

Carefully Hidden Away: excavating the archive of the Mapungubwe dead and their possessions

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature:

Date:

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Abstract

Ever since Jerry Van Graan first stumbled upon golden artefacts in 1933, Mapungubwe – an Iron Age civilisation that existed in the confluence of the Shashe and Limpopo rivers between 900 and 1300 AD – has been the subject of contestation.

Initially knowledge production about Mapungubwe was informed by the need to make a case for the late arrival of Bantu-speaking people in Southern Africa – a now discredited theory used to justify the subjugation of Africans. In the post-apartheid era, Mapungubwe became a focal point for a new form of myth-building: the myth of liberation and a romantic past but, in my view, with a neo-liberal bias.

In this dissertation I interrogate the role played by the disciplines of archaeology and physical anthropology in the political contestation that has surrounded Mapungubwe, focusing on the production of knowledge. I do this by investigating the claim that Mapungubwe was shrouded or hidden away. In particular, I ask: What happens when disciplinary workings, in the course of knowledge production, construe an archive? What do museums, archives and other memory institutions hide and what do they reveal? What gets acknowledged as archive and what is disregarded? How is this knowledge presented in the public domain over time? Lastly, what happens when the archive is construed differently?

My interrogation lays bare the continued discomfort and improvisation that prevails among those disciplines or institutions that engage with Mapungubwe. I have chosen to organise the core chapters of the thesis according to specific timeframes: before apartheid, during apartheid and after apartheid. This is done to demonstrate how

archaeology, claimed as a science, was a powerful strategy deployed to exchange the messiness for the “true” knowledge of the past.

The research on Mapungubwe, by way of the Greefswald Archaeological Project, was the most prolonged research project in the history of South Africa. Its four research phases, which began in 1933 and ended in 2000, mutated as the broader political landscape shifted. As a result, everything that can possibly play itself out in broader post-apartheid South Africa is present in Mapungubwe: contested claims, racial history, land dispossession, apartheid and the military, repatriation, post-apartheid claims, nationalism, pan-Africanism, ethnicity and more.

This thesis demonstrates how the disciplinary practices of archaeology were instrumental in keeping Mapungubwe shrouded. An example of this “shrouding” is the deployment of highly technical language in writing about Mapungubwe. Before the end of apartheid, this epistemic hiding offered a convenient retreat for the discipline, to avoid engaging with issues facing South African society at large. This placed the discipline in a position of power, a position of “truth” and “objectivity”. All inconvenient forms of knowledge were simply disregarded or silenced through choices, made by powerful institutions and individuals, about what was worthy of being archived. However, when the archive is differently construed, a different picture emerges.

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Chapter One: Introduction

All young South Africans were fed myths about this continent and denied exploration of fragments of archaeological data which were freely available to their peers in the rest of the world. This lack of access to knowledge about Africa had particularly constrained many South Africans at attempting to resist apartheid and forge a new consciousness about what it meant to be an African in Africa—such as the founders of the Black Consciousness Movement. We did not have the intellectual backing archaeology would have provided at this critical juncture. For example, the existence of the Mapungubwe golden rhinoceros discovered in the early 1920s was carefully hidden away at Pretoria University in one of the most shameful indicators of science bowing to political mythology. (Helfrich, K. 1999)

This statement is drawn from the address by Dr. Mamphela Ramphele to the Fourth World Archaeological Congress (WAC-4). It was cited by the *Pretoria News* reporter, soon after the WAC-4 which took in Cape Town, in 1999. The headline: “*Golden Rhino find sparks row over ‘apartheid version of history’: Tuks denies ‘hiding’ artefacts*”, referred to the response by the University of Pretoria in defense of the university against Dr. Ramphele’s accusation. The university argued at the time that the lack of local expertise in restoration and the need to protect the artefacts from damage, led to the scant publicity in respect of the Mapungubwe rhinoceros and other objects from Mapungubwe.

I discovered this newspaper cutting at the University of Pretoria’s archives, where it was neatly filed, alongside newspaper cuttings from the 1930s. The cuttings from the 1930s reported on the “discovery” of Mapungubwe and focused mainly on excursions that took place between 1930 and 1933. When I enquired, the archivist pointed out that the Pretoria news cuttings were kept there as “proof” that the university did not hide information on Mapungubwe, even during these early days.

However, Dr. Ramphele’s sentiments resonated with me; they mirrored my own personal near-encounter, with Mapungubwe. My first experience with Mapungubwe dates back to the late 1990s, when I was an undergraduate student at the University of Cape Town’s Department of Archaeology. Reading about farmers and cattle-rich kingdoms such as Mapungubwe in Martin Hall’s book, *The Changing Past: Farmers, Kings, and Traders in*

*Southern Africa, 200-1860*¹, captured my imagination. I was excited at the idea of an archaeological site that did not just consist of dune shell middens or stone implements that represent the Stone Age. Mapungubwe had artefacts pointing to a complex society that engaged in gold-mining and trade with the East, dating as far back as the beginning of the second millennium AD. To me, this was evidence of a much a more complex history of Southern Africa.

This history was also far more interesting to me than the narrative on hunter-gatherer communities of pre-colonial South Africa that I had been exposed to during my first two years of archaeology at the University of Cape Town; I believed that this knowledge would go a long way in instilling a positive post-apartheid identity for black people in South Africa and I wanted to be part of the production and dissemination thereof.

After graduating from the University of Cape Town, I applied to the University of Pretoria for an Honours degree, through which I planned to deepen my understanding of Iron Age archaeology. I enrolled for physical anthropology, the branch of archaeology that focuses on human remains. The University of Pretoria had a very strong physical anthropology department and had been involved in long-term research at Mapungubwe. I believed this would mean I would finally get an opportunity to have a much closer engagement with Mapungubwe, because visits to the historical site formed part of our compulsory fieldwork experience. In 2003, I took part in a rehabilitation project to secure and stabilise the excavations that had been taking place on Mapungubwe since the 1930s. It was then that I learnt that no further excavation work was to take place on Mapungubwe as the site had been declared a National Monument. Construction work was already under way to make way for tourism projects, I was told.

Our rehabilitation work had to be hurried as we needed to make way for the tourism project that the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT) was leading. I was bitterly disappointed at how the site that I had obsessed over was no longer available for archaeological investigation. I vowed never to go back! Nevertheless, when I had to choose a topic for my Honours dissertation, I decided to conduct an

¹ This book by Martin Hall was one the publications that were listed as part of prescribed the undergraduate course reading for archaeology at the University of Cape Town. It gives an illustration of an agricultural way of life in the Southern African region, as well as the discovery of minerals that, according to the author, initiated industrialization.

investigation on the human remains of Mapungubwe. The human remains that had been excavated from the site in the 1930s were still being kept at the university, as part of the skeletal collection of the Department of Anatomy. I planned that the study was to be a typical physical anthropological study, which entailed a skeletal analysis of the remains. However, this was not to be.

I was given a number of reasons as to why I was not allowed to look at that particular collection: the sample would be far too small for any meaningful analysis; the bones were too fragile. I was also told that the population consisted mainly of juveniles and would produce distorted results. I ended up studying a modern population of skeletons that forms the bulk of the Department of Anatomy's skeletal collection.

I was not aware, at the time, that the Mapungubwe Collection of human remains was the subject of high-level contestation. In 2006, after a number of communities had come forward to lay claim to the Mapungubwe skeletal collection, the idea of the repatriation of the collection was publicly raised by then president, Thabo Mbeki. The University of Pretoria contested this idea.

Shortly after this, my opinion on Mapungubwe was sought by a friend, a film maker who had been commissioned by the National Heritage Council (NHC) to record the process of repatriation. This provided me with a close encounter with state interventions, as well as stakeholder engagements with regard to the repatriation.

As a student of physical anthropology, I was torn as I felt that the repatriation was premature and not well thought-through. I suppose I still harboured the hope that one day I would get an opportunity to conduct *my own* study of the Mapungubwe human remains. However, my scholarship was at odds with the Africanist narrative of the day. This narrative sought to reclaim the *ancestors*, whose bodies had been for many years subjected to the scientific gaze. The skeletal remains were subsequently removed from the University of Pretoria and were returned to Mapungubwe for reburial. I was able to follow the burial process as I had access to the film footage of the meetings, ceremonies and interviews with various key players. I was struck by the manner in which the Mapungubwe issue played itself out in public discourse, before, during and after the reburial.

To me, the process of public engagements appeared to be largely improvised, this was especially illuminated by way various communities were included and excluded. In addition to this, public pronouncements by politicians used Mapungubwe to as a strategy to correct inequities of the past, in the present. The reburial itself was even more revealing as the repatriated human remains were interred in a single grave, while neatly packed in clearly marked boxes, something that is very unusual and seemingly improvised.

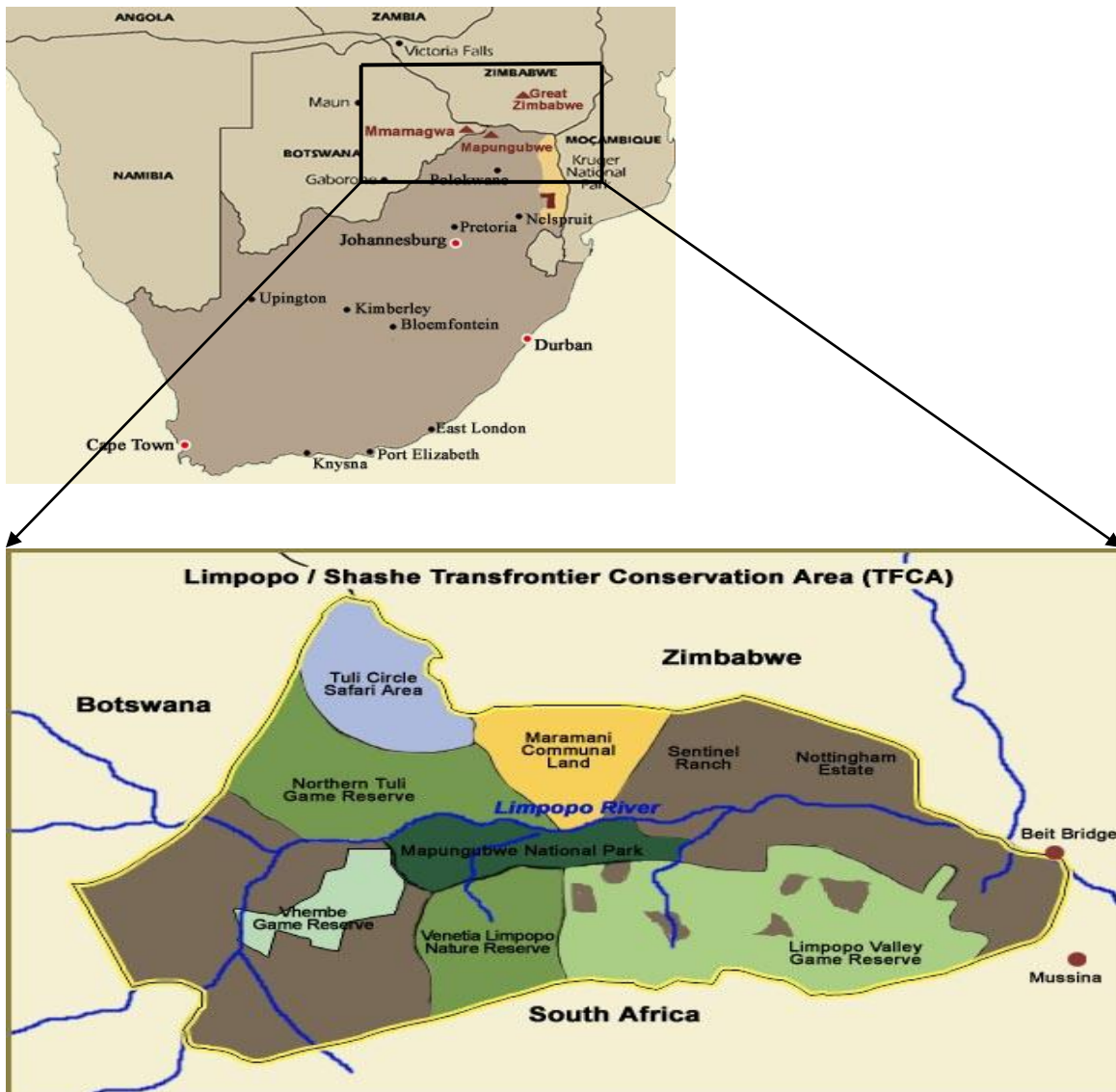
Again, I resolved to disengage from all things Mapungubwe as I felt that there was no political will to take seriously the issue of repatriation and the complex issues that it raised. For a while I forgot about Mapungubwe. After all, I believed that the human remains that were the subject of my research interest had been buried and were no longer available for my scientific scrutiny.

My disengagement was, however, short-lived. In 2010, I joined the Archives and Public Culture Research Initiative at the University of Cape Town as a fellow to pursue a Master of Philosophy degree in Heritage and Public Culture. Through this fellowship I realised that the human remains of Mapungubwe were actually not buried, but rather “archived” or preserved for posterity. Upon revisiting the film footage, this was confirmed by my former lecturer and supervisor, Professor Maryna Steyn, whose own Doctoral thesis was on the Mapungubwe skeletal collection. In the film, she says that “there is hope that future generations may decide to revisit Mapungubwe”². This explained the strange burial method which I had found so unsettling. After consulting with my present supervisors, I decided there were indeed research opportunities with regard to the Mapungubwe human remains. This time, however, I approached the subject not as a physical anthropologist but as a student of public culture. However, this meant there was to be a lot of improvisation on my part, especially in terms of the research methodology because this research focused on the archive and not the bones of the Mapungubwe dead.

² This statement was made during an interview with the producer of the NHC commissioned film: *Mapungubwe Reburial*. The film was produced by Phambili Productions and is referenced throughout this dissertation.

Locating Mapungubwe

To get an understanding of the subject of my enquiry, it is important to first get an understanding of its provenance, the historical site, Mapungubwe. Below is a map of South Africa, showing the location of Mapungubwe, while illustrating its position in relation to the Trans-Frontier Park that straddles South Africa, Zimbabwe and Botswana (figures 1.1 and 1.2).



Figures 1.1 and 1.2 South African Map showing the location of Mapungubwe within the Trans-Frontier Conservation Area. Source: University of Pretoria.

The screen shot that follows is drawn from Google Maps and it gives an aerial view of the location of Mapungubwe on the farm Greefswald, in the Limpopo Province of South Africa. The site is on the confluence of the Limpopo and Shashe rivers, where the borders of South Africa, Zimbabwe and Botswana meet (figure 1.3). The climate in the area is dry and arid, with extremely high temperatures during the warm seasons. Mapungubwe Hill is situated in a valley that is surrounded by sandstone cliffs. The summit of the hill is covered in archaeological deposit and has stone walling and a large number of burials with golden objects were excavated from the top of the hill.



Figure 1.3 Aerial view of the location of Mapungubwe, showing the confluence of the Shashe and Limpopo rivers. Source: Google Maps.



Figure 1.4 Mapungubwe Hill. Source: [www. aimsouthafrica.com](http://www.aimsouthafrica.com)

Research questions

My involvement with the Archive and Public Culture Research Initiative, whose main focus of enquiry is to explore the workings of the archive in contemporary culture, brought me back, full circle to Mapungubwe. In her 1999 address that I open with, Dr. Ramphele claimed the Mapungubwe golden rhinoceros was “carefully hidden away”. She also stated that this concealment deprived liberation movements of “intellectual backing”, which would have contributed to the black consciousness movement.

Ramphele’s claim of concealment is refuted by the University of Pretoria. According to the university, Mapungubwe has been widely reported in mainstream media, hence the large collection of newspaper cuttings on the subject in the Mapungubwe archive. Mapungubwe has also fascinated the research community and politicians alike in South Africa since the 1930s. It is the longest research project to date and the political contestation around Mapungubwe entails some of the most significant moments in South African history.

Hall (1990) argued that Mapungubwe was “shrouded by technique and technical controversy”. The disciplines of archaeology and physical anthropology have been regarded as the major contributors in terms of research on Mapungubwe. While these disciplines claim to reveal that which is buried and hidden by the earth over time, they tend to wrap up information in highly technical language that is only accessible to the few. Language, as used by disciplines such as archaeology, can operate as a way of veiling knowledge, a notion that Shepherd refers to as “epistemic hiding”³. Museums, archives and other memory institutions receive, from these disciplines, a large supply of fragments of the past, in the form of artefacts and other resources, including human remains. These institutions claim to care and look after such heritage resources for future generations and in the public interest. They do this by categorising then placing in carefully ordered shelves, drawers, and cupboards. These so-called “Regimes of Care”, as coined by Shepherd and Ernsten (2007), also require that the public seek permission from the relevant authorities before the heritage resources can be engaged with.

³ This term is borrowed from Nick Shepherd, he made use of it during supervisory meetings that I had with him in. Cape Town, 2012

In this thesis I seek to address a number of questions that arise from the claim that Mapungubwe was hidden: What happens when disciplinary workings, in the course of knowledge production, construe an archive⁴? How is this knowledge presented in the public domain over time? What do museums, archives and other memory institutions hide and what do they reveal? What gets acknowledged as archive and what is disregarded? Lastly, what happens when the archive is construed differently?

The research presented in the chapters that follow, seeks to address these questions. I am also hoping that the process will help illuminate the continued discomfort and improvisation that prevails, among the various people and institutions who engage with Mapungubwe, over a period of time. I have chosen to organise the core chapters of the thesis according to specific timeframes: before apartheid, during apartheid and after apartheid. The timeframes are both deliberate and convenient as they highlight key epochs of South African history.

Theoretical context and literature review

Central to my thesis is the issue of research on human remains, particularly those in public collections, which often leads to highly emotive and unsettled debates (Shepherd 2007, Shepherd and Ernsten 2007 and Rassool 2011). This is an issue because of the way in which such collections represent the symbolic power of the collectors over the bodies of the “colonised other”. The dead bodies of the colonised all over the world have, over the years, been excavated, stored in collections and deemed to be objects of scientific inquiry (Legassick and Rassool 2000). To the indigenous people of many post-colonial contexts, the dead are regarded as ancestors and are revered as symbolic of that which is sacred. The repatriation of the dead from museum collections and various locations around the world has been used as an important instrument for redress, restitution and, in South Africa, for reconciliation. However, the process of repatriation of

⁴ Conventionally, to construe is to interpret or translate a word or a sentence. It refers to the act of taking of words in a sentence to show meaning of a sentence. However, in this context, the term “construe” is part of the conceptual vocabulary that is developed by the Archives and Public Culture Research Initiative to investigate its utility in terms of the archive. Professor Carolyn Hamilton uses the term because archive does have grammar, and she is interested in exposing that grammar, and then in construing it differently. When Hamilton and Liebenheimer construe the archive of Thukela-Mzimkhulu region c 1730-c 1910, they pay attention to the grammar that exists as the archive, to see how the order determines what it offers, then construe it differently by looking at what happens when things that are not recognised as the archive for that place and time are treated as though they are its archive. They do this by placing ethnographic material into an archival context, and their forthcoming book addresses this in more detail (Hamilton, C. 2013. e-mail feedback on thesis).

human remains, as demonstrated in Mapungubwe, can be complex and highly contested.

