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SOCIAL AND PHYSICAL FACTORS INFLUENCING THE USE AND CONSUMPTION OF EUROPEAN FABRIC BY NINETEENTH CENTURY INDIGENOUS SOCIETIES IN THE OLD TRANSVAAL

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the Degree of Master of Science in the University of the Witwatersrand. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination to any other University.



_____

S M Dymond

date: 3rd October 2011

Abstract

In 1854 friction over labour practices, land appropriation and inland trade routes led to the simultaneous murder of three groups of Dutch settlers, or Trekkers by the Kekana Ndebele. The Trekkers mounted a retaliatory attack on the Kekana, who retreated into Historic Cave, Limpopo Province. Although the cave had been well stocked prior to the attack, the Kekana were decimated and this event later became known as the Siege of Makapan. Excavations from 2001 uncovered a unique cache of European fabric preserved by the unusually dry conditions in the cave.

Within the fluid social and political landscape of the internal frontier of nineteenth century northern Transvaal, European clothing and fabric was a valuable resource that served different functions. Contemporary records from traders, travellers and missionaries indicate that, as a high status item, clothing and fabric was often restricted to elites, was subject to social mores and could be used to signal changing religious or political affiliations. Certain groups, or individuals, also invested fabric with unusual properties. No entire garments were recovered from Historic Cave but some of the fragmentary fabric remains that were revealed indicate their possible use as ritual objects endowed with supernatural qualities. The unique find from Historic Cave allows an opportunity of comparing archaeological remains with historical documents to understand more about fabric use at this time.

To absent friends

Robert Collier Shearer 24.10.1952 – 23.02.2011

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Nomenclature

Fabric colour and pattern abbreviations

Patterns were printed on, or woven into, the fabric.

Tartan is a specific type of fabric made of checked woolen cloth.

All Colours were derived from Munsell Soil Colour Charts.

C = Check, F = Fabric, P = Pattern, S = Stripe, T = Tartan.

WSP – White Sprig Pattern

BGC - Brown Green Check

BGP – Black Grey Pattern

FWF – Float Weave Fabric

TP – Tartan Pattern

RPP - Red Pink Pattern

BRC - Blue Red Check

GBS - Grey Blue Stripe

OYP – Orange Yellow Pattern

BBC – Brown Blue Check

YRP – Yellow Red Pattern

RBP – Red Brown Pattern

Chapter 1: Introduction

Excavations at Historic Cave in Makapan Valley, Limpopo Province, revealed a unique cache of European fabric dating to the Siege of Makapan in 1854 (Esterhuysen *et al* 2009, Esterhuysen 2010). During the siege the Ndebele Kekana were overcome by a Trekker commando and the survivors dispersed as indentured labour (De Waal 1978). The nineteenth century was a time of social and political upheaval between settled indigenous groups and Europeans traveling into 'uncharted' territory (Schapera 1961, Du Bruyn 1986, Kopytoff 1989, Boeyens 1994). These circumstances occurred during the 'colonial period' and were influenced by complex factors, often considered the preserve of historical archaeologists, relating to globalisation, capitalism, culture change, culture contact and power relations (Leone 1995, Lightfoot & Martinez 1995, Orser 1996, Stein 2002, Gosden 2004, Silliman 2005).

Previous historical archaeological studies in southern Africa have either focused on styles of indigenous material culture (Huffman 2005), types of settlement patterns (Huffman 1986) and the distribution and types of European glass beads (Wood 2000, 2005). While other studies have focused on colonial households and historical documents (Hall *et al* 1990, Smith & Van Schalkwyk 2002). Up until now a study has not been conducted into woven fabric. Although fabric was a well-known and prized trade item from early times it degrades rapidly and therefore it is extremely unusual and rare to find it in excavations (Robertshaw *et al* 2010). However, a unique combination of factors within Historic Cave, including the drying effect created by the lime in the deposit, derived from the dolomite from which the cave is formed, and the unusually dry climatic conditions prevalent during the mid-1850s, contributed to the exceptional preservation of a wide range of organic items, most importantly, fabric. Such a large amount of fabric from a southern African archaeological site belonging to the historical period has ever been available for inquiry before and allows an

unprecedented opportunity to assess its role against the background of culture contact.

In the mid-1850s various items of non-local material culture were available to indigenous communities living at that time, such as glass beads and European fabric. Contemporary writings from travelers, traders and missionaries suggest that European fabric was readily incorporated by some groups but shunned by others (Duggan-Cronin 1935, Davison 1984, Gillow 2003). Fabric was also used to fashion new identities in a rapidly changing social landscape and could be subject to restrictions due to trade or social limitations (Van Warmelo 1948, Gray & Birmingham 1970, Lye 1975, Harries, 1994, Loren 2001). In addition, ethnographic records recount how fabric was sometimes reworked into objects with possible magical or ritual significance (Du Toit 2009, Webb & Wright 2001). However, although various historical documents are available to us the lack of any excavated fabric available for study means that there is no way of gauging the veracity of these documents, until now (Bowdich 1819, Theal 1898, Lovett 1899, Lye 1975). The archaeological remains of preserved fabric represent an opportunity to allow the interrogation of contemporary records and test these against how fabric was actually used. My aim is to understand the use of fabric by the Kekana in Historic Cave.

To achieve this objective I will first examine ethnographic information and contemporary records of travelers, administrators, missionaries and traders who journeyed through southern Africa, to achieve an understanding of the historical background. Next I will review the social and political dynamics operating at that time. Following this, I will examine the finds from the excavations at Historic Cave and finally, analyse the fabric. The insights gained from both historical records, analysis and the theoretical approach can be compared with the finds from the deposit. The interpretation of this information will give insight into the factors involved with fabric use.

Chapter Two outlines the economic, social and political history of fabric from earliest times in sub-Saharan Africa up until the mid-nineteenth century in the

northern Transvaal. Chapter Three explores various social and political facets of historical archaeology, such as globalisation, colonialism, culture contact, gender and power structures and the ways these influenced fabric use. Chapter Four begins with a discussion of the excavations in Historic Cave and then examines the finds and their contexts. Chapter Five is an analysis of the excavated fabric, where I consider the fabric in the deposit and the processes that affected the fabric after the siege. Chapter Six is an interpretation of all these factors and how they pertain to the fabric found within the cave.

Chapter 2: The economic, political and social history of fabric

2.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to delineate the history of fabric in Africa. It will address changes through time and highlight the socio-economic impact of imported fabric on the communities of southern Africa.

First, I will consider the role of fabric within Africa where there were two distinct traditions. The first was found along the Mediterranean and northeastern Africa, above the Saharan belt. My focus, however, will be the second tradition, found in Sub-Saharan and southern Africa and was more involved with coastal trade. Following this I will discuss Indian Ocean trade during the Iron Age, between indigenous groups and Muslim traders along the southeastern coast. Gold, ivory and animal skins were exchanged for various imported trade goods. At this time locally produced cloth was the primary source of textiles. From the mid fifteenth century Portuguese explorers rounded the Cape on their way from Europe to Asia in search of spice and riches. This intensified trade along the East coast and introduced fabric from Europe. By the latter nineteenth century, imported cloth dominated available supplies.

Journals and documents from travelers, traders and missionaries provide a rich source of documents. These included many references to trade, politics and economics (Bowdich 1819, BMB 22[1], Heckford 1882, Theal 1898, Schapera 1951, 1961, Campbell 1974, Lye 1975, Eldredge 1994, Moths 2004, Schoeman 2007), During the nineteenth century the shift from a subsistence economy to a cash economy was one of the changes that affected the people of southern Africa. I intend to unravel the different elements that had an effect on fabric use by the peoples in southern Africa.

[1] Berliner Missionsberichte No. 22 (1861). Presumed authored by Dr T Wangermann.

2.2 Traditions in Africa

Indigenous cotton, wild silk and wool have all been spun and woven into cloth in Africa from times that pre-date European colonists (Davison & Harris 1980, Idiens 1980, Picton 1995, Nettleton 2000). Cotton is indigenous to Africa and was cultivated from the Sahara in the north, West Africa and as far south as the Limpopo River in present day Limpopo Province. Several varieties of cotton from the genus *Gossypium* may be cultivated or grow freely. Spindle whorls are often found in the archaeological record from sites of early farming communities in southern Africa (Huffman 1971). Those made of ceramic or stone are more durable than those made of wood or other organic materials, which do not survive for long in the archaeological record.

Cotton and other fibres were cultivated and woven into cloth before contact with colonists although Kriger (2005: 87) concedes that the history of pre-colonial fabric production in Africa remains poorly understood. Women harvest and prepare the cotton for spinning, and men or women executed both spinning and weaving (Davison & Harries 1980, Idiens 1980, Nettleton 2000). As well as cotton, limited quantities of wild silk were harvested from a species of wild moth, *Anaphe*. The spun thread was left undyed and used by the Hausa of northern Nigeria, West Africa, for embroidery and woven by Yoruba male weavers into strips. The Yoruba call this silk cloth *sanyan* and it was worn on important occasions. Imported silk cloth was also unraveled and the thread incorporated into locally woven fabric (Bowdich 1819, Alpern 1995). Specific thread and fabric were important as prestige items and used in rituals.

Weaving was done on simple single-heddle, vertical and horizontal looms, or, more complex double-heddle looms and was practiced from times that pre-date colonists (Huffman 1971: 11). Horizontal, or ground looms, were used in North Africa, northern Sudan in northeastern Africa, East Africa, North Nigeria in west Africa and Cameroon in central and western Africa, while vertical looms were

distributed through North Africa, Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo, formerly Zaïre in central Africa (Idiens 1980, Picton 1995). Single-heddle looms tended to be distributed more widely than double-heddle looms, which were found in the island of Madagascar off the southeastern coast, East Africa and especially West Africa (Nigeria, Ghana, Dahomey, Sierra Leone and Liberia). As looms were constructed from wood, which is highly degradable, remains of these in the archaeological record are extremely limited or non-existent.

The size of the loom governs the width of cloth that can be produced. Single-heddle looms produce cloth from approx. 38.5cm to 127cm. Double-heddle looms produce characteristically narrow strips from as little as 1.3cm to 75cm. The average is about 10-20cm. In West Africa woven strips were sold in rolls. These rolls of cloth were then stitched together along the selvedge, or edge, to form strip-woven cloth. These are known as *kente* cloth and made colourful garments widely known to derive from traditions in West Africa (Picton 1995).

In southeastern Africa single-heddle looms predominated and weavers manufactured widths of cotton rather than joining narrow strips (Davison & Harries 1980). Looms were usually operated by one sex, either men or women, but double-heddle looms are usually only operated by men (Idiens 1980: 7). However, division of labour varied so much from region to region in the processes of fabric preparation, from growing fibre to spinning, weaving, dyeing, stitching and completing a finished item, that it is not possible to formulate a principle dictating fabric preparation along gender lines (Joseph 1978, Nettleton 2000).



Fig. 2.1: Map of Africa showing places mentioned in the text

Raphia cloth was produced in great variety and described in local terms by peoples of the “Kingdom of Kongo” (present day Democratic Republic of Congo) in central Africa prior to the arrival of Portuguese in 1508 (Nettleton 2000: 27). Similarly, Portuguese records describe well-established industries of cotton

cultivation, cotton spinning and cloth production upon their arrival at the East Coast in the fifteenth century (Davison & Harries 1980: 178).

Textile production and distribution networks were well established in sub - Saharan Africa (Hodder 1980). In these sophisticated systems of fabric production certain functions were elevated to a “sacred task”. For example, within groups from Sierra Leone the women performed fabric dyeing. They learnt the craft from a female relative and the commissioning of a new dye pot was completed with the aid of spiritual powers. The men of the Dan of Liberia were traditionally not allowed near dye vats and this enclosure was considered “sacred” (Joseph 1978: 34). This illustrates that aspects of fabric preparation, such as dyeing, had special significance amongst this localised group in West Africa, even as late at the mid-twentieth century.

These divisions of labour had parallels with gender-based taboos in southern Africa where specific activities such as metalworking or skin preparation, were restricted to men (Vogel 1983: 25, Nettleton 2000: 32). Some undertakings were considered sacrosanct, for example, metal smithing was performed publicly in a central area while smelting was conducted in a secret area away from the settlement (Juwayeyi 2008: 113). Likewise, other domestic tasks such as pottery, woodworking, skin-preparation and agriculture in the southern African region were also subject to gender-based arrangements (BMB 22, Hooper *et al* 1989, Nettleton 2000, Huffman 2005).

Nettleton (2000: 25) discussed the prestige and ritual use of fabric. She refers to the Yoruba *Egungun* and *Gelede* costumes made of bright pieces of patchwork strips, which designated high status. The Yoruba wore *Egungun* costumes for ceremonial events, while *Bamana* hunting coats, decorated with arbitrary pieces of glass, feathers and organic objects, were worn to bring luck (Schmahmann 2000). Protective powers were invoked by amulets, sometimes embroidered into garments or put into little pockets, which gave the wearer powers over unseen forces, or, by the designs of embroidered stitching on everyday wear (*Ibid.*: 24).

Fabric could also be used as a visual signal to convey political affiliation. Some time around the seventeenth century the Fante from southern Ghana made *Asafo* flags with colourful patchwork or appliqué motifs. These were a symbol of military solidarity by male groups against lineage-based political structures.

Social value was also invested in textiles and yarns, and cloth may have initially been restricted by elites (Joseph 1978, Davison & Harries 1980). Imported European cloth quickly became an indicator of status, wealth and prestige and was favoured over locally produced textiles after its introduction on the West coast by Portuguese (Alpern 1995, Nettleton 2000, Juwayeyi 2008). Chroniclers reported that kings were the first to adopt this prestige item. In the fifteenth century the King of Mali wore long garments made only of European cloth and amongst the Wolof imported cloth served as a symbol of status, while in Zimbabwe the court prized imported cloth over locally produced cotton (Hodder 1980). The Royal wives of Yoruba wrapped their goods in special cloth and received entertainment and traveled free of tribute. Imitators of this cloth faced slavery. (*Ibid.*: 208). Very large, conspicuous, brightly coloured patchwork umbrellas, first described by European merchants in the seventeenth century, were the prerogative of chiefs in North and West Africa (Nettleton 2000).

Silk cloth was restricted to chiefly hierarchies and their courts in West African (Picton 1995: 21). Imported silk fabrics were unraveled and the resultant silk thread incorporated into cloth used by chiefs (Bowdich 1819: 336). Reels of cotton thread were highly valued and, like cloth, were the prerogative of chiefs in northern Malawi (Davison & Harries 1980: 180). Blue fabric was unraveled to yield rare blue thread that was woven into local cloth (*Ibid.*: 181) indicating that colour also had prestige value. This may be derived from the use of indigo dye which demonstrated rank of the wearer - the deeper and more glossy the dyed fabric, the higher his status (Joseph 1978: 35). These uses of fabric, both local and imported, show how different communities invested cloth with prestige and symbolic value.

Cloth was also used as money, but possibly only after contact with European traders. It was exchanged for slaves, used for ceremonial exchange, such as bridewealth, used as transport tax and bartered for other commodities (Hodder 1980, Juwayeyi 2008). The salt trade in Timbuktu, Mali, was based on cloth, and pieces of cloth were used as money in central and West Africa. In seventeenth century Senegambia, West Africa, textiles could buy salt and salt could buy slaves (Hodder 1980: 206). Livingstone, travelling in Zimbabwe in 1851 saw the Mambari, who acted as agents for white slavers, exchange their stock of British cotton cloth for slave boys at various towns. They later swapped slaves for guns with the Portuguese (Schapera 1961: 176).

This ethnographic information shows how fabric was an important part of social life and was subject to various rules within different communities. The value ascribed to cloth, and thread, for its rarity and prestige as a trade good meant that it was restricted to elites from its introduction through early coastal trade up until the beginning of the nineteenth century. I now turn to the archaeological evidence of fabric in sub-Saharan Africa.

Archaeological evidence of woven fabric is limited due to the degradable nature of textiles (Good 2001, Robertshaw *et al* 2010). Limited amounts of locally spun fabric were excavated from the sites listed below. At Igbo Ukwu, a 9th Century site in Nigeria, evidence of woven bast fibre was recovered (Idiens 1980: 8); at Mali, West Africa, needlework on strip-woven cloth was excavated from Tellem burial caves dating from the 12th Century to the 15th Century (Nettleton 2000: 22), and at the Iron Age[2] site of Mapungubwe, South Africa the indirect evidence of beads sewn onto the long-gone garment of either cloth or skin was found (Wood 2000: 87). Spindle whorls were excavated from Mapungubwe c1250AD

[2]The term Iron Age is problematic for being inaccurate as it may include societies that do not even use Iron. Other suggestions have been Early or Later farming communities, and agriculturists, but these terms are similarly imprecise. The term Iron Age is used here to describe communities who practiced some farming and some metal making, living from around 1100AD up until colonial times c1830AD in southern Africa. For further discussion see Hall 2010, or Mitchell 2002.

and associated sites in Zimbabwe and Zambia which pre-date Muslim traders. This indicates knowledge of spinning, and presumably weaving (Huffman 1971: 11, Idiens 1980: 9).

Fabric excavated from Ingombe Ilede in Zambia, dating to 1400, comprised both fine and coarse types of cloth and may indicate access to both imported and locally produced cloth (Phillipson & Fagan 1969: 199).

Huffman (1971) discussed the scanty fabric remains found at a number of sites in northern Zimbabwe and Zambia, namely: Komani, Dhlo Dhlo, Khami, Dambamare and Ingombe Ilede. Komani contained a human burial and remains of coarse evenweave cotton cloth, thought to be a burial shroud. A hut excavated at the site of Dhlo Dhlo contained two partially burned skeletons and fragments of fabric adhering to one skull and mandible and one set of copper bangles. This cloth was also a fine evenweave and thought to be cotton. The excavation at Khami produced a bronze hoard with several fragments of carbonized cloth of a coarse plain weave. Skeletons associated with a 16th or 17th Century Portuguese church were excavated at Dambarare. Several skeletons were wrapped in fine, evenweave cotton, possibly shrouds (Huffman 1971: 5).

At Ingombe Ilede (Phillipson & Fagan 1969) on the Zambian side of the Zambezi River, a rich burial site brought to light quantities of textile fragments from eleven richly adorned human skeletons (*Ibid.*: 204). A mean radiocarbon date of AD 1410 ± 60 years was established. The cotton cloth found in the rich burials, along with trade goods and spindle-whorls in the upper layers, indicates the ability to manufacture fabric before the arrival of the Portuguese on the East Coast. Some cloth was tie-dyed and this supports the link made by the Portuguese to Mozambique in southeastern Africa, who incorporated Delagoa Bay into their trading system from the 1540s (Smith 1970: 265). Links to an overland trade network may be demonstrated by the decorative motifs on pottery and the typology of the metalwork excavated. These styles possibly originated from the Congolese or another group in central Africa (Phillipson &

Fagan 1969: 204). Of the nine pieces of cotton fabric, four were described as "Coarse", and possibly locally made, and five "Fine" by Huffman (1971:9). These five Fine fragments were tie-dyed and may have been of Indian origin, according to Davison & Harries (1980:177). At this time tie-dyeing industries were already established in India. The fabric recovered from this site represents the largest collection of prehistoric textiles to date (Huffman 1971: 5).

Lastly, the proto-historical burial site at Nkudzi Bay along the eastern side of Lake Malawi in Zambia contained iron implements with cloth impressions on them, although no actual cloth was recovered (Juwayeyi 2008: 108). Metal objects may retain an impression of items that lay on top of, or next to them, and these pseudomorphs can give information about artefacts that have long perished. This process occurs when metals break down and create concomitant metal salts in a microenvironment that is ideal for preserving textiles. The textile fibres are not preserved, only the products of their chemical breakdown (Good 2001: 215). This area had extensive cotton growing, weaving and trading networks at the time of Livingstone's travels in the mid-nineteenth century. Records describe how fabrics and other trade goods were the preserve of elites. Cloth was also widely used as currency (Juwayeyi 2008: 113). This shows that textiles were an integral part of the social, ritual, political and economic activities of African groups in the areas described above, since times pre-dating colonist arrivals.

