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**ORIGINS OF MAPUNGUWWE PROJECT
PROGRESS REPORT
2002**

A progress report prepared for the ATG, De Beers, SAHRA and SANParks

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I. INTRODUCTION

Mapungubwe is of international interest because it represents the pre-colonial development of an African civilization. As with civilizations elsewhere, the social structure of Mapungubwe was based on class divisions. As with other civilizations, excess wealth from long-distance trade supported the upper class, while intensive agriculture supported and contributed to the population increase that made social differentiation possible.

This was the third year of a research programme designed to investigate the interlocked roles of agriculture and rainmaking in the origins of Mapungubwe. For 2002, the programme involved the survey of the valley floor for Iron Age sites (T.N. Huffman), test excavations of agricultural communities (T.N. Huffman), test excavations of rainmaking sites (M.H. Schoeman, M. Murimbika) and the ethnological investigation of rainmaking practices today (M. Murimbika). Wits Second Year and Honours Archaeological students participated in the programme along with SAHRA officials from the Limpopo Province.

II. SURVEY

In August, the Honours team surveyed G. Hodgson's farm Den Staat. Thick grass restricted visibility, but the team nevertheless recorded 57 sites, representing 62 occupation periods (Figure 1, Table 1): 4 MSA, 6 Zhizo/Leokwe, 14 K2, 10 Mapungubwe, 25 Khami (4 with Icon) and 3 Venda. All sites occurred in cleared patches in the vegetation. Some were buried, and so, we suspect the clearings contain more sites under the grass and sand cover.

We re-examined the large Zhizo complex (2229 AD 27) on Little Muck south of Leokwe Hill. University of Venda Archaeology students helped to make a surface collection from the eroded road. This complex rivals Schroda in size, and we believe it may have been a Zhizo capital after

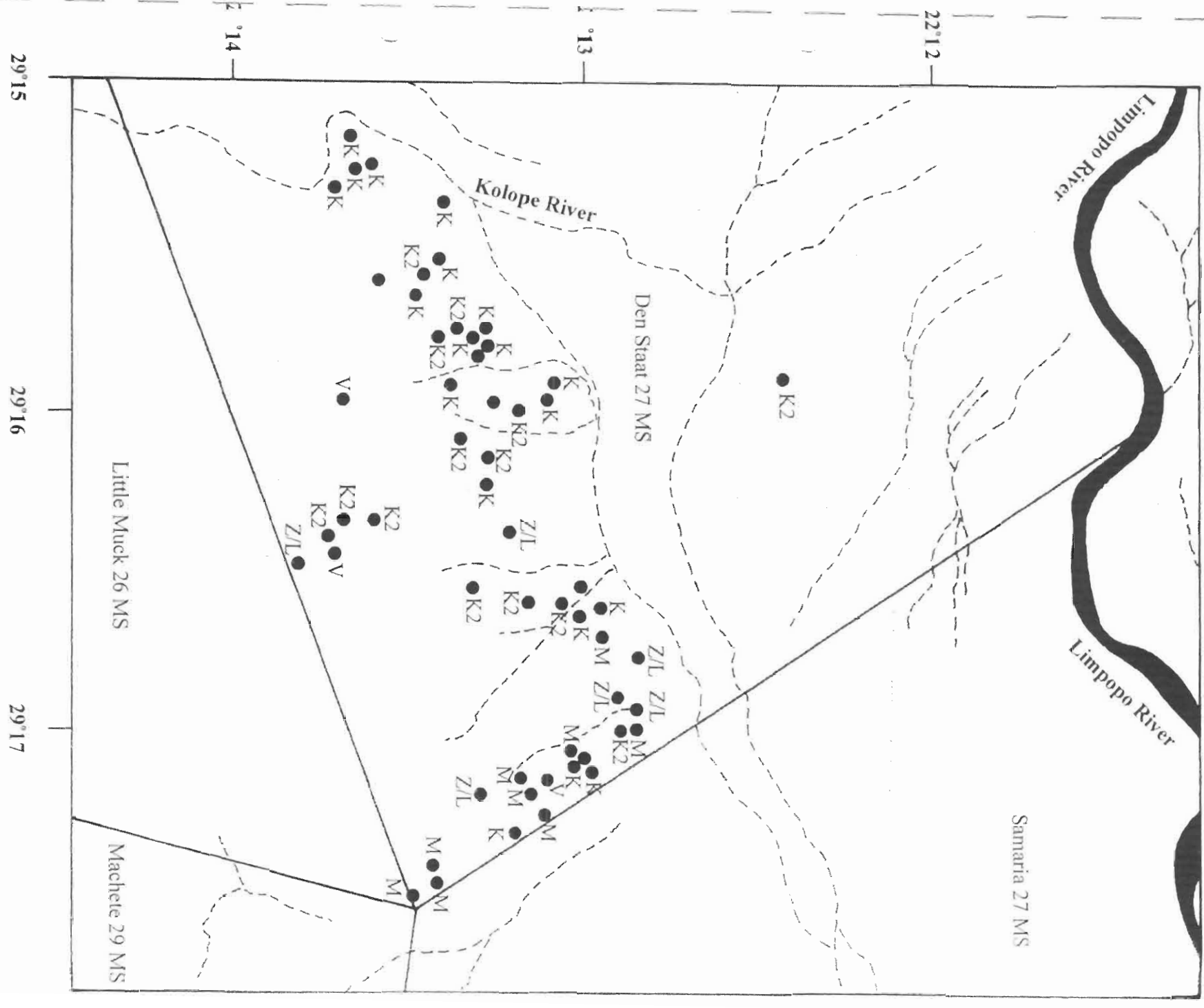


Figure 1. Location of Iron Age sites on Den Staat.

