

ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORY IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN INTERIOR

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Archaeology is the technique of the study of old things made by man or related to man's activities from man's origin to the present day. The technique archaeology may be applied to develop hypotheses related to human activity or the process of change in human activity before the appearance of written documentation. Hypotheses developed prior to written documentation are known as prehistory and hypotheses developed after written documentation are known as history. In the South African context all human activity prior to White settlement is prehistoric. The border between prehistoric and historic South Africa moved inland with White penetration of the South African interior. By AD1823 the South-Western Transvaal was within the historic record.

Prehistoric archaeology in the South African interior is concerned with the study of human activity from its earliest beginnings to the local beginnings of written records. Historic archaeology starts when prehistoric archaeology fades, commencing in the South-West Cape circa AD1497 and in the Transvaal circa AD1823. Today South Africa, the world and its satellite are within the realm of historic archaeology. Historic archaeology in South Africa supplements written history. The archaeologist identifies localities and artefacts associated with historically recorded events or on the fringes of these events.

The first application of Historical Archaeology in South Africa was made by Eric Axelsson who used archaeological techniques to discover the Diaz Cross at Kwaaihoek in 1938. In 1964 I used archaeology to confirm the Historical Monuments Commission identification of the first White settlement in the Transvaal at Matlwase. In 1966 we discovered some archaeological evidence which will contribute to the identification of John Campbell's 1820 site at Kaditshwene. In 1973 we applied archaeological technique to determine the original structure of the Potchefstroom 1880—1881 Fort for the Historical Monuments Council who also asked us to investigate the Voortrekker Fort at Elandsfontein near Potchefstroom built in 1840. In 1982 we investigated the Late 19th Century German settlement at Driefontein on the Braamfonteinspruit using archaeological technique. Numerous historical archaeology projects are now under way in the investigation of ship wrecks on the Natal and Cape coasts and early White settlement in the South-Western Cape. Historical archaeology in South Africa does little more than supplement written history. There is little hope that South African archaeological investigation will actually discover buried historical documents such as the famous Dead Sea Scrolls in Israel or Dynastic Egyptian history in terms of buried painted or engraved written records. Beyond the limits of South Africa historical archaeology has a wide application and most countries today support numerous historical archaeological projects. One of the most interesting for example, is the Canadian excavation of the Fort William Trading Post and its subsequent development as a tourist project. Historical archaeology can even follow man's activities beyond the limits of the planet. The threat of nuclear war poses a threat of destruction of historical records. If historical records were destroyed, human activity on the moon after AD1969 and elsewhere could be investigated and reconstructed in terms of ar-

chaeological technique.

Identification of localities and artefacts associated with historically recorded events assist the understanding of processes and interactions between groups composing the South African population. In terms of scientific process, written history has a vital role to play in both prehistoric and historic archaeology. Written history or observations about living people provide models which are the basis of analogies connecting the prehistoric or historic artefacts and materials taken from the soil with the world of realities as we see it today. Unfortunately, most of South African prehistory is beyond the reach of direct analogies because most of South African prehistoric communities had expired before the earliest historians, generally explorers and missionaries, could reach them. The practice of prehistory and history in any community should be assessed in terms of the nature of the community. The South African community has always been under severe stress because of its exceptionally diverse nature. Stress in the South African community is reflected in at least three different forms of historical hypothesis in South Africa.

The conservative hypothesis in South African history is concerned mainly with the record of Afrikaner achievements. The Black component of the population is presented as hostile to the Afrikaners, open to ridicule or irrelevant. The English are presented as either hostile to Afrikaners or when friendly to Afrikaners confined to coastal areas while the Afrikaners were solely responsible for early development of the entire South African interior. The "South African Historical Atlas for Schools" by A O C Technical Services and H P van Coller (ND, believed to be early 1960's) provides a good example of conservative hypothesis in South African history.

The revolutionary hypothesis in South African history presents Whites as dedicated to exploitation of the Blacks. The Whites are the source of all the difficulties encountered by the Blacks in their African environment. But the Whites are not all powerful and are open to destruction. Black society before White settlement is presented as a Utopia. The revolutionary historians claim that "out of the fighting came larger more powerful kingdoms like the Zulu chieftdom of Shaka ... The people under their rule lived without fear." (Cloete and Mason 1982). L Thompson records that "Fear, too, was an important nation building factor. Executioners were always at hand to kill people Shaka suspected of disloyalty or cowardice." (Wilson & Thompson 1969).

