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Animal Metaphors Representing Human Images: A Case Study on King Shaka, the Founder of the Zulu Nation in South Africa

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ABSTRACT Animal metaphors are widespread in isiZulu because of the Zulu nation's traditional closeness to wildlife. Scholars have demonstrated the dynamic and enduring legacy of animal metaphors where images of small and big animals are used to create new facets of meaning and to reflect the relationship of humans with the animal realm. Although animals are the most popular characters used as metaphors in Zulu folklore, little field-research has been conducted on their social behaviour; on the way in which their characteristics were transferred with precision to depictions of King Shaka's behaviour and activities during the amalgamation of Nguni clans. The examination of animal metaphors has often been based only on library sources. This paper attempts to fill the gap by using first-hand interviews with local informants in KwaZulu-Natal to examine the ways in which the social behaviour of animals is used to represent Shaka's image. The paper concentrates on Shaka's *praise poems* in which the poet describes his physical and dispositional characteristics through bold animal metaphors in the Zulu socio-cultural context. These metaphors reflect the responsibilities and status of the king and also project the crescendo growth of the Zulu nation; from a small clan to a mighty kingdom.