CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Humans have lived in southern Africa longer than almost anywhere else and few places have such a varied, complex past. This makes the region central to many broader debates in world archaeology, including:

- *the evolution of early* ***hominins***,[1] with sites in South Africa's Cradle of Humankind producing an astonishingly high number of fossil individuals that offer unparalleled insights into the diet, ecology, anatomy, and technological competence of species close to our own ancestry (Kuman 2016). Finds like the extraordinarily tiny *Homo naledi* specimens (Berger *et al.* 2017) show that the potential of these sites is far from exhausted;
- *the origins of cognitively complex behaviours* (art, jewellery, the manipulation of fire to make adhesives or alter the flaking properties of stone, etc.) that we recognise as 'modern' and broadly associate with the emergence of our own species, *Homo sapiens*. Southern Africa provides crucial evidence for their appearance, as well as hominin fossils and genetic studies that identify its Khoe-San peoples as one of the most ancient human lineages (Wadley 2015);
- *studies of past hunter-gatherers*, whose well-understood ethnographies – used in conjunction with detailed archaeological and climatic records and broader theory – allow archaeologists to explore the diversity of such societies over time (Stewart and Mitchell 2018a);
- *rock art research*, a field in which southern Africa has one of the world's richest heritages. Continuing to evoke widespread interest beyond the region (Whitley 2005), ethnographically grounded interpretations emphasising the behaviour and experience of shamans in altered states of consciousness remain foundational for understanding Bushman paintings and engravings (Lewis-Williams 2019), but are enriched by new theoretical developments (e.g. McGranaghan and Challis 2016) and

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accelerating work in dating and pigment analysis (Bonneau *et al.* 2017a, 2022);

- *employing ethnographic analogies* to understand archaeological evidence. Challenges arise here from the extraordinary richness (and consequent appeal) of the data available for Bushman hunter-gatherers and southern Africa's herder and farmer populations. How far back direct historical approaches can reach, how to reconcile ethnographically sourced integrative models with smaller-scale variation in the material record, and how to correlate anthropological, linguistic, genetic, and archaeological studies of identity are questions with universal resonance (Fredriksen 2015; Huffman 2015a; Pargeter *et al.* 2016; Forssman 2022);
- *explaining the spread of food production*, whether as a mobile pastoralist lifestyle marked by herding sheep, cattle, and goats complemented by extensive use of wild resources, or as a settled village existence dependent upon combining livestock with cereals and other crops (Guillemard 2020; Olatoyan *et al.* 2022). In both cases, southern Africa saw complex interactions between herders, farmers, and aboriginal hunter-gatherers in how food production was adopted, rejected, or abandoned, with the persistence of all three modes of production side-by-side throughout the past two thousand years unusual at the global scale;
- *the emergence of social complexity* in contexts where local agency, internal mechanisms of change, and interpretations more strongly grounded in African understandings of political action (Chirikure 2021) now compete with those emphasising access to trade goods derived from broader trans-Indian Ocean networks. Whether in the Zimbabwe Culture or beyond (Sadr 2019a; Forssman 2022), this strengthens southern Africa's voice in debates about the emergence, recognition, and internal workings of complex societies that contest models traditionally derived from Europe and the Near East;
- *archaeologies of colonialism*, including studies of European settlement, slavery, and racial oppression that bear global comparison (Schrire 2015a), along with instances where interdisciplinary research has rewritten understandings of how southern African societies transformed themselves via increasing enmeshment with European settlers and global capitalism (N. Swanepoel *et al.* 2008);
- *decolonisation of the archaeological discipline itself*, a topic of growing interest wherever archaeology is undertaken (Schmidt and Pikirayi 2016), but one where southern Africa's unique history means that many of today's challenges have a distinctive record of exploration capable of informing practice in the Global North. Controversies over the excavation and analysis of human remains (Malan *et al.* 2017) and the recruitment into the profession of historically disadvantaged groups (Ndlovu and Smith 2019) are but two examples.