Table 1. Archaeological sites recorded on Den Staat, owned by G. Hodgson

Map No.	Site No	Site Name	Period	Industry/ Culture	Site Type	Co-Ordinates	Recorder	Artifacts	Organic Remains	Structures
	2229 AB 32a	Kharni Complex	IA	Kharni • Icon	Stonewall, level 2	22 13 37.4 29 15 18.2	EOMH		Dung	Daga
	2229 AB 32b	Kharni Complex	IA	Kharni		22 13 37.8 29 15 17.7	TNH, EOMH		Dung	Daga
	2229 AB 32c	Kharni Complex	IA	Kharni • Icon, KZ?		22 13 42 29 15 19.7	TNH, EOMH	Large OES	Dung	gild
	2229 AB 32d	Kharni Complex	IA	Kharni		22 13 37 29 15 0	TNH			
	2229 AB 179a	Venda Hilltop	IA	Venda	Stonewalling, level 3	22 13 11.9 29 16 37.7	EOMH	Historic Glass Beads		
	2229 AB 179b	Venda	IA	Venda	Open Crematoriums area	22 13 42 29 16 30	TNH			
	2229 AB 180a	Bacobab Plateau	IA	Venda	Venda Complex	22 13 37 29 16 00	TNH, EOMH		Dung	
	2229 AB 180b	Bacobab Plateau	IA	Kharni • Icon	Venda Complex	23 13 40.5 29 15 59.9	TNH, EOMH		Dung	
	2229 AB 181	Den Staat	IA	Kharni	Buried	22 13 20.4 29 15 55.4	EOMH		Dung	
	2229 AB 182	Den Staat	IA	KZ • Leekwa		22 13 11.7 29 16 00.5	TNH		Dung	
	2229 AB 183	Den Staat	IA	Kharni, (KZ)		22 13 05.1 29 15 57.8	TNH		Dung	
	2229 AB 184	Castle Rock	IA	KZ	Raised ss	22 12 25 29 15 50	TNH, EOMH		Dung	
	2229 AB 185	Den Staat	IA	Map KZ, Zhizo?		22 12 53.5 29 16 44	EOMH			
	2229 AB 186	Long Hill, north	IA	Kharni		22 13 00.1 29 17 08.8	TNH		Dung	gild
	2229 AB 187	Long Hill, top A	IA	Map		22 13 09.6 29 17 10.6	TNH		Dung	gild
	2229 AB 234	Den Staat	IA	Map	on flat ss outcrop	22 13 25 29 17 29.6	TNH		Dung	
	2229 AB 235	Bacon Hill	IA	Map	Huts above Kanal below	22 13 29 29 17 32.6	TNH		Dung	Huts
	2229 AB 236	Long Hill boundary	IA, MSA	Kharni		22 13 10.5 29 17 19.3	TNH	sp whorl	Dung	
	2229 AB 237	Long Hill	IA	Zhizo/Leekwa	Kanal	22 13 16.4 29 17 12.6	TNH	OES	Ashy?	
	2229 AB 239	Long Hill, top B	IA	Map		22 13 08.6 29 17 11.7	TNH	Dolly holes	Dung	
	2229 AB 240	Long Hill, north side	IA, MSA	Venda		22 13 04.5 29 17 11.3	TNH	Copper?, Slag	Dark patch	gild
	2229 AB 241	Long Hill, northeast	IA	Map		22 13 06.5 29 17 16	TNH		Dung	gild
	2229 AB 242	Long Hill, north	IA	Kharni		22 12 57.4 29 17 07.8	TNH			Circle of gild
	2229 AB 243	Long Hill, north	IA	Kharni?		22 12 59 29 17 06.7	TNH		Dung	
	2229 AB 245	Den Staat	IA	Kharni?, Map, KZ?		22 13 01.6 29 17 05.4	TNH	Shard Beads, Some pale Spherule	Dung	
	2229 AB 246	Den Staat	IA	KZ, Zhizo/Leekwa, Icon?		22 12 51.2 29 17 01.8	TNH	Spotted bowl, collected pots	Ashy patch	
	2229 AB 247	Den Staat	IA	Zhizo/Leekwa	Buried	22 12 49.9 29 16 55.2	TNH		Dung	
	2229 AB 248	Den Staat	IA	Zhizo/Leekwa	Buried	22 12 51.9 29 16 54.4	TNH		Dung	

Table 1. Archaeological sites recorded on Den Staat, owned by G. Hodgson

Map No.	Site No.	Site Name	Period	Industry/ Culture	Site Type	Co-Ordinates	Recorder	Artifacts	Organic Remains	Structures
	2229 AB 249	Den Staat	IA	Zhizol/Leokwe, K2?	Buried	22 12 44.8 29 18 44	TNH		Dung	
	2229 AB 250	Den Staat	IA	Khani, Map?		22 12 54.4 29 16 34.5	TNH		Dung	
	2229 AB 251	Den Staat	IA	Khani • Icon? Map?		22 12 57.1-30 29 16 34.7	TNH		Light patch	qfcl, daga etc
	2229 AB 252	Den Staat	IA	Map		22 12 56.2 29 17 01	TNH	Pottery scatter		
	2229 AB 253	Den Staat	IA	Khani?		22 13 00.2 29 16 32.4	TNH		Light patch	
	2229 AB 254	Den Staat	IA	K2		22 13 02.6 29 16 36.2	TNH			qfcl
	2229 AB 255	Den Staat	IA	K2	Buried	22 13 08.1 29 16 34.8	TNH			
	2229 AB 256	Den Staat	IA	K2		22 13 19.4 29 16 32.8	TNH			
	2229 AB 257	Den Staat	IA	Khani		22 13 03.8-05 29 15 57.6-58.1	TNH		Two dung areas?	
	2229 AB 258	Den Staat	IA	K2?	Buried	22 13 33.7 29 15 36.5	TNH			
	2229 AB 259	Den Staat	IA	Khani	Buried	22 13 27.6 29 15 38.8	TNH		Dung	
	2229 AB 260	Den Staat	IA	K2	Buried	22 13 28.2 29 15 37.1	TNH			
	2229 AB 261	Den Staat	IA	Khani	Buried	22 13 24.2 29 15 37.9	TNH		Dung	
	2229 AB 262	Den Staat	IA	K2, Khani?		22 13 21.2 29 15 45	TNH		Dung	
	2229 AB 263	Den Staat	IA	Khani • Icon	Buried	22 13 18.4 29 15 47.5	TNH		Dung	
	2229 AB 264	Den Staat	IA	Khani		22 13 18.6 29 15 48.5	TNH		Dung	
	2229 AB 265	Den Staat	IA	Khani		22 13 18.3 29 15 45.3	TNH	Pottery only		
	2229 AB 266	Den Staat	IA	K2	Buried	22 13 24.1 29 15 47.6	TNH	Upper qf		
	2229 AB 267	Den Staat	IA, MSA	Khani?	Buried	22 13 16.8 29 15 50.5	TNH		Light patch	
	2229 AB 268	Den Staat	IA	Khani?	Buried	22 13 15.1 29 15 58.7	TNH	Pottery		
	2229 AB 272	Den Staat	IA	K2, Khani? • Icon, Leokwe?	Buried	22 13 20.3 29 16 07	d/I, EOMH		Dung	
	2229 AB 273	Den Staat	IA	K2	Buried	22 13 14.8 29 16 10.3	TNH			Daga
	2229 AB 274	Den Staat	IA	Khani	Buried	22 13 14.7 29 16 14.7	TNH		Dung	
	2229 AB 275	Den Staat	IA	Zhizol/Leokwe		22 13 11-12 29 16 21-23.5	TNH		Light patch	Daga
	2229 AB 276	Den Staat	IA	K2, Map	Mound	22 13 36 29 16 21.5	TNH		Dung	
	2229 AB 277	Den Staat	IA, MSA	K2 • Zhizol/Leokwe, KV		22 13 38.6 29 16 20.6	TNH		Dung	
	2229 AB 278	Den Staat	IA	K2	Barrow pit	22 13 42 29 16 23.2	TNH			
	2229 AB 279	Den Staat	IA	Khani	Buried	22 13 23.6 29 15 23.1	TNH	no artifact	Dung	

