



Prehistory Society of Zimbabwe

Newsletter 142

The animal economy of prehistoric farming communities of Manicaland, Eastern Zimbabwe

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The research seeks to understand the animal economy of prehistoric farming communities in Manicaland, eastern Zimbabwe within an archaeozoological methodological framework. The thesis will explore the diachronic and synchronic patterns of animal resource (wild and domestic) exploitation by Early Farming Communities, Late Farming Communities Musengezi and Zimbabwe peoples. Farming Communities lived in permanent villages, herded animals and cultivated sorghum as well as millets. Southern African, farming community sites date between the 3rd and 19th centuries AD. As part of human behaviour, patterns of animal resource exploitation yields important information on the economy, animal management strategies and socio-cultural practices. Therefore, the study of faunal remains, gives an insight into decision making strategies, choices and constraints encountered by human beings in the past. In diachronic terms, understanding human animal exploitation patterns gives an insight into changing perceptions about the role of animals in diet, economy and society as a whole. By focusing on Manicaland, this research will extend research coverage to a previously neglected region. There is no doubt that the data from the research has broader implications for archaeozoological studies in Africa. Such results may help to inform modern strategies of animal exploitation thereby using lessons from the past for the benefit of the present.

13th PAA Congress & 20th SAFA conference

SECOND CIRCULAR LETTER

The University Cheikh Anta Diop (UCAD) of Dakar, and Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire Cheikh Anta Diop (IFAN-CAD), are pleased to announce the joint organization of the 13th PAA Congress (Panafican Association of Prehistory and Assimilated Disciplines), and the 20th conference of the SAFA (Society of Africanist Archaeologists). This unprecedented opportunity to bring together members of these two associations dedicated to African Prehistory, in African soil, will certainly represent a turning point in the history of African

Archaeology. This meeting will be held November 1st-7th, 2010 at the University Cheikh Anta Diop in Dakar, Senegal.

Participants are encouraged to propose additional topics and initiate thematic panels. It is desirable that teams working on specific or related issues lead sessions. Abstracts must be submitted either in French or English, and no later than April 30th, 2010, at the following address:

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Giant stone-age axes found in African lake basin

Summarised from Physorg.com

A giant African lake basin is providing information about possible migration routes and hunting practices of early humans in the Middle and Late Stone Age periods, between 150,000 and 10,000 years ago. Oxford University researchers have unearthed new evidence from the lake basin in Botswana that suggests that the region was once much drier and wetter than it is today.

They have documented thousands of stone tools on the lake bed, which sheds new light on how humans in Africa adapted to several substantial climate change events during the period that coincided with the last Ice Age in Europe. Researchers from the School of Geography and the Environment at the University of Oxford are surveying the now-dry basin of Lake Makgadikgadi in the Kalahari Desert, which at 66,000 square kilometres is about the same size of present day Lake Victoria.

Their research was prompted by the discovery of the first of what are believed to be the world's largest stone tools on the bed of the lake. Although the first find was made in the 1990s, the discovery of four giant axes has not been scientifically reported until now. Four giant stone hand axes, measuring over 30 cm long and of uncertain age, were recovered from the lake basin. Equally remarkable is that the dry lake floor where they were found is also littered with tens of thousands of other smaller stone-age tools and flakes, the researchers report.



Professor David Thomas, Head of the School of Geography and the Environment at the University of Oxford, said: 'Many of the tools were found on the dry lake floor, not around its edge, which challenges the view that big lakes were only attractive to humans when they were full of water. As water levels in the lake went down, or during times when they fluctuated seasonally, wild animals would have congregated round the resulting watering holes on the lake bed. It's likely that early human populations would have seen this area as a prolific

hunting ground when food resources in the region were more concentrated than at times when the regional climate was wetter and food was more plentiful and the lake was full of water.'

Professor Thomas said: 'The interior of southern Africa has usually been seen as being devoid of significant archaeology. Surprisingly, we have found and logged incredibly extensive Middle Stone Age artefacts spread over a vast area of the lake basin. The record the basin is revealing is one of marked human adaptation in the past. Early humans saw the opportunity to use the lake basin when it was not full of water, but at least seasonally dry. It shows that humans have adapted to climate change and variability in a sustained way.'

