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Engraved rocks at Boomplaats farm: farmer settlement rock engravings of Mpumalanga Province, South Africa

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a general overview and history of rock art research in southern Africa. It then proceeds to outline the geographical location of the current study area, aims of the study, research methods adopted, and the rationale for undertaking the current study. Finally it provides a brief outline for the rest of the current research.

1.1 Overview of Rock Art Research in Southern Africa

Rock art, in both painted and engraved form is well known and widespread throughout southern Africa. Hundreds of thousands of rock art images made by hunter-gatherers, agro-pastoral communities have been recorded and described since the 19th Century by early travelers, scholars and enthusiasts, and retain a strong fascination to a wide rage of people today.

Rock paintings, images painted onto rock surfaces using naturally available pigments and binders, are commonly found in rock shelters, caves, and overhangs and sometimes on large isolated boulders in hilly or mountainous areas of southern Africa. Engravings, on the contrary, tend to occur in areas where caves, rock shelters or overhangs are not common. Generally engravings are usually made on flat boulders or stone tablets of various sizes in open veld.

In contrast to paintings, engravings are executed using the impact process - removal of surface material (Yates1990:56). The most common techniques used for making engravings are: pecking, incision or cutting, scratching and sometimes drilling into the rock (though this is rare). According to Royden Yates (1990), the incision and the fine line techniques used in engravings are the oldest methods, dating back to a about two thousand years ago. He suggests that the tool used for the fine line technique could have been metal. This assumption comes from the fact that small amounts of metal traded by the iron-smelting and using farmers on the eastern coast of which could have been available to the San engravers during the last two thousand years (Yates 1990: 58). However, it must be noted that there is no proof of metal being used

for engraving images as no such metal tools have been discovered at any engraved sites or excavated rock shelters.

A great wealth of southern African pre-historic art, especially the San rock art tradition, has been subject of well-developed and growing academic debate. Prominent rock art researchers such as David Lewis-Williams (1989, 1990, 1992), Patricia Vinnicombe (1976), Jeanette Deacon (1994, 1999), Peter Garlake (1978, 1995), Nick Walker (1983), John Parkington (1979, 2002), Sven Ouzman (1992), Thomas Dowson (1988, 1992), Benjamin W. Smith (1995, 1997, 2006) and Geoff Blundell (2004) among many others have contributed greatly to our understanding of the history of southern African rock art.

Farmer settlement engravings, the main focus of this study, are amongst the least studied and appreciated of all rock art traditions in southern Africa. Although the occurrence of these settlement engravings has been known since the early 1900s, little research has been directed into this area. For a long time now, this rock art tradition has been overshadowed by the majestic and more aesthetically appealing San rock art. This, however, started changing in the mid 1980s and 1990s when researchers such as Tim Maggs and T. Mike Evers shifted their attention from San rock art to Iron Age settlement archaeology (Evers 1984, 1988; Maggs 1986, 1995a). Early interpretation of farmer settlement engravings largely hinged on subject matter of the art (Pyper 1918; Malan 1955, 1957). Consequently, this approach to the study of settlement engravings left a big void in the determination of the possible authorship of this rock art tradition.

1.2 Geographical Location of Research Area

Mpumalanga province, previously known as the Eastern Transvaal, is bordered by Mozambique and Swaziland to the east, Gauteng province to the west, Limpopo province to the north, and KwaZulu-Natal and Free State to the south (see map below). The province is mainly situated on the high plateau grasslands of the middleveld. In the northeast the land rises towards the mountain peaks and then

terminates into an immense escarpment. In the southeast, the Sekhukune Mountains lie roughly along the western banks of the Steelpoort River. In the center of the province are the Leolo (lulu) Mountains that connect the other two Mountain ranges (Monning 1967).

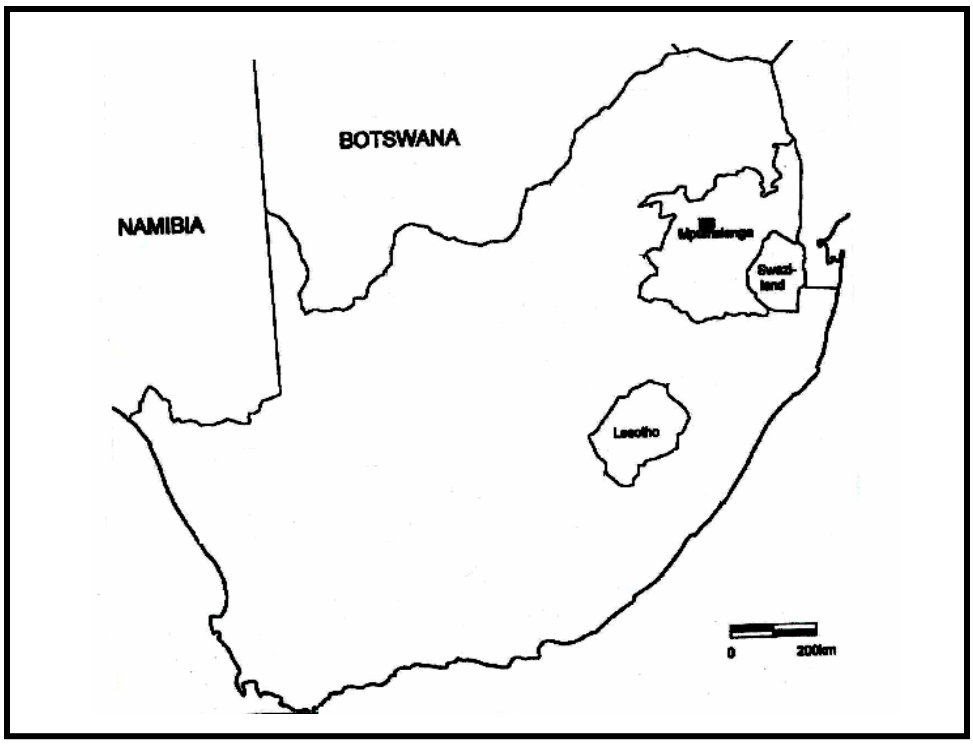


Figure 1: Map of South Africa showing Mpumalanga province, the study area.

1.3 Study Area

Boomplaats farm, the site for the current study, is situated within the bounds of Lydenburg District in the northern part of Mpumalanga province. The boulders bearing farmer rock engravings and other motifs occur on the farm Boomplaats 29 J T, which was previously sub-divided into two portions, each privately owned by two white farmers, Willem and Pritorius. This farm was however returned to its original owners: the Dinkwanyane Community in January 2001. At the moment the farm is used as grazing land for cattle. The engravings at this site are generally in good condition and comprise largely geometric shapes and some naturalistic motifs.

Most of the engravings are concentrated in the central portion of the farm. These engravings have been carved on dolerite rock and soft sand stones. The most common technique used in engraving the rock art was pecking but incising and scratching also occurs. In addition to the engravings, there are other archaeological and historical artifacts in the area such as grinding stones and stonewalling. However, no specific archaeological sites on the farm have been excavated.

A variety of images are depicted on many of the boulders at the site, but the most prominent motifs are the representations of Iron Age settlement patterns. The images range from single circles to sets of concentric circles, usually joined by a meandering line. These images are depicted in both pecking and incision styles. Besides the settlement patterns, the site also has other representations such as spread-eagle designs, drilled holes, semi-circles, rectangular shapes and animal motifs. A detailed description of these images is given in chapter four.



Figure 2: Map of Lydenburg town showing the location of the Lydenburg Heads Iron Age site (B) in relation to Boomplaats farm (A) [after Evers, 1979].

1.4 Aims of the study

This study focuses on Iron Age settlement engravings found at Boomplaats farm in Lydenburg District, Mpumalanga Province. From the existing literature, it is clear that previous researchers have not tackled the issues of authorship of these engravings and chronology adequately. As such the two main aims of this study are as follows:

- To document accurately and attempt to date the motifs at Boomplaats farm so as to produce a reliable archival database.
- To tie down the engravings at the site to specific Iron Age groups since some of them do not fit neatly into either the Zulu or Sotho-Tswana settlement patterns.

In the final analysis, it is hoped that this research will provide the missing link in the studies of farmer settlement engravings in South Africa.

1.5 Statement of the problem

While a lot of research has been conducted in KwaZulu-Natal, Northwest and Free State Provinces on Iron Age settlement patterns, only limited research on the issue of authorship of settlement engravings at Boomplaats farm has been conducted. The lack of targeted research on authorship of settlement engravings has lead to limited understanding of the background of the engravings at Boomplaats farm.

In spite of attempts by previous scholars at interpreting Iron Age settlement archaeology, the issue of authorship of the art at Boomplaats is unresolved. This is so because early research did not target identifying a specific group of people who could have made the engravings. Suffice to say that a lot of generalizations have been put forward regarding authorship of the engravings; none of it has yielded positive results. This research, therefore, presents a rare opportunity of identifying the engravers of this farmer rock art tradition.

1.6 Research Questions

Since the overall objective of this study is to identify the makers of the engravings at Boomplaats farm, the main research question this study attempts to answer is, 'who were the authors of the farmer settlement engravings at Boomplaats site?' Did they belong to the same or different cultural background? It is hoped that the answers to these questions will shade more light on the originators of this unique but interesting rock art tradition.

1.7 Rationale

The rationale and originality of undertaking this study comes from the fact that since the early 1900s, relatively little research has gone into determining the authors of farmer settlement engravings. Most of southern African rock art research has concentrated on San hunter-gatherer rock art and lately Bantu-speakers initiation or identity art (Smith & Ouzman 2004). Consequently, there has been a great need to balance the act in rock art research in southern Africa. This research seeks to increase the knowledge base by generating valuable literature on this under researched farmer rock art tradition. It is essential to bear in mind that the development of farmer settlement archaeology will take a long time and studies like this one are but just the beginning.

1.8 Research Methods

A research method is defined as "the application of scientific procedure towards acquiring answers to a wide variety of research questions" (Adams and Schaneveldt, 1991:16). Therefore, in a bid to achieve the set objectives for this research, a series of interrelated activities have been adopted. The contextual and culture-history methods will form the main tools for analyzing and interpreting the engravings at Boomplaats farm (see chapter 4). Through these methods this research will examine the occurrence and distribution of settlement patterns of both the Nguni and Sotho-Tswana speaking groups in South Africa. Details of these settlement patterns are discussed in chapter 4.

1.9 Structure of Research Report

This research report consists of six chapters. Chapter 1 provides an overall picture of the study and encapsulates the statement of the problem, aims, purpose of the study, study area and the research question. This chapter also contextualizes the general trends in southern African settlement rock art studies. This chapter also highlights the methods used and limitations encountered during the current study.

Chapter 2 reviews the available literature on farmer settlement rock relevant to the current study. The review focuses on findings of previous research to establish a basis for the search of chronology and authorship of the engravings at Boomplaats. This literature in turn provides a theoretical basis for the data analysis employed in chapter 5.

Chapter 3 situates Boomplaats farm in its broader social and historical context with regards to Iron Age research. The chapter then proceeds to place the study area, within the archaeological and historical sequence by describing in detail Iron Age farmer migrations and settlement of southern Africa. Finally, this chapter also examines the current inhabitants of the study area.

Chapter 4 discusses the two theoretical frameworks used for this study and describes the research methods and activities employed in the course of the current research. The chapter also discusses in detail the suitability and appropriateness of the chosen theories and methods. Attention has been paid to the merits of the adopted approaches. This chapter also provides a detailed description and distribution of settlement patterns for both Nguni and Sotho-Tswana groups. Finally this chapter presents the findings or results from Boomplaats farm.

Chapter 5 provides an interpretation of the results presented in chapter 4 by applying appropriate theoretical frameworks. This is followed by discussion and formal analysis of the results in relation to available archaeological and historical data for the study area. In analyzing the results, the contextual and culture-history approaches are applied. Finally

chapter 6 concludes the research and provides observations and recommendations from the current research work.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

Southern Africa is home to what is probably the richest and most diverse occurrence of rock art in the world. Most engravings date back to thousands of years ago while some paintings are only a few hundreds years old. The majority of the rock paintings and engravings in this part of the world are attributed to the San people, while the so-called "Late white" art, and geometric engravings are reckoned to have been executed by the ancestors of the present day Bantu-speakers and KhoeKhoen people respectively (Smith 2004).

Southern African San rock art is known worldwide for its striking images, detail and variety. San rock art is intricate, much of it involving fine line work, vivid colours and accurate perspectives on form and dimensions (see figure 3 below). This is the opposite of the farmer settlement engravings, the focus of this research report.



Figure 3: An example of San fine line painting from Lowlands' area of Mpumalanga province [Photo: R. Mbewe, 2005].

Over the last few decades, a series of scholars have undertaken research on farmer settlement engravings (Collett 1979, 1982; Evers 1984; Maggs1986, 1995, and Schoeman 1997. Their work has ranged from ground surveys to aerial photographs, historical studies to actual archaeological excavations on selected sites (Schoeman 1997 & Collett 1982). The literature generated by these early scholars provides a historical framework within which to place the current study.

This study draws together both published and unpublished data about farmer Iron age engravings. These will be analyzed in the context of the available historical and archaeological knowledge of farmer settlement pattern changes from the current study area so as to place the engravings in a temporal framework within which one can then consider the social production of settlement pattern rock art. Although Boomplaats material will form the core data for this research, reference will be made to other sites in neighbouring areas such as Muden in KZN and the Free State province.

2.1 Literature on Iron Age Settlement Engravings

The history of research on farmer settlement engravings in Mpumalanga province extends as far back as 1918 when Dr Cornelis Pyper visited Boomplaats farm and recorded some of the engravings at the site. He later produced a paper on his findings in the then South African Association for the Advancement of Science Journal. In this paper Pyper gave a general description of the engravings and the area, describing the motifs as; “a system of circles and a dozen cup-like designs all near each other” (Pyper 1918:413). It is clear from his description that he did not recognize the core subject matter of the engravings.

The next person to write about the farmer engravings was Raymond Dart in 1931. In his paper Dart indicated the inadequacy of the state of knowledge of this tradition of art. Dart was the first researcher to recognize the engravings as settlement patterns but did not ascribe them to any African sources. This is confirmed in his paper where he commented that, “the importance of the Lydenburg engravings lay in the fact that they were made by metal users in the late Neolithic period or Bronze Age” (Dart, 1931). In this paper Dart sought to link the engravings to the European Neolithic and his agenda here was to prove

that foreign influences (especially European) might have been involved in the making of these engravings. Dart favoured exoticism theories and he played down the close relationships between the engraved forms and African settlement patterns. As a result of the above situation, Dart's ideas have not been taken seriously by those that have worked on these engravings after him.

Eric van Hoepen in 1939 was the next researcher to undertake extensive research work on farmer settlement engravings at Boomplaats. His work included studying stonewalled ruins in both Lydenburg and Machadodorp areas. He was the first researcher to convincingly correlate the local Iron Age farmer ruins to the engravings in the area. In his initial assessment of the engravings at Boomplaats farm, he also suggested that some of the engravings represented vines or branches of grapes. However this explanation is clearly fanciful and does not fit well with the forms depicted. After consulting with the local Pedi inhabitants, van Hoepen came to realize that most of the engravings represented settlement plans showing cattle kraals and tracks. His work therefore marked a key breakthrough. Ignoring the grapes, he had correctly identified the subject of the engravings for the first time.

Further research on the engravings revealed that the number of rings or circles had significant meaning in the interpretation of the motifs at the site. Van Hoepen (1939), for example, was told that, "three concentric circles or rings represented rich people's kraals with two or more wives, while single rings represented a poor man's kraal with only one wife. The irregular lines that joined the circles were cattle tracks leading from one kraal to the other" (van Hoepen 1939:67). Van Hoepen also noted that the settlement designs at Boomplaats farm were structurally different to those associated with the Zulu village plans or the Sotho-Tswana settlement. He therefore began debate into the specific authorship of the settlement pattern engravings.

Following in his footsteps was Berand D. Malan. Through a series of papers in 1955, 1957 and 1965, Malan was able to show that this kind of engraving was usually executed on

fine-grained, smoothly patinated boulders and rock outcrops, mostly of igneous origin, on exposed kopjes in the Highveld (Malan 1955:427).

Malan (1955) was the first researcher to describe the style of execution of these engravings. He noted that they were either done by incision or by pecking. He also noted that the pecked group showed a greater variety of subject matter, technique and manner of depiction than the incised ones. Malan was also able to show that, in some cases, only the outline was pecked out as opposed to a situation where the subject was depicted by pecking away the whole surface.

Furthermore, it was Malan (1965) who first put on record a range of other motifs depicted at Boomplaats. In a somewhat specialized genre, he noted other geometric figures, which included squares divided by lines, spread-eagled motifs, and animal motifs (Malan 1965:340). Consequently, Malan's work showed a shift for the first time from mere descriptions of motifs to defining style, form and technique. Although this was a valuable contribution to our understanding of the production of art at Boomplaats, Malan still did not resolve the question of authorship and chronology.

Between 1986 and 1995 Tim Maggs researched extensively into settlement engravings in KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga and Northwest provinces. In 1995, Maggs published a paper called "Neglected Rock Art: The rock engravings of agriculturist communities in South Africa" (Maggs 1995a). In this paper, he reaffirmed the ideas that Malan had expressed by linking the engravings with the settlements patterns of Iron Age farmers. Like van Hoepen before him, Maggs discovered that these engravings were often within a few hundred meters of actual Iron Age stonewall settlements (Maggs 1995a.).

Tim Maggs was the first archaeologist to attempt to review the corpus of Bantu-speakers engravings as a single phenomenon. He linked the engravings to his extensive research into the settlement archaeology of Iron Age farmers. He defined the distribution of this rock art tradition and described its regional variability. He noted that, "all sites were in the grassland environment or in the savannas marginal to the grasslands" (Maggs 1995a: 133).

Iron Age settlement engravings are distinct from one region to the other. In KwaZulu Natal (KZN), for example, the engravings tend to have clear primary and secondary circles. In between these two circles, houses or huts are arranged in a circular manner facing the main kraal in the centre. These kinds of engravings are unique to KwaZulu-Natal area (Maggs 1995a; Hammond-Tooke, 2003).

Inland the engravings take a slight variation to those from the east coast. In Lydenburg district, for example, the engravings at Boomplaats mostly take the form of concentric circles with an adjoining line. The hut details are mostly left out except for a few. In the Free State and Northwest provinces the engravings do not bear the external enclosing circle. Instead scalloped walls that form part of the dwellings constitute the external or primary boundary wall. The depiction of settlement patterns in these different ways signifies different cultural orientation by the people who made them. The details of these various settlement patterns are discussed in the next chapter.

2.2 Archaeological Data

Previous researchers have demonstrated the existence of a tradition of settlement pattern engravings and have laid the foundation for their further study (Evers 1988; Maggs1995 and Schoeman 1997). To date no one has made a detailed examination of their authorship or chronology. To place these engravings in their social context, I now review our understanding of Iron Age settlement in Mpumalanga province.

Archaeological evidence from excavations within Mpumalanga and other surrounding areas has shown that various groups of people occupied the area at different times. Huffman (1982, 1986, and 2004) and Evers (1974) have been able to reconstruct a history of the Iron Age people in the area through the study of settlements, ceramics and linguistics.

A major contribution to the understanding of Iron Age settlement patterns was achieved through archaeological analysis of the homestead structure of eastern Nguni groups. This led to the coining of the term a “Central Cattle Pattern” and the discussion of the symbolic use of space in Bantu-speaker settlements (Kuper 1982; Huffman 1982, 1986).

The first archaeologist to excavate actual Iron Age stonewalled settlements in Lydenburg District was Timothy Mike Evers in 1981. He described the engravings at Boomplaats as homesteads with an internal arrangement of concentric form with a cattle kraal in the middle. He also recognized other features as huts, grain bins and outer ring wall. He interpreted the meandering lines that join these circles as cattle tracks and the holes as watering places. It was Evers that addressed the issue of dating the engravings for the first time.

According to Evers (1974), the date of the engravings is dependent on the interpretation of what is presented. He believes that men made these engravings in accordance with the social subject matter of gender and the division of Labour. Patricia Davison (1988) provides examples of the division of labour among the Mpondo Community of the Eastern Cape Province. She states that, “men were concerned with legal and political affairs; women were pre-occupied with domestic and agricultural tasks” (Davison 1988:104). This division of spheres of influence is clearly depicted in the settlement engravings of the Nguni and Sotho-Tswana speaking people.

