

MISTAKEN IDENTITY.

How King Cetshwayo Is Still Confused With His Brother Prince Ndabuko.

By Ian Knight

It's probably fair to say that the image of King Cetshwayo kaMpande is one of the most famous and recognisable to emerge from the Anglo-Zulu War. He was, of course, the subject of considerable press interest at the time of the war, the more so following the spectacular defeat of Lord Chelmsford's Centre Column at Isandlwana on 22 January 1879. This – the greatest defeat of British troops in a single battle during the Victorian era – catapulted both the Zulus and their king to international notoriety within the English-speaking world, and inevitably created considerable curiosity about not merely the Zulu people but the king who had apparently orchestrated their resistance. Numerous engravings were rushed into the illustrated press at the time to satisfy this curiosity, some of which attempted to reproduce the king's features as far as they were then known whilst others merely played to the public appetite for villainous – as it seemed to them – and stereotypical scowling savages.

In fact, it is highly unlikely that Cetshwayo had ever been photographed or sketched at any ceremony before 1873. The king was, after all, monarch of an independent country, and one entirely devoid of professional photographers. Although there were a number of professional photographers working in both the neighbouring colony of Natal and the South African Republic during the 1870s, the practical difficulties had largely deterred them from attempting to record the king. Contemporary photographic equipment was heavy and cumbersome, and would have had to be transported by wagon across Zululand – a country where the roads amounted to no more than rough traders' tracks. It would have required considerable diplomacy to persuade the king to sit for a portrait, and even had he been willing the appointment would have been at the mercy of more important affairs of state. At a time when there was little interest in Zulu affairs in the outside world, moreover, there was certainly no commercial incentive to make the effort appear worthwhile.

At the time of the king's coronation in 1873, Cetshwayo's white adviser, John Dunn, well aware of the historic importance of the event, hired a Natal photographer to attend the ceremonies and record the scene. Despite the fact that this was the first time a photographer had attended a traditional event of this scale and importance actually inside Zululand - and the process must have appeared mysterious and potentially rather sinister to the Zulus - Cetshwayo agreed to allow himself and his entourage to be photographed. As it turned out, however, a potentially fascinating image was ruined by the constraints of the equipment available to the photographer, as Dunn himself noted;

...owing to the cloudy weather, and the water being bad, he could not succeed in taking a good picture. I had stationed him at a capital spot, and led Cetywayo, in full dress and with all his staff, to within fifty yards of where he was. The failure was a great disappointment, and a very great loss to the public in general and to posterity, as such a sight no man will ever have the opportunity of witnessing, and I believe the photographer, and myself, are the only white men who have ever seen a similar sight.

A loss to posterity indeed – although over the next few days the photographer had rather better luck, securing a number of images of the events on the periphery of the ceremonies. He took several pictures of John Dunn himself, of those Zulus well-known to Dunn who visited him in his camp – including Prince Dabulamanzi kaMpande, later to be famous as the Zulu

commander at Rorke's Drift – as well as photographs of some leading *indunas*, the king's carriage and cooks, and the royal huts. Only one viable photograph of the king himself did he manage, and that depicts Cetshwayo at the centre of a long line of Zulu and European officials on 1 September 1873, immediately after his infamous 'crowning' by the Natal representative, Theophilus Shepstone. The image is small and indistinct, apparently blurred because the king moved at some point during the long exposure, and whilst the king's new crown and the robes draped around his shoulders by Shepstone are readily recognisable, the king himself is not.

As an aside it is interesting to note that the artist Thomas Baines accompanied Shepstone's party, and at least one sketch by Baines of Natal Volunteer troops inside their tent has survived, giving rise to the intriguing possibility that he, too, might have attempted a portrait of the king. If he did, it has not yet come to light. Thus, when the Zulus hit the front pages of British newspapers with a vengeance in February 1879, that one distant image, taken at the coronation, was the only one which could provide hungry readers with the faintest indication of Cetshwayo's appearance. Owing to the limitations of the printing process at the time, the photograph itself could not be reproduced but some papers, like the *Illustrated London News*, attempted a faithful copy of that portrait reproduced as an engraving, but were forced to let imagination fill in the gaps left by the indistinct details. Other papers simply did not bother with fine details but offered their readers images broadly in accord with the limited knowledge of the king's appearance – a middle-aged African man with a beard. Few were knowledgeable enough to add perhaps the most distinctive part of his appearance – the married man's *isicoco* head-ring, bound into Cetshwayo's hair – whilst many added feathers, furs and other adornments as the fancy took them, and with little regard to the realities of Zulu costume.

