

Mapungubwe (South Africa)

No 1099

1. BASIC DATA

State Party: South Africa

Name of property: Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape

Location: Northern Province

Date received: 29 January 2002

Category of property:

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a site. In terms of Operational Guidelines this is also a cultural landscape.

Brief description:

Mapungubwe is set hard against the northern border of South Africa joining Zimbabwe and Botswana. It is an open, expansive savannah landscape sprinkled with trees, some thorns, others statuesque baobabs, around flat sandstone terraces rising above the plain.

Centred on the confluence of the Limpopo and Shashe rivers and straddling the north/south and east/west routes in southern Africa, Mapungubwe developed into the largest kingdom in the sub-continent before it was abandoned in the 14th century.

What survives are the almost untouched remains of the palace sites and also the entire settlement area dependent upon them, as well as two earlier capital sites, the whole presenting an unrivalled picture of the development of social and political structures over some 400 years.

2. THE PROPERTY

Description

The Mapungubwe kingdom had largely faded out of history by the mid 16th century. At the height of its powers between 1220 and 1300, the centralised and hierarchical society encompassed at least 9,000 people and had huge wealth and influence gained from harvesting rich natural resource and trading these, via Indian Ocean ports, with Arabia, India and China.

Sited on the confluence of the Limpopo and Shashe rivers, which flooded to provide fertile alluvial soils, and with almost ideal climatic conditions, Mapungubwe had attracted Iron Age agriculturalists from the middle of the 1st millennium AD, and before that there is much evidence of hunter-gatherers.

What transformed Mapungubwe from a small-scale, rural society into an influential city-state was the development of a social structure that encouraged population growth through comparatively intensive agriculture, and of a hierarchical system that produced specialisation and a trading economy. Mapungubwe had ivory and gold and relatively easy access to the east African coast where it could trade with the Arabs, Indians and Chinese. Chinese

porcelain, glass trade beads and cotton all found their way to Mapungubwe.

Mapungubwe's wealth and social structures are evident in the three palaces built on separate sites during the three phases of its growth between 900 and its demise, brought on by a rapid change in the climate, a sort of mini Ice Age. The comparatively sudden change in climate, heralded drought conditions that devastated the agricultural base of the kingdom: it could no longer sustain either its people or its trade. The southern African power base shifted north to Great Zimbabwe.

The overall site thus illustrates successive stages in the creation of the first indigenous kingdom in Southern Africa and its ultimate decline and abandonment.

The Mapungubwe site is magnificent in landscape terms, with superb views in all directions, but the excavated remains are not very impressive. The significance of the landscape and of the individual sites within it are thus not readily apparent, even to an archaeologist who does not have local knowledge. If these sites are to be made intelligible for visitors, that can only be done by means of effective interpretation and signage.

Boundaries

The core site covers nearly 30,000 ha. This is supported by a buffer zone of around 100,000 ha – although this is not marked on the maps supplied. The nominated site contains substantial areas of 'natural' landscape of very high quality – in the north of the area bordering the rivers. To the south the boundary cuts across geometrical citrus farms – which in time will be taken out of agriculture.

The proposed boundaries correspond with those of the Vhembe-Dongola National Park, which is currently in the course of being established (see below). No clear buffer zone is indicated on the maps supplied.

The northern boundary of the nominated property is the Limpopo River, which forms the frontier between the Republic of South Africa and the neighbouring states of Botswana and Zimbabwe. A Trilateral Memorandum of Understanding has been drawn up with the objective of establishing the Limpopo-Shashe Transfrontier Conservation Area (TFCA); this very extensive area (5,040 km²), will, when established as a TFCA, constitute a very effective buffer zone. It is intended that each country will concentrate on one facet of protection: cultural heritage in South Africa, wildlife in Botswana, and living cultures in Zimbabwe. Considerable progress has been made in Botswana, but developments are slow in Zimbabwe because of the present political situation.

Specifically the site contains:

- Remains of palaces – (Mapungubwe period);
- Archaeological remains testifying to Mapungubwe's growth 900-1200 AD (Zhizo, Leopard's Kopje);
- Remains of early settlement: Stone Age & Iron Age & rock art;
- 'Natural' landscape surrounding the built remains.

Remains of palaces 1220-1290 AD (Mapungubwe period): These are the key remains of the site – reflecting not only Mapungubwe’s great wealth but also the social, religious and political hierarchy that developed as a result of population expansion based on successful intensive agriculture and international trade.