Another local archaeological source of information on Iron Age settlement patterns comes from David P. Collett. He used both aerial photographs and ground surveys in Mpumalanga to identify Iron Age settlement types. Through his work, he was able to identify two complex types: simple ruins, and complex ruins (Collett 1982:34). The simple ruins were isolated circular enclosures while the complex ones consisted of two or more contiguous circular enclosures.

Furthermore, datable pottery assemblages (ceramics) from ruin excavations provided valuable information with regard to the occupation of the area by Iron Age people. The results from excavated data suggest an occupation period of between AD1650 and AD 1820 for the complex ruins (Collett 1982:42). Therefore, the excavations by Collett proved that the two ruin types belonged to a single phase of the Iron Age that is related to an historic Pedi tradition.

Collett's findings from Lydenburg area actually tie in with Tom Huffman's dating from the Lephalala drainage area of Malore walling and Moore Park defensive walling. Radiocarbon dating for all these settlement ruins range from mid 16th C to early 18th C (Huffman, 2004:93). These new walled settlements coincide with the first movement out of KwaZulu-Natal of Nguni-speakers into the interior plateau. Huffman, therefore, has been able to see the impact on Northern Sotho and Tswana settlements of the movement of the Nguni onto the interior plateau (Huffman 2004:95).

Another researcher whose archaeological findings are relevant to the study of settlement engravings is Robbie Steel, who worked at Olifantspoort in Magaliesberg valley. During his survey, Steel (1986, 1988a) discovered over 170 rock engravings of settlement plans. He also noted that all these engraved sites were in close proximity to actual Iron Age settlement sites of the Bakwena people (Steel, 1988a). Through his studies Steel confirmed what Malan (1955) had discovered: that these engravings were variations of a single settlement theme called the Central Cattle Pattern (CCP). Steel also tried to correlate the settlement engravings with actual settlements in the vicinity of these engravings.

More recent archaeological work on settlement patterns comes from Maggs (1995b). He suggests that one way of understanding the Iron Age settlement engravings is by examining the religious and symbolic values of the communities that made the art. Through his studies he has been able to detect the differences in the orientation of actual and engraved entrances to the homesteads. In the grassland areas, for example, the stock pen entrances open uphill and the outer surrounding wall is usually omitted. In the engraved version the slope on the rock was used similarly so that entrances point up scope. He also noted that the Tswana and Northern Sotho engravings tend to be smaller, with most complex structural elements left out. In other words, the Tswana-Sotho engravings present a simplified version of an actual settlement pattern.

2.3 Ethnographic Data

Besides archaeological information and rock art literature, ethnography also provides vital information concerning engravings representing settlement patterns. Although there is no direct ethnographic data for the engravings at Boomplaats farm, Malan (1955) provides a records of a local man aged about seventy five years old, who told Mr. Browden, a mining commissioner in Pietermaritzburg, that when he was a boy, he and his friends made toy oxen of clay and using cattle dung wetted with urine, fashioned models of villages into which they placed their clay oxen to play a game. The meaning of this story is that some of the settlement engravings were made as a game by boys looking after cattle in the fields.

This information was later confirmed in 1956 when Malan visited Muden, a rock-engraving site, in KwaZulu-Natal. He also found two small Zulu boys aged between six and eight years who told him that they made the engraved settlement designs as a game. Malan states that, “The boys identified one of the designs as their own making and pointed out the various features such as the outer fence, huts, cattle enclosure and grain bins. They also demonstrated their play by ‘walking’ cattle, represented by stones, through the entrance into the cattle enclosure and small stones, representing calves, into the inner enclosure for calves” (Malan 1957:154).

According to Malan (1957), the technique demonstrated by the boys was simple, direct, and effective. He believes that similar games could explain the making of all the pecked settlement pattern engravings at the site, old as well as new. This ethnographic information is the only oral testimony that we have concerning settlement plan engravings from KwaZulu-Natal.

It must be noted though that, while some engravings may have been used as games, this surely is an unlikely explanation for all of the complex settlement engravings at Boomplaats because this site has thousands of homestead engravings made over and over again in selected geographical areas. This pattern is far more suggestive of some repeated ritual practice in which the production of the image rather than the consumption of the

image were paramount. Why else would the same design be engraved in the same places on thousands of separate occasions?

2.4 Broader Social Context

The Sotho-Tswana and Nguni speaking people, who live in the vicinity of these engraved areas and whose settlement patterns are reflected in the images, had a different religious system from that of the Late Stone Age people. They had highly developed and complex kinship structures which were strongly patrilineal. In most cases the family cattle played a very important symbolic part in religious and social relationships.

Mason (1968) argues that engraved settlement plans are a direct function of social organization. He states that the key to understanding these engravings largely depends on the social organization of the community that is being studied (Mason 1968). Throughout his research, Mason observed that most of the Sotho-Tswana Iron Age settlers tended to build on high ground, slopes or summit of hills (kopjes) for special reasons.

The most important reason why they built on hill slopes was for defense of their homesteads against enemy attacks. The view from the top, for example, allowed for the enemy to be spotted from afar. Mason also noted a concentration of settlements in the rain catchments areas of major rivers such as the Vaal and Limpopo. Available ethnographic data on the choice of settlement confirms that these areas were especially suitable for cattle keepers. These areas had ample water and pasture for the animals.

Ethnographic data on Northern Sotho groups indicates that the homestead structures acted as a microcosm for the community, and for the spiritual world as a whole. The Pedi, for example, believed that “the world of the ancestral spirits is structurally a reflection of the living world” and it is “part of the social order” (Monnig 1967:56). The head of the male homestead, via his deceased male ancestors effected mediation with the spiritual world (Maggs 1995:134). The family homestead with its cattle kraals served as a place of sacrifice to the ancestors.

Within the CCP system, a social and religious structure was and still is inseparable among many rural communities. To many the cattle kraal does not only symbolize the wealth of a household, but is a medium through which ancestral spirits can be contacted.

Ethnographic literature and ethno-archaeological research by Kuper (1982) Davison (1988), Pistorius (1992) and Maggs (1976, 1995) have shown that in many rural communities, the built settlement pattern is a visual manifestation of the traditional spiritual and social order.

Many researchers in this field of study have exemplified the centrality and spiritual importance of both cattle and the cattle kraal. Among the Nguni speaking groups, for example, cattle have a high symbolic and religious significance beyond their economic value. This is reflected in the position and form of their settlement enclosures. Hammond-Tooke et al. (2003) state that the cattle kraal holds un ending nuance of meaning in the lives of local people where tradition still holds strong. Firstly, the kraal is a pivotal feature of the entire homestead or *Umzi*. Secondly, apart from providing protection for the cattle, it is also the focus of both ritual and secular authority (Hammond-Tooke et al. 2003:19).

In addition, the cattle kraal is a sacred precinct of deceased headmen and other prominent male family members who still form part of the social group. It is also here that sacrifices are made to the ancestors for the protection of the whole household and thanking them for good health and abundant crops. Hammond-Tooke et al (2003) also indicate that in the cattle kraal, there is a spiritual force or *umzamo* protecting a sacred burial area, limited to men only. This spiritual force makes the kraal a no-go place for women of childbearing age, except for the daughters of the chief who are exempt from this ban.

In times of sickness and other natural calamities, the cattle kraal is used as a place for patient intermediaries between the world of the living and the dead. The continued importance of the cattle kraal is confirmed by the placing of horns of cattle slaughtered for the ancestors at the gate of the kraal (see Figure 4 Below).

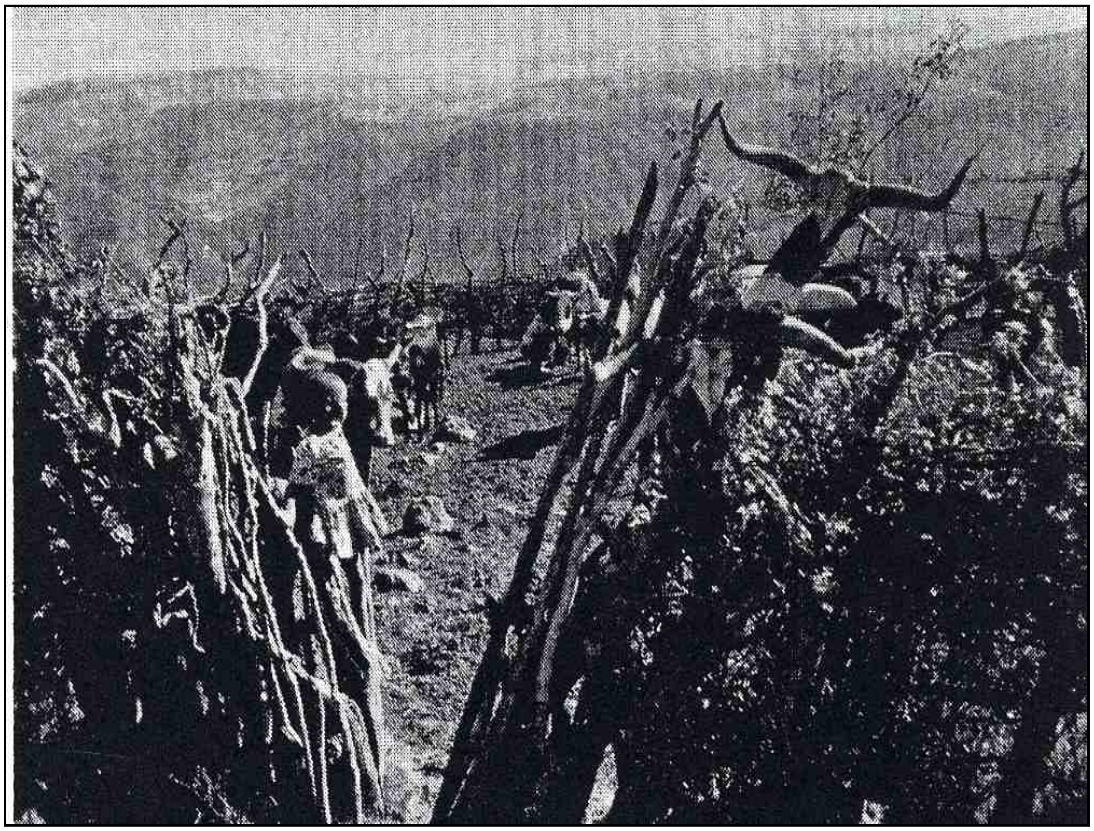


Figure 4: Entrance to an Nguni Kraal. Note the horns of slaughtered cattle placed on the right side of the kraal entrance. The small girl is allowed inside the kraal because she is not of child bearing age [after Davison, 1988].

Davison (1988) states that the horns act as visual affirmation of the spiritual powers vested in cattle (Davison 1988:104). In this respect the horns can be regarded as mediating between the secular and sacred realms, and between the present and the past. Thirdly, the cattle kraal also acts as a men's meeting place, the "*kgotla*", of the Sotho-Tswana speaking people. In these respects cattle byres are used as administrative and judicial centers for resolving local conflicts among household members (Maggs 1976). It is in this place where communal bell-shaped grain pits of the homestead are located.

In all these activities women tend to be excluded from the central area: the cattle kraal. Among the Zulu, for example, the restriction of women of childbearing age from the cattle kraal (no entering, no milking or collecting cow dung) was based on ritual impurity called

umlaza or “hotness” in women, which was deemed a threat to the health of both men and cattle (Kuper 1982; Hammond-Tooke et al. 2003:19).

With this rigid law in place, women were relegated to other chores linked to the dwellings and the fields. They were responsible for the cultivation of crops, storing the harvest and preparing food as well as building the dwellings (Maggs 1976). It is for this reason that among the Sotho-Tswana speaking people, grain storage takes place within or close to the dwelling zone.

The homestead, therefore, represented a map of the family structure, which in turn is a microcosm of the community and the spiritual world. Images of the built environment, therefore, offer artists from such communities the best possible vehicle to express graphically their communal worldview. These patterns reinforce the ideological values of the communities, which they hold in high esteem.

One difficulty in understanding the underlying theme of this art is that there are usually a variety of images that are executed and sometimes patterns vary between areas. In most engravings, for example, the engravers sometimes leave out the internal finer details present in an actual settlement. This makes it difficult to determine whether an engraving depicts a kraal or a dwelling.

2.5 Conclusion

This review has analyzed the available data regarding settlement patterns and their associated engravings. It is clear from the literature that the majority of the work concentrated on identifying the subject matter of the engravings. The engravings were compared with actual settlement plans to determine similarities and differences between the two. However, while dates were suggested for some settlement ruins and engravings, the specific question of authorship at Boomplaats has not yet been answered. Therefore, I proceed in the next chapter to position the engravings at Boomplaats site in their social and historical context.

CHAPTER 3: SITUATING BOOMPLAATS SITE WITHIN MPUMALANGA PROVINCE

3.1 Introduction

The farm Boomplaats 29 JT is located about 8km north of Lydenburg town in Lydenburg District, Mpumalanga Province. The history of this farm's ownership is rich and varied. The Dinkwanyane community bought this farm from a Portuguese family in 1906 for an amount of 50, 000 British Pounds. The community held the land for 60 years under registered title deed No. T 9826/1911.[1]

The farm comprises 2,297 Hectares of fertile agricultural land. It is on this farm that the farmer settlement rock engravings occur in large numbers. The rich soil, mild climate and a number of semi-perennial streams made it possible for the Dinkwanyane Community to raise cattle, maize and fruit on this farm. (See Orientation Map of Boomplaats farm on next page).

This farm was classified as a so-called 'Black-spot' by the apartheid government in the 1950s. This followed numerous complaints of illegal squatting from the many neighbouring white farmers. With such calls and the government's intentions to clear African landowners from predominantly white areas, the removal of the Dinkwanyane Community from their land was inevitable. Therefore, between 1957 and 1961, the Dinkwanyane Community was removed from this farm by force. Figure 5 below shows the orientation map of Boomplaats farm 29JT in relation to other farms in the area [adapted from Mulaudzi, 2000].

[1] South African government information, notice of expropriation for Boomplaats farm Lydenburg District, 2001.

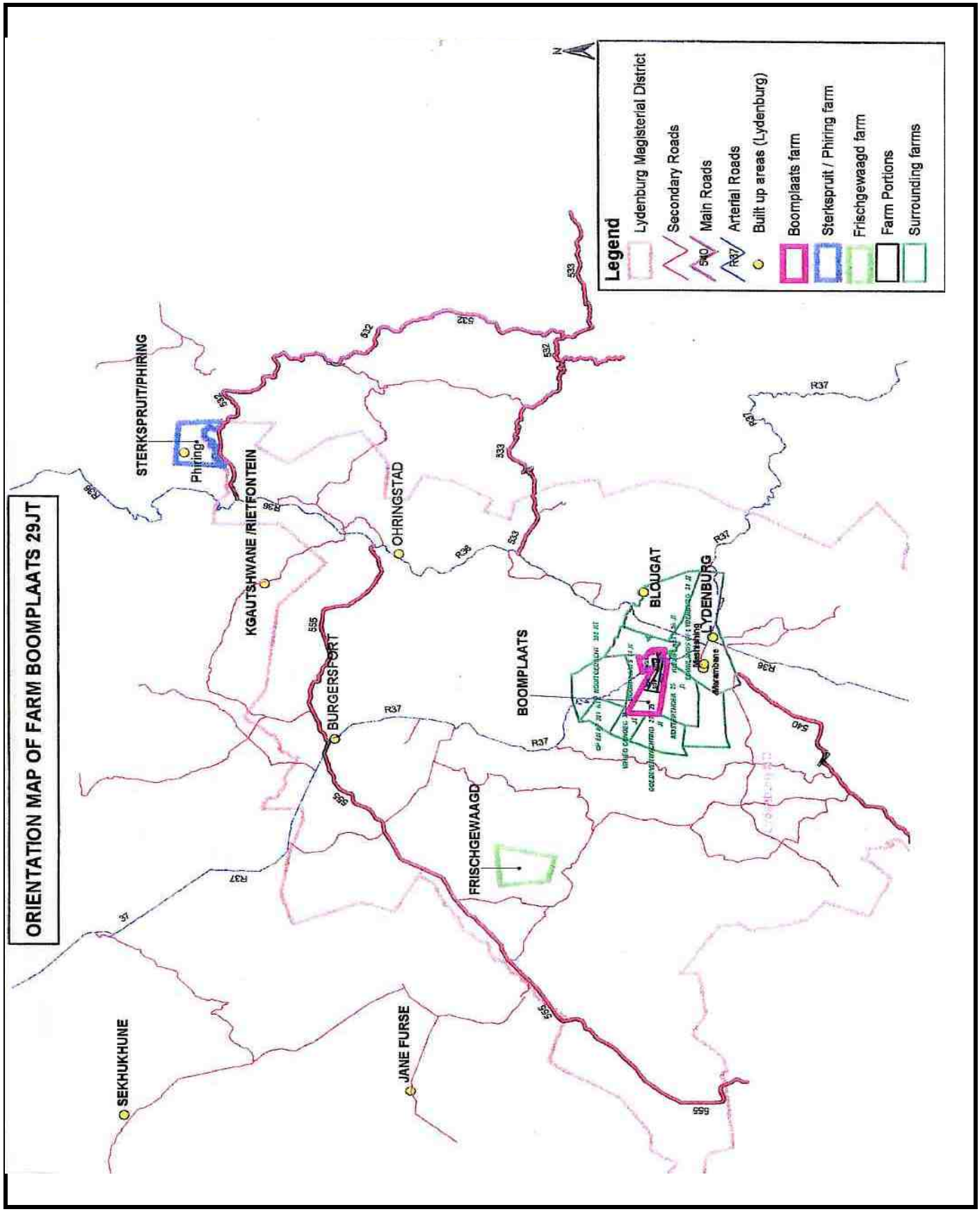


Figure 5: Orientation map of Boomplaats farm, Lydenburg district [After Mulaudzi, 2000].

Although the Dinkwanyane were taken to three different locations, Jane Furse, Sterkspruit/Phiring and Frischgewaagd within Mpumalanga province, their desire to return to their ancestral land never ceased. After the dawn of the new democracy in South Africa in 1994, the Dinkwanyane community launched their land claim with the Land Restitution Commission. Consequently, in 2001 the community got back their land after a long and frustrating legal battle.

The Boomplaats settlement engravings are located on hundreds of exposed rock surfaces of soft sand - stone Ecca series. They depict different themes ranging from settlement patterns, animal motifs, spread-eagled designs and other geometric designs. This site has great variety and detail in its engravings, and perhaps represents one of the largest open-air engraved sites in South Africa, occurring on a landscape of over 2km.



Figure 6: A general view of Boomplaats farm, Lydenburg District, facing northwards towards the hills [Photo: Ben Smith, 2005].

3.2 Geology and Vegetation Type.

Lydenburg district falls in between two hilly areas of Steenkampsberg Mountain in the north and the Long Tom range in the south. Its location in the valley of these two mountain ranges presents a complex geological formation for the area. The general geology of Lydenburg District where Boomplaats is located is mainly composed of granite and pegmatite rocks (Monnig 1967, Visser 1989). However, the predominant rock type at Boomplaats farm on which most of the engravings are made is the fine-grained Aeolian sandstone of the Ecca series. Owing to the soft nature of this rock type, it is highly susceptible to both natural weathering and vandalism by human agents. Boomplaats farm lies at an altitude of 1420 to 1570m above sea level and is criss-crossed by several non-perennial streams.

Falling within the sourish Bushveld of the savannah Biome, Lydenburg flora varies from a mixed Bushveld vegetation to open tree savannah grassland. Boomplaats farm has, in particular, a veld type that has more grass cover than trees. Trees of acacia and combretum species characterize the area. Evers (1974), states that the most common acacia species in Lydenburg area are Acacia Giraffe (camel thorn) and Acacia Karoo (sweet thorn). Besides the two tree species, Lydenburg area boasts of the Ficus species found along riverbanks. Grass cover in the area mainly comprises the hyparrhemia (Tamboikis), broom grass (Egrostis pallen) and finger grass (Digitaria erientha).

The temperature in the area ranges from –2º to 35º Celsius. Between April and October it is generally dry with cool daytime temperatures, becoming very cold at night. July is the coldest month with a possibility of frost, though usually rare. The area has an annual average rainfall of between 600mm and 1100mm.

3.3 Description of Boomplaats Site.

Boomplaats site is an open farm area between coordinates 25º 02''. 87' E and 30º 24''. 27' S (western perimeter) and 25º 01'' 99' E, 30º 24''. 33' S (Eastern perimeter). On this farm there are three concentrations of engravings on separate dykes. The first dyke lying at an altitude of 1423m above sea level has very few boulders (6 clusters) bearing engravings. This area is besides a mash zone where only a few boulders occur. This section of the farm forms the central area of the site.

