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Evidence for girls' initiation rites in the Bheje *umuzi* at eMgungundlovu

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Parkington & Cronin reported unusual features from two of the preserved original hut floors in the Bheje enclosure at eMgungundlovu. Hut 187 was described as having a polished patio, while the adjacent floor (hut 188) had a narrow trench within the floor which was thought to have been part of an interior structure. These floors were recently re-examined and the view that hut 187 has a patio is not supported. With the aid of ethnographic and archaeological data on hand, I will endeavour to show that the features on both floors can be interpreted as evidence of *umgonqo* screens built for the purpose of secluding a girl initiate when reaching puberty. This argument however calls for the Bheje to be placed in spatial and social context within the *isigodlo* and the wider uMgungundlovu framework. It is not the intention to discuss the socio-political function of the *isigodlo*, nor is it intended to give a detailed description of girls' initiation ceremonies.

Parkington & Cronin maak melding van ongewone verskynsels op twee van die oorspronklike hutvloere in die Bheje statjie by eMgungundlovu. Hut 187 word beskryf met 'n gladgemaakte 'patio' terwyl hut 188 'n smal voortjie het wat beskou word as deel van 'n interne struktuur. Hierdie vloere is onlangs weer ondersoek en die mening dat vloer 187 'n 'patio' het, word nie ondersteun nie. Met behulp van etnografiese en argeologiese data word gepoog om aan te toon dat genoemde verskynsels verklaar kan word as bewys vir die bou van *umgonqo* skerms vir gebruik tydens die afsondering van meisie-inisiantie. Hierdie betoog vereis dat die Bheje in ruimtelike en sosiale konteks binne die *isigodlo* en die breëre uMgungundlovu-raamwerk geplaas moet word. Dit is egter nie die doel van die artikel om die sosio-politieke funksie van die *isigodlo* of inisiasie-seremonies vir meisies volledig te bespreek nie.

Introduction

UMgungundlovu was established in 1829 as the main seat and military headquarters of the Zulu king uDingane, who reigned from 1828-40. The settlement or *ikhanda* was located in the *emaKhosini* valley (31°16'E; 28°26'S) which forms part of the greater White Umfolozi drainage system. UMgungundlovu was more or less oval and contained between 1 400-1 700 thatched huts which surrounded an open area known as the large cattle enclosure (*isibaya esikhulu*). The huts were enclosed on both the inner and outer sides by strong palisades.

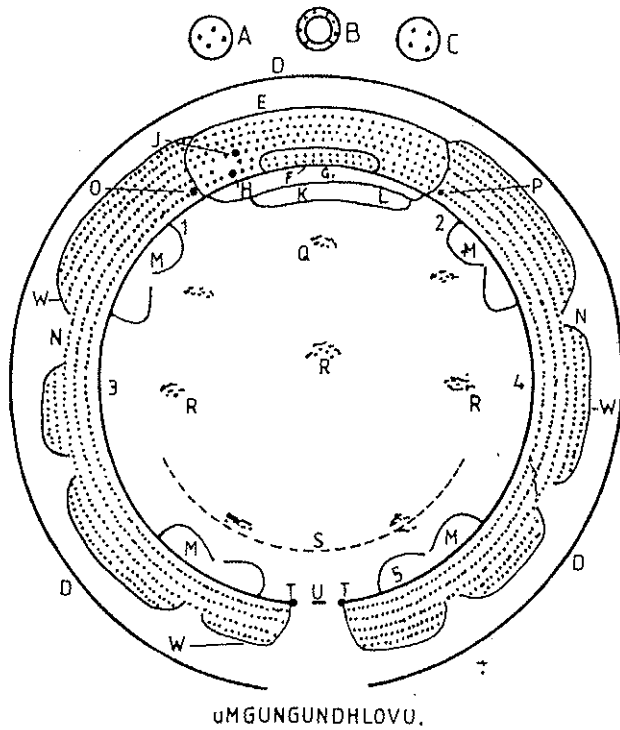
Like all royal *amakhanda*, uMgungundlovu consisted of two major divisions, namely, the *isigodlo* (royal section) at the 'upper' (south) end directly opposite the main entrance, and the barrack area, by far the largest part, comprising the flanks extending from the *isigodlo* 'downwards' and ending at the main entrance. UMgungundlovu was destroyed by fire on order from the king in December 1838, a few days after the Zulus were defeated at the Battle of Blood River (Ngcome) which took place on 16 December 1838. The heat of the burning huts fired the clay floors to a hard brick-like consistency which resulted in their preservation.