Repatriation entails much more than the simple process of disinterment, relocation and re-interment. Issues of contested identities have been observed, while the scientific methods that have been deployed by physical anthropology have been subject to a lot of scrutiny. In South Africa and elsewhere, human remains have over the years been collected through a variety of methods, some of which have are now regarded as questionable (Legassick and Rassool 2000). These human remains, mostly in skeletal form, reside in public institutions where they are subject to scientific analysis that is said to contribute to our understanding of human origins and development of humanity. As result of some of the unethical means of collecting and the objectification that was often associated with scientific study historically, a number of repatriation and reburial projects have been embarked on, as part of the South African post-apartheid process of redress (Rassool 2011).

The repatriation of the Mapungubwe human remains is a good example of such projects. The broader controversy over the origins of Mapungubwe marked the climax of an “old racial diffusionist tradition in South African anthropology” (Dubow, 1995). This tradition fed into the justification of an old tradition of racial oppression in South Africa and research on the skeletal remains in particular, was used to determine attributes such as race to provide scientific “evidence” in this regard.

The repatriation of the Mapungubwe skeletal remains was meant to be symbolic in addressing the deficiencies of the past, in the present. As elsewhere in the world, physical anthropology in South Africa was under scrutiny during this repatriation. Part of the reason for this is because most of the scientists who are involved with research on human remains are whites, while the remains are largely those of blacks. It was not surprising that racism became an issue. The former were perceived by the new dispensation as being representative of a continued colonial fascination or curiosity toward African cultures and African bodies. The call for restitution, in the form of the return of the human remains, was lamented by some researchers as being an irreversible loss of evidence that is valuable for scientific research into ancient cultures

and heritage. These tensions necessitated the development of new ways of doing things.

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault (1972) argues that in producing new knowledge, “it is not enough to open one’s eyes, to pay attention, to be aware, for new objects suddenly to light up and emerge out of the ground”. Instead, knowledge is constructed, under certain ‘conditions’ and ‘relations’. The relations he refers to are those that are formed between “institutions, economic and social processes, behavioral patterns, systems of norms, techniques, types of classification, (and) modes of characterization” (Foucault, 1972). Shepherd (2003) also argued that “there is nothing natural or inevitable about the construction of new knowledge, far less so in the case of new knowledge about the past”. He illustrates this by paying attention to the emergence of classificatory systems, typologies, nomenclatures and disciplinary languages that are form part of knowledge production. He also takes note of the role of institutional spaces, professional bodies, and the relationship between disciplines and state power. Knowledge about Mapungubwe, as will be illuminated by the pages that follow, has over the years, been produced under such ‘conditions’ and ‘relations’.

This thesis will extend Foucault’s argument, as construed by Shepherd, to reveal that such conditions and relations become formative in ways that are integrated into the workings of the discipline. Therefore, to understand the nature of the discipline as it currently exists means “understanding the development of colonial archaeology, and later, of archaeology under apartheid” (Shepherd, 2003). The lack of social accountability with regards to archaeology was also found to be problematic by Hall (2009). Hall’s criticism of the discipline’s disengagement from broader societal issues, specifically during apartheid, reveals the ‘conditions’ that inform the production knowledge by the archaeology. One of the findings of this thesis is that these ‘conditions’ continue to exist beyond apartheid, into the present. Just as the defining characteristic of archaeology under apartheid was the growing separation between archaeology and society, the separation continues to exist; only now it does so under the guise of heritage management. While South African archaeologists were disengaged from the turbulence of apartheid, the present disconnect is associated with the dismissal of different ways of knowing. This is especially with regard to indigenous interpretations of archaeological finds.

According to Green (2008), the most damaging consequence of the use of the term “indigenous knowledge” is that it sets this type of knowledge in opposition to scientific knowledge. Green calls instead for an evaluation of the conditions under which *any* knowledge is produced, whether the knowledge concerned is regarded as indigenous or scientific. She goes on to point out that in providing explanatory models, the scientific laws just like indigenous knowledge also draw on a mid-point between “knowledge” and “belief”, which is “acceptance”(Green, 2008). In terms of this thesis, this claim by science to be the objective and verifiable truth, is challenged by the evidence of political agendas being at work in archaeology; the science that has over the years dominated the production of knowledge about Mapungubwe. This includes the use of science by local communities to legitimise contemporary claims to traditional heritage and other resources. Even Ramphela, as cited earlier, refers to scientific knowledge, in the form of archaeology, as the intellectual backing that would have served to liberate black people.

According to Bruno Latour (1999), a scientific text carries its own verification and he argues that science is in fact a social construct. The hegemonic position that scientists occupy as “law-givers” and “saviours” who have access to a world of “truth” is problematised by Latour. He argues that scientists can move between this socially constructed world of “truth” and that which is occupied by the rest of society. In society, scientists claim to “bring forth truths that serve to shut up the ignorant mob” (Latour, 2005). This is also true in the case of Mapungubwe when archaeologists and physical anthropologists used scientific language to argue against the repatriation of human remains that were collected from Mapungubwe. The resistance to that scientific discourse reveals that science is not always accepted as “God’s truth”. However, the deconstruction of science is still a relatively marginal activity in South Africa and even more so in the rest of Africa. According to Mafeje (2001) what deconstruction does, in terms of anthropology, is to enable new ways of thinking, a notion that may be successfully borrowed for use in archaeology in relation to knowledge production in Mapungubwe. This line of thought suggests that in order to survive, “the emergent ways of thinking must not only be aware of each other but also of new styles of thinking within existing epistemologies” (Mafeje, 2001).

Mafeje's argument suggests that in their engagement with Africa, new ways of thinking tend to be categorised as African Studies which is multi-disciplinary. This, he argues, enables the application of some anthropological methods and techniques, even though their authors are not necessarily people whose original training is in anthropology. This allows scholars to be undisciplined from the assumptions of the discipline, thus "shifting the 'home address' of writing and destabilising the disciplinary power of anthropology" (Mafeje, 2001). This suggestion provides extraordinary methodological potential for my current engagement with physical anthropology, one of the so-called "disciplines of the dead". The disciplines of the dead have been defined by Rassool (2011) as "savage sciences"⁵ that of which had been beneficiaries of apartheid and that made sacred sites, material culture and human remains available for research". In this current thesis, I take into account Mafeje's recommendation of shifting the home address of disciplinary power, in my attempt to deconstruct archaeology and physical anthropology in relation to Mapungubwe. I do this through the application of methodological borrowing, which then enables me to avoid the confines of any discipline.

Methodology

In this investigation, I have eschewed the methodologies that are offered by the discipline in which I am most conversant, physical anthropology, or by extension, archaeology. This branch of archaeology has, for a long time, been fraught with issues of racial science, and in South Africa, this was especially so with regard to Mapungubwe. The subject of my interest is familiar to the discipline of archaeology. However, I chose to borrow from the methodological repertoires of a number of other disciplines, notably from history and anthropology, in an effort to "excavate" Mapungubwe. I choose to use the term "excavate"⁶ deliberately to demonstrate the commensurability between archaeological collections and archival records. This means then that the way in which I encounter the archive, mirrors the way in which an archaeologist would encounter an artefact in the ground during fieldwork. The use of an archaeological term, while working

⁵ The notions of "disciplines of the dead" and "savage science", as used by Rassool were borrowed from Nick Shepherd's 2010 commentary on the subject.

⁶ The idea of utilising the notion of excavating the archive is influenced by Sven Ouzman's unpublished paper: *Archaeologies of Archive*. The paper was presented as part of the Archive and Public Culture Seminar Series at the University of Cape Town in 2012. In his presentation, Ouzman proposed the idea of commensurability between the artefacts that are excavated by archaeologists and their associated documents in the form of field notes, accession registers, insurance forms etc. He argues that these documents, although administrative, eventually become artefacts.

with an unfamiliar method, in the form of archival research, enables me to shift my home address from physical anthropology to history. This shift informs my chosen sub-title: *Excavating the archive of the Mapungubwe dead and their possessions*. This technique of excavation is demonstrated by scrutinizing the presence of the Mapungubwe human remains and the artefacts they are associated with in the record. While recognising that the human remains have now been reburied, and are currently unavailable for research, there is value in the numerous records about the human remains that have been accumulated over the years. To interrogate the production of knowledge about the human remains, I excavate a number of archives, searching for traces of the remains. Such traces are present in various institutions and have been preserved for posterity. I summon and gather a number of these archival traces or fragments and then I “deem”⁷ them to be archive.

In my research I consider the physical landscape, where the human remains were “discovered”. This is also the location of what I call “the archive in the ground”, where they have now been reburied. This landscape is now a World Heritage Site and so subject to global notions of preservation. I then reflect on the golden artefacts and other funerary objects that are still under the custodianship of the University of Pretoria’s Mapungubwe Museum, and are on public display. I also study the Mapungubwe Archive that is associated with the Museum. Finally, I gather a number of other scattered archival resources, found in the various repositories and registries elsewhere. These are in the form of maps, ownership records, land claims reports and project management reports. The inclusion of audio-visual material in the form of a documentary film, as well as the use of blogs and other resources from the internet, is a deliberate strategy that I utilise to further amplify the notion of “deeming”, as used by Hamilton. Although the Mapungubwe Archive at the University of Pretoria is recognised as the official archive on Mapungubwe, the landscape, the artefacts in the museum and records that exists elsewhere are not formally recognised. I “deem” these scattered fragments of the Mapungubwe dead to be an archive; *my* Mapungubwe Archive.

⁷This concept has also been tried out in the Archives and Public Culture Research Initiative. In this context it refers to the process by which materials are constituted as archive, that is, as warranting an apparatus of preservation, based on the notion of provenance. Like construal, deeming is one of Hamilton’s and in terms of this notion, all memory is potentially an archive but there is a deeming process that informs becoming an archive (Hamilton 2011& Harris 2012).

Harris's reading of Jacques Derrida explains that "archive" can be defined by three fundamental movements, or attributes: one, a trace on or in a surface; two, a surface with the quality of exteriority; and three, an act of deeming such a trace to be worthy of protection, preservation and the other interventions we call archival⁸. In terms of Hamilton, as cited by Harris (2012), "deeming" is an act that can take place almost without apparatus and certainly without professional or disciplinary authority. He thus argues that anyone can deem and to support this, he likens the act of deeming with what Derrida calls "archivation". This notion enables me, for the purposes of the present thesis, to "deem" what I refer to as *my* Mapungubwe archive so as to explore what it means to construe the archive differently, when new elements, outside the given sentence (archive) are included.

Now that I have deemed *my* Mapungubwe Archive, I make yet another strategic move, by borrowing from the methodological potentials provided by Carolyn Hamilton in her reading of the James Stuart Archive. Hamilton's notion of biography that she utilises in tracking what happens to the James Stuart notes begins when the material is first engaged, with a view of entering some form of recognised preservatory housing. In terms of this notion, many collections are made with an eye to a possible archival future (Hamilton, 2011). Another dimension of biography, according to this notion, is that it asks us to focus on the way in which the subject of inquiry, in this case an archive, exerts influence on the world around it and in turn how the world exerts influence on the archive. Using biography, as Hamilton uses it, allows me to frame my enquiry from the period of "discovery" of the Mapungubwe burials in the 1930s, up to the present. This particular framework, as provided by Hamilton's notion of biography, requires a focus on the way in which the human remains of Mapungubwe and associated artefacts influence the world around them, and in turn how they are influenced by the world in which they exist over a period of time.

My approach also regards, another of Hamilton's concepts, archival backstory (the history of the material before it was deemed to be archive) to be an important component as it concerns the period before field notes and reports. It also interrogates who was interested in the material and why (Hamilton, 2011). This entails the period

⁸ See Verne Harris (2012): Genres of the trace: memory, archives and trouble, *Archives and Manuscripts*, Volume 4 Issue 3 2012.

before the 1930s “discovery” of Mapungubwe, to the moment that Pikirayi (2005) referred to as “the moment that the traditional secret was broken”. Now that my improvisation with regard to the methodological and theoretical framework has been explained, I turn to give a description of *my* Mapungubwe Archive.

The archive

1. The University of Pretoria: Mapungubwe Museum and Archive

The Mapungubwe Museum at the University of Pretoria was my first point of call, as the museum is a major source of archival material. The museum is located on the university’s main campus, in the old Arts Building. It was established in 2000 to identify, collect, and preserve records of archival value related to Mapungubwe, and also the archaeological site. The material in the Mapungubwe Museum was acquired by transfer or simply purchased by the university. However, some of the contents were acquired by means of exchange. The collection is also a result of over 75 years of archaeological excavation by the University of Pretoria. It comprises historical documents, photographs, art works, audio-visuals, and correspondence. There are currently over 3000 photographs, 2000 slides, and 6000 documents in the form of maps, manuscripts, publications, drawings, site plans, excavation reports and correspondence. The museum has on display a large number of golden artefacts, ceramics as well as glass beads. According to Meyer (2000), the museum collection is part of the SASOL Africa exhibition and Heritage Education Programme at the University of Pretoria.

During my first visit, and after completing all the necessary documents required for access, I was allowed into the Mapungubwe Archive that is located just behind one of the walls of the museum exhibition. The curator of the Mapungubwe collection, Ms. Sian Tiley-Nel, was excited to have this work done as she felt that the story of Mapungubwe still needs to be told. This is even though she has recently published a book that is based on the Mapungubwe collection, entitled: *Mapungubwe Remembered: contributions to Mapungubwe by the University of Pretoria*⁹. The archive is impressive, with a large amount of letters, photographs, field notes, receipts, reports, newspaper

⁹ See Tiley-Nel, S. 2011. *Mapungubwe Remembered: Contributions to Mapungubwe by the University of Pretoria*. This book is largely a collection of chapters by various contributors and is animated by selected archival resources.

clips and other published material. The material covers the period from the 1930s to the present and so, on the surface, it looked like it would provide all the necessary material for the entire lifecycle that is essential for the biography of the official Mapungubwe Collection. What struck me about this archive was the way in which it was meticulously arranged, and unlike other archives that I had encountered before, a large number of documents were photocopies.

My second visit to this archive was more revealing in terms of ownership and access to the Mapungubwe Archive. Even though, I had made arrangements to visit the museum ten days prior to the planned date, I was informed that such a visit would not be possible as Ms. Tiley-Nel was on leave for two weeks. When I enquired about getting permission from the person who is acting on her behalf, I was informed that there was no such person and that the material was only available through an arrangement with the curator. When I challenged this, Mr. Gerard de Kamper, Head of Collections Management, stated that the archive at the Mapungubwe Museum was, in fact a private archive and only the university has a say in terms of how and when it could be available for research. I found this very interesting as I had assumed that an archive, concerning the national estate, would automatically be regarded as public property. The university officials also explained to me that there is also a general concern regarding security around the Mapungubwe Museum, after all, it is the home of the iconic golden rhinoceros. I had no choice but to accept the University's policy on access. I managed to work further on its material by using electronic facilities. The curator was very helpful in this regard as a small amount of the records and photographs had already been digitised by the University of Pretoria.

2. The University of Cape Town: Lestrade Papers on Mapungubwe

G. P. Lestrade was a Professor of Bantu Studies at the University of Pretoria during the time of the initial Mapungubwe excavation by the university, in the 1930s. A linguist by training, Lestrade was appointed to conduct linguistic and ethnological investigations in the villages surrounding Mapungubwe. To augment his ethnological investigation, Lestrade also took a large number of photographs of the people he encountered in the nearby villages. Lestrade's work on Mapungubwe was discontinued when he left to take up a teaching post at the University of Cape Town in 1935. His 1935 report forms part of

the Lestrade Papers that are in the custodianship of the Manuscripts and Archives at the University of Cape Town Library. According to this report, the objective of Lestrade's research was to identify contemporary parallels with the objects that were unearthed in the course of various excavations, together with such information relative to their origin, manufacture and use (Lestrade, 1935). I regard Lestrade's collection of handwritten field notes, photographs, reports, correspondence concerning Mapungubwe an unexpected archive. I never expected to find such a wealth of information on Mapungubwe at the University of Cape Town. It is important to note that this material is not included in the archive at the University of Pretoria, except for the final 1935 report. This absence is quite revealing in terms of the early ethnology on Mapungubwe and it also gave insight to the academic politics of the time.

The biggest challenge with regard to my consultation of the Lestrade Papers is that at the time when I was doing my research, the Manuscripts and Archives Department was in the process of moving. The move was from the Oppenheimer Building to join the African Studies Library, in the Jagger Library building. Getting access to the documents during this time became tricky. However, library personnel were very helpful and gave continuous updates in terms of availability of records. Some of the records had to be brought to the African Studies Library, from the Oppenheimer Building which is on the other end the university campus. The issue of access was exacerbated when the whole of the African Studies Library had to go through a process of renovations and had to close. I then had to make arrangements to work on the Lestrade Papers through the Government Publications Section of the library¹⁰. The Lestrade Papers now reside in the newly opened Special Collections section of the Jagger Library at the University of Cape Town.

3. The South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) Registry: Mapungubwe Files

Another unlikely archive, where I found more traces of *my* Mapungubwe Archive, was the registry at SAHRA, the custodian of all that is regarded to be South Africa's heritage resources. According to the SAHRA website, the organization is a statutory organisation

¹⁰ It was during this time at the Government Publications Section that I had an opportunity to review the Parliamentary Committee Debates Records from the 1940s. The debate on Mapungubwe, or the Dongola Question as it was known then, provided insight into the political mood of the late 1940s South Africa.

established under the National Heritage Resources Act (NHRA), No 25 of 1999, as the national administrative body responsible for the protection of South Africa's cultural heritage. The NHRA follows the principle that heritage resources should be managed by the levels of government closest to the community (SAHRA, 2012). However, as a result of structural challenges that SAHRA is encountering at present, heritage management occurs at national level and so is centralised at the SAHRA headquarters in Cape Town. This proved to be quite a useful resource for me. The SAHRA registry comprises documents that are related to the administration of all heritage resources in South Africa, including Mapungubwe. The Mapungubwe files date back to the 1940s, the period of SAHRA's predecessor, the National Monuments Council (NMC) that ceased to exist in 2000. These files largely entail reports that are associated with applications for declaration of the site as part of the national estate, as well as applications for permits to visit the site, as well as a large mass of correspondence wherein permission to excavate is sought from the NMC and subsequently SAHRA. In addition to this, minutes of meetings about Mapungubwe, as well as photographs and pamphlets, can be found in the files.