The second dyke lying at about 1460m to 1570m above sea level has the greatest number of engravings. The majority of boulders on this section of the farm bear the largest number of engraved settlement patterns. This area is situated on the western perimeter of the farm overlooking the marshlands. Finally the third and last dyke lies at about 1800m above sea level. Here again there are very few engravings. The main reason for the absence of engravings in this area is attributed to unsuitable rock surfaces. The rock types here are mainly granite and this rock is hard to engrave on. The map below shows the three dyke areas that bear the various engravings at the site.

3.4 The coming of Iron Age farmers

The movement of Iron Age farmers from the East and Northwest of Africa into central and southern Africa was done in two distinct migration streams called Urewe and Kalundu. Urewe or the eastern stream originated from East Africa in the Great Lakes region. This stream is linked to Moloko pottery, which is associated with origins of the spread of Sotho-Tswana languages (Huffman, 2004). The Kalundu or western stream originated from Northwest Africa in present day Angola.

According to archeological evidence, the earliest date for settlement in South Africa by early Bantu-speaking farming communities is 4th century AD. This date is evidenced from pottery excavated from sites in Limpopo province such as Silver leaves and Millbank (Schalkwyk, 1993). It has also been demonstrated that pottery from Silver Leaves site belongs to the Urewe tradition. By the end of the 5th century Silver Leaves pottery gave rise to *Mzonjane* pottery (400-700 AD). By 900 AD the makers of Mzonjane pottery had extended into the coastal areas of KwaZulu-Natal.

After 600AD a new wave of Early Iron Age settlers different from the makers of *Mzonjane* pottery emerged from the northwest and entered South Africa. They are recognized by their pottery called *Msuluzi*, a branch of the Kalundu tradition. The earliest site for this Kalundu tradition in South Africa is located at Happy Rest. *Msuluzi* pottery was soon followed by two other Kalundu facies called *Ndondondwane* (700 AD) and *Ntshekane* in about 900 AD (Whitelaw, 2005; Huffman, 2004).

These early Bantu-speaking farmers lived a typical Early Iron Age existence that included mixed farming and permanent villages or settlements. They grew crops such as sorghum, finger millet, bulrush millet, legumes, groundnuts and cucurbits (melons and gourds). The Portuguese only introduced maize, the current staple grain, to southern Africa after the sixteenth century. Besides agriculture these early farmers also hunted game, fished and gathered plant foods to supplement their diet (Huffman 2004).

Similarly, available archaeological evidence has shown that it was only after AD 450 that cattle keeping began in Mpumalanga. This is evidenced by the findings from Broederstroom and Riverside sites where excavation and phytolith analysis of animal pens revealed dung-lined pits (Mitchell & Whitelaw, 2005:8). This discovery helped to document the presence of cattle and to put to rest one of the objections previously raised to the application of the CCP to first millennium contexts. From this evidence it is now more probable to conclude that the early farmers practiced the CCP settlement pattern (ibid).

As acknowledged in the first chapter, the first known inhabitants of the southern Africa were the San hunter-gatherers. The arrival of Early Iron Age people in this part of Africa affected the life style of the San in a profound way. The San were pushed way from the prime areas into more arid areas and eventually lost their traditional hunting grounds. (Evers 1974, Huffman 1984).

Little is known about the social and religious life or the language of these early Iron Age farmers. However, inferences can be made from archaeological remains. Of great

significance, however, are the Lydenburg heads[2], which come from a site, dated by the radiocarbon method to about AD 500-600, near the present town of Lydenburg in Mpumalanga province. Whitelaw (2001) and Huffman (2004) suggest that these early farmers spoke ancestral eastern Bantu languages, though the two groups were linguistically distinct.

Between 1030 AD and 1200 AD new waves of Iron Age migrations from the Urewe stream occurred. This period marked the beginning of Late Iron Age. These new groups absorbed the earlier groups they found already settled in the area: the Early Iron Age farmers. Their ceramic pottery called *icon* (1300-1500 AD) and *Madikwe* (1500-1700 AD) link them to the ancestors of the present Sotho-Tswana speaking people (Huffman 2003a: 12). The presence of these new people is further evidenced by the occurrence of new styles of Iron Age pottery; stonewall settlement ruins and iron smelting furnaces. More recently (1981), Evers discovered abandoned copper mines and salt making pans and other trade items in the Lydenburg district.

Finally by 1300 AD a third wave of Bantu-speaking people entered southern Africa. These new groups of people are thought to have moved down from the Great Lakes region of East Africa along the coast and settled along the coastal line of KZN (Hall 1987:13; Huffman 2003:10). Their ceramic style is called Blackburn, which is distinct from both Moloko and Kalundu facies. The origin of Blackburn pottery lies within the East African pottery traditions. This pottery is less decorated than the earlier facies. Rim notching, appliqué bumps and comb stamping characterize it. The makers of Blackburn are associated with ancestors of modern-day Nguni speaking people, who include Xhosa, Zulu, and Ndebele.

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[2] Seven ceramic heads, resembling U-shaped vessels were found eroding out of a gulley. The heads seem to have been deliberately broken and were buried in a pit. As objects of aesthetic expression they are among the earliest records of African art in the subcontinent. The original meaning and significance of the heads remains elusive, although archaeologists have suggested that they were probably used in the performance of initiation rituals. If this were so, then the heads would have been ceremonial objects used during the enactment of rites that marked the transition to a new social status.

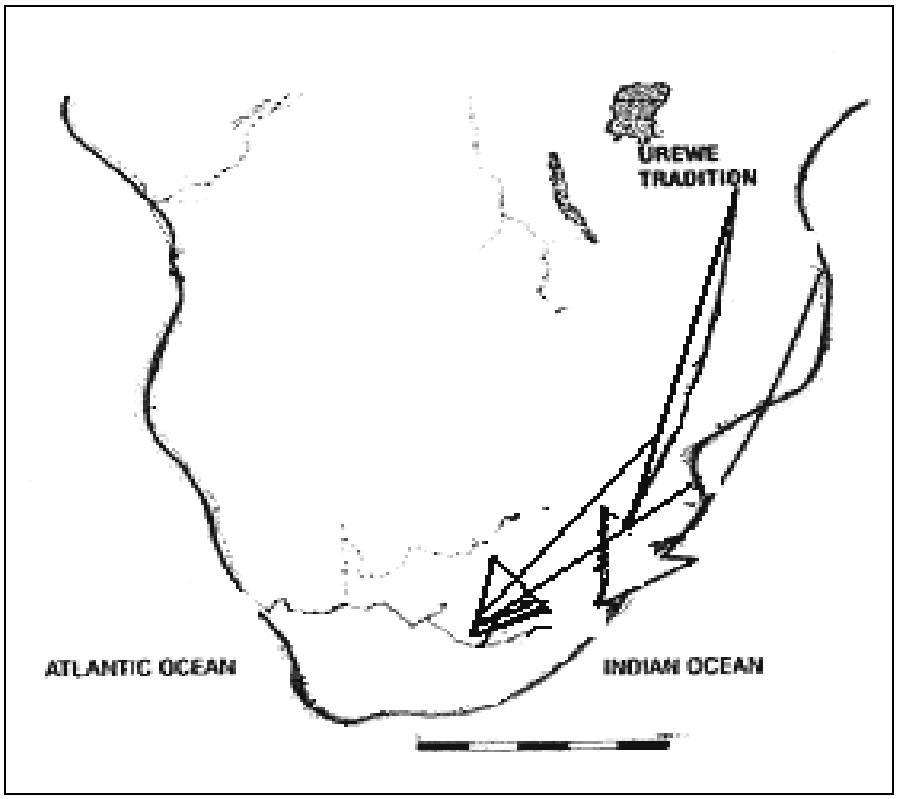


Figure 7: Map showing Blackburn movement into Southern Africa [After Huffman, 2000].

Blackburn pottery appeared in three phases: early phase (1030-1250 AD), Moor Park phase (1300-1640 AD) and Nqabeni phase (1700-1820 AD) [Whitelaw 2001; Huffman 2004]. The second phase just like the first phase was sparsely decorated and less variable. The style included rim notching, appliqué bumps, parallel lines and bands of punctuates, and oblique lines. Whitelaw (2001) and Huffman (2004) indicate that Moor Park sites were first recorded in Midlands's area of KZN, and along the Transkei coast where it was called *Umgazana* ware.

In terms of settlement walling, Moor Park is reckoned to be the first walling type associated with the CCP, and to build with stone. The change in building material was a consequence of the absence of woody vegetation in the grasslands area. Whitelaw (2001) and Huffman (2004) have demonstrated through excavated material culture that Moor Park sites were situated on steep-sided hilltops that provide rocky uncomfortable places to live. During this phase it appears that walling emphasised Front/Back axis. In these settlement

patterns cattle kraals were built in front of the residential huts. Fig. 8 Below illustrates the front/back axis settlement plan.

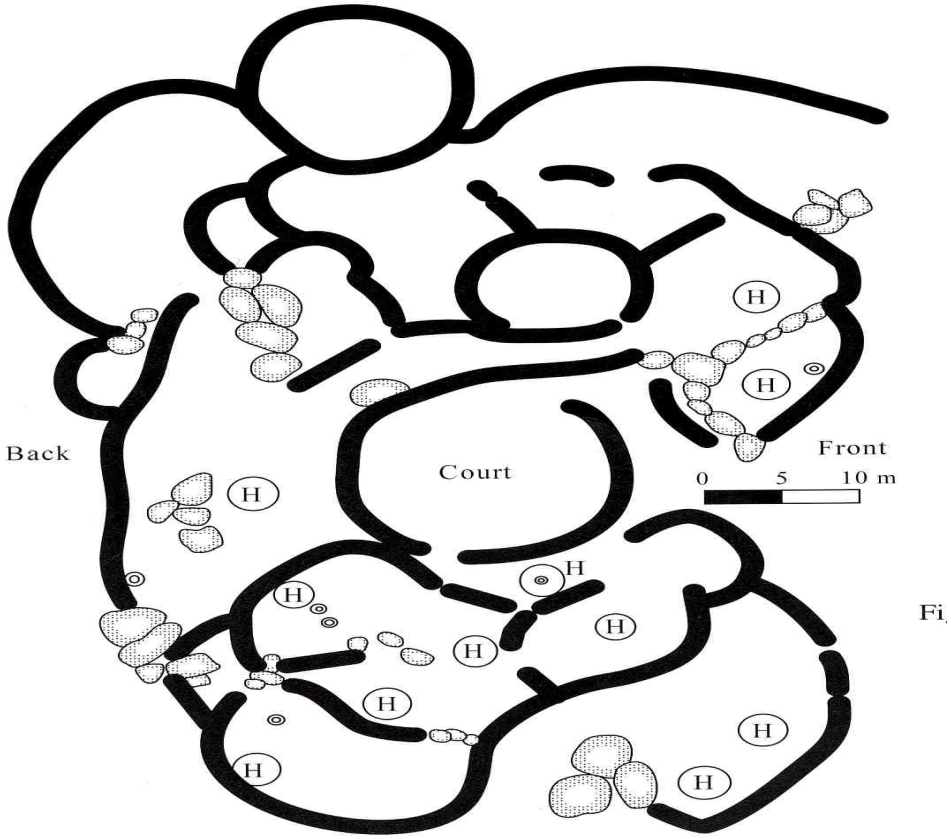


Figure 8: A Moor Park settlement pattern showing the Back/Front axis [after Huffman, 2004].

Furthermore Malore walling, named after a prominent hill in the Lephalala drainage derives from the Moor Park phase. The walling at Malore hill follows the Back/Front plan (Huffman, 2004). Malore settlements such as those at Buffelsfontein represent the earliest known Nguni movement up into the interior plateau. Finally the last phase of Blackburn period is associated with a type of walling that emphasises the Centre/Side axis. In this case stonewalling only designates the central area. Separate single stock enclosures are common around a place called *Mgoduwanuka* (Maggs 1982), while secondary walling link the central stock enclosures. In all cases Nqabeni settlement patterns have kraal entrances

facing uphill (Hall 1981). It was during the Nqabeni phase that *Mfecane* movement rocked southern Africa.

Unlike in other areas, the stonewalling tradition in Lydenburg is characteristic only of Later Iron Age period, and this practice is still reflected in modern Sotho-Tswana settlement patterns (Pistorius 1992). In about 1500 AD the climate in the interior became warmer and rainfall increased (Huffman 1996, 2004), making new areas such as Mpumalanga and the Free State, suitable for subsistence agriculture. According to Huffman (1986), most of this new area was relatively treeless, and so the Sotho-Tswana people began building their homesteads and villages with stone.

3.5 History of Stonewalled Settlement in Mpumalanga

Using the work of archaeologists such as Pistorius, Tom Huffman, Martin Hall, T. Mike Evers and Tim Maggs, I now review the specific history of stonewalled settlements in Mpumalanga. Settlement patterns are defined in terms of the regular ordering of primary and secondary elements that form a recognizable cluster of structures, which we call settlement units. The form of settlement units is largely the result of kinship and internal social organization. Two major environmental regions in the eastern half of the subcontinent – the coastal belt from the sea to the Drakensberg range and, the interior plateau of the Highveld and beyond to the west of the Drakensberg – provided the geographical setting for contrasting forms of settlement.

In the coastal region a pattern of dispersed homesteads tended to prevail, while in the interior more concentrated villages occurred. The Babanango or Type B settlement sites, for example, were restricted to the coastal areas of KwaZulu-Natal province. Primary stone enclosures were arranged in a roughly circular plan and linked by secondary walls to form secondary enclosures. The entrances to the Babanango enclosures were distinctive with carefully cobbled passages that were invariantly placed to lead up the slope of the hill.

I now proceed to illustrate the different settlement patterns of the various south eastern African Bantu-speaking groups. Due to various factors such as population pressure and

adverse weather conditions on the east coast, many southeastern Bantu-speaking groups left the southeast coast and moved into the interior or plateau areas.

The first groups to move out in about 1300AD and settle in Free State area were ancestors to the Sotho-Tswana and makers of Madikwe pottery (Huffman, 2004). In the southern Highveld areas of the present day Free State province, which is mainly a grassland zone, these groups started building with stone due to lack of timber. As a result settlement patterns of these people are characterized by stonewalling. Four settlement types, connected to the Sotho-Tswana groupings, have been recognized and recorded in the southern Highveld area. I now describe and illustrate each of the four-settlement types associated with Sotho-Tswana speaking people.

3.5.1 Type-N Settlement Pattern

Type N settlements dates back to 15th century and are found in the central and northeast Free State. Maggs (1976) argues that the Kwena or Fokeng groups probably occupied these. Pottery from these sites is decorated in comb stamp pendant triangles and bands below the rim. The settlement unit has a group of primary enclosures arranged around a ring and joined by secondary walling to form a central secondary enclosure.

Type N sites are only found in the north-eastern part of the Highveld. Maggs (1976b) also indicated that settlement units usually occur in clusters of up to one hundred, indicating quite sizable groups of people. Surrounding walls show considerable variety in shapes. Some are nearly circular, while others are oval. The figure below shows a classic example of a Type-N settlement pattern common in the southern Highveld among the southern Sotho speakers.

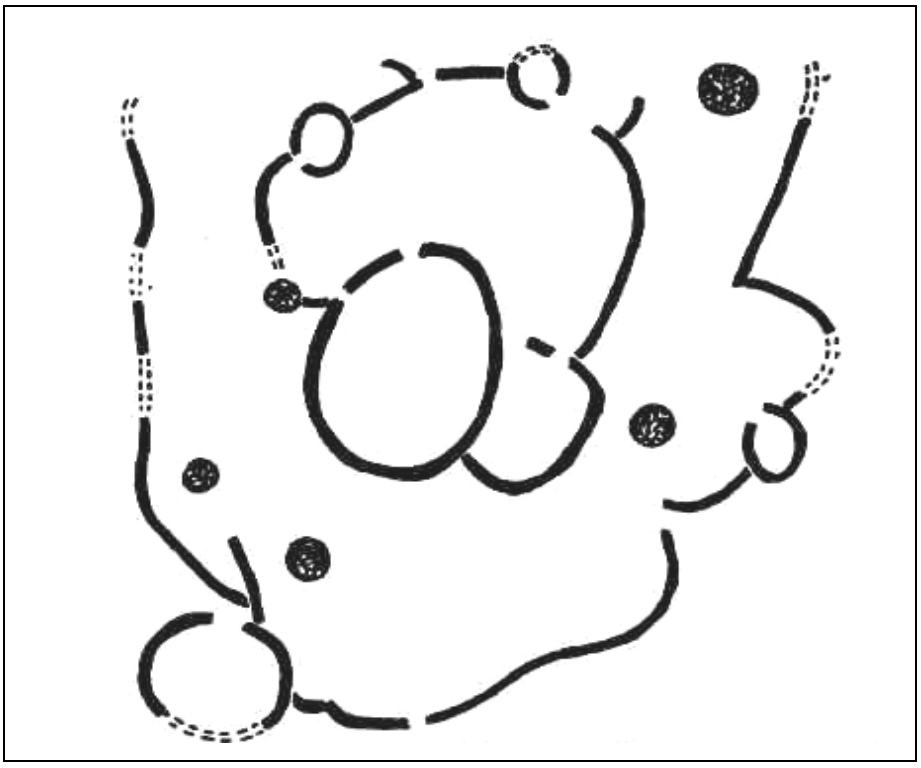


Figure 9: A Type-N settlement plan common in the Free State province [after Maggs, 1976].

3.5.2 Type-V Settlement Pattern

Type V settlement is by far the most common and widely distributed architectural style of the Highveld. The settlement units consist of a number of primary enclosures grouped around a ring. The enclosures are either contiguous or linked by secondary walling to form a central enclosure. The majority of the primary enclosures open into the secondary enclosure. Normally there is only one external entrance. In this type of settlement there is no outer surrounding wall. These settlements are dated from 16th century to 18th century. They are widely distributed and were occupied by later Sotho groups who had adapted the basic Type N settlement pattern. However, these people did not build clear encircling walls, but scallops.

According to Maggs (1976), Type V settlement is a true Highveld expression of the Iron Age, occurring almost exclusively between the altitudes of 1450 and 2000 m above sea level (Maggs 1976:29). Type V sites are found across and beyond the distribution of the

Type N, and in many cases the older sites have been robbed of their stone to allow building in the new fashion. This description restricts its occurrence to the zone between the Drakensberg escarpment to the east and the minor escarpment of the central Free State to the west.

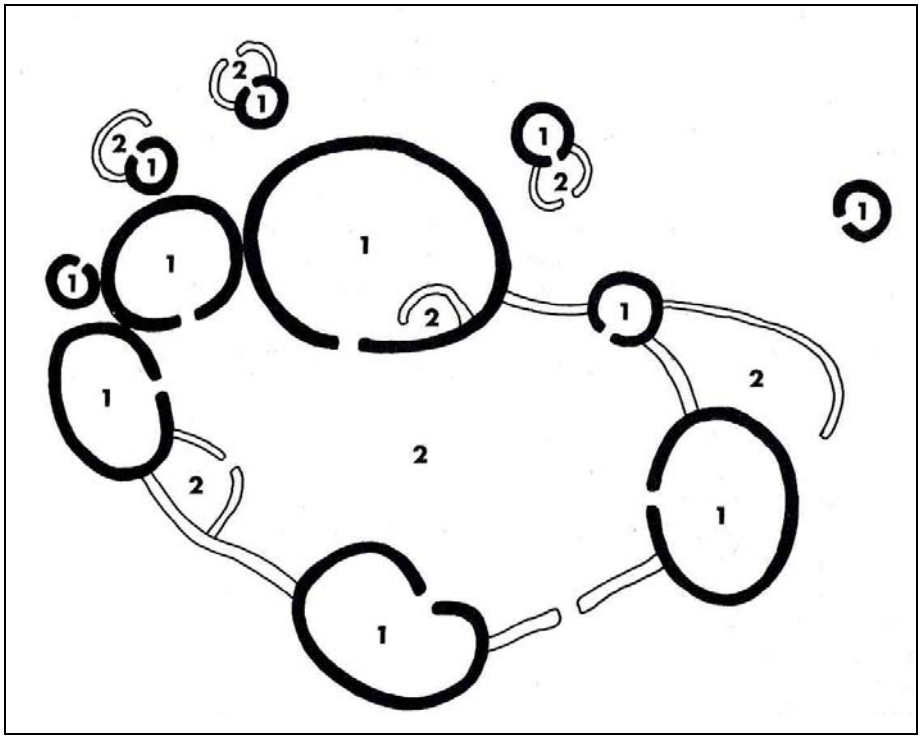


Figure 10: A classic Type-V settlement common in the Highveld associated with Sotho-Tswana speaking people [after Maggs, 1976].