Table 1. Archaeological sites recorded on Den Staat, owned by G. Hodgson

Map No.	Site No.	Site Name	Period	Industry/ Culture	Site Type	Co-Ordinates	Recorder	Artefacts	Organic Remains	Structures
2223	AB 263	Road cut	IA	Zweckhoehe	Buried	22 13 49.5 29 16 29.5	TNH		Light patch	
2223	AB 281	Den Staat	IA	Map	on flat ss outcrop	22 13 25.1 29 17 27.1	TNH		Dunes	

Schroda was abandoned but before K2 was established. E.O.M. Haniisch from Venda University intends to work at this important site in the near future.

III. EXCAVATIONS OF AGRICULTURAL SITES

A. Site 2229 AA 14C

In June, the Second Year team extended the excavations at 14C begun the year before, and then the Honours team excavated more areas in July and August. The combined efforts added nine 3x3m squares and sixteen 1 x 3m trenches (Figure 2).

Among other findings the new excavations uncovered a small kraal next to the main cattle kraal. This dung area covered about 7 x 9m. Presumably, this small kraal was for calves. Surprisingly, it contained at least eight storage pits (Figure 3).

Nearby in V/M&N the team uncovered a stone-lined mortar and stone-edged circle (Figure 4). The circle is too high and too small for a fireplace, and it was more likely a pot stand. If we follow the logic of the Central Cattle Pattern, then the location near the two kraals belonged within the domain of men. This location and combination of features suggest this area was probably for processing cannabis into hashish. If so, then the mortar was for pounding the cannabis into a green pulp that was then placed in a calabash that in turn floated in a pot on the stone circle. Embers under the pot produced the necessary kind of heat to yield hashish, to be later smoked. One should remember that Arab/Swahili traders introduced dagga along with glass beads and other items during the Middle Iron Age.

In addition to the mortar and pot stand, the team found the remains of a child (Figure 5 B2), +5 years old, in a sitting posture in a midden. The remains were left in place. Excavations in 2001 revealed the remains of an infant in a beaker (B1) in another midden next to the main cattle kraal. The site has suffered much erosion since its abandonment, and other burials have probably weathered away.

This season's work exposed a few more burnt grain bins and associated storage pits. Two squares yielded nine pits, and another square, 1J, contained a complex series of seven pits dug

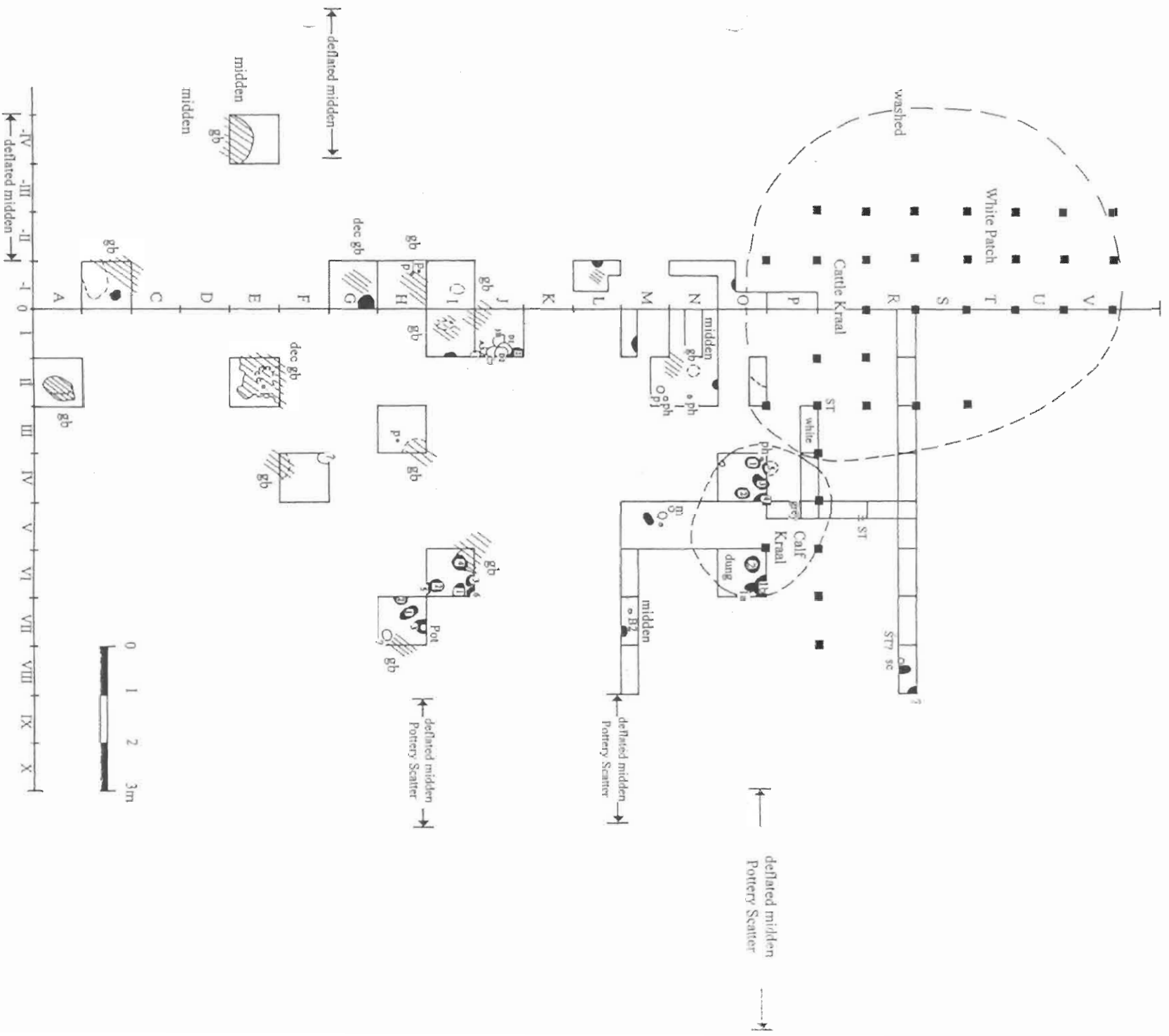


Figure 2. Plan of excavations at 2229 AA 14C.

