

Research Article

THE LOTTERING CONNECTION: REVISITING THE
'DISCOVERY' OF MAPUNGUBWEJUSTINE WINTJES^{1*} & SIAN TILEY-NEL²¹KwaZulu-Natal Museum, Pietermaritzburg / Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research and Wits School of Arts, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa(*Corresponding author. E-mail: jwintjes@nmsa.org.za)²Department of Historical and Heritage Studies, Faculty of Humanities / University of Pretoria Museums, University of Pretoria, South Africa

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ABSTRACT

The iconic 13th-century hilltop site of Mapungubwe (Limpopo Province, South Africa) has been investigated archaeologically for almost nine decades, yet little is known about its living context prior to its 'discovery' by the scientific community in 1933. We contribute to Mapungubwe's early history by examining its association with François Bernard Lotrie (or Lottering), who allegedly knew of the site's existence in the late 19th century. Lotrie appears to have lived as a hermit for a time near to Mapungubwe Hill, with romanticised versions of this narrative filtering into several texts. Writing an evidence-based account of this figure remains challenging owing to the scarcity of reliable primary sources. However, archival traces suggest that Lotrie and later his son Bernard Lottering acted as informal 'custodians' of the site, while also extracting value from it, before its emergence into archaeological fame. Our study exposes the fragile boundaries between myth and contested history in early accounts of Mapungubwe, revealing that the site was not as remote and unknown in the landscape of the recent past as previously thought.

Key words: Mapungubwe, Lotrie, Lottering, discovery, archives, early history, Soutpansberg, Limpopo, South Africa.

A NARRATIVE OF DISCOVERY

Historical myths, ignored histories and selective archival narratives have played a critical role in framing the manner in which the iconic 13th-century site of Mapungubwe (Limpopo Province, South Africa), was 'discovered'. The first detailed account of Mapungubwe's archaeology appears in 1937 in the book, *Mapungubwe: Ancient Bantu Civilization on the Limpopo*, compiled by Leo Fouché, who recounted how the hilltop site was first brought to his attention by Ernst (E.S.J.) and his son Jerry (J.C.O.) van Graan in early 1933 (Fouché 1937: 1–2).

The Van Graans, who farmed in the Mopane district near Messina (now Musina), had attempted for several years to locate the ancient site about which they had heard rumours of treasure (Tiley-Nel 2018: 82–83). In late 1932 they set out again with three local *bywoners* (agricultural labour tenants), Hendrik (H.P.) van der Walt and his two sons-in-law, Dawid (D.J.) du Plessis and Marthinus Venter, locating the site properly on 1 January 1933 with the help of an unnamed African guide, the son of a man by the name of Mowena (Fouché 1937: 1–2; Tiley-Nel 2018: 82–88). There they saw 'breastworks of stone', and numerous potsherds and artefacts made of copper, glass and gold. They also uncovered the burial of an elaborately decorated individual. In February 1933, the younger Van Graan reported the discovery and sent some gold artefacts to Fouché, his former professor of history, at the University of Pretoria (Fouché 1937: 2).

Fouché noted that there had allegedly been two earlier visits to the site by Europeans – a party of prospectors that included a man called Richard Rorke, and a team of German

researchers led by the ethnographer Leo Frobenius, both in 1929 (1937: 4) – based for the most part on hearsay (1937: 1, 4, 7). Fouché also mentioned in passing the "strange story" told to him by Ernst, who had heard it from a "very old Native", of a "white man gone wild, who had lived a hermit's life in a cave on the banks of the Limpopo" in the late 19th century, and "climbed the sacred hill and found things there" (1937: 1). Fouché linked this character, "Lottering (or Lotrie)", to Bernard François Lotrie, the biographical subject of Carl Josef Moerschell's book *Der Wilde Lotrie* (1912).

Fouché did not delve any further into this earlier history, and, for the rest, tended to paint a picture of the site as remote and shrouded in mystery. While the book demonstrates a systematic and scientifically informed investigation, recognising the hilltop site as an integral part of regional African history linked to the "ancient civilization of Rhodesia" (1937: 4), Fouché also subtly perpetuated the idea of a mystery surrounding the origins of these sites, suggesting that Mapungubwe could "help to solve the riddle of Zimbabwe" (1937: 4). His use of the term 'riddle' seems telling, seeing as by then the African origins of Great Zimbabwe had been firmly established (Randall-MacIver 1906; Caton-Thompson 1931). The supposedly puzzling nature of the ruins, linked to disavowal of their status as a recent indigenous achievement, continued however to be debated in the popular realm (Kuklick 1991: 153–154).

Fouché indicated that Africans living in the area around Mapungubwe were aware of the remains there, but his description of them as fearful and lacking in agency seems disparaging (1937: 1). He did not appear to take seriously local perceptions that imbued the site with the presence and power of ancestral kings (the Great Ones), and thus encouraged avoidance practices. He largely dismissed the verity of oral history, yet acknowledged that "it was this tradition [the regarding of the site as sacred] that led to the discovery of Mapungubwe by Europeans" (1937: 1).

By downplaying the living landscape within which the site was embedded, the 1937 study established the story of the Van Graans (explorers in the field), linked to Fouché (professional expert), as the discoverers and historical heroes of the official narrative, framed as the recovery of a lost civilisation. There were complex factors underlying the creation of this narrative, a combination of personal, legal, funding and political issues, but Fouché has been criticised for his lack of attention to Mapungubwe's recent past and to oral history, which has also had the effect more broadly of perpetuating settler and colonial views of southern African history (Tiley-Nel 2018).