3.5.3 Type-Z Settlement Pattern

Type Z settlement units are more distinct than the other two types discussed earlier. In the centre of each settlement unit is a compact group of large primary enclosures: the stock pens. Surrounding these enclosures are usually between eight and twenty distinctive houses, often with front and back semi-circular courtyards. Maggs has called these 'bilobial dwellings' (Maggs 1976b). The ground plans of these sites show scalloped outer walls or bays which are either discontinuous or consists of bilobial dwellings that surround centrally arranged primary and secondary enclosures.

At the center of the settlement a ring of stone walled enclosures form a secondary enclosure, and the outer limit of the settlement is surrounded by a loose circle of bilobial dwellings. This settlement is ascribed to the Tswana speaking group. Maggs (1976) has shown that this settlement pattern connects with the ethnography collected among the Tswana groups. He suggests that either the Tlhaping or Rolong built these settlements. These settlements date back to the 17th century (Maggs1976a: 293). The distribution of Type Z settlement units is far more restricted than the ubiquitous type V and is confined to the valleys of the Sand, Vals and Renoster rivers in the north-west Free State.

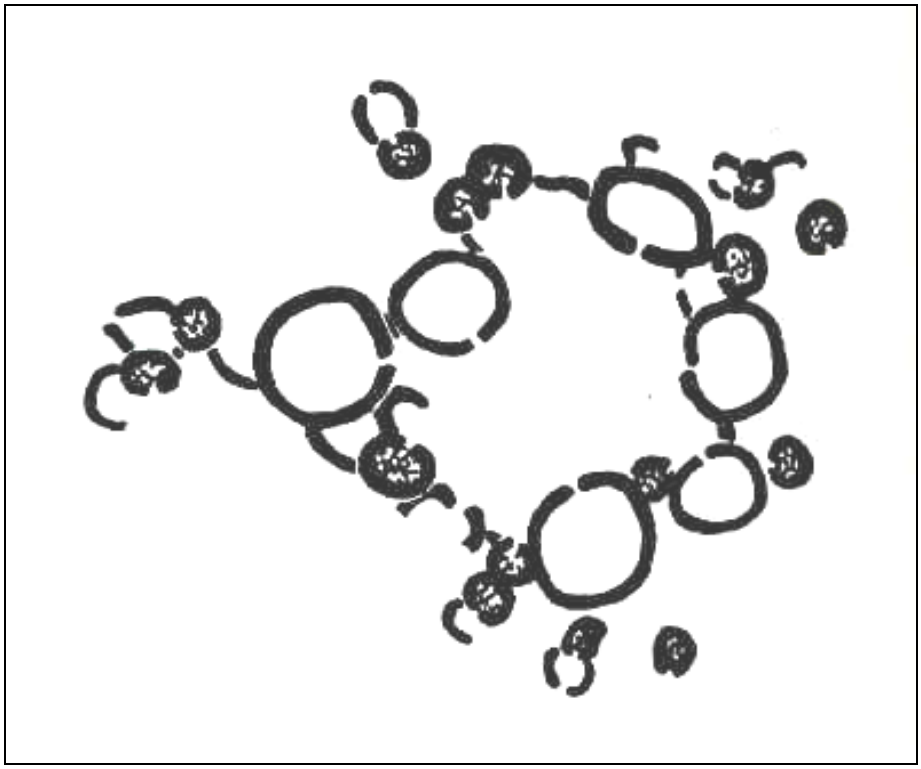


Figure 11: A typical Type-Z settlement associated to the Tswana speaking people of Northwest province [after Maggs, 1976].

3.5.4 Type-R Settlement Pattern

The Type R settlements consist of one large primary enclosure or plan with several small central enclosures loosely arranged around it. These settlement types are mostly located in southwestern Free State and Griqualand West. Maggs (1976), however, indicates that these

settlement types have little in common with other Iron Age settlement types and might be related to Khoe or mixed herder groups.

3.5.5 Lydenburg Homesteads

The settlement ruins in Lydenburg area are quite different from those of the other areas. Mostly they comprise two or three concentric circles with two opposite openings and a number of contiguous circles located around them. Huts were built between the central complex and an outer perimeter wall. Evers (1981) notes that the perimeter wall is sometimes poorly defined (Evers 1981:99).

Another prominent feature of the Lydenburg ruins are walled cattle tracks that lead from outside the terraced area to the homesteads. In some instances these cattle tracks lead directly to the central kraal in the centre of the homestead. As Evers (1974) and Collett (1979) have pointed out, the settlement organization in the Lydenburg area is similar to that of the local Pedi communities. The cattle kraal *(Kgaro),* for example, occupies a central position with residential dwellings around it for security purposes.

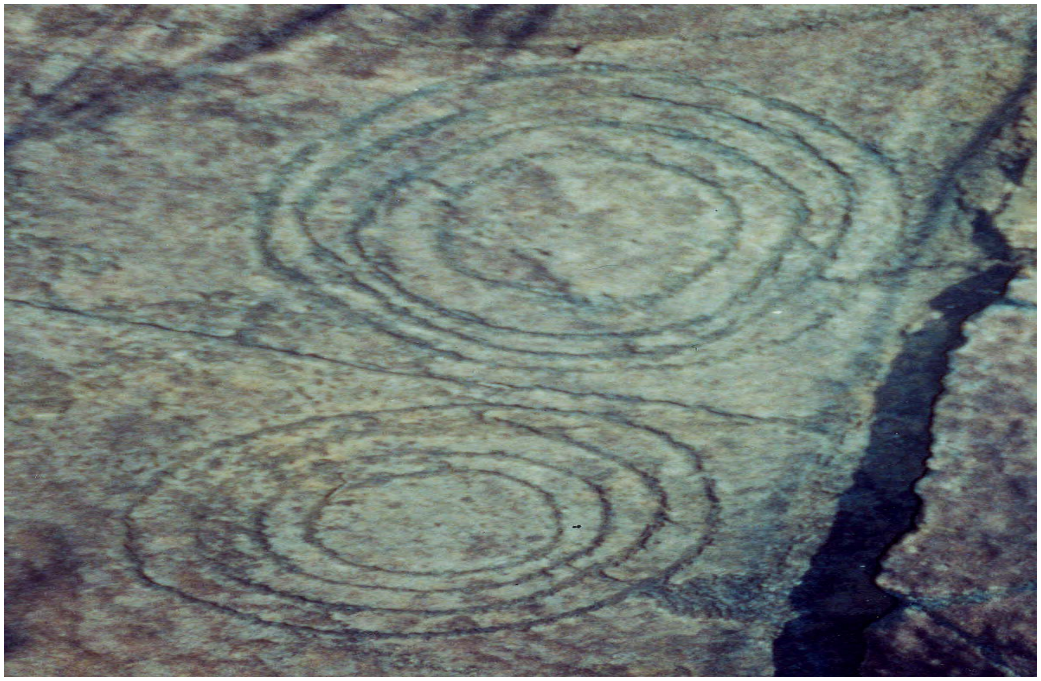


Figure 12: Settlement engravings from Boomplaats farm showing four-concentric circles. The majority of these engravings emphasize the Centre/Side axis [Photo: R. Mbewe, 2005].

The first Nguni-speaking groups to move and settle in the Mpumalanga were the Koni [3](Alex Schoeman, pers com 2006). The Koni are an Nguni group that migrated from the KwaZulu-Natal area in about 1550 AD (Maggs 1976a). They first settled north of the Caledon River in the Free State before moving northwards. They settled in Badfontein and Ohrigstad areas between 1600 and 1650 AD. In the interior these people interacted with the Sotho-Tswana speaking groups that had left KwaZulu – Natal much earlier.

The ancestors of the present Ndebele speaking groups then followed the Koni. The Ndebele moved out of KZN after the onset of the dry and cold weather in about 1650 AD (Huffman 2004). The first group settled in the Pretoria area. They came into the area in three waves of migrations: under Langa and Musi following the central route (Huffman: 2004:95).

After the two earlier groups, the Pedi, an offshoot of chief Sekhukune's kingdom, were the next to settle in the Highveld interior. Both ethnographic and archaeological evidence suggest that the Pedi, a Fokeng speaking group, arrived in Mpumalanga from the south in about 1650AD (Evers 1974: 73; Collet 1982:34). On arrival the Pedi found two other groups, the Roka and the Koni, already settled in the area. Hunt (1931), citing Pedi oral traditions, indicates that people who lived near Ohrigstad and Lydenburg were called Koni.

The Pedi, through trade with the Portuguese, eventually grew strong in terms of both military and economic power. They consequently subjugated both the Roka and the Koni in a series of military raids and brought these two groups under their control towards the end of the 18th century (Evers 1974:83). This date is in broad agreement with Mason's 1968 dating of Late Iron Age sites in Lydenburg District in Mpumalanga province.

Besides the Nguni groups, there are many other Sotho-speaking people that inhabit Mpumalanga today. These people are collectively known as Northern Sotho. The term Northern Sotho is a collective term for many people sharing a common language and

[3] Alex Schoeman is senior lecturer in Iron Age Archaeology in the Department of Archaeology at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg in South Africa.

customs. Under this umbrella name we have the Kwena, Mongatane, Tlokwa, Tau, Birwa, Roka and Fokeng (Monnig 1967: 16). Others linked to the Northern Sotho groups are the Lovedu, Hananwa, Kgaga and Thabina (Namono 2004).

The Hananwa for instance, trace their ancestry to BaHurutswe[4] who separated from Maletse in the present day Botswana (Schalkwyk 1997:155). However, the Hananwa are now predominantly found in Limpopo province where they have attained a position of dominance over a large area. They also enjoy a reputation as rainmakers, which are both a spiritual and economic ritual and a statement of political authority (Hammond-Tooke 1993).

3.6 Colonial Settlement

External influences started appealing amongst the Northern Sotho from the mid 1860s with the coming of Europeans into the interior. White missionaries and traders were the first to settle in the interior. The Berlin Missionary Society under Hans Merensky, for example, established the first mission station in 1870, in chief Sekhukune's area at a place called "Boshivelo"[5] in the Mpumalanga province. The missionaries brought new teachings to their African converts and discouraged them from taking part in many traditional customs such as initiation (*Koma*) and polygamy.

These missionary activities pierced through the very fabric of African culture. Those societies influenced by the new religion were never to be the same again. It was because of these new teachings that the Dinkwanyane community left Sekhukuneland in search of new freedom from the old traditions of the Pedi people (Mulaudzi, 2000).

Following in the footsteps of the early missionaries, came the Boers, British colonial officials and recruitment officers for the Johannesburg gold mines. Many of Boers settled in Lydenburg District after they left Natal and the Cape. Consequently, the presence of these competing white groups further exacerbated the scramble for land in the interior. The competition for control over land between these two European groups increased and

[4] These are Tswana of Sotho-speaking origin whose totem is *tswene* (baboon).
[5] Boshivelo means a place of peace in Pedi language.

eventually led to the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902 (van Schalkwyk1993, Mulaudzi 2000). This bloody war had long lasting consequences on the African populations in the interior (van Schalkwyk 2003). Firstly, the Africans lost their traditional land to the Europeans. Secondly, soon after the war in 1902, the Boers consolidated their own new state by enacting laws that were unfavourable to the Africans. Using the mission stations as their launch pads, the Boers soon started exerting their authority in Mpumalanga province and other surrounding areas and continued alienating land from the Africans by force.

Although land dispossession was already in progress long before the 1899 war, the presence of a large number of whites in the interior aggravated the situation. Gradually, many conflicts arose between the blacks and whites. The results of these conflicts were frontier wars. One such notorious war is the Maleboho war of 1894, which was fought between the Boers and the Hananwa of Limpopo province (van Schalkwyk and Smith 2001:1).

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter a number of important issues have been highlighted. This chapter has firmly situated Boomplaats site in its geographical, social and historical context. The chapter has also shown that Mpumalanga province has one of the longest and most intriguing sequences of human habitation. The various settlement types present in the province and other surrounding areas of Free State and Northwest provinces have been described and illustrated. More importantly, this chapter has shown that various groups of people in the interior interacted with one another as indicated by both the similarity and diversity of archaeological and historical artifacts left behind.

CHAPTER 4: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODS

4.1 Introduction

Settlement patterns studies fall within the broad genre of material culture studies. Several critical assessments of the history of African material culture studies have appeared in different print media (Arnoldi et al. 1996:1). Two major factors in the way African objects have been used to define Africa and Africans have been ethnography and aesthetics. Since the early 20th century, ethnographic approaches to material culture have tended to emphasise context and meaning of objects within a society, while the aesthetic approach has been primarily concerned with the study of and appreciation of the formal qualities of objects and contemplation of things for their own sake (ibid: 4).

Arnoldi et al. (1996) indicate that, emphasis on formal qualities of objects implicitly stressed western elite categories and lead away from an understanding of objects, their use, or their appreciation in culture-specific terms (Arnoldi et al. 1996: 103). The above scenario entails that our understanding of the evolution of past cultures in Africa rested essentially on ceramic typology. This approach consisted of the study of pot sheds and it was restricted to descriptions of the morphological and stylistic properties of these objects. Therefore, comparisons between objects made it possible for historical reconstructions to be made.

To my mind we have now reached a point where a major re-evaluation of African material culture is needed in order to contemplate future directions and research emphases. The re-evaluation is important because early research concentrated on functional classification at the expense of symbolism, cognition and individual agency amongst the makers of these material artifacts. This new effort calls for innovative application of available methods and theoretical frameworks, to bring to the fore the agents of production and reproduction of material culture.

Therefore, in an attempt to answer the current research question, this study has adopted two theoretical frameworks as its main tools for identifying, classifying and interpreting the

engravings at Boomplaats farm. The two frameworks, Structuration and identity, are discussed in terms of their suitability to the topic at hand. This chapter then proceeds to discuss briefly the two methods employed in this study. In the last section of this chapter, the findings of this study are discussed and illustrated graphically so as to create a visual impression of what is found at the site.

4.2 Theoretical Frameworks

4.2.1 Structuration Theory

This theoretical framework draws largely on sociological concepts of Anthony Giddens (1984, 1987), Pierre Bourdieu (1977), Ian Hodder (1986) and Tilley and Shanks (1987, 1991). The concepts and ideas developed by these authors offer insights into social organization and the interpretation of material culture of past and present societies. Structuration theory arose out of much dissatisfaction with earlier social theories such as structuralism and Marxism (Parker 2000). Therefore, this theory attempts to bridge the void between phenomenological approaches and objectivist approaches in the study of society and its material culture.

Structuration theory appeared in the form of Agency and Practice Theory. *Agency*, as defined by Giddens refers not only to the intentions people have in doing things, but also to their capabilities of creating and recreating society through their actions. Hence *agency* concerns events of which an individual is the perpetrator (Giddens 1983). In this regard, Structuration theory highlights the role of the individual as a norm fulfilling being responsible for the construction of social realities by the individual's articulation with given social structure.

Consequently, Giddens (1983) proposed an analytical framework in which the individual or social actor operated consciously or unconsciously, manipulating and transforming material culture in a specific social context. It must be noted that the social actor is only able to pursue these actions in terms of pre-existing structures. Giddens as a major exponent and formulator of this theory stated that, "humans are social constructs. Hence all institutions

and practices performed in a society are considered structures and within these are some specific norms and rules that allow these structures to operate properly" (Giddens 1983:25).

Patricia Davison (1988) believes that what is essential to Giddens theory of Structuration is the notion of duality of structure, which asserts that structure is both the medium and outcome of the practices that constitute social systems (Davison 1988:100). Giddens (1981) further propounded that, "all human actions are carried out by knowledgeable agents who both construct the social world through their actions and yet whose actions are also constrained or conditioned by the very world of their creation" (Giddens 1981:54).

What Giddens means in his statement is that human agents exercise power through the control of resources that are both tangible and intangible. Analyzing the structuration of social systems means studying the modes in which such systems, grounded in the knowledgeable activities of situated actors who draw upon rules and resources in the diversity of action contexts, are produced and reproduced in interaction. Here, Giddens (1983) indicates that, "the moment of the production of action is also one of reproduction in the context of the day-to-day enactment of social life" (Giddens 1983:26).

Structuration Theory entails that the nature of social practices and their reproduction are contingent on social, cultural and historical factors, and that the potential for change and transformation is present in every moment in the constitution of social systems (Giddens 1981). Therefore, the continuity of practice is as much a part of time-space relations as is discontinuity. This concept is important to an understanding of traditional practices, which are often viewed as passive, conservative and timeless.

Ian Hodder (1984), for example, agrees with Giddens view on material culture. He states "artifacts and their spatial arrangement do not merely provide passive settings of social actions, but are actively implicated in reproducing a pattern of social relationships across time and space" (Hodder 1984:352). The notion here is that it is through material culture and its organization that individuals come to grasp meaning and relations in society. Material culture thus carries meaning not in a mechanistic and generalized sense, but in

being one of the means through which social and material relations are perpetuated and transformed by members of society.

Pierre Bourdieu (1977), sought ways in which to understand better the manner in which individuals and society interacted with one another. Following Bourdieu, Dowson (1994, 2000) used Structuration Theory to understand the social changes among the San in the southeastern mountains during the last 2000 years. Although this theory has been applied successfully only to the San of the southeastern mountains, it is also applicable to farmer settlement engravings at Boomplaats farm. I argue that the various groups of Iron Age farmers that passed through and settled in the current study area went through a number of phases of social change over time and space. I also argue that within the changes that they passed through lie the variation of the settlement engravings present at the site.

Structuration Theory sets up a recursive relationship between structure and practice. In other words it allows researchers to see how patterns are generated. A settlement site as pointed out by Davison is structured partly by mechanical variables such as social requirements, frequency of use and the number of people to be accommodated. It follows then that site layout is a complex artifact encompassing social, ideological and practical responses (Davison 1988).This definition of site in spatial terms is critical to this study.

However, many archaeologists before the above distinction was made believed that settlement organization reflected social organization and cosmology in a direct way revealing a society's attitudes such as politics and religion. While this is true at one level, material culture usually does not represent social relations directly in a way that can be simply decoded. Davison indicates that, "cultural symbols do not convey precise and predictable messages but focus attention in certain directions that evoke meaning in the course of experience" (Davison 1988:107). Thus the meaning of material culture and spatial patterning is context-dependent and socially constituted.

In applying the Structuration theory to the current study, attention will focus on the cultural significance of the Central Cattle Plan (CCP) since this theory investigates how the supra

individual and environment interact. It is hoped that this theory will shed more light on the role of agents who produced the engravings at Boomplaats; since actors are enabled individuals with transformative capacity perform historical events in a given society.

4.2.2 Identity Theory

For a long time, archaeologists have been interested in conceptions of identity. In the 1920s and 1930s archaeology, for example, read from material culture a series of archaeological "cultures" and sought to chart their history through time. People sought to examine how each "culture" identified itself in relation to its neighbours. What moved it apart? What influences did it have on its neighbours and so on? Today we think in even more sophisticated ways about identity and include cognition, as being within our studies. As a result different scales of identity are constructed from different sets of material remains. At a large scale, the different cultural identities in South Africa are underpinned by deep cognitive and cultural commonalities evident from the homestead organization. At a smaller scale differences are emphasized in minor variations in homestead organization.

The model called the Central Cattle Pattern (CCP) depicts the organization of a homestead in terms of life forces, kinship and status. According to Huffman (1986a), the CCP provides a unitary standard in which the essence of homestead organization is distilled throughout the Nguni and Sotho-Tswana communities. It is also through the same organization that diversity can be assessed.

Besides the CCP, ceramics provide another scale of identity for farmer communities in southern Africa. Common and indestructible, ceramics are stylistically variable in terms of shape and decoration. Just like the settlement layout, ceramics may act as an expression of identity at a larger scale (Collett 1982). This research shall use both the ceramic and settlement layout to examine identity amongst the authorship of the engravings at Boomplaats farm, by associating the various pottery facies to particular socio-cultural groups that passed through or lived in the study area.

The culture-history approach adopted by some early scholars sought to correlate specific cultural traits to particular groups of people. However, recent approaches consider the

manipulation of identity by individuals. The common assumption underlying material culture research is that the objects made or modified by humans reflect the belief systems and patterns of individuals who made them and commissioned the belief patterns of the larger society of which they are part. Giddens (1984) argues that it is from the individual that societies emerge. Arnoldi et al. (1996) suggests that the objects made by individuals better define human groups and their ways of life. From this perspective, ceramics and settlement layouts will serve as the guiding principle for considering the identity of the authors of the engravings at Boomplaats farm.

