

Introduction

Regarding the birth and development of complex societies in South Africa, there is a tradition of studies dating back to the 1930s, a period that saw the discovery of Mapungubwe, the important 13th-century regional settlement that was declared a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2003.

Since the discovery of Mapungubwe, much of the research into the evolution of its social and political dynamics has focused on the settlement and its immediate surroundings (Fouché 1937; Gardner 1963; Meyer 1998; Calabrese 2007; Huffman 2009). However, in the last few years the research has been extended to outlying areas in order to analyse the theme of social complexity on a regional scale and to examine topics such as mobility and interaction between centre and peripheral areas (Antonites 2013; 2014; Chirikure *et al.* 2014; Antonites, Ashley 2016; Ashley *et al.* 2016; Moffett, Chirikure 2016). These studies focus on small settlements that emerged on the margins of the developing polity; as well as obtaining important information regarding a series of sites that formed a social and trading network across a broad region, they reveal a political panorama in which the various communities interacted and were part of a rich social and environmental mosaic. This led to the idea of analysing two very different situations, far apart in social and environmental terms, which would make it possible to advance hypotheses regarding animal husbandry and the exploitation of wild fauna during the Middle Iron Age. This research thus presents an interpretation of the faunal remains from Mapungubwe and Mutamba, a small agro-pastoral settlement coeval with the capital's period of greatest hegemony, situated on the edge of its area of influence.

The zooarchaeological analysis was accompanied by ethnozoarchaeological research conducted in the Venda village of Bende Mutale in north-eastern South Africa in order to better interpret the faunal data by observing livestock management as currently practised by a local community and to understand the social value of livestock for such communities. In addition, it was possible to observe a rural society's relationship with the surrounding landscape and the climate and understand any restrictions on agriculture and livestock rearing arising from the local environment.

The first two chapters of the book present the historical and cultural framework of the area in which the sites studied here are situated and a description of the region and the archaeological research.

This introductory session is followed by a chapter that summarises the methods applied to the study of the faunal samples.

Chapters four and five are dedicated to the detailed analysis of the finds from the sites, including the frequency of the species and the anatomical parts present in the osteological sample, their age classes, the butchering techniques and the observation of taphonomic and osteometric data.

Chapter six is dedicated to the ethnozoarchaeological study, and presents the results of the research conducted among the local community of Bende Mutale, based on direct observation and information obtained from interviews with the village's inhabitants.

The volume concludes with a chapter setting out considerations and interpretations based on the results obtained from the analysis of the faunal samples of Mapungubwe and Mutamba, integrating them with published data regarding other Iron Age sites in the light of what was gleaned from the ethnozoarchaeological research.

The appendix includes osteometric data for each site.

At the end of the book there is a summary chapter in Italian.