CERAMIC ANALYSIS

ON MATERIAL FROM THE HAPPYLAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE, HOEDSPRUIT, LIMPOPO PROVINCE

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Table of Content

1. INTRODUCTION

Happyland is an extensive Iron Age site located on the farm Happyland 241 KT approximately 1km from the town of Hoedspruit, Limpopo Province. Cultural remains associated with the Iron Age were found on the floodplains of the Sandspruit River consisting of ceramic fragments, hut debris, granary stands, and a possible cattle kraal (E3). Four test excavations were conducted on the site and two excavations (E2 & E3) yielded rich finds. The large sample of diagnostic ceramics recovered from these excavations was used for analysis.
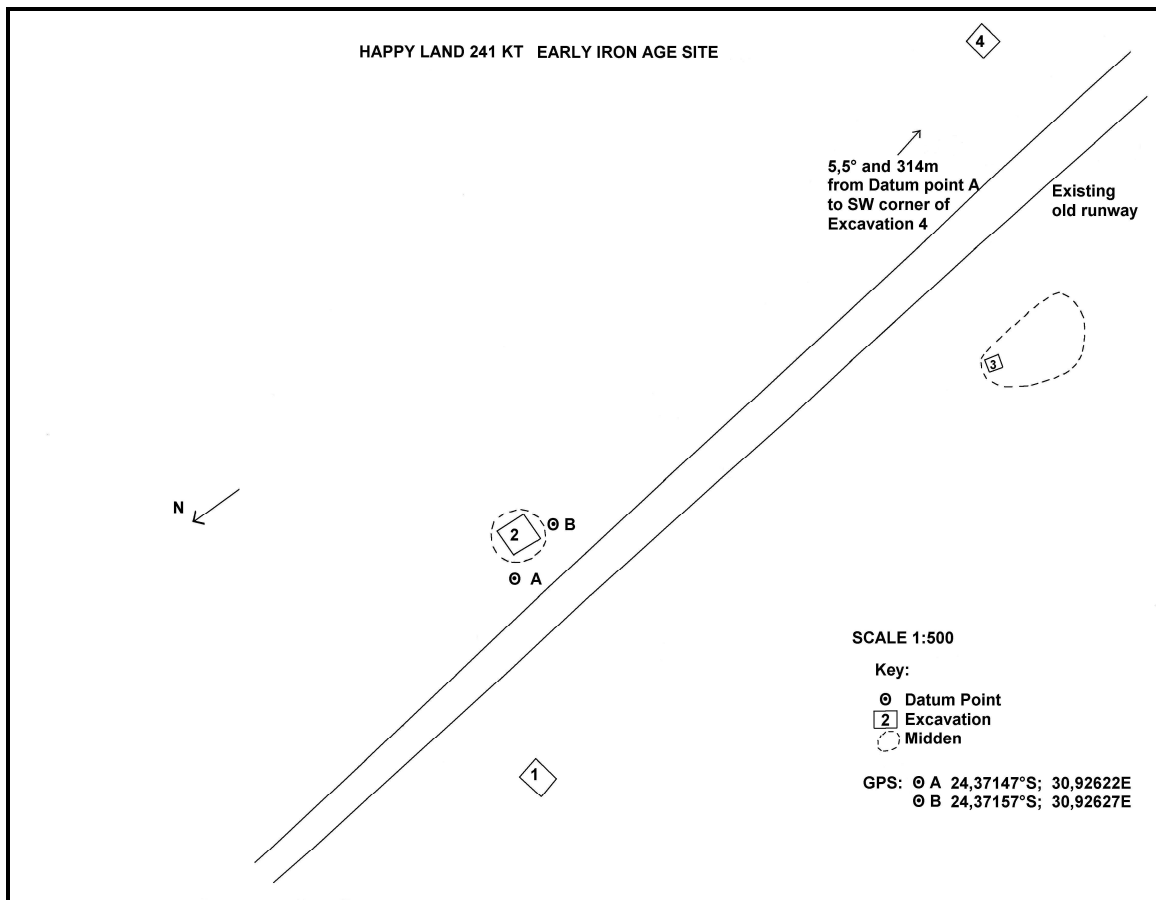