Location of the Bheje

A small cluster of hut floors arranged in a shallow arc, about 100 m behind, and upslope from the main uMgungundlovu complex, is today generally known as the Bheje. Its name and location is derived from information gathered by James Stuart from Zulu informants at the turn of the century.

Four volumes of Stuart's papers, titled *The Stuart Archive* (Webb & Wright 1976, 1979, 1982, 1986) have recently been published. Stuart has also published his own version of a reconstructed plan of uMgungundlovu. His diagram (Figure 1) was taken from Stuart & Malcolm (1969:325). Stuart's plan shows three small enclosures 'above' the main complex, namely: A — *uMvazana* (left); B — *uBeje* (centre); and C — *KwaMbecini* (right). He derived these names primarily from Lunguza kaMpukane whom he questioned in 1909 at the age of approximately 80 years (Webb & Wright 1976:337).

Other informants confirm the name and location of the Bheje. It seems that most, if not all, royal military settlements (*amakhanda*) such as uMgungundlovu had one or more of these satellite homesteads (*imizi*) attached to them. Baleni kaSilwane states: 'I know that Dingana's at uMgungundlovu was called Beje', but



Plan drawn by James Stuart

Figure 1 Reconstruction of uMgungundhlovu by James Stuart. Redrawn from Stuart & Malcolm (1969)

adds that he did not know of more than two attached to any single royal settlement (Webb & Wright 1976:24). This opinion is shared by another informant who remarks that 'The two kraals at the top of Mgungundhlovu ..., were called eNgame and eBeje' (Webb & Wright 1979:91). There is at least one contradictory statement concerning the name Bheje as applied to the *umuzi* (homestead), which is that of Mkando, who says:

'The iBeja (iBeje) was the mdhlunkulu of Dingana. It was not an umuzi but the great isigodhlo' (Webb & Wright 1982:150).

Very little information was left by contemporary white visitors to eMgungundhlovu. Gardiner (1966:38) vaguely refers to '... some detached houses at the back of the isigordlo [sic] ...' to where he had been summoned by the king. William Wood (1840:22) noted that the huts of the king's wives '... extended beyond the circle which formed the kraal, but were also strongly fenced in'. With these statements both probably referred to the Bheje.

Archaeological evidence (Parkington & Cronin 1979:137, 142-3) confirms the existence of an *umuzi* more or less where Stuart's diagram places the Bheje. Unlike the eight huts arranged in a circle as proposed by Stuart, the remains of seven hut floors, arranged in a shallow arc, were located by them. The number of eight hut floors has nevertheless now been confirmed by the author (Figure 2). The fact that the Bheje was not circular, was first established in a survey of the site done by B. Talbot in 1928 (Figure 3).

Talbot's plan indicates a 'crematorium' to the west of the central Bheje floors. This area was excavated and found to be an extensive copper smithing site (Roodt in prep.). This was most probably the 'KwaMbecini kraal' of Stuart and contradicts Parkington & Cronin (1979:137) who suggested that *KwaMbecini* was the location of the grain pit area. Note that Talbot's plan shows a circular broken line around the grain pits — a feature that suggests a pole fenced enclosure (cattle kraal?) of which some remains or scar were possibly still visible in 1928. Evidence in support of grain storage and a cattle enclosure is given