A LIVING LANDSCAPE

The dynamic context surrounding Mapungubwe Hill prior to 1933 has not been closely examined, although several ethno-

logical studies, including oral traditions, were produced on the wider Soutpansberg region, slightly before and alongside the early phase of archaeology (Lestrade 1927, 1932, 1937; Van Warmelo 1932, 1940, 1953). In more recent scholarship, Victor Ralushai produced two reports on the oral history of Mapungubwe (2002, 2003).ⁱ Several other important studies have examined the wider Mapungubwe landscape across the historical and contemporary period (Bonner & Carruthers 2003; Carruthers 2006; Huffman 2012; Meskell 2013; Schoeman 2013).

This paper contributes to the ongoing writing of Mapungubwe's histories by opening a window into the networks of people linked to the site prior to the establishment of the dominant 'discovery' narrative outlined above, with a particular focus on the figure of François (often shortened to Frans) Lotrie, and his son Barend Lottering. The authors came together to further research Mapungubwe's early history after developing an interest in the Lotrie/Lottering connection independently. Tiley-Nel has extensive knowledge of the early Mapungubwe Archive through her role as Chief Curator of the Mapungubwe Collection at the University of Pretoria. She recently completed her PhD on the early contested history of Mapungubwe based on information accrued over years of archival and oral research, seeking to investigate the multiple alternative narratives surrounding Mapungubwe prior to 1933 (Tiley-Nel 2018). Wintjes came across the Lottering link through her micro-historical study of the evidence that the Frobenius expedition excavated at Mapungubwe in 1928 (Wintjes 2017).

The authors have been inspired by the 'biographic turn' in southern African studies, and guided by "a heightened interest in history as narrative [through a] density of historical detail, in peopling the past with personality, and in using the seemingly obscure, whether of sources or characters, as a way of shedding light on broader social and political themes" (Bank & Jacobs 2015: 17). Our paper builds also on the 'archival turn', with its interest in revisiting and refiguring archives to uncover hidden histories and micro-histories that should not be ignored simply because written records are scarce or unclear.

Many of the records consulted come from the Mapungubwe Archive at the University of Pretoria, an institutional repository compiled in the course of the official programme of work at Mapungubwe, but which, like all archives, also contains gaps and contradictions, formed as much by accident and omission as by deliberate preservation (Tiley-Nel 2018). Frans Lotrie was famous in the first instance as a legendary elephant hunter rather than for his links to Mapungubwe, and his biography too is caught between myth and history. His son Barend Lottering is a less prominent historical figure, and reliable evidence for both figures is scant and scattered. But their names form a faint thread that can be followed through the various sources as a way of constructing a narrative (Wintjes 2017: 44). An alternative history can thus be drawn out from the available materials, where the 'cracks' let light in, in ways that resonate with Tom Nesmith's (2002) vision of the archive as being continually reconfigured to reveal contextual patterns that have not been visible before. Archival work can be seen as "an ongoing *process* – as this web of relationships and perspectives is redefined over time – and not something established by the initial inscribers of the records once for all" (Nesmith 2002: 34–35). Thus an archive is a site of deferral, where records are opened to "new meanings and new relevance as circumstances evolve" (2002: 37). Not all of the texts cited here are fully based on verifiable sources, but a subaltern history is woven together that emerges across the sources

collectively, while their veracity is approached with caution, and the narrative is backed up with historical references where possible.

LOCATING MAPUNGUBWE

Mapungubwe Hill is located in a flat area of mopane veld dotted with rocky outcrops just south of the confluence of the Limpopo and Shashe rivers. At this juncture these rivers separate the modern countries of South Africa, Botswana and Zimbabwe (Fig. 1). This landscape lies to the north of the Soutpansberg range and forms the northernmost tip of South Africa. In the 19th century, the area around the Shashe–Limpopo confluence was generally arid and sparsely populated. The rivers acted as significant boundaries between several expanding polities of African farming communities: the Ngwato to the west, the Ndebele to the north and northwest and the Venda to the southeast, but control of the area around Mapungubwe appears ambiguous over this period (Huffman 2012; Schoeman 2013: 616–617, 623). Known to be full of large game pursued by itinerant game hunters, the corridor of mopane veld along the Limpopo river was particularly rich in elephant, and provided the backdrop for a fluid colonial boundary referred to as a 'hunting frontier' (Wagner 1980). In the mid-19th century, the nearest, and virtually only colonial town in the area was the settlement of Schoemansdal, located on the southern slopes of the Soutpansberg range approximately 100 km south of Mapungubwe. Founded as a result of the Great Trek in 1848, Schoemansdal was the northernmost capital of the Boer republics, consolidated under the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (or Transvaal, 1852–1902) (Fig. 2). In the 1850s, the annual average shipment of ivory from Schoemansdal amounted to an astonishing 45 000 kg, with no less than 1000 elephants hunted (Tempelhoff 1997: 8). The town provided a precarious existence for its inhabitants, located far away from other Boer settlements, and was almost completely abandoned in 1867 owing to a lack of political support, internal conflict and growing tensions with the Venda, who were its closest neighbours (Wildenboer 2013: 441–442, 459–460).

