

A review of Lock & Quantrill's reprint

John Dunn, Cetshwayo, and the Three Generals 1886.

By Stephen Coan *The Natal Witness*

Ron Lock and Peter Quantrill, co-authors of the well-received *Zulu Victory* and *Zulu Vanquished*, both dealing with the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879, have also produced reprints of contemporary items dealing with the campaign. Their previous ventures were *The Red Book*, an unabridged compilation of articles from the Natal newspapers of 1879, and *The 1879 Zulu War Through the Eyes of the Illustrated London News*, which collated accounts of the war from the celebrated weekly. Now they have teamed up with Arthur Königkrämer to produce a reprint of John Dunn's autobiography titled *John Dunn, Cetshwayo, and the Three Generals* edited by D. C. F. Moodie and first published in 1886.

Dunn was one of the most controversial characters of 19th KwaZulu-Natal history. As Königkrämer, Lock and Quantrill say in the foreword to the reprint, Dunn has been "described as entrepreneur, politician, arms dealer, trader and hunter, whose loyalties were said to lie where self-interest and gain prevailed". A verdict that a reading of this volume does little to dispel.

Born in 1834, Dunn grew up with little formal education. When his hunter-trader father was killed by an elephant in 1847, he found himself thrown upon his own resources. He became a transport rider but when he didn't receive wages because of his age he became, in his own words, "determined to desert the haunts of civilisation for the haunts of large game in Zululand."

Taking with him a 15-year-old bride, Dunn crossed the Thukela and spent two years (1852-1854) hunting, bartering and living off the land, effectively becoming a "white Zulu". He then came under the wing of Joshua Walmsley, a retired British army captain living on the Natal-Zululand border, who ensured Dunn received an education. The result, according to the foreword, was a "remarkable combination of a man who could pass for a Zulu or be entirely at ease in a European environment such as the Durban Club".

Dunn's career became intertwined with the Zulu monarchy and first saw him siding with the prince Mbuyazi against his brother Cetshwayo in the war over the succession to the Zulu throne. Dunn backed the loser, but Cetshwayo forgave him and Dunn subsequently became the Zulu king's advisor and confidant, moving permanently to Zululand in 1858 where he was granted land and married "Zulu women from a variety of different clans, always paying the going rate of dowry for each of his recorded 49 wives". He had three main residences at Mangethe, Emoyeni and Qwayinduku and had over 6,000 subjects.

In 1879, with the British massing on Zululand's borders, Lord Chelmsford, commander-in-chief of the British forces, made clear neutrality was not an option. Accordingly, Dunn led his people south of the Thukela thereafter providing assistance to the British during their invasion of Zululand. The war over, Dunn became an advisor to Sir Garnet Wolseley and profited from the British post-war settlement by being appointed a chief of a large area of land. Add General Hope Crealock to the names of Chelmsford and Wolseley and you have the three generals of the book's title. Dunn does not mince his words when dealing with their perceived shortcomings and the conduct of the war.

Dunn died in 1895 but his legacy lives on "surrounded, as in his lifetime, by controversy. His progeny of well over 120, today many thousands, are involved in bitterly contested land claims, areas that in the 19th century, came under his direct control ... referred to by him as 'Dunnsland'."

Dunn's autobiography was published in 1886, edited by contemporary historian and polemicist D. C. F. Moodie, but the book was a pale shadow of what might have been. Dunn had been recording his experiences since 1861 but when he took the British side in 1879, he sent a messenger to rescue his papers at his Mangethe residence "from the approaching Zulus; but most unfortunately he brought the wrong box, the contents of which were comparatively worthless, while the box containing the [manuscripts] was left behind and was consumed in the flames when the Zulus shortly afterwards set fire to the place."

So what we have here are Dunn's reminiscences written in hindsight and edited by Moodie which, in this re-set edition, are confusingly titled "John Dunn's Notes" at the head of every page. There's no doubt it's good to have a reprint of this fascinating slice of Africana available economically priced at around R180 considering the only copy of the original on offer on the Advanced Book Exchange website is selling for nearly R13 000.

Appealing price aside, this new edition can only be judged a missed opportunity. The decision to reset the text has proved an unhappy one. It is unattractively double-spaced and the pages often badly cut with little or no margins. Neither does the text appear to have been proofed. The errors are so numerous noting them while reading became pointless — punctuation marks appear in mid-sentence and misspellings abound. At the very least these errors are an irritant, at their worst they destroy sense, break the reading flow and lead one to doubt the overall integrity of the text as reprinted here.

The book is crying out for editorial intervention in other areas as well. Apart from the short four-page foreword quoted from above, there are none barring a map and some photographs. Surely, given the various figures and historical events mentioned by Dunn, there is a need for detailed notes providing information and context. Minus such material this is an opaque volume, unless you happen to be a student of the period. Neither is there an index or even a reverse page bearing the bibliographical details of the publication itself. Sad to report, a book that should have been a singular victory has been vanquished in execution.

Stephen Coan.
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John Dunn.

