

PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF A SURVEY OF BULAWAYO, SHAKA KASENZANGAKHONA'S CAPITAL FROM ABOUT 1820 TO 1827*

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*Accepted for publication January 1994

ABSTRACT

Documentary evidence and a plot of surface artefacts at Bulawayo, Shaka kaSenzangakhona's capital between 1820 and 1827, strongly suggests that it had a similar layout to the later "amakhanda" of Mgungundlovu and Ondini. However, Bulawayo appears to have been considerably smaller than the later sites, while the size estimates of 1820s colonialists were highly exaggerated. Scattered slag and tuyere fragments may indicate the position of an ironworking area. There is documentary evidence for a separate homestead at Bulawayo called Cele, similar to the Bheje at Mgungundlovu.

INTRODUCTION

In the first published account of an archaeological excavation at Mgungundlovu, Parkington & Cronin (1979:148) concluded that the "similarity between Mgungundlovu and other military establishments such as Bulawayo, and the transition from traditional homesteads to military barrack towns remain questions for future research". Efforts to answer these and other questions began in the early 1980s when the KwaZulu Monuments Council (KMC) initiated a project on the military homesteads or "amakhanda" of the Zulu kings of the nineteenth century. The project began with a survey of Cetshwayo's capital Ondini (Rawlinson 1985). Nodwengu, Mpande's capital has also received attention, while sites of "amakhanda" in the region around modern Ulundi have been identified (KMC records). Work at Dingane's capital Mgungundlovu is currently under the direction of F. Roodt of the Natal Provincial Administration Museum Service, but little research has been carried out on Shakan period sites (but see Brooks 1992).

In 1992 the KMC contracted the Natal Museum's Institute for Cultural Resource Management to carry out an assessment of the tourist and educational potential of the complex of royal Zulu sites situated between Eshowe and Empangeni in Natal. These are the grave of Shaka's mother Nandi, Cowards Bush, the place of execution, and Bulawayo (Zulu: "kwaBulawayo"), Shaka's capital between about 1820 and 1827 (Fig. 1). The main aim of the project was to locate Bulawayo precisely on the ground by plotting the position of surface artefacts. Rawlinson (1985) followed the same strategy with considerable success at Ondini. Unlike Ondini and Mgungundlovu however, Bulawayo had not been burnt

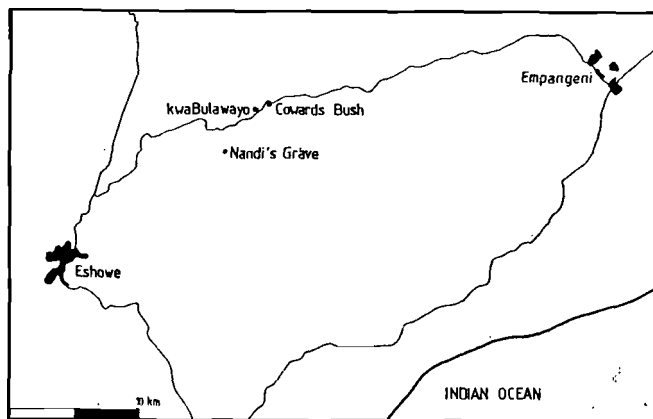


Fig. 1. The sites and their locations.

and we did not expect to find features such as daga floors. Nevertheless we hoped that a shadow outline of the site remained.

Shaka's first capital Gibixhegu, was located in Makhosini on the banks of the Mhodi, a tributary to the Mkhumbane River (Hamilton 1985). Shortly after the defeat of the Ndwandwe in 1819, Shaka moved Gibixhegu to a site between the Mhlataze and Mlalazi Rivers (between modern Eshowe and Empangeni). This new "ikhanda where white colonists first met Shaka in 1824", later became known as Bulawayo; Isaacs (1970) noted the name change in his diary on the 15 July 1826. Late in 1826 Shaka ordered the construction of a new "ikhanda", Dukuza, south of the Thukela River where modern Stanger is situated. Bulawayo lost its status as Shaka's administrative centre to Dukuza by the end of 1827.

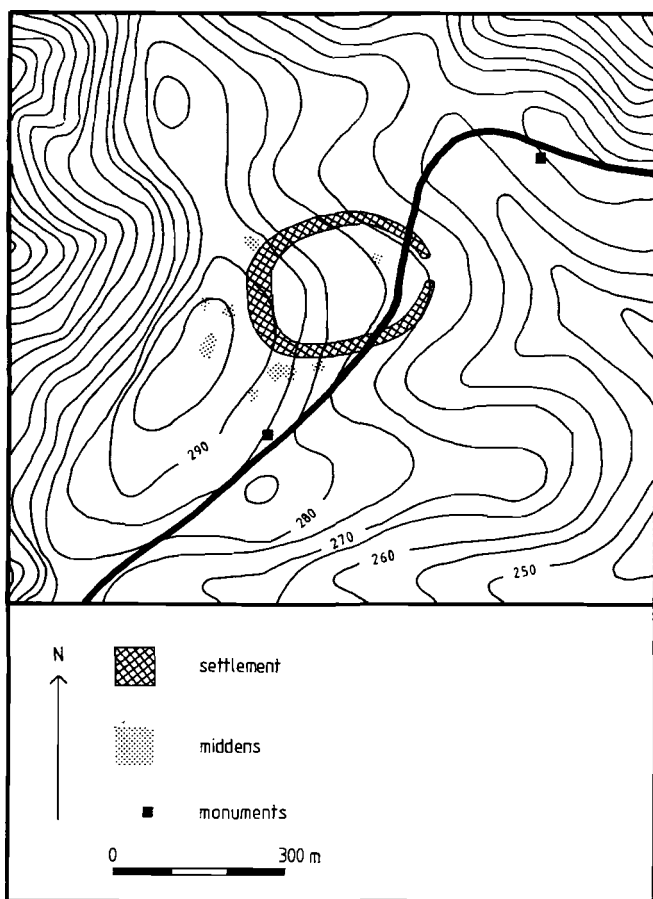


Fig. 2. Hypothesised position and layout of Bulawayo. The middens are concentrated at the upper part of the site.