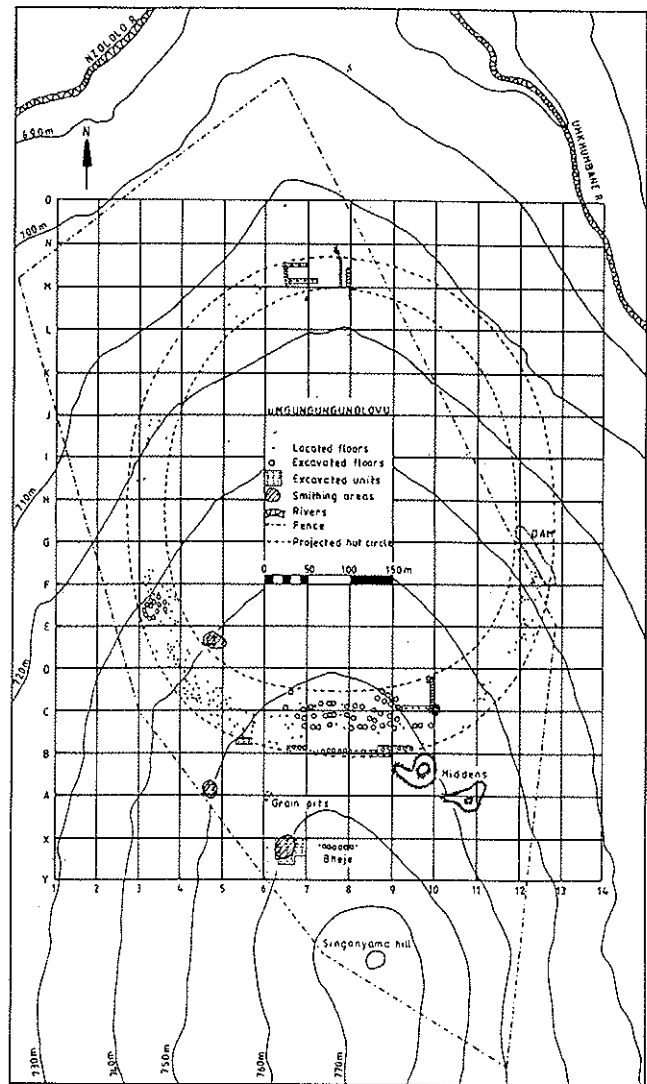


Figure 2 uMgungundhlovu survey and excavations 1985-90

by Ndabambi who stated that

'The king's amabele and milking cattle with their herders stayed in the small kraals known as Emapotweni at the back of uMgungundhlovu. These kraals were also known as iBeje' (Webb & Wright 1986:177).

The informant however seems to have been confused regarding the name Mapotweni, as evidence suggests that Mapotweni was at Nodwengu, King Mpande's settlement. It was also noted that similar grain pits and a cattle enclosure were located at Ondini (King Cetshwayo's royal *ikhanda*) and that the 'kraals' and enclosures behind uMgungundhlovu were called 'Beje' (Webb & Wright 1976:24).

Another interesting feature on Talbot's site plan (Figure 3) is a number of floors north-north-west of the Bheje and almost half-way downslope towards the main complex. It would be premature to speculate on these but they could have been the huts where the herd boys, noted above, were housed.

The spatial arrangement of the area above or behind the main complex is not yet fully understood and needs further investigation which falls beyond the scope of this article. Here one finds male (smithing) and female (Bheje) activity areas in close proximity, even though there was a strict separation of sexes at eMgungundhlovu. Huffman states that

'... human societies everywhere divide their spatial environment into a system of distinct locations where limited ranges of culturally related activities are permitted. The physical signposts of these activities and the underlying

principles constitute a society's "expressive space" (1981:131).

Following Huffman's model, it would seem that the underlying principle of the spatial organization in this particular area at eMgungundlovu is expressed by attitudes about status. Both the Bheje women and the copper smiths were people of high status, as were the activities centering around cattle. The 'physical signpost' that separated the nearby male and female activity areas was probably the strong fence William Wood (1840:22) mentioned when he wrote that the huts of the king's wives, which extended beyond the main complex, were strongly fenced in.

Owing to the general lack of detail, which calls for more archaeological research, it is not yet possible to integrate all evidence on hand. We can however confidently say that the so-called central Bheje *umuzi* did exist and that the name Bheje did apply to it. It seems that, owing to its prominence, all other structures and features behind the main uMgungundlovu complex were collectively called Bheje, irrespective of separate names identifying them.

The Bheje in its social context

Evidence suggests that the Bheje *umuzi* derived its name from a section of the royal *isigodlo* (seraglio) which was known by the same name. One of Stuart's informants states that Dingane had no wives '... only concubines and these were called the Beje' (Webb & Wright 1976:28). Also note Mkando's statement above that the Bheje was the great *isigodlo*.

Bryant (1949:473) describes the *isigodlo* as '... the strictly private quarters ... of royalty' where the king and his female entourage lived. The *isigodlo* was generally divided into a black and a white section, the black *isigodlo*, where the king also resided, being higher in status than the white *isigodlo*.

The fact that Dingane never married officially (Bryant 1949:473; Stuart & Malcolm 1969:299) leads one to assume that the black *isigodlo* at eMgungundlovu was formed by those royal women 'inherited' by him, some of his female relatives and a selection of favoured *umndlunkulu* girls. The white *isigodlo* was assumably occupied by the remaining *umndlunkulu* corps.

