
Later Stone Age archaeology in the Limpopo river basin: new evidence from the site of Txina Txina (Massingir, southern Mozambique)

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Abstract

Although much research has been published on the Limpopo basin and on southern African for the Middle Stone Age (MSA) and Later Stone Age (LSA), previous research in Mozambique has provided little to no data on Stone Age, except for the northern Niassa area. During the last decade, however, Mozambique has finally begun to receive some attention from various researchers, who have been confirming the archaeological wealth of the region and its potential in offering new and important data to fill in several gaps in knowledge about Stone Age in southeast Africa.

Starting in 2011 we have surveyed several different regions of Mozambique, including the lacustrine settings of the Niassa Lake in the north, the fluvial environments of the Elephant and Limpopo Rivers in the Massingir area, and the southern coast of Maputaland. Non-systematic survey was carried out by foot, directed to specific areas where geomorphology and geology increased the chances to find open air and cave/rockshelter Stone Age sites. The team was able to locate over 200 Stone Age new sites.

Here, we present preliminary data from testing, dating and material analyses (lithic, faunal and ornaments) from the new open-air LSA site of Txina Txina, discovered during the 2016 field season. The site is located in the Machampane river gorge, a small stream that runs to the Elephant river, a major tributary of the Limpopo.

The site is over 2500 sq meters in area. A total of three test pits were open where we were able to confirm, so far, a very rich sequence of occupations across a stratigraphy of c. 2 meters. The recovered materials include a wide range of lithic raw materials (cherts, quartz, quartzite, silcrete, rhyolite and other volcanic local rocks), mammal bones, terrestrial gastropods and ostrich egg shell as well as some beads. The lithic assemblage is based on the

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production of flakes and bladelets mostly from centripetal, bipolar and prismatic cores. Formal tools are rare, but nevertheless there are a few microlithic crescents, backed bladelets, denticulates and notches. Radiocarbon results so far obtained revealed a chronology between c. 32 and 7.5 ka cal BP, placing the lower levels of Txina Txina within the timeframe of what is thought to be, according to data coming from several sites in South Africa Lesotho and Swaziland the, still poorly understood, transitional period between MSA and LSA.

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