The abandonment of Schoemansdal did not slow the tide of colonial settlement of the area. The sudden transformation of the Transvaal into one of the richest gold mining regions in the world, with the first discovery of gold at Eersteling (north of Potgietersrus, now Mokopane) in 1871, followed by Pilgrims Rest in 1873, Barberton in 1884 and Langlaagte in 1886, among other locales, attracted many settlers with new towns proclaimed, and railways and other transport routes and trade links established (Callinicos 1980). Over this period, the new colonial economic order crept into the landscape of this 'northern frontier', as the colonial authorities began to apportion the land into farms (Fig. 3), and by the 1890s, a grid pattern of cadastral plots covered the entire area (Fig. 4). The indigenous African inhabitants were pushed into servitude, subjugation, and other forms of forced labour. While white settler communities came to control most formal land ownership, they also included significant numbers of impoverished *bywoners*, or landless tenants, who worked as manual labourers for farm owners (Tiley-Nel 2018: 66). In the first decades of the 20th century, many farms remained unoccupied, used only "for a few weeks' shooting in the winter" (Fouché 1937: 1), with a high incidence of absentee owners, often based in Johannesburg or Pretoria. This was the case of 'Greefswald', the farm within which Mapungubwe Hill came to be enclosed.ⁱⁱ It was against this backdrop that Frans Lotrie appears to have travelled extensively around the area, living a mostly nomadic

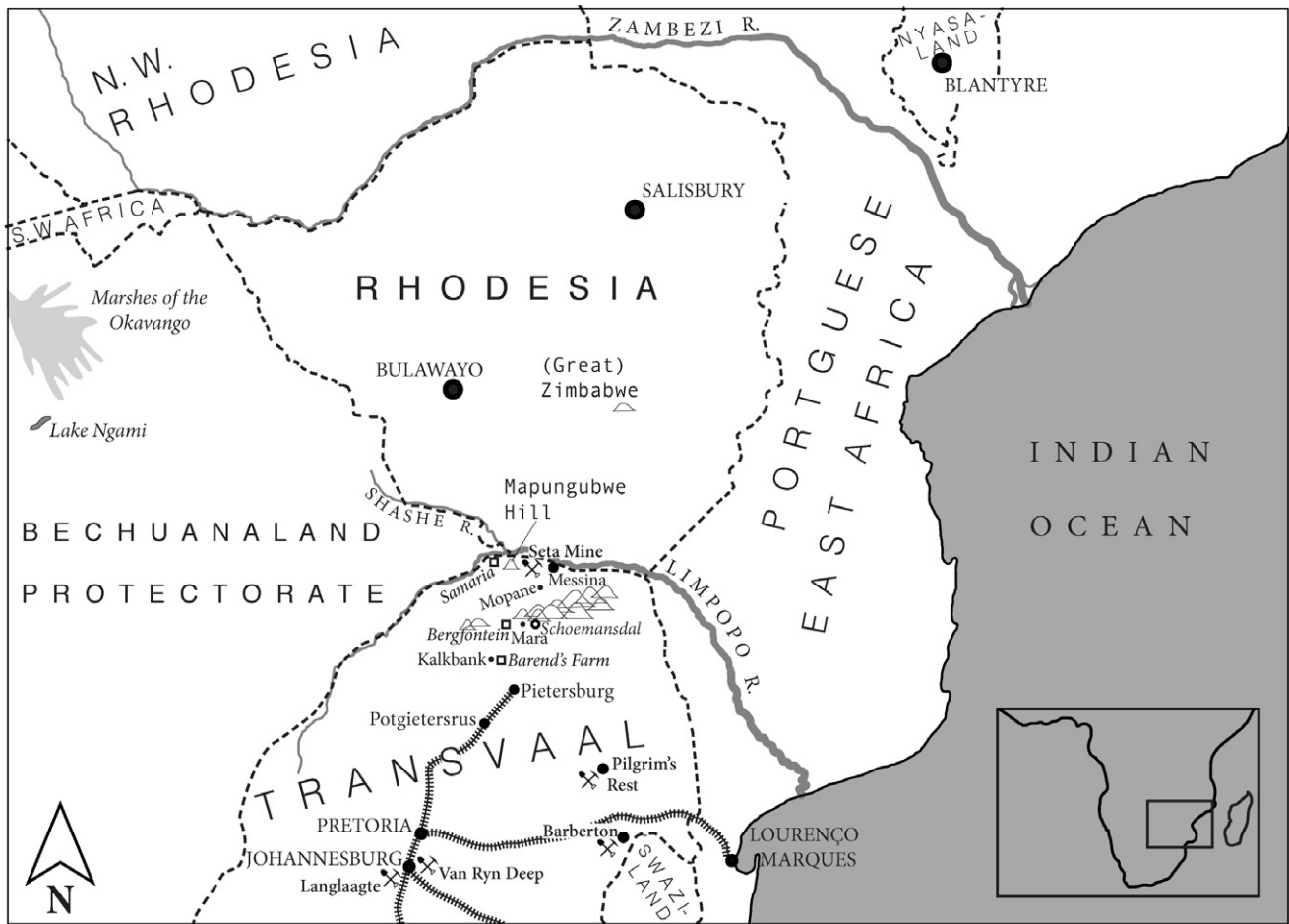


FIG. 1. Northern Transvaal and neighbouring territories, with places mentioned in the text.

lifestyle, settling occasionally for short periods, in a pattern of seeking out isolated places with resources that could be freely gathered, including big game and precious minerals.

LOTRIE AND LOTTERING

A challenge in tracking the surname 'Lotrie' in the archive was its unstable spelling and uncertain origin. 'Lotrie' is often presented as interchangeable with 'Lottering' (Fouché 1937: 1; Rosenthal 1965: 217; Schoemansdal Museum c.1980), and both surnames persistently crop up across sources pertaining to the early history of Mapungubwe. There were and still are several families by this name in the Mapungubwe area, and Tiley-Nel has confirmed through oral research that 'Lottering' is a variation of 'Lotrie'. A number of other variants have been encountered, including 'Lotrich' (Milstein 1933), 'Lottrie' (1933) and 'Lotree', which comes from a handwritten inscription possibly in Frans Lotrie's own handwriting (Moerschell 1912: frontispiece (Fig. 5); Moerschell 1933). However, 'Lottering' is by far the more common form.

