

STONE-WALLED SETTLEMENTS AT SUN CITY

A phase –II report prepared for Sun City Maintenance

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SYNOPSIS

The stone-walled homestead chosen for investigation (a portion of Site 2527 AC 11) dates to the *difaqane*, from about 1780 to 1840. Western Sotho-Tswana, such as BaHurutshe and BaKwena, built this and several other homesteads near Sun City.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

METHOD

DESCRIPTION AND INTERPRETATION

CONCLUDING REMARKS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

REFERENCES

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INTRODUCTION

in the North West Province. In the past, one, cultivatable soil, water and protection for regular stone-walls mark many Late Iron Age long to a type simply called Group II (see

a "sunflower": multiple arcs in the outer wall surrounds the core. Sheep and goat and central cattle enclosures, while daga (dung) a bilobial arrangement of households. Houses with sliding doors (see Maggs 1972, 1976, 1993; a type of what is known as the Central Cattle

areas of Gauteng west to Zeerust (Boeyens 1992; Taylor 1979, 1984), and the limit. Some Group II settlements were huge such as Vlakfontein west of Sun City. They are of the Historic period, and were inhabited by the Tshe and BaKwena.

Southern Sotho-Tswana, created similar stone-walled settlements in the Free State. Their pattern is called (1976), after the hill Ntsuanatsatsi, the site. This pattern resembles a "fried egg" from sheep/goat kraals borders the residential area and cattle enclosures.

Like all Sotho-Tswana sites. Archaeologists have identified two facies (Huffman 2002). The Icon Branch Sotho-Tswana, and the Buispoort facies is called Uritkomst pottery associated with Group I. It has been found in the Pilanesberg (e.g. Mason 1999). Western Sotho-Tswana were in the area in the

attempts to make some of the Group II walling structures Management (ARM) was therefore provide an interpretation.

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With Compliments

METHOD

In 2000, ARM staff in conjunction with Mr E. Johnson (Deputy Manager of Maintenance) chose a suitable homestead unit (a portion of Site 2527 AC 11) east of the main Sun City resort. ARM staff then cleared and mapped the walling with the aid of Maintenance labour. Because of its recent date, 19th century ethnography can be directly applied to the Sun City settlement complex.

DESCRIPTION AND INTERPRETATION

The Sun City complex consists of several homesteads on the northern slopes of a hill facing an extensive open area next to the Kwa-Leitlholenoga stream, itself a tributary of the Elands River (25 20 31S 27 06 47E). Among other reasons for the location, the stream and open area provided water and colluvial soils suitable for cultivation with iron hoes. This close proximity to fields is typical of Iron Age settlements through out southern Africa, and it is only in extreme cases when nearby soils have been depleted that women are willing to travel long distances to fields. Even though cattle were important, settlement location was first based on agricultural priorities.

Most settlements face down slope, and cattle were driven in through the front at the bottom. The Sun City site conforms to this pattern (Figure 1). Here cattle would have moved to the left of the kraal to enter at the top.

The cattle were in the center because they were the principal form of wealth and the main avenue to wives and children and therefore to power, success and status. As is well known, men acquired rights over women by exchanging cattle (called *lobola*), and cattle belonged almost exclusively to the domain of men (Kuper 1982). Because cattle were the best sacrifice to ancestor spirits, as well as male property, it was appropriate to bury men and other important people in the cattle kraal. These graves formed a link through the ancestors to the traditional past, and religious ceremonies of a public nature took place here, such as those associated with sowing, first fruits and harvest. Because of these concepts of continuity and community involvement, produce from tribute fields was stored in this area for public use and future crises. The Pedi (Quin 1959: 137), for example, dug grain pits in the cattle kraal for these purposes. Thus, the central cattle area was a focus of male economic and ritual activity.

Because of this male focus, the central cattle area was associated everywhere with the men's court. Throughout southern Africa every settlement from the smallest homestead to the largest capital had a court where men meet to resolve disputes and discuss political matters. The court was below the kraal in some Pedi settlements (Pitje 1950) and in the middle in 19th century Nguni settlements (Schapera 1943). In the Sun City homestead the court was most likely to the right of the kraal where a small terrace wall forms a suitable open space.