SAHRA files are stored in the strong room of the registry. Permission to work on the files in the registry requires a written request to the head archaeologist at SAHRA, Mrs. Colette Scheermeyer. The records are old and are in such a fragile state that, at times, even making photocopies of the records seems destructive. A number of the records from this archive are in Afrikaans, especially, the files from the 1949 to 1991 period. Although this should be expected of records from the apartheid era, the abrupt change in language is telling in terms of the South African socio-political landscape of the time. The shift towards Afrikaner hegemony is evident and its traces exist, in the record. The individual records are filed haphazardly and there appears to have been no effort to preserve them. Each box is marked, using dates as the means of classification. An interesting dimension is that while most of the boxes from the post-apartheid period contain records from a two or three year periods, the records from the entire 1949 to 1991 period only has one box allocated to it. This means that the records collected over a period of forty years, fit into a single box! When I asked for the, these files were simply placed on a desk in the registry, a space that is assigned to researchers. The registry itself is shared by two SAHRA officials who are responsible for document management. The space also doubles up as the printing and photocopying facility for the entire

organisation and so is a hive of activity. I could come and go as I pleased, without any significant concern for security. This is even though the door leading to the back of the building is almost always open and easily accessible from the parking area at the back of the building.

4. Electronic & Print Media

Post-1994 information about the repatriation of the Mapungubwe remains from the University of Pretoria collection and their subsequent reburial is available in various forms, but most significantly, it is also available electronically. The repatriation and reburial was filmed by Phambili Productions, with the support of the National Heritage Council (NHC)¹¹. The film footage covers stakeholder meetings, commentary by interested parties, an early morning traditional cleansing ceremony that was performed by traditional healers, the reburial ceremony and a celebration. Although certain aspects of these events were veiled in secrecy and not filmed as they were considered to be sacred, events leading up to and during the reburial are well captured on film. This film is an important resource for this research as it includes interviews with key researchers such as Professor Maryna Steyn from the University of Pretoria, Professor Tim Huffman from the University of Witwatersrand, and the late Professor Victor Ralushai from the University of Venda. Representatives of the communities who came forward as the *bona fide* descendants or claimants of Mapungubwe are also interviewed, as well as government officials from the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT), South African National Parks (SANParks) and SAHRA. Media reports, as well as other material, such as speeches, planning and annual reports are available on the internet. Also in this category is a blog with contributions, in the form of personal memoirs, by a group of military veterans who refer to themselves as the “Greefswald Old Boys”. The contributors are individuals who had spent part of their conscription time on Greefswald Farm¹² when it became an army base for the South African Defence Force (SADF).

¹¹ The National Heritage Council is a South African public entity that serves as a funding agency, established to support projects in the heritage sector.

¹² Mapungubwe is on the farm Greefswald, although the farm was bought by the government in 1933, the name was never changed.

Legal framework

The legal framework that governs *my* Mapungubwe Archive is multi-faceted as it entails an engagement with various laws and legislation, over a long period of time. These are both international and local laws that can at times be in conflict with one another. The Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape, as a World Heritage Site, is governed by laws that are promulgated at the level of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The 1972 World Heritage Convention is the most important legislation in this regard. The convention links together, in a single document, the concepts of nature conservation and the preservation of cultural resources. According to the UNESCO website (2012), the convention recognises the way in which people interact with nature, and the importance of preserving the balance between the two. The key benefit of ratifying the World Heritage Convention is that of “belonging to an international community of appreciation and concern for universally significant properties that embody a world of outstanding examples of cultural diversity and natural wealth”(UNESCO, 2012). South Africa has enacted a separate law to administer this category of heritage, the World Heritage Convention Act of 1999.

The National Heritage Resources Act (NHRA) of 1999 which governs heritage resources in South Africa, provides a limited, but useful, procedural framework within which graves or grave goods are to be handled. The National Monuments Act of 1969, the predecessor of the NHRA, did not provide for graves or grave goods such those of Mapungubwe. However, during apartheid, the Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape was declared a national monument under this act. For physical anthropologists, the Human Tissue Act 65 of 1983 provided an ethical framework that is largely based on a guide for health and medical practitioners and this was observed by researchers who worked on the remains of Mapungubwe. This act, along with the Vermillion Accord on Human Remains, an international code of ethics that was adopted in 1989, at the World Archaeological Congress, provide a framework for working with human remains in South Africa. The draft policy document on the Repatriation of Heritage Resources that is currently being developed by the National Heritage Council (NHC), is yet another proposal for the handling of human remains and the repatriation thereof in South Africa.

The policy proposes a framework that sets ethical and professional standards for practitioners. These are drawn from the Medical Research Council's (MRC's) ethical

guidelines for research on human beings, thus “personifying” the remains by taking into consideration the issue of human rights. Contributors to the policy document have proposed special holding spaces that can take the form of a mausoleum, where research may take place. These mausoleums are to be managed jointly by communities or representatives of the descendants. Although it is widely acknowledged that South Africa is rich in evidence of the development of humanity, consent with regards to research on human remains still remains a thorny issue. According to the proposals to the NHC policy formulation process, the absence of consent makes a case for repatriation. In addition to this, apartheid laws allowed certain practice standards that are now regarded as unethical. The draft policy document therefore recommends that all unethically-acquired remains be repatriated, regardless of their contribution to research or their scientific value. An investigation into all remains in public collections in the country is also recommended, to ensure that none of the public collections have unethically-acquired human remains (NHC, 2011). While acknowledging that this policy document is not yet at implementation stage, it is worth taking it into consideration as Mapungubwe had an impact on the manner in which the document was drafted.

As this thesis considers the cultural landscape of Mapungubwe as archive, it is imperative to consider laws that concern land issues in South Africa. The human remains, the subject of the present enquiry were removed from Mapungubwe in the 1930s and have now been reburied back on the land. Although this archive is not available for my enquiry, I do recognise that the presence of the human remains on Mapungubwe, in the form of the burial, increases the significance of the land. This is because the claims associated with the human remains have been, in turn, used to lay a claim to the land. To investigate this, I consider the Natives Land Act of 1913 as a point of departure. The Natives Land Act saw seven per cent of South Africa’s land being set aside as reserves¹³. These reserves would provide mines and urban employers with black labour. In addition to addressing the labour needs of the white-owned mines, the Act restricted ownership of land by blacks, outside of the reserves. Equally important to consider is the resistance against the Act, the evolution of the homelands and forced removals especially in the 1970s through to the 1980s. This framework would then lead to land restitution laws in the present. The Restitution of Land Rights Act of 1994

¹³ This is according to a summary of the impact of Natives Land Act of 1913 on the history of dispossession in South Africa. The summary is available online: www.sahistory.org.za. Accessed on February 2013.

becomes relevant in Mapungubwe as we witness contestation over resources, in the present.

Thesis structure

This introductory chapter is Chapter One of the thesis and it is designed to set out the research questions, to locate Mapungubwe and to present my methodological framework. The theoretical and legal frameworks are also considered in the chapter. The chapters that follow are organized according to key periods that characterise South African history in the last century, these are: before apartheid, during apartheid and after apartheid:

Chapter Two: 1930s – 1948

This section interrogates the grand narrative of discovery of Mapungubwe in 1932. This entails the find by Jerry van Graan, a student at the University of Pretoria, the role played by Jan Smuts, a Prime Minister of the Union Government, in the period that follows, and finally Smuts's patronage which led to the proclamation of Mapungubwe, on Greefswald farm, as a National Park- a key aspect of this chapter. Smuts's "Dongola Wildlife Sanctuary" stood to include parts of then Rhodesia and Bechuanaland. However, this was met by stiff resistance from the white Afrikaner community, leading to the "The Battle of Dongola", one of the longest political debates in the history of parliament in South Africa. This period ends with the proclamation of a National Park in 1947 which was governed by the Dongola Wildlife Sanctuary Act No.6 of 1947. The "Battle of Dongola" reveals fierce political tensions that persisted within the Union Government of South Africa. However, this battle disregarded protestations to the Native Trust and Land Bill by the anti-colonial movement. The anti-colonial movement considered these arrangements inadequate for the satisfaction of African demands for land, an issue with deep roots; having started with resistance to the Natives Land Act of 1913 that triggered the formation of the South African Natives National Congress (SANNC)¹⁴ in 2012.

¹⁴ The South African Natives National Congress (SANNC) became the now the African National Congress (ANC) in 1923.

Chapter Three: 1948-1994

The third chapter starts with the period that follows the victory of the National Party in the 1948 election. It is by far the most intriguing, yet elusive period in terms of availability of records, something that is typical of aspects of the apartheid-era. In 1948, Mapungubwe had been a major election issue and after the change in government, the land that had been proclaimed as a park by Jan Smuts the previous year was returned to former owners, as was promised to the electorate. The chapter explores the research undertaken by the University of Pretoria during this time, while the role of the South African Defence Force (SADF) on Mapungubwe is also investigated. De Beers, a mining giant, also makes an appearance during the latter part of this period, with the establishment of the Venetia Diamond Mine near Mapungubwe in 1990.

Ownership of the land by De Beers and the subsequent leasing thereof to SANParks in the increasingly changing political climate is considered.

The release of political prisoners, the return of exiled freedom fighters, and the negotiated settlement that led to the formation of a new government, are shown to have an impact on activities in Mapungubwe.

Chapter Four: 1994 – Present

In this chapter, the UNESCO inscription of the Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape on the World Heritage list on the basis of evidence for an important interchange of human values in the southern African region is considered. The inscription suddenly placed Mapungubwe on a global platform. It was during this time that Thabo Mbeki's call for the repatriation of Mapungubwe human remains from various public institutions was made. This was part of the African Renaissance project, and it informs a large part of the post-apartheid period of the chapter. The cultural remains or funerary objects that remain the property of the University of Pretoria, and are on permanent display in the university, are problematised. This is done while looking closely at the process of repatriation and its numerous improvised strategies. The chapter ends with the current contestation over land ownership, under the Land Restitution laws of the post-apartheid era.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

To bring the thesis to an end, a number of conclusions are drawn about the ways in which epistemies contribute to the process of hiding that occurs when things are preserved for posterity. This is revealing about the institutions that claim to care for the records and heritage objects they house for safe-keeping. The biographical sketch of *my* Mapungubwe archive reveals the impact that politics have on those disciplines concerned with Mapungubwe. It also reveals a number of things about how Mapungubwe impacts on society, over time. Finally, the issue of knowledge production is discussed.

Chapter Two: Before Apartheid

Challenging the grand narrative of “Discovery”

The narrative of the discovery or re-discovery of Mapungubwe is varied, depending on who is telling the story. The perspective that has been regarded as the official authority, has been that of the University of Pretoria. The university has a long history of research, dating back to the 1930s. Ms. Sian Tiley-Nel, the curator of the Mapungubwe Museum and Archive at the university recently published a book, *Mapungubwe Remembered: contributions to Mapungubwe by the University of Pretoria*. The book was written to set the record straight with regards to the story of discovery, and other controversies regarding Mapungubwe. She does this by drawing from the Mapungubwe Archive that she curates, and uses it to give a biographical illustration of those she considers to be the “pioneers” of Mapungubwe. In addition to this, contributors, offering a range of chapters on the history of archeological research, research on human remains, and the reburial thereof, are included in the book. Tiley-Nel, argues that “there cannot be a more vivid description of the discovery of Mapungubwe than that given by Jerry van Graan in an interview conducted years after the discovery”(Tiley-Nel, 2011).

This assertion refers to a firsthand eye-witness account of the events of the first of January 1933, when a young Van Graan, then a student at the University of Pretoria, “stumbled” upon the legendary Mapungubwe, while visiting his father’s farm in the Northern Transvaal. In terms of this narrative, Van Graan had gone on a hunting excursion on a neighbouring farm, whose owner was one of the absentee landlords of the time¹⁵. As it was a hot day, van Graan became thirsty and went to a nearby homestead to ask for water. There, he was offered water in a bowl that the young van Graan found to be very interesting. He was intrigued by what he regarded as the unusual characteristics of the pot and offered to buy it. The owner of the pot, a man known as Mowena, told van Graan that the pot was given to him by an old hermit, Frans Lottering or “Lotrie” who had found it on Mapungubwe Hill. It has been reported elsewhere that Lotrie had found priceless gold treasures on the hill (Fouche’,1937;

¹⁵ According to Lindenmann (2005) and Carruthers (2006), after the South African War (1899-1902) generous land settlement schemes began all over South Africa, however, due to the harsh climate in the northern regions of the Transvaal, most farms were owned by absentee landlords and mining companies. These landlords only used the land for hunting during the winter seasons.

Lindenmann, P. 2005; Carruthers, 2006). In another account, most of the treasure is said to have been washed away during a flood at Lottering's home in Kalkbank, and all that remained of the treasure was a single gold bangle which Lotrie wore until his death (Tiley-Nel, 2011).

When van Graan asked Mowena to show him the sacred hill, Mowena refused to show him the hill or to sell him the pot. The young van Graan then returned with his father and their neighbours, the party pressed Mowena until he referred them to his son who lived in a neighbouring village (Tiley-Nel, 2011). The *Cape Argus* of March 14, 1933 reported that Mowena referred to the hill as "the burial place of the old ones", in the report it is also said that when he refused to accompany the Van Graan party, he had said that "every *kaffir* who goes up there dies". Nevertheless, Mowena helped, "all the time in a state of abject fear" (*Cape Argus*, 1933). On the hill summit, the party discovered golden artefacts, as well as human skeletal remains. The gold artefacts were shared amongst the group, while the young Van Graan sent his share of the objects to Leo Fouche', a professor of history at the University of Pretoria. In a letter to Fouche' written in Afrikaans, the young Van Graan writes:

Terwyl ek in u klas was het u ons vertel dat die begrafplaas van die bewoners van Simbabwe nog nie gevind nie, en toe het ek u mos vertel van 'n sodanige plek. Nou het dit my geluk om die genoemde begrafplaas te vind (Ek veronderstel natuurluk maar dat dit die begraafplek van Simbabwe is). Daar is ook allehande goue, koper en yster juwele en artikels. Natuurlik, die koper en yster is meestal vergaan. Onder aparte koevert stuur ek u 'n paar artikels, wat daar gevind word. Miskien sal u my beter verstaan, as u dit self sien (Van Graan, 1933)

This can be loosely translated to:

While I was in your class, you told us that the cemetery of the people of Zimbabwe has not been found, and then I told you about such a place I know. Now it is my luck to find the said cemetery (of course, I only assume it is the Zimbabwean cemetery). There are all kinds of gold, copper and iron as well as jewellery and objects. Of course, the copper and iron are mostly destroyed. In a separate envelope I am sending you a few objects that were found. Perhaps you will understand me better, if you see it for yourself.

The letter, as reproduced in Tiley-Nel's book is presented as an iconic indicator of the great discovery; it occupies a whole page, with the scanned copy of the original, framed

with a shadow, on a yellow background that illuminates the yellowish colour of the page that the letter is written on. In the letter, Van Graan declares himself; “the discoverer” of the site that he refers to as the “burial ground of the people of Zimbabwe”. Tiley-Nel (2011) supports this founder’s claim by naming a whole chapter that is dedicated to Jerry van Graan, “The Discovery of Mapungubwe”. All other narratives of previous encounters or knowledge about Mapungubwe, such as Mowena’s cryptic warnings are silenced, and disregarded. Lottering’s encounter with Mapungubwe on the other hand, is merely left to “legend and conjecture” (Tiley-Nel, 2011).

Upon receiving Van Graan’s letter and parcel, Fouche´ requested a meeting with Van Graan and his father. Fouche´ arranged for the Van Graans and the rest of the party to be paid for the gold objects and these were donated to the University of Pretoria for scientific inquiry. Incidentally, Fouche´ was a personal friend of General Jan Christiaan Smuts, a prominent politician in the government of the Union of South Africa and had worked as Smuts’s private secretary during the First World War. Smuts also maintained a Bushveld Camp in the vicinity of Mapungubwe. In 1919, he was able to keep nine neighbouring farms from being part of the post-South African War land settlement scheme, and these remained government property. In 1922 the farms became part of the *Dongola Botanical Reserve* (Lindenmann, 2005; Carruthers, 2006). Due to his reconciliatory attitude towards the English, Smuts was unpopular amongst the majority of his kinsmen, who were the Afrikaner Nationalists. It was Fouche´’s close relationship with Smuts that led to his estrangement from the Afrikaners at the University of Pretoria. The white Afrikaans community was during this time struggling to transform the university into an Afrikaans medium institution (Tiley-Nel, 2011). In 1933, Smuts, then the opposition leader, ensured that Greefswald farm was also bought by the government. In 1934 he personally visited Mapungubwe and in that same year the University of Pretoria was given permission to excavate on the site.

When the excavations started, the police were assigned to protect the farm on a more permanent basis (Meyer, 1998). The Archaeological Committee at the University of Pretoria, that was established to supervise excavations on Greefswald Farm, appointed a Methodist missionary, Reverend Neville Jones, to spearhead fieldwork in Mapungubwe. Jones had previously worked in then Rhodesia and was regarded as a pioneer of the prehistory of the Southern Rhodesian archaeology. According to Tiley-Nel (2011), Jones was requested to conduct an investigation of the “Mapungubwe

neighbourhood” and to work with John Schofield, an architect from Durban. Together they were assigned an assistant by the name of Pieter Willem van Tonder. The team was advised by Clarens van Riet Lowe, an engineer in the Department of Public Works, also a staunch supporter of Smuts (Tiley-Nel, 2011).



Figure 2.1 From left to right: Prof. L. Fouche, Mr. J.F. Schofield, Prof. C. Van Riet Lowe, Rev. N. Jones, and Prof. F.J. Tromp during the first expedition to Mapungubwe in 1933. Source: The South African Archaeological Society 2013.



Figure 2.2 General Jan Smuts (seated, second from left) during a visit to Mapungubwe in 1934. He is seen in the picture, flanked by Clarence van Riet Lowe and Neville Jones. Source: The South African Archaeological Society 2013.

“Dressed up in wrappers of confusion”: Lestrade’s ethnography

G. P. Lestrade, a professor of Bantu Studies at the University of Pretoria at the time of the initial Mapungubwe excursions, was appointed to conduct linguistic and ethnological investigations in the villages surrounding Mapungubwe. His findings were that Mapungubwe was occupied by “a race of mixed elements of Shona and Sotho origin” (Lestrade, 1934; Fouche’, 1937). Lestrade also took numerous photographs of the people from nearby villages. These along with his papers were donated to the University of Cape Town by his wife, in 1962 and more by their son, in 1963 (See Bailey and Lyndall ,1981). Lestrade’s work in Mapungubwe was discontinued when he left to take up a teaching post at the University of Cape Town in 1935. His 1935 report on Mapungubwe forms part of the Lestrade Papers, which are under the custodianship of the Manuscripts and Archives at the university. According to this report, the objective of Lestrade’s research was to identify contemporary parallels with the objects that were unearthed in the course of various excavations, together with “such information relative to their origin, manufacture and use” (Lestrade, 1934). Lestrade’s work does not feature as prominently as the other “pioneers” in Part One of Tiley-Nel’s book, a chapter that is entirely dedicated to the biographies of all the significant players in Mapungubwe.

