

Charles Rawden Maclean: *The Natal Papers of "John Ross"*, No. 7. Killie Campbell Africana Library Publications, University of Natal Press, 1992. 210 pp. R55-55. ISBN 0869808516

Stephen Gray is to be congratulated in that he has collected the Maclean entries in *The Nautical Magazine* and got them published. Instead of having to go personally to the Killie Campbell Africana Library, readers in this field now have access to a handsome volume that complements the work of Fynn (this includes the Fynn Papers in the Natal Archives), Isaacs and Basil Leverton's *Records of Natal* which, besides the newspapers, are basic resources for Natal during the 1802's. A problem with this production is that while the author is highly critical of writers who have contributed to this particular field, he has added little to entrench the discipline of historical method which is sorely required. There is a real need for the author to temper his observations by carefully noting his sources which would help the reader verify his information eg. 21 million slaves: p.181. One is grateful that the personal claims made in this volume were mercifully more modest than those in *John Ross: The true story*. Very few historians have written on this period and agreed - p.30 - still less have used Maclean as a source.

Gray's thought on page 156 is worth pursuing in the light of Isaacs Vol., pp. 154-155, which suggests that King did have interesting thoughts "to the eastwards". A question that is left unsatisfactorily answered is when did Maclean actually write this text? When the first number was published in January 1853 he talks of "the present Chief Dingane" on p.39 which suggests to me that he might have written this text during the terminal dates of Dingane's reign i.e. 1838-1840.

While the illustrations are excellent, it would have been good to have a picture of a brig to enable us to visualize the Mary instead of the pictures of the West India docks on p.22. The valuable Hawes and Hadden maps are most disappointing because even a magnifying glass hardly helps. It would be appreciated if we knew who verified the Zulu orthography - this needs to be acknowledged. Gray perpetuates the confusion surrounding Shaka's umuzis of Bulawayo 2 and Dukuza and their relative distance from Port Natal. The former was built by Shaka in 1820 on the southern slopes of the Mhlatuze and is overlooked by the stately Ngoye mountains and was the umuzi in which Shaka first received the white traders; the latter umuzi was built by Shaka towards the end of 1826 on a ridge above the Mvoti river where Stanger is situated. Although Maclean tells us on page 50 that the indigenous people living on the Bluff (Natal Head) were the amaThuli under their nkosi Mathubane, Gray confuses the reader by his reference to "a Mathubane father", p.179, also p.152, which indicates that the Mathubane's were the clan.

Readers need to be cautioned about the authenticity of

purported dialogue between John Ross and Shaka eg. p.124, p.192. Unhelpful verbosity often hinders understanding; a few examples of this: the bizarre description of Nandi on page 176; “meretricious” p.171 describing trading goods like beads which were increasingly such a significant part of the Zulu culture, and linguistic “glitches” - p.194, I do not find in my Concise Oxford Dictionary. I am extremely curious to ascertain why Stephen Gray describes John Ross, who at 14 years of age successfully completed the return trip to Delagoa Bay from Townshend (not Townsend) for medicine and other supplies, thus: “spindly”, p.23; “milk-sated child”, p.201. The source of the legend must have had some worthwhile physical attributes.

Stephen Gray confirms that Charles Maclean was John Ross on p.200. The hunting anecdotes are valuable: pp. 82-84 and p.99. Some of the statements made by the author seem to be over-reaction eg. “staggering number of half-caste children”, p.165; comparing Norton’s mutiny with the “Bounty” when it was “mutually agreed”, p.58; slavery was the issue, p.164, and “three great leaders”, p.155. Dommana’s story on page 93 was very moving, but I don’t go along with Gray’s comments.

The volume proves convincingly that John Ross and Francis Farewell were significant pioneers in this early period of Natal’s history. The book would have been a lot more valuable had the author been more objective and conscious of historical method in his text. But then possibly it would have been less interesting and controversial.

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