Frans Lotrie's father was reportedly French, and Lotrie was indeed a French surname. Currently listed among the lost surnames of France, its phonetically similar forms include Lotrée, Loterie and Lautrie, all of which have significant archival representation in the northern departments of France bordering on what is today Belgium (Filae 2018; Service Clients Filae, pers. comm. 2018). One possible scenario was that Frans Lotrie's father brought this name to the southern tip of Africa, soon after which it morphed into the Afrikaansified form 'Lottering', recorded as a 'term of affection' for the Dutch name Lotter (Rosenthal 1965: 217). However, Lottering as a surname appears already in 18th-century records, where a Frans

Lottering, possibly hailing from the Netherlands or Germany, married a local woman in 1759, and is listed as the forefather of the Afrikaans surname (Pama 1983: 209). Frans Lotrie was apparently adamant that he was the son of a Frenchman and objected to the 'styling' of his name into 'Lottering', insisting he had "nothing to do" with the Lotterings of Dutch descent (Moerschell 1933). It therefore seems unlikely that his father was the originator of the name in southern Africa, and yet his children carried the name Lottering. Despite the lack of clarity that exists around the relationships between the various Lotries and Lotterings, something can be gleaned of the biographies of the father Frans Lotrie and his son Barend Lottering.

FRANÇOIS BERNARD LOTRIE: THE WILD LOTRIE 1825–1917

Although Fouché described the "wild" Lotrie as a "well-known character", his identity is archivally slippery, as suggested in his pointing to the subject of Moerschell's book using the abbreviation 'C.f.' (1937: 1, n1). Moerschell was a farmer of German origin who encountered Lotrie shortly after the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902) as he waited at Mara for a repatriation grant (Moerschell 1933). After the war, Moerschell invited him to stay on his farm Bergfontein at the western edge of the Soutpansberg, and it was during this time that he wrote down the adventures of Lotrie's life. Moerschell wrote the book in German, and as if Lotrie was speaking in the first person. Many of the biographical details that have circulated about Lotrie derive (directly or indirectly) from this book (De Villiers Roos 1917; Moerschell 1933; Rosenthal 1951: 182–193; Kotzé 1962: 90–98; De Vaal 1977; Anderson 1983; De Vaal 1991a–i; Tiley-Nel 2011, Tiley-Nel 2018: 68–72).



FIG. 2. A portion of the 'Original Map of the Transvaal or South-African Republic' by F. Jeppe and A. Merensky (1868) (Special collections, University of Cape Town Libraries).



FIG. 3. A portion of the 'Map of the Transvaal and the surrounding territories' by F. Jeppe (1878) (Special collections, University of Cape Town Libraries).



FIG. 4. A portion of the 'Map of the Transvaal or S.A. Republic and Surrounding Territories' by F. Jeppe (1899) (Special collections, University of Cape Town Libraries). The arrow points to Greefswald farm.

In this book, Lotrie's given names are Bernard François, but the sketch portrait attributed to an unnamed British officer, published as a frontispiece (Fig. 5), is signed 'F.B. Lotree'. The *Dictionary of South African Biography* lists him as François Bernard Rudolph Lotrie (De Vaal 1977), and similar name sequences appear elsewhere with slight variations: François Bernhardus Rudolph Lotrie (De Villiers Roos 1917); François Bernardus Rudolf Lottering/Lotrie (Schoemansdal Museum c.1980); François Bernardus Lotrie (Central Judicial Commission 1903); and François Bernard Lottering (Nederduitsch Hervormde Gemeente 1852: entry 7).

Of Lotrie's family history, Moerschell wrote that his grandfather fought under Napoleon at Waterloo (in present-day Belgium, where the French army was defeated in 1815, ending the Napoleonic wars); his father was born on the long sea journey to South Africa, and Lotrie himself in Grahamstown in 1825 (Moerschell 1912: 1–2).ⁱⁱⁱ

In 1836, his family joined a trek led by Andries Hendrik Potgieter (Moerschell 1912: 16) and participated in various operations of this first phase of the Great Trek, including the battle against the Matabele of Mzikilazi in 1836 at Vegkop, and the punitive attack on the Ndebele settlement at Mosega in 1837 (Moerschell 1912: 19–20). They then joined Gerrit Maritz's trek to Natal, rejoining the Potgieter party after the British annexed Natal in 1843 (Moerschell 1912: 24–25, 32). After defeats at Zwartkopjes and Boomplaats, they trekked northwards (Moerschell 1912: 32–33). In 1848, Potgieter and his followers, the Lotries among them, founded the northernmost trekker settlement that a short time later was renamed Schoemansdal (Moerschell 1912: 45).^{iv} Driven by his interest in nature, Lotrie's father continued travelling around the region, meeting the Scottish explorer David Livingstone at a mission

station between Moffat and Kuruman, and arranging for Frans to join his expedition to Lake Ngami in 1849 (Moerschell 1912: 34–38).

Frans subsequently returned to Schoemansdal and in 1861 married Helena Catarina Beatrix Botha (De Villiers Roos 1917). Whatever semblance of a sedentary life he may have had there would not last long, however, and, following the evacuation of the small town in 1867, he went travelling across the full breadth of the sub-continent, from the west coast to the east coast. Over time, he gained the nickname 'Wild Lottering' from his perceived eccentricity on different levels – for his reputation as a traveller through uncharted territory (Kotzé 1962: 91), and for his "unwillingness to tolerate even the rough and ready Voortrekkers of that day" (Rosenthal 1951: 182). He became known as one of the greatest elephant hunters of the Transvaal, referred to as 'Dali' by the African ivory carriers who worked with him, translated by Moerschell as 'thunderer' (Moerschell 1912: iv; probably from the Tswana word *tladi*, meaning thunder), as he played his part in the decimation of large game across the region.

