

EXCAVATING NDZUNDZA NDEBELE IDENTITY AT KWAMAZA*

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*Accepted for publication April

ABSTRACT

KwaMaza is a Ndzundza Ndebele site in the Steelpoort River valley and has been dated, using oral histories, to the period between the late 1600's and the early 1800's. This paper documents the excavations and highlights the different identities expressed in a range of material culture categories from KwaMaza; settlement pattern, house form, midden structure and ceramic style. The settlement pattern and houseform express a 'Nguni' identity, the middens express a particular 'Ndebeleness' and the ceramics are 'Pedi', thus reflecting a more regional identity.

INTRODUCTION

KwaMaza is located on the western margin of the Steelpoort River valley, on the lower slope at the eastern foot of the Bothasberg in Mpumalanga (Fig. 1). The valley is approximately 25 km wide at this point and the Steelpoort River is 10 km from the site. A perennial stream, the Sakazana, flows 500 m to the south of KwaMaza. The site clusters along the basal contour of the mountain range and covers a large area (Fig. 2).

KwaMaza was first pointed out to C.J. Van Vuuren by Ndzundza Ndebele informants in 1993. Oral history recalls that the Ndzundza first moved to KwaMaza under the leadership of Bongwe. The name Maza appears in the "izibongo" of Somdeyi, the brother of Siboko, who was the last ruler at KwaMaza in the early 1800's. Using cyclical male initiation schools, the initial occupation at KwaMaza can be dated to the period after Bongwe's 1675 Dlowu initiation school (Table 1). The end of the KwaMaza occupation dates to the "mfecane" period in the 1820s. An old song "incema efitjane ekwasakazana" also makes reference to the name Maza and of "Sakazana", (Skilferlaagtespruit) which flows close to the southern side of the site (Van Vuuren & Schoeman 1996).

We can be confident about the geographical identification of KwaMaza because its historical power holds a continued place in the memory of the Ndzundza. This power is recycled, as indicated by the occupation of the site by a Ndzundza prophet in the early 1990s. She repeatedly acknowledges a relationship between the ancestral power of KwaMaza and her visions which she claimed guided her to the site in the first place. She

further believes that, by living on the site of her ancestors, she will be able to redress the past oppression of the Ndzundza, and bring unity between black and white people. Today the site is locally known as "KwaMaza emlotheni" (KwaMaza on the ashes). This is a reference to the ashy soil and the numerous large ash heaps on the site.

ORAL HISTORY

Oral accounts state that the Ndzundza Ndebele moved to KwaMaza during the reign of Bongwe. Bongwe reigned for only three years, after which another nine leaders in five generations presided over the settlement at KwaMaza, a large number of them being regents (Table 1). During this occupation, spanning almost 150 years, the Ndzundza Ndebele were continually joined by a large number of people of other political-ethnic origins. Van Vuuren (pers. comm.) suggests that the atypical Ndebele clan names originated during this period and reflect Swazi, Kopa, Pedi and even Tswana people joining the core group. Oral accounts recorded by Van Vuuren (1985:40) state that the total settlement spread over a number of hectares and this is borne out by the large size of KwaMaza recorded in this research.

The last leader at KwaMaza was Magodongo (Table 1). Magodongo, succeeded Mrhabuli, his father Mgwezana's brother. The "izibongo" recalls that Magodongo became impatient whilst waiting to have the mystical teachings of the kings bestowed on him by the regent Mrhabuli, and killed him. A prophecy was passed on to him, stating that he would be bothered by black and red ants and then eaten by white ants that would

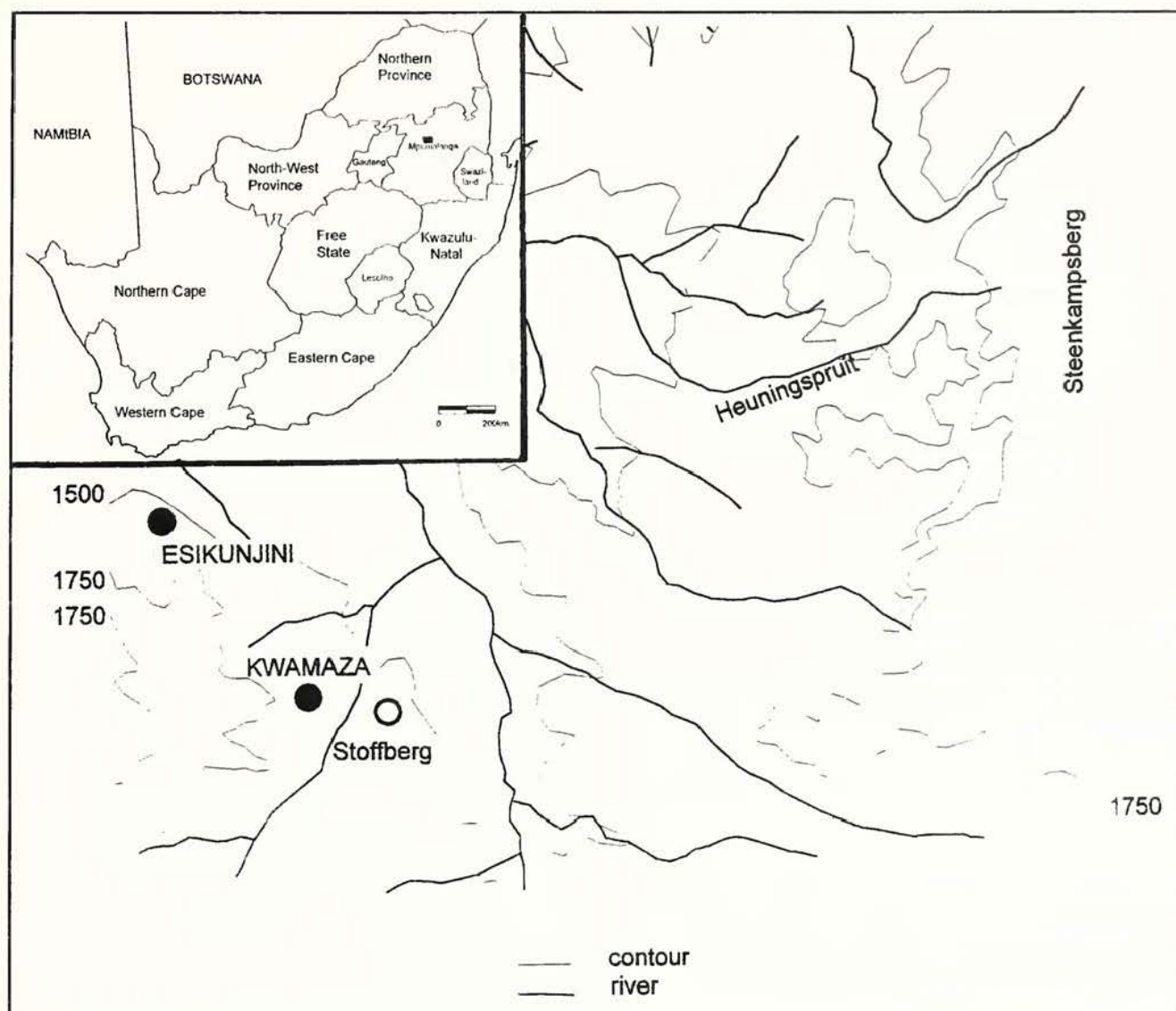


Fig. 1. Research Area.

destroy the kingly line. Consequently, the royal mystical teachings were not passed on to him and were lost. The interpretation of this prophecy is that the black ants represented the amaNdebele of Mzilikazi, the Swazi and the Zulu and the red ants the Pedi, while the white ants were the white settlers (Fourie 1921:36-38; J. Mahlangu pers. comm.¹).

