

TOTENG POTTERY AND THE ORIGINS OF BAMBATA*

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ABSTRACT

Two sites at Toteng yielded a ceramic sample representing three distinct groups of people: historic BaYeyi, pastoral Khoi and Early Iron Age Bambata. The Bambata sample is the first ever retrieved from settled villages. Although small, it helps to clarify the affinities of several other collections.

INTRODUCTION

A.C. Campbell located several Bambata Early Iron Age sites in 1988 in the course of an archaeological survey of a dam area near present-day Toteng (20.23S; 22.57E) in western Botswana. Two were test excavated in February 1991 near the proposed dam wall on opposite sides of the Nchabe river bed (Fig. 1).

Campbell chose these sites because of the importance of Bambata pottery in debates about the spread of pastoralism and farming into southern Africa (Walker 1983). Previously, most Bambata pottery in Botswana (*e.g.* Denbow and Campbell 1980), Zimbabwe (Cooke 1963, Robinson 1963) and South Africa (Wadley 1987:53) had been found in deflated deposits or mixed with Later Stone Age artefacts. The Bambata vessels in these widely-spaced deposits represent 'trait intrusions' because the stone tool assemblages continue without modification (*e.g.* Walker 1983), the pottery itself lacks any antecedent and only a few vessels, or fragments, are usually present. Despite their intrusive contexts, these fragments have greatly influenced our understanding of the Bambata style. Fortunately, the Toteng sites appeared to have been true villages, and it was therefore possible to recover a full assemblage.

Toteng I centred around a mound on the site of a late 19th century European store that was built when Toteng was the capital of the BaTswana. Nine pits were excavated at Toteng I in artificial spits (Campbell 1992). Four were in 1 m squares (Test Pits 1, 3, 5 & 6), two were 1 m x 2 m (2 & 4), two were 2 m x 2 m (D & E) and one was 2 m x 6 m (ABC). Test Pits 1 to 5 and Square D were located on top of the mound, while Square E and Trench A-C were sited on flatter ground below the top. The excavations on top exposed a 0,65 m capping of redeposited sand and calcrete from recent road activities that produced the mound appearance. This recent deposit overlay a layer of historic material, followed by grey ashy sand with Bambata pottery and

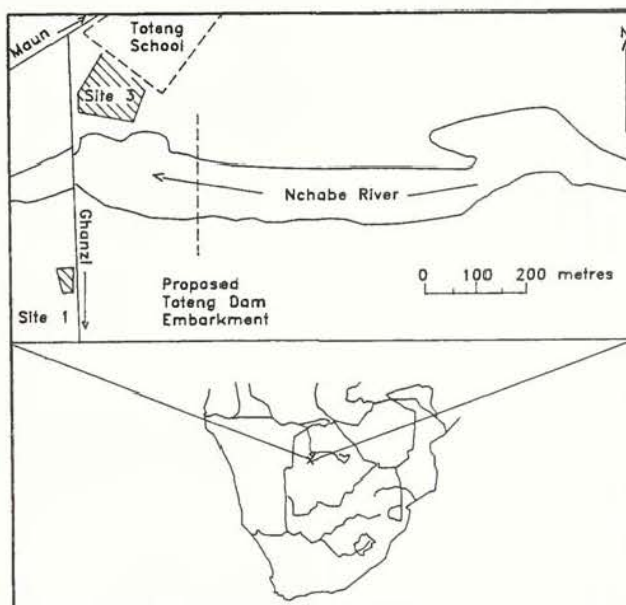


Fig. 1. Location of Toteng I and III in Ngamiland, Botswana.

then a Later Stone Age horizon, fine sand and finally bedrock at about 2,20 m. Square E uncovered the floor of the European store, while Trench A-C found the historic horizon stratified above a Bambata midden about 0,50 m thick. Charcoal from this midden at a depth of 0,70 m has been radiocarbon dated to AD 130 ± 50 (Pta 5534) which calibrates to the 3rd century.

