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**An archaeological investigation into the social structure of a stone walled site
in the North West Province, South Africa**

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Introduction

This application is for an excavation and ceramic destruction permit for the stone walled site of Lebenya, near Swartruggens, North West Province. The research conducted at this site is in fulfilment of a Masters of Arts in Archaeology at the University of Pretoria.

There has been ongoing research on stone walled sites in South Africa (Anderson 2009; Booyens 2000, 2003; Mason 1969; Pistorius 1992), with continued developments in how we approach these sites for archaeological investigation (e.g. Fredriksen 2007; Hall 1998; Lane 2004; Sadr & Rodier 2012). The research on the Tswana in this region stretches from Rustenburg to Zeerust, and spans the last 500 years. However, past research has predominantly been focused on so-called mega-sites - large scale stone walled sites up to 3km long (Pistorius 1992:3), which only represent a relatively late phase in Tswana history, from the mid 18th century to early 19th century (Boeyens 2003:70). Small scale sites, on the other hand, have received little or no attention. My research at Lebenya, a small scaled late Tswana stone walled site, is intended to redress such perspectives.

Research at Lebenya will be based on mapping overall spatial data, and the excavation of various areas within the settlement in order to interpret the identity and chronology of the site. Data collected from the survey and excavations at Lebenya will also be compared to other sites in the region for a better understanding of intra-regional contact and relations. Ceramic and spatial analysis will be indispensable to a holistic interpretation of social dynamics and change within this past Tswana society.

Site Description

Lebenya Farm (35J 0462856 7165781)

Lebenya, a farm situated approximately 10km northwest of the town Swartruggens, contains a collection of Stone Wall Structures (SWS) on a hilltop - whether they are contemporaneous or sequential is still to be determined. The farm is situated in the hinterland of very large SWS's, often referred to as mega sites (e.g. Kaditshwene, Marothodi, Molokwane and Olifantspoort). The area immediately surrounding the site has no significant published research on SWS.

The SWS found at Lebenya, are divided into three main clusters, which in all are 600m in length and 300m in width. The layout and style of the walling suggests the site is likely to date from the mid 17th century or later (Boeyens 2003:65). The SWS were mapped using a GPS (Global Positioning Satellite) (bush density did not allow for an accurate GE (Google Earth) image of the site layout), from which a superimposed map was created on GE. The

settlement style, according to the classification of Sadr & Rodier (2012), would belong to Group II, which includes varieties known as Mason's class 6, 7 and 9, as well as Huffman's Molokwane type (1986:1036). The pottery found on site is *Buispoort*, with surface finds suggesting mica inclusions. Throughout the site survey of Lebenya, no surface debris of metal or its production has yet been found.

Project Aims

This research project aims for an integrated spatial and material culture study at Lebenya; whereby, Lebenya is a case study demonstrating the need for further studies on the relatively under-studied Sotho-Tswana small-scale site.

My research aims are:

- To identify which group settled at Lebenya, and where Lebenya fits into the regional chronology of Sotho-Tswana sites.
- To understand how the small scale site compares to the mega-sites in the area, in regards to features and spatial layout.
- To understand further the different sections found at Lebenya, are they contemporaneous homesteads, or do they reflect the diachronic growth of the settlement?

Methodology

Archaeological Survey

A quick interior survey of the site was conducted in January 2012. This was followed by a full and systematic survey of the interior and exterior of the site in July 2012. It was necessary to do a full exterior survey of the site in order to understand the site in its immediate environment, specifically to identify any other archaeological features related to the known site. The interior survey concentrated on identifying demarcated spaces within the site. These spaces were identified by surface material culture, soil changes, and evident features such as stone walls. Soil changes, material culture and features all provide indications to how the space was used by past communities. Following the survey, all stone walling found at and in the surrounding 300m radius of the site was mapped. The identification of demarcated spaces through survey and mapping highlighted possible areas for excavation.

Excavation

The owner of the farm, Jan Coetzee, was the individual who initiated the archaeological research by approaching the University of Pretoria in 2011. He gave permission for the initial survey to be done, and is also willing to allow excavation subject to SAHRA approval. The excavation will be limited, and placed in areas of significance, as revealed through the

surveying and mapping. Areas selected for excavation will consist of a representative sample of in-situ material culture dense areas. These areas will undergo coring, to test the depth of the deposit, in order to better determine excavation areas.

Laboratory Analysis

After the excavation, the material culture that has been excavated and labelled will be transferred to the Archaeology Laboratory at University of Pretoria for assessment and final storage. The material culture analysis will have a specific focus on ceramics, but all material culture collected from excavation at Lebenya will be sorted, analysed, and stored at the University of Pretoria. A selection of the ceramic collection from Lebenya will undergo thin-section petrography. Thin-section petrography is a method used to identify non-plastic inclusions, from which ceramic compositional data can be gathered (Tite 2008:226). Such information can support the identification of exchange and trade relations between different groups in the region (Tite 2008:216). Previous research has been done on the ceramics of the region; Rosenstein (2008) did petrographic analysis on ceramics of late and early Moloko sites in the surrounding area. A comparison of these studies with the analysis done on Lebenya ceramics will broaden our understanding of regional ceramics. A small sample of selected ceramics from the site will undergo destructive analysis, where ceramics are cut into thin-sections. The University of Pretoria has an archaeological ceramics science laboratory, whereby such research can be conducted. Permission is therefore requested to carry out destructive analysis of a small sample of relevant and representative ceramics.

Timeframe

Excavations (depending on allocation of SAHRA permit) will commence from June 2013. Material culture analysis will be done at University of Pretoria from July to September 2013. Following the analysis, all material culture will be stored at University of Pretoria.

Relevant fieldwork experience

I have gained experience through my BA and Honours practicum (Distinction). I additionally have participated in post-graduate fieldwork at Mutamba (under the supervision of Dr Antonites), and at Boekenhoutfontein where I supervised archaeology undergraduates in the field. I have also done CRM fieldwork for Digby Wells, and previously for Archaic. I believe my academic qualifications, in combination with my fieldwork experience, have formed the necessary skills required to successfully complete the proposed research project.

Conclusion

The spatial layout in conjunction with excavation, and combined with historical data, will provide details on the societal structure of Lebenya and its relation to the wider socio-political context of the area. Further, spatial layout will be combined with ceramic analysis to provide a micro-scale of investigation, which will assist in the placement of Lebenya into the regional chronology of Sotho-Tswana sites.

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