The king's new-found notoriety did at least afford the opportunity for professional photographers within southern Africa to get in on the act and, as Ron Sheeley has pointed out in a past article in the Journal, a number of photographers hastily printed up stock images of Natal or Zulu Africans, added captions describing them as Cetshwayo, and sold them to eager buyers. Judging by the number of these which still survive, they must have done a roaring trade.

It was not until the king himself was captured on 28 August 1879, at the end of the war, that there was a genuine opportunity to satisfy the public hunger regarding his appearance, and a number of amateur and professional artists who saw him – including officers who escorted him into captivity – dashed off sketches which appeared with passable accuracy as engravings in the press from September 1879. Even better, there was a photographer present on board the steamer *Natal* when the king was taken from Port Durnford, on the Zululand coast, to captivity in Cape Town in September. The king, looking rather depressed – as well he might – was persuaded to sit on a bench beside the ship's wheel, and be photographed. The session clearly lasted some time as a number of different photographs exist – in some the king has his striped shawl thrown casually over his shoulders, whilst in others it lies beside him. In some there is a life-belt visible behind the wheel – in others it has been brought forward to stand in front of the wheel so as to display the name 'Natal' prominently. The angles of the king's head vary – in some he has a rather fixed and pained smile, but in most he merely looks resigned.

These were the first good, clear indisputable photographic images of the king, and they too were published in their hundreds as cabinet cards or *cartes des visites*, to satisfy the public curiosity. Once the king was safely lodged at Cape Castle, he was, of course, much more accessible to the European world, and the old distorted images which had proliferated during the early months of the war fell out of fashion. Instead, the king posed for at least two photographic sessions whilst in captivity at the Cape, and a number of the best-known images

of him date to this time. One session was taken at Cape Castle some time in 1880, and the best known image from it shows the king in European dress standing beside a gun-carriage together with his custodian, Major Ruscombe Poole RA (killed at Laing's Nek in February 1881), the interpreter Henry Longcast, the king's induna, Mkhosana kaZanqana, and a Royal attendant. It's clear that a number of other famous images were taken on the same occasion; on one the king sits wearing the same European clothes, with a handkerchief nattily turned out in his breast pocket, but with a chequered shawl on the chair behind him. In another he wears traditional clothing – a loin covering including a leopard-skin *ibeshu* (buttock-cover) – but is photographed reclining beside the same cannon, and wearing the same shawl. In another he sits under a tree, again wearing the same distinctive shawl. One unusual photograph – which depicts him seated but wearing a traditional Zulu head-dress – remains difficult to place, but the presence of a shawl suggests it also dates to this occasion. A second series of photographs appear to have been taken after the king was later moved to the Oude Moulou farm outside Cape Town. In these the king is posed sitting or standing next to an arm-chair, and is wearing European dress with his head-ring hidden beneath a heavily-patterned smoking cap. Some copies of these photographs, published at the time, were retouched to allow the addition of a rather badly-drawn table and wine-bottle in order to suggest that the king was dependent upon European alcohol (he was not in fact a heavy drinker).

The final series of images of King Cetshwayo recorded from life were taken during his visit to London in August 1882. Although the purpose of his visit was an official one – to persuade the British Government to restore him to Zululand – the success of his army at Isandlwana had ensured the king celebrity status, and large crowds gathered to catch a glimpse of him wherever he went. And among the places he went was the studio of the fashionable photographers, Alexander Bassano's, in Old Bond Street, London. Bassano took a number of striking and dignified images of the king – and the *indunas* who accompanied him – all wearing European dress. It is interesting to note that by the time these photos were taken Cetshwayo appears to have been rather more aware of the power of photographic images, and to have been more confident in posing for them – whilst the photographer, too, was keen to present him in a powerful and positive manner.