Five pits were excavated in artificial spits at Toteng III on the north bank about 300 m north of Toteng I. Squares A and C were initially 1 m x 3 m, although Square C ultimately reached 3 m x 3 m because of the burial of a child. Charcoal from 0,22 m deep in a midden deposit around the child has been dated to AD 350 ± 50 (Beta 44966), calibrating to the 5th century. TP1 and 2 were both 1 m x 1 m squares, and Square B

was 2 m x 2 m. Most material was found in the top 100 mm, but occasionally some extended another 100 mm, and in square B it was concentrated in the top 0,30 m. A road quarry next to Square B shows that this deposit formed a midden about 5 m wide. Charcoal from a depth of 200 mm to 300 mm in this midden dates to AD 140 ± 60 (Beta 44965), which calibrates to the 3rd century. Campbell (1992) presents full excavation details in his CRM report, here I present a description and analysis of the indigenous ceramics.

TOTENG CERAMICS

The excavations and surface collections from these two sites yielded some 62 vessels, representing three groups. Generally, these groups could be separated by key features: short necked jars with red-on-buff chevrons characterized historic pottery; bag-shaped vessel with pointed bases and pierced lugs characterised Khoi pottery; and relatively thin vessels with fine comb-stamping distinguished Bambata. I describe them in greater detail, beginning with Bambata.

Bambata

In the Bambata assemblages vessel surfaces tended to be grey or dark and the vessel walls thin, from 4 mm to 6 mm. The same vessel, however, could vary up to 4 mm, depending on the vessel part. The average thickness of 25 vessels illustrates this variability:

mm	3.5	4	4.5	5	5.5	6	6.5	7	7.5	8	8.5	9	9.5	10	No
Rim		1		4		4	1			1				1	12
Neck	1	3	1	3	1	5		3							17
Shoulder	1		1				1		1	1					5

Most Bambata vessels incorporated an organic temper that was often burned out, leaving numerous holes. In other cases charcoal remained in the wall, and a few contained fine grit.

Vessel forms included bowls and jars. Some jar rims were thickened externally or pushed out from the back. Other vessels had straight or curved necks without accentuated rims.

Many vessels were decorated with fine combstamping (*i.e.* 3-4 stamps per 5 mm) although incision, broad-line incision and punctates also occurred. Of more importance, however, were the designs and their placement: vessel lips had oblique stamped or incised lines; rims had a band of oblique incisions or combstamping; necks had horizontal broad-line incision, multiple alternating bands or alternating blocks of stamping; and shoulders had a band of punctates or pendant rays of combstamping. Some vessels also bore traces of red ochre, and one was graphite burnished. One bowl rim appeared to have been decorated with an incised triangle.

No complete multidimensional types could be determined from the fragmentary sample. Consequently, incomplete types were based on design layout. There were six:

Type 1. Jars with incised or stamped rims and broad-line

incision in the neck. Lips were sometimes decorated (1 nearly complete and 3 fragments. Fig. 2).

Type 2. Jars with a large area of horizontal stamping or alternating blocks of stamping. Lips were sometimes decorated, and rims occasionally showed two or three deep rows of stamping. Red ochre was common (6 vessels and 3 fragments. Figs 2 & 3).

Type 3. Jar with band of vertical to oblique comb-stamping in the neck and another at the neck/shoulder junction. Decorated lip (1 example. Fig. 3).

Type 4. Jar with plain rim and multiple bands in the neck. Graphite burnish on one example (1 vessel and 3 fragments. Fig. 4).

Type 5. Bowl with triangle below the rim (1 example. Fig. 4).

Type 6. Pendent rays on the shoulder (1 example. Fig.4).

Khoi

Khoi pottery utilized charcoal temper along with a white grit that was probably derived from calcrete. The six fragmentary vessels represented three types:

Type 7. Bag shaped vessel with internally reinforced lugs and thick pointed bottom (3 fragments. Fig. 5).

Type 8. Thickened jar rims decorated with crosshatching (2 examples. Fig. 4).

Type 9. Plain bowl (1 example. Fig. 5).

Historic

The remaining pottery was also characterized by white grit tempering. The vessels tended to have short upright necks and flat lips. A handle may be part of this group. Decoration comprised a band of punctates, red bands or red chevrons on a buff background, and small applique knobs on shoulders. These decorated fragments formed four types:

Type 10. Painted vessels. One with punctates on the neck/shoulder junction (10 examples. Fig. 6).

Type 11. Short-necked vessels with a hatched band at the neck/shoulder junction (2 examples. Fig. 6).

Type 12. Plain vessel with applique knobs. (1 example Fig. 6).

Type 13. Plain vessels with short upright necks. (12 examples Fig. 6).

The stratigraphic distribution of these types was not always clear because of rodent disturbances. Fragments of the same Bambata vessel, for example, were scattered 0,50 m to 0,60 m apart, while historic material penetrated to a depth of 0,90 m in some areas (Table 1).