Domestic dog origins challenged

JUDITH BURNS

Science reporter, BBC News, August 3, 2009

The suggestion that the domestic dog originated in East Asia has been challenged. The huge genetic diversity of dogs found in East Asia had led many scientists to conclude that domestication began there. But new research published in the journal PNAS shows the DNA of dogs in African villages is just as varied. An international group of researchers analysed blood samples from dogs in Egypt, Uganda and Namibia. Today's dogs are descended from Eurasian grey wolves, domesticated between 15,000 and 40,000 years ago.

Lead scientist, Dr Adam Boyko of the Department of Biological Statistics and Computational Biology at Cornell University, says he decided to look at village dogs because they are so much more genetically diverse than bred dogs that they may hold the key to the origins of dog domestication. The team analysed DNA from 318 dogs from villages in Egypt, Uganda and Namibia and measured their genetic diversity. They also analysed the genetic make up of dog breeds thought to be of African origin, for example the Saluki, the Rhodesian Ridgeback, and the Pharaoh Hound and compared all the resulting data with results for non African dogs such as Puerto Rican street dogs and non-pedigree dogs in the US.

The emphasis on African village dogs came about because Adam Boyko's co-authors, his brother and sister-in-law, were travelling in Africa on honeymoon. They collected all the blood samples from the African dogs.

The team found genetic diversity among African village dogs is just as diverse as that of East Asian dogs, leading them to question the hypothesis of an East Asian origin for dog domestication. Dr Boyko told BBC News: "I think it means that the conclusion that was drawn before might have been premature. It's a consequence of having a lot of street dogs from East Asia that were sampled, compared to elsewhere. The reason that East Asia looked more diverse than elsewhere was not because East Asia as a continent had more diverse dogs than elsewhere but because non breed street and village dogs are more diverse than breed dogs."

Dr Boyko said that all the dogs sampled in the study have grey wolf DNA so he is not questioning the hypothesis that dogs descended from Eurasian wolves. The results led the team to conclude that today's African village dogs are a mosaic of indigenous dogs descended from early migrants to Africa. They also went some way to proving the origins of some pedigree dogs purported to be of African origin. For example the Saluki breed shares DNA with modern day village dogs from Egypt - as does the Afghan Hound, despite its name. Likewise, the Basenji breed is genetically very similar to some Namibian and Ugandan

village dogs. However the Pharaoh Hound and Rhodesian Ridgeback have little in common with any African indigenous dogs which suggests that these two breeds have non African origins.

African Origin Of Anthropoid Primates Called Into Question With New Fossil Discovery

ScienceDaily, September 17, 2009

Well-preserved craniodental fossil remains from two primate species have been discovered during excavations at an Algerian site. They reveal that the small primate *Algeripithecus*, which is 50 million years old and until now was considered as the most ancient African anthropoid, in fact belonged to another group, that of the crown strepsirhines.

This research was carried out by a team of French researchers from the Institut des Sciences de l'Evolution (Université de Montpellier/CNRS), working with Algerian paleontologists from the universities of Tlemcen, Oran and Jijel. The resulting publication, published online on the website of the Proceedings of the Royal Society B (Biological Sciences), reopens the debate on the African origin of anthropoids, the group to which humans and apes belong.

In 1992, fossilized remains of the small primate *Algeripithecus* were discovered in the Algerian Sahara. Fifty million years old, weighing just 75 g and known to paleontologists thanks to the remains of two molars, this primate was considered to be the most ancient anthropoid of the African continent. The discovery of *Algeripithecus* was thus a major contribution to the hypothesis under which Africa was the cradle of anthropoid primates, a group to which humans and apes all belong. The existence of another primate, the *Azibius*, has been known for longer. This is one of the most ancient African representatives of the crown strepsirhines, another primate group that today is represented by the lemurs of Madagascar, the galagos of Central Africa and the lorises of Southern Asia.

At the Glib Zegdou site in north-eastern Algeria, a French team from the Institut des Sciences de l'Evolution in Montpellier (Université de Montpellier/CNRS), working in collaboration with Algerian scientists, recently exhumed cranial and dental fragments from both *Algeripithecus* and *Azibius*. They included some nearly complete mandibles. These remains displayed a certain number of traits typical of the crown strepsirhines, notably an adaptation to nocturnal activity and the putative presence of a "toothcomb" in the lower toothrow. The paleontologists concluded that *Algeripithecus*, like its close relative *Azibius*, did not in fact belong to the family of anthropoid primates but was very probably one of the most ancient representatives in Africa of the crown strepsirhines.



