



CHAPTER 6

Conclusions

6.1. Introduction

The results of this study provide insight into the potential contribution of surface assemblages. The following conclusions were drawn from the artefact analyses and site comparisons conducted during this study project. They reflect the substantial amount of information gained from studying one open-air site in the environment and argue for the consideration of surface assemblages in the reconstruction of prehistoric subsistence strategies.

6.2. Value of a surface site

A very large sample of stone artefacts was recovered from the site BB5, while only a small number of ceramic fragments was found. No OES beads or faunal remains were encountered. However, despite these 'deficiencies', it was possible to retrieve valuable information from the lithic artefacts at the site. Their interpretation was supported by results from the deposits at the BB7 site.

The most important result of this project is the conclusion that BB5 represents a homogeneous sample without evidence of cultural mixing, thus representing a valid research sample. Furthermore, the artefact analysis shows that both in terms of artefact typology and artefact size and shape, the samples from the individual grid blocks do not differ significantly from one another. It is therefore concluded that a single occupation phase is being dealt with.

The artefact analysis revealed that when samples of 250 or more utilised artefacts are analysed, the results are much more similar for the individual grid blocks than when smaller samples are analysed. The conclusion is that one needs at least 200 to 250 utilised artefacts to obtain a representative sample, collecting more than that number does not significantly improve results. Since the samples from the grid

blocks are more or less homogeneous, a smaller sample would have been adequate.

The artefact analysis made it possible to establish which artefact types are present on the site and what they look like. An interesting observation is the high frequency of scrapers manufactured on broken flakes with the bulb of percussion still visible. This indicates that these flakes were selected when manufacturing scrapers.

The metric analysis showed that the use of the Vogel method to determine size and shape of artefacts is much less time-consuming than measuring each artefact individually. It was subsequently shown that the results of the two methods do not significantly differ and suggested that the former method may substitute the latter. The importance of considering the median in metric analysis was also pointed out. The median value reflects the 'most common value' which is more significant than the mean value when the distribution is skewed.

The results from BB5 were also compared to those from BB7. Some differences were observed between the two sets of data, but it was concluded that they are ultimately similar. Obvious differences are either activity related or have to do with the small sample from BB7. BB5 primarily represents a factory/manufacturing site, which was also a living site. On present evidence BB7 represents a living site with little evidence of stone tool manufacture or the preparation of animal skins.

The site comparisons established that BB5 represents a true terminal Later Stone Age site. Neither the artefact types nor the artefact sizes and shapes differed to such an extent for one to conclude that BB5 is not an LSA site. The implication is that artefact analysis, especially stone tool analysis, must form the basis of any attempted inter-site comparison. The importance of a uniform method of analysis in LSA research, be it typological or metric analysis, was also shown. There is a need for a more precise standardisation of terms and definitions which may be used to describe LSA assemblages. Such uniformity will simplify regional and other comparisons.

Other, less obvious conclusions regarding prehistoric lifestyle and subsistence strategies may also be drawn from the research results. The natural environment and location of the site alone imply that hunting was an important economic activity of the people who occupied BB5. The formal tool kit which includes segments and backed blades also points to hunting as an activity, while the presence of grinding stones may be linked to the preparation of plant foods. The similarities between the BB5 sample and that of Biesje Poort II (Doornfontein Industry) indicate that BB5 may also be associated with herding. The natural environment once again lends itself to this type of economy since water is often available during the rainy season. Despite the fact that no faunal evidence of herding was found, it is possible to connect both the lithic and ceramic samples found at BB5 and BB7, to those manufactured by herders during the final LSA in the Northern Cape.

From the amount of waste material and the number of cores and hammer stones at BB5, it is possible to conclude that stone tools were manufactured on the site. No traces of settlement features could be identified at BB5. The presence of grinding stones however indicate some form of settlement. The possibility of seasonal occupation of the site may even be postulated, based on the relatively short distance between the farm and the Orange River, as well as on the annual availability of water and food during the rainy season on Bloubos.

6.3. Evaluation

The **research approach** as outlined in Chapter 1 contained two components - methodology and presentation. These frameworks were used to attain the research objectives of this study. Several contributions that can be expected from the investigation of a surface site were also proposed in Chapter 1.