True to the prophecy, Magodongo was attacked at KwaMaza, by Mzilikazi's soldiers. He escaped, but both he and his son Mloyi were caught a few days later and tortured to death at Matyaneni in the Tautesberg area. Under Magodongo's son Siboko (Table 1), the Ndzundza Ndebele fled north to Mgambana, a Pedi leader in the area of present day Marabastad, where they stayed for an unspecified period. Siboko and his followers returned to KwaMaza where they were again attacked and he and a large number of his followers were killed. This signalled the final end of the KwaMaza occupation (Fourie 1921:38).

Mzilikazi's attack on KwaMaza and his occupation of

Mpumalanga is a well remembered event. Its prominence in both the Zimbabwe Ndebele (Rasmussen 1975) and Ndzundza oral traditions suggest that at the time, the Ndzundza were a key group in the area, since for the Zimbabwe Ndebele, at least, the defeat of a weak group would not have been memorable, and thus not as prominently recorded in their own oral histories.

Whilst there is general agreement that these events significantly disrupted the area in the 1820s, there is little agreement on the exact dates for these disruptions. The main reason for this lies in the contradictory accounts as to whether Mzilikazi's Ndebele or the Ndwandwe were responsible for the major attacks in the area. Rasmussen (1975), on the one hand, backs Mzilikazi's Ndebele, whilst Delius (1983:21-23) on the other, argues that the Ndwandwe, under Zwile, were the principal destroyers of the neighbouring Pedi polity.

Delius (*ibid*) argues that the Ndwandwe raided the adjacent Pedi area prior to the attack by Mzilikazi. Delius (1983:23) uses the date for the Ndwandwe return

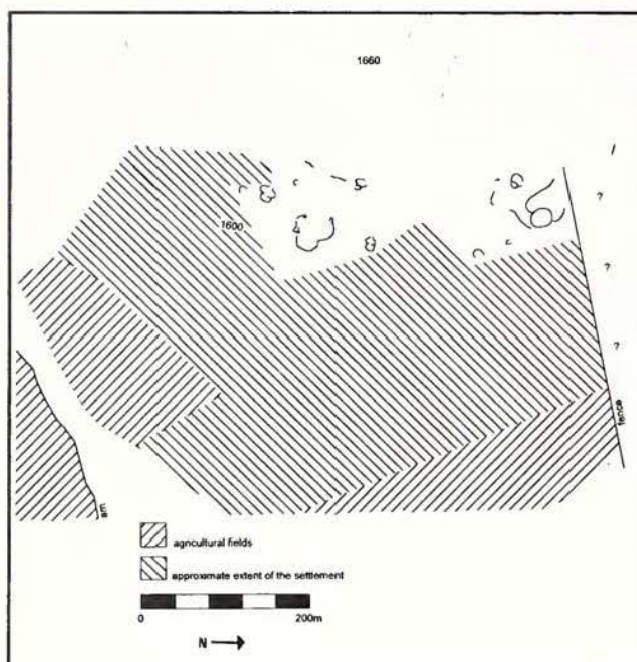


Fig. 2. KwaMaza in topographic context.

back towards Zululand, under Zwide's son Sikhunyana, in calculating a possible date for their attack on the Pedi. The Ndwandwe engaged in battle with the Zulu army north of the upper Pongola in June 1826. Delius, therefore, dates the Ndwandwe assault on the Pedi to approximately 1825. Mzilikazi's raid of the area, therefore, would have occurred in the period after 1825.

Rasmussen (1975:86-87), however, dates Mzilikazi's first attack on the Ndzundza to either 1821 or 1822, based on the Arbousset and Daumas' 1846 record of a solar eclipse shortly before the invasion by Mzilikazi's soldiers (Arbousset & Daumas 1968). The only total eclipse in the area at the time was on 14 March 1820. These dates, whether 1821 or 1825, for the end of the KwaMaza occupation allow a resolution that is obviously not available from radiocarbon dating.

ARCHAEOLOGY

Mapping and excavations at KwaMaza focused on two prominent stone wall and midden clusters located at the highest point of the site (Fig. 2). Each cluster has at least one large, primary enclosure with several smaller stone wall enclosures distributed around them. The two clusters are about 80 m apart. These clusters have been named KwaMaza A and KwaMaza B (Fig. 3). Most of the stonewalling occurs on the basal contour or immediately below it and there is little stonewalling elsewhere. It is clear that as one moves downslope through the site to the east, walling diminishes and the middens become less prominent. The lower part of the site is principally marked by shallow middens and ceramic scatters.

The stone walls that make up the KwaMaza B central enclosure are substantially lower and in poorer condition than the stone walling of KwaMaza A, and may have been

'robbed'. However, where middens cover the walls at KwaMaza B, they are still intact. On the basis of this difference in wall quality, I sampled both clusters in order to investigate the possibility that they marked shifting centres.

KWAMAZA A - 2529BD3 A

KwaMaza A is made up of three homesteads around a large central enclosure. It has two other features in the form of terraces associated with domestic areas, and middens. The location of KwaMaza A on the highest point of the site, and the more exclusive use of walling, could indicate that it was occupied by the ruling elite, since the highest area of sites located on slopes are generally high status positions (*cf.* Kuper 1980).

Features

Central Enclosure

The central enclosure is built out of a low, 0.8 m high stone wall and consists of an upper and a lower compartment (Fig. 3). The upper compartment is open on the upslope side with a maximum width of 44 m across. The walls of the upper compartment end in two small circular stone enclosures, with entrances into the upper compartment. Two further circular enclosures are built into the right² hand wall of the upper compartment. There is an entrance into the larger of these from the upper compartment. Another entrance into the main upper enclosure is located in the right hand wall. The lower compartment is approximately two thirds of a circle that measures 25 m across its maximum diameter (Fig. 3). Apart from the open connection between the upper and lower compartments, there are no other entrances into the lower compartment.