On top of Mapungubwe hill are the remains of a settlement, town, or metropolis some 2.5 km south-east of the Limpopo/Shashe confluence. This capital seems to have controlled an area of about 30,000 km² (comparable with the size of the Zulu Kingdom in the 19th century). In the 80 recorded homesteads associated through ‘Mapungubwe’ pottery with this capital, it is estimated that there were about 9,000 people paying allegiance to an overall leader. Furthermore a hierarchy has been discerned in these sites with up to five administrative levels.

In the final phase of development at Mapungubwe the hierarchical system separated the ruler from his subjects. Commoners lived on the southern terrace at the foot of the hill, while above on top of the hill, the elite rulers resided. By 1250 AD the layout of the palace area on the hilltop further separated the leader from his family and followers with entrances to the elite areas demarcated by low stone walls.

Together the terrace, plateaus and hill cover an area of about 10 hectares and it has been estimated that between 3,000 and 5,000 population lived there.

Remains of a special building complex – probably a palace – have been found in the centre of the hilltop demarcated by an arc of prestigious revetment walls. As inadequate records were kept in excavations of this area in the 1930s, it is not possible to reconstruct this palace with any accuracy. However enough has been found from the buildings, distinctive hilltop graves and from cattle dung remains to suggest royal control of cattle and the amassing of considerable wealth in the palace complex. Finds include Chinese Celadon ware, large quantities of glass beads, possibly from Persia, and gold in the form of foil, wire, bangles, strips, beads, coiled helix and pins. The foil was made by hammering globules into thin sheets and this was then folded over carved wooden forms to produce three dimensional shapes such as the now famous rhinoceros – recovered from a grave in the 1930s.

The wealth was the result of extensive and successful trade through East African Coastal ports with India and China of gold and ivory in return for ceramics, glass beads and other luxury goods. So much wealth seems to have been accumulated that the normal channels of distribution within the more traditional social hierarchy became inadequate, and this led to the emergence of a distinct upper class of apparently hereditary sacred leadership.

Archaeological remains testifying to Mapungubwe’s growth 900-1200 AD (Zhizo, Leopard’s Kopje): The large population that Mapungubwe sustained in its final phase represented a huge increase from what excavations have revealed about the beginning of the urban period. It seems that there was perhaps a five-fold increase in population between 900 AD and 1200 AD.

As the centre of power at Mapungubwe moved twice, three separate sites remained to be examined and collectively they paint a detailed picture showing the development of Mapungubwe from an incipient city-state in 900 to its full blown power three centuries later as a result the emergence

of increasingly sophisticated agriculture and extensive trade links with the Indian Ocean ports.

What are collectively known as Zhizo sites, dating from around 900, represent the first pioneer farmers to settle near the rivers. They cultivated and herded sheep, cattle and goats and begun to trade with the coast. The largest Zhizo site is Schroda on a plateau overlooking the Limpopo valley and housing between 300 and 500 people. This was the focus for 25 smaller sites within a radius of 40 km. A degree of hierarchy was emerging, but the settlements still reflected a very typical southern African pattern – houses encircling a large cattle enclosure. The chief would have been resident at the Schroda capital, with lesser leaders such as headmen in charge of smaller but similarly planned settlements. Large quantities of clay figurines of people and animals – particularly the dense concentration in one area – suggest some sort of centralised ritual ceremonies associated with the chief reinforcing the idea of developing centralised power.

Excavations have revealed evidence of domesticated sheep, goats, cattle and dogs – which with game and fish from the river provided a major source of food. The staple food was Sorghum, which seems to have been the only grain grown.

Imported glass beads and evidence for ivory working imply that Schroda already had trading contacts with the East Coast.

All this evidence suggests that a hierarchy related to growing political power and the unequal distribution of wealth had begun to form in the Region.

After a century Schroda was abandoned and a new centre or capital established by incoming people, believed to be ancestors of the present day Shona people. They established a capital at Leopard’s Kopje housing between 1,000 and 2,000 people. Here the cattle were moved away from the centre of the settlement and the land was farmed much more extensively. Excavations show a settled and successful society growing a wider variety of grain, sorghum, beans and millet, stored in pole and daga grain bins, (similar it seems to ones still built in the area), and still keeping domesticated cattle, sheep and dogs.

Over 6500 glass beads have been recovered from the site indicating substantially increased trade with the coast. Many of these beads are tiny – much smaller than those usually found at sites on the East African coast, and could have been preferred for beadwork, a practice still found in the area today. There is also evidence that imported beads were melted down and re-formed into large roller shapes and then widely traded within the region.

Baked clay figurines of people and animals are still found. There is also evidence of iron and copper working.

After another century, the final phase of Mapungubwe emerged around Mapungubwe hill with it seems the population from the earlier phase moving to the bottom of the hill below the newly built palace.

