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The Later Stone Age occupation and sequence of the Mapungubwe landscape

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For the degree of Masters of Science

THE LATER STONE AGE OCCUPATION AND SEQUENCE OF THE MAPUNGUBWE LANDSCAPE

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Science, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science

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2010

DECLARATION

I, Timothy Robin Forssman, declare that this is my own original work. It has been submitted for a Master of Science degree at the University of the Witwatersrand. It has not been submitted to any other academic institution.

.....

Tim Forssman

"The question of questions for mankind – the problem which underlies all others, and is more deeply interesting than any other – is the ascertainment of the place which Man occupies in nature and of his relations to the universe of things."

Thomas Henry Huxley 1863

ABSTRACT

Forager interactions with Bantu language-speaking farmers throughout southern Africa have yielded different outcomes. Attention has been paid to the way in which the foraging economy changed from the pre-contact into the contact period. On the Mapungubwe landscape this is particularly important as it is here where the first Iron Age state established itself. A series of excavations have been used to determine the forager sequence. However, it is shown here that this model excludes facets of foraging lifeways. Later Stone Age lithic scatters were identified during an archaeological survey. Sites were then selected for analysis from which a sample of artefacts was collected using a stratified unaligned sampling method and a timed collection. These data was then compared to the dated assemblages from excavations at Little Muck Shelter, Balerno Main Shelter, Balerno Shelter 2 and 3 and Tshisiku Shelter. In doing so, various discrepancies between shelter and open air assemblages are made evident. Namely, open air assemblages are generally dominated by quartz and lack the variety of formal tools found at shelters. In addition, shelter sites are dominated by crypto-crystalline materials. A comparison of two excavations echoes these patterns. Den Staat AB 32 is an open air site and compares well with open air assemblages, whereas a neat relationship between Mbere Shelter and other shelter excavations exists. Therefore, sites are grouped together based on similarities between their assemblages. They are also placed into date brackets established using typological cross-referencing with the dated assemblages. Using these dates, it has been shown that forager mobility was not inhibited by the Iron Age settlement of the area. It seems more likely that foragers were selecting sites in order to interact with farmers during certain periods and maintaining their autonomy during others. It is suggested that quartz dominated sites may represent a movement towards or into farmer homesteads as they are mostly located in the zone with the highest density of farmer settlements. Alternatively, these sites may be the result of variable activity patterns at special purpose sites. The findings presented here suggest that a reassessment of the forager record is needed. Open air sites need to be included in forager studies as our understanding of the forager occupation of the Mapungubwe landscape is at present incomplete.

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