According to the records at the University of Cape Town, Lestrade took three trips to different locations, in the immediate vicinity, west and also east of Mapungubwe. During the visits he spoke to numerous informants, with a particular focus on their ability to identify specimen objects taken from the excavated site. The first visit was to Messina in September 1933, where “petty chiefs”, Tshiwana and Dijane were consulted. The second visit took place in August 1934 and on this occasion he consulted Chief Mphephu of the Western Vendas and the Tonga-Shangaan at Elim Mission Station. The Lembas and Shonas, in then Southern Rhodesia, were also visited. The third visit was to Tshivhasa of the Eastern Vendas, in October 1934. On September 1 and 2, 1933, Lestrade conducted a preliminary survey of ethnological problems associated with the Mapungubwe finds. In his report, he writes:

I presume that this document is confidential, and in any case wish it to be distinctly understood that the points enumerated below are provisional, tentative, and in no sense final or binding conclusions, and I should like to stress the extreme unwisdom of their publication or circulation, either by publication in newspapers or by oral repetition on the part of anyone entitled to read the present document.

The points that would seem to emerge are:

- a) The existence, on and about the site, for probably the last century, of a mixed population, embracing (i) a group of clans- chiefly Lea and Thwamamba- of Shona-Venda affinities, which appears to be the older stratum, and (ii) a group of clans- chiefly Kwena of Sotho affinities, which appears to have come later, conquering and partly absorbing the Shona-Venda clans.
- b) The permanence, among the present population on and about the site, of culture- elements, especially of a religious nature, which are identical with or which closely resemble elements in the Shona-Venda nexus, and which are distinct from similar elements in the Sotho nexus.
- c) The possibility that at least some of the finds on the site may be connected with the present population, at least with the Shona-Venda element therein. (Lestrade, 1934)

In the same report, Lestrade makes a case for an enquiry that is ethnological in nature. He argues that the archaeologist can do no more than dig systematically and record accurately, the chemist and bead expert no more than advise on pure technology. When the committee at the University of Pretoria sought Lestrade's opinion in terms of where digging on Mapungubwe should commence, he suggested that it was fairly clear from evidence that the informants attached greater significance to the top of the site than any other portion. According to the report, he stated that, all things considered, digging had to begin there (Lestrade, 1934). In a letter written to Jones on 4 September, 1934, Lestrade gives his opinion of a report by Robert Broom¹⁶, after the latter had analysed one of the skulls that were excavated from Mapungubwe:

Robert Broom gave a report of the skull we had brought him, in which he said that the skull was undoubtedly Negro, but not typically Bantu – whatever Broom understands by that. Since the Bantu-speaking peoples are mixtures, in various proportions, of various

¹⁶ Robert Broom practiced palaeontology, becoming the world's leading expert on the mammal-like reptiles which were found in abundance in the South Africa. His paleontological work was so highly regarded that in 1934, he gave up his medical practice to take a position at the Transvaal Museum in Pretoria with the help of Jan Smuts. Broom published a major monograph on the australopithecines in 1946 and the influential British scientist W. E. Le Gros Clark examined the fossils, leading to most scientists finally accepting that the australopithecines were indeed hominids. Source: <http://www.talkorigins.org/faqs/homs/rbroom.html> Accessed in September 2012.

racial elements, I do not see how there can be a typically Bantu skull. Perhaps he found a Jewish nose! (Lestrade, 1934)

This sceptical response to Robert Broom's findings is indicative of Lestrade's conviction that it was the Lemba people that were connected to Mapungubwe. The reference to the Jewish nose could be indicative of what he believes is the presence of the Semitic features in the Lemba and suggests that these might have confused Broom. In the same letter he writes:

we paid another visit to Mphephu, with amusing result. They all got more or less drunk, and at last one Lemba said that of course they still made gold bangles and beads, and copper stuff too. There was no time or opportunity to ask him to show me, but we saw gold bangles and beads. Also copper ones, and the old boy promised me he would show me his forge in working order when I came again (Lestrade, 1934)

In a letter to Schofield, also on 4 September 1934, he writes:

I am persuaded that the differences that do exist between the different kinds of pottery are due to evolution and culture-contact, and think it is a safe bet to say that Lembas, or people very much like them, made the M and B pottery¹⁷. As regards to the metal-working, the Lembas undoubtedly did that, and do it still (Lestrade, 1934).



Figure 2.3 Lestrade (second from left) photographed with Schofield, Jones and Van Tonder, in 1934. Source: Lestrade papers; Special Collections, UCT.

¹⁷ M – refers to Mapungubwe and B – refers to Bambandyanalo



Figure 2.4 Lestrade; Van Tonder and Jones in 1934. Source: Lestrade papers; Special Collections, UCT.

In his report on ethnological investigations carried out from 27 September to 2 October 1934, Lestrade gives an account of his itinerary. He travelled from Pretoria on the morning of September 27, arriving at Louis Trichardt the same afternoon, and at Tshakoma, a Berlin Mission station among the Dau section of the Venda people under Madzivhandila. On this occasion, some informants available at the mission were interviewed. According to the report, some rather useful information is gathered from them and also from Mrs. Giesekke, the wife of the missionary on the station. Lestrade proceeded to Gooldville, where Dr. and Mrs. R. D. Aitken accommodated him during the three days that he visited Chief Tshivhasa. Thereafter he reports:

Visits were paid to Tshivasa on the 28th, the 29th, and the 30th, and a great number of photographs were taken. Tshivasa entertained us in the most hospitable fashion, providing food and drink for a number of the informants whom he had summoned, in some cases from considerable distances, to give us information, killing an ox in our honour, showing us in some cases some of the most sacred objects and places in his kraal and helping in all ways to make the visit the success it was (Lestrade, 1934)

Lestrade's excitement as a result of the encounter with Tshivhasa is evident in a letter to the Chairman of the Archaeological Committee at the University of Pretoria, dated 5 October 1934:

No amount appears on this account in respect of any present to Chief Tshivasa. I did not give him any, as indeed I had not, nor could I get, any present commensurate with the hospitality he showed or the services he rendered. I sounded him on what he would like to possess, and ascertained that he badly wants a pair of field glasses. A cheap pair of field-glasses could be got for a few pounds, a reasonably good pair for about five pounds. (Lestrade, 1934)



Figure 2.5 Chief Tshivatse and some of his wives 1934. Source: Lestrade Papers. Special Collections. UCT Libraries BC255

On the 11th of October 1934, Neville Jones wrote a letter to Lestrade where he introduced Lestrade to a Mr. Peter Sebina from Serowe, in then Bechuanaland. Jones had attended a literary and debating society meeting where he met Sebina. According to Jones, Sebina was collecting a lot of useful folklore material and he allowed Jones to read his manuscript on the Bakalanga folklore. In the manuscript Sebina describes the death of *Mambo the Thunderer* at Mapungubwe. On an undated University of Pretoria letterhead, a paragraph drawn from Sebina's manuscript, *Bakalanga Sketches*, describes the burial of Mambo as follows:

For a grave a wide hole had been dug capable of holding a lot of people. There the servants of Mambo were killed without resisting after their dead King had been put into this general grave. Mambo was made to sit facing the North, to his town of Dzimbabwe, The black ox-hide had hardened to the stiffness of leather around Mambo, who was also decked with his royal ornaments. His doctor was laid prostrate before him, but a little distance away. Each of the two maidens were laid on either side of him-very close- as they had always slept since they left their home in the distant North. The other people were laid as far from the king as space would allow, for between them and the king were placed pots of beer in every available space. Besides these pots of beer, dishes of meat, calabashes containing every conceivable seed, cones of tobacco, Mambo's weapons and those of his people, and the dead doctor's bags containing medicines including the big eland horn reserved only for Mambo, were put into his grave for Mambo and his party. The royal staff of office, embossed in gold, was put in Mambo's hand (Sebina, n.d).

On the 18th of October 1934, Lestrade wrote to Sebina returning the manuscript that he says he received through Jones. His scepticism is evident when he writes:

Unfortunately, your story is a story, and it is impossible for me to know how much of it is actual tradition and how much fanciful (Lestrade, 1934)

Lestrade, in this letter, questions Sebina on the existence of regiments named *Maphungubwe* and *Madzimbabwe*. However, Sebina in a letter dated 22 October 1934 states that he is unable to give more information as his informant, an old man, had died some years back and that his own exercise books, containing information from the man, had also been destroyed by white ants. He wrote that he had thrown away whatever was left of his notes as he never suspected that they would prove to be so useful. Lestrade's irritation in this regard is evident in a letter he wrote to Jones, dated 27 October 1934:

If there really was a place called Maphungubwe, after the regiment of that name, situated on the southern border of the domain of some Shona chief, and if he really died there, and was buried in the tantalising way described in the MS, it is almost impossible to prevent oneself from assuming what we have to do with our Mapungubwe, and our burials. But, as I say, how separate alleged fact according to tradition from avowed fancy? Why won't these people record soberly what they hear, instead of dressing it up in wrappers of confusion? (Lestrade, 1934)

This is the last time that any reference is made to Sebina in the record about Mapungubwe. This dismissal of Sebina's narrative by Lestrade is indicative of how

information that is regarded as deviant gets removed from record, and in turn exiled from the process of knowledge production. Only this trace of Sebina's manuscript exists as the manuscript itself was not deemed to be worthy of preservation by Lestrade. Nevertheless, Lestrade concluded that the pottery was indeed indigenous, he attributed the large blue beads to the east coast of Africa, the metal beads he attributed to the Lemba people, and "some ethnological peculiarities associated with them" (Lestrade, 1935). This, according to the initial Lestrade report, was a result of their Arab admixture which is indicated by the Lemba names that were Arabic in form (Lestrade, 1934). In the final report, he accentuates his Lemba hypothesis by reporting that it is surprising that information, collected at various times and places from informants who had no opportunity to communicate with each other, should tally as much as it did with regard to Mapungubwe (Lestrade, 1935).



**Figure 2.6 A Lemba woman wearing a golden bracelet. Dated, 1934.
Source: Lestrade papers. Special Collections. UCT Libraries. BC 255**

Mapungubwe and the beginnings of Iron Age archaeology in South Africa

In terms of Shepherd's account of the formation of archaeology as a discipline in South Africa, the contributions of Raymond Dart and John Goodwin introduced new objects of contemplation into South African, and African pre-historic studies (Shepherd, 2002). He suggests elsewhere that an outcome of General Smuts's patronage was the founding of the Bureau of Archaeology, and later the Archaeological Survey (Shepherd, 2003). The Archaeological Survey was chaired by Clarens van Riet Lowe. According to Shepherd (2003), it was part research institute (as it was associated with a university), part public information service within the Department of the Interior and part an archaeological preservation authority. The establishment of the Bureau of Archaeology served to institutionalise archaeology in South Africa as a "directly funded branch of the Government and also marked a localisation of the discipline"(Shepherd, 2003). Even in the 1930s, Leo Fouche'(1937) argued that Mapungubwe, the site, was the reason for the establishment of the South African Archaeological Survey in 1935. To explore this, it is necessary to have a look at developments in Mapungubwe during this time.

In September 1934, Jones and Schofield ceased operations. However, Van Tonder, their assistant, volunteered to remain behind "through the unhealthy summer months" (Steyn, 2007). According to Meyer (2011), Jones and Schofield discontinued their work following the resignation of Fouche' from his post at the University of Pretoria. It was during this time that Van Tonder made the discovery of the "gold grave" on the summit of the hill. The gold grave was "associated with some 70 ounces of gold in the form of beads" Fouche', 1935). Although an amateur, with no training in archaeological methodologies, Van Tonder's discoveries were regarded to be of ultimate significance; even Van Riet Lowe (1936) reported that van Tonder had "reaped a spectacular reward". On the other hand, current researchers attribute the "irretrievable loss of information on Mapungubwe burials" to these early excavations by an untrained Van Tonder (Steyn, 2007). Steyn (2007) argues that standards and guidelines for the study of the Iron Age archaeology did not exist in the early 1930s therefore research reports from this time are "somewhat lacking and had no good stratification records". Other researchers argue that while, to a certain extent, this is true, " there is little evidence that the University of Pretoria went substantially out of its way in the early decades of working the site" (Carruthers, 2006).



Figure 2.7 An undated picture of P. W. van Tonder, posing next to an excavated burial on Mapungubwe. The iconic golden sceptre, labelled f, is still in situ, and is associated with human remains. Source: Maryna Steyn. 2006 (original source: Mapungubwe Archive).

Van Riet Lowe's 1936 report gives a comprehensive description of the grave area when it was excavated:

The cemetery or "Grave Area" as it is called, lies within a well-defined area on the lower western slope immediately adjacent to the original discovery. In almost every instance the body was interred in a flexed position on its side with no regard for orientation. Finely made and beautifully ornamented dish-like bowls were placed with the dead. The women were found with masses of metal bangles made of wire, principally iron, wound round fibre or sinew. Glass beads were occasionally used to ornament the bangles. In two instances the bodies were interred with considerable masses of gold and imported glass beads of various sizes and colours—white, black, blue, green, yellow, orange, red – and finely wrought and moulded gold foil or plating used as coverings for a bowl, sculptures, etc...

In one grave it was almost certainly buried in this position in a cavity, for when uncovered it was found to be complete but to have collapsed or pancaked. The skull was found on the pelvis with all the long bones alongside, the whole interspersed with masses of gold and glass beads. It was clearly not a case of dismemberment, but of collapse. It was from this particular grave that the gold content ornaments were taken, most of them being wire bangles. Tacks and gold-plating in scroll and boss form and a gold plated handle suggests the existence of a staff-of-office that reflect the importance of the person buried. As a result of his preliminary examination of the faunal remains, Professor D. E. Malan

has recognised the important fact that about 95 per cent of the bones belong to domestic animals: cattle, sheep and probably goats (Van Riet Lowe, 1936).

In this description, a great deal of attention is paid to the objects, especially those of the “Gold Burial” as it was associated with a golden bowl, sceptre and the famous golden rhinoceros. According to Steyn (2007), a second skeleton, possibly a female was found with “over 100 gold bangles around the ankles, more than 12000 gold beads and more than 26000 glass beads”. The third skeleton, a male, had some gold beads, cowrie shells and other gold objects (Steyn, 2007). Soon, after the discovery of the “Gold Burial” by Van Tonder, the committee at the University of Pretoria appointed an “experienced” excavator in the form of Captain Guy Gardner, an American soldier who had served in the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902). According to Tiley-Nel (2011), the committee had decided that it required another responsible person, as Van Tonder had been previously suspected of being involved in the irregular sales of gold found at Mapungubwe. Gardner was regarded as such a person: he had also been excavating with Getrude Caton-Thompson in Egypt during 1927 – 1929 (Van Riet Lowe, 1936). Captain Gardner was to head the second season of excavations at Mapungubwe and K2 (Bambandyanalo). This phase started in 1935.

One of the main objectives of Gardner’s excavations was to find deposits that contained human skeletons and material culture. In total, 70 human graves and 6 beast burials were excavated during Gardner’s time at Mapungubwe. According to van Riet Lowe’s 1936 report, Captain Gardner thought that the “folk who settled at Bambandyanalo represented the vanguard of the invasion of South Africa by Bantu-speaking tribes, then appeared a tribe of Sotho-Shona stock which occupied the area, living both on the summit of Mapungubwe and in the valleys immediately below” (Van Riet Lowe, 1936). According to Gardner (1963), the human remains that were found buried on Mapungubwe Hill signified the absorption of “Hottentots” by the Nguni people, then the Venda people and then again the “Hottentots”. In July 1940, Gardner’s work on Mapungubwe also ended abruptly. He was called up for military duty when the Second World War (WW2) began and as a result, his work was only published in 1963, well after the end of the war (Meyer, 1998).

Gardner’s work has since been criticised by subsequent scholars for its inaccuracies. His excavation technique, according to Steyn (2007), was problematic, as no descriptive

records of the Mapungubwe excavations were kept. Steyn attributes this lack of information on the status of these burials to undeveloped methodology for archaeological excavations in South Africa at the time of the initial excavations on Mapungubwe. Shepherd (2002) notes that John Goodwin, a South African-born and Cambridge-trained professional archaeologist, had returned to South Africa in 1923. However, he was not included in the Mapungubwe project, an interesting absence. Shepherd suggests that although Goodwin's proficiency was predominantly with regard to Stone Age archaeology, he was a professionally-trained archaeologist. He would have contributed effectively, especially in respect of methodological considerations such as stratigraphy. Goodwin was excavating Oakhurst Cave during this period and he was instrumental in introducing the concept of successive stages of prehistory (Shepherd, 2002). In addition to Goodwin, Raymond Dart, an anatomist, internationally acclaimed for his involvement in the 1924 discovery of the fossil of *Australopithecus Africanus*, in Taung in the North-West, was also not considered for Mapungubwe research during this early period. The committee at the University of Pretoria instead improvised, by employing the services of a historian, a church minister, a linguist and a soldier, who were in turn advised by an architect. Even the amateur Van Tonder was left to his own devices, leading him to make the discovery of the "gold grave".

The *Battle of Dongola* and the rise of Afrikaner Nationalism

In 1939, then Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa, Barry Hertzog, differed with Smuts over the involvement of South Africa in the Second World War. After Hertzog's defeat in parliament, on the motion to remain neutral during the war, Smuts took over as Prime Minister. The decision to enter WW2, on the side of Britain alienated even more white Afrikaans-speaking people from the Smuts government. Smuts was even promoted to become a field marshal of the British Army in 1941. Not only did Mapungubwe become significant in terms of the establishment of archaeology as a discipline in South Africa during the 1930s, it also increasingly became the focus of South African politics of that period and in turn, politics became a major influence on the research on the site. In 1939, when Smuts became Prime Minister, he motivated for the proclamation of Greefswald farm as a national park. This "Dongola Wildlife Sanctuary" was to include parts of then Rhodesia and Bechuanaland. However, this was met by stiff resistance from the white Afrikaner community, leading to heated political discussions.

After the Second World War, the economic conditions forced the conclusion of the archaeological project on Mapungubwe. The Archaeological Committee was terminated and the government announced the withdrawal of its subsidy (Tiley-Nel, 2011). In 1946 the Department of Anthropology was established at the University of Pretoria. This is significant as it is also the year that the Mapungubwe objects were displayed at the Transvaal Museum in Pretoria. According to Tiley-Nel (2011), during this time, the importance of Mapungubwe also contributed indirectly to bringing environmental conservation and academic research together. This then was an opportune time for Smuts's proposed Wildlife Sanctuary, which had been a cause of much public and parliamentary debate. Popularly known as the "The Battle of Dongola", the political debate, still considered to have been one of the longest debates in the history of Parliament in South Africa, resulted in the proclamation of a national park in Mapungubwe, in 1947. The national park was governed by the Dongola Wildlife Sanctuary Act No.6 of 1947 and encompassed an area four times the size of its contemporary counterpart, the Mapungubwe National Park, now a World Heritage Site. The Dongola Wildlife Sanctuary Act was to:

Provide for the establishment of a nature sanctuary in the valley of the Crocodile or Limpopo River in the Transvaal, for the protection and preservation in the general interest, of the land comprised therein, of its natural vegetation, wildlife and of objects of geological, ethnological, historical, or other scientific interest therein, and for certain matters incidental thereto (*Dongola Wildlife Sanctuary Act No.6 of 1947*).