Remains of early settlement – Stone Age & Iron Age & rock art: The combination of a riverine environment and sandstone hills at Mapungubwe seems to have provided a focus for human settlement whenever climatic conditions have been favourable.

Ancestors of the San Bushmen lived in the area for many millennia; Stone Age occupation is evident from 26 sites. Between 250 and 900 AD these hunter-gathers were gradually replaced or absorbed by Iron Age agriculturalists who, after 900, began to form the foundations of the Mapungubwe state. Rock paintings provide powerful evidence for these changes. Most date from between 10,000 to 5,000 years ago and show itinerant hunters. But the paintings also record the first pastoralists and then are overlaid later by geometric paintings of the settled newcomers who perhaps tried to overpower and neutralise the earlier hunters' images.

'Natural' landscape surrounding the built remains: The extensive landscape surroundings of the archaeological remains are today a back-drop for the site. The huge agricultural enterprise of the final phase at Mapungubwe has vanished and much of the core of the landscape has now been returned largely to its unimproved state with wild grazing game animals. Some farms still remain, growing citrus in irrigated fields. In the valley irrigation allows large scale commercial farming and game ranching but some of this has been cleared and it is planned more will follow.

History

Mapungubwe was the largest settlement in the sub-continent in the 13th century AD before it was abandoned. Various communities settled in the vicinity over the next 600 years. Legends and rumours about the place were passed on from generation to generation. Karel Moerschell, a local German farmer, knew about the gold by 1911, but it was not until the 1930s that the significance of Mapungubwe became more widely known.

On 31 December 1932, a local informant, Mowena, led E.S.J. van Graan, and four others to Greefswald farm on Mapungubwe Hill where they saw stone walls and recovered gold and iron artefacts, pottery and glass beads. The finds, which received wide publicity in the media, were reported to the head of the Department of History at the University of Pretoria, Professor Leo Fouché. As a result of his intervention, the University negotiated with the owner of the property, E.E. Collins.

In a legal agreement the University took ownership of the gold and other artefacts and secured an option and contract for excavation rights. The University also successfully requested a postponement of prospecting, mining and related activities on Greefswald. In June 1933, Greefswald was bought by the Government and excavation rights were granted to the University of Pretoria.

The University established an Archaeological Committee, which from 1933 to 1947 oversaw research and excavations. Rev. Neville Jones from Zimbabwe and J.F. Schofield were appointed to undertake the first fieldwork in 1934 and 1935 and they were advised by Professor C van Riet Lowe, Director of the Bureau of Archaeology. Their work focused on Mapungubwe Hill, the southern terrace and the midden there. They briefly surveyed other similar sites in the vicinity.

From 1935-1940 six excavation seasons at K2 and Mapungubwe Hill were directed by Guy A. Gardner. The results of his work were published nearly 25 years later.

Meyer (1998) describes the excavations on Greefswald between 1933 and 1940 as 'rapid, large scale excavations resulting in the recovery of valuable artefacts'. Research was hampered by 'the lack of professional archaeologists in South Africa, the lack of full-time supervision of the excavations by efficient, trained staff, the fact that adequate scientific methods for Iron Age research had not yet been developed and that the Iron Age in South Africa was virtually unknown to archaeologists. Consequently, many of the deposits on the sites were removed without the meticulous excavation and recording required. These problems inevitably resulted in a loss of irreplaceable deposits and eventually also of excavated materials [and] a lack of scientific data.'

The next phase of archaeological investigation, in 1953-1954 and in 1968-1970, under the direction initially of the Department of Anthropology, and then of Professor J F Eloff who was appointed as Head of the newly-formed Department of Archaeology at the University of Pretoria in 1970, was more systematic and focused mainly on the southern terrace.

Over the next 25 years from 1970 to 1995, the Department of Archaeology at the University of Pretoria recognised that their first priority was to establish a firm data base by testing, correcting and supplementing the earlier research, and concentrating on reconstructing the way of life of the site inhabitants. Between 1979 and 2002 reports have been published on the human and faunal remains, Chinese porcelain, gold objects, glass beads and radiocarbon dating.

In addition, sites on neighbouring farms have been investigated by students of the University of Pretoria during the 1970s and 1980s.

Greefswald has remained the property of the State since the 1930s. Management of the farm was taken over by the provincial Department of Nature Conservation in 1992, and control was transferred to SANParks in 1999.

The proposed boundaries of the world heritage site coincide with the boundaries of the proposed Vhembe-Dongala National Park – which is still in the process of formation. It is being inscribed sequentially – with three areas properties already gazetted. These are Den Staat, Geefswald and Reidal which are areas of 'natural' landscape in which are many of the principal archaeological sites.

