

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF A
LATE IRON AGE TSWANA SETTLEMENT ON THE
FARM HOEKFONTEIN 432JQ, ODI 1 DISTRICT,
NORTH WEST PROVINCE**

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SUMMARY

Archaeological investigation of a Late Iron Age Tswana settlement on the farm Hoekfontein 432JQ, Odi 1 District, North West Province.

Excavations on the farm Hoekfontein, north east of Pretoria, has revealed a Late Iron Age site. Analysis of the pottery identifies it as of Tswana origin. A smelting furnace, possibly belonging to a somewhat earlier period, was also found. Some Late White rock paintings was found in a small shelter to the north of the site. Pottery found in the shelter suggests that there is a link between the two sites.

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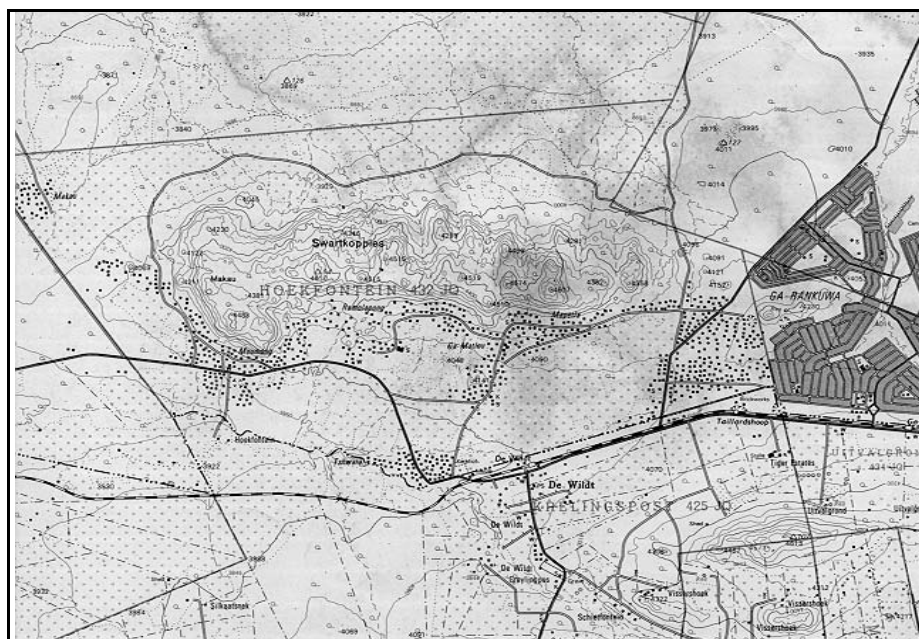
INTRODUCTION

A survey of cultural resources on a portion of the farm Hoekfontein 432JQ, Odi 1 District, North West Province, revealed a number of archaeological features. Apart from Middle Stone Age artifacts found all over, a number of Iron Age archaeological sites were identified as well as a site with some rock paintings (Van Schalkwyk 1998; Smith & Van Schalkwyk 1999).

It is proposed by **Keeley Granite Pty Ltd** to quarry the granite at a specific location in the centre of the mountain range. As some Iron Age features are known to occur here, the National Cultural History Museum was asked to investigate them archaeologically.

THE SITE

The area feature as a small mountain range and have a very broken topography. The site is located on a small plateau on the northern slope of the mountain, roughly at S 25°35'56.4"; E27°56'24.6" (Fig. 1).



The geology is made up of gabbro, hyperite and norite of the Bushveld Igneous Complex. Some syenite, gabbro and diabase dykes occur sporadically in the area. The vegetation of the area is classified as Bankenveld (Acocks 1975:99). This is open savanna with **Acacia caffra** and **Celtis africana** trees dominating. A large variety of grass species occurs. Acocks indicates that intensive cultivation of this type of veld by Iron Age people resulted in **Hyparrhenia hirta** (blougras/steekgras) becoming very dominant in the disturbed areas. The next veld type, Sourish Mixed Bushveld (Acocks 1975:48), occurs just to the north of this and the change-over is sometimes indistinct. This latter veldtype is sometimes found in the Bankenveld on rocky outcrops. It includes **Acacia karroo**, **Acacia caffra** and **Rhus sp** as some of the principle trees, with **Cymbopogon plurinades** and **Themeda trianda** as dominant grasses.