The *umndlunkulu* were young girls presented to the Zulu king by his more important subjects and according to Bryant (1949:378) this practice was aimed at seeking royal favours. The *umndlunkulu* was also made up of girls collected from all parts of the country by people acting on behalf of the king, others being selected at the annual *umkhosi* (rites of the first fruits) while some were captured during raids on other tribes. Also to be found amongst, and as part of the *umndlunkulu*, were maid-servants: little girls known as *iziqila*. They were either daughters of men killed on orders from the king or girls abducted from other tribes. *Iziqila* were seen at eMgungundlovu and at king Mpande's Nodwengu settlement (Webb & Wright 1976:45; 1982:162; 1986:370). They performed menial tasks in the *isigodlo* but could not be distinguished from the other girls by their outward appearance (Webb & Wright 1982:162, 164).

According to available information, those girls who were favoured by king Dingane were admitted into the black *isigodlo* and named 'iBeje' (Webb & Wright 1976:345; 1986:370). The *umndlunkulu* girls became the sole property of the king and could be kept for his own advantage, married off or sent to one of the several *amakhanda* of the king.

Both Fynn and Owen who were contemporary visitors to eMgungundlovu, estimated that the *isigodlo* consisted of 500 women, described by Owen as the king's servants. He distinguished between those servants (white *isigodlo*?) and the king's women numbering 90 or 100 (black *isigodlo*?) who were richly attired with beads and brass rings (Cory 1926:43; & Stuart & Malcolm 1969:39). Gardiner (1966:38) must have mentioned

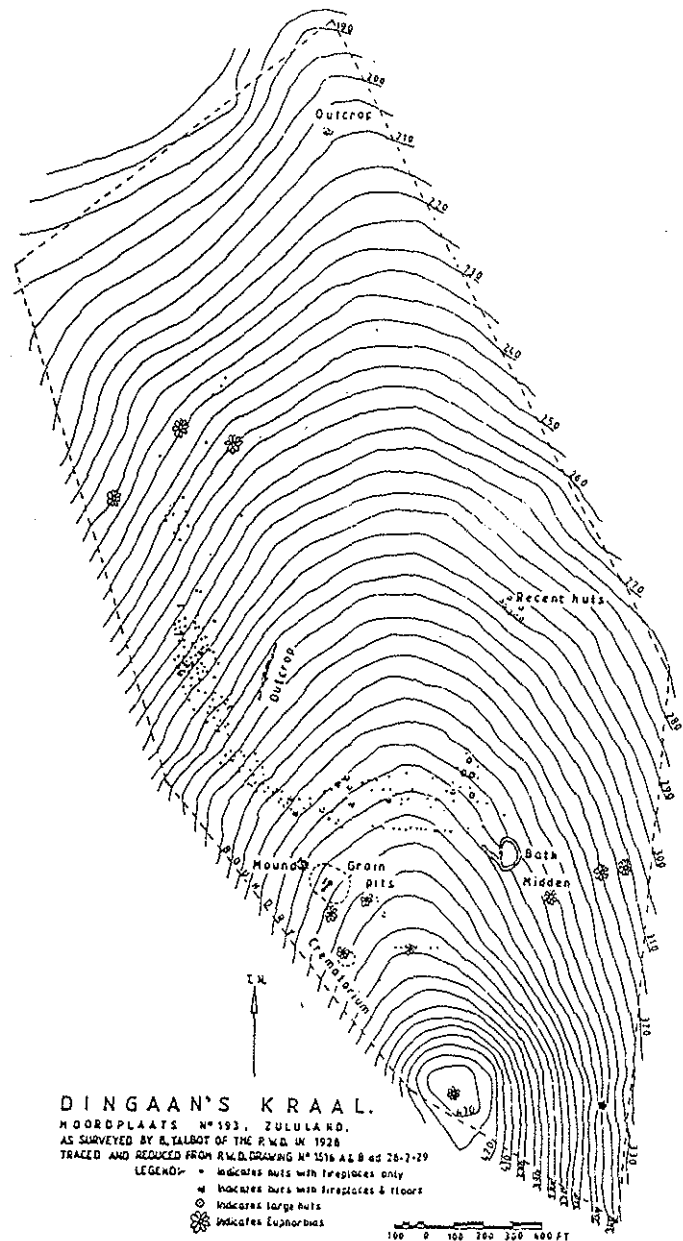


Figure 3 Talbot's plan

these same women when he described them as '... no other than the king's women about ninety in number, ...', decorated in similar fashion with beads and brass on the occasion he was summoned to the 'detached houses' (Bheje) at the back of the *isigodlo*.

