



Prehistory Society of Zimbabwe

Newsletter 141

Editorial

This newsletter is a mixed bag of articles ranging from a preliminary re-interpretation of one of our most important stone-walled sites in the country to a note on a new, but unsurprising find beneath the cold waters of the North Sea. It is rather difficult to find enough Zimbabwe-related articles to fill each issue and I would appreciate hearing from those of you who receive the newsletter with your questions, comments, suggestions - and most importantly - articles!

Some good news is that we will once again be producing an issue of the journal this year - the contents list is below. The diversity of articles is remarkable in light of the sadly limited amount of ongoing research in Zimbabwe. I would like to thank those who have contributed and I would also like to appeal for contributions for next year's issue. We aim to make the journal a reliably regular publication and I think we have done extremely well to keep on producing it at all in the face of the overpowering difficulties of the last decade or so. Since 1999 we have produced six issues, four of those in consecutive years from 2005. This has meant that we have, at last, broken a long-standing tradition in the editorials of each journal, apologies always being offered for the long delay in its appearance. We aim to ensure this always remains the case! We will need help however - in the form of regular contributions as well as expanded finances for production costs. If you know of any person or organisation that could help with either, please contact the editor at hubcapzw@gmail.com

Finally, those with an artistic eye can earn some useful pocket money for doing something they probably enjoy anyway. In a bid to enhance the quality of archaeological photography, *Antiquity* has launched a £500 prize for the best photograph published each year as one of its frontispieces. The Editor would be glad to receive photographs of sites, excavations, features, artefacts or any other subjects that serve to communicate the messages of archaeology. Please send as a TIFF, colour or black and white, landscape or portrait, with a caption describing the subject and the technical details of the photograph, to editor@antiquity.ac.uk

DhloDhlo Cattle Dung Deposits

ROB S. BURRETT

Senior Archaeologist, Natural History Museum, Bulawayo

In the winter 2006 National Museums & Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ) held a field school for its employees at DhloDhlo, sometimes referred to as Dangamombe although it has never been officially renamed (K. Chipunza *pers. comm.*). I was fortunate to attend part of the Field School and took the opportunity to investigate several locations other than those being excavated by the team. One of these was the large enclosure at the front (west) of the Main Platform – marked A in Fig. 1. This has been defined by Huffman (1996) as the dare or public court and I found that most of the archaeologists and ethnographers involved in the excavations as well as local Shona visitors agreed with this assessment.

This space is defined by a long, low stone wall that is decorated on the outside by bands of check and chord decoration as well as lines of darker rock which stand out from the general granite blocks that were used. Most of this wall has now collapsed but three entrances have been identified. The largest is on the north-eastern side adjacent to the Main Platform. It was probably the main entrance. Then there were two smaller doorways on the southern and north-western sides of the enclosure. These are now difficult to locate both due to collapse of the walls and unofficial restoration work that was once carried out by one of the well-meaning, but ill-advised custodians of the site (information given to members of the Prehistory Society of Zimbabwe during a visit to the site in 1997).

Given the apparent absence of cultural remains inside of this enclosure we dug nine shallow shovel tests across it (three north-south rows of three each). These cut to a depth of about 15cm; on the whole they did not go down to bedrock as we had no intension of seriously damaging the deposit. All of these tests showed a dark, ashy humus. However those in the western section of the enclosure, beyond the natural rocky outcrop marked with an arrow in Fig. 2 all revealed an underlying thick, crumbly pinkish-yellow layer. On the east side of the enclosure this deposit was not present and tests were generally shallow reaching bedrock in several instances.