Lately many disciplines within the social sciences have employed theories of identity in their studies. Despite its huge popularity its application is not unproblematic. Lynn Meskell (1999, 2000), for example, criticizes the broad and rigid use of the term to categorize cultures by some scholars. According to Meskell (1999, 2000), many disciplines use the word 'identity' but do not have a precise understanding of how identity operates within a society. The concerns raised by Meskell suggest that the investigation of social life requires a full understanding of the constructs and actions of identity.

The acquisition of knowledge on how identity operates helps in creating a balanced view of societies under study. In this respect, issues of identity have to consider the relationship of the individual and society. This is so because identity operates at two levels: the individual level (personal experiences), and at collective level where identity is part of the broader social associations (Meskell 2000; A.D Smith 1995).

Therefore, in applying the concept of identity, we need to focus on the general collective cultural information of a particular group or social entity. This is important in social research because it is from the general social identities that an individual negotiates the self. Meskell (2000) considers the operation of these two levels of identity as a recursive mechanism in which both the group and the individual are active participants. From this we can conclude that individuals in any given situation are not just part of the collective and that the group does not merely follow a set of norms structuring identity.

The above suggests that cultural practices and beliefs of a group conform to a set of pre-determined rules of behaviour. Based on these latent rules of behaviour, cultural norms are shared by a cross section each of a given community, and maintained through social interaction. However, Fredrik Barth (1969) is quick to warn that there are some instances where certain cultural groups may possess social and cultural commonalities across boundaries. Barth (1987) believes that cultural boundaries are fluid since it is impossible to draw a clear line between cultures. This comes about because of common origins or cultural interaction over time and space.

In applying the concept of identity in determining the authors of the engravings at Boomplaats, care will be taken to avoid blanket generalizations and in realizing the fact that most cultural groups are fluid, interacting and contextual. In this respect the theory will have to accommodate the unbounded nature of culture since cultural identity is a continually changing process overtime and space.

In concluding this section, I would like to state that the main contribution of Structuration Theory to the study of rock art is that it helps our research to move away from arduous quantitative processes. The adoption of Identity Theory into the research at Boomplaats was necessitated by the fact that rock art is a stronger marker of identity than other aspects of material culture, and is also better suited to the operation of individual agency.

4.3 Methods

4.3.1 Data Collecting Procedure

A series of activities were undertaken in collecting data for this study. Both primary and secondary sources, which included government documents, trigonometric maps, aerial photographs and historic papers, were used in this study. Other activities included ground surveys, digital photographing and GPS recording of all engraved motifs at the site. I now proceed to describe and illustrate the findings of my research at Boomplaats farm.

4.3.1.1 Ground Survey and mapping

Any archaeological or historical survey must have a set of well-defined aims. This precaution avoids wasting time on non-relevant activities. The following were the aims for carrying out a reconnaissance survey at Boomplaats site:

- To locate all engraved boulders at the site
- To identify and locate any other archaeological artifacts or features at the site.
- To establish the extent of the distribution of the engravings at the site

The reconnaissance survey of Boomplaats farm took five days and this survey was conducted in the last week of May in 2005. Two days were devoted to ground surveys and recording of geographical coordinates of boulders bearing the engravings. The next two days were devoted to photographing the images at the site. This exercise was done with the help of Leslie Zubieta, a PhD student of rock art in the Department of Archaeology, University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg.

During the documentation exercise the farm was divided into two halves to ease the work. Both halves of the farm were surveyed for possible engravings. This survey included identification of other archaeological and historical artifacts associated with rock engravings. The recording of geographical coordinates of all the boulders bearing engravings was done using a handheld Global Positioning System (GPS) machine, with an accuracy margin of 7 meters. The coordinates were then plotted on a scaled map (1: 50 000) for Lydenburg District (2530AB LYDENBURG 1988). All geographical coordinates were recorded in Universal Transect Mercantile (UTM) units. The distances between the boulders were measured to ease the plotting of points on local map. During the recording it was noted that majority of the engravings occurred on raised altitude [between 1390m and 1700m above sea level].

4.3.1.1 Results

- All boulders bearing any form of engraving within the bounds of Boomplaats farm were located and their geographical coordinates recorded. A complete list of these coordinates is attached in the appendix.
- The survey managed to locate two stonewalled ruins on the farm. These ruins were probably used as cattle outposts.
- This research also established that the engravings go beyond the bounds of Boomplaats farm 29 JT and occur along a particular dyke and that there is need for further follow –up research in the area.

4.3.2 Aerial Photographs

Aerial photographs from Lydenburg district were examined in detail. The trigonometric survey map revealed a high presence of settlement ruins in the area. The photographs clearly located all cattle tracks and individual dwellings. Most of the settlement complexes on the trigonometric survey map were located on valley footsteps [see fig 13 below].



Figure 13: Trigonometric map showing settlement complexes in Lydenburg district [after Huffman, 2004].

Further analysis showed that most settlement complexes were built located on west facing slopes. This preference may have been determined by water availability since there are few streams near the east facing slopes of the valley. Some scholars argue that, the climatic conditions may have also affected location. The east facing slopes, for example, usually fall into the shadow of the mountains in the afternoons and are susceptible to frosts in winter. Huffman (2004) indicates that most of the settlements were located on mountain slopes ranging between 1200m to 1500m above sea level.

4.3.3 Rock Art Recording

Ground photographing took place on two days. All the boulders bearing the engravings were photographed both in the morning and in the afternoon. This was done to capture the images at different times of the day. The images at the site were photographed using three different cameras. Firstly a Canon digital camera was used by Dr. B. W. Smith to capture the motifs in cluster A. Secondly a manual Pentax P-50 camera using a Fuji chrome vivia 50 ASA film was used for purposes of producing slides for the site. Lastly a Kodak EC 100 camera was used for taking colour prints only.

On the first day of photographing all digital images were photographed by Dr. Ben. Smith, Director of the Rock Art Research Institute (RARI) at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. On this day only farmer settlement engravings, graffiti and vandalized boulders were captured in the exercise. Thereafter, Leslie Francis Zubieta and I did the rest of the photographing.

4.3.3.1 Results

All boulders bearing engravings on Boomplaats farm 29JT and Boomplaats 24 JT were photographed for production of slides at the rock Art Research Institute (RARI). During the photographing exercise all forms of engravings at the farm were captured. A total of 38 boulders bearing engravings were recorded at Boomplaats Farm 29JT and a further 6 boulders were recorded on Boomplaats Farm JT 24. The coordinates of these boulders are attached in appendix A.

5.5.2 Description of images

5.5.2.1 Introduction

The images at Boomplaats occur in clusters on boulders that bear them. The engraved motifs are executed in three styles: pecking, incision and drilling. The majority of the motifs are weathered to the same level with the boulders on which they are engraved. Although most of the engravings represent farmer settlement plans, other motifs depicting animals, birds, spread-eagle designs and other indeterminate shapes occur.

For the purposes of this research, the images at Boomplaats have been placed into six categories: settlement patterns, semi-circular designs, spread-eagled motifs, animal motifs, rectangular shapes and undetermined shapes. This categorization was done to allow easy description of the images at the site. By putting these images in separate categories I avoided examining all images at the site individually, but collectively based on similarity of shapes and patterns. Besides the obvious images at the site, graffiti is also present. The graffiti mainly comprise imitated images, names of people and places and dates. No human figures have so far been discovered at the site. I now proceed to describe the various images at the site.

1. Settlement Patterns

Images in this category form the majority of motifs at the site. They range from single to four circle engravings (see figures 6 -11). Most of these concentric circles are joined by meandering lines, which Malan (1955) and Maggs (1995) described as cattle tracks. Some of these lines have a blob just before they join the circles. These blobs are interpreted as watering points for domestic animals. I now describe and illustrate each category of circles.

- **Single circle engravings**

  These appear as complete pecked circles or ovals either as a cluster or individual circles. A meandering line usually joins them. No other details are depicted in these engravings. The figure 6 below show single circles both in cluster and singular form.



Figure 14: An engraved cluster of single-circle enclosures at Boomplaats farm [Photo: R. Mbewe, 2005].

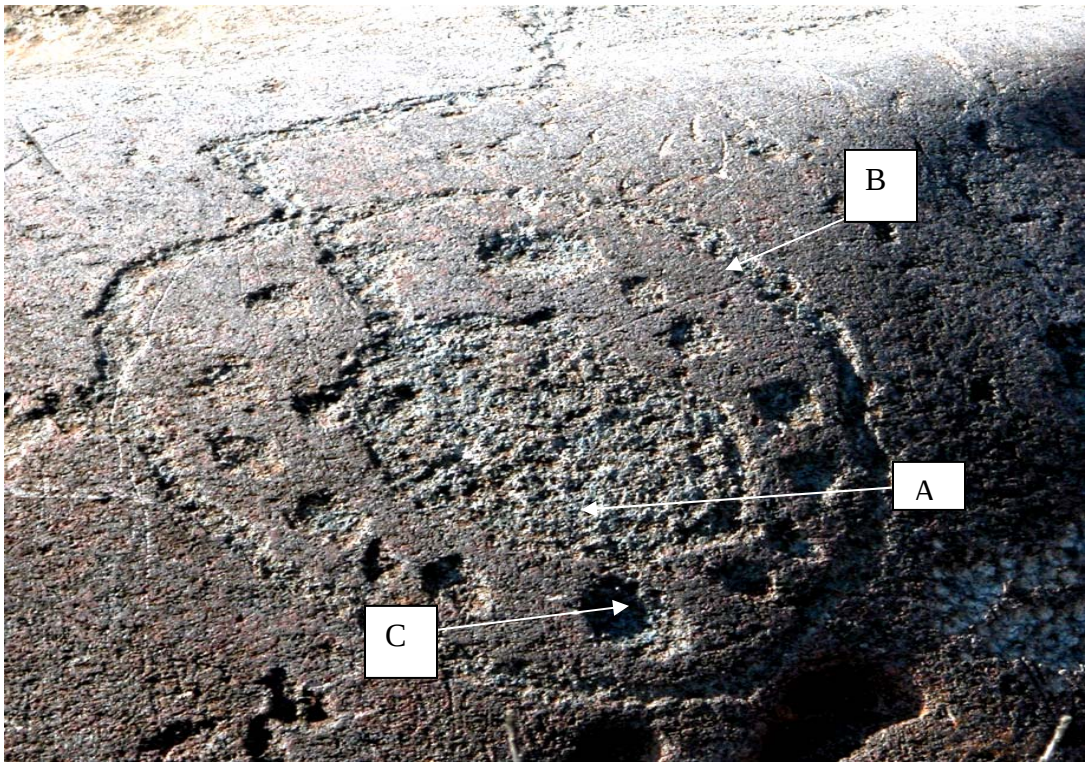


Figure 15: A typical settlement engraving at Boomplaats farm showing the components of an Nguni homestead [Photo: Ben Smith, 2005].

In this engraving, the letter ‘A’ depicts a cattle kraal executed by removing the surface of the boulder to create the desired shape. The letter ‘B’ represents the external or perimeter wall that encircles the homestead. The dots around the cattle kraal represented by the letter ‘C’ represent houses or huts. The bigger hut directly opposite the entrance is the Indlunkulu, usually occupied by the mother to the chief or his senior wife in the event of death of the queen mother. The orientation of the entrance to this homestead follows the uphill arrangement common in KZN.

- **Two concentric circles**

  These appear on boulders that bear both clusters and individual images. As with single circles meandering lines join them. These circles are executed in pecking. In all the engravings recorded so far, no internal details are depicted.

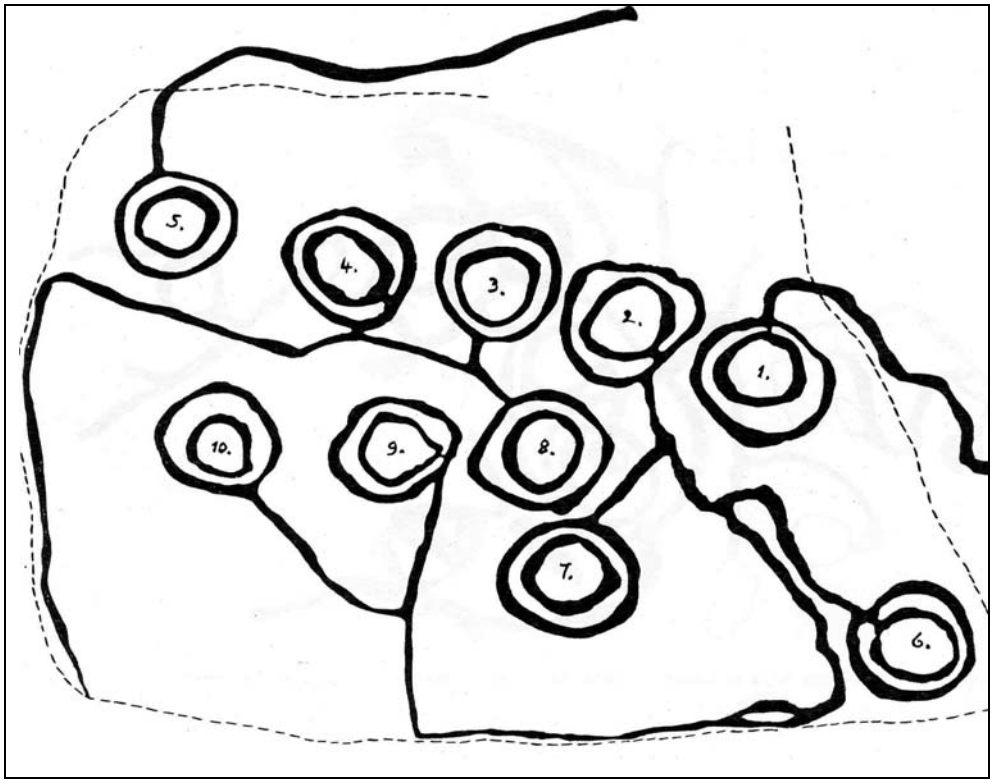


Figure 16: A cluster of double-circle engravings at Boomplaats [after van Hoepen, 1939].

- **Three to four concentric circles**

These are the most prevalent settlement engravings at the site. These engravings are executed in two techniques: pecking and incision. Judging from the level of fading, the incised engravings seem to be older than the pecked ones. The incised concentric circles bear a fine finish but they do not have any internal details engraved in them. The pecked circles on the other hand are depicted in a variety of ways. Some of the circular engravings have dots marked in between the first and the second circle. The meandering line that joins them usually has a blob outside the external circle. The figure below shows the various ways in which concentric circles are depicted at Boomplaats farm.

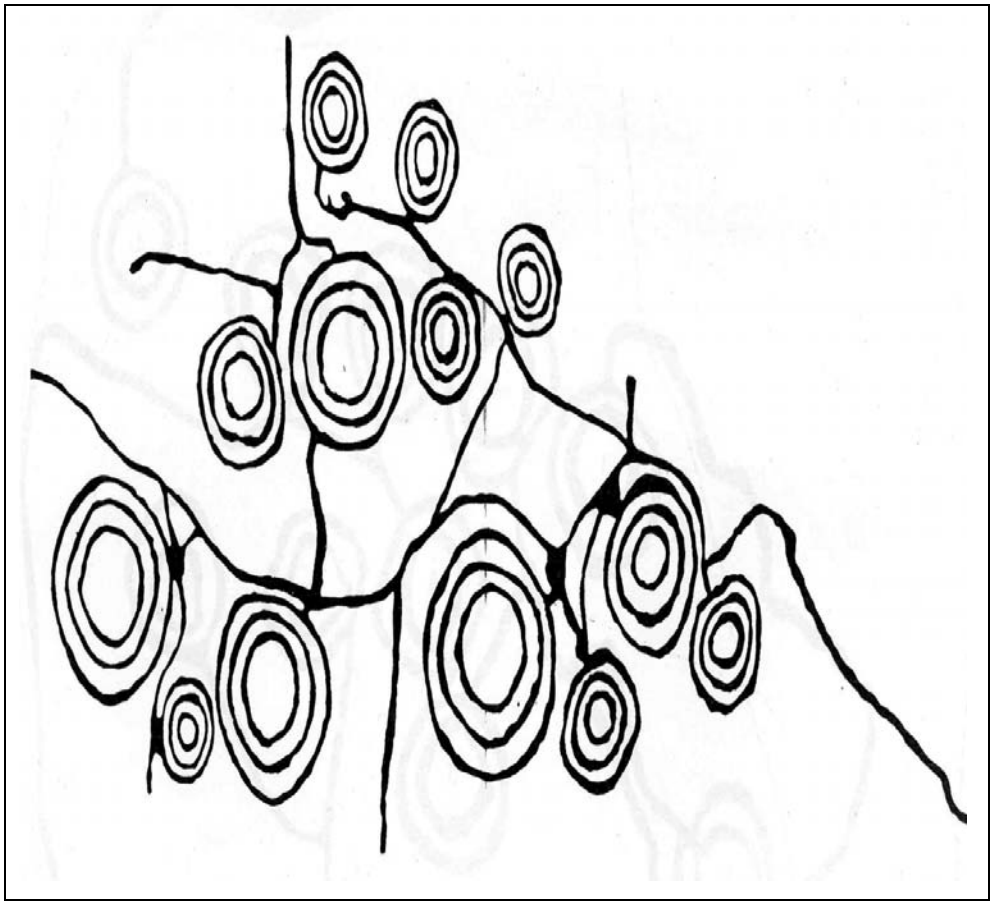


Figure 17: A redrawing of a cluster of concentric circles from Boomplaats farm, Lydenburg district [after van Hoepen, 1939].



Figure 18: A recent picture of settlement engravings in pecked form taken at Boomplaats farm [Photo: R. Mbewe, 2005].



Figure 19: An example of an incised settlement engraving at Boomplaats farm [Photo: R. Mbewe, 2005].

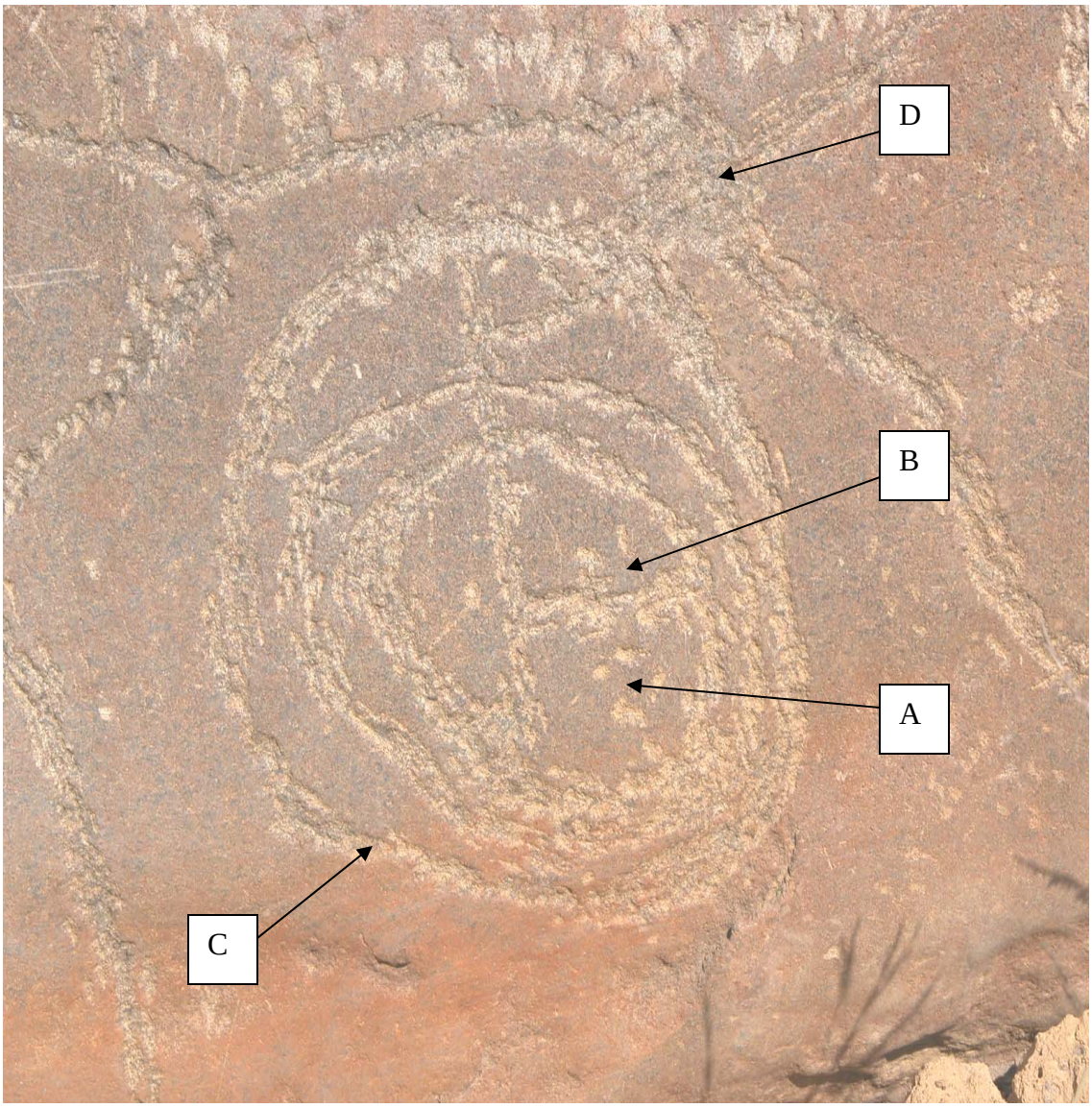


Figure 20: A homestead showing three divisions within a cattle kraal. The two small divisions are used to keep calves away from the cows during the night (Pers comm. with Ndukuyakhe Ndlobvu) [Photo: Ben Smith, 2005].[6]

Letters A and B represent the two sections of a cattle kraal. Letter C is the perimeter wall enclosing the homestead. D represents a big blob just outside the perimeter wall. Although earlier research presumes that these blobs represent watering holes, I believe they have a

[6] Ndukuyakhe Ndlobvu is heritage manager with SAHRA, Cape Town Office. He is former site manager at Didima Rock Art center in KZN.

different meaning, which I propose in chapter 5. The orientation of the entrance to this homestead faces uphill, typical of settlements in KZN. However, this engraving does not show residential houses, as was the case with the other engravings described earlier on.