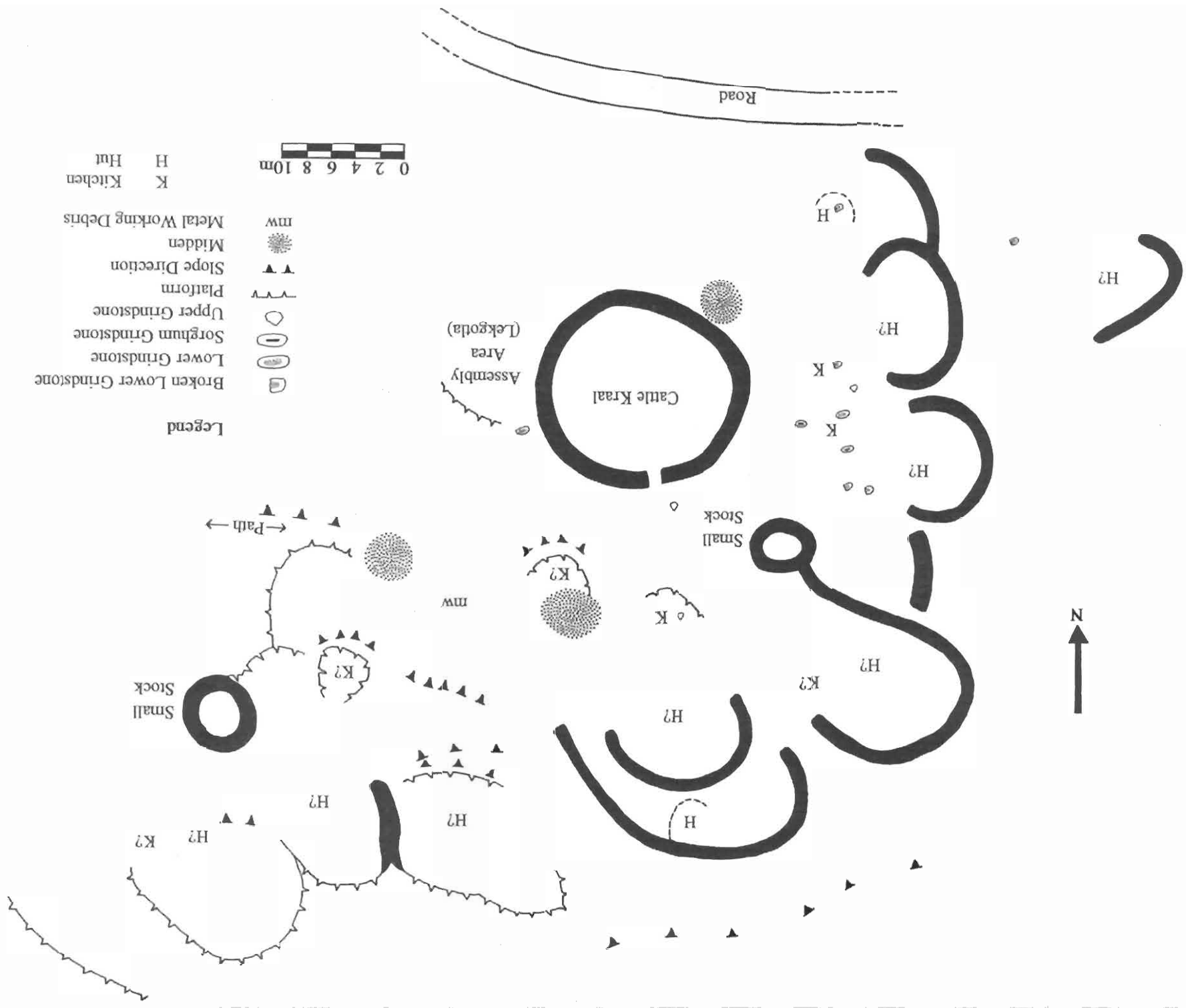


Figure 1. A portion of site 2527 AC 11.

Besides political discussion, men ate in the court and spent most of the day there in mainly activities, such as wood and skin working. As Campbell noted in 1813:

[The settlement] is divided into a number of districts, perhaps fifty, separated from each other, having each a Headman, (or Alderman) and a place enclosed for public resort, where the men spend the greater part of the day together, dressing skins, and making knives and various articles (1815: 187).

In the Sun City homestead an outer residential zone with about ten house compartments surrounds the court and cattle kraal (Figures 2–5). The largest compartments stand upslope behind the court, opposite the entrance to the kraal and the main entrance to the settlement. This location is significant because the front of a settlement was reserved for public, secular and dangerous activities, while the back was restricted to private and sacred functions. This spatial arrangement meant that the most important person lived at the back in the most protected position. Thus, one of the large compartments at the back at Sun City was the most likely residence of the homestead's headman.

The headman's residence, like all others, was ordered according to the public/private principle. Burchell (1824: 516–517, 520) described a typical organization:

The dwelling-house generally stands in the middle of the enclosure, which is divided into a front-court and a back-yard. The floor of these is formed of clay tempered with the manure from the cattle compounds, and beaten or spaced exactly level, and perfectly smooth.

