

Archaeological Survey and Test-Excavations at Tuli Circle 2 Site, Eastern Botswana

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Abstract

Up until recently little was known about the Iron Age archaeology of the Botswana side of the confluence zone of the Shashe and Limpopo Rivers. Mothulatshipi (2008)'s PhD research has established that this area was, like other nearby popularly known sites of Mapungubwe, K2 and Zhizo (Leopard Kopje) site at Schroda, utilised intensively by the agro-pastoral communities. Before this work most researchers did not show much interest in the area possibly because of comparatively insignificant material remains, poor visibility of archaeological remains and the difficulty in accessing the area whose present land-use is that of Nature Reserve. This paper presents some of the findings from the surveys and test-excavations conducted at Tuli Circle 2. They show that the cultural practices in terms of use of space, world view and material culture are closely linked to the broader region. These findings are crucial to understanding and, from a broader perspective appreciating the socio-political complexities of confluence zone in terms of the kind of key roles central sites like Mapungubwe played in the region.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to present the result of a segment of a large area the author worked on in the Shashe-Limpopo Basin called Tuli Circle (or more specifically Tuli Circle 2). The Shashe-Limpopo Basin is a landscape that has been recognised in the archaeology of southern Africa as significantly popular location for settlements by iron using populations during the last two millennia (Figure 10:1). It appears prior to that the area like most other places was occupied by stone using populations. Sporadic sites have been looked into in detail (such as Mooketsi, 2009, Tsheboeng, 1998 and Smith, 2005) but most of what has been produced is based on archaeological surveys geared towards general assessment of archaeological landscapes for predevelopment impact assessment (for example, Manyanga, 2005, Hanisch and Van Waarden, 1989), and no intensive research work has been carried out on this site. This is, in spite, of a long span of extensive and well documented and published archaeological undertakings in the neighbouring countries of South Africa and Zimbabwe (for example Manyanga, 2006, Huffman, 2000, Fouche, 1937, Gardner, 1955). This is not surprising as Figure 10:1 that depicts the confluence zone in which Tuli Circle 2 falls as a predominantly Later Stone Age populated area. However, this study has confidently found out that stylistic evidence of ceramic remains, falls under the characterisation of a Later Iron Age (LIA) site which dates from Zhizo to Zimbabwe Period (ca. AD 900 to 1500) to historic times (Figure 10:2), making it fit within the occupation period for the entire Basin. Furthermore, some