Bearing in mind the statement above by Mkando that the Bheje was the *umndlunkulu* and great *isigodlo* of Dingane and those of other informants such as: 'He (Dingane) had only concubines and these were called Beje' (Webb & Wright 1976:28), '... by "Beje" I mean the *umndlunkulu*' (Webb & Wright 1976:326) and 'Sincwanguya... was of Dingane's iBeje kraal, of his *isigodlo*' (Webb & Wright 1979:81), it seems reasonable to conclude that the *umndlunkulu* girls selected for the black *isigodlo* were named Bheje to distinguish and separate them from the other women occupying the black *isigodlo*. Furthermore the Bheje women were described as Dingane's *izixebe* — lovers or sweethearts (Webb & Wright 1986:370).

The social distinction of the Bheje is also evident from analysis of glass bead samples from different parts of uMgungundlovu (Van der Merwe et al. 1989:98-104). By selecting Hall's (*isigodlo*) and Roodt's (Bheje) bead samples (where recovery methods

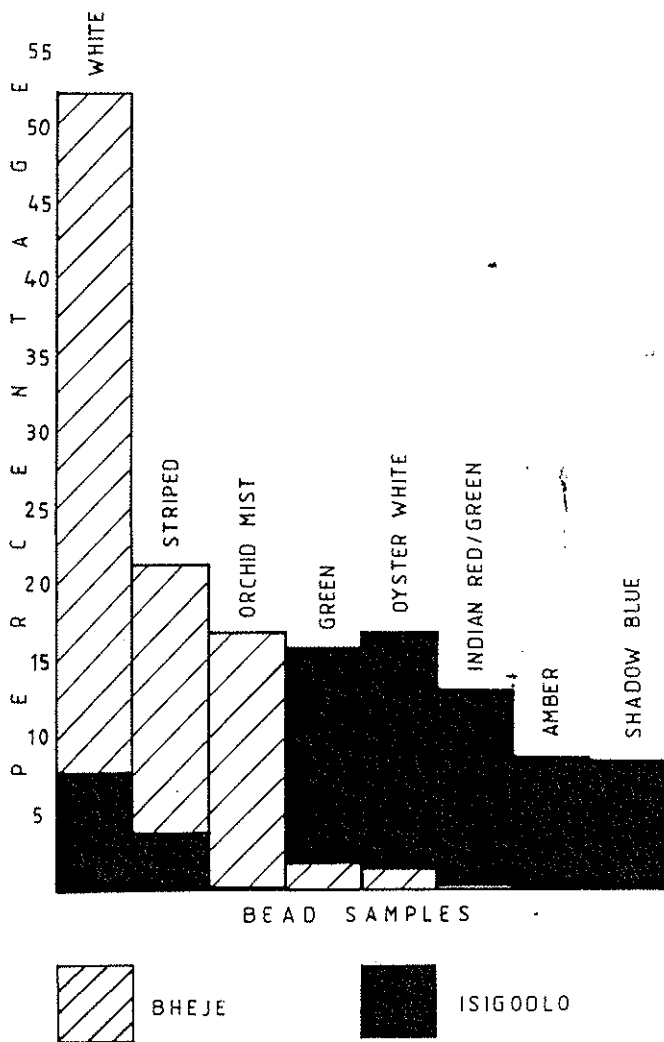


Figure 4 Distribution of colour frequency in beads

are most compatible), a comparison of the variable of spatial distribution of colour frequencies between the *isigodlo* and Bheje shows a sharp contrast in every colour frequency (Figure 4).

Interior features on the Bheje floors

In this article I am primarily concerned with floors 187 and 188 (Figures 5 & 6) of the Bheje which show evidence of internal structures built inside the huts as a result of circular trenches occurring on the preserved original floors. Of the seven floors located at the Bheje by Parkington & Cronin (1979:142-3), four were either fully or partially excavated. These floors are described as

'... unusual, in particular Hut 187 which had a polished clay patio in front. The adjacent hut floor (Hut 188) had a narrow trench within the daga floor which may have been an interior feature'

(Figure 5. The trench on hut 188 is not shown). All eight floors in the Bheje complex have now either been fully or partially excavated but none of the other floors show similar features.