One further famous non-photographic image dates to this period. After meeting Queen Victoria at Osborne House on the Isle of Wight, the Queen's portrait painter, Carl Sohn, was commissioned to paint a portrait of the king. Widely reproduced now, it has become one of the most iconic images of Zulu royalty, but although it captures both the king's likeness and his regal manner, it is not without its distortions; the king is depicted wearing a rather impressive necklace, which may or may not be of African origin (are they meant to be lion's teeth?) but is draped in an impressive animal-skin which appears to be a Black Bear skin rather than anything originating in KwaZulu-Natal!

Famously, the king's London mission had been a success – but only partially. Worried about Zululand's apparent slide into internecine conflict the British Government agreed to restore the king – but only to part of his former territories. Large swathes of northern and southern Zululand were set aside as refuges for those whom the British had set up to rule Zululand in the king's absence and who could now hardly be expected to welcome his return. In fact this compromise proved to be a disaster, and merely exaggerated the fissures within Zulu society; Cetshwayo was back in Zululand by February 1883, and just a few months later was defeated and chased out by his great rival and former general, Zibhebhu kaMapitha. By February 1884 the king was dead.

There seem to have been no more opportunities to photograph him after he left London, and so the occasions on which any surviving image of Cetshwayo was taken can be traced with a fair degree of certainty. Despite this – and despite, now, the extent to which his

features are recognisable – there are still a number of spurious images which claim to represent the king – but which do not. Some of these have been used extensively on the internet, and have even appeared in serious recent historical studies.

The principle – and of course quite unintentional – imposter is a Zulu man, obviously of high rank, who bears a remarkable similarity to the king. Portraits of this man standing and sitting – and usually in each case holding a wooden cane with a curved grip like a walking stick, and so apparently taken on the same occasion – are still regularly passed off as Cetshwayo. One of them appears even appears in Donald R. Morris' classic history *The Washing of the Spears*, although Morris admitted to me in private correspondence that he had identified the man as Cetshwayo himself, despite the fact that the original caption named him as someone else. This was a genuine mistake, of course, and forgivable in the 1960s, when access to photographic collections around the world was far more difficult than it is now; original nineteenth-century captions are often unreliable, particularly when it comes to identifying Zulu personalities, and the modern historian often has to fall back on his own judgement.

Nevertheless, the man in question isn't King Cetshwayo – it's his brother, Prince Ndabuko kaMpande.

It's easy to see how the confusion has arisen – they are certainly very similar to look at, and not surprisingly so; Prince Ndabuko was Cetshwayo's full brother. Although King Mpande fathered many children – Cetshwayo had 28 brothers and 23 sisters – he did so by many wives, and most therefore did not share the same mothers. Only two other sons were born to Cetshwayo's mother, Queen Ngqumbazi, the Princes Silwane (about whom little is known) and Ndabuko. Cetshwayo was ten years older than Ndabuko – Cetshwayo was born around 1832 and Ndabuko about 1842 – but the two were close friends and Ndabuko would prove a life-long ally of his brother's cause. While Cetshwayo had been enrolled as a youth in the older uThulwana regiment – which was a married regiment by 1879 – Ndabuko was a member of the younger uMbonambi, and as such he had fought at Isandlwana and elsewhere. At that time the uMbonambi were not married, although Ndabuko seems to have married shortly after the invasion and to have put on the head-ring. Ndabuko seems to have been relaxed in front of the camera, and was first photographed whilst still unmarried at Cetshwayo's coronation. He formed part of the Royalist deputation which walked to Pietermaritzburg in May 1880 to demand the king's release, and was photographed with other prominent members of the party, and since he was later heavily involved in the Zulu Civil War and in the Dinuzulu Rebellion of 1888 – where he was one of the ring-leaders, sentenced with Dinuzulu and Prince Shingana kaMpande to exile on St Helena – and lived into the twentieth century, he was photographed many more times during his life.

Photographs of the mature, married Ndabuko reveal a remarkable similarity to those of King Cetshwayo, so it is perhaps not surprising that the two have been confused; this confusion is only liable in retrospect since Cetshwayo and Ndabuko were never photographed together, and in fact the age difference between them would have been apparent at the time. Only in his middle years did Ndabuko fully resemble the king, some five or six years after Cetshwayo's death, and the images of Ndabuko and those of the king with which they have been confused were in fact taken some ten years apart.

