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THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

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INTRODUCTION

Outside the East African Rift Valley, southern Africa has the longest record of human occupation anywhere in the world, one that reaches back over 3 million years. Spanning more than 20° of latitude from the Zambezi to Cape Agulhas, southern Africa's more than 3,000,000 km^2 encompass a wide range of ecological zones and a great diversity of human societies. As well as offering the opportunity to examine how the human lineage has evolved and adapted to environmental change over most of its existence, research in the sub-continent is increasingly pertinent to several major debates in contemporary archaeology. Despite having sites that are less fine grained and more difficult to date than many of those in East Africa, it has yielded by far the largest number of individual australopithecine specimens. Continuing excavation of sites in the Sterkfontein Valley promises to increase still further understanding of the evolutionary significance and adaptations of these early **hominins**. In addition, some of the oldest known fossils of anatomically modern *Homo sapiens sapiens* come from sites in present-day South Africa that also play a critical rôle in debates over the behavioural capabilities of these early modern humans. Together with still older specimens of Middle Pleistocene age, such as that from Florisbad, these sites offer crucial support to the case for a recent origin for all modern humans south of the Sahara, subsequent to *Homo*'s initial dispersal from the continent nearly 2 million years ago.

Both these issues are of global interest, but so too is the archaeology of recent southern African foragers. In the Kalahari Bushmen both prehistory and social anthropology found rôle-models for hunter-gatherer societies, as attested in numerous textbooks. However, archaeological, anthropological and historical research over the past twenty years has reappraised the extent to which ethnographically known Kalahari foragers can reasonably be employed as analogues for reconstructing past hunter-gatherer societies in southern Africa, or elsewhere. The impacts of contact with pastoralist and farming communities, in particular, have been the subject of intense discussion and research. Over the same two decades southern African archaeologists have turned to Bushman ethnography to explore the social and ideological dimensions of their data, most effectively in developing an 'insider' perspective from which to understand the region's rich rock art heritage. Combined with insights derived from neuropsychology, the shamanistic view of the art developed principally by

David Lewis-Williams, though now undergoing critique in southern Africa itself, has been widely used to investigate rock art elsewhere in the world, from Europe's Upper Palaeolithic caves and Neolithic megalithic monuments to the engravings and paintings of America's Great Basin.

Southern Africa remained exclusively a sub-continent of hunter-gatherers until little more than two millennia ago. However, the changes in social organisation and more intensive forms of landscape and resource use evident over the past 20,000 years merit more comparison with developments in other parts of the world than they have hitherto received. In particular, such comparisons can be mutually informative when made with other regions, such as Australia and much of North America, where intensifying exploitation of key animal and plant resources did *not* result in domestication and the development of indigenous forms of farming. When food-production was introduced to the sub-continent all the domesticates came from further north. Over the western third of southern Africa a pastoralist lifestyle marked by the herding of sheep and/or cattle came to dominate, while in the summer rainfall regions on the sub-continent's northern margins and across its eastern half iron-using, Bantu-speaking farmers combined livestock-rearing with the cultivation of cereals and other crops. The relationships between pastoralists, farmers and surviving hunter-gatherers and the mechanisms by which food-production spread constitute one of the most active areas of current archaeological research within southern Africa.

Less than a millennium after establishing themselves south of the Zambezi, farming communities were engaging in long-distance trade networks that linked them with the East African coast and, ultimately, the Middle East, India and China. Core–periphery models have been widely used by archaeologists since the 1980s to explore the rôle of external trade in state formation and state collapse. Despite the internationally high profile of Great Zimbabwe, southern Africa's contribution to these discussions has not been as great as it could be, and both archaeologists and (for the more recent past) historians have questioned the significance of external trade in the origins and maintenance of the Zimbabwe state, its predecessors and successors and the nineteenth-century Zulu kingdom. Perhaps less well recognised is the comparatively early date of European settlement – in the 1500s by the Portuguese and from 1652 by the Dutch. Though historical archaeology is a comparatively recent development in the sub-continent, its rapid growth should allow comparisons with other parts of the world, especially in the development of distinctive settler identities and the relations between coloniser, colonised and enslaved.

