

## LATE IRON AGE HUMAN RESPONSES AND CONTRIBUTION TO ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE IN THE SHASHE-LIMPOPO RIVER BASIN: NORTH EASTERN BOTSWANA

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### INTRODUCTION

The present Shashe-Limpopo basin landscape is not pristine, but is a representation of the interrelationship between the ethno and eco systems, a process or interrelationship as ancient as human antiquity itself. The present environment (soils, vegetation cover) and its spatially varied expressions is as intrinsically linked to socio-historical development as it is to natural evolution. Accordingly, the patterns that have developed over time are a consequence of this interrelationship.

In describing this process, some scholars have posited (argued) that African landscape histories are a maze of the continent's social histories (Kinahan 1999; Powell 1997; Head 1996; Guyer & Richards 1996). However, the nature and extent of ethno-ecosystem interrelationships at the Shashe-Limpopo basin is at best conjectural. As part of Botswana's contribution to the SIDNSAREC regional Human Responses and Contribution to Environmental Change project, archaeological research has been focused on the Shashe-Limpopo basin.

The objective of the study is twofold; to establish the cultural sequence in the area whilst simultaneously seeking to establish the extent and nature to which the human/environment interrelationship shaped the present environment. Chronologically, the study is focussed on the Later Iron Age (LIA), a period spanning from c AD 700 to c. 1500. The study takes its lead from an appreciation of the potential of archaeology to contribute new theoretical standpoints if culture and environment are viewed from logistic views rather than one that separates these factors in seeking to understand the past. Critical in this study is an attempt to understand this LIA within a temporal, economic (mode 0 production) and socio-cultural differentiation in the Shashe-Limpopo basin. Specifically, the study is an attempt to delineate what effects mixed farming, iron smelting and trade had on the area of research. That is, the environment normally serves as a matrix on which ways of existence engage strategies of survival, and such strategies may be governed by a particular community's worldview.

These various resource procurement strategies emanating from cultural configurations and differentiation would have had varying effects on the environment. This constitutes the bulk of what this study aims to investigate. Thus the study explores the relationship