The "Dongola Question", as it became known in parliament, and the proclamation of the Dongola Wildlife Sanctuary was a victory for Smuts, but this victory was short-lived. The general election of May 1948 was won by the Herenigde Nasionale Party. The party was largely supported by the white Afrikaans-speaking community, and its victory determined the future apartheid policy of South Africa. After the 1948 election, Smuts left office as Prime Minister and Dr. D.F. Malan replaced him, leading to an unsurprising shift in South African archaeology and in turn, archaeological work on Mapungubwe. The Dongola Wildlife Sanctuary was a major election issue in the 1948 election. Political pressure from local white farmers and property owners was the main concern. The National Party positioned itself strategically by defending local whites and property owners against expropriation that was the consequence of the establishment of the Dongola Wildlife

Sanctuary. In addition to this, the planned collaboration with the then Rhodesian and Bechuanaland governments became highly contested (Carruthers, 2006).

Conclusion

Until the 1920s, there was a general reluctance among Europeans to acknowledge that the complex walled sites such Great Zimbabwe and others between the Limpopo and the Zambezi rivers, might have been constructed by Africans (Dubow, 1995) However, in South Africa, this reluctance was continued well beyond the 1920s with increasing land dispossession of Africans. Both the Smuts project and also the new Afrikaner Nationalists disregarded the anti-colonial sentiment that had also emerged, especially in resistance to the Land Act of 1913. The condemnation directed at the entire post-union trend of government policy, as well as the Native Representative Council (NRC) by the All African Convention (AAC) and the African National Congress (ANC) in the 1930s, were ignored by the “North-South”¹⁸ tensions within the South African academy. None of the narratives on Mapungubwe during this early period make reference to the resistance movement and the implications thereof. These “North-South” academic tensions persisted beyond the Anglo-Boer Wars, well into the Union of South Africa, and beyond. Even though Native Trust and Land Bill were rejected by the anti-colonial movement and considered inadequate for the satisfaction of African demands for land, none of these were taken into consideration by the academy in South Africa.

According to Shepherd (2002), during the period from 1923 to 1948, archaeology in South Africa developed in a particular political climate and context that was personified by Smuts. However, with the growing sentiment of Afrikaner Nationalism at the University of Pretoria, academics such as Lestrade and Fouche´, who were Smuts supporters, were hounded out of the institution for their “liberal” and “anti-Afrikaner” views. According to Carruthers (2006), Fouche´ resigned from the University of Pretoria as the discipline of history was increasingly becoming an Afrikaner battleground, and in terms of the “empty land myth, Mapungubwe was a political anathema”. This supports Shepherd’s argument that during this period, archaeology was exclusively a white settler phenomenon. Shepherd (2002) regards this phenomenon as remarkable because archaeology, as a discipline, is “centrally about a black African experience”.

¹⁸ The North-South dichotomy refers to the split between Anglo-Saxon institutions in the southern regions and the Afrikaans institutions in the northern parts of South Africa.

The absence of the narratives of the local populations in the record of activities in Mapungubwe during this time (except for a few remarks regarding the need to reduce labour on site) is thus not surprising. The informant who guided Van Graan to Mapungubwe Hill is invisible in the record and only referred to as “the native” in most accounts. In the iconic hand written letter that the young Van Graan sent to Fouche’, informing him about the “discovery” in 1933, it is said that the man was “shivering and clearly bewildered” on the occasion that he was coerced into directing the van Graans to the hill summit (Van Graan, 1933). As in many archaeological settings, very little was done to investigate what prompted this reaction, even though it was widely known that the hill was considered to be a sacred site by the local communities. Lestrade, in his report on the ethnology, notes the significance of Mapungubwe as a sacred precinct. However, after he suddenly left for Cape Town, no attempts were made to continue with this work, even though he had begun to make some significant finds.

It is important to note that even though Lestrade made an attempt at doing something different, by drawing parallels between contemporary objects and the ones that were excavated in Mapungubwe, he also was sceptical upon encountering Sebina’s manuscript as it was based on folklore. Although the manuscript gave a detailed account of what Sebina referred to as the burial of *Mambo* on Mapungubwe, Lestrade referred to Sebina’s account as “just a story” . In my view, Sebina’s account could have been used to understand the gold burial in Mapungubwe. However, Lestrade also dismissed this description and said instead that it was “dressed up in wrappers of confusion”. When Lestrade left for Cape Town, the focus was on the archaeology of Mapungubwe, with a special focus on the determination of the racial attributes of the skeletons that were excavated from Mapungubwe.

Dubow (1995) argues that the contribution of physical anthropology, with regard to sites such as Mapungubwe, was in terms of the development of a linear model of history whereby the *Bushmen* were succeeded by the *Hottentots* and the *Bantu*, then the whites. This linear narrative and doctrine of survival of the fittest was used to “legitimise the right of whites to assert themselves as settlers on the sub-continent”(Dubow, 1995). In terms of Dubow’s assertion, the increasing interest in scientific racism, as well as an

enthusiasm to seek technical solutions to the “native question” is evident in the debates on Bantu Origins that became a popular subject amongst archaeologists.

Chapter Three: During Apartheid

The *Dongola Question* and the demise of Smuts's patronage

In 1949, the Dongola Wildlife Sanctuary was deproclaimed as a National Park, after lengthy National Assembly debates. The land was returned to former owners, as was promised to the electorate prior to the nationalist victory of 1948. Greefswald became farmland all over again and the Archaeological Committee at the University of Pretoria was dissolved, bringing to an end Smuts's grand trans-national project. To understand the process of deproclamation and its impact on Mapungubwe, it was necessary for me to first get an understanding of the nature of the debates that ensued in parliament, prior to the repeal of the Dongola Wildlife Sanctuary Act of 1947. The National Assembly debates largely concerned issues affecting private property interests. However, on closer scrutiny, the deliberations also served as a platform to make scathing attacks on Jan Smuts, and his fading legacy:

On 04 April 1949, Minister of Lands, J. G Strydom argued: "Farmers made the Minister of Lands aware at the time of proclamation that what they did was wrong, as they were uprooted to meet the whims of some plant-lover or Botanist whoever he may be" (Government Gazette. *Assembly Debates*: April 1949).

Although veiled, the reference to Smuts is clear in Strydom's statement, wherein he refers to a "plant-lover or botanist". On the 11 April 1949, Smuts made a case for the habit of travel, tourism as a source of wealth and income for the country. He argued for "Americans and Europeans coming to find peace and refreshment in Africa" (Government Gazette, 1949). The next day, on the 12 April 1949, Strydom questioned what was to happen to the farmers who were removed from the 270 holdings that the government had allocated in 1921. A certain Mr. Bowker made a presentation to the committee on the 21 April 1949. In his presentation he argued that only one settler would benefit from what he termed "land settlement on a monument of early civilisation to become the possession of a farmer" (Government Gazette, 1949). Bowker (as cited in Government Gazette, 1949) asked the committee whether they would consider allocating portions of the land to the Native Trust for settlement by natives.

These debates led to the Dongola Wildlife Sanctuary Repeal Act of 1949, assented to on 8 June 1949. The Act also entailed the abolition of the Board of Trustees of the Dongola Wildlife Sanctuary and set out what was to happen to the assets and liabilities of Board.

When the Nationalist Party came into power, a number of things changed in South Africa and so it is not surprising that the official record, with regard to Mapungubwe also starts to change. For me, this was illuminated by an encounter with the records that are in the possession of the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA). The records that I found in the SAHRA registry from this period are almost entirely in Afrikaans. Although I should have expected this, it still somewhat struck me as a glaring indicator of the dramatic shift within the state architecture. Only two days after the Repeal Act was assented to, the Secretary of Lands wrote to the Registrar of the University of Pretoria to inform him of the implications of the repeal:

Die department se arbeidsorganisie wat in verband met die voorgestende Dongola Natuurreserwe daargestel was, sal dus nou ontbind word en dit sal gevolglik nie meer vir die department moontlik wees om toesig, ter plaatse, oor die genoemde plaas te laat hou nie. Sy Edele die Minister van Lande het opdrag gegee dat die plaas Greefswald weer onder u Universiteit se beheer geplaas moet word vir die doeleindes hierbo gemeld op voorwaarde dat die Universiteit self moet reel vir berhoorlike toesig. Indien die Universiteit nog begrip is om verdere navorsing op die plaas te onderneem, sal ek weer in verbinding tree met die hours van minereleregte op die plaas, "Mnre S.A. Townships, Mining and Finance Corporation, Limited" om te verneem of hulle bereid is om toe te stem om geen prospektering op die plaas toe te laat nie (Secretary of Lands, 1949).

This passage can be translated as follows:

The organisation which was established in connection with the proposed Dongola nature reserve will therefore be dissolved and it will therefore not be possible for the department to supervise the abovementioned farm. The honourable Minister of Lands has instructed that the farm Greefswald be placed under the control of the university for the purposes as mentioned above with the requirement that the university itself must arrange proper/adequate/correct supervision. Should the university still desire to do further research on the farm, I will once again contact the owners of the mineral rights on the farm, "Mnre S.A. Townships, Mining and Finance Corporation, Limited", to establish if they are prepared to agree to do no prospecting on the farm.

A letter signed C v R L, presumably abbreviation for Clarence van Riet Lowe and dated 17 June 1949, shows an attempt to resist the decision. In response to the Secretary of Land's letter, Van Riet Lowe argued that:

Op die plaas Greefswald is daar drie uiters belangrike argeologiese aflegginge wat reeds ondersoek is, waarvan die walbekende Mapungubwe die vernaamste is. Ons weet dat daar ook ander dargelyke afleggings op die plaas bestan. Hierdie afleggings bevat 'n groot aantal waardevolle sierrade van goud. Goud ter waarde van etlike duisende ponde is reeds in die opdrawings van die Universiteit van Pretoria gevind. Kennis hiervan is algemeen, en dit is 'n sterk sal vir soekers na "verborgte skatte" wat enige geleentheid om daar rond te snuffel gretig te baat aal neem. Die Historiese Monument-kommissie het al in die verlede envaring gehad van sulke mense.

Of die Universiteit van Pretoria van bedoeling is om verdere ondersoekingswerk daar aan ter voer of nie, moet hierdie werk vroeër of later voortgesit word. Dit is uiters noodsaaklik dat strenge beheer en toesig oor die plaas en besoekers daarheen uitgeoefen word. Nie alleen is dit die geval ter wille van die argeologiese wetenskap nie, maar dit moet in die oog gehou word dat die plaas staatseiendom is en dat die oorlooffde verwydering van waardevolle voorwerpe 'n verlies vir die Staat sou wees. (Van Riet Lowe, 1949)

A translation of Van Riet Lowe's argument, as stated in the letter, reveals his concerns and slight frustration:

On the farm, Greefswald, there are three very important archaeological excavations that have already been investigated, the most well-known being Mapungubwe. We know that there are also other similar excavations that exist on the farm. These excavations contain a large number of valuable gold artefacts. Gold to the value of many thousands of pounds has already been found in the excavation undertaken by the University of Pretoria. This is general knowledge, and it is a strong attraction for treasure hunters searching for hidden treasures that will use any opportunity to go poke around there. The Commission for Historical Monuments has had experience of such people in the past.

Whether the University of Pretoria has the intention to do further research or not, this work must be done sooner or later. It is imperative that strict control and supervision be exercised over the farm and visitors. Not only is it important for the benefit of archaeological science, but it must be remembered that the farm is government property and that the unauthorised removal of valuable objects will be a loss for the state.

Van Riet Lowe's efforts were dashed. The apartheid ideology was already underway, it was illuminated here by a change in focus within the discipline of archaeology, in post-1948 South Africa. The deproclamation of the Dongola Wildlife Sanctuary, the only national park to ever be deproclaimed in South Africa, marked this change. Even more remarkable, is the return of the land to private owners, some of whom seemed to only have interests in mining. For archaeology as a discipline, this was even more telling as the discipline got pulled into state politics. Scholars who were regarded as being close to Smuts got hounded out of the University of Pretoria, while the archaeological committee, chaired by Van Riet Lowe was abolished. The direct engagement with the university by the state during this time, reveals the increasing focus on an intellectual discourse that served to promote Afrikaner Nationalism.

According to Shepherd (2003), the white "settler pan-Africanism and Anglophilia" of the discipline of archaeology was replaced by Afrikaner nationalism during this time. He argues that this marked a transformation in social and state-sanctioned engagements with the past. He also suggests that the cancellation of the Pan-African Congress in Prehistory, due to be held in 1951, was one of the "casualties of this transformation" (Shepherd, 2003). The South African delegation that had attended the first Pan-African Congress in Kenya, had been invited by Smuts to offer South Africa as a host for the second Congress. However, with the changes in the political landscape, this was not to be. The death of Smuts in 1950, and the subsequent death of Van Riet Lowe, in 1956, marked an end to Smuts's patronage of South African archaeology.

"Modern" archaeology and the making of an Afrikaans university

After the Second World War, research was again made possible in Mapungubwe, although it was to be on a very limited scale. During the post-war period, Johannes Frederik Eloff, who had a long history with Mapungubwe, became a key role-player in the establishment of archaeology as a discipline at the University of Pretoria. Eloff visited several sites in Britain and Europe where he participated in excavations which provided him with experience (Meyer, 2011). This led to him supervising research on Greefswald, in the late 1960s. The University of Pretoria had by then established the Department of Anthropology and the new head of the department, Professor P.J. Coertze, also strongly supported the development of archaeology as a scientific discipline as well as the

continuation of research in Mapungubwe. Eloff's interest in Mapungubwe dated back to a visit as a young boy with his father in the early 1930s. He later worked as field photographer during Reverend Jones's fieldwork in the late 1930s. As a result of Eloff's efforts, archaeology eventually became independent of anthropology at the University of Pretoria and this culminated in the establishment of the Department of Archaeology in 1970, with Eloff as Head of Department.

Mapungubwe Hill, on Greefswald Farm, became a priority in fieldwork training for archaeology students at the university. This, according to Meyer (2011), marked a new era in which the university would develop its own internal capacity in archaeological research, including contemporary methodologies. Archaeological research under Eloff revealed the highly complex nature of the layers of human settlement, with dates ranging from AD1252 to AD1270, thus placing the settlement period in the 13th century. Between 1951 and 1970, a period referred to as Phase Two of the Mapungubwe project, the Southern Terrace was extensively excavated, with detailed stratigraphic investigations. According to Eloff's unpublished reports, as cited by Tiley-Nel (2011), "typological problems with regard to identities of cultural artefacts existed as there were differing interpretations". During this period, there was also a marked increase in interdisciplinary approaches, providing potential for the development of new approaches to archaeological research and an opportunity to correct Captain Gardner's research of the 1930s. What is significant, however, is the disconnect between work at Mapungubwe by the University of Pretoria and general trends of Iron Age research in archaeology during this time.

Shepherd (2003) argues that the theoretical developments that came with Ray Inskip and John Parkington, who had arrived from Cambridge in the 1960s to take up posts at the University of Cape Town, saw the emergence of new archaeological values. Citing Lewis Binford's 1962 analysis of the discipline, he argues that this New Archaeology emphasised "ecological relationships, on taphonomy or site formation processes, and on cultural 'process' (rather than cultural history)" (Shepherd, 2003). Shepherd (2003) also points out that New Archaeology encouraged "epistemological rigour and theory-building". This rigour and focus on theory was somewhat lacking in the case of the University of Pretoria's archaeological research. The university was instead more concerned with dating techniques that are related to human settlements. To me, this

focus on dating, mirrors the suggestion by Hall (1984) and others before him, that this search for origins and focus on settlement was to provide a scientific basis for a myth that South Africa was empty for many years, and that the black farmers only moved southwards at the same time that white pioneers were already heading up to the north. Hall (1984) argues that this has been “implicit in all Iron Age research, in seeking to argue for recent black migration into Southern Africa, so convenient for the historical justification of the white presence in the subcontinent”.

In his analysis of South African archaeology, Shepherd (2003) also suggests that the re-emergence of archaeology in South Africa, from the late 1960s, came about as a result of a number of factors, among which was the growth of the South African economy. In terms of this suggestion, South African archaeology became a “beneficiary of this high point in the development of racial capitalism”(Shepherd,2003). Archaeological research by the University of Pretoria was indeed to be a key beneficiary of this boom in the South African economy. In addition to this, by 1969, the National Monuments Act no. 28 of 1969 had been passed and had established the National Monuments Council (NMC), which according to the Act, was to:

establish a *Burgergraftekomitee* and a British War Graves Committee to assist the council in connection with certain matters; to provide for National Gardens of Remembrance and the continued existence of the War Graves Trust Fund established by the War Graves Act, 1967; to repeal certain laws relating to natural and historical monuments, relics and antiques; and to provide for incidental matters (*National Monuments Act no. 28 of 1969*).

The establishment of this public institution, as well as a trust fund, was indicative of the apartheid state’s investment in heritage during this time. By 1970, Eloff had also secured a substantial grant from the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), a state think-tank, for a full time research project on Mapungubwe. His report contributed significantly to the Archaeological Project of the University of Pretoria.

Phase Three of the research project by the University of Pretoria began in 1970, under the direction of Eloff. The objective of this research phase was to collect relevant cultural material, to observe stratigraphy and to produce detailed field records. Andrie Meyer was appointed as the field archaeologist and his salary was paid from the HSRC fund,

along with all the other expenses of the project. Meyer (2011) reported that during the third phase of Mapungubwe research, the main focus was on the study of pottery, human settlements, as well as radiocarbon dating. This provided potential for the reconstruction of the cultural identity of the people who inhabited Mapungubwe. Stratigraphy was also more emphasised during this time as it provided an opportunity to train students and future researchers (Meyer, 2011). The third phase also marked an increased interest in the human remains of the Iron Age population, although the interpretation thereof relied heavily on the material culture.



Figure 3.1 J.F. Eloff and a young Andrie Meyer in Mapungubwe, in 1973. Source: A. Meyer, 1998

During this third phase of the Mapungubwe project, the human remains that were excavated in the 1930s were once again re-assessed. According to Meyer (2011), G.P. Rightmire studied the human remains and his research findings contradicted earlier findings by A. Galloway. The early “San-Boschkop” origins that were suggested by Galloway were refuted by Rightmire who concluded that the population from Mapungubwe was in fact “Negroid” and similar to the modern African populations of the region (Meyer, 2011). This is important as it marked a shift in the language of physical anthropology with regard to racial classification. Dubow (1995) suggests that “Negro” was used by physical anthropologists, in preference to the racist connotations that

“Bantu” had since acquired. He goes on to argue that physical anthropology did more than any other discipline to “generate and sustain the racial paradigm in South Africa, but was not solely responsible for that paradigm” (Dubow, 1995).

