

In 1932, when Ernst and Jerry van Graan stumbled upon ancient artefacts on the summit of an unnamed hill in the far-flung northern reaches of what was once the old Transvaal, they had no idea that an act of placing a few fragments of the finds into a small box and sending it to the University of Pretoria would lead to the formation of one of the greatest archaeological collections in southern Africa. The account of this discovery, reported to Prof. Leo Fouché in 1933, was the beginning of archaeological research by the University of Pretoria and so, ultimately, the foundation of the Mapungubwe collection. Today the collection under the management of the Mapungubwe Museum is renowned for its significant gold artefacts, among them the famous gold rhinoceros, beautifully crafted low-fired ceramic vessels, glass trade beads, bone implements and numerous other objects made from a variety of raw materials such as ivory and shell. The history of the collection is by no means simple. It is fragmentary and complicated although it reveals a fascinating insight into decisions made by the University, as well as conservation efforts and the curatorial management of this vast collection.

# SERMONS IN STONES, POETRY IN POTSHERDS'\*

The history of the Mapungubwe collection at the University of Pretoria

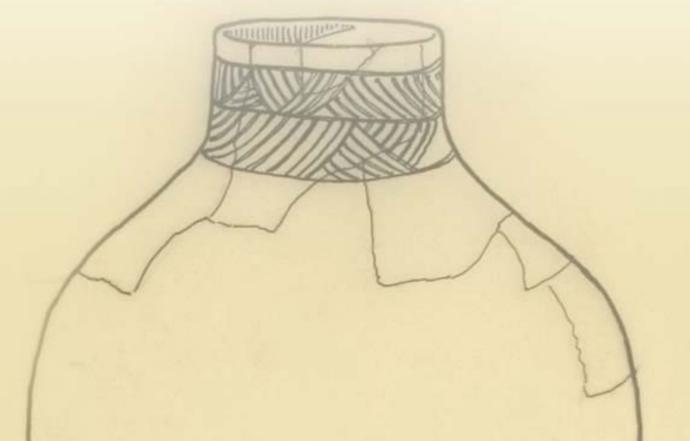
Sian Tiley-Nel

\* 'The Rissik Bowl' poem in Museum archive, author unknown 1933.

# THE RISSIK BOWL 'Sermons in stones, poetry in potsherds'

When Job of old was down and out, Upon a dunghill, in his clout, A potsherd was his joy and pride: It comforted his itching hide. The humble potsherd soothed the sage, And found a place on History's page. Another potsherd, in another clime, Has proved the clue from which to trace And rescue from the womb of Time The history of a long lost race Thus Ulrich's sherd, -a humble bit of pottery, -Immortalizes him in Fame's strange lottery! Zimbabwe long had ruled the roost In Bantu Archaeology; And thousands did her wonders Boost: 'In metals, in chronology, In art, ceramics and what not, -Zimbabwe always scoops the pot!' But, lo! On Mapungubwe's rocky steeps A longlegged hunter snoops and creeps. He makes a grab; he gives a yell: "I've got Zimbabwe knocked to H...! Look what I've found! See what I've got!' It was a little bit of pot! And, - sure enough, - (Though passing strange The way the Fates their web arrange!), Zimbabwe's fallen, - in disgrace; M'pungubwe now claims pride of place, In age, ceramics, art - what not, Since Ulrich snooped that bit of pot!

# Original poem by author unknown 1933.



### Introduction

Pottery was once described by Gertrude Caton-Thompson (1931) an English archaeologist who excavated on the African continent as 'that loyal friend, alone tells a straightforward tale, though one not devoid of a complexity of its own'. She also claimed that archaeology was about discovery, and that there was nothing more rewarding to an archaeologist than finding what seems to be an insignificant fragment of the past and then sharing that discovery with humanity. The discovery on Mapungubwe Hill in 1933 of masses of pottery and the gold rhinoceros, among a diversity of other artefacts, shares a similar view. The excavation journey of the University of Pretoria led subsequently to the accumulation of over 56 000 artefacts, mostly fragmentary, which constituted a vast archaeological collection. Its mere size makes it one of the foremost museum collections for use in comparative studies and Iron Age archaeological research. Today only a fraction of the Mapungubwe collection is on public display in the Mapungubwe Museum, largely due to the fact that most of the material is incomplete. The masses of excavated material are retained for research purposes and once in a while an opportunity presents itself for more fragments to be pieced together, restoring what were once just a few potsherds.

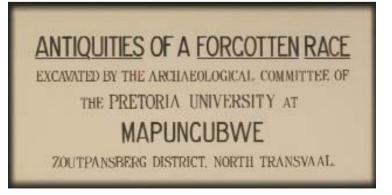
It appears that museum visitors are more often attracted to conventional exhibits in museums rather than being interested in the objects on display or in the minds of the people who created them. The Mapungubwe collection is no different. It is the beauty of the object, intentionally created by human hands, which makes it the centre of attraction. Seemingly, few people are interested in the creators of the objects and even fewer are interested in mere fragments. In managing such a large archaeological collection over decades, the University has had to draw on considerable resources and knowledge to make the most of this significant collection. Management of the collection and the processes of display comprise far more than the mere beauty of the objects, research of material

Archive photographs in 1936 of Mapungubwe and K2 ceramics.

culture, or even the protective storage of archaeological material. It is about sustainable heritage management, the development of guidelines for the management and conservation of archaeological collections, and caring for neglected collections according to international standards (cf. Bawaya 2007; Childs 1995; Marquardt et al. 1982). The ultimate objective is about retaining the future research potential of the Mapungubwe collection for generations to come

It is well known that the story of the Mapungubwe collection has captured the imagination of the public from the first day of its discovery, and the numerous media reports have since attested to the natural human attraction to ancient objects rather than to the early inhabitants of Mapungubwe. The Mapungubwe collection is no ordinary archaeological collection; it is unique, rare and irreplaceable, and finally the humble potsherd, made by some distant, unknown individual has found its place on the pages of archaeological research. Investigations into the history of the Mapungubwe collection are fragmentary and complicated, beginning with the unpublished archival sources where valuable information is hidden in the depths of hundreds of documents, and only after sifting, sorting and gathering the threads of evidence some light can be shed on the collection and its past.