The aim is for SANParks eventually to acquire all the land within the proposed park or to have contractual agreement with the owners. This will allow the land to be taken out of agriculture and revert to 'natural' landscape. A chart of the current progress with land negotiations is included in the nomination. Currently there are 'in principle' agreements for 11 of the remaining 29 land units, but the timetable is missing. These are currently used for different purposes: some are being cultivated using irrigation agricultural techniques based on water extracted from the Limpopo river, some are managed as game reserves, and others are owned by the De Beers Corporation and are used to ensure water extraction, storage, and provision for that organization's diamond mining activities, which are estimated to have a maximum working life of twenty years.

Management regime

Legal provision:

The nominated property is protected by overlapping legislation. The 1976 National Parks Act provides stringent controls over all forms of human intervention in designated areas. This currently applies only to the three gazetted areas of Den Staat, Greefswald, and Reidel, but when the Vhembe-Dongola National Park is created the whole area will be protected. All interventions within the Park must be submitted to the government agency, South Africa National Parks (SANParks), for scrutiny and, where appropriate, authorization.

Legislation has been prepared to complete the designation procedure. This is before parliament at the present time and will be completed in the coming session.

The Mapungubwe, K2, Schroda, and Little Muck (Leokwe Hill) are protected by the 1999 National Heritage Resources Act. All interventions are subject to authorization by the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA). Details of the considerable protection afforded by this statute are set out in the nomination dossier. It is intended to extend protection under this act to the entire area in the near future.

In the event of the of the Mapungubwe cultural landscape being inscribed, it will come within the provisions of the 1999 World Heritage Conservation Act, which imposes an additional level of protection.

Independent environmental impact assessment is a mandatory component of these statutes. This requirement is reinforced by the provisions of the 1998 National Environment Management Act, which relates to all development or rezoning proposals.

Management structure:

Overall management of the existing Park is the responsibility of SANParks, which is represented on site by a professional parks manager, assisted by a small but efficient team.

It is the sole management authority for properties owned by SANParks. For properties that remain in private ownership SANParks will operate in conformity with the contractual arrangements agreed with landowners. These vary in nature: in some cases ownership will revert to SANParks after agreed periods, but agricultural activities will continue on others within agreed limits.

With regard to the sites protected under the National Heritage Resources Act, there is close liaison with the provincial SAHRA manager. There is, however, no member of the Park staff with qualifications in archaeological heritage management (known as cultural resource management in South Africa).

There is a Park Committee, consisting of representatives of all the stakeholders (central and provincial government agencies and private landowners). It is chaired by the chairman of the Representative Stakeholder Committee, set up to ensure public participation in all planning and management decisions.

The mission and objectives of the Preliminary Park Management Plan are in accordance with the requirements of the World Heritage Committee. A number of other plans for the nominated area and the Limpopo Province are listed in the nomination dossier. These are currently being revised and a consolidated plan for the Park, based on the Preliminary Plan and covering inter alia overall site management, cultural heritage management, and tourism, was expected early in 2003. This is in line with the four acts which apply to site and which require a management plan for a world heritage site.

This management plan has so far not been received.

Resources:

The property receives an annual operating budget from SANParks, as part of the overall SANParks budget. For the 2000/01 financial year, the total operating budget is 1.16 million Rand (116,000 US \$ at an exchange rate of 10.0 Rand = 1.0 \$), including 662,000 Rand for human resources. There is also a 165,000 Rand capital budget for smaller capital improvements.

Development planning of the area is being conducted with funds from the National Government managed by the Dept of Environmental Affairs and Tourism.

Site rehabilitation measures are being funded through the Poverty Alleviation Programme administered by the Dept of Environmental Affairs and Tourism.

The Draft Park Management Plan was put together with financial assistance from DANCED.

The compilation of the Nomination Document was funded by NORAD.

Justification by the State Party (summary)

The Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape was the centre of the first powerful indigenous kingdom in Southern Africa. It was established by the cultural ancestors of the present-day Shona and Venda between AD 900 and 1300. Evidence for its history is preserved in over 400 archaeological sites. The dynamic interaction between people and landscape laid the foundation for a new type of social organisation in the region.

The kingdom grew as a result of wealth that accrued by its leaders from trade with the Indian Ocean network, combined with ideal landscape conditions for agriculture that provided for a population of over 9,000 people. Trade goods included gold, glass beads, cotton cloth, Chinese ceramics, ivory, copper and hides.