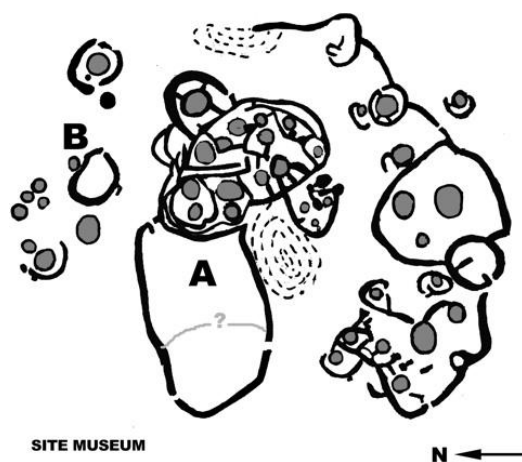


Fig. 1: Map of DhloDhlo

Based on excavation experience elsewhere, I would suggest that the underlying deposit is old cattle dung. It would indicate that at least part of this enclosure was used to hold livestock whose dung accumulated in sufficient quantities to form a considerable deposit over a large area – these deposits are not evidence of transient penning. The livestock was probably herded in through one or both of the smaller western entrances and a wooden fence may have retained them, preventing them from reaching the eastern section of the enclosure.

The presence of this dung would seemingly contradict the interpretation of this enclosure solely as a dare or public court; the two are not one in the same in traditional Shona society. Rather we seem to have had two separate but adjacent functions within the “same” stonewalled enclosure. As archaeologists we need to remember that not everything remains undecayed nor visible at the surface; explanations based sole on present-day surface

reconnaissance are not always correct. Whose cattle these were, and their function at the state capital needs to be further analysed. Could they have been those of the leader, the Mambo or Changamire of the successor Torwa or Rozwi States whose capital this was from approximately AD 1640 to 1830; or were they animals seized as fines in the adjacent dare or evidence of tribute presented to the leader of the state and held here before their redistribution as part of the policy of patronage?



Fig. 2: The dare from the top of the main platform

We also tested the small ruin north of the Main Platform that has previously been described as the cattle byre (Huffman 1996), marked B on Fig. 1. This had a very shallow deposit that was uniformly dark grey; there was no equivalent “dung deposit”. This does not necessarily imply that dung was absent in this enclosure but its deposition and preservation may have been different to that in the large, nearby enclosure. Alternatively it may not actually have functioned as a cattle byre. Microscopic analysis of the soil samples taken from these tests is now necessary to check the conclusions tentatively offered here.

This note suggests that the massive western enclosure of DhloDhlo may have had more than one function and that a barrier, now perished, divided it internally. It also questions the current spatial interpretations of the site as offered by professional archaeologists and custodians. Any real understanding must be informed through archaeological excavations and our definition of chronologies. It is hoped better understanding of the site will be possible once results of the excavations are published in more detail.

Paintings and Petroglyphs in the Bumbusi Ridge Rockshelters, Northwestern Zimbabwe

GARY HAYNES

University of Nevada, Reno

Zimbabwe's thousands of rock-art sites contain almost exclusively polychrome paintings. A very few sites are known with animal-spoor petroglyphs; most are in Hwange National Park. During excavations at the sites in 2008, numerous painted shapes and animal outlines were also discovered alongside the carvings. Also, some spoor carvings had been painted in shades ranging from dark red to a very light grey-blue. Over 400 carvings (spoor and geometric motifs) and more than 40 painted shapes were recorded. The latter category includes geometric designs, curved lines, parallel lines, and dots. The engraved geometric shapes include cupules, asterisks, heart shapes, and “staple” shapes, among others. The painted shapes and line-combinations are sometimes faint but can be found alongside the much more visible carved and pecked images. The carved and pecked petroglyphs are in places densely packed on boulders, slabs, and near-vertical rock faces. The sites containing the petroglyphs also contain stratified deposits of Later Stone Age lithic technology, abundant charcoal, animal and plant remains, and ostrich eggshell beads. Two of the sites have been dated to 2,300 BP, and at least one contains even older dated materials. The sites were occupied during

periods of climatic variability, and the evolution of human economies from hunting-gathering to agropastoralism had its roots in this critical time interval when the engraved spoor and other markings were created.