Figure 1: General site plan after Pelser 2008

2. CERAMICS

Bantu-speaking groups can be connected to various Iron Age entities through their material culture. Because material culture incorporates an arbitrary but integrated and repetitive code of cultural symbols, it can reflect group identity. Ceramic style is part of this integrated code, and because of the variability and abundance of ceramics, it is the main artefact category used. As a component of culture, style is learned and possessed within groups of people, and the correlation between design style and specific groups is well known (Huffman 1980, 1989). Because of the variability and abundance of ceramics, it is the main artefact category used to recognise groups in the archaeological record (Huffman 1989; Huffman & Herbert 1994-95).

Ceramics have been used to define Iron Age entities for many years (e.g. Schofield 1948). Ceramic facies also represents linguistic entities, which means that people producing ceramics of related facies must have spoken related languages (Huffman 1980). Therefore different approaches to ceramic analysis can be used to determine different archaeological group identity (Huffman 1980). Ceramic analysis represent the application of specific theory to data, and a formal analysis can be said to have three components: theory – the choice of variables for a specific purpose; procedure – the formation of variables into types; and comparison – the calculation of relationships between samples (Huffman 1980). Shepard (1961) noted that the significance and reliability of ceramic data depend in no small measure on the proper balance of methods and full correlation of results.

With Huffman's 1980 standardized procedure these concerns can be overcome. The reason for a formalized analysis is that the choice of variables in any procedure can be intuitive or standardized. Standardized procedures are superior in that they can be repeated. Standardized procedures can be based on parts or whole vessels.

3. METHOD

Huffman's formalised typology was used for the analysis. His test on modern ceramics demonstrated the reliability of this procedure and it has been widely used by other researchers in southern Africa, e.g. Evers (1998); Loubser (1994); and Moore (1991).

Huffman's analysis uses multidimensional types, focusing on profile, position of decoration and decoration motif. When ceramic style is complex and the producers and users the same, then multidimensional procedures can reveal Iron Age group identities (Huffman 1989).

Few reconstructible examples are present in the Happyland sample especially in excavation 3. Therefore decorated rim fragments sufficiently large to distinguish profiles and complete decorations were used. Since undecorated vessels are not multidimensional types they are not included in this study.

4. RESULTS

The total sample consisted of over 400 diagnostic fragments that produced 10 reconstructible vessels.

4.1 Excavation 2
Analysis was done in three steps:

1. **Profiles** Five profile modes were recognised

   - Pot with an everted rim with multiple bands of decoration on the neck.

   - Pot with an inverted to upright neck with multiple bands of decoration on the lip

   - Pot with an inverted to upright neck with multiple bands of decoration on the neck and upper shoulder

   - Pot with an inverted to upright neck with multiple bands of decoration on the neck

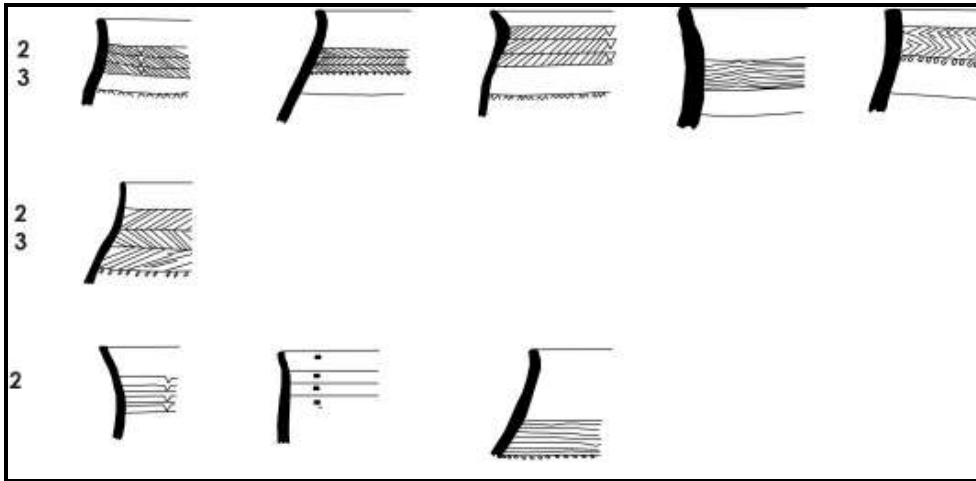- Pot with an inverted neck with a single band of decoration on the upper shoulder