Following the first decisions of the University of Pretoria Archaeological Committee and financial resources made available by an Excavation Fund, research thrived for the first eight years through several seasons of accumulating excavated material from the major sites of Mapungubwe Hill and K2. A brief account of the looting by unknown persons that took place at Mapungubwe in the early years since its rediscovery places the collection into the same situation as many archaeological sites globally who have suffered a similar fate. It is common knowledge that parts of what should have been in the Museum collection, might still be in the hands of private dealers, other individuals or unscrupulous researchers. Little is known or published about the University's conservation efforts, storage of objects, public exhibitions and the role of the Transvaal Museum, which provide a fascinating insight into the beginnings of the Mapungubwe collection.



An exhibition notice from the 1930s.

### The Archaeological Committee and early financial support

On 6 February 1933 Prof. Leo Fouché received from one of his former students, J.C.O. van Graan, a letter with the news of the discovery of gold on Mapungubwe Hill and a package containing several samples of the gold (UP/AGL/D/2). The gold samples immediately attracted attention for their scientific interest and were sent for examination and analyses to the Royal Mint in Pretoria while the University in the meanwhile negotiated for research rights and legal possession of the recovered artefacts with the owner of the land. The first Mapungubwe gold objects were officially examined on 13 February 1933 by the Deputy Master, Dr Roger Pearson, and consisted of a spiral anklet, a fluted and concave fragment of gold and several gold beads all averaging 92% fine gold. The gold samples were priced at the time according to the exchange value of gold in London at approximately £116.12 (UP/AGL/D/7 & D/8).

On 28 February 1933 the University took further action by signing a Notarial Deed of Agreement with the owner of the farm Greefswald No.615, Mr Ernst Ewen Collins of Houghton, Johannesburg (UP/AGL/D/26), offering 10 shillings per morgen for Greefswald that consisted of 2923 morgen. This agreement ceded all rights to the University of Pretoria to investigate, explore and excavate on Greefswald for scientific purposes. By this time, the University had also taken additional measures to protect Mapungubwe by ceasing any prospecting and mining activity by the Transvaal Exploration, Land & Minerals Company (Ltd) who had mineral rights on Greefswald. The discovery of Mapungubwe, received favourably by the press, also attracted the attention of the government. The Prime Minister, General J.B.M Hertzog, after personally viewing the collection, declared the undertaking 'a matter of national importance' (Fouché 1937:6). Unfortunately there was a delay in action from government due to elections and it was only several

Right: The gold artefacts featured in Libertas magazine 1946.

Below: Burial on Mapungubwe Hill exposing a wealth of funerary ornaments.

months later that the University could receive official funding and support research for Mapungubwe. The foresight of the government at the time was remarkable in that, while the University secured a treasure for the nation, a national treasure was considered to also be a national responsibility and so the government contributed substantially, which promised a notable enrichment of the country's historical heritage. Contributions from the public were also welcomed, inviting private individuals to contribute to costs, and any subscriptions would be known as the 'University of Pretoria Excavation Fund' (UP/AGL/D/38). Fortunately, in June 1933, the new government purchased *Greefswald* thereby allowing the University of Pretoria research and excavation rights there. Furthermore, government agreed to provide funds for research on the basis of £2 for every £1 raised by the University, with a minimum contribution of £500 per year (Fouché 1937: 6).



During these early years, substantial amounts of money were spent by the University of Pretoria Excavation Fund for work at Mapungubwe. The annual budget submitted by Fouché to the University Council in 1933 was £1109.15, and was allocated to travel, car hire, fuel, tents, equipment, telegrams, labour, firewood, maps and food, and also included legal costs and payments to the Mint in Pretoria (UP/AGL/D/155). In 1933 the insurance value of the Mapungubwe collection reached £700, based on appraisals of the gold by the Pretoria Mint. The University undertook to pay one half of the metallic value to the five discoverers who each received £239 for 69.16 ounces of gold. The owner of the land, Ernest Collins, received only £203 for his share of the gold. After government support was secured, including supplementary financial

#1109.15, and was allocated to ment, telegrams, labour, firewood, delegal costs and payments to the In 1933 the insurance value of the #2700, based on appraisals of the iversity undertook to pay one half scoverers who each received £239 where of the land, Ernest Collins, e of the gold. After government ding supplementary financial in terms of its constitution, the Archaeological Committee was magnanimously supported by government, the Municipality of Pretoria and a handful of donors. The Archaeological Committee consisted of a Chairman (A.P. Brugman), the Rector (vacant), three members chosen by Council (L. Fouché, Sir T. Truter and D.E. Malan), members nominated by the Department of Internal Affairs, representatives of the public (C. Maggs and J. de V. Roos) and government (C. van Riet Lowe and J.H de Wet), and included an assessor (N J. van Warmelo).

In terms of its constitution, the Archaeological Committee were tasked with the following: to advise the University Council about excavations and progress; to be responsible for all funds; to compile an inventory of the finds; submit annual reports to Council; to compile a budget and statements of income and expenditure; Fouché to be in charge of scientific research and publications; the Rector, on the advice of the Committee, would determine the storage and conservation needs of the finds (UP/AGL/D/ 406).

contributions from the Department of the Interior and private

individuals, the Minister, J. H. Hofmeyer, constituted the

Archaeological Committee of the University of Pretoria on 16 March

With the establishment of the Archaeological Committee, more funds became available for the 1934 financial year with expenses totalling £1226.10, and in 1935 almost doubled to £2736.8 (UP/AGL/D/ 222). In 1936 Mapungubwe's annual costs reached £1138.10 and increased to £1445.19 in 1937-1938 (UP/AGL/D/973). During these years grants of about £800 to £1000 were provided by the government, while the City Council of Pretoria contributed £300 per year. Generous contributions to the University of Pretoria Excavation Fund were also made by private individuals such as J. de V. Roos, Charles Maggs, F.R. Paver and others. Mapungubwe Volume I by Leo Fouché (1937) cost £737 for a print run of 750 copies then, with one copy priced at a little over £2.10. Today this volume is considered as an object of Africana and a collector's item that could fetch around R2500 per copy. (Sotheby 2008:10). Together with the first newspaper article, 'Discovery of gold ornaments: claimed by Pretoria University' in the Rand Daily Mail on 11 March 1933 (UP/AGL/D/61), and the first publication on Mapungubwe by Fouché (1937), the excavations were the first slow beginnings of a Mapungubwe collection. It is well known that the collection held at the University of Pretoria today is only a fraction of what still remains buried for future archaeologists to uncover and, since Mapungubwe was first discovered by F. B. Lotrie in the late 1800s, it is probable that the archaeological sites lay exposed to looters, plunderers, prospectors and treasure-seekers for all that time before the discovery in 1932.