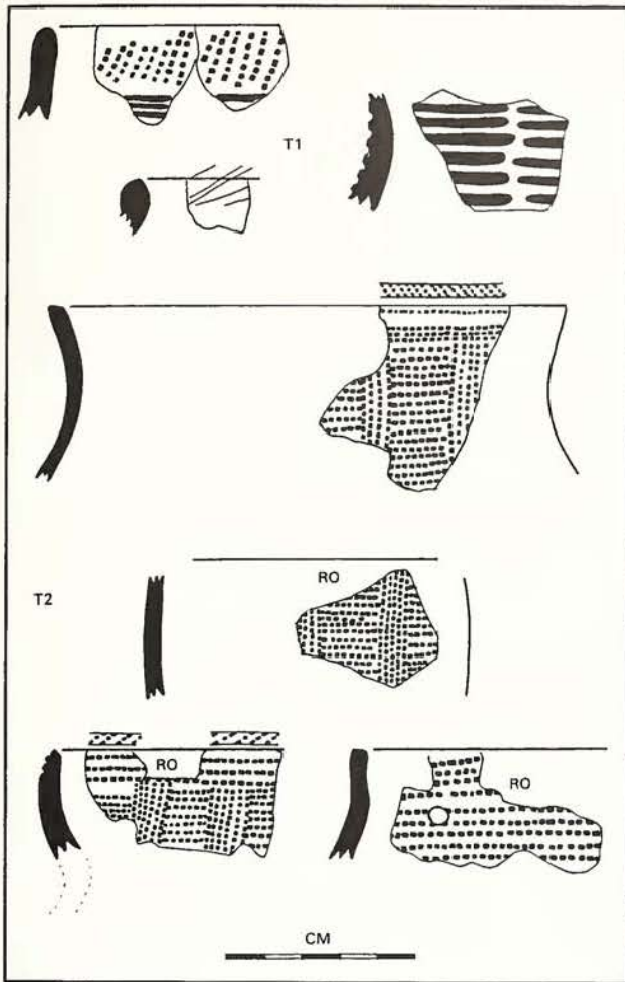


Fig. 2. Toteng ceramic Types 1 & 2: Bambata. RO = red ochre.

Table 1. Distribution of the three ceramic groups at Toteng I.

	TP 1-3, SQD			SQA-C, SQE		
	Historic	Khoi	Bambata	Historic	Khoi	Bambata
Surface	4		7	5		1 x
10			2			
20				1		
30				1		1
40	1					
50						2x 2 6x 5x 7x
60						
70						1 x x
80	1					
90	2		x			
100						
110						
120	1?	1?	5x			1
130			1 3x			
140						
150						
160	Later	Stone	Age			
170						
180						
190						
200						
210						
220						
Total vessels:	CALC 9	RETE 1?	11	7	0	10

| same vessel

Nevertheless, Bambata pottery was generally stratified under the Khoi and Historic types in the two sites (Tables 1 & 2). Indeed the midden in Trench A-C, Toteng I, under the historic horizon, contained 25 Bambata fragments representing 7 vessels. Furthermore, the one nearly complete example of Bambata Type 4 lay above a

