

# THEIR SPEAR POINTS GLEAMING

## Identifying and Dating Anglo-Zulu War Iklwas

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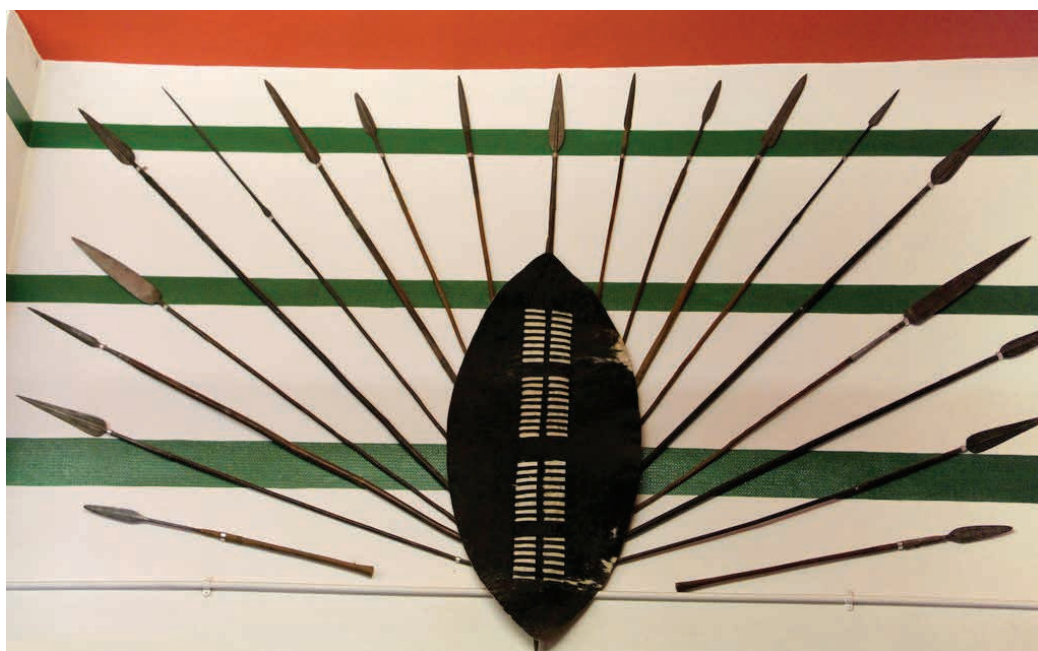
**I**n combing numerous militaria and antique shows over the years, I have come across many examples of African spears that were represented as Zulu weapons and furthermore were associated with the 1879 Anglo-Zulu War. More often than not, I found myself handling interesting spears associated with other tribes typically outside of South Africa, such as those used by Azande slavers from the Congo, Maasi warriors, and others with origins from all over the Colonial Africa. In other words, you never know what to expect, except that most of the time sellers are adamant that the spears are of Zulu origin – possibly due to the fact that given the historical interest in the tribe, they fetch a premium. Spinning a story to close a deal and convince a prospective buyer that a weapon is authentically connected to the conflict in 1879 is just as illicit as selling truly fake militaria. Having

said that, with a little basic knowledge and a feel for what should be real (which will develop over time), it is quite easy to determine the authenticity of Zulu-related spears.

At the time of the 1879 war, Cetshwayo's foot soldiers were armed with a wide variety of spears. There are certain examples – such as spears in the Museum in Brecon, Wales – which were actually used in the war, though some of these do not seem to be the type that one would normally associate with the tribe. The ability to identify a spear that might be connected to the Anglo-Zulu War comes with experience and does not usually entail a textbook approach. Spears purported to have been used by the warriors of Shaka, Dingane, and Cetshwayo are common and need to be properly identified as to vintage and possible, if not likely, connection with specific conflict periods. However, while this

cannot always be carried out with certainty, familiar characteristics and peculiarities are vital clues – some hidden, others clear to see – which are difficult to reproduce and fake. Both art and science, together with the history of the artifacts, may be used in authenticating original Zulu spears.

King Shaka has been recognized as revolutionizing the combat spear in the early 1800s by radically altering the tactics for which it was designed. In so doing, Shaka changed the shape of tribal warfare in South Africa for the rest of the century. We identify the unique shape and form of a true Zulu stabbing spear as the *Iklwa*. The origin of this term is associated with the sound made by the withdrawal of the blade from a victim's body. This close-combat weapon is typified by an extraordinarily long blade, up to 18 inches, an inch and half wide and an eighth of an inch thick, connected to a shorter shaft



**LEFT**  
Display at the Regimental Museum of the Royal Welsh at Brecon. Spears from the AZW in 1879 in a variety of forms with no "typical" example of the iconic Shaka-like Iklwa. Reproduced with permission

**RIGHT TOP**  
Iklwa blades. Author's collection

**RIGHT BOTTOM**  
Typical Iklwas from the AZW period. Author's collection