2.3 Indian Ocean Trade

Indian Ocean trade along the East Coast of Africa from AD 900 onwards brought exotic trade goods such as beads, textiles and ceramics from Asia and the Middle East, for exchange with African communities settled along the southeastern coast (Huffman 2005). Arab traders utilised the natural weather patterns of the Indian Ocean to seek ivory and gold along the eastern coast of Africa (Fig. 2.1). They travelled from the Persian Gulf down to Sofala, a term

taken to mean the southern coast of eastern Africa corresponding to what is now known as Mozambique, and described their journeys with many accounts of their travels (Wood 2000).

Although textiles were not preserved due to their friable nature, the extensive Indian Ocean trade in glass beads and ceramics was demonstrated by finds at excavated sites along the coast e.g. Kilwa in southern Tanzania, which lies on the coast of central East Africa, Chibuene, Inhambane and inland, most famously at Mapungubwe on the Limpopo River (Wood 2000, Good 2001, Mitchell 2002). It is possible that locally spun cotton was traded for imported fabric, as in later times (Juwayeyi 2008). The conclusion that the inhabitants of southern Africa had knowledge of weaving is supported by finds of woven cloth at Iron Age excavations, above (Huffman 1971). Cloth was a valuable trade commodity and was traded in complex networks from the coast and inland as far away as Malawi and Central Africa where archaeological excavations brought fabric to light (Phillipson & Fagan 1969, Juwayeyi 2008, Robertson *et al* 2010).

2.4 Colonial Period East coast trade

Portuguese navigators were the first Europeans to make landfall on the southern Cape coast as they charted a course around Africa seeking trade opportunities and spice in India. Bartolomeu Dias rounded the Cape of Good Hope and landed to the West of what is now known as Mossel Bay in early February 1488. He continued onwards to reach the Great Fish River but was obliged to turn back near Delagoa Bay, Mozambique (Muller 1981, Mitchell 2002). In 1498 Vasco da Gama sailed around the Cape on the way to India (the West Indies) and established trading centres along the African coastline. A Portuguese outpost was built on the coast of present day Mozambique (Iliffe 1995).

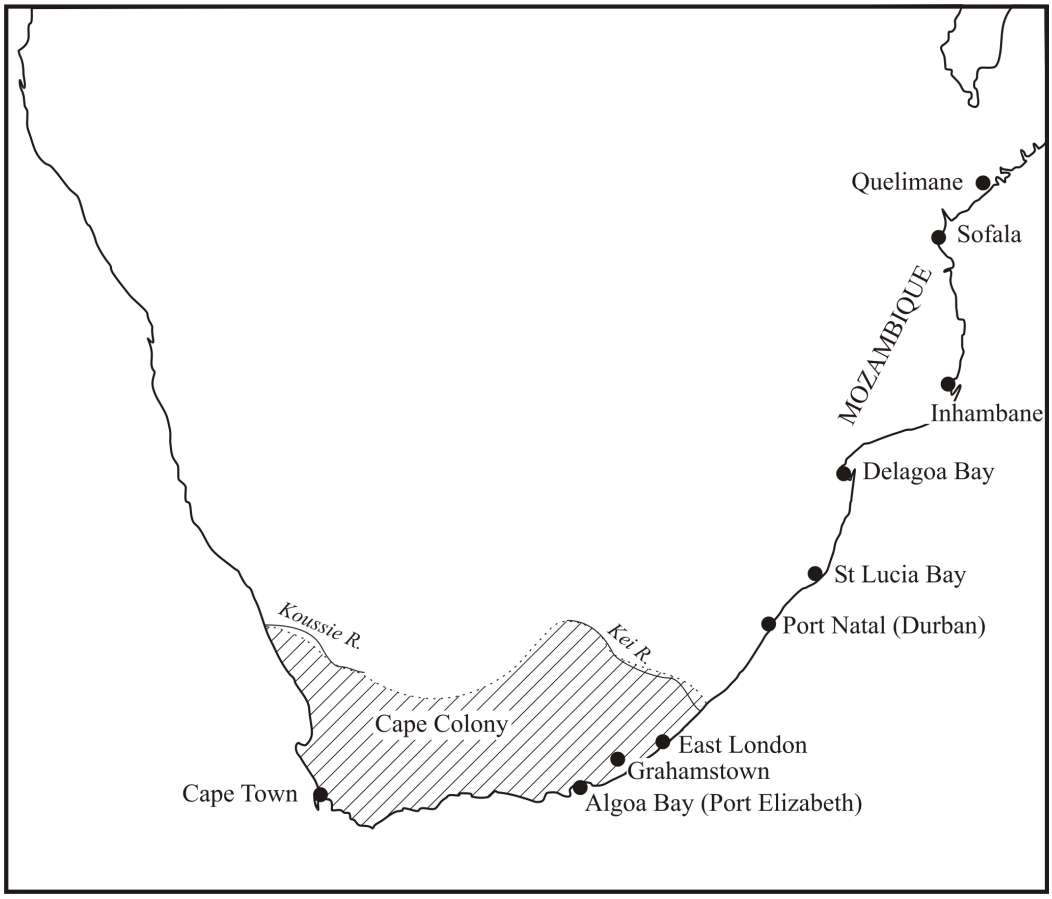


Figure 2.2: Southern African coastal trading ports and Cape Colony c1830

Delagoa Bay was linked to the East African trade network during the early sixteenth century by Portuguese traders sailing southwards from Mozambique on the monsoon winds every year or second year, and staying from December to June, returning with cargoes of rhino horn, 'azeite' (oil), amber and ivory (Smith 1970: 272). Gold, iron and copper were added to the repertoire of exports as trade networks expanded and iron and copper were sourced from inland Musina and the northern Transvaal in southern Africa (*Ibid.*: 285).

From the mid-sixteenth until the early nineteenth centuries French, British, Dutch and Portuguese forces all vied for control of trade with Delagoa Bay. Meanwhile, on the mainland five chiefdoms in the Delagoa Bay area: the Nyaka, Tembe, Mfumo, Nondwana and Manhice, struggled for power in hostile conflicts

that saw the formation of new chiefdoms, the Machavane, Matoll, Maputo and Mabota by the nineteenth century (Smith 1970: 269). The Ronga chiefdom, occupying the territory around Delagoa Bay in southern Mozambique, stretched from the coast in the east to the Lebombo Mountains in the west. They quickly established themselves as intermediaries between Europeans and local groups (*Ibid.*: 267).

British trade was initially more successful than Portuguese owing to the better quality of some items, for example English brass was preferred over Dutch copper (Smith 1970: 271). Demand was also high for cheap glass beads and fabric from India (*Ibid.*: 277*)*. Cloth and metal goods were popular and always found a ready market since fabric was an important commodity in global trade (Alpern 1995:6). Goods moved from Asia to southern Africa and Europe, and India had a booming, well-established textile industry (Brill 1996: 88). As early as 1597 a convoy of three British ships brought fine blue cloth, coral and fabric to Delagoa Bay (Smith 1970: 271). Documents about trade in Mozambique become relatively scarce after this period until the early nineteenth century. By this time a note was made of a special black cloth imported to supply demand from miners in Musina. This shows that trade could be highly specific and cater for particular needs (Van Warmelo 1940, Smith 1970: 284).

The Thonga, settled along the south east coast and inland at the Northern Transvaal, traded with Portuguese at Delagoa Bay from the 16th Century (Junod 1962). Thonga women had incorporated imported salempore fabric into their traditional wear and were known by their dress. Loosely woven Salempore fabric was named after its port of origin in India, and the thick, multi-layered skirts with heavy fringing that formed Thonga traditional dress were worn up until the early nineteenth century (Essequibo and Demerary Royal Gazette, 14th December 1811, Duggan-Cronin 1939). Even though the fabric was a foreign import, it had been adopted and incorporated into new kinds of traditional garments. This use of foreign items to create a new form is termed ‘creolisation’..Creolisation and acculturation are discussed in Chapter 3.

The Portuguese also traded for locally produced fabrics. Abundant cotton was cultivated along the Zambezi River, down to the Limpopo and as far south as northern Transvaal and northern Natal which provided fibre for weaving the white cloths worn by locals on the Portuguese *prazos*, or estates, (Phillipson & Fagan 1969, Huffman 1971, Davison & Harries 1980). These lengths of durable cotton cloth, known as *machiras*, were traded for beads and iron goods, (Huffman 1971, Davison 1980, Davison & Harries 1980). *Machiras* were so in demand on the east coast they threatened the market for Portuguese imported cloth, and were traded as far away as Malawi by Yao intermediaries where they were a symbol of wealth available only to chiefs, hunters, traders and elites (Gray & Birmingham 1970, Juwayeyi 2008: 113). To secure their market Portuguese traders eventually introduced trade limits on these desirable local cottons and promoted their inferior imported cloth.

The tradition of cotton cultivation and weaving did not extend to Nguni-speakers along the further parts of the southeastern coast. This is deduced from linguistic evidence since no terms relating to cotton weaving exist in their languages (Davison & Harris 1980: 178). Skins and hides were prepared by Nguni-speaking communities and used for all forms of clothing or uses normally associated with fabric (Davison & Harris 1980, Hooper *et al* 1989). The introduction of European cloth and the move to a cash economy in the nineteenth century meant that the time-consuming process of skin preparation gradually fell away and gender-based activities became disrupted.

The Lebombo Mountains, between Delagoa Bay and the interior, hampered trade between inland groups and Europeans, from the mid-sixteenth century up until the mid-seventeenth century (Smith 1970: 279, De Vaal 1990). Despite this geographical barrier, the volume of trade gradually increased over time and the link from the Highveld to the coast became better established (Wagner 1980: 324, Eldredge 1994: 129). These tenuous networks gradually expanded to accommodate more variety and greater volume of goods. By the nineteenth century links extended down the coast past Port Natal, and inland to the

northern Cape Colony, distributing imported items and returning local goods for export (Gray & Birmingham 1970, De Vaal 1990).

2.5 The Cape Colony and overland trade from 1800

Sea-borne coast trade, from the Cape Colony to Algoa Bay, Port Natal and Delagoa Bay, remained the primary source of European goods in southern Africa until the latter 1700s because explorers and traders were limited by the harsh conditions they found overland (McClintock 1994). After the Cape Colony was established in the seventeenth century, the Dutch instituted a policy that forbade cross border trade and restricted access to commodities, but these limitations on were difficult to enforce and were eventually rescinded (Beck 1989).

In 1830 the British occupied the Cape and Lord Somerset repealed the law that forbade cross border trade (Beck 1989: 211). However, many traders and missionaries had already turned a blind eye and were trading with those inland. At this time coin or paper currency was quite limited and a barter system was in place, based on beads, gunpowder, agricultural implements, tobacco, textiles and livestock (Lye 1975, Miller & Markell 1993). By the end of the nineteenth century, however, this had changed to a money economy (Pieres 1981, Hooper *et al* 1989). The introduction of a hut tax and the change to a money economy is discussed in Chapter 3.

Missionaries were often the first Europeans to make contact with inland peoples. However, they were often severely underfunded and some supplemented their inadequate stipends by trade, usually with beads, guns or gunpowder. Established chiefdoms usually extended missionaries a warm welcome (Schapera 1961, Beck 1989). Missionaries also brought agricultural implements, European cloth and clothing for local people who went naked or wore simple clothes made from animal skins (Merensky BMB 1899, Beck 1989, Kirkaldy 2005). Initially European garments were keenly adopted and Christian converts

signaled their new faith by wearing dresses or trousers and shirts instead of traditional garments (Bergh & Bergh 1984, Reuther 2002: 364). While some groups were eager to adopt European clothing, others, such as conservative Xhosa on the southeastern coast during the eighteenth century, the 'Reds', were not, refusing to adopt European clothing and continuing to wear ochre coloured skin garments (Gillow 2003, Keegan 2004). The function of clothing as part of colonialism and Christianity is discussed further in Chapter 3. Missionaries were initially able to restrict the availability of European garments to indigenes. However, European clothing became more freely available from the latter part of the nineteenth century following the rising economic power of young black men who found work in the diamond mines of Kimberley (Harries 1995, Kirkaldy 2005).

Fabric could also be obtained from Dutch Trekkers. Between 1834 and 1837 settler farmers of Dutch descent left the Cape in three expeditions and travelled to the northern Transvaal. Fabric inland was often in very short supply and impoverished Trekkers extensively patched or repaired their clothes. When they packed their wagons and trekked north they did not earn hard currency. They bought supplies with the few coins they had when they left the Cape Colony (Preller 1918 Vol I: 109). Trekkers had plain wear during the week and smart wear for Sunday church and special occasions. Checks, velvets, corduroy and moleskin were popular. Women also had both ordinary and special outfits, plus 'kappies', cloth bonnets with a wide peak and a deep frill that extended to the back of the neck, of plain, drab, colours. Kappies were hand stitched from fine cotton or linen and elaborately quilted, Fig. 2.3. Smart wear was made of satins, velvets and lace (Preller 1918: Vol I: 244).



Figure 2.3: Voortrekker kappie, Roodepoort Museum

Travelling peddlers - the smous – supplied trek wagons with all sorts of useful items as they moved from the Cape to the north. The smous's wagon stocked fabric, beads, pots, pans, shoes, clothes, guns and gunpowder, and, travelling between the trek to the coast and back, would bring letters, newspapers, supplies and news. They constituted a welcome break from the daily tedium (Preller 1918, De Vaal 1990).

Although this did not represent a very large source of fabric, trekkers had wagon covers, sewing goods, fabric and clothing. In addition, dry goods like tobacco, flour, rice or sugar, were stored in plain cotton bags that were also reused after they were empty.

The ethnographic collection of the Natal Museum, Pietermaritzburg contained a plain buff coloured tobacco bag, in Fig. 2.4, from a diviner's kit (4817). This incorporated the type of plain evenweave cotton fabric used for storing and transporting dry goods. An animal horn from the divining kit was stoppered with plain evenweave cotton fabric (Fig. 5.16). Although these items are not dated, the diviner's kit could be late nineteenth century (Linda Ireland pers. comm. 2010)[4].

[4] Linda Ireland, Collections Manager, Natal Museum.



Figure 2.4: Reused tobacco bag from a diviner's kit, Natal Museum

Plain and patterned cotton fabric was also incorporated as backings or straps on beaded garments and skirts, such as the fringed skirt from the University of the Witwatersrand Art Collection in Fig. 2.5. The collections at Museum Africa, The Johannesburg Art Gallery and The Natal Museum all held examples of garments incorporating European fabric. Diviner's kits often contained fabric as stoppers or bags. An undated example from Museum Africa, Fig. 2.6, shows a fabric bundle from a diviner's kit (MA 79-553) from Museum Africa, it is similar to the bundle in Fig 2.7, which was found in Historic Cave, Dg5 T19 Surface. These show that imported fabric was readily used for various domestic or ritual items.



Figure 2.5: Fringed skirt with fabric backing, University of the Witwatersrand



Figure 2.6: Fabric bundle from a diviner's kit, Museum Africa



Figure 2.7: Fabric bundle from Dg5 T19 surface-60, Historic Cave

2.6 Discussion

Spinning and weaving traditions were well established in pre-colonial times throughout western, central and eastern Africa, and extended southwards to the northernmost borders of the Transvaal. Throughout Africa different types of locally produced cloth fulfilled different functions, from plain cotton *machiras* on the east coast for everyday wear, to the Yoruba *Egungun* costumes or *bamana* hunting coats that fulfilled the role of ceremonial and religious garments with magical properties. Regional differences can be shown by contrasting the *kente*, or strip cloths of West Africa, with wider fabric woven on the looms of southern

and eastern Africa. Fabric could also function as currency and was a valuable status item often restricted to elites.

During the Iron Age, Muslim traders travelling down the east coast were the first to introduce imported cloth into Africa. In the fifteenth century Europeans circumnavigated the continent and linked Africa to global trade, creating a connection to the massive cloth trade of India and China. Surprisingly, the effect of imported cloth was to stimulate, and then operate in tandem with, local fabric markets.

Along the southeastern coast, the Nguni peoples had no tradition of spinning or weaving and relied on treated animal skins for garments, creating fine blankets and skirts of the softest leather. This lack of cotton cultivation, spinning and weaving traditions in the far southern and southeastern regions of Africa meant that over time imported textiles supplanted traditional skin working practices. Blankets and clothing were bought at markets or from traders and by the early twentieth century the skin working technologies of the Nguni had all but vanished (Hooper *et al.* 1989).

European and American missionaries used clothing to signal conversion to Christianity. However, the Church, coupled with European clothing, was not always blindly accepted. It could be rejected as a non-local object, and in this way served to reaffirm established social structures and group identities (Becker 1995).

The gradual change from a barter economy to a cash economy by the end of the nineteenth century meant that access to clothing and fabric was eventually thrown open to all, losing its allure.

2.7 Conclusion

Fabric, from pre-colonial times up until the contact period, fulfilled many important roles in the economic, social, ritual and political spheres of various African groups. It functioned as an object of monetary and symbolic value, signaled status and generated trade within and between groups. Cotton cultivation, textile preparation and the use of textiles were part of the fabric of societies themselves and the arrival of Europeans with their ever-increasing range of substitutes brought far-reaching changes. Some groups incorporated imported textiles into their repertoire while others rejected them, but the change to a cash economy meant that social restrictions on access to fabric fell away and by the end of the nineteenth century this commodity had become ubiquitous.

Chapter 3: Theoretical approach

3.1 Introduction

This chapter draws attention to the central tenets of historical archaeology and how these ideas influenced my interpretation of how indigenous communities in the northern Transvaal incorporated imported material culture into local traditions. This chapter first looks at the larger picture of globalisation and how trade provided the background for the movement of commodities between countries, then follows with a discussion about capitalism. The complex issues of contact, culture change, and colonialism are outlined, before closing with two sections that explore issues surrounding gender and power relations that affected the use of material culture within traditional communities.

3.2 Globalisation

Globalisation is defined as “the process by which businesses and other organisations start operating on a global scale“ (Soanes & Stevenson 2004: 605). This definition is my starting point for looking at globalisation within historical archaeology where it is bound up with capitalism, culture contact and colonisation. While the main focus of globalisation is the interaction between two different societies against the background of mercantile considerations, researchers agree that globalisation is also bound up with issues of power, race and control (Little 1994: 5, Leone 1995: 252, Lightfoot 1995: 207, Lightfoot & Martinez 1995: 472, Orser 1996: 22, Rubertone 2000: 428, Stein 2002: 903, Gosden 2004: 5, Stein 2004: 5, Silliman 2005: 55).

Initially globalisation was only applied to the archaeology of the last 500 years (see for example Orser), but some researchers (see Stein 2005) argue that this timeframe should be extended, to include prehistoric and historically documented societies in both the New and Old Worlds. Stein (2005: 3) for example, includes the dynamics of trade at the turn of the last millennia in the Mediterranean. For the purposes of this discussion, globalisation is taken to be from the mid-fifteenth century because this coincides with the competitive expansion of European trade routes into the southern African interior.

Trade and the search for new commodities, such as spice or gold, or for the same commodities at a cheaper price, for example, fabric, spurred globalisation while the impetus was sustained by access to both valuable resources and trade routes (Orser 1996: 27). Indigenous figures of authority, such as chiefs, were usually quick to exploit control over these to reap the benefits of expansion in political power and accumulated wealth. In many parts of Africa certain goods remained restricted and assumed an elite status, for example in Mali, West Africa, where only kings were allowed access to fabric (Hodder 1980: 205). Commodities like cloth, beads, tobacco or bullets were all invested with value and were used as currency to barter throughout southern Africa, but by the end of the nineteenth century money became the universal standard of exchange in the move towards a cash-based economy (Schapera 1951: 113 & 176, Gray & Birmingham 1970: 7, Lye 1975: 112, Hodder 1980: 204). The establishment of markets and trade was discussed in Chapter 2.

The introduction of globalisation and access to foreign markets impacted on local markets and forms of wealth. Certain locally produced commodities acquired an economic value that they did not previously have due to demand from traders supplying markets further afield. For example, local commodities belonged to the chief who controlled the resources and the exchange thereof within their territories. When products like beeswax or animal skins were exchanged outside of this system it lead to a gradual loss of both the control and economic power held by traditional leaders (Gray & Birmingham 1970: 3).

