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Let the Ancestors Speak: an archaeological excavation and re-evaluation of events prior and pertaining to the 1854 siege of Mugombane, Limpopo Province, South Africa

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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, 2006

DECLARATION

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

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___16_____ day of _____March_____, 2006

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ABSTRACT

During the 19th century the present Makapan Valley World Heritage site was a place of repeated refuge from the conflicts arising from shifting authority, acquisition and loss of power, and competition over the control of resources in the northern regions of Republic of South Africa. During 1854 growing resistance amongst the northern AmaNdebele against the frontier of colonial expansion erupted in the murder of a number of trekboers who were encroaching on their territory. Historic Cave, one of the caves in the Valley, became written into the Afrikaner Nationalist narratives of the 20th century as the place where the Boers avenged the treacherous murder of their fellow trekkers, by suppressing the savage forces of chief Mugombane and his Kekana chiefdom. The events surrounding the siege and the scale of the massacre became blurred in the playing out of these political agendas, while the Kekana oral histories remained silent on the matter.

The excavation of Historic Cave, prompted by the contradictions in the historical narrative and the silence in the oral record, provided a means to detect the boundary between what happened and what was said to have happened. This thesis presents the results of a survey of the Valley, the excavation of Historic Cave and the analysis of the remains of the siege of 1854. The archaeological survey and excavation indicates that a number of scurmishes took place in the valley, but that Historic Cave was occupied only on one occasion for any length of time, during the siege of 1854. The lime enriched deposits and dry conditions within the cave have allowed for the exceptional preservation of plant, animal and human remains. This enduring evidence chronicled the activities and steps taken by the Kekana to survive. The spatial layout of the cave together with cultural remains echo the structure and hierarchy of the society trapped within it, which like many African societies of this time comprised a heterogeneous 'royal' core and other 'foreign' subordinate groups. Evidence for divination reflects the final attempts to divine the cause of misfortune and protect the group against maleficent forces. However, it is argued that the social and religious forces that operated to keep the chiefdom together may have begun to loosen under the pressure of the siege, especially as the polluting forces of death became stronger and the group began to succumb. The remains of young and old people, and the desiccated bodies of a child and a young woman speak of untold suffering and provide a glimpse of the horror within

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the cave. From this it is reasoned that following the devastation of the siege the core of the chiefdom was challenged; the chief was ‘dealt with’ and the political power base shifted. The real reason for the ‘silence’ then lies at the point of rupture, at the stage when the surviving statesmen contrived a suitable account of ensuing events to give the new chief legitimacy and the lineage continuity.

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In memory of my brothers

Stephen Andrew Esterhuysen 1969 - 2002

Peter Jonathan Esterhuysen 1963 - 2004

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I am grateful to my supervisors Lyn Wadley and Phil Bonner for their support and guidance during the excavation, analysis and writing phases of this research. Lyn kindly agreed to continue to supervise this project even after taking early retirement and moving some distance from the University. Phil agreed to breach both faculty and disciplinary boundaries to supervise this thesis and provide invaluable mentorship. This research was funded by the NRF through the Thuthuka Researcher in Training programme.

My thanks and respect to the elders of the Kekana Royal Household who granted permission for the excavation. The Kekana have a history of dispossession so that their faith in my good faith contributed greatly to this project especially after a dispute erupted between themselves and local government. The elders were extremely patient and accommodating and endured many hot hours listening to my explanations. In this regard I am also indebted to Peter Lekgoathi for acting as translator, spokesperson and intermediary.

The logistics involved in getting equipment into the cave, setting up excavations and working in the cave were never going to be easy, but the following people made it possible. John Cruise and his crew kindly propped the roof over the main excavation area. Rose Sekhaolelo, Ernest Mokhare, Alpheus Sekhaolelo, Mokwasheng Evens, Elisa Baloyi, Phineas Makuleke undertook the arduous task of sieving and sorting. Johannes Makuleke and his sons were always available to help move equipment and thankfully kept the fire under the 'donkey' burning at the Research house. Mike Buchanan and members of CROSA facilitated my entry into a number of caverns in the Makapan Valley and ensured my safe return to the surface.

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My thanks to Hendrina and Bert Ysel who gave up their Saturday to work at the Mokopane museum following a request I placed in the local newspaper asking people to return items taken from the cave to the museum. Hendrina also granted me access to the museum's photo archive, and kept me well stocked in *mampoer*.

To my brothers Stephen and Peter, who never saw the outcome of the project, you will always be remembered for your support and inspiration. My special thanks to my parents who cajoled and encouraged me to finish the thesis through the worst of times, and to Stuart Dunsmore for assisting in innumerable ways.

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PREFACE

My interest in Historic Cave was initially provoked by Dr R.Rayner, then a member of the University of the Witwatersrand Palaeontology Department, in 1992. Rayner highlighted the extent to which archaeological remains, including human remains, were being removed without regard to appropriate procedures from the caves. Attempts to publish this information and raise questions about appropriate ethical practice were blocked by the University administrators of the time. Nevertheless, the University was sufficiently concerned to institute an enquiry into the matter after which it adopted protocols to prevent any repetition of these acts.

In the years following 1994 the University's attempts to protect and take ownership of Historic Cave and the other palaeontological sites for research purposes were met with growing resistance. After a long process of negotiation a compromise was arrived at whereby the land would be ceded to a joint venture between local government and University. The committee set up for this purpose provided the funding and expertise to develop site management plans, the World Heritage application and a funding proposal to raise the money required for the full development of the Valley. When the funding was obtained in 2003 local and provincial government intervened and scuppered the joint venture and set up a new executive committee to manage the process.

It was only really feasible to attempt to obtain permission to excavate the Siege site after 2000. In this year I approached the Royal Kekana Council with the help of historian, Peter Lekgoathi. At our first meeting both Peter and I were cautioned to respect the community and the ancestors. After some deliberation the councillors withdrew to consult further with the community and make their decision, which they did on Heritage day, 23 September 2000. An agreement was signed outlining my obligations to the community in terms of regular communication, access to the site, and an assurance that any human remains recovered during the excavation would be reburied. On the strength of this agreement the South African Heritage Resources Agency issued a permit to excavate the site. The Makapan Research committee requested a stability assessment of the cave as it had previously been deemed highly unstable. Based on this report safe pathways and areas of safe excavation were delineated and a section of the cave propped. The unsafe

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conditions in the cave however precluded the use of student or hired help inside of the cave. This unfortunately severely restricted the extent of the excavation, which for the purposes of the PhD had to be completed within three years. It thus may come to pass that parts of this thesis are refined, modified or even refuted through continued excavation and analysis.

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CHAPTER 1: The political landscape of the 19th century

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1. Introduction

The Makapan Valley World Heritage Site and its caves act as an important mnemonic for historic events occurring from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. Various polities have interacted with and moved over this landscape; remembering it both as a place to settle and to take refuge, and writing themselves into the landscape by leaving behind material traces of their existence. The oral traditions, pertaining to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, provide a somewhat confusing political history that focuses on the origins, migration and fission of dominant lineages (Delius 1983:12). Nineteenth century missionary documents and oral traditions provide only a slightly more lucid record of the movement and fission of various chiefdoms. They reveal the fluid nature of these polities as they absorbed, became absorbed, split, moved or formed alliances with other polities. These archives also provide indications of the nature of relationships between different chiefdoms[1], and hint at trade

[1] For example, the Bapedi Chief Thulare paid tribute, in the form of thatching grass and poles, to the Ba-Mongatane a group whom they recognized as their superiors (Hunt 193: 277), yet repeatedly raided groups like the Amandebele for cattle (*Ibid*.: 283) . The Langa Ndebele also

relations (human, ivory, guns and metal) with, amongst others, the Swahili-Portuguese[2], the missionaries and the Boers.

The Valley was a site of repeated refuge from the conflicts emanating from the linked processes of interaction and conflict, and constitutes a unique record of this period of South African history. Many other archaeological sites exist in the area, but the level of preservation is poor. The highly alkaline deposits and dry conditions within the dolomite caves in the Makapan Valley have allowed for the exceptional preservation of plant, animal and human material, in addition to a wide range of other artefacts, offering unique insights into the socio-economic and political life of this period.

2. The background to the siege

The Historic Cave or Gwaša[3], became known as Makapansgat, after Chief Mugombane II - Makapan or Mokopane[4] - and the members of his Kekana chiefdom took refuge and were besieged by the trekboers in the cave in 1854. The Kekana retreated into the cave after attacking and killing between 23 and 28[5] trekboers. The gruesome murder of trekker men, women and children in the Makapaanspoort[6] and Pruissen by the Kekana, and the simultaneous execution of Boer leader Hermanus Potgieter and his party by the Langa Ndebele at Fothane hill[7] signalled the AmaNdebele's intent to resist the Boers' demands for tribute, labour and land. These actions necessitated and prompted immediate Boer retaliation.

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procured medicated pumpkin for the first fruits festival from the Kekana at Moletlane thereby acknowledging the seniority of the Kekana's lineage (Jackson n.d.:5).

[2] Hunt (1931) notes that the Bapedi speak of the Mapalakata who were armed with muskets and dressed in long white dresses. The Mapalakata are mentioned in a praise song to Thulare who died around 1820. Merensky (1862) in *Beiträge* also mentions early slave traders with long muzzle loaders, but he notes that the guns were called *mapalakata.*

[3] Although the local name for the cave is Gwaša, I will refer to it as Historic Cave to be consistent with papers published on the geology and layout of the Valley.

[4] He was also known as Setšwamadi. At the request of the Royal Kekana Household I will refer to him in this thesis as Mugombane, the Ndebele rendering of his name.

[5] The number and names of the trekkers vary between documents (see De Waal 1978: 64-68)

[6] Now known as Moorddrift on account of the murders.

[7] Subsequently called Moordkoppie.

It is generally understood that the Boers' interest in the Makapanspoort, and more specifically the territory of the Kekana and Langa AmaNdebele chiefs, was based on its strategic importance as a major trade route to the ivory rich northern Transvaal (now Limpopo Province). Although, the full extent of the AmaNdebele territory is unknown, Mugombanes's headquarters spanned the present day farms of Pruissen and Vier-en-Twintag Riviere, and one of his wards was situated at Sefakaolokop 8km west of the town of Mokopane (previously known as Potgietersrus). The headquarters of Mankopane the Langa chief was situated at Fothane 60km north of Mokopane (Fig.1.1).

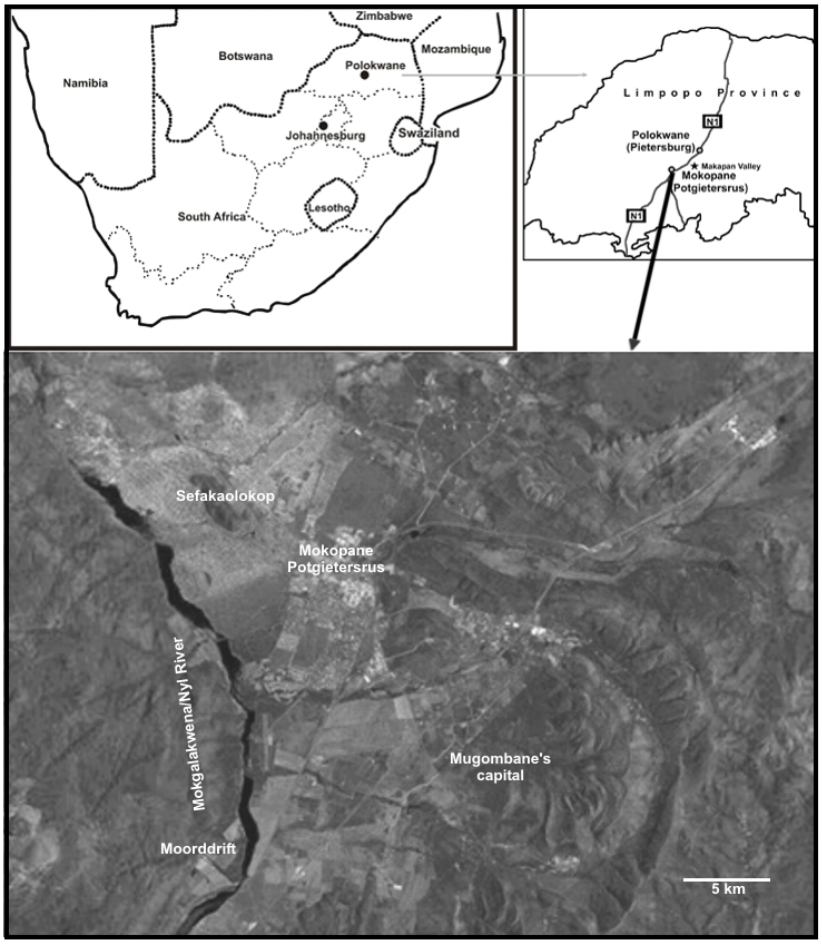


Figure 1.1. The approximate location of Mugombane's territory

In 1852 Commandant-General A.H. Potgieter intended to establish a town called Vredeburg (De Vaal 1990a: 140) in the Makapanspoort to lay claim to the route and facilitate the movement of goods and people between Schoemansdal and

the Magaliesberg (Rustenburg). His objectives remained unrealised because he fell ill and died in December the same year (*Ibid*.1990: 140). By 1854 the Kekana, who had fallen repeatedly victim to Boer raids, demands and various acts of cruelty under the leadership of the Potgieters, joined a growing network of resistance against the trekboers. Between 1850 and 1854, Mugombane formed an alliance with at least three other AmaNdebele chiefs, Sebetiele, Mankopane[8], and Maraba[9] against the Boers. The full extent of this network is unknown, but a letter written just after the siege of 1854 from the trekboers in Lydenburg to J.P. Hoffman State President of the Orange Free State[10] suggests that the web of connections included Mapog[11] (AmaNdebele), and Mosheshwe (BaSotho), who was in a position to provide guns and ammunition. In 1854 the Boers, who were also finding it increasingly difficult to exert their control over Sekwati's Pedi (Delius & Trapido 1983: 62), shifted their trade route from the Strydpoort to the Makapanspoort (Potgieter 1958: 3), and in doing so triggered a cycle of violence, resistance and retaliation between themselves and the AmaNdebele. This period of tension lasted into the early 1870s when the Boers who had tried to settle the area finally abandoned Pietpotgietersrust[12].

Correspondence from Boer Commandant-general P.J. Potgieter[13] and a report written by Commandant-general M.W Pretorius[14] provide the basic details of the murders of the trekboers. Oral testimonies recorded and written later contribute the bulk of the more colourful narrative popularised by Preller in the 1900s. According to the primary sources a party of trekboers passed through the Makapanspoort in September of 1854. About 10km south of the present day town of Mokopane at a point where the Mokgalakwena River was shallow enough to cross, members of Mugombane's chiefdom murdered the party. The Trekker

[8] Notule van die Volksraad van die S.A.R.II V.R. 337/53. Verslag van de Kommandant Generaal P.J. Potgieter van zyne verrigtingen zedert zyne aanstelling to den 19 September 1853.

[9] Bredell & Grobler (1902: 29) note that after the siege a small Boer party was sent to retrieve stock harbored by Maraba on behalf of Mugombane.

[10] V.R. 417/54 Notule van die Volksraad van die SAR III in *Suid Afrikaanse Argiefstukke: Transvaal no's IVII.*

[11] Also Mapoch or Mabhogo

[12] The town would revive in the 1890s as Potgietersrus(t) (Hofmeyr 1993: 47).

[13] S.S.6, R684/54: P.J. Potgieter – M.W. Pretorius, Waterberg, 29 September 1854.

[14] S.S.7, R733/54: Verslag van (report by) M.W. Pretorius, Magaliesberg 6 December 1854.

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party of approximately 12 men, women and children were viciously attacked and their bodies dismembered[15]. Around the same time M.A. Venter and his son arrived at Mugombane's headquarters at Pruissen allegedly to trade and were also gruesomely murdered. Seemingly at the same time Mankopane murdered Hermanus Potgieter and his hunting party at his capital, Fothane. Although, there were no witnesses to the attack on the hunting party most versions suggest that the Langa Ndebele lured the party to Fothane. Following the murder of the trekkers by Mankopane and Mugombane, the Boers sent for reinforcements from Rustenburg and the Zoutpansberg. In the time it took for the commandos to arrive, Mugombane and his people had retreated into the Historic Cave and Mankopane had taken refuge in the hills. The Boers discovered the Kekana hideout, and over a period of about a month implemented various strategies to dislodge the AmaNdebele group. Boer Commandant-general Piet Potgieter was shot dead during the course of the month, but by the end of the month the AmaNdebele resistance ceased and the Boers entered the cave. The surviving women and children were dispersed among Boers, and their aides[16].

The only documentation of the siege comprises a number of dispatches and a report. Through the dispatches the Boers initially called for reinforcements and gunpowder, which they later countermanded, and disclosed the death of Piet Potgieter[17]. The report written by M.W.Pretorius[18] shortly after the siege provided an account of events at the cave and a final tally of the dead. He included an inventory of goods retrieved, and the number of people and livestock captured (see Chapters 4 & 5 and DeWaal 1978: 105-117).

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[15] Although Pretorius may have exaggerated extent to which the bodies were dismembered and discarded all of the oral testimonies mention dismemberment. See for example the version captured by Montanha in his diary a year after the siege (Ferreira 2002: 204).

[16] The Portuguese trader João Albasini who provided the Boers with VhaTsonga marksmen, took a woman by the name of Aia (De Vaal 1953: 21). Paul Kruger who would become the ZAR President, allegedly took a women by the name of Matlhodi Kekana (Paulina). He later allegedly allowed her to marry '*kgosi* Mokgatle' in exchange for bride wealth (Morton 2005: 203). The Bafokeng Chief occupied a portion of Kruger's farm and provided him with a military resource and labour (*Ibid*.).

[17] SS7 R719 /54 & SS7 R733/54

[18] SS7 R733/54. Verslag van M.W. Pretorius 6 Des. 1854.

The siege event featured in a number of subsequent traveller, missionary and trader diaries[19], and was retold in a number of history books[20] and popular articles[21]. Over time the number of Kekana killed, as well as the factors that led to the demise of the besieged AmaNdebele, were altered or twisted to suit the circumstance of the storyteller. One particular version, recounted by Gustav Preller, was accorded iconic status in Afrikaner public history, and became a central prop of the ideology of Apartheid. Preller constructed an elaborate mythology that produced heroes[22], portrayed the trekboers as a 'chosen people' and Africans as treacherous and uncivilized, thereby producing a rationale and imperative for the separation of 'races'.

The first dedicated study of the relationship between the early trekboers, chief Mugombane and the Langa chief Mankopane was carried out by De Waal in 1978. This thesis provides an exhaustive investigation of archival documents and written histories. In 1987 Naidoo analysed the written accounts of the siege and in particular questioned the veracity of M.W. Pretorius' version, which he believed was intentionally trumped up. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, Hofmeyr (1993) recorded several oral accounts related by elders and members of the descendant Kekana chiefdom. These recounts focussed mainly on the restoration of chiefly lineage following the alleged suicide of Chief Mugombane in 1855. It should also be noted that a series of trekker family oral narratives were recorded by Preller[23] in the early part of the 20th century, and although these do not provide much comment on the siege itself they offer invaluable insight into the experiences and activities of the trekkers in the 1850s and the background to the siege.

It is not the aim of this thesis to provide yet another reading of the historical documents, but rather to present a different narrative based on the cultural remains left in the cave after the siege of 1854. While the existing written and

[19] See for example João Albasini's diary (De Vaal 1953) and Montanha's dairy (Ferreira 2002)

[20] See for example, Theal (1908), Preller (1931); Bulpin (1965).

[21] For example, Nel (1933)

[22] Paul Kruger long time President of the Republic allegedly retrieved the body of Piet Potgieter after he had been shot by Kekana marksmen, a feat of bravery memorialized in a panel at the foot of Kruger's statue in Pretoria

[23] Published in several volumes of *Voortrekkermense,* dele I-IV - 1920-1938.

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oral body of information to a large extent informed the archaeological questions - gaps, inconsistencies, exaggerations in these texts form the basis of the archaeological lines of inquiry – the archaeological remains provided an opportunity to bring the besieged into the story, and to focus on the Kekana as political players on a very competitive 19th century socio-economic landscape.

3. Frontiers

One starting point for this analysis is that this area prior to and at the time of the siege constituted part of a frontier zone. During the 18th and 19th centuries the socio-economic landscape of the northern region of South Africa was characterised by shifting authority, acquisition and loss of power and competition for the control of resources and trade. Although, chiefdoms had been trading with the Swahili and Portuguese on the east coast for centuries[24], during the latter part of the 18th century the demand for ivory escalated (Manson 1995: 358) and efforts to monopolise this trade by local communities 'raised competition and conflict in the region to a new pitch' (*Ibid*. 358). To outsiders the prodigious herds of elephant in the Limpopo River basin, coupled with an established market and trade partners made this area economically attractive. To the trekboers and other exiles from the Cape, the opportunity to take control of the Limpopo ivory trade and set up profitable trade relations with the Portuguese, not only held promise of wealth but also offered total independence from British rule (Ferreira 2002:50).

Most of the northern and northeastern regions of South Africa were caught up in this trade economy resulting in a complex web of interactions and exchanges. As the balance of political and economic power see-sawed between one chiefdom or another, or between settler groups and chiefdoms, it produced a myriad of frontier-like interactions (cf. Legassick 1980). These frontier zones were neither fixed nor did they necessarily progress from one form of a frontier to another. 'Open' frontiers, in which there was a 'rough balance of power between communities competing for land and resources', existed along side or alternated

[24] Trade in ivory, hides, and metals may date back to AD 800. A significant number of glass trade beads were recovered from the site of Schroda, a ninth – century village at the confluence of the Shashe and Limpopo Rivers, Limpopo Province (Hall, M 1996: 202).

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with ‘closing’ frontiers where the balance of power tipped in favour of one or other community (Penn 2005: 12). Further, these frontier processes were not necessarily the product of colonialism, because as Kopytoff (1989) has argued, the mechanisms that drove the African ‘internal’ or ‘interstitial’ frontier may well have existed well before the 18th century. However, in addition to ‘issues of power’ the colonial frontier derogated local people and brought with it notions of superiority (on the part of the coloniser) rooted in ‘racial and cultural difference’ (Gosden 2004: 5 & 22-3).

For the purpose of this thesis I will examine the ‘colonial’ and African ‘internal’ frontiers more closely as I believe these provide the best platform from which to interpret the material remains that were left behind largely as a result of the engagement of these two frontiers.

3.1. The ‘internal’ or ‘interstitial’ frontier

Notes and documents compiled by early naturalists, European travellers and missionaries provide some insight into the social mechanisms that governed African society during the 18th and 19th centuries. Government ethnologists in the early twentieth century unfortunately tended to map out the landscape in terms of culturally homogenous groups, thereby masking vital evidence that ‘foreigners’ formed important constituents of most chiefdoms and that composite or pluralist societies were the norm. Jackson (n.d.: 127), for example, reflected on the ‘great variety of clan names and the diversity of their origin’ within the Langa chiefdom. Members of the chief’s ward were ruled directly by the chief, but other wards were ruled by sub-headmen who were subject to the chief (*Ibid.*:126). In the case of the Langa chiefdom only two of the four headmen originated from the Langa clan (*Ibid*.). These wards were comprised of various groups including for instance the Lebelelo a group who were once subject to Mugombane (*Ibid*.). From a study of the ethnographies Pistorius (1992: 48) extrapolated that the ‘three main components of the [Batswana] tribe’ included a royal core, acculturated foreigners who had been with the ‘tribe’ for some time and foreigners who occupied different *dikgôrô* or wards. The Comaroffs (1991: 128-131) also studying the Tswana stressed that each of these wards would have been ranked so as to occupy a different position within the administrative hierarchy.

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The Comaroff's (1991) study highlighted the dualistic nature of a society that was highly ordered and yet fluid and negotiable (*Ibid.*: 139). They located the source of this dualism within agnatic politics, which not only defined one's position in society, but also legitimised power, position and material inequality (*Ibid.*: 134). Households were either sub-ordinate or super-ordinate to one another *(Ibid*.: 139), but competition and rivalry between equals regularly caused households to split, and if the rivals were royal patrikin, divided the chiefdom (*Ibid*.).

The structure of this agnatic society made it necessary for men actively to construct social ties and consolidate their position in society, a proclivity that was especially true of chiefs who were required to accumulate a 'fund of power' or 'accrue social capital' through marital and military alliances, and relationships with chiefs of equal status (Comaroff & Comaroff 1991:151; Kopytoff 1989: 40). As Kopytoff (*Ibid*.) explained, a successful social career involved establishing oneself as the head of a large group of people – of wives, children, in-laws, relatives, adherents, dependants and slaves – which unless inherited, involved detaching oneself from an existing group and establishing a new one (Kopytoff 1989: 22). Once detached, survival depended on political networking. Wealth enabled kinship transactions, and other means of acquiring people of diverse status, who could become 'relatives', dependants, adherents, clients and retainers (*Ibid.*: 46). As a result the polity comprised distinctly unequal classes that enjoyed very different access to exotic goods and local resources. Labour and tribute from subsidiary groups, and military strength facilitated the subordination of groups within the chiefdom (Comaroff & Comaroff 1991:151). Thus combat and commerce were closely interlinked (*Ibid*.: 164) and dependent to an extent on a hunting and raiding economy. Certainly, raiding for cattle and vassals was commonplace during the 18th and 19th century. To what degree the slave market was introduced and maintained by east coast trade and practiced by local chiefdoms is not clear[25].

Alliances between chiefdoms of equal standing were a priority in that they provided the strength to protect and expand economic interests, as well as to

[25] The Swazi supplied children to the trekboers as a means of cementing political alliance (Bonner 1983: 80-82) However, Manson (1995: 358) citing Campbell (1820) indicated that the Hurutshe were not familiar with trade in humans.

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stop the dispersal of subordinates from polities within the alliance (Comaroff & Comaroff 1991: 150).

Failure to set up adequate political networks resulted in loss of authority and control over citizens (*Ibid*. :150). There was thus a constant tension between the 'forces of centralisation' that allowed individuals to establish an economic and political power base, and rival forces competing for that authority (M. Hall 1987: 63). Succession struggles were often caused by the fact that the 'principal' wife was not the 'first' wife, which created competition for legitimacy between first-born sons. The practice of levirate, which allowed the uncle or brother to father a child with the principal wife, also created rivalry amongst half-brothers[26] (Schapera 1955: 55-56; Mönnig 1967: 130, 256-8; Manson 1995: 357). The failure of a chief to perform or fulfil social obligations created the opportunity for individuals with superior political and organisational skills to compete for the power base. Jackson (n.d.: 84) observed that the rules that governed succession were not sufficient to *ensure* succession; there was always a possibility of a challenge.

> "If the rightful heir was man enough to beat down the challenge, he was worthy to succeed. If not, he deserved to succumb to a better man, and the chiefdom gained by the elimination of a weakling or otherwise undesirable person from its apical leadership position" (Jackson n.d.: 84).

He also stressed that if the members of a chiefdom disagreed with the policies of the chief they could transfer their allegiance to a rival faction, or nominate a new leader and create a faction (*Ibid*.). Succession disputes feature strongly in the history of the northern AmaNdebele (see Chapter 3 section 2, as well as Chapter 7 section 3).

Once chiefly lineages split or a new splinter group formed, the fledgling group often intentionally manufactured and establish a genealogy. For this reason Kopytoff (1989: 41) referred to lineages as 'corporate kin groups' because they represented a network of political relationships and key alliances, which were not

[26] The royal Kekana household is presently challenging the Government's decision to install the son of the principal wife (Bernard Langa) over the child of the late Chief Alfred's first wife (Vaaltyn Kekana). In this case the Alfred did not sleep with his principal wife. Bernard is said to be the son of the Alfred's uncle or father.

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necessarily based on authentic genealogical relationships. The group's survival depended on the group's ability rapidly to reorganise relationships and construct new identities to suit the new situation (Kopytoff 1989: 7, see Chapter 9). Thus, although these frontier communities generally re-established themselves along the same pattern of organisation as the society that they split off from (Kopytoff 1989: 26; Comaroff & Comaroff 1991: 129), because at the most basic level it created the conditions for their existence and survival, the identity of the group was highly fluid and changing.

The threat of competition was consequently a constant source of social tension that also played out in the spiritual dimension. An individual could launch an attack on a rival through witchcraft or maleficent magic. This was seen to be the most common cause of misfortune (Junod 1905; Hammond-Tooke 1981, 1993). A diviner would be called on to divine the source of the problem, identify the person with bad intentions, and allay or eliminate the cause of the social tension. Ultimately, however, the chief was responsible for the welfare and protection of his group. He guaranteed rain, allocated land and seed to plant, and interceded with the ancestors (Comaroff & Comaroff 1991: 137). Continued misfortune or death would bring into question his ability to fulfil his function, and the chief's inability to change the wave of misfortune could initiate the break up of the group or the ousting of the chief (Kopytof 1989: 18). Chapter 8 develops and tackles many of these issues in respect of the group trapped within the cave.

These processes of movement and re-alliance generated what Kopytoff (1989) has termed the 'internal frontier', a system whereby frontier politics were continually reproduced on the margin of more 'mature' societies. Kopytoff (1989: 27) posited the existence of a 'Pan – African political culture' whereby Bantu-speaking populations shared the same basic political structure because they had common origins. Genetic studies certainly suggest that South African Bantu-speaking language groups (Xhosa, Sotho, Zulu) shared ancestral roots within the last 2000 years, so that despite language differences each group had not been isolated from each other for very long (Lane *et al*. 2002)

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3.2. The Colonial Frontier

Through a careful study of mission literature the Comaroffs (1992) derived two different models of colonialism which apply in this context and from which one can begin to comprehend the actions and attitudes of the missionaries and trekkers towards each other, and towards the local inhabitants of the interior. The Boer model, termed 'settler colonialism', as derived from the missionary reports, presented the Boers in a fairly negative light, since the British missionaries regarded the Boers as little more than 'half-savages' (*Ibid*.: 199). The model nevertheless described a people intent on being free of British control, and determined to set up and define a new order and form of governance on their own terms and according to their own beliefs which viewed black people as having been created for servitude. This form of control involved an aggressive and almost desperate subordination of local communities. The Comaroffs (*Ibid*.: 199) noted that Boer control was expressed in one or more of the following ways. I quote

- the imposition of tax/or demands for tribute,
- the seizure of men, women and children to toil as bonded servants and unpaid laborers on white farms,
- the requirement that chiefs provide military assistance to whites against 'unfriendly' natives, and
- the gradual appropriation of 'tribal' lands.

Bonner (1983: 69) observed that the first decade of Boer occupation of the interior was characterised by a demand for labour and tribute. The Zoutpansbergers, for example, divided African communities in the area into two categories, *diensdoende kaffers* and *opgaaf kaffers.* The former lived in close proximity to the whites and were required to provide labour, while the latter were expected to pay tribute (Boeyens 1994: 195). Once however, African societies gained access to guns these societies began to protect themselves against expropriation and no longer bowed down to demands for labour (Bonner 1983:69). This then led to 'high levels of sporadic coercion coupled with acts of direct personal violence in an attempt to entrench trekker power and authority' (Delius & Trapido 1983: 64), as well as explosions of resistance. Chapter 3 highlights some of the acts of cruelty carried out by the trekkers against the

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Kekana in an attempt to exact cattle, ivory and slaves and also documents the growing resistance.

In addition to ivory, trade in children formed an important part of the local and regional economy (Bonner 1983: 80-82; Delius and Trapido 1983: 65). Hunting and raiding, which was a dominant form of both the trekker and the local African economy, ensured a supply of captives (Delius and Trapido 1983: 62; Comaroff & Comaroff 1991: 164). Mooi River (Potchefstroom), Pretoria (after 1855) and Magaliesberg (Rustenburg) formed slave-trade centres (Morton 2005: 201), where children were registered and sold as apprentices (*inboekselings*) (*Ibid*.). Commandos, with the support of African auxiliaries, captured many of these slaves from the Kekana, Langa and Sebetiela AmaNdebele, as well as, other Khoe, VhaVenda, BaKwena and BaGananwa groups in the Zoutpansberg, Blouberg and Waterberg regions (*Ibid*.). Slaves also formed part of the external trade market and were exported from Portuguese ports. In July of 1844 Commandant-general A.H. Potgieter and twenty-four mounted trekboers marched 300 slaves burdened with ivory to Delagoa Bay where they did business with the Portuguese (Ferreira 2002: 42). Once Potgieter settled in Schoemansdal a lively slave trade continued to be carried out between the Portuguese and the Zoutpansberg (*Ibid*.). Trafficking in children was not the sole preserve of the trekkers. The Swazi provided the Boers with children to cement alliances (Bonner 1983: 80-82), and African auxiliaries received cattle and women captured during raids in return for their military support (Morton 2005: 204). The trekboers were moreover highly dependant on African marksmen to hunt elephant, especially within the malaria and tsetse belt (Boeyens 1994: 198). These marksmen also participated in the child trade and assisted the Boers in skirmishes against recalcitrant chiefdoms (*Ibid*.). The VaTsonga, for example, were perceived of as *gouvermentsvolk* who worked for the government and were often deployed against African groups who resisted the white rule (Boeyens 1994: 201). It is well known that Joâo Albasini's marksmen assisted the trekboers during the siege of the Kekana (de Vaal 1953: 21).

The colonial frontier thus produced zones of interaction characterised by the dual processes of domination (colonisers) and resistance (colonised) (Sillimen 2005: 59), and of dependence and coercion. Indentured women and children, a by-

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product of these interactions, became acculturated, spoke Dutch, received Dutch names, wore European clothing and were schooled in the ways of the trekboers. The apprentice was expected to 'understand and adhere to the preferences of the prevailing culture, mirror its appearance and language, submit to its authority, and aspire to its approval' (Morton 2005: 204). On achieving this they entered the category of *oorlams* (civilised) *kaffer,* but 'stigmatised by their servitude and loss of African ways' this emerging society was seen to occupy the margins of both African and Trekker societies (*Ibid*.: 200). Gosden (2001: 243), drawing on the work of Homi Bhabha (1994), offers a slightly different perspective on these groups. He argues that because both the colonised and the colonisers had 'vital inputs' new and interesting 'hybrid', or 'creole' cultures emerged (Gosden 2001: 243). Either way these marginal grouping occupied a pivotal role in the early decades of trekboer occupation of the interior, as they served as key collaborators or key opponents of the new regime. The 'coloured' son's of Coenraad de Buys, for example, were employed by the Boers to collected tribute from the surrounding chiefdoms. Claiming to be the chief of the whites the Buys's exacted an enormous amount of tribute in the form of livestock and ivory during the 1850s (De Waal 1978:29; De Vaal 1990b:164). At the same time these *oorlam* groups, like those in the Cape, achieved a measure of political and economic independence, social cohesion and military force, which allowed them to 'play' both sides and prey upon both African and Boer (Penn 2005: 167). From the literature it is also clear that not all 'apprentices' committed themselves to a new way of life. There were many instances of slaves deserting their masters and joining the ranks of the resistance. These escapees represented more than just a loss if labour to the Boers; they carried information about the Boers across to the opposition. This may explain why chiefs in Limpopo often harboured fugitive Khoisan or Vaalpens slaves. It also may be one of the reasons that Mugombane's successor, who was an *inboekseling,* was able to oppose the infiltration of the colonial front so successfully. Refusing to adopt a marginal, intermediate or servile position, he took up a highly oppositional and independent stance against the Boer government. He rejected the mission set up at the foot of the hill of his Sefakaola headquarters because he suspected the missionary was a government informant (Hofmeyr 1983:44-46). He also resisted the people, like the VaTsonga, that the mission attracted (*Ibid*.), because they were often fully acculturated. In 1868 the Boers attacked the new chief, but this time were

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defeated by the Kekana who then sacked the newly proclaimed Pietpotgietersrust (Hofmeyr 1983: 111). The Boers eventually abandoned Pietpotgietersrust, and enjoying increased autonomy chief Mugombane II began to reoccupy Boer farms (Hofmeyr 1993: 46). The mission was abandoned in 1877, and the chief remained steadfastly hostile to Christianity or any form of colonial schooling until his death in 1890 (*Ibid*.).

Lightfoot (1995: 201) also touches on the pluralistic nature of Colonial settlements. These he claims became 'pluralistic *entrepôts* where people of diverse backgrounds and nationalities lived, worked, socialized and procreated' (Lightfoot 1995: 201). This was certainly true of the hunting and trading post of Schoemansdal. Because these settlements were by and large cut off from the rules and regulations of the 'home country' they tended to develop on their own terms and with a certain amount of autonomy. The descendents of the Portuguese, for example, who in 1568 penetrated up the Zambezi River to take control of the Swahili trade and possession of gold mines (Oliver & Atmore 2001: 207) took local wives and assimilated African custom and symbols of African chiefship (Newitt & Garlake 1967). This mix of criminals and noblemen took political control and broke the royal Portuguese monopoly over trade (Newitt 1973: 46). In an effort to regain control over this commerce the Portuguese Crown granted the renegades land titles, thereby endorsing these self-governing 'estate holders' (*prazeiros*) (*Ibid*.). In a similar fashion the trekboers acted as autonomous potentates. They were completely independent of Dutch rule, and, following the signing of the Sand River Convention in 1852, flaunted their freedom from British rule.

The Comaroff's (1991: 200) second model of colonialism was the 'civilizing colonialism' of the mission. This form of colonialism sought to 'civilise' the local inhabitants by introducing them to Christian beliefs and a European lifestyle. Once enlightened, the missionaries believed Africans would amongst other things abandon superstition, adopt a more ordered architectural design, redefine gender roles by turning men into farmers and women into housewives, and recognise the value of time and money and the need to own land (*Ibid*.).

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In reality, however, I would argue that prior to 1854, the missionaries were absorbed into the dynamics in the interior. The missionaries, rather than creating a devoted and 'enlightened' following were repeatedly manipulated and used to by local Chiefs to achieve greater military prowess and power[27].

4. Plurality, mutability and fluidity

Three factors that clearly defined 18th and 19th century African societies were cultural plurality, ethnic fluidity and mutability. In order to understand the material culture of a group that was clearly caught up in these processes (see Chapter 7) one needs to take cognisance of the work of sociologists such as Barth (1969, 1995, 1996) who posited that culture was always fluid and in a constant state of flux, and that ethnicity takes shape to suit specific socio-economic or political circumstances. Barth (1995: 2-3) observed that culture was constantly generated from people's learning experiences, and that the ideas that compose culture 'overflow and spread differentially':

> 'Living in communication in a place where people come and go and mix with considerable degree of cultural pluralism is the normal condition of humankind'

Concomitantly, he argued, there could be no stasis in cultural materials, because the nature and meaning of material culture was constantly generated and negotiated from and through people's experiences (*Ibid*.:2), and therefore cultural material could not be regarded as transmitted traditions from the past (*Ibid*.)

Barth (1969, 1995, 1996) also unpacked the concept of mutable ethnicity. He generally acknowledged that ethnic groups were not formed on the basis of 'shared culture' but rather on the basis of 'difference of culture' (Barth 1969,1995, 1996). He also observed that there was not an obvious relationship between the 'ethnic unit' and 'cultural similarities and differences' (Barth 1995: 9). There were circumstances when certain cultural features would be activated and used to define a boundary or signal ethnic difference, while at other times these same features would be intentionally played down. Barth (1995: 9) advanced a number of reasons to explain why ethnicity was mutable. First, the circumstances that caused ethnic identities to emerge varied enormously (*Ibid.*). Secondly, cultural

[27] See for example Schapera (1974) and Rasmussen (1978)

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features were chosen by the actors themselves, so that one could not predict *a priori* which features the actors would emphasise and recognise as relevant within a particular social context (*Ibid.*: 78). And finally, as the continuity of the ethnic unit was dependent on the maintenance of the cultural features that signal difference, when these features changed the boundaries and the cultural characteristics of the membership would be redefined (Barth 1996: 78-9; see also Hammond-Tooke 2000).

This must lead us towards a more cautious interpretation of archaeological materials. For this reason this thesis diverges from the outset from many Iron Age studies, that tend to assume cultural homogeneity, or that cultures are discrete and defined by a common language and custom (see for example, Moore 1981; Evers 1988: 5; Huffman1983, 1986a & b, 2001). This thesis takes cultural plurality as a starting point, and regards identity as fluid and negotiable. It accepts that there may be structural consistency between groups, and that the organisation of the society may be reflected in the structure and layout of the settlement, but that the meaning of the layout and structure of the settlement will adjust in accordance with shifting socio-economic and political circumstance. Further, because the meaning of material culture is assumed to be in a constant state of flux, I accept the importance of context and time, and that objects can convey a wide range of messages depending on the context in which they are used (Nassaney 2004: 338).

