

## LATE IRON AGE SITES IN THE MAGALIESBERG VALLEY: JONES' (1935) STONE STRUCTURES REVISITED\*

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### ABSTRACT

A survey of Late Iron Age stone-walled sites in the Magaliesburg Valley shows that the settlement plan of some fit the Central Cattle Pattern but others do not. It is suggested that some of the sites represent settlements with large populations and limited space, while others were smaller communities with more personal space. No final answers are given, but needs further research that could open a discussion on the design and variation in settlement pattern.

### INTRODUCTION

During the 1920's and 1930's, pioneer descriptions of stone-built sites on the Transvaal and Free State highveld, later ascribed to the Iron Age, were made (Van Riet Lowe 1927; Hoernlé 1930; Wells 1933; Van Hoepen & Hoffman 1935; Laidler 1936; Daubenton 1938). These included a description by T.R. Jones (1935) of a stone-walled site at the farm Doornspruit near Hekpoort. I have recently managed to trace the locality and to interview the author (Fig. 1).

Trevor Rubidge Jones was born in 1912. He grew up at Hekpoort where his interest in archaeology originated from the stone-walled sites on the family's farm. The enthusiasm of Raymond Dart and the influence of others in the Anatomy Department at Wits (*cf.* Maggs 1976:7) must have inspired the young Jones to write the article on the stone-built site at the time.

In this paper I describe and discuss the site at Doornspruit and sites at the nearby farm, Doornboschfontein. These are compared and contrasted to others in the Magaliesberg, merely to place several recently surveyed localities on record and to present a new view on the 1935 site.

### A SHORT HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE AREA

Stone-walled sites are widely distributed over the Transvaal (Mason 1968) and the Orange Free State (Maggs 1976) and are linked to Sotho/Tswana occupation during the Iron Age (Evers 1984). The important historical role of the Magaliesberg region in Sotho/Tswana traditions was previously recognised by Wilson (1969:132, 141) and Mason (1986:21).

The great chief Kgaswane (Cashane) of the Kwena people is revered in the name for the Magaliesberg (Cashan Mountains) during the 18th century (Breutz 1953:110) and likewise the ancestor Mogale (Magalies) in more recent times (Maggs 1976:308). Other groups such as the Bakgatla and the Bafokeng, are also believed to have come from the Magaliesberg (Ellenberger 1912:31), where they bore the brunt of an attack by the Bapedi in 1823-24 (Ellenberger 1912:68; Breutz 1953:181). Indications are that the Magaliesberg and surroundings did not escape the onslaught of the Amandebele of Mzilikazi (Sanderson 1860:253; Coertze 1971:43). During the years 1825-26 their reign of terror destroyed the settlements in the entire area to the north. This total state of devastation and desolation was witnessed by Moffat on his journey to Mzilikazi in 1829. The occupation of these sites in the Magaliesberg probably terminated after the first contact with the Voortrekkers of Andries Hendrik Potgieter in 1832 (Potgieter & Theunissen 1938).

Several papers have examined aspects of the archaeology of the region (*cf.* Haughton & Wells 1942; Mason 1969, 1973, 1974, 1986; Pistorius 1992), while the descriptions of a stone-walled site at the farm Doornspruit (Jones 1935; Walton 1956) are relevant here.

### ENVIRONMENT AND LOCALITY

The topography of the region is determined by the geology (Fig. 2) and is dominated by the parallel running Witwatersberg and Magaliesberg ranges. The area is characterised by a wavy appearance of ridges and valleys flowing down from the hills (Fig. 3).

The vegetation of the area lies within the central variant of the Bankenveld (Acocks Veld Type 61b) and