Three areas in the central enclosure were excavated in order to try and establish their function. The first was the small circular enclosure at the end of the right hand wall of the main upper compartment (Fig. 3:1). Here a 1x1 m square was excavated and two stratigraphic units recorded. The upper 0.1 m consisted of grey surface wash that lay over a hard red soil. A second excavation was undertaken in the enclosure in the right hand side of the wall (Fig. 3:3). The first 50 mm consisted of the grey surface wash which was again followed by the hard red soil. This trench yielded some ceramics but there was no other evidence that indicated the specific function of the structures.

Another 1x1 m square was excavated along the line separating the upper and lower compartments. The top 40 mm consisted of grey surface wash followed by hard red rocky soil. This excavation yielded ceramics, but no dung was found here, nor was there any indication of cattle dung anywhere else in the central enclosure.

The Kraals and Homesteads

Three homesteads are located around the central assembly area, one on either side and one upslope (Fig. 3). These homesteads consist of a central stone walled

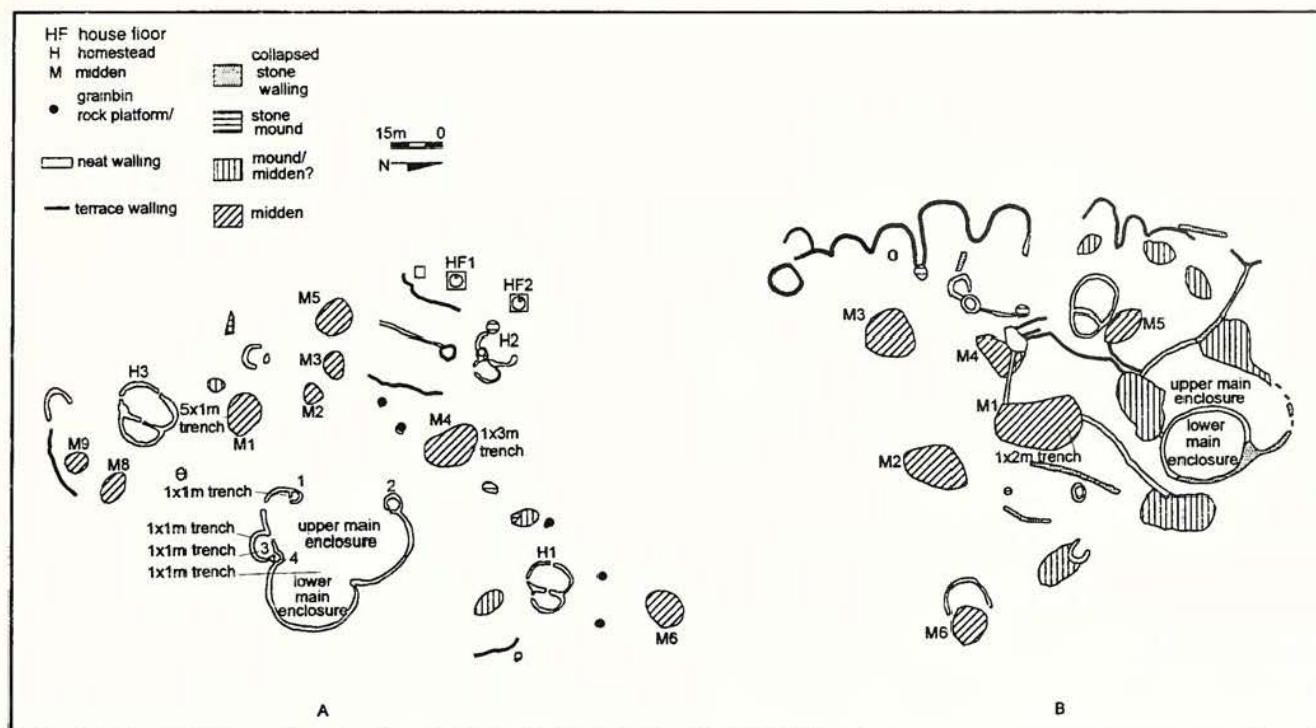


Fig. 3. KwaMaza settlement plan.

kraal ("isibaya"), with associated domestic areas and middens, and for Homesteads 1 and 2, stone grain bin bases. The layout of the kraals is similar to that of the large central enclosure, but with the central divide between the two compartments more complete. There are two entrances to each kraal; one on the right of the upper compartment and another at the top. Smaller enclosures were built into the wall of the Homestead 2 kraal in the same positions as compartments 3 and 4 in the main enclosure (Fig. 3). The kraals in Homesteads 1 and 2 had thick stands of "Tamboekie" grass (*Hyperthelia Dissoluta*), growing within the enclosures and rooted in dung.

Homesteads 1 and 3 were built on relatively flat areas but Homestead 2 was built on the basal slopes of the Bothasberg. In order to provide suitably flat platforms for houses, this area had been terraced. These were built by cutting back into the slope and moving the soil forward. Both the upslope and downslope sections were then stabilised with stone terrace walling. Homestead 2 may have been occupied by the most senior man and his wives, because of its height relative to the other homesteads, and also its position immediately above the entrance to the assembly area and court. The highest terraces in Homestead 2 were examined to recover house remains (Fig. 3:HF1 & HF2).

House Form

Two house floors were located, excavated and mapped (Fig. 4). Although the houses had not burnt down, the floors and features on them were reasonably intact. Both house floors had entrances that faced the kraal. Each floor had a raised fire bowl located centrally in the back

quarter of the house and firestones were found in each of these. On House Floor 1, the back quarter was demarcated by a low "dhaka" ridge that ran from either side of the fire bowl to the outer wall. A small amount of pole impressed "dhaka" was found on both floors. Ceramics were found on both floors, and two copper bangles were recovered from House Floor 2.

Middens

One of the striking features at KwaMaza A is the prominent middens and soil mounds, and at least nine of these features have been identified. These are located between the main central enclosure and the terraces of Homestead 2 and around the kraals of Homestead 1 and 3. Trenches were excavated in Middens 1 and 4 (Fig. 3:M1 & 3:M4).

Midden 1 was excavated through a 1x5 m trench. The depth of the deposit varied; the deepest, at 0.84 m, was downslope to the east and the shallowest (0.2 m) was in the west. Stratigraphy was simple. The surface layer (Surface) consisted of an ashy deposit, while the second layer consisted of a thick red soil (Red 1 and Red 2), which was broken at the eastern end by a band of ash (Ash 1). Sterile red soil (Red 3) at the base marked the end of the cultural deposit (Fig. 5).

A 1x3 m trench was excavated into Midden 4. The deposit was 0.8 m deep on average. The first layer (Surface) consisted of a grey ashy deposit, underlain by a thick red soil (Red 1). The third layer (Ash 1) is noticeably ashy and was underlain by sterile red soil (Red 2). From the section it is clear that a high density of stones occurred around the interface between Red 1 and Ash 1 (Fig. 6).

