

Prehistory Society of Zimbabwe

Newsletter 133

Society News

Welcome to the latest edition of the newsletter. It has been quite some time since we last had one, which does not mean your society has been inactive!

The Society has recently had a controversial and well-attended talk on a new idea about the function of terraces at Nyanga following research by Ann Kritzinger. She believes that they are the result of intensive gold mining. The full results and discussion are to be presented in the next issue of the Society's journal. A spin off of this talk is increased interest in the idea of dwarf cattle and their relationship with the pit structures in Nyanga. Yes they did exist and in the Nyanga area too! Further information on their history and development is given below and with more to come in future numbers of the newsletter.

There has been new research on the site of Great Zimbabwe that suggests several features of the site may have been built to be aligned to specific celestial phenomena. This idea is not without its problems but serves as useful food for thought about the largest stone structures in sub-Saharan Africa. A short summary is presented here, with a fuller article to follow in the Society's journal.

Number 27 of the Society's journal is currently in production. Expect it to be ready by November or December this year. Any person wishing to contribute an article or short note is more than welcome to. The objects of the Society are to promote the study of early history, prehistory and archaeology of Africa,

with particular reference to Zimbabwe. As such, any and all papers that fulfil these broad criteria will be appreciated. For more information, please do not hesitate to contact the Editors via email at burrett@vodamail.co.za or hubcapzw@googlemail.com

One of our members, Robert Soper, has just published an excellent book on the terraces and associated culture in Nyanga. *The Terrace Builders of Nyanga* is published by Weaver Press located in Harare and is likely to become the standard introduction to the archaeology of the area for many years to come.

Please note that we have changed our postal address with immediate effect to:

PREHISTORY SOCIETY OF ZIMBABWE
P.O. BOX A 723
AVONDALE
HARARE
ZIMBABWE

As always, please send your contributions, comments, letters and queries to the newsletter editor at hubcapzw@googlemail.com or dhubbard@mweb.co.zw

Dwarf Cattle

Contributed by Adele and Simon Hamilton-Ritchie

The following is a description and history of Zimbabwe's own breed – the Mashona, The web URL from where this information is derived is:

<http://web1100.anmsci.okstate.edu/breeds/cattle/mashona/>

Mashona

Also Known As: *Makalanga, Makaranga, Ngombe dza Vakaranga, Shona Mashuk, Mashukulumbwe*

Mashona cattle originated from the Shona people of eastern Zimbabwe. They are bred in a wide spreading territory covering most of the eastern half of Zimbabwe and an adjoining region of Mozambique that is free of the tsetse fly. The Mashona cattle are of the Sanga type. Following the decimation in the Shona herds caused by the cattle plague of 1896-98 and the East Coast fever epidemic of 1900-1906 larger number of mainly Angonis cows were mated with Mashona bulls.

This breed is reared for meat production and it is said they make docile working animals. A herd book was established in 1954, after a decade of selection for beef production and polled characteristics (hornless). The breed is usually black or red and most are now polled. The mature weight of the breed ranges from 275 to 350 kg (600 - 775 pounds).

History and description:

Indigenous cattle of varying types found throughout the length and breadth of Africa, but only since the turn of the present century has any attempt been made to study and classify them. Because of the dearth of reliable evidence and the general lack of historical records in Africa, the conclusions arrived at must be regarded as somewhat speculative.

Although the indigenous cattle of Africa generally lack uniformity of type, they may be placed in the following five main groups:

The Humpless Longhorn Cattle: These were the original cattle of North Africa as illustrated in paintings in the tombs of Egypt 7,000 years ago, but are today only found in West Africa.

The Humpless Shorthorn Cattle: These begin to be depicted in the Egyptian tombs from about 2500 BC from which time they obviously displaced the longhorns to the south and west.

The cattle of the Mediterranean region today are mainly of this type.

The Neckhumped Lateral-horned Zebu: There are records of this type of humped cattle from the old civilizations north of the Persian Gulf and later records, about 1500 BC, of their appearance in Egypt. It is thought that they may have entered at the "horn" of Africa and become established in Ethiopia, from once they spread north and south. Today, however, they are only represented by the Afrikaner breed which was developed from Khoi Khoi cattle which the early settlers found at the Cape.

The Chesthumped Shorthorn Zebu: This appears to be the most recent type to enter the continent and evidence indicates that it was introduced down the East Coast by Arab and Indian Traders from about the middle of the seventh century A.D. It is now the dominant type in East and Central Africa.

