered thousands.

AbaQulusi were not drafted into the conventional regiments (“*amabutho*”) but fought as a royal section, and they were not represented in the king’s council by any sort of “*umnumzane*”, because they represented the power of the Zulu royal house, **not just a pre-Shakan clan**. **AbaQulusi** were in charge of “*izinduna*”, the leading ones being persons of high esteem and good reputation within the kingdom, including Mahubulwana and the legendary Sikhobobo wakwaSibiya.

Mkhosana kaZangwana wakwaZungu, the adviser who had accompanied King Cetshwayo in detention **1879**, to London **1882** and in exile and returned to the Kingdom as his emissary, had established homesteads of remarkable size and prestige – “KwaBamb’elentulo”, “eMeveni”, “KwaMngani”, to mention but a few – in the landscape of eMakhwabi, kwaMthashana and KwaNgenetsheni.

By the outbreak of the military conflict today known as the “Anglo-Boer South-African War 1899-1902” **abaQulusi** had - among other drastic changes – seen the endured “loss of territory” in grand manner. Nicholas Hope in his work King Solomon kaDinuzulu wakwaZulu, “To Bind the Nation”, recalls:

“Large tracts (of land) had fallen into the hands of absentee landlords”. (These engaged in what became known as “**Kafferboerderei**” or – as the **abaQulusi** themselves called it – “ukukhonza eBhunwini”, “ukungena/ukusebenza iplazi”, “**ukushada neBhunu**” = to concede to life-long servitude to a Boer-landlord). “Squatters” and “labour tenants” had become the only status of residence **abaQulusi** could have or acquire in the region that was one their own.

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