Image of an *Algeripithecus* mandible, showing the scale of the specimen. (Credit: Copyright Rodolphe Tabuce, CNRS)

In Egypt, the presence of more than a dozen fossilized anthropoid primates dating from 30 to 38 million years ago had long been known. This recent Franco-Algerian discovery thus advances the first true appearance of anthropoid primates on the African continent by more

than 15 million years. With its major consequences on the evolutionary history of African anthropoid primates, this observation further strengthens the alternative hypothesis of an Asiatic origin for anthropoids. Furthermore, this paleontologic research reveals a hitherto unsuspected diversity and great antiquity of the first crown strepsirhines in Africa.

New Publications on Zimbabweanist Archaeology

Chirikure, S., Burrett, R. & Heimann, R.B. 2009. Beyond furnaces and slags: a review study of bellows and their role in indigenous African metallurgical processes. *Azania: Archaeological Research in Africa* 44 (2): 195-215.

Combustion was pivotal in the heat-mediated process of indigenous metalworking in precolonial Africa. For such combustion to be initiated, a consistent supply of air was essential and because bellows generated the air that precipitated the chemical reactions integral to smelting and forging, they were thus critical apparatus in these pursuits. Surprisingly, bellows have failed to attract much academic research when compared to other components of indigenous metalworking such as furnaces, slags and tuyeres. Perhaps the excellent preservation of remnants of furnaces and slags, and the contrasting perishable nature of bellows, is largely responsible for this lack of interest. This paper deals with a 'forgotten' but essential aspect of indigenous metal working in sub-Saharan Africa – the bellows. It discusses their chronology, distribution, technical parameters and socio-cultural dimensions. It achieves this by melding multiple strands of evidence from archaeology and its cognate disciplines.

Mguni, S. 2009. Natural and Supernatural Convergences: Trees in Southern African Rock Art. *Current Anthropology* 50 (1): 139-148.

Prehistoric sites with depictions of trees are fewer and farther apart than those exhibiting their animal and human counterparts in southern African rock art. Even so, this arboreal subject matter occupies a unique position in hunter-gatherer belief and folkloric systems. From extant ethnographic testimonies concerning trees, this report assesses the graphic features and associations of these depictions and recognizes their peculiar ontological and unifying force at the interface of the animal and human worlds. The significance of this oddity is inferable primarily from their generic physical form, which leads to their elevated metaphysical status in hunter-gatherer folklore, cosmology, and belief. While the outward arboreal appearance may be the most obvious in registering peculiarities that were in turn granted threshold status in hunter-gatherer cosmologies, it appears that some of this uniqueness may have derived from their invisible chemical properties of which very little is known in southern Africa at present.

Pikirayi, I. 2009. Palaces, Feiras and Prazos: An Historical Archaeological Perspective of African–Portuguese Contact in Northern Zimbabwe. *African Archaeological Review Online First*.

The consequences of the contact between Africans and Europeans during the early Atlantic Age are examined with a specific focus on the Mutapa State in northern Zimbabwe to the middle of the seventeenth century. The dynamics of contact are presented in terms of three categories of archaeological evidence, namely royal palaces (zimbabwe), trading markets (feiras) and fortifications. It is argued that some royal palaces assumed new identities as they adjusted to the new contact situations presented by the commerce with the Portuguese. The site reported in Portuguese documents as Massapa was one such palace initially, before becoming a fully fledged trading centre. With the intensification of market trade, the fortified stonewalled settlements found in the areas between the Mazowe and Ruya rivers attest to evidence for the conflict between the Mutapa state and the Portuguese, as presented in the written records, and environmental deterioration triggered by intensified exploitation of gold.

Woodborne, S., Pienaar, M. & Tiley-Nel, S. 2009. Dating the Mapungubwe Hill gold. *Journal of African Archaeology* 7 (1).

This paper presents direct dating evidence for the manufacture of some of the gold artefacts from the Iron Age archaeological site of Mapungubwe Hill. The results confirm that the artefacts are contemporaneous with the occupation of the site and are the product of a mature indigenous metalworking tradition. The Mapungubwe Hill gold artefacts were manufactured at a time when a substantial reorganisation of society led to the separation of royals and commoners and a change in the role of cattle as a form of wealth. These changes are clearly manifest in the use of gold. Whereas gold had previously been traded with the East coast, it became symbolic of power, wealth and status at Mapungubwe Hill.

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