The Sanga Cattle: This type is widely spread in South, Central and West Equatorial Africa and is obviously the result of crossbreeding between the original humpless cattle and the invading zebus. They are usually neckhumped but vary greatly in the size and shape of the horns. The indigenous breeds of Zimbabwe fall into this group.

As the migrating Bantu tribes moved down the continent they took their cattle for them, crossing the Zambezi about 700 AD Portuguese explorers reported the presence of cattle in what we now know as Zimbabwe in the 16th Century, and the first white settlers found large numbers of stock, estimated at 500,000 in the hands of the local inhabitants. They were distributed mainly along the central plateau, which was free of tsetse fly.

The cattle which the pioneering settlers found were almost exclusively of the Sanga type. They were neck-humped, small in stature, rounded in appearance with sloping rumps, their coats were sleek and shiny, they were fine of bone, had small, broad alert heads and long thin, active tails. The horns in the cow curved

outward and forwards and were round and fine in cross-section.

The horns in the bull were also rounded but shorter and heavier, curving out and upwards. The horns in the oxen were longer and more widespread. A few of the animals were naturally polled. Color patterns were many and varied. The predominant color was black followed by reds and browns, with yellows and duns being less common. These colors were often accompanied by white patches or stipples very broken in outline. Black and red were frequently mixed giving rise to variations of the attractive M'Sundu pattern or more rarely the brindle (Nhuru).

In, 1896, disaster struck in the form of the Rinderpest epizootic which swept down from the north killing cattle and antelope alike; to be followed a few years later by the introduction of East Coast Fever from Macambiqu. The herds were decimated and by the time these diseases were under control it was estimated that only 50,000 head remained in the century.

To help build up numbers again, cattle were introduced from Zambia. They were mostly cows and were probably Angoni type shorthorn Zebus, but it is not known what lasting genetic influence they had on the native herds. From about this time both Government and private individuals began importing bulls from South Africa and overseas with which to grade-up and "improve" the indigenous stock. In most instances this process led to indiscriminate crossbreeding, without any corresponding improvement in management and resulted in heterogeneous, degenerate animals completely lacking the desirable characteristics of their parent stock.

The indigenous breeds which exist in Zimbabwe today, the Mashona, Nkone and Tuli have developed from this original stock. As might be expected there are close genetic similarities, especially between the Mashona and Nkone, but surveys of transferring types and estimated haemoglobin gene frequencies

from herds throughout the century have shown that animals do in fact all into distinct breed groups. It can be speculated, however that all the original genotypes must have been Mashonas.

The Nkone cattle have descended from the cattle belonging to the a'Mandebetele tribe which settled in Matabeleland in 1838. The largest concentrations of these animals are found in the Gwaii and neighboring communal areas in the western part of Zimbabwe. A small breeding herd was established at Tjolutjo, approximately 130 km northwest of Bulawayo in 1946, and this subsequently grew to become the main center of research and developed of the breed. A second herd was established at Msengenzi Experiment Farm in the Makwiro district of Mashonaland in 1953, and the Nkone Cattle Club was established with a number of commercial breeders in the early 1960's.

In 1942, Mr. Len Harvey, who was a land development officer, noticed a distinct yellow type of animal in the indigenous herds in the low veld south of Gwanda. Government subsequently decided to purchase some of these cattle to see if the type could be improved, and established the Lowveld Cattle Breeding Station with Mr. Harvey as Officer-in-Charge. This became the center of work on the breed and became known as the Tuli Breeding Station. Commercial breeders became interested in the breed and an official Breed Society was informed in 1961.

Prior to 1890, Thomas Baines, the explorer and big game hunter, recorded that he obtained "two little cows which being from Mashonaland were excellent milkers." However, probably the first serious written record on Mashona cattle was contained in a letter written by a member of the Pioneer Column, Mr. Jack CarruthersSmith, to Mr. Frank Willoughby. In it, he wrote:

"My first experience of Mashona cattle was in the beginning of 1891 until the end of March 1897, when I left for Bulawayo in Matabeleland. I considered Mashona cattle a

distinctive breed of their own. They were a very small breed, with very small and fine bone, very compact. They had lovely symmetrical horns. I should think about 70 percent of the cattle were jet black, 25 to 27 percent dark red, perhaps 1,5 percent dark yellow, probably 1 percent dun colored. Amongst the black, there was perhaps 1 or 2 percent hornless and in the red an odd hornless beast.