As noted, the view that floor 187 has a patio, is not supported. The reason being that, as a rule, all the excavated floors at eMgungundlovu have one feature in common, namely, the position of the hearth. It was always placed approximately one third of the diameter of the floor closest to the entrance of the hut. On examining floor 187 (Figure 6), one observes that, had A been the doorway as suggested and B the outer perimeter of the hut floor, the positioning of hearth C would not have followed this rule. The hearth would in fact have been only 50 cm from the

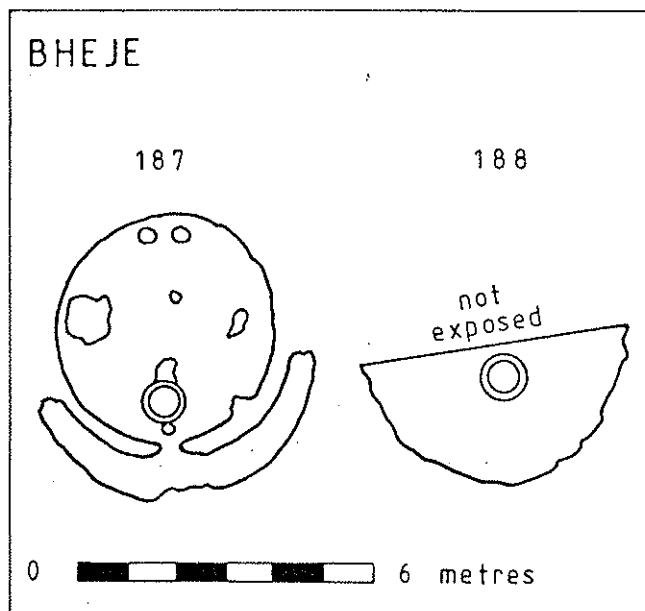


Figure 5 Plan of Huts 187 and 188. Redrawn from Parkington & Cronin (1979)

entrance and with support post D reducing the distance even further, it would have been almost impossible to enter through the low doorway. All indications are that E is the perimeter of the hut floor, in which case the hearth was placed correctly. The break in the floor which was thought to have formed the 'patio' is interpreted as circular trench F which widened owing to the deterioration of the floor.

Floor 188 follows a similar pattern. The trench is fortunately better preserved and more clearly defined than in floor 187. Here the trench is even closer to the hearth but the doorway is well defined by the remains of an entrance porch. This floor was originally only partially excavated owing to a large *Euphorbia* tree growing on it.

The tree has since died and was removed, whereafter the floor was fully exposed. Unfortunately no remains of any construction material were found in the trench. The charcoal remains of burnt withes (sticks the hut was originally built of) have however been found at the lower right perimeter of the floor.

The circular features on these two floors are interpreted as the remains of trenches dug to facilitate the construction of *umgonqo* screens inside the huts. This assumption is supported by the evidence of Mkando who states:

'An *umgonqo*, when a girl has had her first menstruation, is built — a hut inside another hut' (Webb & Wright 1982:184).

Umgonqo screens were built for the purpose of secluding a girl on reaching puberty and her first menstruation, and behind which she retired for any period of up to three months (Krige 1936: 101).

It must be borne in mind that the normal family and kinship structures of a Zulu homestead did not apply or exist at eMgungundlovu. According to Krige (1936:100-1), a girl in a normal family situation will hide somewhere in the vicinity of her father's homestead when she becomes aware that she has attained puberty. Her mother will be informed of her absence by the other girls and while they are sent to search for the girl, the mother will report the matter to her husband. He will immediately send the boys to cut wood for the *umgonqo* partition which will be built in the mother's hut. Raum (1973:281) confirms that the girl is secluded in her mother's hut or her father's mother's hut, the Great Hut. Very little information exists in the literature on what