Figure 21: A variation of a homestead pattern engraved at Boomplaats farm. The houses in between the first two walls are depicted using rectangular boxes instead of the usual dots as depicted in figure 6 [photo: R. Mbewe, 2005].

This incised settlement engraving follows the centre/side axis format common in Lydenburg and Badfontein areas. The entrance is located on the left upper side. The kraal is

joined by a meandering track without a blob. The orientation of the entrance shows non-compliance with either the uphill or downhill preference common in KZN.

- **Clustered Images**

Under this category multiple images occur on a single boulder. Figure 22 below shows an example of a clustered boulder. Cluster "A" shows a settlement system with four kraals in it. All the internal enclosures open outwards towards the perimeter wall. This type of settlement is newer than the others on the panel and is superimposed on earlier versions. B and D represent settlement plans with cattle kraals divided into two sections. This division is meant to separate the calves from the older cattle during nighttime. Letter C represents a normal three concentric circle settlement plan. The houses are depicted using dots as opposed to rectangular boxes as in figure 21 above.

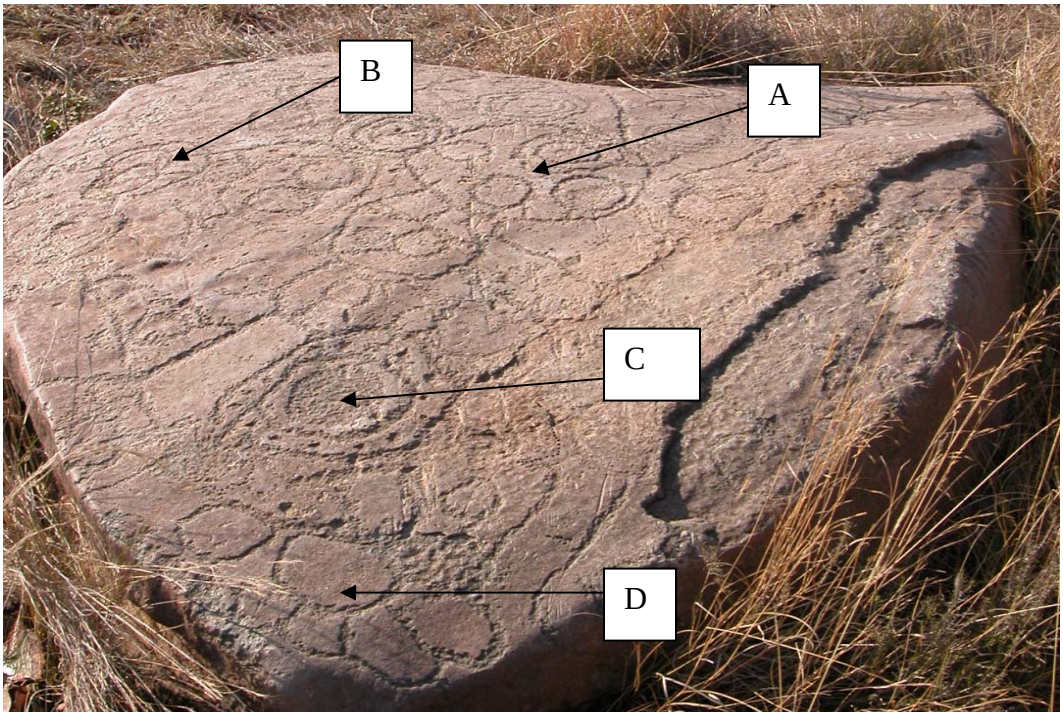


Figure 22: A boulder with a cluster of images representing various settlement plans [Photo; Ben Smith, 2005].

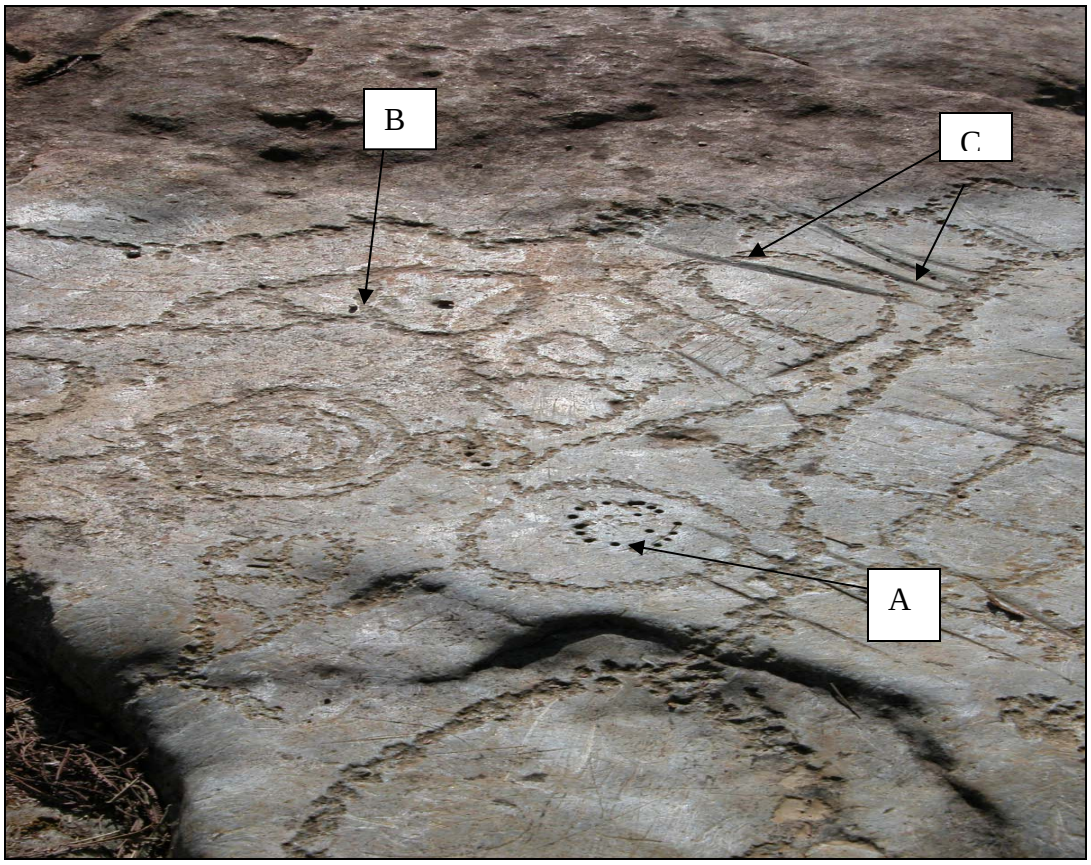


Figure 23: A cluster of different settlement types on a single boulder [Photo: Ben Smith, 2005].

Cluster A in figure 23 above represents a settlement pattern with a single enclosing wall. Inside the wall is a drilled cattle kraal. This is one of the two boulders that have drilled cattle kraals at Boomplaats farm. Letter B represents a different type of settlement called the back/front axis. In this settlement plan cattle kraals are built in front of the houses or residential zones. The middle segment between the kraal and the houses is used as men's court. Besides the settlement plans this boulder also bears other marks. The letter C represents long strikes incised across the face of the boulder. What these lines stand for is still unknown. These strikes are relatively recent owing to the fact that they are superimposed on top of circles.

2. Concentric semi-circles

These images appear exclusively on one large smooth boulder at the extreme east end of the farm. The boulder bears a variation of semi-circular motifs. Van Hoepen (1939) who first described them believes they represent huts viewed in profile. However, no conclusive meaning for these images has been found. Figure 24 below shows some variations of the semi-circle motif.



Figure 24: Engravings depicting semi-circular motifs at Boomplaats farm [Photo: R. Mbewe, 2005].

3. Drilled Holes

Apparently this motif appears only on one boulder (25 02 43 S, 30 24 35E). So far this motif is the only one of its kind discovered at the site. The depth of the drilled holes is about 2.5cm. On this same boulder the drilled holes are surrounded by star-like incisions whose meaning has not yet been established. The incisions seem to have been made by some very sharp instrument. Figure below 25 shows a set of drilled holes whose meaning is not yet known.



Figure 25: A set of drilled holes on a boulder at Boomplaats farm [Photo: R. Mbewe, 2005].

4. Rectangular Shapes

At Boomplaats site there is only one image that represents a rectangular shape. In this image concentric rectangles are joined by straight lines from all corners and mid sections of each straight edge. The resultant shape is a board game called Mhele[7], a game played by boys while herding cattle in the field or by men relaxing in the men's court (see figure 26 below).



Figure 26: A Morabaraba/ Mhele game board photographed at Boomplaats farm [Photo: Ben Smith, 2005].

[7] A game played by two people using stones coloured differently to represent cattle. To win the game one must place three of his cattle in a straight line (pers comm. with Morongwa Nancy Mosothwane). Morongwa is PhD candidate in the Dept. of Archaeology at the University of the Witwatersrand. She is a *Mutswana* from Botswana.

5. Animal Motifs

There is only one boulder at Boomplaats site that bears animal motifs. It is located near perennial stream at the east far end of the farm. The animals depicted on this boulder include antelope, elephant and rhinoceros. These animals are highly faded and they do not bear the same aesthetic beauty as those done by the San in the surrounding areas. All the animals are in pecked form. At the moment there seems to be no connection between these wild animals and the settlement patterns.

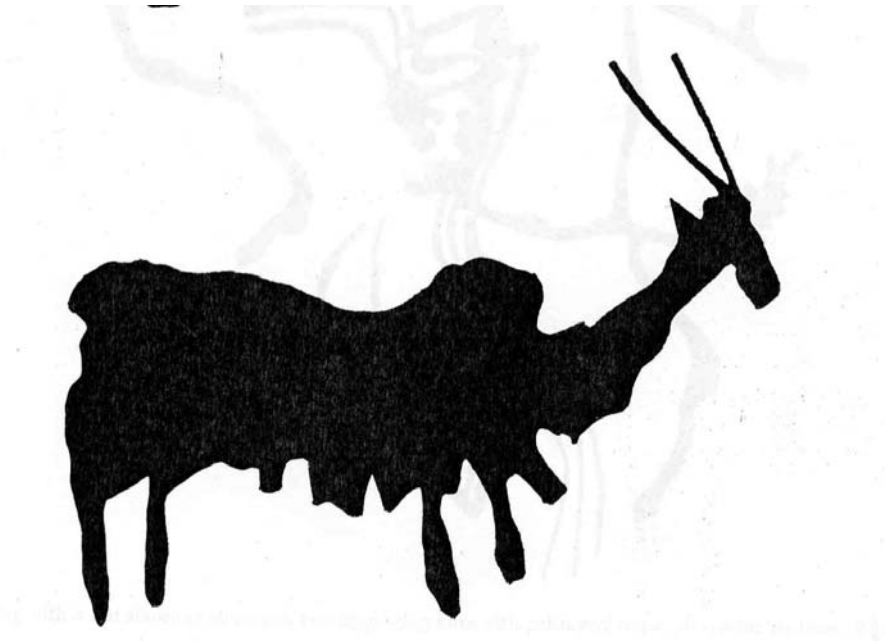


Figure 27: A redrawing of an engraved antelope from Boomplaats farm by van Hoepen, 1939.

6. Spread-eagled Designs

These images appear on a number of boulders at the site. Known also as saurian figures by Maggs (1995), they are all depicted in pecked form. So far no other images are depicted together with them and the majority of these images are of recent nature. Ben Smith (1997) attributes these images to Bantu-speaking peoples. In Northern Sotho rock paintings of the

Limpopo province, these images are depicted in a stylized form and have been linked to the *Koma* of boys' and girls' initiation (Smith and van Schalkwyk 2003; Namono 2004).

However, at Boomplaats, these images are depicted as real lizards with legs, tail and head shown clearly. Like the animal figurines, these images do not seem to have any direct connection with the settlement patterns. They are more of ritual icons associated with initiation of both boys and girls among the Northern Sotho ethnic groups, than the commonly depicted rock art images. Figures 29a and 29b below show the various depictions of the spread-eagle motifs in South Africa.



Figure 28: A pecked out spread eagle motif from Boomplaats farm, Mpumalanga province [Photo: R. Mbewe, 2005].

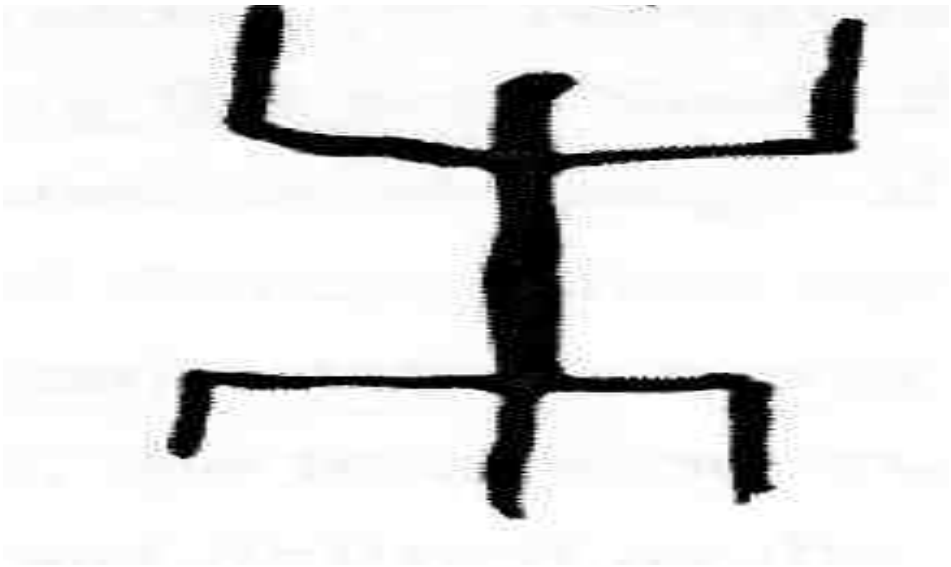


Figure 29a: A stylized painted version of a spread-eagle motif from Makhabeng district, Limpopo province [after Namono, 2004].

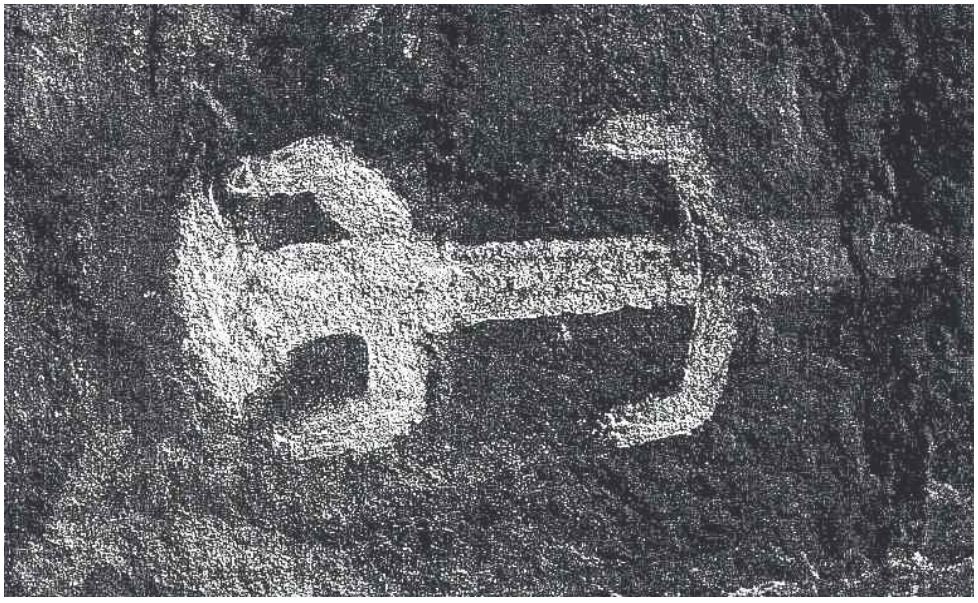


Figure 29b: A stylized painted version of a spread-eagle design from Limpopo province [after Moodley, 2004].

7. Graffiti

Like many other rock art sites, graffiti occurs at Boomplaats farm. At this farm graffiti occurs mainly in the central section of the farm where most of the cattle grazing takes place. Graffiti ranges from imitation of engraved motifs to names of people/places, dates, and religious icons (crucifixes). Young boys herding cattle in the area probably do most of the graffiti. Figures 30 and 31 below show some of the most common graffiti images.



Figure 30: Graffiti at Boomplaats farm showing town name and dates [Photo: R. Mbewe, 2005].



Figure 31: Freshly made graffiti in form of crucifixes. This graffiti could be linked to the Apostolic Faith Christian group that uses the site for prayers

[Photo: R. Mbewe, 2005].

8. Other archaeological and historical material

Besides the settlement engravings the site has two stonewall ruins. These stonewall ruins are about one meter high. The smaller wall has a diameter of about 15 meters, while the bigger ruin has a diameter of about 30metres. From the design of these stonewall ruins one is able to deduce that they were probably used as cattle outposts (stations) since they do not

exhibit any form of residential dwellings within their radii. Figure 32 below shows a section of one of the stonewall ruins at Boomplaats farm.



Figure 32: A section of a stone walled ruin at Boomplaats farm. The general plan of this ruin is similar to some of the engravings at the site [Photo: R. Mbewe, 2005].

9. Indeterminate shapes

Besides the well-known shapes that are depicted at the site, there are images that do not fall into any of the established categories. One such image is a rather amorphous blob interpreted as 'clouds' of pecked marks (Maggs 1995). Although explanations have been put forward for the presence of these 'clouds' of pecked marks, Maggs relates them to cultivated fields. Figure 33 below is an example of such blobs found at Boomplaats farm.

