

# Royal Standards in Southern Africa

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The use of royal standards in Southern Africa is not widespread despite the predominance of monopolistic hereditary chieftainships on the sub-continent. A tradition of royal flags and banners did emerge in the Kingdom of Madagascar and since independence in Lesotho and Swaziland. A more recent development has been the adoption of a personal royal standard and a flag by certain ethnic groups in South Africa. The use of such flags is now more widespread in the region than ever before.

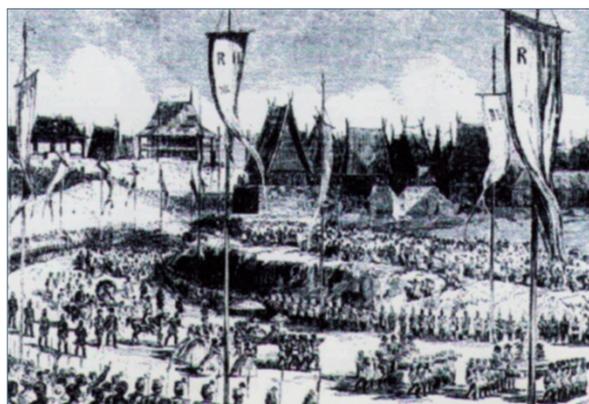
The first indigenous royal standards in Southern Africa, in the commonly accepted meaning as being those flags or banners symbolising the presence or authority of a monarch,<sup>1</sup> were those used by the monarchs during the Kingdom of Madagascar in the late 19th century. Prior to this there is evidence that a flag had been used by the Kongo Empire during the 17<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>2</sup> but this was to represent the “empire” as a whole and was not solely for the use of the monarch. Red flags were also used by the Sultan of Oman on Zanzibar from the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

In the Kingdom of Madagascar, however, the situation seems to have been different. The Hova dynasty first ruled on Madagascar in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and by the 19<sup>th</sup> century their influence extended to two-thirds of the island. According to *Les Drapeaux de Madagascar*<sup>3</sup> Queen Ranaivalona I, who occupied the throne from 1828 to 1861, used a white flag with her name in red and the word “*manjaka*” (for Queen) below. A more precise description of the use of a royal standard is given when King Radama II and his Queen ascended to the throne in an impressive ceremony in Antananarivo on 23 September 1862. In a description of the ceremony, the *Illustrated London News* (repeated in *Ifulegi*) said, “The road ... was lined with soldiers in red coatees, shakos &c. presenting arms. The line was marked by poles at every ten yards with banners, white ground and red border, with Radama II, and a star”. The photograph accompanying the description of the coronation shows a number of swallow-tailed vertical banners is shown as Fig. 1.<sup>4</sup> From the description and the photograph, the banner has been reconstructed as shown in Fig. 2.

The royal flags were red and white banners bearing the cipher of the monarch and sometimes even their full names, and were accompanied by a crown and occasionally a star. In the later years of the kingdom red began to occupy a portion of the white field as seen in the flag of Queen Ranaivalona II. Queen Ranaivalona II succeeded King Radama II, who was assassinated after

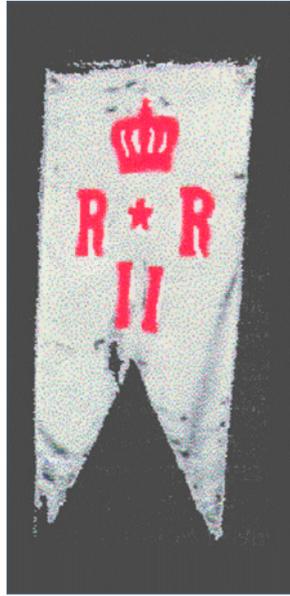
having been only two years on the throne. Several flags are also quoted as being used during the reign of Queen Ranaivalona II (1863 - 1883) and again they are white with the name of the monarch in red, edged in black. Queen Ranaivalona III (1883 – 1897) used a flag of diagonally white over red with her royal cipher (crown over RM) over all. The flag was illustrated on a German cigarette card in reverse as is shown here in Fig. 3.<sup>5</sup> Red and white were the royal colours and seem to have been used in the royal flags of Madagascar since at least the reign of Queen Ranaivalona I. Lucien Philippe refers to a history of Madagascar by H. Deschamps which states that the colours are derived from the Sakalave Ménabé, two princely families who occupied parts of the island. Red is for the Volamena Prince and white for the Volafotsi Prince. Philippe finds it strange that these colours should be united on the Hova royal flags. He offers another hypothesis, that the red and white refers instead to the Indonesian origin of the Hovas.<sup>6</sup>