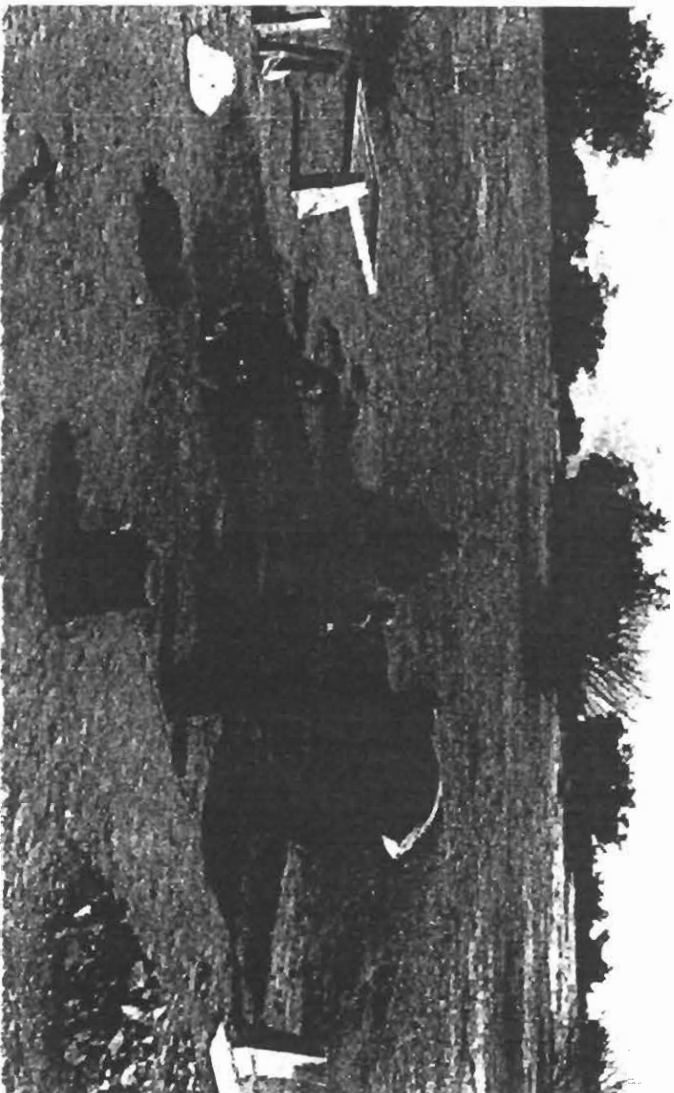


Figure 3. Site 14C: Second Year Archaeology students excavating storage pits in the calf kraal (IV/O).

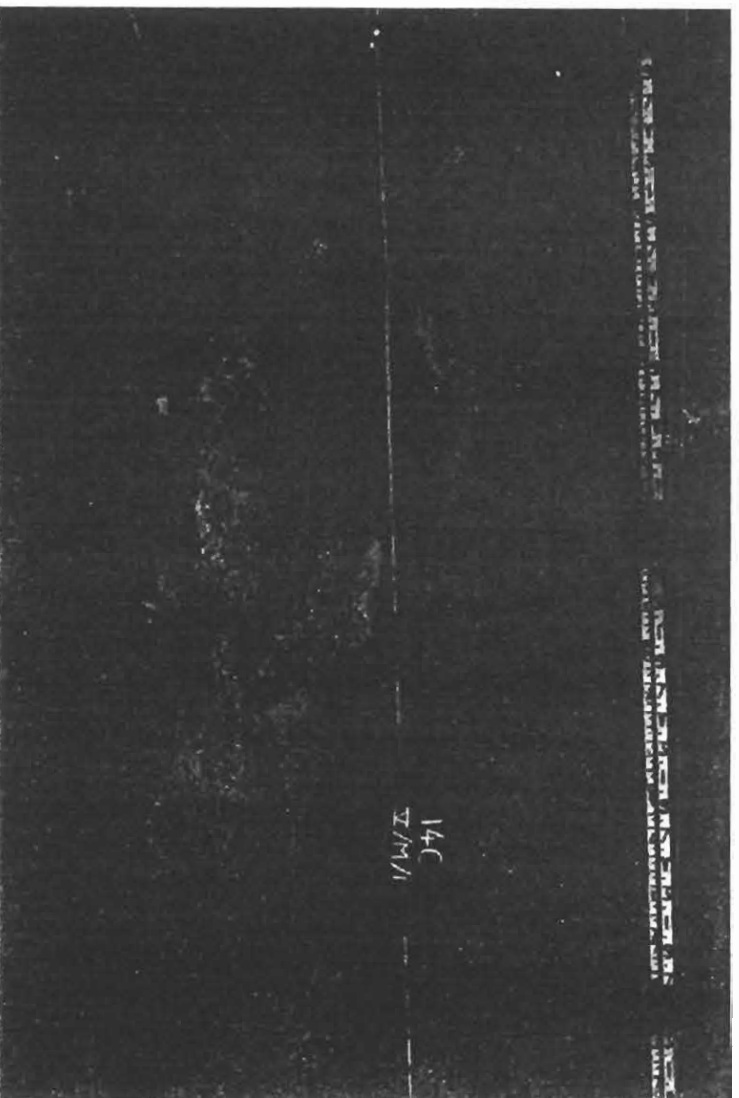


Figure 4. Mortar and pot stand that may have been used to process hashish.