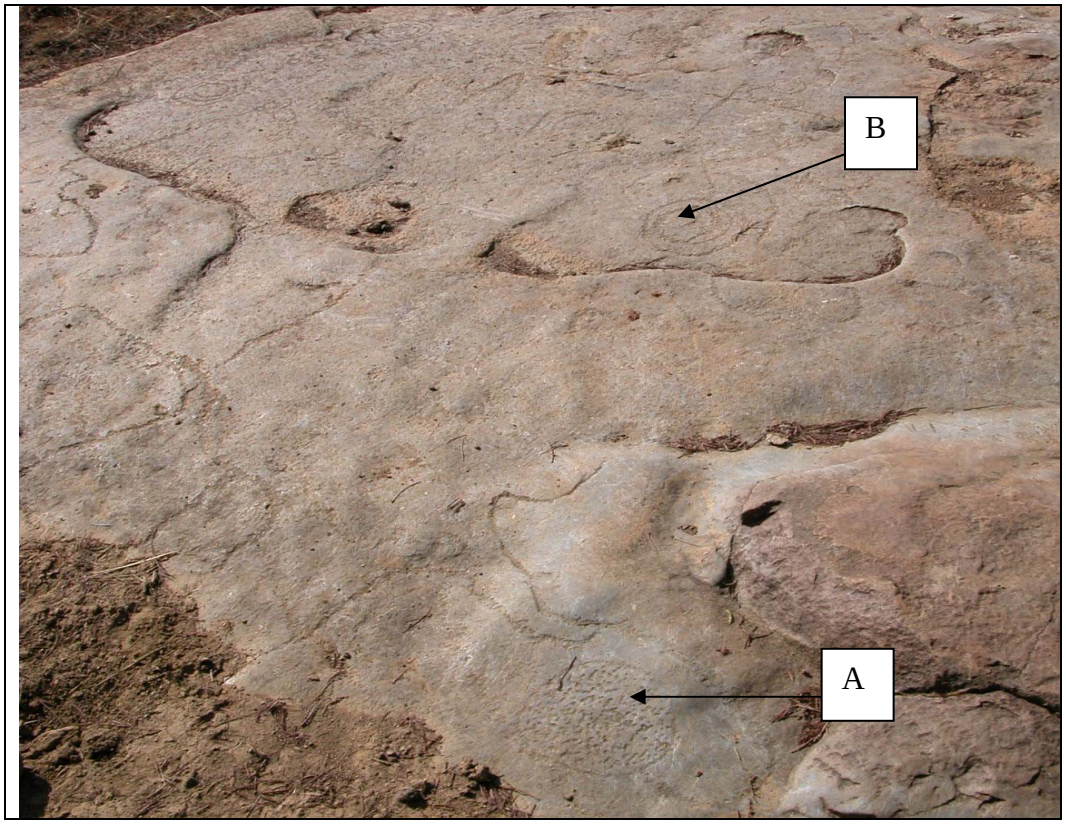


Figure 33: A pecked 'cloud' represented by the letter A. Letter B on top shows a common settlement plan [Photo: R. Mbewe, 2005].

Having described all the images at the site, I now proceed to interpret the images at the site with a view to establishing the possible authors of the engravings at Boomplaats farm.

CHAPTER 5: INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

In Chapter 3, I provided an historical background on Boomplaats farm, placing it in its broader social and historical context. Chapter 3 also described the human settlement sequence in the study area and how the various groups of people interacted with one another. In Chapter 4, I outlined a detailed description of the Structuration and Identity theories adopted for this research. Chapter 4 further provided a detailed description of engraved images present at Boomplaats farm. Using the contextual and formal approaches discussed in chapter 4, this chapter unpacks and analyzes the engraved motifs from Boomplaats farm.

However, before embarking on an interpretation of the engraved motifs at the site, I provide a summary of the settlement sequence for Mpumalanga province, as it is to this that the art must be tied. As earlier discussed in Chapter 3, the first inhabitants of Mpumalanga area were the San hunter-gatherers. These people roamed the area for millennia before the arrival of Bantu-speaking Iron Age farmers in the area. The table below summarizes the human settlement sequence in Mpumalanga province.

SOCIAL GROUP	**SETTLEMENT CHARACTERISTICS**	**PERIOD**
San hunter-gatherers	They had no permanent settlements; lived in small family bands in caves or rock shelters and circular grass huts.	10, 000 BP – 200 AD
KhoeKhoen	Lived a semi-permanent life. They also kept sheep and goats. In the later years, they also traded with Europeans for cloth, tobacco and other	8,000 BP – 1000 AD

	manufactured goods. They interacted with the San.	
Early Iron Age	These people lived in Permanent houses (arranged in form of CCP) and they practiced agriculture in which they grew crops and kept domestic animals). They also made pottery ascribed to Matola and Msuluzi traditions.	AD 200 - 950
Later Iron Age	The first groups of Late Iron Age people arrive in southern Africa were ancestors of Sotho-Tswana speaking people.	1050 – 1200 AD
Ancestors of the Sotho – Tswana speakers	Settled in eastern Botswana, Northwest and Free State provinces. They later spread to Limpopo and Mpumalanga provinces.	1300 –1500 AD
Nguni speaking people	Arrived on the eastern coast of KZN. Lived in family units that were smaller than those of the Sotho-Tswana speakers. They preferred hilly areas and later mountain slopes and valleys. These areas generally had ample water and pasture for their cattle.	1400 – 1650 AD
The Koni	An offshoot of the Nguni. They first settled in the area south of the Vaal river in the Free State.	1500 – 1600 AD

	They later migrated to Mpumalanga and settled in Badfontein and Ohrigstad areas.	
The Pedi	Sotho speakers and an offshoot from Sekhukune's kingdom. They settled in Lydenburg area where they conquered and Sotho-ised the Koni.	1650 - 1850
The Ndebele	Left KZN due to climatic changes and settled in three different areas of the interior – Blouberg area in Limpopo, Badfontein area and KwaMaza near Pretoria.	1680 - 1860
Colonial settlement	Initially missionaries came to the area. Farmers and business people from the Cape and Natal followed seeking agricultural land and wealth respectively.	1760 – 1950 AD

Each of the various groups listed above except for the San had a specific way of expressing their homestead plans, demonstrating their unique cultural identity. By outlining what is emphasized in each of the various settlement patterns discussed in Chapter 4 and correlating them to known historical dates, I will then ascribe the Boomplaats rock engraving to a particular social context.

In archaeological literature, major changes in settlement systems in terms of settlement locations, presence or absence of settlement details, differences or similarities of settlement plans, orientation of settlement patterns (centre/side axis, back/front axis, back/side axis

and so on), position of kraals in these settlement patterns and the nature of cattle tracks have been recorded. Since each of these settlement patterns are unique in its structure, I will apply cultural history by correlating the features in each pattern to known attributes of cultural groups of people who lived or settled in the area at any given time.

All these features of the various settlement patterns taken together will enable me to discriminate the different periods of settlement and ascribe them to specific cultural groups that lived in the area. Since the various changes in the design of settlement patterns seem to be related directly or indirectly to expressions of cultural identities, I will then apply the Structuration and identity theories to explore the processes behind the changes in Boomplaats engravings.

Like most forms of change, any alteration in the belief system of the engravers would have been slow and evolving. Peters (2000) indicates that change is a gradual phenomenon, and the dividing of history and time into chronological social units depends largely on humans involved in the process of making art (Peters, 2000:76). As already described in chapter 4, images from Boomplaats farm show great congruence with other images from areas such as KZN and the Free State. It is this congruence that makes it possible to establish various categories of people who used Boomplaats farm at a given time. It is hoped that this categorization will lead to the determination of identities of various authors of the art at the site.

5.2 Rock Art and identity theory

Rock art images like any other cultural artifacts are made using values and behavioural norms of a particular cultural identity, and as such perceived as embodying these characteristics. This is generally so because objects are made as a result of human activity and are inextricably part of a network of social interaction.

A. D Smith (1995) believes that it is only from basic cultural elements embodied in an object that an identity is forged. These basic elements are symbols, values and traditions of a community expressed in artifact form.

At a general level, traditions such as initiation rites impart a sense of stability to a community, while symbols such as rock art images express the distinctiveness of a given community. However, these traits are not a constant set of elements that define community identity, but they are continuously negotiated and reorganized according to the changing face of a society. Barth (1987), for example, states that the cultural practices and belief system of a group usually conforms to a set of rules of behaviour. Based on these rules of behaviour, cultural traits are shared by each member of the group and maintained through social interaction.

However, it must be noted that there are many instances when certain cultural groups possess social and cultural commonalities across boundaries, yet exhibit variation within the group. Barth (1987) believes that cultural boundaries should be fluid since it is impossible to draw a clear-cut mark between cultures of behaviour. Therefore any theory of identity has to accommodate this unbounded nature of culture since cultural identity is a process that is continual in change over time and space.

According to Meskell and Joyce (2003) identities are always hybrids, made up of mixed composition and fluid, thus not always contiguous. As new identities are consolidated and culturally reinforced, older ideas of difference still exist. In essence identity provides a sense of belonging, perceived by individuals (agents), and yet recognized by the wider community. Identity focuses on structures of beliefs and past experiences regarding self. Since belief systems change with time, then the content of identity is dynamic. In this regard individual identity shifts and transforms in response to the shifting socio-cultural environment (Meskell & Joyce 2003).

While it is true that not all archaeological contexts offer useful information on identity, rock art images actually present a more reliable source of both individual and group identity. Firstly, rock art images provide collective social information on the foundation of any given group. Barth (1969) argues that, it is in such contexts that individuals negotiate the identity of the self. In the process of negotiating, the self also contributes to the collective cultural identity of a group.

Therefore, in analyzing the engraved images, a formal analysis approach has been preferred because available information on engravings at Boomplaats farm is limited and restricted to that which is inherent in the images themselves. Similarly a contextual approach is adopted for two reasons. Firstly, it encapsulates both the environmental and organizational attributes of any given society. According to Hodder (1987), a contextual approach identifies latent networks of patterned similarities and differences in relation to objects being examined. Secondly, it offers an analysis of works of art within its original setting. This ultimately allows for comparison with other associated historical and archaeological artifacts present in the environment.

5.3 Analysis of Engraved Images

After a detailed description of images found at Boomplaats farm, I now proceed to analyze the individual categories of images discussed in the previous chapter. As already discussed in chapter 4, the art at Boomplaats falls under five major categories: settlement patterns, spread-eagle designs, rectangular shapes, animal motifs and graffiti. I present my interpretation in chronological order, starting with the earliest groups that settled in Mpumalanga province.

5.3.1 Animal motifs

As described in chapter 4, only three animal characters: eland, elephant and rhinoceros are depicted at Boomplaats. Depicted in pecked form, these animals are faded and crude in execution. Going by the manner of execution and the level of fading, these animals must have been the first to be engraved at Boomplaats site by the San hunter-gatherers who once roamed the area. This view is supported by the presence of many classic San rock art paintings in the surrounding area of lowlands. The engraving of eland, rhinoceros and elephant by the San clearly suggests that Boomplaats was at one time a place of power: a ritual landscape. The presence of these images near a stream confirms what Lewis-Williams has long argued for that San shamans preferred conducting their rainmaking rituals near rivers (Lewis-Williams 1982). In trance, for example, the shamans would go into water to capture the rain animals (rhino and elephant) to perform their rainmaking

ritual. The engraving of an eland (the greatest symbol of potency among the San shamans) suggests that they harnessed its power to conduct healing and other social rituals.

Therefore, the emphasis on the large and fatty eland in both folklore and rituals was done for good reasons. Firstly, the eland was the largest antelope and a much-desired source of meat and fat amongst many San communities. Secondly, the eland was an animal with most potency that shamans aspired to harness and possess during the trance dance and other San rituals such as marriage, puberty and boy's first kill (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1994). The other activities include control of the movement of game and wading off benevolent spirits.

I therefore argue that the engraving of the potency animal(eland) and two rain animals (rhinoceros and elephant) signify that the San shamans used Boomplaats farm as a centre of power for their rainmaking and healing activities for their community and that of their Late Iron Age neighbours when approached. Scholars such as Peter Jolly, Dowson (1994), Lewis-Williams (1982, 1998) and others have documented this symbiotic interaction between the San and Bantu-speaking farmers in the southeastern mountains.

5.4 Settlement patterns

It is a known fact that all people organize space in culturally specific ways. The link between social organization and traditional settlement patterns of Bantu speakers in South Africa, for example, has long been recognized by many scholars such as Monnig (1967) Mason (1968), and Maggs, (1976). Despite considerable variation in appearance, most traditional homesteads of Bantu speaking people of South Africa are organised according to the same underlying code: the Central Cattle Pattern (Whitelaw 1994).

It is these settlement patterns that form the bulk of the images at Boomplaats farm. The engravings at the site conform to various cultural designs discussed in chapters 3 and 4. From the archaeological and historical data gathered so far regarding Iron Age people, I argue that settlement pattern engravings at Boomplaats farm were first made during the Late Iron Age period, at the time when Bantu-speakers expanded from the coastal areas into the interior plateau areas of Mpumalanga.

Although archaeological evidence shows a broad cultural uniformity to the CCP during the Early Iron Age period, no evidence has been found to suggest that Early Iron people engraved any of the settlement patterns at Boomplaats farm. At the moment we do not know how settlements patterns looked like during the Early Iron Age period. Although Whitelaw (in press) and Huffman (2004) argue that Early Iron Age homesteads followed the CCP, there has not been any extensive archaeological evidence to substantiate these claims. This is largely because these people lived in wooded areas that did not provide open rocky areas suitable for engraving (Huffman, 2004).

The other reason why the Early Iron Age people could not have engraved settlement patterns is that the majority of these people are largely associated with the Shona and Venda speaking people known not to have any tradition of rock art making. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Early Iron Age period does not show any signs of having contributed to the engraving of images at Boomplaats farm. This situation, therefore, restricts our discussion to the Late Iron Age period. As already discussed in Chapter 3, these early farmers were absorbed by the Later Iron Age groups.

5.4.1. Classic Central Cattle settlement pattern

The engraving of settlement patterns is originally an Nguni tradition. Although we get Sotho-Tswana engravings as well, this only happens in areas of extensive contact. We should therefore see this tradition as originating in KZN at sites like Muden and Erskine (Malan 1955; Maggs 1976). This idea was then brought to Mpumalanga by the migration of Nguni speaking people.

Although no obvious reasons have been suggested for the start of this practice, it seems more probable that this system started as a result of the political and religious beliefs enshrined in the Nguni worldview. These people strongly believed in the presence of the spirits of ancestors, and that cattle were directly associated and connected to the spirits ancestors (Hammond-Tooke et al. 2003).

Therefore, the engraving of homesteads appears in both single circle and concentric circle forms. In all cases they show internal settlement details that include huts, grain bins and cattle kraals in the centre. The entrances to these settlements face either uphill or downhill. The homesteads with entrances facing downhill are mostly found in the coastal areas of KZN, while those with entrances facing uphill are common inland or interior plateau areas.

These engravings are also depicted with a meandering cattle track that has a blob near the entrance to the kraal. Figure 34a below shows a typical CCP settlement pattern found at Boomplaats. The implications of the above situation are that different groups of people made the engravings. Those groups that preferred the uphill entrance orientation probably hailed from the interior areas of KZN, while those that preferred the downhill aspect came from the coastal areas.



Figure 34 a: A typical CCP settlement plan



Figure 34b: An Nguni settlement pattern engraved at Boomplaats

In trying to understand the authors of this motif, I first draw attention to three prominent features apparent in this design: general settlement design, arrangement of dwellings (huts) and orientation of entrances. Firstly, the arrangement of huts alludes to the association with Nguni house arrangement of round or oval huts around the main kraal. Secondly, the general arrangement of the settlement follows the concept of centre/side axis, in which the cattle kraal is located in the centre of the homestead with huts built around it. Again this is a distinctive Nguni arrangement. The figure below depicts a typical Nguni settlement pattern from the coastal areas of KZN.

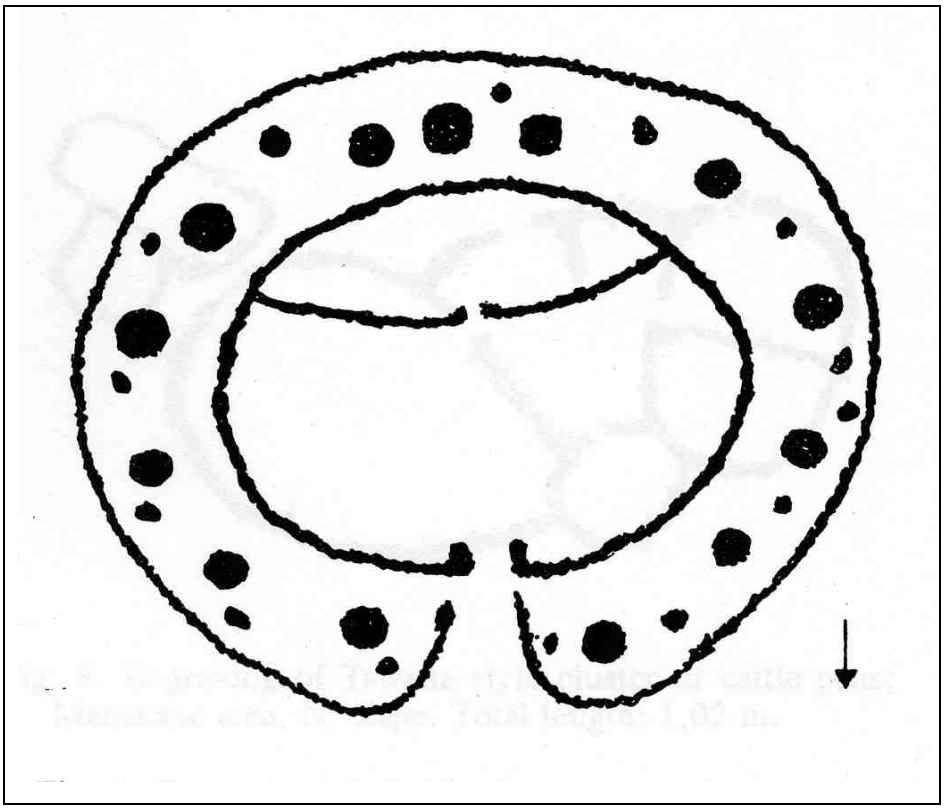


Figure 35: A drawing of a Zulu homestead showing the internal settlement details. Note the downhill orientation of the entrance. The blob *(Inkundla*) which is usually in front of the entrance is missing from this drawing [after Maggs, 1995].

Nguni settlement patterns open with both uphill and downhill depending on the area where they are located. In the coastal areas, for example, homesteads open downhill, while those from the inland areas open uphill (Malan 1955; Maggs 1995).

A third feature that may again point to Nguni authorship of these engravings is the blob or *Inkundla* on the edge of the settlement pattern. Commonly associated with Nguni cleansing rituals, the blob suggests that the makers of these engravings had Nguni ancestry. This feature is uniquely associated with the spiritual world in Nguni settlement contexts (Maggs 1995). Figure 34a above summarizes the concept of Nguni settlement pattern and its powerful spiritual associations through the blob.

Although no conclusive evidence has been presented regarding the presence of these blobs on settlement engravings, Maggs (1995) believes that these blobs represent resting places for cattle after they have returned from grazing. This is also the place where ash from the community hearth is heaped. After resting the community animals are made to pass through this *Inkundla* as a cleansing process. This is particularly an Nguni tradition where the *Inkundla* (hearth ash) is seen as having powers that cleanses any evil act that may have been mooted by enemies.

Judging by the degree of fading associated with this type of engraving (Figure 34b), it is most probable that these were the first Late Iron Age settlement engravings to be engraved at Boomplaats farm. Because of their high affinity to the Zulu homestead setup, these engraving were most likely made by the Koni, the first Nguni speaking people in this area. They left the KZN coastal areas for the interior in about 1500 AD (Huffman, 2004).

Another image in this category is one shown in figure 36 below. Although this figure is structurally similar to the Nguni settlement pattern, it also shows profound differences or changes in its internal settlement details. This image shows huts in a rectangular way instead of the usual round or oval shape. I argue that the change in way of depicting houses is a clear manifestation of cross-cultural influences on the engravers. This change could have been a result of many factors, among them interaction with other social groups with different workmanship skills. The manner of depiction is also different. The engravers used a much finer pecking system, which is not very common among the Nguni. This technique suggests the engravers used a sharp metal device.

From all archaeological evidence gathered so far there is no indication that the Nguni used any walled cattle tracks. Stone walled cattle tracks are a characteristic of large settlements such as those of the Pedi. Ordinary cattle tracks are common where settlements are isolated and restricted to hilly or mountainous areas. The stonewalled cattle tracks came with the Pedi system of settlements with its terraced fields. In Lydenburg area, stonewalled cattle tracks are depicted by the thickened sections of the cattle tracks (Maggs, 1995:139).