METHOD

Time for the archaeological investigation was very limited as prospecting work was already under way when the team arrived on the site. The effect of this was that some damage was done to a section of the site, limiting our selection of where to excavate. For this reason only a few small test trenches were excavated.

In total five test trenches were excavated. This was done according to natural stratigraphy and arbitrary layers, 10 cm thick.

Refuse dumps

Three test pits were dug into small refuse middens, all located within the large, central enclosure (Fig 2). Two of these were 1,0 x 1,0 m square, with the third 1,0 x 3, 0 m in size. Although a useable number of potsherds and a sufficient amount of charcoal for dating purposes were recovered, no material of significance were found.

Hut debris

A 2 x 3 m test trench was put out over a concentration of hut rubble. Originally this was believed to be the remains of a hut. However, no floor could be found below the rubble and it is thought that this structure might rather have been a granary.

Furnace

Possibly the most interesting feature identified was the remains of an iron smelting furnace. A large concentration of slag was located on the eastern site of the perimeter wall. Excavation revealed the remains of a small, broken down furnace. A number of stones had to be cleared away, below which remains of the furnace wall was found. It is therefore deduced that the furnace was deliberately destroyed. Some charcoal was found in this context and submitted for dating purposes.

Figure 2. Lay-out of the site, showing the location of the different excavations.

THE FINDS

Stone walling

The survey revealed that the site's main spatial features comprised two big circles, with a number of smaller ones associated with it. The walling is, to a large extent, determined by the natural topography of the site. Natural boulders and steep slopes, played a role in the placing of the walls. At present the walls are not higher than 0,5m

As mining is going to take place in the area, and in fact some of the walls were already damaged because of this, all the walls were investigated for the possible occurrence of graves. According to general ethnography, it was the practice to bury persons below the walls, especially the walls of the cattle kraal. No such features were observed. Nor was any indication found that there are any such places where worship currently takes place. Of course, this is only based on a visual inspection and it does not mean that such places do not exist. The latter, however, can only be proved if all the walls are completely excavated.

Pottery

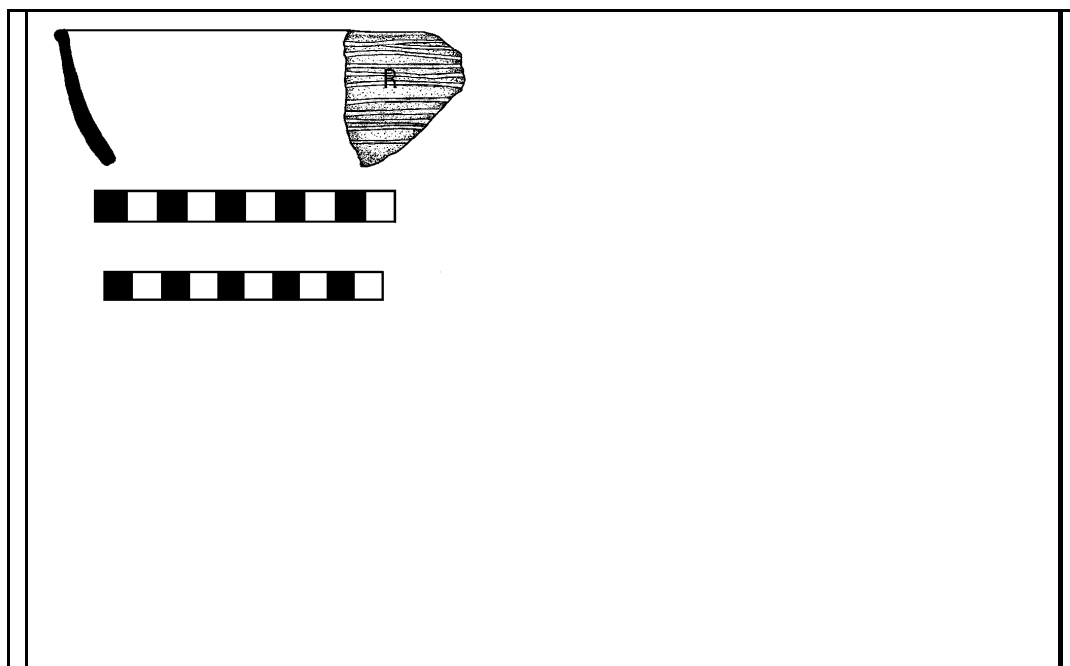
The pottery sample retrieved consists of a number of small and fragmented pieces. Some decorated as well as undecorated pottery was found.

