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SOCIAL CHANGE AT TWYFELPOORT ROCK SHELTER IN THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY*

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ABSTRACT

Twyfelpoort rock shelter is situated in the eastern Free State, with sequences indicating contact between San people and new groups in the early nineteenth century. This was a time of political and social upheaval in southern Africa, with large scale migrations and frequent periods of famine and the people living there would have been part of this climate of change and insecurity. Historical accounts frequently ignore Bushmen or portray them as victims or trouble making thieves. Excavations at Twyfelpoort however, suggest that while the people living at Twyfelpoort did experience social and economic stress, they had constructive ways of dealing with changes happening around them as new people moved into the area. They cannot be ignored as people making conscious decisions in response to the changing circumstance around them.

INTRODUCTION

Twyfelpoort is a rock shelter situated in the eastern Free State with sequences indicating contact with both black and white agriculturists during the early nineteenth century. This was a period that saw the whole of southern Africa in political and social upheaval marked by massive migration, sporadic raids and frequent periods of famine (Eldredge 1995). The eastern part of the Free State was no exception to this climate of change and insecurity and it is in this context that the uppermost part of Twyfelpoort rock shelter must be viewed. The people living there at the time would have had to contend with increased competition in terms of resources, as well as negotiate their own place in the changing political and economical environment.

In most historical accounts the San are almost totally ignored, except for a few accounts citing them as thieves. Ransford (1972:4) states that San "would have nothing to do with whites. Their inclination was to withdraw before them into the more inaccessible parts of the interior. Yet their presence was always felt and it was always a malevolent one, for they were quite incapable of resisting the temptation to raid the European pastoralists' stock". Yet these are the people that had been living there for thousands of years, long before any others chose to lay claim to the land. Surely they too must have their place in history. This paper tries to understand the complexity of relationships that influenced the people that lived at Twyfelpoort in the early part of the 19th century.

The uncritical view taken in the classical history texts is that in the eastern Free State, San either retreated into isolated areas or went to war in the form of raids. They are often seen as passive victims of the changes that surrounded them. Historically, Bushmen coming into contact with farming communities have been described as reacting negatively. They are seen to have been overwhelmed, with no control over their changing environment. It is seldom considered that they may have reacted to a changing environment in a way that was advantageous to them. Several recent papers have emphasised the need to understand the active roles that Bushmen played in shaping their history (Jolly 1994, 1996; Dowson 1995).

SAN INTERACTIONS WITH FARMING COMMUNITIES

The first Bantu-speakers to occupy the Caledon valley were the Phetla, a Nguni group who settled in the south-eastern Lesotho. They were later joined by the Polane and the Phuti, two other Nguni groups (Maggs 1976). The Fokeng were the earliest of the Sotho groups to occupy this area after migrating from the central Transvaal. By the end of the 17th century, a relatively stable frontier had been established (Jolly 1994; Maggs 1976). In the early 1920's the effects of the Difaqane first began to be felt in the area when Nguni groups crossed the Drakensberg into areas occupied by the southern Sotho (Wright 1971:16).

Jolly (1994) has characterised the relationships between these new groups of people and the San who had been living in the area. Early relationships appear to have been fairly amicable, with close symbiotic relationships

forming between these groups. As Jolly (1994:73) points out, the potential benefits to pioneering farmers of forming good relationships with San neighbours are often likely to have outweighed any benefits that may have resulted from attempts to subdue these people. Options would have included trade, exchange of labour in the form of clientship and intermarriage.

Interactions would have undoubtedly have changed as a response to the years of turmoil associated with the Difaqane. In many ways, the San had an advantage over their farming neighbours (Jolly 1994:56). They possessed no crops and few if any cattle, and while there must have been a greater competition for the resources available to them, they had a better understanding of those resources than the farmers. While there were some disputes between San and Sotho, relationships on the whole appear to have been fairly good during this time, with San often coming to the aid of refugees in the form of shelter, food and military assistance.