The true Mashona, as I remember it, had very short legs, bone very fine, a long thin tail, with a bush at the end of it, not unlike the bush on a lion's tail.

To the beast of my memory, the pure bred little Mashona gave 1 1/2 to 2 bottles of milk, at a milking.

I might add that the hair on the Mashona cattle was very short and simply shone, when in perfect condition, which in the early 1890's they generally were."

Meanwhile, in 1941, some forty years after these early recordings, and independently of each other, two dedicated men, Mr. F.B. Willoughby and Mr. E.A.B. McLeod began building up herds of indigenous cattle in Mashonaland. They visited dip-tanks in various remote communal areas and bought up animals which conformed to the characteristics which they had fixed in their minds. Mr. Willoughby obtained many of his foundation stock in the Chilimanzi and Buhera Communal lands. One polled bull in particular, which, as a three-month-old calf, walked the 200 miles from Buhera to Ellerton Farm, had a tremendous influence on the future Mashona breed. Mr. McLeod bought most of his original animals in the Mhonondoro area. He trekked them first to Gokwe and then to Essexvale as he was transferred, finally buying a farm in the latter district. He obtained some polled bulls from Ellerton and by small, black, hornless cattle of considerable hardiness and docility. The Ellerton herd was larger and more broadly based and although predominantly black, managed to perpetuate most of the color and color patterns of the native stock. Here again selection was based strictly upon the most desirable functional characteristics of the

indigenous cattle, and over the years a remarkably productive herd was achieved.

The enthusiasm of these two men led to the founding of the Rhodesian Indigenous Cattle Society on the 16th of January, 1950, with Mr. Willoughby becoming the first President and Mr. McLeod as honorary secretary. A few years later the name was changed to the more specific Mashona Cattle Society.

The vision and enterprise of Messrs. Willoughby and McLeod have been more than justified, and while the breed today has a much broader genetic base than either may ever have visualized, their original bloodlines still run very strong in the modern Mashona.

References: Genus Bos: Cattle Breeds of the World, 1985, MSO-AGVET (Merck & Co., Inc.), Rahway, N.J. Mason, I.L. 1996. A World Dictionary of Livestock Breeds, Types and Varieties. Fourth Edition. C.A.B International. 273 pp. Jim Weaver, Weaver Ranch, P.O. Box 23, Causey, New Mexico

Short Notices

Botswana

Inside a cave, next to a python-shaped rock, archaeologists may have found the remains of humankind's oldest known ritual. Researchers report evidence for what appears to be the ceremonial destruction of spearheads some 70,000 years ago--30,000 years earlier than the first ritual sites in Europe--but others are skeptical of the interpretation.

China

Inscriptions on two bronze urns found in the Shaanxi province contain 2,800-year-old evidence of bribery. The rare unheroic story is told in first-person by a nobleman who paid his way--in jade--out of accusations of appropriating farmland and slaves.

Papua New Guinea

Scholars have long been intrigued by the stylized faces that appear on early South Pacific

Lapita pottery. Now it is thought that the 3,000-year-old faces might not represent ancestors but sea turtles, which are still part of local creation myths.

Some Astronomical Aspects of Great Zimbabwe

Richard Wade

Nkwe Ridge Observatory, PO Box 75201, Lynnwood Ridge, Pretoria, 0040, South Africa

Basically the ruins of Great Zimbabwe are arranged as well to function as a sort of astronomical instrument, designed as a general calendar and were used to predict the new year and the correct time to start ploughing and sowing.

The use of astrological/astronomical marker monoliths or 'phallic' stones found in Egypt, Ethiopia - Axum, Tiya, Namoratunga and Yemen - as well as in the Zimbabwe Complex, still persists, though rarely, amongst the east African people like the Galla, Borana, Konso, Sidamo and Gugji - who make use of agricultural marker stars and constellations - that may conceal an ancient tradition of astronomy from north eastern Africa to southern Africa since the Stone Age. I suggest that, the monoliths on the main wall may have been placed in alignment with stars or other astronomical objects as viewed from the platform area, forming a 'locus' to an elliptical view of stars rising to the east in the ecliptic zone.

By mathematically retracing precession, certain monoliths on the Great Enclosure wall aligned at various azimuths from the 'Platform Area,' as well as from a 'central' viewing point, with solstices and equinoxes and certain known stars mentioned most often in the ethnographic record over a specific period identified by simulating the past stars in a computer analysis.