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Over the past twenty-five years several colleagues have addressed aspects of these debates, variously focusing on individual sites or localities (e.g. Soper 2002; Chirikure 2021), larger regions (e.g. Jerardino *et al.* 2013; Manyanga and Katsamudanga 2013; J. Kinahan 2020), or specific periods and themes (e.g. Lewis-Williams and Pearce 2004a; S. L. Hall 2010; Parkington and Hall 2010). Huffman's (2007) monumental *Handbook to the Iron Age* occupies a special place here, as do several works aimed at a wider public (e.g. A. Campbell *et al.* 2010; Delius *et al.* 2014; Parkington and Dlamini 2015). An ever-increasing number of academic papers and student dissertations underpins and extends these outputs. Since 2002 there has not, however, been any further attempt at producing a synthesis of southern Africa's archaeology from the australopithecines to the twenty-first century. That absence, and the wealth of new research implicit in the citations I have provided above, offer my justification for this new edition.

In writing it I make no apology for retaining a narrative that is fundamentally chronological in its organisation, since no one theoretical model can conceivably address early hominin ecology, on the one hand, and the archaeology of nineteenth-century mission stations, on the other. However, while human history (and hominin evolution) may display an *overall* trend towards increasing complexity, I reject any notion of inevitability or unilinearity in what the archaeological record reveals or how we should interpret it. Hopefully, too, my text conveys key debates without falling into the trap of assuming that only one theoretical orientation is valid. An extensive bibliography enables readers to pursue those debates more deeply from published literature or, when essential, graduate theses. Many of the latter are available online, but this is true of only some contract archaeology reports. I have therefore avoided citing such 'grey' literature, as well as unpublished papers and personal communications.

SOURCES AND STRUCTURE

Archaeology, that is the scientific study of the (typically anonymous) material residues that societies leave behind, is but one source for learning about the past. Along with its cousins palaeoanthropology and palaeoenvironmental research, it is nevertheless by far the most wide-ranging. For recent centuries we can also call upon the historical traditions of southern Africa's Indigenous communities,[2] all of which had their own ways of conceptualising the past (Hamilton *et al.* 2010b). Historians (e.g. Beach 1980; Peires 1981; Delius 1983) have intensively researched these records, which were transmitted orally before being written down. Although often selectively emphasising political, even mythical, events that validate present-day political and social arrangements, when carefully interrogated with attention to source and context they can provide a fuller picture than archaeological data alone.

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Outside Swahili towns in Mozambique, writing was not used in southern Africa before European arrival. Occasional references in external Arabic texts reach back to the tenth century, but only from 1488 do written sources begin to become plentiful, initially mostly in Portuguese and Dutch, but with English and, in places, German increasingly important in the nineteenth century. Explorers, missionaries, and government officials produced often detailed accounts of the landscapes and peoples they encountered. While these are always filtered through variable degrees of linguistic competency and cultural prejudice, archaeologists have made productive use of them and of official archives to complement the evidence of material culture.

Archaeology developed side-by-side with anthropology in the mid-1800s. Contemporary with the earliest efforts to collect stone artefacts, Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd worked with those whom they called their 'teachers' to produce an incomparable archive of the lives, beliefs, and knowledge of the /Xam Bushmen of South Africa's interior (Bank 2008). With few exceptions, however, professional field-based ethnographic research only developed from the 1950s, making the Ju/'hoansi and G/wi archetypal hunter-gatherers for generations of students. Along with the Bleek/Lloyd archive, works by Marshall (1976, 1999), Lee (1979), and G. Silberbauer (1981), among others, continue to inspire hunter-gatherer archaeology in southern Africa and beyond. Ethnographic research among Khoe- and Bantu-speaking communities has been similarly influential in interpreting the archaeological records of past pastoralist and farming societies; McGranaghan (2017) reviews the challenges that analogical reasoning from such ethnographic data presents.

Two further datasets merit attention. Historical linguistics reaches back to Bleek's (1862) pioneering investigations of Bantu languages. Archaeologists have frequently sought correlations between ceramic styles and Bantu linguistic divisions (notably Huffman 2007). Linguists have also offered historical reconstructions of their own (Ehret 1998; Jimenez 2020), although with in-built assumptions about how fast languages change and how far they borrow words from each other. The rapidly increasing evidence offered by the genomes of contemporary populations and the DNA of ancient skeletal remains also holds much potential. After a less than robust start, geneticists now pay more regard to the histories of the communities whose genes they sample while employing increasingly sophisticated analytical tools on an ever-larger scale (Montinaro and Capelli 2018). Results from both disciplines feature recurrently in what follows, although chronological precision remains a challenge when seeking ties to archaeological and palaeoclimatic data.