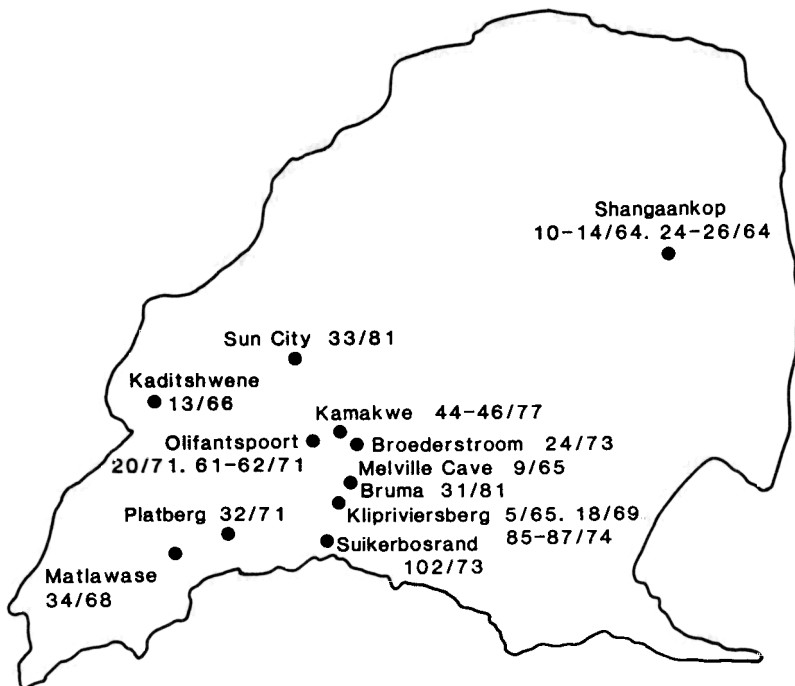
The third form of prehistoric-historic enquiry in South Africa follows the rules of logical inference. Prehistorians and historians following the rules of logical inference reject the prejudices of the conservative or revolutionary historians and attempt to analyse human activity with the objective procedures characteristic of the natural sciences. (Mason 1967, Mason and Thompson 1972).

Historians at work on the history of the South African interior require a knowledge of the prehistory of the Black man.

I shall use the term "Iron Age" for the longer term "prehistory of the Black man". The term "Iron Age" refers to a technology or means for responding to the environment, based on the production of metals, particularly iron, a food economy based on domestication of plant and animals, and a culture of settlement based on the construction of long term occupation of the same spot in the same locality (Mason 1952). Although there is some evidence for the presence of Late Stone Age people, possibly SAN, at Early Iron Age settlements skeletons at both Early and Late Iron Age settlements such as Broedersdroom 24/73 and Olifantspoort 20/71 represent a racial type indistinguishable from the skeletal anatomy of the present Black population of

South Africa.

Since the 1960's archaeological technique has revealed that Iron Age people, probably directly ancestral to the present Black population of South Africa, were distributed over parts of the Transvaal, Natal and Eastern Cape from the 3rd Century AD onwards. (See Fig 1 for Transvaal sites).



Excavated prehistoric iron age sites and early historic sites investigated by R J Mason. There are a large number of other excavated iron age sites in the Transvaal investigated by other archaeologists. (Reproduced by kind permission of The Editor, S A Journal of Science).

The food producing economy of the Early Iron Age people is best represented at the Broederstroom 24/73 Site (Mason, Brown, Fatti and Beardall 1983). The Broederstroom Early Iron Age people from about AD350 to AD600 were sheep/goat farmers because we have identified the bones of sheep/goats at a number of different sites within the 500 metre wide area where the Early Iron Age remains are distributed. It is possible that the 500 metre wide area was occupied by relatively small groups possibly moving in and out of this locality at intervals for several hundred years. There is nothing to suggest that the same group occupied the whole area for the whole of the circa 250 years of the Early Iron Age development at the site. The presumably successive small communities occupying different parts of the 500 metre wide area at different times were presumably related to one another to judge by the uniformity of style of the pottery from different localities within the site together with uniformity of other features of technology such as hut building and iron production. Remains of a wide

variety of wild animals are distributed at the site suggesting that the Broederstroom Early Iron Age people got important contributions to their food supply from hunting, collecting, gathering and snaring wild animals of all kinds within a reasonable distance of their site. Wild plant foods probably contributed an important part of the food supply although these are not preserved at the site. Dish shaped lower grindstones of the kind used for grinding domesticated grain crops are not present at the site although a few grooved lower grindstones were found. The people may have used wooden mortars for processing domesticated grain crops but there is no definite evidence that the Broederstroom Early Iron Age people produced domesticated crops. Although we cannot assume that the Broederstroom food economy represents Early Iron Age food economies as a whole in the South African interior the well preserved Broederstroom animal materials suggest a food economy based on the possession of possibly small herds of goats, sheep or both while the rest of the food supply came from wild animals and plants of all kinds. Fortunately, Robbie Steel's excavation of Kruger Cave near Rustenburg, two days' walk to the west of the Broederstroom Early Iron Age site provides excellent evidence on both wild plant and wild animal foods available to Stone Age people who occupied the Magalies Valley both before and after the Broederstroom people built their villages between circa AD350 and 600. The Kruger Cave dates are to be published in the near future.

We have not yet discovered Iron Age sites dating to the period after the end of Broederstroom but before the earliest Olifantspoort settlements at about AD1200 in the Western Transvaal. T M Evers and others working in the Eastern Transvaal have found a few sites dating to the Western Transvaal "missing link" period circa AD600—1200. (Evers 1981)

I have suggested that a similarity in the pottery motifs and placement of motifs on the Broederstroom Early Iron Age pottery and the pottery from the Olifantspoort Iron Age sites dated from circa AD1200 onwards together with pottery from other Western Transvaal sites seems to indicate that the Broederstroom people were actually ancestral to many of the Western Transvaal Iron Age people despite the 600 year gap between the dated pottery assemblages and other materials. In turn, the circa AD1200—1800 materials from the Western Transvaal Iron Age sites are directly ancestral to the Black peoples identified historically as Sotho/Tswana people (Mason 1983). My interpretation of continuity between the Early Iron Age people of Broederstroom and modern Sotho/Tswana people is not accepted by archaeologists such as T M Evers. Evers believes that "ancestral Sotho/Tswana ceramics cannot be derived from Early Iron Age ceramics in the Transvaal ... the sample of ancestral Sotho/Tswana ceramics consists of two groups early (circa 1150—1500AD) and late (post 1500) ... the differences between early Sotho/Tswana and the immediately preceding phase are too great for local development to be postulated; a migration hypothesis is therefore more acceptable."

I cannot accept T M Evers's argument particularly since he does not explain the source of his supposed "migration" or "movement of people". I am satisfied that the evidence I have excavated at over 50 sites, supported by 69 radiocarbon dates, suggests uniformity of development in the Central Western Southern Transvaal from circa AD350 to the historically identified Sotho/Tswana peoples the earliest explorers such as John Campbell and Thomas Hodgson found in the Western Transvaal from AD1820 onwards.

Space prevents discussion of the immensely complex Iron Age developments elsewhere in Southern Africa. I hope my presentation of the Central Western Southern

Transvaal Iron Age will provoke historians to enquire into work by other archaeologists concerning the prehistory of the Nguni, Venda and other Black communities of Southern Africa.

Late Iron Age stone walled settlement layout and distribution in the Southern-Eastern-Western Transvaal was first investigated by air photography in the mid 1960's (Mason 1967) revealing over 6 000 sites. Subsequent detailed fieldwork shows that this estimate is far below the real number preserved on the ground but hidden in vegetation. Most of the sites may be related to Sotho/Tswana development.

Meat foodwaste analysis for the Southern-Western-Eastern Transvaal Early—Late Iron Age settlements suggests at least six distinct 'classes' of meat food economy for the settlements. These range from an economy based mainly on hunting and gathering with a small domestic stock supplement (Broederstroom Early Iron Age and Shangaankop Late Iron Age) to an economy based mainly on the eating of cattle, such as Olifantspoort Late Iron Age (chief's area) (Mason, Brown, Fatti, Beardall 1983).

By the 18th Century at least three large population clusters were established at Kaditshwene near Zeerust (Mason 1965), Selonskraal west of Rustenburg (Pistorius 1984), and Lithakong near Mafeking (Burchell 1812). Approximately 10 000 or more people lived in each cluster (Burchell 1812, Campbell 1820). Kaditshwene and Selonskraal boundary structures were built in stone but Lithakong boundaries were indicated by wooden stockades. Kaditshwene, Selonskraal and Lithakong were built by ancestors of the present day Sotho-Tswana cluster. Similar smaller stone walled clusters were constructed in the Eastern Transvaal by ancestors of the present Pedi (Evers 1981). Large numbers of similar settlements were built in the Orange Free State (Maggs 1976). The development of other Iron Age clusters was recorded in settlements whose debris has been found between Northern Natal and the Eastern Cape (Maggs 1980).

Lithakong is in Acock's zone of Kalahari Thornveld just west of the western edge of the *Dry Cymbopogon-Themedra* grassveld zone. Kaditshwene and Selonskraal are in Bankenveld, transitional zone between grassveld of the south and bushveld of the north. These two sites are close to *Cymbopogon-Themedra* grassveld.

A Brown found that the Kaditshwene meat food economy was based on cattle, sheep/goats hunting, snaring and gathering. In the meat foodwaste, cattle outnumbered sheep/goats by 1.8:1, herding producing 87%, hunting 13% and snaring gathering only 0.02%. 'Dished' lower grindstones indicate grain production but no seeds were found. Natural stone mortars suggest processing of hard materials for food, indicating poverty. C14 dates for early and late charcoal suggest Kaditshwene site duration from circa AD1650 $\pm$ 20 to AD1825 $\pm$ 25. Approximately two centuries of unbroken residence by a large population would downgrade local natural food resources, fertility and grazing, so that the archaeologist and historian are obliged to view sites such as Kaditshwene as possibly within a decline phase by the time of Campbell's 1820 visit due to pressure on food resources. Nevertheless, the location of Kaditshwene, Selonskraal and Lithakong in or near bankenveld adjacent to grassveld and bushveld suggests that the resources of these three regions were essential to the growth of clusters of 10 000 or more people.

Late Iron Age settlements elsewhere in South Africa were more dispersed than the Kaditshwene-Selonskraal-Lithakong 'megasites' except for the Nguni sites such as Shaka's kraal where Fynn observed 80 000 people in 1825, but many of these may have

assembled from outlying 'satellite' settlements (L Thompson in Wilson and Thompson 1969).

All the Iron Age sites developed without the benefits of complex water supply or wheeled transport systems. The populations could not have developed without efficient pastoral cultivation economies and without iron tools and weapons. The demand for iron was undoubtedly satisfied by iron mining at shallow exposures of iron ore which are widespread throughout Southern Africa but ornamental metals such as copper and tin were probably mined at large copper mining complexes in the Dwarsberg Western Transvaal and the Rooiberg tin complex in the Central Transvaal (Mason 1982).

The historian Neil Parsons claimed that 'Africans in precolonial times' worked small mines on the Witwatersrand. These small mines attracted Fred Struben to the main gold reef. (Parsons 1982, p. 169). Iron Age miners did not have the complex chemical technology necessary to extract Witwatersrand gold. Parson's 'small mines' could have been prospecting pits dug by White settlers before Struben arrived. Iron Age miners did mine gold in the Eastern Transvaal (Mason 1962) but not on the scale of the Zimbabwe Iron Age gold mines.

When the 19th Century missionaries arrived in the Transvaal at Matlwase in 1823 prehistoric Black technology had reached its maximum development. There was no indication that Black communities were making independent discoveries of inventions vital to the further development of Black settlements, such as wheeled transport, large scale irrigation, and written communication. But the prehistoric style Black settlements had succeeded in developing large healthy active populations vital for the construction of the South African population clusters of the later 20th Century.

Prehistoric archaeology therefore has greater potential than historical archaeology for the understanding of South African history. Historical archaeology in South Africa provides a useful technique in culture history for the identification of important historical sites such as the AD1823 Matlwase Mission whose association with T L Hodgson and S Broadbent has been confirmed by the excavation of early 19th Century artefacts at the site. Both prehistoric and historic archaeology provide materials vital for the effective development of historical education in the broad sense in South Africa.

Most white and Black South Africans appear to consider that South African history and prehistory are irrelevant to South Africa's present and future. For example, the University of the Witwatersrand is well known as a centre of progressive student activity but none of these students have ever asked to see our displays of prehistoric Black villages and other materials discovered at our prehistoric Transvaal Black man sites. Massive investment in education and communication technology is necessary to develop a future South African community well informed on all aspects of its later prehistory and history. This information is vital to the development of the social attitudes necessary to the future survival of South African populations.

The thrust of White settlement placed White farms in areas possessed by ancestors of the Bophutatswana-Leboea people for 1 500 years before the Whites came. Today, these people are responding by stating "The land belongs to us" (Delius 1983). But South Africa, and any other part of the world, belongs not to the people who have occupied the same areas for centuries or thousands of years, but to the people who can achieve the most effective adaptation to the environments of the 21st Century AD. South African archaeology contributes to South Africa's future adaptation.

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