By the 1830's, the area in which Twyfelpoort is situated was at the edge of the Basotho territory ruled by Moshesh (Orpen 1955; Smith 1975). In June 1833, missionaries Casalis, Arcousset and Gosselim came to settle with Moshesh at Morija (Casalis 1861; Orpen 1955). Orpen (1955:6) reports that until then, Moshesh had seen only two whites who were assumed to have been "killed, and probably eaten, as they went towards a tribe who were at the time cannibals". Soon after the arrival of Casalis, the Rev Archbell, along with Revs Edward and Alison of the Wesleyan missionary Society set up a mission at Lishuani, some 50 km south of Marquard (Orpen 1955; Smith 1975). The first white trader, Mr Fossey, appeared in the year following the arrival of the French missionaries.

We can assume that the people who lived at Twyfelpoort and the surrounding areas had no direct contact with white people at least until the 1820's, but more likely until the early 1830's. Smith (1975) travelled through the area in late 1834. He reported European settlers, presumable Trekboers at a place called Seven Fonteynes situated on the Lieu or Lion River. Smith reports three Bushman kraals just outside the settlement.

By 1836, the Great Trek was well under way (Lacour-Gayet 1970; Selby 1973). The main routes passed through the area West of the Caledon river valley, including the area where Marquard is now situated. Orpen reports that in the latter part of 1836, "the great immigration of the Boers took place, most of them stayed for some time..." (Orpen 1955:10). Although Moshesh never actually granted them any land, he did allow them to stay for a year or so, "that they might rest on their journey" (Orpen 1955:11). Many of them took up temporary residence in the Caledon district, and by the end of 1937, they had mostly passed on to Natal.

There are several options available to hunter-gatherers after contact with new settlers in a region (Alexander 1984:15). First, they can retire into isolation and continue existing in areas not utilised by farmers. Second, this can result in the destruction and dispersal of communities into previously marginal land. Third, they can establish symbiotic relationships with farming communities, sometimes leading to clientship. Finally, they have the option of going to war with the farmers. Twyfelpoort shelter is easily accessible and there is no archaeological evidence to show that the people living at Twyfelpoort had retreated into isolation. Evidence from the site suggests that there is a 2000 year hiatus between the last occupation of Later Stone Age people and occupation in the early nineteenth century. This reoccupation of the shelter may indicate a greater competition for resources as a result of the Difaqane when many farming communities were forced to subsist by hunting and gathering and to occupy rock shelters (Jolly 1994). Changing relationships with neighbouring farmers would have impacted on the San in many ways. There may have been physical stress as a result of increased competition for resources, but there would also have been social, economic and political repercussions.

MODELS OF STRESS

Hunter-gatherers have developed various mechanisms to deal with stress. These mechanisms involve both positive and negative reactions. Dirks (1980) found that humans react to stress in the from of famine and severe food shortages in a fairly predictable manner. The initial stage of famine or perceived food shortage results in alarm. During this early stage, stress can have a positive consequence. There is usually an increase in activity and reciprocity. There is a tightening of social rules, often accompanied by an increase in ritual. All in all, individuals attempt some sort of control over their environment. These reactions characterise either a short period of stress, stress at local level, or the early phase of a prolonged period of environmental stress.

If the situation continues to worsen, an increase in energy deficit results in a decrease in activity. Social ties erode and there is a decrease in reciprocity. This is almost a mechanism to conserve energy. The state characterised by resistance can be expected when the stress is fairly long term and regional as opposed to local. Finally, when exhaustion sets in, there is a general collapse of the social structure. Reciprocity almost ceases and eventually constricts to a point at which the family ceases to function as a redistributive, protective entity and individuals begin to fend for themselves. Exhaustion occurs where the stress is long term and at a regional rather than a local level.

While Dirk's model describes a social reaction to what is essentially a physical phenomenon, it is important to understand that stress can be psychological, political, economic or social. These realms are interrelated, and changes in one are bound to result in changes in the others. In the case of famine, physical or environmental stress and social stress cannot be separated from one another. Indeed, famine is less of a problem of food shortage than one of food production and food sharing or distribution (Copans 1980). It is difficult to define food shortage without understanding the various stratifications and distributions of power within a society. In other

words, stress arises out of social circumstances rather than simply physical or environmental ones.