He had a number of children in the 1860s and early 1870s, three sons and two daughters, although there are inconsistencies concerning their names and birth dates (De Villiers Roos 1917; Moerschell 1912; Schoemansdal Museum c.1980). As a result, the full family tree is not reconstructed here, but we note that his youngest, born in 1874, was Barend Christoffel Johannes (De Villiers Roos 1917).

At some point, Lotrie is alleged to have returned to the Soutpansberg with a large herd of cattle (De Vaal 1977). By the late 1880s, he had established himself on the Limpopo river, at the northernmost edge of the Transvaal (Kotzé 1962: 91). This may have been in the vicinity of the old Seta Diamond Mine,

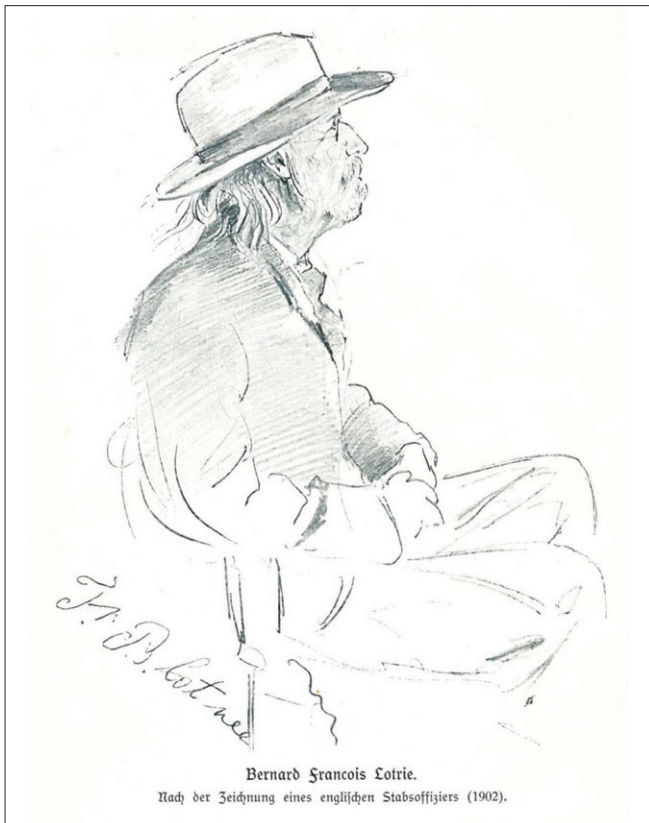


FIG. 5. François Bernard Lotrie, portrait attributed to an unnamed British officer (Moerschell 1912: frontispiece).

approximately 10 km east of Mapungubwe, as reported by a ‘J. Lottering’, one of Frans’s sons, possibly in conversation with the historian B.H. Dicke (Rosenthal 1951: 183).^v Shortly following the ‘discovery’ of Mapungubwe in 1933, a ‘B.C. Lottrie’, who claimed to be Lotrie’s son (presumably Barend Christoffel), stated that they had lived on the farm Greefswald itself for a period of 15 years, and had to flee from there during the Anglo-Boer War (Lottrie 1933: 2–3).^{vi} According to Rorke, who knew Barend personally, they lived “on the southern portion of the farm” where they “knew about this [Mapungubwe] hill and that it was the burial place of the natives” (Rorke 1933: 1).

Other accounts also place Lotrie and his family in the area in the late 19th century. In 1888, Piet Grobler, consul of the Transvaal Republic, set out towards Matabeleland for a meeting with Chief Lobengula at his capital Bulawayo, allegedly crossing paths with several hunters living along the Limpopo river, including Lotrie. He is said to have employed Lotrie and his family to accompany him for protection and guidance (Kotzé 1962: 91). On the return trip, the expedition clashed with a Tswana group, a skirmish in which Grobler was fatally wounded, while Lotrie and a son sustained only minor injuries (De Vaal 1977). In this clash, Lotrie’s daughter Helena allegedly “saved the life of her wounded father by spreading her skirts to catch the deadly spears of the fierce black hordes”, becoming mythologised into Voortrekker history (Kros 1987: 10); another account says that it was Grobler that she was protecting (Kotzé 1962: 98).

It was around this time that Lotrie is supposed to have found a site of alluvial gold, and was under some pressure by the dispersed community of the abandoned town of Schoemansdal to disclose its location (Rosenthal 1951: 184). In order to protect the isolation of the area, he chose to move southward with his family – possibly to the vicinity of

Kalkbank (40 km north of Pietersburg, now Polokwane) where they are known to have lived subsequently – while continuing to hunt in the territory between the Limpopo and Zambezi rivers. It was upon returning from one of these trips that he is said to have worn a “gold bracelet of beautiful workmanship on his right wrist”, and told his children about a cache of old things, including beads, armlets and dishes made of gold. He had covered up these finds in order to retrieve them later, but was supposedly unable on two subsequent trips to relocate the exact place, although he knew the broad locality (Rosenthal 1951: 184). Eric Rosenthal links Lotrie’s knowledge of these items to his knowledge of Mapungubwe (1951: 182–183). One has of course to approach Rosenthal’s popularist historical account with caution, but it does appear to incorporate information from a named oral source, the historian B.H. Dicke, who also published on Voortrekker history (1926, 1937).