Another important change brought about by the global markets that affected local economies was the conversion from a subsistence economy to a cash economy which found its final expression by the later nineteenth century as migrant labour. In southern Africa a hut tax, being £1 for every male over the age of 18, and poll tax, was imposed by government on the indigenous population living in traditional villages towards the end of the nineteenth century; these taxes could only be paid in coin (Mönning 1978: 183, Callinicos 1981: 7). To pay hut tax young men left their villages and families to seek cash-based work in towns or in the mines of Kimberley (Bergh & Morton 2003). The absence of men for lengthy periods meant that women were obliged to shoulder the entire workload of the homestead. This brought about changes in traditional lifeways. Earning money and buying European goods through trade routes that crisscrossed the countryside, lead to subtle changes in the composition of traditional family structures. With the men away from the homestead, the previously strict control over women became more relaxed and rules pertaining to gender-based work softened (Hooper *et al.* 1989, Porterfield 1997).

The creation of global markets had a profound influence in changing local power structures and internal markets, not least of all because globalisation went hand in hand with capitalism.

3.3 Capitalism

Orser (1996: 72-73) defined capitalism in Marxist terms as a system where private individuals, or capitalists, assume control over the forces and means of production from the State. Individuals owned “infrastructure”, such as factories, machines or agricultural estates (the so called “forces of production”) and these facilities then produced items or commodities to be sold. In this system the work is done by labour, which is reduced to an input component within the cycle of manufacture. Workers provide labour (through the “relations of production”) and work for a cash wage. This cash constitutes part of the cost of the item

produced. Orser (1996: 72) described an earlier and a later form of capitalism. The earlier “merchant phase” ran from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries, while the later “industrial phase” gained momentum from the end of the eighteenth century onwards. The phase that pertains here is the earlier merchant phase when Europeans established trade links with local communities or set up trading posts and instituted monopolies.

Leone (1995: 253) furthers the scope of impact brought about by capitalism in that he argues it was used as a tool of propaganda by a dominant group, to ensure a hold over resources while workers were kept in a state of endemic poverty. Some capitalist societies used, and still use, apparently self-evident information, such as skin colour, gender or educational differences, to affirm class differences. This mechanism creates the idea that some sections of society can only fulfill a role as a worker, while other members of society are automatically entitled to a position in an upper class. In a capitalist society the goal of this strategy was to keep a large population of people in a subservient position in order to provide labour for a minority. This was the attitude and approach of the Dutch Trekkers at the frontier. They believed that the local population of the interior should be forced either to pay tax or work for them (Bergh & Morton 2003: 86).

Furthermore, as Gosden (2004) and Leone (1995) point out, capitalism encouraged class-based exploitation and the appropriation of ‘empty land’. The idea that ‘empty land’ could be appropriated and owned by settlers regardless of any pre-existing ownership often lead to conflict between newly arrived settlers and the communities already on the landscape. Both Dutch and British farmers, for example, used the ‘terra nullius’ approach to appropriate land in southern Africa to appropriate apparently empty land (Du Bruyn 1986).

One of the unintended but inevitable consequences of global travel and capitalism was the effect of cross-cultural interaction and culture change (Orser 1996: 27, Gosden 2004: 12).

3.4 Culture contact and culture change

Gosden (2004: 5) describes culture contact as the interaction of two groups. Since people tend to meet and mingle on a daily basis it is not unusual that this relationship may involve some sort of cultural exchange, or culture change, where one person may decide to adopt certain traits or behaviours shown by the other. I will look at how culture contact developed into colonialism, which is characterized by the domination by one group over another and a more coercive set of interactions (Silliman 2005: 55).

A number of scholars have examined the nature of contact between colonists from Spain, England, France and the Netherlands, and the native peoples of the East and West Indies, North and South America, Oceania, Asia and Africa (Orser 1996: 34, Thomas 1997: 1, Rubertone 2000: 426, Brink 2004: 91).

Culture contact was thought to be a 'catastrophic event' because it was assumed that a western culture always dominated and effaced local cultures. Scholars who studied contact initially adopted a model that assumed a one-way direction for the absorption of material culture - from dominant to subservient[5] societies, where the subservient group automatically absorbed or adopted cultural traits from the dominant group (Lightfoot & Martinez 1995: 471, Gosden 2004: 2). In addition, the presumed wholesale movement of alien culture from a dominant group was thought to be predictable and uncontested by indigenous communities. Subsequent studies have shown that recipient groups do not passively absorb material culture or cultural traits, these groups actively engaged in the kind of material culture they adopted and the manner in which it was adopted (Thomas 1997: 12). Dominant groups also adapted and changed in response to indigenous polities (Lightfoot & Martinez 1995). In an effort to retain their individuality local populations would not always adopt new goods from foreigners. They created strategies of re-interpretation and dynamic

[5] The words 'dominant' or 'subservient' are taken to mean 'larger' or smaller' in the relationship between two groups and do not imply superiority or inferiority in any pejorative sense.

resistance either through using items in different ways to their original purpose, or through the non-use of imported items. This theory is the one I find has provided the best application to my thesis – that the absorption of alien material culture is not predictable and may not even take place. Furthermore, if some material culture is used by a native group, then those items may be reinterpreted into a different value system and assume a new significance (Silliman 2005: 56).

In addition, the physical movement of colonisers from “core” to “periphery” could be accompanied by a blurring of roles between dominant and subservient groups as they negotiated new social roles and devised innovative ways of expressing alliances (Lightfoot 1995, Lightfoot & Martinez 1995, Silliman 2005).

Furthermore societies are not homogenous but are pluralistic and composed of various factions within their own social realm. Such local groups are themselves complex and may wish to adopt parts of alien culture “to articulate their distinctness, not in relation to white colonisers, but in relation to other indigenous groups” (Thomas 1991: 11). Leone (1995: 257) illustrates this neatly with excavations of African American houses at Annapolis that contained artefacts demonstrating both reinterpretation and non-use of European household items, while other European items such as table settings, are used in a ‘normal’ way. Apart from everyday items, he uncovered certain other objects (*Ibid.*: 262) that would typically be used in West African divination practices, such as rock crystals and pierced bone discs, in the domestic setting. His findings highlight the fluid use of material culture. This reinterpretation or selective use of certain items is key to my question of ‘what was fabric doing in Historic Cave’ since none of the fabric found there was being used as clothing.

In the northern Transvaal, or Limpopo Province (Fig. 2.1), which is the area examined here, early contact between settlers and chiefdoms tended to be ‘give and take’, centering on access to trade routes or resources. Europeans were granted, or sometimes refused, various rights such as access to territory or permission to hunt. In 1848 the Venda of the northern Transvaal allowed

Trekkers to establish the town of Schoemansdal, initially as a trading post for elephant hunters (Wagner 1980: 316). Hunting rights were granted, but by mid 1867 the relationship between Trekkers and Venda had soured due to the unfair demands that the Trekkers made on local inhabitants of the area (Boeyens 1994). The Trekkers were forced to flee and the Venda razed the settlement to the ground, demonstrating their precarious position there (Wagner: 1980: 327).

Within the northern Transvaal the control over territories and access to trade routes and imported commodities created the potential for conflict; one of the touch points for the Siege of Makapan was based on access to Delagoa Bay on the southern East African coast. Dutch Trekkers used this trade route, which ran through territory held by Chief Mokopane, however, Chief Mokopane had not granted permission (De Vaal 1953: 10, De Waal 1978: 40). By using the route without permission the Trekkers disregarded his authority to grant safe passage.

Chiefs or individuals in this area also had their own political agendas and continually manipulated and juggled existing social and political networks. Newcomers also had different ways of negotiating social interactions. An example of an individual with his own agenda is the Portuguese trader João Albasini who made his fortune through trade and acted as a local potentate. He monopolised trade via the inland route from Delagoa Bay to the northern Transvaal in the mid nineteenth century (De Vaal 1953: 3, Wagner 1980: 321, De Vaal 1990: 50). He also acted as a power broker between local chiefs and the newly formed ZAR (Zuid Afrikaansche Republiek) and collected tribute for the government (Wagner 1980: 326). At the same time he was in charge of his own personal Tsonga force (*Ibid.*: 327). In many ways he captures the mercurial relations that existed at this time and demonstrated the ease of movement between peoples.

The Portuguese provided another example within the fluid social landscape that operated on this dual basis by becoming closely integrated within traditional social and political systems along the East Coast. The Portuguese established private kingdoms along the Mozambique coast from the sixteenth century

onwards, the *prazos,* or estates (Newitt 1995: 217, Pikirayi 1999: 167). Chiefs granted land and trade rights to Portuguese traders, who in turn were expected to maintain law and order. *Prazo* leaders exercised their rights in the same way as traditional chiefs and fulfilled the role of religious leaders; in addition they raised tribute and distributed booty to their warriors after attacking neighboring tribes. The lure of booty was a great incentive to new recruits and eventually led to the establishment of standing armies by the seventeenth century. Towards the end of the seventeenth century the Portuguese Crown granted land in Mozambique to Dominican and Jesuit missions, and established *ecclesiastical prazos.* These were funded by tribute gathered from local agricultural communities (Newitt 1995: 218). The *prazos* successfully incorporated both the local political structures with those instituted by the Portuguese and functioned up until the early twentieth century before being disbanded.

These examples show how settlements on the edges of the frontiers tended to display a greater blending of the European culture with local cultures, providing examples of both creolisation and acculturation. Creolisation describes the process, or formation, of new objects or behaviours formed during culture contact, while acculturation relates more to a process of assimilation and details the changes that occur in material culture or cultural patterns after people from different cultures have been in contact (Lightfoot & Martinez 1995: 482, Rubertone 2000: 428).

Not all relationships at the frontier were based on relationships of give and take. Globalisation and capitalism were the mechanisms behind the encounters of different cultures during the Age of Exploration. The relationships that were subsequently formed were often defined by issues of power, race and control, and manifested in the creolisation or acculturation of objects or behaviours. Researchers of culture contact have agreed that contact has an impact on both participants (Leone 1995, Lightfoot 1995: 206, Thomas 1997: 20, Silliman 2005: 56). Gosden (2004: 4) described how the uneven relationships between invasive newcomers over native peoples could be interpreted as dynamic with the

potential to bring change.. However, Silliman (2005) explored how the use of the term ‘culture contact’ tended to downplay the severity of the interaction, the long duration of the experience and loss of power experienced by the weaker group. This is better expressed through the term ‘colonisation’.

3.5 Colonisation

In contradistinction to culture-contact, colonisation in the age of globalisation centered on issues of power, prejudice, racism and in particular the control of resources such as land, water, trade routes, and settlements; usually enforced by a larger power subordinating a smaller power (Leone 1995: 254, Gosden 2004: 2). Comaroff & Comaroff (1992: 198) outlined their framework of how colonialism was enforced in southern Africa through a three-model system, namely: the three models of colonialism. Derived from contemporary mission literature, it provided a template of interracial behaviour. One rider to using contemporary records is that these were primarily based on administrative structures such as legal, trade or political documents, usually composed by white males. Mission literature was especially drafted with the community ‘back home’ in mind, giving a rosy portrayal of how the Christian ’bringers of light’ fought their way through uncharted territories to convert savage heathens to both Christianity and civilisation at one stroke. This bias of European male perceptions tends to leave us with a single point of view of events (Leone 1995: 254, Brink 2004).

The three rubrics of the Comaroffs Models of Colonialism (Comaroff & Comaroff 1992: 198) were:

- the state model
- the settler colonialism model, and
- the civilising colonialism of the mission

3.5.1 The State Model

The British authorities imposed a state model of governance, the so-called *Pax Britannica* (Comaroff & Comaroff 1992: 198). This form of control originated in the Cape Colony and radiated inland. It was an administrative system that brought pacification to various "tribes" based on trade and alliances with chiefs. This system was primarily funded by taxes imposed on the local population, who would be obliged to seek paid work. The *Pax Britannica* also sought to limit chiefly powers through laws while paying lip service to the Church of England. The church and its missionaries were seen to be disruptive to the aims of state control. Teaching reading and writing to mission converts was almost counted as sedition by British authority. The state model was instituted to provide an area for "British commerce, interests and values to flourish" (Comaroff & Comaroff 1992: 202).

3.5.2 Settler Colonialism

Settler colonialism, imposed by the Dutch Trekkers and farmers, was based on prejudice, racism and subjugation. Comaroff and Comaroff (1992: 199) described how Dutch settlers used brute force and Old Testament Biblical morality to establish, and justify, their relations with indigenous groups as they moved inland in search of new pastures. Their use of unfree labour, or slavery, was justified by the Bible and served to fortify the social standing of Trekkers within their community (Delius & Trapido 1981: 154). Slaves provided both an underclass and a ready supply of cheap labour to perform manual work thought to be unsuitable for gentlemen farmers (Boeyens 1994: 190).

Dutch Trekkers, who settled in the interior after the Great Trek of the 1830s, either formed alliances with local peoples or started wars. Either way, the end result was complete subordination of local communities and the eventual imposition of tax, demands for tribute, the seizure of people as bonded labour, demands for military support from chiefs against "unfriendly natives", the gradual

appropriation of land as well as their traditional power (Boeyens 1994: 199). This internal migration, known as the Great Trek, had its origins in the political developments of the Cape Colony and led to the formation of an internal frontier, which is discussed later.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century the Cape Colony began to experience a labour shortage as demand increasingly outstripped supply. Although the Dutch settlers had imported slaves from Southeast Asia these were not enough to fulfill the requirements of the Cape (MOOC 2006). Non-slave, or free, labour was completely unavailable and in response to the labour shortage the cost of labour and the price of slaves rose dramatically (Newton King 1980: 171). At the same time there was widespread international pressure towards abolition. The British ruling power was keen to move away from the harsh practices instituted by the previous Dutch administrators and distance themselves from the practice of slaving (*Ibid.*: 178).

The emancipation movement brought the British Cape Government more and more into conflict with the mainly Dutch frontier farmers over issues of security and slave rights. Farmers had encroached into Xhosa territory along the eastern Cape and were constantly attacked but the British Government refused to provide military assistance. The farmers were unhappy about receiving no military support while still paying taxes (Wilson 1975, Du Bruyn 1986). Coupled with the lack of action by British authorities was the promulgation of Ordinance 50 of 1828 that reduced the control of slave owners over their charges. The emancipation of slaves in 1834 added to the insecurity of Dutch farmers who began to fear for their very lives (Boeyens 1994: 188). At this point the Dutch made a decision to move north *en masse*, beyond the border of the Cape Colony, and establish their own settlements where they would be unencumbered by the legal constraints of the British. At a stroke they would achieve their political independence and secured a new source of cheap labour.

From 1834 to 1838 a group of 15 000 people, representing approximately one tenth of the Dutch settlers at the Cape, traveled into the southern African interior

in a migration that became known as The Great Trek (Du Bruyn 1986). The arrival of Trekkers, in three waves from 1834 to 1838, was the largest influx of Europeans into the Transvaal and effectively established a colonial frontier (Wagner 1980, Du Bruyn 1986, Kopytoff 1989).

The Trekkers, together with the continuous stream of settlers from the large European population along the eastern coast, found themselves competing with indigenous groups for arable land and resources further inland (Wilson 1975, Bergh & Bergh 1984, Du Bruyn 1986). In addition, the Trekkers expected to find a large, cheap pool of labour but their bad treatment of domestic and farm labour, combined with harsh terms of contract, meant that their prospective work force quickly lost interest as they gained a reputation as hard taskmasters and unfair employers (Kirkaldy 2005).

The Trekker attitude towards indigenous communities was characterised by servitude and rough treatment. They continued to uphold the ideas about territorial separation, class and racial distinctions, and superiority over black races that were first established at the Cape. They were also firmly committed to enforcing slavery to provide cheap labour for their farms. Their labour force was comprised of '*oorlams*' who were those people classed as unfree labour (Delius & Trapido 1981: 147). The source of *oorlams* was young black children, known at the time as 'black ivory', obtained from various sources such as seizure by raiding commandoes, as gifts by Africans to seal treaties or as tribute. These youngsters were designated 'orphans' and were '*ingeboek*' into a book tallying the number of orphans 'found' during a raid. Following an established practice these orphan children could be indentured up until a specific age, usually 25, and then emancipated. This system of indenture of young children was criticised by contemporary observers, such as the British who wanted to prosecute ZAR commando leaders and Albasini (Boeyens 1994: 200); it was seen as a disguised form of slavery (Wilson 1975, Delius & Trapido 1981, Du Bruyn 1986).

Following emancipation in 1834, owning or trading in slaves was outlawed; however, the system of using *inboekelinge* ("apprentices") for labour continued

to be used to circumvent prosecution. Although illegal, both British and Dutch authorities turned a blind eye. Emancipated slaves eventually constituted a large part of frontier communities (Boeyens 1994, Morton 2005). Some slaves eventually gained their freedom, by manumission or running away. Over time, the growing movement of people across the landscape meant that marginalised members of society, such as runaway slaves and '*oorlams*', formed their own creolised communities, often living on the periphery of towns (Boeyens 1994). These *inboekelinge* worked as indentured labour and eventually became deracinated (Boeyens 1994). Later when they were manumitted, these adults would often find it difficult to move back into their original cultural group.

After migrating northwards the Dutch Trekkers gradually established themselves in the northern Transvaal, now Limpopo Province, but after leaving behind the restrictions of the British legal system they found they were obliged to deal with British missionaries. The London Missionary Society (LMS) missionary David Livingstone became a thorn in their side for helping the Bakhatla buy land in 1843 and apparently supplying guns and gunpowder to local populations to halt depredations by Settlers against local communities. Although Livingstone said he had not supplied any contraband, the Trekkers retaliated by harassing Livingstone (Schapera 1961: 222); ultimately the Trekker commandoes destroyed his house and mission at Kolobeng after he had left in September 1853 (Comaroff & Comaroff 1992: 205). Livingstone was at the forefront of the attempt by the Church to bring new ideas to 'heathen masses' based on the Age of Enlightenment.

3.5.3 The Colonialism of the mission

The civilising colonialism of the mission and Christianity, as promoted by the Church of England and the London Missionary Society, aimed at the total reconstruction of African society and culture by implementing an entirely new value system. Missionaries were keen to reconstruct a new European-style

order in Africa; however, their methods often took a form of paternalistic control over ‘heathen masses’ with the mission station as the hub of the new order (Ranger 1983, Kirkaldy 2005). Ideas derived from both the Bible and the Age of Enlightenment sought to instill European values, such as the nuclear family, ownership of private property, involvement in wage labour, commerce, suitable clothing, refined living and devotion to God (Lovett 1899: 548). However, this new model of society was completely different to the structure of traditional social relations.

Part of the effect of the mission model on traditional societies was the inversion of traditional male and female roles, for example in Tswana or Pedi society (Mönnig 1978: 145, Comaroff & Comaroff 1992: 160). Rules governing gender-based divisions of labour were well established within local groups. However in the new Christian pattern, men were expected to go out into the fields and do agricultural work, which was traditionally the women’s role, while women were expected to rule the domestic realm and stay at home (Comaroff & Comaroff 1992: 200). The role of women in traditional societies therefore changed following the arrival of missionaries as Christianity gave an alternative model to converts. The status of women within the Church was not dependent on men, as was the case in traditional societies, and traditional belief systems were also impacted by the Church.

Researchers (Mönning 1978, Junod 1962, Comaroff & Comaroff 1991) have outlined how traditional belief systems were based on both ancestor worship and the supernatural powers invested in the traditional leader and diviners. Indigenous groups, such as the Tswana or Lobedu, generally had no formal religious system, their belief system centered on ancestor worship and superstition (Krige & Krige 1943: 241, Schapera 1953: 59). Ancestors, going back a couple of generations, occupied an underground world that was a replica of the normal world above ground. In addition, because the chief was the protector of the group, so the chiefly ancestors remained protectors of the group.