Exploring these and other developments in a way that illustrates the richness and complexity of the southern African record and its relevance for the wider global picture is one of the objectives of this book. A second is to provide an overview of southern Africa's past as reconstructed from archaeological sources for the entire 3 million years or so of hominin presence in the sub-continent.

The overall thrust of the narrative is chronological and thus, in one sense, cultural-historical. But I hope too to have covered in as balanced a way as possible the key debates within southern African archaeology, without falling into the trap of assuming that only one theoretical orientation holds a monopoly of wisdom or applicability. While I have tried to be as thorough as possible in discussing the archaeological record, in the interests of allowing the reader to investigate specific issues further I have confined references to the published literature or, where unavoidable, graduate theses. Reports from contract archaeology operations are increasingly important as sources of primary data, but they are generally much more difficult to obtain or check. For the same reason, references to works 'in press', unpublished conference papers and personal communications have also been avoided.

Several recent detailed syntheses of aspects of southern African archaeology are already in print, including books on Iron Age farming communities (M. Hall 1987), rock art (Dowson 1992; Dowson and Lewis-Williams 1994; Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1999) and Stone Age foragers and hominins (H. Deacon and Deacon 1999). All, however, like the component chapters of Klein's (1984a) synthesis of palaeoenvironmental and archaeological research, A.B. Smith's (1992a) analysis of prehistoric pastoralism, M. Hall's (1993) review of the archaeology of European settlement and even Inskeep's (1978) overview treat specific periods of southern Africa's past. Other syntheses of the Middle Stone Age (A. Thackeray 1992) and Later Stone Age (Wadley 1993; Mitchell 1997) are further restricted to those parts of the sub-continent lying south of the Limpopo, for which several regional summaries also exist, among them Voigt (1981), Parkington and Hall (1987a), Evers *et al.* (1988), Beaumont and Morris (1990), A.B. Smith and Mütti (1992), A.B. Smith (1995a) and Dreyer *et al.* (1996). Botswana (Lane *et al.* 1998) and Zimbabwe (Pwiti 1997a) have also recently been surveyed in depth. Forty years on from the last synthesis of southern Africa's past from *Australopithecus* to the modern era (J.D. Clark 1959), the time thus seems ripe for attempting another overview of the whole of the sub-continent's past.

Sources and structure

Archaeology is, of course, only one of several sources for the investigation of this past. Allied disciplines in the social and natural sciences also provide much important information. However, archaeology, with the related fields of palaeoanthropology and palaeoenvironmental research, is by far the most wide ranging in both time and space. To be sure, the sub-continent's indigenous peoples all have their own historical traditions, and these have been intensively researched to help reconstruct the precolonial past of, for example, the Shona (Beach 1980; Mudenge 1988), Xhosa (Peires 1981) and Pedi (Delius 1983). While the concentration of these sources on political or mythical events which

validate present political and social arrangements means that they are often highly selective in their emphasis, combined with archaeological research they offer a much fuller picture than is possible from archaeological data alone.

Except among the Swahili settlements of the northern Mozambican coast, no southern African society used writing prior to European colonisation. The earliest documents relating to the sub-continent are thus in Arabic and reach back to the tenth century. Yet even well-informed writers, such as al-Masʿudi and Ibn Battuta, had a limited knowledge of the region, restricted almost entirely to the Indian Ocean coast. Only for the last four to five centuries are written sources more plentiful, initially mostly in Portuguese and Dutch. English and, to a lesser extent, other languages became important in the nineteenth century as European exploration and colonisation of the sub-continent's interior intensified. The writings of explorers, missionaries and government officials provide detailed accounts of the landscapes and peoples of many parts of southern Africa. With appropriate cautions, such as their competence in local vernaculars, they have been extensively used by archaeologists working on recent sites. Recent developments in the archaeology of European colonial settlement create a further locus of interaction between the archaeological record and contemporary documentary sources.