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5. The structure of the thesis

Chapter Two opens with a description of the Valley and the key sites. It then reviews the excavation of Historic Cave and discloses the range of materials excavated and the context in which they were found. This Chapter provides some analysis of the artefacts, particularly the ceramics, and attempts to come to grips with the way in which the site formed, and the number of different occasions that it was occupied.

Chapter Three comprises a survey of the Caves and Late Iron sites in the Makapan Valley, and a review of the ethnographic literature and oral histories to understand the occupation history of the Valley. It shows that Historic Cave was

not the only site of violence and that the other sites might provide proof of earlier incursions of the BaPedi and the trekboers.

Chapter Four presents the results of the analysis of plant and animal remains. Since the adequate provision of food would have been key to the survival of the Kekana, this chapter explores the measures taken by the Kekana to ensure the availability of such resources. The food and animal remains also afford some insight into the agricultural and herding strategies practiced by the groups in the mid-1800s.

Chapter Five comprises a study of the human remains and attempts to resolve questions around the number of individuals that died and the possible cause of death.

Chapter Six interprets the spatial layout of the cave according to information derived from the structure and layout of 19th and 20th century African settlements. This chapter reflects on the nature of the social relations and tensions that may have been building within the cave.

Chapter Seven moves back out of the cave and back in time. The status of the chiefdom within the Limpopo Province and the history of its alliances are touched upon through an analysis of specific ceramics.

Chapter Eight returns to the group in the cave and examines the evidence for divination and ritual protection. Based on information pertaining to death and misfortune, this Chapter then traces events occurring after the siege to explain the ‘suicide’ of Mugombane.

Chapter Nine returns to the oral narratives of the siege. This chapter assesses the memories about the siege, and the context in which the various tales were told. The apparent ‘silence’ around the siege event is then interrogated in the light of the archaeological data.

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CHAPTER 2: Survey & Excavation

1. Introduction

1.1. The Valley and the sites

The archaeological sites surveyed and excavated for the present study are located within the Makapan Valley World Heritage Site (24° 12" S, 29° 12" E), some 18km E-N-E of Mokopane in the Limpopo Province (Fig. 2.1). The Valley is situated on the western flank of the Highlands Mountains (also referred to as the Makapansgat Highlands) that forms part of an isolated north-south spur of the Strydpoort Mountains (J. Maguire 1998).

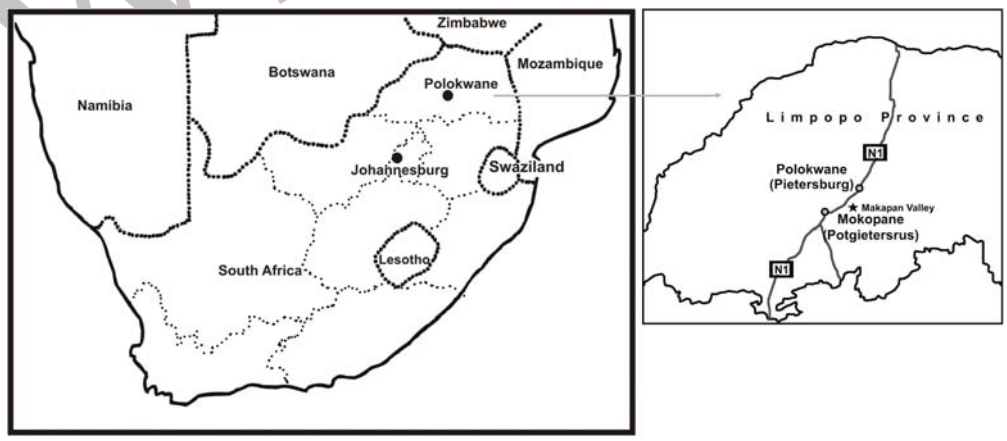


Figure 2.1. Location of the Makapan Valley World Heritage Site

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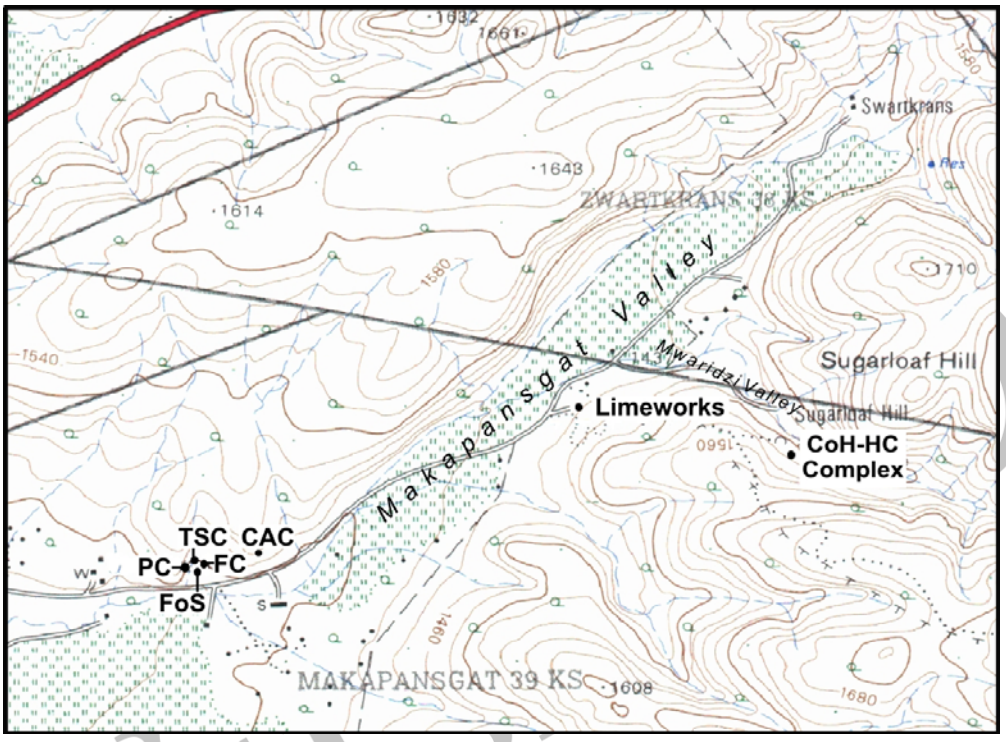


Figure 2.2. The Makapan Valley World Heritage Site (1:50 000 map), showing the main Makapansgat Valley and Mwaridzi Valley and associated sites (PC-Peppercorn Cave, FoS–Ficus Open Site, FC–Ficus Cave, TSC–Two Skulls Cave, CAC-Cold Air Cave, CoH-HC-Cave of Hearths-Historic Cave complex).

The principal excavation site, Historic Cave, is to be found in the southernmost arm of the bifurcated Makapansgat Valley (J. Maguire 1998: 8) referred to as the Mwaridzi or Makapan Cave Valley (see Peters and Maguire 1981:570) (Fig. 2.2). The head of this Valley is announced by 100 metre high Red Cliffs (Fig 2.3). The vegetation at the base of the Red Cliffs is a composite of evergreen forest, and 'part-deciduous fringing forest', while the vegetation further down the Valley is characterised by typical Upper Bushveld hillside vegetation (*Ibid*.; B. Maguire 1965: 119) or Acock's (1953) North – Eastern Mountain Sourveld type, transitional to Sourish Mixed Bushveld (Holmgren *et al.* 2003). The Mwaridzi Valley enters the Makapansgat Valley proper, which in turn opens into the Nyl/Mokgalakwena River Valley just north of Mokopane (formerly known as Potgietersrus) (Peters & Maguire 1981: 567).



Figure 2.3. The Red Cliffs and mixed evergreen and deciduous forest

Historic Cave has formed within Malmani dolomite high up on the left side of the Mwaridzi River Valley. This cave forms part of a complex of caves that includes the well-known Cave of Hearths. It is thought that the Cave of Hearths-Historic Cave complex together with the nearby Limeworks Cave once formed part of the same underground drainage system which created a complex set of connected underground passages (Latham *et al.* 2003; Latham & Herries 2004). The water would have entered the through a large fault near the Red Cliffs and exited at the Limeworks Cave, which acted as a resurgence for the system (*Ibid.*: 70)

The other sites surveyed and excavated during the course of this project, i.e. Peppercorn Cave, Ficus Cave, Two Skulls Cave and Cold Air Cave are situated on the northern slopes of the Makapansgat Valley (Partridge1966) about 3 – 4 km from the Limeworks (Fig.2.2). In contrast to the Limeworks – CoH-HC complex these caves appear to have formed along a fault zone and by solution below a watertable (*Ibid*.: 70). Ficus and Peppercorn Caves, for example, are situated at the base of the dolomite kranz, both having developed at the intersection of two geological faults. Both caves extend to a watertable (Partridge 1966: 126), and appear to be connected because the present-day water levels in the caves rise and fall together (Latham *et al.* 2003: 70).

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Peppercorn Cave, Two Skulls Cave and Ficus Cave are situated within a u-shaped krantz of dolomitic limestone, which circumscribes the Ficus open site (Fig. 2.2) (Moore 1981: 14; Partridge 1966: 125). Cold Air Cave is located further up the Makapansgat Valley. The more level parts of the Makapansgat Valley have been cultivated and grazed. The vegetation is presently characterised by open to closed *Acacia* savannah.

2. Archaeological Survey

The repeated occupation of the Makapansgat Valley, as inferred from previous archaeological investigations and implied in the oral histories, presented a need to determine the temporal relationship between the different late Iron Age sites in the Valley to understand better how the Valley was occupied at any one time during this period. To do this I obtained access to a number of sites in the Valley. The ones reported here had possible and/or definite Late Iron Age materials associated with them.

- *Cold Air Cave*

Cold Air Cave, one of the caves closest to the entrance of the Makapansgat Valley, contained a skull of a male aged around 15 years and the mandible of another younger individual. The morphological traits of the individual are consistent with those of the Bantu-speaking populations of South Africa[28] (as apposed to Khiosan or European) (Bass 1995; Morris 1992). It is therefore unlikely that the skull pre-dates AD 550, the date for the earliest Iron Age occupation in the Valley. It was impossible to determine whether the individual had been buried because the skeletal material had eroded out of deposit near the entrance of the cave. The mandible had rolled down into the bottom of cave while the skull had become wedged under a rock on the right side of the entrance (Fig. 2.4), and was subsequently covered with further eroding deposit. The skull was removed at the request of the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA).

[28] Determined from alveolar prognathism, rounded forehead and platyrrhiny. CI = 65; NI = 58.6

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Figure 2.4. Cold Air Cave – skull of a young male

The only cultural material found in the cave was an undecorated clay jar placed just to the left of the entrance, and several *Achatina* beads, which were sieved out of the deposit that covered the skull. *Achatina* beads were also recovered from the Ficus Cave excavation (Partridge 1966: 130), from all levels of the Ficus Open site excavations (Moore 1981: 84) and from the Historic Cave excavation (see Section 3). While this demonstrates the long and continued use of land snail for decoration[29] amongst the various Iron Age populations within Valley, it does not provide a more sensitive indicator of time.

- *Two Skulls Cave*

Two Skulls Cave[30] contained the remains of at least three different individuals - two adults (one skull and one cranium) and possibly a child (hipbone). The individuals were not buried in the cave, nor was it possible that their bodies were placed in the cave after death, as the small-bifurcated entrance makes it very difficult to access this cavern. The individuals, more likely, took refuge in and died in the cavern. Although it was not possible to measure the remains, the morphology of the skull is again consistent with the Bantu-speaking populations of South Africa (Fig. 2.5). More skeletons are reported to have been in this cave

[29] Vogel 1983 also notes the presence of the snail motif in wall decoration

[30] My entry into a number of the smaller caverns along the valley was supervised by CROSA (Cave Research Organisation of South Africa).

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but have disappeared due to cave collapse (Buchanan pers. comm. 2004). The human remains were left undisturbed in the cave, because the entrance is concealed and the cave rarely visited.



Figure 2.5. Human remains within Two Skulls cave

A European 'Flow Blue' printed sherd (Fig. 2.6) found together with the skulls, may place the deaths around the 1850s. This type of decoration was first adopted in Britain in the 1820s and exported during the 1820s-40s. 'Flow Blue' appears at Cape sites from around the 1820s to the mid-19th century and then in lesser frequencies throughout the rest of the century (Close pers. comm. 2004)

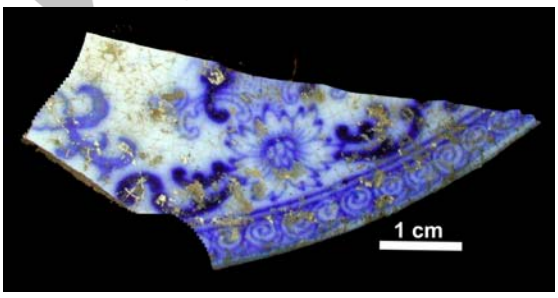


Figure 2.6. Flow Blue is a relatively high-fired white-bodied refined earthenware (whiteware), with the underglaze transfer printed and purposely 'blurred' by the addition of lime or ammonium chloride during firing (Close pers. comm.).

There is reportedly[31] another cave close to Two Skulls Cave that contains evidence of a short-term occupation – clay pots, grinding stones, a small fireplace

[31] We were unable to locate the entrance to the Colin I cave.

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and a number of metal objects (CROSA 1985: 4). A 'well packed rock wall' allegedly masks the entrance to the cave (*Ibid*.) suggesting that it too may have been used as a place of refuge.

- *Peppercorn Cave*

Peppercorn Cave contains some evidence of Iron Age activity. A few broken potsherds were discovered in a low cavern accessed through a 'crawl' leading off from the main cave. The pottery was undiagnostic, but may be associated with rain-making (S. Hall pers. comm. 2005). There were no other obvious signs of the site being occupied as a place of refuge.

- *Ficus Cave*

Ficus Cave has a fairly extensive Iron Age deposit. An excavation carried out by Partridge in 1966 revealed a fairly homogenous Iron Age occupation. The pottery was considered to be similar to the pottery excavated by Mason from the Iron Age levels of the Cave of Hearths, and said to resemble modern 'Sotho' wares (Partridge 1966: 131). Only one human rib fragment was excavated at this time, but a further six human fragments, of which three were infant, had been collected by J.W. Kitching in 1947 (*Ibid*: 129). Partridge (1966:131) claimed that the cave was used as a refuge during the Siege of 1854. His argument was based on cut marks on the rib fragment, which were reminiscent of similar signs of 'hacking and abrasion' observed on human bones in the Historic Cave. These cut marks were interpreted as signs of cannibalism. He also noted that the presence of a perennial water supply would have made it an ideal stronghold during the siege (*Ibid:* 131).

- *Ficus Open Site*

Moore (1981) excavated the Ficus Open Site during 1980.

He excavated nine trenches and four test pits that ranged in size from 1 – 30 square metres. Four cultural components were identified and dated:

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Component I - AD 550±40
Component II - AD870±40 /AD830±50
Component III - AD1490±50/AD1560±50 and,
Component IV - more recent.
Moore (1981: 43) also noted the presence of Shangane graves in the Ficus Open Site, which he reasoned were placed there sometime after the 1890s.

Moore's (1981) most recent component IV bears similarities to the Iron Age assemblage excavated by Mason (1988) from the uppermost levels at Cave of Hearths, Partridge's Ficus Cave assemblage, and my Historic Cave assemblage.

- *The pathways below and on top of the Cave of Hearths-Historic Cave Complex*

The paths around the Cave of Hearths-Historic Cave complex were surveyed and the presence of cultural material noted. In each case an attempt was made to locate the source of the material. From both the survey and a small excavation carried out on the pathway above the Cave of Hearths there appeared to be an Iron Age cultural horizon lying between 10-15 cm below the surface of the upper hill-slope deposits (see Appendix 1). The pottery and beads located there were comparable with those found in Historic Cave. No dwellings were located on the top of the hill. However there was evidence there of smelting and possibly food preparation. A grindstone was found lying on the pathway to Historic Cave. It, however, may have been removed from the Cave itself.

3. Historic Cave

Historic Cave has an upper eastern entrance that lies over a massive block fall (Latham & Harries 2004: 330). The roof collapse has produced a stepped or terraced appearance within the Eastern Chamber. The floor of the cave dips down steeply until at the base of the chamber the roof forms a 'septum' between the Eastern and lower Western Chamber. The entrance to the Western Chamber is presently situated next to the Cave of Hearths. Prior to mining and

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archaeological excavation the entrance would have extended across to the Cave of Hearths.

The interior of Historic Cave was surveyed in 2001. An impressive pile of vitrified dung in the western Chamber suggested that this Chamber was used for penning the stock. The level floor of this Chamber would also have made this more suitable for animals than the steep incline of the eastern Chamber. Humans, from the remains of artefacts and low walling that was constructed, appeared to occupy positions under the collapsed roof on the east side and under a low ceiling toward the back of the west side of this Chamber. A stability assessment of both caverns was also undertaken in 2001. The Eastern cavern was considered more suitable than the Western Cavern for the purposes of excavation, although precautions against minor rock fall and/or major cave collapse were still considered necessary on the Eastern side[32]. The interior of the Eastern Cavern was mapped out and possible living areas identified (Fig. 2.7).

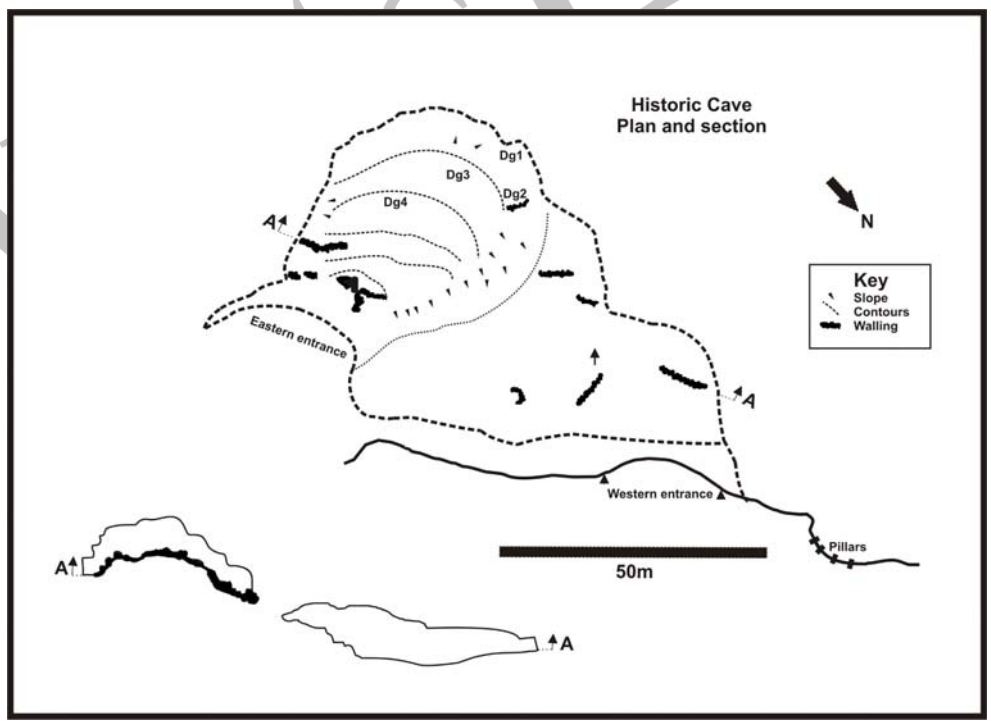


Figure 2.7. Outline and profile of Historic Cave

[32] The roof was propped around the main excavation area, secondary exit routes and safe pathways were delineated, hard hats worn and the number of the people excavating in the cave kept to a minimum.

3.1. Historic Cave: excavations

Four areas were excavated in the Eastern Chamber (Fig. 2.8). Each of these will be discussed separately. All excavated deposit was sieved through a coarse (5mm) and a fine (1mm) mesh sieve.

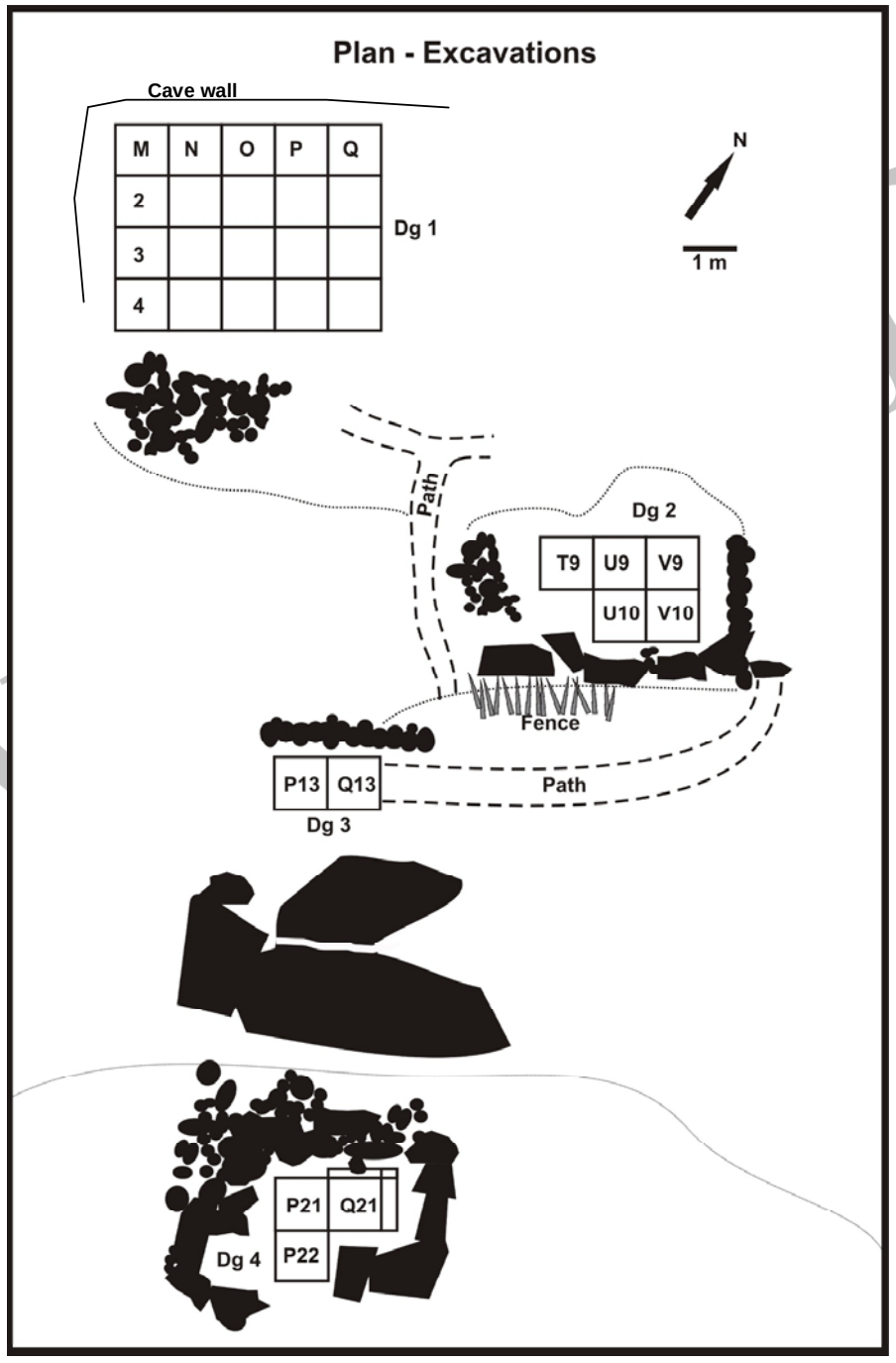


Figure 2.8. Plan of the excavated sites within Historic cave

3.1.1. Excavation Site 1 – Dg1

Seventeen square metres were excavated at the base of the Eastern Chamber. The designated area was located in a small alcove or recess in the cave wall. The roof immediately above the excavation area was fairly low and had to be propped. A 4 x 5 m^2 grid was laid out (Fig. 2.9).

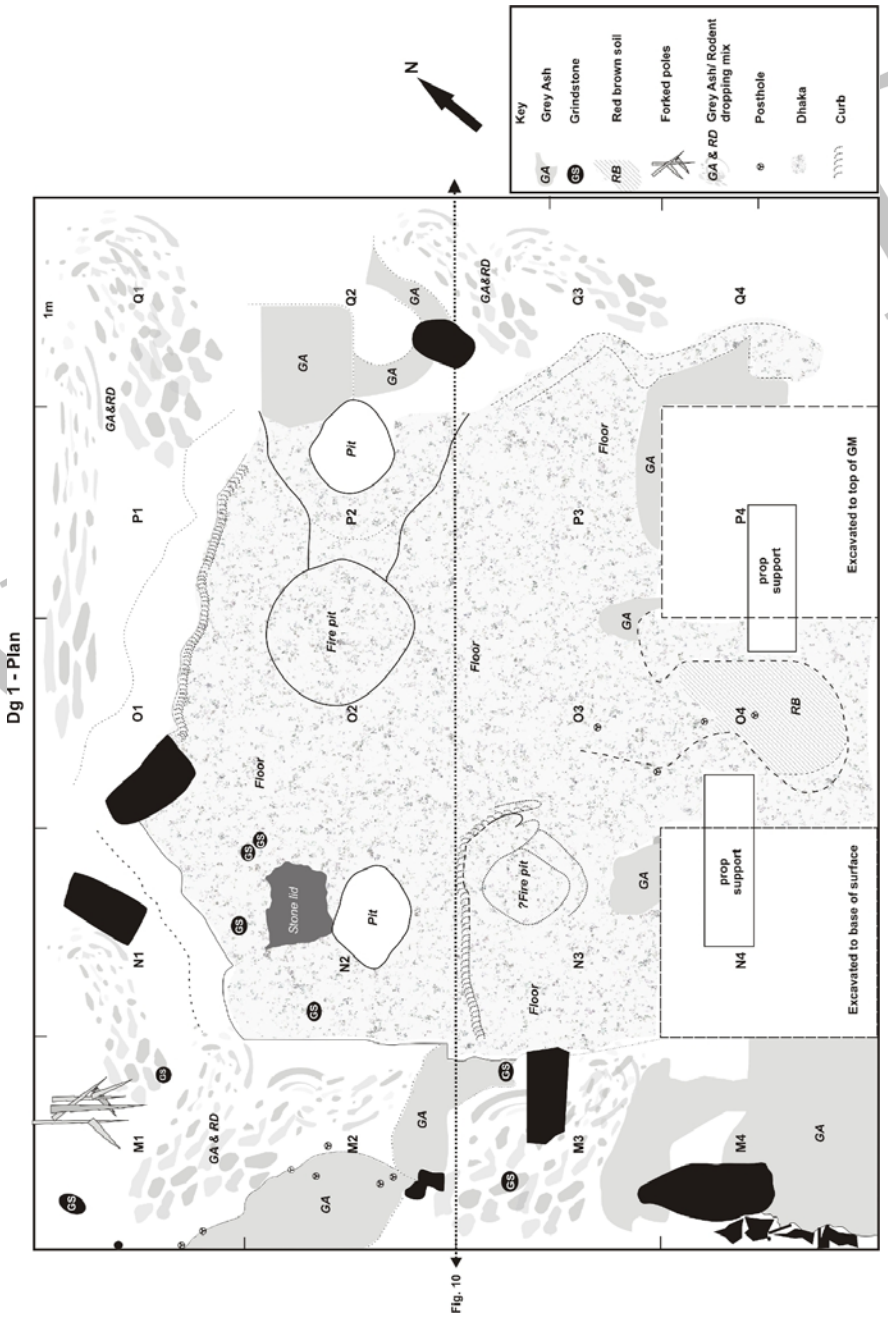


Figure 2.9. Plan of the excavated Floor in Dg1.

The following stratigraphic units were identified (see Fig. 2.10):

- Surface - a surface layer of loose, fine cave dust (~ 10cm).
- RBL - a layer of rubble comprised of roof spall and wall dhaka (especially on the M/N side of the excavation). The roof collapse was centred in four square metres (M1&2 and N1&2). The mound (12cm high at its centre) petered out in the squares around this centre so that P2 &3 had little rubble and M4, N4, O4 & P4 had no rubble layer at all. At its centre RBL was approximately 20cm thick.
- GM – A grassy layer (5-10cm),
- GA – A thick layer of grey ash
- RD – a compressed layer of rodent droppings, grass and twigs (~ 5cm),
- Floor – a hard compacted and plastered dhaka floor.
- Pits – The content of the various pits in the floor were excavated as separate entities.
- RB – a compact red brown soil located predominantly under the Ash layers to the front of the excavation.

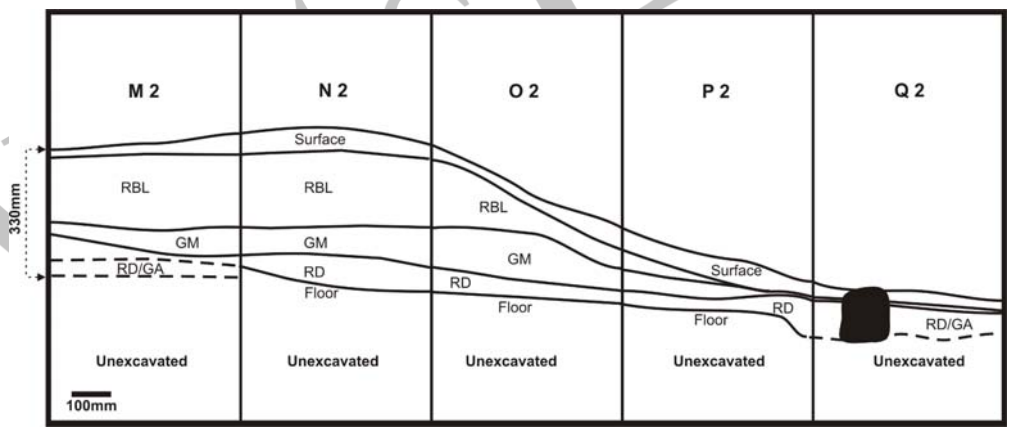


Figure 2.10. Section through Dg1, M-Q2 south east wall

The dhaka floor marked the base of the excavation (Fig. 2.9). Two pits in the floor (N2 & P2) provided an opportunity to check for features and artefacts in the deposit beneath the floor. Both pits were about 200mm deep, but no cultural material was visible in the walls of the pits[33]. The depth of the deposit beneath the floor is unknown, because bedrock was not detected at the base of either of the pits. The dhaka floor was fairly, thick, hard and compact, and although the

[33] The presence of some earlier Stone Age and Iron Age material may indicate the presence of an earlier cultural horizon somewhere at the base of the cave.

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roof props prevented a complete spatial analysis of the floor many features were apparent. The southern part of the dhaka floor (M3/N3) was spatially discernible through a 5-7cm rise in the level of the floor. A round feature that may have been a disused fire pit was situated towards the front of this platform (N3). A small alcove in the cave wall delineated the space to the southwest, but from the remnants of collapsed dhaka, poles and ash, a fence and/or other structures stood between the cave wall and the living area (M1&2/N1&2). The large amount of grain, forked poles, baskets and rodent activity on this western side suggested that these structures might have been related to storage. An apse or platform ran along the back of the dhaka floor and up against the cave wall (N1, O1 & P1). A small pit with a stone lid had been dug through the floor in N2. A fire pit was situated in O2/P2 and this was linked by a dhaka kerb or wall to a large storage pit (P2/Q2) immediately to its east. Beyond this, the eastern side of the floor was fire hardened and broke away under a layer of ash. A thick layer of ash marked the outer perimeter of most of the floor. Remains of burnt pole supports, and charred wood in postholes (see Fig. 2.9) together with the thick ash and vitrified organics suggest a fence made from reeds or grass ran around the perimeter of the floor. Postholes in O3&4 may have marked the entrance to the living area.

An examination of the different layers provided insight into the order and manner in which the different deposits built up. Once human activity on the floor slowed down or ceased rodents descended *en masse*, attracted by the left over grain and the rotting flesh of a large number of humans, the remains of which were found in GM. The rodents shredded the grass sleeping mats (GM) to nest in and deposited a layer of rodent droppings (RD) on top of the dhaka floor. At some stage the pole/reed and dhaka wall that enclosed most of the living area was set alight because a thick ash layer (GA) circumscribed the floor, and in a number of areas around the perimeter of the dhaka floor the floor had been altered by heat (RB). After some time, the cave roof collapsed and with it the remains of the sidewalls/dhaka features (RBL), giving rise to the mound shape in fig.2.10. Importantly, although the different layers may have formed at slightly different times, all of the stratigraphic layers below the Surface layer appear to belong to the same event, which based on historical documents and oral histories would be the Siege of 1854.

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3.1.2. Material Remains: late 1800s – present

Some objects dating to a later period have intruded into the upper layers. Surface and RBL layers contained some more contemporary artefacts probably brought into the cave by miners, archaeologists and people who visited the cave from the latter part of the 1800s to the present. These include part of a newspaper article dated to between 1903 and 1913[34], a few pieces of metal, cloth, a metal button[35] (Fig. 2.11a), a small metal cap with a wooden core and copper wire 'hook' (O1-Surface) (Fig. 2.11c) and what could be a copper coin (Fig.2.12a). A coin from the 1970s (O2-RBL) and cigarette butts belong to the second half of the twentieth century.

3.1.3. Material Remains: 1854

- *Metal*

Six iron spearheads (for examples see Fig. 2.11f & 2.12d&f), what could be a stem of a spear (02-RBL) (Fig. 2.11e), two iron needles (M2 & O2 RBL) (Fig. 2.11g), ninety iron beads (Fig. 2.12c) and fragments of metal objects including a hoe (Fig. 2.12e) and possibly a bangle were recovered during the DG1 excavation (see Appendix 2). Two of the spearheads were located on top of the apse or platform (N1-GM), while a third found in M2-RBL may have been in or on top of the structure that collapsed. The other spearheads were lying on the floor (Q2) or in the grass bedding (O2 & O4 GM) immediately above it. A lead bullet (Fig. 2.11d), and a piece of molten lead found in the grassy layer GM (O1), was of the kind shot from the front-end muzzleloader used by both the trekboers and Kekana during the Siege.

- *Beads*

In addition to the iron beads 176 glass beads and 230 ostrich eggshell (OES) beads were recovered from Dg1 (see Appendix 3). Nineteen pieces of ostrich eggshell, including incomplete or half-made beads were concentrated in M/N/O 1& 2.

[34] The newspaper article makes mention of early mining activities on the reef, and documents the arrival of cranberries in the Cape (1913).

[35] The button has an inserted shank, which only came into circulation after 1918.

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The glass beads from this excavation comprise beads that belong to the period 1820 - 1850, as well as older 'heirloom' beads (Wood pers.comm. 2005). The older beads include brownish red cylinder-shaped beads that were manufactured in India until about AD1600 (Fig. 2.13a), and brownish red on green (clear or black) cylinders made in Europe from the 1600s (Fig.2.13a). These were replaced by red on white beads in AD1835 (Fig. 2.13b). Wound white (Fig. 2.13c) and Venetian blue beads also date back much earlier (*Ibid*.). The brownish red on green (clear or black) beads found in Historic Cave were manufactured slightly differently from those found at other sites. An unusually thin layer of red envelops the green/clear/black core of these beads. This phenomenon has only been noted at the site of Kaditshwene in the North-West Province.

The colours of the beads from Dg1 are predominantly brownish red, blue-green, yellowish-green, white, white with pink and green stripes (Fig. 2.13d) and a range of blues (pale to royal blue). A fairly rare soapstone bead was also found (Fig. 2.13e). Three beads from Dg1 are similar to those recovered from Mgungundluvu in Kwa-Zulu Natal (1828-1839). These include two red on white oblates and a ruby red marved bead with white dots (Fig. 2.13f) (Wood pers.comm. 2005, Appendix 3). This may indicate interaction with traders from the Kwa-Zulu Natal. Blue-green beads, however, do not occur at Kwa-Zulu Natal sites and so must have been obtained from Mozambique or the Cape. Other blue beads are common on archaeological sites in the area, particularly 'Pedi' and 'Venda' sites (Wood pers.comm. 2005)

Beads made from the shell of the land snail (*Achatina* sp.), bone, tooth and seeds are also present but in lesser quantities (see Appendix 3).

- *Flora and fauna*

The lime-enriched deposit of the dolomite cave enhanced the preservation of the organic material and an abundance of plant remains was recovered from this excavation. Consequently, only a relatively small portion of the seeds, legumes, grains, fruits and plant elements were studied from Dg1 (Appendix 4). The outcome of the analysis of the plant material is presented in Chapter 4. The entire

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sample of animal remains was studied (Appendix 5), and the analysis of the faunal remains is also discussed in the same chapter.

Other objects made from plant material include a small amulet attached to a leather string (M2-RBL) (Fig. 2.14a), four leg rattles (Q2-Floor) fashioned from seed (Fig. 2.14b), and many pieces of the calabash*, Lagenaria siceraria* (Fig. 2.14e). The bottle gourd would have been used as containers for a wide range of things. Roots/stems bound together with grass fibre were recovered from M1-RBL (Fig. 2.14d) while a large bolus of *Ficus* lay in the middle of the platform in N3. Many long thorns from the branches of *Acacia karoo* were found throughout the excavation (Fig.2.14c). In some cases the branch end of the thorn had been modified.

A bone spatula (N1 Floor) formed part of the general cooking paraphernalia found in the back area (Fig. 2.15a). A long bone point (O1 Surface) recovered from the surface of the excavation may have been employed in weaving or may have functioned as a hair ornament (Fig. 2.15b)(see Krige 1939: 209). A bone whistle (Fig. 2.15f) was contained in the grassy (GM) layer in O1, and a drilled sheep astragalus or divining dice (Fig. 2.15d) was found in the same layer in N2, while a horn lay on the floor in M3 (Fig. 2.16b). A hole had been made through the 'wide' end of the horn and a leather loop threaded through so it could be hung. The other end of the horn had been sharpened so it could be pegged upright into the soil. Fragments of cowrie shells (N3&M2-RBL) were also recovered (Fig. 2.15c).

- *Human remains*

The largest number of individual skeletal pieces (n=94) was retrieved from Dg1, and this collection comprises the highest number of identifiable cranial and post-cranial skeletal pieces (Appendix 6). The human remains are discussed in Chapter 5.

- *Thread, string and woven material*

Different kinds of string made from plaited or rolled plant fibre were common in all the layers and were no doubt used to bind, tie or weave poles, reeds, grass and other structures together. Tightly rolled sinew or tendons were used as thread to

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sew leather garments and to thread beads (Fig. 2.13d). A portion of a sleeping mat was retrieved off the floor in N1 (Fig. 2.17b). The remains of two different baskets were found on the floor in M1 and N2. The first basket was made from tightly plaited or knotted plant fibres (Fig. 2.18), while the second was manufactured by weaving the plant fibres around a frame of reeds. The latter basket presumably was hung as it was attached to a wooden hoop by means of a leather strip (Fig. 2.19). Two grass coils or potholders were also recovered from the northwestern corner of the excavation (M2 – RBL & M3 – Floor)(see for example Fig. 2.17c). The remains of what might be a winnowing basket was found in the Pit in P2 (Fig. 2.17a). This was woven out of flat strips of wood. *Acacia ataxacantha* is often employed for this purpose today (Van Wyk & Gericke 2003: 297).

- *Wooden objects*

The remains of three wooden spoons were recovered, two off of the floor and one in GM (M1/M3 & O3 respectively) (see for examples Fig. 2.20b&d). A hoe handle (Fig. 2.20c) and a part of a wooden bowl or lid (Fig. 2.20a) were discovered in M1-GM. A smaller piece of a wooden bowl or plate was found in one of the pits (P2). A piece of wood with a 'lug' and what appears to be a carved wooden stopper were lying on the surface of the excavation.

- *Stone artefacts*

Two quartz hammer stones were lying on the floor in O2 and P2 (Fig. 2.21a). Approximately eight upper grindstones were recorded on the western side of the floor (M & N). Two lower grindstones were also discovered in this area one of which had been turned upside down (M2/M3) (see for example Fig.2.22a).