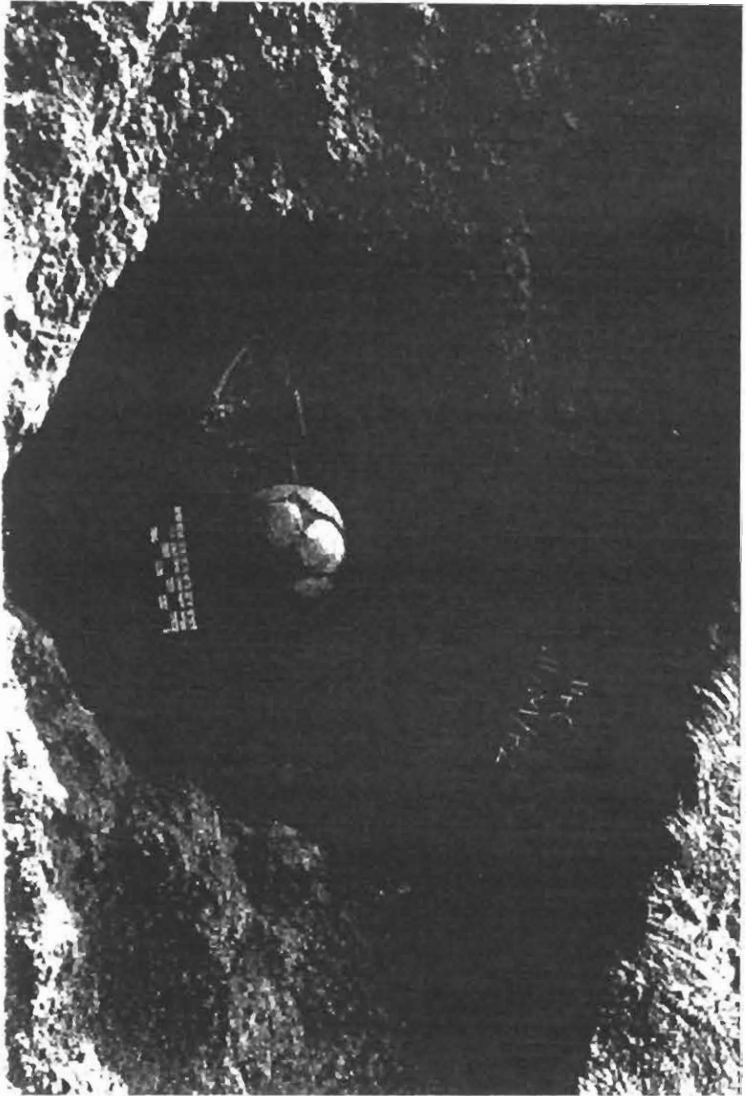


Figure 5. Child burial in a midden.

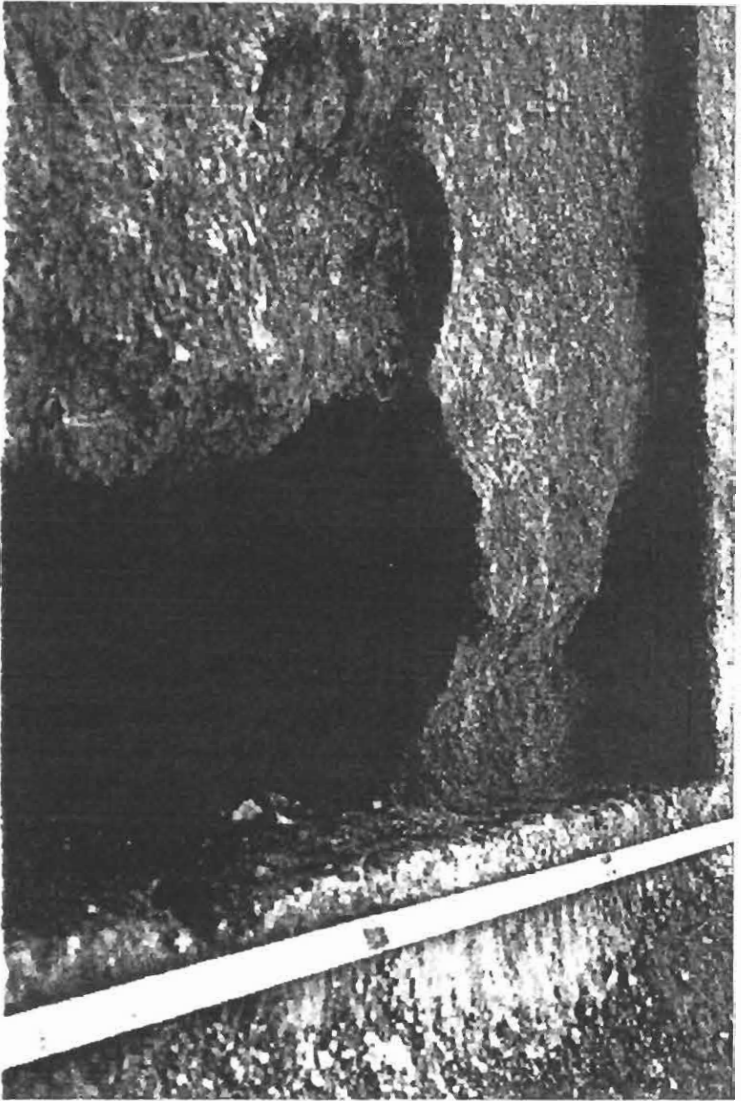


Figure 6. A complex series of seasonal storage pits in I/J.

into each other (Figure 6). According to the ethnography, storage pits such as these near grain bins are used usually only once, and a new one dug each year.

Charcoal from an outer post of a grain bin in -I/H/2 has produced a calibrated radiocarbon date of AD 1035 to 1155 (Pta 8759), while charcoal from a pit in I/M/3 dates to AD 1055 to 1225 (Pta 8771). Unfortunately, greater precision is not possible because of the shape of the calibration curve. At best, the radiocarbon results date Site 14C to the first half of the K2 period.

B. Site 2229 AA 19 (ATEN 99)

We test excavated Site 19 in 2000, but stopped after one season because animal burrowing had severely damaged the central zone. We could only locate one cattle kraal, although we suspected at least one more. With the agreement of SANParks and SAHRA, we therefore accepted G. Hodgson's offer to use his bulldozer to remove some of the overburden. We spent five days on this task in August (Figure 7). The bulldozer exposed two cattle kraals as well as midden deposit and a daga feature.

The remains of a young child, +3 years old, lay in a flexed posture near the daga feature. At least 200 K2 period glass beads had been buried with the child. The remains were badly decomposed and left in place. A tooth was retained for future analysis.

At the end, the bulldozer helped to rehabilitate the site (Figure 8). Soil was put back in the cuttings, and then the blade was dragged at right angles to the cuttings to help level the surface.

IV. THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF RAINMAKING

M.H. Schoeman's part of the programme began in October 2001 and then continued throughout most of 2002. During this time Ms Schoeman test excavated three hilltops that appeared to be rainmaking sites because of three unusual features: (1) steep sides with difficult access for cattle; (2) insufficient space for a normal homestead yet considerable Iron Age deposit; and (3) human-made dolly holes, or cupules, in association with natural cisterns and natural rock pools (Figure 9).

