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Introduction

An Invitation Fulfilled

Amanda Esterhuysen, Karim Sadr and Chrissie Sievers

African archaeology in the twenty-first century is challenged to transcend not only national and linguistic boundaries that separate scholars and researchers, but also disciplinary boundaries between archaeology and the many other fields of study that can enrich our understanding of the past, as well as the artificial boundaries within archaeology itself, such as those drawn between the study of different 'ages' that should not be understood in isolation. These and other issues are among the topics addressed in this edited collection of papers drawn from the proceedings of the landmark 2014 PanAfrican Archaeological Association of Prehistory and Related Studies Congress. Held in Johannesburg nearly seven decades after the conference planned for 1951 was relocated to Algiers for ideological reasons following the National Party's rise to power in South Africa, the 2014 meeting marked a historic return to the southern tip of the continent and provided an opportunity for professional African archaeologists to showcase the value of archaeology and related disciplines in foregrounding African cultural values and historical achievements.

The first PanAfrican Congress for Prehistory and Related Studies was, according to Mary Leakey, 'very much Louis's brainchild' (1984: 91). Louis Leakey conceived of the conference in 1944 and solicited support from colleagues in South Africa, England and later France. In his memoirs he reflected that he felt strongly that the 'moment was most opportune to inaugurate a pan-African congress of prehistory' (1974: 193). It was an exciting time in history, full of the promise of change, and Leakey would no doubt have been aware of the political momentousness of the pan-African movement that held its fifth congress in Manchester, England, immediately after the war. Many key African leaders attended this congress, and there was a strong feeling among Africans and people of African descent that liberation, freedom and pan-Africanism were 'idea[s] whose time had come' (Abrahams 1947: 11). Leakey would also have taken cognisance of the formation of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation in 1946. The organisation specifically promoted the role that

science could play in promoting peace and security and it provided a platform for scientists to dispel the biological myth of race and to question racism.

Leakey, having recognised the scientific and cultural significance of Kenyan fossils and material culture, felt the palaeo world was ready to accept 'Darwin's prophecy that Africa would prove to be the birthplace of mankind' (1974: 210) and invited 55 delegates from 26 countries to attend the inaugural PanAfrican Archaeological Congress of Prehistory and Related Studies in Nairobi in January 1947. Despite relatively few Africans being in attendance, the delegates were keenly aware of the importance of prehistory and palaeo studies in Africa, and of the need to encourage governments in Africa to develop and systematise studies in prehistory (G.A. & A.J.A. 1947: 170). For many delegates the congress marked the beginning of a new chapter in research and collaboration following the period of stagnation and isolation that had been brought about by the war (G.A. & A.J.A. 1947: 69).

The liberal sentiment of the 1940s however did not translate into an easy transformation and immediate liberation of African countries. For many Africans, it marked the beginning of the liberation struggle and the fight for freedom. The development of archaeological and prehistoric studies was similarly patchy and often slow to respond to the liberation cause (Hall 1984).

The South African archaeologists and palaeoanthropologists who attended the first congress were riding the crest of a wave of discoveries and government support. Studies in archaeology and palaeontology had flourished under the political patronage of General Jan Smuts, who provided an air force plane to fly the delegates to the conference in 1947 (Shepherd 2003: 832). The delegates carried with them an invitation from the South African government to meet in the Union of South Africa in 1951 (G.A. & A.J.A. 1947: 170). This meeting sadly would only take place 67 years later in the Republic of South Africa, because, as Leakey recalled, the then South African government made an 'unacceptable condition that non-whites could not participate' (1974: 203).

In 1948 the National Party came to power in South Africa and its intention to reject pan-Africanism and to segregate society along racial lines was a matter of political record. A raft of legislation aimed at hardening the separation of South Africans along racial lines was now imminent. In 1949 Leakey felt the need to warn colleagues attending the African regional conference in Johannesburg that without transformation South African researchers would not be accepted in other African countries (Dubow 2006: 249). Not long after, the South African government rescinded Smuts's invitation to host the second PanAfrican congress and Smuts's death in 1950 marked the end of political support and the beginning of a period of isolation (Shepherd 2003: 832).

The 14th PanAfrican Archaeological Congress thus in many ways marks a milestone for South African archaeology. While it is not the first conference to have been

held or attended since the advent of democracy, it has provided an occasion to look back, reflect and revisit some of the original goals of the first PanAfrican congress, particularly the need to collapse or transcend borders, lobby governments, increase collaboration and encourage a comparative framework for an African archaeology. These themes certainly provided the impetus for the topic of the conference: African Archaeology Without Frontiers.