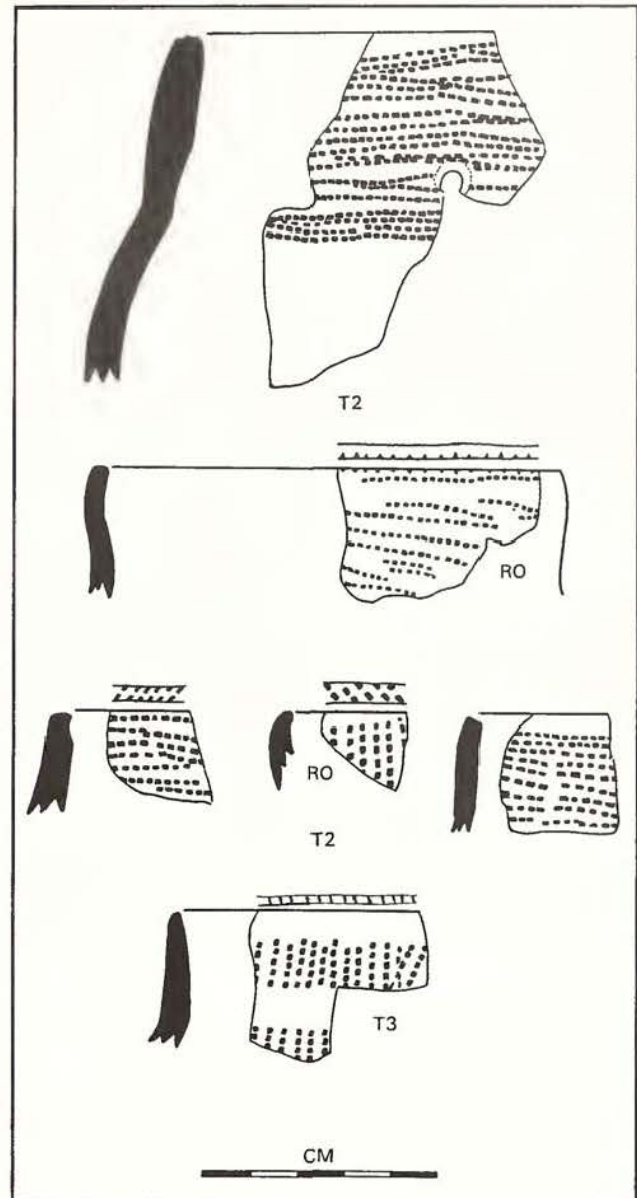


Fig. 3. Toteng ceramic Types 2 and 3: Bambata. RO = red ochre.

LSA horizon on top of the mound. Thus there can be no doubt that a Bambata occupation predated the historic village and that at least three different groups of people can be identified through ceramic style.

IDENTIFICATIONS

The historic pottery is not well known although the historic sequence is relatively clear. According to oral tradition, the BaYeyi moved into the Toteng area from Caprivi at the end of the 18th century, before the early 19th century occupation of the Tawana (Tlou 1985). The Yeyi are matrilineal people related to other Western Bantu speakers such as the Subia and Totela in the middle Zambezi area (Murdock 1959). The Subia and Totela make pottery belonging to Phillipson's (1974) Linyati Tradition that is notably similar to the red-on-buff ware at Toteng. This close ceramic similarity and

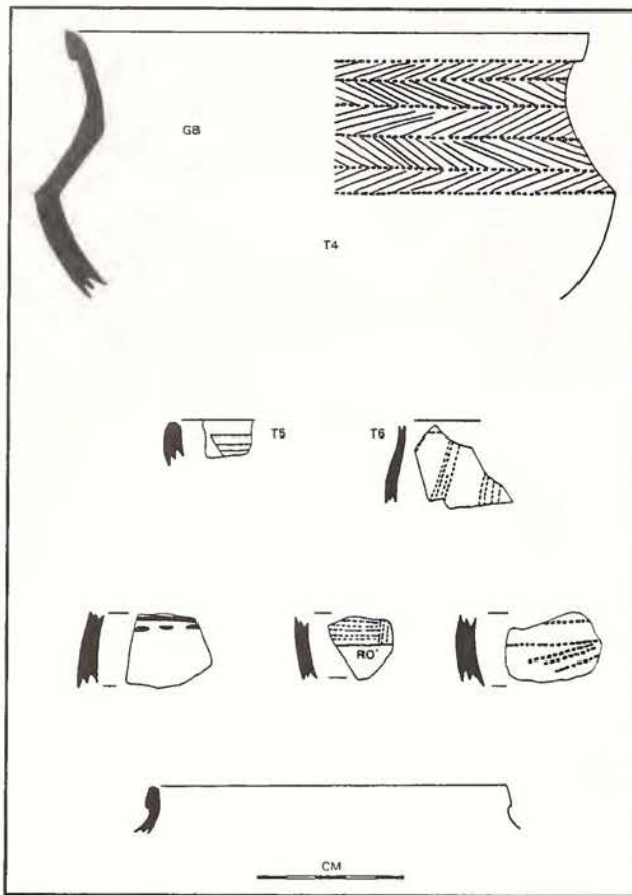


Fig. 4. Toteng ceramic Types 4 to 6 and miscellaneous sherds: Bambata. GB = graphite burnish, RO = red ochre.

Table 2. Distribution of the three ceramic groups at Toteng III.

	Historic				Khoi		Bambata		
Surface	2x	3x	5x	12	1	4		x	1
10						5x			
20							2x	x	4x
30							3x	1	3x
40									
50									
60									
70									
Total vessels:			15			6			7

linguistic relationship suggest the Yeyi made Types 10-13.