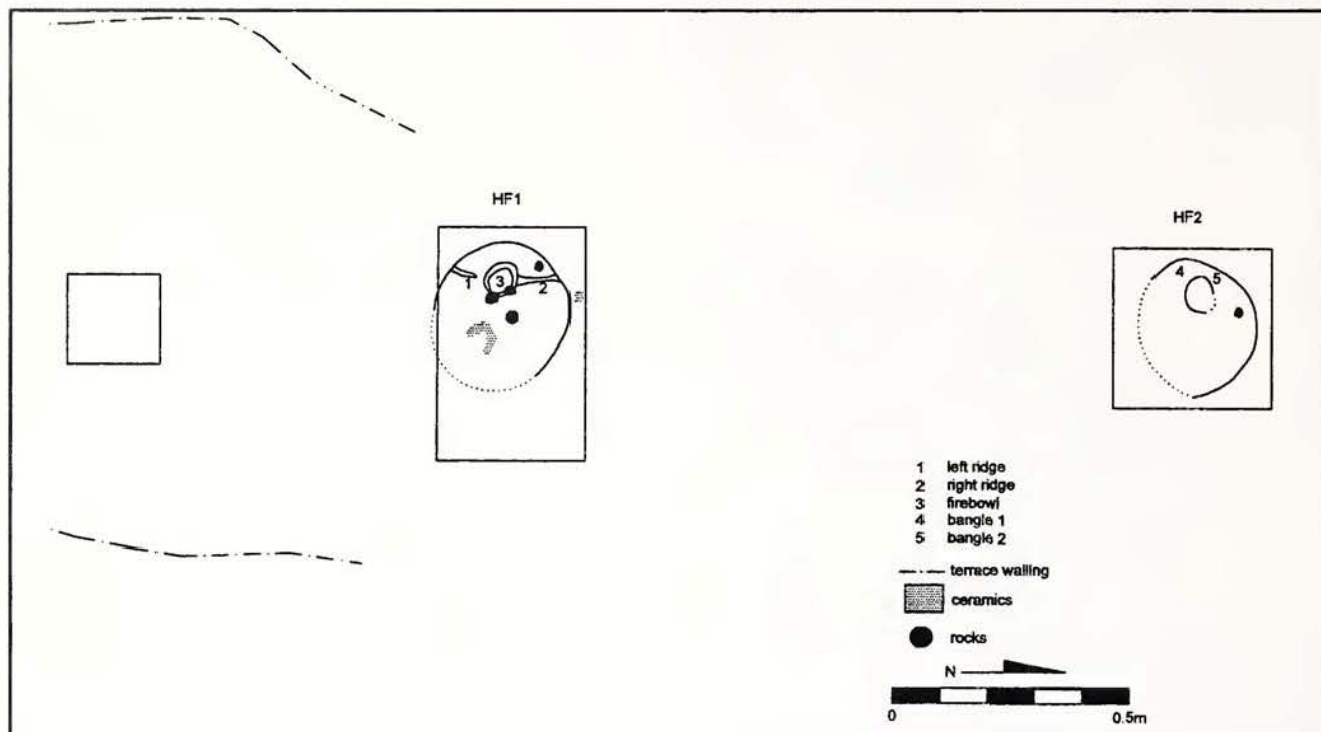


Fig. 4. KwaMaza: A, Domestic Area.

The Finds

Ceramics

Pottery was found in all the excavations (Fig. 7). Out of a total of 1019 shards recovered, only 70 (6.8%) were decorated. Ninety (8.8%) shards were identifiable rim and neck shards. Of these 77 (85.5%) came from jars, and 30 (38.96%) of these were decorated. Twelve (13.3%) shards came from bowls, and 5 (41.6%) of these were decorated. The jars were coarsely made, thick walled vessels, whereas the bowls were neatly made with thinner walls. Due to the small size of some of the decorated shards, not all could be allocated to a multi-dimensional class.

On the basis of motifs alone, 17 shards could be identified as Early Iron Age Eiland ceramics. These shards were too small to establish ceramic types. Three shards could represent an even earlier Iron Age phase. The rest of the assemblage consisted of Late Iron Age ceramics. Ceramic Types 2 (20 shards), 4 (2 shards) and 5 (2 shards) were present.

Other Finds

The other finds from KwaMaza A are listed below.

Midden 1

Surface: 1 metal spear shaft, 1 broken clay spoon, 1 smoothed stone (possibly an upper grindstone), 1 broken upper grindstone, 1 abraded ceramic shard and 1 stone flake.

Ash 1: 1 piece of iron wire, 2 pieces of a broken ceramic spoon, 1 piece of broken ostrich eggshell and 1 broken upper grindstone.

Red 2: 2 broken upper grindstones.

Midden 4

Surface: 1 abraded ceramic shard and a miscellaneous piece of iron sheet.

Red 1: 1 piece of worked clay.

House Floor 1: 1 dark blue and two light blue glass beads, a piece of a broken ceramic spoon and a stone floor smoother.

House Floor 2: 2 copper bangles, 67 glass beads (15 red, 15 white, 14 dark blue and 23 light blue) and a stone floor smoother.

KWAMAZA B - 2529BD3 B

KwaMaza B is a discrete section of the site located to the north of KwaMaza A. It is not as well preserved as KwaMaza A and the settlement layout is less clear. It is made up of a large stone walled central enclosure and at least one smaller enclosure. There is a wall that separates the central area from the domestic area, terrace walling, and a number of large middens. The northern section of KwaMaza B is located on another farm and past agricultural activities seem to have destroyed the rest of the site. As with KwaMaza A, its location upslope of the rest of the site suggests that it was occupied by the ruling elite. The walling of KwaMaza B is substantially lower than the walling of KwaMaza A (Fig. 3).

Features

Central Enclosure

The central enclosure consists of two compartments, forming upper and lower lobes, similar to the assembly

