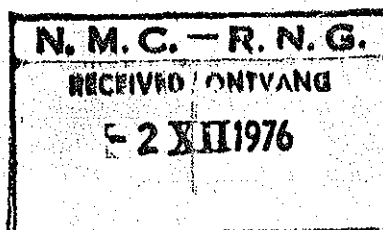


M G U N G U N D L O V U

In January 1974 and July 1975 a small team from the Department of Archaeology at the University of Cape Town worked at Mgungundlovu. The aims of this project were to expose by excavation a number of areas whose function and layout could be predicted with some degree of confidence. Subsequently the archaeological plan of the site could be compared with sketches made by visitors to the site and a more reliable version could be derived for the purposes of planing future monument development.

One of the prime objectives was the establishment of a set of accurately surveyed datum points around the site so that all excavated or cleared features could be precisely located in relation to one another. This was achieved with the help of the Department of Land Survey at U. C. T. and the Department of Photogrammetry at the University of Natal. Excavations were carried out in six localities spread around the area thought to represent the actual distribution of Dingane's structures. These were the excavation of hut-floors in the Beje, Isigodlo and warrior areas, the excavation of half of one of the grain storage pits, and small trial trenches in two middens where refuse had accumulated during the occupation of the site (see figure 1).

In the Isigodlo the hut floors proved to be very variable not only in size but also in contents and in the type and distribution of hut features. Diameters ranged from 8,0 to 3,5 metres and some huts seemed to have special features such as elaborate fireplaces (see figure 2) rows of post holes, (see figure 3) one or more holes thought to have held beer pots (see figure 4) or low ridges defining the rear portion of the hut floor (see figure 5). In addition the hut floors were well spaced and gave no indication of overcrowding. By comparison in the warrior area hut floors were very close together, almost identical to one another in size and contents and had none of the special features mentioned above.



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In the Beje area there is a row of seven or eight hut floors marking the rear of a circular enclosure which must have housed people of some importance. Huts in this area had 'verandahs' and all contained some item of interest such as copper artefacts or ochre balls presumably for the manufacture of paint. The discovery of crucible fragments and copper slag near the Beje huts suggests that these may have housed artisans of high status. Further excavations are necessary in both refuse middens and grain storage pits before their overall size, shape and contents can be described in any detail. A cross section through one grain pit is presented here (figure 6).

Very few metal objects were found during the excavations but some are presented in figure 7. Perhaps the most interesting item found in the fill of the grain pit and therefore not strictly contemporary with Dingane's occupation, is the bead and bangle mould (figure 7). Made of a soft schist it shows a number of hollows intended for the casting of copper beads and grooves along the sides in which bangles were presumably cast before being bent into shape. The burnt sticks set into the hollows to form the bead perforations are still visible.

In terms of overall size Mgungundlovu seems to measure about 570 metres from the uppermost Isigodlo hut row to the lowermost huts near to Nkosinkulu's grave, and about 520 metres across from one warrior wing to the other, assuming we have roughly half of the hut floor distribution. The line of Beje hut floors is a little over 100 metres behind, that is upslope of, the Isigodlo rear hut row, whilst the Isigodlo area itself is about 75 metres deep. Within the Isigodlo is a large open area with no hut floors measuring 25 metres across, possibly a dancing area as suggested by Andrew Smith, or a cattle enclosure.

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