Towards the end of his life, no longer living with his wife and children, Lotrie is alleged to have been living in a rock shelter at the foot of Mapungubwe Hill (De Vaal 1977), which another account locates half a mile from the hill (Fouché 1937: 1; Rosenthal 1951: 184), and a third about two miles away from the hill near the banks of the Limpopo river (Moerschell 1933). A candidate for this rock shelter lies around 500 m to the east of Mapungubwe Hill, featuring an engraving of a game board known as *isafuba* on a flat rock, indicated on a map drawn by members of the University of Pretoria’s Archaeological Committee in 1934 (Fig. 6). Lotrie is alleged to have climbed the hill frequently to “potter round among the many sherds and pieces of slag littered upon its summit” (Rosenthal 1951: 184). His son reported that he retrieved a “very handsome earthenware pot, unlike the type [then] used by the natives”, offering it to the elder Mowena who lived in a nearby kraal, who then showed it to Ernst van Graan in 1930 (Rosenthal 1951: 184).

Lotrie is supposed to have died aged 92 in 1917 (De Villers Roos 1917; another source claims he died in 1923 in his 99th year; Rosenthal 1951: 183). He allegedly wore the gold bangle from Mapungubwe until his death, and possibly into his grave (Rosenthal 1951: 184). Up to here, the details of Frans Lotrie’s eventful life, including his links to Mapungubwe, remain difficult to substantiate, with circumstantial as well as mythologised elements and numerous inconsistencies. However, hints that there is some truth to the story can be found in following the traces of his son Barend.

BAREND CHRISTOFFEL LOTTERING: LEADING FROBENIUS 1928

Shortly after formal archaeological work had begun at Mapungubwe, B.C. Lottrie wrote a letter to a Mr Visser imploring him for help (Lottrie 1933). This was probably Barend Christoffel, Lotrie’s youngest son, who would have then been in his fifties.^{vii} In this letter, he sounds anxious and confused, and reports that Jerry van Graan had been to see him, claiming to have been the first to discover the site of Mapungubwe Hill with his father. Van Graan also tried to convince him that the site the Lotries knew of was on the neighbouring farm of Samaria. Lotrie’s son laments that his late father was actually the discoverer of Mapungubwe – “die plek waar die outhede gevind is, met die goudstukke” (Lottrie 1933: 1). He even suggests that the Van Graans had used the Lotries’ knowledge of the site to locate it, which included consulting with Mabina, whom Lotrie’s son knew well and who lived near to the site (possibly the man referred to as Mowena by Van Graan) (Fouché 1937: 1).

B.C. Lottrie also indicates that he did not know who to

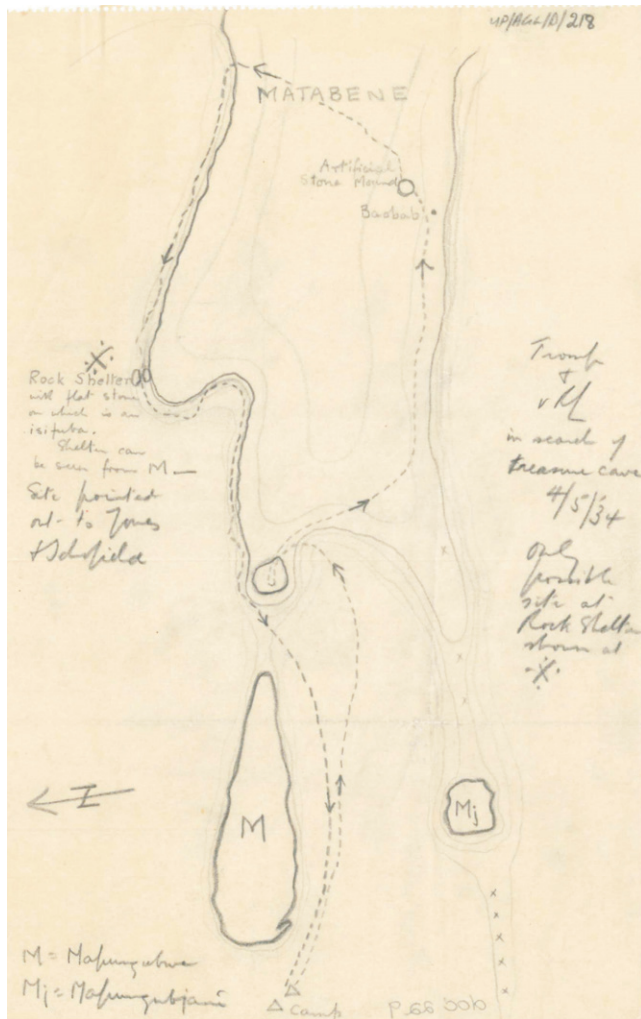


FIG. 6. Sketch by F.J. Tromp and C. van Riet Lowe (1934), indicating a rock-shelter near Mapungubwe Hill, which could have been Lotrie's abode (Archive ref. UP/AGL/D/218, Mapungubwe Archive, University of Pretoria). The isifuba is indicated as isifuba on this map, also known in southern Africa as marabaraba, and in Africa more widely as mankala (Townshend 1979).