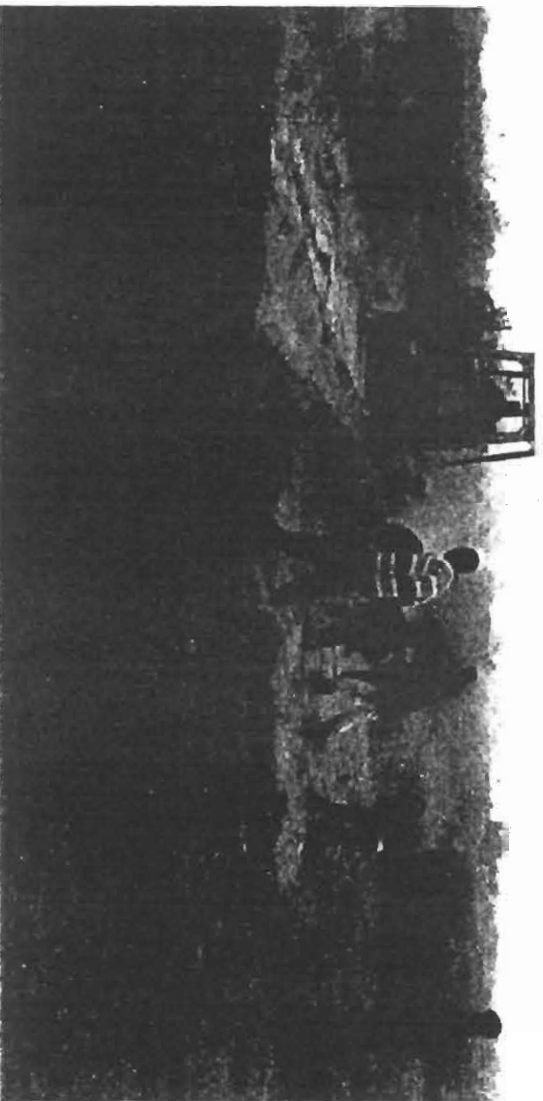


Figure 7. Site 19: the Honours team examining the bulldozer scrapings.

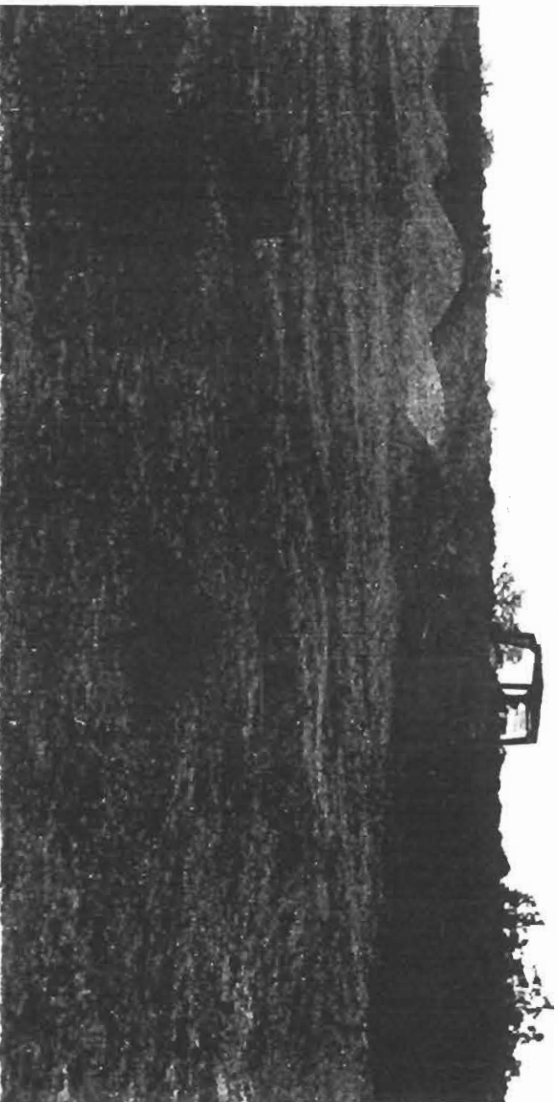


Figure 8. Site 19: rehabilitating the scrapings.



Figure 9. Armenia: natural rock cistern.



Figure 10. Armenia rainmaking site from the south. Note acacia patch in an otherwise mopane veld.

A. Armenia (2229 AC 11)

This site is a flat-topped hill (Figure 10) near the main gate. Venda walling and vegetation anomalies on the south side mark the location of a Venda settlement. In all, the P1 excavated twenty-two 1 x 1m squares and three 1 x 2m trenches on the hilltop. These excavations uncovered a K2 horizon beneath Venda material on the surface. Some low walling probably belongs to the Venda occupation, but a small-stock kraal (Figure 11) and a stone-working lense are older. Chips and chunks of chalcedony and opalines, extracted from calcrete, dominated this lense. Evidently, the chips and chunks were the final product, rather than stone tools in the normal sense.

B. Little Muck (2229 AD 30)

Venda walling also stands on this prominent sandstone kopje (Figure 12). Excavations in a natural stone cistern yielded K2 ceramics as well as bone, beads and two clay figurine fragments. The location of the cistern on a raised rock suggests that the infill was intentional. Equally intriguing, one cupule had been pecked into the rock bottom near a cluster of pecked marks (Figure 13).

Other excavations yielded carbonized sorghum and burnt daga. One trench (XII) contained the base of a partially preserved grain bin on top of Zhizo\Leokwe ceramics. The peculiar chips and chunks were also present.

C. Machete (2229 AD 35)

Similar to the other two hilltops, Venda walling stands on the slopes of this prominent sandstone ridge (Figure 14). A 7 x 7m grid in the saddle (Figure 15) revealed a series of gravel floors interlaced with carbonized sorghum and a sheep\goat kraal. Once again chips and chunks were present.