# **Early looting at Mapungubwe**

The illegal looting of archaeological sites by treasure hunters is a world-wide issue, if not by unscrupulous individuals, then by collectors ready to sell artefacts for a profit. Great Zimbabwe suffered a far worse fate as a result of looting so that almost none of its gold exits anymore today. Although Mapungubwe was more fortunate in this sense, it was nevertheless not wholly free from looting, and it is reported that some objects were plundered from

ORNAMENTS
CLAIMED BY PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY

From Our Own Correspondent
Louis Trichardt, Priday.

Authorities of the University of Pretoria, who have been excavating in the Louis Trichardt district, have recovered most of the ornaments buried there. Many of the articles are in small pieces and reconstruction will be difficult and even impossible in some cases. The Pretoria representative of the "Rand Delly Mail" learns that the value of the metal has been exaggerated.

The University of Pretoria does not think that any of the articles, which were on the property, are being deliberately withheld, but a warning is issued that as all discoveries are the sole property of the University, selling any of the articles or even harbouring any, may incur serious penalties.

may incur serious penalties.

As already stated in the "Rand Daily Mail." the articles recovered and at present being examined, cover a wide field. Many gold beads have been found in addition to other gold ornaments as well as interesting pots and bangles. In some cases the gold is very refined, even purer than gold refined at properly equipped refineries.

Rand Daily Mail 11 March 1933.



Mapungubwe before the University intervened in 1933. Many of these incidents may be rumours or conjecture. However, a few surviving archival documents provide glimpses of illegal removal of finds from Mapungubwe Hill. The existing Mapungubwe archives contain fascinating testimony to the first objects ever recovered from the Mapungubwe soil, unfortunately by treasure seekers or prospectors and at a time before the Van Graans came onto the scene.

In May 1928 a prospecting party consisting of Baron von Leesen, an electrical supplier at Winchester House in Johannesburg, A. Parpendorf from the Van Ryn Deep Mine and Barend Lottering, a farmer at Kalkbank, are recorded in a sworn affidavit to have removed several pots, particularly a smallish sized pot of exquisite workmanship, pottery and iron fragments, including some agate stones from the summit. 'On top we found what one of the natives called 'the chief's grave'. It had four or five stones of about 2ft 6 inches to 3ft in length or even longer, which were square stones in shape and possibly polished, the sides of the stones were about 4 to 3 inches thick. I pulled out one of these stones which was buried horizontally in the ground, which was showing about 2ft out of the ground and about one foot 6 inches was still buried in the ground. I lifted the stone out and left it there. The other stones were standing about 2ft 6 inches out of the ground. This grave was not disturbed any further by us' (UP/AGL/D/ 34).

The German anthropologist, Leo Frobenius (1931), was also reported to have been on Mapungubwe during a 1929 expedition to the Limpopo to search for ancient metals (Miller 1992). However, there is no evidence to suggest Frobenius was ever near Mapungubwe Hill even though Fouché (1937:4) states that there were disturbances visible on Mapungubwe Hill, and it only 'may' have been Frobenius. The archival evidence however suggests that it was perhaps the diggings of the Von Leesen and Parpendorf prospecting party who first disturbed the grave area and some

An option is bereby given by K.K. collins was, of lower house shann, dohannessury, in his depending as water of the fare preservall to laber, Southeasherg, to the University of Pretorial herin represents by in the Poucha, Professor of History of the said University, for the period of months from the date harder to investigate the old graves and remains on the cases's said farm with a view to the purchase of themret covering the said graves and remains not exceeding moryed, to be pointed out to the owner by the said University for the agent of pounds, to be read in cash against transfer. The said option may be exercised by the University within the tire limit hereby given by registered latter adjressed to the owner educessed scand 151t, sagt atmost. Lower boughton Johannesburg, on exercising the option the University shall have tree purchases surveyed out by a surveyor and transfer taken of the said ground. All survey costs and transfer taken of the said ground. All survey costs and transfer costs shall be borne by the university.

From the date of exercising the option all remains of scientific or other interest found or coming from the university of the option at any time shall belong to the university shall also have the right to purchase or outsin may lines by natives or others.

Inner schahten, Johannesburg, Suth February 1933.

Legal option given to Mr £. Collins for the University to investigate his farm *Greefswald* (UP/AGL/D/15).

valuable objects may have been removed since there was no other evidence of digging or other damage. In February 1933, soon after the discovery was reported to the University, there were accusations by the Van Graans directed at the Van der Walts of illegally selling gold in Musina, and news was spreading fast about the discovery of gold (UP/AGL/D/22). The University instituted a formal investigation and Hendrik van der Walt was accused of having a gold necklace in his possession which he claimed was a family heirloom that had been in the family for 100 years. Unfortunately no criminal case could be brought against him as the gold law constituted the possession of only unwrought gold to be a criminal offence and, since the gold necklace was fashioned, the case was dropped. There is also evidence to suggest that some of the casual labourers, including Van Tonder who was employed by the University, were accused of stealing a gold ring or a tin of gold beads from the Hill and attempted to sell them in Musina. The case was reported to the police but nothing came of it (UP/AGL/D/578).

### Origins of the collection

The origins of the Mapungubwe collection are based primarily on the archaeological excavations undertaken by the University of Pretoria at the sites of Mapungubwe and surrounding areas, from the preliminary work done in March and June of 1933 to the first official field expedition undertaken in May 1934 (Fouché 1937). The University of Pretoria Archaeological Committee, consisting of several influential people, were charged with overseeing the archaeological finds and objects recovered from these first excavations (UP/AGL/D/406). First defined in 1933 as a 'treasure trove' according to Roman Dutch Law, the archaeological finds discovered by the party of five namely Ernst van Graan, Jerry van Graan, Martinus Venter, David Jacobus du Plessis and Hendrik van der Walt, and thereafter further excavated by the University of Pretoria, technically constitute the first beginnings of the Mapungubwe collection. The University sought legal advice from

Adams & Adams Attorneys (UP/AGL/D/30) on the collection, opening the question of criminal liability for excavating ancient graves and questioning the ownership of the finds, whether accidentally or deliberately. Advocates J.M. Murray, A.A. Roberts and C. Niemeyer advised that the Mapungubwe collection did fall within the legal definition of a 'treasure trove' but did not fall under the definition of the Bushman Relics Act No 22 of 1911, since this only dealt with the removal of relics from the Union itself. As such, the opening or excavation of ancient graves or any other types of grave would thus not constitute a criminal offence.

It was recommended that the University obtain permission from the Administrator of the Transvaal and also rely on the legal contract that was signed by the land owner and Adams & Adams in order to exercise the benefits of ownership (UP/AGL/D/30).