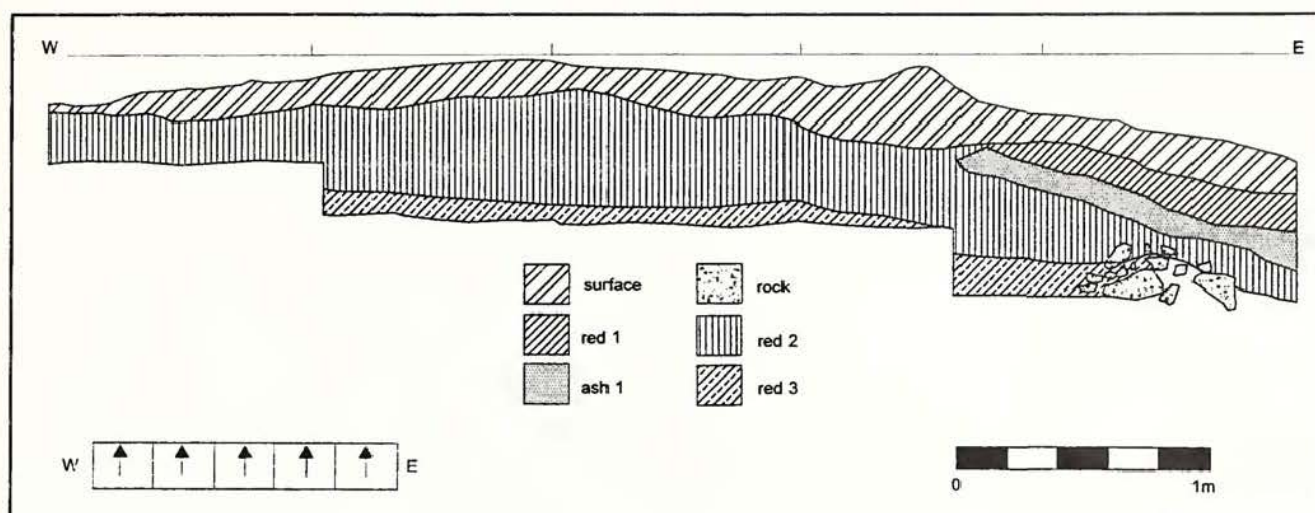


Fig. 5. KwaMaza: A, Midden; 1, Trench; 1, North section.

area and kraals at KwaMaza A. Large portions of both the upper and lower sections of the central enclosure wall are only traceable from a few remaining key stones. This wall, and others at KwaMaza B appear to have been 'robbed', except where mounds and middens cover large sections of the remaining walls. It is, therefore, difficult to establish the position of entrances into the main enclosure (Fig. 3).

The Kraals and Homesteads

There is not much clarity on the spatial layout of KwaMaza B outside of the central enclosure. At least one homestead is located above the central enclosure. This homestead consists of a kraal, with associated domestic areas and middens. The conceptual plan of the kraal is similar to that of the assembly area (Fig. 3).

Up-slope from the assembly area, a number of bays are located at the back of terraces. While no house floors could be found in these bays, the similarity with KwaMaza A suggests that it is a domestic area. This area may have been occupied by the most senior man and his wives.

Downslope from the central enclosure, there are a number of stone walls and middens. The purpose of these walls is not clear. One of the walls might have channelled cattle through the settlement, or simply separated the central area from the surrounding domestic zone.

Middens

There are at least nine clearly identifiable middens at KwaMaza B and five other mounds that may also be middens. The middens are located below the house-terraces and adjacent to or below the kraal. Six of the middens/mounds have formed over stone walling and most of the middens have been extensively burrowed. This is in sharp contrast to the middens at KwaMaza A (Fig. 3).

A 2x1 m trench was excavated into Midden 1. The deposit was excavated to bedrock at 1.18 m. The midden deposit was stratigraphically complex, with a number of

distinct layers, and smaller ash lenses. Within layers, deposit was removed in 0.1 m spits. The first layer (Surface) consisted of an uniform ash. At the base of this layer there was a concentration of rocks. The second layer (Red 1) consisted of a red soil with relatively little charcoal and ash. The Khaki Layer, consisted of an artefact, charcoal and bone rich khaki ash deposit. The fourth layer (Brown) was a browner ash. Ash Brown 1 was rich in charcoal and Red 2 was basically sterile. The basal cultural layer, Ash Brown 2 was an ashy charcoal rich deposit (Fig 8).

The Finds

Ceramics

The ceramics were thick walled and coarsely made. Out of a total of 239 shards recovered from Midden 1, 29 (12.1%) were rim and neck shards. Only 22 (9.2%) were decorated. Twenty five (10.5%) shards were from jars, of which 15 (60%) were decorated. Four (1.7%) shards were from undecorated bowls. One possible Letaba shard was found, but was too small to be conclusively identified. At KwaMaza B ceramic only Type 2 (15 shards) were present (Fig. 9).

Fragments of very small ceramic vessels, a very small jar with a band of rim decoration and a very small bowl were found. These were possibly made by children and are therefore not included in the ceramic analysis (Fig. 10).

Other Finds

The other finds from the Midden 1 excavation are listed below.

Surface 0-0.1 m: 5 Middle Stone Age stone tools and 2 shards from a very small ceramic vessel.

Surface 0.2-0.3 m: Slag, 1 ostrich egg shell bead a shard from a very small ceramic vessel.

Surface 0.3-0.4 m: 1 ostrich egg shell bead.

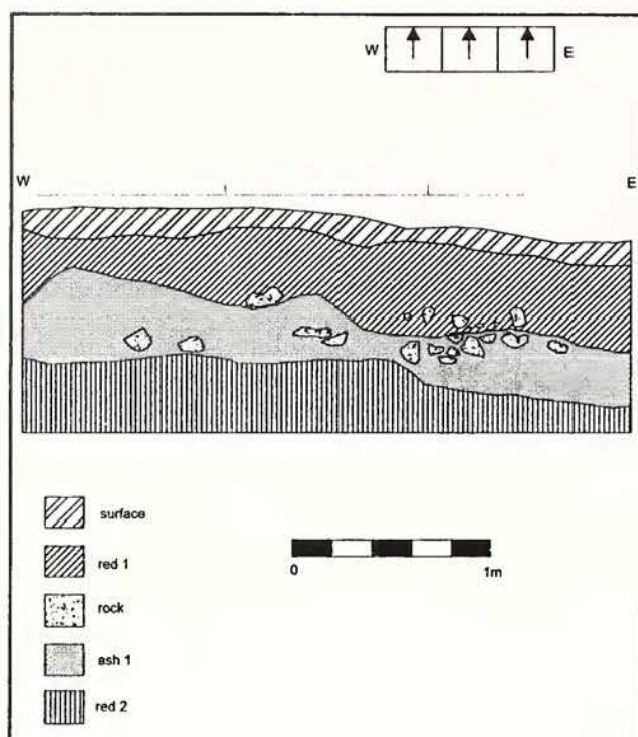


Fig. 6. KwaMaza A: Midden 4 North section.

Table 1. KwaMaza leadership chronology.

Date	Site	Leader	Leader's Regiment Name	Leader's Initiation Date
1800	Esikhunjini	Somdeyi Siboko (regent)	Thula	1819
		Magodongo	Dlowu	1795
		Mhabuli (regent)	Rhasa	1767
		Dzela (regent)	Dlaza	1763
		Mgwezama	Thula	1759
1750	KwaMaza	Mdalanyama (regent)	Nghama	1727
		Maridili (regent)	Phaswana	1723
		Phaswana	Phoko	1719
		Mahlangu	Thula	1699
1700	KwaSimkulu	Sidemi (regent)	-	-
		Bongwe	Dlowu	1675

Surface 0.4-0.5 m: 1 shard from a very small ceramic vessel.

Red lens in Surface: 1 upper grindstone.