The ancestors behaved in the same way as normal people, with jealousies and needs, and could be prevailed upon to provide protection or support through supplication or sacrifice. One effect on converts through their conversion to Christianity was the dissolution of a belief in the supernatural world of ancestors, a belief in immortality and the adoption of a new support system in the Church. Since the Church provided for spiritual needs, the position of chief as a provider of protection fell away. This obviously undermined his position within the tribe. Although Christianity competed with traditional religious practices it was not often adopted as a 'pure' form and would be integrated with existing practices and reinterpreted (Comaroff & Comaroff 1992, Kirkaldy 2009). This lead to the formation of syncretic churches that combined the symbolism or imagery of traditional practices with Christian models and gave rise to completely new expressions of worship

The arrival of Christianity often manifested as a source of conflict between chiefs and their charges. British missionaries considered the cultural practices of chiefs as well as their traditional belief systems, to be incompatible with a Christian lifestyle (Keegan 2004: xxii). One reason why the Christian lifestyle was not popular with chiefs was the Church's demand that they give up polygamy. The status of a chief was measured by strategic and numerous marriages but they were reluctant to stick to only a single wife (Schapera 1951: 12, Schapera 1961: 130, Reuther 2002). The chief was also mandated with providing rain but missionaries undermined his position by invoking Supreme Powers or purporting to have mastery over rain (Mönnig 1978, Comaroff & Comaroff 1991: 137, Porterfield 1997: 68, Delius 2001: 438). Chief Makapan, or Mugombane, was known for his powers as a rainmaker and may not have welcomed competition from missionaries (De Waal 1978). This may be the reason for Mugombane's successor, Mugombane II being a strong opponent of control by Christian Boers and mission schooling. He rejected a mission set up near his headquarters (Esterhuysen 2006: 14). Despite the best efforts of missionaries chiefs remained the *de facto* custodians of tribes; their

relationships with missionaries were often patchy and the path to Christianity did not always run smoothly (Mönnig 1978: 274, Comaroff & Comaroff 1991: 200).

Active opposition to the Church came from not only from chiefs but also the women within traditional societies. Kriel and Kirkaldy (2009: 321) give the example of a 'small chief' Makeere in the northern Transvaal who wanted to convert to Christianity but whose efforts were thwarted by his wife and grandmother who tormented him and refused to provide food. This shows their ability to overturn Makeere's decision. Also in the northern Transvaal, the mother of Chief Makwarela, Matshekesheke (*Ibid.*: 325), was herself the acting head of a territory abutting Makwarela. She persistently kept BMS missionaries at arms length to maintain stability in the area and uphold traditional customs despite their attempts to convert her son. In this way she was able to exert her influence over the group as a whole, and the missionaries, who were obliged to live in designated areas, had limited access to the group. In this study, women were shown to be more conservative and converted less frequently than men; in addition, men who were keen to convert found they lost female support, which was usually severe enough to stop their efforts. Perhaps this is one explanation behind the low conversion rate. In the northern Transvaal the rate of conversion to Christianity through the efforts of the Berlin Missionary Society was a meagre 0.35% (Kirkaldy 2009: 609). Even within a patriarchal society women manifested their agency by preventing men, sometimes in senior positions, from realising their aims.

The role of women in traditional societies was clearly prescribed, but European missionaries brought their ideas about how women should behave which were often entirely different (Mönnig 1978, Vogel 1983, Comaroff & Comaroff 1991). In Natal, an area administered by American missionaries from New England in the mid nineteenth century, the role of women received a lot attention (Kriel & Kirkaldy 2009: 322). The missionaries saw the way Zulu men treated women as outright heathenism, citing the exchange of cattle for women in the ritual of '*lobola'* as proof that women were traded like a commodity. Ironically both the

Church and Zulu culture shared patriarchal views of 'handling' women, based on the supremacy of men, but in traditional society women also enjoyed the security of status, protection and respect while they remained in the homestead. However, despite their apparent lack of power women were able to express their opinion if a man made an unpopular decision such as wishing to convert to Christianity.

Despite their power to persuade men to change their course of action women in traditional societies, such as Venda or Zulu, who converted to Christianity lost their status, support and economic power within their group and were obliged to seek wage-based work outside of the homestead (Porterfield 1997: 73, Kriel & Kirkaldy 2009: 76). I assumed that the role of women within traditional societies was difficult to negotiate and dress was possibly used to actively reconstruct their identities following conversion. Kirkaldy (2009: 613) described how western style clothes were adopted and worn by converts to distinguish themselves from those wearing traditional dress. Again, in local communities wearing European clothing was deliberately used as a device to signal their new religious status, and therefore social, change.

Loren (2001) explored how the appropriation of alien dress was one way of signaling changed status. Native peoples could adopt different clothing habits, either by absorbing or avoiding items of clothing from incomers. Conversely, incomers, as a way of showing empathy with local populations, could assume local dress. One effect of assimilating new dress habits could be described as social blurring or signaling. This is the mechanism whereby in this case, clothing, could be manipulated and worn as an obvious visual device to show a change in status or frame of mind. It was a method of showing social identity (*Ibid.*: 176). Chiefs, by wearing European clothes, when meeting travelers or dignitaries, may have deliberately used this to indicate a willingness to trade or conclude treaties; it also may have demonstrated their readiness to try out new ideas. It could also have provided a way to show the potential of locally based groups to move into political alliances with different groups, either within their

social milieu or with groups of a different political make-up, such as traders or missionaries.

While some groups, such as the Zulu of the Natal coast, were conservative and construed missionaries as meddling in their affairs and chasing away rain, others, such as the Venda of the northern Transvaal, welcomed the Church and its perceived innovations and readily adopted western clothing as a form of visible change (Porterfield 1997, Kirkaldy 2005). Ideas on appropriate dress and ways of covering nakedness were important steps on the journey to the kind of civilisation envisaged by missionaries. Missionaries wanted to clothe the "heathen masses", disliking nakedness as an obvious mark of a lack of "civilisation" they also used clothing as a device to grade their flock and encouraged the demand for Western clothing, supplying clothes and cloth (Loren 2001: 178, Kirkaldy 2005: 150-155). Many were eager to take up fabric and clothing; Sechele the Kwena chief adopted European clothes as a token of civilisation, both Livingstone (Schapera 1961: 104) and Andrew Smith (Lye 1974) who travelled through the Cape in 1834, often described male and female congregants in church wearing western clothes and sitting apart from others wearing traditional clothes. Kirkaldy (2005: 55) expands the ideas of equating nakedness with 'heathen' behaviour; missionaries would write home in journals to sponsors and private letters. They quantified their progress of conversions by the amount of European clothing worn by converts. Native people going to town were embarrassed by their lack of appropriate (European) dress and in missionaries in towns along the Eastern coast demanded the Xhosa be "decently" attired (Peires 1981: 107, Kirkaldy 2005: 57).

The adoption of western clothing was not universal and conservative communities, or individuals, sometimes refused to incorporate European clothing because it was a symbol of Christianity (Du Toit 2009). The rejection of "mission clothes" tended to be accompanied by the perception of a return to "heathen ways" (Kirkaldy 2005: 270). The story of Nomanzi, from the James Stuart Archives of oral tradition towards the end of the nineteenth century in

Natal, tells how a small baby was rescued from a river after a battle and raised by the Mr and Mrs Walmesley's as their own. When Nomanzi met Sifile "a raw Zulu" she wished to marry and move to his kraal and live like an ordinary Zulu woman. The Walmesley's were scandalised and asked why "in spite of all your careful upbringing, discard your dress, and forget the new manners and customs you have learnt" (Webb & Wright 1976: 1). This illustrates both colonial attitudes to the apparent civilising effects of acculturation and amazement at the idea of putting this aside.

The Xhosa along the southeastern Cape coast used clothing as a device to signal religious or political affiliations. Pressure to support the Church split the Xhosa into two groups, the 'School' and the 'Reds'. The 'School' Xhosa went to missionary schools, adopted Christianity and western dress, while the 'Reds' refused to adopt European ways (Duggan-Cronin 1939: 30, Gillow 2003: 222). The 'Red' women continued to wear their traditional long skirts prepared with red ochre and were remarked upon by missionaries, as non-converts. A photograph of a small congregation taken by missionaries towards the end of the nineteenth century distinguished between one group, called 'Heiden' (heathen), and another group, named 'Christen' (Christians) (Duggan-Cronin 1939: Plate XXXVI, Keagan: 2004 illustration p. 198). Individuals also used clothing to demonstrate religious affiliations. Maria Sethume, one of the wives of Sekhukhune who did not sanction Christianity, cast off her traditional garments, as well as ornaments and the hides given to her by the chief, in a public ceremony to demonstrate her conversion to Christianity. By doing so she also rejected traditional social mores relating to clothing (Bergh & Bergh 1984, Reuther 2002: 364). These actions show that either the adoption or rejection of Christianity generated a strong reaction.

Reuther (2002: 360) strengthens the point that European clothing was used both as a social marker and a form of expression of social identity. She described how women, recently converted to the Lutheran church in nineteenth century

Transvaal, wore dresses with crinolines[6] to Sunday services. BMS Missionary Gruenberger viewed this as so inappropriate that he stormed into town and seized the crinolines to "burn them to death" (*Ibid.*: 359). Within the community wearing western clothes was used both as a symbol of their newfound identity and their enhanced status. However, the missionary interpreted the use of European dress by Africans as a sign of rebellion and inappropriate social aspirations that needed to be stopped. Campbell, from the London Missionary Society, noted that amongst recent Christian converts (Lye 1975: 40) western dress was perceived as a mark of progress up the social ladder and in this way conferred status to the wearer, while in other contexts it was a novelty, such as shiny brass buttons sewn on to animal skin skirts (Campbell 1974: 336). Different kinds of clothing definitely provoked a strong response from the wearer, supporting its use as a potent symbol of identity and how it could be refashioned.

Despite their best efforts missionaries were not able to restrict access to fabric and clothing indefinitely. Trade gradually expanded throughout the territory and via the coastal trade from the Highveld to Delagoa Bay in Mozambique. The use of fabric and clothing percolated through to most men and women by the end of the nineteenth century.

Colonisation involved issues of power, racism and control by a larger, dominant, power over a smaller, subordinate group, generally represented by the indigenous population. This situation was derived from the economic exploitation brought about by globalisation and necessitated the appropriation of land and resources. As these cultures came into contact, the subordinate group devised various mechanisms to incorporate the rapid changes in the social landscape. The three models of colonialism outlined by the Comaroffs, those of the settler, the state and the mission, provided the framework of power that manifested in southern Africa. Against this backdrop indigenous groups chose to

[6] Crinoline: a stiffened or hooped petticoat worn to make a long skirt stand out, it is worn under the skirt or dress.

adopt, reject or reinterpret alien material culture, and this reflects in my interpretation of the fabric from Historic Cave.

In addition to the factors described above, historical archaeology also considers how gender and power relations affect the use of western clothing as items of material culture. In the following two sections I discuss how relations between men and women, and power structures, influenced this.

3.6 Gender based power relations

Gender based divisions of labour have been well covered in various contemporary records from missionaries, travelers, and anthropologists (BMB 1861: 22-23, Duggan-Cronin 1939: 27, Junod 1962: 91, Lye 1975: 280, Mönning 1978: 271, Peires 1981: 24, Nettleton 2000: 21). Although there were differences between the various indigenous groups it is possible to make some generalisations; for example the care of cattle, the main source of social capital in local populations, rested with men, while pottery and agricultural efforts fell to women. These labours were more time-consuming and perceived to be of lower status than those allocated to men. Rules about settlement arrangements and marriage rites also differed between groups. Women had a lower status than men, although they were held in esteem (Mönnig 1978: 271). Nonetheless, this did not prevent groups splitting up over issues of succession as a woman was not considered suitable chiefly material and the lack of a male figure would be sufficient to cause a split (Van Warmelo 1953: 30). Wives and mothers often played a key role in the way communities split over competition between the offspring of the ‘principal’ wife and the ‘first’ wife (Schapera 1953, Esterhuysen 2008b: 200). The ‘principal’ wife, from a union based on strategic political alliances, produced the heir to the chiefdom. However if she was unable to produce an heir the ‘first’ wife could capitalise on this by promoting her offspring. This process had the potential to cause fissure in the group.

Within the Venda men controlled all property, including any items belonging to their wives, who would have to seek their husband's permission to sell or otherwise dispose of their own goods (Van Warmelo 1948: 317). However, the husband was not allowed to dispose of the wife's property without her permission Within the Tswana, the wife had possession of her own hut and courtyard, she could produce crops on her own allotted field (Comaroff & Comaroff 1991: 133). Her produce was kept in a separate granary and was her sole property; even her husband would need permission to remove grain. In this way it can be seen that different polities had different rules about different things and these spilled over into the use of alien culture by men and women; it could be incorporated, rejected or subjected to specific rules; for example Zulu diviners refused to use Western fabric as it representing the Whites, while it was readily incorporated into Pedi tradition as protective amulets or to ward off danger (Duggan-Cronin 1939 Plate XXXV, Du Toit 2009).

The control of men over women can be seen in the manner of making traditional clothing. Fabricating garments was a long, complex process that started by using carefully prepared and worked skins, primarily of cattle. Skin preparation followed four steps, namely drying or curing, cleaning, softening and currying, and finally softening with fat to make the skin supple (Shaw & Böhme 1974, Vogel 1983: 40, Hooper *et al.* 1989: 320). Women were forbidden to source their own garments as it was taboo for women to work with cattle; the task of making traditional clothes therefore fell to the men and the purpose of their labours was to produce skirts for their wives and children (Warmelo 1948: 303, Vogel 1983: 24). Strict rules governed garment making and determined the decoration, size and age-appropriateness of skin skirts. For example small skirts were suitable for uninitiated young girls, larger skirts for initiated girls and the largest skirts were worn by married woman with children. These garments signaled status and were widely understood within the community (Vogel 1983: 30, Bekker 1995). A woman could not procure her own clothing and once she was married her family was not allowed to gift her with clothes, apart from the odd small present. Her only source of clothing was her husband, who provided these as

well as ornaments. The husband, by assuming this obligation, could choose to clothe his wife or not.

A lack of clothes could be construed as a lack of love and provide grounds for divorce. A Venda proverb “a dog that has an owner can be recognised by having a collar” meant that a married woman is recognisable by her ornaments. This showed that providing clothing was based on more than expediency and that ideas about ownership extended into areas unfamiliar to colonists (Van Warmelo 1948: 303). This system, of being provided with clothing from husbands, began to unravel when missionaries gave clothing to women. Porterfield (1997: 71) argues that amongst the Zulu of Natal, the power of the chief and other men over women lost impetus as missionaries disturbed the smooth running of tribal custom. The Zulu men responded by withdrawing economic and social support to women converts (*Ibid.*: 76). This conceivably made the decision for women to convert to Christianity more difficult because they stood to lose their status and economic support.

Over time different trends in dress appeared throughout southern Africa. Urbanised women in the Cape Colony often wore entirely European outfits (Lye 1975) while along the East coast and further inland women tended to replace specific items of traditional clothing, for example, replacing skin karosses with imported blankets (Campbell 1974). In some communities, such as the ‘School’ Xhosa, the skirts used as ‘traditional dress’ were European imports that had been incorporated into their repertoire (Keegan 2004) demonstrating a selective adoption of western goods. Xhosa women were not passive recipients but chose what they wanted and discarded the rest (Peires 1981: 78). By incorporating western fabric or dress, women were able to use alien material culture to refashion their identity or appearance.

By contrast, men more usually elected to wear a western suit in its entirety such as waistcoat, shirt, shoes and hat, as in Figure 3.1, below. Perhaps women’s treatment of clothing reflected the more conservative nature of communities inland where men were able to dictate styles of dress or perhaps it was because

clothing and fabric were simply very hard to obtain, or, men had access to the cash economy (Vogel 1983). Nonetheless, clothing represented a dynamic form of non-verbal expression that could be easily manipulated.



Fig 3.1: Undated photograph of a man, possibly a chief, wearing a suit of Western clothes, flanked by two kneeling women wearing fabric skirts (Courtesy Museum Africa PH2007_16058)

3.7 Power of the chief over subjects

Traditional power relations were firmly gender based and lay in the domain of men who held power and enforced power over women. Male chiefs issued decrees and defined punishments, often after consultation with (male) advisors (Comaroff & Comaroff 1991: 137). In addition, chiefly power was absolute and

his word was law (Duggan-Cronin 1928: 17). Amongst most groups, for example the Pedi and Tswana, the chief had power of life or death over his subjects. In addition they were obliged to render tribute through goods or labour and respond to a call to arms if there was conflict (Schapera 1953: 52, Mönnig 1978: 278). A chief could give status items as rewards to subjects who gave him generous tribute, such as prized imported fabric or alcohol (Gray & Birmingham 1970: 19). The chief could also choose to bestow favours to enhance the status of loyal adherents and used this as a mechanism to attract support and expand his support base (Kopytoff 1989: 41). Ensuring a large, solid support group by attracting and retaining subjects was essential to the longevity of his reign in the unstable African social climate. A continually expanding support base improved the chances of supremacy over other, smaller, groups. Apart from his main job of reinforcing his position, the chief may have had to deal with other pressures, for example moving to new territories in search of better resources, fleeing enemies or finding allies. This fluidity of movement over the landscape is central to African social structure and is outlined by Kopytoff (1989).

Kopytoff (1989: 7) discussed the concept of 'fluidity' as a key aspect of social relations within Africa. Since land has limited value by virtue of being unlimited, power was built on gathering a large support base of people, who themselves represented an economic resource; in addition, the larger the group, the greater the power of the chief through simple numerical supremacy. Polities relocated throughout the landscape to take advantage of resources. In addition, small groups split off from larger groups, often over issues surrounding succession. The nucleus of a new group, or firstcomers, moved into apparently open land, established their primacy and instituted new organised societies (*Ibid.*: *17*). I think that this idea of fluidity also translates into fluidity of image. Since communities were so mobile and the rise to power was potentially so transient, the presentation of persona was also capable of being rapidly manipulated to suit prevailing circumstances. I discuss this further below.

In his position as chief, the chief fulfilled a social contract to provide protection, to bring order and to nurture the group (Kopytoff 1989: 66). If these conditions were not fulfilled he could be just as rapidly demoted and lose his position and the trappings of his rank. While he enjoyed the support of the group the chief used visual signaling through kingly paraphernalia and titles which to reinforce his status. If his support evaporated, through war or natural disaster, he would lose his status and by the same token, all the benefits of his position. Obviously it would be imperative for the chief to attract and reward as many adherents as possible to strengthen and maintain his supremacy. All sorts of items or privileges were used as incentives, and one of these was bestowing the wearing of European clothing and shoes.

Livingstone writes:

> "The privilege of wearing boots is conferred on certain (men) by their native chiefs. They then, though quite black, call themselves "white men" they then speak of the unbooted as "that black" (Schapera 1961: 280).

The origin of the value of wearing shoes may have derived from the law in the Cape Colony (Schoeman 2007: 219) that forbade slaves from wearing shoes or hats, possibly in a hangover from prescriptive European sumptuary laws. These catalogued types of garments and fabrics that could be worn by certain members of society providing a quick visual measure of social status. This has parallels in African societies, as above, where the status of women e.g. married with children or single, could be seen at a glance through their clothing (Vogel 1983).

Chiefs and elites were also first in line to access to rare items, such as European fabric, (Peires 1981: 40, Comaroff & Comaroff 1991: 162, Juwayeyi 2008: 113). Elites had greater access to resources; they also received gifts of clothing or other items from travelers or as tribute from traders. Figure 3.2,

below, illustrates this through the dress of the chief, standing on the right. He is the only one wearing a long white cotton skirt.

Chiefs already employed a system of appearance as a visible mechanism to differentiate themselves from adherents by wearing leopard skins, special beads or bracelets of ivory (Duggan Cronin 1928, 1931, 1935, 1939, Vogel 1983: 47). These traditions were all well established as devices to signal kingly status and may have been extended to include western dress, particularly military style hats and jackets that were unfailingly popular (Duggan-Cronin 1931: 38, Duggan-Cronin 1939: Plates II and III, Peires 1981: 27).