In most of the houses, the back part inwardly and outwardly, is divided from the front, by traverse walls; and in the same manner a cross fence separates the front-court from the back-yard. This after part [of the house] was not enclosed by walls; it might be considered as an open shed, and was generally intended as a granary or storeroom for the principal bulk of their dry provisions.

Low daga walls usually marked front courtyards. At Sun City terrace walls probably supported kitchen areas inside the front yard. Kitchens such as these were often roofless, and daga walls served as windbreaks. At Sun City several lower grindstones used for the preparation of maize lie on the ground near the kitchens. The Portuguese introduced maize to southern Africa in about 1750, and over time maize became part of the staple diet, supplanting the traditional crops of sorghum and millets. Grinding areas and kitchens in the front yard meant that someone responsible would be present when visitors arrived.

Arcs of thick stone walls and high terrace walls defined back yards in the Sun City homestead (Figure 3). Some terraces must have been dug out to create a level space. These back yards would have contained privately owned grainbins (Casalis 1859) and the graves of women and men of low status (Monnig 1967). The private nature of the back yard is respected even during burial rites today. Among the Pedi, for example, only close kin attend the grave, while other mourners remain in the public frontyard.



Figure 2. Mapping the homestead.



Figure 3. Back walling.



Figure 4. Residential Area.



Figure 5. House circle.

This public/private dichotomy also influenced the organization of a house. Ancestor spirits, for example, were associated with the threshold of a doorway during group rituals, such as the purification of widows (Willoughby 1928: 69), but they were invoked for individual purposes at the back. Furthermore, a corpse should be removed through the back wall, and, as Burchell noted, women kept their private storage vessels there.

A low arc of upright stones marks one hut site at Sun City (Figure 5) and others by low mounds. Excavations in similar sites elsewhere have yielded grooved stones that served as the base for sliding doors (Mason 1986; Maggs 1993).

Two small stone enclosures between the compartments and the central kraal probably housed sheep and goats. As a rule most African farmers pen their small stock together but away from cattle to avoid injury. Kids, lambs and calves are generally separated from their mothers for the same reason. Furthermore, this separation will also provide more milk and encourage the mothers to return to the kraals at night.

Besides the public/private dichotomy, spatial organization was governed by attitudes towards status. As Mackenzie (1871: 367) observed in the 19th century, a status principle governed the location of homesteads in a complex:

In laying out a Bechuana town, the first thing to do is to ascertain where the chief's courtyard with the public cattle-pen is to be placed. As soon as this is settled the remainder is simple... As soon as the chief's position is ascertained, one says, "My place is always next to the chief on this side," and another adds "And mine is always next on that side" and so on until the whole town is laid out (see also Schapera 1943: 72).

Late Iron Age farmers commonly expressed status through left and right positions. A house, for example, is usually divided into left-hand female and right-hand male sides (Ashton 1952; De Jager 1964), and houses were usually arranged on both sides of the senior residence according to some alternating system of status. Among the Pedi, for example, a man's second wife should live to the left of his first wife, and his third should live on the right (Monnig 1967: 212). Thus the organization and location of houses follow the same principle as the distribution of residential units within a town complex.

Finally, one must remember that stone-walled homesteads such as the Sun City example were established to accommodate a specific number of families. Consequently, any substantial growth must necessarily affect the original layout. The house compartment on the far left and the double arc at the back probably reflect such growth.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Late Iron Age people clustered in stone-walled settlements in the Pilanesberg for mutual defense during a particularly troubled time known as the *difaqane*. Conventionally, this period began in 1821 when Nguni moved onto the highveld from KwaZulu-Natal and hammered Sotho-Tswana. In the conventional view Chaka and the Zulu were the prime

causes of the upheaval (e.g. Omer-Cooper 1966). More recent analyses, however, show that they were the result, not the cause, of several processes that led to the troubles (Hamilton 1995). In summary these processes included climatic changes, the introduction of maize, population imbalances and the spread of Europeans and armed horsemen.

As is well known, the Nguni leader Mzilikazi was based in Gauteng and the North West Province during this troubled time. Indeed, he contributed substantially to the troubles. Because of his reputation as a powerful leader, many people today credit Mzilikazi with all the stonewalling. Some stone-walled settlements in the Rustenburg area can be associated with Mzilikazi's followers (Pistorius 1997), but the spatial pattern is different to those in the Sun City area. This difference adds further support to the original identification of Group II settlements with the Sotho-Tswana.

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