Growing partly out of the interests of colonial administrations, professional anthropological research in southern Africa has been, and is, extensive. Groups such as the Ju/'hoansi (!Kung) and G/wi Bushmen of the Kalahari have served as archetypal hunter-gatherers for generations of anthropology students. Marshall (1976), Lee (1979) and G. Silberbauer (1981) are only three of many classic texts that provide inspiration for much recent Later Stone Age archaeology, along with the incomparable archive built up from late nineteenth-century /Xam Bushman informants by Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd. Ethnographic research among Khoe- and Bantu-speaking populations has been similarly influential in recent research on the archaeology of southern Africa's pastoralist and agropastoralist communities. As we shall see, archaeologists and historians are, however, increasingly aware that many of the uses made of anthropological research lean too heavily on widespread generalisations from a few well-known case-studies, rather than careful examination of the diverse contexts from which it is drawn (S. Hall 1990; Lane 1994/95; Webley 1997a).

Historical linguistics, especially the interconnections of the various Bantu languages spoken today in southern Africa, provides a further source for the reconstruction of the sub-continent's past. Archaeologists have sought to correlate ceramic styles with Bantu linguistic divisions (e.g. D. Phillipson 1977; Huffman 1989), but linguists have also offered detailed historical reconstructions (Ownby 1985; Ehret 1982, 1998). However, problematic assumptions about chronology, the rates at which languages change and the extent to which elements of a language's core vocabulary are, or are not, subject to borrowing from other languages (Borland 1986), as well as an apparent lack of interest in

relating these speculations to the archaeological record, render many of these reconstructions suspect (M. Hall 1987; D. Phillipson 1999).

Oral traditions, written sources, anthropology and historical linguistics all provide different perspectives on the past from those recovered using archaeological methods. Where archaeology differs is in focusing on material culture (stone tools, pots, settlement plans, plant and animal remains, etc.) as the basis for reconstructing past societies. Additionally, it emphasises investigating the ecological contexts within which societies existed, understanding change over much longer timespans than those typically dealt with by historical and anthropological sources and working with individuals who are usually anonymous rather than named. Chapter 2 proceeds to examine the frameworks within which archaeologists pursue these goals in southern Africa. Relevant frameworks include contemporary and past environmental settings, the establishment of chronologies and the historical development of archaeological research as a whole.

The remainder of the book takes up the human career in southern Africa along broadly chronological lines. Chapter 3 examines the fossil and archaeological background to early hominin evolution, beginning with a focus on Plio-Pleistocene sites in South Africa's Sterkfontein Valley and moving on to discuss the lifestyles of the makers of Acheulean and early Middle Stone Age technologies. The poorer, but no less significant, fossil record from the Middle **Pleistocene** foreshadows one of the crucial themes of chapter 4, the appearance of anatomically modern humans. Some of the key fossil-bearing sites in South Africa are among those central to the related issue examined in this chapter, the extent to which the emergence of a modern skeletal morphology was coeval with that of modern behavioural capacities.

Chapter 5 then considers how southern African populations coped with the challenges and opportunities of living through the quite drastic climatic and environmental changes of the later Pleistocene and the degree to which similarities in subsistence and social behaviour can be traced between them and their Holocene successors. Chapter 6 continues this story across the Pleistocene/Holocene boundary, with one emphasis the interconnections between cultural and environmental change. Chapter 7 then reviews the archaeology of southern African foragers from the middle Holocene down to the introduction of food-production about 2000 years ago. Reflecting the shift in recent work from a predominantly ecological paradigm to one much more interested in social relations and ideology, chapter 8 breaks the chronological narrative to examine current interpretations of southern African rock art and how these have encouraged the use of Bushman ethnography to develop models of Later Stone Age social relations. The Kalahari debate touched on above demonstrates the importance of critically considering how far this dependence on recent, and exclusively southern African, hunter-gatherer ethnography can or should be pursued.

As already indicated, two basic forms of food-production were practised in southern Africa. Chapter 9 considers the introduction and impact of pastoralism across the sub-continent's western third, including the archaeological evidence for the organisation of pastoralist society and the relations between herders and foragers. Chapter 10 looks at the establishment of early farming communities in northern and eastern southern Africa, with the appropriateness of using a direct historical approach to ethnographic analogy again a major theme. In the far north of South Africa and beyond the Limpopo the last thousand years have witnessed the development of the more hierarchically organised, centralised polities of the Zimbabwe Tradition. How they formed, were maintained and collapsed is examined in chapter 11. Chapter 12 emphasises the contemporary development of farming societies further south, including the expansion of agropastoralist settlement onto the **highveld** and relations between farmers, herders and foragers on the western and southern margins of Iron Age settlement.