The pottery was analysed according to procedures proposed by Huffman (1980). In it multidimensional types are formed by using three independent variables: vessel profile, decoration layout and decoration. A total number of **117** decorated shards were found during excavations, of which **53** are decorated lip shards. The total number of individual vessels identifiable as either pots or bowls are **33**, of which **24** are pots and **9** bowls. Of the 33 vessels, **17** are decorated (**51.5%** of the vessels).

A wide variety of decorative styles and motifs, as well as combinations thereof were used. These include comb stamping, incisions, wire bangle impressions and punctate. Graphite and red ochre were also used in combination with the incised and stamped decoration. The different types of decoration were mostly used individually, but on one piece comb stamping and incision were used in combination. Comb stamping was the most commonly used, with bangle decoration the least. Decorative motifs include single or wide horizontal bands, diagonal bands and single lines, chevrons, diagonal lines or bands within horizontal borders or vertical lines underlined with a single horizontal line. Most decoration was done just beneath the lip, with one or two on the lip or on the body of the vessel.

The intersection of profile and layout modes produced a possibility of 12 classes, of which 4 are present (Fig. 3):

1. Pot with a slightly everted neck. A band of decoration occurs below the rim (2).
2. Pot with a slightly everted neck. A band of decoration occurs below the rim, with decoration also on the shoulder of the pot (3).
3. Pot without a neck. Decoration occurs below the rim (2).
4. Bowl with a band of decoration below the rim. Sometimes colouring is added to the inside of the vessel (9).



Although it is a very small sample, it is clear from the above analysis that there is a large resemblance to Uitkomst material (Huffman 1998, pers. com.), as well as to the material found by Hall (1985) in the Waterberg. On the basis of this, it is therefore possible to identify the pottery as being of Tswana origin.

One object that might have been the handle of a clay spoon was also recovered.

Metal working

The remains of a small iron smelting furnace/forging were found just outside the perimeter wall of the great enclosure. It is argued by some (eg. Huffman 1990) that iron smelting was surrounded by ritual prohibitions and therefore would not have been located within the settlement. Forges found by Pistorius produced little or no evidence of slag and tuyeres, indicating that it might be forges rather than furnaces (Pistorius & Steyn 1995). From the amount of slag and pieces of tuyeres, the structure at Hoekfontein seems to be a furnace.

Faunal remains

The analysis of identifiable skeletal material from the Hoekfontein archaeological excavations (see Table 1) has revealed that both domesticated and non-domesticated animals were present in the diet of the Iron Age occupants of the site. Non-domesticated species include dassie, kudu and other similar-sized species such as last mentioned. The skeleton of a rodent (rat sp.) is more than likely a later intrusion in one of the middens. A freshwater mussel (*Unio caffer*) shell points to the fact that they also utilised this, probably as source of food. Domesticated species include sheep, goat, cattle and chicken-sized fowl. The remains of a domesticated dog (an incisor) were also

recovered.

SKELETAL PART	SPECIES	AGE/SEX	PROVENANCE
Complete skeleton	Rodent - Rat sp.		2527DB41 Layer 1
Piece of upper maxila and molar	Bov.III(Non-domestic)	Juv.	Ditto
Incisor	Ovis/Capra		Ditto
Incisors x 2	Bos taurus		Ditto
Distal humerus	Procavia capensis(Dassie)		Ditto
Proximal metatarsal	Bov.III(Non-domestic)		Ditto
Metatarsal	Bov.III(Non-domestic) - Possibly kudu		Test Trench 1 Layer 1
Metatarsal	Bov.I		2527DB28/2/1
Upper dp3	Bos taurus		Ditto
dp 4	Tragelaphus strepsiceros (Kudu)	Juv.	Ditto
Upper M2/3	Bos taurus		Ditto
Piece of shell	Unio caffer - Freshwater mussel		2527DB28/5/1
Incisor	Canis familiaris (dog)		2527DB28/5/1
Incisor	Bov.III		Ditto
Lower left mandible with teeth	Ovis aries (sheep)		Ditto
Molars	Ovis aries		Ditto
Accessory carpal	Bov.III - Bos taurus?		Ditto
Tibia tarsus	Medium-sized bird (Chicken?)		Ditto