There have been many suggestions as to the function and meaning of the conical tower, from phallic symbol to minaret to symbolic

grain bin. Looking at it astronomically, it should have been marking some highly significant star - but nothing seemed to fit, until I came across a report of a recent supernova. A supernova is the death explosion of a star, and the newly discovered one (called RX J0852.0-4622) was very close to our solar system and would have been clearly observable in the night sky. I entered the co-ordinates of the supernova into a simulation of the site and its attendant sky and saw that it would have risen directly over the conical tower in about the mid-13th century. It would have proceeded in line with the tower, on its vertical journey for most of the late evening and set at dawn, in alignment with another monolith on the western side of the main wall.

Who would have seen this star and then built the structures? Recent ethnographical, genetic and historical studies of the Basena/Vamwenye/Balemba people indicate they might have been the authors. They claim to have followed a bright star from the area of Bagamoyo in Tanzania and again later from Sena in Mocambique, to the present site of Great Zimbabwe. The direction from Sena to Great Zimbabwe is the same as that of the setting supernova and the string of ruins from the coast to the interior, made within the period of this event, lie along the route followed.

Recent genetic studies done on the Lemba supposedly show a strong Semitic signature. Around nine percent of Lemba men show a DNA sequence that is identified with the patrilineal lineage of the *cohenim*, or Hebrew ritual priests, a proportion which rises to 53 percent in the case of the Buba clan. Biblically, the *cohenim* are descendants of Moses' brother Aaron. Lemba oral traditions stress that they came from a northern city and a couple of recent authors have argued that these people are of Israelitic origin based on their similar dietary preferences, particular religious codes, oral traditions of foreign origin and their apparently alien physiological features.

The stellar lore and knowledge of times and seasons throughout the pre-trade and early-trade era archaeological sites have yet to be determined. Expressions which may have fallen away at the introduction of the time-keeping means of later contacts - whose only possible remains are still to be gleaned in the myths such as those of the 'Abyssinian' or 'people of Zeng' as described by the earliest ethnography and that can be reconstructed by studying the archaeoastronomical aspects of rock art, artifacts and structures and human response through expressions in megalithic archives of celestial patterns and galactic events.

Short Notices

Peru

The time the archaeologists beat the looters. In 900-year-old pre-Inca graves, researchers have found hundreds of artifacts, including 12 tumis, a type of ceremonial knife that is now Peru's national symbol. It is the first time decorated tumis have been found by archaeologists instead of thieves.

Greece

Excavations on the tiny isle of Keros have revealed an unusually large cache of the modern-looking marble figurines made by the mysterious Bronze Age Cycladic culture. Many of the figurines and bowls appear to have been deliberately and repeatedly broken and jumbled up, suggesting that the small, barren island was a key ceremonial center.

Poland

On August 4, 1944, a Royal Air Force Halifax bomber with a crew of five Canadians and two Englishmen disappeared over Poland while delivering supplies to the resistance. Historians just discovered the rare plane buried in a field along with the remains of its crew. Officials are now searching for the men's families.

Russia

An idol of the Hindu deity Vishnu was found in excavations at a remote village in the Volga

region. The figure, which may be more than 1,000 years old, suggests some kind of contact between India and medieval Russia.

Israel

Let the toilets be your guide. An ancient latrine near the ruins of Qumran follows the unusual and stringent guidelines in both the Dead Sea Scrolls and historical accounts of the strict Jewish Essene sect--directly linking the sect, the scrolls, and the settlement as never before. The latrine was required to be hidden a specific distance northwest of the city, but it may have been very unsanitary, thus contributing to the poor health of Qumran's ancient residents.

Pakistan

Another day, another archaeologically rich region faces a massive dam project. The \$6.5-billion Diamir-Bhasha Dam will inundate more than four square miles when it is completed. According to German archaeologists working there, it will imperil tens of thousands of rock carvings from the Neolithic period to the sixteenth century. Salvage plans are under consideration.

Hollywood

The world's most famous archaeologist is back! Filmmakers George Lucas and Steven Spielberg announced that they are finally beginning production on the long-delayed fourth Indiana Jones film with 64-year-old star Harrison Ford. No word yet on what coveted artifact he'll be after.

For more news snippets, check out:

<http://www.archaeology.org/online/news/index.html>