Chapter 13 then examines the archaeological evidence of colonial settlement and the impact that this had on indigenous populations. As well as land-based research, the growing field of maritime archaeology makes a contribution here. Southern African archaeology is itself a consequence of the colonial experience and chapter 14 thus examines the status of the discipline following recent political changes in the sub-continent. Issues such as the presentation of the past, the reburial of human remains and contract archaeology are increasingly universal ones, but this chapter concentrates on their specifically southern African dimensions. Picking up on this last point, a Glossary covers technical or vernacular terms that are not otherwise defined at their first appearance in the text.

J.D. Clark (1974) asked whether Africa played a peripheral or a paramount part in humanity's past. Affirming the second possibility, he emphasised the continent's rôle in hominin evolution, its 2.5-million-year-old archaeological record and the innovation by African populations of hafted stone tools, microlithic stone-working technologies, pottery manufacture and farming at dates easily comparable to those in other parts of the world. I hope that this book succeeds in demonstrating that in understanding and explaining all of these developments, as well as the others I have mentioned, a southern African perspective is both essential and enriching.

A note on names

More so perhaps than in many other parts of the world the appropriate nomenclature for discussing the peoples of southern Africa and their past is bedevilled by history. No one solution can be acceptable to everyone, but hopefully the terms that I have chosen to use offer least offence and greatest clarity.

Bushmen, San, BaSarwa

The vocabularies of the indigenous hunter-gatherer and herder groups of southern Africa traditionally lacked inclusive names for themselves larger than those of the linguistic unit to which they belonged. This creates a major difficulty for those who wish to talk about them. 'Bushman' first appears in written form in the late seventeenth century (as *Bosjesmans*; Wilson 1986). It came to be employed by Europeans as a generic term for people subsisting primarily from wild resources. However, it also acquired derogatory, pejorative (and, indeed, sexist) overtones, with the result that it began to be replaced in academic writings from the 1960s with the supposedly more neutral and indigenous term 'San', a Nama word for their hunter-gatherer neighbours. Unfortunately, since this literally means 'foragers', implying that those concerned are people of lower status too poor to own livestock, it too is not without problems, one of which is that many forager groups actually speak languages identical or closely related to those of southern Africa's indigenous herders! Another solution is offered by the Botswanan government's change of the Tswana term 'Sarwa' ('Bushman') to 'BaSarwa', the 'Ba' prefix placing it in the same class of nouns as people speaking Tswana and its closest relatives (Wilmsen 1989); the Sotho term 'Baroa' shows a similar predisposition. Perhaps to avoid the problems inherent in both 'Bushman' and 'San', some archaeologists now employ 'Basarwa' when describing Later Stone Age hunter-gatherers outside the confines of modern Botswana (e.g. Bollong *et al.* 1993).

Clearly, none of these terms is ideal and people of hunter-gatherer origin in the Kalahari express different preferences. While Namibia's Ju/'hoansi choose 'Bushmen' over 'San', some Botswanan groups use 'Basarwa', though 'San' and 'Khoe' also have their indigenous advocates (Lee and Hitchcock 1998). In this confused situation I use the term 'Bushman', rejecting any derogatory connotations that it may have and agreeing with Barnard (1992), who sees no reason to employ a Tswana or Nama, rather than an English, word in an international context. I follow him too in spelling the names of individual Bushman groups, but use Ju/'hoansi, their own name for themselves, for the people commonly referred to in the literature as the !Kung, a more all-embracing, linguistic term (after Biesele 1993).