Phillipson attributes the Linyati Tradition in Zambia to Kololo (*i.e.* Tswana) influence in the 19th century. The similar Yeyi pottery at Toteng, however, predates the Tswana, and so the origins of Linyati pottery probably lie elsewhere.

Khoi-speaking people also lived in the area in the 19th century (Denbow & Campbell 1980). In the 1840s Livingstone found pastoral BaDete along the Botletli river, and oral traditions collected by Campbell & Denbow among Bantu speakers indicate the Dete predated Yeyi, Tswana and Kalanga. Significantly, the Dete claimed to have formerly made Types 7 & 8, and these types can be confidently ascribed to Khoi people. Since red painted ware has been found with Khoi pottery at Toromojo (Denbow pers. comm. 1979), the Khoi may have also used some of the historic pottery. Further work

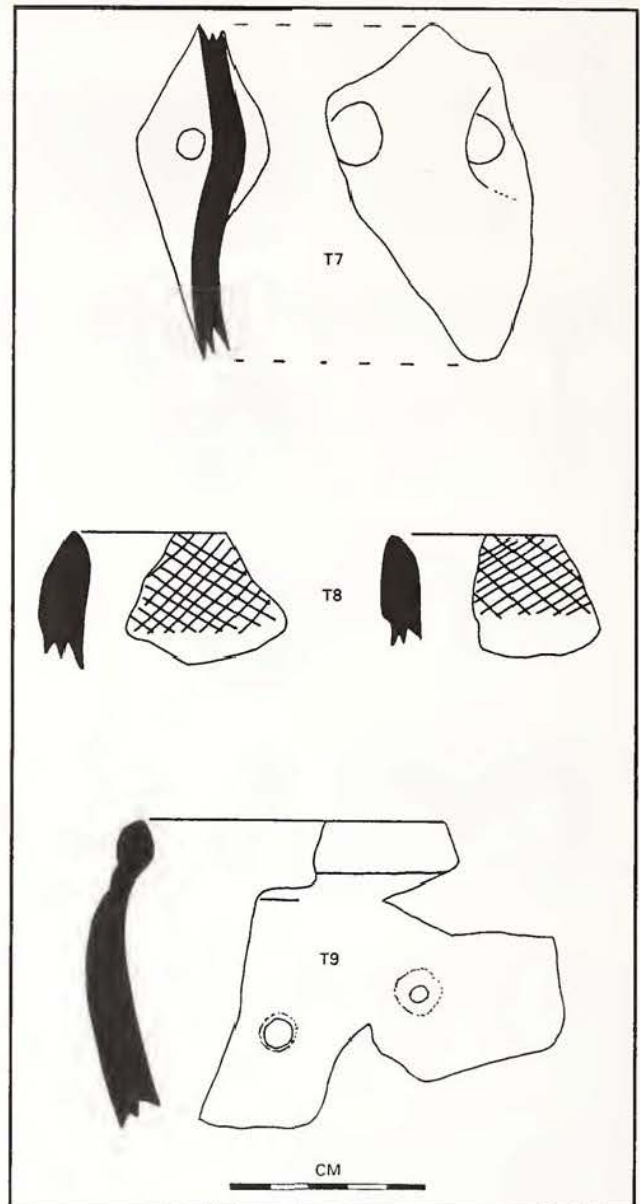


Fig. 5. Toteng ceramic Types 7 to 9: Khoi.

is necessary to clarify this period.

Although the earlier Bambata sample is disappointingly small, it nevertheless clarifies a few important points. First, the numerous pieces of the same vessels in the midden suggest that the Toteng sites were settled villages where many pots were used, rather than transient hunter-gatherer camps where individual vessels and even fragments may have been valued. The thickness of the discrete midden supports this conclusion.