Chapter 2 outlines some of the key frameworks within which all this research is conducted. Beginning with southern Africa's contemporary geography and ecology, it discusses past environmental change and the basis for archaeological chronologies. Chapter 3 then explores the history of archaeology in southern Africa and the political context within which it has been undertaken. The

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major paradigms guiding research in fields such as stone tool analysis and rock art, as well as those governing interpretations of hunter-gatherer, herder, and agropastoralist archaeologies more broadly, are critically discussed.

The remainder of the book takes up humanity's career in southern Africa along broadly chronological lines. Chapter 4 examines the fossil and archaeological background to early hominin evolution, emphasising sites in the Cradle of Humankind before discussing the makers of Acheulean and Early Middle Stone Age technologies across the region. While the Middle **Pleistocene** fossil record remains poor, its later stages are crucial for understanding the evolution of *Homo sapiens*. Chapter 5 thus discusses some of the key fossil-bearing sites relevant to the emergence of an anatomically modern skeletal morphology. More crucially, southern Africa offers rich insights into the appearance of behaviours that collectively help differentiate our species from other hominins, suggesting that over the past 100,000 years or so we are observing the material residues left by people cognitively no different from ourselves.

How those people coped with the massive environmental changes of the late **Quaternary** is pursued further in Chapter 6 for the period from 60,000 to 13,000 years ago (60–13 kya), when the focus also turns to how far similarities in social relations and subsistence strategies can be traced between Pleistocene hunter-gatherers and their **Holocene** descendants. Chapter 7 continues this story across the Pleistocene/Holocene boundary (~13–8 kya), a period of rapid, discontinuous, climatic shifts that provides unparalleled opportunities for exploring connections between cultural and environmental change on a reasonably resolved timescale. That timescale becomes still finer-grained in Chapter 8, which reviews the archaeology of southern African hunter-gatherers from the start of the middle Holocene to the introduction of food production. In keeping with shifts in research emphasis and data quality relative to earlier periods, social and ideological topics are emphasised as much as dietary and demographic ones. This includes the challenge of integrating the insights into past lives provided by rock paintings and engravings with the record uncovered by excavation, with both datasets informed by Bushman ethnographies.

As already indicated, two basic forms of food production were practised in pre-colonial southern Africa. Chapter 9 considers pastoralism's introduction and spread within its western third, triangulating between the evidence of genetics, linguistics, and archaeology. Simultaneously, it looks at the organisation of herder societies and the relations between people with livestock and those without. Chapter 10 then explores the establishment of mixed farming populations in northern and eastern areas of southern Africa. Understanding how these communities organised themselves socially again draws heavily on ethnographic data, and the appropriateness of doing this is therefore a major theme. So, too, are the connections between incoming farmers and aboriginal hunter-gatherers. In the northeast of southern Africa, the past millennium saw

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the development of the more hierarchically organised polities of the Zimbabwe Culture. How they formed, maintained themselves, and in some cases collapsed is explored in Chapter 11. Chapter 12 looks instead at contemporary developments among farming communities further south, including their expansion on to the **highveld**, potentially parallel processes of centralisation and aggregation, and the relations between agropastoralists, herders, and hunter-gatherers on the western and southern margins of farmer settlement.

Chapter 13 considers the archaeology of European colonial settlement, its impacts on Indigenous communities, the emergence of new creolised populations beyond the colonial frontier, and archaeological investigations of slavery. To emphasise their contemporaneity and their political connections with European expansion, and to encourage comparative study of processes of state formation, migration, and population incorporation, I also include here the archaeology of the nineteenth-century ***Mfecane*** and the states that emerged from it. Finally, Chapter 14 looks at the challenges facing archaeology in southern Africa today: the need for greater equity and representativeness within the discipline; conflicts over heritage management; lack of funding, especially to secure sustainable growth in archaeological capacity and infrastructure; problems of communication; and the potential of new, post-colonial approaches for interpreting archaeological evidence. Potentially unfamiliar technical terms are explained in the Glossary and appear in bold the first time they are used.

NOMENCLATURE

Southern Africa's fraught history bedevils the terminologies used to discuss its past. In the absence of universally acceptable solutions, my choices hopefully offer clarity without offence.