Hottentot, Khoikhoi, Khoekhoen

If 'Bushman' has often been used in a derogatory sense, still more is this true of 'Hottentot'. Widely applied to all Khoisan peoples in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it came to be used specifically for those following a pastoralist lifestyle early in the nineteenth century (Barnard 1992). Later rejected by scholars because of its use as a racist term of abuse, it was replaced by the words

'Khoi', 'Khoikhoi' or 'Khoikhoin', derived from the Nama word for themselves meaning 'person' or 'people'. The modern spelling, followed here, is 'Khoe' and 'Khoekhoen' for the singular and plural respectively, with 'Khoekhoe' usable as an adjective (A.B. Smith 1998). Though in most cases the languages of the Cape herders were not well recorded before they ceased to be spoken, a similar term 'Quena' was noted as the self-referential term for herders living near Cape Town in the seventeenth century (Thom 1952–58).

Khoisan

Schultze (1928) coined this as a collective designation for all southern Africa's indigenous herder and hunter-gatherer peoples. Originally intended as a biological label, it was soon also employed to reflect shared features of language and culture (Schapera 1930). An amalgam of the Nama words 'Khoe' and 'San', its literal meaning is 'person-foragers'. Though not an aboriginal term, it retains considerable popularity among scholars as a general cultural and linguistic term for both Bushmen and Khoekhoen peoples.

'Race', language and economy

The matter is not, of course, as simple as the preceding paragraphs might suggest. As will become apparent, not all Bushman groups are, or necessarily were, hunter-gatherers; some have, probably for several centuries, subsisted by other means (herding, fishing, working as clients for pastoralists and farmers), or shifted back and forth between different subsistence strategies. Furthermore, many, such as the G/wi of the Central Kalahari, speak the same Khoe language as the Khoekhoen, some of whom may have cultivated and, more certainly, temporarily or permanently reverted to a foraging lifestyle after losing their livestock. Only where historical, ethnographic and archaeological evidence is compelling do I therefore refer to Bushman and Khoekhoen communities, elsewhere preferring the more general, if sometimes ambiguous, terms 'hunter-gatherers', 'foragers', 'pastoralists' or 'herders'. In discussing the biological affinities of archaeologically known skeletal populations I follow the practice of the authors concerned (e.g. A. Morris 1992c).

Bantu languages

Bantu languages, which predominate in southern Africa today, classify nouns in different groups, using prefixes to alter the meaning of the stem term. Thus, Lesotho refers to the country of the people known as Basotho (singular Mosotho) who speak the Sesotho language. Strictly speaking, the prefixes should always be employed and the stem capitalised, e.g. BaSotho. However, since many of

the Bantu-speaking peoples discussed in this book are already well known to readers of English, I employ the common English name for them, thus Zulu and not AmaZulu.

A note on orthography

Khoisan languages use a number of click sounds, tones and other vocalisations not found in English. The click sounds are represented as follows, with all but the first found in all Khoisan languages:

⊙ the bilabial click, produced by releasing air between the lips, as in a kiss. Found only in !Xõ and in extinct Southern Bushman languages;
/ the dental click, produced by a sucking motion with the tip of the tongue on the teeth, as in the English 'tisk, tisk';
≠ the alveolar click, produced by pulling the tongue sharply away from the alveolar ridge immediately behind the teeth, somewhere between / and ! in sound;
// the lateral click, produced by placing the tip of the tongue on the roof of the mouth and releasing air on one side of the mouth between the side of the tongue and the cheek, as in urging on a horse;
! the palatal click, produced by pulling the tip of the tongue sharply away from the front of the hard palate, something like the sound of a cork being removed from a bottle of wine.

Barnard (1992) discusses the orthography of Khoisan languages in greater detail than is possible here, except to note that most non-native speakers find it easiest to avoid pronouncing the click sounds all together. This can be done either by ignoring them completely, pronouncing the word as if they were not present, or by substituting an approximately equivalent non-click sound: p for ⊙, t for / or ≠ and k for // or !.

One final point: as a result of centuries of contact and intermarriage with Khoisan speakers some of the Bantu languages spoken in southern Africa also make use of click sounds, but here they are represented by conventional English letters – c for /, x for // and q for !. All three clicks occur in IsiXhosa, the last two in IsiZulu, SiSwati and SiNdebele and q alone in SeSotho.