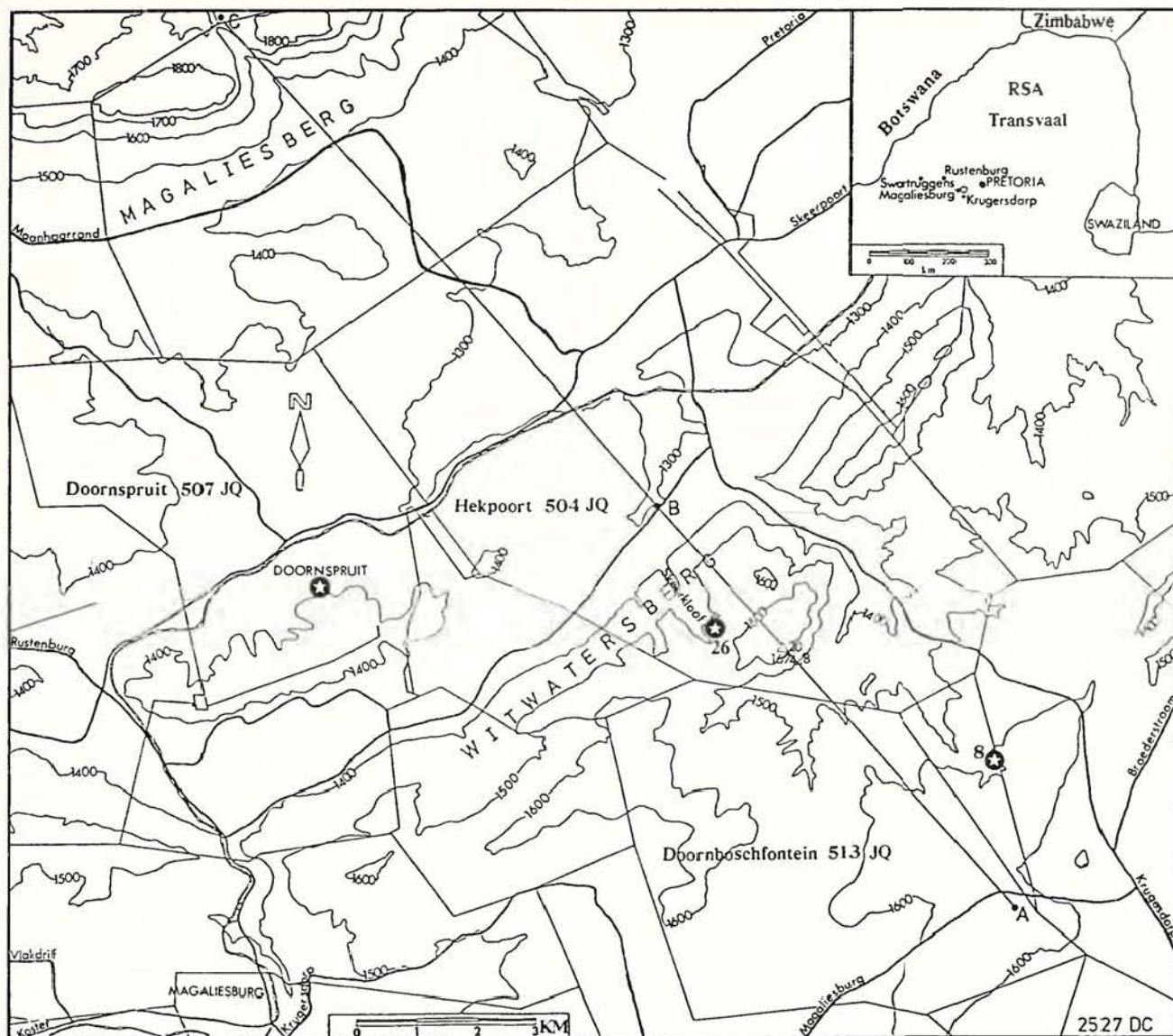


Fig. 1. locality of the Late Iron Age sites in the Magaliesberg Valley.

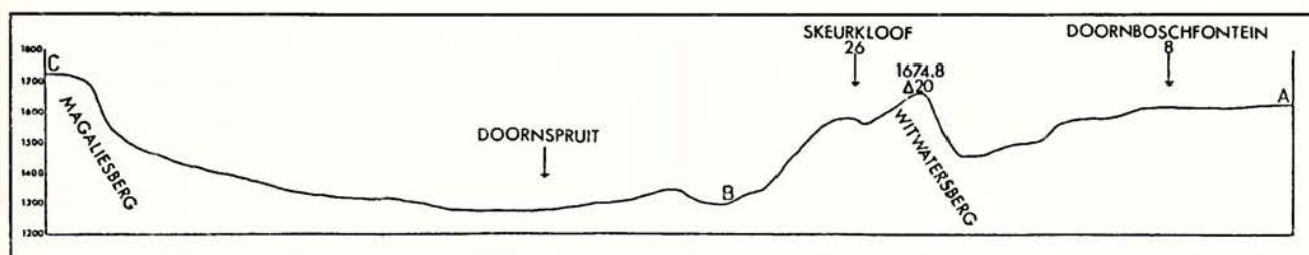


Fig. 2. Topography.

is part of the False Grassveld vegetation. Along the hills and ridges sour mixed bushveld shrubs and trees consist mainly of *Protea*, *Acacia* and *Celtis* species (Acocks 1988). It is notable that the hillslope environment was able to support the large settlements of the western Transvaal around the 17th century (Mason 1986:56, 319, 740). Acocks (1988:114) states that the particularly sour grass cover of the low lying parts of open savannah could probably be the result of the cultivation of crops by

the Amandebele of Mzilikazi during prehistoric times.

The farms Doornspruit and Doornboschfontein lie about 8 km apart, to the east of the town of Magaliesburg in the Krugersdorp district (2527DC 1985). Doornboschfontein lies to the south of the Witwatersberg at an altitude varying between 1591 m and 1674 m above sea level. The land borders on the main road from Hekpoort to Krugersdorp, not far from the Sterkfontein Caves. Doornspruit is located on the north-facing slope of the





Fig. 3. General view of the environment.

of the Witwatersberg at about 1380 m above sea level (Fig. 1). The original farm stretched far down the valley between the mountains but today the land is subdivided into several smaller stands.

### SURVEY

Stone-walled archaeological sites were recently examined at the farm Doornboschfontein 513 JQ, near Magaliesburg as ordered by the owners as part of a project to attract tourism. Twenty-five living sites were identified, numbered and plotted (Fig. 1). No excavations were done but several units were selected arbitrarily and mapped in detail. This included another stone-walled ruin (No. 26) situated above the Skeurkloof. At Doornspruit 507 JQ the assessment was primarily based on surface finds and the reports by Jones (1935) and Walton (1956).

### SITES AND FEATURES

The archaeological sites are characterised by stone structures forming a complexity of round and oval enclosures with prominent scalloped and circular walls on the periphery. Walls were built in the traditional manner of two faces of stacked stones with a rubble filling.

#### 2527DC Doornspruit

During the present survey, remnants of stone walls were located at the farm Doornspruit (25.56S; 27.33E.) about a 100 m above the main road and the railway line from Magaliesburg to Hekpoort and Pretoria (Fig. 1).

Time has taken its toll of the stone buildings. The height of the walls is nowhere in excess of 0,50 m. Middens could not be found but concentrations of potsherds, mostly undecorated, were located on the surface. A few decorated fragments display comb-stamping and incised lines (Fig. 4). Pottery concentrations are in association with paved surfaces and pieces of baked hut plaster with imprints of saplings and grass (Fig. 5). These occurred just inside and against the outer wall of the complex. Upper and lower grinding stones were present in this area. No slag could be found on the surface.

For a detailed description of the structures and layout



Fig. 4. 2527DC Doornspruit: pottery.



Fig. 5. 2527DC Doornspruit: baked hut plaster with impressions of saplings and grass.

I refer to the observations by Jones (1935) and Walton (1956:45-47). The site is described as being near the farmhouse, some distance above the main road and the railway line. Walls were built of the local natural round and uneven stones gathered in the vicinity. The walls consisted of a double row of foundation stones laid in a shallow ditch. The sides of the walls were built up in two faces with a core of rubble fill "...cemented with a mixture of clay and cowdung" (Jones 1935). Some of the structures were described as nearly 2 m high. It is alleged that walls of both byres and dwellings showed traces of plaster on the outside (Jones 1935).

The previous researchers made a distinction between structures for "human habitation" and "others for housing stock" (Jones 1935; Walton 1956). The first cluster of structures (Fig. 6) about 60 m in diameter had circular outer walls with a series of linked enclosures in the central part. Several entrance passages ("gateways") are formed by outer walls bending inwards towards the central open area. These openings divide the exterior walls into individual "segmented courts". According to Jones (1935:530) the circular and oval-shaped enclosures in the centre, were dwelling huts. This assumption is based on plastered floors found inside the enclosures. These structures probably had thatched roofs. Houses



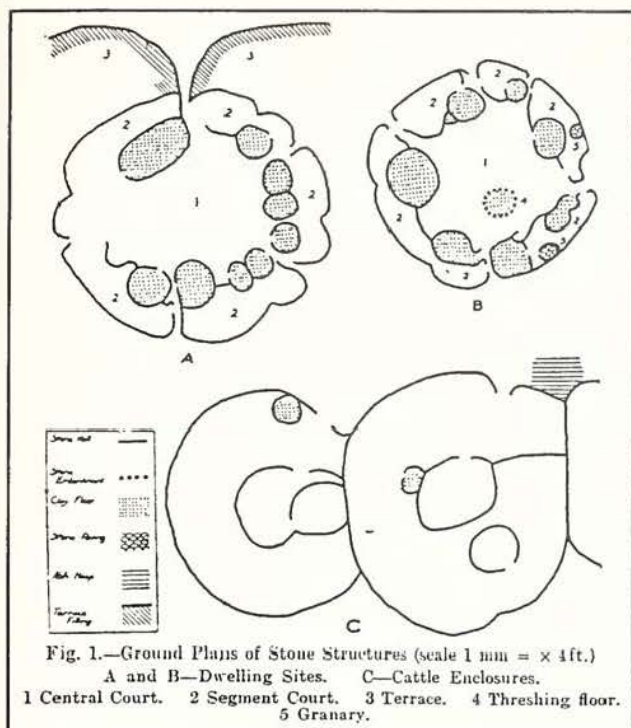


Fig. 6. Doornspruit settlement layout (Jones 1935).

faced inwards towards the central open areas or the segmented courts. Smaller structures with paved floors, inside the segmented courts, could have been granaries or storage huts. The floor level in the central court and the segmented courts seemed to have been levelled. Threshing floors of plastered clay, with a margin of small stones, often occurred in the central areas.

Walton (1956:45, 47) agreed with Jones that the smaller circular structures could have been houses with conical thatch cover. He, however, doubts that the larger oval enclosures were dwellings. These structures could have been byres or open living areas (*malapa*) attached to dwellings of wood and grass.

The second group of structures were described as cattle enclosures. These structures have circular external walls, approximately 50 m diameter, with one or more smaller (15-20 m in diameter) circular enclosures in the centre (Fig. 6). A single dwelling occurred near the entrance of the large enclosure near the cattle kraal and was probably used by herdboys (Walton 1956). Middens containing pottery, bone and clay-covered human burials were found near the entrance against the walls of these cattle enclosures (Jones 1935:531). Skeletons of a child aged 7-8 years and an infant of about 8 months were retrieved from below a 0,30 m ash deposit. The first skeleton presented San characteristics.

A clay pipe was recovered on the site. Potsherds with patterns in red and black polychrome, ochre burnish and incised and impressed decorations were present in abundance. Large quantities of slag are said to have been present on the site and two pieces of iron were found (Jones 1935:533).

Features consisting of low stone walls occurred as part

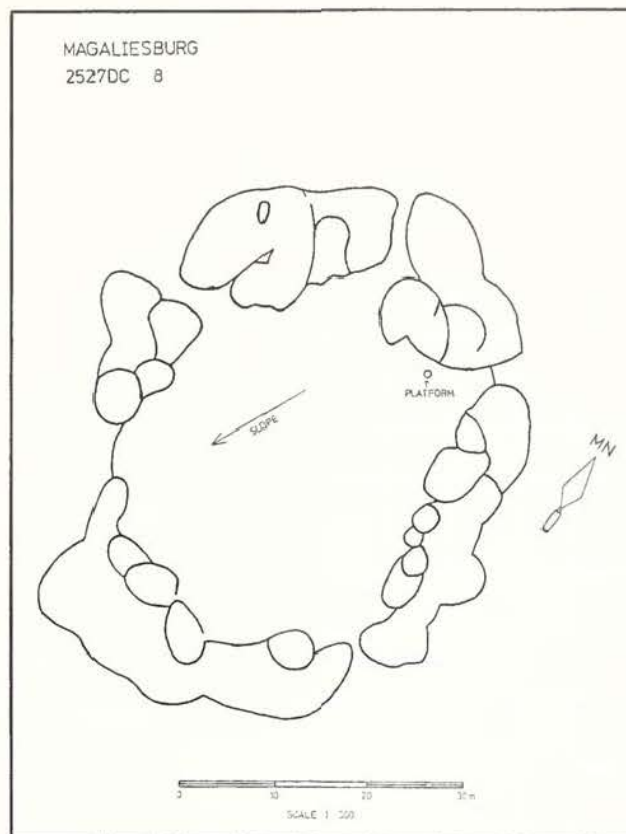


Fig. 7. 2527 8 Doornboschfontein: site plan.

of the enclosures (Fig. 6). These were described as terraces "to increase the area of arable land". Other finds include upper and lower grindstones (Jones 1935:531). The terraces described by Jones could not be identified. It was noticed, however, how soil has accumulated against the walls. This was eroded down the hill by flood water and filled the area above the walls to a higher level than below, thus resembling terraces.

#### 2527DC 8 Doornboschfontein

This site is located (25.57.34.S; 27.39.58.E.) near the eastern border of the farm (Fig. 1). It comprises of a single cluster of stone-walled enclosures about 60 m in diameter. The settlement consists of a spacious central open area surrounded by a series of linked stone enclosures with an oval or scalloped stone wall on the perimeter. Several entrances gave access to the inner area (Fig. 7).

No middens or hut remains were visible on the surface but a few undecorated potsherds were recovered.

#### 2527DC 26 Skeurkloof

The site complex lies to the north of Doornboschfontein (25.56.14.S; 27.37.07.E.) above the Skeurkloof (Fig. 1). It consists of four separate clusters of stone-walled enclosures ranging between 43 m and 58 m diameter (Fig. 8). The ground surface slopes down towards the north and the different clusters are spread out over a total distance of about 220 m along the incline. The stone walls were built in the traditional manner of



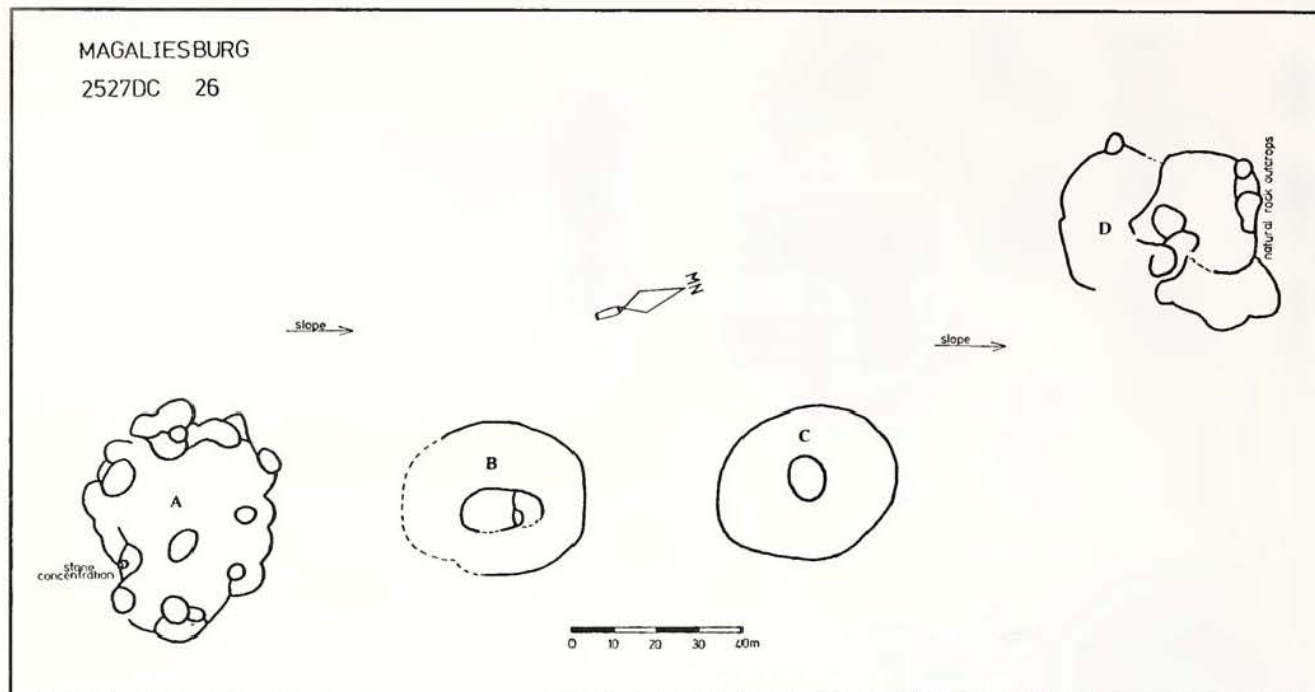


Fig. 8. 2527DC 26 Skeurkloof: site plan.



Fig. 9. 2527DC 26 Skeurkloof: construction of the stone wall. Two faces of stone with rubble infill.



Fig. 10. 2527DC 26 Skeurkloof: general view of the stone wall at 26B.

two faces of stacked stones on the outside with rubble infill (Fig. 9) and seem to be well preserved (Fig. 10).

The most prominent group of stone walls (A) lies at the highest point on the ridge giving a view to the north and south. The layout of this unit consists of a central open area which includes a single oval stone enclosure. On the outside enclosures are linked together by uneven connecting walls to form a rough circle. Some of the smaller enclosures seem to be large enough to have housed a hut with front *lelapa* but no hut remains were found on the surface to confirm this. At least two gaps in the outer walls give access to the central area. Another group (D), resembling A, is located down below, almost hidden from sight behind a low ridge above the Skeurkloof. Enclosures B and C in the complex have a very simple layout. They consist only of one or more circular or oval enclosures in the centre, surrounded by a single stone wall (Fig. 8).

No hut remains, middens or other surface finds could be located at the site. Only two potsherds, with ochre burnish and combstamped decoration respectively, were collected during the survey (Fig. 11).

## DISCUSSION

According to Jones the Doornspruit site was occupied by a settled pastoral community who built mainly in stone, cultivated crops and practiced smelting and forging of iron. He concludes that the pottery at the site resembles Sotho/Tswana assemblages.

The prehistoric settlement patterns reflect not only perceptions of people about their specific ways of living, but also represent social clustering, economic systems and political organisation at the time. There is diversity



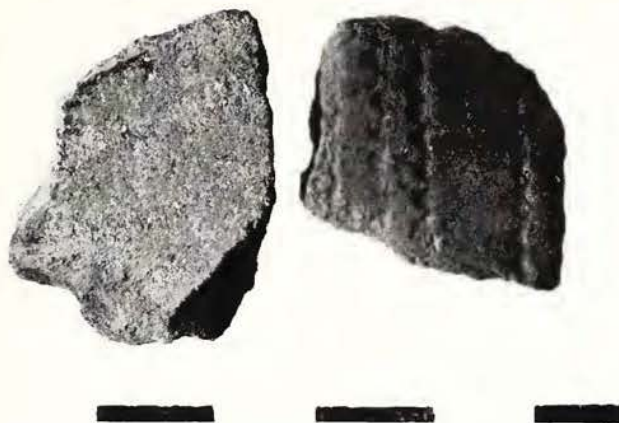


Fig. 11. 2527DC 26 Skeurkloof: pottery.

in the layout of the sites. In this case it is notable how site 26 above the Skeurkloof, reflects in its visible extension the potential dynamics expressed in the development of the site (cf. Pistorius 1992:73). Spatial utilization during the Iron Age on the highveld is characterised by the placing of the main dwelling area on the perimeter of the settlement unit and the prominent position of the byres displays the important role of domestic stock in the daily life of the people (Maggs 1976:319).

Based on settlement pattern, the occupation at Doornspruit and Doornboschfontein fits in with other sites accepted to date from the Iron Age (cf. Mason 1986; Pistorius 1992). An assessment of the sites in the area indicates at least two different categories of settlement patterns. The sites at Doornspruit (Jones 1935; Walton 1956:45-47) and Olifantspoort 18/83 and 20/83 (Mason 1986:499, 500) are characterised by an open central court (Fig. 6A & B) which is often associated with a separate complex of cattle byres. Another settlement type is found at Molokwane (Selonskraal) near Rustenburg (Pistorius 1992), Boschoek at Suikerbosrand (Taylor 1984; Huffman 1988) and Olifantspoort 20/71 (Mason 1986:338, 351). This layout consists of a central byre complex separated by an open space from the surrounding scalloped outer walls which contained the dwellings (cf. Pistorius 1992:66, fig. 20).

The basic settlement layout at Doornboschfontein (2527DC 8) and Skeurkloof (2527DC 26) resembles Doornspruit (Jones 1935) and Olifantspoort 18/83 and 20/83 (Mason 1986:357, 499, 500). This contrasts with Molokwane (Pistorius 1992) and Boschoek (Taylor 1984, Huffman 1988). Molokwane, Kaditshwene and Olifantspoort 20/71, represent sites with large populations where the limited space was defined by stone walls (Mason 1986:49, 376). Doornspruit, Olifantspoort 18/83 and 20/83 and Doornboschfontein, however, portray smaller communities allowing more personal space.

Doornspruit is compared by Mason (1986:338, 357, 500) to Class 4 at Olifantspoort 18/83 and 20/83. At these sites houses with the typical Tswana cone-on-cylinder "single and double cell" with sliding doors and verandahs occurred (*Ibid.*:397). Mason (1986:337, 499)

also connects this type (Class 4) to Type V in the Free State (Maggs 1976). This comparison is not clear in view of the absence of corbelled huts at Olifantspoort. There is also a difference in settlement layout, as the corbelled huts and stock byres at OO1 (Maggs 1976) for instance, form part of the central cluster of structures with houses of perishable materials on the periphery (cf. Dreyer 1992:380). This is not the case at Doornspruit nor Olifantspoort.

Little information regarding the pottery from Doornboschfontein is available. Doornspruit pottery included bagshaped vessels with round bases, tapered walls and open bowls (Jones 1935:532). These wares were previously classified as ST1, part of the Buispoort Tradition (Schofield 1948:144) which is of little value today (Maggs 1976:297; Mason 1986:739) and are presently described as Moloko (Evers 1984). The pottery assemblage at Molokwane includes barrel shaped vessels and open bowls with combstamped and ochre burnished decoration (Pistorius 1984:128, 1992:36). Olifantspoort 20/71 (Group 2) pottery (Mason 1986:746) consists of a wide range of pots and bowls and, as at Molokwane, pot covers were present. In the relatively small sample of decorated sherds the decoration consists mainly of incisions and depressions in lines on or below the rims (Mason 1986:466-476).

The use of clay pottery, the position of livestock within the settlement layout and the presence of upper and lower grinding stones, indicate that the life style of people was based on a stock and cereal economy. The settlement pattern at Boschoek (Huffman 1988), Olifantspoort 20/71 and Molokwane fits the ethnographic model of a Central Cattle Pattern. This system of spatial organization dates back to the Early Iron Age (Huffman 1993) and is ascribed to Sotho/Tswana and Nguni peoples (Evers 1984:241). Moloko is considered to be ancestral to Sotho/Tswana. There is therefore a close relation between Moloko settlements and the Central Cattle Pattern (Evers 1984:241, 243). However, it is not clear if Olifantspoort 18/83 and 20/83, Doornspruit and Doornboschfontein (2527DC 8 & 26) fit into this ethnographic model.

Stone walled sites in general date back to the seven teenth and eighteenth centuries according to radiocarbon dating and oral traditions (Pistorius 1992, Mason 1986; Maggs 1976; Dreyer 1992). Although we are dealing with settlements during the Late Iron Age, Huffman (1993) has shown that cattle farming was already present in this area during the Early Iron Age, thus contradicting Mason's (1986:54, 56, 319) statement of a climax of population expansion and economic oversupply after c.1700.

## CONCLUSION

Various settlement patterns on the Highveld collate with different pottery assemblages (Maggs 1976:290; Mason 1986:737). Pottery from Molokwane resembles contemporary Kwena ware from Botswana, while the occupation of Olifantspoort 20/71 and Molokwane is



likewise linked to the Bakwena (Mason 1986; Pistorius 1992). Earlier references maintain that the area was initially occupied by members of the Kgatla and Fokeng lineages (Ellenberger 1912:31). No support for this claim could at present be found. Mason (1986) did not identify the builders or occupants of the Olifantspoort 18/83 and 20/83 sites. At this stage it is therefore not possible to offer different cultural origins for the dissimilarity in settlement layout between the sites at Doornspruit and Doornboschfontein as opposed to those at Olifantspoort, Molokwane and Boschoek. The only clarification possibly lies in a difference in function.

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