The Hova royal standard appeared in three forms, namely in an elongated banner form of the type shown in Fig. 1, a triangular form as shown in Figs. 2 and 3, as well as in a rectangular version. In the latter, the flags were divided diagonally red over white with the letters RM, for Ranaivalona-Manjaka, embroidered in the center under a crown.

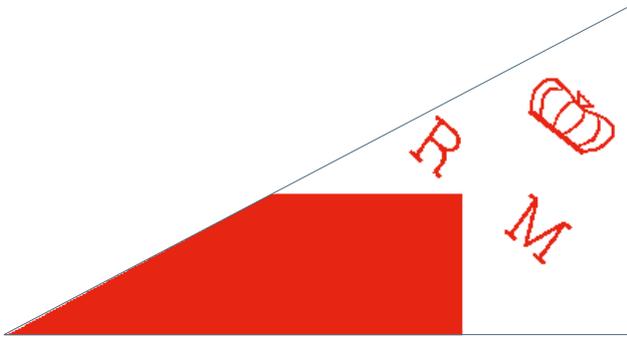


1. Royal Banners at the coronation of King Radama II

Although most references seem to confirm the description of Queen Ranaivalona III's flag, there has been at least one dissenting view. Karl Fachinger, responding to a description of the flag similar to that given above in D. Ruhl's *Die Flagge des Kriegs und Handelsmarinen*, says this is incorrect, and in fact, the royal standard was the French *tricolore* with a golden crown in the white stripe and the letters RM below.<sup>7</sup>



2. Banner of King Radama II



3. Royal Standard of Queen Ranavalona III

The New Treaties with Britain (1865) and with France (1868) recognised the Queen of Madagascar but provided economic concessions to Europeans trading on the island. However, France claimed territories in the north west and “to enforce their claims in June 1862, the French removed the Queen’s flags from the north-western territories . . . a clear denial of Malagasy sovereignty in that region”.<sup>8</sup> Following a later agreement with Britain whereby the latter agreed to recognise a French protectorate of Madagascar in return for French recognition of a British protectorate over Zanzibar, French forces landed on the island in May 1895 resulting in the island becoming a colony annexed to the French Empire. The monarchy was overthrown and Queen Ranavalona III was later exiled to Réunion.

In the period between the overthrow of the monarchy in Madagascar and the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there appears that there were no indigenous royal standards being flown in Southern Africa. The entire sub-continent was under colonial rule and local royal standards only started to reappear with the granting of independence to Lesotho and Swaziland, each becoming a constitutional monarchy.

Prior to independence in October 1966, Lesotho was the British Protectorate of Basutoland. The local Basotho inhabitants had resisted successive attacks by

invading Zulus in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and emigrant Boers during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with Paramount Chief Moshoeshe I eventually asking Queen Victoria for British protection “under the great folds of her flag”. On 12 March 1868 the British High Commissioner in South Africa issued a proclamation declaring the Basotho to be British subjects and their territory to be British territory. Despite the brief annexation to the Cape Colony between 1871 and 1883, Basutoland remained under direct British rule until internal self-government was achieved following the first general election held on 29 April 1965. Independence followed on 4 October 1966 when the country became the Kingdom of Lesotho. Under the independence constitution, the Paramount Chief (since 1960) became King Moshoeshe II of Lesotho and a new national flag and royal standard were adopted.