Three broken tools of Middle Stone Age origin, a single piece resembling a Later Stone Age scraper (O2- GM), but which may have been a gunflint (Fig. 2.21b), and a heavy-duty chopping tool (M1-RBL) (Fig. 2.21d), probably of Iron Age origin, were recovered (Appendix 7). Other stones or minerals clearly introduced into the cave include two quartz cobbles (N1-RBL), a river pebble (N1-Floor) with damage on one end, and two pieces of micaceous sandstone. Different pigments in the form of red ochre, chalky limestone and in particular a large number of nodules of a blue mineral were present in most layers (Fig. 2.21c).

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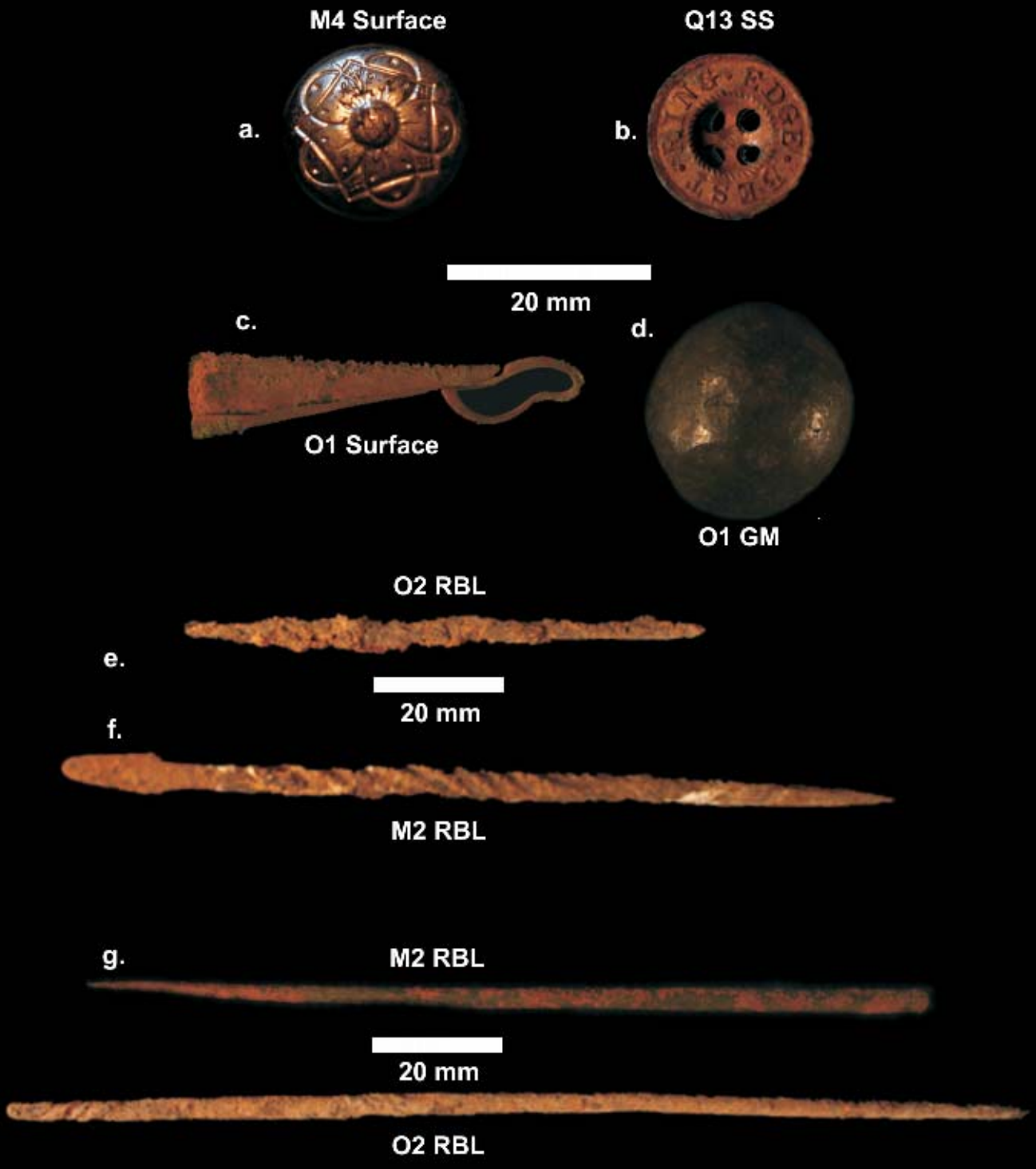


Figure 2.11. a. Metal button with an inserted shank, b. 'Best ring edge' suspender button, c. metal'cap' with wooden core, d. lead bullet, e. spear stem? f. iron spearhead with a twisted stem, g. iron needles

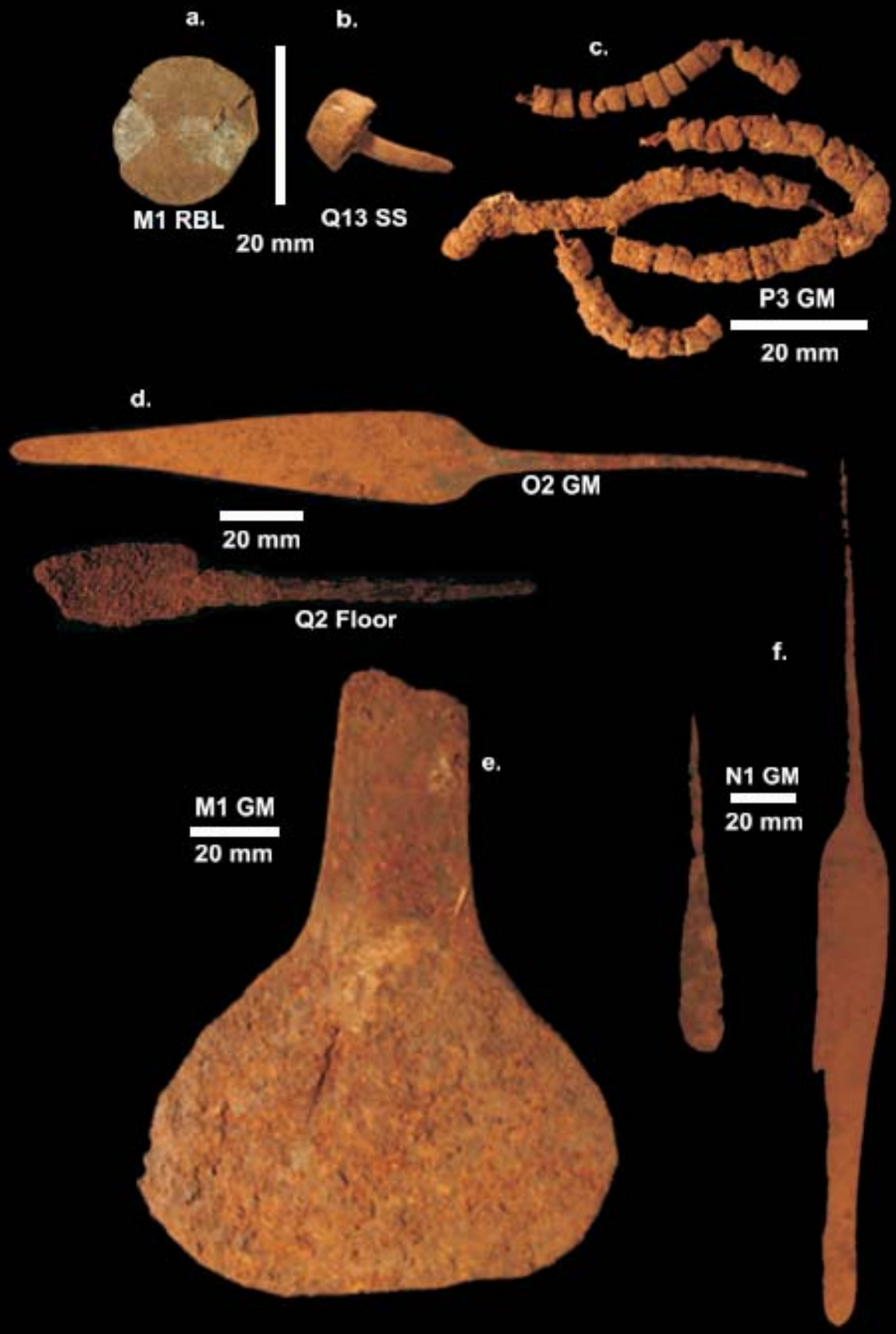


Figure 2.12. a. Copper coin?, b, iron tack, c. iron beads, d. spearheads, e. hoe head?, f. spearheads

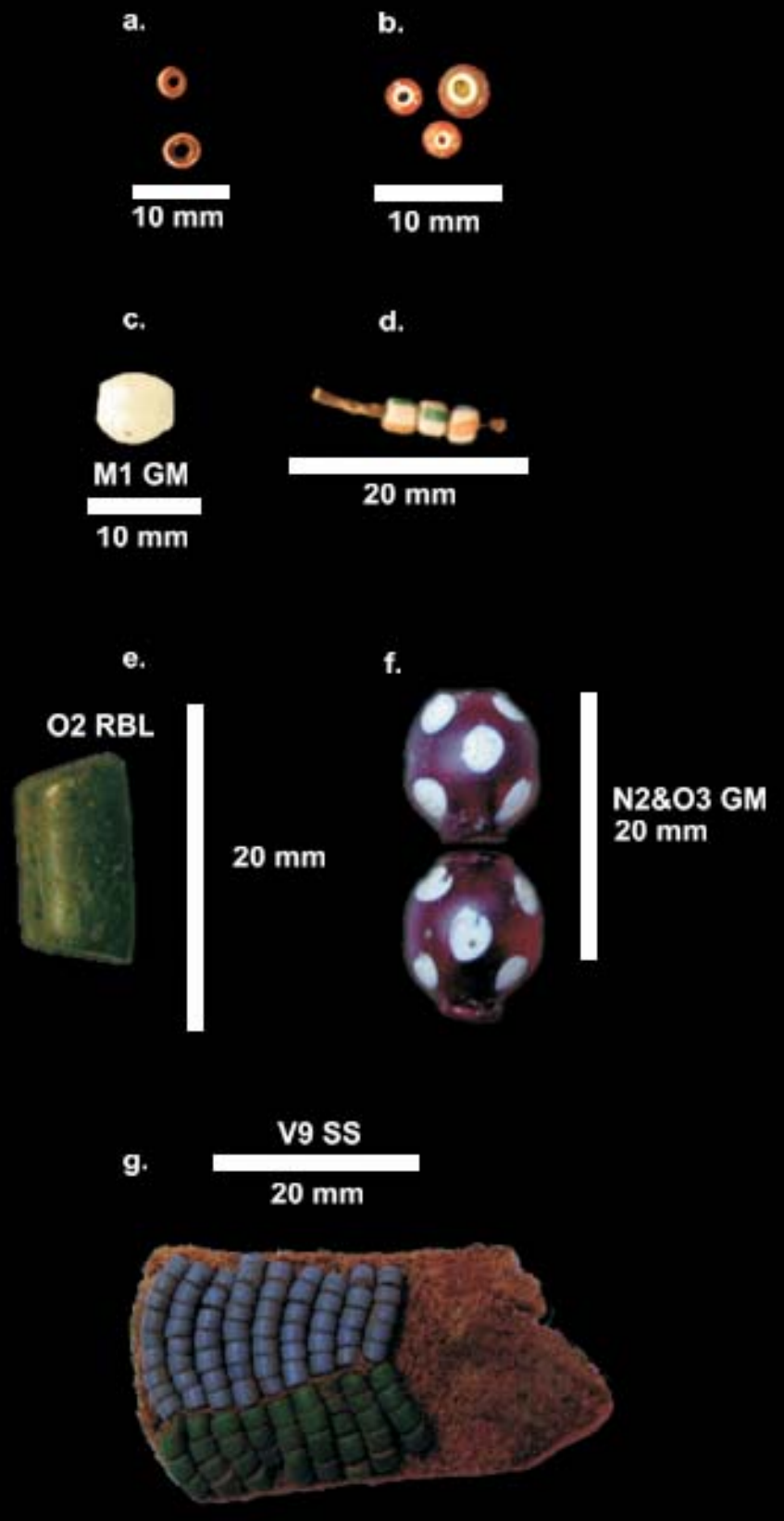


Figure 2.13. a. Brownish red & moderate brownish red on a clear core, b. red on white, c. white 'wound' bead, d. white with green and pink stripes, e. soapstone bead, f. ruby red with white dots, g. pale blue & moderate green attached to leather

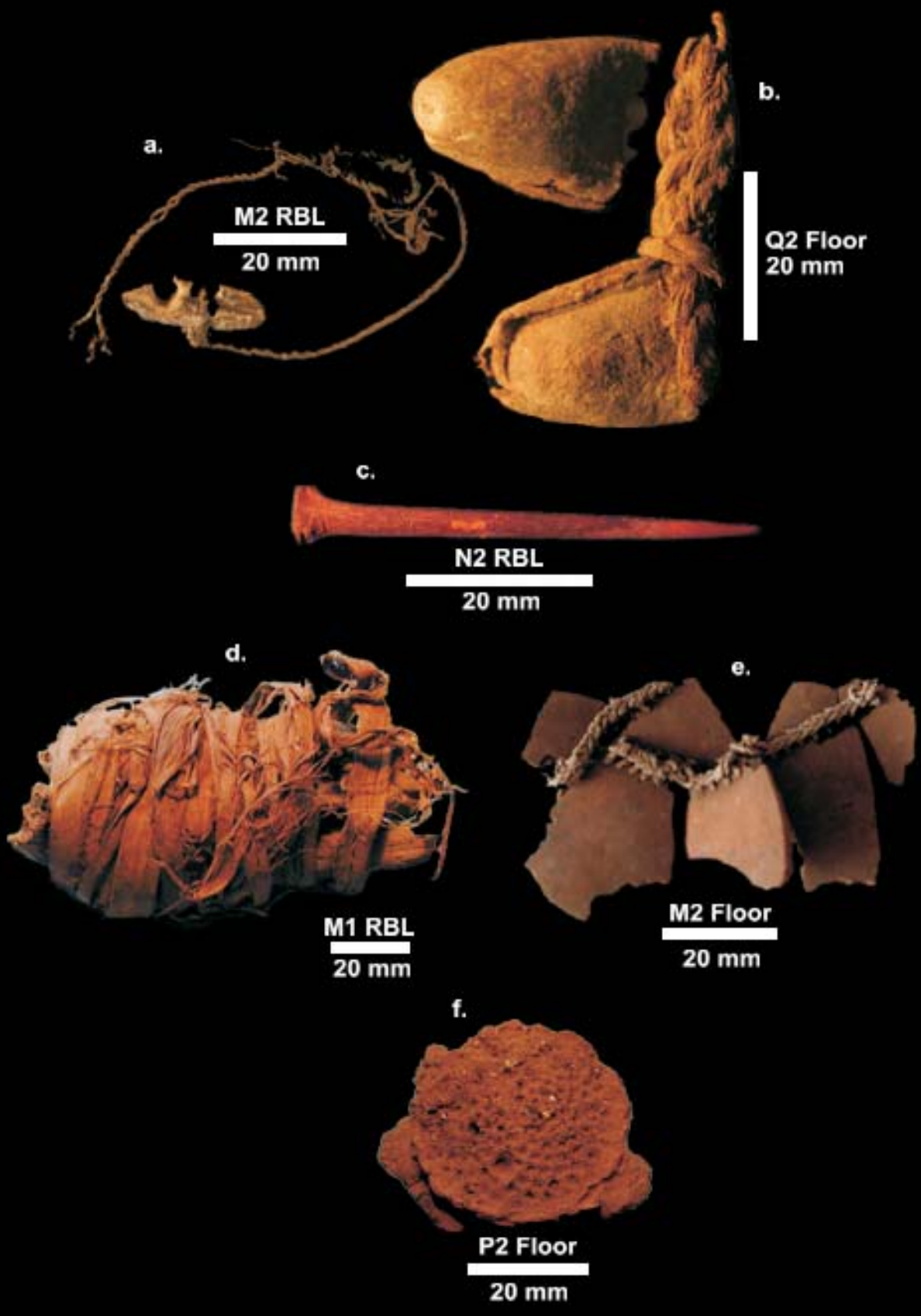


Figure 2.14. a. seed amulet, b. rattles, c. *Acacia* thorn, d. roots/stems bound with plant fibre, e. calabash (mended), f. *Protea* flowerhead

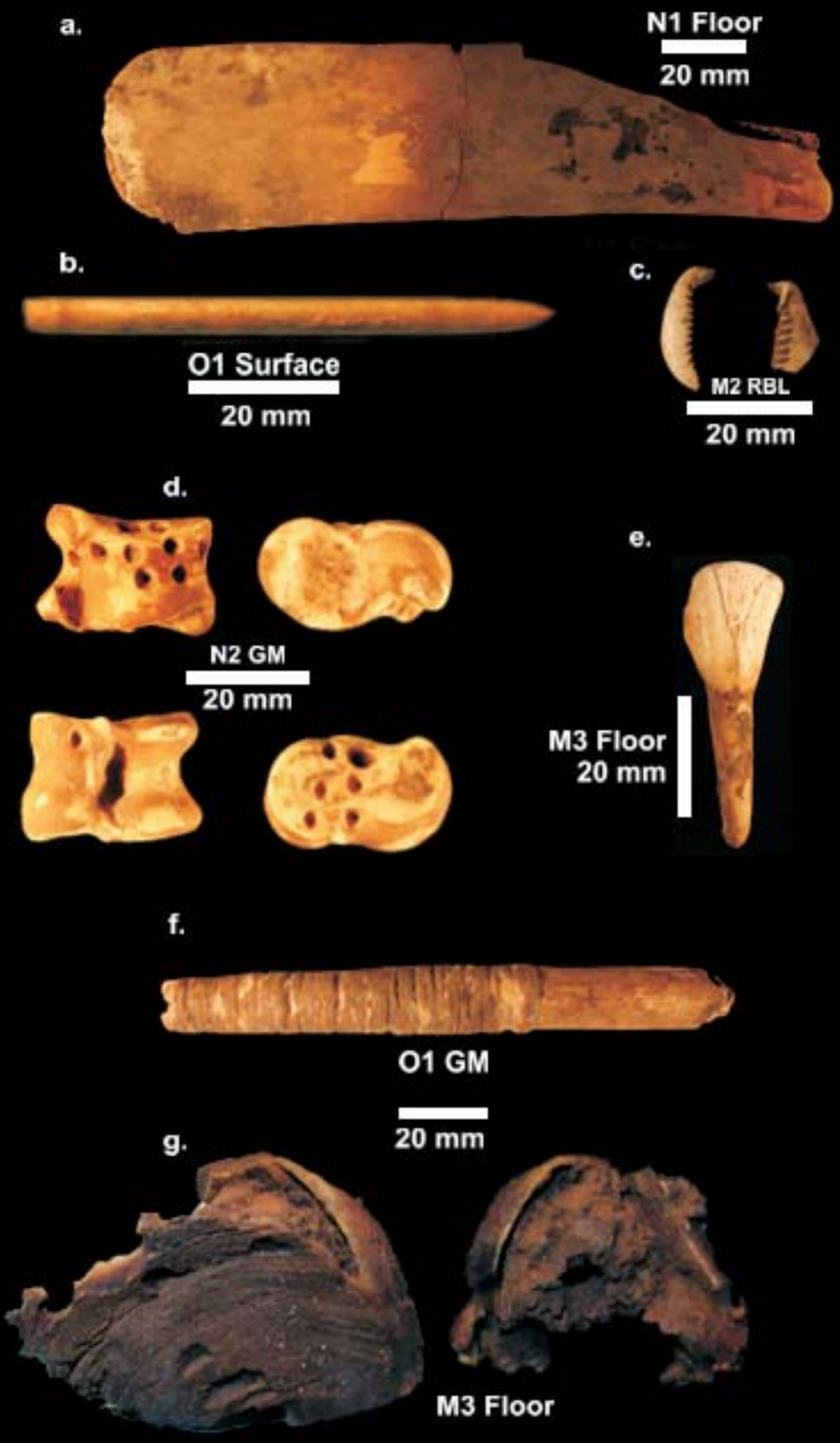


Figure 2.15. a. bone spatula, b.bone point, c. cowrie shell, d. astragalus (four sides), e. bovid tooth, f. bone whistle, g. cow hoof (front & back)

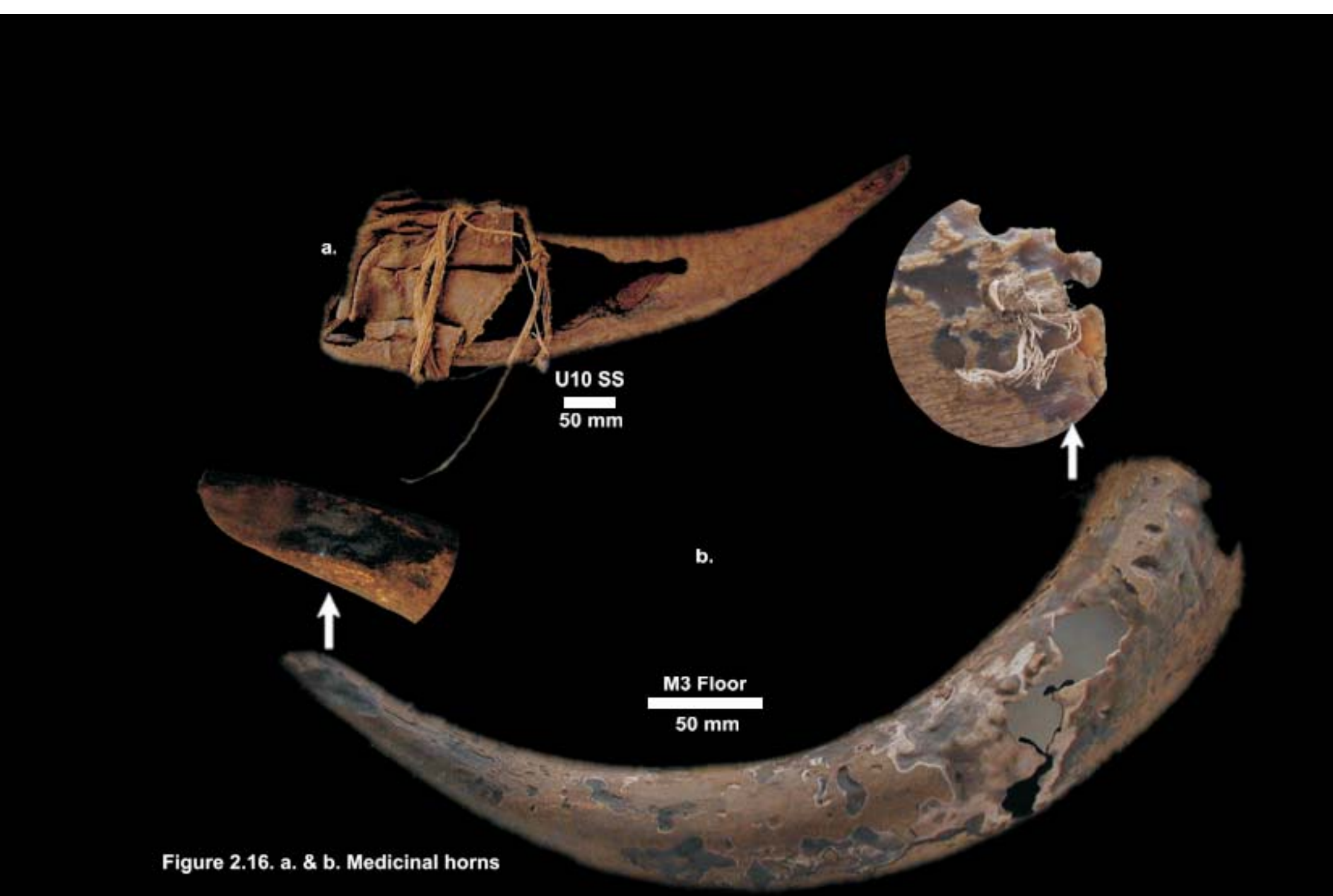


Figure 2.16. a. & b. Medicinal horns

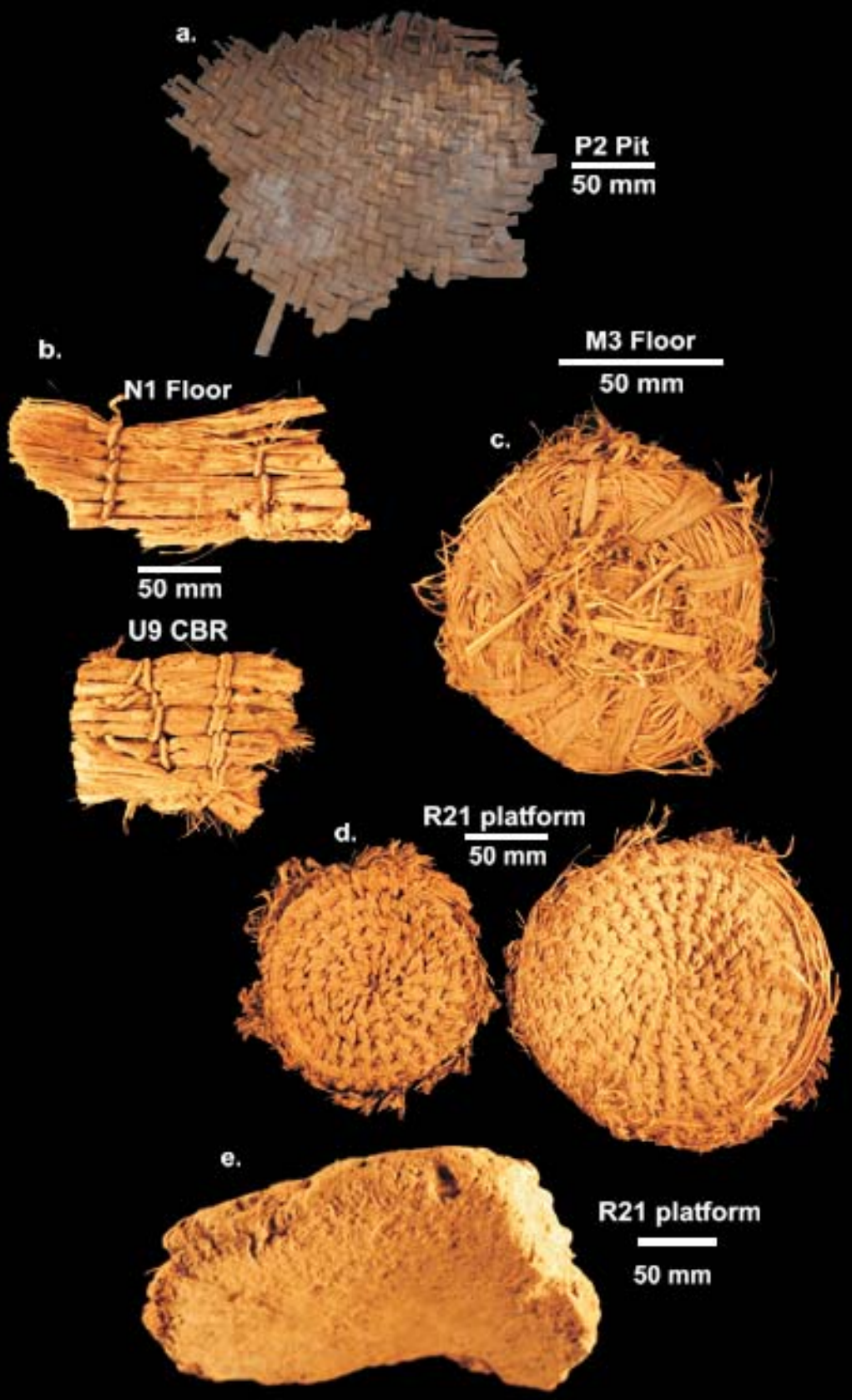


Figure 2.17. a. a segment of a winnowing basket, b. pieces of sleeping mats, c. pot holder, d. grain bin lids, e. part of the grain bin

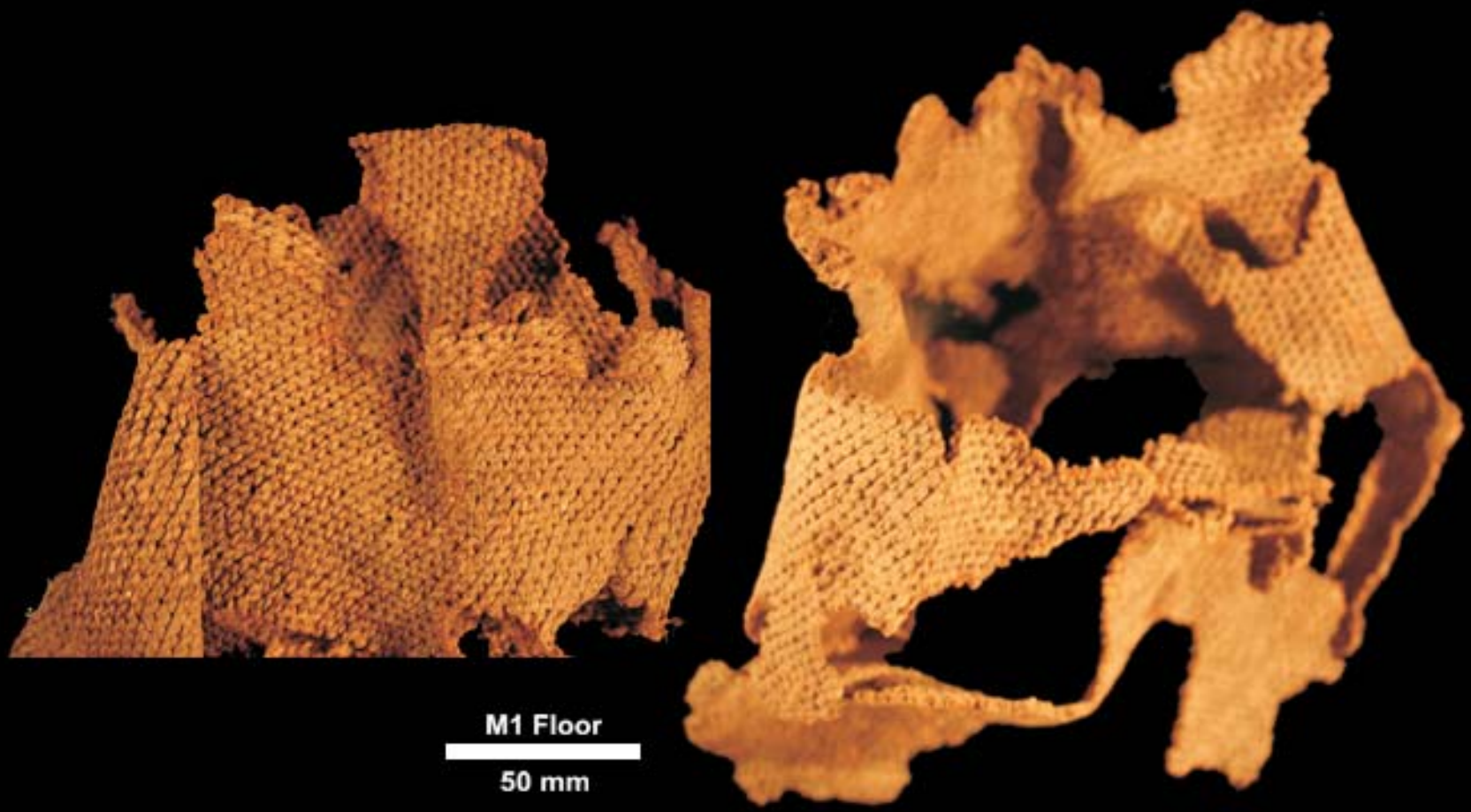


Figure 2.18. The remains of a collecting or storage basket



Figure 2.19. Hanging basket

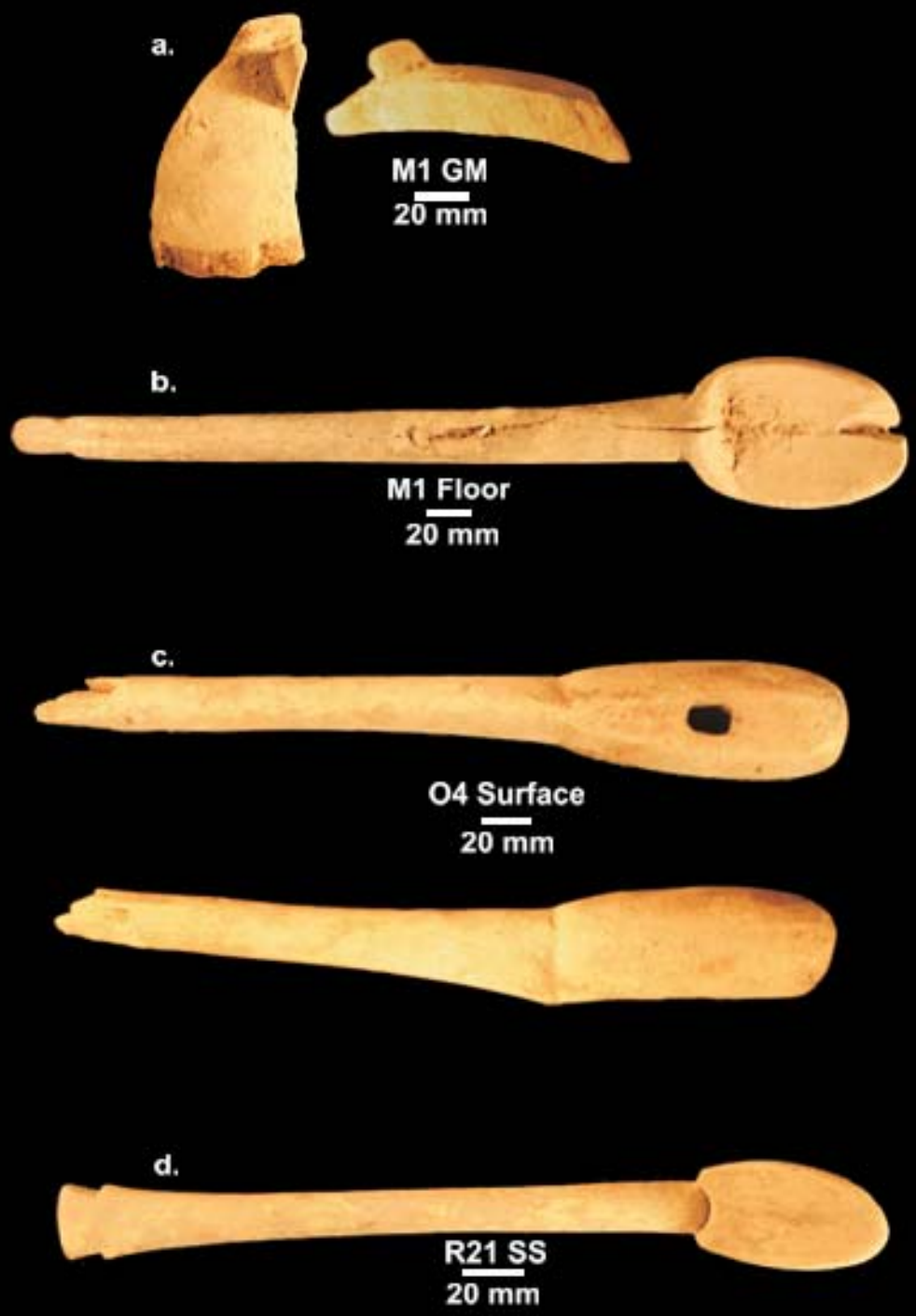


Figure 2.20. a. wooden lid?, b. wooden spoon, c. hoe handle (top and side), d. wooden spoon

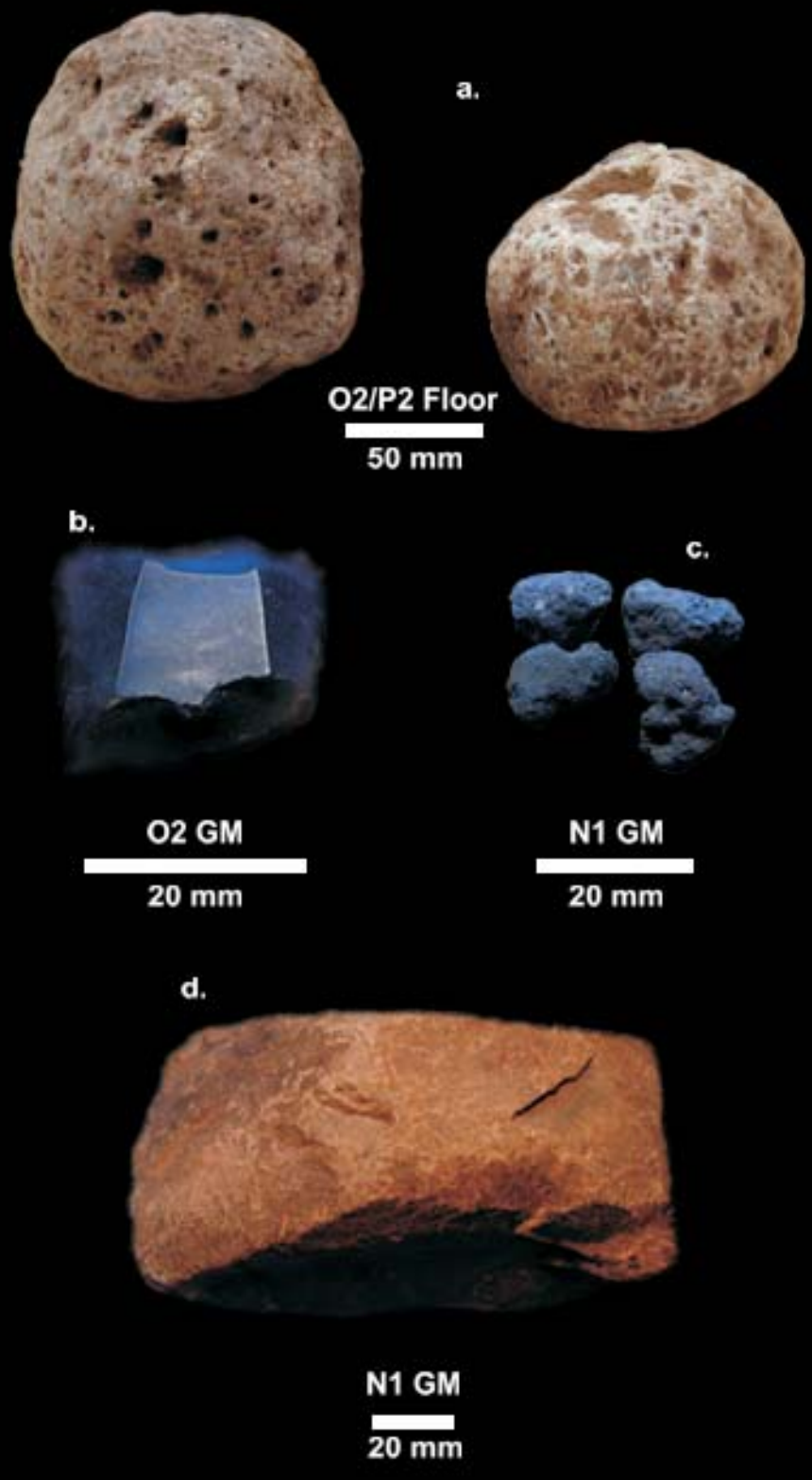


Figure 2.21. a. Quartz hammer stones, b. LSA scraper/flint?, c. blue pigment, d. heavy duty chopping tool



Figure 2.22. a. Grindstone, b. floor polisher (top and side)



Figure 2.23. a. European cloth, b. strips joined together with grass twine, c. European 'white' ware, d. segment of a note penned in Dutch, e. pieces of a Dutch psalm book

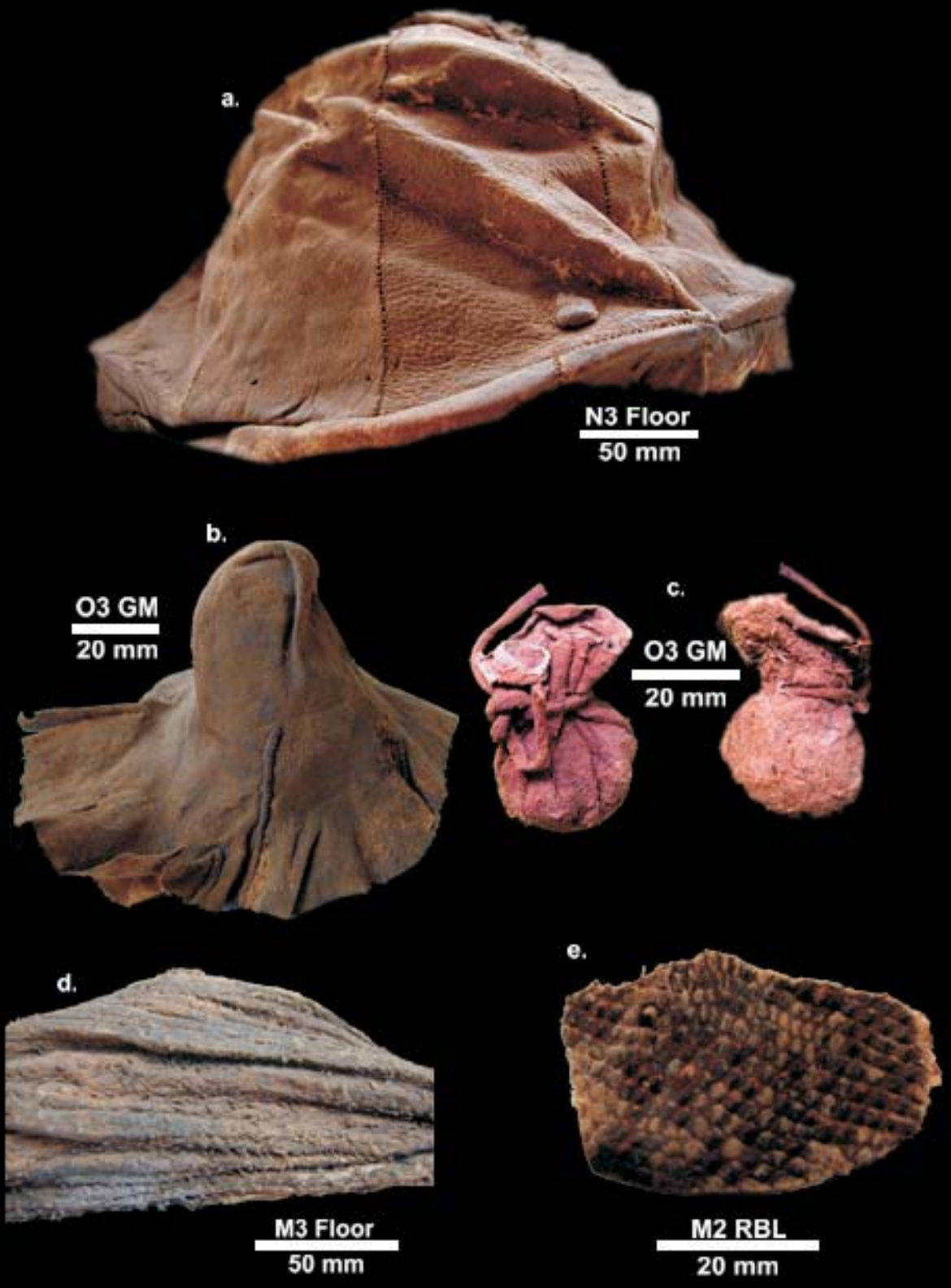


Figure 2.24. a. Leather hat, b. male's front cover, c. pouch (front and back) d. skin bag? with cilia visible on the inside, e. skin of *Varanus albigularis*

- *'European' artefacts*

Twenty-five pieces of 'European' fabric were retrieved (see Appendix 8, Fig. 2.23a). Although, some of the pieces in the surface layers may derive from the miners and visitors, the pieces from the lower layers appeared to fit the 1854 context. No complete European garments were recovered, but many strips of cloth were found some of which had been joined together with grass twine (Fig. 2.23b). These strips may have been attached to the head or used as arm or leg decoration. A single piece of European white ware (O2-GM) printed in underglaze blue (pos. 'Willow pattern') also forms part of the material remains of the Siege (Fig. 2.23c). Two fragments of a Dutch Psalm book and a segment of a note penned in Dutch were imbedded in the rodent droppings and grass material in O1& O2 – GM (Figs 2.23d&e).