Figure 2: Ceramic classes from excavation 2

2. **Three decoration positions** were identified

- Position1
- Position 1 &2
- Position 2 &3
-

4.2 Excavation 2

The sample is highly fragmented and lacked enough data to conduct a full analysis. For classification purposes the following attributes were identified:

1. **Profiles** Two profile modes were recognised

- Necked jar with an everted rim
- Constricted bowls

2. **Three decoration positions** were identified

- Position1 & 2
- Position 2
- Position 3

5. DISCUSSION

The material recovered from the Happyland site is directly comparable with the results of a ceramic analysis done by Whitelaw (1996) on material from the Lydenburg heads site. Whitelaw identified two distinct stylistic groups, the material from Happyland excavation 2 compares to his Group 2 and Happyland excavation 3 to his Group 1.
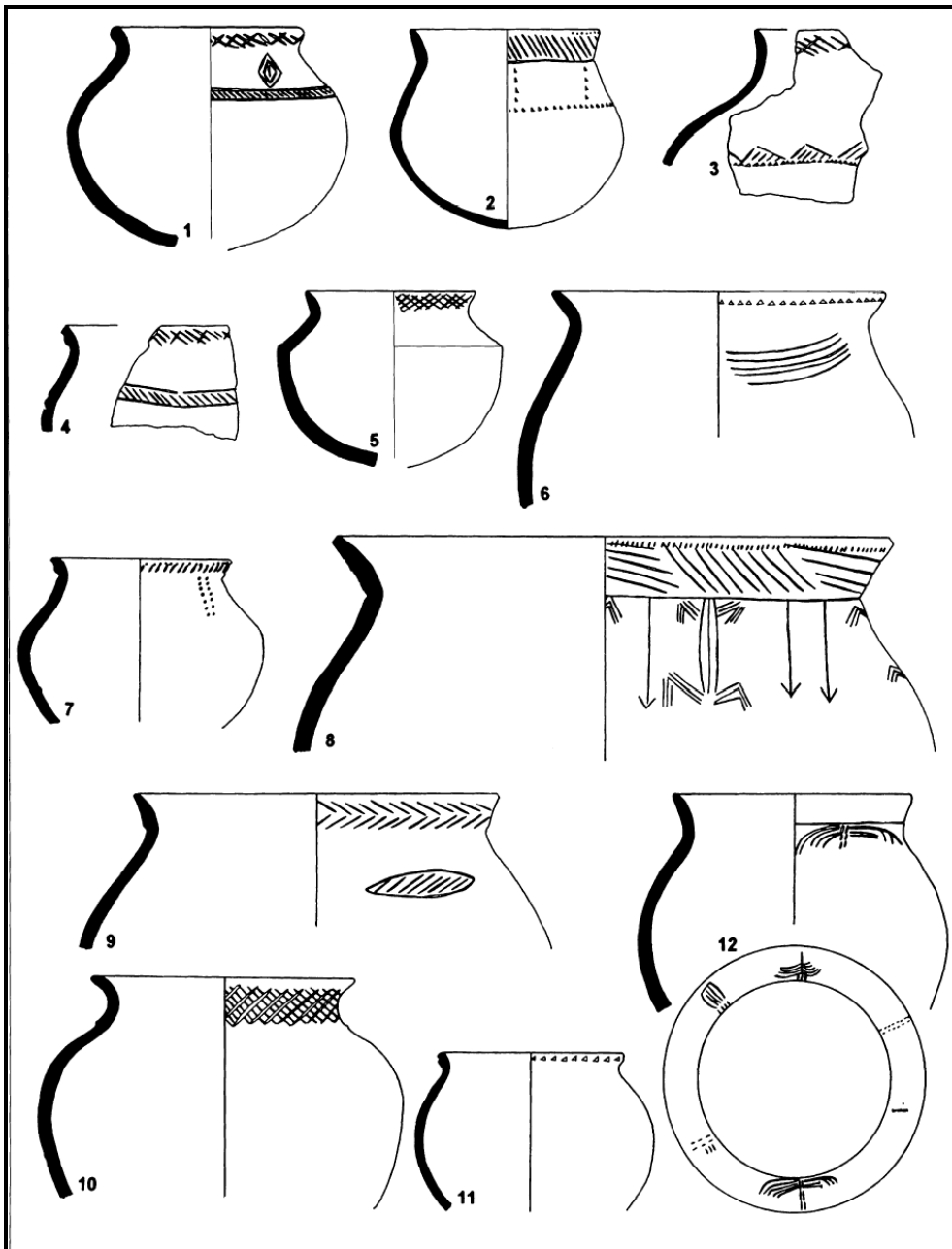