One set of images – all taken at the same sitting – which are particularly liable to be mis-identified, show Ndabuko posed with what appears to be a large tarpaulin as a back-cloth behind him. In some pictures he is sitting on a wooden chair – evoking comparisons with the photographs of Cetshwayo taken in Cape Town – and in some he is standing. In perhaps the best known he is sitting with a shawl cast off on the chair beneath him, rather as Cetshwayo had himself been posed. It is these similarities which have led to a confusion which is still being perpetuated today.

Yet in fact a careful study of the various images reveals significant differences. Although both Cetshwayo and Ndabuko were photographed in minimal traditional dress, the costume is not the same. In the photograph of Cetshwayo reclining beside the gun, the rear part of his loin-covering – his *ibeshu* – is clearly visible, and it is made of leopard-skin, as one would expect of a high-ranking member of the Royal House. It is true Ndabuko might on occasion have worn a similar item – but in his posed photos he appears to be wearing tails, a rather different loin covering composed of heavy bunches of animal-skins twisted together to resemble tails. There is no indication that he is wearing an *ibeshu* behind. In all his photographs from that sitting Ndabuko is wearing a neat necklace of red beads and leopard-claws, which also suggests his status – Cetshwayo was never photographed in this necklace. Ndabuko carries the same cane in most of his pictures – it is present in none of the Cetshwayo studies.

There is one last decisive element to consider. These studio photographs of Ndabuko seem to have been taken shortly after he and King Dinuzulu surrendered to the Natal authorities at the end of the 1888 Rebellion. A number of photographs of Dinuzulu exist apparently posed against the same backdrop, potentially taken at the same sitting. And if the two were photographed together, then the older figure must be Ndabuko and not Cetshwayo, since Cetshwayo died when his son was just sixteen – and the two were never photographed together. And, sure enough, these photographs – an obvious completion of the photographer's set –do exist. Fascinating in their own right, as an insight into the post-war struggles of the Zulu people, they depict Ndabuko wearing the same loin covering and necklace and carrying the same distinctive cane. As an aside, they conclusively prove that the individual portraits taken on the same occasion cannot be of Cetshwayo, but are indeed of Prince Ndabuko.

Although it is easy to see how confusion between images of the two has come about in the past, it is surely time to separate the king from his brother and respect the surviving images of both of them for who they truly are.

Images.

1). King Cetshwayo photographed in captivity in Cape Town in 1880 with his guardian, Major Poole, his *induna* Mkhosana, the interpreter Longcast, and one of the king's attendants. A number of photographs were taken on this occasion – note the distinctive way the king has displayed his pocket handkerchief.





2). Another photograph taken on the same occasion – the king still wears the same European hat and suit (note the handkerchief!) but a distinctive shawl is now draped across the chair behind him.



3). Another photograph of the king taken on the same occasion; although the king is now posed in traditional dress, the same gun-carriage is visible behind him, and he is wearing the shawl depicted on the chair in the earlier photo. His leopard-skin buttock-cover, *ibeshu*, is visible spread out behind him on the left.



4). The photograph of Prince Ndabuko most usually confused with that of Cetshwayo. Note, however, that Ndabuko is wearing a necklace in this study which Cetshwayo is not, that he is wearing a different loin-covering at the back, and that the patterning on the shawl on the ground is different. Note, too, the cane, which is not present in any of the confirmed portraits of Cetshwayo.



5). This version, taken at the same sitting, shows the Prince standing (but with the same cane, necklace and loin-covering), and has also been confused with Cetshwayo.



6). The clincher – a photograph (tinted for publication as a postcard at the time) which depicts Prince Dinuzulu and Prince Ndabuko together. This photograph was taken at about the time they were arrested by the Natal authorities for High Treason following the rebellion of 1888. Note that Ndabuko is still carrying the same cane and wearing the same necklace, confirming that it was taken on the same occasion as the similar individual portraits reproduced here. King Cetshwayo and his son Dinuzulu were never photographed together, and in fact this series of images was taken four years after the king's death.