By the thirteenth century AD, a social hierarchy had developed which was reflected in settlement planning. Mapungubwe Hill was occupied and modified to separate the elite from the commoners below.

The onset of the Little Ice Age caused drought and crop failures. The kingdom dispersed after AD 1300, new social and political alliances were formed, and the centre of regional power shifted to Great Zimbabwe.

3. ICOMOS EVALUATION

Actions by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS evaluation mission visited the site in October 2002.

Conservation

Conservation history:

Archaeological research in the form of excavations and survey has been in progress in the nominated area for many years. This has been carried out by the archaeological departments of three universities: Witwatersrand, Pretoria, and Venda. There has undeniably been a considerable measure of rivalry between these institutions in the past. The Archaeological Task Group has played an important role in the development of an integrated policy for archaeological research, as well as aspects of conservation and presentation. It is important, however, that this body should be more closely integrated into the overall management of the nominated property. It should be responsible for defining and monitoring research and interpretation policies for the Park in the short, medium, and long term.

Substantial excavation projects have been carried out at the three main sites Mapungubwe, Schroda and Leonards' Kopje, and there are plans for a large project at Den Staat.

The latter two excavated sites have produced much important material, but they are on flat land and have very little to offer the visitor in visual terms. At Leonards' Kopje such conservation work as has been carried out has been confined to stabilizing the boundaries and sections of the open area, whilst there is little to see of archaeological work at Schroda. It is unlikely that Den Staat will produce any major structural remains for display.

There has been a great deal of field survey, which has produced evidence of many habitation sites. However, these can only be identified from surface finds and differential soil colour and vegetation.

State of conservation:

No specific evidence is put forward in the nomination document for the state of conservation of the excavated remains. However mention is made of natural erosion affecting many old excavation sites that is to be addressed by a Site Rehabilitation Programme.

Nor is there generic information on the state of records. A comprehensive list of known sites in the core area of the Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape, in the buffer zone, and in Botswana and Zimbabwe, has been compiled by Huffman and is synthesised in Figures 6-8 of the nomination. The list also contains all rock art sites recorded during field surveys in the core area and adjacent properties in Zimbabwe by Palaeo-Art Services, a voluntary organisation co-ordinated by Ed Eastwood.

Risk analysis:

The following threats are identified in the nomination documents:

- Agriculture;
- Mining;
- Environmental pressure;
- Natural disasters;

- Visitors' pressure;
- Criminal damage.

And these are dealt with separately:

Agriculture: Intensive agriculture is being practised on irrigation lands along the Limpopo River and in the south of the site. The main impact is likely to be the ploughing of cultural sites. Within the proposed boundary, land currently intensively farmed will in time be decommissioned and gradually rehabilitated, halting any further agricultural encroachment (Cf. History section).

Grazing, particularly by cattle, has had a substantial impact on the vegetation in the past. However, the numbers of stock are substantially lower than they were in the middle of the last century and there are unlikely to be any significant new impacts.

Mining: There are two mining operations with a potential impact, the small Riedel diamond mine, and the major Venetia Mine.

A small portion of the farm Riedel in the eastern part of the Park has been kept on in the hope that it will yield profitable mining operations. All indications are however that it is worked out.

The Venetia Mine is a major diamond mining operation opened in the 1990s by De Beers Consolidate Mines Ltd. Because it is new it was subject to the Environment Conservation Act of 1989, and a full Environmental Impact Assessment and Environmental Management Plan was prepared.

Most of the staff of the mine live in Messina and are bussed in on a daily basis, so there is limited development pressure at the mine itself. However, the bright lights of the mine are highly visible from many kilometres away.

The Messina area is a fairly rich mining area, and there is a possibility that deposits of other valuable minerals may be found. The exact ownership of most of the mining rights in the Park has not yet been sorted out, apart from the above two mines. However, the new Minerals and Energy Act returns all mining rights to the State, and the Government will therefore be in a far better position than it has been for over a century to make an informed decision on whether any new deposits should be mined or not.

Environmental pressure: Very limited environmental pressures are expected. A five-year Alien Invasive Plant Eradication Programme is being carried out under the Working for Water Programme, aimed mostly at waterborne invasives such as Nicotiana, as well as some cacti.

The impact of the recent opening up the property to big game, especially elephants, needs to be considered. There is some argument for fencing off the most important sites from elephant damage. However, elephants have been part of the picture for thousands of years, and the counter-argument says that some elephant impact should be accepted as part of the natural processes. A monitoring programme to detect elephant impacts has been initiated.

Climate change is clearly a major factor in the Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape: the main settlements grew and then declined in response to changing climatic conditions. The early 21st century is at the drier end of the

cycle for this part of the Limpopo Valley, and higher rainfall periods may return in the future.