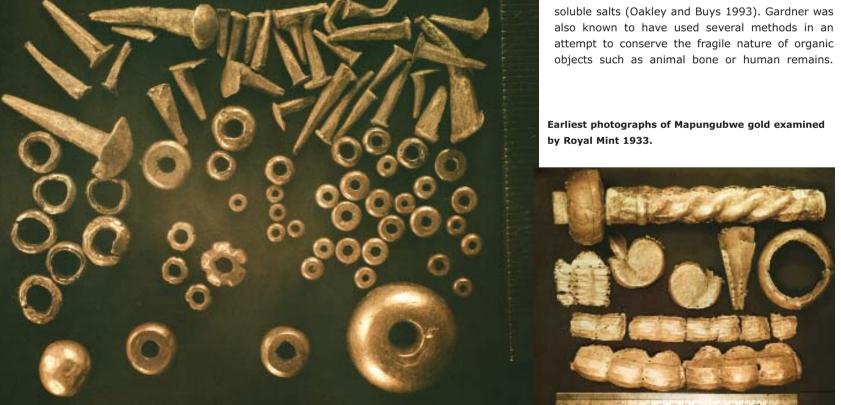
Fortunately the discoverers and land owner were prepared to enter into a reasonable agreement with the University, entitling them each to half the value of the finds in exchange for rights for the University to legally take over ownership of the collection and to keep the property for archaeological and scientific investigation. The objects from Mapungubwe Hill that were handed over by the discoverers to the University included three animal figurines: a gold rhinoceros, a gold buffalo and fragments of another animal torso, and also five gold bangles, the gold bowl, gold nails, decorative gold plating, large quantities of glass beads, many iron and copper bangles and three earthenware ceramic vessels (UP/AGL/D/58/2). Fouché (1937:10) admits that, 'the making of a collection of objects is merely a matter of vigorous digging and sifting ... the objects retrieved under such conditions become mere curios and it was not the turning over of the maximum amount of material in order to amass a large collection'. Instead, the main objective was rather to determine what evidence could be sought in answering questions about the discovery of such material, the sifting of such evidence to establish any cultural contacts and whether the collection of objects and fragments might indicate who once lived there.

# Early conservation and protection efforts

In relation to the great quantity of material, consisting predominantly of potsherds and animal bone fragments, the complete objects found were comparatively few in number. Although

conservation was not considered a priority in the earlier excavations, the care and conservation of artefacts recovered from Mapungubwe and K2 did exist when Fouché called upon a number of specialists to examine the material (Beck 1937; Schofield 1937; Stanley 1937; Pole-Evans 1937; Weber 1937). From the first finds Fouché made enquiries from G. H. Stanley about the best and most appropriate preservation methods for the masses of corroding iron bangles that were found mainly in the grave area. The very fragile iron bangles were subjected to drying treatments in steam ovens at the Chemistry Department of the University of the Witwatersrand, and afterwards submerged in melted paraffin wax at a temperature slightly above melting point. After soaking and allowing the surplus wax to drain off, the remaining wax was removed from the iron with solvents (UP/AGL/D/67). The first gold objects were examined by Roger Pearson from the South African Mint on 13 February 1933; they were subjected to analysis for a period of a month where the gold was 'washed and cleaned' (UP/AGL/D/86) and the organic fibres within the gold anklets were frayed in caustic alkali (Pearson 1937:116). Deductions were made on the gold content, composition and methods of manufacture for the gold beads and anklets. It is also presumed that Pearson was the first to attempt to reconstruct the gold fragments of the gold rhino although there is neither supportive evidence nor any treatment reports available to shed light on the type of treatment. More than 250 ceramic vessels are also known to have been reconstructed by John Schofield and later by Van Tonder, Gardner's assistant, using plaster of Paris. Plaster of

Paris, or powdered gypsum, was moistened and then allowed to harden. In the case of ceramics it was used for mould-making or gap filling for missing parts of the ceramic. This technique however, is known to contaminate the ceramic substrate with soluble salts (Oakley and Buys 1993). Gardner was also known to have used several methods in an attempt to conserve the fragile nature of organic objects such as animal bone or human remains.



Shellac or gelatine was applied to many bones in situ, probably as a method of stabilization (UP/AGL/D1147& D/1001/1). In a similar fashion, Van Tonder would inject the skeletons with a gelatine solution to keep the fragmentary human remains from crumbling, and by carving out the soil around and beneath the skeleton 'as cautiously as a surgeon', he ran plaster of Paris below the human remains to form a support bed, so as to safely lift the skeleton (UP/AGL/D1114).

# Early recording procedures of objects in the collection

From 1934-1940 objects recovered from excavations or collected from the surface were temporarily stored in small containers such as match, cigarette or rifle cartridge boxes. These boxes were clearly labelled to create a lasting record of excavation matched to a compiled inventory. The provenance of all archaeological finds was recorded according to an extensive grid system, so that every object excavated would have an X, Y and Z coordinate. Many objects and ceramics in the collection are marked M for Mapungubwe, B2 S3, block 2 section 3 and A36.R30.D20. Expressed as a whole, the letters ARD represent the coordinates and thus the provenance of each object. The letter 'A' represents the distance along each section from left to right; 'R' represents the distance from the left edge of the trench towards the right; 'D' represents the depth from the surface. By this method of recording, according to a simple formula, the exact position of any object relative to its position in a section of the excavation can easily be verified (Gardner 1963:3). Therefore, when curating material from the earlier excavations, museum archaeologists can still link many objects in the collection to the original inventories. The extensive photographic archive of over 643 photographs from the earlier years attest to the scope of the photographic recording of the excavations and collection from 1933.



FLATS IN MAPUNGUBWE PEAKLER AND CHEA CLARCE NE 45 The street of 12 POLITED POL REALES 14 CARRESTTA AND 100 GURAG BUT COMPLEX T 82. 83. Z. SCALE: NA 10e 64 51

Ceramic vessel shapes illustrated by John Schofield.