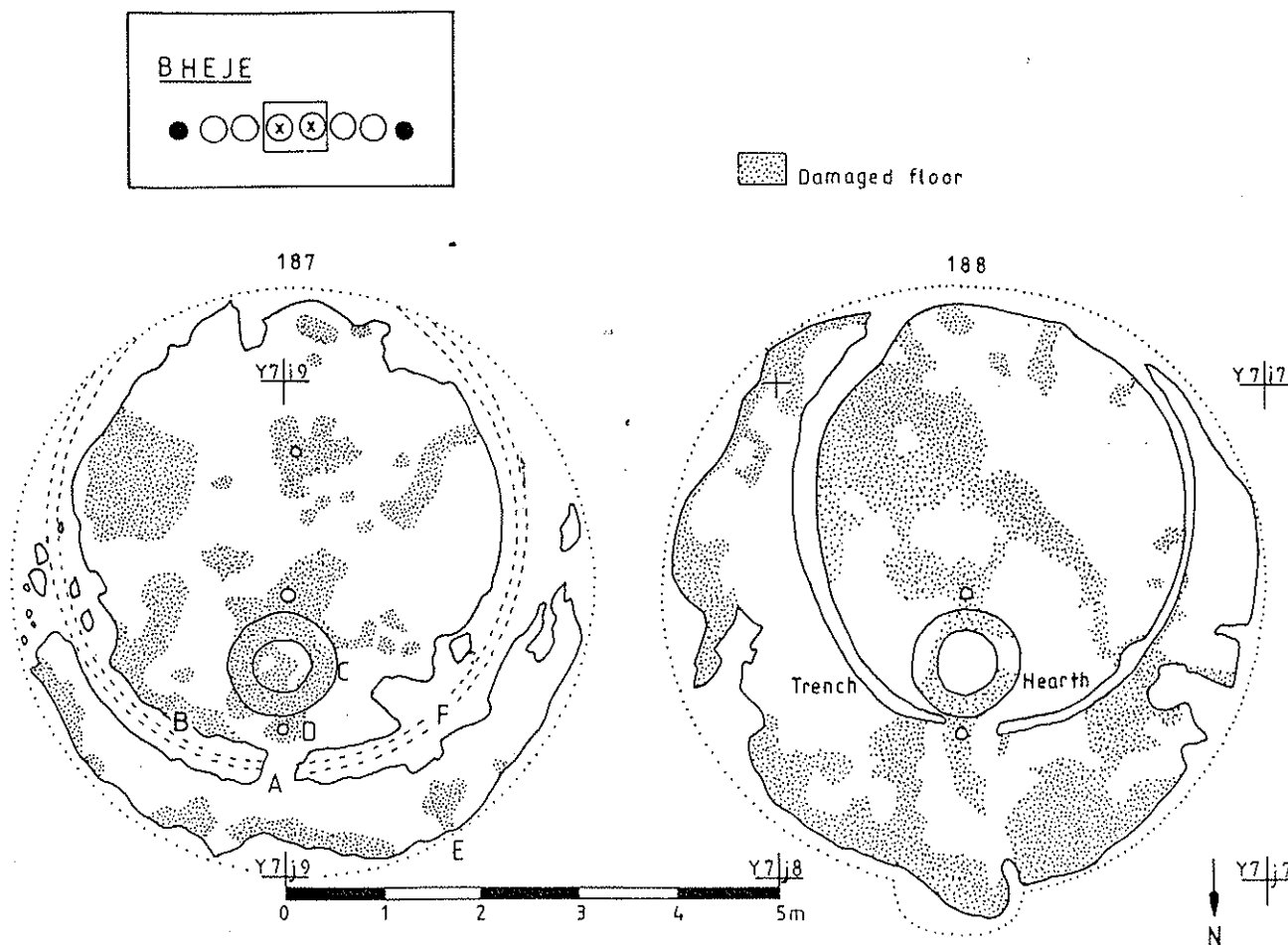


Figure 6 Recent plan of Huts 187 and 188

the screens looked like. Krige describes it as a 'wickerwork partition'. Its height and the area screened off were not mentioned. The girl is brought back, completely hidden from view and surrounded by her friends, only when the *umgonqo* is completed. It is interesting to note that the two floors under discussion here are located in the central position within the group of eight floors which form the Bheje. It can therefore be argued that, at least symbolically, they occupy the position of the great hut or *indlunkulu*.

On assuming that the trenches were for *umgonqo* screens, one notices that a relatively large area was screened off. This could be explained by the position of the hearth which falls within the screened area. The fire's warmth and light were in all likelihood required by the initiate and those who assisted her for the duration of the ceremony. One can only speculate on the function of the opening at the lower end of the trench. It was certainly not an entrance as it is too close to the hearth and blocked by the support post.

Initiates

Here too we find a lack of information. During his short stay at eMgungundlovu, Owen claims that no girls attended his lessons on account of there being none present at the settlement (Cory 1926:45). This was probably true with regard to the quarters of the warrior population where girls were prohibited from living. As far as the *umndlunkulu* was concerned, one must take into account the nature and confinement of the *isigodlo*. It would have been unlikely for the king to allow them to attend such a public gathering.

There is generally no reference to the ages of the *umndlunkulu*

girls admitted to the *isigodlo*. The most likely initiates were however the *izigqila* (maidservants). It therefore seems probable that young girls, not necessarily part of the Bheje social unit, could at certain periods have been present in the *isigodlo* at eMgungundlovu. It must be remembered that the king would have assumed the role of guardian and would have been responsible for arranging an *umgonqo* hut, should such a girl have reached puberty, much as her biological father would have done.