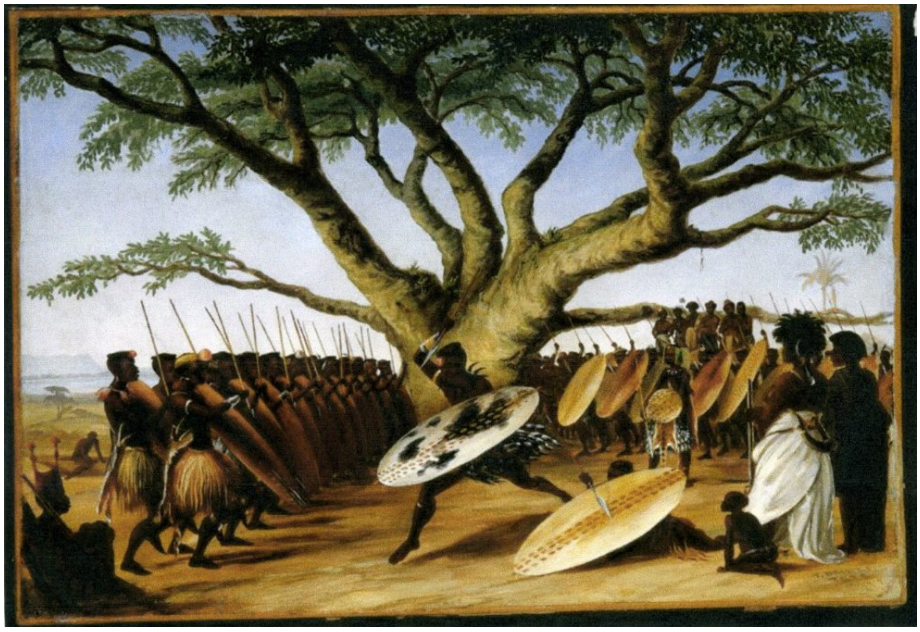


Fig 3.2: ‘War dance under a fig tree by Zulus’ by Thomas Baines, dated 1859, from the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. (Courtesy Aluka.org)

Campbell, travelling through southern Africa in the early nineteenth century, describes shows how clothing was used to create a distinction between a chief and his family. The chief was dressed in

> "a short blue jacket, and white trowsers, but neither shoes nor stockings. He had a white epaulette on the right shoulder, and in his hand a formidable staff….his wife was with him, with an infant….with two rows of beads around its neck but without any other clothing" (Campbell 1974: 82)

Later, he met "the Chief of a Bushman's kraal (who) joined us to conduct us to the ford… The Chief wore a hat, a short blue coat, and skin trousers. The others wore only sheepskin clothes" (*Ibid.*: 153). The History of the London Missionary Society mentions that "Sechele and some of the chiefs adopted European clothing" (Lovett 1899: 611) and Kirkaldy (2005: 245) described how Chief Mphaphuli officially received the Evangelists Paulus Luvhengo and Johannes Mutshaeni, David Denga and Carl Beuster. Chief Mphaphuli was dressed in European clothes, but took great exception to the jacket worn by Johannes Mutshaeni and jumped up to beat him with a staff. By not removing his jacket, a status item restricted to the upper echelons of society, Johannes had not presented himself properly to the Chief and invoked his wrath, an unhappy conflation of traditional and Christian ideals.

Campbell used dress to identify different groups, for example using headgear or shields to distinguish between Tswana, Korana and Zulu. He mentioned that military gear such as hats or jackets with lots of brass buttons were highly prized items (Campbell 1974: 233). This desire for fancy goods was capitalised on by missionaries and travelers to gain favours from chiefs, pay tribute tax or for permission to travel through territory (Lovett 1899: 548, Schapera 1951: 89, Schapera 1961: 97, Lye 1975: 10). Wearing eye-catching military uniform as a form of conspicuous consumption may be one of the reasons behind the outlandish military wear worn by modern day African despots, such as Idi Amin, in Figure 3.3, below.



Figure 3.3 Idi Amin (c1925-2003) wearing military uniform

These costumes seem to function more as a show of military might rather than military expertise and may be better explained as a form of visual signaling.

The desire for western garments was such that even in the absence of actual European clothing, a substitute would be made from traditional materials. The London Missionary Robert Moffat wrote:

> "Had some conversation with Ceraits the chief. He is a singular character, and is quite in love with the manners of white people. He has made himself jacket and trousers (of skin)" (Schapera 1951: 48).

Besides clothing, missionaries, traders and travelers gave all sorts of gifts (Lye 1975: 290, Comaroff & Comaroff 1991: 184) such as beads, snuffboxes, mirrors, brass wire tobacco and knives, to chiefs or those in power. This was a routine practice to ensure safe passage through territory, to enlist help tracking before a

hunt, for protection or for the use of shelter or water. Gift giving was often a reciprocal exchange, chiefs would respond to gifts of western trinkets with presents of oxen and small stock (Comaroff & Comaroff 1991: 184).

Although chiefs and persons of rank had first option on status items and may have initially restricted access to these, contemporary observations of indigenes in southern Africa by European travelers underscore the rapid adoption of European clothing by local people in urban areas. Eyewitness observations showed that European clothes were worn not only by Chiefs but also by almost anyone, of either gender, on a day-to-day basis. John Campbell, writing about his visit to Cape Town in 1812 came across well-dressed slaves in European garments attending church on Sunday (Campbell 1974: 7), “Hottentots” in both European clothing and traditional loose sheepskins (*Ibid.*: 18), a bushman chief in European clothes accompanied by his group dressed in traditional clothing of strands of beads (*Ibid.*: 153), Griquas wearing both European and traditional clothing of sheepskin cloaks or nothing at all (*Ibid.*: 182), while a missionary convert, Potje, wore a waistcoat together with strips of skin (Keegan 2004: 211).

Harries (1994) described how European clothes “formed an important cultural marker” (1994:60). Black male migrants tramping to Kimberley in the 1870s seeking work on the recently discovered diamond mines arrived dressed in tattered overcoats and corduroy pants. After some time on the mines these men would demonstrate their newfound economic power by wearing trousers and tails, military tunics and a patchwork of second-hand garments and footwear on weekends. This apparently garish get-up would function as a ”visible marker of their passage into a new community” (*Ibid.*: 60*),* indicating their new status to their peers.

While looking at the evidence of clothing habits, I had assumed that chiefs, who had greatest access to status items, wore traditional clothes ‘at home’ and European clothes when doing ‘business’, but discovered that clothing was a very fluid element of their identity. For example, Andrew Smith traveled the interior in the early nineteenth century and wrote of meeting King Moschesh at a

town some distance from his kraal “Though he generally prefers his native dress, the occasion as well as the circumstances of his having travelled on horseback probably induced him this day to lay it aside. Before us he appeared in the common dress of a colonial farmer” (Lye 1975: 64). Later, at his kraal, “he issued from his hut…this day looked like a man and a chief…over his shoulders hung a splendid leopard skin, on his body, his limbs, and his head were a variety of tasteful ornaments and in his right hand was a spear which quivered as he spoke with delight..” (*Ibid.*: 73). This shows that although practical reasons may be behind certain forms of dress, clothing was also used to reaffirm status and image. While the general impression from contemporary writings and pictures is of a desire to obtain European clothes, this was not universal.

Writing about Chief Mzilikazi, Andrew Smith was unimpressed with his ‘uncivilised’ state and described him “There was nothing in the appearance of Mosulacatzi save his nakedness which was calculated to excite a disagreeable impression….He was without dress or ornament except a girdle round his loins from which anteriorly and posteriorly were suspended a few twisted stripes of monkey skins, a string of beads round each leg just below the knees and two strings above each ankle” (Lye 1975: 234). London Missionary Robert Moffat also described Mzilikazi, or Moselekatse, after meeting in 1829. He writes (Moffat 1969: 546) that Moselekatse was “below the middle stature, rather corpulent, with a short neck, and in his manner could be exceedingly affable and cheerful. His voice (was) soft and effeminate…” also that he was generous with food and supplies, inviting Moffat and his party to “sleep where you please” (*Ibid.*: 534). Moffat’s description is contrary to Andrew Smith’s and highlights Smith’s prejudice as it portrays Chief Mzilikazi as naked and, by inference, uncivilised. On the other hand, the description from Moffat does not use Mzilikazi’s appearance to inform us of his opinion of his character.

In more sparsely populated areas European clothes did seem more restricted to elites by virtue of their scarcity. However, over time the control by chiefs on trade goods and trade routes became more difficult to exercise. Road networks

gradually enlarged and expanded, accelerating after the first quarter of the nineteenth century (Lye 1974, Comaroff & Comaroff 1991: 165); by the latter part of the nineteenth century there were simply too many travelers to regulate and restrictions over imported cloth fell away. Western clothes were so rapidly adopted that by 1845 colonists on the eastern coast complained Xhosa were wearing coats, knee breeches, and silk stockings and using parasols (Peires 1981: 107). By the end of the nineteenth century western clothing was ubiquitous and by the twentieth century traditional clothing became restricted to special occasions in homage to the memory of "the old people" (Vogel 1983: 27). This is an inversion of previous practices where Gillow (2003: 222) described how Xhosa 'Reds' refused to incorporate western clothing into their usual dress. The later trend was for people to wear traditional clothes 'at home' and western garments 'in town' (Kirkaldy 2005: 57, Liebhammer 2007: 59). Chief Mphaphuli in the northern Transvaal would not go and attend church service because he was not properly dressed in Western clothes (Kirkaldy 2009: 613). Wearing Western clothes became equated with 'being civilised' but despite the adoption of Western dress, native people were never fully accepted by Europeans, who would comment on 'half civilised' Africans (Reuther 2002: 365).

Over time the administrative and religious powers of colonists, described above, eroded the powers of traditional leaders and chiefs. With this brought a concomitant change in the social landscape. Contemporary literature supports the idea that clothing was a powerful device used to reflect changes in persona. European clothing was often rapidly adopted (Schapera 1961: 183, Junod 1962: 104) - it became a 'social skin'. By using the term 'social skin' I refer to how clothing was used to create social identities as outlined by Loren (2001). Loren (2001: 176) explains that French colonists of Louisiana in the late seventeenth century, like colonists in other areas of the world, used control of the body as part of their method of rule. Thus "dress was a visual measure of difference as it visually communicated self and social identities in contact and colonial period contacts" (*Ibid.*: 173*)*. She found that 'mixed' clothing, described as wearing, or

more likely not wearing i.e. nakedness, often constituted traditional dress. Combined with European garments, this became both a device used to communicate newly emerging identities and a multivocal practice that blurred the divisions between colonised and coloniser (*Ibid*.: 179). This practice, of using clothing to communicate identity, was often described in contemporary writings in southern Africa where various chiefs, men and women would take up or reject European clothing or fabric. Likewise, in the internal frontier of the northern Transvaal, clothing was an expedient way of signaling status, religious affiliation or social standing.

Within traditional societies the rules of gender based relations and power structures had an impact on appearance and dress. The special qualities that were assigned to clothing will be foregrounded in my interpretation of the fabric from Historic Cave, in Chapter 6.

3.8 Conclusion

Colonialism and culture contact sparked many social, political and economic changes after the arrival of colonists along the coasts of southern and eastern Africa from the sixteenth century. The process of culture contact was dynamic and could not be predicted (Stein 2005). However, the one thing that is assured is that both parties, both incomers and natives, will be changed (Gosden 2004: 4), leading to a refashioning of their societies.

Models from researchers in the field of historical archaeology influenced my interpretation of the use of fabric, as follows. The three models of colonialism outlined by the Comaroffs, being: the legal and administrative controls of the state emanating from British rule in the Cape Colony, the master-servant relationship of the Dutch Settler and ideas based on the Age of Enlightenment brought by Christianity and the mission. These models provided a framework for understanding the social and political dynamics operating in the interior. Bound up with this was the use of clothing and European garments to conform to ideas

about ‘civilised’ and ‘God fearing’ people who shunned nakedness. New status was signaled with jackets, pants, dresses and skirts to remake the body and self in the Protestant image (Comaroff & Comaroff 1991: 282).

Clothing was an effective form of visual signaling, as discussed by Loren (2001: 172), who outlined how “the practices of dressing, which implied status, race and gender, as well as political, social and sexual interactions” were powerful visual tools to manipulate image. The re-use of fabric or garments points to the willingness to take items from one culture and incorporate them into another. In this process previous associations e.g. of Europeans or Christianity, were removed and new meanings were conferred that chimed with those of the group e.g. protective qualities or social signaling. Rejection of alien culture by indigenous populations sometimes manifested as rejection of new ways of dress. Thus, this valuable commodity was absorbed into the mix and became subject to rules of access, restriction and use; it functioned as a medium of expression to demonstrate political leanings, religious beliefs and social mores.

Silliman outlines how indigenous communities choose to either adopt or reject items of alien material culture. Those items that are incorporated may be reinterpreted into entirely new functions. This applies to some of the fabric from Historic Cave, whose function was changed from clothing to objects of ritual significance.

Clearly it is impractical to adopt a ‘one size fit all approach’ because different people and groups used European garments and fabric in different ways. Trekkers obliged their indentured labour to wear trek style clothes as a form of uniform, missionaries used clothing as a reward for conversion to Christianity, women in traditional societies cast aside their usual garments and adopted western wear to show their new religious orientation, chiefs eagerly displayed military uniform to show their supremacy. So, the use of European fabric was many and varied but above all it was consciously and dynamically manipulated for a variety of ends, primarily to signal identity – whether by choosing not to wear it or by compelling someone else wear it.

To get a better understanding of the use of fabric within the Kekana Ndebele during the Siege of Makapan I turn to the excavated finds from Historic Cave in Makapan Valley.

Chapter 4: Previous Excavations in Historic Cave

4.1 Introduction

The European fabric recovered from Historic Cave in Makapan Valley is unique for being the largest amount of such textiles currently available from a nineteenth century archaeological site in South Africa. Its preservation is due both to the conditions within the Cave and the circumstances around the Siege of Makapan in 1854. In this chapter I will look at the events of the Siege, outline previous excavations in Historic Cave then discuss the extant material remains and their archaeological context.

4.2 The Siege

The reports of Commandants-General M. W. Pretorius[7] and Piet Potgieter comprise the main description of the events of the siege of Makapan (Esterhuysen 2008b, Esterhuysen *et al* 2009). Other scholars have provided an overview of events (Preller 1918 Vol III: 18, De Waal 1978:114). In October 1854, a group of at least 600 Kekana Ndebele took refuge in Historic Cave in Makapan Valley under Chief Mugombane II, or Makapan,[8] following the attack and murder of between 23 and 28 Trekkers and their families at a nearby ford in Makapaanspoort (Esterhuysen 2008b: 461). Simultaneously, Mr Venter and his son were murdered at Mugombane's kraal at Pruissen, and a Trekker group of

[7] [7] S.S.7, R733/54: Verslag van (report by) M. W. Pretorius, Magaliesberg (6.12.1854).

[8] Chief Mugombane II was also known as Makapan, Mokopane, Mugombane and Setšwamadi. In accordance with the precedent set by Esterhuysen (2006:2) I will use the name Mugombane.

approximately 23 and 24 men, women and children lead by Hermanus Potgieter were murdered at Fonthane Hill, the headquarters of Langa chief Mankopane (De Waal 1978: 70). After the Trekkers received news of these killings, two Trekboer commandos were assembled comprising approximately 480 men, to make a retaliatory attack. They were led by Commandants-General M. W. Pretorius and P. Potgieter (*Ibid.*: 105) and tracked the Kekana to Historic Cave where they had taken refuge.

The commando arrived there on 25th October along with two cannon however, the Kekana were well stocked with food and domestic items; these preparations suggest that the attacks on the Trekkers were premeditated (De Waal 1978: 104, Esterhuysen *et al.* 2009: 1040). The commando stormed the cave, but to no avail as Kekana sharpshooters armed with guns and assegais successfully repelled them. However, the Kekana had no source of water within the cave, they drew water from a small stream that ran past the cave entrance. The Trekkers quickly realised that the attack had the potential to be extremely protracted and within a few days they cut off the supply of water to bring matters to a head (De Waal 1978: 107, Esterhuysen 2006: 53).. The Trekkers also tried to smoke out the Kekana (De Waal 1978: 108). Over the following weeks the Trekkers continued to mount attacks with the cannon, and extra gunpowder was called for, but they could not dislodge the Kekana.

At this point the siege began in earnest. The Trekkers cleared the area around the cave entrance to prevent people slipping out undetected under cover of darkness and mounted a twenty four hour watch to shoot anyone trying to escape (Preller 1918 Vol III: 33). They also tried to smoke out the Kekana. Groups of women and children continued to flee the cave and on the 6th November a large group left, desperately looking for water. Many died after drinking from the nearby stream, which was an effect of rapid re-hydration (De Waal 1978: 111, Esterhuysen 2006: 87). Those that survived were taken prisoner and by the 12th November the Trekkers held over four hundred women and children captive. Finally, on 17th November a group of approximately 364

women and children gave themselves up and the Trekkers entered the cave. However, Chief Mugombane had somehow left the cave some time before the end of the siege and was nowhere to be found (De Waal 1978:114). The Trekkers retrieved what they wanted from the plundered possessions of the victims of Moorddrift, which were found stockpiled within the cave. Guns, lead shot, bandoliers, gunpowder, “two chests of clothing” and other personal items were removed (De Waal 1978: 114). Commandant-General M.W. Pretorius ordered a patrol to fetch Mugombane’s cattle from nearby Chief Maraba’s kraal (*Ibid*.: 114).

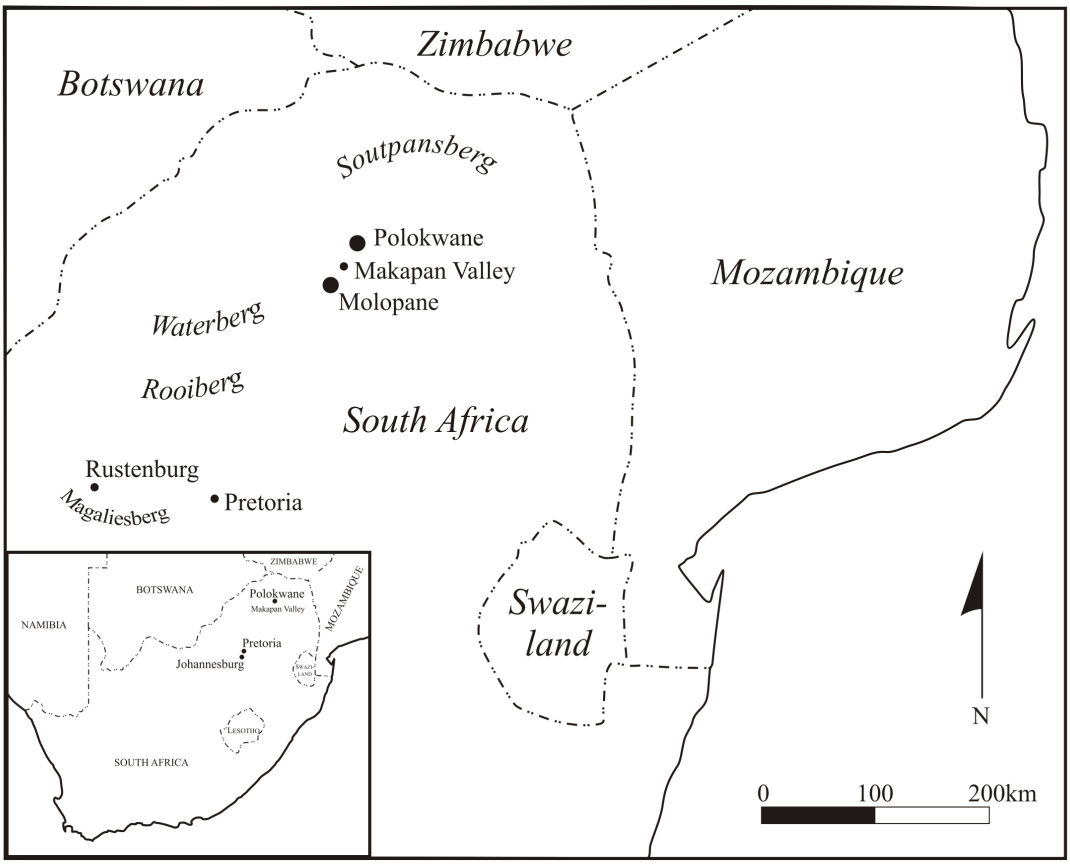


Figure 4.1: Location of Makapan Valley (after Esterhuysen 2010)

4.3 The Excavation of Historic Cave

Historic Cave is located in Makapan's Valley World Heritage Site approximately 18km northeast of Mokopane (previously Potgietersrus) in the Limpopo Province, formerly Northern Transvaal (Fig. 4.1) (Esterhuysen 2010). Excavations of Historic Cave were conducted by Esterhuysen from 2001 to 2007 and have been fully described elsewhere (*Ibid.*: 67). A brief description of the caves and excavations is included here, and a full description of the main site, Dg1, follows. The cave comprises two chambers, a large Eastern upper chamber and a smaller lower Western chamber (Fig. 4.2) separated at the lowest point by a screen of dolomite (*Ibid.*: *68*). Eight areas within the Eastern chamber (Fig. 4.3) were identified as suitable for excavation and thirty-eight 1m x 1m squares were excavated in total (Esterhuysen 2008b: 463, 2010).