The village status of the sites leads to an important point about the assemblages. The association of types and range of other variability can be used as a datum to assess the association of pottery found in rock shelters and deflated environments with little stratigraphy. Using this datum for association, we can now see that the thin vessels with herringbone on the rim, multiple bands in the neck and triangles on the shoulder at places such as Toromojo and Hippo Tooth (Fig. 7). Denbow & Campbell 1980) were part of the Bambata assemblages

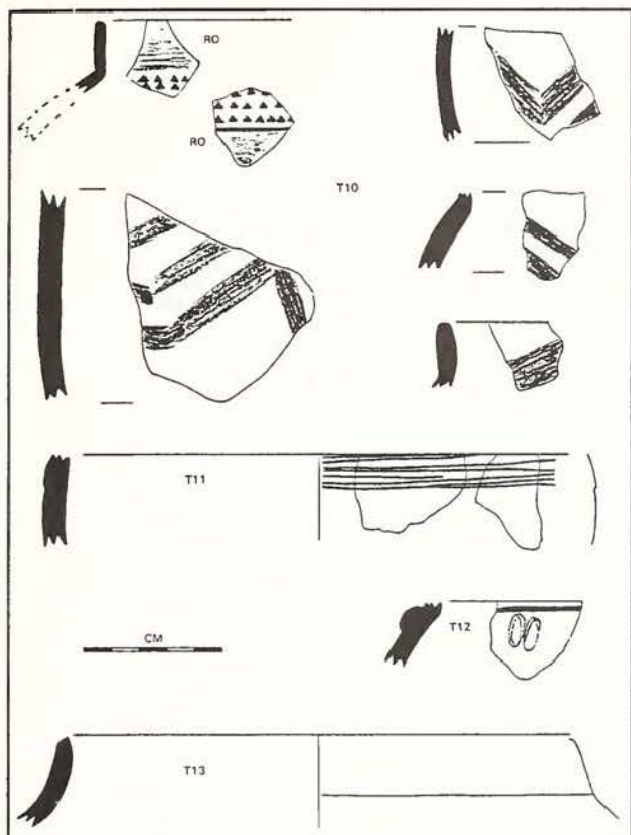


Fig. 6. Toteng ceramics Types 10 to 13: historic.

there. Likewise, Toteng Type 1 and similar combinations at Bambata sites in Zimbabwe (Schofield 1941; Robinson 1963; Walker 1983) were also part of those assemblages and not intrusive.

Although most of these assemblages are small and fragmentary, their combination with Toteng can improve the general definition of the Bambata style. For present purposes jar types are sufficient. One group includes Toteng 1 and is characterized by a clear separation between rim and neck: group 1A has rolled or thickened rims decorated with bands of incised or stamped herringbone or hatching continuing across the lip, and necks are decorated with bands of incised parallel lines or multiple bands; group 1B includes decorated lips, thickened or protruding rims decorated with incised or stamped hatching or cross hatching, and the necks are covered with incised, stabbed or stamped parallel lines, alternating blocks of lines or multiple bands (Fig. 7).

The second group has a long layout that combines the rim and neck positions of Group 1, or at least extends the neck positions. This extended neck position is decorated with long incised or stamped oblique to vertical lines, or alternating blocks of lines. Decorated lips are common, as are two horizontal lines or a blank space below the lip.

Group 3, judging by fragments from Tshangula (Cooke 1963 and collections in the Queen Victoria Museum, Harare), is characterized by bands of punctates, stabs and stamping on or near the rim, neck and shoulder. Other shoulder fragments show that some types in Groups 1-3 include wide bands of incised alternating