Natural factors: The main natural disasters are flooding and fire.

Flooding occurs periodically and has done for thousands of years. Most of the sites near the river have been extensively damaged before they were discovered. The main consideration is that any new excavations close to the river should take into account the potential impact of flooding.

A long history of heavy grazing by domestic stock over the last century means that the vegetation is prone to fires only under exceptional conditions. The Park has a fire management policy in place, fire assistance agreements have been made with neighbours, and fire fighting equipment on standby.

An ongoing problem is the erosion of old excavations through the actions of wind and rain. This is being addressed by the Archaeological Task Group.

Visitors' pressure: This is one of the main factors affecting the property. Inadequately controlled tourism pressure could have a substantial impact on the sites, through trampling of deposits, graffiti, damage to paintings, and removal of archaeological material such as pottery and beads.

These issues are to be addressed in the Tourism Master Plan presently being drawn up. A particular issue is whether visitors should be allowed on to the top of Mapungubwe Hill.

Authenticity and integrity

Authenticity at Mapungubwe is high. The cultural sites have not been subject to any form of human intervention since they were abandoned apart from archaeological excavations. The excavations have been stabilised and filled in where possible and the recovered materials are curated at the University of Pretoria, at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg and at the African Museum in Pretoria.

The natural landscape has been modified along the Limpopo River where commercial farming has been undertaken during the past century: cattle ranching, game ranching and latterly, since the 1980s, irrigation crop farming. Farm houses and buildings have been built and various irrigation measures installed.

In the core area some properties have been acquired and others soon will be in order to address conflicting land use. Farming in the core area has either ceased already or will be phased out over the next five years.

Once the properties in the core area have been acquired by the State, or the owners have entered into a contractual agreement with SANParks, and the properties have been consolidated, all fences will be removed to allow elephants and other game animals to range freely. The flow of game will be extended further with the establishment of the proposed Trans Frontier Conservation Area that will extend across the Limpopo into Botswana and Zimbabwe.

The integrity of the site has only been compromised by the standard of the excavations in the 1930s which it could be argued led to valuable evidence being lost – and thus the completeness of the site, in both physical and intellectual terms being compromised.

Comparative evaluation

The Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape is the cultural and historical precursor to two sites already on the World Heritage List: Great Zimbabwe and Khami, in Zimbabwe. Great Zimbabwe is about 250 km to the north-east and Khami is about 220 km north-north-west of Mapungubwe.

Mapungubwe is the precursor to Great Zimbabwe in the sense that both belonged to the same regional culture and Great Zimbabwe took over as the major east coast trading partner after climatic changes undermined the prosperity of Mapungubwe. However, there is no evidence that the Mapungubwe people moved to Great Zimbabwe from Mapungubwe.

The physical remains at the two sites are different, but with strong similarities. At Mapungubwe Hill, as at Great Zimbabwe, high quality walling relates to the royal areas and to the main entrance to the hill. There are also similarities in social structures. By the end of the period of occupation at Mapungubwe the inhabitants had established a ruling class that lived apart from the commoners. At Great Zimbabwe, the physical separation of commoners and sacred rulers was developed to a greater extent, using large and elaborate stone-walled structures to emphasise this separation.

Mapungubwe, Great Zimbabwe and Khami each represent a different stage in the inter-twined historical process of external trade and social stratification. Whereas the two Zimbabwean sites each cover a period of about two centuries, the core area of the Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape includes a series of three capitals that were occupied over a period of about 400 years. The story they tell is amplified with evidence from hunter-gatherer rock paintings. Mapungubwe should therefore be seen as part of a cultural continuum with Khami and Great Zimbabwe rather than as a competing site.

In a broader global context, Mapungubwe could perhaps be compared with the early city states in Central America and the Near East in that their remains chart the origins of centralised settlement in those continents, although Mapungubwe is much more recent than its counterparts. Although there are similarities in the effects of sedentary agriculture, trade, population increase and class distinction with these sites, the cognitive use of the landscape is different. Whereas elsewhere successive populations built settlements on top of each other to emphasise dominance by ethnic replacement, in the Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape different parts of the landscape were selected at different times. Archaeological deposits therefore tend to represent a limited time period of only one century or two.

Outstanding universal value

General statement:

Mapungubwe is of universal value for the way it demonstrates the rise and fall of the first indigenous kingdom in southern Africa. Within the site are the remains of three capitals, their satellite settlements, and the lands

around the confluence of the Limpopo and Shashe rivers, whose fertility supported the large population within the kingdom.