Table 1. Hoekfontein skeletal material - identifiable species

Rock Art

A panel of rock art was discovered north of the Iron Age site, lower down, the mountain. The full panel consists of a total of fifteen paintings (some now smudged into one another) and six additional splodges and remnants of pigment. The subject matter principally comprises antelope (some certain kudu, the rest of uncertain species), giraffe and two creatures that are probably baboons. The antelope and baboons are executed in white pigment and the giraffe in black. The white and black paintings were executed by daubing. In addition there are a few traces of older red pigment now damaged to the point where subject recognition is impossible.

The technique of pigment application by daubing, together with the consistency and colour of the pigment, along with the general artistic style of the images, identify the paintings as having been made by painters from the Northern Sotho and Tswana rock art tradition. In this area that means more likely Tswana than Northern Sotho painters. Northern Sotho/Tswana rock art is found widely across the Northern Province, spreading into neighbouring parts of Mpumalanga and Botswana. This is only the second site belonging to this painting tradition that has been found in the North-west Province - Gauteng Province area. The other is in the Suikerbosrand Nature Reserve near Heidelberg. Only one of the figures can be made out clearly. The Hoekfontein paintings are by far the best examples of Northern Sotho/Tswana rock art in the region and are thus of great significance. Lying on the border of North-west and Gauteng Provinces, the Hoekfontein site marks the south-westerly extent of this rock art tradition.

In addition to the Tswana art, there are a few traces of red pigment at the site. These are the remnants of older San (Bushman) art, now all but destroyed.

DATING

Charcoal from the various trenches was submitted for dating. Four dates were obtained. One of these falls outside the expected range, possibly due to contamination and is therefore discarded. The results of the other three dates, with the most probable calibrated date indicated between brackets, are as follows:

290 ± 45 BP or AD 1643(1657)1670; 1784-1792 (Pta 7823);
330 ± 35 BP or AD 1497(1638)1657 (Pta 7803);
350 ± 60 BP or AD 1528-1554; 1633(1645)1655;

Sites with similar pottery are found in Rooiberg (Hall's RU-4 member). Here the dates fall into the same range as that for Hoekfontein, i.e AD 1670 for Rooikrans hill-top site 131/78 (Hall 1985:144) and AD 1640 for Renosterkloof valley floor site 101/78 (Hall 1985:179).

CONCLUSION

Geographically speaking, the excavated site on Hoekfontein can form part one of two possible larger cultural complexes. The first of these is what Pistorius calls the Mabyanamatshwaana complex, i.e of Tswana origin, of which the nucleus is located in the vicinity of Brits. The alternative might be that it is the western extremities of the Ndebele settlement in the area, known as KwaMnyamana. The latter is found on the farms Onderstepoort (300JR) and Doornpoort

(195JR) (Pistorius 1995:51).

At first glance, the layout of the site does not conform to the Tswana models excavated by Pistorius. This is possibly due to particular adaptations that were made because of the particular geography of the site. It might also be that it is just a smaller outpost and that the very elaborate and complex stone walling found on larger sites were not necessary.

The pottery, on the other hand, show definite resemblance to Uitkomst material, found further to the west as well as to the north (Huffman 1998, pers. com.; Hall 1985). It might be that it is a Ndebele site and that the pottery was traded from other Tswana settlements.

The conclusion, therefore, is that the sites identified on Hoekfontein, and especially the one that was excavated, form part of the Tswana settlement of the larger geographical area. As such it can probably be linked with other sites not located in the area under consideration, eg. Van Schalkwyk (1994) and Pistorius & Steyn (1995).

What remains to be determined, is the relationship between the people currently inhabiting the larger geographical area, i.e the Bakgatla ba Makau. Is there any claim that they have on the area and its sites? Historical evidence seem to indicate the contrary and that the area was rather inhabited by the Bakwena ba Mogopa (Van Warmelo 1935:map 18). This, however, can only be determined through thorough documentation of local oral tradition, which falls outside the scope of this investigation.

PROJECT TEAM

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