- *Leather artefacts*

A number of leather garments including a hat (N3-Floor) (Fig. 2.24a), a male's front cover (O3-GM) (Fig. 2.24b), a small pouch (O3 GM) (Fig. 2.24c) and a piece of skin (M3-Floor), which from the cilia visible on the one side was part of the alimentary canal or womb of an animal (Fig. 2.24d), were recovered. A piece of leather from the ground monitor (*Varanus albigularis*) (M2-RBL) (Fig. 2.24e) was also found in Dg1 (Appendix 9).

- *Pottery*

A total of 3037 potsherds was excavated during the Historic Cave excavations. Of these only 4% of both rim and body pieces were decorated (see Appendix 10). The largest concentration of pottery was excavated from Dg1 (2192 potsherds) especially from the back of the floor where a large number of pots appear to have been stored on the apse or raised platform. A number of potsherds contained residues of burnt food, as well as residues of pigment, such as red and yellow ochre, white diatomite, or grey/blue pigment mixed with fat (see Chapter 8) indicating that the pots were utilised for a number of different tasks, ranging from cooking and storage to medicinal activities. A small clay cup, possibly a child's toy pot, was found in M1-GM.

The undecorated ceramic component comprises a number of black recurved jars and beakers, and large unburnished, recurved and spherical jars. In total, a

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minimum number of 13 pots was refitted from 75 rim and decorated pieces, 53 individual decorated pieces could not be refitted. Ten of the 13 pots were found in Dg1. The most common decorations and decoration techniques include herringbone, single of multiple horizontal lines of punctuates produced by finger nail or stylus (triangular and square), single or multiple incised lines with applied red or black burnish, bangle imprint, cross-hatch between horizontal incised lines, comb stamping around the neck of the pot with pendant triangles outlined by a single or double row of comb stamping filled alternately with red, buff or black colour. The decorated pots are generally large necked jars, small jars with recurved necks, and open bowls.

When the pottery collection was analysed according to existing ceramic categories[36], the decorated part of the collection separated out into an earlier and later component, and the later component into different traditions and facies (see Table 2.1).

Table 2.1. Summary of the pottery analysis

Excavation	*Early/Middle Iron Age*		*Late Iron Age*		
	Eiland	*Indeterminate*	*Late Moloko Uitkomst affinities*	*Phalaborwa/Letaba affinities*	*Indeterminate*
Decorated pots					
Dg1			6		4
Dg2			1	1	
Dg4					1
Decorated pieces					
Dg1	11	2	13	4	8
Dg2				1	2
Dg4			4	5	3

The earlier component, only found in Dg1, comprises a number of individual pieces of 'Eiland' pottery. The 'Eiland' pieces with characteristic finely incised herringbone decoration (Fig. 2.25) may indicate an earlier AD900-1200 presence in or around the cave. Mason (1988: 400) noted the presence of Eiland style pottery in the upper Iron Age layers of the Cave of Hearths excavation near the entrance to Historic Cave. However, his entire Iron Age horizon was just over a

[36] Prof. Tom Huffman assisted with the identification of pottery types.

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30 cm deep (Bed 11 and 12), and due to the homogenous nature of the deposit and the mixing of younger with older material he expressed some uncertainty about whether this represented several different occupations, including the siege of 1854, or a single occupation. The Early to Middle Iron Age pieces found in Historic Cave Dg1 04-RB (5 pieces) were plastered into the floor, and some of these pieces were coated in a lime precipitate suggesting they had been previously exposed in the dolomite cave. The remaining eight pieces were found on top of the main floor. This suggests two possibilities, first, that an underlying Early/Middle Iron Age deposit exists in the base of the cave, which with its associated potsherds became incorporated into the1854 floor when the floor was being prepared, and sherds from below the floor were repositioned to the top of the floor when, for example, the pits in N2 & P2 were made. This underlying deposit was not apparent from the excavation of the pits. A second possibility is that these potsherds were picked up by individuals and brought into the cave site. Fragments of the older pots may have been intentionally recycled for their ritual qualities. The earlier pottery would have been associated with the earlier inhabitants of the area, who may have been acknowledged as general progenitors and/or associated with the environment, climate or rainfall.

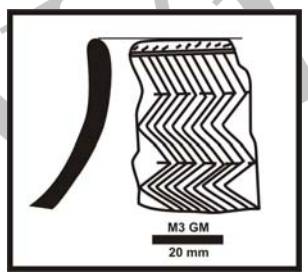


Figure 2.25. An example of the early Eiland pottery found in Historic Cave

The remainder of the decorated pots and sherds are consistent with the 1700-1800s phase of the Late Iron Age. Six of the decorated pots from Dg1 are clearly Late Moloko, a pottery tradition that is broadly associated with the Sotho-Tswana of Gauteng, Limpopo and North-West Province (Fig. 2.26) The other 4 pots from this excavation are too generic to place in any one category (Table 2.1). The decorated pieces are principally Late Moloko, with a few possible Letaba/Phalaborwa pieces (Fig. 2.27). A number of fragments were categorised ‘indeterminate’ because either the decoration was generic or it was impossible to

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determine the position of the motif on the vessel from the piece of ceramic. The pottery is discussed further in Chapter 7.

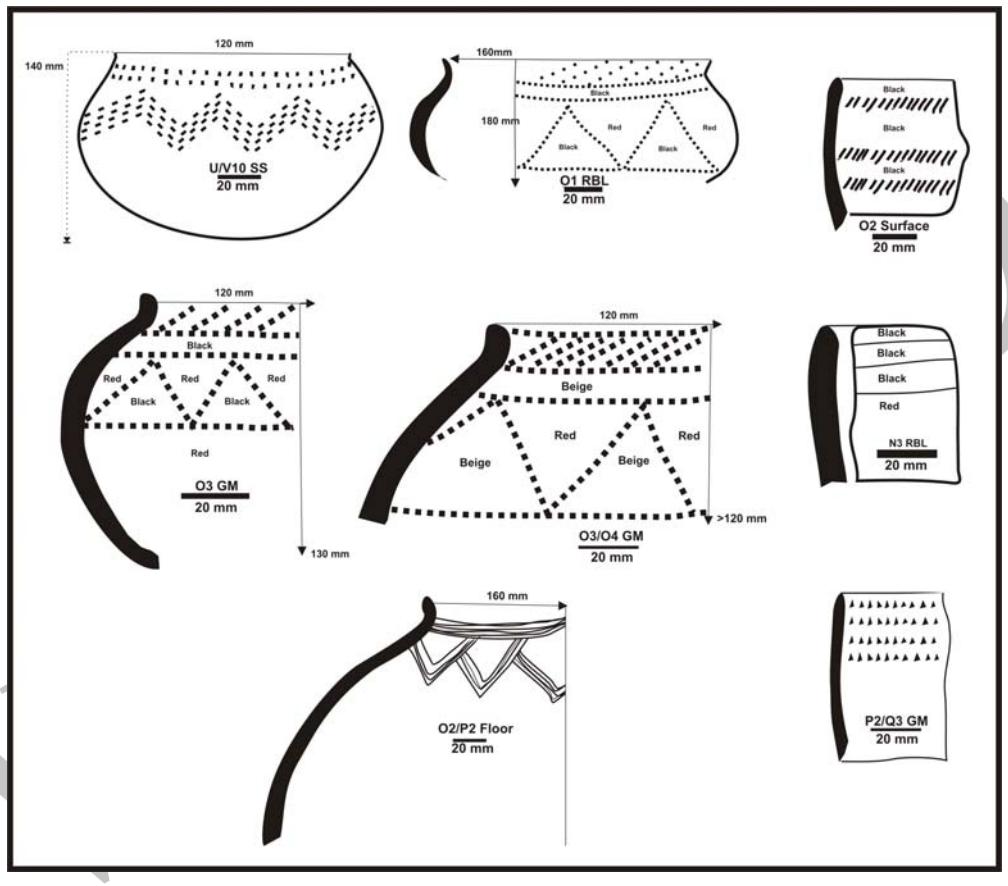


Figure 2.26. Examples of Late Moloko pottery

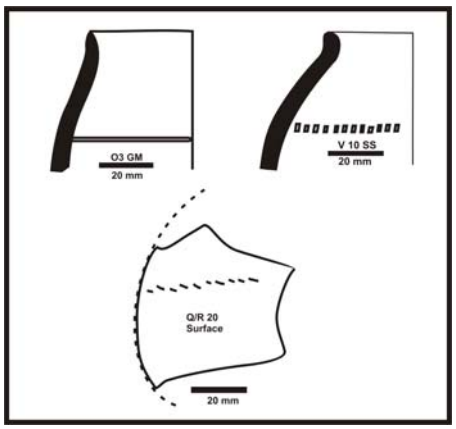


Figure 2.27. Examples of Letaba pottery

3.2. Excavation Site 2 – Dg2

Dg2 is located immediately at the base of the rock fall 'terraces', about 5m to the east of Dg1. The excavation area was bounded by a rock fall behind and a built wall on the north-eastern side. A 2x2m^2 grid was set out and later extended by an extra square metre - T9 - to determine the extent of the 'living area' (Fig. 2.28).

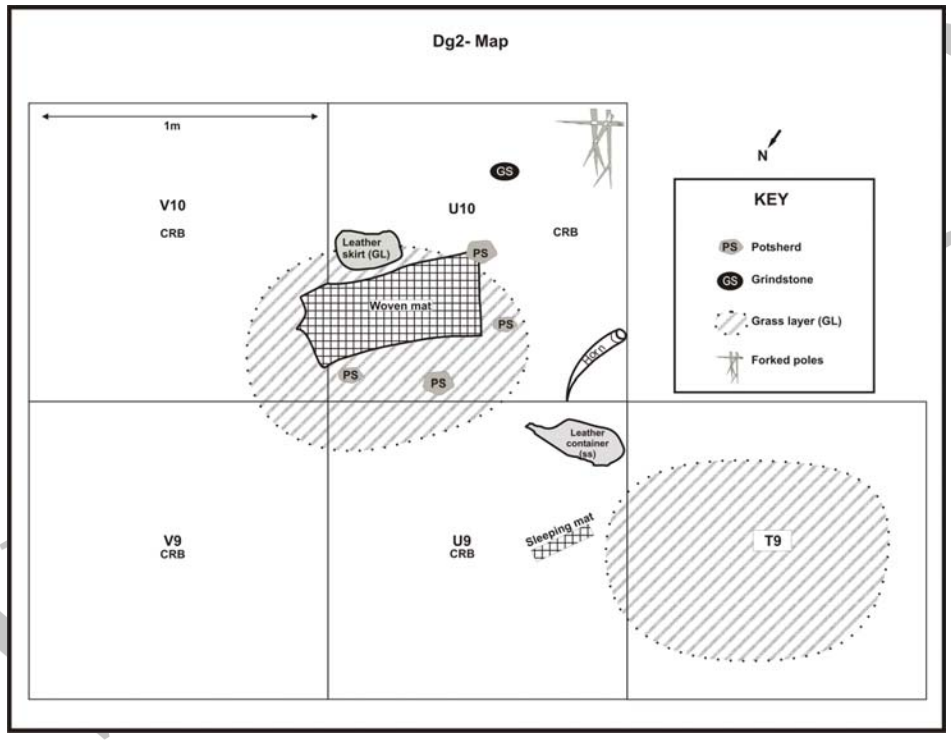


Figure 2.28. Plan of Dg2 at the top of layer CRL. The extent of layer GL as well as the position of some of the artefacts is indicated

Six stratigraphic units were identified (Fig. 2.29):

Surface – loose dust

SS – a sub-surface slightly more consolidated layer (~5cm)

GL – a thick layer of fine grass (~ 8cm thick mostly in U10)

CRB - a consolidated, brown rubble layer (~ 3-4 cm thick)

CRL – a hard consolidated layer with a high percentage of rodent droppings (~ 7cm thick).

PL – sterile pinkish layer, degrading dolomite.

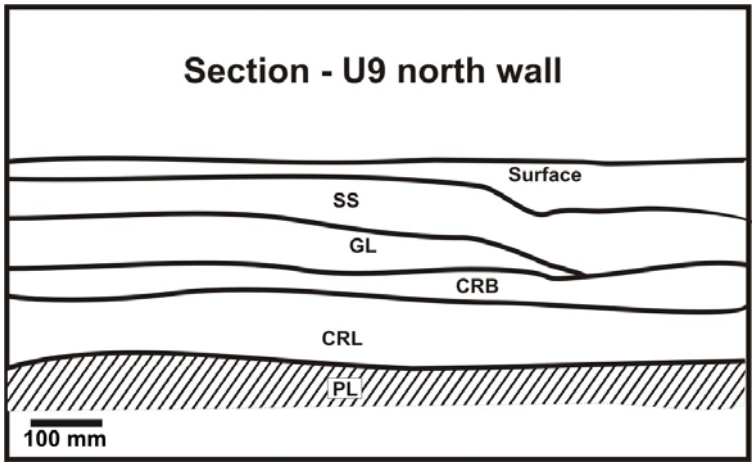


Figure 2.29. Section through U9 north wall

CRL marked the base of the occupation layer, and as such represents the floor. Although this floor was featureless, a spatial arrangement was still apparent. A concentration of fine grass matter (GL) in U10 and T9 was taken to be the remains of sleeping mats thereby demarcating the sleeping areas, and forked poles, bin fragments, and sorghum at the back of U10 to indicate storage. The nature and context of the cultural material found on top of the consolidated layer (CRL) was consistent with a single occupation event. There was no evidence for earlier occupation, as the layer below CRL was sterile. PL, a layer of degrading dolomite, may be part of the roof fall that produced the terraces. Between 8-10 cm of layer PL was removed, but it appeared to go on for some depth.

3.2.1. Material remains: late 1800s to present

The Surface and Sub-Surface layers contained evidence of activities that took place later on in the cave. Fifteen short rim fire cartridges and an unfired bullet were found in the surface layers (one cartridge had worked its way down to CRB), which based on the manufacturing dates[37] of the bullets indicate that sometime after 1910 someone stood in the bottom of the cave and shot off two or three rounds. A number of Rondies candy wrappers were also found on the surface. This candy seems to have been popular from the early to mid 1900s.

[37] The cartridges had two different headstamps, Peters HV and ICC. Peters produced these cartridges between 1887-1934, while Independent Cartridge Co produced the ICC cartridge between 1910 – 1913 (see Appendix 2).

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3.2.2. Material remains 1854

Finds from Dg2 include:

- *Beads*

One hundred and six glass beads were found in Dg2. Most of the beads had been sewn onto what could have been the tail of a woman's rear skirt, and were sewn on in 'blocks' of pale blue and moderate green (Fig. 2.13g). Blue oblate- and tube-shaped beads, red on white oblates and cylinders, and a single yellow tube-shaped bead were also found. The red on white oblate is reminiscent of beads found on Mgungundlovu in Kwa-Zulu Natal while the yellow, pale blue and moderate green tube-shaped beads are common on 'Pedi' and 'Venda' sites in the area. Only five ostrich eggshell beads were recovered (see Appendix 3).

- *Pottery*

A total of 294 potsherds was excavated from Dg2. This excavation produced a relatively high percentage of decorated pottery (7%) and a complete small finger-pressed pot. This possible toy pot was found in the grassy material under a mat in U10-GL. Most of the fragments of decorated potsherds came from just two pots. Only three individual decorated pieces could not be refitted. One of the pots is Late Moloko while the other has Letaba affinities. One of the decorated sherds fits the category Letaba while the other two could not be identified.

- *Leather items & 'European' fabric*

Several pieces of leather, a small leather skirt or breastplate[38] (U10-GL) (Fig.2.30b), a beaded piece of leather (see beads) (Fig. 2.13g), a leather milk or water container (U9-SS) (Fig. 2.31a) and several pieces of 'European' fabric were recovered (Appendix 8). Three of the pieces of leather have a 'cross-hatch' pattern, called *letloko* by the Pedi (cf. Vogel 1983) (Fig.2.31b). This may have been a common filler pattern as it also appears on Ngwane garments. According to Tyrrel (1968:127) the Ngwane were regarded as Swazi who had been influenced by the Zulu in matters relating to clothing. Another small skirt or

[38] The traditional healer Mogodweni (see Chapter 8) identified the similar but decorated 'skirt' as a breastplate worn by traditional healers.

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Figure 2.30. a. Small skirt or 'breastplate' found in the WITS Makapan collections, b. small skirt or 'breastplate'

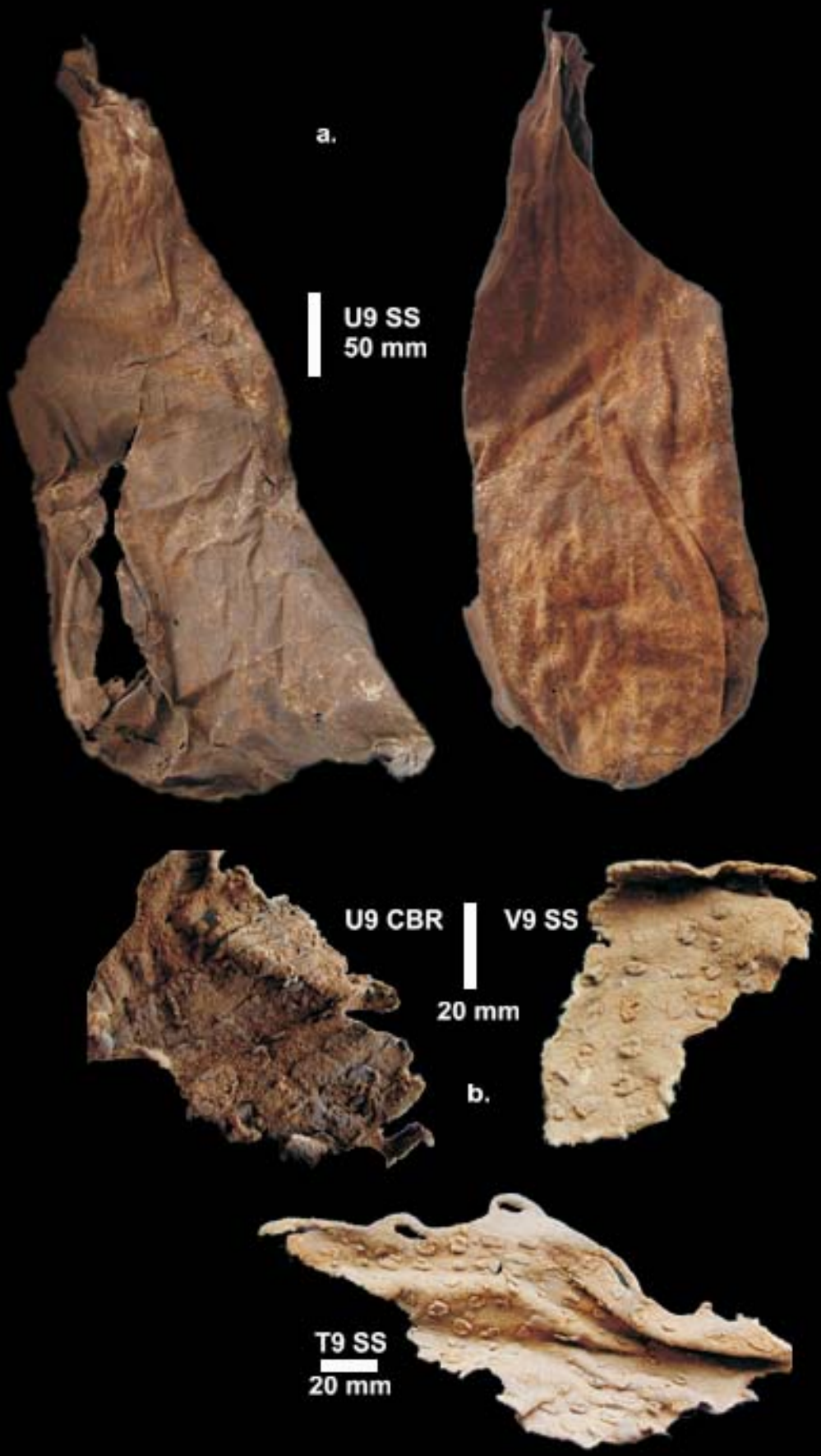


Figure 2.31. a. milk or water container (front and back), b. pieces of leather with 'cross-hatch' or *letloko* pattern

breastplate, discovered in the University of the Witwatersrand Historic Cave collection (Fig. 2.30a), is elaborately decorated with circles and lines. This appears to have been refashioned from a larger skirt or cloak, in which circles featured as a pattern. Circles and half-circles have been documented on the fore skirts of Pedi women (Vogel 1983), and cloaks of Ntwana men (Tyrrell 1968: 77). Vogel (1983:12) recorded that amongst the Maroteng Pedi full-circles were said to represent the land snail and these were also incorporated into Pedi floor patterns. Land snails which do not appear during periods of drought, are said to symbolise rain, and by extension probably fertility (Vogel 1983: 14).

- *Woven material*

The remains of two different mats (U9-CRB & U10-CRB) were recovered, one is a typical sleeping mat (Fig.2.17b), the other which is more tightly knotted or woven could have been employed in a number of ways. Numerous pieces of grass string were found during the course of the excavation.

- *Faunal and floral remains*

A horn container with a leather 'lid' (U10-CRB) (Fig. 2.16a), calabash containers, and a significant amount of plant and animal remains were retrieved from the Dg2 (Appendix 4 & 5). These are discussed in Chapter 4.

- *Human Remains*

The remains of 9 teeth, a proximal phalanx and 6 postcranial bone fragments were recovered from Dg2 (Appendix 6). The human remains are discussed in Chapter 5.

3.3. Excavation Site 3 – Dg3

A 2x1 grid was laid out and two layers were excavated. Once the surface and sub-surface was removed (3cm) a hard consolidated pathway was exposed. From this it became clear that the brush and wood lying further down the path once formed part of a fence. The pathway and pole fence indicate that movement in the cave was carefully planned and controlled.

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Fewer artefacts were excavated from this area than from any of the other excavation sites.

3.3.1. Material remains: late 1800 - present

All objects apart from the 'Best Ring Edge' suspender button (Fig. 2.11b) and the round-headed iron tack are consistent with the Siege Event[39] (Fig. 2.12b). Miners or archaeologists who worked at the Cave of Hearths entrance to the cave during the first half of the 20th century may have introduced the button and the nail (see Chapter 3).

3.3.2. Material remains: 1854

- *Beads*

One ostrich eggshell bead and 114 glass beads were found on this path. A string of small black oblates (108) was recovered from P13-SS. In addition to these, there are three white cylinder shaped beads, two brownish red cylinders on a clear core, and a single white bead with pink and green stripes.

- *Pottery*

Dg3, as may be expected of a pathway, contained only 52 potsherds and one discoid or pot lid, of which none were decorated (Appendix 10).

- *Fauna and flora*

A small number of fragments of calabash and sorghum seeds were recovered (Appendix 4), as well as a few pieces of leather and a goat coprolite with a piece of cotton cloth imbedded in it (Apppendix 8). A few bone fragments of cattle, sheep/goat and a bird were found on the pathway (Appendix 5).

- *Human remains*

Thirty-three human elements were recovered (Appendix 6). These remains are discussed further in Chapter 5.

[39] The suspender button, known to secure overalls and dungarees has been found on UK sites dating from 1905/06 (Ferris 1984: 5).

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3.4. Excavation Site 4 – Dg4

Dg4 is circumscribed by large boulders. A gap in the boulders on the south east side marked the entrance to this living area. The boulder to the right side of the entrance had fallen over, and a large number of rocks capped the surface. Three square metres were laid out inside the boulder walls. The grid was extended slightly to allow for the excavation of features (Fig. 2.32).

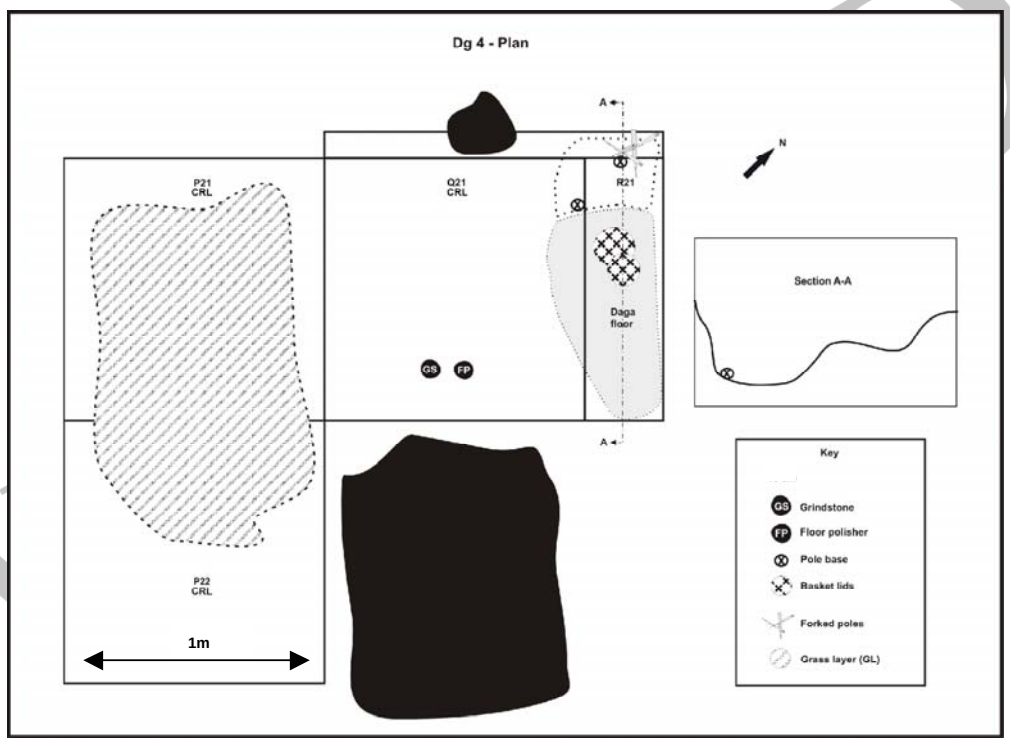


Figure 2.32. Plan of Dg4 at the top of CRL. A section has been drawn through the storage area in R21

Four stratigraphic units were identified (Fig. 2.33):

Surface – Unconsolidated, fine layer

SS – More consolidated layer 10-12cm thick

GL – grassy layer presence of roofspall

CRB – consolidated rubble layer

CRL – compacted surface

SL – sterile layer (P/Q21)

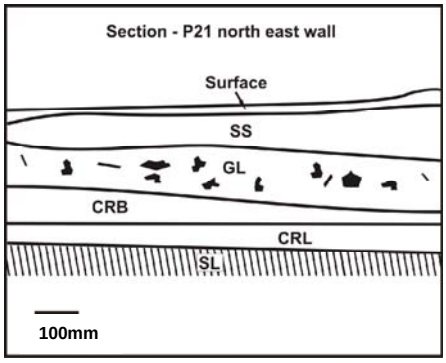


Figure 2.33. Section through P21 – northeast wall

The consolidated, compacted surface (CRL) delineates the occupation floor. The material cultural remains were concentrated in layers CRB and GL above it, and no objects were found below it. Once again the objects appeared to emanate from a single occupation event and provided clear evidence of distinct activity areas. A concentration of fine grass material in P21&22 thought to be the remains of sleeping mats defined a sleeping area. A plastered base or platform in Q/R21 formed the foundation for a storage area. A moulded dung storage bin was found together with two woven grass 'lids' on top of this platform (Fig. 2.17d&e). A well-polished floor smoother (Fig. 2.22b) and a grindstone (Q21-base of SS) found together with a wooden spoon (R21-SS) (Fig. 2.20d) provided further evidence for domestic activity. Apart from nine pieces of European fabric (Appendix 8) that could belong to a later period, no late 1800, early 1900 artefacts were found in this area. The lack of later material may indicate that this excavated area was not on a route regularly used by visitors to the cave.

3.4.1 Material remains: 1854

- *Beads*

Three OES and 137 glass beads were recovered (Appendix 3). The majority of these beads are shades of blue, and probably belonged to one of the two broken strings found in Q20 & 21. A white cylinder and two white tube-shaped beads, a single black tube, two brownish red on a clear, and a brownish red on green cylinder were also found. Many of these blue beads are common on other 'Venda' and 'Pedi' sites in the area.

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- *Pottery*

Dg4 produced a total of 498 potsherds of which 4% of the body and rim pieces are decorated (Appendix 10). The only decorated pot is too generic to fit into any one category, while of the decorated sherds, four are Late Moloko, five Letaba and three too generic to classify (see Table 2.1).

- *Flora and Fauna*

All the seeds from this excavation were analysed (Appendix 4). This provides evidence of a fairly limited food resource - pumpkin, beans, and sorghum. *Protea* flowerheads (Fig. 2.14f) and pieces of *Aloe* are also present. The faunal remains comprise bones of cattle, sheep/goat, domestic fowl and Red Rock hare (Appendix 5). The fauna and flora are discussed further in Chapter 4.

Two amulets, one made of shell (Fig. 2.34a) and the other bone (Fig. 2.34b), were found in R21 (Surface) and P22 (SS) respectively. These are considered in Chapter 8.

- *Leather items*

Two small leather pouches (P22- SS & R21-Surface)(Fig. 2.35a), a bag with cilia visible on one side, and a skirt, maternity apron or cloak with the standard cross-hatch pattern was recovered from P22-SS (Fig. 2.35b) (Appendix 9).

- *Woven grass items*

Two woven 'lids' were recovered from R21, one is slightly larger than the other (Fig. 2.17d).

- *Human remains*

Thirty-eight human skeletal elements were found in this area (Appendix 6). Approximately 21 of these are teeth and cranial, and the remainder sub-cranial. The human remains are analysed in Chapter 5.

4. Observations and conclusion

It is immediately apparent when compared to Dg2, 3 & 4 that the excavation at the base of the cave (Dg1) was bigger and more elaborate, and consequently

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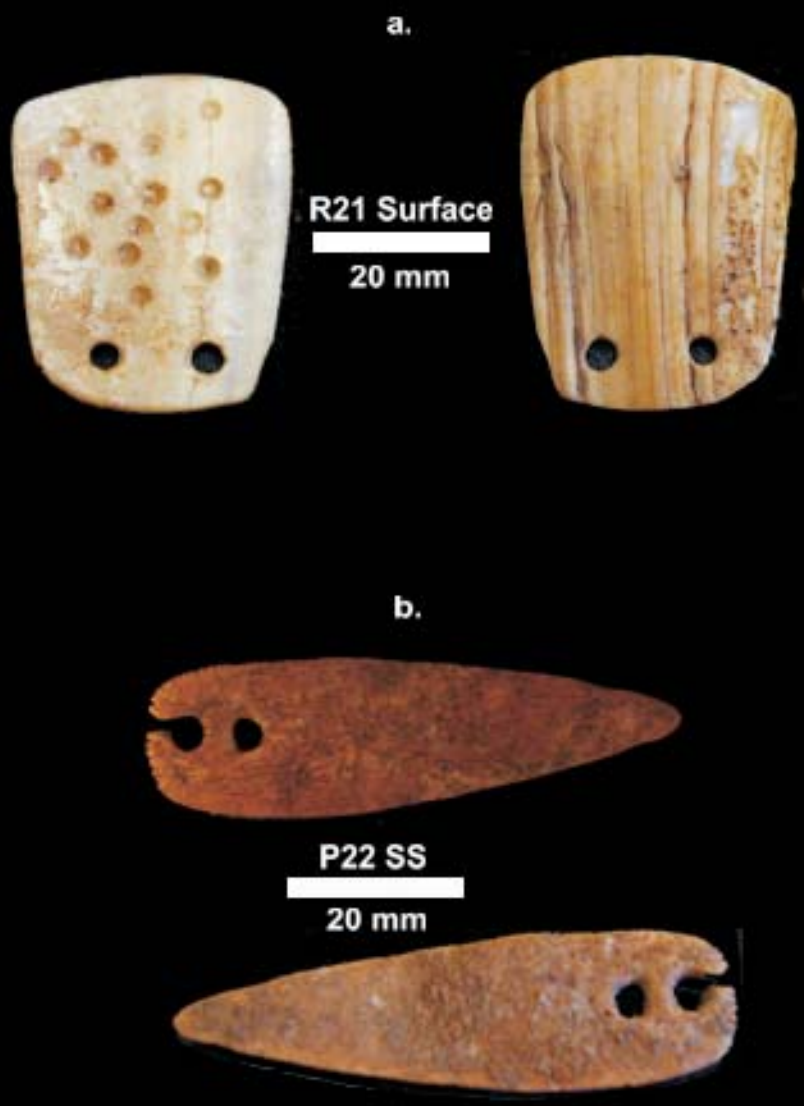


Figure 2.34. a. Shell & b. bone amulets



Figure 2.35. a. small pouches, b. skirt, apron or cloak with 'cross-hatch' pattern (*letloko*)

richer in material culture remains. However, there are four noticeable disparities that warrant comment. The first is the complete absence of any Siege-related metal objects in any of the other excavation sites other than Dg1. This could be given a social spin, but is more likely the result of visitors to the cave searching for and removing metal over the years. Reportedly metal detectors were often employed to assist in the recovery of choice pieces (J. Maguire pers.comm. 2004). Spearheads and iron bangles were certainly collected over the years by the members of the archaeology/palaeontology fraternity and presently reside in the University of the Witwatersrand archaeology collections. Importantly, while on one hand this implies loss of information, on the other it means that roof above Dg1 at the base of the cave must have collapsed before people began to visit the cave on a regular basis. The second notable difference is the absence of pigment from sites Dg 2, 3 & 4. Nodules of a blue 'clay mineral' in particular were found in abundance in the Dg1. This I argue is related to the nature of the activities practiced on this floor (see Chapter 8). Early 'Eiland' pottery was also only found this floor, which may indicate the presence of an earlier archaeological deposit below the floor or again link to activities on the floor. Lastly, the Dg1 floor was plastered with dhaka and contained many features, like storage pits, an apse or back platform and a fire pit, while the 'floors' in Dg2 and Dg4 were not plastered and were only apparent because the underlying soil became compacted during the occupation of these living areas.

There is no evidence for multiple occupation of the site. Although, a number of individual objects from later periods in time intruded into the underlying layers, there is no evidence that the site had been occupied for any length of time, either before or after the siege. The material culture found on or above the floor levels was spatially coherent and many broken pieces of ceramic, calabash and beads as well as torn skin found in layers above the floor were refitted with those located on the floor. The strategraphic layering apparent in Dg1 documented the events and agents that altered and covered the floor after it was abandoned or its occupants died.

There is also a chronological consistency between the objects associated with the different floors. None of the excavated floors appears to have been occupied earlier or later than any of the others. Further, the fact that human remains form

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an integral part of the material recovered from all of the excavations, including the pathway, suggests that they were victims of the same event.

The theme of ‘space’ and time or ‘timing’ reverberates throughout this thesis. The following Chapter examines the position of the caves within the Valley and attempts to discover when they were occupied.

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CHAPTER 3: Activities in the Valley

1. Introduction

Both my own and Moore's (1981) survey of the Valley indicate that most, if not all, of the settlement sites were situated in the flatter, more open reaches of the main Makapansgat Valley. Remnants of old walling were clearly visible around the area of the old Peppercorn farmstead, and interspersed between Matlakaneng and Mokopeng communities, who occupy this portion of the Valley today. There was no evidence of permanent open settlements in the Mwaridzi River arm of the Valley or on its surrounding cliffs. There was, however, evidence of people carrying out activities such as smelting and possibly food preparation on the hillside around Historic Cave. Although it was not possible to date these activities, the depth of the cultural horizon (10-15cm below surface) implied an appreciable time depth (see Appendix 1).

The material culture on the Historic Cave hillside was consistent with people moving around the hill slopes before periods of retreat, when activities would have focussed on securing the refuge site, making it habitable, storing and preparing food and manufacturing weapons. From what remains of the stone walling at the entrance the cave it is evident that the Kekana spent a considerable amount of time securing the site. The clay-dung floor also indicates that clay was brought in from outside to manufacture the floor in Dg1, poles and mud were fetched to create walls, paths and storage areas, and rocks and boulders were rearranged to create living areas. However, while there is evidence that the group invested a large amount of time securing and preparing

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the site, the excavation suggested it was occupied only once. This introduces some interesting possibilities vis-à-vis the oral histories and the material culture found within the different caves further down in the Valley.