Mapungubwe's position at the crossing of the north/south and east/west routes in southern Africa enabled it to control trade through the East African ports to India and China and within southern Africa. From its hinterland it harvested gold and ivory – commodities in scarce supply elsewhere – which brought it great wealth displayed in such imports as Chinese porcelain and Persian glass beads.

Mapungubwe's comparatively sudden demise, brought about by deteriorating climatic conditions, and the abandonment of the capital, means that the remains of the kingdom have been preserved. Mapungubwe's position as the power base in southern Africa shifted north to Great Zimbabwe and Khami. Mapungubwe must be seen as the forerunner of these two later kingdoms.

Evaluation of criteria:

Mapungubwe is nominated under *criteria ii, iii, iv* and *v*:

Criterion ii: The Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape contains evidence for an important interchange of human values that led to far-reaching cultural and social changes in Southern Africa between AD 900 and 1300. International trade through the Indian Ocean ports created wealth in society which was closely linked to ideological adjustments and changes in architecture and town-planning. The archaeological evidence shows a clear shift as trade increased to a pattern influenced by an elite class with sacred leadership in which the king was secluded from the commoners.

Criterion iii: Until its demise at the end of the 13th century AD, Mapungubwe was the most important inland settlement in the African subcontinent. In its heyday between 1220 and 1300 AD the kingdom extended over an area of about 30,000 km² on either side of the Limpopo and Shashe rivers. The cultural landscape contains a wealth of information in archaeological sites that record the development of the kingdom from relatively small settlements based on a central cattle kraal to a capital with separate areas for the elite and commoners. High status burials provide the earliest physical evidence of substantial gold working in the sub-continent. The gold work and related trade network is the indigenous precursor to the subsequent European exploitation of this precious metal in Southern Africa that began more than 500 years later. Glass beads, spindle whorls and fragments of Chinese porcelain are evidence for a flourishing trade with the east coast of Africa and, from there, with India, Indonesia and China.

The power-base of this culture shifted to Great Zimbabwe when climate change meant it was no longer possible to support a large sedentary population.

Although farming communities continued to live on and off in the Mapungubwe region after 1300 AD, they never again reached the same high population density or political power. As a result of subsequent social and political events and colonial intervention in the last 400-500 years, direct linkages with the original population at Mapungubwe have become obscured. The remains at Mapungubwe are therefore testimony to this once thriving civilisation.

Criterion iv: At Mapungubwe trade, in gold and ivory through the east African ports in exchange for glass beads

and ceramics that derived from as far afield as China, combined with ideal climatic conditions for agriculture, led to the establishments of the first indigenous kingdom in the southern African sub-Continent, a significant stage in the history of the area.

Criterion v: During the past two millennia, periods of warmer and wetter conditions suitable for agriculture in the Limpopo/Shashe valley were interspersed with cooler and drier pulses. When rainfall decreased after 1300 AD, the Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape could not continue to sustain a high population using traditional agricultural methods, and the inhabitants were obliged to disperse.

The remains at Mapungubwe thus graphically illustrate the impact of climate change and record the growth and then decline of the kingdom of Mapungubwe as a clear record of a culture that became vulnerable to irreversible change.

4. ICOMOS RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation for the future

The nominated property contains substantial areas of virtually untouched cultural landscape of very high quality. These are, however, separated by some areas of present-day agriculture (principally citrus plantations and circular irrigated fields) in private ownership. The aim is to transfer ownership of these commercial operations to the SANParks, to enter into management agreements, and thus to allow the land to return to 'natural' landscape. This process is already under way, and some previously worked fields are now fallow, awaiting natural regeneration, but a clear timetable is needed.

Whilst it could be argued that sections of the Park in this latter category should be excluded from the World Heritage site, these sites do contain valuable archaeological material and inscription would provide protection under the provisions of the 1999 World Heritage Conservation Act.

Furthermore, exclusion of certain areas within the proposed National Park from the World Heritage site might cause management and legislative complications.

The inscription of the site is seen as offering potential economic advantages through increased tourism activity. The Mapungubwe Tourism Initiative has been set up by the Department of Trade and Industry to assist regional development and economic growth in the central Limpopo valley with Mapungubwe as the central feature. A baseline scoping study of the tourism potential has been prepared. This is being followed up by a Tourist Destination Development Plan, which is coordinated with the work of the Development Bank of Southern Africa. Project managers from SANParks and DBSA have been to the USA on a fact-finding mission. It is clearly crucial that tourist activities are expanded in a sustainable way.

It is also imperative that there should be a well-designed interpretation centre linked with interpretation panels at the main sites – to explain the significance of the almost invisible remains.