Meyer (2011) regarded this phase as one of increased scientific application. This was largely as a result of the involvement of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and the use of carbon dating techniques. In his words, “Phase Three only lacked by the way of household architecture and settlement phase” (Meyer, 2011). Although the value of ethnographic research was emphasised as a need by the HSRC, very little effort was made to relate the site to the contemporary population of the Northern Transvaal. This phase was also at the height of apartheid and the growing political tensions between the state and the liberation movement during the 1960s and the 1970s. The tensions had an impact on research in Mapungubwe. A number of incidents were reported in the area, including the killing of a family, when a car they were traveling in, was blown up by a landmine (Meyer, 2011). The increasing presence of the state machinery on the site, in the form of military patrols, turned Mapungubwe into a significant political terrain. The strategic location of the site, on the border with Botswana and Zimbabwe added to the site’s potency as a political flash point.

The Vhembe Military Base at Mapungubwe

In 1967 the land on Greefswald was given some provincial proclamation, however, this proclamation included only three farms. In 1968 the government handed Greefswald Farm over to the South African Defence Force (SADF) who established a military base there. Politically, the site’s location on the borders of two countries that were known to harbor political exiles from South Africa, was strategic. In that same year, the SADF granted the University of Pretoria access to the archaeological sites, erecting fences around the main sites that were out of bounds to military personnel. The army also assisted the research team with the construction of a campsite (Meyer, 2011). It was during this time that Greefswald farm also became an infamous “rehabilitation centre” for the army. This was the project of controversial army psychiatrist Dr. Aubrey Levine (Linderman, 2005). Very little information is available on the military activities at Greefswald during the 1980s. However, it is known that the area was a sensitive security zone. A blog, *Greefswald Old Boys*, gives a glimpse of such activities. The blog was established to share stories and personal accounts of army conscripts, who had been

“admitted” to Greefswald. One of the contributors to the blog gives a haunting description of the political landscape:

The invasion of Angola in support of CIA-backed UNITA mercenaries was still three years away. The Soweto uprising was five years away. The murder of Steve Biko was six years away. But the war in South Africa had already begun. It wasn't the war we expected, and it wasn't against the traditional enemy. As far as the South African government was concerned that was already over. Mandela was on Robben Island, the ANC was in disarray, the PAC was in exile, and the Communists had long been routed. These were the golden years of apartheid. The Afrikaner oligarchy, sustained by lucrative precious metal exports, nourished by the spiritual support of the Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerk, and guided by the Machiavellian strategies of the notorious Broederbond, was at the height of its pure white powers. Now they had the time, the money and the inclination to turn on that other enemy of the slegs blankes state – a disaffected white youth suckled on the poisonous tits of rock & roll, dagga and sexual deviance (“Torr”, 2007).

Another account alludes to how the site was used for the pleasures of those who were part of the ruling class of the time:

Every now and then, during the course of that year, the big brass would come from Pretoria in jeeps and black Mercedes Benz limousines. They would shoot buck with machine guns and party around a massive braai until the early hours of the morning. We could smell the charcoal and burning kudu steaks from the top of Greefswald koppie. A few days later, after they had gone, we had to go down to the river and clean up everything that hadn't been eaten by the vultures (“Torr”, 2007).

The location of Mapungubwe on the banks of the Limpopo River made the site a perfect bushveld resort of sorts, where the apartheid elite could go and kick back. The Limpopo river bank is more like a beach than a river bank. In addition to this, the hunting prospects in the area made the site a convenient and secluded spot for the top-brass's pleasures. The SAHRA registry has comprehensive files with regard to the site but remains silent on the military operations during apartheid. The little that was available was only revealing in terms of the extent of control that the military had over the site during this time. SAHRA and its predecessor, the National Monuments Council (NMC), as the custodians of heritage resources in South Africa keep records in terms of heritage management of the resources they stand to protect. During apartheid, the key correspondents on Mapungubwe are the University of Pretoria and the army. The 24

January 1983 correspondence from the Chief of the SADF (who only signed off as Commander Botha), presumably to the NMC, is revealing in this regard:

It is requested that it be stipulated in the regulations that the registrar will only approve applications once final written permission for entrance has been obtained from the General Commander Northern Transvaal.

The following will be applicable:

- a. Visitors must follow a direct route to Mupungubwe and K2.
- b. Visitors must subject themselves to the security rules of access at control points.
- c. No visit will be allowed to the area unless written permission has been obtained from the HQ Commander Northern Transvaal.
- d. Visitors must indemnify the State (government) against any claims for damage or loss that may occur as a result of their visit to the area.
- e. No hunting of wild animals or birds, all flora and fauna must be protected.
- f. No change to or removal of notices may occur/be done.
- g. The leader of the visiting group must report within four hours of arrival to the base.
- h. The length of your visit will be 24hrs and 3 weeks will be given for excavations.

Can you please indicate whether the Council has taken a decision regarding the restoration of the Smuts house (Botha, 1983).

What is interesting about the correspondence is the intricate detail of security measures that are determined necessary by the military. Another interesting detail is the author's inquiry on the decisions regarding the "Smuts Huisie" that appears at the end of the SADF letter. Jan Smuts had built himself a cottage near Mapungubwe and there was concern that it had become dilapidated. Yet, no decision seems to have been made regarding the status of this feature as a heritage resource. This reminder of Smuts's patronage, still etched on the Mapungubwe landscape, seemed to be a cause of concern (or lack thereof), throughout this period. In a number of reports leading up to the declaration of Mapungubwe and the Southern Terrace, an area of 14 hectares, as a national memorial, "Smuts Huisie" keeps coming up. However, in 1984, when the site was declared under the National Monuments Act, the "Smuts Huisie" was not included,

marking the total erasure of the Smuts legacy and that of an inconvenient physical symbol of his patronage.

During the Border War (1986 to 1989), the Greefswald Farm archaeological project faced many delays. The area had been declared unsafe for researchers because of the SADF border conflict with Umkhonto weSizwe (MK) and other liberation movement armies, who were operating outside South African borders. Strict security measures were dictated by the army during this time and in 1988 fieldwork on Mapungubwe was postponed. Only a stabilisation project was permitted in 1989 and during this time, the army assisted in installing what would be a field laboratory for the University of Pretoria's Department of Anthropology and Archaeology (Tiley-Nel, 2011). During the post-border war period, the SADF also erected an electric fence along the Limpopo River to secure the border. In the 1990s, the Department of Environmental Conservation and Tourism (DEAT) and the SADF, provided logistical support for the research project. This direct involvement of archaeology with the state apparatus, such as the army, was amplified during the apartheid period. The University of Pretoria became so entangled with the state that it became inevitable for a symbiotic relationship to form.



Figure 3.2 Andrie Meyer (second from right, front row) with members of the SADF 1989. Source: Mapungubwe Archives, University of Pretoria.



Figure 3.4 and 3.5 Andrie Meyer with the golden artefacts at the University of Pretoria, 1990. The golden artefacts, which had become iconic at this stage, were stored in wooden boxes, as this was before the establishment of the Mapungubwe Museum, where they are currently on display. Source: SAHRA Registry

Between 1991 and 1995, only surface surveys and mapping of K2 and Mapungubwe took place. However, in 1994, Maryna Steyn's Doctoral research on the human remains, reconstructed the lifestyle and health status of the people from Mapungubwe. Although the focus was on markers of disease and diet, she also made reference to the grave goods as they were thought to be a reflection on the number of people who had obligations to the diseased. This shift, as explained by Steyn, is said to have resulted from a "change in the philosophy of physical anthropological research, to focus more on lifestyles, demography, adaptation and health" (Steyn, 2011). Steyn goes on to argue that skeletons are valuable sources of information on disease, diet and the general well-being of a community. As the largest collection of any Iron Age site, the Mapungubwe human remains attracted a lot of interest. However, she acknowledges that the excavation and study of skeletal remains has become "socially inappropriate because of its conflict with local beliefs, particularly of those that were obtained in an unethical manner" (Steyn, 2011). Her acknowledgement reflects an attempt to reinvent physical anthropology and move it away from a form of racial science, while acknowledging the culturist critique that was becoming stronger at the time. This reinvention of the discipline coincided with the end of apartheid. The liberation movements had been unbanned, leading to the return of freedom fighters from exile. This led to the installment of a new ANC government in 1994, thus creating a new political landscape in South Africa.

Conclusion

The advent of the apartheid government in South Africa marked an end to Smuts' patronage over South African politics and by extension archaeology. With regard to Mapungubwe, this was amplified by the deproclamation of the site as a national park, to become ordinary farmland. The site, even during these early days, was fraught with contestation as it stood to challenge long held beliefs of a primitive and uncivilised pre-colonial South Africa. Although it is argued by the University of Pretoria that information on Mapungubwe has always been in the public domain, even during this period, I argue that it was in fact hidden. It was hidden in both archaeological terminology that is inaccessible, and also in the Afrikaans language that for years was rejected as the language of the oppressor by the majority of the South African population. This type of obfuscation through language is still evident in the record, in the form of official documents that dramatically shift from the English language to Afrikaans. While serving to emphasise Afrikaner hegemony, language indeed limited access to information.

According to Hall, as cited by Shepherd (2003), there is a "remarkable contradiction" which characterises the archaeology of the 1970s: although "the liberal germ, from which the florescence of Iron Age archaeology had stemmed, had been outraged at the conscious distortion of history to form a part of apartheid ideology, no attempt was made to make the new archaeological synthesis accessible either to challenge settler consciousness or to serve Black Nationalist aspirations" (Shepherd, 2003). In the context of Mapungubwe, while archaeology at the University of Pretoria was entangled with the state's apartheid ideology, very little was done by archaeologists located in the South of the "North-South" academic divide to serve the anti-apartheid movement. Contributions by these so-called "liberals" would have gone a long way to challenge apartheid ideology by providing the "intellectual backing" that Ramphela referred to in 1999.

The extent of the distance between South African archaeologists and their potential constituencies is evident "in the failure of the new Iron Age synthesis – potentially one of the most politically significant branches of archaeology in the world – to make any political impact" (Shepherd, 2003). This then amplifies the notion that South African archaeologists in general, remained disengaged from the conflict of the apartheid era,

whereas, the potentials that the discipline offered, were disregarded to suit the political climate of the time. Archaeology was a beneficiary of the apartheid state and also the army, in the case of the University of Pretoria's Archaeology Department. While elsewhere, this relationship between the discipline of archaeology and the military is implicit, in the case of Mapungubwe, as illustrated in this chapter, the relationship was direct.

Chapter Four: After Apartheid

The *new* South Africa and the end of a global cultural boycott

In 1995, a year after the first democratic elections, Mapungubwe on Greefswald Farm, was transferred to the South African National Parks (SANParks). However, the withdrawal of the South African Defence Force (SADF), after 1997, meant that security was compromised, leading to further pillage on the site. In 1997, the National Monuments Council (NMC) declared the collection of cultural artefacts associated with Mapungubwe hill as National Treasures, in terms of the National Monuments Act of 1969. For the first time, the objects kept at the University of Pretoria, were recognized as national treasures worthy of official preservation. This would then entail their mobilization, away from Meyer's wooden boxes and into a more institutionalized facility of care. This move led to the establishment of the Mapungubwe Museum.

In 1999, Parliament passed the National Heritage Resources Act (NHRA), to replace the National Monuments Act of 1969. The NHRA introduced a system for the management of heritage resources in South Africa, which provided for the inclusion of communities in the conservation of their heritage resources. Section 41 of the act provided for the restitution of movable resources and also for negotiations between public institutions and communities with *bona fide* interests. 1999 was a significant moment for South African archaeology as it was also the same year that the Fourth World Archaeological Congress (WAC-4) was to be hosted by South Africa, after many years of cultural and academic boycott. The formation of WAC was, in fact, precipitated by the banning of South Africa and South African archaeologists from the first congress that took place in Southampton in 1986 (Ucko, 1987). During the WAC-4 which was held at the University of Cape Town in January 1999, Kader Asmal, then Minister for Water Affairs and Forestry, noted the importance of the original ban in the campaign against apartheid (White, 1999). The ban was part of a global boycott against South Africa, in an effort to put pressure on the apartheid regime.

It was also at WAC-4 that the University of Pretoria released for public display a selection of gold artefacts from Mapungubwe, including the gold rhinoceros, during the plenary session of the Congress. This was a symbolic gesture, indicative of the formation of a new academic landscape as there had been claims that the University of

Pretoria had, in the past, refused on several occasions to allow researchers from other institutions to work on the site (SAHRA, 1997). The University of Pretoria, a traditionally Afrikaans university that was instrumental in promoting Afrikaner Nationalism, was given a platform in the Anglo-metropolitan University of Cape Town. In addition to that, Dr. Maphela Ramphela, a black female Vice-Chancellor of the university, at the helm of the proceedings, amplified the symbolic gesture of reconciliation. The event marked the end of the North-South tensions that had persisted within the discipline of archaeology in South Africa, especially where Mapungubwe was concerned. It was also on this occasion that Ramphela made the statement that I open with. According to White (1999), the WAC-4 session on current South African archaeology, had six speakers who spoke to the range of research and teaching in the "new" South Africa. This gave the foreign conference participants a good idea of the current scene in South Africa (White, 1999). The sentiments were very much in line with the popular notion of a "Rainbow Nation" of the post-1994 South Africa, especially in the period of Nelson Mandela's administration. This period entailed public gestures of goodwill and forgiveness, partly to heal a nation with a fragmented past and also to showcase, to the world, the collective commitment to unity and reconciliation.

Mapungubwe and the politics of global heritage management

In 2001, the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) considered a recommendation for Mapungubwe to be graded as a National Heritage Site, in terms of the NHRA of 1999. In 2002, Professor Victor Ralushai from the University of Venda was commissioned by the Norwegian Agency for Development (NORAD) to conduct an investigation of the oral history of Mapungubwe. The primary purpose of Ralushai's work, according to his report, was to:

complement findings of archaeologists, as up to now, there is very little information produced by historians, social anthropologists, socio-linguists and ethnomusicologists. What is available are historical accounts based on archaeological interpretations. By using oral sources, it does not mean that I am downplaying written sources (Ralushai, 2002).

In doing this, Ralushai focused on praise songs, folk tales, place names and linkages between oral history and archaeology. Ralushai encountered problems during his field

work as many of the informants lived far from Mapungubwe, because of natural migration and forced removals. To me, the most significant finding of this research relates to Tshiwana, a “petty chief” who had lived in Mapungubwe and was interviewed by Lestrade in 1934. An informant told Ralushai that Tshiwana was another name for Mokwena, whom according to Ralushai, is spelt *Mowena*, in all official accounts on Mapungubwe. If Mowena was indeed Tshiwana, I am assuming that his erasure worked to reduce his authority as a chief. Ralushai proposed that more research needed to be done on the history of Tshiwana. Nevertheless, Ralushai also concluded that Mapungubwe was indeed the biggest pre-historic trading centre with international connections in Africa and the rest of the world. His conclusion, along with the long history of archaeological research, was to inform the nomination of Mapungubwe as a World Heritage Site.

In 2003, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) inscribed the Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape (MCL) on the World Heritage list, on the basis that it provides evidence of an important interchange of human values that resulted in significant cultural and social changes in the Southern African region between AD900 and 1300. The evidence of such significant changes pointed to “the existence of a state society that had trading connections with eastern Africa and Asia, and also evidence of climate change in the area” (Carruthers, 2006). The shift from “Heritage Site” to “Cultural Landscape” is consistent with global standards that are predetermined by UNESCO. According to UNESCO, cultural landscapes are defined as cultural properties that represent the “combined works of nature and of man”, as designated in the World Heritage Convention. Cultural landscapes are supposed to be illustrative of the evolution of human society and settlement over time, under the influence of the physical constraints and/or opportunities presented by their natural environment and of successive social, economic and cultural forces, both external and internal. This means that not only the cultural aspects of Mapungubwe were considered, but also the natural aspects.

Still in 2003, the Forensic Anthropology Research Centre at the University of Pretoria conducted the rehabilitation of the old excavations at Mapungubwe and the Southern Terrace as part of a Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism Poverty Alleviation Project for SANParks. The Project was aimed at rehabilitating and stabilising

the old excavations that were conducted between 1934 and the late 1950s, a process that is also consistent with UNESCO standards. During this process all the previously unprocessed archaeological materials were to be screened and all the artefacts were to be recovered and the previously unrecorded features to be documented. This rehabilitation project was to be my own first direct encounter with Mapungubwe, wherein as part of the requirements of my Honours degree at the University of Pretoria, I had to do field work on Mapungubwe. The rehabilitation process for me, as a young physical anthropology scholar, was exciting and seemed like an opportunity of a lifetime. This was indeed to be a turning point in my life. But my excitement was short-lived. I soon found out from my colleagues that there were to be no further excavations at Mapungubwe.

The UNESCO inscription of the Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape (MCL) on the World Heritage list entailed opportunities for tourism that were associated with development projects. While the stabilisation project was under way, contractors were already building a staircase that would make the hill accessible to tourists. The team of researchers worked awkwardly side-by side with development projects. While the one side made claims at conservation, the other was aimed at tourism which is often destructive. An interesting aspect of the development project was the use of the soil that the archaeology team had excavated to build the staircase. To me this looked like an improvised strategy to “preserve” the integrity of the site, even with all the development that was taking place.



Figure 4.1 Local women during the *Rehabilitation and Stabilisation of Mapungubwe Project*, in 2003. The women were part of the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT) Poverty Alleviation Project for South African National Parks. Their function was to carry sand buckets from the area that the research team from the University of Pretoria was working, the soil was in turn used in the construction that was taking place simultaneously. Source: Author's personal photographs.



Figure 4.2 Staff and students from the University of Pretoria during the *Mapungubwe Rehabilitation and Stabilisation Project* that took place in March 2003. The construction workers in the background are building the staircase to the hill summit, while university team, at the fore is stabilising the trenches at the foot of Mapungubwe Hill. Source: Author's personal photographs.

Laying claim to South Africa's own "Golden Age"

In 2004, a committee similar to the Archaeological Committee of the 1940s was again re-established. This was the Mapungubwe Committee of the University of Pretoria and it served to advise senior management at the university on all issues pertaining to Mapungubwe (Tiley-Nel, 2011). In that same year, then President Thabo Mbeki called for the repatriation of the Mapungubwe collections, from various public institutions. Mbeki popularised the concept of an African Renaissance, or a rebirth of African innovation and values, and regarded Mapungubwe to be an important symbol of South Africa's own Golden Age. The Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT), which has jurisdiction over SANParks, was selected as the implementing agency of the consultative process that was required by the NHRA of 1999.

The process soon became embroiled in highly-contested ownership issues. Various groups claimed to be the *bona fide* descendants of the people of Mapungubwe, while the academics at UP argued for the role of scientific research. The DEAT mediated this process and a series of improvisations emerged.