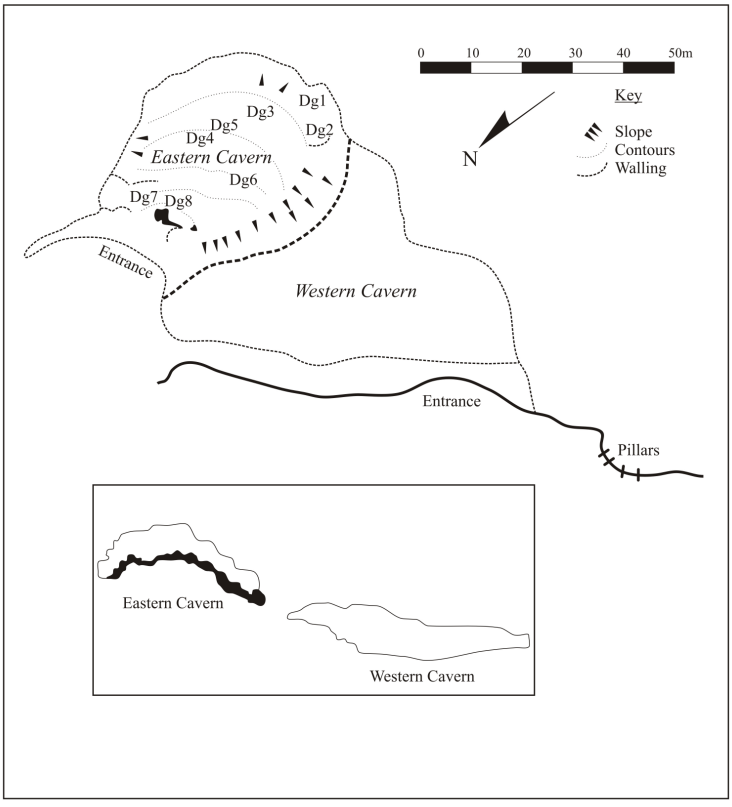


Figure 4.2: Historic Cave showing cave layout (after Esterhuysen 2008b)

Areas Dg1, Dg2, Dg4 and Dg5 were identified as households and contained food preparation and sleeping areas; some were surrounded by grass fences or low walls; Dg 3 was a well-trodden pathway, Dg 6 a communal storage area, Dg 7 and Dg 8 were small units located near the cave entrance. The occupation layers at each site formed a single deposit above a sterile base, indicating a single contemporaneous event. This was taken to be the Siege of Makapan in 1854 (Esterhuysen 2010).

A wide range of organic remains was preserved by the exceptional conditions in the cave. Rapid desiccation of these remains was due to various factors including the high lime content of the dolomitic environment, the relatively constant temperature, the low humidity and the drying effect of fires lit by previous occupants of the cave, for example early miners (Esterhuysen 2010:70). In addition climatic conditions in Limpopo Province during the1850s was unusually dry (Esterhuysen 2006: 92). European fabric was recovered from almost every area within the cave (Table 5.1) however, the largest area, Dg1, contained the greatest number and widest variety of remains. No complete garments were recovered from any part of the cave. As the fabric from Dg2 to Dg6 comprised fragments and strips of fabric with few distinguishing characteristics I will not discuss these further. The remains from Dg1 included almost every piece of fabric that had been worked or modified and these are considered below.

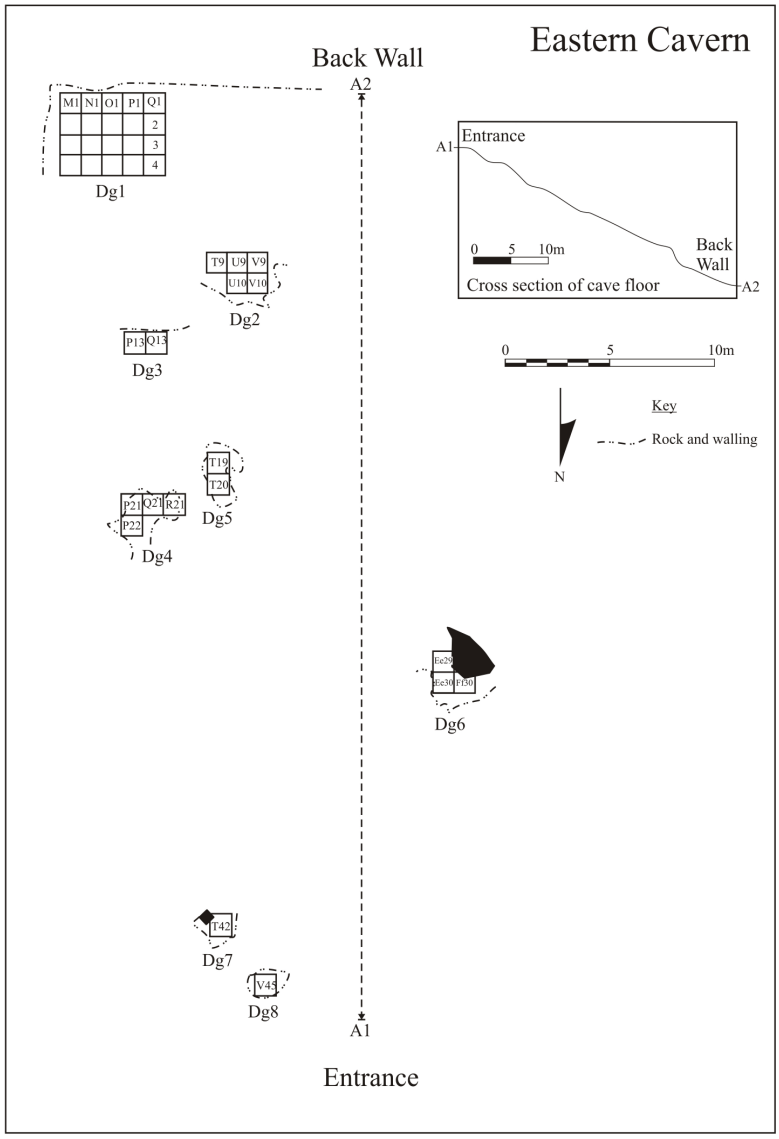


Figure 4.3: Historic Cave showing excavated areas (after Esterhuysen 2008a)

Site	squares excavated	number of fabric pieces	pieces per m²
Dg1	20	33	1.65
Dg2	5	10	2
Dg3	2	1	0.5
Dg4	4	13	3.25
Dg5	2	5	2.5
Dg6	3	1	0.33
Dg7	1	0	0
Dg8	1	0	0

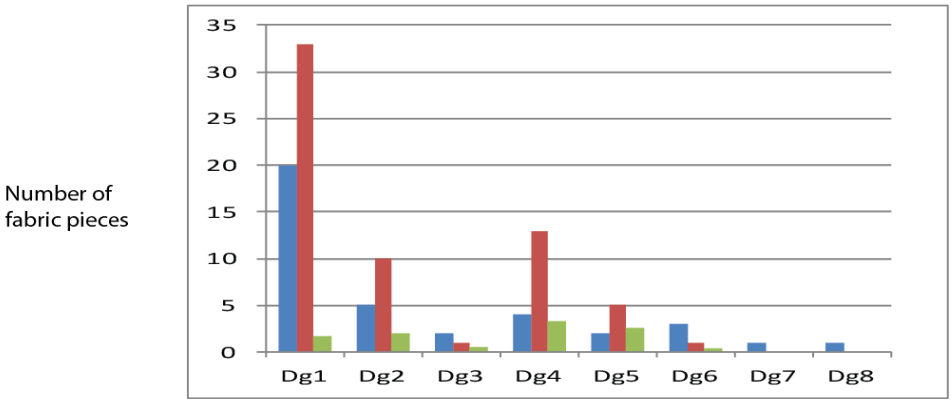


Table 5.1 Number of excavated squares and number of fabric pieces recovered

4.4 Area Dg1

Of all the sites excavated within the cave, this was the largest and most elaborate. It contained the richest deposit (Esterhuysen 2010). It was located at the furthest point against the back of the cave wall, 41m from the entrance, and had been capped by a rock fall. A total of twenty 1m x 1m squares were excavated. The area was covered by a thick layer of ash and burnt poles, a large quantity of vitrified organics as well as remains of charred wood in postholes, attesting to considerable damage by fire. The amount of ash

suggests that a fence, made of reeds or grass, may have originally surrounded this site (Esterhuysen 2008b: 465). Four pits were found within an elaborately plastered dhaka floor and this area was divided into living and storage components. Calabashes containing pigment, some possibly mixed with human fat, were uncovered on a small recessed platform that ran along the back wall (Esterhuysen 2008b).

The analysis of the stratigraphy suggested that after the siege rodents foraged in the cave when food and grain, as well as human remains, were *in situ*. Rodents gnawed various organic materials in this area and created layers of nesting material and rodent droppings above the dhaka floor. A roof collapse, at some indeterminate time, created a mound and sealed the deposit. Esterhuysen notes that all the stratigraphic layers below the Surface layer appear to belong to the same event and this would be the siege of 1854 (2008b: 465).

Material remains in this area that date to the siege included metal objects, glass beads, ostrich eggshell beads (OES), *Achatina* beads, plant remains, faunal remains, ceramic remains, wooden objects, stone, leather and alien artefacts. The European items are discussed below. The pottery collection comprised various components, an earlier Eiland (Early/Middle Iron Age) and two later Late Moloko and Phalaborwa/Letaba (Late Iron Age) components (Esterhuysen 2008a). Ceramic styles are one method used to identify specific groups of people (Huffman 2005, Esterhuysen 2008a: 197). Dg1 contains three ceramic styles. The first is an Eiland component from a very much earlier occupation. The other two ceramic traditions date to the later siege-related event. These are the Late Moloko and the Letaba/Phalaborwa traditions and include sherds with specific comb-stamped decoration. Comb-stamped pottery may be associated with a different group who were keen to form an alliance with the Kekana Ndebele (Esterhuysen 2008a). Inter-group marriage was one way to cement political alliances and Esterhuysen outlines how comb-stamped ceramics may be taken as an indicator of a high status marriage and indicate a union based on such a marriage (*Ibid.:* 201).

The European artefacts found in Dg1 include thirty three pieces of cloth, a single piece of porcelain, two fragments of a Dutch Psalm book and a piece of a note with Dutch writing embedded in rodent droppings (Esterhuysen 2010: 78). European glass beads were found here and throughout the site and are not discussed further. This area also contained items that would have formed part of a divining kit, including an amulet attached to a string, leg rattles, calabash fragments, roots and stems bound with plant fibre, a bolus of *Ficus*, thorns of the *Acacia karoo*, fragments of cowrie shells, a sheep astralagus or divining dice and a modified horn with a leather thong (Esterhuysen 2010). Different pigments were found on and near the recessed platform at the back wall, either pasted to pottery fragments or lying in the deposit. These include fragments of ochre and chalky limestone plus many small lumps of a blue chalky substance that was present in most layers. These pieces of blue substance were only found in Dg1 (Esterhuysen 2006: 35). Three pieces of loosely woven blue plaited fabric (Dg 1 O1 GM-21/-22/-23) (Fig. 5.15) were recovered from the back wall of this area. This type of fabric was not found in any other sites. Other fabric remains that were not found in any other area include knotted pieces (Fig. 5.13, a *timfisa* (Fig. 5.12) one piece of tartan (Dg1 N1 RBL/GM-14), a small cross-knotted knotted wristlet from Dg1 M2 RBL-04 (Fig. 5.14), two strips from Dg1 O2 GM-31, plus small strips and odd fragments.

Thornton (pers comm. 2009)[9] explained that the blue, possibly indigo-dyed, knot (Figure 5.12) from Dg1 M1 would function as a *timfisa ("hidden things")*. Witchdoctors, or *sangomas,* created *timfisa* from small pieces of fabric that were made into bundles containing *muti* or medicinal substances. These *timfisa* were protective amulets and widely worn by sangomas, men, women and babies (Duggan Cronin 1931 Plate XXXV, Junod 1962: 471). Strips of fabric could also be also formed into long sausages, beaded and incorporated into necklaces with a similar function. The fabric is analysed in Chapter 5.

[9] Professor Robert Thornton, Anthropology Department, University of the Witwatersrand

Apart from the divining paraphernalia recovered from Dg1, items relating to divining were also recovered from Dg4, i.e. a drilled astralagus, one shell amulet, one bone amulet and two leather pouches. Dg5 yielded a fabric bundle (Fig. 2.6) (Esterhuysen 2006) similar to bundles found with a divining kit in the collection of Museum Africa.

4.5 Discussion

Dg1, described above, was the largest area excavated and brought to light the greatest quantity and variety of material culture. A roof fall had capped this deposit and helped to preserve it in a more complete state that other areas that had been affected by human traffic or interference by visitors to a greater or lesser degree. The remains found here were therefore more complete than those found in other areas.

In addition to capping, the unique environment within the cave contributed to the very high level of preservation of organic remains. This is the reason for the preservation of so much fabric, a substance that does not usually survive in archaeological deposits due to its extremely degradable nature (Good 2001, Robertshaw *et al* 2010).

Excavations revealed a decorated plastered dhaka floor in Dg1, which was the most elaborate and complex of any in the cave. This area was also originally surrounded by a special wooden fence, which limited access to and conferred privacy on the people in this area. Esterhuysen (2010) argues that Dg1 was the most protected area of the cave by being furthest away from the entrance and therefore most likely to have been occupied by an elite group.

In addition, ceramic remains of two different types of pottery (Early Eiland and comb-stamped), from Dg1 further underline the enhanced status of this household area as ceramics provided a widely understood visual signal of an

elite group. The two different types of ceramics found here may indicate a strategic alliance between the Kekana and another group (Esterhuysen 2008b).

Furthermore, the greatest variety and quantity of items were found here. A greater quantity of European fabric, a piece of porcelain and other objects, such as fragments of Psalm book, a piece of notepaper with Dutch writing may be taken as further indication of the occupation of this area by an elite group as elites often have greater access to prestige items (Picton 1995, Juwayeyi 2008). Some of these items belong to the standard collection found in a divining kit such as amulets, pieces of blue chalky substance, calabashes with pigment and pieces of cowrie shells. These may have been used in the spiritual fight against the enemy (Esterhuysen 2008b: 469). The leader of the group would have been responsible for the safety of everyone within the cave and would have either enlisted the aid of a diviner or performed the necessary rituals himself (Mönnig 1978: 274, Esterhuysen 2008b: 466). These finds provide more support for the elite nature of Dg1 and are discussed further in Chapter 6.

Although most of the excavated sites had various strips and fragments of fabric, I will argue the form of some of the European fabric from Dg1 was unusual, such as a knotted up *timfisa,* loosely woven blue plaited fabric, a small wristlet of rolled and cross-knotted plain fabric and two strips of loosely woven stranded fabric. No garments were found at any part of the site. An analysis of the fabric is found in Chapter 5.

It is important to note that items found inside the cave represent objects that were actively brought in by the Kekana taking refuge. Some may have represented items with specific ritual properties. Conversely, it is possible that other items were excluded, either due to avoidance or to prevent raising the anger of the ancestors for placing foreign objects within the cave (Esterhuysen 2008a: 471). A discussion of the possible ritual or supernatural attributes of European material culture follows in Chapter 5.

It was not possible to discern gender specific areas within the cave. Gender-based activities such as woodworking or hide working for men, and food preparation for women, would manifest by specific debris patterns on the cave floor (Shaw & van Warmelo 1988, Huffman 2005). This is most likely due to the limited amount of space and the brief period of occupation.

4.6 Conclusion

The preservation of the remains of the Siege of Makapan was due to various unusual environmental and physical factors within Historic Cave. The excavated evidence includes many items of European material culture, obtained either by trade or exchange. Fabric remnants were uncovered in many of the areas, but no complete garments were revealed. Some items taken into the cave had been modified in such a way that the only explanation for this is that, by being reshaped; these items found a new significance to the group who perished there. Most of these modified objects were excavated from site Dg1 and the comparatively rich deposit found in this area points to occupation by an elite group who had access to a greater amount of prestige goods. This area had been capped by a roof fall and the items recovered here would have been the least disturbed by visitors to the cave, therefore providing a more complete record of artefacts.

I now turn my attention to the analysis of fabric from Historic Cave.

Chapter 5: Analysis of fabric from Historic Cave

5.1 Introduction

The fabric from Historic Cave was preserved due to exceptional conditions there (Good 2001, Esterhuysen 2010, Robertshaw *et al* 2010) and is currently stored at the University of the Witwatersrand, Archaeology Department laboratory where it is labeled and boxed. The bulk of the sample, all excavated by Esterhuysen (2010), was from 2001; further samples were collected from subsequent excavations up until September 2007. I was interested in analysing these fabric remains, firstly, because they represent the largest amount of European textiles excavated thus far and, secondly, to date there is no information on how fabric was used by indigenous people after it was acquired, either by trade or exchange. The object of this analysis is to determine the use of this fabric.

5.2 Location of fabric within Historic Cave

Four areas were initially excavated within Historic Cave, Dg1, Dg2, Dg3 and Dg4. Later excavations included areas Dg5, Dg6, Dg7 and Dg8. The area Dg1 contained the most fabric remains, and was the largest area excavated. The amount of fabric recovered from each area is shown in Table 1. Site information and descriptions of all fabric pieces are recorded in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2. A specific identification number (UIN) was allocated to each piece of fabric recorded in the Appendices. Photographs of most fabric pieces are pictured in the Appendix 3 (Plates). Note that there is not picture for Dg1 M2 surface-07, a lightweight piece with a floral pattern, which was poorly preserved.

Many pieces of fabric were extremely fragile and badly degraded and no complete garments were recovered from any area within the cave. Two experiments were conducted. One, to establish the composition of a coprolite containing fabric, and a second, to assess damage caused by insects or small gnawing mammals such as shrews, mice and dassies, who entered the cave foraging for food. The results are below.

Area Dg1 was the area furthest within the cave, abutting the back wall, and capped by a rock fall. Items found here were the most varied and included a small fabric wristlet that would fit a child, fashioned from twisted and cross-knotted strips from M2 RBL-04 (Fig. 5.14), fabric sewn together like a pocket (M2 RBL/GM-06), a longish strip that was much creased as if tied around the body like a sling (N2 RBL/GM-16), three samples of narrow strips of loosely woven blue plaited fabric joined at the end by twine (Dg1 O1 GM-21/-22/-23) (Fig. 5.15), a tapering piece with string tied at one end thought to be a 'patch' strip for use with a flintlock gun (O2 GM-27). In addition, other rich finds from Dg1, outlined in Chapter 4, such as an elaborate dhaka floor and a special wooden fence plus items not found elsewhere such as porcelain fragments and paper fragments, indicate that an elite group may have occupied this space.

Area Dg 5, near the middle of the cave, contained an item that was not found elsewhere: a folded fabric bundle tied with twine from T19 surface-60 (Fig. 2.7).

5.3 Fabric analysis

The collection comprises sixty-three pieces of fabric of different sizes and different types. These were classified according to their weight, pattern, weave, and shape, discussed below. The fabric was mass-produced in Europe or Asia and the bulk comprised medium- or light-weight fabrics typically used for jackets, shirts, wraps, scarves or dresses or found in domestic surroundings as tablecloths, etc. Two heavyweight pieces and a few very lightweight pieces were also in the collection. Classifying the material into weight categories helped

establish the possible uses of fabric. There are different methods of classifying weights of fabric and two are discussed below.

The term 'fabric' (from the Latin to '*fabricare',* to make, to build, to 'fabricate') is taken to mean 'the generic term for all fibrous constructions'; and the term 'textile' (from the Latin '*texere'*, to weave) refers to fabric that is 'woven' (i.e. *"interlaced* warp-weft *fabrics*" (Emery 2006: xvi). Fabric is classified according to two main methods. One is based on the techniques involved with the manufacture of fabric, according to Seiler-Baldinger (1944), while the other is based on the appearance of the finished article as outlined by Emery (1966). The second system is employed here.