An excellent site for the interpretation centre has been identified alongside the main road that forms the southern boundary of the nominated area. It is planned to erect a suitable building or buildings here that would be screened from the interior of the Park. This would need to be linked

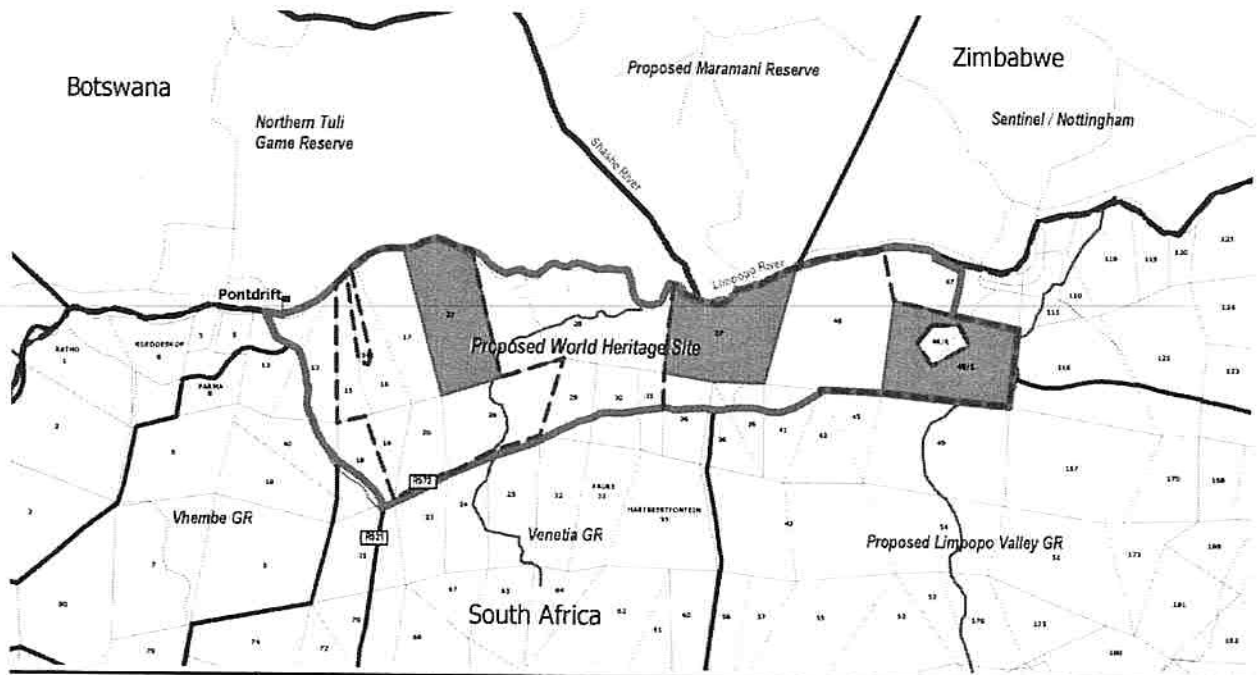
to an overall interpretation strategy for the whole proposed world heritage site.

Recommendation with respect to inscription

That this nomination be *deferred* in order to allow the State Party to:

- Provide an updated Management Plan;
- Provide satisfactory progress of the formal designation of the Vhembe-Dongola National Park, of contractual negotiations with private landowners within the nominated property, and of the production of the Management Plan. (All these were originally promised by January 2003);
- Expand the permanent staffing of the Park management team so as to include at least one full-time professional archaeologist with heritage management training;
- Reconstitute the Archaeological Task Group as an integral part of the management scheme, with the responsibility of preparing research policies and authorizing and overseeing excavation and survey projects;
- Commission from consultants, with experience in this field, an integrated interpretation plan, involving the content and display of the interpretation centre, and the presentation and interpretation of individual sites (This might be the subject of a request to the World Heritage Fund. It might also take the form of a bilateral agreement with the US National Park Service).

ICOMOS, March 2003



MAPUNGUBWE WORLD HERITAGE SITE NOMINATION
FIGURE 5
PROPERTIES FOR INCLUSION IN THE MAPUNGUBWE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

Legend

- International Boundaries
- Border Posts
- Farm Boundaries
- Major Rivers

Road Network

- Major Road
- Main Road
- Secondary Road

Properties

- Category I: Gazetted National Parks
- Category II: In Principle Agreement For Contractual Park
- Category III: Proposed World Heritage Site
- TFCA Areas

Source: Peace Parks Foundation (2001)

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INVEST

Map showing the boundaries of the site
Plan de délimitation du site