MECHANISMS OF COPING WITH STRESS

All societies have developed mechanisms to deal with stress. In San societies, scarcity places a strain on relations and tensions are resolved through increased ritual and a formalisation of relations. Reciprocity is also witnessed in the from of gift exchange which can play a vital part in times of social or economic stress (Wadley 1987:76). Strengthening reciprocal ties with neighbours provides some kind of insurance against risk (Cashdan 1985).

The use of reciprocity as a form of insurance against risk can be linked to territoriality. Cashdan (1983) found that the degree of territoriality displayed by foraging groups depends to a large extent on the type of environmental stress experienced and whether or not it occurs at a local or regional level. If the stress is local, people have the option of moving into neighbouring territories, and mechanisms such as gift exchange can facilitate this. Thus, where local scarcity can be compensated by regional abundance gift exchange plays an important part in maintaining social ties with neighbours as a means of risk insurance (Wadley 1987:77). However, among groups living in areas where resources are scarce and unpredictable and where the effect is regional rather than local, this mechanism for coping no longer works. Territoriality tends to become more emphasised and territorial mechanisms of social exclusion come into play as means of coping with risk (Cashdan 1983:5).

To sum up, there are various mechanisms that societies use to cope with stress. During the initial stage, these responses are characterised by an increase in reciprocity, a tightening of social rules and often an increase in ritual. The usefulness of reciprocity as a means of coping with risk would depend on the type of stress experienced, in other words whether it was regional or local, short-term or extended. The tightening of social rules and the use of ritual could be expected no matter whether the stress is local or regional, since these mechanisms do not depend on conditions in neighbouring areas. These are mechanisms that are situated within the group rather than outside it.

RECOGNISING STRESS IN THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORD

Since stress affects all aspects of social life, including reciprocity and territoriality, it must have a significant effect on material culture. An increase in territoriality indicates increasing concern with group identity. In terms of material culture, variations in patterning are related to changes in the degree of conflict and competition over resources and the resulting need to stress overly clear, unambiguous identities (Hodder 1979:447). Style is a useful form of transmitting information about both personal and group identity (Weisner 1983:56).

Weissner (1983) identifies two types of style; assertive and emblemic. Assertive is a formal variation in material culture which is personally based and which carries information supporting individual identity. Emblemic style on the other hand style refers to formal variation in material culture that carries information about the existence of groups and boundaries. Emblemic style can be distinguished archaeologically by uniformity within its realm of function.

Hodder (1979) emphasises the importance of material culture to social relationships, especially when they are under strain. When tension exists between two groups, style or specific artefacts can be used as part of the expression of within-group corporateness in reference to outsiders. At the same time, as distinctions between ethnic groups decrease, for whatever reason, variability within the material culture associated with individuals may be greater. Thus, when tension between groups exists and they wish to emphasise territoriality, we can expect an emphasis on emblemic style and less variation in the material culture within each group. There is an emphasis on group identity. On the other hand, in groups that are no longer concerned with stressing group identity, there is a greater emphasis on assertive style, and we can expect to see a greater variation in the material culture.

RESULTS OF EXCAVATIONS AT TWYFELPOORT

The details of the excavation of Twyfelpoort shelter are discussed in detail elsewhere (Backwell *et al.* 1996) and will only be briefly summarised here. Since this paper deals with the site during periods of contact, I will focus on the upper levels. These are the P, C, M and H levels. Level L underlies H and is dated 1880 ± 50 BP (Pta-6171). Level H is followed by C and finally P, the youngest layer. Level M is very similar to C, but while it is older than H, we are uncertain as to it's relationship with H, C and P.

The lithic assemblage from Twyfelpoort can be classified as post-classic Wilton. In general, the frequency of formal tools in the H level is fairly high compared to the earlier L level. The level drops off in the C and is at its lowest in the P. This trend is especially true of small scrapers. A similar trend is followed by the blades, spokeshaves and adzes.

Worked bone and ostrich eggshell are most abundant in the L, less common in the H level, and almost absent from the youngest levels.

The H, M, C and P levels all contain pieces of pottery. Only one fragment from the P level had a decorated rim indicating a Type V industry (Maggs 1976). Other evidence of contact with farmers include unidentified metal pieces, glass beads and an *Ovis* (sheep) bone from the H level.