One standard measure of fabric weight is by *denier*, a unit of weight describing the amount of yarn required for a length of 9000 meters. The lower the *denier* count, the finer the yarn (Soanes & Stevenson 2004). This unit of measure was impractical to apply to the sample from Historic Cave due to the very limited quantity of fabric available.

A better indication of weight was derived from another standard, based on thread count or the count of threads per inch (*tpi*). This method is based on the number of threads in one square inch of the warp (running vertically) and weft (running horizontally) (Seiler-Baldinger 1994). Samples were examined with a hand lens of 10x magnification under normal daylight and the threads counted. The thread count of eight small or twisted up and very fragile samples was a rough estimate, as noted in Appendix 1. The thread count of the majority of fabric fell within the range of medium weight, taken to be between 25 to 55 threads per inch (40 pieces). Fabric with less than 25 *tpi* was coarser and described as heavyweight (5 pieces) and fabric with more than 55 *tpi* was finer and described as lightweight (18 pieces).

Descriptions of fabric in historical documents sometimes indicate fabric as heavyweight, medium weight or dress weight. However, these are relative terms and difficult to quantify. Alpern (1995:6-12) compiled an exhaustive list of

European and Asian cloth and cloth products derived from cargo manifests, port records, trading-post inventories and shipping documents of fabric traded along the African West coast from the fifteenth century. Fabrics were named and described. Although these descriptions were generic, such as 'fine cotton' or 'coarse woolen', the findings by Alpern (1995) demonstrate the extremely wide variety of fabric products available at that time.

A comparison of the thread count (*tpi)* showed that the bulk of the fabric recovered from Historic Cave fell into the category of mediumweight. A few pieces from the sample could be described as heavyweight and some as lightweight. This emphasis on mediumweight fabric indicates that the majority of fabric, especially patterned mediumweight fragments, may have been intended for wear. They would be typical of fabric gained through trade or exchange and possibly used as clothing or as carrying bags or slings.

Of the sixty-three samples, forty-one were plain fabric and twenty-two were patterned of a simple evenweave construction (Emery 1966). I allocated complex float weave and twill fragments to the patterned category. The largest sample measured 24.5cm x 22cm and the smallest sample was a strip 2cm x 1.5cm. In total the combined area of all fabric recovered represented 6461cm², or just over half a square meter (one square meter of fabric equals 10 000cm²). The area of the 41 plain pieces totaled 4226cm², while the 22 patterned pieces totaled 2235cm². The ratio of plain to patterned fabric was equally represented and patterned pieces were found throughout the site. The amount or type of fabric recovered throughout the cave did not indicate a particular bias, however, the type of fabric pieces and how they had been modified showed that the bulk of the modified pieces came from Dg1. This is discussed further below.

To ascertain colour the fabric was examined in natural daylight and compared with a Munsell[10] chart. The original colours could not be gauged due to the age

[10] Munsell Charts were devised to measure soil colours according to hue, lightness and chroma (colour). They are widely used in archaeology and are a ready reference.

of the sample and effect of post-depositional forces. The plain fabric ranged from off white through various shades of brown. The eighteen patterned pieces were from a very small repertoire and had lost their original vibrancy. However, they were typical of mid nineteenth century patterns (Young 1988). Jenny Lister (pers. comm. 2010)[11] confirmed the most common pattern (RPP), from Dg1 N4 surface-18 surface (Fig. 5.1) as typical of this period and available from 1840 to 1850.



Fig. 5.1 Patterned fabric RPP from Dg1 N4 surface-18

All fabric was simple evenweave excepting four small, burnt float weave pieces from M4 surface, being Dg1 M4 surface-09,-10 and -11 respectively, and three twill/herringbone pieces from M2 RBL/GM (Dg1 M2 RBL/GM-05), O4 Surface (Dg1 M4 surface-08) and Dg3 Surface (Dg3 All surface-44). 'Evenweave' describes fabric constructed of one thread over and one thread under so that the warp and weft threads are of an equal number (Emery 1966, Huffman 1971). Twill, or herringbone, describes a weaving method that gives a fabric with a diagonal surface pattern (Emery 1966). Float weave is a complex twill weave method giving a dense fabric, often used for furnishing. There was one solitary piece of corduroy, a small strip from Dg2 All surface-34 (Fig. 5.2). This piece

[11] Jenny Lister, curator of Fashion and Textiles at the Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

may have found its way into the cave with later visitors or miners. However, the shape of the fabric and the dense layer of blue powder, presumably from the blue nodules found throughout the cave, impregnated into the back of the fabric plus records indicating Trekker men commonly wore corduroy as work clothes tend to support the deposition of this piece at the time of the siege (Esterhuysen 2008b, Preller 1918). One piece of multicoloured check fabric from Dg1 N1 RBL/GM-14 was thought to be tartan. The term 'tartan' describes a fabric woven with a check pattern, usually a hardwearing worsted fabric used for outerwear such as jackets or kilts (Baines 1977). Jenny Edmunson (pers. comm.)[12] unequivocally confirmed the piece as tartan.



Fig. 5.2 Corduroy from Dg2 All surface-34

Two goat coprolites (Dg1 N1 RBL-13 and Dg3 All surface-34) were excavated. These contained fabric remnants. It was decided to find out if the coprolite could yield any information. One coprolite was soaked in distilled water to ascertain its composition. The coprolite from Dg3 measured approximately 5cm by 2.5cm and comprised a lump of fabric with bits of twine and grass or small sticks protruding from it. The coprolite was immersed in a 500ml container with distilled water. After ten days the coprolite had disintegrated, revealing a piece of fabric and some organic matter. The fine residue was poured away and one piece of fabric, bits of twine, small sticks, pieces of grass and two tiny bone fragments

[12] Jenny Edmunson, the owner of the shop Rob Roy, has supplied Scottish paraphernalia for approximately twenty years. She is an acknowledged expert of Scottish history.

remained. The fabric was a plain coloured twill weave and measured approximately 6cm x 5cm. It was an irregularly shaped piece of material similar to other plain fabric, for example in Dg1 P4 GM-33 and was included in the arbitrary group, discussed below.

To try and establish the types of fibre, I examined a large number of samples with an Olympus SZ61 Zoom Stereo Microscope and WHSZ1OX-H/22 eyepiece. The magnification ranged from 25x to 35x. Wool and cotton fibres under extremely high magnification are shown in Figures 5.3 and 5.4.

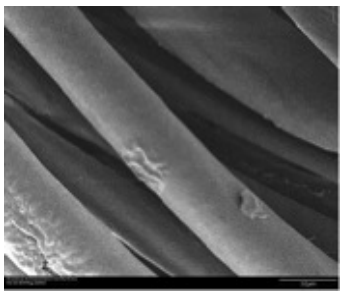


Figure 5.3: High magnification of cotton fibres showing smooth surface



Figure 5.4: High magnification of wool fibres showing scaly surface

Cotton fibres, grown from the cotton plant, are continuous and smooth, while wool is composed of hairs that grow from the skin of an animal and made up of tiny overlapping scales. Wool fibres are not smooth and have a small burr that can be felt when fibres are stroked against the grain. This scaly construction gives wool it's characteristic curly appearance and the tendency to felt together

under hot and damp conditions (Baines 1977). Woolen fabric is usually thicker and heavier and would have been used for more durable outer garments such as jackets or coats. Some of the fabric had a wooly appearance, especially along raw edges. However, on examination through a microscope it was not possible to determine a difference between wool fibres or cotton fibres in various samples, including the tartan fabric, which would most likely be woolen. It was decided that all the fabric, except for three samples, would be described as cotton. This may indicate either a greater availability of cotton textiles through trade or a preference for lightweight cotton, possibly due to climate (Davison & Harries 1980). However, post-depositional forces, such as rodent damage, may have played a part in which fabrics were preserved.

5.4 Rodent Experiment

Many of the fabric pieces excavated from Historic Cave displayed holes and damage along edges, as in Figure 5.5. The Area Dg1 contained a thick layer of rodent droppings that indicated the presence of rodents within the cave (Esterhuysen 2010). An experiment was conducted to determine the kind of damage rodents could cause to fabric. Woolen and cotton fabric were obtained, to match the excavated fabric as closely as possible.

A burn test was conducted to ascertain the wool content of the wool sample. When wool fabric is burned with a naked flame the edge will burn and curl and since wool is naturally flame retardant the flame will extinguish. The burnt edge crumbles away easily. Burning wool also has a characteristic smell of burnt hair. If the fabric contains any man-made fibres, such as nylon or polyester, then it will smell of burning plastic, the burning edge will bubble, blobs of molten matter may drop off and the burnt edge will form a hard ridge. In addition mixed fibre fabrics are not flame-retardant and will need to be extinguished (Schaffer 1981). One sample showed high wool content and I cut four strips measuring 7 x 25cm. All edge stitching was trimmed off.



Figure 5.5: A piece of damaged cotton fabric from Historic Cave

Evenweave cotton fabric was straightforward to obtain and four squares measuring approx. 20 x 19 cm were cut from an old sheet known to be pure cotton. Worn fabric was preferred to new, as this was closer to the kind of fabric that would have been available at the time of the siege.

Half of the samples, viz. two pieces of cotton fabric and two pieces of woolen fabric, were treated to try and duplicate the state of some of the fabric after the siege. These samples were immersed in chicken stock overnight, then dried. Conditions in the cave following the end of the siege were horrendous and a report by Commandant-General M.W. Pretorius described the thousands of dead and rotting bodies lying around the interior and the terrible stench. It is probable that some textiles would have lain under or nearby some of the victims of the siege. Fabric is naturally absorbent and may have soaked up body fluids from those who had perished there.

All the samples were measured and photographed, then taken to Reptilians Pet outlet in Bryanston. Eight pieces of fabric were prepared, four woolen and four cotton pieces. Two woolen pieces and two cotton pieces had been treated, by being soaked in chicken stock, and two woolen and two cotton pieces were untreated. Two tanks were made available at Reptilians, one 2m x 2m tank with approximately twenty rats, and a second tank 2m x 1m with approximately twenty mice. One treated, and one untreated, cotton sample, one treated and

untreated wool sample were placed in each of the rat and mice tanks. All samples were collected after 24 hours. Fig. 5.6 shows a cotton sample and Fig. 5.7 shows a woolen sample prior to the experiment.

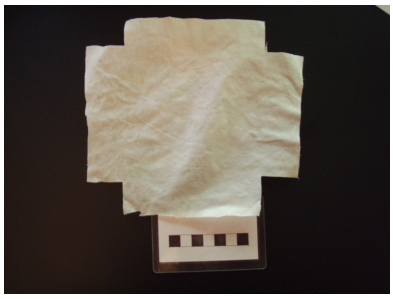


Figure 5.6: Cotton fabric before being put in the rodent tank

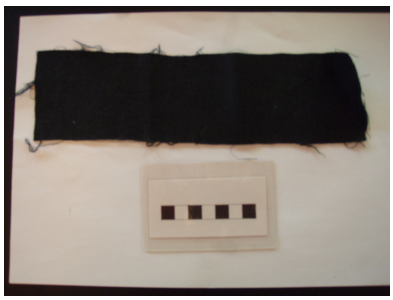


Figure 5.7: Woolen fabric before being placed in the rodent tank

When the samples were collected the next day it was obvious that there was big difference in the amount of damage done to the cloth. The fabric from the rat tanks showed the most dramatic change. In the treated cotton, Fig. 5.8, approximately 50% of this sample was lost and one corner had completely disappeared; it looked similar to fabric from the cave (Fig. 5.5). The untreated cotton sample showed almost no change. Of the woolen sample, the treated woolen piece (Fig. 5.9) had almost completely disappeared leaving less than 10% of fibre, while the untreated piece from the rat tank was slightly chewed.

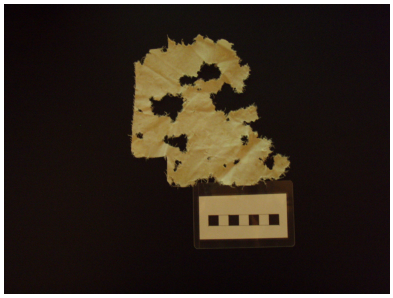


Figure 5.8: Treated cotton fabric after being in the rat tank



Figure 5.9: Treated woolen fabric after being in the rat tank

Fabric from the mouse tank showed hardly any change. Both untreated and treated wool and cotton samples contained very few small chewed holes, indicating that insects rather than mice did damage to some fabric in the cave.

These findings indicated that considerable damage could be credited to rats and the amount of fabric lost this way could be quite high. The treated woolen piece, shown in Figure 5.9, had lost over 90% of its original mass and could explain why such a high percentage of the fabric recovered from the cave was cotton.

5.5 Fabric Shape

Looking at the fabric samples over some time, I realised that they fell into categories based on their shape. Many pieces were simply pieces of fabric with no specific form, some pieces had been cut or torn into narrow strips while others had been knotted, tied or fashioned in some way and may have been

worn on the body. I decided to create three groups and assign the fabric as follows:

- fabric of arbitrary shape (*a*) (19 pieces)
- fabric of specific shape (*s*) (24 pieces)
- fabric fashioned into objects (*f*) (20 pieces)

The fabric designated arbitrary (*a*) was of indeterminate shape when compared to other fabric with a specific shape. Arbitrary pieces were often extremely degraded or were very small fragments that did not appear to have any useful characteristics. The two coprolites were included in this category, along with the singed and carbonised pieces that remained after a fire that occurred either during the siege or at a later time when people visited the cave.

Fabric pieces designated specific (*s*) had been cut or torn into regular shapes mainly squares or strips. Many strips were narrow (up to 6 cm wide), as in Fig. 5.10, and it is hypothesized these may have been used as 'patches' to wrap around lead shot to give a snug fit before being rammed into the barrel of the flintlock by Zipfels (pers. comm. 2009)[13]. Specific fabric would have been preferred for use in flintlocks, however Zipfels speculates that desperate conditions within the cave meant that every available piece of fabric might have been used. This may explain the single piece of corduroy cut into a strip (Fig. 5.2); corduroy is very bulky and would be unlikely as a preferred fabric because the shot would be more likely to get stuck in the barrel.

[13] B. Zipfels belongs to a club that recreates nineteenth century American pioneer life. The group makes garments from both traditionally tanned animal skins and fabric that would have been historically available. They also shoot flintlock weapons using traditional methods and materials.



Figure 5.10: A fabric strip from Dg1 M2 RBL/GM-05, a possible ‘patch’

The third group, fabric that had been fashioned (*f*) included knotted fabric, sewn items, fabric that had been joined or plaited and the cloth bundle. The knotted pieces were very distinctive. One piece of fabric contained a large knot (Dg1 M2 RBL-03) (Fig. 5.11) and five pieces contained small knots (Fig. 5.13). One smaller knotted piece (Fig. 5.12) comprised a *timfisa*, discussed below.

The piece with a large knot from Dg1 M2 RBL (Fig. 5.11) may have been used as a sling or as a tie for a garment. Photographs from the early nineteenth century show Thonga woman wearing a *kapulana,* or cloth, and Chopi women wearing tied cloths and using fabric as slings to tie a baby to their backs. Both groups lived in Portuguese East Africa and had access to cloth via coastal trade routes (Duggan-Cronin 1935). *Minceka*, large flat rectangles of cloth, are still worn as clothing today and are derived from an earlier form (Becker 2000). *Machiras,* described in 1898, are cloths of varying size tied at the shoulder or worn around the waist (Theal 1898). Another piece (Dg1 N2) was not knotted but was much folded and may have been part of a sling or tied garment.



Figure 5.11: Fabric from Dg1 M2 RBL-03 with a large knot

The function of the pieces of fabric with tiny knots tied into the corners (Figure 5.13) is not known but may have been used for ritual purposes; they do not seem to have any utilitarian function.

A *timfisa*, (Fig. 5.12) was recovered from Dg1. The ritual properties of these amulets have been described in Chapter 4.



Figure 5.12: Small piece of knotted fabric (*timfisa*) from Dg1 M1 surface-01

This category included a tapering strip, similar to those allocated to (*s*) above, from Dg1 O2 that had been folded and stitched at one end. Two short, cut strands of fine twine project from the stitched end. The shape of the fabric, a strip, plus evidence of the strings attached to the folded end supports the use of this piece as a patch used with a flintlock. Zipfels described this as a patch that would have been tied to a jacket or bandolier by the strings. The marksman would have torn or cut pieces from the bottom end until the patch 'was exhausted and too short, and then discarded.



Figure 5.13: Fabric from Dg1 N4 surface-18 with a small knot in the corner

Other fashioned items were plain fabric pieces with stitching along one or more edges. These may have originally been bags or from garments with pockets e.g. Dg1 O2 GM-30 (a bag?), Dg4 All surface-45 (a bag?) and Dg2 U9 SS-40 – possibly from a shirtfront. Amongst traditional communities clothing was invested with special powers. Pedi diviners wore special outfits thought to have magical qualities that would help with their work (Mönnig 1978: 87). These pieces were relatively large. They were not suitable for use as bags since the stitching was only along one or two of the edges and not three edges to form a closed pouch. Perhaps they were preparatory patch pieces. These pieces of fabric were also quite worn. Old or used fabric was apparently imbued with a person's essence or *nsila* and was preferred over new material (Junod 1962: 549). These ideas may have been extended into western garments in that they could give exceptional powers to the wearer or even afford some kind of supernatural protection.

Area Dg1 included many items commonly found in a diviner's kit, described previously in Chapter 4. A sangoma would ask for some worn fabric, put thorn needles into it and cast a spell over the owner (Thornton pers. comm. 2009). Thorn needles were used to bounce back evil and many thorn needles were found throughout the site (Esterhuysen pers. comm. 2009). It is tempting to speculate whether this was fabric from the victims of Moorddrift and possibly used in spells.

This section includes a small wristlet formed from two pieces of plain fabric rolled and cross-knotted from Dg1 M2 RBL-04 (Fig. 5.14); three finds of long narrow strips of loosely woven blue plaited fabric from Dg1 O1 GM-21/-22/-23 joined at the ends by twine (Fig. 5.15), and lastly one fabric bundle made of plain fabric tied with twine from Dg5 T19 surface-60 (Fig. 2.7). The wristlet may have been a type of amulet. As mentioned above, many members of the community wore different amulets for protection.

All of the narrow strips of loosely woven blue plaited fabric (Dg1 O1 GM-21/-22/-23 were found in Dg1. They may have had some special significance conveyed by their colour as colour was known to have meaning to different groups in southern Africa (Hammonde-Tooke 1981, Wood 2000, Jolles 2006). Furthermore, cloth contained significance as an item of prestige and a signifier of wealth. Bikwayo ka Noziwawa gave a statement c1850 that amongst the Zulus of Kwa Zulu-Natal only the *isigodlo*, those inhabiting the king's enclosure, or the women of the king's establishment, were allowed to wear blue cloth (Webb & Wright 1976, Vol 1: 63). In addition, societies accrued imported cloth through trading surplus production; this was a marker of stratification in small-scale societies that could support an elite non-working class (Juwayeyi 2008: 113, Du Toit 2009). Within the cave these strips may have been worn either as a visible sign of prestige by elites, or worn under garments as hidden objects with specific qualities. Du Toit (2009) discussed how the use of colour in fabric had specific connotations to some communities extending as far back as the mid nineteenth century when Zulu sangomas shunned European fabric as tainted or unclean.

These strands of blue plaited fabric may also have been used as girdles and tied around the waists of children for two possible purposes. Firstly, as amulets or luck charms for protection against malevolent spirits and, secondly, to show how a thriving child puts on weight, since the more it eats the tighter the girdle becomes. As the child grew, the girdle would tighten and be replaced with a

new, larger one. If the girdle began to hang loosely it showed that the child was not growing (Van Warmelo 1941 part 220).



Figure 5.14: Wristlet of strips of cross-knotted fabric from Dg1 M2 RBL-04



Figure 5.15: Loosely woven blue plaited fabric from Dg1 O1 GM (-22)



Figure 5.16: Plain fabric used to stopper an animal horn, Natal Museum

The small folded and tied bundle of fabric from Dg 5 T19 surface-60, Fig. 2.7, is the same as a fabric bundle found in a divining kit in the ethnographic collection of Museum Africa (79/553, MA 1939-468), (Fig. 2.6). Other fragments of plain of

fabric may have been used to stopper the wide end of animal horns (Fig. 5.16), or as small *muti* bags similar to Fig. 2.4. The use of fabric could be varied and outside the 'accepted' use of fabric as clothing.

