

BOOK REVIEW

Marothodi: The Historical Archaeology of an African Capital

(Mark Anderson. (2009). Atikkam Media Publishers. Hardcover [ISBN: 978-0-9561427-1-9,]; Paperback [ISBN: 978-0-9561427-2-6,]; EBook [ISBN: 978-0-9561427-0-2,])

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Marothodi: The Historical Archaeology of an African Capital is essentially archaeological research that is based on the excavations of the Tlokwa capital that flourished in the 18th century. "Marothodi", as Dr. Mark Anderson correctly translates the SeTswana word, means "drops", directly implying, "rain drops." As a toponym, it refers to the historical capital of the BaTlokwa, one of the modern BaTswana peoples who inhabited the area, between Pilanesberg and the Great Madikwe (Groot Marico) River. That was before the 18th to 19th Century *Difaqane* or *Nfecane*, which were occasioned by a series of social and political upheavals in Southern Africa, and which were rooted in inter-ethnic disputes. Initially these instabilities were started further south, mainly from within the Zulu Kingdom, and later spread further north. The BaTlokwa were concerned by these socio-political instabilities at an earlier stage, when they came to live among the Batswana; and at a later stage when they were moved from the Marothodi. As the author correctly states, the Tlokwa are not originally Tswana but are from some Nguni groups who came to live among the BaTswana in recent centuries, possibly in the 18th century. Some of the Tlokwa remained among the Northern

Sotho and are called the Dogwa. Their constant migrations resulted in some of them settling in what has become Botswana, next to the present day capital city of Botswana, Gaborone. The city of Gaborone is actually named after a Tlokwa chief who led the Tlokwa people to Tlokweng, their ethnic settlement by the Ngotwane River. Mark Anderson has objectively reflected this history in his historical and archaeological account of an African Capital.

The book, *Marothodi – The Historical Archaeology of an African Capital*, is an extensive and thoroughly researched account on the ruins of a stone walled capital town of the BaTlokwa. The book comprises numerous illustrations (figures, tables, pictures) which illustrate and support an archaeological and historical account regarding the way of life of the BaTlokwa in the 19th century. The introduction of the book details “Tswana Towns in Context”, and this context provides the historical background for this archaeological site and of other ethnic Tswana sites, and thus links the BaTlokwa to their regional ethno-linguistic history. Importantly, the site of the town is located in an area that facilitated its defence, enhanced by the building of the stone walls. The agro-pastoral life of its inhabitants is also pertinently accounted for.

The first three chapters are historical. Chapter one provides an account on early contact with the BaTlokwa, documenting journeys into the interior of Southern Africa by European travellers, and also provides elaborate historical information on the 19th century Tswana ruins. Chapter two provides the research background of the book. Therein, one gets to appreciate the descriptive beginnings of the inhabitants of Marothodi. A discussion on the early use of Tlokwa ethnography is presented. Regional distribution of site types and their identities are presented, discussed and profiled according to cognitive models, details, and variability within a historical context. This historical context takes focus in chapter three which links BaTlokwa regionally, evaluating their oral history, traditions and social activities from the 18th century. A Tlokwa territory is also defined in this chapter.

Purely archaeological subject matter is discussed in chapter four, and onward. This chapter makes an interesting biophysical discussion which looks into topography, climate, geology, soils, vegetation, and metallurgy technology of the BaTlokwa, and also compares other Tswana capitals within a premium biophysical landscape. Chapter five provides an archaeological context for examining the macro and micro settlement structures, and the metallurgical evidence found around Marothodi. Chapter six focuses on the presentation of the royal residences – the *kgosing* - their spatial organisation, as well as comparisons with that of the Molokwane. Detailed discussion is also provided for the excavations at the ‘primary’ *kgosing* (chief’s residence). The spatial organisation of the ‘secondary’ *kgosing* is also discussed, and comparisons are made with the Kaditshwene. The discussions demonstrate the importance in the location of the *kgosing* spatial organisation, and how this forms the nucleus of the settlement. Chapter seven looks at the copper specialists. The spatial organisation of the settlement unit, and the excavations done thereon lead to a very interesting discussion on the nature of this category of trade, and the techniques employed by these artisans who worked on copper smelting. Chapter eight deals the hearth and home – the spatial organisation of this settlement unit and the discussions of what the excavations reveal. Chapter nine deals with masters of iron. This chapter opens a very important discussion regarding an Age of iron among the Tswana Sotho-Tswana Communities in particular and

Southern African in general. The identification of iron ore working sites and the excavation of the settlement unit lead to the identification of iron smelting precincts, and indeed the demonstration of metallurgical technology and a thriving metallurgical industry. The discussion reveals that these artisans were employed in the working of the iron ore.