Some of the first photographs of the Mapungubwe collection were taken by Neville Jones on glass negative plates, of which 153 glass negatives are still intact. Lacking not only in staff and equipment, but also a professional photographer still proved to be a severe handicap in recording excavated objects. The few photographs from the early excavations were taken with an old camera, and at times films were difficult to obtain. Gardner published '...all photographs, good, bad and indifferent, in the hope that something may be gained even from the very worst of them'. Objects were recorded, drawn to scale in field notebooks, and some inventories were fastidiously maintained and attached to regular field reports which were submitted almost monthly to the Archaeological Committee. Discussions and observations about the new finds and any interesting objects were also made in weekly reports, and the media thrived on new finds and the results of excavations (UP/AGL/D/398). The collected material from the excavations was stored in a shed in the campsite at the southern foot of Mapungubwe; larger ceramics were packed by casual labour into cardboard boxes with lids before they were sent by rail from Musina back to Pretoria (UP/AGL/D 1276).

The collection was handled reasonably well despite adverse conditions such as the lack of archaeologists and professional training in managing archaeological collections.

All excavations and the recovery of any archaeological material were controlled by the issuance of legal permits by the Commission for the Preservation of Natural and Historical Monuments (1934). The first attempt to protect any form of archaeological heritage in South Africa was the Bushmen Relics Protection Act 22 of 1911, then later the National and Historical Monuments Act 6 of 1923, followed by the more inclusive Natural and Historical Monuments, Relics and Antiques Act 4 of 1934, which then culminated in the National Monuments Act 28 of 1969. The National Monuments Council then became the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) who is mandated by the National Heritage Resources Act 25 of 1999. This is currently the central legislation regulating the management of heritage resources, among them the Mapungubwe collection. Kotze and Van Rensburg (2003) remain cautious of the current legislation's ability to protect heritage resources and state that the Act is not exempt from criticism, and question whether sufficient financial and human (own emphasis) resources are able to lend adequate protection. SAHRA's responsibilities still remain doubtful, as they frequently demonstrate their inability and capacity to effectively manage South Africa's heritage resources (South African Heritage Resources Agency Annual Report 2008:46).

## The Transvaal Museum as acting custodian

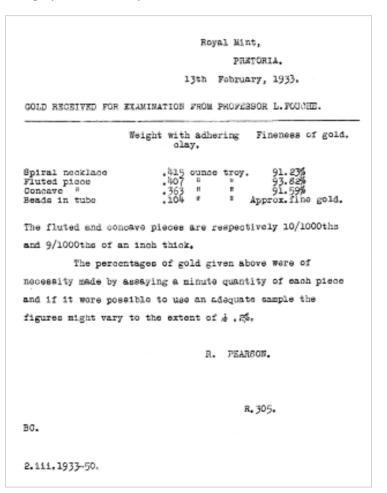
At the onset of the first excavations at Mapungubwe the University of Pretoria, as a growing institution did not have sufficient space to store any archaeological collections resulting from field excavations at Mapungubwe and K2, and thus called upon the Transvaal Museum to temporarily store collections on their behalf. The University of Pretoria was never solely responsible for the human remains and were largely guided by the Department of Anatomy at the University of the Witwatersrand Medical School who also stored most of the human remains temporarily in cardboard boxes. Most of the gold collection was safely stored at the Royal Mint in Pretoria, while some of the gold was kept in the University of Pretoria's safe. On 20 October 1933 the University entered into an agreement with the



The Old Museum in Boom Street Pretoria where the Mapungubwe collection was temporarily stored (Grobler 2005).

Transvaal Museum to collaborate on a collection loan and a facility to provide accommodation, both storage and exhibition space, for the Mapungubwe collection. The Museum did not accept responsibility for theft or fire however, but promised to take reasonable precautions to ensure the safety of the collection (Transvaal Museum Board of Trustees minutes of the meeting 28 August 1933).

The University made efforts to assist the Transvaal Museum in managing the collection and in 1937 allocated £30 to £40 for wooden shelves for the collection, then housed at the Old Museum in Boom Street. Here Dr W.T.H. Beukes was temporarily placed in charge of the Mapungubwe collection in November 1937 (UP/AGL/D/923), and assumed the proper storage and sorting of the material which arrived by rail from Musina. Gardner however, continually complained that the smaller objects from Mapungubwe and K2 in storage at the 'Old Museum' in Bloed Street were in constant disarray, and that 'there had been no attempt to put the finds in any sort of order and everything was mixed up together higgledy-piggledy' (UP/AGL/D/1370). He recommended to Van Riet Lowe that his assistant, Pieter van Tonder, help with managing the collection. By 1940 the Archaeological Committee had tasked Van Tonder to be officially responsible for the Mapungubwe collection in storage (UP/AGL/D/ 956).



Report from Royal Mint on the first analysis of the gold on 13 February 1933 (UP/AGL/D/7).



His duties were the unpacking of the collection from larger containers into smaller cardboard boxes, to assist in the selection of objects for exhibitions, packing shelves and creating a catalogue system from Gardner's field inventories. Van Tonder managed the stored collection and classified the objects according to excavation data, sorting objects from the top of the shelves to the bottom, as one would excavate. Regrettably, the Van Tonder inventories of the grave excavations and other inventories from storage could not be located or have since gone missing. Van Tonder served as Gardner's dedicated field assistant from 1935 to 1940, 'although quite untrained as an archaeologist and having had a very superficial education, he was one of the most enthusiastic and most versatile men...a first rate mechanic and a crack shot, he could be relied upon in almost all circumstances'. Gardner (1963) was worried when Van Tonder was called up for military service and referred to him as the 'walking encyclopaedia of the collection that had to be pumped dry, before he slips through our fingers' (UP/AGL/D/1271). Van Tonder was also required to provide monthly reports to Van Riet Lowe at the time, detailing the inventory of finds, reporting on the excavations he performed, detailing all the burials (which were almost singlehandedly excavated by Van Tonder) and to keep inventories of camp equipment. Not much is known about Van Tonder, but he was certainly a key person at Mapungubwe, and one of the forgotten pioneers, who reportedly drowned under mysterious circumstances in the Limpopo River at a very young age.

Probably the most serious complication of World War II with regard to Mapungubwe was the complete cessation of the Archaeological Committee by 1946, as some were being released from military duties and many of the leading spirits of the Archaeological Committee had dispersed as a result (UP/AGL/D/2059). Thus the original impetus was lost, no research funds were available and for

Van Tonder and unnamed labourers with the sifting machine nicknamed "the baby".



several years the Mapungubwe collection faded away into storage. It remained in storage at the Transvaal Museum along with the Museum's own growing archaeological, ethnographical and historical collections. The details are unclear, but the Mapungubwe collection was moved from storage several times, from Boom Street (where the Pretoria Zoological Gardens are situated today) to the present Transvaal Museum in Paul Kruger Street, among other places. The loan of the Mapungubwe collection was considered by the Transvaal Museum to be one of the most important loans of the Museum (Grobler 2005:270). For eighteen years the Museum safely stored and temporarily exhibited the collection as a means of bringing more public attention to Mapungubwe (Grobler 2005:377).