Red 1: 1 shard from very small ceramic vessel.

Red 3: 1 miscellaneous piece of worked clay.

Khaki 0-0.1 m: 1 small ceramic bowl, 1 shard from a very small decorated ceramic vessel.

Khaki 0.1-0.2 m: 1 broken upper grindstone, 1 shard from a very small ceramic vessel.

Khaki 0.3-0.4 m: 1 stone flake, 1 floor smoothing stone.

Khaki 0.5-0.6 m: 1 copper spiral.

DISCUSSION

The large central enclosure at KwaMaza A has been identified as an assembly area for several reasons. Firstly, this enclosure is open at the upper end and thus would not have functioned effectively as a cattle kraal. Secondly, there is no evidence of dung in the enclosure. The smaller enclosures at the centres at Homestead 1 and 3 functioned as kraals. This interpretation of the large central area as a court or mens meeting place was reinforced by W. Mahlangu, a Ndzundza Ndebele royal "imbongi" who visited KwaMaza in 1995 whilst we were excavating. He also suggested that the two circular stone enclosures at the end of the court walls, would have been occupied by two royal "indunas" who controlled access to the Paramount leader. The circular enclosure in the right wall was said to have been the paramount's house. Ndzundza custom dictates that no-one should know where the male head of a homestead sleeps. He would stay at the court until everyone has gone to sleep and only then would he go to the house of one of his wives, returning to the court before anybody else gets up in the morning.

The spatial layout of KwaMaza B suggests that the central enclosure also functioned as a court, with the adjacent enclosure(s) functioning as a kraal(s). This is suggested by the stone wall that separates the central area from the domestic areas, which could have channelled cattle to the smaller enclosure/kraal, since there is no obvious entrance through the right wall of the main enclosure. The absence of a clear entrance into the right hand side of the central enclosure could, however, be a product of the lack of preservation.

The clear difference in the preservation of the stone walling of KwaMaza A and KwaMaza B suggests that KwaMaza B predated KwaMaza A. It is possible that sections of the central enclosure in particular, were robbed and used to construct KwaMaza A. Ethnography and oral history provides us with potential clues for the occurrence of two 'centres' at KwaMaza. Ndzundza custom dictates that if a king dies the capital should be moved, unless it would not be safe to do so (Fourie 1921:151). If this is the case, only the court is moved from one side of the cattle kraal to the other (*ibid*). Furthermore, although highly speculative, it is possible that KwaMaza A was built on the return of Siboko to the site after the initial attack on KwaMaza by Mzilikazi in the early 1820's. When re-establishing the site, he would have had to move the court in accordance with custom,

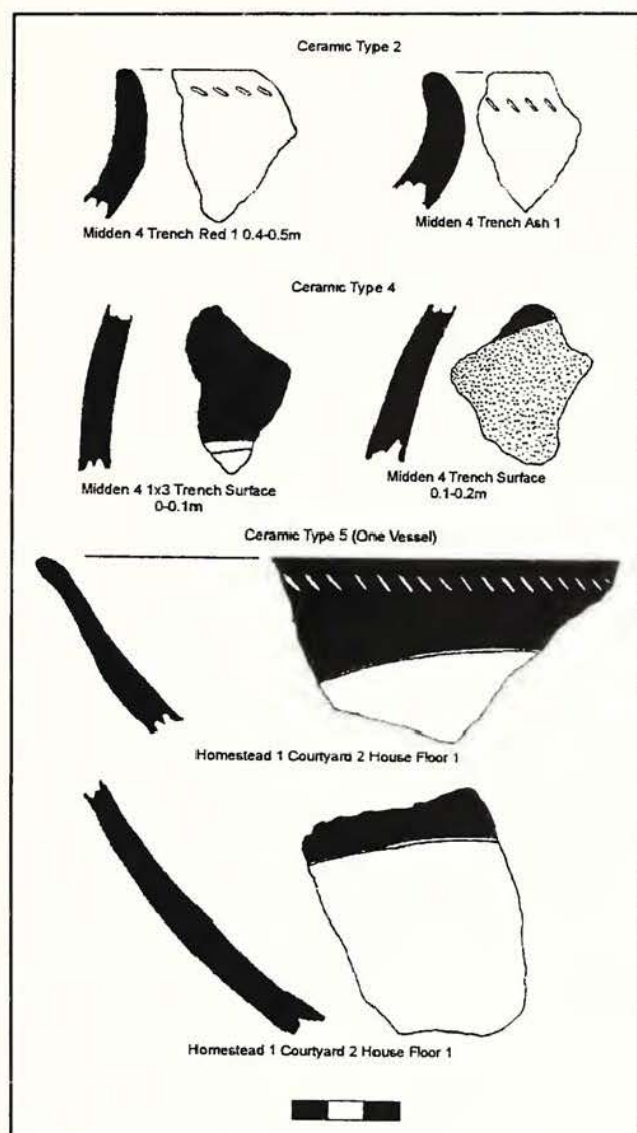


Fig. 7. Ceramic shards from KwaMaza A.

and this would explain the greater degree of degradation in the walls of KwaMaza B. If KwaMaza A was re-established after the "mfecane", the re-occupation by the royal family is borne out by the use of stone walls, since the general site layout seems to indicate that only the royal section used stone walling during the period.

The settlement layout of both KwaMaza A and B shows similarities to the Nguni homesteads excavated by Hall and Maggs (1979) and Maggs *et al.* (1986). As with the use of stone on Nguni sites, the kraals and assembly areas are demarcated by stone, but not the peripheral domestic areas. The shift of cattle out of the centre in favour of a more overtly political structure could suggest Sotho-Tswana influence, however Kuper (1980:17) suggests that in Sotho-Tswana communities such shifts reflect a political shift to larger-scale political decision-making units rather than identity marking. The shift of the cattle from the centre at KwaMaza, therefore, possibly supports oral history accounts about extensive Ndzundza political power.

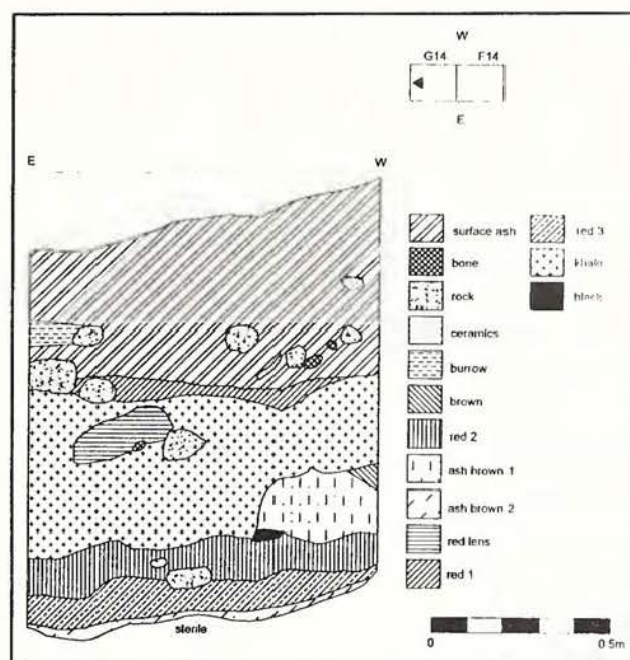


Fig. 8. KwaMaza B: Midden 1, Trench 1, G14 South section.