There are vague descriptions of Bulawayo in the writings of Fynn (1969) and Isaacs (1970), as well as in the James Stuart Archives (Webb & Wright 1976, 1979 1982, 1986). These lack detail and provide only a rough outline of the appearance of the site. However, there is sufficient correspondence between Mgungundlovu, Ondini and the documentary hints to indicate that Bulawayo had a similar layout to the later capitals. This is not surprising as "amakhanda" were essentially a transformation of the traditional homestead pattern.

THE SURVEY

Bulawayo lies on a hill just north of the road P230 about 43 km from Eshowe (Fig. 1). The area is hilly but to the north drops steeply towards the plains of the Mhlatuze Valley. The Ngoye Forest is visible on the skyline to the southeast of the site. Geologically the area is dominated by the Vryheid Formation which has been extensively intruded by dolerite. Bulawayo hill itself is capped by dolerite, but towards the southern edges of the site the soil is increasingly shaley.

Bulawayo hill is currently used for agriculture and at some time in the recent past, suffered contour ploughing which created a series of terraces and trenches along the slope. Similar ploughing operations were carried out on other hills in the vicinity.

I used a theodolite to plot the position of individual artefacts on the surface, taking nearly 5000 readings. I

entered the data onto a computer using the cadastral-based software Compuplot and generated four 1:500 maps showing the distribution of artefacts and bone fragments. Although the survey is not yet complete I mapped a sufficiently large area to gain some indication of the position of Bulawayo on the ground (Fig. 2).

DISCUSSION

Four points of interest emerged from the project. First, the survey results suggest Bulawayo was smaller than Mgungundlovu and Ondini, and considerably smaller than indicated by Fynn and Isaacs who estimated its circumference as "nearly two miles" (Fynn 1969:71) and "about three miles" (Isaacs 1970:49) respectively. Such a circumference would enclose a circle with a diameter of between 950 and 1530 m. By contrast, Mgungundlovu and Ondini are only 550 to 650 m from the "isigodlo" to the lower gate, and between 500 m and 550 m in breadth (Parkington & Cronin 1979, Plug & Roodt 1990, Rawlinson 1985, Roodt 1992). It seems highly unlikely that Bulawayo was this large and indeed, the survey results suggest it was around 200 to 250 m across and 300 to 350 m in length (Fig. 2). Thus, Isaacs' (1970:35) estimate of 1400 huts at Bulawayo is almost certainly too high; the much bigger Mgungundlovu appears to have had about 1100 huts (Parkington & Cronin 1979).

Secondly, scattered slag and tuyere fragments at the north-western corner of the site suggest that ironworking took place here. If these remains are contemporaneous with the rest of the site, this area may have been separated and secluded in some physical way from the settlement, and particularly from the nearby "isigodlo" which was a high status female area. Interestingly, slag occurred in a similar location at Ondini, but has unfortunately been lost to road construction (Maggs pers. comm.). Further work is needed to determine the relationship between the slag and other remains on Bulawayo.

Thirdly, there is documentary evidence for the existence of attached homesteads at Bulawayo similar to the Bheje at Mgungundlovu. According to Baleni kaSilwana, one of James Stuart's informants

Cetshwayo had small kraals, like Mapotweni [at Mpande's Nodwengu], outside and above his main kraals... These small kraals were attached to Cetshwayo's kraals. The women bore their children at these kraals. Cattle were also milked there. The cattle for milking stood there. The king used to go there on short visits. In these kraals the king's grain was stored in the ground. There were either one or two of these kraals. I do not know the names of those of Tshaka. I know that Dingana's at Mgungundhlovu was called Beje...

Attached to Bulawayo kraal was the Cele kraal, i.e. Tshaka's private quarters (Webb & Wright 1976: 24).

It is clear from Baleni's evidence that the Cele homestead was the equivalent of the Bheje. His apparently contradictory statements on the naming of the homestead may be the result of confusion caused by the two relocations of Shaka's capital. Supportive evidence for the existence of separate homesteads attached to "amakhanda" during Shaka's reign comes from Isaacs. On his first journey to Bulawayo, Isaacs stayed at an "ikhanda" north of the Thukela River which he described as consisting of some 400 huts, excluding those of the palace ("isigodlo") and "its appendages" (Isaacs 1970: 33; *my italics*).

We did not locate the site of the Cele homestead and because no house floors are preserved on Bulawayo, its identification is likely to be more difficult than was the identification of the Bheje. However, a homestead may have been situated on the hill immediately to the north of Bulawayo hill where there are midden concentrations. If these remains are contemporaneous with Bulawayo, it seems possible that this was the position of the Cele homestead.

Finally, as Rawlinson (1985) demonstrated at Ondini the results indicate the usefulness of this sort of survey, even on sites which have no preserved floors and which are disturbed by agriculture. Further survey work and possibly excavation will be carried out at Bulawayo in the near future.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am particularly grateful to Fikile Nene and Thanda Maphumulo who assisted with the survey of Bulawayo, and Kevin Suzor and his team at KwaZulu Department of Works, Survey and Mapping, Mpumalanga who spent many hours helping me process the raw survey data and produce the maps. Len van Schalkwyk, James van Vuuren, Tim Maggs and Frans Roodt provided assistance or advice at various stages of the project. The project was funded by the KwaZulu Monuments Council.

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