2. Recorded history

Written and oral records suggest that various groups occupied the Valley from the early 1800s on more than one occasion, prior to and after the Siege event. The Mamaala group of Langa Ndebele under Makgenene occupied the Valley for a short period of time between 1795 and 1825 following a succession dispute that arose after the death of chief Seritarita (Jackson n.d.: 8-9). However, the oral tales pertaining to this group and its leader seem to imply that they were never attacked, and probably did not stay in the Valley for very long as Makgenene was said to be a restless person who never stayed in one place for any length of time.

The Kekana Ndebele, under chief Mugombane[40](also known as Makapan, Mokopane and Setšwamadi, see Chapter 1, footnote 4), allegedly took refuge repeatedly in the Valley up until the siege of1854. In 1836 he attacked a younger brother of the BaPedi chief Sekwati (De Waal 1978: 3) and possibly rekindled old tensions that existed between his own and Sekwati's forefathers (see Chapter 7 section 3). Information provided by Jackson's (n.d.: 17) informant indicated that due to the conflict between the two groups the Kekana had been forced to take refuge in the caves at least three times prior to the siege of 1854, and on each occasion many people had died which is why the Bapedi had given him the nickname Setšwamadi - the one from whom the blood flows. The name certainly predated interaction with the trekboers, because Livingstone referred to him by this name when he passed through the area in 1846 (Schapera 1974: 30).[41]

There is also some indication from the Boer's oral records and early traveller diaries that Andries Hendrik Potgieter, Commandant General of the Zoutpansberg district, attacked Mugombane and chased a group of Kekana into

[40] Jackson (1969: 64) places the beginning of his reign around 1835/6.

[41] The name seemed to stick with him as the headstone of his grave erected in his kraal at Pruissen by the Kekana reads 'In memory of Chief Makapan. Setswamadi. Died 1855.'

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a cave sometime before he died in April of 1852 (Preller 1920-1938: 32-33; Chapman 1971 (1849-1863): 21). Andries Hendrik Potgieter Jr. recalled that 'Makapaan' repeatedly attacked hunting and other parties and murdered a group of 'mak Kaffers' under the Potgieter's protection. Potgieter rallied a 'kommande' together and attacked Mugombane. Andries Hendrik Potgieter Jr. recollected that it was after this attack that his father developed the chest complaint that caused his death (Preller 1920-1938: 33). The traveller Chapman[42] (1971: 21), sketched out a slightly different scenario, but recorded the same event. He portrayed the Boers as intent on subjugating the 'natives' and as thereby being argumentative and quick to pick fights, and he depicted Andries Hendrik Potgieter in particular as 'exceedingly cruel in his wars, having been known on some occasions to flog Kaffirs to death. In addition 'when a tribe had been conquered by him a portion [of it] fled into a cave, he burnt and smothered them in it' (original parenthesis. *Ibid*.). From other contemporary accounts, the core of the conflict between the Boers and Mugombane emerges as the Trekker's demand for children as labour, and cattle[43].

In October 1854 two Boer commandos, comprising approximately 480 men, under the leadership of Commandant-Generals M.W. Pretorius and P. Potgieter tracked the Kekana to Historic Cave. The Kekana had retreated into the Makapansgat Valley in anticipation of reprisal from the Boers following the murder of trekboers at Moorddrift (See Chapter 1, section 2), Pruissen and Fonthane at the end of September. De Waal (1978: 106-115) drawing primarily from Pretorius's report sketched out the following sequence of events. The Boers arrived at the cave armed with two canons on the 25th of October. Over the next three days they repeatedly stormed the cave, but the Kekana were well-provisioned and fought back. On the 28th of October the commando sent for more gunpowder to 'blow open' the cave, which they attempted on the 30th of October. When this did not work they may have tried to smoke the Kekana out of the

[42] Chapman travelled through the interior of South Africa from Natal to Walvis Bay between 1849-1863.

[43] Khosilintse informed Moffat (November 1854) that it was on account of the Boers raiding for children and cattle that the Kekana killed nine Boers in 1854 (Moffat 1976:378). Complaints about local resistance and resultant loss of labour are common in Boer correspondence written between 1850 and 1853 (see de Waal 1978: 52-55).

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caves (*Ibid.*: 108). By early November once all their efforts to extricate the group had proved unsuccessful they tightened up the siege and decided to 'starve them out'. Paul Kruger justifies the decision in his memoirs some years later;

> Er bleef den Kommando's dus niet anders over dan de Kaffers uit to hongeren (Bredell & Grobler 1902: 29).[44]

The terrain around the cave was cleared of all foliage to prevent people creeping in and out at night. On the 6th of November Piet Potgieter was shot dead, and although different versions credit a range of different people for retrieving the body[45], Paul Kruger claimed sole credit and was accorded heroic status for the deed.

According to Pretorius's record of events the first signs that the Kekana were weakening became evident on the 6th of November when a group of women and children left the cave apparently driven by thirst. Many of these women and children died after drinking water, and those that survived were taken prisoner (De Waal 1978: 111). On the 8th of November Pretorius decided to block all the cave exits. This was executed with the help of 50 spans of oxen and 300 workers[46] (*Ibid*.). During the night over 700 men attempted to escape most of whom were shot. These men were followed by a group of women and children who were taken captive. On the 17th of November 364 women and children surrendered and over the next few days the Boers began to enter the cave to retrieve guns, powder and the property of the families murdered by the Kekana. With very little resistance coming from within the cave, the Boers decided to end the siege on the 21st of November (*Ibid*. 114-5).

Unfortunately the Kekana oral record is silent on the events that preceded and occurred during the siege. A number of other accounts written after the siege

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[44] Loosely translated –the Commando was left with no alternative but to starve the 'Kaffers' out of the cave.

[45] P.J. Marais who was at the siege made the following entry into his diary on Nov. 6th , 'Piet Potgieter killed. Paul Kruger, Hans Nel and myself carried him away from before the cave.' Orpen (1964: 255) claimed that the body was retrieved by Kgatla auxiliaries. De Vaal (1990: 141) stated that the body was removed by Paul Kruger and Manungu, Albasini's 'hoofman'. The Pretorius' report does not mention who removed the body.

[46] Probably Kgatla auxiliaries (see Hofmeyr1993: 110)

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render different versions of how and why the Kekana died (see Chapter 5), and as mentioned already (Chapter 1) and discussed in Chapter 5 the veracity of Pretorius's report has been questioned.

Years after the siege, the Valley was occupied again when impoverished Shangane-Tsonga people moved into the area from the lowveld[47] sometime after the rinderpest epidemic of the 1890s (Moore 1981:5). Slogans written on the walls of Powder Keg Cave, a fortified cave on the farm Zwartkrans, may suggest a Boer occupation during the Second South African War, and in 1905 the Ndebele Chief Johannes Kekana relocated from Sebetiela and settled in the Valley (*Ibid.*). White commercial farming and lime mining began in the area sometime between 1910 and 1914 and incorporated the local residents as labour tenants (J. Maguire 1998: 71).

3. Multiple or single occupation of the Valley?

The excavation of both Ficus Cave and Historic Cave suggested a single occupation event. The question then is whether the material evidence reflects a progressive movement by the group up into the Valley following a succession of attacks possibly executed by different assailants, or whether the data provides evidence of a widespread occupation of the Valley during the siege of 1854. The different scenarios have different implications. In the first scenario, the Kekana repeatedly took refuge in the caves near the entrance of the Valley, but after being discovered and suffering fatalities at the hands of the BaPedi and Boer commando pushed further up into the Valley to find and secure a better site. Here, drawing on previous experience, they invested a considerable amount of time in securing and preparing what is now known as Historic Cave, a site that they occupied only once during the siege of 1854.

It is unclear how the people in the lower valley caves were killed. The individuals in the three smaller caves, Cold Air Cave, Colin's II and Two Skulls Cave, may well have died from smoke inhalation, but it is unlikely that the individuals in Ficus Cave suffered this fate as the entrance to the Cave is too open and wide. They

[47] The resident Maluleke clan is Shangaan-Tsonga (J. Maguire 1998:71) and ancestral Shangaan-Tsonga graves have been identified in the Ficus Complex (Moore 1981: 5).

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were more likely to have been overrun, which may also explain the cut marks on the human bones. Rather than evidence for cannibalism, the cut marks may indicate that the individuals were stabbed and hacked to death.

The act of 'smoking' people out of caves was widely practised during the earlier part of the nineteenth century. The Ledwaba chief, Phatlhaphatlha, was purported to have been trapped by Moselekatse's warriors and burnt in a cave (Ziervogel 1959: 189; Loubser 1981: 15). The Zulu under Mpande attempted to smoke the Swazi out of the caverns in which they had taken sanctuary after a surprise attack by Mpande in July of 1852 (Bonner 1983: 62), the Swazi smoked out the Pulana[48]during the 1830s, and Chapman's diary (see section 2) indicates that it was common for the Boers to smoke groups out of caves. No doubt because it was such common practice, later renditions of the story of 'Siege of Makapan', both written and related, assumed that the Kekana were smoked to death (see Chapter 5). The strategy of placing people under siege until death by thirst or starvation seems to have been confined to the trekboers. Hunt (1931: 289) related how after the Boer Commando failed to capture the BaPedi in 1852, they encircled their stronghold and cut off their water supply. A similar pattern was followed in the siege of 1854. The slender data available on the years immediately prior to 1854 and the absence of any clear archaeological indicators precludes the possibility of distinguishing between different aggressors, and determining when the attacks occurred. One tantalising possibility that may link Andries Hendrik Potgieter with Ficus Cave is the fact that shortly after attacking Mugombane he developed a chest problem. This cave is particularly well known for an aggressive strain of *Histoplasma capsulatum* that colonises the lungs, and which if untreated would have proved fatal.

In the second scenario, as suggested by Partridge (1966), the lower part of the Makapansgat Valley was occupied during the Siege of 1854. This would imply that the Kekana were more widely spread throughout the Valley, and possibly that smaller military units were strategically placed near the entrance to the Valley.

[48] To this day the Pulana recall how they were smoked out of caves by the Swazi in the Pilgrims Rest area during the 1830s (D. Motshego pers comm. 2005)

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There is some indirect evidence to suggest that the Kekana did not enter the Valley as a single unit after they realised the Boer commando was advancing in 1854. According to Paul Kruger's[49] memoirs Potgieter's Zoutpansberg commando was attacked before the Pretorius and Potgieter commandos joined together to pursue Makapan and Mapela,

> Voor deze beide Kommando's zich met elkaar konden vereenigen, vielen de Kaffers 's snachts onverhoede het lager van Potgieter aan. Zij werden echter gelukkig teruggeslagen (Bredell & Grobler 1902: 27).[50]

This suggests that a fighting group remained outside of the Valley possibly to deter the commandos and to act as decoy for the larger Ndebele group. A similar strategy may have been adopted inside the Valley. The Kekana may have intentionally tried to draw the trekkers into the Ficus Saddle site to ambush them from the surrounding caves. However, the remains of children and infants together with adults argue against the Ficus area being occupied solely by a 'fighting' party. The evidence rather supports the possibility that a decoy group was placed in the lower reaches of the Valley to deceive the trekboers into thinking they had discovered the Valley-hide-out, thereby giving them reason to move on and find the Langa Ndebele to avenge the death of Hermanus Potgieter and his party.

Pretorius's report, however, which provided a day-by-day account of steps taken to force the Kekana to surrender, made no mention of a skirmish anywhere else in the Valley. This could suggest that the group was captured quickly and without incident so as to go unrecorded, or provide tacit support for the first scenario in which the 1854 commando was not responsible for the deaths of the individuals in these caves.

4. A symbol of resistance

The act of turning Historic Cave into a fortress and place of refuge suggests that the group were expecting to be attacked. From Boer correspondence and

[49] Who became the last President of the Republic.

[50] Loosely translated – Before the two commandos were able to join together, many 'Kaffers attacked Potgieter's laager during the night. They were fortunately repelled.

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minutes taken during a Volksraad[51] meeting in September 1852, friction between Mugombane and the trekboers was growing. The Boers reported that members of Mugombane's chiefdom were openly hostile towards the trekboers, refused to work for them[52], and were clearly setting up alliances with other Amandebele groups and arming themselves[53]. At the meeing the Boers decided to kill members of the group until such time as the Kekana began to toe the line[54]. This being the case there is a good chance that the preparation of Historic Cave began well in advance of the September 1854, and that the cave itself offers tangible evidence of the growing resistance amongst the chiefdoms in the area. An early preparation of the cave, the building of rampart walls, the erection of 'house' structures and fences, the manufacture of weapons and the preparation and storage of food further supports the speculation that the simultaneous murders of the Boers at Moorddrift, Pruissen and Fothane hill by Mankopane and Mugombane were premeditated.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, the survey of cave and related sites in the Makapansgat Valley demonstrated that Historic Cave was not the only refuge site in the Valley. Signs of conflict were evident lower down in the Valley. The excavation of both Ficus and Historic Cave presented evidence of single occupation events. The recorded histories presented two possibilities, that the remains in the lower caverns resulted from skirmishes with the BaPedi and the Boers prior to the Siege event, or that all the refuge sites in the Valley linked to the 1854 siege event. If the former was the case, then one could argue that the Kekana, following a succession of attacks, progressed up into the Valley in search of the perfect hideout. Feasibly, as tensions with the Boers increased and the alliance drew up their plans of attack, the Kekana began to turn the cave into a fortress in advance of the anticipated reprisal. Certainly the rampart walling, plastered floors, paths, walls and divisions with in Historic Cave speak of extensive planning and preparation that may have taken place over a number of months. Further, signs

[51] see especially Notule van die Volksraad van die S.A.R II, pp. 348-349.

[52] S.S.5, R539/53: P.J. Potgieter – A.W.J. Pretorius, Waterberg 28 May 1853.

[53] Notule van die Volksraad van die S.A.R II, pp. 473-475.

[54] Notule van die Volksraad van die S.A.R II, pp. 348-349.

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of activities like smelting on the hilltop, and other activities outside of the cave (See Appendix 1) may relate to preparation for battle or retreat.

From the documentary record it is clear that the cave proved impenetrable and possibly impervious to smoke. The analysis of the archaeological plant and animal remains discussed in the following Chapter provides additional evidence that the Kekana did not simply retreat into the cave without having undertaken adequate preparation.

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CHAPTER 4: Provisions

1. Introduction

A significant sample of plant material was retrieved during the excavation of Historic Cave. The sample consisted of a wide range of plant elements - seeds, leaves, roots, nuts, legume pods, flower heads and bark (see Appendix 4)[55]. The identified seeds comprised different grains, legumes, squash and fruit, which in combination with ethnographic and oral data helped to build a picture of agricultural strategies practised at the time, as well as the extent and nature of the provisions taken into the cave. Likewise the faunal remains provided information about the amount and type of available protein, but also reflected the broader principles of stock management.

2. Plant remains

The mixture of different cultivars such as maize, sorghum, pearl millet, groundnuts, cowpea, melons and cucurbits points towards the practice of mixed-cropping. Ethnographic and historical data indicate that mixed-cropping was an effective means of minimising both pest damage and the depletion of nutrients, particularly nitrogen, from the soil (Krige & Krige 1943; Schapera 1953; Mönnig 1967). Strategically the planting of more than one staple also limited the risk of

[55] This study focuses largely on the identification and interpretation of seeds, leaves and nuts. The root and bark have been set-aside for the purposes of a more thorough study on the medicinal use of plants

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crop loss due to poor rains, and allowed for 'staggered crop ripening' that extended the harvest period (Smith 2005: 47). Maize (*Zea mays*) represents a very small proportion of the identified grains (two cobs and a few seeds) from Historic Cave. This may imply that maize had yet to become a principal crop amongst the African communities in the area or that maize grain stocks were already depleted by October that year. Maize is presently the preferred crop as it has high grain yield, relatively low field tending requirements because the outer sheath provides protection from birds, and can be eaten green and thus early in the season (Krige & Krige 1943; Mönnig 1967; Harries 1994). However, documentary evidence suggests that although maize probably reached the interior by 1750 it was not adopted indiscriminately, and in some parts of the interior it was taken up later than previously imagined (Parsons 1995: 339; Boeyens 2003: 74). One of James Stuart's (Webb & Wright 2001: 377 & 382) informants interviewed in 1907 insisted that the Hlubi did not cultivate maize because they regarded mealies as medicine used in the treatment of fevers[56]. John Campbell, after visiting the Thlaping capital at Dithakong in 1820, also noted that maize was regarded as medicine and that planting crops would 'render them unclean' and cause drought (Boeyens 2003: 74). McCann (2001: 260), drawing on information recorded in the diary of French Protestant missionary, Eugene Casalis, showed that by the mid-nineteenth century in Lesotho maize was still only a minor part of the mixed cropping system, and that prior to this it served as effective refugee food, because it was available earlier in the season than sorghum and could be roasted or prepared at the milky stage (*Ibid.*: 261). It seems plausible that this was the case in Mokopane in 1854. Unfortunately, none of the other archaeological excavations in the area provide enough evidence to shed more light on the issue. Moore (1981) and Loubser (1981) do not report on plant remains, and Partridge's (1966) excavation produced only four seeds, two of which were *Zea mays.*

Much of the sorghum and millet on the floor in Dg1 was still attached to the heads of their respective plants. This is consistent with modern rural storage practices where the grain is stored in the head until it is threshed (van Wyk & Gerricke 2003: 14). Kuper (1980: 19) noted that raw grain was stored on raised platforms

[56] Sivivi 13.3.1907. File 62 nbk 84 pp.5-7 published in *The James Stuart Archive* (Webb & Wright 2001).

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outside the village; once it was threshed outside it was buried in pits in the cattle byre and then brought into the household for cooking. There was evidence in Historic Cave for grain at the different stages of preparation, and of a wide range of storage systems. A hanging basket was found on the floor in Dg1 (N1/2), as well as a collecting or storage basket (Dg1- N1), and the remains of dung bins in (M1-Floor) and Dg4 – (R21) (Fig. 2.17d&e). Two pits were dug through the floor in Dg1 (N2 & P2), one of which had a stone lid (N2) (Fig. 4.1). The dung storage bin located at the back of Dg4 was placed on top of a plastered platform. A grain store was also located towards the back of the floor in Dg2; grain, forked poles often employed as basket supports (for an example see Pistorius & Steyn 1995:73), and pieces of storage bin were recovered from here.

The many upper and lower grindstones still distributed in the cave would have been employed to process the grain by pounding and grinding it into meal. Residues of burnt starch were evident on some of the pot bases.

Today, cereals still form the main part of the diet in African society, and from ethnographic and historic data sorghum appears to have been the principal grain well into the twentieth century. Quin (1959) recorded a number of different dishes made from sorghum. These included porridge, fermented porridge or gruel, and porridge with sour milk, beans and vegetables. Porridge was considered a low status dish, while beer, made from malted sorghum (Schapera & Goodwin 1966:131), ranked as a high status dish normally associated with men and was offered to the ancestors during ceremonies (Schapera & Goodwin 1966:133; Kuper 1980: 19). It was likely that both porridge and beer would have been made during the preparation phase of the cave and may have been available during the early stage of the siege. A substantial amount of unprocessed grain was retrieved from the excavations. Sorghum, in particular, was found in large quantities on all the excavated floors. The surplus grain may indicate that the Kekana had stored sufficient grain, and/or that the demand on grain diminished as the group began to thin out, weaken and die. Equally, if one accepts that the besieged Kekana were confronted by a severe shortage of water (see Chapter 5) their ability to cook the grains to make them digestible would have been reduced.

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Figure 4.1. Stone lid (underside)

The cowpea, *Vigna unguiculta,* and mung bean, *Vigna radiata,* depending on when they were harvested may have provided a longer-term source of raw starch, but once dry they too would require cooking. Pumpkins (*Cucubita maxima*) and squash (*Lagenaria siceraria*), which could be roasted, may have provided a source of starch with no water requirements.

The entire collection of seeds recovered from Dg 2, 3 & 4 comprised grain, pumpkin and squash. Seeds or pips of fruit were limited to Dg1, even though only a sample of the seeds was analysed from this area. Thus, from the excavated plant remains there appears to have been an inequitable distribution of food. The fruit, stems and roots of *Diospyros mespiliformis*, *Anabotrys brachypetalus*, Ximenia caffra, *Englerophytum magalismontanum*, *Citrillus lanates*, *Mimusops zeyheri* and *Vangueria infausta*, and *Aloe* would have provided an important food and medicinal supplement (see for example van Wyk *et al*. 2002) for those who had access to these resources. Many of these fruits are also listed as having magical properties (see Arnold *et al.* 2002)

Some of the fruit identified from seeds may have been picked shortly before entering the cave. The Tsamma melon, *Citrillus lanates*, for example, ripens through the winter, while the berries of *Grewia monticola* begin to ripen in October. But, in most instances, the fruit would have been harvested earlier in the year and the fruit or stones stored. The Tsamma melon is a well-known source of water, and indeed is regarded as the most important source of water in the Kalahari during the dry months when no surface water is available (van Wyk & Gericke 2003: 38). Arguably if the Kekana had access to enough Tsamma melons they may have been able to survive the siege[57].

The marula also has a wide range of uses (van Wyk & Gerricke 2003). The fruit, which is an important source of vitamin C, is eaten raw, cooked together with sorghum and millet or turned into juice or beer (Shackleton *et al*. n.d..: 10). All of the recovered marula stones or pips had been opened and the kernels removed. This makes it is difficult to determine whether the fruit, or only the stones were

[57] Apparently a person can survive for six weeks on a diet of nothing but Tsamma melons (Mac Crone 1973 cited in van Wyk & Gericke 2003: 38).

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brought into the cave. The fruit of the marula tree ripens in February and therefore a fresh yield would not have been available to take into the cave. It is possible that the Kekana had fruit in store as incidences of marula fruit storage have been documented amongst the Phalaborwa (van Wyk & Gericke 2003:114), but it is just as likely that the pips or stones were stored and brought to the cave as a source of oil (Krige 1937). In order to extract the kernel, the operculum end of the pip is opened by smashing the pip between a stone hammer and anvil (Boshier 1965: 131), or against an axe, and then the kernel is prised out (Shackleton *et al.* n.d.:12). Heavy-duty stone tools, as well as two heavily pitted quartz hammer stones located in Dg1 (O2/P2-Floor) (Fig. 2.21a) may have been used for this purpose[58]. In some documented instances the nuts were boiled or heated to facilitate extraction (Shackleton *et al.* n.d.: 12). Sharp tools made from metal, bone or a thorn, especially *Acacia karoo,* were then used to extract the kernel (*Ibid.*). The iron needles (Dg1-M2&O2 RBL) (Fig. 2.11g) or the thorns of *Acacia karoo* (Fig.2.14c) may have been used to remove the kernels from the marula stones found in the cave.

Other floral elements present in abundance in the cave include the leaves of *Dombeya rotundifolia,* the *Protea* (pos. *P. caffra*) flower head (see Fig. 2.14f) and pieces of calabash, the dried fruit of *Lagenaria vulgaris. Dombeya rotundifolia* leaves are renowned as good fodder, so much so that in some areas the tree is called the 'fodder tree' (Palmer & Pitman 1961: 228). It seems fair to assume that the leaves, which appear on the trees between August and October, were collected to make provision for the livestock in the cave. These leaves, however, may have had another use; they were often found in association with storage areas where they had been 'pasted' together with a thin smear of dung. This may imply that fruit or grain was laid out on it and that it has some insect repellent properties that have yet to be documented. The function of *Protea* flower is unknown and its presence may be purely incidental; the heads may have been brought in to the cave attached to branches of the *Protea* bush or tree. *Protea* is a good fuel, and the stems and roots have medicinal properties (van Wyk *et al.* 2002: 198). The dried fruit of *Lagenaria vulgaris* are widely used as containers,

[58] Boshier (1965: 135) witnessed quartz hammer stones or *kgekgetos* being used to break open marula pips in a village just outside of Mokopane (previously Potgietersrus). He also mentioned their presence at Ficus Cave and the Cave of Hearths.

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bowls, ladles and bottles (van Wyk and Gericke 2003 :46). For example, pear shaped gourds which were often used for sour milk, ladles and spoons, were manufactured from long gourds split lengthwise, and small bottle gourds were employed as snuff boxes or other containers (Hammond-Tooke 1993: 205). Residues of white, red and blue coloured pigment, adhered to many of the pieces of calabash found on the floor on Dg1, suggesting that the bottle gourds were used to store potions. From the calabash remains it was also apparent that the calabash containers were not readily discarded, or dispensed with, as many of the pieces displayed signs of having been repaired (Fig.2.14e). Women, according to ethnographic accounts, were generally responsible for the manufacture and repair of calabash containers (Hammond-Tooke 1993: 205).

3. Faunal remains

The faunal sample comprised 812 individual pieces of bone (NISP) of which approximately 13% was unidentifiable. Of the identifiable portion of the faunal assemblage, 77% were domesticates, and the remaining 10% made up of *Equid*, *Suid*, antelope, rodents, carnivores and snake. A tooth/age count was used to estimate the minimum number (MNI) of bovid represented in the faunal collection, which provided an estimate of approximately six cattle and sheep/goat at various stages of maturity and one small antelope (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1. MNI of Bovid species based on tooth/age

Species	**Age**	**MNI**
Bos taurus	Neonate	1
	Immature	1
	Mature	1
Bovid II *Ovis/Capri*	Neonate	1
	Immature	1
	Mature	1
Bovid I	?	1
Total		**7**

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The protein diet of the Kekana may have been supplemented by the domestic fowl, *Gallus,* and their eggs, as well as by the commonly snared smaller rodents, *Pronolagus* sp. and *Procavia capensis,* However, since there is little to suggest how the rodents were killed it is possible that they were introduced into the archaeological record by non-human predators. The seashell and ostrich egg shell, snake, carnivore and *Equid* remains were more than likely to have been brought into the cave as objects used for the purposes of divination, medicine or decoration (see Chapter 8).

The different age classes of domestic cattle represented in the record are significant. Even though the sample from Historic Cave was very small, the composition of cattle remains suggested that older cattle, immature animals, and pregnant cows were taken into the Valley. The inclusion of pregnant cows, evidenced by the neonates, implies that the group may have had access to milk. Although, the stressful circumstances in the cave may have caused the cows to drop their young prematurely, if the group was consuming the cow's milk, it is likely that newborn calves would have been killed so as not to exhaust the milk supply through suckling.

Amongst the Sotho- and Nguni-speakers of southern Africa cattle were of socio-economic, ritual and political importance. They were reluctantly slaughtered as they constituted a principal form of wealth and an important medium of exchange (Schapera & Goodwin 1966:138; Hammond-Tooke 1993: 53), which reflected on a man's social standing and his ability to fulfil social obligations. Cattle were thus strategically managed in order to maintain and encourage the growth of the herd. Studies carried out by Thorp (1984) and De Wet-Bronner (1994) demonstrated that the mortality and slaughter patterns of cattle fitted within this strategic framework. Older animals, and surplus young males between the ages of 18-30 months were singled out for slaughter so as not to diminish the reproductive capability of the herd (*Ibid*.). The cattle remains excavated from Historic Cave fit within these age ranges suggesting that surplus or expedient animals were separated out from the main herd[59] and taken into the Valley as a meat supply. The main herd was dispatched to Maraba for safekeeping, but was later claimed

[59] Partridge's (1966) excavation of Ficus Cave presents a similar pattern to Historic Cave where many of the butchered animals were immature.

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by the trekboers as part of their spoils (Bredell & Grobler 1902: 29). It is impossible to say how many animals were selected for this purpose; if one assumes that the excavated animals are a representative sample (approximately one domestic animal in every four square metres) then there could have been upward of 400 cattle, sheep and goat taken into the Valley. De Waal (1978: 118) calculated that the trekboers claimed a total of 3300 cattle and 1200 small stock after the siege, but according to this tally most of the cattle belonged to the Langa Chief, Mankopane.

Many of the bones showed signs of having been cut and then processed – 10.6% of the total domesticate sample (67/627 pieces) was cut, crushed broken or split. The cut marks on the bones indicate that the animals were butchered and the meat removed from the bone. The crushed, broken or split bones suggest that bone marrow was extracted. Approximately 10% of all the bone was burnt or roasted. According to the various ethnographies meat in Sotho and Nguni societies was prepared in a number of different ways. It was commonly boiled by women, but also roasted over an open flame (Kuper 1980: 19). Men reportedly carried out the roasting of meat on ceremonial occasions (*Ibid*.). Although, the evidence for roasting meat in the cave could point towards ritual or ceremony, it more likely denotes their efforts to conserve water.

The faunal bone assemblage also provided evidence of the scavengers that lurked in and around the cave, becoming more emboldened and numerous as humans became weaker, died or abandoned the cave. Approximately 15% of the entire sample was chewed and crushed by carnivores, and/or then later gnawed by porcupine.

4. Conclusion

The food remains retrieved during the excavations of the cave showed that the Kekana did not simply retreat into the cave without having undertaken reasonable measures to store food and water. The archaeology demonstrated that a wide range of methods were employed to store grains, pulses, legumes, and squash. Surplus or expedient cattle and small stock were separated out from the main herd, in accordance with normal management strategies, to provide meat and

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milk. Fruit and various kernels, albeit limited to Dg1, showed an awareness and use of medicinal and nutritional supplements. However, the inequitable distribution of fruits, suggested that not everyone in the cave had equal access to these supplementary resources a factor that would have affected their ability to survive. This food discrimination, as discussed in the Chapters (6 & 8), may reflect the presence of a social hierarchy within the cave.

The wide range of different starches requiring different preparation techniques may have extended availability of this food group, however, the amount of grain still remaining within the site suggested that either the Kekana had a surplus of grain in store or there came a point where they could no longer prepare the grain, because they ran out of water. This issue is interrogated further in the next Chapter.

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CHAPTER 5: Human remains

"Ruim 900 lichamen leggen voor de gaten doot. Sommige door de honde en vogelen half ver teerd en sommige geheel die toen Ruim 21 dagen tot 1 dag lyken zynde, die beschouwend in de gaten zyn al der afgrijselyks hier aan. Moet Ik de eer toeswaayen aan een deel myne onderhorige die ingedrongen hebben tussen zoo een Menigte dode en half verrotte lyken die naast 3000 kan geschat worden in de onderaards duistere Kelders leggende en nog van den vyand beseten, Maar de Menschen nu de stank Moede zyn en dreng gevaren trotseerde om een einde te Maken aan dit hag lyk Werk" (Verslag van M.W. Pretorius, Magaliesberg, 6 Des. 1854)[60].

1. Introduction

The number of fatalities incurred during the siege has always been a point of contention in tales of the 'Siege of Makapan'. The scale of the massacre has been played up and down at different junctures in history. Hofmeyr (1993: 144) noted that 'The Siege' featured in anti-Boer propaganda leading up to the second South African War as means of amplifying Boer brutality. During the 1980s, on the other hand, Naidoo (1987) emerging from a school of Social or People's History, chose to play down scale of the 'massacre' arguing that the Boers exaggerated the numbers to appear more heroic and legitimise the siege from which they had made small profit. Naidoo (1987: 181) questioned the number of fatalities because, on the one hand, he believed Pretorius, who provided the only tally, had every reason to exaggerate the numbers, and on the other, the massacre did not feature in Kekana history.

> 'The adage that the first casualty of war is truth is particularly relevant to casualty figures and it is a commonplace that belligerents play down their own and exaggerate those of the enemy. In this case the African voice is silent' (Naidoo 1987: 181).

Naidoo supported his argument by pointing out that it would have been impossible to establish an exact number of deaths as their 'computation' would

[60] Loosely translated: After about 21 days 900 bodies lay outside the mouth of the cave. Dogs and birds had eaten some of the bodies while others remained intact. Conditions in the cave were horrific and my men deserve praise for entering the cave wherein approximately 3000 half-rotten corpses lay and the enemy was hidden. They endured stench and stress to bring this dreadful work to an end.

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have been hindered by poor lighting, the stench of decomposing bodies and the threat of snipers hiding deep in the cave (Ibid.). He further argued that if 2000 people were killed inside the cave an 'equally impressive' number of skeletons would have survived.

A second point of variance between the different stories of the siege concerns the way in which the Kekana died. A range of possibilities has been presented in different versions: dehydration, shooting by gun, canon fire, exploding dynamite, starvation, smoke inhalation, and disease. Although all of these together may have contributed to the demise of the Kekana, once again the authors of the various stories favour or argue against one or other explanation. Again this is done to persuade the reader of the inhumanity of the actions, to appreciate the risks taken or, to play down the event.

In Pretorius' official report the besieged either died of thirst (both in and outside of the cave), or were shot trying to escape the cave at night. Here again Naidoo (*Ibid.*:181) questioned the veracity of the official document. He cites Dart (1959: 94) who, drawing on information from a certain Mr Eitzman, suggested the possibility that water may have been available to the Kekana whilst they were trapped in the cave. Naidoo (*Ibid*.) noted two possible sources of water, the first being present in an underground passage and the second derived from water trickling down the inner walls of the caves.

The Pretorius version[61] mentioned denuding the area around the caves of the dense vegetation that obscured various shafts and allowed people to escape at night. He relates how, using an enormous work force[62], the trekboers blocked the various exits by throwing trees and rocks down into these avens. These actions reportedly had the desired effect and many women and children, driven by thirst, surrendered. Many others who tried to escape during the night were shot. Pretorius also mentioned that of those who surrendered a percentage died even though they were allowed to drink freely (De Waal 1978:111).

[61] SS 7 R733/54 Verslag van M.W. Pretorius 6 Des. 1854.

[62] Kgatla auxillaries (Hofmeyr 1993: 110) are thought to have provided this support.

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As far as I can determine, mention that wood was thrown into the cave to smoke the Kekana out was first made in the 1870s by Thomas Baines, who had heard about the siege when he passed through the area in the 1860s (Hofmeyr 1993: 142).

> '…the Boers adopted the effective but cruel expedient of bringing several hundred wagon loads of wood to the brow of the mountain, hurling them down to the foot of the cliffs in which the caves were, and then throwing fire upon the mass.' (Baines 1877: 68).

Although, De Waal (1978:108), listed this as one of many unsuccessful techniques employed by the Boers in their efforts to force a surrender - other aborted methods include storming the cave, and trying to blast it open with gunpowder (De Waal 1978:107-8) – smoke inhalation commonly appeared in later versions as the primary cause of death. Hofmeyr (1993: 301) believed that Mark Twain was talking about the Makapan incident in *More Tramps Abroad* (1897: 471) where he was told by Doctor X that after a group of 'kafirs' had taken refuge in a cave, the 'Boers blocked up the entrance and smoked them to death.'

Mason's (1988:395) proposition was somewhat more contextual. He suggested that the cave fungus disease (*Histoplasma capsulatum*) might have contributed to the heavy mortality of the Kekana in the cave. This idea is based on P. Boshoff's report that he contracted a particularly virulent strain whilst exploring a particular area of Historic Cave. Certainly the fungal lung infection caused by *Histoplasma capsulatum* or any number of bacteria may well have taken hold of individuals with compromised immune systems. However, apart from Boshoff there are no other reported cases of infection from this cave. Most of the reported cases of histoplasmosis were contracted from Ficus Cave.

2. Human Remains

It would be naïve to assume that the analysis of a small sample of archaeological material could enable an accurate reconstruction of the scale and nature of any event. In the case of Historic Cave it seems an even more futile endeavour since it is well known that bone relics of the siege have been rifled from the cave for well over 100 years. Local people speak of wagonloads of bones being removed for bone meal, skulls being removed for the purposes of study or to be placed as

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trophies on mantle pieces (J. Maguire and DeWitt pers. comm. 2003). It is reported that the cave was seen as a source of *muti* for local healers and it is not clear whether the miners used bone as a flux in the limekilns located near by. Certainly photographs taken in 1888 by H.F. Gros of both the eastern and western entrances of the cave attest to this massive loss of information. The photographs record many skulls lying on the rampart walls and pathways (Fig. 5.1 & 5.2).



Figure 5.1. The eastern entrance photographed by H.F. Gros in 1888.



Figure 5.2. The western entrance photographed by H.F. Gros in 1888

I can only attempt, through an analysis of available material, to access points of congruence or identify points of incongruence with established knowledge about the siege.

The study of the human remains from Historic Cave was carried out with the permission of the Kekana of Vaaltyn. The human remains recovered during the course of my excavations are, by agreement, to be handed over to the Kekana for burial.

2.1. Excavated material

2.1.1. Number of Individuals

Over 181 individual human skeletal pieces were retrieved during excavation of the cave (see Table 5.1 & Appendix 6). Of these only skulls, mandibles, maxilla and teeth were used to calculate the minimum number of individuals (MNI) represented. If each excavated area is regarded as being discrete 18 individuals are represented in total (see Table 5.1). However, given the close proximity of at least two of the excavated floors, and the fact that rodents may have moved many of the specimens it may be safer to eliminate overlap between the excavation sites. This provides an MNI of 15 for the combined excavations. Two other individuals were recovered from the western cavern during the course of the excavations, the first a skull of an adult female was retrieved from a porcupine lair under a low ledge, and the second, a cranium, was found on a pathway near to the western entrance of the cave.

Table 5.1. Minimum Number of Individuals and Number of Individual Skeletal Pieces found in each of the excavated areas.

Excavated area	**MNI**	**NISP**
Dg1	10	94
Dg2	2	16
Dg3	2	33
Dg4	4	38
Western cave (not excavated)	2	
Total	**20**	**181**

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2.1.2. Analysis

Only one mandible and an associated tooth, out of a total of 83 teeth, four mandibles and two maxilla, showed signs of enamel hypoplasia (Fig. 5.3). These horizontal grooves caused by deficiencies in the thickness or amount of tooth enamel can be an hereditary marker, but more often indicate episodes of acute disease, malnutrition (Larsen 1997:44) or localized trauma (Buikstra & Uberlaker 1994: 56) occurring during the initial phases of enamel formation. It is evident from the degree of dental development that the Historic Cave specimen, belongs to an individual approximately ten years of age. If the hypoplastic features were caused by malnutrition or sickness the individual would have been ill approximately four to five years prior to the cave event. This illness or lack of nourishment does not appear to have been a widespread phenomenon, as the other teeth from individuals of similar age bear no similar signs of stress. Interestingly, this finding may grant some credence to Livingstone's claim on passing through 'Mankopane's' area in 1846 that "the people are rich in cattle, and were never subject to Mozilikatze" (Schapera 1961:97).



Figure 5.3. Enamel hypoplasia visible in the mandible from Dg1 M2-GM

Many of the molars and pre-molars were heavily worn indicating the presence of grit in the diet. The worn down incisors and canines may indicate the utilization of teeth in leatherworking. According to Murphy *et al*. (2003: 628) the saliva makes the leather pliable, but the constant drawing of leather to and fro over the incisors causes them to wear uniformly. Due to the perceived 'ritual impurity' of women amongst Bantu-speaking peoples and the danger this poses to cattle, men are

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usually responsible for the manufacture of leather garments (Vogel 1983:25). The maxilla and mandible recovered from O2-GM may thus be that of an elderly male.

Caries were present in many of the adult teeth. This is consistent with a diet rich in carbohydrates and sugars (Buikstra & Ubelaker 1994: 54).

Cortices of the long bones were thick and mineralised, indicative of active lifestyle (Murphy *et al.* 2003: 628). Long bone measurements could not be taken as rodents, hyaena or dogs had damaged the ends of the bones. Indeed many of the skeletal pieces have been damaged or altered by various scavengers with varying degrees of severity (see Appendix 6). The skull of a female retrieved from under the ledge on the western side of the Western Cave, for example, had been severely damaged by porcupine - both zygomatic arches were missing and front of the maxilla gnawed.

The age of the individuals ranged from infancy to very old (50+).

2.2. Human remains in collections or on record

2.2.1. Wits University

The remains of six individuals reside in the Raymond Dart collection at Wits University (Appendix 6). Two of the individuals were naturally mummified and will be discussed separately. This collection (including the mummies) comprises a very old individual, one adolescent female, an 11 year old, and three individuals between the age of 2 & 5.

One skull and a number of long bones collected by Brian Maguire were located with the Cave of Hearths collection at Wits University. This cranium belonged to a very young individual (18 months – 2 years).

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2.2.2. University of Pretoria

Nine skeletons were reportedly taken to University of Pretoria in the 1940s[63]. These could not be located by the Pretoria Anatomy Department.

2.2.3 London College of Surgeons

Six skulls were removed from the caves and presented to the London College of Surgeons by W.L. Distant in 1892. This collection of skulls was allegedly destroyed when the museum was bombed during the Second World War in 1941. Fortunately, acquisition numbers and craniometric measurements of each skull were recorded in a catalogue. Cranial Indices, an expression in percent of the ratio of the breadth to the length of the skull (Bass 1995), were calculated for each of the skulls as a means of establishing the relative maturity of the individuals selected by Distant (Table 5.2). Adult Bantu-speaking South Africans tend to be dolichocephalic (→74.99), the female found under the western ledge, for example, had a cranial index of 70. Young children on the other hand are mesocephalic (75.00 –79.99), and become more dolichocephalic with age. The mummified child, for example, had a cranial index of 78 (Cresswell 1993:15). On the basis of this it would appear that Distant selected more mature individuals for his collection.

Table 5.2. Cranial indices recorded for the six crania removed by W.L. Distant.

Catalogue number	Cranial index Breadth x 100/length
1299 (1)	70.1
1299(2)	69.2
1299(3)	68.1
1299(4)	71.9
1299(5)	72.4
1299(6)	72.6

All of the skull remains apart from the cranium found on the pathway are consistent with the morphology of South African Bantu-speaking peoples. The

[63] This was noted in correspondence between Profs. Van Riet Lowe and Prof. L. Fouche in 1938 (Makapan No. 347. 57/38).

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pathway cranium is however extremely small and pentaganoid in shape which tends to be a Khoisan characteristic. The bone around the 'ear' is still spongy suggesting that the specimen dates to the historic period and is hence unlikely to belong to an earlier Stone Age period (R. Clarke pers. comm. 2005). Presuming then that the cranium belongs to the siege it could reflect intermarriage between Khoisan and BaTswana/AmaNdebele groups. Jenkins *et al.* (1970) recorded over 50% genetic admixture in BaTswana groups, although there was considerably less amongst the Northern AmaNdebele. The individual could also have been one of the trekboer's 'Bushmen' slaves harboured or captured by Mugombane. Johannes Augustus Breedt (Preller1920-1938: 148-150) recalled tracking fugitive 'Boesmans' to Mugombane's 'land' where he was forced to stay for a period of three days. During this time he alleged he was required to participate in a series of competitions against the Kekana. Eventually Mugombane informed Johannes that he had killed the 'Boemans' and told him to leave. On his return Johannes found out from a surviving 'Boesman' that Mugombane had killed all but a few of the females. This apparently occurred sometime before the murder of Hermanus Potgieter. Again this highlights the frontier location of this area and this society (see Chapter 1).

3. Mummies

Two near–complete human mummies, mummified rodents and a number of human and animal specimens with desiccated skin attached indicate that circumstances in the cave, or specific areas of the cave were conducive to rapid exsiccation of tissue and consequent mummification.

3.1. The process of mummification

Mummification occurs when dehydration or desiccation precedes or interrupts decomposition so that tissue, like skin, survives the decaying process. The skin becomes leathery or parchment-like (Vass 2001: 191). A number of factors determine the degree of mummification. A range of external environmental factors – temperature, humidity, anaerobic vs aerobic conditions, types of micro-organisms, insects and carnivores present (Murphy *et al*. 2003: 625), as well as, the condition of the body at the time of death play a role in the rate and nature of postmortem change (Amendt *et al*. 2004: 53).

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3.1.1. External environmental factors

Temperature and water vapour readings were taken from various positions in the cave over the period 11/9/92 to 13/9/92 (Creswell 1993: 24). From this study it became apparent that the environment inside the cave was more stable and constant than the environment around the mouth of the cave. The relative humidity ranged from 26%-47% outside the cave, but varied between 28-42% inside the cave. The average water pressure outside the cave was 0.975 ± 0.137 Kpa, while inside it was 0.875 ±0.112 Kpa. From this Cresswell (1993: 25) concluded that for the areas of the cave that measurements were taken the relatively low and constant vapour pressure would have inhibited the growth of fungi and bacteria, thereby creating conditions conducive to mummification.

Two other factors need to be noted, the lime-enriched sand in the cave possesses superior drainage qualities, which would have assisted in the rapid desiccation of the bodies, and any fires, cooking or other, within the cave would have made the atmosphere in the cave hotter and drier.

3.1.2. Post mortem change and the condition of the body

Categories of postmortem change that affect soft tissue are: autolysis, putrefaction, adipocere formation or saponification, and/or mummification through desiccation (Vas 2001: 190-1; Murphy *et al.* 2003: 625). Minutes after death the process of autolysis begins. Through the action of cellular enzymes cells begin to dissolve and release nutrient rich fluids, which are necessary for the process of putrefaction (Vass 2001: 190) The process advances more rapidly in tissues that have a high enzyme and water content. Only after sufficient cells have ruptured and have made nutrient rich fluids available, can putrefaction begin. Putrefaction involves the biodeterioration of the soft tissues through the action of micro-organisms (Vass Ibid.). However, micro-organisms too require moisture to survive and grow (Berkeley & Campbell 1985: 76; Beech 1985: 343). Desiccation thus provides a means of preventing biodeterioration (Berkeley & Campbell 1985: 76). These moisture requirements are expressed as a measure of the amount of available water (a_w).

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$$a_w = \frac{vapour\ pressure P}{pure\ water\ P_0} = \frac{relative\ humidity}{100}$$

Micro-organisms grow in the range a_w = 0.63-0.99, bacteria normally existing between 0.995 – 0.990 a_w, although staphylococci can exist below this range (Beech 1985: 343).

The internal organs and tissue of the Historic Cave mummies appeared to have undergone partial deterioration. There was no sign of any brain matter on the mummified child's C-T scans (Cresswell 1993), but desiccated tissue mass was visible in the thorax and abdomen of both individuals. This would imply a lack of sufficient water in the organs and tissue to sustain microbial activity for any length of time.

Further, it would seem that natural mummification only occurs in corpses with minimal body fat mass; only a thin person can mummify. It is for this reason that many embalming processes employ substances to break down fat or take steps physically to remove body fat[64]. It can thus be assumed that at the point of death both Historic Cave mummies would have lost any excess body fat.

Certain species of insects play an equally important role in the process of decomposition. Colonisation of the body begins immediately after death, but it has been noted that in some cases blowflies may lay eggs on the body before death (Maples & Browning 1994: 60). Usually the female blowfly will oviposit at the body orifices: eyes, ears, mouth, nose, or wounds of the corpse (Amendt *et al*. 2004: 54). The pupal casings of blowfly were present in both of the Historic Cave mummies, and blowfly larvae had perforated the skin of both individuals. Female Diptera will not, however, lay eggs in mummified or dehydrated tissue. The successful development of the eggs and larvae depends on moisture (Introna & Campobasso 2000). We can thus assume that the blowfly advanced on the two individuals fairly soon after, if not immediately on or before death.

[64] The Egyptians, for example, applied natron salt for this purpose.

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3.2. The kneeling mummy

The first of the mummies to be entered into the Raymond Dart Collection (A1081) was brought to the WITS Department of Anatomy in 1948 by a Mr Malan. The head and neck/shoulder area of the individual were missing. It appears that at the time of death the individual was kneeling, both hands clasped together in the lap, with its head bent forward - chin on chest. At some stage the dry skin at the back of the neck tore and the head, neck/shoulders and arms separated from the body. The separation occurred between the first and second thoracic vertebra. Thus, in addition to the head, all the cervical vertebrae, one of the thoracic vertebra and associated ribs, and the right scapula were missing. The arms and the right scapula were tied to the body by a Hessian rope (Fig. 5.4).



Figure 5.4. Specimen A1081

The skin is leathery and brittle, but there were a number of small holes in the skin, which was caused more than likely by blowfly larvae burrowing into the skin. The skin of the body – thorax and abdomen – and legs was extremely well preserved. The skin of the abdomen has worn away on the right side and front towards the area of the perineum, as well as in the upper section of the inner thighs. Fibrous materials, which may be exsiccated abdominal muscles, were visible through the break in the skin. There were many blow fly pupae visible in the thoracic cavity. Some exsiccated tissue was present in the body cavity but no organs were identifiable.

The legs and feet obscure the perineum underneath, and the skin was torn away in the front. No genitalia were visible.

The skin and flesh of the upper arms did not preserve so that both the left and right humerus were visible. The skin of both the forearms and hands was well preserved. There was a tear in the skin of the left wrist (anterior) extending into the palm through which carpals and metacarpals were visible. It has been noted that due to severe shrinkage the skin can split in a way that resembles an injury. These tears often occur in the areas around the neck, armpit and groin (Spitz & Fisher 1980: 23). Although the arms became separated from the body it is evident from the position of the hands and indentations left in the skin that the hands were clasped together and resting in the lap of the individual at the time of death. The right hand was folded around the left hand (Fig. 5.5).



Figure 5.5. The hands re-placed in the original clasped position

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The individual was sitting on his or her feet, so that the legs were tightly folded back under the buttocks, the right foot being secured underneath the left foot. Both feet were fully extended (Fig.5.6). Although, profound dehydration obscures the original muscle bulk, the leathery, dehydrated skin of the upper thigh has held the shape of what appears to have been a well-formed upper leg muscle (see Fig.5.4).



Figure 5.6. The underside of the mummy (A1081)

3.2.1. Digital x-rays[65]

No invasive procedures were carried out on the mummy. The mummy was x-rayed on the low dose digital x-ray machine, Statscan™. This machine, specifically designed for trauma patients, was favoured over conventional x-ray as it can scan a full body, and produces a high-resolution digital image immediately (Fig.5.7). This machine is modelled on an earlier 'Scannex' machine built by DeBeers for the purpose of scanning miners for diamonds after a day's work.

A C-arm emits a thin, fan beam of x-rays through the 0.6 or 1.0 mm wide slot, as it moves over the body of a person. The small slit width eliminates scatter and is

[65] The technical information on Statscan was provided by V. Saunders of Lodox who also x-rayed the mummy.

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Figure 5.7. Scannex

the chief reason why this x-ray emitting machine produces such a low dose of radiation. The mummy was manipulated to obtain AP and Lateral scans on the legs, pelvis, thorax and arms, separately. Approximately ten short scans were taken. The scans were set at a very high resolution, consisting of 120 micron pixel sizes or 4.2 line pairs per millimetre. Lucid™ was applied to enhance the image. Lucid™ is an enhancing software feature that produces a pre-processed "first view" image that displays both soft tissue and bone in great detail. The images were burnt onto DVD and further analyses were carried out using Aculite software (lite 3116) (Fig. 5.8.)

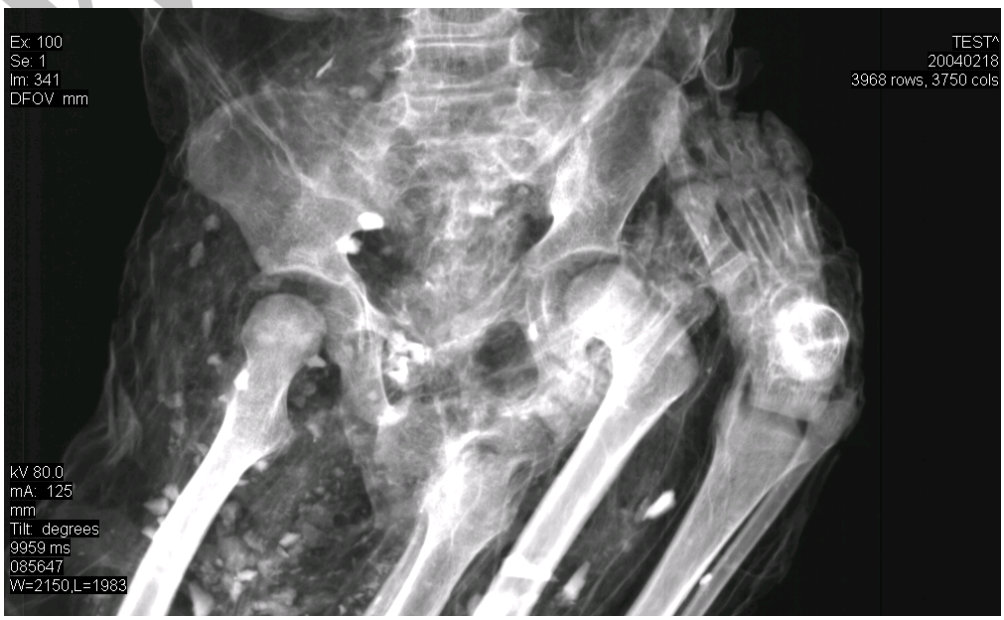


Figure 5.8. Pelvic area of the mummy - Aculite software

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Bone lengths were measured by using a "Viff viewer" and placing the cursor at the top of the bone, noting the number of pixels at that point, then moving the cursor to the end of the bone and noting that number. The two numbers were subtracted then multiplied by the binning and the pixel size. The binning refers to how many pixels are averaged per mm and is directly related to the spatial resolution. High resolution is 2.7 line pairs per mm and consists of 3x3 binning while very high resolution is 4.17 line pairs per mm or 2x2 binning. The pixel size always equals 0.06. For example: (2320-3358) x 3 x 0.06 = 186.84mm in length.

3.2.2. Results

The absence of any cranial information, coupled with the mummified nature of the individual made it extremely difficult to determine the age and stature of the individual. Certainly, the desiccated state and tightly flexed position of the body gives the impression of someone very small and therefore young.

- **Age**

Osteological or bone age of a sub-adult can be determined by examining the development and fusion of ossification centres and epiphyses (see Table 5.3). This is measured in years (with a margin of error), but may not be exactly the same as chronological age due to differences based on sex, and the socio-economic influences (Schmeling *et al.* 2000).

Table 5.3. Age estimate based on ossification and epiphyseal fusion.

Bone	**Epiphysis**	**Stage of Union Buikstra & Uberlaker (1994: 43)**	**Suggested age in years based on Buikstra & Uberlaker (1994)**	**Suggested age in years based on Bass (1995)**
Vertebrae	Primary centres	Fully fused	> 7	>7
Humerus	Head	missing		
	Distal	Partial union	≥ 9 (f) ≥11 (m)	<17
Radius	Proximal	Partial Union	≥ 12 (f) ≥ 14 (m)	14-16 (f) 15-18(m)

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	distal	open	< 16 (m)	16-17 (f) 17-19 (m)
Ulna	Proximal	Partial union		Appears at 11yrs unites by 19th year
	Distal	Partial union		17-20
Hand	Epiphyseal centres, ossification of the seamoid	Open, sesamoid present		Epiphyseal union with the distal phalanx of the thumb complete by 15th year, sesamoid appears between 10th and 15th year.
Pelvis	Iliac crest	Not clear but probable non-union	11-15 (f) 11-19 (m)	≥15
Femur	Head	Partial union	≥12 (f) ≥14 (m)	14-19
	Greater trochanter	Partial union	≥ 14	14-19
	distal	Partial union	≥ 14 (m)	14-18 (f)
Tibia	Proximal	Partial union	≥ 14 (f) ≥16 (m)	
	distal	Partial union	≥ 11(f) ≥ 14 (m)	13-18 (f)
Fibula	proximal	May be open	< 14	<14 (f) <16(m)
	distal	Partial union	≥ 11 (f) ≥ 14 (m)	11-12 (f) 14-15(m

From the analysis (see Table 5.3), the individual appears to be older than 14 but younger than 19 years of age. However, two factors suggest that the individual belongs at the younger end of the age range (14-16). First, the epiphyses of the femur head and the greater and lesser trochanter are united but trabecular activity suggests a relatively recent union (Morris pers. comm. 2004), and secondly, the epiphysis of the distal phalanx in the thumb has yet to unite.

It is difficult to determine the sex of the individual because of the overlap of the feet with the pelvis, but the general impression based on the wide sciatic notch

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and sub-pubic angle is that the individual is female (A. Morris pers. comm. 2004, V. Saunders pers. comm. 2004).

- **Stature**

A string measurement was taken of both arms and across the back in an attempt to determine the individual's arm span, as there is a 1:1 relationship between stature and arm-span length (Jarzem & Gledhill 1993). A measurement of 96 cm was calculated, but seemed unrealistic. More accurate measurements of the long-bones were obtained from the digital images. These measurements were then entered into formulae generated to estimate stature from skeletal material. Two different stature estimation formulae were applied (Table 5.4). The Genoves formula was applied to obtain a stature range from formulae based on a study of a shorter population (Bass 1995: 33).

Table 5.4. Stature estimation formulae.

	Length of long bones in cm[a]	**Genoves 1967** ***(in Bass 1995)***	**Stature range in cm**	**Trotter & Gleser 1977** ***(in Bass 1995)***	**Stature range in cm**
Radius	12.3			3.67 (12.3) + 71.79 ± 4.59	112-121
Ulna	13.1			3.31 (13.1) + 75.38 ± 4.83	114-123
Femur	21.4	2.59 (21.4) + 49.742 ± 3.816	101 - 109	2.28 (21.4) + 59.76 ± 3.41	105-112
Tibia	18.1	2.72 (18.1) + 63.781 ± 3.513	109-113	2.45 (18.1) +72.65 ± 3.70	113-121
All bones		- 8.66 (12.3) + 7.37 (13.1) + 1.25 (18.1) + 0.93 (21.4) + 96.674 ± 2.812	126-132		

[a] measurements taken from digital x-ray images

The long-bones of the arms provide a greater estimate of stature, than the long-bones of the legs, but the calculation incorporating all the long-bone measurements provided the most feasible stature range (126 – 132 cm) given the osteological age of the individual.

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- **health**

Even though, when alive, the mummy appears to have been a particularly petite individual there was no indication that this was the result of poor nourishment or illness. No degenerative alterations of the skeleton were apparent from the x-ray. Indeed, the individual appears to have enjoyed a fairly healthy lifestyle before entering the cave.

3.2.3. Cause of death

I think it is fair to assume from the fairly relaxed upright position of the mummy that the individual probably fell asleep and/or slipped into a coma and then died. At least two of the suggested causes could have brought about this manner of death.

- **Smoke inhalation**

A forensic fire inspector inspected historic cave and adjoining caverns during October 2002. In her opinion the prospect of the caves filling up with smoke was highly unlikely. The roof of the cave is too high and there is a significant movement of air between the two main entrances. We know that the Boers were unable to block up either of the main cave entrances. Smoke may have become trapped in pockets within the caves or closed off shafts. However, the relaxed sitting position of the mummy is not consistent with choking or coughing associated with smoke inhalation. It is also possible that she fell victim to carbon monoxide poisoning from wood smoke - a well-known silent killer where there is no perceptible warning smell. However, the presence of intoxicating smoke in the cave as well as in the naso-pharynx and lungs of the individual would have curtailed insect activity. This does not fit with the overwhelming presence of blowfly pupae, which appear to have been active at the time of death.

- **Severe dehydration.**

Dehydration involves the loss of total body water. About two thirds of our body's fluid resides within its cells the other one-third is extracellular (interstitial and intervascular). Fluid is lost on a daily basis through stools, urine, sweat and breath. This fluid is drawn from intervascular space. When water from the intervascular spaces is not replenished there is a drop in intervascular volume which results in a significant drop in blood pressure. As the blood thickens the

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heart becomes strained and eventually is unable to pump sufficient blood to the brain. At this point the body enters hypovolemic shock and without treatment the person will become unconscious (http:// tkdtutor.com /11Training /dehydration.htm. 6/17/2004). This occurs after a loss of between15-20% of total body water.

A second consequence of severe dehydration is hypernatremia. Here the disruption in the water balance causes an increase in the serum sodium concentration and results in electrolyte disorder and cellular dehydration (Adrogue & Madias 2000: 1493). In extreme cases brain shrinkage occurs, followed by vascular rupture, cerebral bleeding, brain damage and death. Typical symptoms include muscle weakness, confusion and coma. Convulsions are absent in cases of hypernatremia, but occur in cases of aggressive rehydration (*Ibid*. 1493-4), i.e. when rehydration occurs too quickly it can result in heart failure and or cerebral odema, which can lead to coma, convulsions and death. The relaxed position of the body is consistent with the state of unconsciousness brought about by severe dehydration. Also, it should be highlighted that the phenomena recorded by Pretorius of women and children dying after they drank water is explained by the fact that rapid re-hydration results in death (cf. De Waal 1978: 111).

Dehydration may have been promoted further by a sudden shift in diet. Once water became scarce and starch could not be cooked the group would have increased their protein intake. A sudden shift from a high carbohydrate to low carbohydrate diet would have promoted the loss of water and sodium from the body. In addition, the consequent emphasis on protein would have placed an extra solute load on the kidneys causing an increase in excretion of urinary water (Special Committee on Nutrition 1974). Further, a change from a starch-based diet to a more protein-enriched diet would have placed an additional burden on the kidney and liver function (St. Jeor *et al* 2001: 1873) producing discomfort and fatigue (*Ibid.:* 1871). Thus, dehydration promoted by a low carbohydrate diet, and sustained and intensified through continued lack of water, would not only have caused death, it would also have precipitated the dehydration of internal tissues and organs of the individuals in the cave to a degree that is consistent with the level of desiccation required for natural mummification to take place.

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It is possible that this individual died towards the end of the siege or at a point when those still alive were to weak to notice she was dead or unable place the body in a traditional burial position (see for example Eiselen and Schapera 1966:248).

3.3. Mummified child

The desiccated body of a child was removed by Dr Wium from the Historic Caves in March 1991. In a report submitted by Dr Wium in 1992 the mummy was described as "lying supine with the head flexed, hips flexed and knees flexed so as to adopt a foetal position. The head and legs were resting on rocks while the trunk was partially buried in loose soil. It was noted at the time that the mandible was detached from the body and was lying nearby. After carefully displacing the surrounding sand and lifting the mummy, it was observed that the dorsum had been eroded away, and that a few vertebral bodies and ribs were lying in the soil. These were recovered. The conditions in the cave at the time were cool and dry and the mummy was lying in a relatively inaccessible yet well ventilated area of the cave" (Wium 1992). During 1992 the exsiccated right forearm of the child was discovered by school children and removed and reunited with the rest of the body by Dr Richard Rayner. Dr Rayner and I photographed the mummy in 1992 (Fig. 5.9). Thereafter the mummy was studied by Mark Cresswell (1993) and then taken from him and placed in the Dart collection (Cresswell & McKee, pers comm.) but no acquisition number was given or logged at the time. There is thus no record of the mummy and I was unable to locate it in the Dart collection to re-examine it. I did manage to locate Cresswell's report, and the x-rays and CT-scans carried out by Cresswell during the study. Cresswell's (1993) report and my reappraisal of the x-rays are summarized in Table 5.5.

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Figure 5.9. Mummified child as photographed in 1992

The estimated length of this mummy based on a string measurement was 780mm (Cresswell 1993: 19), the size equivalent of a one year old. However, the skeletal development indicated that the child was probably around 3-4 years of age at the time of death (see Table 5.5). There were no observable external genitalia, and because the child was pre-pubertal it is not possible to say whether the individual was male or female (*Ibid*.)

The skeleton of the mummified child appeared to be well mineralized and there were no signs of growth arrest lines. This individual, like its kneeling counterpart, appeared to have been healthy on entering the cave.

It is apparent that the child was placed in a customary foetal position and some attempt had been made to conceal or bury the body. The presence of blowfly in and around the child indicated that its grave was very shallow as most Diptera are not found on bodies buried deeper than 30cm (Amendt *et al.* 2004: 54), or that it was buried after it desiccated.

It is impossible to determine cause of death. The child died at a time when there were people still able to bury it, albeit inadequately.

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Table 5.5. Analysis of and projected bone age of the mummified child from Historic Cave

Element		**Epiphysis & Ossification**	**Stage of Union or development Buikstra & Uberlaker (1994)**	**Suggested age in years based on Buikstra & Uberlaker (1994)**	**Suggested age in years based on Williams *et al* (1989)**	**Suggested age in years based on Greulich & Pyle (1959)**	**Suggested age in years based on Bass (1995)**
Cranium		Anterior fontanel	Closed, but not well mineralised				
Mandible:	Deciduous molars All eight are present		Root length of the deciduous molars are ¾ - complete. Apex is still open in all the deciduous molars.	3 ± 12 mos			3 ± 12 mos
	Permanent molar		crown complete				By 2yrs ± 8mos
.	Deciduous canines		Missing				
	Permanent canines		Poorly formed				
	Deciduous Incisors						
	Permanent Incisors		Crown three distinct mamelons				
Frontal & maxillary sinuses		absent			≤ 5		

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Vertebrae:	Cervical		Incomplete fusion of the points of ossification				
	thoracic	Neural arches	Unfused				
	lumbar	neural arch and the centrum	Unfused	< 6			<7
humerus		medial	Ossified				Birth - 5
radius		distal	Open				≤5
carpals		Capitate and hamate well formed; triquetral & lunate slightly calcified				Betw 3-4	
phalange		medial	Open			Betw 3-4	
pelvis		ilium, pubis and ischium	Open				

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4. Conclusion

While it is quite possible that a number of factors contributed to the death of individuals in the cave, there is some evidence that at least one individual died from dehydration. Additionally the presence of both mummified people and animals further implies dry cave conditions. From my own experience, the roof and walls drip after heavy and prolonged rainfall and the cave becomes fairly humid. However, during the dry season there is no available water in the cave. A recent carbon isotope and anatomical analysis of two *Breonadia salicina* trees from the Limpopo Province indicated that conditions around 1850 were particularly dry (Norström *et al*. 2005: 167). The actual date of the drought and its impact was captured in the oral testimony of Johana Smits (Preller 1920-1938: 114), who clearly remembered 1853 as the year that almost killed them. She recalled how scarce food was, and that due to the drought the price of corn was prohibitive. It would thus seem likely that during October of 1854 the cave was dry.

It is impossible to establish whether there is any truth to Pretorius's claim that over three thousand people died during the siege. It is however, tempting to play around with the available numbers - a minimum of 15 individuals was recovered from the 28m^2 excavation. This provides an average of about one person per 2 m^2. If we multiply this over an area of 1200 m^2 it provides conservative estimate of roughly 600 individuals, a far cry from 3000. The distribution of bodies around the floor may however have been uneven, and many skeletal remains are known to have been removed from the cave, which may tempt one to revise the number upwards.

The analysis of the human remains does however provide support for a number of other elements in the official document:

- people died of thirst,
- severely dehydrated individuals who drank too quickly once out of the cave may well have died from heart failure or cerebral edema,
- the corpses and carcasses were heavily scavenged by a variety of scavengers including dogs,

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- resistance would have dwindled as people became weaker, less coherent and incapable of resisting.

Finally, the evidence of death and suffering conveyed through the human remains cannot and should not be played down. The numbers may have been trumped up (one hopes) but the tragedy of the siege cannot be denied.

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CHAPTER 6: Space and Status

1. Introduction

The physical[66] and historical matrix of the cave provided a unique opportunity to access the material culture and social organisation of the besieged Kekana. Lack of evidence for earlier or later occupation of the cave created the potential to analyse aspects of this particular society at a moment in time. Although there was evidence that objects had been removed from the cave, the spatial relationships between objects, coupled with, in one instance, roof collapse contributed to the integrity of the archaeological context.

Based on this I would like to advance two propositions. The first is that, even though the circumstances around the occupation of the cave were abnormal, because time was spent planning and organising the interior of the cave, the layout of the households and floors within the cave would have been informed and influenced by the same principles and logic that would normally regulate the organisation and layout of a settlement. Secondly, as suggested by studies of other refuge situations (S. Hall 1995), the rules that govern 'normal behaviour' may have been even more rigorously applied than under normal circumstances *(Ibid*.). The sites of refuge may thus provide a fairly accurate replication of social structures and practices that operated outside of the refuge situation.

[66] The highly alkaline deposits have allowed for the exceptional preservation of plant, animal and human material.

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2. Space

2.1. Time, space and structure

Studies of twentieth century settlements have demonstrated a relationship between the physical layout of the settlement, the society's belief system and the socio-economic and political circumstances of the time (Kuper 1980, 1982; see Hofmeyr 1993 and Reid *et al* 1997 for different responses to colonialism for example). Kuper's (1980) seminal paper on the 'symbolic dimensions of the southern Bantu homestead' in particular profoundly influenced the way that anthropologists and archaeologists began to look at the use of space and the spatial layout of ancient and modern settlements and households (see for example, Huffman 1982, 2001; Evers 1988; Pistorius 1992; Hammond-Tooke 1993:56; S. Hall 1998). In some archaeological circles these recognised settlement patterns have been projected into the past and used to infer the existence of the belief system they embody (see for example, Huffman's 2001 argument for bride wealth in the Early Iron Age)[67]. In other circles, drawing on the works of Bourdieu and Giddens, researchers regard space and time as important constituents of action or behaviour (Lane 1993: 198; Martin Hall 1992). This approach moves beyond the limitations of a static semiotic system, to the study of discourse that assumes that artefacts and the space they occupy are part of a social dialogue in which people 'create and re-create' themselves and one another (Martin Hall 1992: 376; 396). By factoring in historical context, these studies take cognisance of the fact that people manipulate their 'symbolic framework' to mediate, resist, respond to, or contest power relations (see Martin Hall 1992 and Simon Hall 1998).

The material cultural remains from Historic Cave must be seen as part of a highly complex set of socio-economic circumstances playing out within a politically charged landscape. By the 1800s the area to the north had become a frontier of interaction. Oral traditions extending back to the mid-17th century plot the origins, migration and fission of dominant lineages (chiefly houses) and record an

[67] Many have criticized this approach for presenting material culture and associated belief systems as fossilized and unchanging (see for example, Thomas. 1996), for uncritical use and applications of ethnographic stereotypes (see for example Hall, M 1984), and idealized models (Lane 1998).

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increasing intensity of interaction between indigenous peoples, trading centres along the east coast and then with traders, settlers and missionaries advancing northwards from the Cape (see Chapter 1). Various forms of political and economic control were sought and resisted, with different measures of success. The siege event is a direct consequence of these linked processes of interaction and conflict, and as such constitutes a unique record of this opaque period of South African history.

2.2 Symbolic space

Kuper (1980), drawing on the work of a range of ethnographers, argued that despite superficial variations Nguni and Sotho-Tswana homesteads and dwellings shared the same basic spatial idiom. Applying a Levi-Straussian, structuralist model he observed that the Nguni homestead was ordered diametrically (up/down, left/right) and concentrically (inner/outer). Thus, for example, the *Indlunkulu* or Great Hut was most often situated at the top of the homestead and the highest ranking wives would occupy positions to the left or right of it, while a centre/outside opposition functioned to distinguish between relatives and spouses (*Ibid*.:1). Wives would be usually situated diametrically opposite (up/down) to the bachelor's quarters (*Ibid.* 13). Generally speaking the cattle byre or *sibaya* marked the centre of the settlement, and was considered a male space (*Ibid*. : 17).

The space within each dwelling was also regarded as diametrically ordered. A raised sacred area at the back of the hut was associated with the ancestors (*Ibid*.: 11-14), and the left/right position assumed by a male or female within the hut determined and reflected their gender and status (*Ibid*.).

Kuper (1980: 16-17) presented a similar analysis of the Pedi homestead drawing primarily on the work of Mönnig. The Pedi, who he felt characterised the Sotho-Tswana, displayed similar structural divisions; a principal homestead divided to some degree into superior or inferior wings. (*Ibid:* 17). Unlike the Nguni settlement pattern, however, the Sotho-Tswana settlement was not focussed on the cattle byre but rather on the male assembly area or *kgotla.* Kuper did not regard the displacement of the cattle-byre as problematic because both were male areas.

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Further, Kuper (1980) observed that the layout of the homestead was open to manipulation and that diviners often intentionally inverted the layout of their homesteads. This homestead would be approached from above instead of below, and the diviner's hut would be completely screened by a fence that functioned as a symbolic boundary to provide protection against witchcraft, especially in Nguni households (*Ibid*.:18; Hammond-Tooke 1993: 58).

Kuper's work (1980; 1982) went a long way toward elucidating underlying conceptual structures, or imbedded knowledge that formed part of the social framework of southern African societies. Likewise it highlighted the figurative and symbolic nature of their physical world, and the way in which it reflected its social hierarchy, and reinforced social relationships and status. His structuralist approach, however, elevated the meaning of the codes and patterns to deterministic, timeless universals setting them out as 'universal principals' which avoided rather then entertained the issue of 'contextuality of meaning' (Preucel & Hodder 1996: 308).

Simon Hall (1998), made use of Kuper's observations within a different paradigm. Through a comparison of early pre-1700 Tswana house floors with later eighteenth century floors he showed how gender relations and associated structures were not fixed or timeless, but in a state of 'perpetual negotiation'. He revealed how features clearly visible on the early floors were no longer apparent on the later floors. He established that this loss of floor detail coincided with a change in the spatial configuration of the household and settlement (*Ibid*. :240-2). The early floors had raised platforms or apses at the back of the hut, a sunken wooden mortar associated with sorghum and millet and a fire bowl on the left, and a bench to the right (*Ibid.*: 241). The features on these floors corresponded with the left/right female/male dichotomy. In the later settlements cooking and storage areas moved out of the hut to the front and back of the courtyard respectively. Hall *(Ibid.*: 245) interpreted the change in configuration as signifying a change in the organisation of male and female labour. The highly compact early floors suggested a 'close knit symmetry' in which gendered 'loci' interfaced directly (*Ibid*: 242). This close 'juxtaposition of boundaries' was sufficient to mediate the pollution threat that women posed to men, thereby ensuring the safe

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transformation of food (I*bid*.:241). As this domestic space became more fragmented and defined by walls, female and male labour became more defined, and female labour in particular more managed and controlled *(Ibid.*: 246-8). This spatial elaboration occurred during a period of increasing military and socio-economic tension, coupled with an agglomeration of homesteads, factors that Hall (*Ibid*.) argued resulted in an intensification of female labour, particularly agricultural labour, and a concomitant need to control their work (*Ibid*.).

Although, a dedicated study of Nguni floor space has yet to be carried out, studies of Ledwaba (Loubser 1980) and Ndzunza (Schoeman 1997) Ndebele settlements demonstrated a similar change in house form over time. Loubser (1980) illustrated a progression from an earlier more intimate arrangement of beehive huts to larger aggregations of cone-on-cylinder homesteads. Later households were depicted as having an external cooking and storage area. Schoeman (1997) also observed that the Ndzundza's relocation from Kwa-Maza to Eskunjini was accompanied by a shift from beehive to semi-plastered structures and a loss in floor detail. Like the Sotho-Tswana counterpart the Ndebele appear to have undergone a similar shift in spatial idiom, except that they also lost the shape and structure of the bee-hive, which has since become synonymous with Zulu identity. The loss of house identity may have been caused by a number of factors. First, it may have gradually disappeared with the attrition of Nguni mothers and sisters and simultaneous increase in Sotho–Tswana wives through exogamous marriage alliances. Secondly, the marked increase in Sotho-Tswana sub-headmen and groups that became subsumed under the Ndebele chiefdom, by agreement or subjugation (Jackson n.d. 126), especially from the eighteenth century onwards, may have resulted in a strategic blurring of boundaries to present a unified identity.

2.3. Spatial organisation within Historic Cave

The general orientation of the 'households' in the Eastern Cavern corresponds with the spatial organisation of normal homesteads in that they were built on a slope facing downwards (Huffman 1988: 6; Hammond-Tooke 1993: 58). Although status was often expressed through physical height (Huffman 1988) in this case the highest point was also the most exposed so that status households would have been relocated to more protected areas, an attribute that 'height' would

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normally confer. Armed soldiers more likely occupied the highest point at the mouth of the cavern. The cattle byre, through the presence of dung, is thought to be located in the lower western cavern. Young herd-boys may have occupied the smaller, occupation areas associated with the stock in the lower western cave.

The Dg1 floor was constructed in the lowest most protected area of the eastern cavern, and a fence that enclosed the occupation area granted further shelter. Fences, like the 'height' of the homestead, also symbolised status. According to Krige (1936: 253), a special fence surrounded the huts of the king's wives, and the king's hut had its own special enclosure. This 'special' feature is accorded greater time depth in the accounts of earlier travellers. A note made by Bleek in his diary in 1856 (Spohr 1965), during his travels in the interior of Kwa-Zulu Natal, recorded how he located the royal hut:

> 'I went up until I found a large hut with a special fence around it' (Spohr 1965: 54)

Campbell's unpublished illustrations (1820) indicated that a fairly high fence obscured the chiefly household at Kaditshwene (Boeyens 1998: 293), and Lichtenstein (1928: 3776) made an observation that the boundary between the principal houses and ordinary dwellings was clearly demarcated within the Batlapin town that he visited in the early 1800s.

Further, there is some indication that status huts contained more elaborate floors. Boeyens (1998: 207) noted that Kay's 1834 description of an elaborate hut floor with multiple compartments and two fire pits was not at all common at Kaditshwene. He argued that it was possible that more complex hut forms signified status, and that the complexity of the hut form more than the size of the hut provided an indication of social position (*Ibid.* 207-8). Krige (1936: 45-6), in her study of the Zulu hut, emphasised the amount of time involved in the manufacture and upkeep of a floor[68], as well as the importance of making it as attractive as possible. She also alluded to the status attached to an impressive floor. From the general survey of the cave and the excavations, Dg1 was the most complex hut floor in the context of Historic Cave.

[68] According to Krige (1936: 45-6) 'the floor is made of a mixture of ant-heap and clay, and is beaten hard with stones, after which the surface is made smooth. Two or three times a week this surface is smoothed over with cow dung which, by hard rubbing with a smooth stone now and then, is kept in a very good condition'.

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As was the case in ethnographic examples and other archaeological case studies described in section 2.2 of this Chapter, a number of features were moulded or incorporated into the Historic Cave floor. There may at one stage have been two fire pits if the N3 feature was a fire pit. This round feature was situated on a platform delineated by a low curb. Whatever the intended function, this area (M/N3) ultimately became the preserve of a diviner (see Chapter 8). It is possible that the diviner intentionally shifted the fire pit to disrupt and invert the 'left–right' gendered layout of floor (cf. Kuper 1980). Either way, the presence of diviner need not be inconsistent with the interpretation of the floor being that of a chiefly household. Indeed, the diviner may have been the Chief or a member of the royal family. The chief would perform rites on behalf of the group, but he would also employ a celebrated diviner to carry out rites on behalf of the 'tribe' (Schapera 1969: 159; 1971: 60 see also Chapter 8). The fence then would have had the dual function of designating status and acting as a symbolic boundary to provide protection against spying and witchcraft.

In light of the evidence that Dg1 may have been a status living area, the apse or platform that ran along the back of the wall in Dg1 takes on particular significance. Many ethnographers have commented on the importance of the apse or platform at the back of the hut. This was regarded as the most important and sacred part of every hut where the ancestral spirits were thought to dwell (Krige 1936: 46). Amongst the Zulu, this platform was known as the *umsamo* and was defined by a border or *umbundu* (Krige 1936: 46). Pots and utensils were commonly stored on this platform, but the *umsamo* of the chief's hut would hold other valuables (*Ibid.*) like ancestral spears (Berglund 1976: 102-103) and private storage pots (Huffman 1988: 5). The back part of the chief's hut was regarded as especially important as this was where offerings to the important guardian spirits were made (Krige 1936: 46). The platform or apse at the back of Dg1 housed a range of storage baskets, utensils, spears and pots. These objects should arguably be granted a measure of ancestral or heirloom status through the 'sacred' context in which they were found. Additionally, the numerous different grain stores associated with this floor may also reflect power and prestige. Parsons (1995: 339) refering to the Kgabo-Kwena, noted that size of a chiefs 'grain basket was an essential public indicator of his power and prestige as a chief, lineage head, and household head'.

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The other households on the eastern 'terrace' were circumscribed by low, stonewalls. The floors were fairly featureless and not plastered. Nevertheless the positioning of items of material culture provided insight into how the space was used. In each case there was a sleeping area, a food preparation and a storage area. Apart from the absence of a cooking area these spaces were condensed versions of the normal household. The people on the terraces had a private store, but participated in communal cooking. This would not have been considered atypical behaviour. A women's grain store was considered her own property so that grain could only be removed with her permission (Comaroff & Comaroff 1991: 133). However, it was perfectly acceptable for wives to contribute to a communal cooking pot (*Ibid.*)

The visible and communal activities of the terrace dwellers, as opposed to the contained and concealed activities of the chiefly household mirrored the physical/spiritual boundaries of the normal settlement. Concealment reinforced status and importance of the elite and their associated ancestors, and rationalised the need for physical and spiritual protection against polluting or negative forces. The elaborate Dg1 hut floor further reinforced the social standing of the group living at the base of the eastern side of Historic Cave

3. Status and gender

The landscape during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was dynamic and constantly transforming, stimulated primarily by the contradicting processes of centralisation and decentralisation (Comaroff & Comaroff 1991: 150), of agglomeration and fission of dominant lineages (Delius 1983:12). Agglomeration was accompanied by growth in the size of the polities, expansion in the political power of chiefly households, and their military power and prowess. Linked to this process, I would argue, the trappings or material expression of status became exaggerated, and categories or positions held by people within the society more elaborated.

One aspect of this phenomenon was explored in the work of Hanretta (1998: 399), who argued that the militarisation of Zulu society created a means by which Zulu women could obtain a measure of social status and power, and consequently the material and cultural conditions of women during the early

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1800s became highly stratified (*Ibid*.: 390-401). The development of the *amaButho* system, for example, and the posting of representatives, often royal females, at widely spread military stations as the king's representatives granted women, even if only women of status, a means with which to increase their own power (*Ibid*.: 399). There is also some indication that the male *amaButho* contributed to 'women's' fieldwork during harvest (Hanretta 1998: 401)[69]. This was not limited to the Nguni of Kwa-Zulu Natal. It was alleged, for example, that Mmatshipi, Maraba's first wife, represented his interest at one of his satellite settlements (Loubser 1981: 17).

Simon Hall's (1998) interpretation of the change in floor and household space over time rested on the assumption that, political and social organization was dependent on surplus female labour at the level of the homestead. He thus assumed that increase growing military tension and the withdrawal of the male contribution to agriculture during the latter part of the 1700s created a greater demand for female labour and necessitated greater control measures to manage it (S. Hall 1989: 247). However, it is equally plausible that the agglomeration of Sotho/Tswana wards, coupled with the growing absence of men, necessitated the appointment of royal females to positions of power particularly over agricultural labour. This possibility at least warrants further attention. Certainly elsewhere different developments and dynamics were at work. In the Zulu example discussed by Hanretta the emergent hierarchical system 'opened up' the gender system, and disrupted gender duality (Hanretta 1998: 399) by increasing female control over the socio-economic unit. If a similar argument is brought to bear on the Sotho/Tswana zone then the 'spatial elaboration' of the post-1700AD homesteads could be seen to symbolise a shift in relations, from a more balanced and closely mediated set of male-female relationships, to a more complex social hierarchy that elevated the position of some females over certain males of sub-ordinate groups and granted females greater control over female labour.

Furthermore, it would appear that more elaborate house forms and hut floors existed alongside the featureless forms post-1700AD, as observed by Boeyens (1998) at Kaditswene and as is apparent from Historic Cave. The more

[69] Hanretta 1998 cites Delegorgue

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complicated individual house forms appeared to correlate with status or royal households and lack of detail with lower status household. It is possible then that the floors, which were manufactured and maintained by women, reinforced the difference between status and non-status females, and in particular royal and foreigner households.

4. Reflecting on the cave

This Chapter moved beyond the spatial confines of the cave to reflect on the complexity of the broader social landscape. However, these insights bring to light some important issues about the social dynamics within the cave. The presence of different house forms, albeit from a fairly limited excavation, suggest a social hierarchy, which typically would have comprised a royal core with 'foreign' wives[70], as well as other lower ranking 'foreign' subjects of the chief (see Chapter 1; Jackson n.d.: 126-7; Comaroff & Comaroff 1991: 130,139,152; Pistorius 1992: 48). We possess little detailed information about the structure of the Kekana chiefdom, but there are a few indications in the historic records that they may have been entering an expansive and incorporative phase at this time. We know that they paid tribute to the BaPedi chief, Thulare, in the early 1800s, and may have been regarded as subordinate to Sekwati, Thulare's successor. The Ndebele chief, Sebetiela, presumably equal in status to Sekwati requested assistance from the BaPedi to force Mugombane to accept his authority, and even a gift of twelve wives from Mugombane to Sekwati did not stop the attacks (De Waal 1978: 4). During the 1850s Mugombane seemed to have repaired his relationship with Sebetiela, because together with the Langa chief, Mankopane they formed an alliance against the trekboers[71]. Mention of other ties are hinted at in other ethnographies, Trekker correspondence and oral histories. Mugombane's rule extended at least to Sefakaolo, which was governed by one his headmen, Lekalakala (Jackson n.d. 20-1). There is also some indication that the Lebelelo were once subject to Mugombane (Jackson n.d. :126), Sambok (BaKgatla?) took refuge with Mugombane in 1851[72] and according to Johannes

[70] The Ndebele are exogamous.

[71] Notule van die Volksraad van die S.A.R.II V.R. 337/53. Verslag van de Kommandant Generaal P.J. Potgieter van zyne verrigtingen zedert zyne aanstelling to den 19 September 1853.

[72] S.S. R245/51 H.B. Klopper – A.W.J. Pretorius, Apen river, 2 March 1851.

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Augustus Breedt (Preller 1925: 142), Mugombane hid and may have harboured the Trekker's 'Boesman' slaves or taken in the females as vassals of his own.

I wish to flag the notion of 'foreign' as I believe it raises the possibility that the individuals within the cave would not all have shared the same sense of allegiance and/or obligation toward Mugombane or the chiefdom, and conversely that the 'foreigners' may have been blamed for the predicament of the royal lineage.

If we accept that the chief survived the siege without being captured then it must be assumed that he was smuggled out before the trekboers blocked all cave exits, that is to say within the first twelve days of the siege. The core of the royal party would then have comprised female relatives, wives, daughters and younger and older males.

The existence of a marked social hierarchy would have led to differential access to resources. The archaeological remains supports this hypothesis, in that members of the chiefly household appear to have been afforded greater physical and spiritual protection, and access to more food and medicine (see Chapter 4 & 8). This social inequality may have been further reinforced through beliefs about food, which determine rights of access and refusal. Milk of cows and goats, for example, was generally regarded as an important item of food (Schapera & Goodwin 1966: 132), but amongst the Nguni it was considered a status food and vied with the cereals as principal staple (*Ibid.*). Krige (1936: 55) recorded that *amasi* or curds of milk was the 'mainstay' of the Zulu diet, and that most of their dishes comprised a mixture of the *amasi* with different vegetables. In accordance with its status there were fairly strict social rules governing who was or was not allowed to drink milk (Schapera & Goodwin 1966: 132). Kuper (1980:19) noted that amongst the Zulu, new wives, visitors and affines were not permitted to drink milk, while Schapera & Goodwin (1966: 132) discovered that women could not drink milk when they are ritually unclean, menstruating, lactating or newly widowed. On the death of his mother, Tshaka is said to have forbidden the drinking of milk. According to an informant[73], 'Ordinary people ate *incumbe porridge, which is ground for children. The calves were fit to burst,* there was so

[73] Ngidi 13.8.1904. File 61, nbk.39, pp. 1-5. The James Stuart Archive.

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much milk*. The country was destroyed; it was destroyed by lack of food'* (Webb & Wright 2001: 36 original italics).

It is not possible to ascertain whether the Kekana Ndebele would have strictly enforced the rules pertaining to the eating and drinking of milk. Milk is not ascribed the same status in the Sotho world, and thus through constant interaction and marriage with Sotho/Tswana women these rules may have been relaxed or even rendered redundant. However, if these beliefs survived there is a strong possibility that they would have been strictly enforced in the cave, especially after members of the refugees began to weaken and die, as ritual observances were generally enforced during period of misfortune and death in order to appease the ancestors (see Chapter 9, Hammond-Tooke 1993:159-68; Eiselen & Schapera 1966: 254).

If the rules around milk drinking were enforced while the group were besieged in the cave a spectrum of women, visitors and low-status individuals may have been denied access to an important source of liquid. However, it is difficult to ascertain how long the animals would have been able to sustain a milk supply in the absence of water. Other prohibitions around food may have had a similar impact on women in the cave; Schapera & Goodwin (1966: 137) noted that women may not eat domestic animals that have aborted or died while calving, or hen's eggs. The meat of poultry, however, was thought of as women's food (*Ibid.*).

As circumstances in the cave became more pressing, tensions originating from this inequality and difference may have open up elisions within the society and widened the divisions between the different components of the chiefdom. Fault lines may have appeared in socio -economic relationships that normally held the chiefdom together, and growing suspicion, resentment and blame may have resulted in the early weakening and physical collapse of the besieged, who by all accounts outnumbered the Boer Commando.

Pretorius' report provides some indication of this social dissension. Twelve days after being placed under siege the first group of women and children burst out of the cave, in an advanced stage of dehydration. Two nights later a large group of over 700 men stormed out of the cave followed by women and children. Over the

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next ten days small groups and individuals continued to abandon the cave, until finally after being trapped for 24 days 364 women and children handed themselves over to the commando (De Waal 1978:114). The fact that one group of women and children became severely dehydrated within the first twelve days but another managed to survive for double this length of time lends credence to the proposition that certain women and children had access to more water and possibly milk than others (see Chapter 4). This being the case, it was most probably the 'foreign' or lower ranking members of the chiefdom that would have been forced to surrender early. Real division in the ranks may have occurred on the 14th day when the large group of men stormed out of the cave with the women and children in train.

Enjoying access to better physical and spiritual resources members of the royal household conceivably felt equipped to outlast the trekkers, possibly to their own detriment. Towards the end of the siege, I would argue, the Dg1 floor was abandoned, an act signalled by the upturned grindstone straddling M2 & M3 and setting light to the outer fence. This would have been done to destroy all physical remains to prevent witches and sorcerers getting access to materials they could put to malefic use (see Chapter 8 & 9). However, this does not imply that all the occupants of the floor escaped. Upturned pots and vessels also denote death, and it was common practice to destroy and/or abandon the house of the head of a homestead after he died (Eiselen & Schapera 1966: 248).

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5. Conclusion

Rampart walling, fences, walls, and a plastered floor found within the cave provided evidence for a carefully defined use of space and demonstrated that the Kekana invested a considerable amount of time fortifying and preparing the cave for retreat. Excavation of three different 'households' brought to light, in one instance, a fairly elaborate plastered floor and two others that had not been plastered. The spatial arrangement of objects on these floors reflected how space was apportioned and used within each living area.

The presence of both 'elaborate' and 'featureless' floors within the cave modifies Simon Hall's (1998) interpretation of pre- and post-1700AD floors. Hall

determined that the appearance of featureless floors was linked to historical processes that resulted in an elaboration of the homestead in general. However, more elaborate floors do not disappear instead they appear to become a marker of the elite. Further, Hall argued that the elaboration of the homestead signalled a redefinition of gender relations. Food preparation moved out of the hut, but the associated area became defined by walls that symbolised increase in male control over female labour. I contend that the complexity of the homestead mirrors a more complex and hierarchical social system that may have granted more social and economic freedom to certain categories of women.

However, within the confines of the cave, while these advantages may have prolonged the lives of status individuals, it would have exacerbated the divisions within the social alliances that formed the chiefdom. Lower ranking, subordinate groups may have chosen to abandon the cave, partly out of desperation and partly due to resentment and suspicion brought about by an hierarchical system that relied on socio-economic successes and allied spiritual forces to hold it together. The next Chapter I will look more closely at the history and status of the Kekana and consider some of the ties that the chiefdom may have formed.

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CHAPTER 7: Networks alliances and connections

1. Introduction

From its inception, South African Iron Age studies have focussed on ceramics to try to identify groups, and/or determine the degree of interaction between groups (Mason 1986: 700) through the continuity or discontinuity of ceramic styles within and between sites (Huffman 2002: 3). Most of these studies adopt a multi-dimensional approach where a combination of profile, layout and motif has been used to establish different ceramic styles (*Ibid.)* or 'pottery groups' (Mason 1986: 700). This chapter advances a different approach to ceramics in attempt to understand the network of relationships and alliances made by the Kekana.

2. Fluid design

Studies of pottery and pottery making in sub-Saharan Africa have shown pots to be homologies of men and women (Huffman and Evers 1988, Ohinata 2002; S. Hall 1998, Gosselain 1999), and have demonstrated that pottery making was a symbolically invested activity which mirrored and by extension reinforced gender taboos, rites and practices (S. Hall 1998, Gosselain 1999). Gosselain (1999: 209) pointed out that many gender and sexual prohibitions are extended to pottery making. In the making of pottery the controlling of heat is important (*Ibid*.:217), and the danger of 'hot persons', 'hot things' or 'hot states' was made explicit. Women who were menstruating or pregnant were not allowed to extract or manipulate clay or touch unfired vessels (*Ibid*.: 209), while men were seen to expose themselves to dangerous 'heat' if they witnessed the firing of the pots (*Ibid.* :210). In the first case the 'birth' of the pot would be affected, while in the second the fertility of the male could be compromised (*Ibid.* :211-12).

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There is thus a strong symbolic connection between pottery and women. Huffman (2002: 2) noted that ceramic decoration parallels female clothing and scarification, while Ohinata (2002: 39) drew attention to the metaphorical link between the womb and the pot, a concept that informed the burial of foetus's in pots, because by returning the child to the womb the process came full circle enabling the mother to bear other children in future (*Ibid*.: 40).

The introductory chapter has already alluded to the importance of agnatic politics in African society, and how these male-centric relationships supported and buttressed the administrative hierarchy of the chiefdom (Comaroff & Comaroff 1991: 140-150). It was also made clear that the structure of the hierarchy was not fixed, and that even the chiefship could be challenged at any time. This necessitated the continual maintenance and management of political networks through, on the one hand, the reaffirmation of political connections and the creation of new alliances, and on the other, the perpetuation of inequality and attempts to transform equal ties into relationships of inequality (*Ibid*. 143). This was achieved through the careful negotiation and maintenance of relationships through marriage alliances, or through coercion – demanding labour and tribute, raiding for cattle, women and children – and/or completely destroying polities through war (*Ibid.* 140 & 164, see also Parsons 1995: 340). Consequently, a woman's identity was arguably one of the more mutable aspects of the social universe. It could be manipulated, changed or lost depending on her social status and the ensuing socio-economic circumstance in which she found herself. Studies of pottery, ostensibly the material expression of women and thus the tangible remains of alliances, ancillary relationships and political strategy, must give consideration to those characteristics that define the chiefdom; fluidity, cultural pluralism, and mutability of ethnicity (see Introduction; Barth 1995, 1996, 1970; Kopytoff 1989).

There are a plethora of examples illustrating cultural pluralism and how identity and ethnicity takes shape to suit specific socio-economic or political circumstances. Loubser (1991: 415) noted that the early ethnographic record was replete with examples of non-Venda communities adopting Venda custom in order to forge alliances with powerful Singo chiefs. Also, during periods of war

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some polities became absorbed into more powerful chiefdoms (Comaroff & Comaroff 1991: 164). This created conditions whereby subordinate groups, and specifically women, were forced to reduce the visibility of their own particular identity. Schoeman (1997) has shown that the Ndzundza of Esikhunjini and UmKlaarmaak (approx.1820-1860s), who were subordinate to Sekwati's Pedi, made fairly nondescript 'Pedi' style pottery until the ancillary relationship ended with the death of Sekwati in 1861 (Schoeman 1997: 198). During the 20th century, the Ndzundza developed a highly distinctive visual vocabulary, which extended to their pottery. This expression of identity emerged from a very specific context in which ordinary people of low status created a distinct identity to survive a harsh and changing environment (Delius 1989*:* 248).

Marriage alliances created opportunities for ethnic or status posturing, particularly amongst groups who practiced exogamy. These alliances were not taken lightly especially with regards to the choice of the principal wife[74] for the chief. Such exchanges reflected broader political processes, in which wider socio-economic relationships were negotiated and symbolically expressed through the ceremony and union (c.f. Thomas 1991: 7). Negotiations around the principal wife were particularly important, as she gave birth to the heir of the chiefdom. She therefore needed to be drawn from a royal line (Mönnig 1967: 256) of appropriate socio-economic standing. To ensure that the next heir was born to a 'properly designated mother', and that suitable socio-economic unions were forged, long and protracted negotiations often occurred between families of high status. Royal families often resorted to infant betrothal to secure such beneficial alliances (Mönnig 1967: 130). Importantly, the broader socio-economic status of both groups was reflected in the transaction - the woman symbolised the socio-economic standing of her own group, the bride price indicated that this status was appreciated and recognised by the 'groom's' family, while the ability of his group to afford the alliance reflected on their own economic standing as equals.

A chief thus married for diplomatic reasons (Mönnig 1967: 264) or offered gifts of wives to broker deals. Sekwati's rejection of the wives sent from Mugombane to broker peace provided clear indication that he, Sekwati, did not consider Mugombane a good or useful ally (see Chapter 6). Feasibly, in the case of a

[74] Also known as the 'candle wife'.

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highly beneficial socio-economic alliance, the group could make a strategic decision to foster or display the 'visual identity' of the principal wife. This strategy may have operated at different levels. The identity of the wives may have functioned as a marker of status both between and within chiefdoms, so that sub-ordinate wards and/or non-lineage dependents would have been 'allowed' to wear different clothing and produce different styles of pottery. Loubser's (1981 & 1994) analysis of ceramics relating to the Ledwaba/Maune Ndebele may illustrate this phenomenon. The analysis showed that a mix of Moloko and Letaba (Phalaborwa) ceramics went back to 1650. However, sites of important Ndebele chiefs or headmen were characterised by a predominance of Letaba/Venda ceramics, while at sites of minor headmen, Moloko/ Sotho-Tswana ceramics predominated (Loubser 1994: 140).

The different ethnographic and archaeological studies underline the complex socio-economic relationships and circumstances that allowed for the management and continuation of the chiefdom. They also reinforce the notion that material objects, provide a medium through which human agents can manipulate, express, challenge, create and recreate social structure and order (Nassaney 2004: 337), and more importantly that these objects or 'socially and culturally salient entities…change in defiance of their material stability' (Thomas 1991: 125).

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3. A background to the pottery style and the people

Information about the broader political landscape and social context is key to understanding the role of pottery style within a given a group or polity. My interpretation of the pottery from Historic Cave was thus influenced by the assumption that the remains from Dg1 were of a high-status household, and that any pottery style unique to this area would reflect the status of the household and the ties and relationships that it formed and maintained with allied chiefdoms of equal status.

Briefly, the pottery collection, as discussed in Chapter 2, separated out into an earlier and later component, and the later component into two different traditions. The large but undecorated ceramic component comprised a number of black

recurved jars and beakers, and large unburnished, recurved and spherical jars. Residues in these pots provided evidence of a number of different uses ranging from cooking and storage to medicinal activities.

The earlier component, only found in Dg1, comprised a number of individual pieces of 'Eiland' pottery that occur to between AD 900-1200 in the Valley. The 'Eiland' pieces with characteristic finely incised herringbone decoration may indicate an earlier presence in or around the cave, or may have been brought into the cave by the occupants of the floor in Dg1.

The decorated pottery from all the excavated areas fell broadly into two different traditions - Late Moloko or Letaba. However, one particular Late Moloko style or design was confined to the base of the cave - horizontal or oblique lines of comb-stamping around the neck of the pot with pendant triangles outlined by a single or double row of comb-stamping, the triangles being alternately filled with red, buff or black colour. These were small jars with recurved necks. This design was also found at other Ndebele sites in and around the Valley[75], but was absent from the Ledwaba/Maune sites excavated by Loubser (1981 & 1994) and from ceramics excavated from known Ndzundza Ndebele sites (Schoeman 1997).

The earliest incidence of the comb-stamp design, with horizontal lines in the neck, date to the fifteenth century and come from Ntsuanatsatsi in the northeastern Free State (Maggs 1976:140). This site was claimed as an ancestral site by a number of groups, but seemed to be most firmly linked to the BaFokeng and later the Koena (*Ibid.* 142 & 315). These settlements and their associated pottery then spread across the Vaal into the Balfour, Suikerbosrand, Vredefort and Klipriviersberg areas (Huffman 2002: 14). Mason (1962), initially designated the pottery from these sites 'Uitkomst' after pottery he excavated from the site Uitkomst, which was comb-stamped and incised with red and black burnish (S. Hall 1981: 15). Later he modified his use of the term, as he felt it did not apply to

[75] Partridge's (1966:126-127) excavation in Ficus Cave produced a comparable range of comb-stamping and red and black burnish (Late Moloko). Similarly, incision, comb-stamping, punctuates and colour burnish (Late Moloko) was the most common decorative techniques excavated from the site of Kekane a site occupied by the Ndebele towards the latter part of the nineteenth century (Moore 1981: 100).

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the Late Iron Age in general[76] (Mason 1986: 739). Instead, he argued that certain features, in particular a horizontal band, with arcade or zig-zag dentates, were limited to an Olifantspoort-Kaditshwene-Klipriviersberg-Sun City group or Kaditshwene Phase[77] pottery which only occurred between AD 1700 -1800 (Mason 1986: 743). Ensuing work in the Springbok Flats, Rooiberg, and Waterberg (S Hall 1981: 83 & 143-5; Huffman 2002: 17) showed that vessels with horizontal and/or oblique comb-stamping in the neck, comb-stamped chevrons or arcades filled with comb-stamping or red and black colour occurred in these areas from the second half of the seventeenth century. This design field thus extended from south of Johannesburg in a northerly and westerly direction as far as the Waterberg and Mokopane.

To contextualise this information in relation to the Kekana royal lineage it is necessary to understand the origin and movement of this particular group of Ndebele. Disagreement exists about the origins of the Kekana Chiefdom. The Transvaal Native Affairs Department (1905), Van Warmelo (1930), and Jackson (n.d.) grouped them with the Southern Transvaal Manala–Ndzundza Ndebele. According to these accounts the Southern Ndebele descended from Chief Musi or Msi who originated in the Drakensberg or Kwa-Zulu Natal area (Van Warmelo 1930: 10-13). By counting the number of named chiefs, and assuming an average rule of 10 years, Van Warmelo (1930), suggested that Musi ruled somewhere between 1630-1670[78]. The timing of their movement into the Transvaal is not entirely clear, Van Warmelo (1930) argued that Musi moved and settled north of Pretoria, whereas the information provided by the Native Affairs Department (1905) suggested that the movement only took place after Musi's death. Either way this situated the relocation between 1650 and 1700.

[76] Earlier I adopt the term Uitkomst (see Table 2.1) in the broader sense to incorporate ceramic categories including but not limited to comb-stamping and as it continues to be applied by Iron Age archaeologists (cf. Huffman 2002).

[77] Mason identifies his Kaditshwene Phase pottery as Hurutshe. However, this was based on the assumption that he had dug the Kaditshwene visited by Campbell in the 1800s, which turned out not to be the case.

[78] Fourie (1922; also Van Warmelo 1930: 18) used an 18-20 year average rule and calculates the rule of Musi to be 100 years earlier. Van Warmelo (1930: 19), however, points out that very often chieftainship does not pass from father to son, but to brother as many of the chiefs were killed. He thus assumes a 'safer' 10 year average.

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Musi or Msi sired five or six son's, who split up after his death. The Kekana are said to have descended from Matombeni, also known as Kekana, who withdrew to the North and settled at Moletlane (Zebediela) (Van Warmelo 1930: 10-13). Fourie (1922) who provided more or less the same background for the Southern Ndebele did not offer any information about the Matombeni line, and therefore did not necessarily include the Kekana among the Southern Ndebele.

Ziervogel (1959) on the other hand has contended, from oral records and linguistic markers, that the Northern and the Southern Ndebele had very different origins. He argued that the Muledlana and Lidwaba Ndebele had their origins amongst the Kalanga speakers of Zimbabwe. They then moved south and spent time with the Phalaborwa and the Swazi[79]. Later they moved south west to the Pretoria area where they came into contact with and became influenced by the Southern Ndebele (*Ibid.*: 5; 181-185). He further claimed that oral traditions preserved by the Ledwaba and Gegana (Kekana), indicated that these two groups shared ancestors until Gegana and Lidwaba, the sons of Madidzi, divided the chiefdom. The Gegana moved to Muledlana (Zebediela) and the Lidwaba to Maxashula (the farm Goedehoop) (*Ibid.*:185).

At this point the discrepancies in the Kekana family tree came to an end. All versions concur that three generations after settling at Muledlana/Moletlane the lineage was again disrupted, when on the death of Tjhumana[80]/ Chumana[81], his sons Kxumbha/ Khoopa and Kxhaba/ Kgaba fought for succession. Kxhaba/ Kgaba was defeated and settled just outside of Potgietersrus (*Ibid*: 8). This Kxhaba/Kgaba line eventually gave rise to Mugombhane II or Mokopane. The Kxumbha- Kxhaba split occurred around the early to mid 1700s, while Mugombane lived from around 1800 to 1855.

Despite differences, both accounts placed the ascendants of the Kekana in the Pretoria area towards the latter part of the seventeenth century, and by the mid-eighteenth century near the present day town of Mokopane (Potgietersrus).

[79] In reality this would have been the predecessor chiefdom to the Swazi.

[80] Ziervogel's (1959) spelling

[81] Van Warmelo's (1930) spelling

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The comb-stamp design found in Historic Cave may reflect early interaction and intermarriage with groups like the Bafokeng and Koena, as the Kekana moved through the Gauteng and Limpopo regions. These relationships, however, would have become strategically important once Kxhaba/Kgaba lost the fight for succession. The survival of the group would have depended on socio-economic alliances to the west and south of Mokopane, especially since Kxumbha/ Khoopa, who appeared to have entered an alliance with the BaPedi chief Thulare, would have constituted a perilous force to the north and east. These two groups continued to present a threat for Mugombane well into the 1800s.

The presence of some Letaba elements may suggest a residual relationship with the Ledwaba or lowveld groups. In Loubser's (1981) study of the archaeology relating to the Ledwaba/Maun Ndebele in the Pietersburg area the presence of Letaba was seen to provide support for Ziervogel's hypothesis. Louber's (1981) ceramics from chiefly households presented evidence of northeastern lowveld affinities, like the Phalaborwa or Shangane (*Ibid*.:140 & 157). However, the absence of a comb-stamp motif in these assemblages may suggest that when the Ledwaba moved south to Pretoria, unlike their Kekana counterpart, they failed to develop, or did not need to maintain alliances with the regions to the south and west of Mokopane. On the other hand the lack of comb-stamp design may support van Warmelo's proposition that the Moletlane and Ledwaba Ndebele have different origins. The origin debate may be resolved only through the systematic identification and excavation of early AmaNdebele sites in the Gauteng and Limpopo regions.

This analysis should not be seen to negate or limit the Kekana's relationships with other regions; other lesser design elements on pots, and leather garments suggest otherwise. Rather, the presence of one particular design field, which has limited distribution, simply helps to delineate one set of relationships that this lineage seemed to foster that other Northern Ndebele did not.

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4. A question of time?

A key question for Iron Age archaeologists is whether this phenomenon of ethnic mutability and cultural pluralism is a product of the recent past (last 450 years) or whether as J. Krige (1937: 327), speculated the 'inextricable tangle' of relationships that he observed in the 30s was the outcome of historical processes of considerable time depth. Lekgoathi (2004), who studies northern AmaNdebele groups today, reminds us that the perception that all groups were at one time homogenous may in part have been created and perpetuated by South African Government ethnologists of the early 1900s who operated under the assumption that groups could be defined by a common language and custom. These presuppositions played a significant role in the way that groups were categorised and labelled. Crucially, 'heterogeneous' groups that were seen to have incorporated 'foreign elements' were no longer considered 'pure' or 'authentic' (Lekgoathi 2004: 22). Lekgoathi (2004: 13 -22) believes that Van Warmelo's conviction that all groups were at one time homogenous led him to assume that the assimilation of Sotho customs and language by the Northern 'Transvaal' Ndebele was a recent occurrence and an invalidation of their Ndebele identity. Lekgoathi (2004:14), by contrast, advances the argument that 'outsiders' have always been an important feature in the survival of AmaNdebele chiefdoms and that diversity of language and custom have always been part and parcel of AmaNdebele identity.

If this is the case then the straight forward assumption that pottery groups at one time represented homogenous ethnic or language groups is problematic and the use of shape and decoration to identify cultural or ethnic units[82] may not only be inappropriate for the last 450 years, but for the Iron Age in general.

5. Conclusion

The ceramics from Historic Cave separated into an earlier and later component. Although, the later component from Historic Cave broadly conformed to findings

[82] Ceramic analysis in South Africa is strongly influenced by the idea that the producers and users of the pottery style are one and the same, so that style can be used to identify groups of people, or the distribution of the style will mirror the distribution of the group (Huffman 1982, 1983, 2002).

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from other contemporaneous Transvaal Ndebele sites, the interpretation of the pottery was influenced by the apparent fluidity of the 17th to 19th century political landscape. The ethnographies, oral histories, anthropological and archaeological studies dating to this period provided evidence for intensive mixing of peoples and associated material culture, and numerous and complex processes resulting in the fission, fusion and interaction of different players on the socio-economic landscape. Importantly, they emphasized the need to understand the status of the chiefdom, the role of women in bolstering that status, the relative positions of groups within the chiefdom and external socio-economic pressures in order to comprehend how women, style and decoration, were assimilated, manipulated and used by both men and women of rank. A key question for Iron Age archaeologists is whether these criteria apply to all time periods.

The predominance of a particular design motif in the pottery collection from Dg1 in Historic Cave was seen to provide support for one set of relationships that the Kekana lineage fostered to the south and west of Mokopane. These networks may have been established when they moved through Pretoria from the Drakensberg, or after moving down to Pretoria from the north and up again between AD1650 and 1750. These relationships would have proved key in the survival of the Kekana after they split from the main chiefdom around 1750AD.

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CHAPTER 8: Divining the siege

1. Introduction

One of the 'uncomfortable' advantages of excavating a siege site or refuge site abandoned under desperate circumstances is that the material evidence of activities undertaken during the occupation of the site still can be found. The Dg1-Floor situated at the base of the cave provided compelling evidence for activities associated with a diviner.

2. The evidence

The presence of a diviner or doctor was inferred in the first instance from a number of vessels that were located on the platform floor. Although, broken during the roof fall the remains of the complete containers were recovered in the position in which they were left. These objects included calabash containers with residual red and white pigment on the inside, a pot containing a mixture of blue pigment (Fig. 2.21c) and animal fat[83], which from the way the paste was pressed onto the sides of the pot suggested that it had been mixed in the pot, and a long cow's horn with a sharpened end for pegging into the ground and a leather loop at the other end for hanging (Fig. 2.16b).

[83] An iodine fuming test was carried out to test for the presence of fatty acids, after which saturated iodine solution was added to the mixture (paste + water & chloroform) to determine whether there was a predominance of saturated (animal) or unsaturated (plant) fatty acids. The contents of the pot tested positive for saturated fatty acids. The blue colour was obtained through the addition of a blue mineral.

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The ethnographic record is replete with examples of how these containers and their contents were (and continue) to be used in traditional medicine. Animal or human fat features as an essential ingredient in rain medicines as well as in those medicines designed to provide strength and protection against witchcraft and sorcery (Junod 1905: 236- 237; Krige 1936:163-4; Hammond-Tooke 1993: 172). Pigments, ground from different stones, were purported to have a 'strengthening effect' (Krige 1936:163). Krige (1936:163-4), for example, refers specifically to blue ground stone and black powder being used to strengthen members of the Zulu homestead who, following the death of one of its members, were deemed weak and in danger of being 'drawn after the deceased'. Horns, designated medicinal or ceremonial horns, also feature in a number of ethnographic studies of both Nguni and Sotho-Tswana groups (cf. Watt & Van Warmelo 1930; Hoernlé 1966, Schapera 1969). Schapera (see Hoernlé 1966 photograph face p. 232) photographed a doctor mixing rain medicines in a horn pegged into the ground. He (Schapera 1969: 167-8) also observed the preparation of *tshitlhô,* a medicine that was rubbed into small incisions on the body or taken orally to ensure protection against sorcery. He described how, once the powders were prepared, they were poured into a horn and mixed with a liquid fat to form a paste. Similarly, Watt and Van Warmelo's (1930: 46) Northern Ndebele informant, Monkwe[84], doctored an area designated for a new hut with medicine kept in a horn, to safeguard the home. The medicine was made from the charred and powdered plant and animal matter mixed with sheep's fat. The ingredients included roots of a tree, bones of 'brave' animals or those unafraid to attack such as baboon, lion, hedgehog, snake, ratel or vulture (Watt & van Warmelo 1930:59).

A drilled astragalus (N2-GM) (Fig. 2.15d) found near the 'platform' presented further evidence for divination. Divinatory bones were (and are) consulted to discover the cause of illness, death and misfortune or to foresee whether a venture would prove successful or not (Eiselen 1932: 10-11). The astragali often represented particular totemic clans, and a divination kit contained two bones of each totem animal, a male and a female (*Ibid.*: 6). In some instances these bones were connected with the elements (*Ibid.*: 8) or a person (Thornton pers. comm. 2005). Goat and sheep astragali, for example, were often linked with rain. Due to

[84] Watt and Van Warmelo regarded Monkwe as Sotho-ised.

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the impression that these animals avoided rain, the arrival of rain was announced when the astragali fell in an unfavourable position (it can fall in four different ways) (Eiselen 1932: 8). The horn like projections found on the side of the astragali also predicted positive or negative interaction between clans. One clan bone pointing at another, depending on the position, might predict imminent threat or the provision of aid from the one clan to the other (Eiselen 1932: 9). The astragali found in Historic Cave was identified as sheep, but had been further altered to suit the needs of the diviner. Robert Thornton (pers.comm. 2005) speculated that the drilled holes represented the same sort of thing that dominoes in divining kits do today. That is to say the piece may represent a number '4' or a 'six', but he stressed that the pattern was more important than the number. Thus a four may represent anything on four legs (cow, goat, horse, etc.), or anything that the animal might represent, e.g. cattle as *lobola* (bride wealth), six as two lines of three might represent two paths that do not cross or a failure in communication.

In order to establish which of the other objects found on the platform or on the Dg1 floor formed part of the diviner's paraphernalia, I consulted Magodweni[85], a traditional healer. Of the objects found on or near to the platform, which included a leather hat (Fig. 2.24a), bolus of wood (identified as *Ficus* sp.), a hoof and incisor of a cow (Fig. 2.15e&g), a grass coil (Fig. 2.17c), a maize cob, a sheep/goat phalanx, and a piece of skin (M3-Floor), Magodweni only rejected the maize cob and grass coil (pot holder) as parts of the divining apparatus. Magodweni's decision to exclude the maize cob may have been the result of his own acquaintance with the grain as a modern staple. There is some indication that maize was not widely propagated in this area during the early 1800s and may have had a medicinal function (see Chapter 4). With regards to the other objects, he pointed out a hole in the back of the hoof that he imagined would have been plugged with '*muti*', and indicated that the incisor would have been ground down and used to treat people who grind their teeth or babies born with teeth. He also pointed out that the skin was significant as it had cilia on one side and was thus part of the alimentary canal or birthing organ (Fig. 2.24d). Magodweni did not elaborate on the bolus of wood, but Loubser (1981) provided

[85] My thanks to Prof. Robert Thornton for facilitating this meeting.

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further affirmation of its ritual qualities, when he observed that *Ficus* was considered a ritual wood amongst the Ledwaba (Loubser 1981).

Magodweni selected a number of other objects found in layers above or further away from this platform. He identified three objects as having a protective function, these included: a small bag filled with white pigment (O3-GM) (Fig.2.24c) that he indicated would have been worn around the neck, a seed or piece of wood attached to a leather thong, which he called a '*muti*' protector (M2 –RBL)[86](Fig. 2.14a), and a piece of skin from the ground monitor, *Varanus albigularis*[87] (M2-RBL) (Fig.2.24e). His remarks about the piece of wood, bag and amulet echoed observations by early missionaries and ethnographers. In one instance, witnessed by the German missionary Wangemann in the 1870s, a diviner supplied a wooden amulet to protect a child against evil intent (Delius 2001: 435). Hoernlé (1966: 233) noted that diviners employed a range of amulets to protect themselves and others against dangers of sorcery, infection or travel. Mönnig (1967: 142) reported that Pedi widows were given little bags called *sebebana* to wear around their necks for protection, and Schapera (1969: 165), that amulets were worn on the body and charms placed in the house as protection against disease and misfortune. The skin of *Varanus albigularis* is still highly prized and sold at the *muti* markets around the country today (Martin Whiting pers. comm. 2005). The only other mention of this type of leather was found in Watt and van Warmelo's (1930:59) interview of the diviner, Monkwe, who believed that the piece of iguana skin in his medicine kit would protect a child from illness when worn around the neck.

Magodweni also picked out an additional sheep/goat phalanx (M2-RBL), leg rattles (Q2-Floor) (Fig. 2.14b), which he was at pains to explain were originals, fragments of cowrie shells (M2&N3 RBL) (Fig. 2.15c), a hollow bone whistle (01-GM) (Fig. 2.15f), and a small bundle of roots or stems (M1-RBL) (Fig. 2.14d). There were a few other snake and carnivore bones that, if brought in by humans, Mogodweni indicated would have served medicinal purposes. Snakes and

[86] This piece also had been earlier identified as a *muti* protector by the local residents who helped me to sort.

[87] The skin was identified by Professor Martin Whiting, School of Animal, Plant and Environmental Sciences, University of the Witwatersrand.

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carnivores were not eaten as they were generally considered taboo (Schapera & Goodwin 1966: 133).

Phalanges were common in divining sets. These sets generally comprised four principal pieces (not usually phalanges) and any number of incidental pieces (Eiselen 1932: 6). Seashells in divination kits were purported to represent Europeans who came from across the sea (Eiselen 1932: 8; Hoernlé 1966: 238), but oval or rounded shells, like cowries were also associated with women (Hoernlé 1966: 239). Kirby (1968), Schapera (1969) and Watt and Warmelo (1930) documented the use of magic whistles by doctors. These were often made from the hollow leg bone of a bird and used in various forms if magic. A *naka* or whistle was blown at the end of the ceremony in which pegs were doctored and positioned to protect a new cattle kraal (Watt & van Warmelo 1930: 60), but it was also blown to ward of lightening (Schapera 1969: 162).

Magodweni regarded the bundle of stems or roots to be a source of 'herbal' medicine. Jackson (n.d. 105) photographed a similar bundle carried by the herbalist Baadjie Tlatla. The roots in his bundle were to be chopped and boiled. Many of the fruit, stems and roots of the plants identified from Dg1 are still known for their medicinal and magical qualities[88], and concoctions made with these plants are used in the treatment of lung, stomach and menstrual problems (see for examples, Arnold *et al*. 2002; van Wyk *et al*. 2002).

Although not singled out by Magodweni, it was acknowledged that certain beads were employed for ritual purposes. Hunter (1966: 399) recorded that Pedi babies were given a necklace of white beads for protection, and Pittendrigh, who worked amongst the BaVenda, was informed that brownish red beads with a green core were worn by royalty and practising 'priests or witchdoctors'[89]. Royal beads were also purportedly used in divination to connect with the chief's ancestors (Vogel 1983: 47). Phophi Raletjena[90]who visited Historic Cave while I was excavating told me that where he grew up in the Blouberg, ostrich eggshell beads were

[88] For example: *Diospyros mespiliformis*, *Anabotrys brachypetalus*, Ximenia caffra, *Englerophytum magalismontanum*, *Citrillus lanates*, *Mimusops zeyheri* and *Vangueria infausta*, and *Aloe*

[89] Correspondence between Pittendrogh and Van Riet Lowe 1950.