report the site to, but that he had alerted various people to its existence. Indeed, a number of visits took place to the top of Mapungubwe Hill in the company of a Barend Lottering in the late 1920s, by parties of men from Pretoria and Johannesburg (Wintjes 2017). Little is known about the people involved in these visits except that they all somehow knew one another. One of them was a businessman named Von Leesen who, in Johannesburg in 1928, had shown Frobenius several items of pottery gathered on the hilltop. Frobenius thought them to be of a certain antiquity and expressed interest in visiting the site. Von Leesen wrote to Barend to arrange for him to meet the Germans the following month at Kalkbank (Von Leesen 1928), six miles east of the farm where Barend worked (Rorke 1933: 1). Von Leesen commented on Barend's ability to work with Africans, and advised him to plan to appoint labourers to assist the German team with their work at the site (Fig. 7). He also assured Barend that he would have his transport reimbursed, be paid for his time and efforts, and earn much more than if he stayed home on the farm (Von Leesen 1928).^{viii}

The activities of the Frobenius expedition at Mapungubwe represented investigations of a more scientific nature than the earlier visits. The expedition had some connections to the intellectual community in South Africa, and received substantial political support and publicity (Kuklick 1991: 151–152). But

their findings were never published, and disappeared into the archive until recently (Wintjes 2017). This entire network of knowledge relied on Barend Lottering's knowledge of the site's location, learned from his father. Although alluded to by Fouché and others, their role was effectively written out of history.

HIDDEN AND IGNORED HISTORIES

The standard narrative promotes the encounter of the Van Graans and Fouché with Mapungubwe in 1933 as the moment of original 'discovery', which took place through a network of formally educated and economically prosperous professionals with strong ties to Johannesburg and Pretoria. Fouché's brief account of these events (1937: 1–7) establishes the idea of a sudden coming to light of the place, sidelining prior knowledge held by local communities of Africans and white settlers. What is essentially the same story is perpetuated through numerous subsequent publications, further reinforcing the power and authority of published texts. A re-examination of the archive complicates our understanding of the site's living context and history prior to 1933, revealing that it was not as remote and unknown as the dominant narrative implies.

Materials from the Mapungubwe Archive, supplemented by documents from the Frobenius Institute, open a window onto a superficial foray into the site's archaeology by the Frobenius expedition (Wintjes 2017). Some years later, Fouché described the site as a "sealed site" (1937: 4), warning that it "was so remote and lonely that unscrupulous treasure hunters could easily have ransacked it completely and got away with their loot", and that the "tragedy of the Rhodesian sites [...] might have been repeated in the Transvaal" (1937: 2). And yet the earlier visits now on record suggest that damage to the site before it came to be formally protected could have been more substantial than previously thought (Wintjes 2017: 58).

The complete absence of any mention of gold from the various archival sources makes one wonder whether the unspoken retrieval of gold items was a primary motivation behind the visits, evoking the pillaging that took place elsewhere in a deceitful entwinement of treasure hunting and archaeology, for example, in the activities of the Ancient Ruins Company at Zimbabwe sites in Southern Rhodesia in the late 19th century (Kuklick 1991: 142–143). Evidence for ancient mining encountered by colonial participants in the gold rush of the late 19th and early 20th centuries in southern Africa was at first attributed to Phoenicians or other exotic people, because of widespread racist beliefs that indigenous Africans were not capable of mining or working gold (Miller *et al.* 2000: 91–92). One of the other members of the pre-1933 visits to Mapungubwe, called Papendorf, worked at the Van Ryn Deep gold mine east of Johannesburg (Rorke 1933), while Von Leesen (1928) believed that the Egyptians had been to South Africa frequently between 3000 and 8000 years ago to extract gold and copper, so this seems like a plausible context for their focused interest in Mapungubwe. Frobenius, for his part, also saw the greater complex of stone ruin sites as an ancient and essentially colonial culture that he called 'South Erythraean', in which "the search for gold must have been extremely important" (Frobenius 1928: 154). The problematic nature of Frobenius's methods of collecting both living and archaeological material culture over the course of his career has been recognised in other contexts (e.g. Fabian 1998), and questions remain more generally around the acquisition and ultimate fate of materials collected on the southern African expedition.

It is clear furthermore that one has to approach any claim of 'first discovery' of archaeological sites with caution. Such



FIG. 7. Photograph taken by the Frobenius expedition (probably by Heinrich Wieschhoff), captioned 'Grabung in Tumulus I' (1928) ('excavation of Tumulus 1', identified as site 2229AB98; Wintjes 2017: 55). The unnamed man in the picture may have been one of the labourers appointed by Barend Lottering. (Photographic negative, 9 × 12 cm. Archive ref. FoA-09-11880, © Frobenius-Institut an der Goethe Universität, Frankfurt am Main).

claims would have been motivated for a range of reasons, and their assessment is made more difficult by the fact that, in the case of Mapungubwe (as with many other sites), numerous local inhabitants had knowledge of the remains located there. It is entirely plausible that the presence of the capital was never entirely forgotten following its early 14th-century demise, and so it is less a question of 'discovering' for the first time than one of tapping into existing networks of knowledge. Another invisibility that is therefore revealed – although not corrected

by any stretch – is that of the African informants, interlocutors, guides and 'traditional connoisseurs' (after Fontein 2004) who would have played such a key role in this story.^{ix}

What also emerges from our re-examination of the archive is the story of a certain entanglement between several generations of a local family, the Lotries/Lotterings. Frans Lotrie was a traveller and hunter, and seems at various points in his life to have lived near to Mapungubwe Hill. His son Barend, as an adult, was probably a *bywoner* (Fig. 8), supplementing his

