

CHAPTER 10

Archaeology Without Borders: A Case for the Shashe-Limpopo Basin Archaeology, Eastern Botswana

Sarah Mantshadi Mothulatshipi

Much of our knowledge of the archaeology of the Shashe-Limpopo basin is based on research conducted on the South African side of the Limpopo and Shashe rivers confluence. The Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape, in spite of its recent inscription on the World Heritage List, still focuses on South African sites only. This gives a rather biased approach for a region rich in archaeological heritage across the three countries and whose former inhabitants had no movement restrictions. This chapter presents the archaeological characterisation of the Confluence Area from the Botswana side, as part of larger Shashe-Limpopo Basin, and questions whether archaeology or archaeological landscapes have borders.

Introduction

The Shashe-Limpopo Basin confluence is a cultural a landscape with a long settlement history dating from a least the Late Stone Age (see Eastwood and Blundell, 1999; Hall and Smith, 2000) and continuing to recent farming periods (Hanisch, 1981; Huffman, 2005). There is evidence of interaction between the foraging and farming populations within the broader basin under variable climatic conditions (Huffman, 1996; O'Connor and Kiker, 2004; Smith, 2005; Holmgren and Öberg, 2006). The continuity in terms of settlement was only interrupted in a significant way following the emergence of pre-colonial state societies, and more recently, European colonialism. This was accompanied by the colonial resettlement of people involving the Babirwa sub-group of Sotho-Tswana origin, who had been settled in the area for over two centuries (Tsheboeng, 2001). The creation of European commercial farming proved unsuccessful, and the land was then changed into a nature reserve in the 1960s. According to the archaeological evidence, this region was utilised by humans for various purposes over several millennia in the past (Plug, 2000). An agricultural expansion is believed to have taken place in southern Africa between ca. 850 and 1290 AD, where communities expanded from southern Zimbabwe to the fringes of the Kalahari desert. During this period, important trading activities in gold and ivory also took place at both the regional and international levels, producing centres the size of Toutswe, Mapungubwe and Great Zimbabwe.