Bushmen, San, and BaSarwa

Indigenous hunter-gatherers (and herders) lacked inclusive names for themselves larger than the linguistic unit to which they belonged. 'Bushman' first appears in the late seventeenth century (Wilson 1986), with Europeans coming to employ it as a generic term for people subsisting primarily from wild resources. However, from the 1960s its pejorative, indeed sexist, connotations led many academics to replace it by the supposedly more neutral term 'San'. Unfortunately, this word, derived from Nama-speaking herders, is also problematic as it denotes, in misspelt form, 'foragers', that is people too poor to own livestock who must therefore gather food from the ground (cf. Parkington 1984b).[3] Having previously devised the cumbersome term 'Remote Area Dwellers', Botswana's government modified the Tswana word 'Sarwa' ('Bushman') by employing the plural 'Ba' prefix that places it in the same noun class as the Tswana themselves (Wilmsen 1989).

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Still widely used there, 'Basarwa' has only occasionally found favour with archaeologists (e.g. Bollong *et al.* 1993).

Clearly, none of these terms is ideal, and today people of hunter-gatherer origin express different preferences. Namibia's Ju/'hoansi, for example, choose 'Bushmen' over 'San' (a word that occurs in no Kx'a or Tuu language), while some Botswanan groups prefer 'Basarwa'. 'San' and 'Kua' also have Indigenous advocates (Barnard 2019: ix). Seeing no compelling reason to prefer a non-English word over a longstanding English alternative, and with 'San' found insulting by at least one academic of hunter-gatherer descent (Kiema 2010: 69–70), I follow Barnard (2019) in retaining 'Bushman', rejecting any derogatory connotations that it may have. In general, I also follow him for the names of individual Bushman groups, referring to the people commonly known as '!Kung' by their own name for themselves, 'Ju/'hoansi'.

Hottentot, Khoe, and Khoekhoen

The first of these terms presents even greater difficulties. Widely applied to Indigenous peoples in western southern Africa in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries before becoming restricted to those following a specifically pastoralist way of life in the nineteenth (Barnard 1992), it long ago became a term of racist abuse. In response, academics replaced it with 'Khoi', 'Khoikhoi', or 'Khoikhoin', all from the Khoekhoe word for 'person', Khoekhoe being a sub-division of the Khoe-Kwadi languages of which Nama is now the most widely spoken. I follow Andrew Smith (1998) in using the updated spellings 'Khoe' (singular) and 'Khoekhoen' (plural), with 'Khoe' or 'Khoekhoe' their adjectival forms. The languages spoken by Indigenous herders in South Africa's Cape were not well recorded before ceasing to be spoken, but 'Quena' was employed self-referentially by people living near Cape Town in the 1600s (Thom 1952–1958). Spellings of the names of individual Khoe or Khoe-speaking peoples follow Barnard (2019).

Khoisan and Khoe-San

Schultze (1928) invented 'Khoisan' to designate all southern Africa's Indigenous hunter-gatherers and herders. Originally emphasising biological affinities, it quickly also came to denote shared linguistic and cultural features (Schapera 1930). Later, Greenberg (1963) applied it to one of the four language families he recognised on the African continent. His inclusion within this of Hadza and Sandawe, languages spoken in Tanzania, has had a long history, taken by some (e.g. Ehret 2002) to imply a common 'Khoisan civilisation' across eastern and southern Africa. However, resemblances are superficial: Hadza lacks discernible links to any other language and, while Sandawe may be related to Khoe-Kwadi, only the extensive use of click sounds groups the latter with the Kx'a or Tuu

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language families spoken by many southern African hunter-gatherers. Otherwise, they are wholly distinct, with Khoe-Kwadi a recent intrusion (Güldemann and Stoneking 2008). In carefully hyphenated form 'Khoe-San' may nevertheless usefully refer to characteristics common to speakers of all three families, particularly in biological anthropology (e.g. Vicente *et al.* 2019).