Conclusion

The remaining question is, why was the Bheje *umuzi* selected for initiation practices? It is clear that the Bheje women were a distinctive social grouping of particularly high status. It is also clear that the Bheje *umuzi* was a culturally distinct location — a place where the women, most of the time, had total privacy. Evidence in support of their secluded state is given by Mgidigidi (Webb & Wright 1979:91), stating that the two 'kraals' at the top of uMgungundlovu to which no-one, not even Ndlhela (chief *induna*) went, was a place where '... the umdhlunkulu girls went about naked. They did not cover themselves but simply walked about as they were'. The implication being that men were strictly prohibited in that area unless in the company of the king, as was the case with Gardiner noted above, which seems to have been on very rare occasions. The Bheje was therefore the most convenient place to seclude a girl or girls when reaching puberty.

The practice of using the upper *umuzi* as a private place for the *isigodlo* women may have introduced the later custom, recorded by James Stuart (Webb & Wright 1976:24, 45), whereby similar *imizi* were used by the wives of kings Mpande and Cetshwayo to seclude themselves when giving birth.

Acknowledgements

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Invloed van die Islam in die Maghreb

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Influence of Islam on the Maghrib. Taking the extensive research of J. Spencer Trimingham as a point of departure, the culture change that took place consequent to the Islam invasion in Africa, is discussed. The reciprocity of culture contact, the emerging new religious-social patterns, the process of assimilation and the eventual dualism that elapses in parallelism are analysed as part and parcel of the process of the radical changes that followed the conversion to Islam. A diagram is presented as a graphic analysis of the consecutive steps in the process of change. The resulting conclusion shows that Islam accomplished its goal only after three generations. The diagram also serves to demonstrate that any analysis of this kind must take into account the ethno-historical factors, and not only the bare historical facts.

Met die uitgebreide navorsing van J. Spencer Trimingham as vertrekpunt, word die kulturele verandering wat op die aankoms van die Islam in die Maghreb gevolg het, ondersoek. Die wisselwerking van kultuurkontak, die nuwe gods-dienstig-sosiale patrone wat daaruit voortspruit, die proses van assimilasië en die dualisme wat later in parallelisme verloop, word ondersoek as onderdele van die proses wat volg op die bekering tot die Islam. 'n Diagram word aangebied as 'n grafiese voorstelling om die agtereenvolgende stappe in die proses van verandering te ontleed. As resultaat van die studie word daarop gewys dat die Islam eers na drie generasies ten volle gevestig is. Die diagram dien ook as 'n aanduiding dat enige ontleding van hierdie aard, rekening moet hou met die etno-historiese faktore en nie net die historiese feite moet oorweeg nie.

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Inleiding

Die doelstelling met hierdie studie is om die ontledings wat Trimingham (1980) ten opsigte van die proses van kultuurverandering in die Maghreb maak, verder te ondersoek en dit diagrammatis voor te stel. Die invloed wat die Islam in hierdie gebied van Noord-Afrika ten opsigte van die veranderingsproses uitgeoefen het, word met behulp van die diagram stap vir stap aange-
dui en bespreek. Die diagram word ook as 'n handige ontledings-
meganisme vir etno-historiese navorsing aangebied.

Die grootste enkele blywende verandering wat ooit in die kultuur van die inwoners van Noord-Afrika teweeggebring is, het as gevolg van die besetting van die Arabiese Moslems aldaar plaasgevind. Hierdie proses van verandering het reeds in die sewende eeu na Christus in beduidende omvang begin. Daarna het dit met die verloop van die eeue in wisselende tempo soms toegeneem en

soms afgeneem, totdat die grootste gedeelte van veral die kus- en aangrensende gebiede totaal verarabiseer is. Die besetting en assimilasië wat plaasgevind het, was so blywend en ingrypend van aard dat hierdie gebied vandag internasionaal as deel van die Arabiese blok beskou word.

In hierdie artikel word die veranderingsprosesse wat plaasgevind en voortgevloei het uit die kulturaanraking tussen die inheemse en die vreemde groepe van die gebied wat as die Maghreb bekendstaan, behandel — dit wil sê die tradisionele woongebied van die Berbers. As vertrekpunt word uitgegaan van die standpunt wat Trimingham (1980:44) stel, naamlik dat daar 'n wisselwerking tussen die Islam en die betrokke Afrikakultuur plaasgevind het en dat dit gelei het tot 'n sintese wat hy die Afrika-Islamitiese kultuur noem. Hy onderskei onder andere die volgende aspekte in hierdie proses van transformasië: