LATER STONE AGE BURIAL PRACTICE IN THE EASTERN CAPE PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA

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Volume 1

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Science, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Johannesburg, 2008
Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University.

_____________________
(David Gareth Pearce)

________ day of_______________, 2008
Abstract

This thesis investigates Later Stone Age burial practices in the southern Cape of South Africa. Research is built around the methodologically important theme of continuity and change. The theme is explored in terms of continuity and change between archaeological and ethnographic societies. The outcomes of this research suggest that aspects of San ethnography, primarily cosmology, may be used to interpret certain features of Later Stone Age burial practice. Continuity and change are also explored within different periods of the Holocene Later Stone Age. Two temporal phases of burial practice are identified and a third is hypothesized. Little spatial variation is identified across the research area. In addition to the theme of continuity and change, much of the thesis explores the symbolism of the structure and contents of graves. Symbolism related to water and entrance to a notional spirit world is prominent in the graves. The thesis concludes that during the Holocene Later Stone Age human graves became important resources used by religious specialists in the negotiation and contestation of power relations within and between social groups.
For my mother and father
    and
    for Lara
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This thesis draws extensively on both ethnographic and archaeological data. To avoid confusion I distinguish terminologically between the two. All archaeological material I deal with falls within the period conventionally known as the Later Stone Age (LSA) (Goodwin & van Riet Lowe 1929). I describe the material and people as being ‘Later Stone Age’ or a sub-division thereof, such as Albany or Wilton (after the respective lithic industries).

The ethnographic material I draw upon relates to the people commonly referred to as the Bushman or San. Because these communities speak many mutually unintelligible languages, there is no single indigenous name to cover all groups. ‘Bushman’ is, in the view of some people a pejorative and sexist word, although, some groups do themselves choose to use it. ‘San’, a Nama (Khoekhoe) word, is preferred by many, but by no means all, academic writers and some indigenous communities. Unfortunately, it means something like ‘vagabond’, and is therefore also pejorative. There is no unanimity, amongst either indigenous communities or researchers, as to which word should be used. In this thesis I use the word ‘San’ (except, of course, in direct quotations). In doing so, I explicitly reject any negative connotations the word may have. In addition to this general term, I, where appropriate, use the names of particular linguistic groups (such as /Xam or Ju/'hoansi).

In practical terms, this means that I attempt to reconstruct the history of Later Stone Age people based on models derived from living San communities. The terminological distinction is methodologically necessary in order to avoid analogical confusion.

For geographical and place names I use, wherever possible, modern names and spellings (except, once again, in direct quotations). I deviate from this general rule by referring to the areas of the Western and Eastern Cape Provinces in which this
study is based collectively as the ‘southern Cape’. I do this to avoid the repetitive use of a clumsy phrase.