## **Anthropologists managing Mapungubwe**

When the Mapungubwe collection was finally returned from the Transvaal Museum to the University of Pretoria on 16 October 1952, Prof. P. J. Coertze, Head of the Department of Anthropology, initiated renewed research at Mapungubwe, taking responsibility for the collection once again on behalf of the University of Pretoria. In 1950, Van Riet Lowe, in his capacity as Director of the Archaeological Survey, recommended the termination of the excavations on Greefswald (UP/AGL/D/1372/2). Coertze opposed this and, together with J.F. Eloff, requested a research grant from the University and recommended resumed excavations at Mapungubwe, thus favouring continued archaeological research (UP/AGL/D/1379). Limited excavations took place under permit from the Historical Monuments Commission on the Southern Terrace during 1953 and 1954 (Sentker 1969), adding a substantial amount of finds to the ever-increasing Mapungubwe collection. Due to a lack of trained archaeologists and research funding (Meyer 1998:25) excavations were once again postponed after 1954 and only resumed again in 1968 and 1971.

In 1955 a request came from the South African Mint, urging the University to relieve them of the gold objects from Mapungubwe that had been stored in the bullion stronghold for the past twenty years (D/3581). Coertze suggested that the gold be permanently moved from the Mint to a safe deposit box at Volkskas Bank and further advised the University not to keep any of the gold on its premises for security reasons. It was only in 1968, when the Department of Archaeology was established, that excavations were resumed by archaeologists thereby adding even more material to the now rapidly expanding Mapungubwe collection. During the sixteen years from 1952 to 1968, the Mapungubwe collection was largely managed by anthropologists. The greater part of this time was spent editing the second Mapungubwe volume (Gardner 1963), which was thirty years overdue by the time it was finally published.

The first radiocarbon dates for Mapungubwe were only published in 1959 by Alexander Galloway. A total of 21 material samples from the K2 and Mapungubwe collection were submitted for dating purposes by Prof. Raymond Dart and Dr Phillip Tobias as early as March 1952 to Dr E.S. Deevy, Director of the Geochronometric Laboratory at Yale University in America (UP/AGL/D1548). Later, Mapungubwe dates were refined and confirmed by Vogel (1979;

1998; 2000) and recently the Mapungubwe gold graves were dated for the first time in history (Woodbourne, Pienaar and Tiley 2009). Now, even decades later, these results confirm the value of collections-based research and emphasize the importance of the Mapungubwe collection to science.

### The next three decades

There have been many archaeological achievements and supplementary research done on the collection over the next three decades from 1970 to 1990, which eventually led to a permanent, public exhibition of the Mapungubwe collection in the Mapungubwe Museum, established in 2000. Southern African Iron Age archaeology had grown significantly during the 1970s and divergent interpretations and theoretical approaches towards archaeological research reached its peak in the 1980s (Meyer 1998). During the 1990s there were renewed appeals from the public and the media for the conservation of Mapungubwe as a national heritage site, a possible future national park, and for a driven change in educational curricula that were stimulated by Mapungubwe's vast archaeological collection. Archaeological material was continuously being excavated thus accumulating on site, as well as in academic department storerooms due to newly injected funds and prolific stratigraphic fieldwork conducted at Mapungubwe and K2 (Eloff 1979; 1980; 1981; 1982; 1983).

The Department of Archaeology housed a small segment of the collection for research and educational purposes in the Human Sciences Building at the University, while the remainder were kept in a storeroom at the University. The Mapungubwe archives were catalogued for the first time by Andrie Meyer (Meyer 1998), who collated archival documents, old field reports, maps and photographic records. In the mid-1980s the gold collection was moved from Volkskas Bank to the University, and held in a secure safe, to be taken out only from time to time for viewing or for temporary exhibition. Towards the end of the 1990s, space for the ever-increasing archaeological collections and excavation equipment was at a premium due to the expansion of the Faculty of Humanities at the University. The time had come to decide on the future of the Mapungubwe collection, and the idea was broached to hand the collection over to one of the national museums for safe-keeping. However, taking the value of the University's historical role at Mapungubwe into account, it was decided to make the collection available to the public on a permanent basis, although this would not be the first time the Mapungubwe collection would be placed on public exhibition.

# **Public exhibitions of the Mapungubwe collection**

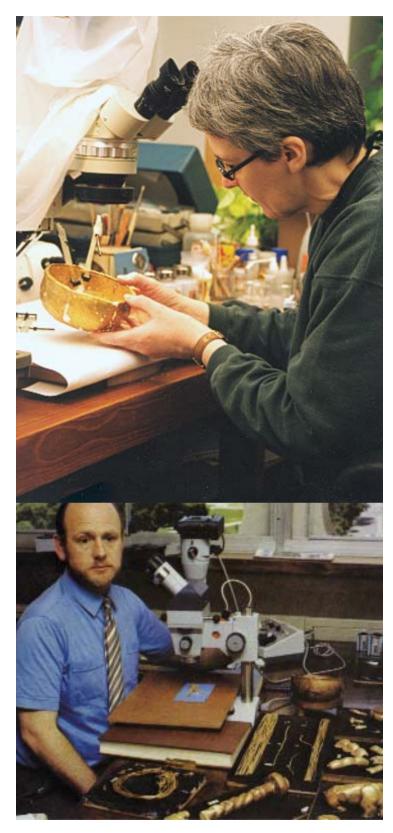
There have been more than 43 temporary exhibitions of the Mapungubwe collection over seven decades, the less well-known being those from as early as 1933 through to the 1970s. One of the first public displays of the collection was at the Transvaal Museum on 28 June 1933, within months of the Van Graan discovery. This exhibition was formally opened on a Wednesday afternoon by the Minister of the Interior, the Hon. J.H. Hofmeyer. More than thirty

Mapungubwe objects were displayed in the foyer of the Museum, among them the gold rhinoceros, gold sceptre, gold bowl, gold nails, clay spindle whorls, iron spearheads, bangles and trade glass beads (UP/AGL/D/932). This first public exhibition of the finds generated great interest from the public, particularly since the artefacts were accompanied by maps of the archaeological site indicating the positions of the layers from where the objects had been excavated. The exhibition at the Transvaal Museum was then expanded in 1946, and again considerably added to in 1952 (Transvaal Museum Annual Report 1935-1936:3-5). On 13 March 1952 the Museum mounted another exhibition depicting cultural development in South Africa over a 300 year period. The display themes covered the expansion of Bantu-speakers, periods of settlement, Van Riebeeck and other major events, including the discoveries at Mapungubwe. The Museum borrowed additional objects from storage to increase the exhibition, and so Mapungubwe remained a dominant feature in the Transvaal Museum foyer (Grobler 2005:182-183).