In 2006, DEAT established a steering committee for the repatriation, with the office of Rejoice Mabudafhasi, the Deputy Minister at DEAT, as the secretariat. The steering committee included representatives from interested groups: the University of Pretoria, South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA), The National Heritage Council (NHC), and other local government structures. As a result of the engagements, it became clear that the process was not inclusive enough and that other stakeholders had to be invited. The Vhangona Cultural Movement (representing the Vhavenda, Vhangona and Vhabikwanaive tribes) had already engaged with the University of Pretoria to claim the human remains, language being the basis of their claim. According to Nienaber et. al. (2008) these claimants believed that the people who name a place are the authentic "aborigines and owners of such a place". Place names such as *Mapungubwe*, *Dongola*, *Musina*, *Dzimbabwe*, and *Vhembe* were used to support the claim (Nienaber et.al., 2008). However, the Steering Committee agreed that all affected tribal groups should rather make the claim as a collective. The Lemba Cultural Association, Leshiba Royal Family, Machete Royal Family, San Council, and Tshivula Royal Council also made

subsequent claims to connections to Mapungubwe (Phambili Productions, 2007) All were invited to the consultations and a collective claim was made by all the groups.

On 13 February 2006, the University of Pretoria wrote a submission to respond to the claim. In the submission, the university said it supported the repatriation of human remains, provided that it occurred within the legal framework. However, the institution noted that the human remains have a scientific research potential and that their loss would have a negative impact on future research into the past of South African communities. It was further stated by the university that scientific research on the remains had contributed to what we know about the health status, demography, growth patterns of children and burial practices of this population. According to the submission, the dating of Mapungubwe remained problematic due to the lack of dateable materials and some bone samples could be of use in radio-carbon dating techniques. DNA sampling that was required for recording the genetic characteristics of the population was, according to the university, still at its development stage, and also very expensive. Other forms of research, such as isotopic analysis into diet, the development of dental casts which would inform investigations into heredity and lifestyles, still had to be conducted on the remains. It is interesting that no acknowledgement of the long history of racial typing, with regard to the Mapungubwe human remains, feature in the submission.

In addition to the case for scientific research, the university offered further arguments to discourage the return of the human remains to their original burial place. According to the officials at the university, the original burial place on Mapungubwe Hill was devoid of soil as it is sandstone and so they argued that no hole could be dug there. It was argued in the submission that any other location near the hill was going to disturb archaeological deposits and risk uncovering even more human remains. Alternatives to reburial were proposed, and these involved storage facilities in the form of a mausoleum that would conform to stipulations set out in the Human Tissue Act of 1983. An Interpretative Centre, on the site, was also recommended as an alternative facility (University of Pretoria, 2006).

In 2006, Maryna Steyn, then a Professor at the University of Pretoria's Department of Anatomy, revisited the three gold burials and published a paper containing new

information on Mapungubwe. What is interesting about Steyn's methodology is the use of archival material, especially photographs. In this study, she suggests that there is a possibility of a secondary burial, and she supports this suggestion by drawing from Venda oral tradition which points towards the practice, where royalty burials are involved (Steyn, 2007). In terms of the oral accounts that she pursued, dead Venda kings would be left to decompose before being interred. According to Steyn (2007), this suggests that the Mapungubwe burials may have been brought from elsewhere and so are possibly much older than the actual site. This interesting methodological approach that is inclusive of archival material and even draws from oral tradition marks yet another important shift in respect of research methodology at the University of Pretoria. On the one hand, it sought to disrupt the distinction between science and tradition. But on the other, the findings also echoed and gave credence to the "foreign origins" doctrine of the past. Before Steyn's paper was published, the human remains of Mapungubwe had been removed from the University of Pretoria's Anatomy Department, for reburial in Mapungubwe.

"Paying lip service": repatriation and restitution in Mapungubwe

The call for the repatriation of Mapungubwe remains was evidently received with dismay by the University of Pretoria. In a paper that was co-authored by Maryna Steyn and Coen Nienaber, to illustrate lessons learnt from previous examples of repatriation in South Africa, it is said that:

Unfortunately often only lip service is paid to the interests of descendent communities in current repatriation and restitution practice. Control over, and ownership of objects and remains, should revert to descendents and descendant communities and should not be superseded by political interests in the way that the repatriation of the remains of Saartje Baartman, for example, was superseded by women's rights issues, or the way in which the return of Hintsa's skull became a power play between parties. Intermingled with all the issues, the importance of scientific studies should be also taken into account. It is widely accepted that there is now a phase of redressing problems of the past. However, with the necessary respect, cooperation and open discussion some balance between the interests of communities to which these remains belong and the scientists and the curators can be reached. It is also imperative that future research potential be safeguarded, because there is still much to be learned about our past (Steyn and Nienaber, not dated).

This turn by the University of Pretoria was intended to locate science outside of politics and is interesting, especially from a discipline that had previously been inextricably linked with a political discourse. The association of science with politics goes as far back as Smuts' patronage of archaeology, as demonstrated in this thesis. To a certain extent the assertion by Steyn and Nienaber that claimants are politically motivated is true; the Deputy Minister of the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT), as a member of one of the *bona fide* claimant groups, had a vested interest. Pikirayi (2005), also from the University of Pretoria, offered a different perspective in that he argued that these negotiations rather be considered as part of the overall management of the Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape. He proposed that Mapungubwe be regarded as setting a precedent for best practice; parties concerned would be given an opportunity to explore gaps and inconsistencies in the legislation, "particularly on restitution and repatriation guidelines which are scant and developed without full consultation across the broad spectrum of South African communities"(Pikirayi, 2005). His argument, as was presented to the 15th General Assembly of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), proposes that:

At this stage it is critical not to conclude that restitution (or even repatriation) would harm scientific research, or compromise "standards" pertaining to the process. Here, ethical considerations outweigh scientific research priorities. The reburial of human remains excavated at Thulamela in neighbouring Kruger National Park is generally regarded as a rushed exercise that compromised potential scientific research. While this may be correct to some degree, it is important to remember that the political contexts in which the remains were exhumed there, and, at Mapungubwe and K2 were different (Pikirayi, 2005).

Political agendas were indeed pursued by a number of politicians during the process of negotiating the repatriation of the Mapungubwe remains, and this was confirmed during the hand-over ceremony at the University of Pretoria. The Deputy Minister of DEAT stated that the government saw the repatriation as an opportunity to discharge its responsibility of promoting democratic and humanitarian solutions amongst its people. The contestation between the DEAT and the University of Pretoria, that preceded the hand-over event, was downplayed in the Minister's speech. Instead, she showered praises upon the university; the Northern Flagship Institution and the University of

Witwatersrand, for their “readiness and willingness” to accept claims for the human remains to be repatriated and reburied at their places of origin. She went on to say:

Unlike their predecessors who authorised wholesale excavations and collections of human remains during the colonial era, the new leaders of these institutions have shown great respect for indigenous people and the remains of their ancestors (Mabudafhasi, 2007).

During the same event, the spirit of reconciliation was reiterated by then Limpopo Member of the Executive Council (MEC) for the Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism, Collins Chabane. The MEC stated that it was the government’s view that “this gesture will go a long way in fostering nation building, reconciliation and social cohesion in our country” (Chabane, 2007). This mobilisation of the human remains as being symbolic of nation building is in contrast to the role they played in previous years. From being symbols of “bantú invasion” that stood to justify white settlement in South Africa, the human remains were for a while also symbolic of white domination over black bodies. In the post-apartheid era what the human remains stood to symbolise shifted significantly: they became symbolic of a need to redress past injustices while also being invaluable resources for scientific study. As proposed by Pikirayi (2005), in the case of the Mapungubwe human remains, ethical considerations had to outweigh scientific research priorities, leading to their repatriation.

A total of 150 skeletons were carefully packed in sealed boxes that were made of high-density polyethylene, a type of plastic. This material, according to Johan Nel of the University of Pretoria, is non-corrosive and does not oxidise (Phambili Productions, 2007). The boxes were engraved with a series of numbers, according to each skeleton’s unique code and recorded in a corresponding register. These were to be placed in tomblike structures in Mapungubwe. No sampling for destructive analyses, such as DNA analysis, was allowed prior to reburial. The claimants regarded this to be the ultimate desecration of the ancestral remains. The human remains were then transported by the officials from the University of Pretoria to Mapungubwe, after a release certificate had been obtained from SAHRA. The cultural objects, however, remained behind “for safe-keeping” at the University of Pretoria, and are still on permanent display in the Old Arts Building.



Figure 4.3 The Mapungubwe skeletal remains in numbered high density polyethylene boxes. These were prepared by the University of Pretoria's Anatomy Department, before repatriation to Mapungubwe. Source: Phambili Productions, 2007

The reburial of the skeletal remains in Mapungubwe was preceded by a cleansing ceremony involving traditional healers and members of the communities that claimed to be the *bona fide* descendents of the human remains. The cleansing ceremony, hosted by the Freedom Park Trust, and the provincial government of Limpopo, started on the 5th of November and concluded with the “return of the spirits ceremony” on the 6th of November 2007. Traditional healers burnt candles and *impepho*, a herb that is usually referred to as an equivalent of incense. They called on the ancestral spirits to bless the site and cleanse it, in preparation for the return of the human remains from Pretoria. Traditional beer, medicine and tobacco, were offered by pouring them on the ground, a way of stabilising the terrain.



Figure 4.3 This is a screenshot from the film on the repatriation of the Mapungubwe human remains. The picture shows traditional healers performing a cleansing ritual, while calling on the spirits to gather on Mapunguwe in preparation for the reburial. Source: Phambili productions, 2007.

The reburial took place on the 20th of November 2007 but the events leading up to the actual ceremony, were not without controversy. According to Nel, the concrete slab that covered one of the two graves, “did not have enough time to cure, due to delays in payment by the National Lotteries Board”, the main sponsor. Nel argues that even though the committee had agreed with the claimants that remains would only be buried once the grave was ready, there was a lot of unhappiness with this agreement. In terms of the agreement, a symbolic burial was to take place in the evening, however, before this could start, a “teeming horde of ‘descendants’ in various states of sobriety were calling for the immediate reburial of the K2 remains” (Nel, 2011). Frustration with the seemingly tedious process, lack of trust and power struggles regarding what should be done, is evident in Nel’s description of events. To me it seems that improvisation was yet again inevitable, for everyone’s satisfaction.



Figure 4.5 The Reburial Ceremony in Mapungubwe: Claimants are seen gathered around the grave that has been prepared for the interment of the human remains. The people seated around the grave are chanting, calling upon the ancestors to bless the space and to facilitate the return of the ancestral spirits to their resting place. Source: Phambili Productions, 2007.



Figure 4.6 The grave on Mapungubwe Hill, showing the neatly stacked boxes containing human remains. The manner in which they were interred led some claimants to regard these burials as mass burials. Source: Phambili Productions, 2007.



Figure 4.7 The Burial on Mapungubwe, showing the opening that was to become the manhole that would enable access for future research. Source: Johan Nel, 2007.

In each of the two burials, a manhole was included, with the hope that the human remains would again be available for future research, should future generations decide differently. The University of Pretoria successfully argued that the human remains were interred in the same grave so that it would be more convenient to find them, should they be sought for further research. After the concrete was poured over the graves, they each were engraved with a number and date, again for the convenience of future research. This is indicative of yet another way that the repatriation and burial process was inherently an improvisation that sought to address short-term tensions between the university and the concerned communities. The Interpretation Centre has been completed and was launched on 10 September 2012, sans the funerary objects. The objects are still under the curatorship of the University of Pretoria and appear to have been forgotten, at least for now. So far, no known effort has been made for their repatriation. The issue of the sacredness of the objects and the disconnect from their provenance has not been raised. Instead, these funerary objects are now mobilised as symbols of a romantic history of technological advancement and majesty, as demonstrated by the National Order of Mapungubwe, one of the highest national decorations. While the human remains are muted in their improvised burials, the

funerary objects are tucked away at the University of Pretoria. Current efforts at Mapungubwe are directed at questions of land ownership and mining rights.

Land claims, mining and the re-emergence of a dormant identity

According to the South African National Parks (SANParks) 2010 Draft Management Plan, the land claim that was lodged by the Machete Community comprises of privately owned land and also land owned by the state. According to SANParks (2010), although some land owners are disputing the validity of the claim, the Land Claims Commission is in the process of acquiring properties on behalf of the Machete Community through the “willing seller, willing buyer” concept. The SANParks plan states that the organisation is in the process of negotiating an amicable resolution to the land claim but the process can only be concluded within the effective years of the park management plan. The claim will be considered within the framework of the public participation process that is linked to the park management plan programme. The public participation process, as proposed by SANParks, is inclusive enough and it provides adequate opportunities for comment and engagement. The SANParks (2010) proposes that should land that is within a protected area be successfully awarded, a consistent process needs to be followed to evaluate possible land uses and commercial opportunities within the park.

The properties that are currently included in the Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape, in terms of the March 2010 plan, are illustrated in Table 1 below. Greefswald farm is highlighted. A total of 21 farms that were initially proposed for inclusion in the 2001 submission to SAHRA, are still not part of the Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape. These mostly belong to private owners, some of whom are individuals, while others are registered companies.

Farm Name	Farm Number	Registered Owner
1. Mona	19/0	Friends of Peace Parks
2. Armenia	20/0	Friends of Peace Parks
3. Armenia	20/1	Friends of Peace Parks
4. Rhodes Drift	22/0	Peace Parks Foundation
5. Den Staat	27/0	SANParks
6. Samaria	28/0	Hendrik Daniel Heyns sold to SANParks
7. Samaria	28/3	Hendrik Daniel Heyns sold to SANParks
8. Welton	34/0	Kariba Trust / NPT
9. Greefswald	37/0	RSA transferred to SANParks
10. Hamilton	41/0	De Beers Consolidated Mines Ltd, now SANParks
11. Hamilton	41/2	De Beers Consolidated Mines Ltd, now SANParks
12. Schroda	46/0	De Beers
13. Schroda	46/4	De Beers
14. Schroda	46/7	De Beers
15. Schroda	46/8	De Beers
16. Riedel	48/1	National Parks Trust
17. Stindal	44/1	SANParks
18. Little Muck	134/0	Friends of Peace Parks
19. Tuscanen	17/3	WWF South Africa
20. Balerno	18/1	SANParks

Table 4.1 Land Managed by SANParks in terms of the March 2010 Park Management Plan. Greefswald Farm is highlighted (SANParks, 2010)

In a 1997 report to SANParks, the issue of mining rights that are owned by De Beers was raised by the National Monuments Council (NMC). However, in a follow up letter to Dr. Jeanette Deacon, then Director of the NMC, Mr. Msimang, of the SANParks, cautioned the NMC about De Beers rights by stating:

I think we should rephrase the de Beers mineral rights issue (bottom, p.1) because it is sensitive at this stage. I suggest you omit the last sentence of that part (Msimang, 1997).

The omission of the De Beers mining rights, as suggested by Msimang, is a reflection of the strategic promotion of Mapungubwe as a site of natural and cultural significance, while suppressing its economic currency. In 1990, shortly before the end of apartheid, De Beers had established the Venetia Diamond Mine and bought farms in the area of Mapungubwe.

In 2012, the UNESCO World Heritage Committee produced a report, on the assessment of the progress made in the implementation of the recommendations made by a 2010 reactive monitoring mission on Mapungubwe. The mission paid particular attention to the additional Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) that was requested in order to assess the potential impact of the proposed large scale coal mining on the cultural attributes of the property. The mission was also to consider the overall state of conservation of the property and to detail local concerns. However, the stakeholder meetings, a critical aspect of the mission, were revealing in terms of the continued contestation with regards to ownership of the Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape. The Tshivhula Royal Family was strongly opposed to the planned Vele mining project, as well as to the process through which the mining project had been developed.

According to the UNESCO report, the Tshivhula Royal Family representative stated that their main concern was that they had not been consulted. The representative further expressed the family's wish for the community to be consulted, before the mission was concluded. This was to ensure the protection of the graves of their ancestors, as well as "other interests of the community" (UNESCO, 2012). The Leshiba Royal Family voiced similar concerns and criticisms. The Leshiba representative stated that during July 2011, the community had been contacted by Coal of Africa¹⁹ to arrange a meeting. However,

¹⁹ According to their website, Coal of Africa Ltd, originally GVM Metals Limited, was incorporated in Western Australia in 1979, and listed on the Australian Stock Exchange in 1980. The company focused primarily on

according to the representative, the company did not announce the meeting properly and did not invite the proper representatives of the community. The report states that the main concerns were that the HIA team did not consider the opinions of the Leshiba community. In addition to this, the consultancy firm which had produced the HIA, was said to be representing Coal of Africa and therefore speaking on its behalf. Lastly, the Leshiba community felt that they would have had a positive attitude to the mine, should they had been given a stake in the mining project, for example, in the form of skills development (UNESCO, 2012).

The Machete Royal Family on the other hand, argued that they were the only community which had traditionally lived in the area, “since time immemorial” (UNESCO, 2012). According to the UNESCO report, the Machete representative stated that the Machete had also not been asked to take part in the HIA and that the community had not been consulted in any way. The community leader allegedly demanded an inspection of the Vele mining area focusing, among other things, on the graves of their ancestors. It is also reported that the community leader argued that in March 2011, the said inspection had taken place, but without consulting the Machete community. The Machete community representative was also strongly critical of the Vele colliery location, which was allegedly in a zone where anti-apartheid fighters fought with the South African army during the 1960s and 1970s. According to the Machete representative, these liberation fighters died and were buried in various places in the planned Vele mining area. According to the representative, the graves of the victims of the liberation struggle, form part of the heritage of all South Africans. He said that he regarded it as an insult to South Africans that the consultants had not discussed these graves in the HIA (UNESCO, 2012).

The representative of the Vhangona cultural movement argued that Coal of Africa was determined to go ahead without consulting the Vhangona community, because the company had political backing. He said that the Vhangona community had taken part in two separate meetings, the first meeting ending in failure, because Coal of Africa had not provided opportunities for the Vhangona to voice their opinion. A second meeting

minerals exploration in Western Australia and Indonesia. Through a series of strategic acquisitions, Coal of Africa has moved its focus from being a gold, platinum and base metals exploration company to becoming a coal mining and metals processing business, targeting predominantly South African mining and minerals processing assets.

allegedly also ended in failure. The Vhangona representative also said that the project could have benefits to the community, but the Vhangona were not been consulted in a respectful way (UNESCO, 2012).

What is interesting in the Vhangona submission is that it refutes the claims made by the other groups. Vhangona claim to be the “direct” descendants of the owners and rulers of the Mapungubwe Kingdom. In the statement that was compiled by the Vhangona Cultural Movement, and attached as an addendum to the UNESCO report, it is said:

If any group or individual claims their relationship with or connection to Mapungubwe, let them produce their history and/or anything that could show that they belong to it. Saying this we know full well that there are those like the Vhatwanamba of Tshivhula now subdivided into three families, namely: Tshivhula, Matshete, as well as the Vhalemba group. We need to prove it here and now that these groups cannot lay claim to Mapungubwe as belonging to them or any of their ancestors. It is common cause that the Vhalemba are the Black Jews. Their country of origin is neither Venda nor any African country, they originated in Judea. Likewise, the *Matshete* and *Lishivha* people, who in any case are the younger brother to Tshivhula cannot really claim to belong to Mapungubwe save to say that they did stay there sometime, but having found the original residents there, although some of them had already left. (UNESCO, 2012)

This claim is in contrast to the collective claim that was made during the repatriation process. During the repatriation of human remains, the different groups made decisions and even performed sacred rituals, as a collective. This divisive claim to land by the Vhangona may have been instigated by the 2009 Machete land claim that excluded the other groups.