The H, M, C and P levels all contain large quantities of fragmented peach pips. The presence of peach pips has been taken to represent either direct or indirect contact with Europeans. The early missionaries that settled in the

area began to plant fruit trees and to develop the orchards that would become a feature of their stations soon after they arrived (Germond 1967). Thus the peach pips probably date to around 1833. Of course local people may have been growing peaches ahead of the arrival of the missionaries, but it is unlikely that the pips date to much earlier than the 1820's. Interestingly, barter exchange of foodstuffs is almost unheard of between hunter-gatherers (Moore 1985). The presence of peach pips gives us greater insight into the changing mechanisms that people at Twyfelpoort developed to cope with the changes surrounding them.

UNDERSTANDING INTERACTION AT TWYFELPOORT ROCK SHELTER

At Twyfelpoort, there are several possible indicators of change in the society due to interaction between hunter gatherers and farmers. Since stone tools have the capacity to reflect degrees of formal behaviour and an increasing emphasis of emblemic style, changes in the lithic assemblage need consideration. Notably, there is a significant increase in the number of formal tools in the H level, and compared with earlier levels. The H level contains the highest frequency of small end scrapers, signifying greater standardisation than was present before.

As archaeologists, we classify tools in terms of informal or formal. This does not however necessarily reflect a difference in the functions of these tools. Harper (1994) has found that use-wear on blades and flake-blades is similar. Tools classed as "formal" are not different from those classed as "informal" purely in terms of function. They have the capacity to emphasis style, and their value may well be social rather than functional. Hodder (1987) argues that an increase in standardisation and formalisation are an indicator of stress. The lithic assemblage found in the H level may indicate an increasing concern with emblemic, rather than assertive style. This signifies a greater concern with territoriality and group identity. It is also an indication of the tightening of social rules. Wadley (1987:42) argues that standardised morphology is a reflection of formal behaviour.

In the H level, there is a decrease in the number of potential gift items such as ostrich eggshell and bone bead and there is no evidence of the type of reciprocity which is to be expected if the stress the occupants were experiencing was on a regional rather than a local level. Gift exchange is only effective as form of insurance when the partners have the option of moving in with neighbours during times of stress. If the stress occurs at a regional level, this option is not longer available, and reciprocity becomes redundant (Cashdan 1985).

There are several lines of evidence that point to an increase in ritual in the H and C level. First, both levels contain MSA tools and antique pieces. These may have been recognised for their great antiquity and link to the past, and may have formed part of the shaman's paraphernalia (Wadley 1987:44). The C level also contains a quartz crystal, an object which can be linked to shamanism and ritual. There is an increase in the amount of ochre found in the C level which may also indicate an increasing concern with ritual and shamanism expressed in rock art. Shamans in San societies enter into a trance for a variety of reasons; curing, predicting the future, ensuring good hunting and rainmaking. Trance is also used as a mechanism for resolving conflict (Lee 1979). Most, if not all rock art has been unequivocally associated with trance belief and experience and the art is actively implicated in the reproduction and transformation of social relations (Dowson 1995). In a time characterised by changing social relations and often conflict, rock art and the rituals associated with it would be an important mechanism for resolving stress. There is evidence to suggest that San rock art depicting domestic ungulates was an attempt to regulate changing relations within their own society rather than regulating San relation with farming neighbours (Loubser & Laurens 1994).

There appear to be several indicators pointing to a positive reaction by the San to the initial stages of stress. There is a tightening of social relations as well as an increasing concern with ritual. There is also a greater emphasis on territoriality and group identity. Although the above evidence indicates stress, it does not signify the type of stress experienced, nor its extent.

Faunal remains can be an important indicator of stress. Cohen argues that an increase in population pressure could result in the exploitation of previously ignored micro-niches (Cohen 1975:473). An increase in competition could also result in a change in animals hunted, as could a decrease in mobility. Interestingly, the faunal remains do not indicate a meaningful change in the hunting strategies of the people occupying the H level. Other than a general decrease in the amount of bone present, there is almost no difference in the procurement strategies of the people who occupied the shelter during the L level almost two thousand years ago, and those that occupied it during the last century. The fact the animals were still hunted as well as snared seems to signify that there was no significant restriction in the mobility of the people living at Twyfelpoort.