5.6 Discussion

Contemporaneous historical reports tell how Trekkers removed various items, such as guns and fabric, from Historic Cave after the Siege of Makapan (De Waal 1978). It is reasonable to assume that over time visitors removed fabric, some rotted away and small mammals, or insects, that foraged there ate quantities fabric. The fragments of European fabric that remained were preserved by the exceptionally dry conditions within the cave.

The scanty textile remains that were uncovered during excavation were typical of the mid-nineteenth century. Plain and patterned fabrics were found in even proportions throughout the cave. Most surprisingly, even though the bulk of the fabric recovered was appropriate for clothing, no complete garments were recovered from any area in the cave. It is conjectured that even though fabric was available, as demonstrated by cloth fragments found there, the lack of garments indicates that European clothing may have been avoided when the cave was stocked prior to the siege for the potential evil that may be invested in the fabric (Du Toit 2009).

Pieces of fabric with large and small knots were found throughout the excavations. Dg4 had the highest ratio of fabric to excavated area, possibly due to the compacted nature of the soil layer or the fact that it was away from the main track of later visitors to the cave. Some fabric showed modification and had possibly been used as ties or wraps, as 'patches' for balls of lead shot, knotted in corners, formed into small knotted balls and one item, from Dg5 near the entrance of the cave, had been formed into a fabric bundle and tied with twine. This item is identical to a bundle from a diviner's kit in Museum Africa.

Although there was no special difference in the distribution of plain or patterned fabrics, almost all the unusual items were recovered from Dg1 at the furthest point within the cave. Dg1 had been 'capped' by a rock fall and was therefore the least disturbed area. It contained European items such as a single piece of white ware porcelain and two fragments of a Dutch Psalm book (Esterhuysen 2008a). This area also contained artifacts that would have been part of a divining kit and other high status goods. These finds, described in Chapter 4, along with attributes such as a decorated floor, wooden fences and a special ledge for valuable items, support the use of this area by an elite group. The fabric from Dg1 also included all the pieces that had been modified to wear around the body, such as a tiny wristlet of plain cross-knotted plain fabric and loosely woven blue plaited fabric strips bound at one end. The loosely woven blue plaited fabric, wristlet and *timfisa* from Dg1 were not garments in the accepted sense of the term – they could not be worn as clothing. These items may be better explained in the context of objects with magic-ritual properties. Protection of the group, through supernatural means, was mandated to the chief and some of the items found in Dg1 were consistent with objects from a divining floor (Mönnig 1978). Fabric was invested with symbolic values and these qualities may have been invoked in the supernatural fight against the Trekkers.

5.7 Conclusion

Even though Dg1 was capped by a rock fall and would be the least disturbed by visitors to the cave, it revealed no complete garments. It is possible that western clothing was deliberately shunned and not taken into the cave in an attempt to avoid attracting potential harm. The use of western cloth was considered by the Zulu of Natal as unclean due to its origin as an alien object. It is possible that the Kekana avoided European garments for this reason.

Although the fabric recovered from Historic Cave was not unusual, the treatment of some of the pieces was unconventional. This demonstrates that fabric may

have been endowed with unseen powers and may have been deliberately modified to bring protective qualities to the wearer. These include the small cross-knotted bracelet in Figure 15.3 and the *timfisa* (Fig. 5.12). Small pieces of fabric with knotted corners (Fig. 5.13) may have served a similar function. In addition, the find of high status items, objects from a divining kit and strips of loosely woven blue plaited fabric were only found in Dg1. This supports the idea of the occupation of this protected back area by an elite group. As an elite, this group would also have had greatest access to the support offered by sangomas in the desperate circumstances within the cave.

Chapter 6: Interpretation

6.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to examine at the archaeological evidence recovered from Historic Cave and to use ideas from historical archaeology, outlined in Chapter 3, to understand its meaning. The location of fabric finds, and their form, can be compared to what is known about the use of fabric from historical data and ethnographic records. This comparison can give insights into how fabric was used by the group who perished there. This section will first look at the excavated deposit, the fabric found there, how fabric may have found its way into the cave and, finally, interpret its use.

It is my assertion that a lack of complete European garments excavated from Historic Cave may indicate that clothing was subject to avoidance and was not taken into the cave prior to the siege. In addition, some fragments of fabric no longer functioned as clothing. They indicate possible use as markers of status or as amulets conferring protection. I intend to demonstrate that fabric had been reinterpreted into an item invested with special or supernatural properties.

6.2 The excavation and fabric found

All the textile remnants recovered from Historic Cave are listed in Appendix 1 and were analysed in Chapter 5. The number of fabric pieces and the squares where they were found is shown in Table 1. A total of 63 pieces were recovered from 38 excavated squares. No complete garments were recovered from any of the excavated sites. In addition, a layer of rubble capped Dg1, effectively sealing

the deposit, and it may be argued that the finds there were the least disturbed and provided a wider range of artefacts in their original position.

The exceptional preservation of organic remains, including fabric, was due to the unusual conditions within the cave. The weather during the 1850s was also exceptionally dry. The dolomitic complex where the cave is sited, the relatively constant temperature and humidity as well as fires lit by visitors all contributed to a microclimate that promoted rapid drying of organic objects.

The bulk of the fabric sample was excavated from the largest excavated area, Dg1, while some squares, located nearest the entrance of the cave, contained no fabric. The interpretation of these remains is problematic for two reasons, first, for having no way of determining how much was originally deposited in the cave and secondly, there is no way to ascertain how much was lost over time. Contemporary reports describe how the Trekker commando of 1854 removed fabric and property belonging to the victims of Moorddrift following the siege. Visitors or researchers coming to the cave may also have removed items (De Waal 1978, Esterhuysen 2010). The amount lost to animal activity is also unknown but an analysis of rodent damage to fabric indicated this might be extensive. The prospect of finding items such as complete garments in Dg1 would be greater, due to the capping. I think a lack of garments of European fabric indicates the avoidance of clothing. Although Trekkers may have removed garments from the cave after the siege, it is my assertion that these items were never taken into the cave prior to the siege.

Dg1 was different from other areas for having qualities associated with elite settlement patterns (Esterhuysen 2008b). These comprise its location at the most protected rear wall of the cave, a special fence which provided privacy and limited access, an elaborately plastered floor and a ledge in the back wall for possessions of ritual significance and valuable items (*Ibid.*: 467). This inference is supported by the find of loosely woven blue plaited fabric (BRC) that can be linked to elite use, this colour was worn by occupants of the chiefs' enclosure and was the preserve of elites (Webb & Wright 2001). The wealth of divinatory

paraphernalia also found in this area indicates the dwelling place of the chief. The chief would have been responsible for the wellbeing of the Kekana and would have received the greatest physical and spiritual protection.

Many fabric pieces were fragmentary and very degraded. However, amongst the recovered pieces there were some unusual finds and the great majority of these came from Dg1. These include three of the five pieces of fabric with small knots, the only *timfisa,* the only three strands of loosely woven blue plaited fabric (BRC) and the only rolled and cross-knotted wristlet. These items did not function as clothing and I propose they were reinterpreted into protective amulets or objects with special properties (Junod 1962, Mönning 1978). I think this greater quantity of unusual finds from Dg1, as well as the attributes of its location and layout, shows that this area was different, and points to the occupation of this area by an elite group.

6.3 The Siege of Makapan

A description of the siege has been covered in Chapter 4, and the fabric excavated from the cave dates to this event (Preller 1918 Vol III: 18, De Waal 1978:114, Esterhuysen *et al* 2009, Esterhuysen 2010). There were many potential sources of cloth available to the Kekana prior to the Siege. Trade via the East Coast link, overland and between various groups could have provided fabric (Wagner 1980: 324, Eldredge 1994: 129, Huffman 2005). We also know that Trekkers, missionaries and travelers brought fabric and other items, either as gifts or for exchange (Schapera 1961, Beck 1989). In addition, fabric was routinely plundered from settlers following attacks by war parties of indigenous groups on homesteads or wagons traveling through the country (Schapera 1951). Different kinds of fabric were therefore available to the Kekana from various sources.

In addition, prior to their attack, the victims of nearby Moorddrift possessed chests of clothing. These found their way into the cave and were recovered by

the Trekkers after the siege (De Waal 1978: 62). Besides chests of cloth, the clothing worn by the Moorddrift victims, along with their body fat, may also have been plundered after the gruesome attack and been taken into the cave.

Clothing would have been worn by the hated Trekkers and may have been invested with their essence or *nsila* (Junod 1962). As a potential source of supernatural harm to the group this clothing may have represented evil objects. It is intriguing to speculate whether finds of pieces of shirtfront from Dg1 were from Moorddrift victims and ritually used in *muti* by a *sangoma*, either to protect the group or bring harm to the Trekkers.

6.4 Interpretation

Fabric, like other scarce or prestige commodities, was often restricted to ruling elites who had greater access to resources and kept these within their inner circle (Juwayeyi 2008). As ruling elites were usually headed up by men, this tended to play out within the heavily gender-based structure of many indigenous groups, such as Tswana, Pedi, Tsonga or Venda, where men dictated use of specific items to women (Van Warmelo 1948, Mönnig 1978, Junod 1978, Comaroff & Comaroff 1991).

One of these items was clothing; in terms of social mores, women were obliged to wear prescribed styles and types of clothing; this was an effective method of reflecting their status within the group (Vogel 1983). Historical records show that Western clothing tended to be more readily adopted by men, while women tended to wear traditional clothing of prepared skins (Lye 1975, Gillow 2003). This could be due to women being more conservative or to restrictions imposed by men. For example, Zulu women could choose to disregard these rules, but found themselves alienated from the group and without economic support from their husbands (Porterfield 1997). It is possible that men restricted the use of Western clothing by women and forbade taking clothes or fabric into the cave.

Chiefs readily wore western pants and jackets, possibly to show either that they were elites or to demonstrate their social and political flexibility in a changing social and political environment (Lye 1975, Loren 2001). Western clothing could function as visual signal to show the status of the wearer, either as an elite those within their group or to show their openness to new people and ideas to outsiders (Thomas 1997: 20). Indigenous groups used clothing to signal alliances or status; it formed a 'social skin' that could be actively manipulated to display changed identities (Harries 1994, Loren 2001). However, within the context of a conflict against the Trekkers the Kekana possibly chose to reassert their traditional persona and reject European clothing.

Western clothing, coveted as rare and novel, was a device used by missionaries to encourage traditional communities to convert to Christianity (Bergh & Bergh 1984, Kirkaldy 2005). The Comaroffs outlined their model of control of southern African communities through Christianity and the mission (Comaroff & Comaroff 1992). The mission aimed to replace traditional social and religious systems with those of the Church and wearing European clothing was a part of this process. However, the take up of Christianity in the northern Transvaal was anaemic to say the least. Clothing and Christianity were often bundled together and a rejection of Christianity often translated into a rejection of clothing (Kirkaldy 2005). In the context of the Siege, where the group may have reaffirmed their traditional identity, the rejection of Christianity may have spilled over into a rejection of European clothing.

To some groups western fabric represented an object that could be tainted by connotations of the unfamiliar and evil (Du Toit 2009). As the ritual leader of the group, and in natural opposition to the Church, the chief was responsible for ensuring the wellbeing of his people and their safety (Mönnig 1978). In this role he may have excluded all alien fabric to reduce the possibility of angering the ancestors and thereby exposing everyone to malignant forces. This leads to the last point, about magical use of fabric.

The presence of a *sangoma* in the cave is supported by the many items of divination paraphernalia recovered primarily from Dg1, including divining dice, calabashes with pigment and fat, and nodules of blue substance (Esterhuysen 2008b: 466). Small pieces of paper from a Bible were also found, possibly indicating the use of specific European items for their presumed magical properties. Bibles were literally interpreted as 'the word of God" and used in a divinatory context (*Ibid.*: 470). Fabric was also known to absorb *nsila* and in this way became transformed into a substance invested with supernatural powers. Along with the amulets, the *timfisa* and small, knotted pieces of fabric, these fabric objects no longer represented clothing. They had been reinterpreted into objects with supernatural properties, possibly used to ward off danger or as constituents of spells, either to bring harm to the Trekkers during the siege or provide protection to the group within the cave.

As a valuable commodity, fabric functioned on many different levels; as a prestige item restricted to elites, a social marker denoting rank and standing within the community and an indicator of political or religious leanings. The archaeological evidence indicates that fabric had been reinterpreted away from its function as garments and may have been invested with special powers. The desperate conditions within the cave may have prompted the rejection of non-traditional garments in an effort to underscore traditional values, and worn fabric - known to absorb essence or *nsila* - could have been incorporated into spells. In these ways fabric was reinterpreted into substances possessing supernatural or magical properties.

6.5 Conclusion

The use of fabric was complex. To understand fabric use, I examined historical documents, ethnographic records and archaeological evidence, and set these against the ideas of historical archaeology. These underscored the futility of seeking a simple approach in the varied social and political environments of

culture contact (Stein 2005). Alien material culture had the potential to be a contested item between communities as they explored changing identities and status (Lightfoot 1995, Leone 1995). Records show that the use of fabric was constantly changing and was subject to regional and local variation. Most relevant to this thesis was how certain items were adopted and reinterpreted into objects with an entirely different significance (Silliman 2005).

The unusual conditions within the cave contributed to the exceptional preservation of organic remains and revealed the largest quantity of nineteenth century fabric preserved to date. Furthermore, the rock fall over Dg1 allowed the best opportunity to retrieve a comparatively complete sample, yet no complete garments were recovered from this area.

I contend that the lack of entire garments indicates rejection of Western clothing by the Kekana Ndebele who abandoned them before retreating into the cave. This may be attributed to the soured relations between the Kekana and the Trekkers and the subsequent rejection of European items. One proviso is that perhaps European clothing was taken into the cave, and, after the siege, Trekkers carefully removed every single item of clothing they could find. This avenue seems unlikely. The Kekana went into a well-stocked cave in the expectation of surviving the assault and did not bring along European clothing even though these items may have been freely available as items of trade or exchange. It may be that clothing was thought be invested with negative properties, or *nsila.* They were unprepared for the vicious attack by the Trekkers, who were well armed and used cannon to blast the cave. The Kekana had not counted on having no access to water. Their efforts to fight off the attack included substances, such as fabric, pieces of paper and thorns, which had been re-contextualised into items with magical properties.

The greatest variety of quantity of unusual finds came from area Dg1. Attributes of its construction and location, such as being located at the most protected area at the back of the cave, incorporating the most elaborate decorated floor, being secluded by special reed fences and having a recessed area with items

associated with a diviner, all indicate its occupation by an elite. Elites would have had greatest access to both prestige items such as those found in Dg1, as well as the greatest protection afforded by the diviner who operated in that area.

From the points discussed above I argue for the reinterpretation of fabric as a magical substance. As an item of European material culture, fabric received special treatment for being rare and therefore valuable. It was a high-status item often restricted to the elite members of a group. In addition, fabric had the ability to absorb a persons' essence, it could be used to make amulets or bundles of *muti*. In this way it ceased to function as clothing and was used as an element with specific, possibly magical, properties.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This thesis is set against the events of the internal frontier of the northern Transvaal during the mid-nineteenth century. This was a time of contested territory and resources; a state of flux. Different groups and individuals operating within this environment used various methods to show alliances with, or distinction from, others. Traditional societies used strategic marriages, military superiority or political alignment either with nascent governments, or between themselves, to secure their position within the shifting social and political landscape. Other players, such as missionaries, traders or travelers used political alignment or gifts to ensure their safety and locality during this volatile time.

The unique find of European fabric from excavations in Historic Cave, dating to the Siege of Makapan in 1854, provided an opportunity to explore its use by the Kekana. Fabric has never been studied before because of its poor preservation in the archaeological record but the unusually dry conditions within the cave revealed sixty-three fragments of imported textiles. The aim of this thesis was to understand fabric use.

It was found that many factors affected fabric in southern Africa. The records provided by traders, travelers, administrators, missionaries were used to illuminate fabric use by local groups. Ethnographic writings showed that social factors influenced the take up and distribution of European clothing and fabric. Physical factors also played a part and affected the availability of cloth through trade routes. Well-developed trade routes on the East coast allowed greater access to fabric along the southeastern coast, where Asian fabric had been incorporated into ‘traditional’ dress long before the nineteenth century. Access to

fabric by inland routes took a little longer, up to the latter nineteenth century, due to scanty road infrastructure. Fabric in these areas was therefore more rare and possibly more valuable. Textiles themselves were a valuable part of the social and ritual fabric of communities and this value translated into their use as currency in barter systems that pre-dated cash economies.

Social factors impacting fabric use include the restriction of access to imported fabric or garments by elites, the mores governing the gifting of clothing by men to their wives and the provision of clothing by missionaries to Christian converts. Some communities identified European fabric with Christianity and rejected both. Others rapidly adopted both clothing and the Church. Further, being "decently attired" came to be identified with "being civilised". Attributes such as colour also affected fabric use, leading to its restriction to certain members of some communities. Cloth also had the potential to absorb the essence of the wearer and in this way represented a substance that could be invested with magical or ritual powers.

These aspects show that European clothing was an easily manipulated element within the social fabric of the northern frontier. Although dress, or nakedness, was a fact of daily life, the use or avoidance of certain items, such as imported cloth or European garments, could be exploited to convey subtle messages of alliance or power. Dress had the potential to be a dynamic method of expressing or signaling identity in the shifting social domain of post-contact/colonial southern Africa.

The excavations of Dg1 in Historic Cave disclosed attributes that were consistent with elite use, such as its location at the most protected part of the cave, an elaborately decorated floor, a special fence and items of European material culture that were not found anywhere else. Divining equipment found there indicated the presence of a *sangoma* who would have afforded this group greater protection against malevolent supernatural forces, further supporting the occupation of this area by elites.

The area Dg 1 had fortuitously been capped by a roof fall and was potentially the least disturbed excavation within the cave. Despite this, no complete garments were revealed. This may support the interpretation that European clothing had been deliberately shunned, either because it represented hated Europeans and Christianity, or because of a desire to propitiate the ancestors and reduce the potential for harm that clothing may have attracted at the time of the siege. However, historical documents mention that Trekkers removed items, including chests containing fabric, from the Cave following the siege. This makes it difficult to estimate the original type or quantities of fabric. In addition an experiment conducted to find out how much damage could be ascribed to rodents showed that rodent damage had a significant impact on the amount and types of fabric remaining in the deposit.

Of the fabric that was excavated, some had been carefully refashioned, such as a tiny, knotted wristlet and loosely woven blue plaited fabric. These items no longer represented conventional garments and it is my argument that these had been reinterpreted into objects invested with special significance, such as amulets or indicators of status. It is possible the wristlet was more visible and the blue plaited fabric could have been concealed under other garments. In this way the visible objects may have readily conveyed a specific meaning to the greater group, and objects that were not visible may have had a message directed towards a small, possibly elite, group.

While contemporary writings from traders, travelers and missionaries often indicated the rapid absorption of European material culture, the findings from Historic Cave tell a different story. No European garments were found, even in the capped area of Dg1, and the fabric recovered from this area had been changed out of all reference to its origin as clothing. This indicates to me that European garments had been rejected as the Kekana sought ways to deal with Trekker incursions. The Kekana reaffirmed their traditional values and enlisted the aid of a *sangoma* to oppose their enemy by any means possible. The notion

that objects could be invested with supernatural qualities is demonstrated by the changed shape of some of the fabric found in this area of the cave.

My conclusion is that fabric was a valuable commodity and was used for various purposes, as outlined above. In Historic Cave, fabric had been reinterpreted into elements with magico-ritual properties, most likely by an elite group who occupied a specific area within the cave. My reasons for this conclusion are that none of the fabric found constituted an entire garment, which indicates avoidance; all the reworked fabric was found within a specific space; and lastly, certain fabric remains had been reinterpreted and reworked away from any function relating to ‘conventional’ garments, subsequently operating either as amulets with magical properties or as indicators of special status.

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