The scalloped back courtyards at KwaMaza B might indicate Sotho influence. However, when read in conjunction with the layout of the whole site, especially the absence of stone walls demarcating the domestic areas, and the construction of the houses and housefloor floors, it suggests that their shape is simply the product of excavation into the hill. Above all, the settlement pattern shows no similarities to the 'Pedi' sites excavated by Collett (1982).

The exact shape of the house structures at KwaMaza A is difficult to interpret from archaeological evidence on the house floors. The burning of rondawel houses produces large amounts of collapsed wall "dhaka" (mud plaster), whereas thatched beehive houses would leave few traces of "dhaka". The houses at KwaMaza A appear not to have burnt down, thus the lack of preserved wall "dhaka" could be problematic as evidence for house form. However, at UmKlaarmaak, the last site in the sequence, the floors are not baked, and the houses, therefore, also did not burn down but, nevertheless, large amounts of wall "dhaka" were preserved.

The absence of "dhaka" from the KwaMaza A floors could indicate a structure built predominantly of grass over a pole frame. This would be similar to Nguni houses that are traditionally beehive in shape, in contrast to Sotho houses that are cone-on-cylinder, with plastered pole and "dhaka" walls and a thatch roof. Furthermore, the central internal fire-bowl and apse demarcated by a ridge ("umbundu") at the back of the house, is similar to the floors excavated at Mgungundlovu (Parkington & Cronin 1979). Although, at KwaMaza, there is no clear evidence for a central posthole and the fireplaces are further back than those at Mgungundlovu. The relatively small size of the floor suggests that structurally a central

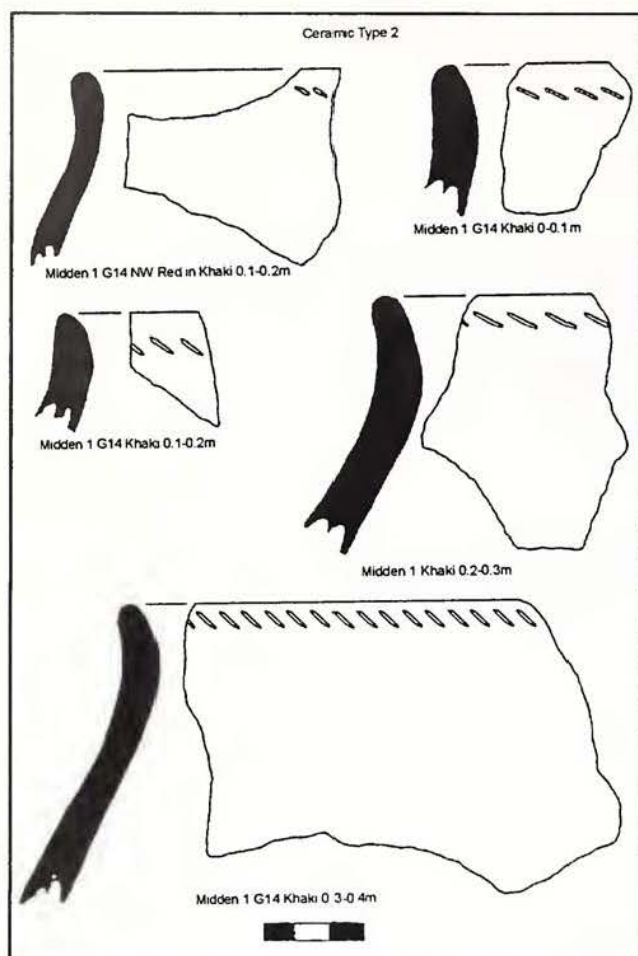


Fig. 9. Ceramic shards from KwaMaza B.

pole was not critical, and the house could still be beehive in shape. Lastly, although it is unclear what criteria were selected, W. Mahlangu favoured a beehive structure.

It is evident that there are a number of similarities in the layout of the assembly area, the kraals and the houses, that relate to the structuring principles of left/right and front/back.

Van Vuuren (1980:41) argues that left and right are key structuring principles within present day Ndzundza settlements. The right hand side ("ubene") of the house is the male side and the left hand side ("ikhohlo") is the female side. The same left/right division applies in the "isibaya". Today the "ibandla" is always located on the "ubene" side of the "isibaya". This division also reflects status, the house of the first wife is located on the "ubene" side and the house of the second wife on the "ikhohlo" side. The "ubene" side is thus the male or higher status side, whereas the "ikhohlo" side is the female or lower status side. This left/right division is evidently applied at KwaMaza A. The paramount's 'house' built into the assembly area wall, the side entrance to the "ibandla", and the side entrances to the "isibaya", are all located on the "ubene" side.

There are also similarities in the front/back layout of the assembly areas, kraals and the house floors. The "umbundu" defines the back area of the house, and the

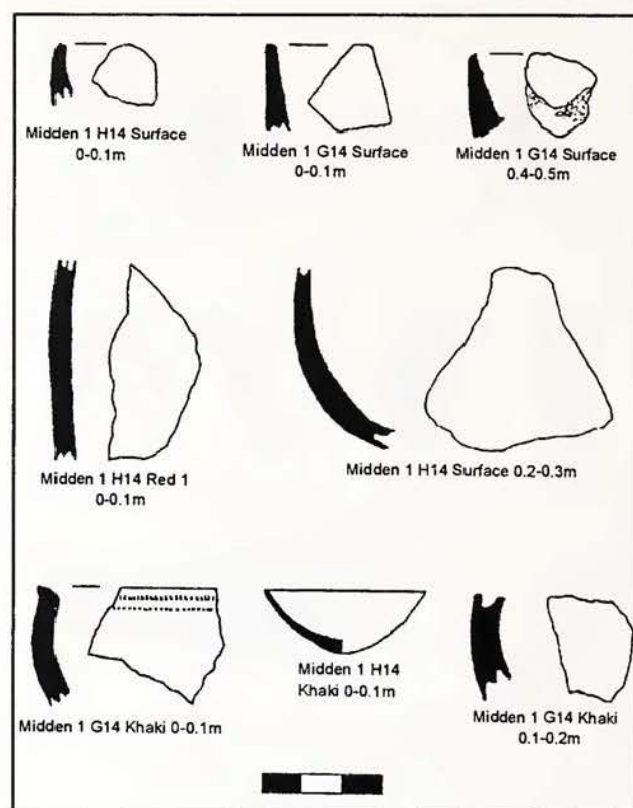


Fig. 10. 'Children's' ceramic shards from KwaMaza B.

