

Burial Pottery versus Domestic Pottery: An Ethno-Archaeological Study of Decoration and Style

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Abstract

This paper examines pottery assemblages from two Musengezi tradition sites (12th to 16th Centuries A.D.), namely Monk's Kop ossuary and Shinje settlement site. The need to establish the decorative and stylistic relationship of pottery from burial and domestic contexts, and their symbolical implications prompted this ethno-archaeological study. Empirical data shows that pottery from burial contexts were more decorated and stylised than their domestic counterpart, indicating the cosmological beliefs of the Musengezi tradition communities towards the dead. Ethnographic inquiry revealed that pottery accompanying the dead were carefully and intentionally selected from household context owing to their decorative and stylistic attributes, which, when in burial context, communicate some social messages about the buried individuals, their relationship with the living, and ideological aspects of the community.

Introduction

The study focused on two sites belonging to the Musengezi tradition, namely Monk's Kop ossuary and Shinje settlement site (Figure 7.1:). Monk's Kop ossuary is the largest known burial site from the Musengezi tradition. The site lies on 17°02'-45''-S and 30°35' 15''-E, and is a major archaeological feature of the Mbagazewa Ancient Park in Mutorashanga district. It is located 10.5km north of Mutorashanga centre and 10km west of the Great dyke. Excavations conducted on the site in 1964 by Crawford yielded several pottery vessels, metal objects and organic materials interred into the communal cave burial with at least 71 individuals of different age groups (Crawford, 1967). Pottery vessels, which are the focus of this paper, mainly comprised complete or semi-complete vessels placed between and surrounding human remains, whereas others (including potsherds) occurred in shallow deposits. The site has two radiometric dates of A.D. 1285 ±95 (S.R. 101) and A.D. 1270 ±95

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