The royal flag (Fig. 4) was based on the new national flag and is somewhat ambiguously described in the *Gazette Extraordinary* (No. 3548, effective 4 October 1966) which led the standard to be incorrectly illustrated in Smith’s *Flags through the Ages and across the World* (1975). In this illustration the national arms are placed directly against the Basuto hat symbol as shown in Fig. 4.<sup>9</sup> A correct illustration is given in *Flags and Arms across the World* (1980) where the national arms are placed below the Basuto hat in the centre of the blue field (Fig. 5).<sup>10</sup>

Following the seizure of power in a coup by troops of the Lesotho paramilitary force on 19 January 1986, the new ruling Military Council called for suggestions from the public for a new national flag. The previous national flag was considered objectionable to many because of its close association with the ousted prime minister, Chief Leabua Jonathan, and his Basutoland National Party, which had ruled the country since independence and whose colours of horizontal blue, white, green and red had obviously influenced the design of the country’s national flag. On the first anniversary of the military coup, a new national flag was adopted in Lesotho. A new royal flag was also adopted (Fig. 6) and continued in the tradition of being a modified version of the national flag. This flag is described in the Second Schedule of the Emblems and Public Seal Order (Order No. 2 of 1987) as being:



4. Incorrect illustration of the first Lesotho Royal Standard



5. Royal Standard Lesotho (1966–87)

“A rectangular tricolour proportion three by two (3 x 2), per bend reversed, white, blue and green, the white occupying half the surface area of the flag and charged, with the center line, one quarter ( ) of the distance from the hoist with the coat of arms of the Kingdom of Lesotho proper; the blue and green each occupying the remaining surface of the flag.”<sup>11</sup>



6. Royal Standard of Lesotho (1987- )

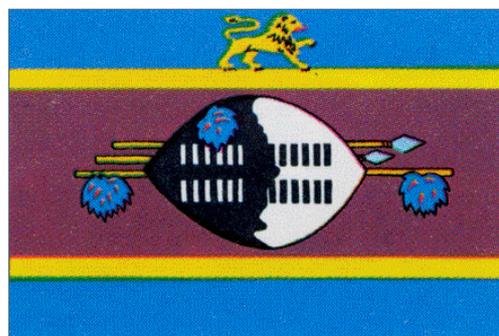
Unlike the official description of the first royal standard where no illustration was provided, the new royal standard is illustrated in this Order. The Order also provides an heraldic description and illustration of the Lesotho Arms in Schedule 1. The Order also specifies that any person, without the authority of the King of Lesotho, who uses the royal standard in any manner except for the purposes for which it is intended, is committing an offence and will be subject to a fine or imprisonment, or both.

There was no change to the royal standard following the death of King Moshoeshoe II in January 1996 and the new monarch, King Letsie III, continues to use the royal flag adopted in 1987.

In common with Lesotho, Swaziland was also a British Protectorate prior to attaining its independence on 6 September 1968. Swaziland's political history is unique in that its original political structures remained intact throughout colonial period and continue to play a pivotal role in the modern state. The Swazi nation formed in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century but it was not until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century that it migrated to the area it occupies today. It was in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that a coherent nation state emerged under King Sobhuza I. Swaziland became a British High Commission Territory in 1902 and King Sobhuza II ascended to the throne in 1921. Swaziland became independent as a constitutional monarchy under King Sobhuza II on