door the front. Raum (1973:157-159) states that Zulu houses are symbolically divided into front and back. The front area is more public, whilst the back area is used for storing important items, certain food such as beer and ritual items like the ancestral spear, the stabbing spear and ritual robes. It is also a ritual site and is associated with the ancestors. Kuper (1982:148) argues that this front/back division is common amongst Nguni-speaking groups. He (1982:147) states that back area of Nguni houses are sacred, and associated with the ancestors, whereas the front area is 'public'. Raum (1973:159), however, challenges the perception of the "umbundu" as immanently sacred, and states that the avoidance of this area is rather related to the fact that ritual objects are stored here and that it is "visited by or belongs to the ancestors" (Raum 1973:159). The front/back division also applies to the kraals and assembly areas, the back is defined by the lower lobe and the front by the upslope entrances. There are, therefore, conceptual similarities in the layout of the assembly area/court, the kraals and the houses. These similarities are the product of the "ubene"/"ikhohlo", and front/back symbolic divisions.

The position and structure of the middens at KwaMaza A and B also needs some discussion at this stage. At KwaMaza A, Homestead 2 middens are situated below the kraal and house-terraces, as is the case at Homestead 3. At KwaMaza B the middens are also located below the house-terraces and adjacent to or below the kraal. Six of the middens/mounds have formed over stone walling. The position of the middens can be interpreted through the Nguni ethnography that records

a number of avoidances and rules regarding the handling of ash. Ash is handled by women (except new brides), and strangers should not tamper with the ash of a household, since it is believed that the ash could be used in maleficent magic against the owner of a homestead (Raum 1973:145-146). Ash heaps are, therefore, located in front of the homestead, so that they can be constantly observed. The relatively dense clustering and location of the ash heaps at KwaMaza A and B could express this concern over the protection of ash middens through their surveillance.

Furthermore, the culturally sterile red soil layers could indicate the intentional capping of ash in order to protect the household against the use of ash in malevolent magic (Schoeman 1995). Whilst, I interpret these red layers as the purposeful capping of middens in order to protect them, it could be argued that the red soil layers were simply the spoil heaps from digging and constructing the house-terraces. These two suggestions are not mutually exclusive. If the soil originally came from the excavation of the terraces, it would have acquired social meaning through being incorporated in middens. However, it is interesting to note that at KwaMaza B, where excavation and terracing was more comprehensive, the middens are not as extensively capped.

It appears that the capping of ash is a good indicator of people with a worldview that originated in the Nguni areas of KwaZulu-Natal. Similar examples of capping are found in the Ndebele sites excavated by Loubser (1994) and Huffman and Steele (1996). This is in sharp contrast to the Sotho world. As far as I can establish, there are no examples of this way of disposing of ash in Sotho sites, and the practice is, therefore, peculiarly Ndebele.

Another aspect of the KwaMaza A and B middens is their relatively large size. This may indicate not only a long occupation, but symbolically reflects the high status and wealth of the immediate occupants. It is noticeable that the middens in the rest of the settlement below KwaMaza A and B are low and ephemeral by comparison.

In spite of their large size there are, however, two key differences between the middens at KwaMaza A and B. Firstly, the capping at KwaMaza A is more extensive than that of KwaMaza B. The surfaces of KwaMaza A middens are covered in thick red soil caps and stony rubble, whereas, the KwaMaza B ash layers are intermittently capped by either stone or red soil, and the surfaces of some middens have not been covered at all. Second, the KwaMaza A middens contain less ash than the middens at KwaMaza B. This is apparent from excavations and also indicated through the extensive burrowing of the KwaMaza B middens, where thick ash has attracted numerous rodents. In contrast, the KwaMaza A middens are hardly burrowed and Middens 2, 3 and 5 have not been burrowed at all. This may relate to significantly less ash in the KwaMaza A middens, and also indicate that the capping layers are considerably thicker, and were more frequently laid down in comparison to the KwaMaza B middens. In other words, this difference possibly indicates a greater concern at Kwa-

Maza A to protect ash.

In contrast to the 'independent' identity expressed in the settlement pattern, housefloors and middens, the type of ceramic decoration found at KwaMaza A and B is similar to historic Pedi ceramics. Traditional Pedi decoration consists of a band of decoration on the rim and a series of arcades or chevrons on the shoulder associated with graphite and ochre (Laidler 1932; Lawton 1967; Collett 1982). The Ndzundza Ndebele are not recorded to have had a ceramic tradition of their own in the twentieth century (Lawton 1967). The reason for this can probably be found in the effects of the 1883 dispersal. Today they obtain their pots from their Pedi neighbours and have done so for at least the last seventy years (W. Mahlangu, pers. comm.). The evidence from KwaMaza indicates that from the seventeenth century, the Ndzundza occupants also used 'Pedi' style ceramics. The occupation at KwaMaza clearly does not give any indication of how, or when, the Ndzundza adopted this style. The 'children's ceramics' at KwaMaza B, however, suggests that they did make their own ceramics, and that the 'Pedi' decoration (at least Type 2) formed part of the stylistic consciousness of young people from an early age.

CONCLUSION

Different identities are expressed in the different material culture categories from KwaMaza: settlement pattern, house form, midden structure and ceramic style. The settlement pattern and houseform express a more 'Nguni' identity, the middens express a particular 'Ndebeleness' and the ceramics are 'Pedi', thus reflecting a more regional identity. The range of identities expressed in the different types of material culture, highlights the importance of examining all types of material culture when studying identity in the Late Iron Age.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks are due to; Mr J. van der Woude for allowing me access to his farm Blinkwater (213JS portion 51), on which KwaMaza is located, The Ndzundza royal family who kindly gave their permission for this research, J. Mahlangu and W. Mahlangu for sharing their knowledge on Ndzundza history, social organisation, settlement layout, K Sales for all of the AutoCAD graphics, C. Van Vuuren for sharing his knowledge of Ndebele anthropology and oral history, S Hall, for his intellectual and practical guidance during this research, T. Huffman for valuable comments on aspects of Iron Age Archaeology, G. Lathy, H. Domleo, Wits Archaeology II Class of 1995, H. Schoeman and M. Grant for assisting in the field, The University of the Witwatersrand Postgraduate Merit Award and Karen Feldman Memorial Scholarship for providing financial assistance for my M.A. research on which this paper is based. The financial assistance of the Centre for Science Development, (HSRC) towards this research is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed

and conclusions arrived at, are those of the author and are not necessarily to be attributed to the Centre for Science Development.

ENDNOTES

1. The leader of the Sokhulumi section of the Ndzundza Ndebele and Ndzundza oral historian.
2. Left and right refer to the direction when facing into the entrance of a structure.

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