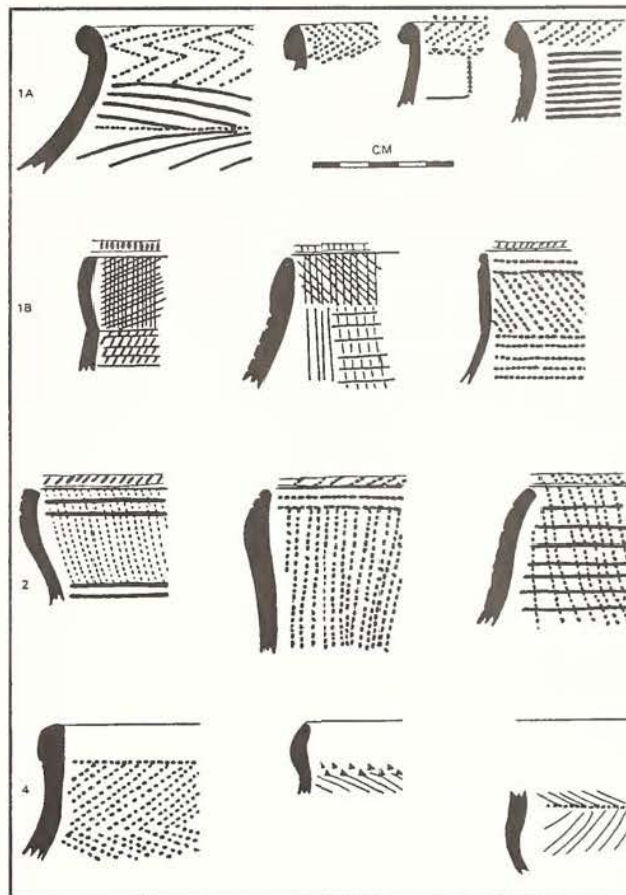


Fig. 7. Bambata pottery. Group 1A from Hippo Tooth, Cave of Bees (Matopos), Hippo Tooth, White Water (Matopos); Group 1B from 'Old Gwanda Road' (Matopos), Toromojo, Tshangula; Group 2 from Bambata Outspan, Buhwa, Shame Shabe (Matopos); Group 4 from White Water, Hippo Tooth, Toromojo.

blocks of lines, hatched triangles and parallel lines.

Group 4 incorporates recurved profiles with multiple bands in the neck. Bowl forms repeat these layouts.

Groups 1A and 4 are widespread in other Early Iron Age facies, whereas 1B and 2 are definitive of Bambata in Botswana, Zimbabwe and South Africa. The presence of Group 1B, as well as 1A and 4 in the assemblages from Benfica (Dos Santos Jun & Ervedosa 1970) and Quibaxe (De Sousa Martins 1976) in Angola (Fig. 8) is some of the evidence supporting the view that Bambata represents an early movement of the Kalundu Tradition, or Western Stream, into southern Africa from the northwest (Huffman 1989).

The unusually wide range of stylistic types (bowls as well as Groups 1 to 4) at Bambata Cave indicates that Bambata villagers moved east into Zimbabwe. Although the radiocarbon results from the Bambata levels (Walker 1983; Vogel *et al.* 1986) are problematic, other evidence helps to date this movement. A Matola village at the base of Mt Buchwa (National Museums of Zimbabwe 2030 CB 19) yielded a Group 2 Bambata vessel (Fig. 7) from among the rubble of a daga structure along with typical Matola pottery. There therefore seems little reason to

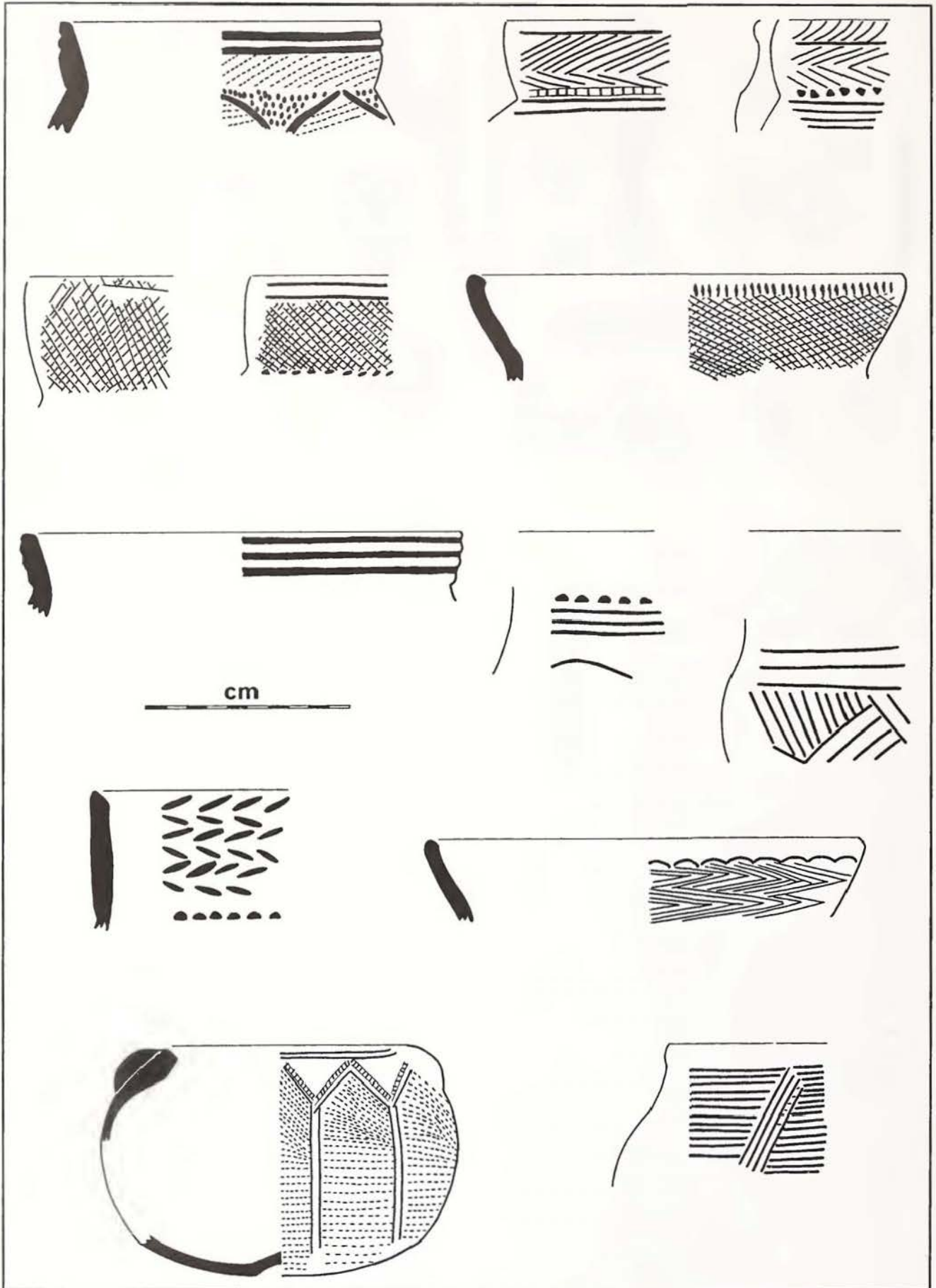


Fig. 8. Benfica pottery, redrawn from Dos Santos Junior and Ervedosa 1970 (thin profile), and De Sousa Martins 1976 (full profiles). From Huffman 1989.

doubt the association. The narrow limits of Matola radiocarbon dates (*e.g.* Hall & Vogel 1980) shows that this village most likely dated to the calibrated range of AD 200 to 400. This range is in agreement with the three dates from Toteng and clearly shows that Bambata predates Gokomere.

Gokomere pottery belongs to the Nkope Branch of the Urewe Tradition (Huffman 1989). It differs from Ziwa and Nkope further north in that it contains a significant proportion of multiple bands in the neck. Multiple bands in this position are characteristic of the Kalundu Tradition, however, and the earlier presence of Bambata with this type suggests Bambata was its source in Gokomere. From this perspective Ziwa incorporated Bambata, creating Gokomere in the process.

Because Bambata and Gokomere assemblages share some types and many motifs, it is not always possible to identify the affiliation of small and fragmentary samples. For example the Bambata fragments at Mabveni (Robinson 1961a: fig. 7, nos. 9, 12, 16 & 17) and Great Zimbabwe (Robinson 1961b: fig 23, nos. 5,6,7 & 10) could represent either an early Bambata occupation or the later period of incorporation. In either case these fragments provide support for interaction between the makers of Bambata and Ziwa.

Further west the origins of Early Iron Age facies are not so clear. Early Iron Age pottery at Bisoli and Panga in eastern Botswana, as well as at Merry's site in the Matopos, differ from contemporaneous Gokomere assemblages in a few notable details. For example, jar lips are often decorated, some rims have herringbone designs, triangles occur on shoulders, and some complex designs are reminiscent of Bambata. Rather than an origin in Ziwa, the Early Iron Age in eastern Botswana may have evolved from Bambata. This new interpretation, made possible by the excavations at Toteng, is a topic for future investigation.

Despite the small sample then, the Bambata pottery from Toteng has helped to clarify the Early Iron Age in southern Africa. Evidently, Bambata settlements spread from Angola in the 2nd and 3rd centuries to places such as Toteng in Botswana. As a result hunter/gatherers acquired pottery and passed it along their own exchange networks to places as far away as the Magaliesberg in the southern Transvaal. Somewhat later, Bambata villagers moved into Zimbabwe. The spread of Ziwa from the northeast into southcentral Zimbabwe in the 6th century incorporated Bambata and created Gokomere. Further west, however, Bambata ceramics may have been less affected. To clarify this sequence, we need to define ceramic facies in terms of complete rather than fragmentary types. Consequently, larger samples from actual villages are necessary.

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