

ARCHAEOLOGY AND DEVELOPMENT IN BOTSWANA

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Botswana is in a unique position, requiring much development of its infrastructure, industry and other economic sectors on the one hand, yet, on the other hand, having a high per capita income and one of the highest annual growth rates in the world (12.1%). Consequently, many development projects are taking place and are being planned for the future.

This presents both problems and opportunities for the archaeology of Botswana. Problems of protection of the prehistoric and historic sites, and opportunities for new discoveries.

There is legal protection for sites through the Monuments and Relics Act (Laws of Botswana 59:03), which states (section 17):

- (1) *No person shall without the written consent of the Minister given after consultation with the Commissioner*
 - (a) *make any alterations to, or destroy, or damage; or*
 - (b) *remove or allow to be removed from its original site or export or allow to be removed from its original site or monument, ancient monument, ancient working or relic or any part thereof.*

The penalties for an offence are a P.2,000 fine and 2 years in jail and the cost of damages.

A National Monuments Commission was set up as part of the National Museum, in order to monitor the sites and manage the artifact (relics) collections and to reinforce the laws of the Monuments and Relics Act. Severe constraints of staff and funds have made it very difficult for the Commission (now the Archaeology Division of the National Museum) to carry out its mandate, however, and several important sites have been damaged or destroyed. Such destruction rarely occurs intentionally - Botswana, fortunately, has few problems with looters; lack of awareness or concern for prehistoric sites is usually to blame. Construction companies have usually not recognized prehistoric sites in their project areas and have just bulldozed through them.

The National Museum and myself, as private consultant, have launched a renewed effort to stop this, by conducting archaeological impact assessments in areas for which development projects, involving earthmoving, construction or flooding, are planned.

An impact assessment usually requires a survey of the area and, if necessary, testing of any sites found. A recommendation is then made whether a site should be preserved and the development project altered, or whether the expected impact on the site should be mitigated through a salvage excavation, or whether the site is not important and construction may proceed. The cost of surveys, tests and salvage excavations is paid for by the development projects themselves, since the National Museum is in no position to fund such research, and it is in the interest of the projects to avoid violating the Monuments and Relics Act.

Our aim is that such impact assessments will become a standard requirement for all development projects. We are presently lobbying the various government ministries and departments and we hope that the archaeological resource will be included in the National Conservation Strategy, which is presently being formulated. This type of archaeology programme is well developed in North America and Europe, but seems rare in developing countries.

In Botswana such work started in 1982 with the salvage excavation of a late Zimbabwe commoner site on the Francistown to Plumtree road (VAN WAARDEN, 1987). This site, known as 'Matanga', had been discovered by one of the consulting engineers on the project, who is a keen amateur archaeologist, after 15 cm of overburden had been removed by bulldozer. After some test pits had been dug by hand, the site was excavated by an enormous Caterpillar 633C self-loading grader with a toothless, 2.5m wide bucket, which took off clean strips of approximately 10 cm depth at a time. Such controlled destruction allowed us to map a large portion of the site and collect artifacts by rough strata. The dominant features are a series of cattle kraals and it is likely that this was a cattle post. The machine excavation was halted temporarily when several burials were found and it became necessary to excavate these by hand. Radiocarbon dates for the site are 580 ± 75 B.P. (a.d. 1370 ± 75) and 530 ± 75 B.P. (a.d. 1420 ± 75). This road project made the discovery of the site possible and, although many details were lost, the salvage excavation has provided us with an interesting overview of a hitherto little known type of site.

In 1983 and 1984 Jim Denbow conducted surveys for Shell Coal Co. at the Kgaswe coalfield and for British Petroleum at the proposed soda ash recovery area, resulting in the discovery, amongst others, of many more sites of the Toutswe culture, one of which was excavated (Kgaswe B-55; DENBOW 1986), as well as the discovery of a previously unknown stone walled Zimbabwe.

This year I undertook archaeological impact assessments for the new road from Nata to Maun, and for expansions of the telecommunications and broadcasting networks, and assessments for several other road and dam projects will be done shortly. Several small M.S.A. and L.S.A. sites, as well as an M.S.A. quarry, were recorded during these projects, as were several small Later Iron Age sites. No rescue excavations have been necessary for this year's projects, since the construction plans were altered to preserve the sites.

The importance of this type of work for archaeology in Botswana, as well as for other developing countries, can not be overemphasized.

First of all, it is of the utmost importance for the conservation of sites that they be discovered, so that they can be protected from unnecessary damage due to construction.

Proper conservation and management of the archaeological resource requires a well-staffed, well-equipped, well-funded archaeological service, which at present is lacking in Botswana. Impact assessments and salvage excavations, funded out of the budgets of development projects and with a sufficient overhead charge should make such a service possible.

Development projects can also make another important contribution to archaeology, apart from helping to fund a proper archaeological resource management service. Properly conducted archaeological surveys for impact assessments can provide an unbiased sample of various regions of the country, so that distributions of sites can be used for predictive modelling and locational analyses relative to resources such as soil, vegetation, water, metal and mineral deposits, etc.

I would very much like to hear about any such work in other African countries.

References

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