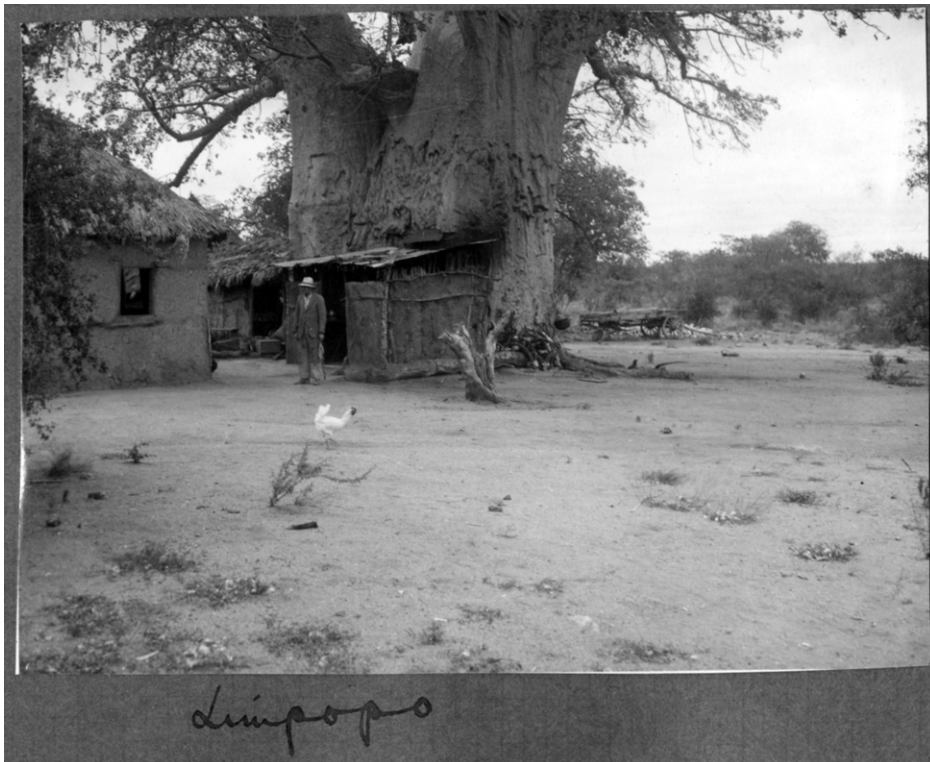


FIG. 8. Photograph of an unnamed *bywoner* in the Mapungubwe area c. 1933. Photograph from the collection of EV Adams, Adams & Adams Attorneys © Fiona Adams. Reproduced with permission from the Mapungubwe Archive, University of Pretoria.

farming activities with income generated through taking visitors to Mapungubwe Hill from time to time. He lived among Africans, probably spoke indigenous languages and would have had to negotiate access to the site in some way with local communities; indeed, Fouché (1933) suspected him of having ‘gone native’. Some of the archival materials show that Fouché had attempted to find out more about the Lottering connection to Mapungubwe (e.g. Fouché 1933; Knobel 1933; Milstein 1933), and it may have been owing to the inconsistencies surrounding who exactly Lottering was that he did not pursue this line of investigation. The Lotterings may not have been fully literate, and did not have strong links to the wealth and prestige of the big cities with their networks of academics and other professionals, but arguably played the role of informal ‘custodians’ of the site, from which they also collected items of value and generated income. This is a tenuous history that can only be reconstructed using fragmentary hints across disparate archival and historical sources, and it serves as a reminder of how easily knowledge can be elided. It complicates the dominant narrative surrounding the discovery and meaning of Mapungubwe, and starts to create an understanding of the dynamic context and contest surrounding the site prior to its emergence into the archaeological limelight in 1933.

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NOTES

ⁱVictor Ralushai died in 2011, but had intended to pursue this study (Thomas Huffman [University of the Witwatersrand], pers. comm. 2017).

ⁱⁱThe delineation of the property Greefswald No. 615 (currently No. 37-Ms) can be traced back to 1871 (Surveyor General’s Office 1871; Otto 1963: 58). It changed hands frequently before being purchased in 1929 by E.E. Collins, who sold it to the University of Pretoria soon after excavations had been initiated (Adams & Adams 1933a, 1933b; Otto 1963: 58).

ⁱⁱⁱThis chronology seems unlikely, unless Lotrie’s grandmother had travelled to South Africa around 1800.

^{iv}Christiaan Lotrie (or Lottering) is recorded as one of the original founders of the town of Schoemansdal (Schoemansdal Museum c.1980: 34), and could have been Frans Lotrie’s father. The names of his two brothers are also uncertain, but municipal records from 1852 list a Gerardus (Gert) Johannes Lottering (born c.1820) and Cornelis Johannes Andries Lottering (born c.1829) (Nederduitsch Hervormde Gemeente 1852: entries 9 and 24 respectively).

^vThis interlocutor may have been Barend, whose third given name was Johannes. However, this text suggests a birth year of c.1869, which fits more comfortably with the dates on record for Lotrie’s middle son Cornelis Stephanus (De Villiers Roos 1917).

^{vi}The inconsistent spelling of Lotrie may have been due in part to the limited literacy of Frans and Barend.

^{vii}There are also a few variations in the spelling of Barend’s first name (Wintjes 2017: n11), for example, Bernd (Moerschell 1912: IV).

^{viii}One source (Milstein 1933) suggests that Frans Lotrie’s son Barend died ‘around 1905’, but had had several children, one of whom may well have carried the same first name. The Barend Lottering who guided the Frobenius expedition could therefore have been Frans Lotrie’s grandson, although the writer of the 1933 letter identified Frans as his father.

^{ix}In a separate paper (Wintjes & Huffman, in prep.), we apply a similar archival approach to the toponyms recorded in the early archival records pertaining to Mapungubwe, which allude to a layer of knowledge of the landscape that has been lost, replaced by the standard configuration of place-names as published in the literature.

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