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Middle Stone Age bone tools from the Howiesons Poort layers, Sibudu Cave, South Africa

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Abstract

Recently discovered bone implements from Middle Stone Age (MSA) deposits at Sibudu Cave, South Africa, confirm the existence of a bone tool industry for the Howiesons Poort (HP) technocomplex. Previously, an isolated bone point from Klasies River provided inconclusive evidence. This paper describes three bone tools: two points and the end of a polished spatula-shaped piece, from unequivocal HP layers at Sibudu Cave (with ages greater than $\hat{1}/461\hat{A}$ ka). Comparative microscopic and morphometric analysis of the Sibudu specimens together with bone tools from southern African Middle and Later Stone Age (LSA) deposits, an Iron Age occupation, nineteenth century Bushman hunter-gatherer toolkits, and bone tools used experimentally in a variety of tasks, reveals that the Sibudu polished piece has use-wear reminiscent of that on bones experimentally used to work animal hides. A slender point is consistent with a pin or

needle-like implement, while a larger point, reminiscent of the single specimen from Peers Cave, parallels large un-poisoned bone arrow points from LSA, Iron Age and historical Bushman sites. Additional support for the Sibudu point having served as an arrow tip comes from backed lithics in the HP compatible with this use, and the recovery of older, larger bone and lithic points from Blombos Cave, interpreted as spear heads. If the bone point from the HP layers at Sibudu Cave is substantiated by future discoveries, this will push back the origin of bow and bone arrow technology by at least 20,000 years, and corroborate arguments in favour of the hypothesis that crucial technological innovations took place during the MSA in Africa.



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Keywords

Howiesons Poort; Hunting technology; Bone tools; Behavioural modernity

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