

For the degree of Masters of Science

**THE LATER STONE AGE OCCUPATION AND SEQUENCE OF THE
MAPUNGUBWE LANDSCAPE**

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

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DECLARATION

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

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "tim forssman". The signature is written in a cursive, lowercase style. Below the signature is a horizontal dotted line.

Tim Forssman

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

Thomas Henry Huxley 1863

ABSTRACT

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

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Declaration		ii
Abstract		iv
Acknowledgements		v
Table of Contents		vi
List of Figures		iv
List of Table		x
CHAPTER one	Introduction	1
CHAPTER two	Literature Review	4
	2.1. The Mapungubwe landscape	4
	2.2. Foragers and their changing world	6
	2.2.1. Changing views of southern African foragers	6
	2.2.2. Pre-contact foragers	8
	2.2.3. Early contact: the arrival of farmers	10
	2.2.4. Late contact: the Middle Iron Age	13
	2.3. The forager cultural record of the Mapungubwe landscape	16
	2.3.1. Early pre-contact: 6000 BC to 1220 BC	16
	2.3.2. Late pre-contact: 1220 BC to AD 100	17
	2.3.3. Early contact: AD 100 to AD 900	18
	2.3.4. Zhizo contact: AD 900 to AD 1010	19
	2.3.5. Leopard Kopje contact: AD 1010 to AD 1300	20
	2.3.6. A summary of the forager record	21
	2.4. Open air archaeology	22
	2.4.1. Survey method and surface collection	23
	2.4.2. Chronological control of open air sites	25
	2.4.3. Geographic information systems (GIS)	26
	2.5. Summary	26
CHAPTER three	Method	27
	3.1. Research design	27
	3.2. Research area	27
	3.3. Survey method	29
	3.4. Forager occupation	30
	3.5. Surface analysis	30
	3.2. Mbere Shelter	31
	3.3. Den Staat AB 32	32
	3.4. Data analysis and comparison with the dated sequence	32
CHAPTER four	Analysis	34
	4.1. The Holocene occupation of the Mapungubwe landscape	34
	4.1.1. Survey results	34
	4.1.2. Critical variables and site selection	37
	4.2. Holocene open air site analysis	40

4.2.1.	Lithic artefacts from the grid analysis	42
4.2.1.1.	Raw material	42
4.2.1.2.	Formal tools	42
4.2.1.3.	Formal tool's raw material	45
4.2.2.	Lithic artefacts from the timed analysis	46
4.2.3.	Non-lithic artefacts	47
4.2.3.1.	Beads	47
4.2.3.2.	Ceramics	48
4.2.3.3.	Copper	49
4.2.3.4.	Other artefacts	49
4.2.4.	Comparison of open air assemblages with the dated sequence	50
4.2.4.1.	The geographical setting of open air site clusters	50
4.2.4.2.	Site clusters: raw materials, formal tools and formal tool's raw material	53
4.2.5.	Undated assemblages and the dated sequence	57
4.2.5.1.	Raw material	57
4.2.5.2.	Formal tools	58
4.2.5.3.	Formal tool's raw material	59
4.2.5.4.	Conceptual control	59
4.2.5.5.	Forager and farmer spatial relationship	60
4.2.5.6.	Beads and ceramics	63
4.3.	Analysis of Mbere Shelter and Den Staat AB 32	65
4.3.1.	Mbere Shelter	65
4.3.1.1.	Lithic artefacts	65
4.3.1.2.	Non-lithic artefacts	65
4.3.1.3.	Sequence	65
4.3.2.	Den Staat AB 32	66
4.3.2.1.	Lithic artefacts	66
4.3.2.2.	Non-lithic artefacts	66
4.3.2.3.	Sequence	66
4.3.3.	Mbere Shelter, Den Staat AB 32 and the dated sequence	72
CHAPTER five	Discussion	74
5.1.	Forager camps on the Mapungubwe landscape	74
5.2.	The significance of Holocene surface scatters on the Mapungubwe landscape	76
5.3.	Disparities in the excavated record	81
5.3.1.	Mbere Shelter	81
5.3.1.1.	Comparison with the dated sequence	82
5.3.1.2.	Comparison with open air assemblages	82
5.3.2.	Den Staat AB 32	83
5.3.2.1.	Comparison with the dated sequence	84
5.3.2.2.	Comparison with open air assemblages	85
CHAPTER six	Conclusion and Recommendations	86

CHAPTER seven	References	89
Appendix A		99
Appendix B		103
Appendix C		109
Appendix D		152

LIST OF FIGURES

2.1	The Mapungubwe landscape in northern Limpopo, South Africa	5
3.1	The survey zone	28
3.2	Environmental zones in the survey zone	29
4.1	Identified lithic scatters in the survey zone	35
4.2	Analysed sites and the vegetation map of De Beers Venetia Limpopo Nature Reserve	35
4.3	Surface lithic scatter distribution in the environmental zones	36
4.4	Distribution of analysed sites	37
4.5	Distribution of lithic scatter locations	38
4.6	Distribution of LSA site locations	38
4.7	Terrain ruggedness and non-perennial water courses	39
4.8	Site distribution	40
4.9	Artefacts from the MSA site (no. 144)	41
4.10	CCS and quartz dominated sites	51
4.11	CCS and quartz dominated sites and farmer settlements	52
4.12	Early pre-contact period LSA sites	61
4.13	Late pre-contact period LSA sites and Zhizo settlements	61
4.14	Early contact period LSA sites and Zhizo settlements	62
4.15	Zhizo contact period LSA sites and Zhizo settlements	62
4.16	Leopard Kopje contact period LSA sites and Leopard Kopje settlements	63
4.17	Bead details from Mbere Shelter	68
4.18	Ceramic details from Mbere Shelter	69
4.19	Lithic distribution at Mbere Shelter	70

LIST OF TABLES

4.1	Site distribution	36
4.2	Sites selected intentionally for analysis	41
4.3	Site clusters based on raw material	43
4.4	Diagnostic formal tools	44
4.5	Diagnostic formal tools raw material	45
4.6	All raw material versus formal tool's raw material	46
4.7	Bead provenance	47
4.8	Earthenware provenance	49
4.9	Other artefacts at forager sites	50
4.10	Raw material site clusters	51
4.11	Location and cover of CCS and quartz dominated sites	53
4.12a-c	Open air site clusters: a) CCS, b) quartz and c) multi-component sites	55
4.13	Chronological variable assessment	58
4.14	Formal tools from the timed analysis	59
4.15	Ceramic, bead and lithic time frame relationships	64
4.16	Mbere Shelter analysis	67
4.17	Den Staat AB 32 analysis	71
4.18	Critical variables from Mbere Shelter compared to the dated sequence	72
4.19	Critical variables from Den Staat AB 32 compared to the dated sequence	73