Officials Thwart King Mswati's Cultural Visit

Summarised from *The Chronicle*, 6 June 2009

A scheduled visit to Old Bulawayo by King Mswati III was cancelled at the last minute after the government reportedly discovered that the cultural village was in a dilapidated state. The Swazi monarch, who was in Zimbabwe on a three-day state visit, had been scheduled to tour the theme park touted as the country's first cultural site. Old Bulawayo was the capital of the Ndebele state and was built by King Lobengula who assumed the throne after the death of his father King Mzilikazi. King Mswati had also been expected to visit King Mzilikazi's grave in a gesture descendants of the Ndebele monarch had hoped would help them strengthen cultural ties with Swaziland. But descendants of the monarch were told by government officials that the trip had been cancelled yesterday morning because of "cultural reasons". Sources said the officials claimed that in Swazi tradition a king was not supposed to visit a grave or view a corpse. However, this was dismissed by King Lobengula's descendants who queried why Mswati was visiting Cecil John Rhodes' grave instead.

Prince Zwidekalanga Khumalo, a descendant of King Lobengula said government would be embarrassed during the tour because the theme park that was officially opened last year by Vice-President Joseph Msika was in "a sorry state". "The King's visit to the Old Bulawayo site was cancelled because there was a feeling that the state of the site would not send the right signals in as far as the preservation of our culture is concerned," Khumalo said. "That place is now dilapidated and its condition is not good at all." He said the cancellation was embarrassing because the government officials who had organised the king's itinerary must have known that the site had been neglected. The bee-hive huts that were reconstructed by the Department of National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ) are said to be caving in because of poor maintenance.

Sacred Zimbabwe Game Park falls prey to vandals, neglect

Summarised from news reports from *AFP*, the *Zimbabwe Independent* and the *Mail & Guardian*, 27 May 2009

Ancient Bushman art peels off rock surfaces and endangered rhinos wander through derelict fences as neglect threatens to rob Zimbabwe's Matopos game park of its world heritage status. Shillah Nyakudzi, wildlife manager of the UNESCO site, cannot suppress her dejection as she points out a gap in the boundary fence between the Matopos National Park and a neighbouring village. "Not only is the boundary fence being stolen, but ancient paintings are not spared either by lack of care and maintenance," Nyakudzi, area manager for the 435 square kilometre (168 square mile) park, said. "Matopos has now become porous as people are stealing the fence which is supposed to provide a boundary."

The mystical Matopos Hills is a revered site where the Shona and Ndebele, Zimbabwe's two main ethnic groups, have long held religious rituals amid imposing ancient granite rock formations. The San Bushmen also found their home among the precariously balancing

boulders and lifelike rock formations weathered by two billion years of erosion, leaving some of the best rock art in Africa. Zimbabwe's famous settler leader Cecil John Rhodes chose the silent grandeur of the park as his final resting place. It is rhino country, home to the endangered black and white rhino, while some 200 rare black eagles make their home in the craggy rock outcrops.

However government neglect due to an ongoing economic and political crisis, community and cattle encroachment, staff shortages, dwindling tourist numbers and a lack of funds have hamstrung the national park. "The rock paintings are fast deteriorating, they are peeling off. There is need to preserve these otherwise we will lose that world heritage status," said Nyakudzi. Bits of fence are stolen for scrap metal, and cattle from neighbouring villages have wandered into the park for grazing. Nyakudzi said some black and white rhinos "strayed 25 kilometres after finding their way out through the broken fence. Last year we lost one black rhino outside the park while two died inside the park because of the fencing problem," the parks manager said.

A new security fence around Matopos -- home to 17 black rhinos and 45 white -- will cost eight million dollars, she says, bemoaning the lack of funding from both UNESCO and other aid organisations. "Although we were listed as a UNESCO heritage site in 2003 there is nothing we are getting from UNESCO," Nyakudzi said. The area, listed as an intensified protection zone, has only 32 game rangers, less than half the number needed. "In a proper environment, a ranger must cover one to 10 kilometres yet right now a ranger is covering 32 kilometres."

The creation of a government of national unity between long-time President Robert Mugabe and his rival Morgan Tsvangirai has instilled hope that the country's wildlife conservation will get some much-needed attention. "Now that things have changed politically, I think that things will improve," said Nyakudzi.