The last two chapters, being ten and eleven, deal with the organisation of metal production and the origins, prosperity and prospects of Marothodi respectively. Under the organisation of metal production, the author discusses the technology of metal production and the spatiality of metal production at Marothodi. Under the origins, prosperity and prospects, the author presents what he terms the archaeology of identity. This is followed by a discussion on production and trade, carried forward from this historical settlement of the BaTlokwa. In the conclusion of chapter eleven, the author proposes an inter-disciplinary approach to the study of the site and he further suggests directions for future research.

The historical and archaeological account of Marothodi makes it an interesting site for African archaeological work, and a pioneering research study on African history. The book is skilfully written and systematically presented, and allows for a better understanding of the subject matter under investigation. The findings of the excavations show that the Marothodi community evinced industriousness, and possessed impressive skills and techniques to work metal ore, and sustain the inhabitants with an agro-pastoral production. The author adeptly details these activities in a circumspect, historical narrative style that makes the book a pleasant read for all. Furthermore, the technical analysis that the author makes regarding every item or structure of the relics is profound, and produces precious historical information in every chapter. I am persuaded to state that henceforth, all accounts of African history should, as much and where possible, be accompanied by supportive evidence, in manner similar to how Mark Anderson presented his research. Archaeology alone gives a physical dimension of relics; and history (oral and documented) gives a social dimension. However when crafted together, they present a more objective account of a human life. This is the greatest achievement of this book by Dr. Mark Anderson. It is factual as it is objective. It is artistically interesting as a result of its multi-disciplinary approach to all the archaeological, geological, geographical, oral, and documented evidence gleaned from the study of the Marothodi site, as it was inhabited by BaTlokwa in the 18th and 19th centuries. The articulation of these two synergic disciplines, archaeology and history, brings the BaTlokwa to life, from two centuries ago, invoking a vivid experience associated with anthropological accounts. This is what distinguishes the presentation of this book from its precursors. By creating different contexts and backgrounds, and detailing the activities and technologies of the BaTlokwa, Dr. Mark Anderson brings yet another dimension to the benefits employing multi-disciplinary approaches to the study of Ancient African, ethnic communities.

This book, *Marothodi: The Historical Archaeology of an African Capital* is a valuable contribution to Southern African history through archaeological evidence. It is archaeological research that has been associated with historical sites such as Mapungubwe and the Great Zimbabwe Ruins, and which ultimately highlights the extensive history of African societies. It is also archaeological evidence that encourages African historical research to go beyond the boundaries of oral tradition and superficial, travellers' documentation. Reliance on hard archaeological facts has therefore enriched African history and has granted it the benefit of

being based on sound historical methodology, and interpretation of facts. The study on Marothodi, a BaTlokwa ancient capital, is thus a consequential contribution toward the linkages and interpretations of Southern African history and the archaeological findings in this book. What is also evident is the book's extensive bibliography and illustrations, and indeed the application of advanced techniques in geology and archaeology. These factors make this book a well-researched publication. It is informative and resourceful. It will provide techniques and theoretical approaches regarding archaeology and history for many researchers in the field.

The BaTlokwa, a peaceful, industrious, and metallurgical community, just like most societies of Southern African during that Age, made great contributions, and this archaeological and historical account pertinently bears testimony to the ingenuity of Africans before European colonialism. The remnants of the BaTlokwa people may be currently much smaller in number compared to their other ethnic Sotho-Tswana neighbours, but this publication puts them in a historical pedestal which makes their account as important regarding the understanding of the Sotho-Tswana people of Southern Africa, before and after the onset of colonialism. In this regard, it is not just the BaTlokwa, but all their neighbours in Southern Africa that are brought into prominence. Henceforth, African people's history should not be subordinated to other continents', people history. Africa has its own monuments to remind historians that its people are as ancient, and their past life being as productive and inventive as any society in the world.

The book, *Marothodi: The Historical Archaeology of an African Capital*, is methodically written, without any jargonry of the profession. It is suitable for both archaeology students and field archaeologists. It is also a must read for historians and social-anthropologists. By linking the past of the BaTlokwa to their present, it pertinently breathes life and factuality to African history and the people this history deals with. The book also compels archaeologists to undertake similar excavations for other ethnic groups.