[90] Phopi identified himself as Pedi

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locally made, and that strings of ostrich eggshell beads were strung around a baby's waist for protection against evil forces. The concentration of ostrich egg shell blanks, and half made beads in Dg 1 (M, N & O) may indicate that the diviner had pieces of ostrich egg shell in reserve from which he could manufacture beads as required

Magodweni further confirmed that the horn container from Dg2 (Fig. 2.16a) and the four amulets from Dg4 were ritual objects (Fig. 2.34a&b, 2.35a). The horn (Dg2) and two small pouches like the other small bags were purported to contain protection *muti.* The bone and shell amulets, however, were thought to represent a more northern divining tradition and were seen to belong to a different healer or diviner. The two pieces were regarded as 'decision makers' with a 'yes', 'no' function. The bone pointer would be used to confirm a person's innocence or guilt, while the shell, which was ornamented on one side, would predict a good/ bad, positive/terrible outcome. The ornamented side was identified as the 'bright' side. Interestingly, two of the principal pieces in the divining kit of a BaSotho diviner of the BaMasemola, operated on a similar principle. Eiselen (1932: 5) described them as flat pieces that could only fall in two ways "they either lie on their faces and weep or they show their faces and smile". Eiselen (1932) too considered these pieces foreign, and thought the design indicated a northern Venda influence. This speaks to a fluid exchange of divination techniques and practices learned and exchanged through the interaction between a novice and his/her many teachers, as well as to the distances travelled by doctors, possibly in an attempt to achieve notoriety. Schapera (1969: 161) mapped out the influences in Rapedi Letsebe's (Kgatla) education. Rapedi learnt about rain medicines from his father, but after his father died he was taught at different times to throw the bones by a two different Shangane doctors, one from the northern part of the South Africa, and the other from the Magaliesberg area. His final teacher was a Pedi rainmaker from Mochudi in Botswana.

Based on the eclectic and personalised nature of each divining set, I feel it is possible that the fragments of Dutch psalm book (Fig. 2.23e) belong with the set found in Dg1. Local Africans, who had been converted while working as migrant labourers in Natal or the Cape, were the often the first to introduce Christianity to the interior of the country (Delius 2001; Kirkaldy 2002). With specific regard to the

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Kekana, De Waal (1978: 22) established that French Missionaries sent 'African teachers' to Mugombane in the 1840s, but by this time white missionaries were probably well known in the area[91]. Delius (2001: 437) argues from oral and missionary records that Christianity was initially perceived and possibly accepted in terms of the existing belief system, and that many of the initial converts were 'witchdoctors'. The *psalmboek* and bible were revelatory; they functioned as a guide to god's will and wishes, or were regarded as the 'word of god' or a text inspired by god. This would have been compatible with objects in a divining kit, which were illuminated by the ancestors. The *psalmboek* or pieces thereof would have transformed easily into objects of divination.

3. Divination

The divining dice on the Dg1-Floor indicates the presence of a diviner who divined by means of dice or 'throwing the bones'. The diviner would have been seen as the channel through which the ancestors communicated to facilitate a correct reading of the dice (Hammond-Tooke 1993:187). Diviners were recognised as the most important doctors amongst all groups, as they detected, protected, fortified and cleansed people against hostile forces (Krige 1936; Schapera 1969). They also had an intimate knowledge of plants and substances, which they used in combination with divining (see Krige 1936, Schapera 1969 and Watt and Van Warmelo 1930). This broad based knowledge was readily put to commercial use. John Mackenzie a missionary in the interior between1859-1869 remarked that rainmakers did not limit their deeds to rainmaking, but often arrived laden with medical roots, bark and leaves which they exchanged for beads and other articles (Mackenzie1971: 384). The chief, however, sought out and employed the most accomplished doctors, particularly those highly skilled in rainmaking and purification (Schapera 1969: 159). This was necessary, because as the Comaroffs (1991) point out, perceptible access to the spirit world was 'a crucial timber in the symbolic scaffolding of the chiefship' (Comaroff & Comaroff 1991: 155).

[91] David Livingstone and Robert Moffat both passed through the area prior to the siege.

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4. The aetiology of misfortune

The aetiology of misfortune was ancestral wrath, pollution and sorcery or witchcraft. In cases where misfortune continued unabated, for reasons that could not be divined, the Supreme Being *modimo,* who otherwise seldom interceded in the affairs of humans, would be recognized as the cause (Comaroff & Comaroff 1991: 157; Hammond-Tooke 1989: 46).

The most common cause of illness and misfortune was the witch or sorcerer (*moloyi* (singular) *baloyi* (plural) - *Sotho*) who had the ability harm others (*Ibid*. & Junod 1905). Junod (1905) described the *baloyi* as having the ability to change shape, use medicines to harm, and employ familiars as agents of harm. For this reason witches and sorcerers were hated and feared (Hammond-Tooke 1993:173). Witchcraft and sorcery was essentially a by-product of agnatic politics, and served to mask or resolve the contradictions in the social system (cf. Comaroff & Comaroff 1991). The foreign or 'stranger' wife was most often depicted as a *moloyi* (Hammond-Tooke 1993: 178), which allowed blame for misfortune to be shifted from the male's ancestors to his wife and her family (witchcraft was thought to be inherited), and misfortune could be pinned on maleficent magic deployed by jealous or envious rivals. The witch was also detected through divination.

Pollution was regarded as a state of ritual impurity or contamination usually caused by people in ambiguous or hot conditions (Hammond-Tooke 1981: 20) such as menstruating women, initiates, corpses, travellers or displaced persons (Gluckman 1937; Hammond-Tooke 1981: 20; Hammond-Tooke 1993:174*).* The Nguni and Sotho-Tswana responded to pollution differently. The Zulu cleansed through induced vomiting or use of emetics (Hammond-Tooke 1981: 21), while the Sotho -Tswana carried out cooling rituals (*Ibid.* 21).

Misfortune and death could also be caused by ancestral wrath. Ancestors were held responsible for visiting their displeasure upon humans through misfortune and illness (Jansen 1992: 94). While ancestors were generally known for their benevolence, they would bring bad luck if offended or neglected (see Hammond-Tooke 1993:159-68; Eiselen & Schapera 1966: 254). According to Mönnig (1967:54):

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> The Pedi say that nothing is impossible for the ancestor spirits. Their main desire is to be remembered by their descendants. If this is done faithfully, they reward the living through good health for themselves and for their live-stock, plentiful rain and good harvests. If, on the other hand, they are forgotten or disregarded, they may withdraw their protection and bring ill-health or death, drought and disease…

Ancestors thus meted out punishment for breaches in 'tribal' law (Eiselen & Schapera 1966: 251), and/or if the necessary observance of ritual offerings and rites were ignored. Common ancestors were easily offended of they were not remembered, respected, honoured and obeyed and praised at marriages, births, feasts and festivals (Gluckman 1937 128-9). Offerings to the ancestors of the chief were made by the chief on behalf of his people on occasions like harvests, first fruit and planting ceremonies as well as at times when more urgent intervention was required; before and after war, during times of drought and when land was 'attacked by epidemic' (Eiselen & Schapera 1966: 255). The chief played a politico-religious role (Hammond-Tooke 1993: 69), so that the chief's kraal or homestead was regarded as the economic, political, judicial and religious centre of the polity (Mönnig 1967: 280). The chief was ultimately responsible for the physical and spiritual well being of the group, because regardless of its source - witches, ritual impurity or ancestors – 'affliction was associated with breach of conventional order and its repair usually involved an authoritative restatement of that order' (Comaroff & Comaroff 1991: 158). When, through divination, it was established that the ancestors were at the root of the misfortune, 'piacular' rituals were performed to atone for offending or neglecting them (Hammond-Tooke1993: 162). This was usually done through the ritual slaughter of small stock and cattle.

Early missionary records and ethnographies revealed that Sotho- and Nguni-speakers shared a fear of death (see for example, Baumbach *Berliner Missions – berichte* 1881in Delius *2001: 434*, Gluckman 1937; Hammond-Tooke 1993). The nature of the death was irrelevant; the death of an old or sick person was regarded in the same way as the sudden death of a young person. Death was actively opposed as it was seen to be the result of mystical causes (Gluckman 1937: 125), sorcery (Baumbach *BMB* 1881 in Delius 2001: 434) or angry

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ancestors dissatisfied with lack of ritual observance or breach in tribal custom (Eiselen & Schapera 1966: 251).

Associated with these attitudes was a deep-rooted belief in the contaminating effect of death. Death polluted; it was infectious and had to be dealt with by the traditional healer. As Gluckman explained (1937: 125), '…here the strongest notion is that of the contaminating effect of the death which extends to relatives, material objects and food. Medicinal washings and protective rites directed by the magician, and appeals to the ancestors and the dead man are used against this contamination'.

Months of strict observance of rituals, and avoidance practices in marital and sexual relations followed this ritual cleansing.

5. The spiritual fight

It is fair to assume that the same amount of effort that went into physically preparing the cave for battle also went into to protecting it from the less tangible hostile forces. It seems likely that sticks rubbed with protection medicine would have been pegged across the entrance of the cave, in the cattle kraal and between huts. In some cases urine or saliva would have been sprinkled on the boundaries to create the illusion of an impassable lake or to cool the hot, malicious magic of the *baloyi* (see earlier section; Hammond-Tooke 1981: 18). The archaeology provides evidence of the amulets worn by children and adults and the protection medicine obtained by each household to keep their personal space free of evil influence. These remains also capture the final activities of a diviner trying to detect the source of the misfortune and attempting to remedy the situation through the application of protection medicine.

During the first six days of the siege while the Boers repeatedly attacked the Kekana, the Kekana had the upper hand. The fortress was impenetrable and they picked off the Boers from within the cave. Both the physical and spiritual barriers would have appeared to hold. But, once the ravages of thirst, and associated illnesses set in, it is difficult to know how the blame would have been apportioned. Certainly, the presence of the divining dice and evidence that

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protection medicine was being prepared on the floor in Dg1 would suggest that the source of the problem was perceived to be maleficent magic. The Boers and their auxiliaries may have been seen to possess more powerful malevolent magic. Delius (2001) has shown that during the 1860s suspicion and tension between the converted and those who resisted Christianity was based largely on the perception that converts had 'magical powers' (*Ibid. :*438). The superior magic of the Christian converts was thought to be the cause of disease and death amongst those who resisted religious change (*Ibid.* :438). The BaKgatla and VhaTsonga may also have been seen to have powerful *baloyi* in their midst. However, it may have been perceived that the source of the misfortune lay within the cave. The presence of royals possibly without their leader together with foreign subordinate groups, as well as, displaced persons, like 'bushmen', and people in a state of ritual impurity (menstruating women) may have created tensions and suspicions within the cave especially if members of one ward began to die off earlier than others. The archaeological remains indicated that this was likely, because status individuals had access to a greater variety of food and liquid, and would have had the resources to survive over a longer period of time. The inability of the chief diviner and/or the chief to divine the source of the misfortune and more importantly reverse the condition (see Comaroff & Comaroff 1991:158 for the role of the diviner) may have encouraged sub-ordinate groups ultimately to question the authority and power of the ruling elite and the chief, and to abandon the cave, which we know occurred.

Presumably, as the death continued unabated and no relief in the form of outside help or rain was forthcoming[92], the ancestors or *modimo* would have been seen to have been displeased. The inability to bury and ritually cleanse would have exposed the survivors to further pollution and risk of dying. It is not clear from the ethnographic record whether it was acceptable to leave people who died during at war unburied, and where they were killed. Eiselen and Schapera (1966: 248) remarked that it was commonly reported that only Chiefs and prominent men of Nguni tribes were buried and corpses of commoners were left out in the open to

[92] If rain had come the trekboers would have been forced to abandon their siege, as they would not have risked the horse sickness and fever associated with warm and wet weather conditions (De Waal 1978: 115).

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be devoured by scavengers. They question whether this was a product of the inter-ethnic wars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as generally the rule was to bury. Mönnig (1967:55) certainly found this to be the case amongst the Pedi who believed that people who were not buried with necessary rites would not be able to enter the 'world of the ancestors'. These spirits haunted their living descendants until appeased through sacrifice. Either way the long-term consequences of mass death and loss of cattle would have impacted heavily on the economic and ritual status of the chief, Mugombane.

6. The loss of men, women, children and cattle

In his study of mortuary customs among the south – eastern Bantu, Gluckman (1937:118) made the point that death brought about a change in, or partial destruction of, the 'network of social relations' in a society.

> When a man dies his death breaks off a number of social relationships…these relationships were determined by certain social rules and expressed in certain modes of behaviour. After his death these relationships are changed and new ones come into being; perhaps also the relationships between his surviving fellows are affected. (*Ibid*. 118-9).

The circumstances surrounding the death of the person determined how social relations were 'reconstituted' both in this and the 'after world', and where and how the body was to be buried (*Ibid*: 120).

Women and children were seen to occupy a position of 'insignificance' relative to men both in this world and the next (Mönnig 1967: 251), but they were nevertheless a source of wealth, and a reflection of social standing, social connections, success and fertility. The loss of women and children thus affected a man's social status in this world and the next. A man who died without any offspring or had no surviving family members would have no one to remember and honour him after his death.

The death or loss of cattle had a similar impact on a man's social standing and on his ability to fulfil social obligations. Amongst the Zulu a man with no cattle was '*umfokazana*' a person of 'no account' (Carton 2003: 3). The man was no longer

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able to: protect his family or the group through ritual sacrifice; carry out ritual cleansing required to safeguard mourners after death; negotiate marriages and thereby advance his family to a higher social standing (*Ibid*.) or create beneficial socio-economic alliances.

Prior to the siege Mugombane would have invoked the ancestors, and employed a traditional healer or witchdoctor to ensure the spiritual protection of his people while they were in the cave. From the archaeological and documentary evidence his actions did not prevent major loss of human life and livestock, marking a failure on his behalf to meet his obligation to protect and ensure the well being of his people. Either way, after the siege Mugombane's ability to atone on behalf of the group, and cleanse would have been important. His ability in this regard may have been severely compromised by the enormous loss of people and livestock.

Failure to take appropriate steps to cleanse, appease the ancestors, and or garner spiritual protection could lead to further misfortune, illness and death. From events occurring immediately after the siege it would seem that circumstances did not improve for Mugombane. We learn from the Pretorius' report that once resistance at the cave ended he sent one patrol up north to retrieve cattle and the remaining members of Mugombane's clan who had taken refuge with Maraba (De Waal 1978: 117), and another in pursuit of the Langa Chief Mankopane. When, however, he realised that the chief had fled and knowing that his commando was tired, and that the first rains and thus the threat of horse sickness were upon them, he withdrew (*Ibid*.). For some time after this Mankopane was monitored closely. Through reports sent from A. Duvenage, in the Zoutpansberg, it became apparent that during December 1854 an outbreak of highly contagious bovine pleuro-pneumonia occurred that inflicted heavy loss of cattle. Then in June 1855 Duvenage reported to Commandant-general S. Schoeman[93] that an epidemic had broken out amongst the 'tribes' and many of Mankopane's people had died.

It is unlikely that Mugombane's group would have escaped the cattle and human sickness, so that after suffering great loss at the hands of the Boers, the Kekana

[93] S.S.7 R827/55

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would have had to endure further loss at the hand of nature. Thus while the significant loss incurred during the siege would have rendered Mugombane socially and spiritually exposed, his position would have been further undermined if and when people and livestock continued to die due to the epidemic that followed. An indication of the chief's reduced status may be read into the way that he died.

According to Jackson's informant sometime during 1855 Mugombane, who survived the cave event, took poison, died[94] and was buried in his kraal at Pruissen (Jackson n.d.:17). The chiefdom re-settled at the kraal of one of Mugombane's headmen, Lekalakala, and Mogemi[95] acted as regent on behalf of the incumbent chief who was still very young (Jackson n.d. 20-1).

In another account, told to the German missionary Wangemann some years after the siege, Mugombane was said to have died after he drank poisoned water offered to him by the Boers (Wangemann 1868: 458). While I agree with De Waal (1978: 125) that it was unlikely that the Boers poisoned Mugombane, because this was not a practice resorted to by them, I think it may be significant that the theme of poisoning occurs in both accounts. The importance resides in the fact that instances of poisoning are well documented amongst southern African Bantu-speaking groups[96]. Chiefs committed suicide in response to social/religious pressure by drinking poison, and poisoning was employed as a means to 'do away' with unsatisfactory chiefs.

Jackson (n.d. 36 & 57-59), for example, recorded that both the Langa chief Masebe, and Hans the first Mapela chief, committed suicide. Masebe shot himself after becoming infirm. His wives intimated that the ancestors, who communicated through dreams, were not pleased that he murdered his brother (*Ibid*.: 36). Hans cut his own throat after he fell into disgrace and was arrested by

[94] Orpen (1964:252) and Dart (1959: 92) maintain that he lived for many years after the siege. This notion probably arose from the confusion caused by the application of the name Mokpane/Makapan to all the chiefs.

[95] See footnote 4

[96] I am indebted to Bernard Kekana for bringing this point to my attention.

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the police (*Ibid.*: 57-9). Ziervogel (1959:193) recounted the circumstances around the death of an Ndebele Chief (possibly Maraba) who chose to be killed in battle to avoid ridicule for failing to protect his people:

> They [the Ndebele] saw a man fall, then another. They said: 'Let the chief flee to the mountains!' While he was climbing the mountain he saw blood on his shoulder. He asked those who were with him what this blood was. They said: 'Oh, chief! You are wounded!' He said: 'Oh! What sort of chief will I be even if I get well again? I shall be laughed at by other chiefs, who will say: you are a chief of scars! I shall return to fighting to that they can kill me'.

According to Schapera (1966a: 184) ' instances abound' in which chiefs deemed unsatisfactory were 'put out of the way' in a similar fashion by irate or desperate subjects. It is thus likely that Mugombane's poisoning whether self-inflicted or not was brought to bear by social pressures. His complete loss of political and religious power may be read in the group's movement away from the existing socio-political and ideological hub towards the centre of a lower level of authority – from Pruissen to Sefakaolo, the district of one of Mugombane's headman, from the authority of a chief to the authority of a regent.

7. Conclusion

The archaeological excavation produced evidence of a wide range of protection '*muti*' and amulets as one would expect of a group of people about to enter battle. There was also evidence of divination and the preparation of potions on the floor in the base of the cave. The last, possibly desperate actions, of the diviner create a sense of the overwhelming spiritual malignancy experienced by the people trapped in the cave. The cause of the misfortune may have been divined to be inside as well as out side of the cave especially once the polluting force of death began to pervade the area.

The chief's inability to reverse the misfortune even after the siege may have shamed him into committing suicide or his socially bankrupt position may have lead to his being deposed. The grave of Mugombane, now on a white-owned-farm at Pruissen, stands as a lasting reminder of the physical, spiritual and spatial dislocation wrought by the siege.

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Intriguingly, however the oral accounts are completely silent on this subject. The next Chapter interrogates this silence.

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CHAPTER 9: Tales

1. Introduction

In the light of the archaeological evidence and interpretation of the data there is a need to return to the oral record and to re-interrogate the 'silence'.

It has long been the concern of oral and colonial historians to analyse the images and content of memory as well as that, which has been omitted, forgotten or silenced (see for example, Passerini 1992, Stoler 2002). Stoler (2002: 91) noted that students of colonialism were taught to write histories of resistance from the 'bottom up', to search for human agency in "small gestures of refusal and silence among the colonized". Accordingly, we find Naidoo (1987) commenting on the Kekana's silence and reading it as 'insignificance' – introducing the possibility that the siege did not impact on the group to the extent that the early Boer and later Afrikaner narratives would have us believe. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, Hofmeyr recorded several oral accounts related by elders and members of the Kekana chiefdom. At face value these records appeared to support Naidoo's position. Hofmeyr (1993) noted that the 'only mark that the siege left was that of a 'brief interregnum' in which the chiefly line was momentarily threatened' (*Ibid*.: 135). Further, the oral accounts that did make mention of the siege appeared to have been shaped by the narratives of the siege written in the 1900s (*Ibid.*: 136) and thus divulged more about the complex interaction between the craft of story telling, the convention – the form and structure, and the socio-political context of the performance - than about the siege itself. In order to begin to interrogate silence one needs to access and assess that which has been remembered.

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2. Memory produced

The many versions of the siege, told from the perspective of different storytellers between 1854 and 1890, became 'concretised' towards the end of the 1800s through the concerted efforts of Afrikaners to nation-build (Hofmeyr 1993). This included, amongst other things, efforts to construct an 'embraceable' past or heritage (Lowenthal 1998: 162), through the creation of a grandiose mythology. This grand narrative provided the ideological and legal rationale for the appropriation of land, for racism, and for inequality in work and in education. The period following the Second South African War thus saw a reconfiguration of the past to suit the nationalist and separatist ideals of the Afrikaner. Narratives were constructed portraying the trekboers as a 'chosen people', carrying out heroic deeds for the upliftment of the nation, while Africans in general were depicted as treacherous and uncivilised, thereby producing a rationale and imperative for the separation of 'races'.

Hofmeyr's (1993 see Chapter 7) detailed analysis of the Afrikaner narratives lays bare the aggressive way in which power and resources were used to create a particular memory about the circumstances surrounding the siege. She demonstrated how this memory was made familiar and authentic through repeated acts of commemoration, public holidays, museums, monuments, film, popular literature[97] and school textbooks and how the core message legitimised the social order. She also presents examples of how the topography was slowly transformed by monuments and graves that again reinforced the social order that created it. These include, the unveiling of Kruger's statue in Pretoria in 1913 the base of which depicts his heroic rescue of the body of Piet Potgieter from the caves, the 1909 unveiling of the monument at Moorddrift, the celebration of the Great Trek in 1938 during which the associations were made with the cave event, conferring National Monument status on Historic Cave in 1938, and the reinterment of Piet Potgieter in the centre of Potgietersrus in the 1960s (Hofmeyr 1993: 146-59).

[97] Particularly the popular writing of Gustav Preller and later Eugene Marais.

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The popular and 'formal' documents, monuments, and commemorations comprise multiple sites from which a single, simple historic message was repeated and reinforced. Hofmeyr (1993: 149) summarised this message – unwarranted black aggression necessitated white retribution that resulted in the destruction of the AmaNdebele chiefdom. Thus through the topography created by the Afrikaner the Kekana were constantly reminded of their 'savagery', and their deserved punishment. They were also by extension singled out as one of the reasons for racism and *apartheid*. Madimetsa Kekana was fully aware of underlying function of the monument at Moorddrift;

> "That (the monument) is why we are not on good terms with the Boers. Every white child, if it misbehaves, is taken to the monument and then told, 'You can read there, look what the kaffirs did'" (quoted in Hofmeyr 1993: 167)

Over the years this monument came to embody so much fear and hatred that in 2004, ten years after the change in government, when in a reconciliatory gesture the very inflammatory wording on the plaque was altered, the Kekana refused to attend the ceremony. They explained that they did not feel secure going to the monument with the Afrikaners, and as the Government would not agree to provide them with protection against the Afrikaners they chose not to attend (Bernard Kekana pers. comm. 2005).

3. The tales that they told

According to Hofmeyr (1993: 163) the Kekana oral accounts of the cave event comprised a series of core clichés, which were elaborated upon in performance. The accounts themselves ranged from sketchy outlines of how the people trapped in the cave died, to more elaborate explanations of why the trekboers were killed at Moorddrift. Further, they traverse the way in which the Kekana were able to trick the Boers and plot the successful escape of Chief Mugombane, include humorous anecdotes about the shooting of Piet Potgieter and finally present detailed explanations of the rediscovery and installation of the son of the chief that ensured the survival of the lineage. Many of the images, motifs and underlying messages in these tales were probably forged in response to, and provided a much needed ideological cushion to survive in the face of the extremely hostile 'official' history of the ruling party. Selective memory or even false memory often enables groups or individuals to cope with and live in the present (Leydesdorff 1992).

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In the main the oral accounts focussed on the re-discovery/re-capture of the young Chief who had been intentionally given to the Boers before or during the siege to ensure the safety and continuation of the lineage (see Hofmeyr 1993: 105-122). In this version the young chief was captured or the indenture of the child was 'organised' by the Kekana during the siege. Later, migrants returning from the Kimberley diamond fields discovered and identified the chief even though he answered to the name Klaas and only spoke 'Afrikaans' (Dutch). Livestock and ivory were collected to purchase and reclaim the chief from the farmer.

Hofmeyr (1993: 132) argued that the re-capture/purchase of the young Mugombane from the Boers may well have occurred, as the Boers took many young men captive for the purposes of servitude. Certainly, the core of the story existed by the time Sarah Heckford visited the chiefdom in the 1870s. She recounted how elders told her that chief 'Mugombane' or 'Clas' was stolen back from the Boers during the night:

> One of the old Kaffirs told me that the little Clas had been very much frightened when he found himself a prisoner amongst the Kaffirs, and had cried and kicked to get away (Heckford as cited in Hofmeyr 1993: 132).

This fits with the information provided by Langa ethnographies that suggest the young chief was home by 1868. During 1868/9 a dispute arose between the Langa chief Mankopane and his son Masebe over a prior marriage arrangement. Masebe married off his sister, who has already been promised by his father to Mokopane II[98], to the chief of the Kgatla Mošetlha (Jackson n.d.: 20-21). Presumably, this conflict would not have arisen if the young chief Mokopane were still missing.

Much of the story told to Hofmeyr (1993) appears to have been added on later. The characters that feature in the tale very often lived at a different time. For example, the Langa chief, Masebe, was said to have provided the ivory to buy back the young chief (*Ibid*.: 271) was chief from 1877 - 1890 (Jackson n.d.: 7). In

[98] Designation given by Jackson (n.d. 17 ff.) to the chief that took the place of Mugombane after his death in 1855.

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another instance Mošupye was said to be the Kekana chief when Klaas was discovered (Hofmeyr 1993: 271). In a footnote Ziervogel (1957: 8) explained that Mushupya, also known as Klaas, acted as regent after the death of Lekgobo[99] who died without any issue. The genealogies place Lekgobo one or two generations after Chief Mugombane, and a National archive search produced a reference to Lekgobo Mokopane (Valtijn Makapan) dated to 1907. The conflation of events may revolve around the name, Klaas, or the notion of regency, or simply that names and places became altered with time and embellished to suit the storyteller.

4. The archaeological tale

In contrast to the oral tales, the archaeology provides enduring evidence for some of the activities and steps taken by the Kekana in an effort to survive. The spatial layout of the cave hinted at the structure and hierarchy of the society, which like many African societies of this time comprised a 'royal' core and other 'foreign' subordinate groups. However, the social and religious forces that operated to keep the chiefdom together may have begun to loosen under the pressure of the siege. The source of the misfortune, which became compounded for every day that the Kekana could not get access to water, was divined, and potions to protect against these maleficent forces were applied. With no reprieve, and with the polluting forces of death becoming stronger the group began to succumb. The grizzly remains of young and old people, and the desiccated bodies of a child and a young woman speak of untold suffering and provide a glimpse of the horror within the cave. Following the devastation of the siege, there is some evidence that the core of the chiefdom was challenged; the chief was 'dealt with' and political power base shifted.

I argue then that there is more than one reason for the 'silence'. A root cause lies within the cave itself and with the need for the survivors of the traumatic event to forget. A second loss of memory would have been suffered when those who experienced the siege were captured by the Boers and became dis-located from the chiefdom. Lastly, new memories would have been manufactured to cover the embarrassment of major social and economic misfortune that culminated in the

[99] also Likxhobho or Sikxhobo.

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loss of the chief. The silencing was caused, as it had been many times before, by the reorganisation of political relationships and the recreation of a suitable genealogy. The oral record thus resumes with Klaas who symbolises a new beginning and signifies the restoration of the chiefdom.

5. Conclusion

Memories, false memories (Passerini 1995: 16), counter-memories and silences (Trouillot 1995) result from a complex interaction of socio-political process that occur at different points in time, up to and including the present. It is for this reason that Trouillot (1995: 27) cautions that not all silences are equal nor can they be redressed or addressed in the same manner.

> …any historical narrative is a particular bundle of silences, the result of a unique process, and the operation required to deconstruct these silences will vary accordingly (*Ibid.:* 27).

He also reminds that the boundary between what happened and what is said to have happened is important. The difference between the two versions can expose a second or third narrative (cf. Troulliot 1995: 8). In the case of the Siege of Makapan the archaeological narrative accentuates the loss and the collapse of the chiefdom, while the oral tales either echo the written narrative or create, through the Klaas story, the impression of continuity and permanence. Using this as a starting point I argue three points. First, that the oral accounts were produced and or altered in response to the Afrikaner's use of the siege event to promote Afrikaner nationalism. The Afrikaner version was so aggressively imbedded in both the national psyche and the physical landscape during the 1900s that a reactionary set of oral accounts was produced by the Kekana to enable the group to 'cope' in the present. Secondly, the Klaas story reveals the real reason for the 'silence'. The real memory of the siege was 'silenced' early on by the Kekana statesmen who rapidly negotiated new relationships to re-establish themselves, and then contrived a suitable account to give the new chief legitimacy and the lineage continuity. The oral accounts captured the sentiment of a new beginning, but masked the tragic collapse of the chiefdom. Lastly, within the silence lies the tale of the downfall of chief Mugombane and the dislocation and near destruction of his chiefdom.

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CHAPTER 10: In Conclusion

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The excavation of the cave in which Chief Mugombane and members of the Kekana took refuge during the siege of 1854 provided an opportunity to explore the material evidence of this event, the details of which had become changed, exaggerated or forgotten over time. The exceptional preservation of organic material within the cave also afforded a unique opportunity to spotlight the people besieged within the cave. Further, the material culture could be interpreted against the background of the known political and socio-economic landscape of the interior of South Africa, and ethnographic and oral histories of 19th and early 20th centuries.

At the time of the siege of 1854, the Limpopo Province was defined by shifting authority, acquisition and loss of power and competition for the control of resources and trade. As the balance of political and economic power shifted from one chiefdom to another, or between settler groups and chiefdoms, it produced a myriad of frontier-like interactions. Competition for economic and political power within and between African chiefdoms created a system whereby frontier politics were continually reproduced on the margins of these societies. The rivalry between chiefdoms and between individuals within chiefdoms not only contributed to the 'fission' of different groups, it also forced individuals and chiefdoms to develop networks of political relationships in order to secure a

power base or realign themselves with more powerful polities. For political reasons these alliances were often given the semblance of authentic genealogical relationships.

In this northern region of South Africa the Dutch/trekboer colonial frontier was defined by a group intent on freeing itself from British rule, and determined to set up a new order and form of governance according to its own terms. This form of control involved an aggressive and almost desperate subordination of local communities. Once, however, African societies gained access to guns and began to protect themselves against the expropriation of their wealth and demands for their labour, the trekkers responded with high levels of coercion and violence in a desperate attempt to regain power and authority. These frontier situations also produced new and interesting 'hybrid', or 'creole' cultures which occupied a pivotal role in the early decades of trekboer occupation of the interior, as these served as key collaborators or key opponents of the new Trekker regime. This complex set of fluid interactions and social relations provided the backdrop against which the northern AmaNdebele launched what appears to have been a coordinated campaign of retaliation and resistance against the trekboers in 1854.

The ensuing battle and siege at Historic Cave subsequently formed an important part of Afrikaner propaganda of the 1900s. Intriguingly, the Kekana Ndebele oral accounts were completely silent on the subject of the siege. Hofmeyr (1993: 135) noted that the 'only mark that the siege left was that of a 'brief interregnum' in which the chiefly line was momentarily threatened'. Further, the oral accounts that did make mention of the siege appear to have been shaped by the narratives of the siege written in the 1900s and thus they divulge more about the complex interaction between the craft of story telling, its conventions – the form and structure, and the socio-political context of the performance - than about the siege itself. In the main, the oral accounts focused on the re-discovery/re-capture of the young Chief who had been intentionally given to the Boers before or during the siege to ensure the safety and continuation of the lineage. The research that has been described here was inspired to a large extent by this 'silence' in the oral record; the excavation of the siege offered the potential to authenticate or refute old records andmemories, and to reclaim forgotten information.

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A survey of caves and related sites in the Makapan Valley indicated that Historic Cave was not the only refuge site in the Valley. Signs of conflict were evident lower down in the Valley. These remains may relate to earlier skirmishes with the BaPedi and the Boers or indicate that the Valley was more widely occupied during the siege of 1854.

The well-preserved remains of the siege were exposed during the excavation of the Historic Cave. The archaeological data is interpreted as providing tangible evidence of the extensive preparations that went into furnishing and securing the cave before the siege. The material culture on the Historic Cave hillside is consistent with people moving around the hill slopes before periods of retreat, when activities focused on securing the refuge site, making it habitable, storing and preparing food and manufacturing weapons. Stone walls were constructed around the cave's entrances, clay was brought in from outside and mixed with dung to manufacture the floor in Dg1, poles and mud were procured to create walls, paths and storage areas, and rocks and boulders were rearranged to create living areas. The same data suggested a growing resistance to Boer demands amongst the chiefdoms in the area and was taken as support for the long-held speculation that the simultaneous murders of the Boers at Moorddrift, Pruissen and Fothane hill by Mankopane and Mugombane were premeditated. However, while evidence suggests that the group spent time preparing the cave, the material remains also imply that the site was only been occupied once during the siege of 1854. The stratigraphic layering documents the events and agents that altered and covered the occupation layers after the cave was abandoned or its occupants died. Although there was evidence that objects had been removed from the cave, the spatial relationships between remaining objects coupled with, in one instance, roof collapse contributed to the apparent integrity of the archaeological context.

The food remains retrieved during the excavation of the cave provide further support for the suggestion that the Kekana did not simply retreat into the cave without having undertaken reasonable measures to store food. The archaeology demonstrates that a wide range of methods were employed to store grains, pulses, legumes, and squash. Surplus cattle and small stock were separated out

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from the main herd to provide meat and milk, and fruit and various plant remains showed an awareness and use of medicinal, magical and nutritional supplements.

The human remains tell something of the individuals who died during the siege, and of the indiscriminate way that death took both young and old. Apart from one case, individuals appeared to have been healthy on entering the cave. Relatively low and constant vapour pressure within the cave inhibited the growth of fungi and bacteria, and fires and lime-enriched sand created conditions conducive to mummification. Two mummies recovered from the cave were studied. The first mummy was x-rayed on a low dose digital x-ray machine. The x-rays provided some indication of the age and sex of the individual, and showed no degenerative alterations of the skeleton. From the relaxed posture and kneeling position in which the individual died it was posited that dehydration was the primary cause of death. The second mummy of a 3-4 year old child may have died of similar causes but, unlike the kneeling mummy, the child died at a time when there were people still able to bury it, albeit inadequately. While the number of people who died in the cave remains largely unresolved, the analysis of the human remains supports a number of elements in the official Boer document, notably that people died of thirst, and that corpses and carcasses were heavily scavenged by a variety of scavengers including dogs.

The contextual integrity of the objects and 'households' within the cave enabled a rudimentary study of the spatial organisation within the cave and by extension provided insight into the society that created this organisation. The general orientation of the 'households' in the Eastern Cavern corresponds with the spatial organisation of normal homesteads. In this case, however, the status households were located in the base of the cave. This high status was expressed through a well-made dhaka floor, extensive grain stores, the presence of a back platform and protective fence. The archaeological remains associated with this floor indicated that members of the household were afforded greater physical and spiritual protection, and probably access to more liquid, food and medicine. The other households on the eastern 'terrace' were circumscribed by low, stonewalls. The floors were fairly featureless and were not plastered. Nevertheless the positioning of items of material culture provided insight into how the space was

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used. In each case there was a sleeping area, and a food preparation and storage area. Apart from the absence of a cooking area these spaces were condensed versions of the normal household. The people on the terraces had a private store, but participated in communal cooking. Thus the layout of the individual occupation areas, as well as the artefacts found on the occupation floors in the cave captured the hierarchical character of the chiefdom and provided evidence of an unequal distribution of resources.

When circumstances in the cave became more pressing, it is posited that tensions originating from this inequality and difference may have opened up lesions within the society and widened the divisions between the different components of the chiefdom. Fault lines may have appeared in socio-economic relationships that normally held the chiefdom together, and growing suspicion, resentment and blame may have resulted in the early weakening and physical collapse of the besieged. Lower ranking, subordinate groups may have chosen to abandon the cave, partly out of desperation and partly due to resentment and suspicion brought about by an hierarchical system that relied on socio-economic successes and allied spiritual forces to hold it together.

The ceramics from Historic Cave separate into an earlier and later component. Although, the later component from Historic Cave broadly conforms to findings from other contemporaneous Transvaal Ndebele sites, this interpretation of the pottery was influenced by the apparent fluidity of the 17th to 19th century political landscape. The ethnographies, oral histories, anthropological and archaeological studies dating to this period provide evidence for intensive mixing of peoples and associated material culture, and numerous and complex processes resulting in the fission, fusion and interaction of different players on the socio-economic landscape. Importantly, they emphasize the need to understand the status of the chiefdom, the role of women in bolstering that status, the relative positions of groups within the chiefdom and external socio-economic pressures in order to comprehend how women, style and decoration, were assimilated, manipulated and used by both men and women of rank.

Material culture relating to divination imparted an overwhelming sense of the spiritual malignancy that the besieged must have felt as both young and old

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began to succumb to the ravages of death. The archaeology provides evidence of the amulets worn by children and adults and the protection medicine obtained by each household to keep their personal space free of evil influence. These remains also capture the final activities of a diviner trying to detect the source of the misfortune and attempting to remedy the situation through the application of protective medicine. The cause of the misfortune may have been divined to be outside as well as inside of the cave especially once the polluting force of death began to pervade the area. As the death continued unabated and no relief in the form of outside help was forthcoming, the ancestors or *modimo* would have been seen to have been displeased. The inability to bury and ritually cleanse would have exposed the survivors to further pollution and risk of dying. This significant loss incurred during the siege would have rendered the chief Mugombane socially and spiritually exposed. Historical documents indicate that an outbreak of cattle and human sickness occurred after the siege, so that after suffering great loss at the hands of the Boers the Kekana would have endured further loss at the hand of nature. Thus with his position further undermined, it seems that Mugombane was either shamed into drinking poison or forced to take it.

In the case of the siege of 1854 the archaeology presents a means to detect the boundary between what happened and what was said to have happened (cf. Troulliot 1995). The archaeological evidence of the siege suggests that there was more than one cause for the 'silence' that was referred to previously. The first lies within the cave itself and with the need for the survivors of the traumatic event to forget. The second loss of memory would have been suffered when those who experienced the siege were captured by the Boers and became dis-located from the chiefdom. Lastly, and most importantly, memories would have been intentionally 'silenced' to cover the embarrassment of major social and economic misfortune that culminated in the loss of the chief.

In conclusion, the archaeological narrative plots the transition of Historic Cave from a site of resistance to a site of trauma, and plots the physical and spiritual disintegration of the society within the cave. Finally, it reveals a loss that was so profound that it is thought to have rendered Mugombane socially and spiritually bankrupt, a condition that would have required his removal as chief. From this it is argued that the real reason for the 'silence' lies at the point of rupture. At the

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stage when the surviving statesmen contrived a suitable account of ensuing events to give the new chief legitimacy, the lineage continuity, and create an impression of continuity and permanence.

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POSTSCRIPT

Since 1994 the historical landscape or topography around Mokopane has begun to transform once again. It seems fitting that the town, which was named after a Trekker leader, Potgieter, should now have been renamed, Mokopane, after the besieged chief, neither of whom were considered heroes at the time of their death. The valley has been granted World Heritage status, a new plaque has been placed at Moorddrift, a monument commemorating the siege has been erected in the Valley above Historic Cave, and a new gravestone placed on Mugombane's grave.

Ironically these changes have not affirmed the Kekana royal family's role in the siege any more than before. Government officials have by and large excluded them from decision-making processes, and refused to acknowledge their choice of chief by installing the son of the late chief's uncle. The Kekana have lodged an application with the High Court to have the decision overturned. The local municipality, the present landowners of the Valley, have also decided to intervene should a land claim placed by the northern AmaNdebele be found valid. They will ask the Government to compensate the group rather than grant them the land ownership on account of its World Heritage status (Executive meeting held in the Mokopane Municipal Chambers March 2005).

The South African Heritage Agency (SAHRA), the organisation managing the site and the museum development has requested a reconciliatory version of the siege. They wish the tale told in a way that will make the actions of both the Boers and the Kekana understandable and acceptable. In this way new memories are to be created once again with the explicit purpose of nation building and creating a heritage embraceable by all. In this process it is likely that the archaeological artefacts will be put on display as an examples of indigenous knowledge and crafts, but that the tale told by the archaeological material will be played down. Evidence of a growing AmaNdebele resistance against the repeated onslaught of the trekboers, subsequent attempts by the Kekana to ensure their own physical and spiritual protection, the dehydration of healthy women and children, and severe loss and internal collapse of the society

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whose members were then either killed or dispersed amongst the trekkers and their allies may not set an appropriate tone in the new South Africa.

At the point of writing the human remains recovered during the course of the excavation have yet to be reburied. The Kekana are no longer confident that they will be allowed to conduct the funerary rights if the burial takes place in the Valley. I have been unable to obtain any insight or clarity on this issue as management of the Valley appears to be in transition and all development has come to a standstill.

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