'Race', Language, and Economy

Not all those described as 'Bushmen' or 'San' in the literature are, or necessarily were, hunter-gatherers. Some subsisted by herding, fishing, or working as clients for pastoralists or farmers, or shifted back and forth between different subsistence strategies, precisely as 'revisionist' scholars argued in the well-known Kalahari Debate (Wilmsen 1989). Indeed, many hunter-gatherers, notably central Botswana's G/wi (Silberbauer 1981), speak Khoe languages, while some Khoe-speaking herders likely became foragers after losing their livestock. Only where historical, ethnographic, and archaeological evidence is compelling do I therefore refer to Bushman or Khoekhoe communities, employing instead the more general terms 'hunter-gatherer' (or 'forager') and 'herder' (or 'pastoralist'). In every case, but especially in the context of the disruption provoked by European colonisation, readers should also note that the identities people (or our sources) choose to use are often malleable, frequently multiple, and sometimes imposed by outsiders.[4] The terminology employed to discuss the biological affinities of archaeologically known skeletal populations is a case in point and here I follow the practice of the authors concerned.

Bantu Languages

Today, most people in southern Africa speak Bantu languages that classify nouns in differing ways, using prefixes to alter the meaning of the stem term. Thus, Lesotho refers to the country of the Basotho people (singular, Mosotho) who speak the Sesotho language. Strictly speaking, the prefixes should always be used with the stem capitalised, for example BaSotho. However, where names are well known to English-speakers, I employ them, for example Zulu not AmaZulu. I use 'Bantu' (more correctly 'Sintu') only with reference to language and those speaking it ('Bantu-speakers'), rejecting its employment to describe South Africa's black majority during ***apartheid***.

Place Names

Political change has altered the names of southern Africa's countries and many of the places within them. To avoid confusion, I provide historical as well as contemporary names where necessary.

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A NOTE ON ORTHOGRAPHY

Many southern African languages employ vocalisations that English lacks. The click sounds widely used in Khoe, Kx'a, and Tuu languages are represented as follows:

ʘ the bilabial click, produced by releasing air between the lips, as in a kiss. Restricted to the now-extinct Tuu languages and ≠'Amkoe, a severely endangered Kx'a language of southeastern Botswana;

/ the dental click, produced by a sucking motion with the tip of the tongue on the teeth, as in English 'tisk, tisk';

≠ the alveolar click, produced by pulling the tongue sharply away from the alveolar ridge immediately behind the teeth to make a sound somewhere between / and !;

// the lateral click, produced by placing the tip of the tongue on the roof of the mouth and releasing air on one side between the side of the tongue and the cheek, as when urging on a horse;

! the palatal click, produced by sharply pulling the tip of the tongue away from the roof of the mouth, making a popping sound like that of a cork being removed from a bottle.

Barnard (1992, 2019) discusses the orthography of all three language families in detail. Non-native speakers often find it easiest to avoid pronouncing the clicks altogether. This can be done by simply ignoring them or by substituting an approximately equivalent sound: p for ʘ, t for / or ≠, and k for // or !. Although not strictly correct, I follow widespread usage in capitalising the first letter after a click sound, for example /Kabbo, not /kabbo, for an important nineteenth-century /Xam rainmaker and informant.

Centuries of intermarriage and contact mean that some southern African Bantu languages also employ click sounds. Here, however, they are represented by conventional English letters: c for /, x for //, and q for !. All three sounds occur in isiXhosa, the last two in isiZulu, isiNdebele, siSwati, and other 'Tekela Nguni' languages, and q alone in SeSotho.

NOTES

1. Words in bold are defined in the Glossary.
2. 'Indigenous' is problematic in a southern African context (Coombes 2003; Kuper 2003; Lane 2014). While there is a case for emphasising its appropriateness for Bushman peoples, the region's political situation nowhere approximates that of

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North America or Australia, where most of the current population is of European descent and Native peoples are a distinct minority. In this book 'Indigenous' refers to those communities with cultural and biological origins within southern Africa before European arrival in 1488. In keeping with the views of the Association of Southern African Professional Archaeologists (B. Smith 2009: 88), this in no way denies claims to African identity by those whose origins trace to Europe or other continents.

3. The correct spelling for a common gender plural version of the word would be 'Saan' or 'Sān' (Barnard 2019: ix).
4. For example, the Sesotho 'Baroa' (singular, 'Moroa') generally refers to 'Bushmen' in the sense of ethnolinguistically distinct hunter-gatherer communities but can also denote individuals who opted for a more mobile lifestyle independent of emerging centralised polities like the nineteenth-century Lesotho state (Morelli 2022).

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