The question as to whether the **research objectives** were reached, will be addressed first. The value of a surface site in terms of a regional reconstruction of prehistoric subsistence strategies is indicated by the successful placing of the site BB5 within the larger LSA context. Contributing to the completion of this research aim was the artefact

analysis conducted, the description of the results thereof and the subsequent comparison of these results with other stratified sites in the area. Without the initial typological and metric analysis, no such comparisons could have been made. The answer to whether any 'new, relevant information' was added to the existing chronological and spatial LSA framework is also affirmative. BB5 may safely be ascribed to the early phase of the Doornfontein Industry (Wilton Complex) of the Northern Cape. The site therefore broadens both the spatial and temporal scope of the LSA database in the research area.

Contributions that can be made by investigating surface sites may be summarized as follows:

BB5 represents an open-air living site where food, animal skins and stone tools were prepared. It is therefore probable that similar activities were practised on other open living sites. This shows that LSA people not only sheltered in caves. The size of the site and artefact assemblage, furthermore suggests that the communities actually spent more of their time camping in the open and occupied cave sites only to a lesser extent. We thus have an improved perception of the utilisation of the area. Furthermore, investigations similar to the one conducted on BB5 will ultimately lead to a more complete reconstruction of subsistence strategies and terrain utilisation in the Northern Cape.

By comparing the results from BB5 and BB7, it seems as if several different activities took place at the surface site while the other was only a living site. The comparison between surface and stratified sites may therefore add to our understanding of site utilisation.

With regard to practical implications, surface accumulations of artefacts often indicate the location of a deposit. This was the case at BB7 where a surface scatter of potsherds indicated the presence of a cultural deposit. Also, the extent of the utilised area of a site is clearly visible on open-air surface sites while this is not the case from excavations in stratified caves. In terms of field work this influences the collection strategy. Lastly, a group consisting of several people

could participate in the field work and so gain experience in the collection and handling of stone artefacts.

In terms of cultural resource management this project did not harm the site in any way. Only a limited proportion of the artefacts were collected while the rest were left for future research. It also documented the locality of a living site that is worthy of preservation.

6.4. Concluding remarks

All evidence shows that the lithic material from the Bloubos samples represents a relatively uniform assemblage covering a restricted time period in the Late Holocene. Firstly, there are no artefacts belonging to an obviously earlier period at BB5 or BB7 - an absence which might be attributed to a more recent age of dunes on the farm. Secondly, there is an undeniable similarity between the collection and other stratified sites in the research area. The Bloubos sites therefore can be used to compliment the reconstruction of the final Stone Age human habitation of the region.

For a comprehensive reconstruction of LSA activities and lifestyle, focus must be placed on the following three aspects of utilisation of the natural environment or landscape:

- investigation of stratified cave sites to provide the chronological sequence;
- investigation of surface assemblages to identify the living sites;
- recording of the distribution of both shelters and open-air sites in the environment to reconstruct the extent of the habitation.

Only such a complete investigation of an area might lead to a true reconstruction of subsistence strategies and land use patterns. Sampson (1985; 1986) has started to explore the possibilities of LSA surface sites, especially with regard to the identification of so-called contact zones between hunters and herders in the Seekoei River valley.

Local researchers also have much to gain by taking note of European archaeological trends. Reconstructions in France have become so sophisticated that it is currently possible to link Mesolithic sites to specific groups that were in frequent contact. They have reached the stage where different tribal territories may be identified (Rozoy 1998). It is emphasized that such reconstructions are based on investigations which include all types of sites and their distribution in the environment.

It is conceivable that similar patterns may be identified in the Northern Cape, but such regional research will only become possible once all aspects of land use are taken into account. Regional research on this scale may in turn just indicate related or associated LSA groups or communities and regional boundaries between them.

The high frequency of open-air sites in the Northern Cape implies that they were regularly occupied. Both hunters and herders probably spent more time on open sites than in caves where stratified deposits accumulated. This observation sheds light on the general land use pattern. The extremely large surface scatter at BB5 indicates that it was a regular camp site within a restricted time period. Cave sites on the other hand may only have been visited by a limited part of the population or only for short periods, thus leading to distorted reconstructions of prehistoric lifestyles. Information retrieved from both cave and open sites may therefore only complement one another.

The research conducted at BB5 contributes to our expanding understanding of the final LSA in the Northern Cape. The possibility exists that other such sites may also add to the existing body of knowledge with regard to this period in prehistory. They may do so in terms of the geographical distribution of industries, their age, their composition and their cultural affinities. In addition, every individual within a group may be represented on an open site. This implies interesting possibilities for future research. Surface assemblages have up to now often been neglected, resulting in the destruction and loss of potentially important archaeological evidence. It is only through the comprehensive



investigation of all the sites in the landscape that truly holistic reconstructions of the past can be made.