Perhaps one of the most notable public exhibitions of the Mapungubwe collection was at the Chamber of Mines Empire Exhibition held at Milner Park, Johannesburg which coincided with the celebrations of Johannesburg's Golden Jubilee in October 1936. From September 1936 to January 1937 the exhibition reportedly attracted thousands of visitors, staging one of South Africa's largest public exhibitions of people, objects and ideas from across the country (Robinson 2003). From 24 March to 6 April 1970, an exhibition consisting of seven glass display cases of Mapungubwe gold and other artefacts was displayed at the Rand Easter Show in Milner Park, which attracted 150 000 visitors to the Chamber of Mines Pavilion (UP/AGL/D/1655).



Some Mapungubwe ceramics on loan for the *Democracy* exhibition in the Castle of Good Hope, Cape Town 21 April 2004.



Above: Marilyn Hockey, Senior Conservcator of the British Museum, restoring the gold bowl in November 2001.

Below: Dr Andrew Oddy, Head of Conservation of the British Museum, examining Mapungubwe gold in Pretoria 1983. In December 1978, a decision was taken by the Chamber of Mines to establish a museum at Crown Mines. The Gold Mine Museum in Johannesburg was opened on 5 June 1980 with the intention that this Museum would be a living monument to the history of the pioneers and the gold mining industry in South Africa (Gold Bulletin 1980:104). Several articles about the display of the Mapungubwe collection in the new Museum appeared in the media, among them Die Vaderland, Beeld, and the Sunday Times (UP/AGL/D/ 1716/1810/1829/1931). In his opening address Prof. Eloff said, "...try to picture these objects in the social and religious setting in which they were used at Mapungubwe 800 years ago, only then would you appreciate the real significance of the Mapungubwe finds' (UP/AGL/D/ 830). These original objects were featured together with a unique range of gold jewellery designed by Geophrey Foden (The Citizen 6 October 1983) that was inspired by the earliest indigenous finds of gold working at Mapungubwe. Foden was commissioned by the International Gold Corporation, a marketing subsidiary of the South African Chamber of Mines, to produce the Mapungubwe jewellery series (Sunday Times 18 September 1983). In the same year a joint venture by the University of Pretoria and the Transvaal Museum, funded by Intergold, brought Dr Andrew Oddy, Conservator of the British Museum, on a three-week visit to South Africa to research the technology and manufacture of the Mapungubwe gold (Oddy 1983, 1984), as well as to 'authenticate' the gold collection (Pretoria News, Gold artefacts genuine - expert, 14 April 1983).

From the early 1990s a core collection of artefacts from Mapungubwe and K2 were identified and listed as part of an ongoing, yet pioneering collections management programme within the Department of Anthropology and Archaeology (Meyer 1998:35), and in cooperation with the National Monuments Council a selection of the artefacts was proclaimed a National Cultural Treasure. By this time, public viewing of the artefacts for interest sake or for news items in the public media was often permitted upon request or by appointment due to the lack of permanently available display space and academic staff. The need for a permanent public display in a safe and accessible venue on the main campus of the University of Pretoria became imperative, and initial plans were made to develop such a facility in the offices of the old Culture Bureau. This initiative laid the foundation for the eventual establishment of the permanent Mapungubwe exhibition that became the beginning of the current Mapungubwe Museum. These developments also lead to the transfer of the entire Mapungubwe collection, including its archive, to the Museum. Under the management of the Museum, exhibitions of the Mapungubwe collection increased at a pace countrywide with no less than 32 temporary exhibitions mounted in many provinces, and also for the first time spreading its wings internationally.

The collection has been displayed at many prominent exhibitions locally, i.e. at the SA National Gallery in Cape Town during the *Musuku* exhibition in 2000, the Gold of Africa Museum in 2001, the *Motho a Motho ke Batho* exhibition in Pretoria in 2002 and during the World Summit on Sustainable Development in the same year.



Replica of the Mapungubwe gold rhino on exhibition in Aichi Japan 2005.

Also, for the first time in history, artefacts were on public display at their place of origin at Mapungubwe itself for an extraordinary temporary exhibition to celebrate the launch of the site's World Heritage status in 2003. In the same year, more than 25 objects were placed on exhibition for the World Parks Congress held in Durban. A year later, another exhibition took place at the site of Mapungubwe, this time for the opening of Mapungubwe National Park in 2004, and then in Cape Town for the important *Democracy X* exhibition at the Castle. Spirited by Dr Ben Ngubane, South African Ambassador to Japan, the Mapungubwe collection's first international exposure was at the 2005 World Expo in Aichi, Japan.

The Mapungubwe collection would have received more world recognition had it not been for the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) who did not permit any archaeological heritage objects to leave the country. Years earlier, in 2001, SAHRA made the grave error of declining a temporary export of the gold rhinoceros to be exhibited at the *Musée national des arts d'Afrique et d'Oceanie* in Paris, France. The main reason cited for not granting permission was a risk of loss or damage. The gold rhino would have been the centre of attraction for five months and its image would have been on the cover of the catalogue for the exhibition entitled *An encounter with another Africa, the Arts and Cultures of South Africa*. Yet, despite efforts by the University and endless museum motivations, the gold rhino never saw European shores.

Instead, commissioned replicas of the Mapungubwe gold rhino were later permanently exhibited at the Little World Museum of Man in Japan, and at national museums in China and Taiwan.

### Immortalizing the collection in a museum

From 2000 onwards there was a decline in archaeological fieldwork at Mapungubwe, and less collecting of material from the sites was done although research did continue sporadically. The Department of Anthropology and Archaeology had finally relinquished the Mapungubwe collection to the Department of Cultural Affairs who then took over the management of archaeological material as a formal museum collection, and the three archaeologists who held academic posts within the Department of Anthropology and Archaeology, left a few years later. This then was the Department of Anthropology and Archaeology's closing chapter on the Mapungubwe collection, until such time that new archaeologists would be appointed in 2003 and once more raise Shashe-Limpopo research from the ashes. The focus of the collection was now in the hands of the Museum, which managed the mass of archaeological material in storage. The Museum devised a plan of action for public displays as well as becoming the permanent base to manage the collection from a professional museum perspective rather than by an academic department whose focus was not on collections management. A major turning point for the collection came in 1999 when substantial funding was allocated to Mapungubwe by the University for documentation of the collection, sorting and repackaging excavated material, and to place the collection on permanent public view as well as to create Mapungubwe's first electronic inventory.