06 September 1968.

As in the case of Lesotho, a new national flag and royal standard were formally adopted by the Kingdom at independence. The national flag is based on the flag granted by King Sobhuza in 1941 to the Emasotsha Regiment of the Swazi Pioneer Corps which had fought on behalf of the Allies during World War II. Again, in common with the situation in Lesotho, the royal standard was derived from the national flag and was designed by King Sobhuza himself. The royal standard was the same as the national flag with the addition of a gold lion centred on the upper blue stripe. (Fig. 7). The lion, the symbol of the king, is oriented towards the fly and can heraldically be described as passant contourné. The lion has three paws on the ground and one raised (statant) and is yellow with a black eye, claws and outlines, and a red tongue. The lion (*Ingwenyama*) is the symbol of Swazi kingship and also appears in both the national and royal coats of arms. The King himself can also be called *Ingwenyama*. The tassels on the spears and shield of both the national flag and royal standard are called *tinjobo* and are made from the *lisakabuli* (widow bird) and *ligwalagwala* (lourie) birds. These *tinjobo* are only used by the King.<sup>12</sup> The royal standard flew publicly for the first time on 5 September 1968 at the Somhlolo National Stadium at Lobamba during independence celebrations.<sup>13</sup>



7. Royal Standard of King Sobhuza II (1968–1982)

King Sobhuza's death on 21 August 1982 precipitated a prolonged power struggle within the royal family. Initially the Queen Mother, Queen Regent Dzeliwe, assumed the regency and appointed 15 members to the *Liqoqo*, a traditional advisory body which Sobhuza had sought to establish as the Supreme Council of State. However, due to confusion over the status of the *Liqoqo*, a power struggle ensued between the Prime Minister, who sought to assert the authority of the Cabinet over the *Liqoqo*, and members of the *Liqoqo*. The Queen Regent was pressurised by the *Liqoqo* to dismiss the Prime Minister and replace him with a *Liqoqo* supporter. Subsequently a power struggle revolved around Queen Dzeliwe until she was placed under house arrest by the *Liqoqo* in October 1983. The *Liqoqo* subsequently installed Queen Ntombi Laftwala, mother of the 14 year old heir apparent, Prince Makhosetive, as queen regent in late October, and she

accepted the *Liqogo* as the supreme body in Swaziland. Prince Makhosetive was subsequently crowned King Mswati III on 25 April 1986.



8. Royal Standard of King Mswati III (1986- )

A new royal standard for King Mswati III replaced that used by King Sobhuza II (Fig. 8). The design follows the same basic pattern of the previous royal standard and national flag. The lion symbol of King Sobhuza has been replaced with another lion, which is now the most prominent feature on the flag. This lion is now orientated to the hoist but faces the observer (statant guardant) on the central maroon stripe. Small Emasotsha Regiment shields, of the same type found on the national flag, are found in the upper hoist and lower fly corners of the flag and traditional Swazi spears are placed in the upper fly and lower hoist corners. The traditional ceremonial head-dress of the monarch (*Inyoni*) is placed in the centre of the upper blue stripe. The royal cipher (M III R) is found in the centre of the lower blue stripe. The new royal standard thus contains many more symbols relating to the monarchy and is easier to distinguish from the national flag than the previous standard used by King Sobhuza.

The situation in South Africa is different in that as an independent republic, the head of state is the President. However, within the country there are a number of ethnic groups falling under various political systems. Probably the most famous of these are the Zulus who were welded into a centralised militarist kingdom by Chief Shaka during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and who retained some degree of local autonomy despite the other political developments in South Africa as a whole. During the apartheid era, KwaZulu was the designated area for the Zulus and during the negotiations leading to the first democratic constitution of South Africa in the early 1990s, the role and status of the Zulu monarchy was an important issue. The new Constitution of South Africa recognises “the institution, status and role of traditional leadership, according to customary law ...”.<sup>14</sup> Accordingly the Zulu monarch has adopted a higher profile in recent years although the province of KwaZulu-Natal has yet to formalise the role of the Zulu monarch with the adoption of its own provincial constitution.

Nevertheless, a personal flag for the current Zulu monarch, King Goodwill Zwelithini Kabhekuzulu, was unveiled on 21 December 1999. The flag, the first for a Zulu monarch (Fig.9), comprises seven horizontal stripes of black, yellow, red, green, white, blue, and maroon with the royal arms in the centre. The colours symbolise social development factors with black representing the soil, yellow wealth, red defence, green vegetation, white purity and peace, blue religion and maroon royalty.

The blazon of the Royal Arms is described as:

Arms: Argent, in pale the sceptre of the King between four huts, over all in base a representation of the Royal Hut, proper.

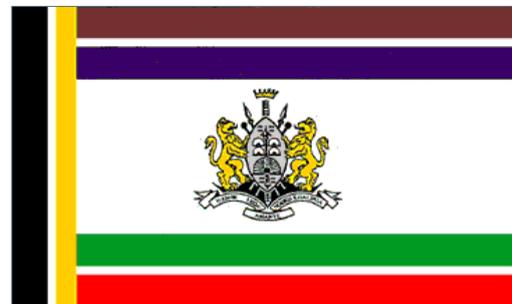
Supporters: On a ground sable, two lions Or, armed Argent and langued sable.

Motto: *Ilembe Leqa Amanye Ngoku Kbalipha* (Together we shall surmount – is an allusion to the motto on the former South African arms, Unity is Strength).

These arms were registered with the South African Bureau of Heraldry under Certificate number 757 issued on 02 June 1975. The arms were registered without the Royal Crown that is now placed above the Arms on the flag.<sup>15</sup>

The silver (white) shield is derived from the colour of ox-hide of the royal herd and the sceptre or “*Inblendla*” is the symbol of the King’s authority. The Royal Hut never stands alone and the King is the “Lion of the Zulu”, hence the choice of supporters.

The new royal flag is flown at all royal households, on all official royal vehicles and on other buildings conducting royal business.



8. Royal Flag of King Goodwill Zwelithini (1999-)

Although the flag for King Goodwill Zwelithini is the only royal standard within South Africa, another ethnic group within the country has recently chosen to fly a flag of its own. What is particularly interesting about this is the use of the term “Royal”. So while not being a royal standard in the strictest sense, it nevertheless is worthy of mention as the flag is used by the Royal Bafokeng Administration

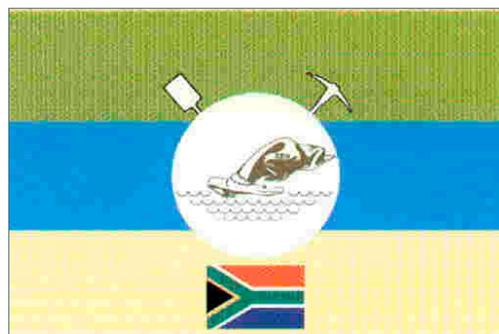
and by the King of the Bafokeng.

The Royal Bafokeng occupy an area of some 2 000 km<sup>2</sup> approximately 200 km west of Pretoria adjacent to the world renowned Sun City resort and comprise a population of 3 million. The Royal Bafokeng are members of the Setswana-speaking indigenous community and rose to some prominence during the 1980s when they demanded compensation and royalties from mining companies who were mining platinum in the area. The world's largest platinum reserves are to be found here and the agreement reached between the mining companies and the Royal Bafokeng Administration has resulted in the Bafokeng receiving considerable amounts in compensation payments and annual royalties.

The present Kgosi (Setswana for King) is Leruo Molotlegi, the 36th recorded Bafokeng king. His father, Lebone Molotlegi II (on the throne between 1996 and 1999) was the designer of the current flag of the Royal Bafokeng Administration, the traditional authority responsible for administration in the area. The flag (Fig. 10) was designed in 1995 and comprises three horizontal stripes of light green, light blue and beige, with the Bafokeng logo in the centre. The green symbolizes the algae found in the water in the area and is a reference to the everlasting nature of the Bafokeng kingship. The blue symbolizes water and the source of life for the community while the beige represents the sand found in the rivers. For the Bafokeng, algae represents a blanket and the sand, a mattress.