Conclusion

While the Machete focused on the ancestral graves as well as those of the victims of the liberation struggle to lay a claim to land, the Vhangona mobilised the “foreign origins influence” theory. This “foreign origins influence” theory was promoted by the idea that Hamites from north-east Africa or Semites from the Arabian peninsula accounted for external influences in Mapungubwe (Dubow, 1995). The Vhangona mobilised this theory to refute both the Lemba and the Machete claims to land ownership. In 1934, the same

theory was used by Lestrade, to promote the Lemba as the manufacturers of the Mapungubwe golden objects. Whereas the rights of the Machete and Lemba to Mapungubwe were not questioned by the Vhangona previously, where mining was concerned, the Vhangona assumed a different position.

To me, the contestation tends to shift goal-posts depending on what benefits are at stake, and thus illuminating yet another improvisation. This time, the improvisation is displayed by the claimant communities, who mobilise dormant identities and also outdated “scientific” theories to suit the needs of the present. SANParks’ strategic borrowing of global conservation standards and heritage management protocols that are set by institutions such as UNESCO is also evident here. However, the fact that this type of borrowing is at times at odds with local narratives is completely disregarded. It is also interesting how these are the very local narratives that were promoted during the process of repatriation, to illuminate the Mbeki-era Africanist ideals.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

The reluctance of the discipline of physical anthropology to engage with its history as a racial science, and the continued essentialisation of research over efforts at redress, has put the discipline at odds with the post-apartheid government and local communities. To deal with these challenges I decided to be undisciplined, in an effort to engage critically with physical anthropology. This is a borrowing of Mafeje's notion of being undisciplined (2001). However, when he made a case for undisciplinarity, he was making it in reference to anthropology. This notion may be extended to archaeology, to inform the un-rooting of archaeology's ontology and epistemology from coloniality (Haber, 2012). According to Haber (2012), undisciplined archaeology is the kind that involves local conversations and always retains a local grounding. I believed that this methodological improvisation would provide different scenarios, and would enable me to employ a diversity of fields of intervention as suggested by Haber (2012). The focus on archival resources in engaging with the human remains of Mapungubwe provided scenarios that are different from the standard archaeological narrative.

In my engagement with the Mapungubwe human remains and the funerary objects that are associated with the remains, I asked a number of questions. The questions were based on a 1999 statement made by Dr. Maphela Ramphele, then Vice Chancellor of the University of Cape Town. The questions sought to investigate what happens when the disciplinary workings construe an archive. How this knowledge was presented in the public domain over time was also investigated. In addition to this, what museums, archives and other memory institutions hide and what they reveal was interrogated. Finally, I looked at what gets acknowledged as archive and what is disregarded.

The archive, according to Foucault (1972), defines a level of a practice that causes a "multiplicity of statements to emerge as so many regular events, as so many things to be dealt with and manipulated". In seeking a multiplicity of statements about Mapungubwe, I created an archive, one that exceeded the official Mapungubwe archive and called it *my* Mapungubwe Archive. In reading this archive, something that is more conventional for historians, I chose to use the term "excavate" to describe my engagement with the archive. While I made an attempt at removing myself from physical anthropology, the discipline that I am qualified in, at times, I found myself borrowing from it during the

course of my investigation, as demonstrated by the use of the term excavate. As I was working with *my* Mapungubwe Archive, it was necessary to describe its components; the different archives that I encountered, as well as those that I deemed. This was revealing in its own right. When the archive was construed differently, by bringing forth a much broader archive, *my* Mapungubwe Archive, the role of science and the politics of knowledge production revealed themselves.

The official Mapungubwe Archive that is associated with the Mapungubwe Museum, the home of the golden rhinoceros is more organised, and the records meticulously kept. The administrative process associated with the availability of this resource is also quite intricate. Only one person, the archivist may give permission for anyone from the public to work on the archive. This was said to be a security measure, as the golden objects share the same space. During the course of my research, I discovered that there was material that was not included in this archive; the Lestrade Papers that I found at the University of Cape Town are a good example of this absence.

My engagement with the Lestrade papers at University of Cape Town's archives and special collections illuminated the institutional transformation that the University of Cape Town was undergoing, towards reinventing itself as an Afropolitan university²⁰. This notion of an Afropolitan university has been fraught with contestation, reminiscent of the "Mamdani affair" of the 1990s²¹. This led to many believing it was evidence that African Studies was being marginalised from the real work of the university. The Lestrade papers were part of the Archives and Special Collections that was located in the African Studies building. During my research, these records were so mobile that following them around the university campus became an interesting daily challenge. To me, the mobility of this archive, specifically in relation to the African Studies Library, amplified the continued discomfort in dealing with the study of Africa by the University of Cape Town. For now, the archive seems to have finally found the ideal location. It is housed in the

²⁰ This transformation at the University of Cape Town entailed the formation of the new School of African and Gender Studies, Anthropology and Linguistics, collapsing the departments of Anthropology, Linguistics, Centre for African Studies (CAS), and the African Gender Institute (AGI).

²¹ In his capacity as the director of the Centre for African Studies (CAS) at the University of Cape Town (UCT), Mahmood Mamdani felt that the centre was totally marginal to the real work of the university, teaching and research, and that that the work of the centre was merely an extra-curricular affair to the institution. He thus saw an opportunity to address these issues when he was given the responsibility to design of a foundation course on Africa for students in the humanities. In his course design, Mamdane raised issues previously silenced in disciplines that study Africa. This erupted into a debate that still haunts UCT today and it led to Mamdani's departure from the university.

African Studies Library, a reunion of sorts. The archive and the African Studies Library once shared the Oppenheimer building, where the Centre for African Studies is still located. In addition to this, the presence of the Lestrade Papers at the University of Cape Town and their absence from the University of Pretoria, revealed the academic wars that were in turn influenced by the politics of 1930s South Africa.

The SAHRA registry, where I found the Mapungubwe files on heritage management of the site, had its own revelations. The institution is currently facing major challenges of organisational change. At the time of my research, the Chief Executive Officer had been placed on special leave and by the time I finished my research, she had been dismissed. The mood and level of care towards the registry by SAHRA officials illuminates these challenges. Few security measures were observed throughout and for a while I was the only person signing the visitors' register, even though other people visited the building. I was allowed to remove photographs that I needed to digitise, as the organisation did not have access to the necessary digitisation facilities. Another interesting aspect of *my* Mapungubwe Archive at SAHRA is how the record transformed over time, from handwritten letters of the 1930s, to typewritten apartheid-state documents that are mostly in Afrikaans. These are the products of their times and they responded to their environments accordingly. The turn in the language of the archive after 1948 is also a reflection of how politics, in this case, the Afrikaner hegemony of apartheid, influenced public institutions.

In Chapter Two, I described the early archaeological excavations at Mapungubwe, from the moment the site was "discovered", to the point where the Nationalists won the South African elections in 1948. The 1948 endpoint for the chapter is, illuminating how political ideology, even during these early days, influenced research on the site. The "North-South" tensions that persisted within the academic community in the 1930s were revealed by the marginalisation of academics in the South, while the University of Pretoria, in the North, took ownership of research, as well as knowledge production with regard to Mapungubwe. In addition, the role of prominent politicians such as Jan Smuts become apparent in the way that Mapungubwe was purchased by the government and subsequently declared a National Park in 1947, only to be de-proclaimed in 1949, after the Afrikaner Nationalists came into power. When the Nationalists won the 1948 election, land was given back to white property owners, an act that was revealing of the political priorities of the apartheid government. Throughout this period, the black

populations in the surrounding areas were disregarded and silenced by both the politicians, the academics that were involved in research on Mapungubwe during this early phase.

The period that followed, covered in Chapter Three, was largely shrouded in secrecy as the site became a military base for the South African Defence Force (SADF). This is the chapter where I become most undisciplined, by excavating the SAHRA registry, an archive that is not considered the official archive on Mapungubwe. I drew material from a blog, to supplement the lack of information, especially regarding the SADF activities. During the time of the Vhembe/Dongola Military Base on Greefswald farm, a rehabilitation center was the most peculiar feature of the base. The rehabilitation centre was intended for the “correction” of military deviants, however, evidence in this regard is still elusive. The site was also strategically located as it was on the border with Botswana and Zimbabwe, countries that accommodated the anti-apartheid liberation movements operating outside of South Africa. Although some research took place in Mapungubwe, the site was considered to be dangerous, so the production and dissemination of research findings was limited. In this chapter the relationship between the apartheid military and archaeology is amplified. But, as mentioned before, this is nothing new; Meskell’s work in the Kruger National Park, demonstrates that South African national parks always have military presence (2012). However, in the case of Mapungubwe the relationship is more direct and more intimate.

In Chapter Four, I showed how listing Mapungubwe as a World Heritage Site in the post-apartheid present, placed South Africa on the global “golden age” map. This, coupled with the hosting of WAC-4 by South Africa in 1999, after years of non-participation due to a cultural boycott, was indicative of the reconciliatory “Rainbow Nation” mood at the time and of the new South Africa’s global significance. Mapungubwe was indeed used as a site of healing, something that Meskell refers to as “therapy culture” (2012). Mapungubwe is also a site where many post-apartheid entanglements played themselves out. These entanglements were revealed by the repatriation of the human remains back to Mapungubwe and their subsequent reburial, a process that was fraught with improvisations. The notion of the African Renaissance and the promotion of African values by President Thabo Mbeki led to Mapungubwe being mobilised as a symbol of African excellence and contribution to global civilisation. This fitted comfortably with UNESCO’s language of “universal good”, even though local people continue to be

marginalised. The land claims issues that now plague the site, are still subject to a great deal of contestation, while the mining project may undermine the site's integrity.

The research on Mapungubwe, by way of the Greefswald Archaeological Project, is the most prolonged research project in the history of South Africa. The four research phases, which began in 1933 and ended in 2000, made findings that are still subject to debate in the present. The idea of archaeology as science, as was demonstrated in research on Mapungubwe, is a powerful strategy that was deployed to exchange the messiness of the present for the clean and "true" knowledge of the past. Mapungubwe was, and still is, messy in that everything that can possibly play itself out in broader post-apartheid South Africa is present in Mapungubwe: contested claims, racial history, land dispossession, apartheid and the military, repatriation, post-apartheid claims, nationalism, pan-Africanism, ethnicity, the list goes on. The positioning of archaeology as science is, according to Shepherd (2003), "a traditional gesture of keeping society at arm's length". Science was deployed in Mapungubwe as a way of dealing with the messiness that emerged. To keep Mapungubwe hidden, highly technical language was deployed. The assertion that Mapungubwe was shrouded by technique and technical controversy supports this argument (Hall, 1990). This "shrouding" in turn offered a convenient retreat for physical anthropology, to avoid engaging with issues facing South African society at large.

This retreat also served another purpose. It placed the discipline in a position of power, a position of "truth" and "objectivity". In his critique of the notion of science as knowledge proper, Latour (2005) argues that Science, in the singular with a capital "S" is a social construct. He suggests that scientists position themselves as "law-givers" and "saviours" who have access to a world of "truth" that is not made with human hands. This then means that scientists can move between this world of "truth" and that which is occupied by the rest of society so as to bring forth "universal truths" (Latour, 2005). This position of power, as demonstrated by Latour, would provide archaeology with the authority to provide "authentic evidence" for the empty land myth. However, Green (2008a) challenges the hegemony in science by advancing the notion of pluralism. She argues that science is not the only way of knowing and calls for an evaluation of the conditions under which any knowledge is produced, "whether the knowledge concerned is regarded as scientific or otherwise" (Green, 2008a). The conditions under which knowledge was

produced in terms of Mapungubwe were informed by the need to prove the late arrival of Bantu-speaking people in Southern Africa.

Pikirayi (2005) argues that given the apartheid ideology in which the research was conducted, the research findings certainly did not provide the full story of Mapungubwe. Orality is one component that was disregarded and marginalized by the knowledge production project in Mapungubwe. In a documentary film, where Pambili Productions interviewed the late Professor Victor Ralushai from the University of Venda, oral sources as a potential source of evidence for making claims on Mapungubwe are highlighted. During this filmed interview, Ralushai criticises the methodologies of archaeology, arguing that these methodologies marginalised oral tradition. To illustrate this, he emphasises the absence of African scholars in the Mapungubwe discourse, while making a case for folklore that is contained in songs. Ralushai argues that traditional songs make reference to Mapungubwe, the “place of jackals”, and goes on to illustrate that the symbolism in the name did not pertain to jackals in the literal sense, but rather loosely translates to “a stone or a place of wisdom” (Phambili Productions, 2006). In addition to oral tradition, there is a continued disregard of the alleged graves of Umkhonto weSizwe and other freedom fighters that are said to have been killed during apartheid. Meskell suggests that this “learned ignorance” by the current administration serves to sustain the “rainbow nation” (2012).

Very little investigation has been made in terms of the motivation for the preservation and circulation of oral accounts of the sacredness of Mapungubwe hill. Pikirayi (2005) also argues that African traditional elders safeguard sites from destruction and alienation by resorting to enshrined, intangible values. The archival backstory is important in Mapungubwe as “archival backstory concerns the period before field notes are written, it entails the history of the material before it was captured in writing, it interrogates who was interested in the material and why”(Hamilton, 2011). This brings me to Peter Sebina, whose manuscript was dismissed by Lestrade as just a story, all those years ago. This would have provided a unique research opportunity that may have complemented the archaeological research. In this regard, the notion of backstory, as proposed by Hamilton would have been more revealing and would make a case for oral accounts, traces of which are found in tales, clan names and songs. However, these are often regarded as indigenous knowledge that tends to be exiled from the record and thus

hidden. They are hidden or exiled by museums, archives and other “Regimes of Care” that tend to play the role of gatekeepers in terms of what enters the record and what is excluded. Traces of indigenous knowledge and other local ways of knowing, such as Sebina’s manuscript, exiled by the archival practices of the official Mapungubwe Archive, only appear by default as a result of Lestrade’s relocation to Cape Town. However, contemporary notions of indigenous knowledge can also be problematic as they display a form of “nostalgia for a former greatness, an imagined identity in the past, and a lost self” (Shepherd, 2003).

Green (2008a) suggests that if we are to make a strong case for the relationship between local ways of knowing and dominant forms of knowledge, then a debate on these issues is worth the trouble. She goes on to state that it is necessary to have an engagement with “local theories of relatedness and knowledge that transforms in both directions” (Green, 2008a). Subaltern knowledge or discourse is making an attempt at this in its consideration of the body, performance and even landscape as an archive. A challenge still remains in naming, wherein, the imposition of a particular language may still be problematic in an attempt to move towards a new way of doing things. Schangler (2002) argues that given the discontinuity between the African past and those who studied it, archaeology and physical anthropology still have the potential to surpass the disciplinary divisions of the present. According to this line of thought, “the past had known no disciplinary boundaries, and neither should the future” (Schlanger, 2002). In terms of this thinking, there is still an opportunity for the disciplines to reinvent themselves, and transcend the disconnect between local ways of knowing and the dominant world views of scientific knowledge that have been so controversial at Mapungubwe.

At the moment, the controversy of the Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape is still limited to the South African side of the trans-frontier park. The inclusion of Zimbabwe and Botswana, will potentially contribute to further the contestation. The trans-frontier aspect of the park and its diplomatic implications will require broader and cautious consultation. The farms on the Zimbabwean side of the Limpopo have been taken over by the Zimbabwe African Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) War Veterans, part of the Zimbabwean ‘land reform’ project. On the South African side, during the early period, the contestation was limited to white land-owners and managed by the Union government,

followed by the apartheid government. However, the common thread, through to the present, is the issue of land ownership and political influence. Associated with land ownership is the issue of mineral resources. Mapungubwe has great potential in this regard, as demonstrated by the early treasure hunters, followed by the continued interest by De Beers and more recently, Coal of Africa. Local communities who have been previously deprived of access to the land, and are now laying claim to land, are aware of this potential at Mapungubwe and also wish to benefit from it. The physical proximity of this contested landscape to the Zimbabwean land conflict may be too close for comfort for the South African neighbours.

The Botswana component of the TFCA appears to be less complicated. However, the involvement of De Beers in diamond mining in the country may need further investigation. It is interesting to note that, the two lives of the Mapungubwe National Park have astonishing parallels that, according to Linderman (2005), can also be demonstrated by the role of De Beers and the Oppenheimer family. De Beers was founded by Cecil John Rhodes, a key figure in South African and Zimbabwean politics. Sir Ernest Oppenheimer, of the Oppenheimer family which now owns De Beers, was a member of the board of the Smuts' Dongola Wildlife Sanctuary. De Beers is now an important stakeholder in the present life of the Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape as a number of properties that are included in the park are owned by De Beers and merely leased to the SANParks. The continued presence of De Beers in Mapungubwe demonstrates continued white dominance in the form of property ownership and in turn of the mineral resources that are associated with such property. The land claims process continues in Mapungubwe but it will be interesting to see how land ownership unfolds at Mapungubwe. Added to this, is the issue of Coal Africa and the threat it poses to the integrity of the site, as was discussed at the UNESCO World Heritage Committee in St. Petersburg, in July 2012.

The way I construed *my* Mapungubwe archive not only revealed the knowledge production politics of the past, but also those of the present. The discovery of Mapungubwe by Van Graan disrupted the notion of *Terra Nullus* for the white property owners. The conservation language that was deployed by Smuts in the 1930s served to erase black presence as the protection of nature was prioritised over the cultural past. This erasure continued into the apartheid era. However, during this time, archaeology

was deployed to provide scientific proof for the “empty land” that white settlers claim to have found in South Africa. All inconvenient forms of knowledge that emerged over time were simply disregarded or silenced in the process. In the post-apartheid era the continued erasure is somewhat unsettling. However, as Meskell (2012) discovered in Kruger National Park, international efforts to conserve, as imposed by UNESCO, also serve to expel black presence in parks and heritage sites. An interesting twist in *my* Mapungubwe archive is revealed when local people mobilise the previously marginalised “traditions” to sustain themselves, as demonstrated during the repatriation and the subsequent land claims in Mapungubwe. However, the needs of the present tend to be more neo-liberal and self-promoting. Prior-victimhood has become currency, while there is deliberate forgetting of the remains of the Mapungubwe dead and their possessions. For now, the remains are buried in the “archive in the ground” in Mapungubwe while the funerary objects are neatly tucked away at the University of Pretoria. I cannot say what future generations will make of these but what I know is that there is still much more to learn about Mapungubwe, perhaps now is not the right time.



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²² In terms of the present thesis, archival resources are in terms of *my* Mapungubwe Archive. They are not limited to the official archival record, and have been extended to include unconventional archives, such as electronic media such as a film, and the internet

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