D. Rhodes Drift (2229 AA 73)

A fourth site (Murimbika is P1) is located on a small but steep sandstone outcrop at the south end of the farm (Figure 16). Because it is some distance from arable land, Venda people did not occupy this spot. Only K2 material is present. The K2 deposit included a goat kraal (identified

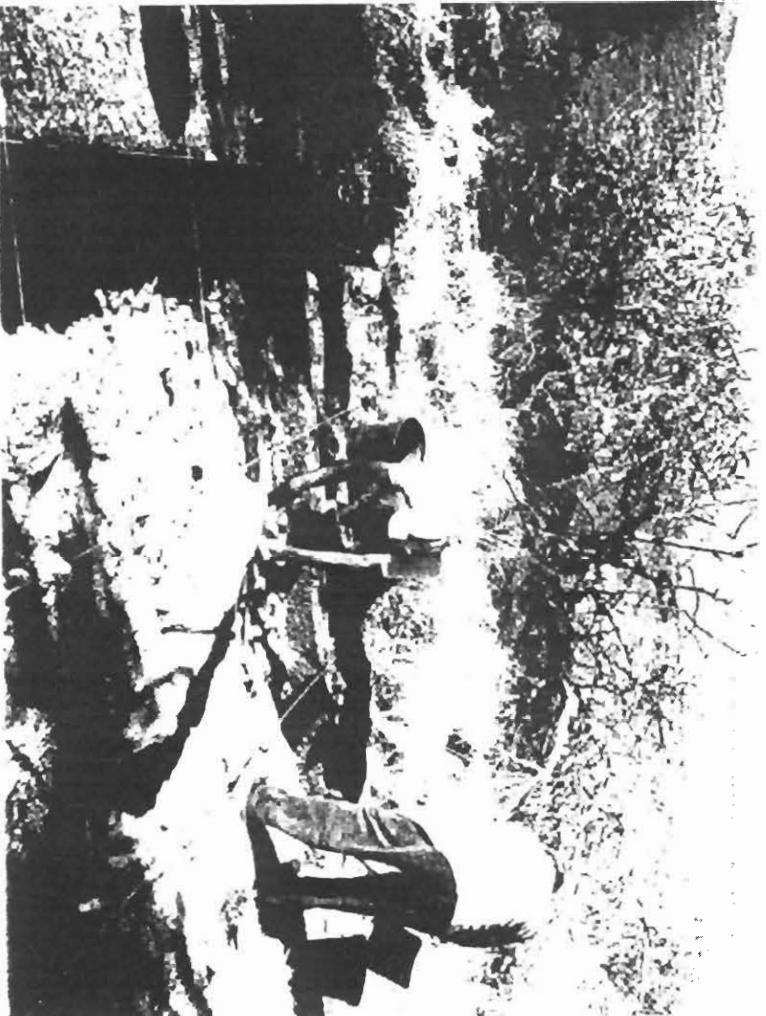


Figure 11. Armenia: excavations in the sheep/ goat kraal.



Figure 12. Little Muck rainmaking site from the southwest.



Figure 13. Little Muck: cupule and pecked cluster in the bottom of a natural cistern.

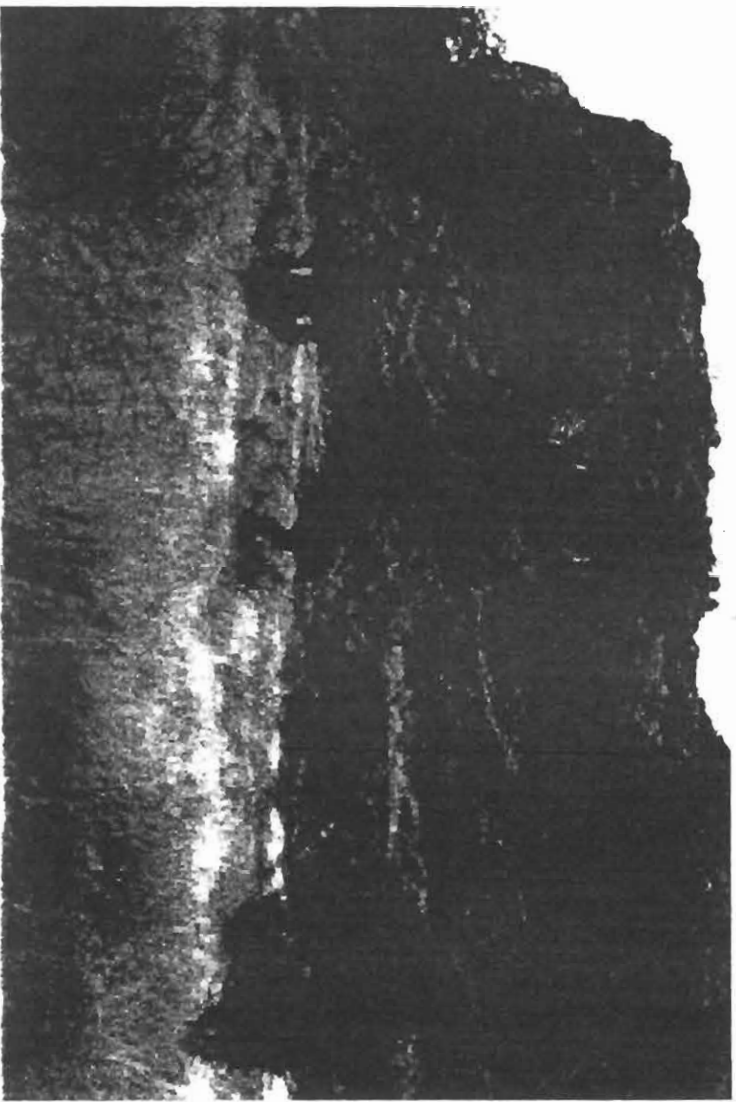


Figure 14. Machete: rainmaking site in saddle of hill. Note Venda walling on northern slopes below the saddle.



Figure 15. Machete: carbonised sorghum resting on gravel floor. Kraal deposit in section to right of figure.

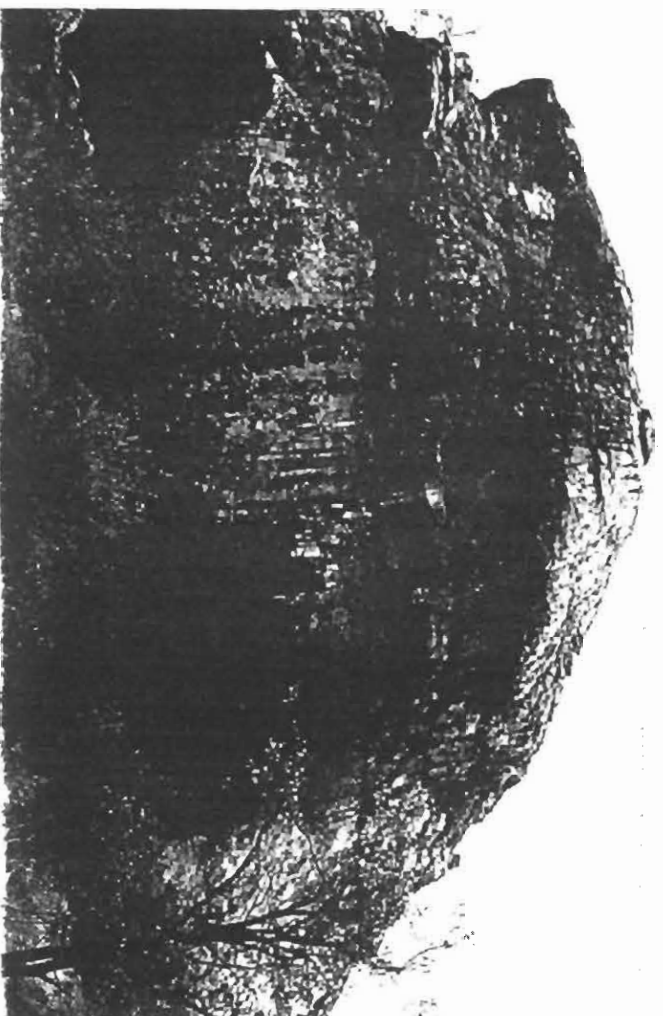


Figure 16. Rhodes Drift rainmaking site.

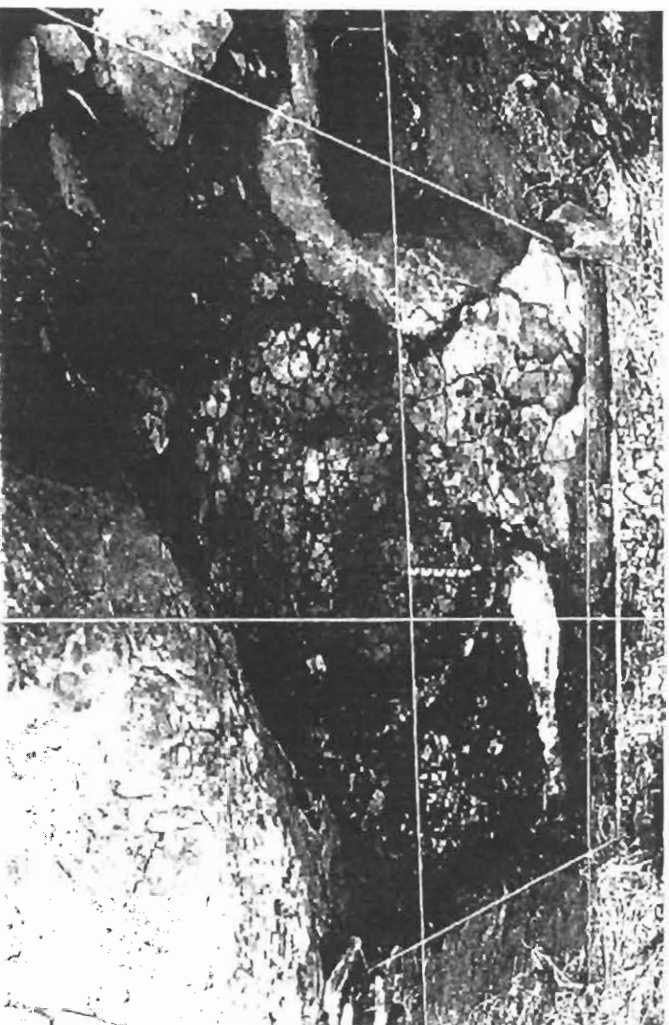


Figure 17. Rhodes Drift: burnt base of grain bin.

by the pellets) and the burnt base of a daga grain bin (Figure 17). An unusually large beaker lay near the bin.

V. THE ETHNOLOGY OF RAINMAKING

Mr. Murimbika interviewed people in northern and eastern Zimbabwe in 2001, and in 2002 he started in Venda. In August and September, he went to the Mutale area with Mr. R. Munyai. They collected information on rainmaking rituals as well as the associated harvest thanksgiving, tributary fields and seed-doctoring ceremonies.

Because traditional knowledge is not for sale, they approached informants in a quest for knowledge as part of a university-based research programme. They spoke to many Venda, but concentrated on nine individuals, including commoners, royalty, a rainmaker, assistants and a chief (Chief Takalani Mukula).

Although rainmaking is no longer widely practiced, it remains one of the most sacred and secretive rituals. Consequently, detailed data are difficult to acquire, and repeated visits are needed. Nevertheless, some principles are clear. First, rainmaking is a cyclical process, rather than a single event. Secondly, chiefs are responsible even though they are not rainmakers themselves. To begin the process, chiefs summon the rainmakers by sending grain for ritual beer and either a sheep or goat. Among other things, the rainmaker must up-grade their rain kraal. This special area (usually behind their homestead) should contain large and small cooking pots, large and small storage pots and other items, such as horns, to store the rain medicine. During the last stage, after the harvest, members of the royal family go to a sacred place at the back of the *musanda* where ritual beer is poured on sacred objects as a means of communicating with royal ancestors. Once the senior chief has completed his ceremonies, lesser chiefs and headmen conduct their own. Thus, in parallel with the rest of Venda society, rainmaking is hierarchical.

VI. FUTURE RESEARCH

The ethnological project will help to yield interpretive frameworks for several aspects of the programme. So far, interviews with Shona and Venda reveal features relevant to the Zimbabwe and post Zimbabwe cultures. Ultimately, principles derived from this ethnology will help to

clarify rainmaking during the Mapungubwe period. For the K2 period, we need more data from societies based on ranking, rather than a class structure.

The archaeology of rainmaking is nearing completion. One other site, on Ratho, requires minor testing. A considerable amount of curation and analyses still remains.

The archaeology of K2 period agricultural communities will continue for at least another season. There are a few features to investigate at 14C and 14B. For example, we need a radiocarbon sample from the decorated grain bin at 14B, and a few squares need to be completed there. Site 14A has not been sampled at all.

Finally, we intend to survey the Vermeulen and Moerdyk portions of Samaria. These two sections will then complete the concentration of agricultural communities around the Limpopo-Kolope floodplains, west of K2. Thus, one half of the floodplain system within the National Park will have been documented.

VII. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank SANParks for their help and cooperation throughout the year. De Beers provides generous financial support for M.H. Schoeman, while the Mellon Postgraduate Mentoring Scheme helps to fund M. Murimbika. We thank the Second Year and Honours classes for their assistance on the excavations. We are grateful to Mr. D. MacWhirter for permission to excavate on Machete and to Mr. G. Hodgson for permission to survey Den Staat as well as his help at Site 19. The archaeological sites were excavated under SAHRA permits No. 80/00/07/002/51; 80/01/08/014/51-015/51-016/51 and 017/51.