The logo of the Bafokeng (Fig. 11) is a modern representation of the Bafokeng totem, the crocodile, hence the symbolism of water in the flag as a whole. The crocodile of peace has long been the recognized totem of the Bafokeng people. A statue at the royal residence at Legato depicts the crocodile of peace and, having a short tail and only two legs, is representative of a human being. The short tail, and closed mouth, also emphasizes non-aggression as the Bafokeng people believe that a long tail would imply aggressiveness. The posture of the crocodile denotes movement towards water, which the Bafokeng believe to be a sign of contentment. This results in a common expression, used at meetings, "A e wele mo Metsing", which literally translated means "Let there be peace".<sup>16</sup>

Behind the logo are a crossed pick and shovel, which refer to the common economic activities in the area, namely mining and agriculture. Below the logo, in the center of the beige stripe is a South Africa flag. This symbolizes that the Bafokeng recognise that although they are distinctive, they are nevertheless an integral part of South Africa.<sup>17</sup> This flag can be seen flying at the offices of the Royal Bafokeng Administration in Phokeng and at the royal residence of Legato.



9. Flag of the Royal Bafokeng Administration (1995-)



10. Logo of the Royal Bafokeng Administration

The royal standards used in Southern Africa appear to fall into two categories. Those used during the Kingdom of Madagascar, and more recently, in Swaziland are personal standards, unique to the reigning monarch but containing elements or colours pertaining to the ruling dynasty. The standards used in Lesotho, however, do not follow this tradition as the current monarch continues to fly the standard used by his predecessor, the change in the country's royal standard being determined by political factors rather than by a change in the monarch. It remains to be seen if this standard will continue to be used by the successor to King Letsie III.

In South Africa, the standard of King Zwelithini appears to be for his personal use only, while the flag used by the Royal Bafokeng Administration represents the nation as a whole and should continue to fly unchanged despite future changes in the monarch.

1. Smith, W., 1975: *Flags through the ages and across the world*, McGraw-Hill, p. 24.
2. *Flag Bulletin*, 1997: No. 176, p.172.
3. Philippe, L., 1994: *Les Drapeaux de Madagascar*, *Société française de vexillologie*.
4. *Ifulegi*, 1998: No. 3, p.2.
5. Crampton, W., 1990: *The World of Flags*, Studio Editions, p.65. Also quoted in Ruhl, D., 1885; 1887: *Die Flagge des Kriegs und Handelsmarinen*.
6. Philippe, L., 1969: *Quelques Drapeaux du Musée des Arts Africains et Océaniens*, *Vexillologia*, Tome II, No. 1-2, p.2-5.
7. Submission by Jaume Ollé to Flags of the World (FOTW) website ([www.fotw.net](http://www.fotw.net)) on 7 January 1999.
8. *Africa Today* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed), 1996, Africa Books Ltd., p.952.
9. Smith, W., 1987: *New Flags: Kingdom of Lesotho*, *Flag Bulletin*.

*tin*, Vol. XXVI, No. 4, p.174. The error was noticed following a slide of an actual flag being provided to the Flag Research Center by James Croft after a visit to Lesotho.

10. Smith, W., 1980: *Flags and Arms across the World*, McGraw-Hill.
11. Kingdom of Lesotho, 1987: Emblems and Public Seal Order, Order No. 2 of 1987.
12. Swaziland Dept. of Information, circa 1970.
13. Murdoch, G., 1969: The Swazi Royal Standard, *Flag Bulletin*, Vol. VIII, No. 2, p.173-175.
14. *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, Act 108 of 1996, Chap. 12, p.119.
15. *SAVA Newsletter*, SN: 27/00, April 2000, p.5.
16. Details from the Royal Bafokeng Administration website at [www.bafokeng.org](http://www.bafokeng.org) and personal communication with the Public Affairs Office of the Administration.
17. Interview with Herbert Mngadi, Public Affairs Executive, Royal Bafokeng Administration, March 2001.