Over the decades the archaeological collection had been broken up and distributed over several storerooms on the University campus, and the first major challenge for the Museum was to consolidate the collection again. In 1999 the various parts of the Mapungubwe collection were relocated from all the storage areas to the University's art safe, along with other museum collections, until such time when the Mapungubwe Museum was formally established and where its collection could be professionally curated. Unfortunately the other departmental archaeological collections were neglected and remain neglected due to a lack of funding.

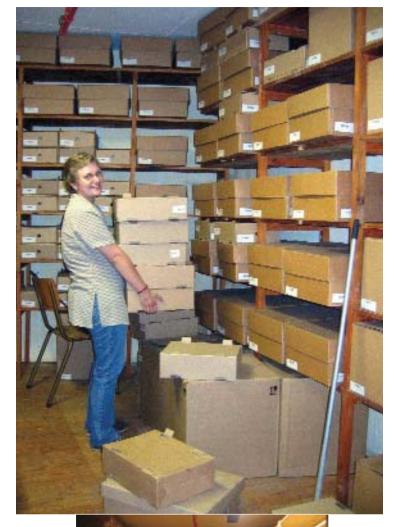
In June 2000 the SASOL African Heritage Exhibition, now the fullyfledged Mapungubwe Museum, was founded and became the first permanent home for the once-wandering Mapungubwe collection. The much awaited opening of this permanent public exhibition of more archaeological finds from Mapungubwe and K2 than just the gold was celebrated on 15 June 2000. This launch represented a milestone for the University of Pretoria and for the future safeguarding of one of our most sacred archaeological collections. It was only four years later that Mapungubwe would be declared a National Park and World Heritage Site. The official opening address by Dr Ben Ngubane, then Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, stated that 'the value of the exhibition in creating spaces where our people and interested visitors from around the world can experience the wonders of Mapungubwe is immeasurable and contributes both to our vision of the past and our work as a nation for the future'.

The Mapungubwe Museum as custodian of what is regarded as our main national collection today, manages perhaps one of the most significant and richest Iron Age archaeological collections in South Africa. It has inherited its protracted history, along with all the attached trials and tribulations, but the collection has now at long last become available for permanent public exhibition, conservation, education and research purposes (Tiley 2002, 2004). It consists of metal objects and fragments of gold, copper and iron, ivory, bone tools, trade glass beads, marine and terrestrial shells, organic materials such as fragile fibres, seeds, charred sorghum and millet, clay figurines, Chinese celadon fragments, low-fired ceramic vessels and masses of potsherds and animal bone fragments, 174 of which are recognized as distinctive heritage objects and rare national treasures, as well as a few dinosaur fossil remains and geological samples from the natural surrounding landscape.

The main mission of the Museum is to serve society, to be open and accessible to the public, to acquire, conserve, research, and exhibit the material evidence of Mapungubwe for the purposes of study, education and enjoyment. The Museum is an important centre for research and serves as a collections management and conservation training ground for undergraduate and postgraduate students. The collection no longer exists in isolation and is managed by the Department of UP Arts along with the art and heritage collections of the University. Its management and conservation is influenced by several heritage, academic, national and educational trends,

Right: Nikki Haw, first collections management assistant for the Mapungubwe collection 2002 - 2007.

Below: The UP Arts Objects Conservation facility was established in August 2008 to conserve the Mapungubwe and other University heritage collections.





specialisation by other tertiary institutions, government, the public and private sector who all have shared interests in the collection, interlinked with the long-term care of the archaeological site as an integral part of a National Park that is also a National and World Heritage Site. A minor portion of the museum collection is specifically declared as national heritage which means that 174 objects associated with the Iron Age settlements of Mapungubwe Hill, the Southern Terrace, K2 and Bambandyanalo are declared national heritage objects. They were gazetted on 10 October 1997 on account of their archaeological and historical importance under the auspices of the former National Monuments Council, now known as the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA).

### Conclusion

The Mapungubwe collection has become more than just an accumulation of material culture, more than just 'an open book waiting to be read and interpreted by anyone interested in its contents' (Owen 1999; Pearce 1992; Tiley 1990). Despite the obvious research potential of the collection, it has become increasingly important over the past decade for the collection to become a major statement of discourse. The meaning of the collection certainly did not remain static over time and is influenced by several national, political and regional trends. The social significance and political developments surrounding the collection within the context of community expectations (Pikirayi 2006), broader accessibility, repercussions of repatriation of the human remains, possible restitution of objects, the long-term care and storage of objects, continually changes the dynamics of managing the Mapungubwe collection.

There are fundamental principles in managing any heritage collection, guided, or often misguided, by the national legislation of the South African National Heritage Resources Act No. 25 of 1999. Safeguarding, managing and preserving such heritage resources have become a complicated and often contested affair. Adding to the complexities of Mapungubwe are other museums and research institutions who also manage smaller Mapungubwe collections, as well as the proposed Interpretive Centre at Mapungubwe National Park that will exhibit a collection and possibly manage its own Mapungubwe collection one day. When managing any enormous archaeological collection one is faced with dilemmas: appropriate management, storage, funding, space, staff, and professional conservation, even the risk of losing valuable research information and deteriorating archaeological material.

The Mapungubwe collection at the University of Pretoria has its own set of challenges. Like any other archaeological collection and important heritage objects, it is impeded sometimes by political constraints, as well as the lack of funding, lack of confidence by interested parties, lack of capacity, and does not have enough human resources dedicated to conservation and collections management. Concerted efforts and measures are visible in an attempt to overcome these challenges through quality-based conservation training programmes, a better developed archaeology syllabus, improved emphasis on theory and practical archaeological

field schools (Sven Ouzman pers. comm. July 2009). There is no denying the difficulties that lie ahead.

Today the Mapungubwe Museum is recognized as an official repository of the main collection that complies with national and international museum policy and professional standards as set by the South African Museums Association and the International Council of Museums. The Museum collection is guided by policy and adheres to a stringent code of ethics to steer the collection forward in the best and most effective way to professionally manage one of South Africa's foremost archaeological collections.

Our only course is to move forward, have the willingness to engage in discussions and negotiations with all affected stakeholders and communities, and for researchers to invest professional and considered care in the future of the Mapungubwe collection.

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