It would seem then, that any stress experienced was not the result of scarcity or restricted mobility. I argue that the stress was social in origin. In the 1820's and 1830's, the Bushmen living at Twyfelpoort had to contend with many changes. The social disruptions caused by the Difaqane resulted in many new groups moving into the area. Along with the influx of new people came changing alliances and new conflicts. The arrival of whites, first in the form of missionaries, and later in the form of early trekers also had far reaching consequences. No-one living in the Caledon district could have been untouched by these changes. I argue that the San living there during the H levels responded to the stress caused by this uncertainty by tightening their social relationships and emphasising their own group identity. Ritual was used as a means of reinforcing those relationships.

The development of these new relationships may have been mutually beneficial. The fact that there is no significant change in subsistence strategies could indicate good relations that allowed continued access to resources as well as maintained mobility. It would seem as if the hunter-gatherers reacted positively to stress by forming mutually beneficial symbiotic relations with the farmers, maybe leading to some form of client ship.

The C level has evidence for a greater amount of stress. The lack of identifiable bone could indicate an increase in marrow extraction it could also be that fewer animals were hunted, signifying a decrease in mobility. Cores and unretouched blades and flakes reach their peak in this level, indicating more expedient manufacture of tools than previously. Nevertheless, the frequency of formal tools is still high and the people may still be concerned with group relations and group identity. This evidence is supported by the number of artefacts associated with ritual. What we may be seeing in this level is the beginning of more strained relations between the San and the neighbouring farmers. This could be an indication of resistance; physical stress is starting to increase and the continuing concern with ritual and identity may be a means of coping with both scarcity and strained relations.

The P level has the lowest frequency of both formal and informal tools, as well as items for gift exchange. Given the fact that San society as a cultural entity in the area did become extinct, it is entirely possible that the people occupying the P level at Twyfelpoort had entered Dirk's stage of resistance or even collapse. But there are other possibilities. One possible explanation is that the occupation was ephemeral. While this could be the result of fewer people living in the area, it could also be that they were living somewhere else. Houses could have been built close to their employers. Smith reports three San kraals outside of the settlement of Seven Fonteyns in 1934. The inhabitants of these kraals were described as "visiting Seven Fonteyns occasionally for the twofold purpose, first of showing that they were friendly and second, of begging a little food or tobacco" (Smith 1975:46). But it would also make sense for San working for white farmers to live near their employers.

Thus, while the artefacts in the P level could signify an increasingly negative reaction to stress that characterises the collapse of a society, they could also indicate continued incorporation and assimilation into a different society. Clientship was not the only option available to them. Many may have intermarried with either blacks or whites, or become concubines, and their children may have become assimilated into those communities. History has long held that the San of southern Africa became extinct in most areas as a result of their inability to cope with social change and their continued persecution by the farmers they came into contact with. Certainly not all relationships were good, and writers at the time often describe the San as menaces. But researchers are beginning to realise that these people cannot be regarded as simply passive or helpless.

Increasingly, evidence shows that the San cannot be ignored as people making conscious decisions in response to the changing circumstances around them. Hunter-gatherers coped with the introduction of farming communities by establishing new types of social relationships with them. For instance, exchange relationships with early farmers were based on barter in contrast to the reciprocal nature of exchange arrangements between hunter-gatherers (Thorp 1996). The San also had control over the degree of interaction with new-comers. Their decisions did include resistance and warfare, but they also included clientship and intermarriage. Initially, at least, hunter-gatherers probably had a lot to teach the immigrants, both black and white, and they may well have engaged in mutually beneficial relations. This seems to be the case during the H level at Twyfelpoort. The people living there did experience stress, but it was the stress of forging new relationships and adjusting to a new presence in the area, not the severe stress associated with the complete dominance and competition that would characterise the area in later years. Far from just being victims to stronger and more advanced powers, San too have their place in our history, making choices and decisions that would shape their destiny.

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