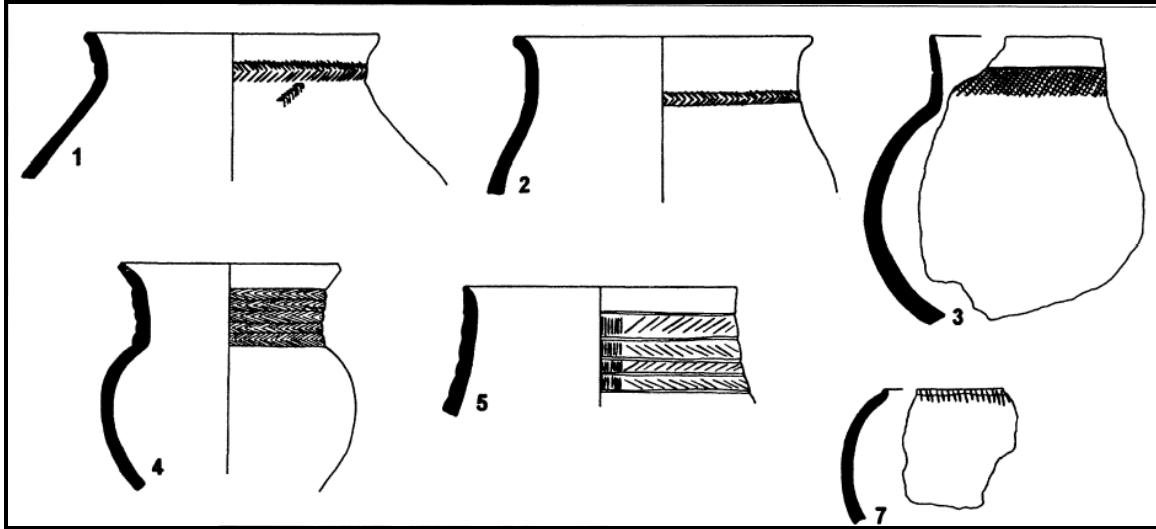**Figure 3: Group 1 ceramics from Lydenburg Heads Site after Whitelaw 1996**

Figure 4: Group 2 ceramics from Lydenburg Heads site after Whitelaw 1996

The ceramic analysis for the Happyland archaeological site established the local culture history sequence of this multi-component site. First was the Group 1 ceramics (Mzonjani Pottery) from Excavation 3 dating to AD 450 and 700. Mzonjani is the second phase, derived from Silver Leaves of the Kwale Branch of the Urewe Tradition. The pottery is characterised by key features like punctates on the rim and spaced motifs on the shoulder of vessels.