However, despite sharing some goals with the first congress, the nature and scope of archaeology is significantly different today. In 1947 the focus was almost exclusively on hominins and the earlier Stone Age and since then there has been a proliferation of fields, sub-fields, methodologies and theoretical approaches. New generations of Africanists now study the archaeology of the liberation struggle and routinely question western models of conservation and heritage. Most fields have undergone major theoretical introspection and efforts have been made to make practices public and transparent. Ways of thinking about the African past have changed and the boundaries and frontiers are evolving and moving in new and interesting ways. This collection of papers captures a small portion of the extraordinary range of topics and the geographical spread of current research. The chapters have been arranged according to region rather than by theme, but here we briefly highlight some of the ideas common to each.

The opening contributions by keynote speakers Chapurukha Kusimba and Akin Ogundiran explore the theme of archaeology without frontiers. Their addresses approach the topic from different perspectives, and thoroughly explore the social and political factors that presently innovate or constrain the discipline. The authors highlight the new networks that have formed at a regional and global level and motivate for further institutional change to bring about a truly pan-African archaeology. They encourage practising archaeologists to interrogate methodological boundaries, particularly those that continue to invoke a subtext of European prejudice and superiority, and to create cross-disciplinary networks to produce more critical and productive ways of thinking about the past. However, they raise some red flags. They caution that global forces are creating new and different boundaries, inequalities and a resurgence of nationalisms. These neo-liberal and nationalist pressures may place constraints and temptations in the way of aspirant archaeologists. Stereotypes and job insecurity will deter students from studying archaeology and others might never attain an opportunity as universities grow increasingly unaffordable.

The theme of working across disciplines and creating opportunity for comparative research within Africa is common to many of the papers in this volume. The chapter by Matthew Davies, Caleb Adebayo Folorunso, Timothy Kipkeu Kipruto, Freda Nkirote M'Mbogori, Henrietta L. Moore, Emuobosa Akpo Orijemie and Alex Schoeman presents a compelling argument for academic networking. The authors have a cross-disciplinary focus and their work is carried out in three African countries

by researchers on different continents. The research points to the value of comparative research as well as the benefits of resource sharing and capacity building.

The papers by Narcisse Santores Tchandeu and Dirk Seidensticker provide an opportunity for comparative studies by adding to our knowledge about rock art and its presence at particular sites and areas in Cameroon and central Africa respectively. At an intimate scale these studies refine regional networks and produce a nuanced understanding of local change. Adrienne Daggett, Marilee Wood and Laure Dussubieux offer fresh insight into the early Indian Ocean trade network. They focus on one node in a much broader system of trade through a study of beads excavated at Thabadimasego in Botswana. Their study, which is also cross-disciplinary in essence, foregrounds the interconnected nature of regions within southern Africa during the tenth century and offers insight into the mechanisms of trade and exchange politics.

Festo W. Gabriel through his study of the Makonde community in Tanzania demonstrates the need to contextualise and historicise heritage practices and resources. Heritage, often driven by tourism and marketing agendas, tends to ignore the complex nature of cultural enactments and traditional performances and the social role that these play at the level of the community. Similarly, Kate Smuts and Nic Wiltshire's research into the use of digital platforms for heritage management across South Africa presents the many challenges faced by conservation authorities, particularly when trying to encourage and enable heritage management at the local, regional and national levels.

Philip de Barros and Gabriella Lucidi highlight the value of ethnoarchaeology and work closely with community members to document evidence of specialist activities. Through their detailed study of bloom crushing mortar sites in the Bassar region of Togo, they provide new insights into the intricacies of iron working and draw attention to the similarities between these and other grinding sites and to the potential for misidentification and misinterpretation of these sites.

Elinaza Mjema's study of Zanjian-period settlements in Tanzania drives home the point that old divisions and assumptions need to be questioned and challenged. Her study of material culture from pre- and post-Swahili contexts shows continuity in certain material forms. From this she argues that the Zanjian settlements were not simply replaced by Swahili culture but that the people from these earlier settlements contributed to the social transformation. Tim Forssman likewise questions the hard boundaries created between forgers and farmers in the northern part of South Africa, and argues for interaction and assimilation rather than the sudden abandonment of a forager way of life.

As a whole, this collection of diverse papers from a historic congress illustrates the range of research in Africa as well as the challenges facing archaeologists and heritage practitioners who work on the continent.

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