Environment minister Francis Nhema said the government planned to raise money to repair the vandalised fence. "We are trying to address the problem of fencing," Nhema told AFP. "The major problem we have is that locals always want to herd their animals inside the park as they are saying they have run out of grazing land. We just have to raise monies on our own, because organisations like UNESCO are just voluntary organisation; they just provide funds when they have some." He said the shortage was being addressed, adding that government had ordered that people who had abandoned their parks jobs due to low pay be re-employed provided they do not have any criminal record.

Comment from Matobo Conservation Society Newsletter 66, May 2009

The story quoted above has been given wide coverage in the local and regional press. However, the MCS would like to note some corrections –

A – The article paints a dire picture of the Matopos National Park, but much the same can be expressed on any of the Parks in Zimbabwe today. In many areas the Matopos is slightly better off!

B – The rock paintings are contained on surfaces that are subject to natural erosion. Yes, in time they will all disappear as the process continues to its logical conclusion. But this will not be in our life time and is not quite as dramatic as the article above describes it. What can occur in our lifetime and needs to be addressed are fires within rock art sites, destruction of forests at the mouths of caves, unauthorised excavation and the damage inflicted by visitors such as graffiti and scratching. If steps are not taken to protect this heritage then indeed the

Matopos could be listed as endangered – the first step towards losing its World Heritage Status.

C – UNESCO will not contribute to the upkeep of the National Park. Firstly, the National Park is not essential to the World Heritage Status, (the World Heritage Site is approximately 3,000 square kilometres whilst the park is only 435 square kilometres) and secondly, it is very clear in the World Heritage Convention (signed by the Government of Zimbabwe) that the host nation has full responsibility for the upkeep and maintenance of its World Heritage Sites. The condition of the Matopos (National Park and World Heritage Site) is the responsibility of the Government of Zimbabwe.

D – UNESCO would support research and special projects within a World Heritage Site, but not day to day costs. UNESCO is not a voluntary organisation but a part of the United Nations.

E – The management committee of the Matobo Hills World Heritage Site has not been re-appointed following the expiry of its 3 year term of office in 2007, and it has not met in over 2 years. This factor could well threaten the status of this particular site, and UNESCO could place the Matopos on the Endangered Site list. At the same time, Government has taken no action to resolve the ambiguous legal status of the management committee, and noting has been done towards realizing the original management plan.

F – Until the year 2000 the Dept of National Parks treated theft of fencing, and grazing of cattle in the Park as a serious matter. All thefts were investigated and prosecuted. In recent years the approach has not been as vigorous. There may be many reasons for this – but what is needed now is a commitment to uphold the law! Persons who break the law and steal either fencing or grazing from the Matobo National Park should be pursued and prosecuted with vigour if there is to be any hope of retrieving the situation. There is plenty of grazing in the communal areas this year after the good rains we enjoyed, so this is a good opportunity to make an impact.

Sea gives up Neanderthal fossil

PAUL RINCON

BBC News, 15 June 2009

Part of a Neanderthal man's skull has been dredged up from the North Sea, in the first confirmed find of its kind. Scientists in Leiden, in the Netherlands, unveiled the specimen - a fragment from the front of a skull belonging to a young adult male. Analysis of chemical "isotopes" in the 60,000-year-old fossil suggest a carnivorous diet, matching results from other Neanderthal specimens. The North Sea is one of the world's richest areas for mammal fossils. But the remains of ancient humans are scarce; this is the first known specimen to have been recovered from the sea bed anywhere in the world.

Significant areas of the North Sea were, at times, dry land. Criss-crossed by river systems, with wide valleys, lakes and floodplains, these were rich habitats for large herds of ice age mammals such as horse, reindeer, woolly rhino and mammoth. Their fossilised remains are brought ashore in large numbers each year by fishing trawlers and other dredging operations. According to Professor Chris Stringer, from London's Natural History Museum, some fishermen now concentrate on collecting fossils rather than their traditional catch. "There were mammoth fossils collected off the Norfolk and Suffolk coasts 150 years ago, so we've known for some time there was material down there that was of this age, or even older," Professor Stringer, a museum research leader, told BBC News. Indeed, some of the fossil material from the North Sea dates to the Cromerian stage, between 866,000 and 478,000 years

ago. Professor Stringer added: "The key thing for the future is getting this material in a better context. It would be great if we could get the technology one day to go down and search (in the sea floor) where we can obtain the dating, associated materials and other information we would get if we were excavating on land."