The ceramics from excavation 2 belong to Group 2 ceramics (Doornkop Pottery). Doornkop is a facies of the Happy Rest branch of the Kalundu Tradition. This facies is dated elsewhere to between AD 750 and 1000. The pottery is characterised by key features like multiple herringbone bands in the neck. How ever, note worthy from the Happyland site is the use of appliqué on position 2.
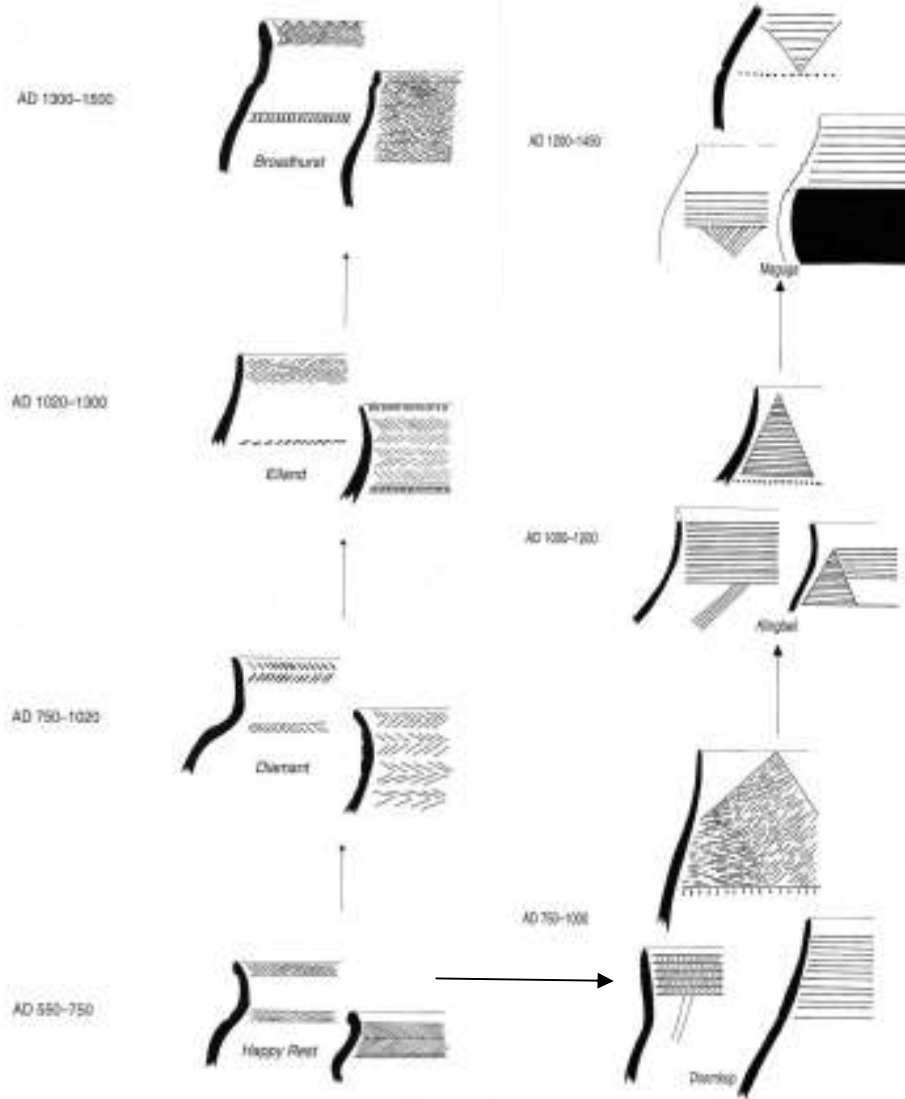
Figure 5 Doornkop Ceramic sequence after Huffman 2007

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