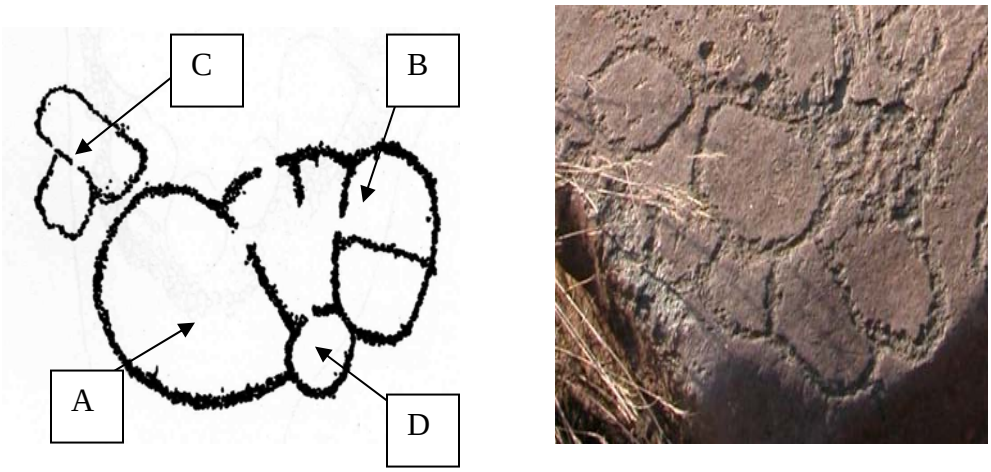
Figure 36: A variation of the Nguni type of settlement pattern [Photo: R. Mbewe, 2005].

5.4.2 Back/side (Bilobial)

Under this type of settlement pattern, huts are built around a central cattle enclosure. No perimeter wall is included in the design. The walls of houses form the external wall that encloses individual cattle kraals in the centre. Houses form what is called the scalloped walls, usually with two entrances. Maggs (1976) attributes this type of settlement pattern to the Sotho-Tswana speaking groups that hailed from the Vaal River area in the Free State. These people crossed the Vaal into Mpumalanga and Northwest provinces long before the arrival of the main Nguni in the area. Coincidentally, this happens to be the second oldest engraving type at Boomplaats site after the classic Nguni ones.

Therefore I suggest that the engravers of the bilobial engravings at Boomplaats were the Fokeng (Maggs, 1976) who are sometimes called mboNguni. These people had a

settlement pattern that emphasized the back/side axis system. This settlement pattern is reflected in the engraving in figure 37 below.



a **b**

Figure 37: "a" is from the Free State and compares with engraving "b" from Boomplaats farm. Letters A and B represent cattle kraals. C is a residential unit. Letter D represents kraal for smaller stock.

5.4.2 Centre/side Axis

These engravings are structurally similar to the classic Nguni settlement patterns. However, these engravings do not depict internal settlement details such as huts and grain bins. These engravings appear to be a variation of the classic Nguni Settlement pattern adapted to suit the new environment. Most of these engravings do not comply with the up or down hill aspects of the entrances. The entrances for these settlement patterns appear to be located on the sides. I propose that this change was a result of new location of settlements. These engravings seem to be a direct result of a localized change in settlement traditions. Although they emphasize the centrality of the cattle kraal, internal details of these settlements seem not to matter as much.





Figure 38 a: **Figure 38b:**

In this structure, the inner circle is meant to hold cattle; the second enclosure is the domain of men and the outer enclosure houses the dwellings for women and children (Whitelaw 1994). The loss of internal settlement details is attributed largely to new emphasis on group identity rather than on individual wealth. Both pottery and historical records link this pattern to the Pedi who settled in the area where the Koni were already resident. Collett (1982) and Maggs (1976a) put the arrival of the Pedi to about 1650 AD. This date is confirmed by their pottery: the Marateng type, which also dates to 1650± 30 AD.

The Pedi eventually subjugated the Koni and the Roka, a Northern Sotho tribe, whom they found already, settled in the area. The Pedi facing serious threats from other Nguni groups adopted the three-circle wall system as an added security measure (Monnig 1967; Evers 1981). This is seen in their stonewall settlement ruins and in the form of engravings they make (see Fig. 36a above and compare with figure 39 below).

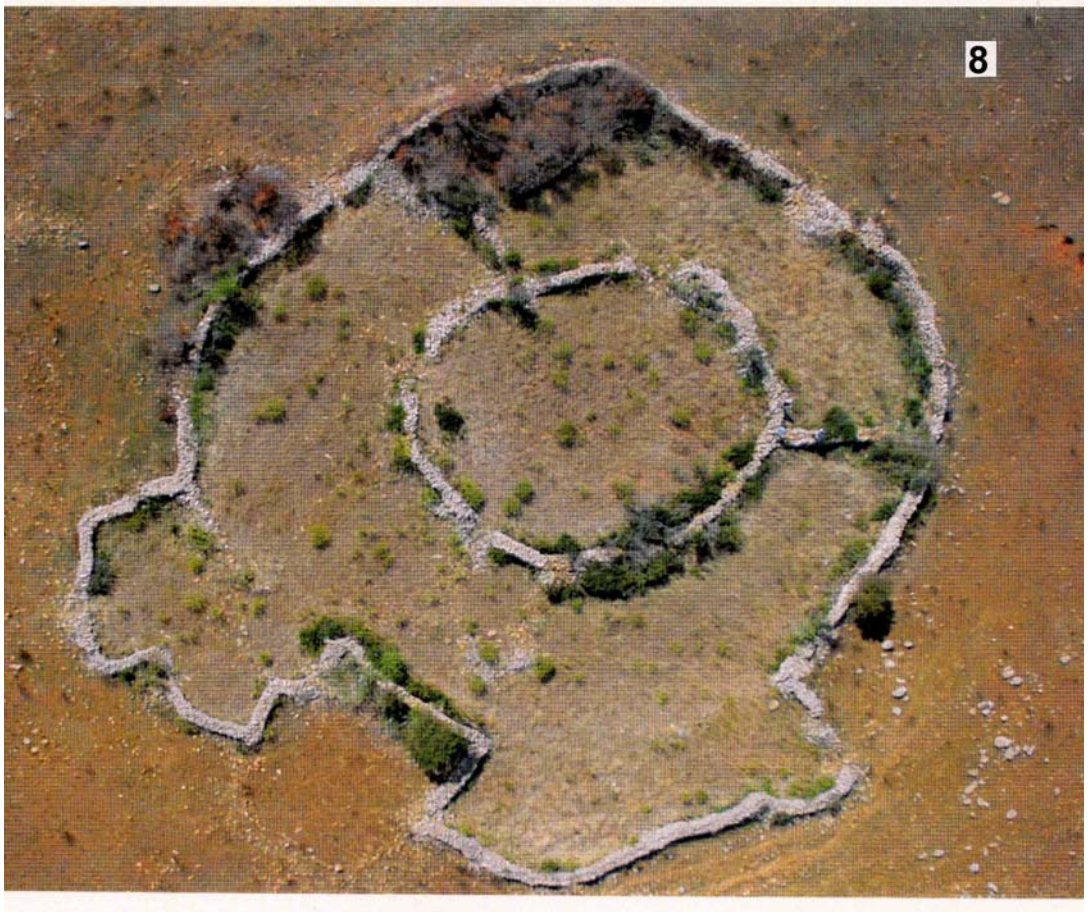


Figure 39: An aerial photograph of a Pedi settlement ruin from Lydenburg district, Mpumalanga province. The second wall is distorted by the removal of some stones for use elsewhere [Pers comm. with Alex Schoeman, 2006].

The interaction between the Koni and the Pedi show cross-culture influences in the layout of settlement patterns. This means that both the Koni and the Pedi lost some of their cultural attributes. This change is seen in the construction of their houses. An Nguni influence, such as the absence of scallops at the back of the domestic area in most Pedi settlement patterns, is proof of change of identity (Huffman, Aug 2005, pers com).

The uphill or downhill entrance orientation among the Koni was similarly lost because they were no longer living in hilly areas or on mountain slopes. They were now living on grassland (veld) areas of the interior (Maggs 1976). As for the Pedi, their engravings of

homesteads now show the *Inkundla*, a clear testimony of cross-cultural influence between the Pedi and Nguni speaking groups. As already discussed this feature is common in Nguni homesteads.

From the above situation, it is clear that material culture, styles, symbols and their uses are actively selected and manipulated in order to pursue specific goals. Material culture is used to rationalize social action, particularly in the context of interaction with other people. Therefore recognizing this recursive relationship between material culture and social reality allows us to access, not only the identity of the group who produced the objects, but also agency in the production process.

This in turn facilitates the study of power relations and relations of dominance and resistance. One of the most commonly recognized aspects of social change is the adoption of items from outside the traditional culture repertoire such as the Sothoization of the Nguni groups. As discussed in chapter 4, identity is reflected in most material culture. This implies that even settlement patterns can function as identity markers. Moore (1982) states that the adoption of new elements into a culture is not a product of a straightforward desires to emulate or imitate others, rather it is the result of changing values and opportunities linked to alternative social, economic and political relations (Moore, 1982:86).

5.4.3 Back/front Axis

This type of engravings marks a major cultural shift from the classic Nguni settlement pattern. In these designs cattle kraals are built on the upper section of the hill behind residential houses with the entrance facing downhill. In the centre of the homestead is the men's court, and in front and around this court are residential houses. This type of construction made it difficult for enemies to reach the cattle kraal, as they had to pass through a series of houses first and the men's court before accessing the kraals.

Huffman (2004) generally attributes this design to the Ndebele, who left KZN after 1600 AD. These people are said to have migrated in three different groups under the leadership of Musi and Langa. The Langa Ndebele split into two groups before leaving KZN. One group settled in northern Limpopo and the other one settled in the Badfontein areas of

Mpumalanga province. The Musi Ndebele on the other hand settled in the southern part of Mpumalanga province. Below is a map showing the migration routes of the Ndebele into the interior.

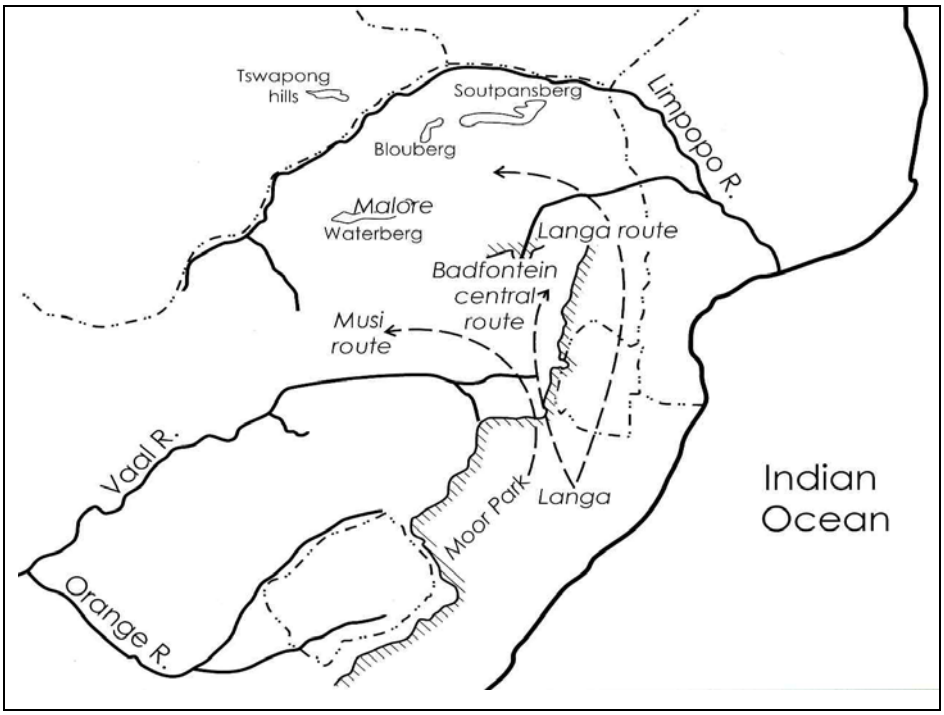


Figure 40: Ndebele dispersal routes from KZN into the interior or Highveld areas [after Huffman, 2004].

The group that settled in the southern parts of Mpumalanga are today known as southern or Musi Ndebele, while those under Langa in the north are called Northern Ndebele (pers com with Alex Schoeman, Feb 2006). At *KwaMaza* the capital of Ndzundza or southern Ndebele near Pretoria, for example, people still build their homesteads in this manner.

Despite being an Nguni speaking group, the Ndebele did not necessarily follow the centre/side axis in the construction of their settlement patterns. Instead they followed the back/front pattern. Again this a reflection of change in the way of life of Nguni speaking people in the interior. Because these people were faced with more uncertainties in their lives, they had to change their settlement system to suit the new situations. Below are two variations of the back/front axis settlement patterns.

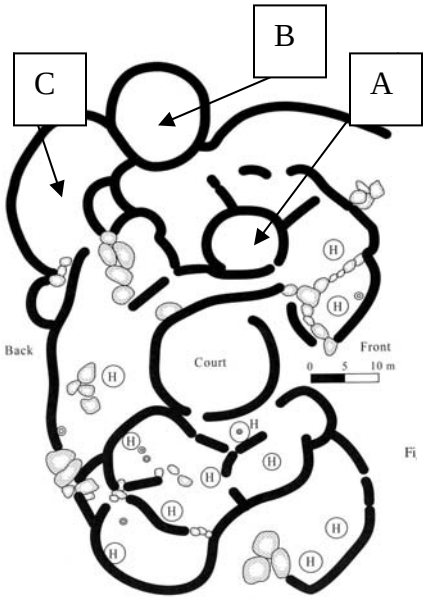




Figure 41a: **Figure 41b:**

The Back/front settlement patterns were common on hill slopes in which cattle kraals were constructed at the back of the residential areas. To access the kraal area one had to pass through the houses and the men's court in front. This arrangement gave more protection to the cattle against enemies/raiders [pers comm. with Huffman, 2006].

5.5 The end of engraving settlement patterns

The tradition of engraving settlement patterns did not continue into the 19th century. There are basically two reasons that I propose for the demise of this tradition. The first one is that the havoc of the *Mfecane* in the early 1820s caused a lot of social changes in most local communities with far reaching consequences for the entire southern African region.

For example, a number of ceremonies such as the initiation of boys among the Zulu were abandoned due to war and general social instability. Secondly the coming of missionaries into these communities also affected social fabric of the local people. Among the Pedi, for example, the Berlin Missionary Society under Merensky discouraged traditional practices that had been part of the local people for a long time (Mulaudzi 2002). This external interference tore down the core of social identity among many communities.

5.6 Spread-eagle designs

Although depictions of these images are found in various parts of southern Africa, these images are most common in the Northern Sotho rock art tradition (Namono, 2004). Varied spread-eagle images are said to be central to initiation rock art of Bantu-speaking people of east, central, and southern Africa (Smith 2006). In Limpopo province, for example, these images are considered 'ancestral beings' of the initiation school: the *Koma* (Namono 2004:84). Although predominantly painted in white, other colours are also used.

At Boomplaats farm, however, only engraved images are found. Some of the images appear together with settlement patterns, while others are on their own. The appearance of these images with some settlement patterns may suggest that Boomplaats farm was at one time used for ritual performances, especially boys' initiation. It is therefore probable that the area was a long time ago a secluded zone for various ritual activities.

I propose that these images were made at Boomplaats farm because this place had ritual significance. It is most probable that this place was used as a recuperation zone for newly initiated boys. According to Namono (2004), initiates were expected to carry out a number of male chores such herding cattle and making of tools before returning to the villages to join the adult domain.

Judging the general landscape at Boomplaats farm, one is left with a feeling that the area provided a very suitable arena for such secretive activities. The area is big to accommodate a lot of cattle and it has perennial streams that could provide water to both the animals and people.

The spread-eagle engravings seem to be the last ones to be made at Boomplaats farm. A good number of these images are fairly recent than the settlement patterns. In most cases they are less patinated than the other engravings and some of them are engraved on top of other images at the site. These were likely made a few decades before the arrival of the Missionaries in the area. Since spread-eagle motifs are associated with secret rituals, it is probable that these images were part of the settlement patterns that could have ritual connotations to societies that made them.

The presence of these images at the farm confirms that the area had ritual significance to Northern Sotho speaking people, especially the Pedi who lived in this area from about 1650 to 1820 AD (Collet 1982). The presence of stonewall ruins could also indicate that these structures were used as boys quarters during initiation recuperation.

5.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have demonstrated that settlement patterns at Boomplaats belonged to different time phases. After a careful analysis on the various types of engravings at the site, it is now clear that different people made the images at different times. This research has shown that settlement patterns at Boomplaats have undergone dynamic changes over time and space. At a lower level the changes are seen in the settlement details that are either included or left out by the engravers. Such details include huts, grain bins, cattle tracks and kraal divisions. At a larger scale the differences emerge in terms of general layout of settlement patterns. All these differences signify different identities of the makers of the art at Boomplaats farm, the fusion, borrowing and hybridity in identity.

In this study I have placed Boomplaats farm in five stages of area usage that have been discerned from the engravings themselves. The San, the first inhabitants of this land left their mark in form of engraved animal motifs found at the extreme far east of the farm near the perennial stream. The presence of engravings of animals of power suggests that perhaps Boomplaats was a ritual centre for San rainmaking activities during the Early Iron Age period for themselves and the local Iron Age farmers. Although contact between these two groups was mainly through rainmaking activities, these groups also interacted at other social levels such as marriage. However, all the five stages of occupation of Boomplaats site reflect the various social and religious belief systems of the engravers that used the site at a given time. Consequently, each social group incorporated their own indicators or markers of identity into the settlement engravings.

Through the exercise of placing various engravings into stages or phases, this research has been able to provide a relative chronology for the engravings at Boomplaats farm,

established through partial superimposition of images over the six stages, and correlating them with known identities of cultural groups that settled or lived in the area.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

This research has established that the Nguni speaking people led the way in exerting their identity in the interior. They went on to 'Nguni-ise' the other groups by stamping their own cultures in areas that were occupied by other people. This led to the appropriation of once Sotho-Tswana speaking areas. The arrival of the Pedi in about 1650 AD further complicated the situation in the interior. Despite them being dominant over the Koni, they were forced to engage with Nguni identities. This is seen in their adopting the center/side settlement plan and dropping of the scallops in their dwellings.

This interaction led to the copying of outside identity in the art. The results of interaction between the Pedi and koni created hybridity of identity. Through military conquest, for example, the Pedi were able to subjugate the Koni. For political reasons the Koni largely accepted Pedi identity. From the above situation, it is clear that various social groups were manipulating identity to promote their own agenda. This was done by utilizing material culture to promote their identities. The white population in the area, for example, removed all African settlements from Boomplaats and other surrounding areas, replacing them with European based brick houses. The new settlers planted exotic plants such as Gum (Eucalyptus) trees and vineyards. The changing of homestead types and planting of exotic trees symbolizes the stamping of new identities on the landscape.

Now that the land has been given back to the local Dinkwanyane Community, there are calls for new houses, clinics and other social amenities to be built at Boomplaats farm. If these calls will be honoured by government, then we will witness the demolition of the remaining white identities on the farm: the European style houses and vineyards. These remaining remnants of European identity will eventually be replaced with Rural Development Programme (RDP) house that the African National Congress (ANC) led government is building for its people. Once again this will be the stamping of new identities in the area.

In the course of this project I have tackled different sources of knowledge with regards to settlement engravings at Boomplaats farm. Each of these sources has informed a different

aspect of the art. By shuttling between formal analysis and contextual approach, one was able to see the various stages through which the site was used by different social groups of people over time and space.

Taken together, the various strands of historical and archaeological evidence have made a strong argument for the origins of the Boomplaats settlement engravings. I argue that Boomplaats engravings represent a habitual convention that was carried on and became a way of representing cultural identities through homestead patterns. I also believe that the convention of engraving at Boomplaats farm continued for a long time because some images fulfilled the objectives of engravers of linking the world of ancestors (spirits) and that of the living.

Sequential overlays on some engravings suggest continuous usage of the site over a long period of time. Similarly the variations in the engraving techniques used; from smooth incisions to rough pecking, indicate diverse individual expertise or alternatively different groups of people with varying degrees of workmanship. It is probable that each time a different group of people settled in the area new images were added onto the boulders.

Using the occupation sequence of the area, this research has brought to the fore the various social groups that had a hand in the making of the art at Boomplaats farm. Owing to the competing factors at play, it must be understood that the changes exhibited at the site were gradual. It is hoped that this research has added value to the topic of settlement archaeology.

Finally, I argue that the engravings at Boomplaats farm were authored by different groups of people with different ideologies. These ideologies clearly show themselves in the manner the settlement patterns are shaped and also the presence of ritual images such as spread-eagle motifs. The overlaps and similarities in the engravings simply confirm that identity is a fluid and ever changing process of acculturation.

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