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- 2) Solange Macamo Jan Risberg & Anneli Ekblom - The Archaeology of Afro-Portuguese Settlements and Site Formation Processes in the Zambezi Valley Mozambique
- 3) Clapperton Gutu - An Analysis of Pottery from the Site of DhloDhlo, Southwest Central Zimbabwe
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- 6) Gary Haynes, Simon Makuvaza & Teresa Wriston - The Bumbusi Petroglyphs and Paintings in Hwange National Park, Zimbabwe: Preliminary Results of Recording and Rockshelter Excavations

New Publications on Zimbabweanist Archaeology

Huffman, T.N. 2008. Zhizo and Leopard's Kopje: Test Excavations at Simamwe and Mtanye, Zimbabwe. in *Animals and People: Archaeozoological Papers in Honour of Ina Plug*. Badenhorst, S., Mitchell, P. & Driver, J.C. (eds.), 200-214, Oxford: Archaeopress. (BAR International Series 1849).

The 1972 Rhodesian Schools Exploration Society (Matabeleland Branch) Tshibidzini expedition to Doddiburn Ranch recorded several new sites and excavated two. Simamwe yielded pottery typical of Zhizo, while the upper occupation at Mtanye belongs to Mapungubwe. The lower occupation contained Transitional K2 pottery, only recently recognised at K2 and Mapungubwe. A bifid vertebra from the Transitional K2 deposit may have come from an animal with a small neck hump or muscular crest. Bifid vertebrae and clay figurines from other sites suggest that Zebu cattle may well have been present during the Middle Iron Age.

Huffman, T.N. 2009. Mapungubwe and Great Zimbabwe: The origin and spread of social complexity in southern Africa. *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 28: 37-54.

Stratified societies in southern Africa first developed in the Shashe-Limpopo Basin. As is well known, rank-based society at K2 developed into class distinction at Mapungubwe. The transfer of this new social organisation to Great Zimbabwe has received less attention. New research on rainmaking practices suggests that a Mapungubwe dynasty introduced class structures at Great Zimbabwe. Poor climatic conditions at the end of the 13th century undermined sacred leaders at Mapungubwe itself, and while vulnerable, the elite at Great Zimbabwe took over the important gold and ivory trade. Among other things, the new elite used the unique Zimbabwe bird stones to establish their legitimacy.

McGregor, Joann. 2009. *Crossing the Zambezi. The Politics of Landscape on a Central African Frontier*. Oxford: James Currey & Harare: Weaver Press.

This book is a history of claims to the Zambezi, focussed on the stretch of the river extending from the Victoria Falls downstream into Lake Kariba. It is a story of 150 years of conflict over the changing landscape of the river, in which the tension between the Zambezi's 'river people' and more powerful others has been central. By investigating how the claims made today by the people of the Zambezi relate to a longer history of claims and appropriations, the book contributes to a long-standing debates over the relationship between geography, history, landscape and power.

Roberts, R.S. (Ed). 2009. *Journeys Beyond GuBuluwayo to the Gaza, Tonga and Lozi. Letters of the Jesuits' Mission, 1880-1883*. Harare: Weaver Press.

The publication of these letters of Frs Depelchin and Croonenberghs completes the rendition into English of the original two-volume work in French. The first volume was published in late 1979 and the letters therein described their journey from the Eastern Cape to the establishment of a mission house near Lobengula's capital. This second volume continues the story of the Mission from 1880. The letters written by the missionaries chronicle the trials and tribulations they suffered in trying to implement their ambitious plans for the Zambesi Mission. In the end, courage and fortitude were not enough and the book ends on a note of failure after much loss of life. The book was translated by Véronique Wakerley of the University of Zimbabwe and edited and, annotated and introduced by Ray Roberts.

Postal Address: Prehistory Society of Zimbabwe, P.O. Box A 723, Avondale, Harare, Zimbabwe.

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